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“Not Yet a Priority:” The Intersectional Exploration of Labor Market Access for People with Disabilities

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**“Not Yet a Priority:” The Intersectional Exploration of Labor Market Access for People
with Disabilities**

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ABSTRACT

Approximately one in four families in Morocco are affected by disability. Of those affected by disability, many are in vulnerable situations, because there is an explicit linkage between having a disability and likelihood of experiencing poverty. The primary reasons for this phenomenon include lack of access to education, employment and health care. Following the Arab Spring, the Moroccan government implemented Article 166 which explicitly banned workplace discrimination against people with disabilities (PWD); however, only 13% of those affected by disability of working age can find employment. In this paper, I investigate the obstacles PWD face that prevent them from accessing the labor market and give insight as to where future in-depth research should be focused. The stigma that infiltrates every aspect of public and private life concerning PWD has led to flawed infrastructures, ineffective policies and public ambivalence that continues to limit their accessibility to basic rights and freedoms that would enable them to use their skills in the labor force.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my coordinator Mina and my professor Taieb Belghazi, because without their continued patience, encouragement and leadership, I would not have acquired the knowledge, or maintained the stamina required to complete this paper. Next, to them, I would like to thank my peers who have been with me on this journey abroad and inspired me to challenge myself and critically think about my experiences here. Finally, I must thank my mother, my biggest supporter across the world who always says she is proud me, even when I am questioning everything. Also, a special thanks to the people in this country of Morocco, and specifically the city of Rabat for allowing me to stay in this magical place and learn so much from every experience I have had here, giving me the chance to grow as a person and better understand the world around me. I hope that in the future I will be able to pay it forward in return.

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INTRODUCTION

When I lived in Rabat, I observed there was a visibly high frequency of homelessness in the area. I wanted to investigate this observation and discern whether it was reflective of a greater phenomenon and I learned that the likelihood of being homeless is much higher for people with disabilities (PWD) in Morocco than for other groups.¹ In our program focusing on multiculturalism and human rights, we have discussed how groups in Morocco have utilized protests to mobilize the government and enact change. Following the Arab Spring in 2011, where PWD protested the lack of employment opportunities, the government drafted Article 166 along with several other laws relating to PWD that seemingly banned workplace discrimination based on disability and aimed to improve the lives of PWD, enabling them to fully participate in social spaces.

According to the National Research Survey, one in four households in Morocco is affected by Disability.² The employment rate of working age PWD is only 13.6%,³ and the average monthly income is only 1500 dirhams, in comparison to the average monthly income of working age adults living in Morocco which is 23,387 dirhams.⁴ Moreover, of these adults that are employed, 64.9% of them are self-employed in fields such as agriculture, trade and services. More than half of those that are employed stated in a survey that they received their job by going door to door asking for recruitment rather than the typical interviewing process.⁵ Furthermore, of those that are employed, only 1% believed that the work they did was important, which can have

¹ Trani, Jean-Francois & Bakhshi, Parul & Tlapek, Sarah & Lopez, Dominique & Gall, Fiona. (2015). Disability and Poverty in Morocco and Tunisia: A Multidimensional Approach. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*. 16. 1-31. 10.1080/19452829.2015.1091808. C:/Users/acnea/Downloads/Tranietal-JHDC-2015.pdf

² Morocco World News. (2017). *One Family Out of Four at Least Includes Person with Disability in Morocco*. Retrieved from <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2017/03/212529/one-family-four-least-includes-person-disability-morocco/>

³ Nour, Taibi & Arssi, AbdLaziz. (2017). Disability and Employment in Morocco. *International Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research*. Volume 8. Page 585.

⁴ Average Salary in Morocco 2019. (2018). Retrieved December 7, 2019, from <http://www.salaryexplorer.com/salary-survey.php?loc=146&loctype=1>

⁵ Ibid.

negative long term mental health effects.⁶ These are frightening statistics that disproportionately affect women, as 15.5% of men with disabilities are employed compared to only 3.8% of women. Additionally, people with cognitive, intellectual and developmental disabilities or multiple disabilities are also disproportionately affected.⁷

It is clear from the information above that PWD are not able to access the labor market, at least not by traditional means, and I wanted to understand why. In the US, PWD are described as an “invisible” marginalized group, because they have been socially excluded to the point where they often are literally not visible in common social settings. This is often due to perceptions of ableism and concepts of neoliberalist responsibility, as well as many other social and institutional factors. Consequently, there is a lack of substantial research that would successfully create accessible and welcoming spaces that would enable these individuals to be integrated into society.⁸ The ability to provide for yourself and your family is a basic human right. The potential denial of that right inspired my ISP. I intend to investigate whether PWD are unable to access the labor market, and if so, what causes these barriers to entry, whether social or institutional. However, because the experiences of all PWD are so diverse, and because of the limits inhibited due to the structuring of this project, rather than drawing conclusions regarding the exact reasons why or why not this phenomenon is taking place, the goal of my ISP is to curate a platform for PWD to ensure that their rights are a part of the continuing conversation.

RESEARCH THEMES

Through this project, I will investigate two main themes:

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Nicole Brown & Jennifer Leigh (2018) Ableism in academia: where are the disabled and ill academics?, *Disability & Society*, 33:6, 985-989, DOI: [10.1080/09687599.2018.1455627](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2018.1455627)

- The status of PWD in Morocco to understand their conceptualization in society to situate the relevant factors that likely contribute to the low employment rate.
- The extent to which these factors contribute to creating barriers to entry in the labor market as well as other spaces.

POSITIONALITY

In completing this project, I recognize that my position as an able-bodied person, conducting research in a country that is not my own, limits my ability to engage with this topic and empathize with my research participants. The extent to which people are willing to talk to me, and what they are willing to share is affected by my positionality and I know that I am not entitled to the information that I will receive. Additionally, I recognize my privilege in that I am able to write about this issue that I do care about deeply without being directly affected by it, and furthermore, I will be removing myself from the space in which this specific issue exists by the time I present my research. These logistical constraints of time and positionality almost prevented me from choosing this research topic originally, because I feared that I would only be taking from the community for my own growth rather than producing work that could be utilized by PWD to give them a platform and contribute to positive change. However, I realized my fear in challenging myself to examine a topic I am not well versed in contributes to the lack of research that exists concerning disabilities in the first place. Choosing not to write the paper would only contribute to societal complacency with the status quo. Considering the U.S. conceptualization of PWD as an “invisible community,” I think choosing to research this topic despite my fears is important to spread awareness that can encourage people to learn more and make sure consideration of PWD institutionally and socially is a priority.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this research project, I am implementing a cross-sectional approach. A Cross-Sectional analysis is when the data analyzed is focused on a specific population at a certain moment in time. This helps provide a clearer view of the data, in my case, a snapshot of the current status of PWD in Morocco. I will be combining observations, online research and semi-structured interviews to address my research themes and evaluate viable research questions that would be worthy of study based on my findings. I intend to use online resources, textbooks, newspaper articles and other readings to conduct my research. Additionally, I intend to use my observations from my travels along with observations from my visits to NGOs to enrich my findings, and finally I intend to interview employees of these establishments along with Moroccan residents to understand what the common perceptions are regarding my research themes, and what the focus of disabilities activism around the topic of employment is in Morocco. I will use interview guide questions based on relevant preliminary research. These interviews will provide in-depth first-hand accounts that give essential insight regarding the emotions and current involvement of Moroccans regarding this issue. From this research I will not draw conclusions that answer a specific question, but assess what questions are left unanswered, so this research can move forward and be carried out in the future with an adequate amount of time and resources.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I recognize that my topic can bring up sensitive or triggering experiences for the people I am interviewing. Therefore, I have chosen to interview employees, rather than PWD to prevent harm to research participants. Nevertheless, I intend to make sure every contributors identity remains completely anonymous for confidentiality purposes and that verbal consent is given prior to each interview. Prior to each interview, I will make sure that the instructions and entire

scope of the project is clear and where this information will be used is clear to the person I am speaking with so that when they give consent they fully understand their commitment.

Furthermore, after the interview I will ask for their consent for me to use their recording or the notes I have taken, because it is possible they did not expect certain questions and because the interviews are semi-structured and could lead to different topics than expected, I will make it clear that they have the option to take anything “off the record” at any point. I am aware that I am not entitled to any of the information that is shared with me, and that my participant’s awareness of my positionality may effect the way they respond to questions, but I will not change my questions or make them more “leading” to coerce certain answers or information. I aim to let the stories and what I learn speak for itself as much as possible, because I am not from this country and ultimately will only scratch the surface with my findings from this research.

ASSUMPTIONS

There are many assumptions that I have going into this ISP that could affect the success of my project. I am assuming that I will be able to communicate with the people I approach to interview under the guise that they either speak English or they will be willing to utilize a translation service like google translate to bridge the gap. Frankly, translating conversations over Google translate is irritating and if I am turned away, because I do not have an alternative solution, I will have to accept this. As I will be visiting organizations that engage with the global community, I assume there is a range of languages spoken in these facilities and I will be able to find someone that I can communicate with effectively, without the necessity of a translator (whether that be a person or technological device). Another assumption I have is that my positionality as an outsider, particularly as an outsider from America does not act as a deterrent to the individuals that I interview, and they will answer truthfully regardless. The confidentiality and anonymity of the interviews give the individuals the freedom to say what is on their minds

without consequence, so I believe this will incentivize them to answer truthfully. I additionally assume on my end that these people's understandings of this topic reflect the greater cultural understanding in Morocco to an extent. Despite my understanding that I cannot extrapolate and allow these individuals to represent the opinions of the entire group, they will impact my understanding. Once again considering I intend to talk to individuals who have studied this subject in depth for years, they should have a general understanding of public sentiment toward PWD.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Stigma Has A Causal Link to Poverty

In a study conducted and published for the Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, the results of the study confirmed there is a causal link between disability and poverty in Morocco. Factors that contributed the strongest to this phenomenon included limited access to employment, education and healthcare. The study further stated that stigma played a crucial role in perpetuating these barriers to support as stigma impacts every aspect of public and private life, legally and socially applied in the constitution, family code, legal code and on the grassroots level.⁹

To conduct this research, they utilized what they described as "indicators of deprivation" to determine the quality of life that PWD in Morocco are experiencing. For example, under the category of social participation, they measured participation in their community and ability to make friends asking whether participants engaged in around 13 specific activities. This was done to gauge whether these individuals felt socially included. Under both subcategories, there was very low numbers of participants across activities. When participants were asked to give reasons

⁹ Ibid.

for why they did not engage in certain activities, there was a high linkage to infrastructure – physical accessibility for social participation. Individuals claimed that people were not overtly excluding them, but people were picking activities that required actions such as climbing the stairs which is not possible for some, or it's such a hassle they do not think it is worth doing. Abdelasis Arssi, Disabilities Studies expert, weighs in on this in his article as well, claiming that Moroccan infrastructure was “missing basic things” such as clear signage, braille devices, screen-readers, and access to sign-language interpretation.¹⁰

These situations give reasoning behind why many disability experts refer to PWD as an “invisible” community, because so many spaces that exist that are not accessible to the point where these individuals simply are not present in many public spaces. The authors of the article continue discussing how this “invisibility,” has many negative outcomes regarding mental health such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem.¹¹ This concept applies in the workforce as well, because in a survey of working Moroccans with disabilities, only 1% claimed that they believed that the work they did was important or fulfilling to the point where they were no longer aware of their handicap. This is an example of how the lack of visibility can be internalized and manifest into a feeling of not being wanted in spaces.¹²

Additionally, the article discusses how women with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the lack of jobs for PWD in the workforce, because the labor market is primarily male,¹³ and they are competing for fewer available jobs against able-bodied women. People living in rural areas with lack of access to material well-being and food security are particularly vulnerable to harm as well, because they are unable to access necessary resources. The social

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Women make up only 24% of the labor market as of 2015.

isolation combined with all the previously mentioned factors contributes to a high likelihood that PWD will become impoverished at some point in their lifetime, because there are less available jobs partially due to lack of access to education that would qualify these individuals for many jobs, they have less access to social spaces and the limitations of their social lives can contribute negatively to their health, thus most PWD do not work in Morocco.¹⁴

What the Law Says and Its Interpretation

When considering the rights and freedoms of PWD in terms of access to employment, it is necessary to juxtapose the law with current labor statistics in order to understand the effectiveness and implications of the current law. Furthermore, it directs my research to historical contexts that can explain current phenomena. There are several employment protections specified for PWD, but these protections are ineffective and harm the community. In 1998, the Prime Minister of Morocco mandated that PWD must make up 7% of the workforce in the public sector which is specified in Article 20 of Law 07-92 in the Legal Code.¹⁵ However, there was not a specific percentage specified within the private sector, and furthermore, minimum wage earnings are not specified for PWD. Generally, public sector workers earn 1.57 times more than private sector workers.¹⁶

The subsequent decade showed that PWD were not being employed, or generally considered within political society, so during the Arab Spring in 2011 there were many protests that resulted in the following article that was added to the new constitution, as well as several other articles that pertained to PWD:

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ El Masaiti, A. (2017). *Public Vs. Private Sectors: Who Earns More in Morocco?* Retrieved from <https://www.morocccoworldnews.com/2017/12/237324/public-private-sectors-morocco/>

Article 34

The public powers enact [elaborent] and implement the policies designed [destinies] for persons and for categories of specific needs. To this effect, it sees notably:

- to respond to [traiter] and provide for the vulnerability of certain categories of women and of mothers, of children, and of elderly persons;
- to rehabilitate and integrate into social and civil life the physically sensory-motor [sensorimoteurs] and mentally handicapped and to facilitate their enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognized to all.

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Article 34 claims that policies should aim to rehabilitate and integrate PWD into society which is beneficial theoretically; however, in practice, if these individuals are unable to access basic needs, because of unemployment, social life cannot be adequately addressed.

Article 166 of the Moroccan Constitution states that “Any employee who became disabled for some reason, is to retain the position he held before.”¹⁸ At face value, it can be argued that this law condemns discrimination against PWD in the workplace. However, this statement only applies to individuals that had the position prior to the disability, and 47% of Moroccan people who identify as having a disability claim to have had the disability prior to the age of 14;¹⁹ therefore, these individuals likely did not have a living wage job, and the law does nothing in their favor. If they are never hired, they are never fired, and this allows lawmakers to remain complicit concerning these individuals’ access to the labor market, because many are not considered members of the labor force.²⁰

In a research paper written by Moroccan native, Abdelasis Arssi, a professor at the Fez Academy for Education, titled “Disability and Employment in Morocco,” Arssi writes about the challenges PWD face accessing the workforce and the challenges they face inside the workplace.

¹⁷ Morocco’s Constitution of 2011. (2011). Retrieved December 7, 2019, from https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco_2011.pdf

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Article 167 of the Moroccan Constitution continues in saying that it is forbidden to employ PWD if the work is determined to be too stressful to the worker to the point of causing “further impairment” that could increase the severity of the individual’s disability. This decision is determined legally by a doctor and Arssi claims that doctors will act in favor of the employer regardless of their individual diagnosis regarding the measured “stress” of the work. He then further implies that as a result, employers will use this as a “loophole” to prevent PWD from working in their establishments. To understand why employers do not want to hire PWD, it is necessary to investigate the social conceptualization of disabilities and general attitudes towards them which will be addressed later in the paper. To summarize, there is the perception that hiring PWD is a burden that would negatively impact their businesses, as well as the general economy. Contrary to this belief, the hypothetical employment of the even 5% more of PWD of working age would increase the GDP of the country by 2%, approximately 9.2 billion dirhams.²¹

The Moroccan constitutional definition of Disability states:

“Persons with disabilities are individuals with sustained physical, mental, intellectual or sensory disabilities whose interaction with various barriers may hinder their full effective participation in society on the equivalent premise with others.”²²

Arssi claims that the definition of disability is fundamentally shortsighted, because the “blame” is placed on the disability, and on the person, rather than the faulty infrastructures, perpetuated stereotypes and general attitudes of Moroccan society towards the disability. The

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

definition implies people with disabilities' place in society and ability to participate is decided by their disability and is thus immovable.²³

Theoretical Framework

It is important when deploying this kind of research to understand current and past conceptualizations of disability. The medical model is the primary model developed during the 1800s and was/still is considered the scientific explanation for disability. The medical model of disability describes disability as a physical deficiency or damage to the corporal body and/or mind. The body's "deficiency" is attributed to three broad categories including "bad luck" such as getting into a car accident, unhealthy lifestyle practices such as smoking, or gene expression. Thus, the medical model implies that disabilities only come about as a result of a biological defect, illnesses or individual characteristics. However, the medical model became highly criticized over time, because it's conception implies that the individual is to blame for their impairment which has led to oppression by society as a result, and the medical model fails to address society's role in establishing and perpetuating the oppression of people with disabilities.²⁴

In the 1970s, Vic Finkelstein and Michael Oliver developed the social model of disability which directly contrasts the medical model. The social model conceptualizes the term "disability" as to only refer to the social oppression and prejudices people with individual impairments experience that limits their accessibility to social and civil life. The social model seeks to remove the association of the label "disabled" or "disability" from the individual with an

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Alzheimer Europe. (2017). Alzheimer Europe - Ethics - Ethical issues in practice - 2017: Dementia as a disability? Implications for ethics, policy and practice - About disability. Retrieved December 7, 2019, from <https://www.alzheimer-europe.org/Ethics/Ethical-issues-in-practice/2017-Dementia-as-a-disability-Implications-for-ethics-policy-and-practice/About-disability>

impairment, to associate the label with society, and its inability to make spaces accessible and accepting of people with impairments.²⁵ This model is often criticized, because it is said to erase the experiences that people have solely as a result of their impairment, such as people with chronic illnesses who live in constant pain and discomfort. Some even go so far to say that completely rejecting the medical disability as a “problem” as stated in the medical model, implies that things such as medical prevention, rehabilitation, or eventually finding a cure for impairment is not necessary, or something that should be worked toward. Consequently, there is ongoing arguments concerning the validity of considering disabilities as “problems” as it negatively contributes to representations of PWD as well as public perception that affects the way individuals with disabilities are treated daily. One of the creators of the social model, Michael Oliver who was a tetraplegic explains that the social model does not deny the limitations of impairment itself, because to deny that reality is to deny the consideration of accommodations that PWD need. The relevance of impairment is not denied, but it is evaluated separately from disability; to have a dis-ability is completely related to society. Since the 70s the model has been re-interpreted to better encompass the personal experiences of those with impairments and emphasize the role of society less.²⁶ Furthermore, there has been the development of the human rights model of disability that focuses on two main principles: the individual with an impairment is an equal citizen with given rights and freedoms and it is the duty of others to maintain and secure those rights and freedoms. The human rights model discusses how PWD should not only be able to experience the same benefits as people without disabilities but be able to take the same “risks.”

²⁵ Beaudry, J.-S. (2016). Beyond (Models of) Disability? *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 41(2), 210–228. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhv063>

²⁶ Ibid.

In an article written by Dr. Mary Bunch analyzing the work of disabilities philosopher Julia Kristeva, they discuss the concept of wanting to include and integrate PWD into society. They refer to so-called “politics of assimilation,” a Kantian idea that implies sameness is required for ethical recognition, which is essentially societal acceptance.²⁷ This means, in order for PWD to be included and integrated into society, their “sameness” must be proven or they will not be accepted. Kristeva is not referring to the corporal human form when discussing this necessity for sameness; however, though the corporal form does play a role. Kristeva refers to a desired form of life that every person aspires to have. The idealized version of life that only exists on television shows at best. This of course depends on the culture everyone lives in, but from an American perspective for example, there is the idea of the nuclear family: white picket fence, backyard, dog, homemade dinner on the table every night sort of lifestyle and so few people have it. She rejects the idea that PWD should aspire to have this sameness to achieve “inclusion.” She says that for many PWD this neoliberalist, idealized, way of life is not feasible so its necessary for society remove it from the pedestal, and pluralize our conceptions of what living “the good life” is.²⁸ This concept goes beyond PWD as well, in places like the United States where so many cultures and communities exist who do not fit the perfect mold of “the good life,” they are looked down upon by society and that can be internalized by the members of the community. Particularly in the context of Morocco, there is this concept that PWD must be pitied, and it is society’s burden to take care of them. Currently, many PWD are taken care of by their families, or they are in situations where they are required to have assistance for many tasks. If these individuals do not have families of their own, or they are not living on their own,

²⁷ Bunch, M. (2017). Julia Kristeva, Disability, and the Singularity of Vulnerability. *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 11(2), 133–150. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2017.11>

²⁸ Menjivar, C., & Abrego, L. J. (2012). Legal Violence: Immigration Law and the Lives of Central American Immigrants. *American Journal of Sociology*, 117(5), 1380–1421. <https://doi.org/10.1086/663575>

building a career or doing things of that nature, their lives are less valuable and there is shame associated with them.²⁹

Additionally, there exists a time limit on an individual's ability to identify as having a disability. After a certain age, people who may develop or may already have a disability just become "old people." The elderly community, though highly respected in many cultures, is often not considered when making decisions concerning the rights and freedoms of people with disabilities, because they are "on the way out." This relates to the inherent underlying belief that impairments are avoidable and fixable.³⁰ Despite the fact that some people are born with different impairments, and likely will have them the rest of their lives, there's this idea that some miracle of modern medicine will eventually "fix" the person. After a certain age, an individual is not considered fixable, or worth fixing anymore, so they are not considered. For example, dementia, a cognitive disability according to the World Health Organization, was not "officially" considered a disability until the 1980s.³¹ Due to these perceptions, there is less research on impairments of this nature, as compared to impairments acquired earlier in life such as autism. Representations of PWD often do not include older people; furthermore, there is less compassion for these individuals because their wants or desires are not considered relevant anymore, and accessibility for them is not typically a priority of NGOs and nonprofits.

In terms of the corporal form, Kristeva discusses how society must become more open to heterogeneity in the way that a body can look. She promotes heterogeneity so that disability is not erased, yet people should no longer consider impaired bodies "deficient" of something. This relates to the concept of the social model of disability where impairment and disability are

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ World Health Organization. (2019, December 7). Morocco. Retrieved December 7, 2019, from <https://www.who.int/countries/mar/en/>

separate concepts, whereas impairment only relates to the corporal form and it is oppression by society's standards that makes an individual "deficient." This removes that responsibility from the person and places it on society, enabling people to have more compassion for the individual.³²

Ultimately Kristeva and Bunch reject the idea that inclusion and integration should be the end goal. According to Bunch, "Inclusion is limited in its transformative scope in terms of corporality, temporality and relationality." It should be acknowledged that these ideas were theorized considering Western nations; however, these concepts are manifested in Moroccan culture. They ultimately suggest that for PWD to truly exist freely and exhibit all the rights and freedoms afforded by everyone else, there must exist a "plurality of worlds" where different forms of body images, lifestyles, and familial models exist at all stages of life and are accepted by everyone.³³

Disability and Religion

There is a moral model of disability that reflects religious beliefs and teachings. According to this model, disability is the consequence or punishment of a sin of a past ancestor in a family, most often it is the parents of the person. However, this depends on the disability, because if this person incurred a disability later in life, then it is a result of the person's own sin they committed earlier in their lifetime. Under this model, disability is viewed as a negative thing that is meant to torment the individual.³⁴ Arssi reflects the view of this model in his paper when he argues that one of the reasons PWD are unable to find employment is because employers do not want them to work for them out of fear that a curse will come on their establishment. He

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

explains that disability is viewed as a curse because of Islamic beliefs in Morocco, and employers hold these values and refuse to let PWD work for them in many cases.

However, Arssi's views are not reflected in the Quran itself. One ayah³⁵ states, "There is not upon the blind man any guilt or upon the lame any guilt or upon the ill any guilt" (48,17). These theories based in religiosity misguide people, causing them to believe that PWD are not deserving human beings and that they have done something wrong when they are innocent.³⁶ The extent to which people believe disability is a curse is unknown, and despite research that would imply that disability and religion are separate entities, it negatively contributes to perceptions of PWD that stigmatize the community and makes them seem incapable and bad luck, which lowers their chances for employment in terms of accessing the labor market. Moreover, these ideas can become internalized and PWD can become embarrassed and ashamed of themselves, thus becoming less willing to access spaces they are entitled to be in.³⁷

FIELDWORK & ANALYSIS

In total I visited two NGO's and interviewed five different people.³⁸ It should be understood that in the following analysis, I make generalized statements based on what I am told by my interviewees, and it should be known that in no way are these statements generalizable or proven. The analysis is based on what I was able to research and gather from these five individuals who were willing to speak to me. The organizations and relevant graphic information are listed below followed by the findings and in-depth analysis of the information that was shared with me.

³⁵ Quranic verse.

³⁶ Condon, F. (2019). *Representations and Perceptions of Disability in Contemporary Morocco*. Pennsylvania: Haverford College.

³⁷ Hiam Al-Aoufi, Nawaf Al-Zyoud & Norbayah Shahminan (2012) Islam and the cultural conceptualisation of disability, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 17:4, 205-219, DOI: [10.1080/02673843.2011.649565](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2011.649565)

³⁸ Interview questions at the end of the paper.

NGOs

- Association HADAF located in Rabat, Morocco.
- Association Tahaddi pour le Handicap located in Fez, Morocco.

Interview Participants

- Dr. Grant: Moroccan; male; Professor of education; conducted the interview in English.
- Dr. Malcom: Moroccan; male; Professor of education; conducted the interview in English.
- Dr. Sattler: Moroccan; male; Professor of French; member of blind community; conducted the interview in Arabic with translator.
- Adam: Moroccan; male; Disabilities Studies Ph D. candidate; member of blind community; activist for the blind community; conducted the interview in English.
- Ian: Moroccan; male; employee at Association Tahaddi Pour le Handicap; conducted the interview in English.

A Glimpse at the Culture Surrounding Disability Rights

The general attitude toward PWD is ambivalence. What is important to fundamentally understand about Moroccan culture is that due to the collectivistic nature of the country, shame plays a major role in the way people behave. Dr. Grant explains, “The community is the spectator that monitors your conduct,”³⁹ and that your desires come second to the desires of the community for that reason. This is especially emphasized in smaller, rural communities that exist in an absence of subcultures and people are forced to seek acceptance from the whole

³⁹ Personal communication (Nov. 2019)

community. Thus, the way people in society behave toward PWD is the way that everyone will behave toward PWD and this applies to governmental institutions as well. The laws are ineffective and to be frank, the concerns of PWD are not a priority of the government unless PWD make themselves louder, to the extent that the international community notices and then the government acts, because they know they are being watched.

One of my interviewees explained an incident related to the lack of labor market access for PWD: “[There is a job recruitment assembly for PWD] on the 15th of December. That is a result of a dead blind person that was striking last year in Rabat with a group of people that [were] demonstrating in front of Moroccan parliament and it cost his life. It cost a sacrifice of a person to have this opportunity. And the last opportunity was in 2011 with the Arab Spring. That was the last time the government gave [PWD] jobs, because their situation was frightening and horrifying. And this year it was a result of a lot of strikes, a lot of strikes and demonstrations and a blind person lost his life...and the government responded, finally. You need to pay your life as a price to get a job.”⁴⁰

Essentially, the rights of people with disabilities is not yet a priority which will be further proven throughout this fieldwork, because society does not internally feel obligated to help these individuals because they are not recognized as full citizens. This ambivalence exists at every level of the society, and effects each other reinforcing the lack of mobility. It requires protests to reach extremes, because people’s livelihoods are at stake.

Access to Education

⁴⁰ Personal communication (Nov. 2019)

When interviewer participants were asked what they believed were the largest contributors to the unemployment rate of PWD, they all discussed lack of access to education, and the scope of education took many different forms. For example, Ian who is employed at a school for children with intellectual, developmental and cognitive disabilities talked about how many students do not receive the specialized education they needed because their parents are not fully aware of their condition. So, to an extent, some students are not able to access the education, because of society's lack of education on disability as it is often minimally included in common preparatory school curriculum. Then, Ian explained that as a result of this lack of awareness some children come to their school very "late" and struggle with the material they learn in school, he specifically mentioned language. He believes that language is the most important skill the students in the school need to learn in order to get jobs, because communication is necessary for just about any job.⁴¹

Dr. Sattler similarly mentions the importance of language education as a French teacher for blind students. He speaks from his experience:

"[I am] the only teacher who's using [my] computer to access primary and secondary sources to give to students. [I am] the only teacher who can use and is using their computer(s) in school. [I am] obliged to "spell" the texts to [my] students who use the braille system to write down their texts, the primary source and the secondary source. Which coincidentally wastes [my] time...just to spell...and because there is a lack of technology, [I am] losing [so] much time (in and out of class)."⁴²

⁴¹ Personal communication (Nov. 2019)

⁴² Personal communication (Nov. 2019)

Dr. Sattler is explaining how he personally translates novels and stories into French braille for his students, because he is a teacher in higher education (college and graduate students) and beyond a certain age, there are fewer and fewer reading resources for blind people to read. At this point in the interview he was very frustrated, because it was clear he would rather spend his time doing other things than translating books for students. These resources should already exist in braille and be accessible to students. Beyond this, he created a WhatsApp group chat for his students and other blind students that are unable to take his classes (as he is the only professor who takes time to do this) to let them know about readings and lessons ahead of time so that when he teaches in class he is able to spend less time spelling out French terms in script and braille. He made a joke claiming that this was his volunteering side job, because he is not getting paid for all the extra labor that he is putting in for these students, but he says that it is worth it, because language – learning French in Morocco specifically, and effective communication is so important for getting jobs in the future.

Adam also discusses the lack of access to education, but he recognizes that blind people have more access to education than people with other disabilities. However, compared to his sighted peers he has significantly less access to content. Ultimately, Dr. Grant sums up the idea that, “PWD have less chances to get schooling...Because they have less education, or no education, they are not qualified for the job market.” Dr. Grant explains that because society does not give PWD the opportunity to get the same education that other people can get, then they are unprepared for the labor force and disproportionately unemployed as a result. Adam reveals another truth, claiming that the reality is that PWD are fighting for fewer spots at less jobs, because they cannot necessarily access the average job. Many jobs may require “more physical ability” than some PWD may have, and he himself stated that he cannot apply for many jobs

because they require the ability to see. Thus, lack of access to adequate education makes the odds of getting a job worse for some PWD, contributing to high levels of unemployment and many people resort to becoming self-employed, asking for jobs door to door, or begging.

The “International Community”

In the literature review, it was explicitly clear that government laws that affect PWD are not enforced based on recent statistics, and the laws created following the Arab Spring were simply to appease protesters rather than create real change. Interview participants gave a wide range of answers concerning the role of the government; however, they were all aware that a lot of what the government does is for show. For example, Dr. Grant asserted, “The State is very supportive of the disabled...officially there’s a lot of support.” However, later in the interview he talks about how in the ranking of world countries, it does not just mean GDP, but it takes into account poverty levels, employment levels and so on, and he mentions in particular that, “Part of showcasing that [we] doing well is meeting the demands of the international community (a.k.a. Western nations).” He claims that the state is supportive, yet he recognizes the reason why that may be is to raise the status of the country and the extent to which they take action to support PWD is ingenuine.

A similar situation occurred during the interview with Dr. Malcolm in which he first stated, “The government is very on top of this,”⁴³ in response to my question regarding the role of the government. He was quick to give this answer, and rather fidgety which I assumed was because discussions about the government are decidedly taboo in Morocco. However, later in the interview he said, “Morocco is very open to the global system and the influence from the global

⁴³ Personal communication (Nov. 2019)

system.” This quote implied that the reason Morocco is “on top of this issue,” is to look good in front of nations that have become concerned with the rights of minority groups, and I assume he meant Western nations. Rather than focus on the issue, because PWD are full citizens of Morocco like everyone else, they are concerned with what the international community will think if they do not address the protests. They are forced to address PWD by external pressures, just as individuals in society are pressured to help PWD by religion and other external spectators that will shame them if they are not charitable toward PWD. The government must take their role seriously and make PWD a priority or their needs will be truly addressed.

Is Disability a Blessing or a Curse?

Abdelasis explained in his research that Islam conceptualizes disability as a curse from God, and even though the Quran does not affirm this belief, some people in Moroccan society believe this and treat PWD accordingly. This belief was reflected in some interview responses as well. According to Dr. Grant there are many proverbs that say that disability is God’s punishment, and for that reason, amongst others, families have a lot of shame surrounding family members with disabilities. He claims, “If they have PWD, they don’t want, some families will ‘chain’ their PWD, because they think, it’s the stigma. They don’t want the society to know that they have PWD, so they just hide them.” The person with a disability in their family is a reflection on the family as a whole, and they do not want people to know about the “curse on their family.”

However, Adam gives us an entirely different perspective saying that God chooses certain individuals to have disabilities. Rather than the reasoning being that it is meant to be a curse on their family, it is a blessing, because it gives them a “supernatural power:” “These people of disability are disabled because God wanted them, and they are specific for God, and

they are beloved and they are chosen by God to be like that.” As a member of the blind community, he speaks from his own experience, “You are a blind person, you have a strong memory. This is the fantasization⁴⁴ of the image of blind people/people of disability. God took your eyes and gave you in return a ‘very supernatural power.’” Dr. Malcolm commented on this subject as well saying that in Moroccan society people view, “Disability as something to [make them feel] empowered.” This statement completely counters the idea that disability is something to be ashamed of, and rather PWD should be proud they have them, and people should recognize the power these individuals have. Adam further explains how this also gives people more incentive to give PWD begging on the street money, because when helping someone God has chosen to give a special power, it is like being good to God. He further explained, “And to take care of those people is to be good to God. This is coming from [the religious] side. So when they are looking at people [they say], ‘Look these are disabled people, we should give them some money so we can gain a *hasanat*.⁴⁵” As shown in his statement, people’s response to disability does not come from the intrinsic need to help the person, but rather to please God and when family members care for other members that have a disability it is viewed similarly as an obligation rather than love for their relative.

Dr. Sattler gave a personal example from his own lived experience as a blind person: “Once he was with his family, with his parents, and they were having like dinner and the waiter came and said to his father, ‘Because you are helping him, God will give you a prize in Paradise.’” The waiter is subtly implying that for a father to take care of his blind son that is “such a burden” he requires a prize. It should be acknowledged that caring for a relative with a disability does often require extra labor that can be difficult to manage and in most cases family

⁴⁴ To create or develop imaginative and often fantastic views or ideas; to indulge in reverie (Merriam Webster)

⁴⁵ *Hasanat* is an Arabic term that means “good things as you are alive” according to Adam.

members try their best to take care of them and help them live well.⁴⁶ Ultimately, religion plays a major role in perpetuating misconceptions about PWD and causes individuals to treat them differently for this reason. Furthermore, whether disability is viewed as a blessing or a curse is dependent on the disability, because some disabilities such as blindness are commonly associated with positive stereotypes,⁴⁷ while other disabilities do not have these positive associations. The extent to which this factor contributes to PWD ability to get or retain jobs is unclear, but it contributes to how these individuals are perceived and whether they are capable of handling work tasks. Beyond that, the culture of “charity” makes it seem like they should not have to work and that the society should take care of them, yet PWD are not receiving the care they deserve, because society does not care for the individual, but what they can get as a result. Hence, even though there is still a lot more that can be done in terms of accessibility, there is little mobility amongst those capable of producing change.

Charity Over Independence

Part of the reason caring for PWD can be difficult is because society does not enable these people to be independent, and family members are required to help them perform miniscule tasks by law, even if they can perform these tasks themselves. Adam gives two specific examples concerning regulations for blind people. Concerning bank accounts:

“If you want to open a bank account in Morocco. If a blind person wants to open a bank account in Morocco...they may not. They must come with 2 people who will witness the operation. Otherwise you may not open any bank account or do any bank operation via banks. Because I am not allowed by law, because they are afraid...there is no clear status at a level of

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

legislation that will allow these banks to give an alternative solution to blind people. The only solution is to come with 2 people who you trust to open your bank account and do any kind of transaction [for you].”

Then, concerning elections:

“If you want to take part in the political election, and you want to vote for a specific party...you cannot do it for yourself. You need to come with someone, and you need the person in order to cross the symbol of the party to vote for, and there is no guarantee to ensure the person is voting for the same.”

Essentially, Adam makes the point that PWD are treated like children in Morocco, and just like children who are raised without ever having any responsibility, PWD are raised without being given the opportunity to become independent. Thus, many end up being supported by their families their whole lives, because the individuals and the families do not think they can live another way. Until alternative solutions are allowed and enforced, there will not be another way.

Is God the Cure?

4 years ago, in 2015, it was discovered that a well known Sufi shrine near Marrakech known as Bouya Omar was shut down after being found guilty of several human rights violations against PWD.⁴⁸ The cult of saints of these shrines are believed to “heal” PWD by casting out the demons afflicting them that caused their disability. Dr. Grant spoke about this topic claiming that families with PWD believe, due to a lack of education, that their relatives have become mentally deranged due to demonic possession. They think only the Iman can evict these spirits from them

⁴⁸ Khammali, B. (2015). *Closing the Shrine of Bouya Omar*. Retrieved from <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2015/04/156241/closing-shrine-bouya-omar/>

and many people take their relatives there. Furthermore, some families cannot afford the proper healthcare their relative needs to receive treatment so they take them there in the hope they can be “healed” for free.⁴⁹ Moreover, for people that are ashamed of their relatives with a disability, it allows them to remove the person from their home and hide them where society does not know they are related to someone with a disability. Some families are simply overworked and do not have the time to take care of their relatives. Dr. Grant explains that in more rural areas it is common practice for people to marry their cousins, so it is possible to have multiple children with disabilities in one family, and with limited income and resources, the stress can become overwhelming to the point where a parent (typically the father) will leave. It should be acknowledged that his assertion may be an extrapolation, and as these interviewees were all from major cities, it is plausible their knowledge could be biased.

Aside from the reasoning, people would drop off family members at Bouya Omar and similar locations not knowing that they were being chained down and left in dark chambers, only to be released when they were “cured.” Some were confirmed to be left there for more than 20 years suffering starvation, beatings and humiliation.⁵⁰ There were often detention centers near the shrines where prisoners would be temporarily placed so families that paid to visit them could see them, without seeing the conditions that they were actually living in.⁵¹ The fact that these types of institutions are still operational proves that people do not see PWD as full human beings that are deserving of the same rights and freedoms as everyone else; they are ambivalent to their situation and knowingly allow places like this to exist where these individuals are caged and beaten. It also proves the lack of education people have concerning the proper care their family

⁴⁹ Hajjioui, A., Fourtassi, M., & Nejari, C. (2015). Prevalence of disability and rehabilitation needs amongst adult hospitalized patients in a Moroccan university hospital. *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine*, 47(7), 593–598. <https://doi.org/10.2340/16501977-1979>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

members need to live fully, and how much the health care system has failed individuals who could not afford to care for their loved ones that they resorted to what they believed was the only other option available.⁵² So in society, people believe that PWD deserve charity for their own benefit; yet, they also think PWD deserve to be punished, because they are seemingly “useless” to the point that caretakers do not know what to do with them and “put them away.”

Disability as a Source of Income

Part of the preliminary research for this issue implied that many PWD have had to resort to begging as a result of not being able to find employment. However, multiple interview participants claimed that begging is a viable source of income for people with disabilities. Dr. Grant claimed that he knew many PWD who had once been recruited for jobs, but chose not to take them, because they were able to make more money by begging on the street. Considering the average working person with a disability is only earning 1500 dirhams per month, the assertion is justifiable. He even went so far as to say that some had even become millionaires.

Dr. Malcolm made similar statements during his interview, stating that because so many PWD are in vulnerable situations, they are forced to resort to begging, focusing more so on the idea that they had to rather than that they wanted to, and he mentioned that some families use their own family members with disabilities to get them money or “pimp them out” so to speak, forcing them to beg on the street and get money from sympathetic passersby. Then, these family members will take the money for themselves.

Adam elaborates on this subject even further by relating the subject to religion and the collectivist nature of the country. He says that people give money to people with disabilities,

⁵² Ibid.

because they are chosen by God and it is important in Islam to do good deeds for others, and other people expect you to perform these good deeds, otherwise you are a “bad Muslim.” Therefore, people are more than willing to give, out of shame and the desire to please God, rather than because they believe the money will help the individual. This contributes to the idea about the general ambivalence people have towards the situation of people with disabilities, because even amongst those who wish to “help them,” they are operating under the guise of ulterior motives that limit their capacity to make real progress and change by enabling PWD to be more independent. They would rather give these individuals money so they can eat for a day, than for example, advocate for accommodations that would enable some PWD to pursue their education.

Stereotypes

Throughout these interviews, it became clear that there was a very distinct colonial stereotypical image of what a PWD in Morocco looks like and Adam discusses the effect this image has stigmatizing the blind community:

“There is a frozen image of blind people that is sleeping in the government mind...The first image that comes to their mind are very poor...That’s why you are not judged on a merit basis, but you are judged at the disability basis. You are disabled? You are incapable...by default, incapable of production. These images go on also within institutional [psyches]. Public officers, the political decision makers, the governmental institutions, because these institutions at the end of the day are people. And these people have the same image that is taking place in the society.”

Adam is currently pursuing a Ph D. and he explains how people are often shocked by his abilities, because they assume, he is incapable, because of stereotypes and representations of blind people and PWD in general. He has lost opportunities regarding his research, because he is

not judged based on his merit and the work he has done. Dr. Sattler claimed he had a similar experience in the classroom when giving presentations before the dean of the school where he works: the dean and the audience are shocked by his ability to use the computer.

Dr. Sattler says in relation to stereotypes, “PWD are [considered to be] in a very poor situation, very bad situation, so they deserve charity.” PWD in Morocco are perceived as very poor, fragile and incapable; therefore, they deserve money, but they are not given the capacity to break the stereotype and live independently in a way that would make people realize PWD do not need their pity. He continues,

“You should look at me as a human being, as a citizen, someone who has full citizenship, not incomplete citizenship. Not as a poor person to be looked at in [a] very sympathetic way.”

He also gives two examples from his personal life where people assumed what his life was like, because he is blind. First, he told the story of his friend: “A friend, while he was walking in the street with the help of another assistant helping him to take directions. She told him that he is left with no life...A blind person has no life in Morocco, because there is no life for blind people.” Second, he told a story of an experience he had in America: “My ex-wife and I were in D.C. and they wanted the official documents from the institutions and the employee there said to his wife. ‘I hope you can take care of your brother.’” He explained to me that in the eyes of society, because blind people, despite their “supernatural” qualities, are still a “burden,” it is impossible that someone other than a blood relation would willingly take on the full responsibility of taking care of them, other than giving them money as charity. Furthermore, he explained how this played into the physicality of having a disability, because blind people often do not fit into the typical standards of beauty that exist in Morocco and for that reason, they are

considered less desirable in that way as well. When telling both sensitive stories he insisted that it was necessary for him to tell them so that I understood the way people see PWD, and how these microaggressions are reflected of a greater problem of denying PWD their full humanity.

The Complicated Role of NGOs and Support Groups

The Association HADAF is a center that supports youth that have developmental disabilities and connected to the association is a restaurant opened a little more than 20 years ago by Amna Msefer in support of her daughter. The restaurant became open to the general public about two years ago and many people have left overwhelmingly positive reviews across social media.⁵³ The restaurant receives a lot of media attention is because the restaurant solely employs individuals with developmental disabilities. Such publicity acts as a double-edged sword, because while the intentions of the establishment are to support these individuals and show that PWD are not a burden, and do have a lot to offer in society, it can become a sort of “inspirational porn.” Inspirational porn refers to the idea that these individuals that work in the restaurant are considered “role models” for their group to prove they can succeed, despite hardships.⁵⁴ This is common with many marginalized groups in that one person doing something deemed significant, regardless of whether its good or bad, can be assumed by ignorant people that everyone in the group does or is capable of doing, or wants to do, the same thing. Additionally, because the restaurant employs such a specific demographic, that becomes the focus of the establishment, and it becomes what the patrons focus on when they come to visit. They think, “Wow! Look at the incredible things these people can do! They are beating the odds!” Then, these same individuals will see someone else with a developmental disability who may be supported by their

⁵³ *Restaurant in Morocco Changes Perceptions About Disability*. (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.trtworld.com/life/restaurant-in-morocco-changes-perceptions-about-disability-13762>

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

family, and think, “Wow, this person is so lazy. Why don’t they go out and get a job?” The responsibility is placed on the individual rather than the failing social structures that do not enable PWD to get jobs and limits their job options. This is not to claim that people are only the summation of their circumstances and that individual agency does not play a role, but failure to recognize the social forces at work when considering why such a high percentage of a marginalized group is unemployed will prevent the issue from fully being addressed.

However, despite the implications of the Association HADAF, giving PWD the chance to see people like them in societal roles is powerful and beneficial to the group and helps people outside the group to widen their world view as well.⁵⁵ I had the opportunity to visit this establishment during my time in Rabat. Before I even reached the door, there was someone holding it open for me. As I walked inside, I immediately noticed the restaurant is very small (smaller than Google images would imply), with only eight tables of varying sizes on the inside. I was greeted warmly by the hostess in French and directed to my seat. I ordered couscous, because it was Friday and proceeded to have a highly pleasurable dining experience. The organization’s aim to normalize PWD in the work force is effectively carried out in their restaurant and what they do is important to changing representations and stereotypes regarding PWD. It is noteworthy that the primary language spoken in the language is French rather than Arabic, and it makes me consider whether they establishment wants to present a certain image to gain recognition from the international community, as the French language in Morocco is typically associated with globalization.

On another venture, I had the opportunity to visit a school for PWD in Fez known as Association Tahaddi pour le Handicap. The school is small and teaches people of different age

⁵⁵ Ibid.

groups from children to young adults and they teach a variety of subjects to the students. They additionally provide three different forms of support including physical therapy, psychological therapy and health oriented therapy.⁵⁶ The children seem very happy to be there, but I learned from Ian, an employee at the association that there is often difficulty educating parents about their children and that some children experience discrimination and abuse at home and they do not have control in that regard. It can be difficult to understand the extent to which a school can play a role in a child's life and upbringing, and therefore the solutions to issues concerning PWD requires an intersectional approach that requires more education across realms at a grassroots level and an institutional level.

Looking Forward: What Will Contribute to the Biggest Change?

When asking participants what they believe should be the next steps moving forward to improve the situation of PWD, multiple participants mentioned what they referred to as “positive discrimination.” Dr. Grant suggests that there should be a member quota for PWD in parliament to hold the government accountable for the laws and institutions it creates to improve the lives of PWD. Institutional representation for PWD has not changed since the 1970s and 80s, and because of the general lack of awareness the needs of PWD are not being addressed in the government.⁵⁷

Additionally, the general lack of awareness needs to be diminished by integrating disabilities studies into school curriculum including lower and higher education as a requirement in schools. According to Dr. Sattler, “Education should redefine PWD within the content that is exposed to all of Morocco.” If people understood more about PWD they would be able to realize

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

that they do not want charity, but to be recognized as full human beings and furthermore, this could help parents, family and other caregivers be able to give PWD they may be caring for the necessities that enable them to access every aspect of civil and social life that people without disabilities are able to access.⁵⁸ Moreover, Adam suggests people within the community should help each other. He says, “I’m helping blind people learn how to use computers, and I took this knowledge and I’ve been training myself and getting online courses from friends.” He is taking his situation into his own hands and making change for his community.

In addition, multiple participants emphasized the importance of “grassroots” activism. Even amongst top NGOs who have been working on solutions to these issues mentioned for years have been unable to make progress because the research they have done is not accessible to the people they are trying to help. Dr. Grant explains that activism needs to no longer be an “ism,” because it has become elitist and academically focused to the point where often these theories and concepts that are significant to improving the lives of PWD are not actually discussed with PWD, the individuals who would understand the concepts the most and have the most to contribute. Dr. Sattler explains that, “We should take part in gaining recognition as PWD, and we should take part and take initiative and not wait for people to work for us.”

Finally, Adam explains the role of media in creating change and written below is the full passage from this portion of the interview, because this portion is powerful and required to stand alone to understand the full effect:

“[We] need to make people aware by media. Using radios, television, websites, all the digital media. In order to change people’s minds about the actual status of blind people and

⁵⁸ Hemidach, A. (2014). *Mentally Challenged in Morocco: We Want Our Rights, Not Charity*. Retrieved from <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2014/12/148048/mentally-challenged-in-morocco-we-want-our-rights-not-charity/>

PWD there should be a political recognition and the social recognition of the merit. Of the qualities. That PWD have. NOT CLAIM. We don't claim that we are having capacities that [we do not have]. They are fantasizing the situation of PWD. [They think] PWD have, you know, capabilities that are unbelievable. Unimaginable. That is coming from an unknown world. That is just to make you weird. To make you like a stranger. NO. PWD are the same just like other people. Neither their coming from another world. Nor are they like very poor and incapable or frightening or horrifying. What you can say about sighted people, you can say similarly about blind people...We are not denying that there is a difference. But for me, difference does not mean strangeness. Difference does not mean backwardness. Does not mean periphery. Does not mean darkness."

What he conveys in this passage reflects what Kristeva and Bunch discuss in their article about the "plurality of worlds" in relation to the way people look and the way people live. Rather than perceiving PWD as strange or weird, Adam recognizes them as different, but this form of difference is not negative and is still "normal." He proceeds to establish that the view that PWD are strange comes from colonialism and that its effect is like what minorities such as black women, and people of color experience in the United States in terms of lack of representation and negative stereotyping in the media. Like previously stated regarding the Association HADAF, often individuals are forced into the scenario where they are a representation of their group so if they act a certain way, other people assume that is how everyone in the group behaves or looks. Whiteness is put on a pedestal in terms of look and lifestyle and anyone who diverts from these social norms that are established by the dominant group are marginalized in society.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The results of my research are not generalizable, because there is not a large enough sample size of interviews. Every participant identified as male, and there was not enough demographic diversity. Not being able to interview women who are disproportionately affected by this issue leaves a significant gap in the analysis of the issues PWD face on a regular basis. The men were of similar ages, education levels and they were all from major cities in Morocco including Rabat, Fez, and Tangier. In every interview each person mentioned that many of these issues would exist differently if this information had been gathered in rural areas of Morocco where they implied the people there do not have access to the same resources and some necessary healthcare options are inaccessible in terms of location and cost. Furthermore, they implied that the belief systems were more conservative in terms of religion; thus, conditions for PWD may be worse in terms of treatment socially. However, this is not verifiable, because of the lack of conclusive evidence. Also, as I was mostly able to interview individuals that had high frequencies of interactions with the blind community, it is likely the findings of my research would have been very different if the interviewees had been of a different part of the PWD community. Life experiences, depending on the individual's disability, are very different. I was fortunate to be able to interview people who had personal experiences that really enriched this study. I felt privileged that they shared their stories with me, but as they are activists for their community, they felt it was necessary to share as much as they could with me, and it is part of what they do in their daily lives. These issues become real when you can put a name and a face to them.

CONCLUSION & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Completing this project was fruitful, yet draining, because going into this period I was determined to do this topic justice. However, the logistical constraints and my own lack of

knowledge proved to be a major obstacle throughout this journey. The more I learned, the more I realized how much I did not know and could not understand. I wish I could have completed more interviews, and I wish I could have visited more NGOs, but as I travelled, I was conscious of spaces that I should and should not be in. I chose to speak with these activists for the blind community, because sharing their stories is part of what they do, and they believed talking to me as an outsider was important to them. I would not have felt comfortable speaking to a person with a disability that was at one of the NGOs, or someone I met with a disability. My priority as an outsider completing this research was to prevent harm and contribute positively with this research. Whether I failed or succeeded is not yet determined, but it was important to recognize that my research discusses the lives of real people, and it is important that people understand these issues so they can be addressed.

Ultimately, PWD in Morocco encounter what is known as the “earning handicap.” The earning handicap is the perceived inadequacy of PWD as a result of stigmatization that lowers their capacity to earn an income in the minds of the society. Thus, they are hired at a lower rate, and because of limited job opportunities, this results in high rates of unemployment. They have limited job opportunities for many reasons, one of them being because many PWD do not have the opportunity to receive the standard education that would qualify them for certain jobs. Additionally, many jobs do not provide accessible spaces or accommodations for these individuals to work. The stigmatization of disability is perpetuated in every aspect of private and public life including religion, social life, work life, family life and the like. Moving forward representations of PWD must be changed in the public mind and that starts with media. Furthermore, there should be more representation of PWD in government and public institutions that can hold these establishments accountable for the consideration of PWD. The general

ambivalence towards PWD will not change until people are fully educated on the status of PWD, and the struggles they face every day because of their current situation in society. PWD deserve the human rights established with full citizenship and personhood and until these issues are made a priority, society will continue to be complacent.

Future research questions:

If given the opportunity to conduct real ethnographic research based on the findings of my study, I have listed the following example research questions:

- To what extent do the religious implications of disability permeate the public psyche in Morocco? Are these understandings differentiated across categories of disability?
- Women with disabilities are disproportionately unemployed compared to men in Morocco. To what extent does gender play a role in the employability of PWD? What barriers to entry do women face in comparison to men?
- What are common beliefs and practices regarding PWD in rural areas of Morocco?
- To what extent does the health care system play a role in the stigmatization of PWD?

Finally, Michael Oliver discusses, in another one of his works, the concept of “emancipatory disability studies.” Essentially it is the idea that disabilities studies research must be at the disposal of the community. If the research is not accessible, then it should not exist. To truly demystify the social infrastructures that stigmatize PWD, to find efficient solutions that would enable these individuals to fully participate in society, it is necessary that researchers and PWD are intimately connected. If I ever complete relevant extended research regarding PWD, it is essential that it is accessible to the community first, then to the public. It is then that change can happen.

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APPENDIX

Interview Guide Questions

- What is the general attitude toward PWD?
 - Does religion play a role in the general attitude toward PWD?
- How do families treat relatives with disabilities to your knowledge?
- Are PWD able to access educational opportunities?
- The employment rate of working age PWD is 13.6%. Why do you think this is the case?
- What is the solution to increasing the employment rate?
- What is the biggest issue PWD face today in your opinion?
- Is there anything more that you think I should know?

** It should be noted that depending on the level of English the person had during the interview, I changed the wording of the questions. **