Single Mothers in Morocco:

Social Stigma and Struggle for Identity

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MA Near and Middle Eastern Studies

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Abstract

This paper aims to deconstruct the stigma carried by single mothers in Morocco. It explores the genesis of this stigma, analyses its effects, and demonstrates its pivotal role in obstructing the birth registration process and in defining the identity of their children. In violating gender norms of honour and sexuality, single mothers challenge social order and rules and threaten what bestows recognition as members of Moroccan society, namely lineage. This violation engulfs them in a spiral of social and economic exclusion which is silently legitimised by law and transmitted to their children. Not only does the stigma attached to these mothers hinder the crucial birth registration process, but the legal identity of their children will be tainted by absence of lineage.

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Introduction

In recent decades, Morocco has taken considerable steps forward in improving women's rights protection through the promulgation of reforms and civil society initiatives that gave voice to those legally and socially marginalised.

In particular, 2004 represents a watershed year with the adoption of the Mudawwana (Hursh 2012:255), a new Family Code that includes a set of progressive reforms for women, such as raising the minimum age for marriage to 18, abolishing the institution of the tutor (*wali*) and recognising custody rights in case of divorce or remarriage (Žvan-Elliot 2009:218). Because of these actions, Morocco is used as a positive example by foreign governments, NGOs and the international community in general to push for the introduction of similar reforms in other North African and Middle Eastern countries.

However, there seems to be a gap between the image Morocco has cultivated for the local and international community and the real-life experience on the ground, especially for those who challenge social norms and religious precepts. The Mudawwana remained almost silent on many subjects that desperately needed attention but touch upon sensitive aspects of Moroccan culture, society and religiosity.

The changes in the law indeed had a marginal effect on both the legal and social status of single mothers in the country, as it still contains substantial inequalities that keep them at the margins of society, creating the conditions for the stigma attached to them to be transmitted to their children. Moreover, although attitudes are slowly changing, the shame of having a child out of wedlock is a great obstacle for mothers in giving their children a legal identity.

This paper aims at deconstructing the stigma attached to single mothers in Morocco, exploring its intrinsic nature and external manifestations through the experiences of women on the ground who agreed to share their stories with me. It also assesses how such a stigma creates a series of barriers to birth registration, the first important step to limit its transmission to the next generation, at least in its practical effects. For this purpose, the taboo on single mothers will be explored in relation to Kristeva's and Butler's theories on abjection and gender performativity which will help to conceptualise the condition of total outcasts single mothers are forced to live in.

Chapter 1 will investigate why the stigma exists. Firstly, it will assess how non-compliance with gender norms established under the guise of honour creates the conditions for a "social death" (Butler 2015:177). Secondly, it will discuss the threat single mothers pose to what bestows recognition as subjects in Moroccan society, namely lineage.

Chapter 2 will discuss the stigma in its external manifestations. It will assess how it triggers a combination of social and economic exclusion legitimised by an ambiguous legal system that does not grant single mothers "the right to have rights" as a legal category. This section will also explore how the stigma shapes the relationship between mother and child and how it is interiorised by them according to gender norms.

Finally, chapter 3 will investigate one of the most relevant consequences of the stigma in terms of its transmission. It will outline the obstacles single mothers face when trying to give their children a legal identity through birth registration. Even when these obstacles are overcome, it will show how an imperfect legal system allows illegitimacy to define the legal identity of the children, exposing them to a lifetime of discrimination.

Methodology

In order to explore the research topic it was necessary to use a mixed-methods approach including qualitative and quantitative data derived from both desk research and fieldwork.

The desk research provided a general overview on the social, economic and legal conditions of single mothers in Morocco. The material used for this purpose was mainly a collection of secondary literature, such as books and journal articles, especially Naamane-Guessous (2011) and Bargach (2002;2005), and international reports.

The fieldwork was carried out in the month of July 2017 in Taroudannt and partly in Inezgane, two cities of the Souss-Massa region, a rural area in South Morocco. It was done with the support of two NGOs working to achieve sustainable development for young people and their communities in the region: Moroccan Children's Trust (MCT) and Fondation Amane pour la Protection de l'Enfance (FAPE). They also individuated the participants in the research based on their professional or personal involvement in issues related to the project.

The fieldwork consisted of ten one-to-one interviews, including four interviews with single mothers aged 32-43 and six interviews with MCT/FAPE social workers. Social workers were involved either in the CARE (Citizen's Access to Birth Registration) Project, funded by the US-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), or working at FAPE's Centre Amane in Taroudannt that supports street children and single mothers.

The languages used for the interviews were English, French or – in the case of the mothers – Moroccan dialect (*darija*), for which a translator was needed. The translator also helped with note-taking, which was extremely

useful as it reduced time-consuming transcriptions of the recordings. For accuracy purposes, however, all the notes were thoroughly checked by listening to the recordings to fill the gaps.

All interviews were semi-structured; I had a clear framework of the themes to be explored, yet the main concern was to let participants express their own opinions and experiences. While the interviews with social workers also addressed a set of specific technical, legal and procedural issues, those with single mothers aimed at understanding their personal experiences in relation to such issues. Due to word-limit impositions, only small parts of the interviews are in the form of direct quotations in the body of the paper. However, the stories of Meryam, Fatima, Zaynab and Houda, the four mothers I met, are available in the appendix for reference.

The quantitative data served to outline the procedure and obstacles to birth registration. They were drawn from FAPE/MCT unpublished surveys and reports on birth registration produced as part of the CARE Project. Because of the lack of secondary literature on the subject, chapter 3 on birth registration is mainly based on these data and interviews to social workers.

The material gathered in the field was then analysed in the light of the secondary literature, integrated with the quantitative data, and finally elucidated through Kristeva's theory on abjection (1982) and Butler's theory on gender performativity (1993).

I make no claims for the generalisability of the data collected through the interviews to the whole population of single mothers in the country. They served the purpose of illustrating previous literature on single mothers in Morocco with the experiences of the people I met, by providing insights into the specific rural

context of the Souss-Massa region. Moreover, they were crucial to understand the procedures and obstacles to birth registration.

Ethics

All interviews were conducted with ethical clearance from SOAS and verbal consent from participants who also agreed to be recorded for revision purposes. The use of unpublished quantitative data provided by MCT/FAPE was also ethically approved by SOAS.

Due to the sensitive information discussed in the interviews, all identities, including those of the social workers, have been anonymised by choosing different Moroccan names. When deemed necessary, other general information, such as dates, the names of cities, the number of siblings or the profession of family members, has been changed. Although it was not originally planned, this was done mainly because during the interviews it emerged that the families and communities of the mothers are not all aware of their situation.

Rather unexpectedly, all the mothers interviewed were willing to discuss their personal experiences and spontaneously provided excellent material on which to base the analysis. Nevertheless, their interviews were structured in such a way as to allow them to establish the tone and depth of our interaction, without external pressure.

I am aware that the language barrier might have blocked the spontaneous flow of the interaction and not allowed me to grasp all the connotative nuances of specific word choices. Although it was a source of concern, it did not represent a serious obstacle on the ground, as translations were made mostly

word-for-word and elements such as body language and voice tone were extremely useful to fill the gaps.

Conceptual Framework

Abjection

Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection refers to a sense of revulsion that pervades the boundary between the Self and the Other. In a wider sense, it is the process through which regimes of identification exclude what is culturally unintelligible and symbolically illegitimate, hence located in "a place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 1982:2). In other words, abjection could be described as a liminal state of "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" that disturbs "identity, system, order" and "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva, 1982:4).

The abject threatens the clean and proper Self with its disruptive potential to dissolve its defining boundaries. Because of that, it is brutally rejected and located in a site of horror, yet from this place of expulsion the abject plays a crucial role. Abjection as a liminal state defines the domain against which the subjects can measure and claim their autonomy and very existence (Butler 1993:3). The abjection of the Other is precisely what reinforces those very boundaries it threatens and defines the identities of who falls within them. In fact, Butler (1993:3) emphasises how the subjects require "the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet subjects, but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject".

Abjection has a dehumanising effect and is tantamount to what Butler (2015:177) calls "social death", that is a social exile that reduces a subject to live in the "unlivable and uninhabitable zones of social life" (Butler 1993:3) as

"a shadow figure who is never quite human and never quite not" (Butler 2015:175).

Butler's concept of "social death" is precisely the effect of being a single mother in Morocco, a position that goes beyond categorisation and is not culturally intelligible. It is perceived as a threat to the boundaries of identity and system, and as a violation of social norms. As Butler (2009:4) explains, one first needs to conform to a series of norms in order to be a full, recognisable subject.

Gender Performativity

According to Butler (1993) gender is performative. There are a series of social and behavioural norms individuals must perform according to their biological sex, which are prescribed by the social group and expected to be complied with. Gender norms are framed within power relations and experienced as pressure to meet social expectations.

The gender norms ascribed to each sex are interiorised from an early age, yet they are not just mechanically reproduced, but negotiated and performed by individuals to the best of their abilities according to dominant conventions of gender (Harris 2016:254). Complying with gender norms means being eligible to appear as subjects in the hegemonic discourse and, therefore, being accepted by the group. That is, "the performativity of gender has everything to do with who counts as a life […] and who lives, or tries to live, on the far side of established modes of intelligibility" (Butler 2009: iv).

The liminal state in which single mothers live in Morocco is precisely the consequence of how they failed to meet social expectations. Gender norms

determine "who will fail to be protected by the law or, more specifically, the police, on the street, or on the job, or in the home. Who will be stigmatized" (Butler 2009: ii).

Single mothers are defined by a lack of what is recognised as pertinent to the feminine domain in Moroccan society. Therefore, such an absence leads to a crisis as it goes beyond the symbolic scheme circumscribing this domain (Butler 1993:104).

Chapter 1

Deconstructing the Stigma: Failure, Absence and Threat

> "Here in Morocco, the way society sees single mothers is as if they committed a crime. People don't accept it. They see single mothers or relationships out of wedlock the way you [in Europe] see terrorism – something that is too bad. And society will never forgive them." (Hicham, social worker)

Despite their different backgrounds, personal experiences and levels of education, all the people interviewed during my stay in Taroudannt agreed on one thing: single mothers[1] are among the most socially despised and marginalised people in Morocco.

To be fully understood, a specific human condition first needs to be deconstructed and thought of in the social fabric in which it exists and develops. It is precisely by deconstructing the stigma single mothers suffer that their "embodied exclusion" (Bargach 2005:2) is revealed.

Single mothers are stigmatised and segregated in a state of abjection because they embody failure, absence, and threat of what preserves social balances and identities.

Hence, to better understand why such a stigma exists, this section will explore how single mothers failed to comply with gender norms related to honour and

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1 The terms single mothers or unwed mothers as used in this paper refer to women who had children out of wedlock. They do not refer to divorced or widowed women who had children during their marriage.

sexuality, and how their existence threatens lineage, a pillar of Moroccan identity.

1.1 Challenging Honour and Taboos

The concept of honour is a core element of societies in the Mediterranean region. In Morocco, honour and family structures were heavily influenced by French colonialism, which lasted from 1912 to 1956 (Warnock Fernea 1995:10). While one could argue that the European presence might have led Moroccans to challenge traditional social norms, in general colonialism strengthened family patterns of gender division, segregation of sexes, and the safeguard of family honour. As in other European colonies around the world, by being denied a role in the public sphere fathers turned to their families to restore their authority, the family becoming the last independent refuge and therefore the cornerstone of opposition and resistance to the French invaders. (Warnock Fernea 1995:12).

Echoing Latreille (2008:600), under the guise of honour a whole set of behavioural norms determines how individuals (inter)act in a specific society and establishes a set of gender tasks.

Although in Islam both men and women must abstain from sexual relations outside the frame of marriage, the social blame of having a child out of wedlock and engaging in non-marital sexual intercourse is highly gendered and depends on how norms of honour are interiorised and performed according to gender mainstream. The wider concept of honour is built upon a dichotomous gendered dimension entailing two complementary – yet opposed – facets. Feminine honour ('*ard*) does not only include reputation, morality, religiosity

and hospitality as it does for men but has further, crucial attributes, including chastity before marriage and fidelity after marriage (Warnock Fernea 1995:10). This type of honour has been conceptualised as modesty, as opposed to masculine honour (*sharaf*), more ostentatious and exhibitionist in its essence (Abu-Lughod 1999:118; Latreille 2008:600). Once lost, a man's honour can be regained but for a woman it is extremely difficult.

During one of the interviews, social worker Hicham highlighted this point:

"Society accepts changes in men: if a man has been a criminal for his whole life, and then suddenly starts going to the mosque, wearing nice clothes, growing his beard […] he becomes the perfect man, and people seem to forget what he was like before. But society does not forgive women; if they have done something considered a crime, no one will ever forget it."

This dichotomous dimension of honour translates in the virility-virginity ideal, one that tolerates, if not celebrates, sexual relations out of marriage for men as a proof of manhood. Such a dichotomy is interiorised by Moroccan women as well, as Hicham explained, confirming how the sexes perform established gender norms.

"If a man did not have any relationships before marriage he is not a real man. Even in families, if you, as a mother, know that your son had sex, you will tolerate his behaviour. But if your daughter did it, you want to kill her! Women accept it in men but not in other women."

Interestingly enough, even though honour typically belongs to men, the social discourse measures its quality depending on women's behaviour, in particular, the women of the family (Žvan-Elliot 2015:70). Modesty and shame as typical feminine attributes become powerful tools to preserve masculinity and honour and therefore crucial values of society. By engaging in extramarital relations, single mothers fail to fulfil their gender-ascribed role of preserving honour through modest behaviour, and therefore they become social deserters.

When a woman becomes pregnant out of marriage, dishonour is felt not only by the family, but by the entire community, especially in small villages where it is hard to hide a pregnancy. In addition to a gendered dimension, honour therefore has a strong, collective one that also rests on women's shoulders (Naamane-Guessous and Guessous 2011:64), as social worker Hicham explained.

"In the countryside, villages are […] like a big family, and if people find a problem in one of their neighbours' houses it is as if it happened in their own house: they fear to suffer from that same shame. When a girl has sex outside marriage […] it is as if the whole village has been in the relationship."

Although honour killing is extremely rare in Morocco (Naamane- Guessous and Guessous 2005:74), Houda, one of the mothers I met, confirmed how violating honour can still be felt as life-threatening.

"When my two sisters found out I was pregnant, they sent me to Rabat to get an abortion. I did not want to but they insisted, and

insisted. They told me – You have to, because if our brothers find

out, they will kill you."

Fear of dishonour is what drives many single pregnant women to try to abort in any possible way, often with dramatic consequences. In Morocco, abortion is prohibited by law (Art. 449 and 454 Penal Code) and only allowed when the mother's health is at risk. As observed in Houda's story and confirmed by social workers, the heavy stigma carried by single mothers, combined with the criminalisation of abortion, leads many women to rely on private clinics that practice secret abortions. However, as the costs are usually prohibitive, they occasionally try with homemade remedies, infusions or pills. "Some may even drink bleach and commit suicide" commented Nadia, one of the social workers.

Echoing Abu-Lughod (1999:119) "[…] the greatest threat to the social system and to the authority of those preferred by the system is sexuality itself". Single mothers are the embodiment of sexual deregulation and not meeting social expectations of chastity may have dramatic consequences. Without going that far, the taboo on sexual relations out of marriage and the emphasis placed on chastity indirectly contribute to increasing the number of unwanted pregnancies, for reasons related to the lack of sexual education and also to marriage promises.

1.1.1 Bodies, Choice and Marriage

The majority of pregnancies outside marriage are the result of consensual relationships. Because the taboo on extramarital sex is extremely strong in families, sexual education is often based on the unsaid. It prohibits, rather than informs (Namaane-Guessous and Guessous 2011:65).

Despite the differences in terms of age, background and personal experiences, there is a common denominator at the basis of a large number of these pregnancies: lack of sexual education and poor knowledge of the female body. A paradoxical effect of the taboo on sex outside marriage is that it provides limited room for young girls to be informed, and in so doing it increases the risk of becoming pregnant (Namaane-Guessous and Guessous 2011:65).

Lack of knowledge of their own bodies is not the only reason underlying unwanted pregnancies. Among the many factors that can play a role, research shows how false marriage promises made by men are another frequent starting point in the life as a single mother (Namaane-Guessous and Guessous 2011; El Batoul 2013;). The mothers interviewed all confirmed they had received false marriage promises. Zaynab's partner, for instance, went as far as asking her to have a baby as proof of her love before getting married.

However, the concept of marriage promises needs further contextualisation to avoid reducing it to the naivety of single women. As Ech-Channa argues, there is a clear hierarchy in Moroccan society which makes the life of unmarried women hard: "At the top of that hierarchy is a mother with sons, then a mother, then a widow, then a divorced woman, then a single woman. At the very bottom is the single mother" (Ech-Channa 2009). In a society that looks upon single women – and even more so upon single mothers – with suspicion, not only does marriage have a high religious value, but it is the passport to acquire the privileged social status only married women enjoy. Being a mother but not a wife means not complying with gender norms and, therefore, is not an admissible choice. As social worker Nadia argued in this regard, "single mothers become prostitutes or victims in the collective imagination; total outcasts."

While discussing the question of marriage promises it is crucial, therefore, not to fall into that same guilty/victim stereotype which erases any trace of agency. Single mothers are, indeed, active agents in a system of gender norms and power hierarchies that grants certain material and moral privileges exclusively to married women. Their decisions are highly influenced by those power hierarchies. Seen in this perspective, single mothers are not just naïve victims of male desire, but are part of a system in which power relations of gender, civil and economic status intersect and to whose norms they want to conform to meet social expectations.

1.2 Disrupting Lineage

Abstinence from extramarital relations has a further meaning in Morocco. It allows men and women to fulfil the religious duty of ensuring purity of lineage.

Lineage (*nasab*) is the backbone and organising principle of Muslim societies, and lies at the basis of the patrilineal family upon which economic and political orientations develop (Bargach 2005:262). It is a blessing God granted human beings for them to have a social structure (Bargach 2002:56-57) and must be established as a starting point to determine who individuals are, and who they are connected to (Rosen 1989:12-15; Žvan-Elliot 2015:71-72). *Nasab* determines both self and social perceptions and therefore has a significant relevance in one's life and future. It is visible, as it takes the form of one or more patronyms placed next to the first name to indicate a parentage that activates a series of rights (Schlumpf 2016:6).

Blood (kinship) has a sacred status in Islam and is, together with marriage, the only way by which *nasab* can be established (Schlumpf 2016:6), as Surah

25:54 of the Quran provides for: "It is He who creates human beings from fluid, then makes them kin by blood and marriage: your Lord is all powerful".

More specifically, *nasab* is passed through the males via blood and through the females via marriage. A legalised union is paramount to establish *nasab*, for it is only through one that all the reciprocal rights and duties of the couple and towards their offspring – namely inheritance and name – are passed through (Bargach 2002: 56-58).

Thus, intercourse out of marriage has the disruptive potential of threatening social cohesion, order, and identity, resulting in a condition of chaos (*fitna*). Most importantly, illicit sexual relations lead to a pollution of the lineage and it is a duty of all pious Muslims to preserve its purity and cleanliness which then, by extension, reflects in the family structure and community *(ummah)* as a whole (Bargach 2002: 56-58).

Some jurists (*fuqaha*) emphasise the role of lineage as the means that endows individuals with full humanity, going as far as to say that it is only by virtue of a pure *nasab,* by acknowledging who fathers, mothers, siblings and grandparents are, that humans can be fully considered as such (Bargach 2002:58). This narrow interpretation of who – and by virtue of what – is entitled to be considered a member of the human community can help to understand why single mothers and their children are not considered full subjects from a social and legal perspective, as will be explored in the following chapters. The threat to social cohesion that a disrupted lineage represents is one of the reasons underlying the marginalisation and social stigma attached to them. Single mothers engaged in an illicit act but, unlike men, they publicly carry the consequences of that act.

To conclude, single motherhood is a taboo because it challenges the pillars of Moroccan society, threatening to dissolve the boundaries that ensure their authority and stability. Single mothers embody the absence of lineage and the failure of gender norms related to honour and sexuality and therefore become the dangerous Other that must be silenced. For the sake of social order they are exiled from the world of those who, instead, preserve and respect those principles, as "to recognise the validity of an alternative reproductive sexuality outside marriage would be tantamount to legitimising it" (Bargach 2005:260). Deconstructing single mothers' suffering means, therefore, breaking what Noelle-Neumann (1993) calls the "spiral of silence" they are trapped in and giving them a voice from their site of abjection by exploring the multiple dimensions of their exclusion.

Chapter 2

The Spiral of Exclusion

The general scarcity of official data makes it difficult to obtain up-to-date statistics on single mothers in Morocco. Overall, their number is on the rise. According to a 2010 report by the National Institution of Solidarity with Woman in Distress (INSAF), in Casablanca the estimated number of unwed mothers between 2003 and 2010 was 21,135; four times more than between 1996 and 2002. As for the Southern region of Souss-Massa, it registered 23,386 births from single mothers between 2003 and 2009 (INSAF 2010). Nevertheless, official statistics are below real numbers as they do not take into account hidden pregnancies, abandonments and infanticides (El Batoul 2013:471; Naamane-Guessous and Guessous 2011:44).

The most serious consequences of having a child outside marriage are manifested in terms of multifaceted violence against the mother and her child which does not necessarily entail physical harm, but it is mostly expressed in terms of social, economic and legal exclusion. This section will analyse this exclusion by exploring how a combination of social hostility and stereotypes, lack of material resources and literacy, and weak legal protection creates the conditions for the abjection of single mothers to be transmitted to the next generation.

2.1 Family and Social Exclusion

The stigmatisation of single mothers begins within the family. As Naamane-Guessous and Guessous (2011:75) reports, when the family learns of the

pregnancy, many women are expelled from the house, while others do not wait and leave as they fear the announcement of their pregnancy will put them at risk. Hostility comes from a failure to adhere to gender norms of chastity that threatens the honour of the entire family.

The majority of single mothers inform their partners about the pregnancy (Naamane-Guessous and Guessous 2011:75) yet without a legal constraint as that of marriage most of the times men do not take responsibility for their child, as Meryam, one of the mothers I met, explained:

> "This is how it works with men here in Morocco – if they have a sexual relationship and have a child, they don't take any responsibility and even deny the child is theirs. He left me alone and now my daughter is 11 years old. I have two girls and the same happened with both of them."

Dishonour is one of the reasons, and the pressure felt by family and neighbours not to acknowledge an illegitimate child plays an important role. Left alone, single mothers often move to other cities where anonymity is easier to maintain as they fear persecution for engaging in an illicit sexual relationship, or because they want to hide their pregnancies from their families (Naamane Guessous and Guessous 2011:137). Sex out of wedlock is a crime in Morocco, punished with imprisonment (Art. 490 Penal Code). However, as confirmed by all social workers, the law is not enforced in the case of single mothers, as it is mainly intended for non-married couples when found guilty of adultery (*zina*).

Stigmatisation does not stop by leaving the family and community environment, and shapes the daily life of unwed mothers when accessing both private and public services. For instance, it is not unusual for a single mother

to see her request to rent a house refused, and it is often because of neighbours who pressure the owner to do so (Nammane Guessous and Guessous 2011:66). In the worst cases, single mothers may be asked for their phone numbers or sexual favours in return for a service, which is justified by the fact that, as social worker Loubna remarked, "the social discourse says she is a loose woman". Social aversion is indeed fed by stereotypes that relate unwanted pregnancies to prostitution, which is religiously illicit and legally prohibited (Ech-Channa 2013). Whilst it is difficult to generalise as it depends on the individual and the context, as certain environments are more conservative than others, the truth is that those working in private or public services are part of that same system that ostracises single mothers.

"I am treated badly by the authorities, they don't help me. They make me go from one place to another looking for papers", explained Meryam, one of the mothers, whose treatment is similar to the one Houda received when she went to the hospital for the first time after becoming pregnant.

> "The first time I went to the hospital, I approached a nurse and told her I was four months pregnant. The nurse threw my file at me and told me to go away. A friend sent me to a doctor, who sent me to the hospital director, who eventually directed me to a social assistant. All this because I didn't have a husband with me."

Bureaucratic procedures take longer and are complicated for single mothers who might also encounter corrupt officials, as Meryam reported: "When I wanted to register my eldest child, a woman working in the

administration asked me for 200 dirhams[2] […] after saying – We help women and children in difficulty".

It is clear how the combination of social and family exclusion pushes unwed mothers to the margins of society where they usually find themselves completely alone. As a result, the support NGOs provide is often the only option unwed mothers have, as in the case of single mother Fatima:

> "I am alone, I don't have relationships with anyone, other than the social workers. I don't have confidence in myself, and I prefer not to speak to anyone. I always have eyes on me. Just yesterday, the neighbours were on the roof, and when they saw me going out they shouted at me – What are you doing? This is normal for single mothers, it is *daruri* [natural, necessary]."

FAPE's Centre Amane, for instance, is one of the limited options for psychological support and legal assistance with birth registration single mothers have in Taroudannt. Yet despite the support it receives from the authorities, the centre still has to confront social prejudice, and it is often accused of encouraging prostitution and normalising the deviant.

2.2 Economic Exclusion

Numerous studies have identified the typical profile of single mothers in Morocco: rural or freshly urbanised girls from precarious economic and social backgrounds, unskilled and illiterate (UNIFEM, UNICEF, UNFPA 2002; INSAF

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[2] 1 dirham (MAD) = 0,10 USD

2010). However, according to local NGOs the profile of single mothers is evolving into more nuanced individuals with different social and economic backgrounds (Naamane Guessous and Guessous 2011:9).

The link between single motherhood, poverty and illiteracy is clear, especially in rural areas where there are still high percentages of female illiteracy (International Monetary Fund, 2013). Illiteracy is an impediment to them knowing their rights (El Batoul 2013:474), and previous conditions of misery predispose them to early marginality and irreversible loss of economic status. This is particularly true for many young housemaids who become mothers after suffering sexual, psychological and economic violence (Naamane- Guessous and Guessous 2011:93-102). More in general, estimates indicate that about two-thirds of single mothers started working as housemaids before the age of 15 to contribute to the family income (Ech-Channa 2013).

However, economic marginalisation is not just a preliminary condition. Poverty and exclusion are also amplified when a second level of marginalisation – the one related to their newly "acquired" status of social outcasts – materialises. Job opportunities are reduced and there seems to be little space for unwed mothers to work in the formal economic sector. As observed with Meryam, Fatima, Houda and Zaynab, and confirmed by social workers, single mothers often beg, or work in the informal sector either in farms or as prostitutes, with high chances of being exploited.

Thus, the economic hardship unwed mothers have to endure can be described as a spiral. Different layers of marginality – social and economic – accumulate, intersect and eventually reinforce one another leading to a condition of utter exclusion (UNIFEM, UNICEF, UNFPA, 2002). Chances are

very high that their children will be caught in that same spiral and reproduce the same patterns of marginalisation (Naamane-Guessous and Guessous 2011).

2.3 Legal Exclusion

The 2004 new Family Code (Mudawwana) introduced important reforms for women, most of which did benefit single mothers and improved the status of their children. Art.146, for instance, is a great achievement in terms of access to birth registration, as it recognises filiation through the mother "which produces the same effects regardless of whether the children are the result of a legitimate or illegitimate relationship" (The Moroccan Family Code).

However, any hope of creating a legally defined space for single mothers not to be treated – at least by law – as outcasts, was quashed (Bargach 2005; El Batoul 2013). The very notion of rights becomes indeed ambiguous, as no legal category for single mothers exists. They are only defined in terms of filiation to their legitimate or illegitimate child. Such a gap silently justifies their social exclusion with a legal framework which "obviously considers them as non-persons" (Bargach 2005:257).

According to Art.156 of the Mudawwana, a child born during the engagement period is considered legitimate as long as the official engagement can be proven. This is another positive reform for both the mother and the child born in these circumstances who is given a "sliding 'shade' of legality" (Bargach 2005:257). However, while for obvious reasons many single mothers pretend they were engaged at the time they became pregnant, even when that is really the case, engagements are difficult to prove. Ceremonies are often discrete, and celebrated privately within the family, without photos, videos, or any other

public proof. As a consequence, it is rare that children born in these circumstances are declared to be legitimate. (El Batoul 2013:479)

When all the above-mentioned prerequisites are met, according to Art.158 of the Mudawwana the judge may order a DNA test if, for instance, the man still refuses to acknowledge the child. However, not only is it rare that the court calls for DNA testing – between 2005 and 2006, for instance, only 2 paternity tests were imposed – but it is the woman who has to pay for it (about 350 USD) (Welchman 2007:145). Moreover, paternity cannot be legally established through a DNA test when the engagement is not proven and, in the end, it is the judge who decides (Bargach 2005:259).

Whilst filiation through the mother produces the same effects regardless of whether the child is legitimate or illegitimate (Art.146), Art.148 of the Mudawwana provides that "illegitimate filiation to the father does not produce any of the effects of legitimate filiation". It, therefore, absolves biological fathers from any moral or material responsibility towards their children born out of wedlock. In doing so, Art.148 normalises the idea that, although both men and women engaged in the same illicit act, "only […] women are caught up in its consequence" (Bargach 2005:265).

It is clear then that single mothers' protection by the law is unsatisfactory, the reason being perhaps in the very notion of rights. In this regard, Bargach (2005:249) asks "Does the notion of right really apply to the condition of the individuals that they are? […] Can it be a women's right […] to give birth outside of marriage?" Such questions touch areas defined by cultural and religious norms and are grounded in questions of agency and exercise of one's right to choose, that respond to gender norms. Most probably, the answer is no. Rights and duties are for married couples towards their legitimate children and for

children to have a name and to inherit (Bargach 2005:249); the very legal categories single mothers challenge.

2.4 Mother and Child

The stigma carried by single mothers is decisive in shaping their relationship with their children. What emerged from the interviews with both mothers and social workers is that most single mothers face different emotional stages with regard to their children, the first is often one of sub-conscious blame which may translate into a refusal, for instance, to breast-feed them.

The stigma is transmitted from the mother to the children, and it is felt strongly by them. A child born out of wedlock is a *waldu l-haram*, a bastard, whose identity is destroyed by prejudice and re-constructed upon illegitimacy. Although children are not blamed as much as their mothers, they are still branded with a shame/blame mark which denies them their childhood innocence. Social workers confirmed how the dramatic effects such a mark has on the psychological and emotional development of the children start in school when peers make comments on their family situation, and during adolescence they may develop into depression-related issues.

Though affecting both boys and girls, the stigma assumes different connotations which follow general gender norms. From what emerged during the interviews with both mothers and social workers, girls seem to interiorise the shame and stigma their mothers carry and identify with it. The stigma of illegitimacy will, according to gender norms, shape their life as women, the main consequence being a general difficulty in finding husbands who accept their situation. In contrast, boys rarely accept their mother's condition and this

reflects more strongly when they reach puberty and their masculinity starts to be defined. In this regard, social worker Hicham argued:

> "If you say to a boy – You were born from a prostitute – it is as if you kill him. […] Girls of course also feel bad, but the intensity for males is higher. I think they feel more embarrassed."

Boys are caught between maternal love on one side and the embarrassment and urgency of re-constructing their honour by complying with those gender norms their mothers violated on the other. In fact, in many cases, blaming their mother becomes almost a social obligation that often leads to them leaving the maternal home during adolescence, as social worker Aicha explained.

The stigma single mothers carry is therefore hereditary – as a series of social, economic and legal factors create the conditions for it to be perpetuated – but it is interiorised and negotiated by children according to gender norms. Although most of the times mothers commit their lives to forge a new "clean" identity for their children, that same exclusion will be felt by them.

Having a legal identity is surely a first step towards "de-abjectification", a way by which children born out of wedlock can reacquire the status of full subjects they lost at birth. Although it does not erase the stigma of illegitimacy, birth registration removes the weight of invisibility and opens the doors of opportunity, allowing for social redemption and the chance of a new life.

Chapter 3

Struggling for Identity

When the stigma of "bastardy" shapes individual's social and self-perceptions, birth registration has increased significance as it represents a return to society. As explained by social workers on the ground, the lack of legal identity is a key aspect of the discrimination children born out of wedlock are exposed to in Morocco. Not only are non-registered children denied a legal identity and, therefore, a recognised name and a nationality, but they must also face all the consequences that such a denial entails. These children have limited access to education and to basic health care. When they reach adulthood, they cannot vote or open a bank account, and cannot apply for jobs in the formal sector, with the consequent risk of being exploited (UNICEF 2002).

Registration in Morocco is compulsory (Art. 3 Civil Status Code), and many positive steps have been taken to ensure all children are registered, regardless of the marital status of their parents. Art.16 of the Civil Status Code, for instance, allows children of unknown father to be registered by the mother. If the father is known and agrees, the child can be registered in his name (Art.152; 158 Mudawwana). If permission is denied, according to Art.16 of the Civil Status Code, single mothers can choose a name from an official book of Moroccan family names all starting with the epithet *Abd*. This is a great achievement considering the previous state of things, where not only were illegitimate children given two first names and therefore condemned to a life of social anonymity, but their birth certificate contained the statement *ibnu zina*, child of adultery (Barghach 2002:114).

Official statistics (UNICEF 2016; Ministère de la Santé 2012) estimate that between 2010 and 2016 94% of Moroccan children aged under 5 have been registered. However, the reality of South Morocco suggests that birth registration rates are lower than what official statistics report (Moroccan Children's Trust and Fondation Amane pour la Protection De l'Enfance 2015:2). The high number of unregistered children on the ground is indicative of how the state responses continue to be unsatisfactory, especially when the person responsible for registering a child is a single mother. Stigmatisation plays a major role, and the legislative framework often proves inadequate to deal with sensitive cases.

This section will outline the main obstacles to birth registration single mothers face in the Souss-Massa region, in South Morocco. The taboo surrounding illegitimacy and sexual relations outside marriage has a considerable impact at every level of the procedure of birth registration and hinders the protection of children's best interest, which is the law's ultimate objective. Moreover, even when the obstacles are overcome and the children obtain legal identity, the mark of illegitimacy remains visible, exposing them to a lifetime of social discrimination.

3.1 Obstacles to Birth Registration

3.1.1 Lack of Awareness

One of the main impediments to birth registration is the lack of awareness of its value as a fundamental right, with the result that it is given low priority at many levels (UNICEF 2002:12). Although in the region families are generally conscious of the importance of civil registration, what emerged from the

interviews is that many of them tend to neglect its long-term potential in the face of more immediate, and short-term issues. Single mothers, for instance, face family, economic, and social problems on a daily basis and may not be willing to deal with further complex bureaucracy, often perceived as a formality. They are frequently confronted for the first time with the consequences of not registering their children when they cannot graduate from secondary school, as a proof of identity is required.

The CARE project initiated by Fondation Amane Pour la Protection de l'Enfance (FAPE), aiming at achieving universality of birth registration in Morocco, distributed an awareness-raising questionnaire in the Souss-Massa region between September 2016 and June 2017. The information collected is, in this regard, extremely relevant. Among the 282 participants, mostly women, 81.5% identified the protection of the rights of the child as the main benefit of birth registration, and the loss of those same rights was indicated as the most negative effect of lack of legal identity. Hence, the data highlight a general awareness of the importance of birth registration, which emerged from my interviews as well. However, of the 282 participants only 108 had registered their child at the time of the survey, and 87 did not answer, demonstrating how birth registration is often neglected. Family issues and negligence on the part of the parents were indicated as the first obstacle to birth registration, followed by administrative barriers (FAPE 2017a).

3.1.2 Legal and Administrative Barriers

When birth registration laws are not clear, inflexible or are disconnected from the socioeconomic reality and therefore hard to implement, a series of practical, administrative and procedural issues arise. Single mothers are among those most affected by these barriers, with the fear of being stigmatised playing a

major role.

The first main barrier is the 30-day limit by which a child must be registered, a rigid regulation provided for by Art.15 of the Civil Status Code's implementation section that does not consider adverse personal and economic circumstances such as those of most single mothers (FAPE, 2017d). After 30 days, the procedure becomes highly complex, and anybody going through the process at that point is required to appear in court (Art.30 Civil Status Code). The penalty for not complying is that the identity is not created and registered, but in reality that rule is rarely enforced. What emerged from the interviews is that single mothers are generally scared of appearing before a judge. Although sensitive questions are not necessarily asked, this still represents a major obstacle often responsible for them not presenting themselves. As a result, many single mothers register their children beyond the deadline with the support of NGOs, but often children remain unregistered.

The whole process of birth registration is more complicated without a father figure, and in general this is the case from the moment of birth. For instance, it is common for a single mother to provide a false name to the hospital when asked about the father of the child, to avoid being stigmatised, which at the time of registration will complicate the whole process. She does so because, when a single mother arrives at the hospital to give birth, the midwife should call the police as a means to protect the child. However, this practice is not common, as confirmed by social workers, and it mostly depends on how conservative the province in question is. Nevertheless, it still represents a source of fear for single mothers.

The lack of a standardised birth certificate complicates the system further (FAPE 2017b). The fact that no official category exists on the birth certificate

for a single mother, for instance, means that it will be issued with false or unclear information regarding her civil status. Later on, this will block the whole process of registration, for which the birth certificate must be provided. In Taroudannt, as explained by social worker Mohamed, a first – yet unofficial – solution was found by discussing this problem with the prosecutor and the courts:

> "They [prosecutor and courts] said to mark the forms with 'Maman Celibataire' [single mother] – so they 'created' another category. This way, when it comes to the judicial process, they know more about the mother."

3.3.3 Lack of Political Will

One of the main barriers blocking the efficiency of birth registration is the poor cooperation and coordination between the various ministries and sectors that have a key role in the system (FAPE 2017c). Such a limit has been identified by Sharp (2005:30) and UNICEF (2002:12) as a direct consequence of the lack of political will, which also results in the allocation of inadequate financial resources to the sector, low prioritisation in terms of training, availability of birth registration facilities and all that is needed to stimulate public demand. All these obstacles indirectly impact on single mothers by discouraging them to register their children.

Lack of resources translates, for instance, in many civil registration offices of the region not having a private space to have one-to-one sessions with beneficiaries to discuss their family situation prior to registration (FAPE 2017c). For single mothers, this is a strong deterrent: because of the social scrutiny

they are exposed to, they will be less inclined to talk with multiple people listening.

State support in terms of training and guidance on administrative procedures and registration laws is essential for a system to work efficiently, and it is what is often scarce in the region. One of the most serious issues identified by the CARE Project is precisely the lack of knowledge of the actual process of registration among staff working in the civil registry, the local authority, and the justice, education and health departments (FAPE 2017d).

A poorly trained staff has a direct impact on the success of birth registrations in general, but complex and vulnerable cases are certainly the most affected. Many single mothers, for instance, have a long family history of non-registration or arrive at the registry office after the 30-day limit has elapsed, which complicates the procedure in terms of bureaucracy. Moreover, depending on the circumstances in which they gave birth – often not in a hospital – they do not have the birth certificate of their child, which is essential for registration. Without adequate knowledge, those in charge are unable to help them on a procedural level.

Finally, birth registration is not just a bureaucratic process, but an act of support for single mothers and families in general. This kind of support is not part of any professional training, with the result that civil officers might have attitudes that discriminate those who they are supposed to help.

As explained by social workers, this is often the case with *muqaddems*, the lowest of the authorities in the hierarchy who yet play a role in the process of birth registration. It is their responsibility, for instance, to conduct investigations about births in their jurisdiction, and when a woman gives birth at home, the *muqaddem* registers it as taking place there and issues the birth

certificate. Nevertheless, enquiries are often influenced by stereotypes about single mothers and conducted in a way that does not encourage them to share their stories. As a result, single mothers often hide the birth from the authorities and the certificate is not issued. As confirmed by social workers, having one issued later is extremely complicated, and this can block the whole process of registration. What was also highlighted by social worker Mohamed is that there is no inclination from the state to offer training to the *muqaddems*, and this relates, again, to the lack of political will.

> "They [muqaddems] do not necessarily have a level of education
> to be able to do the job effectively, let alone the training. The State
> just wants someone to follow orders and do as they are told".

3.3.4 Geographic and Economic Barriers

Birth registration in Morocco is free when completed within a month from the date of birth. If the deadline is missed, a 300 to 1200 dirhams fine is imposed, as provided for by Art.31 of the Civil Status Code. However, the social workers on the ground confirmed that such a fine is never applied, yet the above-mentioned process in court requires parents to pay a 50 dirhams fee. In the case of a single mother with many children and limited resources or support, paying that fee for every child is almost impossible.

Moreover, Art.16 states the obligation for a child to be registered in the place of birth. This legal obligation represents a great disincentive for those with limited material and time resources, especially if living in rural and mountain areas (FAPE 2017d). It is felt even more when, in addition to the lack

of funds required to travel, there is little or no support from family members as in the case of many single mothers. What can happen is that they might rely on corrupt officials, as social worker Mohamed explained:

> "Let's suppose that the mother gives birth to the child at the hospital, and the hospital has a record of that child being born. She then goes back home and does not have the money or ability to travel back to town to register the child. To avoid having to travel, she goes to the local *muqqadem*, pays him some money, and he will give her a new birth certificate. At this point, there are two birth certificates for the same child: another case of double registration that blocks the whole process."

3.2 When the Law Perpetuates the Stigma

The importance of birth registration goes beyond the legal protection of the individual. Having a legal identity means being given a name, and "to give a name is to give form to what is existent" (Bargach 2002:107) and is tantamount to making the newborn a social being especially when lineage is a fundamental principle of society. In the case of a child born out of wedlock, registration therefore acquires the meaning of a new social birth.

It is true that when lineage is missing a name is socially perceived as "only a name, a functionality, an empty shell which cannot establish the other intricate means of identification and belonging" (Bargach 2002:112). Yet it is this very functionality that allows for the burden of illegitimacy to be eased.

When the law is unclear, however, or even contradictory, the name's functionality fails to fulfil its task and instead participates in perpetuating the

stigma. Social worker Loubna recounted the story of Naim, a case that highlights such a contradiction.

Naim was one of the beneficiaries of Centre Amane who, after struggling for years was finally issued an identity card (carte nationale) when he reached the age of 18.

> "One day he was stopped by the police. When they saw his carte nationale they said – Ah! you are an illegitimate child! Naim was furious and came straight to us. He asked – How do they know? Tell me how do they know I was born outside marriage! A few days later he tried to commit suicide."

The answer to Naim's question can be found on the Moroccan identity card, which next to the name reports the lineage of the individual, including the name of both parents and male grandparents. Here there is a contradiction.

On one hand, the law stands as a neutral, impartial and objective system that has the best interest of the child as its main concern, regardless of the marital status of the parents. The reforms introduced by Art. 16 of the Civil Status Code discussed above are a clear example of the steps made in this direction. On the other hand, however, the push for social equality and non-discrimination seems to be constantly counterbalanced by traditional values, cultural beliefs and stereotypes that want to maintain a clear distinction between who is a full member of the societal realm and who is not.

If the possibility for a single mother to select a name from a book of family names is a big step forward, the fact that the same cannot be done for the paternal grandfather greatly diminishes its relevance. This way, whoever is

born out of wedlock, like Naim, is clearly identifiable by having a blank space in his identity card.

The case of Mohsin presented in the film Bastards (2014) illustrates the discrimination this blank space causes. Mohsin, a 22-year old law student, wanted to drop out of university after his application to work in the police force was withdrawn.

> "The Royal Gendarmerie asked for certain qualifications, which I have. They didn't say explicitly that they rejected me because I'm illegitimate. But they saw on my application that I don't have a full name. I think that's why they rejected me, because I don't have a father. […] [The application] asked for the full name: So-and so, son of so-and so, son of so-and so. I only have Mohsin, son of so-and so." (Bastards 2014: 26:10)

To conclude, it is clear how regulations contribute in perpetuating the stigma from mother to child by reinforcing the structure of the normative family as founded upon marriage and lineage (Bargach 2002:115). As a result, children born out of wedlock, like their mothers, cannot but stand on a site of abjection and exclusion. The birthmark of illegitimacy is a social and legal construct (Hirczy de Mino 2000:237), but it is constructed upon absence. This absence, however, reinforces the domain of the legitimate subjects, those who have a full, recognisable lineage. Due to what is written on their identity card, Naim and Mohsin are clearly identifiable as Others that fall outside of this domain, and in the eyes of society their identities prove their mothers' guilt.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at deconstructing the stigma attached to single mothers in Moroccan society. It investigated the elements contributing to its genesis, the utter exclusion it entails, and its pivotal role in obstructing the birth registration process and in tainting the identity of the child.

When lineage is what confers recognisability on individuals in the societal realm, and complying with gender norms of honour is what ensures its order and stability, any different form of human experience is a dangerous contingency that needs to be suppressed. Hence, with their illicit act, not only do single mothers challenge what is legally and religiously acceptable, but they embody the violation of unwritten rules that protect the lineage and honour of the family, microcosm of the economic and social order. Single mothers violated a series of taboos and prohibitions which are highly gendered, and are introduced to define the framework for the correct exercise of sexuality, that of women in particular (INSAF 2015:2). Their punishment is a condition of "social death" (Butler 2015:177) that serves as a safeguard against unacceptable practices society is unwilling to encourage as a life choice, such as having a child out of wedlock.

This resistance against single mothers entails serious repercussions for their lives. It engulfs them in a spiral of social, economic and legal exclusion and presents them with practical barriers when they try to register their children. Not doing so has severe consequences, as it adds invisibility to the burden of illegitimacy, denying these children their right to be members of society. It has been shown how the domain of those who, instead, are recognisable as full subjects needs to measure its legitimacy against an abject, illegitimate Other.

In fact, even when birth registration is obtained, the law's deficiencies allow the stigma of illegitimacy to be visible. Although social attitudes are changing, the absence upon which the legal identity of non-marital children is constructed – absence of a clear and pure lineage – remains a permanent mark of social exclusion.

Appendix

Meryam, Fatima, Zaynab and Houda

The following statements are only small parts of each interview conducted with the mothers, that provide an insight into the very first stages of their lives as single mothers. Other details discussed, such as those regarding birth registration obstacles, are not included here.

Meryam, 35

"I was born in Marrakech, and I first came to Taroudannt when I was 8 with my mother and my disabled sister. My parents were having problems and my mother wanted to leave, but her family did not accept her back home. We stayed in Taroudannt for a while before going back to Marrakech, but my mum could not provide for me, so I was sent to live with my uncle. Life with my uncle, his wife and my cousins was very difficult. I never studied because my father had not registered me so I couldn't go to school. I started working as a maid at the age of 9 but the people I worked for did not treat me well… Eventually I decided to run away.

During my adolescence, I met other girls in my same situation. It was very difficult…we were sexually abused and we turnwd to prostitution to earn some money. I wanted to work but I did not have any papers, and when I turned 18 I tried to get my identity card.

When I met Ibrahim I fell in love with him. We wanted to get married, but when I became pregnant he changed his mind. This is how it works with men here in Morocco – if they have a sexual relationship and have a child, they don't take any responsibility and even deny the child is theirs. He left me alone and now my daughter is 11 years old. I have two girls now and the same happened with both of them.

From that moment on I have always been seen as a bad person, as if I was incapable of doing anything in life".

Fatima, 37

"My eldest child, Adil, has a father. We were married, but then we divorced and

he passed away. After the divorce I started working as a housemaid. The owner of the house was a young man…I was sexually abused by him, so one day I decided to leave. I've never worked in a house again.

Now I live alone with my children and work making *djellabas*. When I fell pregnant of my second child, Hamza, I didn't tell my family. I told everyone I adopted him.

When Hamza was born, things became more difficult even with Adil who's now 14…he doesn't accept me. He keeps saying – you were married and now you have another baby. How is that even possible?

I am alone, I don't have relationships with anyone, other than the social workers. I don't have confidence in myself and I prefer not to speak to anyone.

I always have eyes on me. Just yesterday, the neighbours were on the roof, and when they saw me going out they shouted at me "What are you doing?" This is normal for single mothers, it is *daruri* [natural, necessary]."

Zaynab, 32

"I was born in Inezgane and was living with my family but both my parents passed away when I was 15. I struggled a lot and did not go to school.

Karim and I had Loubna when I was really young. We were living together and I was happy…he was a good person and I could rely on him. We wanted to get officially married, but he had a car accident and passed away.

I did not want Loubna to suffer the way I did, so I started working in a farm to feed her and pay the rent. One day a man saw me, he was much older and wanted to help me. People told him – You can help her by marrying her.

We went to live together; I was waiting for him to go back to his hometown to fetch the documents for the official marriage, but he was always postponing. After three months I told him that if we didn't get married he had to leave. He said he wanted to have a baby as proof of my love, so I stopped taking the pill.

He eventually left and went to Tangier before I learned I was pregnant. I asked him to help me but he had found a new job and he didn't want to leave. He told me to go to Tangier, but I had no money so I couldn't go.

I was alone, and I needed to work but in the farm they didn't allow me to because I was eight months pregnant. I started to beg and was having mental issues. I remember at that time I only had 100 dirhams in my pocket which wasn't enough money to feed Loubna and myself, so for a while I could only

have milk. The neighbours helped me, and although Loubna was little, she helped me a lot until I gave birth and I could start working in the farms again. Youssef was born premature, he was sick and had to stay in the hospital for a while. The doctors told me to buy some medicines but I couldn't afford them. A woman gave me some money. I had to stop working in the farms because I didn't know who to leave Youssef with, and I started begging again. It's not for me, but this way I can take him out with me in the street. I cannot look after Loubna the way I would like to and she spends a lot of time by herself. She failed this year in school."

Houda, 43
"When I found out I was pregnant, I was with another man. He wanted to marry me, but he couldn't take me to his house at first because his family wouldn't accept me, so I went to the farms to work. My sisters sent me to Rabat to get an abortion. I did not want to but they insisted, and insisted. They told me – You have to, because if our brothers find out, they will kill you. I have five brothers and I was scared.

The first time I went to the doctor, he told me to buy six pills and to stay home and rest as I would have lost a lot of blood. One of my brothers is a doctor and I thought to myself – if I take these pills and then I have to go to the hospital, I will die either because I lost too much blood, or because my brother will find out and kill me.

The pills were 3000 dirhams, and I couldn't afford them, so my sisters sent me to another doctor. I told him I didn't want to have the operation but I had to because I was too scared of my family. I told him – This is my crime and my baby cannot pay for a crime I committed. Please, when you take my baby's life, take mine as well.

The operation was too expensive and my cousin told me to ask my younger brother for some money. I was speaking on the phone with him when my cousin told him – Your sister is pregnant.

He stayed silent and then told me to go to Casablanca where he was living with his wife, so I took a taxi. My brother didn't say a word until the next day. I saw he had a big knife in the kitchen and I was scared, but when I told him the story, he was nice to me. He didn't believe me, as the father of my child was known by everyone to be sterile. He himself thought he was sterile and when I told

him I was pregnant he said – It's impossible, it's not mine.

I decided I didn't want to cause any further problem to my family so I asked my brother and my two sisters to help me to go to Agadir. They gave me 500 dirhams in total. I was in the hands of God, alone and with very little money. My sisters didn't want me to go back home. It was June 2013, and since then I've never heard back from them.

I had some friends in Agadir but they didn't want to put me up. They were very nice, but outside their own homes. After working in the farms for a while I had to change job because I was too big. When I gave birth to Yasmine I asked one of my friends to give me 50 dirhams to buy some wool and started making wool socks and selling them.

Yasmine knows the story, I explained the situation to her. But with my second child things are tougher. It's too much to handle, and I cannot afford the food we need. Now I take my son out with me and I beg. He keeps asking me – Where is my father?"

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