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Examining the Culture of Poverty Argument in Morocco: How Development, Criminalization, Education, and the Makhzen Craft Perceptions

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Examining the Culture of Poverty Argument in Morocco

How Development, Criminalization, Education, and the Makhzen Craft Perceptions

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Abstract

This paper explores if and how stakeholders in Moroccan poverty reduction invoke the culture of poverty argument. The thesis originally proposed by Oscar Lewis has been used and transformed to justify a variety of policies or lack thereof over the past several decades and varies according to history and cultural context. We understand the notion of what it means to be poor in Morocco through the lens of NGOs working with vulnerable populations. The organizations interviewed in this research were all connected to government or foreign aid funding, which inserts a particular development and Western oriented lens to solutions. Although these organizations may not hold negative views of poor people, shanty towns, and migrants, their solutions are geared towards needs in line with a bureaucratic imposition of knowledge rather than the amplification of existing voices and solutions that these communities already have.

Keywords: Culture of poverty, vulnerable populations, international development, The Makhzen

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Introduction

Research Question

Do Moroccans invoke an argument that there is a culture of poverty associated with marginalized groups differing by race, ethnicity, gender, class, and citizenship? How useful are cultural, structural, and other modes of interpretation to understanding realities? How do we reach marginalized and segregated voices to amplify the realities and coping mechanisms of the poor instead of being overshadowed by Western, colonialist, and bureaucratic concepts and categories?

Hypothesis

Fabricated insights on poverty are influenced by Morocco's history of slavery and colonization wherein colonization created hierarchies and understandings of ethnicity. The tropes that developed during the era of slavery persist today to impact views of women, migrants, class, and Sub-Saharan Africans in the form of holding the belief that there is a culture of poverty. This may include notions of laziness, work ethic, or character traits of poor people reflected in personal interviews, NGO agendas, and the execution of the Moroccan welfare state.

Theoretical Framework

The culture of poverty is a thesis that has surfaced and been spun throughout history where the poor are ultimately blamed for their poverty. It asserts that the culture of poverty encompasses a set of adaptations that offer a temporary solution to poverty, but then perpetuate poverty in the long term. Its most recent deployment was conceptualized by Oscar Lewis in the 60s with an anthropological argument that there is a set of norms, beliefs, practices, attitudes, and values unique to the plight of the poor that are transmitted throughout generations. He argues that these habits manifest because the poor have few opportunities; they begin to lack ambition and instead turn to alcohol and drugs. These

alternative mechanisms ultimately preclude them from any opportunities that may arise. Lewis uses these observed modes of behavior and self perception that derive from material deprivation to justify the argument that there is a collective culture held by the poor.

This is an ideological cover to perpetuate the marginalization and the exploitation of the poor. Frequently used to describe the plight of poor minorities in the United States, it enables the stigmatization of black families without appearing to be racist; it also blames the victims associating their predicament with their attitudes and values that distance them from the job market. More importantly, it justifies the absence of a policy by the State, the argument being that no policy is likely to change the poor's predicament. It also generates hostility to the welfare state.

The culture of poverty argument became prominent after theories of biological inferiority as an explanation for poverty were discredited, so Lewis' proposal was well received as another victim-blaming avenue to justify exclusion, relieve agencies and citizens of moral obligations, and enhance the image of the middle class as deserving of their privilege (Streib et al. 2016). The reality is that as just as biology based approaches were entangled with race, the culture of poverty is as well, as people are always looking for an explanation to validate white supremacy. In order to do this and maintain social position, the culture of poverty is used and demonizes minorities, promulgates stereotypes, and creates a sense of othering. These have real impacts that come in the form of policies, discrimination, and differential access to resources (Streib et al. 2016). When implementing "solutions," people may criticize the government for its failure to ameliorate the social conditions of the ghetto poor. They believe the government and affluent citizens have an obligation to improve the impoverished lives of the ghetto poor, stopping crime and various problems in the context of a moral superiority as if they can't help themselves. This view of welfare goes in both directions where people use this just to show their commitment to morally upright lives rather than recognizing the history and historical oppression of the situation, and that this is not a problem to be fixed (Shelby 2007).

Institutionalized racism is coupled with the discrimination and deprivation that have occurred in many different forms over time. Beginning with slavery, people were disenfranchised to such an extent that the oppression has continued to be a lived-reality. The wealth and agency disparity has widened and accumulated over the years. Poverty is a cycle that can follow individuals throughout the lifespan and families through generations. This operates today through the enforcement of attributing characteristics possessed by racial minorities and the poor as signs of disvalue or incompetence (Shelby 2007). The majority is able to validate white supremacy to keep themselves at the top.

A culture of poverty is particularly employed to explain the endemics of certain neighborhoods, commonly referred to as 'shanty towns' or slums across Morocco. Neighborhoods previously neglected and relegated to "outsider status" from civilized urban life came into the spotlight after the 2003 Casablanca attacks, as the suicide bombers were from the shanty town of Sidi Moumen. There was ample talk in the media about the area, and the bombers' backgrounds were tied to a culture of poverty as an argument to explain the terrorist attack. Invoking this argument in conjunction with explaining a breach of national security renewed an urgency for attention to focus on vulnerable populations and areas and to explain the phenomenon of the urban poor. Economic management and reforms rallied around this mystery, determined to improve the social condition of the poor (Litvack 2019).

Why this matters

It is not culture, but racial and class hierarchy, that is reproduced from one generation to the next.... The culture of poor and marginalized groups does not exist in a vacuum. It is in constant and dynamic interaction with the matrix of political, economic, and social factors in which it is embedded. (Steinberg, 1998:10)

Justice needs to be recognized as fairness, and not just conforming to a hierarchical system. To do so, we need to distinguish between definitions and impositions of subjective poverty, the opinions and assumptions of the privileged, compared to the reality of history, the present, and coping mechanisms.

This is currently not distinguished in the literature, as most of it relies on neoliberal statistics aimed toward quantitative poverty reduction. The statistics also position Morocco as a Western nation that looks down on the rest of Subsaharan Africa. Austerity measures and structural reform measures were introduced under the auspices of the IMF and World Bank. Trends in poverty and social welfare have fluctuated since these programs were introduced, but the rhetoric is now primarily development based. Material deprivation and inadequate levels of consumption have always been central to the conceptualization of poverty and living standards, and direct measures of failure to meet “basic needs” are commonly used alongside income-based measures such as the World Bank’s “dollar a day” standard. Material deprivation is seen primarily as a means to go “beyond income” in capturing poverty. Austerity policies impact framing of development and what it means to be poor, and it’s important to understand how this is integrated in Moroccan ideologies, political consciousness, and transposed onto others.

Defining poverty

When teasing out the issues endemic to certain neighborhoods and segregation, the criminalization of poverty, and wealth disparity, it’s clear why responding with organization around the causes, rather than results, breaks the cycle. Poverty is not just the absence of income or even the material deprivation that accompanies it. It is both of these and everything that follows from them: the hassle; the hard work; the stress; the budgeting; the conflict; the shame; the degraded environment; the isolation; the helplessness; the ill-health; the misfortune (Kus et al. 2016). These factors are compounded for those who have interesting disadvantaged statuses, and consequent oppressions

cannot be divided to fit into a linear definition (Branch and Scherer 2013). The limited qualitative knowledge of this calls for participatory means to understand and amplify experiences.

Literature Review

Poverty and inequality

Generally, equality refers to the uneven distribution of wealth in Morocco as expressed in its Gini coefficient of 41, indicating a high level of inequality. As a whole, developing countries tend towards economic inequality: households in the most prosperous areas of developing countries have been shown to consume an average of 75% more than households in poorer areas (Rawding, 2010). Even among developing countries, however, Morocco's ratio of the richest 10% to the poorest 10% is quite high at 11.7 (Boutayeb, 2006). Though extreme poverty has decreased significantly in recent years, 13.3% of Moroccans are still living just above the poverty line. When combined with those Moroccans living in poverty, this means that 6.3 million of Moroccans – a fifth of the population – are living below or just above the poverty line. Rural populations make up two thirds of those in poverty (Morocco Overview, 2014), driving many rural inhabitants towards cities.

While urbanization presents a general dilemma for Morocco, there are also vast differences between the resources of cities. The cities of Casablanca (pop. 3.2 million), Rabat/Salé (pop. 1.8 million), Fes (pop. 1 million) and Marrakech (pop. 0.9 million) make up 38% of Morocco's urban population as centers of trade, tourism, and culture. 80% of industry and service jobs are located in Casablanca, Rabat-Salé, and Tangiers, making up 75% of total urban employment. Casablanca only houses 10% of Morocco's population, but it has 60% of industrial workers and 55% of the nation's production units.

Despite the concentration of industry in major cities, there are vast inequalities in the way that people live within them; both urban and rural inequality is increasing, and Casablanca has a Gini coefficient of 0.52. Morocco is working to raise the standard of living within cities, working with the

Cities without Slums program to relocate slum dwellers and improve infrastructure. One strategy is to harness urban growth to create new towns immediately outside major cities, increasing the availability of affordable housing (Maghreb Cities, 2012). In 2010, urban unemployment was 12.7%, while rural unemployment was only 3.3%. The brunt of this unemployment has largely been borne by younger, more educated Moroccans.

According to recent studies, over 46% of Moroccans feel dissatisfied with their lives. Sociologist Kenza Attouzan suggests that half of Moroccans are without the conditions necessary for dignity, particularly “healthcare, transport, employment, sanitation, housing and education... key priorities which, when they are not met, make life irredeemably unbearable for human beings” (Brnovic and Hatoum, 2010).

Levels of wellbeing have ceased to rise with economic growth, and rather in these developed countries we now see an increase in anxiety, depression, and other social problems. Every measure of wellbeing from life expectancy to mental illness, to violence and literacy is less affected by the wealth of a country than by how unequal it is. The index of health and social problems include trust, mental illness, obesity, teen birth, homicide, imprisonment, social mobility. Social problems are caused directly by poor material conditions like bad housing, poor diets, and lack of educational opportunities. As these problems are commonly attributed to the most deprived areas of society, or people at the bottom of any social ladder, they are also more common in more unequal societies which implies richer countries would do better, but the scale of material differences between people within society is too big. Insecurities in early life due to social problems, isolation, poor health, limited opportunities lead to more anxieties later in life. Social problems contribute to unequal status within society, thus heightened anxieties and an increased importance of social status. This leads people to lose faith in the system and thus produces an overall decreased sense of trust in regimes and policies, and we see higher levels of trust where inequality is low (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009).

Austerity policies

Morocco is burdened with a legacy of capitalism and other contingencies that compose the current social condition, which acts as a huge barrier to achieving any form of equality of opportunity. This form of market exchange is inherently against the value of community, and works against satisfying distributive justice (Cohen 2009). Some years ago Morocco started a process of important and often arduous reforms and established the objective of developing its economy and institutions in order to ensure a convergence towards an economic system governed by market laws, with an open and democratic government system (Jaidi). As the classic neoliberal models based on privatization, structural adjustment, financial deregulation and the roll-back of direct state intervention in the domestic economy proved incapable of sustaining durable growth and poverty alleviation, the beginning of the 2000s witnessed a transformation in market-oriented government with a focus on participatory development and a clear concern with security. However, austerity ultimately leads to the weakening of public services and welfare lead to greater inequality, which means deeper reliance on other nations. Therefore, despite the marked reduction of poverty, Morocco has experienced persistent, if not greater, income inequalities (Jaidi).

Ethnicity is relevant in the production of inequality, especially in the context of the targeted neoliberal and austerity policies today. According to a group of Moroccan students, ethnicity is only apparent in Morocco because the colonizer used it to control, separate, and make people aware of inferiority. This is how market hierarchy is created, maintained, and justified and how it prevents change from uplifting those who need it, instead putting a bandaid on issues. Or in other words, the present privileged majority validates supremacy to keep themselves at the top. This is evident in the string of neoliberal agendas and the continuous reproduction of narratives to delegitimize the unemployed or working poor.

Slums and Development

The 2003 Casablanca bombings 'instilled an even greater sense of urgency into the commitment to eliminate slums as breeding grounds of antisocial behaviours', as a World Bank report stated (World Bank 2006, p. 11). ' The issue of the slums was incorporated in a larger vision to combat poverty. The King manifested this agenda through a series of speeches that stressed the importance of human development and launched the National Initiative for Human Development. The program seeks to address poverty and social problems through policies, the promotion of local projects, and an emphasis on a civil society that attempts to improve access to social services, create employment opportunities and combat the poverty of the most vulnerable groups within society. Coupled with an equally prestigious and ambitious development plan, Villes Sans Bidonvilles, or cities without slums, these initiatives were readily backed by the government, NGOs, and various international development organizations including USAID, the United Nations Development Program, and the World Bank. These conglomerates conducted studies to geographically target these initiatives through a poverty numbering and mapping strategy. The programs primary goals were to eradicate slums, thus slums became the priority of poverty alleviation policies (Zemni and Bogaert 2011).

The geographical targeting and mapping strategies that Morocco's poverty reduction programs rely on are lacking comprehensive local data on the true characteristics of poor households and indicators other than location. Regardless, they serve the purpose that the government hoped to highlight that the urban poor may be falling between the cracks and receiving a disproportionately low share of the allocations linked to government poverty reduction efforts (Litvack 2019). As, between bombings that reignited interest in the urban poor and the World Bank's targeted mapping strategy, the solutions of the poor were criticized and people were deemed violent for falling through the cracks aka getting involved in drugs and extremism, so this information through household census data was amplified to paint a picture of slums

Via the National Human Development Initiative (INDH), the slums were targeted through a series of programs with the objective of reducing poverty, vulnerability, insecurity and social exclusion and establishing dynamics in favor of human development. The program seeks to improve the living conditions of poor and vulnerable people and to promote “wider access to basic services, social programmes and economic opportunities in the pockets of poverty” (Jaidi).

The INDH and its affiliated NGOs are combatting vulnerability, but in reality they are focusing on location and not holistically looking at the conditions of the poor. This effectively places NGOs in relegated shanty towns and simultaneously stigmatizes an entire neighborhood like Sidi Momouen or Beni Makada in the process. This superficial approach calls into question who actually needs state interference, and what the proposed definitions of unemployment and vulnerability mean. The problems of the slums are not analyzed from a structural point of view, nor framed in a specific discourse on economic and social injustice. Instead, the problems are visualized and made comprehensive in terms of the spatial metaphor of slums being only remotely connected to the city and its social and economic services (Zemni and Bogaert 2011).

The political rationale justifying these social development schemes is to explain how 'poor people' are or are not being integrated into the realm of the market. These initiatives, under the pretext of 'participation,' - are involved in the creation of a specific political world in which the ability to claim and articulate political rights are not only restricted by 'the regime' but also by the sanctions and incentives of the 'free market' (Zemni and Bogaert 2011).

The national initiatives have effectively brought globalization, or a facilitation of the flow of goods, capital, services, labor, and market integration, to the slums and their inhabitants as a solution to their problems. This involved relocating slum dwellers to affordable housing complexes. These were coupled with state-directed NGO intervention to improve citizen participation. This technique of top-down social engineering was an attempt to integrate the slum population in the formal city through

housing. Consequently, residents were forcefully relocated to other peripheries of the cities and confronted with new costs for electricity, water, public transport, and loans. Relocation thus acted as a different manifestation of poverty capital to control the poor, and again, dictate who has access to capital. Ultimately, the goal of eradicating vulnerability was to create a new frontier for capital accumulation through globalizing the urban poor (Zemni and Bogaert 2011). This agenda highlights the importance of gathering lived realities of people who are now in affordable housing or were deeply impacted by relocation and intervention efforts.

The fabrication of poverty capital did not ensure the financial inclusion of the poor into the formal city on fair and just terms and instead was an innovation to exploit. The introduction of these new policies was also a way of giving the urban poor new hope for the future, or is state support rather a convenient (class) instrument to privatize benefits and socialize risks (Zemni and Bogaert 2011). This begs the question of whether these initiatives and state intervention were really meant to get people out of poverty and create peace or acted to reproduce the legitimacy of the King by temporarily buying peace.

Education and cultural capital

Vulnerability policies have NGOs specifically target and intervene with local education systems. Education is frequently employed as an answer to eradicate poverty; thus, the government allocates resources accordingly. However, as more youth become more highly educated in Morocco, there is a gap between degree holders and employment (USAID). A mission to create an equal playing field for equal opportunity is plagued with the very inequality it is trying to correct for.

By projecting an ethos of social class neutrality, the education system conceals the fact that serves to primarily reproduce class structure. There is a class based distribution of valued cultural capital in society where the upper class has more and the lower class has less. Cultural capital is the cultural

knowledge, resources, ideas, and pedigree that one can draw on to signal class standing and have their knowledge valued and rewarded by mainstream society. Cultural capital allows some people to participate in movements that work towards equal opportunity while still benefiting from neoliberalism. It is not financial like economic capital or human and networking knowledge like social capital; rather, it is the ideas of knowing what to wear, how to act, and what to say. The labor market evidently draws upon this distribution of capital; however, schools actively facilitate the reproduction of this cycle and exclusion of people from society as well (Lareau 1987). Thus, education acts as an operational way to determine socioeconomic status throughout generations.

Class and class cultures play an important role in facilitating or impeding children's or parents' negotiation of the process of schooling. Schools expect and reward the proper display of cultural capital in the classroom. The working class is presumed to have a schooling culture that defies the expected involvement in school. There is a cultural mismatch where teachers think that working class parents don't care about a child's education. This puts an emphasis not just on the student's cultural capital and background but also on the parents' agency or lack thereof (Lareau 1987).

The dependency on cultural capital to carry students and their families through the education system and the workforce has lasting effects. Students in certain districts or of more disadvantaged backgrounds are assumed to not have an investment in their education or be independently navigating it with parents who could care less. This imposed narrative follows youth into the workforce where their work ethic is continuously questioned and criticized.

Skills mismatch and informal work

The culture of poverty welcomes a fixation on unemployment as central to the struggles of poor minorities. Jobs and vocational training are communicated as a necessity in order for communities to avoid total social collapse (Branch and Scherer 2013). Even with this goal in mind, employment must

follow the appropriate cultural script to escape poverty through engaging in the formal labor force. If the poor are able to secure these positions, the culture of poverty argues that even if material conditions were to drastically improve, the poor would remain culturally deficient and their poverty would be self-perpetuating due to work ethics or the choice of employment. Capitalist reorganization of labor shined much of the work available to the poor into the public sphere and assigned it a market exchange value, but the structural racist and sexist barriers persisted to characterize this work as unskilled or low value, this reinforcing isolation and low value (Branch and Scherer 2013).

Historically, the jobs available are deemed as bad or illegitimate vocations. The employment options available are characterized by instability, exploitation, and invisibility; thus, employment alone is not sufficient enough to enable a family to escape poverty (Branch and Scherer 2013). Poor people are swelling the ranks of the low range work force in an attempt to make ends meet (Branch and Scherer 2013). This means many people are in positions where they are earning less than \$2 a day in informal work. Thus, informal work acts as a survival mechanism to get out of poverty. Street vendors, for example, have provided this as a solution for themselves.

There is a flux of youth who make it through the education system to become degree holders, then comprising a sector of skilled unemployment. This suggests a skills mismatch between the current outcome of the tertiary education system and the type of demand for skills in the labor market. Although this is a broader economic and social welfare problem, scholars and communities are able to impose characteristics on the unemployed, attributing their status to a work ethic. Da Silva attributes high and persistent skilled unemployment rates to the workers' job-search-behavior. A "wait-and-see" attitude can depend upon unemployment insurance, benefits, reservation wages, and family support (Da Silva). Impoverished and unemployed youth are pushed to the brink of society but kept just close enough to ensure social order.

Welfare

Welfare states were built with working class in mind, but with their destruction through austerity policies, there has been growing fragmentation, leading to the formation of the precariat. Development of precariat was driven by policies and institutional changes as the economy was disembedded from society as a global market economy of competitiveness and individualism was sought out by the Moroccan government (Standing). Invoking the culture of poverty means stakeholders are preoccupied with the role of welfare and whether its availability is helping or hindering poor communities (Branch and Scherer 2013). The government's focus on vulnerable people plays on the trope of the 'welfare queen' to stigmatize those in a lower class. The poor can be deemed as takers, victims who believe the government has a responsibility to care for them and that they are entitled to health care, food, and housing. Austerity policies are used to obscure the more empathetic faces of poverty like the working poor, and instead highlight success as self-sufficiency, autonomy, and affluence. This leads to an emphasis on participatory citizenship that selects certain members to integrate in the more formal society of the King, and the burden is put on slum dwellers and those in affordable housing alike to reshape their communities to fit inside the confines of that society. The welfare queen stereotype is thus used to undermine support for public benefit programs and create a public identity for the poor that undermines democratic listening to the needs and priorities of these communities and instead relies on the principle that poverty reflects a moral failure to participate in the formal market economy (Pruitt).

The reality is that the majority of people want to work but are simply barred from doing so by formal, informal, and social disadvantages. If we really value the tenants of education and hard work as part of success, then why is there an influx of the working poor and highly skilled unemployed? There is an influx of skilled unemployment in Morocco, which is the focus of many workers rights movements whether it involves teachers and contracts or recent graduates. This is a growing problem, but it doesn't

holistically represent the entire unemployed population in Morocco and varying definitions of work and skill. This discourse aligns with the fact that there is a dominant cultural capital of what is most valued, and there is still a class based distribution based off of this.

Reexamining poverty

Considering current approaches to equal opportunity aren't countering structural inequalities, it's important to examine how this time can be reclaimed and compensated. Ideologies may differ in believing that there will not be a revolution against the status quo as poor people are not capable because they are entrenched in their culture. Conversely, Streib et al. point out that a revolution is possible and can be powerful just as other major movements in history (Streib et al. 2016). However, we currently criminalize tools used in revolutions and resistance movements. A revolution can come in different forms, as people's attempts to gain power take different shapes because they have been denied conventional ways to do so. As a recipient of violence like poverty, people are unable to respond appropriately. When impoverished communities don't have much else and are consistently denied power, fighting to assert power and respect may look like a culture of violence. People who are impoverished don't necessarily want this life but are conditioned through symbolic violence¹ that this is how to act and cope. Although it's tragic, violence serves a purpose as a response to the social environment and is part of a toolkit for society and culture (Streib et al 2016). Symbolic violence teaches people to misrecognize the social structure and inequalities inherent to the world as natural, which in turn naturalizes racialized assumptions that lead to pain. This habitus is normalized so that certain people work certain jobs, and certain people control the economic and symbolic means of production, all of which produces justification for the system. This hegemony has the ability to shape public opinion.

¹ This symbolic violence refers to impoverished minorities internalizing supremacy. They may see themselves as deviant and part of a stagnant culture and position. They are pushed into immobility as the way in which individuals and their communities move through the world are evaluated through a middle class standard which can lead to differential capital, achievement, and opportunity.

Normalization and invisibility become a form of structural violence in the form of neoliberal policies, violence continuum, market practices, and work related rights and dangers.

Methods

Recruitment

I identified organizations on an international development scale that worked in Morocco such as IOM and UNHCR to examine their involvement in the community and how grounded they are in the lives of real people. I also identified stakeholders in the community by widening my lens to examine local NGOs that may not explicitly deal with poverty reduction but focused on employment, education, community development, or other strategies typically employed to solve the poor's problems. I specifically chose organizations and stakeholders in Tangier to focus my work on as they might have a unique positionality with more Western and development oriented influence.

I identified organizations like Association Chifae and Rawabit Assadaka through connections from other students. Both located are located in the Beni Makada region of Tangier, a stigmatized shanty town. I identified subsequent organizations through partners of these organizations, recommendations from my academic advisor, and an internet search of local organizations in the labor, education, and development sectors.

I wanted to interview leaders at these organizations to determine whether they had a genuine investment and connection with the community, as well as to determine what kind of theory of change the organizations followed and where their funding came from. If the organizations emphasized grassroots priorities and solutions, I hoped to interview participants at the organizations about their experiences with the views and policies imposed on them and their communities.

My goal was to cultivate a genuine connection with the identified NGOs, stakeholders, and community members so that the research is understood and relatable and results can easily be communicated back.

Interview Process

In depth, semi structured interviews allow views and experiences to not just be dictated by who's conducting the interview, but instead engages and empowers participants through prompts. This method not only helps the researcher gain knowledge about an issue and then potential solutions at hand, but actively gives a voice to people to share what they know, exhibit potential, and capture attention. I want to ensure that the finished product is not just communicated in a paper to make all of this knowledge accessible across communities. I hope to cultivate more vehicles for the community to create and disseminate change among themselves. This arises by people taking leadership roles to solve issues within their own communities, thus the organization is embodying socially just systems.

Effective participatory consultation requires that participants are not just heard but are listened to and understood by stakeholders. This method demonstrates how solutions are different across areas, and through gathering information people can then share strategies and techniques with each other. Through co-learning and participatory methods, it is easy to demonstrate that communities themselves know what they need, and they often know the solutions too when given the right tools and platform.

I drafted an interview guide (See Appendix A) with questions geared towards stakeholders in organizations that were intended to prompt a discussion about how the goals of their organization defy or perpetuate a culture of poverty argument, as well as what their views on the government's vulnerability politics were. Many of my questions were often automatically answered to or alluded to by the representative, and we were able to easily converse on deeper points.

Ethical Concerns

My goal is to associate with a nonprofit or existing research project that invests in participatory action research and the co-creation of knowledge, otherwise, as foreigners what's our place to pretend that we're creating new knowledge when this is the experience and reality for many that has likely already been gathered? Our participants are not here for our gain, and how meaningful are our conversations and interviews if we haven't made genuine connections with people yet? You can't fabricate a personal encounter and meaningful experience when the only goal is to discuss issues. People are also reluctant to share information about themselves and open up, so there needs to be an established relationship sometimes not just with an organization but with individuals as well.

Working in communities and conducting interviews in spaces that community members create cultivates a supportive and safe environment. Privacy here is essential. In this sense, the organization strives to put in place an organizational structure that is a model for the social system they want to see. This inherently provides a space to ensure that people who have historically been excluded from political decision-making play leadership roles in addressing problems affecting their own communities.

In this process of breaking down structural barriers, it must also be recognized that people themselves hold all of this knowledge already, but have merely been dispossessed from the ability to autonomously advocate for themselves. Solutions then must revolve around community members as leaders and actors in the system rather than still being those who are acted upon. Development projects regularly overlook marginalized people's needs and priorities. It's important that interviews and the dissemination of results are grounded in lived reality and pay attention to power relations that help everyone involved grow and be aware of mutual respect rather than classic interviews that could cause tensions or unintended feelings of unease due to formalities. Ultimately, people should have their own priorities frame the research rather than those of the researcher, which provides invaluable empowerment and information on both ends.

These ideals are particularly important when working with vulnerable populations. There needs to be a structured relationship and procedures in line with the IRB to ensure protection for participants when asking about sensitive topics and inserting ourselves into their time and place. It was important to me to have a mutual or developed relationship with a participant, and not to just randomly pick a recruitment center or ask people in the street without a prior relationship, as a lot of privilege and power is present to coerce strangers to talk to me only for my benefit. As students we can be intentional but there aren't necessarily checks and balances when it comes to asking the right questions, or making sure interviewees know exactly what this information will be used for. Otherwise, the knowledge gained is not necessarily new or productive, and people don't necessarily feel comfortable revealing information when you have no established relationship. So how do these interviews contribute to the community of research we're striving for? We need to have meaningful connections whether that be with organizations of people integrated in the community to have meaningful conversations, otherwise we're fabricating a personal encounter.

Essential in the interview process was also making sure that the participants felt that they could adequately communicate their responses. Participants gave verbal consent to be recorded so that they could speak freely without worrying about translation. I recorded interviews and reassured interviewees that translation or 'good english' wasn't a problem and that I could handle the translation afterwards as an attempt to make it an easy process for the participant lending their time.

Barriers

Research surpasses a standard of ethics and uplifts and works with participants what it is participatory action consultation. My goal for this project was to make connections with community organizations and stakeholders that follow a theory of grassroots change, and ultimately to interview community members about how they feel they are perceived, treated, and what their needs and

priorities are. It was important to me to not just randomly interview people off the street, even if they are vendors that I may have the occasional interaction with. However, upon reviewing the literature, it became clear that first, there is not a breadth of literature explicitly linking a culture of poverty argument to Moroccan policies and organizations. Consequently, it may be hard to make these connections with individuals impacted by policies and stereotypes through surface level interactions with organizations. The more pertinent task was to evaluate the motives and impact of NGOs in 'shanty towns' to examine whether they defy neoliberal agendas and are invested in the lived realities of the communities that they serve.

Findings

Remess

The representatives from Remess described themselves as a solidarity organization to build a fair and equitable development model. They focus on social economy, income generating activities, and job creation. They achieve this through workshops with local organizations focused on fair trade, solidarity, employment of women and youth, sustainable tourism, and literacy. The representatives explained their mission as working towards a social solidarity economy, one that doesn't conform to capitalist standards and focuses on democratic decisions. However, they receive their funding from the INDH, Dakar, Oxfam, and other international development organizations and agreements.

In Rabat, the organizations they work with are focused on women and youth employment, because these will benefit the family in the long term. Upon questioning, the representatives said that they are not focused on ethnic, racial, or migrant justice, as they only work with social solidarity so women and children are included in that.

Association Chifae

I spoke with a representative at the organizations office in Beni Makada. The organization has three main functions: Labor and social insertion, education, and community development, each intended help people to escape poverty, they need access to high quality education and to have jobs. Chifae's representative said that these were the minimum requirements, as they also need to be citizens and need help on a personal and community level. Therefore, the organization works to see how people can live, understand their needs, and how they can fit into societal norms and laws to create communal living. The three components of the organization work towards this; however, the programs try to address all three with an integrated methodology and approach but may only focus on one.

Association Chifae works with four schools to be in touch with whom they see as the main actors for change in the community: schools and parents. The schools provide Chifae with a list of students, usually those most likely to drop out from school. The representative attributed this risk to "bad results or bad social situation," which he said are usually linked. He outlined how a mix of events can make people vulnerable, including big class sizes due to overpopulated schools and the fact that it was an immigrant neighborhood. He explained how the area has been historically formed by immigrants from the countryside who "haven't had the chance to know how to live in the city, as it is not the same way of living." People come to live in this city because they find it easier to find transportation, and there is a cheaper cost of rent and living. He added that many inhabitants didn't have any guidance when they married or when they had children; therefore, parents work and live, but they don't know responsibility and their children are independent. Because of this lack of supervision and responsibility, he said that children often find themselves just living in the streets and doing whatever they can to survive in the neighborhood, all without the support of social services because there are historically not many politics in the area. The state puts too much money in some areas, and others are left with few investments in terms of infrastructure and social services. The representative then attributes these

factors as the reason that Beni Makada is supposedly a hub for crime and drugs, and the solution is more schools where children have guidance and structured free time, as currently they don't have any formal services to spend their free time or where they can 'control' what they are doing and get on the right path. To compensate for these causes, Chifae works with parents as they "need to learn how to parent."

Chifae also offers vocational and professional trainings in service and mechanics. Students can attend workshops to learn about their interests, capacities, and strengths, and after receiving the vocational training of their choice they are placed in the workforce. This not only helps create a stable livelihood, but the representative highlights the importance that being successfully settled in a company gives individuals a chance to thrive in the community by learning to work with a team and follow rules. Although they are theoretically able to contribute to society, the representative states that poverty is not only having money, and sometimes students the first paycheck and resign. He says that there is not necessarily a solution to this, as the organization can only provide services according to what they've seen as a model to explain how to get a better life and have access to opportunity. He said a barrier to this is that today's youth have distorted expectations and dreams and don't think that there are any easily attainable requirements to reach these dreams. They are fascinated with cars, money, and material goods. The organization understands that the basic needs must be fulfilled first; everyone needs to eat and have shelter, and then you can go to the second level of needs.

Ultimately, after Chifae provides the tools for personal preparation, students need to learn to respect the rules before they get the job. Without learning the appropriate behaviors for certain expectations like respect, promptness, time management, and dress code, students will not succeed in a job.

Rawabit Assadaka

The representative highlighted the fact that their organization acts as a mediator between the neighborhood and companies, providing companies with skilled youth, and youth the opportunity to use and learn life and soft skills. He explained that this is an intervention for youth who want a job but don't have the skills to find it. The intervention works directly with youth on an education level and also incorporates new activities like exposure to cinema, theater, dance, and sports. They have an obligation to serve the community, as they are at-risk migrants who are faced with homelessness and drugs, so they work with community members, institutions, families, schools, and international organizations to help at risk youth.

It is important in this process of uplifting youth to listen to their priorities. During the first meeting of a workshop, youth are asked why they want a job and what they will do with their first salary. If they don't want to work, youth can also elect to participate in extracurricular activities and sports.

Rawabit Assadaka is unique because they emphasize a transfer of knowledge and equal opportunity. The jobs youth get are important, because otherwise they "don't have a chance." The representative details how "this is the last chance for them because they are not in the education system; they have nothing in this life; they are in the street smoking drugs -- now they need to prove themselves in front of their family that they can do something." He says that vulnerable youth are also drawn to gangs and radicalization. The representative explained how the stigma around drugs in the community has subsided since the new port, Tangier Med, has been in operation. Youth were previously involved with drug trafficking between Spain and Tangier to bring in money, but with better security, this is no longer an option. Youth instead have to rely on their studies and the workforce. Migrant youth and their families may also be involved in informal work -- they are hard workers but earn a low salary

and can afford the basics, so Rawabit Assadaka aims to build capacity, to build responsibility, and to build time management skills to see results within a company in the labor market.

They work with small associations in neighborhoods to transfer study throughout the entire neighborhood because they cannot touch all the people. In this vein, Rawabit Assadaka is only one part of the solution. They need youth to volunteer and ideally have the capacity to change, repeat, and reflect. They will learn the importance of hard work, and once they are secure in their career, their success story is used as an example for others. Their stories can be transmitted through social media to connect with the community, or the successful youth can meet with and present to other students about their experiences, what they've gained, and what they all have the capacity to do. The success stories are disseminated throughout communities, but Rawabit Assadaka also works with public administration to change perceptions of vulnerable youth.

The representative noted that without funding from international organizations it isn't possible to find an organization that accomplishes this mediation and intervention. He specifically highlighted the importance of funding from USAID, stating that if funds don't come from the U.S. it is very difficult to find a successful project.

ART LINA

ART LINA is a multicultural center in Rabat that aims to bring intercultural dialogue to life on a daily basis, it's main mission being the dissemination of languages and cultures and vocational training, while offering psychological support and support towards self-reliance. They serve vulnerable populations including women out of school, students, migrants, and sub-Saharan refugees. The representative I spoke with saw that poverty went beyond the identities that may hinder people, and defined it as "the lack of means, subsistence, and without assistance to create a precariousness." She explained how the poorest people are then mostly sub-Saharan migrants because they don't have

equitable job opportunities; their work has long hours with little pay; people are prejudiced against them; and there are cultural barriers. These barriers are difficult to surpass due to the complexity of administrative procedures when trying to enter the formal labor market, coupled with discrimination and lack of socio-professional training among these groups.

ART LINA aspires to help young sub-Saharan migrants succeed without losing hope. They strive to make their services accessible to everyone, and their “art for all” mission includes socio-cultural activities like language classes, African dance, yoga, samba, writing workshops, slam poetry, and more to emphasize the importance of migrant culture. They see that these are not a solution to poverty, as the solution isn’t obvious, but they should work together through initiative and mutual aid to seek it.

Conclusions

Equality of opportunity

All of the organizations interviewed emphasized that they were working to provide more equality of opportunity for the communities. Morocco is criticized by natives and outsiders alike for not being free or equal. Considering this criticism is in the context of development, especially concerning these organizations, when we talk about an equal society, what do we mean? Do we mean solving a problem of a lack of synergy between prosperity and social cohesion? Do we mean development oriented solutions? Or, do we mean uplifting the voices of the marginalized to create equal opportunity?

In working in the direction of any of these goals, Moroccan liberties have expanded and society has democratized, but what impact has this actually had for those most deprived of them? If progress existed outside the confines of the law, an egalitarian society could rest on the principles of justice, equality, and opportunity. There is a principle of community where people care about and care for one another (Cohen 2009). Equality of opportunity works towards these ideals to remove obstacles some people experience and others don’t due to enhanced opportunities the more privileged enjoy. This

doesn't always benefit those most suited for rewards, and sometimes reduces the opportunities of those who benefit from inequality. Even though this sounds scary and radical -- it's okay! Equalizing makes it so dynasties of privilege don't continue to benefit from the oppression and exploitation of others but instead, pay some of that back and together we're able to grow by redistributing opportunities.

Education as inequality

Education is boasted as the fix to equality of opportunity. However, the onus is put on the students to take full advantage of these obscure benefits. This approach corrects for inequality after the fact, not the problems that would have put people here in the first place.

A focus on access to education ignores the within school structures of inequality. Parents are criticized for not being responsible or caring about their children's education. This is a cultural mismatch where burden is put on the parent's and their modes of survival are criticized.

Reinforcing a culture of poverty

The discourse surrounding vulnerable populations involves saving communities from drugs, extremism, and other deviant or violent activities. Viewing the poor's working solutions that manifest as a culture of poverty as something that needs to be fixed is an attempt to protect the upper class. We force people into these situations, then criticize the culture they use to adapt and force them to assimilate into the culture they've been barred from participating in (Streib et al 2016). Culture is a manifestation of the human spirit, not an attempt to privileged.

Expectations are imposed on the participants at these organizations of how they need to conform to be legitimate, whether it's their type of work or their spending habits. People are relegated to standards of poverty based off of their aspirations and what they're allowed to want or have based

off of their socioeconomic status. Someone can be materially deprived, but still be able to buy a new jacket, and still experience the range of burdens poverty brings.

Even when people do assimilate, into the workforce, education system, etc..., history shows that they are still discriminated against and barred from success. In debunking the culture of poverty, it is paramount to recognize and respect the meaning that people produce and mobilize to act in their environment. People in power have put the impoverished in this position then criticize their mechanisms of survival. People in poverty are deemed as deviant for invoking violence or other tools, yet they're normalized and even rewarded when committed by white people (Streib et al 2016). Many forms of violence may not be physical and can present through womanizing, cheating, participating in hookup culture, and drug use which are punishable and can have real implications like incarceration for poor minorities, but these behaviors are rewarded and can even contribute to upward mobility when it comes to privileged folk (Streib et al 2016). The deviant acts that happen in minority societies are frowned upon when they're merely methods of survival, yet when they're replicated in the upper class there is no aspect of survival present, nor are there any consequences.

How the culture of poverty creates and perpetuates criminalization

Previously, slums were politically tolerated as long as they remained separate from the formal city. Active governing of the slums through INDH and VSB shifted this narrative to see unemployment, poverty, and marginalization as technical problems that could be resolved through market-oriented approaches that reflect the requirements of efficiency and expertise. People went from being invisible and inferior to 'vulnerable.' Specifically, since people were alienated and outside the bounds of the formal economy, they are vulnerable to drugs and extremism (Zemni and Bogaert 2011).

Urban mega-projects like Tangier Med we in part crafted to target these concerns. The city was radically redesigned and restructured in order to satisfy the desires of global capital and erase

vulnerability in its wake. The project's political and economic consequences for slum livelihoods was coupled with direct development actions through organizations to reduce violence and poverty in communities (Zemni and Bogaert 2011). These efforts delegitimize sources of income to teach people how to cope with poverty, and also propose that people are inherently prone to violence without the helping hand of the market and government infrastructure. Although stigma surrounding drugs may have subsided due to the security at Tangier Med, the narrative has lasting impacts how organizations interact with communities and how politics view the plight of these communities.

Funding

I learned early on that funding was a significant barrier that precluded a lot of community connections and participatory action I was hoping to see. All of the organizations were funded by international organizations. This solidified the notion I had that these organizations were serving capitalist and market-oriented interests, that, although may temporarily benefit communities, ultimately widen inequalities.

Community Empowerment

Just and redistributed social capital will come with a sense of community where we don't exploit one another and benefit from oppression. Knowledge and skill diffusion is key to overall productivity growth as well as reduction of inequality. Each of these organizations works for the benefit of their communities, but is simply barred from creating radical change by the confines of funding and government priorities. Consequently, this restricts the diversity in engagement that they can apply to communities. The narrow lense of 'vulnerable,' creates a definition of poverty that doesn't take into account the many intersectional factors that create these realities. Identities of race and gender are neglected, as well as the histories of oppression that come with these. Vulnerable is geared towards

these communities as a whole to assert that their socio-economic status makes them more likely to take part in revolutions, radicalism, and extremism.

How are needs and priorities listened to in the context of The Makhzen

Moroccan civil society programs are proud to feature a participatory approach to development. However, their participation is at a local rather than individual level, and is focused around the integration of public, private, social and economic agents in a single process to work as a tool for development. This agenda falsely stresses the importance of decentralization and democracy for local elected bodies, and masks the fact that the INDH is a vertical process leading up to the financial priorities of the Makhzen. Local officials are not elected but directly appointed by the king proves a direct bypassing of local elected bodies in favour of a top-down approach in which the King and the Makhzen set agendas. In appearing to broaden citizenship, national initiatives have instead just reorganized control of the Makhzen (Zemni and Bogaert 2011). Thus, the national programs and consequently their community partners are more likely to reproduce social inequality rather than alleviating poverty.

Recommendations

I spent time searching for an organization that was committed to uplifting local priorities, knowledge, and solutions. I was able to make connections with organizations, and unpack their approaches and assumptions in communities. In conjunction with my literature review, the organizations form a movement that's committed to community development. It is imperative that the participants in these organizations have their voices heard in the addition to the officials. Gaining knowledge on their lived experiences, aspirations, politics, and what they wish to be communicated is the next step to creating solutions that value community and eliminating inequality rather than erasing the coping mechanisms and livelihoods people have worked so hard to maintain.

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Appendix A

1. Can you tell me about your organization?
 - a. Who do you work with?
 - b. What are your goals?
2. Who is poor in Morocco?
3. Why do you think people are poor?
 - a. Can people work and be poor?
4. Why are people unemployed?
5. What do you think the government should be doing for poverty reduction?
 - a. Do you think that their efforts will actually help people?
6. What can communities do to empower themselves?
7. Do you think there is a solution to poverty?