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### Navigating Cultures and Development: An account of a female Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco

Renee Palecek

*Illinois State University*, [rcpalec@ilstu.edu](mailto:rcpalec@ilstu.edu)

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Palecek, Renee  
Fall, 2019

# NAVIGATING CULTURES AND DEVELOPMENT:

An account of a female Peace Corps  
volunteer in Morocco

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## INTRODUCTION

From September 2017 until October 2019, I served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco working in the “Youth in Development” sector. Upon the onset of my moving to Morocco, I began a hefty process of learning Moroccan culture, language, and finding a sense of belonging in my new home. I simultaneously have held enduring connections back in the United States; my family, friends, and my university community to name a few. Growing up in the United States, I became socialized to the norms that guide American living, specifically, New York living. Of course, when I moved to Morocco to begin my Peace Corps service, I found myself trying to use tools that did not quite fit the project that I am working on. I’ve had to relearn how to live in society. The institutions and cultural forces that I am entangled with daily include a governmental development organization, my gender, race, class, sexuality and nationality. How I understand them has changed as a result of the experiences that I’ve endured subsequent to my initial move. As a student of Sociology, I recognized the fertility of my position and decided to explore the sociological relevance of integration as a white American female, doing development work in Morocco.

This work is not a critique of the U.S. Peace Corps as an international development agency. Rather, I am providing an analysis of my integration experience while also having responsibilities as a development worker. Through auto-ethnographic reflection I inspect the nitty-gritty realities of doing international development and the creation of home in a foreign country. I have found, that doing development and creating a home in Morocco can influence each other as well as repel one another. My race, nationality, gender and sexuality all had opportunities to facilitate or hinder my ability to do my work as a Peace Corps volunteer as well as integrate into my community. This analysis is less grounded in work, and more grounded in

location. A Peace Corps service is 27 months; 3 months I spent training in a small rural village in North Central Morocco, Nzala Bni Amar, while the remaining 24 months I lived and worked in Ouarzazate, a city in the South, also called “*Bab Sahara*”, or “Door to the Desert” in English. To serve anywhere else other than Ouarzazate, Morocco would have changed my interactional experiences as well as my volunteer service drastically.

The opportunity to serve in Morocco as a Peace Corps volunteer has been one of the most transformational periods of my life. This transformative experience did not come as a result of simply my being in Morocco, but because of the actions that took place during my time.

Transform is a verb; it requires a prior state of being, followed by the introduction of a new element, and a catalyst, with the interaction of these 3 elements resulting in a changed state. I sought to capture these transformational processes through 3 questions:

- How does the female PCV in Morocco make sense out of and create value from life events, relationships, the environment and herself?
- How does the female PCV navigate the structure of the Peace Corps and her host community?
- To what extent does my experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer deepen my own sense of feminist consciousness?

During my 27 months in Morocco, I had the ability to transform and grow past the person I was prior to my service. This growth is often uncomfortable, saturated in experiences which highlighted the differences between the culture and social structures I grew up with, and those I found myself in. Through analyzing my data collection, I found that this transformation was not exactly linear, but instead wrought with twists, plateaus and occasional descents. A chronological account of my path of belonging and feminist consciousness did not accurately portray my process and path. As I analyzed my data, I found the experiences I discussed the most often fell into 4 categories; Time, Space, Language and Doing Development. These four

categories of my analysis carried through my service and became the catalysts in my transformation and integration. It wasn't enough to simply be placed in Morocco, but my interaction with Morocco, its people, culture and societal structure- i.e. my experiences with time, space, language and doing development- that aided the creation of a sense of belonging and raised my feminist consciousness.

This analysis was predicated by a dive into feminist development literature and an examination of literature describing the state of women in Morocco. All research is performed through a lens, mine being a feminist lens. I read through preexisting literature to strengthen my relationship with this lens so I could produce a sound research analysis as well as perform my service work supported by Peace Corps in a sustainable and equitable way. I had formulated my three research questions prior to my arrival in Morocco but after I had completed much of my review of preexisting literature. Due to the extremely subjective nature of my research, I consciously formulated inductive questions that would allow my research to withstand changes and unexpected events that so often occur during a research endeavor. Once I arrived in Morocco, I began my data collection of private journals, public blogging. This continued throughout my service and research process. It wasn't until after I exited pre-service training and lived in Ouarzazate for a year and a half that I began my analysis. I identified four categories which my most profound of experiences lied within; these macro-sociological concepts of time, space, language, and doing development. While my experiences are of course quite personal and cannot be duplicated, interactions with time, space, language, and even doing development can occur in an array of social structures and geographical placements. As a student of Sociology, my subjective and objective perspectives are in a constant dialogue. As I experience life in through small interactions, I become better informed of a grander societal scheme. Prior to my

arrival in Morocco, I had personal interest in working and researching gender and development. While reviewing my journals and reflections I was made aware of the entanglement of my gender and my experiences with time, space, language and my working in development. Focusing on my interactions with these macro-sociological concepts through the lens of gender indeed fit my research goals but more pertinently, it was the most relevant discussion to be had.

These experiences are worthwhile to study in order to understand how cultures and societies interact especially in such a globalized age. My research aims to look at the ways in which a female Peace Corps Morocco Volunteer negotiates with familiar and unfamiliar social structures, and thus construct her multiple realities and ontologies (relations of being) as a woman who moved from a Globally Northern country, such as the United States, to a Globally Southern Country, like Morocco. The realities and ontologies of living refer to the process of making sense of the world. Realities and ontologies can be contradicting especially if a person views her or himself as one thing but is perceived as something else. This meaning-making process can change depending on one's increasing age, her marital status, and especially her cultural or societal location- such as I experienced.

Feminism is an unfinished project. It is a project that grows, learns, adapts and evolves from its surroundings and from itself. Feminism's goal is to create a more equitable world by raising marginalized voices and experiences. When women are inhabiting the world differently than what we previously understood (re: androcentric), it is the Sociologist's duty to document and analyze this female social reality. This is precisely why I have felt compelled to share my experiences through autoethnographic analysis, so that we can have a greater understanding of women's experiences as they interact with other cultures and peoples as we live and grow in a globalized world.

## PEACE CORPS MOROCCO

The United States' Peace Corps is a volunteer organization currently working in 65 countries across the globe. To date, more than 230,000 Americans have served in 141 countries. This large global development organization sends Americans over the age of 18 to countries to immerse themselves in a community abroad for 27 months while providing technical help of the partnering countries through meeting their need for trained men and women (About, Peace Corps: [peacecorps.gov](http://peacecorps.gov) 2018). The Kingdom of Morocco has partnered with Peace Corps for 55 years, working with many sectors including Health, Education, and Environment. Now, there is only one sector functioning in Morocco: Youth in Development. Through integrating in our communities, learning the local language and working with host country nationals, Peace Corps Volunteers in Morocco, and the other 64 countries strive to promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals:

1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

To move into the understanding of what it is like to be a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco, one must have a greater understanding of Morocco. However, attempting to ascribe Morocco a singular, comprehensive cultural identity is foolish, as the nation of Morocco itself is the conglomerate of invasions from Roman and Arab empires, European colonization, and international trade. Located on the west coast of North Africa, this majority Muslim country is an enigma for anybody attempting to



describe it. It's "not like other Arab countries," "not African," and yet "definitely not like Europe." Morocco is in competition with the very aspects of itself that link it to other countries it has similarities with, thus inhibiting real productive solidarity that could benefit it. Morocco is an Arab-Muslim country with a large indigenous population which converted from traditional Amazigh religions or Judaism to Islam during the Arab conquest of the Maghreb. The most western location of the old Arab Empire, Morocco is made up of many kinds of people. Some can trace their lineage to the indigenous Amazigh<sup>1</sup> tribes, others to the Arab conquest; there are those who have recently immigrated from other African countries, and some whose family left Morocco- emigrating to Europe (most commonly France, its former colonizer) or North America. I have found myself constantly learning about the communities I've lived in, especially Ouarzazate with such a rich Amazigh history and pride that now holds the largest solar plant in Africa, and two internationally renowned movie studios. To serve in such a transitive place has been a whirlwind. Constantly caught in the fray of pushing boundaries but erring on the conservative side; caught in a liminal space, much like the country I've served in.

To be a Peace Corps volunteer (PCV) is to strive to become something like a braid. A braid is itself a single entity but is made of different parts. You have one string, which in this case represents the volunteer's "Americanness," or America's culture, social & political histories etc. and the second string representing the host country's culture, social history, political history etc. The third cord represents the volunteer her or himself. This last cord is necessary to make the other two intertwine in such a fashion that their distinctiveness becomes distorted. When you wrap the three strings or

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<sup>1</sup> "Berber" is the name most often used to refer to the indigenous peoples of North Africa; originating from the French, Berbère which is a variant of the French root word, "Barbare," meaning barbarian. Those who are referred to as "Berbers," the indigenous people of North Africa, utilize their own word, Amazigh (plural Imazighen), which means "free people" in the indigenous Tamazight language.

cords in such a fashion, they become something new, while still holding their three individual components. This braid-work is essential to perform meaningful work, and ultimately creates the unique experiences of a Peace Corps Volunteer.

My fellow volunteers and I in Morocco are contracted through Peace Corps to work with the Moroccan Ministry of Youth and Sports. We often work at a *Dar Chebab* (Youth Centers) or *Nedi Neswi* (Women's Clubs) or another local association (Volunteer Policies and Procedures Handbook, Peace Corps Morocco 2017: 9). A service of twenty-seven months is divided into two parts; pre-service training (3 months) and service (24 months). It was both during training and my first 6 months of service that I learned how to perform this "braid-work" I mention. In both communities, I learned that braid-work occurs not only in the Ministry buildings but also in our host family's houses, walking down the street of our neighborhoods, and engaging in conversation with friends. In all honesty, it never truly stopped, but instead by technique improved with time, and with each experience-positive or negative.

I arrived in Morocco on September 12, 2017 with 112 other hopeful people. After arriving, we attended a weeklong orientation in the country's capital of Rabat at a large hotel sleeping in "bungalows" with four others of our same gender, in an alphabetically order. During this time, we received many vaccinations, endured sessions on medical woes such as extreme diarrhea, leishmaniasis (a waterborne parasite), and safe sex, and were placed into language training groups. This first week was incredibly overwhelming with long hot days, constantly introducing myself to new people. After a week passed, I traveled with my training group to a small village where I would live with a family for three months.

My pre-service training was spent in a small North-Central village of Nzala Bni Amar (Image 1). A rural town of around 1780 households, Nzala had an elementary school, a girls' middle school, a

*Dar Chebab*, three café's, one mosque, and a soccer field. I lived with a humble family, with a father, Abdellatif, a mother, Majda, two daughters, Chaima and Aya, and a young son, Si Mohamed; SiMo for short. Living with this family, I was thrown into the “real” Morocco; I was a part of a normal family, one where the kids spent their days at school, the father at work, and mother cooking in the kitchen. Our time spent together was often over a tajine, using bread in place of utensils, and burning our mouths because, once again, Mama overheated the Harira soup. Monday through Saturday my training group and I learned Darija, and the Moroccan culture from 8:00 am until 5:30 pm., with the Moroccan standard of a two-hour lunch break in the middle of the day. It was only until halfway through training that we began to work with the children in the *Dar Chebab*. Since there weren't middle or high schools for boys, we primarily worked with children up to age eleven, unless they were girls, which due to the presence of an all girls' middle school allowed girls up to age 14 to participate in *Dar Chebab* activities.

In Nzala, was when I first experienced the pervasiveness of gender segregation. As noted, there were 3 cafés located in the village, and my training group consisted of 4 females (myself included) and one male. Derek, the single male in my training group went to one café quite often with his host father. The other females in my group and I, however, were not welcomed to patronize any of the three cafés, and even received harassment if we walked too closely to them. I also mentioned previously that there was a soccer field in town. This field was just across the street from my Language and Cultural Facilitator's (LCF) apartment. The field was always occupied by the neighborhood boys, that is until my training group decided to play around with a soccer ball after class. We quickly decided to make this a habit of ours- to play soccer or kick the ball from person to person after class because little by little more of the neighborhood children would join. Eventually, a little girl, likely around 10- years-old, ask to join our game. “No, go away!” yelled a boy. We

explained to her that she is very welcome to play with us and told the children with us that everybody is same, and we can all play together. It didn't take long for more and more girls to play and transform the soccer field as a space where both the boys and the girls were expected to be. At the end of November 2017, I left my small training village to be sworn in as an official Peace Corps volunteer. I still often wonder if the girls and boys share that soccer field as they did with us.

For my 24 months in Ouarzazate (image 2 &3), I worked at a *Nedi Neswi* and another separate local association for women. At these women's centers, I engaged women and girls in capacity building activities, such as fitness, yoga, life skills, and women's health. Capacity building is defined by the United Nations as the "process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world (Academic Impact, United Nations 2017)." These activities work to provide knowledge and skills to the women frequenting these centers and to provide them a background to lead healthier lives and to make educated life decisions for themselves and their families. Work hours are not fixed, so it is up to the volunteer to network and build relationships within the association and their participants in order to establish work activities and hours.

I entered my Peace Corps service with a personal goal of empowering women. I had made that clear to Regional Managers (Peace Corps Morocco administrative staff support to volunteers) that I wanted to work directly with women. I also asked to be placed in a small village in the mountains, and I happen to be placed in the exact opposite- a city in the desert- they did make sure that I was working with women. The *Nedi Neswi* in Ouarzazate is a complex of two buildings; a main building with a large kitchen, a room to learn how to cut and style hair, two sewing rooms- one for learning how to use a machine, and the other for hand-sewing, an empty room with foam mats laid on the floor, and finally the *Mudira's* (director) office immediately inside the entrance, on the left side. The

center of the building is exposed without a ceiling, where a large palm tree grows. Outside, there is another separate, smaller building that holds two classrooms for the preschool students, with walls painted in murals of Mickey Mouse, a map of Morocco, and the national anthem written in Arabic. The entire complex is enclosed with a tall cement wall, and a green gate closed during nighttime, weekends and holidays.

Day to day, my class size changed and week to week my schedule changed. Genuinely, I had no idea what I would be walking into. Some days there would be little to no interest in our fitness class, so I would have a class of 4 women as opposed to 10 or 15 women participating. Lack of location created an issue as well since there wasn't a room where I could teach English. I requested a white board from the Peace Corps office in Rabat and taught my lessons in the sewing rooms but on more than one occasion after announcing that we will hold our English lesson I would wait at the end of a table for women to join me for up to an hour until I understood that nobody was interested in learning English that day. My work was never rooted, it was constantly changing which made it difficult to create habits and routines. Even when I began to write a women's health curriculum, I still felt untethered to a sense of work that I was accustomed to. Perhaps it was the lack of office or set work hours. I was never good at bringing work home, so the class preparation and curriculum creation was sporadic, with their progress matching my personal feelings of motivation or laziness at the time.

I struggled with such a lack of structure likely because of my own concept of what work means; a concept that was formed by my American cultural value system that places work and work productivity on a quantifiable scale encouraging greater work hours. Work in the sense of being a Peace Corps volunteer is different. It is less based in work hours and more in a sense of community integration. What became work was engaging with neighbors, drinking tea or eating lunch; perhaps

it could simply be buying food at the closest vegetable stand or butcher. This transition of concept was difficult, and I had to remind myself in times of frustration or self-doubt that I am working hard- with every cultural question I had that was answered or every conversation with a community member, I was doing my job. Two of three goals of Peace Corps discuss a cultural exchange; at times this exchange was reciprocal, and at others it was more one-sided, focusing on my observation of Morocco or a Moroccan's observation of me. This work was at times incredibly difficult, and it most definitely influenced my ability to perform my work at the *Nedi Neswi*. If there was a cultural wall rather than a cultural bridge, it was made apparent by the difficulties in a successful project or class. There isn't a simple formula or rule to follow in order to be a successful Peace Corps volunteer; it depends on a volunteer's independent meaning of success, and their motivations for joining Peace Corps.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

For this research, there was a need to review feminist literature; specifically, feminist-development, feminist epistemology, as well as literature surrounding Moroccan gender relations historically and politically. Central scholars (Desai 2009; Moghadam, 2005; Mohanty, 2003; Lazreg 2002) and others within the transnational feminist field have been examined and included within the creation of methodology and research inquiry. Personally, I found the literature regarding Feminist research and epistemology to be most useful in understanding why and how a qualitative methodology can be more useful in analyzing accounts of transnational experiences, specifically through a gendered lens, than a quantitative, deductive research methodology. A better knowledge of gender and development, and gender in Morocco was needed to lead me towards a more successful research endeavor and volunteer service as well. Articles and books regarding gender in Morocco, most notably *Beyond the Veil* (1987) by Fatima Mernissi, a

Feminist Moroccan Sociologist, improved my understanding of gender in specifically a Moroccan context. Altogether, after reviewing these topics I found that I am couched in a specific and unique starting point for this project; one that holds a mirror between my personal transnational journey and my sociological research. My personal questions, concerns and emotions were parallel to those which my research is based upon; “Will I make friends? “How will I make friends?” “What will it be like to walk around my town?” These are basic questions that one may find themselves asking if they were about to move to a new place. Doing this preliminary literature research inquiry provided me with a foundation and framework for how I will analyze my ethnographic data and aided me in my volunteer service by guiding me in “doing development.”

## Transnational Feminism & Feminist-Development

Manisha Desai (2009) takes the stance that globalization is not a recent event, rather it is a historical process, where the diffusing of people, ideas and goods have always spread. She explains what makes contemporary globalization exceptional is the pace and scale at which it is occurring. This stance implies that the modes by which gender oppression has consistently undergone change due to the constant influx of new ideologies and ways of living from other communities. Therefore, Desai and other scholars warn against the singular and monolithic notion that paints all women of the world, especially that of third-world<sup>2</sup> women (Desai, 2009:

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<sup>2</sup> Third World is defined as: the developing nations of the world, especially of Asia, Africa, South America and the Middle East, specifically those that do not align themselves with the policies of either the U.S. or the former Soviet Union. The classifications of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> World countries were created post WWII, by the French Demographer Alfred Sauvy in 1952 (Leslie Wolf-Phillips (2007) Why Third World?': Origin, definition and usage, *Third World Quarterly*, 9:4, 1311-1327, DOI: [10.1080/01436598708420027](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436598708420027)). One will find the terms, 'third-world,' and 'Global South' used interchangeably, this is due to the overlap of countries comprising the 'third-world' and 'Global South.' However, moving forward, unless directly referencing the work of Third-World Feminism (a term developed by Academic Feminists who are women of color from 'third world' countries), I choose to use the term “Global South” because the categorization of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries is rather outdated. I also do not find productive value

Mohanty, 2003). This is especially important when considering Morocco, which as noted is an Islamic country with a large population of Arabs as well as indigenous Amazigh people of North Africa. Reviewing Desai's work tied a string around my finger so to say- it instilled a reminder for me to expect diversity, and to not assume a single reality. Of course, I witnessed this diversity throughout my time living in Morocco, and especially as I discussed regional cultures and customs with fellow Peace Corps volunteers in Morocco.

By focusing on the micro, lived reality of "common people" Manisha Desai works to illuminate actors that are not commonly connected to globalization processes (Desai, 2009:2). This estrangement occurs when our focuses are only on macro analyses of globalization, where disembodied actors, such as multinational corporations, are highlighted while ordinary men and women who physically carry out globalization through their interactions are glossed over (Desai, 2009:2). By investigating global interactions through a gendered lens, both the macro and micro realities of men and women, the different opportunities lent to them, and the issues they face through the processes of globalization can be examined. Desai makes the argument within the introduction of her work, "*Gender and the Politics of Possibilities (2009)*" that to miss the ways in which macro and micro processes of globalization are gendered is essentially to not only neglect examining the full picture, but it is to miss the "possibilities for global justice that are evident in the work of these gendered actors (pp.3)." Through sensitivity to the gendered consequences within the development field, a greater equitable process can be carried out or a previously unjust project can work to be remedied. Due to colonial history, and the transition into a globalized world where colonial powers still sit at the head of the table, any type of

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in assigning the labels of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> because it does not construe the balance of power as judiciously as Global North and South.



development work cannot be separated by a hierarchal system. In my own service, and in my ethnographic research I worked to consider and include gendered consequences of experience and development.

Valentine Moghadam illustrates how globalization & development are gendered; the intersection of class and gender in the 'feminist political economy' renders the sexual division of labor and especially female labor as central to analysis (Moghadam, 2005:18). Although with many caveats and exploitations of women in the expansion of women's labor movements resulting from economic globalization, Moghadam (2005) includes the important positive aspects of globalization which have allowed women more space to carve out for themselves, and more opportunities to seize and claim ownership to than previously. These positive effects of globalization can be seen in the proliferation of women's movements at the local level; the emergence of transnational feminist networks working at the global level; and the adoption of international conventions with a goal of dismantling oppressive gender regimes. Valentine Moghadam examines globalization as a gendered process, focusing on women's incorporation in labor and the economy (2005). She frequently incorporates the positive primary and latent effects of globalization on women's lives and status as active participants in the world forum. By including these positive aspects, Moghadam stresses the ways women act upon their agency, respond to and resist growing material and immaterial inequalities (2005). Valentine Moghadam's inclusion of both positive and negative responses to globalization supports the complexities of women. They contribute to this 'full and accurate account of society (Nielsen in DeVault, 1996).' I personally find a strong connection between Moghadam's discussion on positive primary and latent effects of globalization on women's lives and Manisha Desai's cautionary discussion of a monolith. Often in feminist development research I have found there

to be a strong negative outlook on development. There absolutely is a reason for this when we consider colonial and imperial history, however, being involved in development, especially on a local, community level, I have found that there are positive discussions to have regarding the effects of development and globalization on women's lives. For example, health education or access to educational materials through library and literacy projects.

This research focuses on the realities and relations of being for a U.S. woman volunteering in Morocco through the Peace Corps, me. Inherently, the other volunteers serving in Morocco and I will be working in and with a powerful international development bureaucracy. Kathleen Staudt's piece, *"Dismantling the Master's House with the Master's Tools"* provides rich detail in how feminists may do gender work in and with similar bureaucracies (Staudt in Saunders, 2002). Women, Staudt describes, live and work within different organizations that allow some degree of agency, such as institutions of the family, workplaces, universities, national women's bureaus, and progressive NGOs (Staudt in Saunders, 2002). Women and other "non-masters" develop their own skills and ways of living within these organizations, but Staudt states that "master-free" houses, or organizations are few and far between. She advocates for feminist work within these institutions to 'dismantle the master's house with the master's tools. (Staudt in Saunders, 2002). The goal of this is to challenge, change and transform institutions; to do this people must act strategically both inside and outside agencies of development and neo-colonial globalization (Staudt in Saunders, 2002). There is also stress, within transnational feminism as well as feminists in development that productive work within the dismantling of oppressive regimes is about more than "just writing." Claire Hemmings (2011) in her book *Why Stories Matter*, touches upon the issue of "active feminism" frequently in her discussion of 'loss narratives' in feminist theory. To be an active feminist requires one to practice what they preach;

“transform restlessness into reflexivity, to see if this failure might provide some useful reflections on feminist knowledge (Hemmings, 2011:63).” The idea of active feminism is useful regarding development work and dismantling these oppressive regimes Staudt discusses because it makes feminism into a tool by which development can be built with, rather than only a theatrical body of knowledge.

Women in development are just as much its agents as they are its objects (Lazreg in Saunders, 2002). This is true just as much for the practitioners of development as it is for the target community. Because of this, it is necessary for whoever engages with the field of development from the perspective of gender to also critically engage their own interests as part of the forces that sustain and reproduce relations between individuals and groups representative of larger institutional forces (Lazreg in Saunders, 2002). Marina Lazreg in "Development: Feminist Theory's Cul-de-sac (2002)" argues against past Gender and Development work on collecting 'life-histories.' The collection of life histories refers to women reporting the state of their lives orally to researchers and development agencies. Lazreg argues that through this collection, women's lives become entrenched within the systems of development, and so a normalization of these narratives occurs which reify a singular experience to which the 'third-world woman' is conjured. Lazreg (2002) describes multiple methodologies through which gender and development have been examined and she communicates how the methodology a researcher utilizes affects the stories outputted regarding gender and development, as well as how these accounts and stories can be used for positive change in the development field. Our research and methodologies do not exclude ourselves; Lazreg supports the notion that we must be informed by one's own position within development to produce sustainable and culturally sensitive change (Lazreg, 2002).

## Gender/Women in Morocco

Similar to women in countries of the Global South, 'Muslim Woman' is not a monolithic group. There is great diversity along regional, national, urban/rural, class and ethnic lines just as there is among 'Western Women.' Those who comprise the 'Muslim World' live in countries stretching across Africa and Asia into the Pacific Islands (Newcomb, 2009). Of course, there are also Muslims living within the countries of "the West" and Latin America. Because of this, there is danger in reducing the Muslim experience, just as it is for the Woman experience, into a single story. Newcomb, in "Women of Fes," examines the relationship between women and development within the City of Fes in Morocco. Although there are many new spaces, such as cyber cafés, the ways women experience these spaces are culturally distinctive; including ethics of shame and hospitality as guides through the arguments of how to present themselves to the world (Newcomb, 2009). The public space is still dominated by men, but women strategically work within existing structures of power, and as they respond to them, Moroccan women exercise their agency and push boundaries of acceptable behavior (Newcomb, 2009). The women incorporated in Newcomb's ethnography of Fes work to dismantle the master's house with his own tools (Staudt in Saunders, 2002).

The status of women is often invoked as a "barometer for the countries 'progress' (Newcomb, 2009)." And so, the progress of the country can be understood to be highly contestable. A notable site of this contestation was the *Mudawana* reform of 2000, or the reformation of marriage laws. Two elements of this reformation were the raising of marriage age from 15 to 18, and women's right to a judicial divorce (Newcomb, 2009). Those in favor of the reformation, cited that although Morocco had signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, the country's laws still

discriminated based on gender. However, Moroccans against the reform argued that the reform represented the abandoning of Islam and relied too heavily on concepts of human rights imported from Western countries (Newcomb, 2009). In this crux is where Newcomb situates her ethnography; how women "respond to the expectations of others, where they demonstrate agency and where they grapple with the indeterminacy of the modern condition (Newcomb, 2009)." In terms of law, and international relations, the reforms of the Family Code, or *Mudawana* are a hot topic. In the international community, Morocco has had the reputation of being "a relatively modernized, moderate, progressive and liberal" country regarding both Arabic-Islamic countries, and African countries as well (Elliot, 2014:2). With a notion of gradualism, the *Mudawana* reforms have been a directional effort for the country, according to the Ministry of Communication and Government of the Kingdom of Morocco in 2003 (Elliot, 2014:2). While this notion of gradualism is central for rebutting dismissals of the reforms as falling short of feminist expectations, author Katja Zvan Elliot claims that Morocco has indeed failed to live up to its progressive image.

Overall, Elliot concludes that the Kingdom of Morocco fails to comply with international orders regarding women's rights and gender equality, which it "adheres to, at least on paper (2014:3)." In the preamble of the reformed Family Code (*Mudawana*), there is a declaration to the aim of the law as threefold: "doing justice to women, protecting children's rights and preserving men's dignity (Global Rights in Elliot, 2014:3)." Elliot makes note that the inclusion of the preservation of men's dignity among the stated goals is understandable due to the backlash the Family code is often faced with from more conservative sects in the country and their belief that the law is asymmetrically preoccupied with the 'woman's situation.' In the *Mudawana* reforms, women have been granted the right (if of legal majority age) to marry without the

presence of her *wali* or guardian (Article 25); have gained enhanced measures for the right to seek divorce; as well as an article spelling out mutual obligations and rights between spouses (Article 51) (Elliot, 2014:3-4). However, under these same reforms, there are articles that reaffirm patriarchal relations and perpetuate gender inequality. For example, under Article 194 the husband is reaffirmed as the obligatory financial provider for his wife and children, and under Article 236, the father is designated as primary legal representative of his children regardless of who had custody over them. Elliot argues that Article 194 works to confirm gendered divisions of space; where the private, domestic sphere is female and the public, works sphere is male (Elliot, 2014:4). Due to these seemingly contradictory goals from multiple articles within the *Mudawana*, it is difficult to accurately gauge the progressiveness of the reformation.

Elliot finds through her interviews with Moroccans that many believe that the *Mudawana* reforms are more or less smoke and mirrors because tradition takes priority. The reform for Article 25, where a woman's legal guardianship, her *wali*, is now her own person affirms the progressive knowledge that a woman is mature and capable of making her own decisions. However, regarding tradition, if a woman marries without consulting her 'would-be' *wali*, such as her father or paternal uncle, she is acting disgracefully, and disrespectfully. Traditionally the *wali* has been looked as the defender of a girl; he is to look out for her and make the 'good' decision for her. So, Elliot explains, despite the progressive reform the tradition of protection is far stronger. This form of protection provides girls shelter physically and emotionally symbolizing both a roof over her head and a social identity (Elliot, 2014:13). This relates to Elliot's main finding that articles, laws, and international doctrine are "subject to the "*des constantes*" or in Arabic "*thawabit*" of the Kingdom and its laws. (2014:14)" Elliot takes notice to the use of both French and Arabic within the *Mudawana* reformation, which creates ambiguity

in the statements true meaning. *Des constantes* in French translates to “constant” while *thawabit* in Arabic translates to “fundamental principles.” Elliot’s finding that any articles, laws and international doctrine would be considered moot if it is found to be in contradiction to any such established custom, or since Morocco is ruled by Islamic law, found in contradiction to an Islamic pillar of society (Elliot, 2014:14). Writing in rights to women into political law does not simply eradicate centuries of religious and cultural traditions which include specific rights to women and men. Rights to women include food, water and accommodation; men’s rights include these as well as obedience. So, if a woman does not receive food water or accommodation it is understood that her rights have not been fulfilled, but if they are fulfilled, she is expected to be obedient to the one that provided them to her, namely her father or husband. Elliot claims that overall, the new Family Code works to negotiate a woman’s right to protection, or guardianship. Mostly, the reforms negotiated that a woman has the right to act as her own guardian. However, by doing this, Elliot makes note that the reform then also legally states that the woman has the right to being protected. And so, despite reformations, the new *Mudawana* reproduces the traditional idea that women need protection, which denies them individuality and autonomy (Elliot, 2014:24).

Territories of ideology delimit women’s participation in public space, and by doing so, the contemporary Moroccan woman may resist, or respond in 'modern' ways (Newcomb, 2009). The notion of 'space' is central to many works involving the 'Muslim Woman.' Overall, much research surrounding Muslim Women engage issues of gender in relation to power in space (Newcomb, 2009; Steinmann in Falah & Nagel, 2005; Freeman in Falah & Nagel, 2005). Rachel Newcomb (2009) works to examine how women succeed or fail at manipulating ideologies and transforming the public sphere. There is an understanding as the concept of space as dynamic

rather than static, and constructed through social systems, practices and everyday activities. However, despite the dynamic nature of space, culture norms and standard Islamic discourses about gendered spaces persist in Middle Eastern and North African cultures (Steinmann in Falah & Nagel, 2005). In MENA (Mid-East/North Africa), religious ideology exacerbates the cultural norms of segregating activities into distinct public/productive and private/reproductive spaces (Steinmann in Falah & Nagel, 2005).

Personal freedoms regarding mobility may pose as a problem of morality for the Moroccan woman. The notion of personal freedom may challenge the moral order of patriarchal societies. This moral order often rests on ideas about women's sexuality and the policing of female's bodies (Freeman in Falah & Nagel, 2005). Freeman (2005) says that spaces are coded as morally correct or incorrect, and so regulated based upon the practices or activities that are believed to take place there as well as the reputation of the people that occupy those spaces. From the regulation of space then comes the issue of morality for the Moroccan woman, more so than the man (Freeman in Falah & Nagel, 2005). Due to these gendered spaces and activities, it is necessary to understand how the female Peace Corps volunteer is situated within these expectations and moral order.

Women are the most vulnerable social group in Morocco (Skalli, 2001:76). Due to high levels of socio-economic and legal constraints, the exclusion of women to develop and participate in the Morocco economy is strong. Loubna Skalli (2001) describes this vulnerability as economic insecurity, and the general state of precariousness (pp.76). In her journal article, *Women and Poverty in Morocco: The Many Faces of Social Exclusion* (2001), Skalli explains how poverty is also a multidimensional phenomenon, where economic, demographic and socio-cultural factors interact (2001:75). And so, poverty is a complex experience that is made from



various forms of social exclusion. These social exclusions are all rested upon a strong patriarchal structure that permeates all levels of society to position women at a lower status than men. This patriarchal ideology has prevented women's and girls' access to equal education, employment opportunities, treatment before the law, as well as denied women access to equal control of resources, adequate health services and more (Skalli, 2001:76). As mentioned regarding the *Mudawana* (Family Code), women are not necessarily granted the right to work, especially the right to equal opportunity to work and receive an income as compared to men. Historically, women have higher rates of illiteracy and economic dependency. Their low-income jobs in food or textile industries and rate of illiteracy do not permit most to improve or maintain their standard of living in the case of divorce or widowhood. Many divorcees return to their parent's houses or widows find themselves dependent on their children due to their likely advanced age (Skalli, 2001: 81). However, if a woman is divorced and has children, she often enters the labor market; nearly 70% of divorced women live in urban centers and work in the manufacturing industry (National Survey, 1991 in Skalli, 2001:82). Studies have shown that female-headed households represent the most vulnerable family units in Morocco (Skalli, 2001:81). Skalli (2001) states that development projects in Morocco "have not taken into consideration the specific needs or conditions of women (pp. 85)." She explains that due to the gender-specific aspects of poverty in Morocco, national programs for the alleviation of poverty will likely not benefit women as they would men. Skalli (2001) makes it clear that because women experience poverty differently than men, there needs to be a revision of policies aimed at poverty eradication and social integration for women (pp. 85).

Upon reviewing literature surrounding women's status in Morocco, it's become clear that women are systematically oppressed in multiple layers of society; economic, familial, social and

more. Fatima Mernissi, the late Moroccan Feminist Sociologist wrote much about women's status in Morocco, and Muslim society in general. In her work, *Beyond the Veil* (1987), Mernissi dives into explaining these male-female dynamics and their historical roots in Modern Muslim Society. This book has been central to understanding my own position, and the position of others as women in Morocco. It has been a central tool in learning the historical and traditional roots of Moroccan and Islamic culture and so has been used as a tool of understanding. Mernissi (1987) relates the Modern state back to the relations between men and women and remind the reader that class conflicts as well as the bewildering process of change often express themselves as "acute sex-focused dissent (pp. xi)." Through her book, she details the traditional Muslim view of women, and female sexuality as well as the place of women in the social order. Much of this discussion focuses upon the regulation of the female body, and her sexuality (Mernissi, 1987). After this discussion, she breaks down her own data on the "Modern Situation" in Morocco. Much of her analysis leads to talk of space, and how it is utilized by the different sexes, this is like the discussion of Newcomb (2009). Mernissi notes how in her data, collected through a series of interviews and analysis of counseling letters sent to a service run by the Moroccan government, nearly all informants recalled sexual desegregation as especially impactful in the modern condition. This sexual desegregation was so important to the women in Mernissi's research because previously with strict sexual segregation, all spaces were divided into male and female.

After the desegregation of spaces by sexuality, men and women seemed to be in a state of acute-anomie, where the rules or norms dictating how one should act towards the other became blurred and less physical in nature. Mernissi explains how the veil worked to disguise women as invisible while out in public and displayed her exclusion from the street (1987:97). A large

difference between older women, and those of the younger generation were the new spaces available to them and so women in their fifties (at the time of this research) had strict sexual segregation for all their lives; for those interviewed in their twenties, it was more or less optional. Mernissi gives detail to the Modern Situation in Morocco during the 1980's, and many of her words still ring true today. As previously stated, *Beyond the Veil* has become invaluable to me in this research endeavor. I find her words more eloquently state the need for this preliminary literature research and so I will let her words speak for me; "It is essential that the nature of democratic male-female relations be clarified. This basic question concerns all of us and is particularly vital for me, a woman living in a Muslim Society (1987: 96)."

## METHOD & METHODOLOGY

Wickramasinghe (2009) described research methodology as a theorization on knowledge as well as a theory of knowledge production. With this description in mind, I chose to utilize data collection methods that helped me capture how women live transnationally and the process understanding of their surroundings. My research methodology became utilized the feminist stand-point epistemology (DeVault, 1996), grown from the grander phenomenological epistemological vein (Lehn & Hitzler, 2015). These epistemologies not only guided me on my research endeavor, but through my volunteer service as well.

The Transnational Feminist Praxis, as described by Richa Nagar and Amanda Lock-Swarr (2010) became my standpoint of living transnationally and doing international development. My research method of autoethnography was naturally informed by my epistemology and to adheres to the praxis. Simply, through an autoethnographic research endeavor I work to provide an ethical account of a transnational experience and international development; highlighting the

experiential reality of female volunteers in the Peace Corps and the impacts potentially felt on-part of the host community as a result from the volunteer's presence.

According to Swarr and Nagar (2010), the Transnational Feminist Praxis highlights the labor of activism as being tightly interwoven with the labor of producing knowledge. This production of knowledge requires an engagement of positionality, reflexivity, representation and accountability (Swarr & Nagar, 2010). Transnational Feminisms are best understood to be an intersectional set of tools, understandings and practices which attend to racialized, classed, masculinized and heteronormative logics and practices of globalization. Through this attention comes critical reflexivity to understand one's own position, and the risks and benefits from their engagement in the world of international development and knowledge production. Through a Transnational Feminist Praxis, solidarity and collaboration are emphasized for the production of knowledge to be representative of the multiplicity of women and the communities they inhabit around the world. Grounding feminisms in activist communities globally is most certainly a goal, one by which an interrogation into all forms of implicit and explicit relations of power arise. The contestation of those relations occurs through an ongoing process of self-critique, and collective reflection (Swarr & Nagar, 2010).

Phenomenological epistemology (Lehn & Hitzler, 2015) lends its subjectivity to ethnographic works. Ethnography works to depict lived realities, while phenomenology works to understand how these realities are created. The inclusion of this phenomenological epistemology gives opportunity to yield a rich sociological work. When working under a phenomenological epistemology one's analysis must include the goal to uncover nuanced explanations of the experiences, activities, and engagements that make up the world of individuals or groups. With this goal, subjective and personal experiences remain the principal source of data and their

analyses focus on the creation of meanings (Lehn & Hitzler, 2015). These meanings which individuals assign to their actions, as well as the actions of others, are paramount in understanding social life (Lazreg in Saunders, 2002). The incorporation of this type of epistemology provided myself with a platform to dive into a deep analysis of the realities and ontologies that I may be engaged in.

Knowledge is not transcendent, rather it is subjective and conditional; this makes the utilization of subjective research methods rather pragmatic when attempting to uncover the multiple realities of women. Feminist research most typically begins with a standpoint epistemology. This epistemology allows for reflexivity in research so that potential harms can be avoided while carrying out the endeavor. As Marjorie DeVault (1996) puts it, “The feminist sociologist, in her formulation, must refuse to put aside her experience and, indeed, must make her bodily existence and activity a ‘starting point’ for inquiry (pp. 39).” The feminist sociologist's inquiry is oriented towards an analysis of social context, experiences, and the relations of ruling. These targets of her inquiry provide the structure for daily life and connect all members of a society in systematic interactions (DeVault, 1996:39). According to Peace Kiguwa (2019), standpoint theory argues that women's experiences of being and becoming gendered subjects must have the spotlight in how we theorize and make sense of the social world. The differences between and amongst women are therefore best understood “not only to present multiple ways that we can understand the world, but also to provide insight into the different axes of power that women the world over experience and are faced with (Kiguwa, 2019).” My research, utilizing Kiguwa's explanation, provides (subjective) narrative to these “axes of power” and experience between and amongst women.

Engaging in a transnational feminist praxis consists of core features that address epistemology of feminist methodology. This includes a focus on and objective to critically engage women's lived social realities with a view to changing them for the better (Kiguwa, 2019). In an examination of feminist approaches to research, Peace Kiguwa (2019) posits that "feminist research aims to attend to women's marginalized and often silenced voices, not just in the social world but also in the production of knowledge." Through my autoethnographic account of transnational living - as well as the heavily male dominated arena of international development- I refused to be silenced, and I aimed to not silence others. I strove to produce my own knowledge of life as a female in Morocco, not the knowledge of life as a female in Morocco; I have no authority to do such a thing. The emphasis on women's knowledge has been the concern over canonical research methods, namely positivist quantitative research constructing knowledge about the world and about the dominant group, from the perspective of the dominant group- men (Kiguwa, 2019).

Autoethnographic research methods were both realistic, as well as methodologically relevant. Through a Feminist Standpoint epistemology, it is argued that it is politically important for women to narrate their own stories and experiences in order to challenge the passivity women have been historically accorded in the knowledge production process. Autoethnography therefore is a natural research method to utilize. Feminist theories and praxis actively works to address gaps and misrepresentation in research, ethically speaking. By choosing to narrate *my own* experiences living in Morocco as a (foreign) female and doing international development work, rather than positing *my analysis of* Moroccan women and international development work, I attempt to align myself with the goals of feminist research.

Data collection via journaling and blog-posting was performed majority of my time in Morocco with the Peace Corps. Accompanying my arrival to Morocco in early September of 2017, I started journaling and blog-posting until March of 2019, where then I moved forward on my data analysis. During this time period, I lived temporarily in a small village in North Central Morocco, Nzala Bni Amar for approximately 3 months with a host family, but primarily in the Southern city of Ouarzazate. My time in Ouarzazate influenced me most, since it was there that I was able to settle and work. Due to the lack of choice in Peace Corps placement, my research site can be considered one of convenience, academically speaking.

My methods were both personal and public. Writing journals lent me an introspective and private account of my life in Morocco, while public blog posts became a way to share my life with family, friends, and strangers online, in a way that captured the macro-sociological themes organically. I wrote in a journal daily or weekly based on my time and focus over the course of a year and a half. In these journals I include to-do lists; weekly or monthly personal budgets; hopes, expectations, and frustrations of my volunteer service; as well as cathartic brain dumps of experiences living in Morocco. I analyzed my personal journals through thematic coding. Utilizing colored markers, I reread my journal and assigned a specific color for main topics in my writing; privilege, gendered space, language, sexual harassment, belonging, Peace Corps framework, relationships with those back home, time and identity. Following the coding of my written journals, I coded my public blog. Thematic coding of my blog yielded fewer and broader results; time, gendered space, and belonging.

Roughly three months after moving to Ouarzazate, I found that my daily journal writing slowed to weekly, or bi-weekly writing. When I noticed this, I started to create “voice-journals.” These voice-journals were simply voice-recording on my personal phone. This method lent me

far more flexibility than strictly written journaling. If I had an especially busy day, or forgotten to journal until late at night, I would simply make a voice recording as I walked to work, prepared dinner or walked my dog. Rather than transcribing the voice recordings and following thematic coding as I did for my written journal and public blog, I chose to take notes, as if listening I were conducting an interview. This allowed me to include an almost objective notetaking of the experiences I describe. I then followed thematic coding through the voice-journal notes. I found the ability to listen to my experiences added nuance to my analysis; my voice on the recording seemed somehow alien to me- it didn't match my voice I have in my head. I was able to triangulate and consolidate my thematic codes as I reviewed my data as a whole. This led to my determination of macro themes in which all other codes and experiences fell into; Time, Space, Language and Doing Development.

It was also a methodological choice to have the juxtaposition of my micro-experiences narrated in the context of macro-social constructs. Carrie Mott (2018) in *Building Relationships within Difference: An AnarchaFeminist Approach to the Micropolitics of Solidarity* mentions the concept; "Every politics [...] is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics." From the feminist standpoint epistemology, all experience is political and so through the understanding of experience being both micro and macro, despite my sample size of 1 and extreme subjective narrative, my analysis can be generalized in a way that doesn't create a biased monolithic account of female transnationalism nor females in development work. I say this because since I focused on a personal narrative, I did not recount or analyze others' experience, therefore I did not deliberately silence others. However, in discussing such macro-themes of space, language etc., my narrative is in dialogue with others who discuss these same themes. This is all central to



feminist theory and research- including women's voice, perspective and experience in the production of knowledge of lived social realities.

Autoethnography can be useful within sociological works because through our own critical reflections of the field and through our analyses, new frameworks and visions emerge as a result of our engagements with audiences comprised of both academic and non-academic readers. As a student of Sociology, I am interested in the examination of society- meaning the events and practices of people within their everyday lives as they contribute to a great social order. I too, inhabit society, and therefore it is worthwhile to examine my own contributions.

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

"I found that overall, going up was a lesson on perseverance; meanwhile going down was a test on trusting myself. Both of which are lessons in Peace Corps and all life I'd say."

-Journal Entry, Hiking Mt. Toubkal, September 11, 2018

Women every day, around the world, are navigating their selves through a maze of identities. We assess which ones help or hurt our chances at successfully interacting with others; that means, leaving an interaction feeling confident that the person or people have the same perspective of the interaction as we have. We do this so quickly it may not be until we reflect upon our experiences afterwards, do we come to understand where we are situated in relation to others. When I say "relation to others" I'm referring to our relationships; familial, friendly, romantic, work related, communal, national and environmental. I have asked myself three questions repeatedly through my first year living in Morocco;

- How does the female PCV in Morocco make sense out of and create value from life events, relationships, the environment and herself?

- How does the female PCV navigate the structure of the Peace Corps and her host community?
- To what extent does my experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer deepen my own sense of feminist consciousness in order to advance a feminist transnational framework?

Ultimately, the first two questions are aimed towards understanding the process to becoming part of a community, or a sense of belonging. While aiming to understand this process, all three questions also capture the transnational nature of my being in Morocco; they highlight my motivations for serving abroad as well as my difference compared to the people in my community in Southern Morocco. My motivations are no secret nor are my inherent differences (re: race and nationality).

Through this year of journal entries, blog posts, and the time taken to sift through all their words, I have found several patterns weaving through them. Time and time again I write to the same issues that affected me most. I found to be tracing both my sense of belonging, in “Peace Corps language,” *integration*, as well as the growth of my feminist consciousness. Both integration and the transnational feminist praxis requires work on the part of the migrant volunteer; this work is often discreet and requires such a grand focus on self-reflection that I don’t believe many have had experience with. Ultimately, through my thematic coding and emotional recall, I’ve found that my journey of integration has been tied to the macro-social constructs of time, space and language; meanwhile the growth of my feminist consciousness has come from simply my exposure to a new social structure, and culture situated in the Moroccan context.

## *Time*

“The days go by SO SLOWLY! But I feel as though in the time it takes to blink, another week has passed me by.”

- An Issue of Time and Other Things, FEBRUARY 21, 2018 RENEE PALECEK

Time can be an overwhelming concept to ruminate. Seen as something unchanging as one looks to the past, and malleable when regarding the future. No matter our actions, precautionary or reactionary, time is seemingly uncontrollable. A standard Peace Corps Service is 27 months; 2.25 years. Reference against the life expectancy of Americans, nearly 79 years, this 2.25 block of time seems inconsequential. Yet these same 2.25 years in the eyes of a new volunteer, struggling to learn how to live in a new country, culture and language, can look insurmountable.

Prior to moving to Morocco, I felt that my ability to integrate and create a sense of belonging in my future community would be dependent on the projects I implement in my workplace. However, in blog posts, journals, and discussions, the concept of time and the “feeling” of time’s passage was often the first topic I mentioned in my reflections. “I feel like my life is on hold,” “Waiting, again, “I can’t stand the stagnancy! I need these two years to go by fast!” Upon reflection, I realized that I didn’t want to skip over time, but rather fast-forward when I felt a part of my community, when I felt like I belonged. Ultimately, I felt powerless in the face of time. While reviewing my reflections, I found that time became a major topic in my discussions, and specifically the way time was spent and how it ‘felt.’ Michael G. Flaherty set out to better understand the causal effects of time perception in “Making Time: Agency and the Construction of Temporal Experience” (2002). “What makes for variation in the perceived

passage of time? [...] My analytic framework was derived from classic determinism; there is a cause (variation in one's circumstances) and an effect (variation in the perceived passage of time) (Flaherty, 2002). Using Flaherty's causal understanding of time perception is logical and has helped me understand the value of time and its relation to transnational belonging.

There was a romanticizing of the passage of time for me, a naivety in my expectations of living in Morocco. I first felt the weight of time heavily on my shoulders during the second month of living on my own, in February 2018. The previous month, I moved from my host Family's house in Ouarzazate, into a single bedroom apartment of my own. The move into my own apartment felt incredibly liberating. Overnight I regained control over meals, mealtimes, personal space, availability to communicate with loved ones and more. Certainly, there was an expectation that "everything will be better and easier, once I move into my own place." Again, a naive thought that did not turn out to be true.

Time moved slowly that month and the month after. As I settled in, I gained time back from the days I lived with a host family. When at one time, I was eating lunch for an hour and a half, I now found my hands full of time, and my stomach empty of food. I was learning my way around Ouarzazate but since I was on my own, I felt comfort in my home and chose to stay indoors rather than explore my neighborhood. In an unfamiliar neighborhood and an unfamiliar city and country, I found small comforts in living on my own. I brewed coffee, I sat in patches of sun, chasing it in my living space as the clock changed from AM to PM. In my own home, the day began and ended when I wanted, and I was not dependent upon the schedules of others. When I exited my home was highly dependent upon my environmental factors, like students' schedules, lunch times, and the odd 12pm-5pm pocket in the day where somehow nothing seemed to be open. Flaherty (2002) discusses in his piece on time that the perception of time's

passage indeed has some self-determining factors; time can be mediated by our immediate circumstances. So, if a volunteer is very busy, or has many projects and classes throughout the week, her weekly perception of time will likely be faster. I surely felt this. Although my days were not taken up by much- I would conduct one class a day, on average, until the center closed in May- at least I had class Monday through Friday, making my days feel long, but weeks feel short. In *Making Time*, Flaherty (2002) conducted a survey to understand college students' perception of and agency over time, he writes, "they had taken steps to bring into being circumstances that provoked the desired form of temporal experience. These individuals had constructed their own circumstances and had done so, moreover, with the intention to shape the perceived passage of time." I recognized that when I had something to look forward to or to prepare for, time felt as if it was moving quickly. Grasping this, I searched for activities, personal or work related, that I could do to fill my time and perceive it as moving faster. I had greater control, or agency, over how I spent my time when I moved into my own apartment but and even more so when I was inside my apartment. I exercised this control by repeatedly creating calendars, lists of goals and daily/weekly schedules. This "time work" was expressing more than just my self-actualization but was also displaying my own cultural values regarding the commodity of time (Young, 1976; Flaherty, 2002; van den Scott, 2014). Through my socialization, or enculturation in America, I have learned the appropriate or inappropriate ways to react to a given phenomenon (Young, 1976). Regarding time, I have learned values of productivity, and efficiency; if I am not utilizing my time productively then I produce a negative reaction. These reactions most often were negative self-talk, greater anxiety over that which I had little control over, and obsessive thoughts about future commitments. My need to create

calendar after calendar and schedule after schedule, all essentially telling me identical things, is indicative more of my American set of cultural values than of my perception of time.

Some cultures value and encourage flexibility while others express beliefs that plans and schedules should be inviolate (van den Scott, 2014). Moroccan culture strongly emphasizes flexibility. If one needs proof that time is nothing but a social construct, they need to look no further than Morocco. Up until Fall of 2018, Morocco followed the changes of Daylight Savings Time. This meant that four times a year (depending on the Gregorian calendar placement of Ramadan) Moroccans, and volunteers, asked themselves and each other “Old Time, or New Time?” for a few weeks. After my first time change in Ouarzazate- moving from Standard time (GMT) to Daylight Savings time (GMT+1)- I was invited to weekly Friday Couscous lunch at my landlord’s apartment.

“What time?” I asked

“1:30 in the afternoon,” Fatima told me, holding up her right pointer finger for emphasis.

Just a minute or so after 1:30 pm rolled around, I walked up the stairs and entered my landlord’s apartment, announcing myself as customary, “*Salaam Alaykum.*”

“But what time is it?!” Fatima hollers. In her kitchen, she is kneeling over a large ceramic plate of steaming couscous, gently mixing oil into the round grains with her hands.

I give a confused reply, “It’s 1:30! You told me to come to eat lunch.”

“No, no, no. 1:30 OLD TIME. This means 2:30 New Time, understand?”

I understood her words but the essence of what she said, I could not grasp. Why would we work on two different yet simultaneous schedules? As Ramadan, the holiest of months in the

Islamic Calendar year came, Time changed again, back to Old Time, just for this one exceptional lunar month. However, time has changed more than just from New to Old during Ramadan.

Time changed into something far more precious. Time was marked more importantly by the call to prayer, five times per day. During the daytime with each call to prayer, we became that much closer to breaking fast and satiating our hunger. The streets, which I often considered such a lively place, had become silent. The people walked more slowly, but their patience wore quickly as a result of their physical and mental states becoming weaker from hunger .

I had great difficulty adapting to Morocco's flexibility. At the beginning of my service, I saw the malleability of time as disregarding schedule and disrespecting others. My adherence to a strong schedule highlighted how different I was from those around me I would try my hardest to hide my frustration with the women, or my supervisor (*mudira*) at the *Nedi Neswi*, when a regularly scheduled class was spontaneously canceled due to an event that nobody felt the need to inform me about. As these events occurred, I felt disrespected. I felt as if my time, did not mean anything to my *mudira*, or to the women I worked with. However, the cultural difference lies in exactly how I stated my last sentence. "I felt as if *my time* did not mean anything." In America, we have an individualistic culture meaning that we emphasize the value of the individual and their agency. We also value time; time is understood as a commodity. And so, to seemingly "disregard" an individual's time, is a strong offense. In Morocco, there is a greater collectivist culture. Moroccans often thrive when they are in a group. Flexibility, as previously mentioned, is emphasized and valued relating to time. This is because time does not belong to one person. Time doesn't even belong to the group, rather it belongs to God. Everything occurs in God's time. This sentiment is expressed by the Arabic God-phrase, *Inshallah* (God Willing).

"Remember, we have Yoga tomorrow, at 10 in the morning!"

*“Inshallah”*

“I will come to your house for lunch on Friday”

*“Inshallah”*

“I will live in Morocco for two years.”

*“Inshallah”*

If everything is up to God’s will, then it can be extrapolated that Moroccans have a very fatalistic view of events, and of time. To be fatalistic in nature means that you accept your own lack of power over life’s events. Time has the symbolic meaning of power, and those who get to control the time have greater power (van den Scott, 2014). Ultimately, God is in control of everything- He has all-encompassing power. Naturally then this translates to power of time and temporal demands. As I came to realize through my greater exposure to what I call, “Inshallah Culture,” it is liberating to not be so tightly bound to schedules. As I gave up my individual power over time, and adopted Inshallah Culture, the time that I spent with the women at the *Nedi*, or families over mealtimes somehow became more saturated in value. It was easier to connect to the women I worked with. Rather than giving up time that was dedicated to a fitness class, I became to understand that I was gaining time to create meaningful relationships. These meaningful relationships contribute to creating a sense of belonging.

As mentioned, those who get to control the time, have greater power. While God has ultimate power over time, it is believed, and displayed through an Islamic patriarchal hierarchy of bodies, that men are closer to God than women, and are therefore designated greater power in society (Mernissi,1978). Time is certainly directly affected by men’s power. Before living in Ouarzazate, I lived with a host family in the central northern region of Morocco, in a small village, Nzala Bni Amar, for nearly three months. One evening, myself and a fellow Peace Corps



trainee in my same village were instructed to go to a *Sebuae*, or baby shower. *Sebuae*'s are typically held 7 days after the birth of a child. Walking into an unfamiliar house, an older woman with a toothless smile leads us upstairs to the grand salon, where they entertain guests. As we reach the landing, we promptly take off our shoes before walking onto the carpet. "Rania!!" I hear my host mother, Majda, call my name. I walk over and kiss her once on one cheek, then twice on the other. After this I shake hands with the rest of the women in the room, it would be considered incredibly rude to not greet each individual.

Despite arriving quite late to the party, and sitting for around an hour still, nothing had happened. Leaning over to Majda I ask,

"Why are we waiting?"

She replies, "We are waiting to eat."

"Are they catching the chicken??" I joke. Majda laughs, thankfully. I have learned that the American sense of humor is quite different than the Moroccan.

"We are waiting for the men to finish. After they finish, we will eat the chickens they haven't."

There is still a strict patriarchy governing the bodies of Morocco. The concept of time is subject to this as well. Religiousness and conservatism vary from village to village, and often inversely correlate with population size, but gender segregation is pervasive and expected. While we waited for the men in the neighboring house to both begin and finish eating their meals, eventually the women took back their time, and turned up the music. The drums of Moroccan Shebbi music blared from the speakers and within a beat a handful of women and girls jump to their feet to dance. As the drums carried more and more women away, many removed their headscarves and tied them around their hips to better accentuate their dancing. Watching all of

them, I learned the art of taking back. While I sat irritated that the men were able to eat whenever they felt, and that our mealtime suffered as a consequence of their temporal dominance, the women surrounding me took this as an opportunity to capitalize on being in a room with only women; they danced. They created a welcoming and happy environment, and even made me forget my hunger with each step and each sway of my hips. Before I knew it, we were washing our hands and eating.

When meeting a new person, often one of the first questions we ask is “how do you spend your free time?” Time is a display of both our place in our social structure, and a display of our cultural values (Young, 1976; Flaherty, 2002; van den Scott, 2014). Our gender certainly influences how we spend time. Perhaps in societies with greater social and economic equality, all genders may utilize their time similarly; no one gender may work more hours or spend more time with specific tasks. This work, and these tasks that any one gender may do are also influenced by the society’s culture. To measure my sense of belonging, I must understand both my own cultural values, my new community’s cultural values, and the amount of which I mirror or adopt their values.

In my experience, there are two sets of time calculating, one for men and another for women. For men, time is calculated by the mosque and the 5 calls to prayer throughout the day. Around five to ten minutes after each call to prayer, men leave their homes or workplaces, and walk to the neighborhood mosque. On Fridays, the midday prayer is extended as it is Islam’s holy day of the week. While women are no less religious than the men, most women do not go to the mosque to pray. Unlike the men, their day is ruled by mealtimes. On any given day, there are four to five meals; Breakfast, second breakfast (optional and varies by family), lunch, *kaskrut*, and dinner. In my opinion, if there were any two meals that are “mandatory,” they would be

lunch, the largest meal of the day, and *kaskrut*, a spread of pastries, different types of bread, cookies, cakes, and a lot of tea, typically served between 7:00-8:00 p.m. When men are at the mosque, women are typically cooking and preparing for the next meal. When men are at the café's, women are again cooking, cleaning the house, or perhaps catching up on a Turkish Soap. Although I had asked my teacher during my training months if meals and prayer times were correlated, she assured me that this was merely a coincidence. I disagreed. As I grew in my understanding of Moroccan daily routines and created my own routines both inside and out of homestays, I found that prayer times and meals were absolutely correlated. Meals were often prepared and cooked before and during prayer times and consumed after the men of the family returned from the mosque. This would be especially apparent to me on Fridays when families would cook couscous-the official food of Morocco. Every Friday, women would spend hours preparing couscous, during this time I would be working. Many Fridays in Ouarzazate, I would attend lunch at various households. Despite arriving at the time I was instructed to, I would find that we would still wait upwards to an hour for the men to return from the mosque. Upon their arrival we would immediately begin to eat.

I find these mealtime experiences are pertinent to my conversation on gender because a hierarchy of power is very much made apparent. My observations, and more so my interactions with many Moroccan women and their families were concentrated at mealtimes. These women I worked with and spent time with would decline attending programming opportunities at the *Nedi Neswi* because they had to be home to prepare a meal for their husbands and children. These meals though would have to wait to be consumed until their husbands and sons returned from the mosque. Women's activities were governed by mealtimes, mealtimes were subject to the return of men from their activities governed by prayer times at the mosque; this linear correlation, I

believe, further supports that time, and the ways by which time is spent, is gendered. As explained earlier, the relationship of time and gender reflects power in society which in Morocco is a patriarchal system.

Understanding time's relationship with gender and power both put me at ease and angered me entirely. I believe that my anger stemmed much from my perception of loss and lack; I felt as though some time was taken away from me, a type of control and power I had over myself in my life that upon my moving to Morocco, was taken away from me. On the other hand, I felt so at ease with this "diagnosis" of sorts because I acknowledge that there was nothing I could change about this. Observing the women I surrounded myself with taught me to release my attachments that I had to the concept of time. A concept that was informed so much by my American socialization but that clearly did not fit into the Moroccan context; a sort of square peg in a round hole. I didn't learn this lesson quickly. There were a lot of growing pains and time when I couldn't recognize that which was around me and this occurred throughout my service. I looked to the women in the *Nedi Neswi*, my host mothers, the women that welcomed me into their lives for reference and learned to accept change, and work in a flexible manner so that I can respond in a productive and more culturally aware fashion so that I can perform my work in the best possible way.

Progress isn't necessarily linear, so even towards the end of my service I would have moments of frustration, especially after times of isolation from families or work due to holidays and vacations. The more I engaged with the Moroccan concept of time the more adept I became in responding in a more "Moroccan" way. However, if I didn't visit families for a while or I had a conference with Peace Corps I would revert into my American way. This leads me to understand that time-work, or the work I do to within a given time period to conduct a desired

condition, is more important and has a greater effect upon creating a sense of belonging, than does the duration of time spent in a community (Flaherty, 2002; Van den Scott, 2014). Van den Scott supports this, stating, “The measurement of time does not always fit with the feeling of duration (2014).” She goes further by stating that the perception of time is distinguished and felt as “quicker,” when there are critical events. For me, these critical events are typically interactions with the Moroccan women I work with or the families that have welcomed me into their homes as a daughter. Through my reflections, I came to understand timework as more valuable to integration and belonging than time-duration.

## *Space*

I knew it all before I even walked in. They're all the same really. Go into any café in this country and it will be a clone of this one. As the door opens and I step into the building, the cigarette smoke singes the inside of my nostrils, my pupils are working hard to adjust to the dim lighting. The sound of a soccer game, and the commentators blaring from the television on the wall to my right. Inside, every chair is facing the screen, and while the bodies of men packed like sardines in a can are oriented to the television, their heads have whipped over to allow their eyes to focus on me. “Yalla,” Zaid says, so subtly pushing me forward by the tips of his fingers on my shoulder. He can't actually touch me, of course, we're in public.

He leads me across the room, and down a small pathway through tables and men. I make sure to keep my eye-line above the heads sitting around me as I pass by, and once we find an empty table and chairs, we sit. I exhale, the hardest part is over. After the waiter takes our coffee order, Zaid gets up to use the bathroom, and I am left alone. I become painfully aware that I am not able to shrink myself or become invisible, instead the complete opposite occurs; my presence in the café becomes magnified as Zaid disappears, and the men find it safe to turn and stare once again. They don't realize that the men who are in earshot of me, I can understand. Eventually, Zaid is on his way back and he gives me a wry smile as if he can hear my voice already telling him, “how could you leave me alone in this place?” Somebody catches his arm, and through laughter tells Zaid something I cannot understand. Zaid wags his index finger, “Shame on you!!” he laughs.

“What did that man say?” I inquire as he sits beside me.

Zaid replies, “He asked me, “How much did you pay for her? I'll take her next.””

I quickly examine my outfit; Teva sandals, black denim jeans, my blue knit sweater, underneath the large denim jacket I has bought from the market in Tinghir two months prior, and a green Pashmina scarf. “*I'm not wearing anything inappropriate,*” I think. And then I realize that it's not what I'm wearing, instead it was when I opened the door to this café, I also unknowingly opened the door to the assumption that I am a sex worker; since why else would a female be at the café?

The gendering of space is pervasive in patriarchal societies. The act of gendering space may be carefully thought through in the space's creation or perhaps, space created in non-sexist ways has been interpreted as having specific gender affiliations (Papadopoulou, 2014). For example, a set of bathrooms all have the same amenities; sink, toilet, doors, etc. But the sign on the bathroom door genders that space specifically male or female. Whereas a soccer field is not created with the intention of ascribing to any one gender, however, sports are interpreted as male-affiliated activities, therefore gendering this soccer field as a male space. Most societies are structured from some form of patriarchal blueprint, and the spaces that society creates- cafes, bathrooms, soccer fields etc. will likely adhere to the dichotomously gender-affiliated interpretations of appropriate action (Bastromski & Smith, 2017; Elsgray, 2014; Jun & Whitson, 2014; Papadopoulou, 2014).

The basis of gender and feminist research is in the concept that women inherently experience and move through the world differently due to the dialectic relationship of gender and society. With gender being a keystone in the construction of society, it becomes a worthy research endeavor to explore and the way by which society is constructed (Stanley & Wise, 1993). The gendering of space is familiar in social research and it can be plainly stated that in most patriarchal societies, the domestic, or private space has been designated for women, where the public space is welcomed to men (Mernissi, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Newcomb, 2009). Morocco is no exception to this concept. A main congregation space for men in Morocco are the cafes. These cafes are all very similar; a cool metallic atmosphere where tables are arranged in clean lines, the chairs are all facing either the street if they are located outside, or the television if

they are inside. Due to the lack of smoking laws, there will always be at least one cigarette lit, and its smoke will inevitably hang in the air far longer than the duration of the patron's stay.

While each neighborhood in Ouarzazate may hold one or two mosques, each main street perhaps has five times as many cafés. Mosques and cafés both are places of community gathering, worship (to Allah or Real Madrid), and both are catered towards the male gender. Cafés however may be places where many *haram*, or forbidden, actions are committed such as smoking, gambling, drinking, and engaging with women unrelated to them. The most frequent activities taken place at a café are watching soccer, smoking, and people watching. Unless there is a soccer match being televised, most chairs will face outward, towards the street or public for maximal observation capabilities for the patrons. At first, I was excited to frequent cafes in Ouarzazate, since due to my gender I wasn't welcome at the three cafés available in my training site, Nzala Bni Amar. Since Ouarzazate was much larger, with greater diversity I held the assumption that women were more welcome at cafes. I wasn't necessarily incorrect, women most definitely frequent cafés more so in Ouarzazate, but I also found that this came with a catch; were the women accompanying their husbands? And were the women working- either in the café itself or were they sex workers? Learning these answers came from observation and experience, as expressed in the journal passage above. I live in a liminal space in Morocco, I am both a part of and apart from the larger communities surrounding me. Due to my status as a foreigner I have been granted access to an aspect of Moroccan culture that many Moroccan women do not hold.

A Café attracts a very homogenous group of people; likely men, out of school, but not elderly. However, there are certainly differences among the "morning" crowd and the "night" crowd. In the morning, men will frequent the café for their morning coffee, to read the

newspapers, to meet with a business partner or simply to watch the people walk by. He may sit alone, or with a friend but outwardly it almost seems as though he is there without reason. There is always a reason of course; for retired men, they have spent a majority of their adult lives working, and therefore outside of the home. To retire, and immediately spend all of one's time inside a home where they have little decision making over their wife- who has spent her life presiding over and maintain- may come as a stark and unwelcome challenge. The Café also provides opportunity to maintain a man's presence- and therefore voice or status- in his community. Those that attend the Café at night are likely socializing. Young men flock to the cafes in herds, spilling out of the doorways onto the surrounding patio or sidewalks. At night, there is a shift towards a younger crowd, many patrons within their twenties. These young men cause a ruckus while watching soccer matches or enjoying the company of friends that are home visiting family, since they study or work in another city. Currently in Morocco, there is high youth unemployment. Unlike their sisters, young men are expected to work, and it could be considered weird or negatively different if he were to spend so much time inside his home. Public or community pursuits are not performed inside the home, and so if he were to network with community members in search of a job, it is more likely that he would find success by frequenting the Café each night than if he were to stay at home. The Café, in Morocco is the epicenter of community dealings, however micro or macro they are. To be present at the café is to be present in the public-community conversation, and it can be easily understood that the lack of women's presence in the Café directly relates to her lack of involvement in public-community decisions. On a country-wide scale then, gender greatly affects politics.

In Ouarzazate, I have two cafes where I feel comfortable and welcome. Both are in the center square of the city and are frequented by many tourists. These are the only cafes I will visit



by myself, and at my pleasure, since they have been introduced to me by previous Peace Corps volunteers. While my race allows me to access public spaces, I still must pay a tax, that is, likely being the sole female in the room (Papadopoulou, 2014). Most visits to a café with Zaid I have been the only woman, perhaps aside from a cook or waitress. I can visit these cafes because I have a facilitator, Zaid, and because my whiteness supports a presumption that I don't know that I shouldn't be here. However, a gender-tax affects women from entering spaces that may not have been inherently gender affiliated. "Gender-tax" can be best understood as the spectrum of consequences endured by women (Mernissi, 1987; Papadopoulou, 2014). My consequences for entering these spaces were most often the assumption that I was a sex worker, as detailed in the journal entry above, constant staring, cat-calls or whistles, the occasional balled-up tissue being thrown in my direction if I were momentarily alone, or a steady flow of people approaching Zaid and I to introduce themselves and ask about where I work and live.

Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan Feminist Sociologist cogently connects spatial boundaries to gender in Islam. Her book, "Beyond the Veil: Male-Female dynamics in Modern Muslim Society (1987)" discusses these nuances of gendered space in Morocco. Stated in her introduction (added in 1987), a key theme for this book is space as an important component of sexuality. Muslim sexuality, Mernissi explains, is territorial, and public spaces are "by definition, male spaces (1987: 137)." Space is so bound by gender and sexuality because Muslim society is structured in ways that prevent illicit relations between unrelated men and women (Mernissi, 1987). If the public area is designated to men, as Mernissi states, then is it unexpected- even illicit- for a woman to trespass into the man's public space. Mernissi's research expresses a phenomenon which gender and feminist research have stated before and after her; "the institutionalized boundaries dividing the parts of society express the recognition of power in one

part at the expense of the other (1987:137).” political power is acted upon in the public arena, and women’s inability to access this arena displays their lack of power. Cafes in Morocco are places where men congregate; they discuss an array of topics, and as I have witnessed, business and political deals and transactions occur in the cafes as well. Men have dual citizenship; they are citizens of the domestic space where their role is to monetarily support the family and create sons. As citizens of the public space- a space where a woman's presence is an anomaly- men’s roles are in the domains of religion and politics, these are the domains of power in society (Mernissi, 1987;137-139). The historically strict sexual segregation of men and women in society magnifies the sexualization of human interaction. This ironically is exactly what segregation seeks to eradicate. While Morocco has undergone rapid economic and social development since Mernissi wrote and revised this pinnacle work, gender or sexual segregation is still enforced, and expected by its citizens. Women who defy these norms, endure consequences within the spectrum of sexual harassment and social ostracization. As a foreign, specifically American, woman I could access the public arena; I was not so forcefully bound by Moroccan Muslim social expectations. “You are a white girl; you can do as you please.” Zaid had told me on multiple occasions.

I struggled for quite a while because my personal views are that I am as capable, competent, and human as any man, and to limit my (or women’s in general) ability to fully participate in life is wrong. I was struggling to find my own space in my town because when I tried to do the activities I enjoyed, I was harassed, ogled, or shamed in some type of way. I had people close to me telling me that I can go into cafes, to go for runs, to dress in “American fashion,” but I quickly learned that this was not the case. Firstly, there was no representation of me performing these things in public. Women were not in the cafes, women were not running

outside, and women were not dressing (not ubiquitously that is) in “America Fashion (revealing legs and arms).” Secondly, whenever I attempted to perform these actions in any degree, I felt the immediate consequences- verbal sexual harassment by men, and expressions of shame by women. Despite the decades between myself and Fatima Mernissi, I have asked myself nearly the identical question that she stated was her motivation for her research, “Why can’t I stroll peacefully in the alleys of the Medina that I like and enjoy so much (Mernissi, 1987:xv)?” The answer was- and remains from 1987 to 2019- the strict gendered spatial boundaries in Moroccan society.

Women are situationally disadvantaged when they enter the public space. Due to the geographies of power lying in the hands of men, women are disproportionately targeted for unwanted attention by strangers (Bastromski & Smith, 2017). Unwanted attention should be understood as a spectrum, ranging from generic uncivil behavior, to catcalling, sexual harassment, and physical sexual assault. The entire spectrum of unwanted attention, for Bastromski & Smith (2017) is considered “intrusive behavior.” Men are more likely to be the perpetrator in intrusive, uncivil acts in public spaces, and they are also less likely to be the victims of intrusive behavior (Bastromski & Smith, 2017). Since uncivil behavior is so often perpetrated against women in public, women develop coping and reactionary behaviors to bring themselves comfort and keep themselves safe (Jin & Whitson, 2014; Elsgray, 2014; Bastromski & Smith, 2017). Many women will avoid spaces and situations which make them uncomfortable or strive to have a companion or group with them as they enter uncomfortable places and circumstances.

Through my young adulthood, I have prided myself on being a fiercely independent woman. I tackled problems as they came, and had no qualms about engaging in solitary

activities, rather I embraced them as opportunities requiring little to no compromising on my part. However, when I was confronted with a high frequency of unwanted male attention, I found myself withdrawing from activities which made me go outside alone. If it was possible, I would try to compound numerous errands into a single day, or after a morning of teaching preschool with my site-mate since I was already outside. While I was distressed by street harassment, unwanted attention, and other intrusive behavior in America, they plagued me in Morocco. I attribute this intensification to the lack bystander reaction. Even as I was grabbed by a man on a street corner, the group of women behind me merely stopped walking to avoid potential conflict, and the taxi drivers parked on the side of the road watched on as if they were watching a soccer match. The pervasiveness of gender segregation in public allows intrusive behavior perpetrated by men to become acceptable and expected (Mernissi,1987). Unlike my Moroccan female counterparts, I had to go outside quite often. Oued Dahab, my neighborhood, is approximately a thirty five-minute walk from Douar Shems, where my workplace is located. I would return home after my classes for lunch and return in the afternoon until the center closed at 5 pm. On the days when I taught preschool with my former site-mate, I was far more at ease, walking with my head up and looking forward. My body language itself completely altered as I walked alone; I would listen to music, wear sunglasses, and look to the pavement.

It was through learning these spatial boundaries that I came to understand that Moroccan society is less structured by race as it is by gender. American society certainly has its gendered spaces; however, I have felt more limited by my gender here in Morocco than I have in America. I believe these limitations are purposeful, motivated by men's desire to retain control and power in society. As a woman, I do not "fit" into the Moroccan public sphere, despite my differing race. How does one create belonging in a space where she is purposefully excluded? "Walk with

purpose” is the advice Peace Corps staff members gave us on how to walk in our communities. Not all female volunteers are in sites where they receive this type or amount of unwanted attention. I found it difficult to walk with purpose; I lost much of the confidence and purpose that I entered my community with. By the end of January, I felt isolated, or alienated, despite living in a large community with many resources and having multiple site mates. I expected sexual harassment; however, I did not expect to react in such a way. When I became concerned that this was affecting my ability to work and integrate into my community, I adopted a young street puppy. I named her Nora, meaning “light” in Arabic. While this new responsibility meant that I couldn’t stay long hours at my women’s center, I couldn’t truly do that anyway because the women themselves returned home to care for their families. Adopting Nora provided me with a reason to go outside often, and become physically present in my neighborhood, which I was new to at that time.

While outside with Nora, I received a lot of attention. My motivations for taking a street puppy into my home wasn’t necessarily to rid myself of attention, but to feel accompanied and confident while outside. Quickly, I met many of the children who lived on my street and their parents as well. I had more conversations the first week after adopting Nora than I did my first month living in my apartment. Soon, my neighbors learned my name, why I live in Morocco, and that I am a (semi) permanent fixture in this neighborhood. Granted, I still received unwanted attention from men while I was on my walks with Nora, but within a few months, these encounters drastically decreased. In Morocco, dogs are not viewed as companions. Dogs are feared street animals, and if a dog is kept at a home, it is used only for protection against intruders. It has been explained to me that many believe that if a dog is kept inside the home, angels cannot visit at night. Moroccans’ fear of dogs is not completely unfounded either; in

general street dogs are subject to a widespread spectrum of abuse, and so they learn to associate humans with abuse therefore reciprocating aggressive behavior if they feel they are in potential danger.

One evening, I took Nora for a walk before we settled down for the night. It was winter, and the street was relatively empty. As Nora sniffed around in a group of bushes, two young men walked up behind me. “Ca Va?” one man asked me. “Oh hello, I love you,” said the other. As my shoulders tensed, Nora peeked her head up to see the two men approaching us; she leapt gracefully over the bushes, and gives a quick yip, excited to meet people. I spun to look at the men, and calmly grabbed Nora’s leash to keep her close; the men screamed, and immediately ran away. With satisfied laughter, I gave Nora a good scratch behind the ears, and we walked home.

While my intention in adopting her wasn’t to scare people, I must admit that I am pleased with the outcome of this interaction. Yes, if I hadn’t adopted a dog, I wouldn’t have been on the street, and therefore wouldn’t have been approached by the men. However, if I hadn’t adopted a dog, I am not sure if I would have felt comfortable going outside ever. For every story that I have describing how Nora created an invisible barrier between myself and others while in public, I have an equal or greater amount of experiences proving the opposite. By adopting a dog, I created my own purpose for being in the public space, something I had previously struggled with, and this purpose’s integrity was not questioned by others. Nora provided me with a purpose both to engage with others in public, and a purpose to disengage when I felt uncomfortable; whether I had to continue to walk with her, or if she was alone, I had to return to her. Because of my increased presence outside, I met many people, who have since expanded my network of relationships. I became a known presence in my community, and one that was expected to be

seen. Eventually, my absences were also noticed, and with the inquiries of my whereabouts, I found that I had a community around me that I was a part of, rather than apart from.

While there remains a strict dichotomy between public and private spaces in Morocco, there has been a reorganization of space due to women occupying jobs outside the home (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006). While rural women have more or less consistently worked outside on their family farms, since the 1960s more and more urban women have left their homes and sought out work in the public realm, causing a feminization and democratization of public space (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006). However, this reorganization did not allocate equal access to the whole range of public space. There remain spaces in public that can be understood as *leisure spaces*. Public leisure spaces are productions and reproductions of the complex geographies of power because to have access to leisure space means that one has the power to feel comfortable in public (Jin & Whitson, 2014). Despite the feminization and democratization of public space, allocation of access hasn't been granted to women in the context of public leisure spaces, such as the street, cafes, public parks etc., this much is clear from my own experiences. Rather, places in the public have been created and designated for women. This is not inherently negative; women deserve access to public leisure spaces, and perhaps the first step is securing designated female-only spaces. The prime example of this would be my workplace- the women's center, or in Arabic, *Nedi Neswi* (Women's Club). In the *Nedi Neswi*, women can remove their veils or headscarves with confidence as men rarely enter the building. The women learn how to embroider and sew Jellabas, Caftans, and other clothing, as well as learn how to cook and cut hair. Some *Nedi Neswi*'s are home to women's cooperatives making traditional rugs or couscous- a staple of Moroccan cuisine. While these clubs are in the public sphere, they function as an extension of

the private sphere, where in more traditional settings, women would learn these trades inside their homes by their older female family members.

At the *Nedi Neswi*, the women and I were able to engage in activities that weren't expected of or acceptable for women to do in public. During my time working at the center, I taught exercise, yoga, and general health topics. I worked hard to provide a safe space for the women to engage in these activities and address these topics because despite the *Nedi Neswi* being a space only for women, there was still a lot of embarrassment within my classes. Women would giggle and make shocked expressions when given instructions for unfamiliar yoga or exercise movements. These giggles and expressions continued when I would broach the topic of women's bodily functions and health. As time continued, the women and I became more comfortable with each other, as I shared my experiences from both Morocco and the United States, and we learned together that we have more commonalities than differences. Exercise classes turned into impromptu dance halls, and time spent sewing became lessons in health and opportunities to exchange stories and experiences. There was a novelty to my presence in the beginning of my service work, but like the color clothes hanging the sun, it faded. The women and I created a new normal. Each time a woman entered the center, we'd shed our armor from the street and embraced one another with kisses on our cheeks. Every time I left the *Nedi Neswi* I felt whole again, even if my class plan had fallen apart. I understand now that this wholeness I felt can be better translated as belonging. The *Nedi Neswi* held women who attended university, illiterate women, and women looking for a place to break the traditional routine of daily life and duty.

I found spaces that provided comfort, camaraderie, and freedom. None more-so than my own home. Inside my own apartment I could eat, wear, and do whatever I wanted. I was away from the staring eyes, catcalls, and general conduct code I had contorted myself to adhere to. I



often felt guilty for my desire to stay at home. While I disagree with the patriarchal stance that I “belong” in my home because of my womanhood, I felt happy to remain there because I felt safe. Perhaps, the reason women so often remain in their homes isn’t because that is where they belong- there is no sense of belonging when it is forced- but rather because the women feel safe, as I do. As a student of sociology, I understood the value of space in society, but as a citizen of the United States of America and as a white woman, I was privileged in the space I was allotted. Eventually throughout my time in my community, my presence became commonplace and normalized, and perhaps if another volunteer were to be placed in Ouarzazate, and chose the neighborhood of Oued Dahab to live in, their presence would be normalized much quicker. Most individuals will navigate society differently largely depending upon their intersecting identities and personal experiences. As for me, I felt the weight of space heavily on my shoulders, my set of navigation tools were ill-equipped to handle the difference in social construct. Perhaps if I were to remain here longer than my service role of 27 months, I would gain more relevant tools, enough tools to fill an entirely new toolbox. But that hasn’t yet been my experience.

### *Language*

I had never studied Arabic prior to my arrival in Morocco, but I wasn’t the only one. Majority of other volunteers in my incoming group had also never studied Arabic. While my high school education in Italian would get me nowhere, I was optimistic about my language acquisition. Through my undergraduate studies in anthropology, I learned that culture is how lessons, traditions, and values are passed from generation to generation; it can transcend language. However, I know just from being a part of society, that language is one of the most important media by which humans communicate- on both micro and macro scales- emotions and needs on an efficient and constant basis. Language is central in forming relationships, and while

there are other pathways to forming relationships, language is the most direct way of going about it.

Language is seen as the most useful tool for integration within the Peace Corps model. During our training period we are divided into groups of 5-6 other trainees with similar language abilities and placed in host families so we can become immersed in the language and culture of Morocco. Aside from the trainees, and a current PCV in Nzala Bni Amar, the only person to speak English with exceptional skill was my group's teacher - or Language and Cultural Facilitator (LCF) - provided by Peace Corps. Despite such large language barriers, I felt comfortable and welcome in my host family and host village. I bonded with my host mother and sister while watching Turkish and Bollywood soap operas, laughed at my host father's pranks on the kids, and giggled at my nine-year-old host brother pretending to be a cat every night. While I was living in Nzala Bni Amar, I felt safe and supported by my peers and host family so much that I did not feel the effects of my language inability. Moving to Ouarzazate however, with a smaller immediate support system, lack of knowledge of the community, and dealing with the culture shock of moving from a small village to a city, I relied upon my language abilities much more than in Nzala. Unfortunately, my abilities in the language were not quite strong enough to support my weight.

Language serves a fundamental role in interpersonal contacts, relationship formation, regulation of interactions, and socialization of children into becoming competent citizens of a culture or nation-state (McCabe & Meller, 2004). In a study of children with language impairments, and their social integration, McCabe & Meller (2004) outline the directly correlated

relationship between language ability and social competence.<sup>3</sup> Social competence can be defined “as a repertoire of skills, including knowledge of social standards of behavior, social problem-solving, emotion recognition and emotion understanding, and communication and language efficacy (Marshall in McCabe & Meller, 2004).” By this definition, social competence can be understood as the ability to successfully engage with others in a shared culture based on the cultural rules, traditions and values. If language is the main and most direct way to transmit a society or culture’s standards of behavior, then language is crucial in social competence. Essentially, language is the most versatile tool in the social competency toolbox. As I entered my own community, post-swearing-in, and in the year and a half since then, I’ve come to experience the importance of language’s role in social competence and successful interaction, so much that I found it a paramount theme in my journey towards belonging.

My language acquisition was hindered by a lack of self-confidence due to negative interactions, or rather, interactions I interpreted as negative or failing. McCabe & Meller (2004) state that there is “often a reciprocal relationship cited between social competence and language skill” and with a language inability there is greater difficulty in initiating conversations, contributing to conversations, communicating intentions, addressing multiple participants in a group, and making adjustments while communicating with others. Besides language ability, there must be general cultural sensitivity on my part in Morocco. Throughout my training period, gaining a cultural foundation upon which to build my knowledge assisted my transition into my own community. Culturally, I knew I hadn’t crossed over lines or acted inappropriately. However, when it came to me speaking, interactions often stopped short or came to awkward

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<sup>3</sup> While I do not claim any similarities between myself and language-impaired children, I do find a connection between their theoretical foundations and my own. Specifically, their (McCabe & Meller, 2004) theoretical framework of ethnomethodological understanding of language and society.

halts. Comments such as “you need to learn Arabic,” or “you don’t know anything I can’t speak with you” were often hurled towards me as I fumbled through a sentence or spoke too slowly, wearing the patience of my listener thinner and thinner. I struggled to find individuals that would practice patience and engaged listening with me as I tried to speak in my broken Darija.

Language is a way of doing activity (Zimmerman, 1978). Situated in a specific socio-cultural context, “natural language” is one action in contributing to society and social structure. Through natural language- or day-to-day talk- the “social facts” we utilize to mark society with are expressed; the nuance, the layers of value and belief that dive under the surface to reveal the massive socio-cultural iceberg. My inability to coherently participate in the “natural language” (i.e. Darija or Amazigh) of Morocco, therefore made it difficult for me to participate fully in Moroccan society. Further, there seems to be difficulty for others to separate my lack of language abilities from my other abilities (Zimmerman, 1978). I was seen and treated as a small bird with a broken wing. Despite my university education and employment experiences, because I couldn’t communicate clearly and efficiently, not only my social competence, but my competency to get things done for myself was often questioned.

Status and role entail rules of conduct describing appropriate actions and activities in specified situations. Appropriate uses of language are central to upholding status and role in social structure; for example, when to speak, to whom you speak, and what to say (Zimmerman, 1978). In Morocco, it is common for any one individual to be able to speak and understand multiple languages. At home, families often speak Tashlheet, (an indigenous language of the North African Amazigh peoples) and Darija. On the street, most people will speak Darija, while in school they teach and learn in Standard Arabic, while possibly learning French and English. Depending on the sector in which a person may work, they must hold a specific level of French

or English language ability. From this ladder of language ability, we can easily deduce that language is most certainly a class and gender issue; one that Fatima Sadiqi (2003) has called a “structure of power” most harshly repressing women. In terms of class privilege, to become upwardly mobile, it is necessary to learn and have a good grasp of French, and even more so, English. Sadiqi explains that upper class individuals are more likely to code-switch with French than others. If the individual is a woman, this is even more relevant because she is attempting to make her status known to others, which is more important towards gaining respect than it would be for a man in such a patriarchal societal system (Sadiqi, 2003).

Historically, a woman’s “place” was in the home, and thus concealed her from opportunities to raise her status. Girls in Morocco are more likely to end school earlier than their male counterparts and they often marry younger; my own host mother was 16 years old when she got married and had her first child two years later at 18 years of age. If women are living in very rural areas, they likely work in agricultural fields every day, until they are physically too weak. Fatima Sadiqi (2003) explains how each individual has multiple identities, some more salient than others regarding upward mobility- class, education, language-skills, work-status, marital status etc.- all which accrue value. However, one such identity in Morocco is inseparable from these other factors, diluting their accrued value: gender. Fatima Sadiqi’s (2003) research in *Gender and Language in Morocco* displayed that gender alone does not hold a powerful place in identity construction, but it is always attached to other markers, like education level, diluting its value and therefore reducing options for upward mobility, and typical perks that come with upper class living; such as respect, wealth, health, and opportunity. In my experience, I find that gender is what dilutes other social markers, and absolutely hold a powerful place in identity construction.

To come into a community, completely unknown, naive to the culture, and mediocre in lacking any strong grasp on the language, first impressions were difficult for me. I will admit that I thought my integration would be much simpler, faster, and stronger than it came to be. While I recognized that since I am a woman, I would face some bigotry and sexism, I also expected my privileged status as a Peace Corps Volunteer, English speaker, and American would be more important. Perhaps in a smaller site, this would have been true, but Ouarzazate is a city of 70,000 also frequented by many tourists, and so I was not a novelty as many of my fellow volunteers were. I also was not alone; my site mate, Alex, who swore in with me, was also placed in Ouarzazate. In the first few weeks after moving to Ouarzazate, we did nearly everything together until I recognized that this partnership was hurting my chances at building relationships, rather than helping. I felt frustrated with my lack of language skills, and I took note that I felt that I rarely had opportunities to speak with others. The more I thought about why this could be, I realized that my frequent interaction with Alex was decreasing my opportunities to speak and engage with others.

Two weeks after moving to Ouarzazate, Alex and I left my *Mudira's* (and Alex's host mother's) house after eating lunch. We were walking next to the mosque in the neighborhood Douar Shams when we ran into the *mudir*, or director, of the *Dar Chebab* (Youth Center). After exchanging the normal greeting with Hicham, he asked when we would be in the *Dar Chebab* to discuss programming or to observe classes. Alex explained that he was planning to visit the center that very night to watch our other site mate teach an English class. Hicham seemed unable to contain his excitement and asks, "Will your wife be joining you?" Alex and I laugh nervously, and as I begin to speak, Alex explains that I am not his wife, but another volunteer. The remainder of the day was uneventful, and it was in my journal that night that I found myself

writing about my anger and frustration with language. “If I could just have the confidence to speak,” I wrote, and “Alex is so much better at Darija than I am.”

While reviewing my journals I found that until I had moved into my own apartment, I was writing comparisons between my language abilities and those of Alex. My unhealthy comparisons came to a precipice one day at the end of January, while Alex and I were about to begin a meeting with the director of another women’s association. Prior to our meeting, we had been introduced to the president of the association, and he did not speak English, unlike the female director, so we spoke to him in Darija- or rather, Alex spoke to him in a mixture of Darija and French and I sat next to Alex. The president was asking Alex about Peace Corps, our mission, and what we do daily for work. I noticed that Alex would turn to me constantly asking what the president said, and after translating for him, Alex would answer. Eventually, the president asked, “Does she speak any Arabic?” In shock, I began to say, “yes I do know Darija,” but Alex interrupted me, saying, “Yes, she understands Darija, but I speak better than she does.” It was at this moment that I recognized the affect my gender had on my language abilities. Not only was I being ignored in a conversation, but my only ally wasn’t an ally at all, instead he spoke for me- which was I was not a stranger to since this also occurs in the U.S.

As Alex and I tried to begin our service together, we ran into the assumption that we were married. This did not affect Alex, positively or negatively, but it did negatively affect me. The assumption that I was present because of my “wife” status was not only false, it was detrimental to my language acquisition. In Morocco, wives are silenced in public. Their voices and opinions are alienated from themselves and must be spoken through their husbands. I was disappointed to find myself in this position where I felt overlooked and disregarded. It also gave me greater perspective for the position’s women are placed in Morocco. After this event, I made a conscious

decision to lessen my work collaborations with Alex. Our potential for collaborative work wasn't worth the negative comparisons and self-talk I had as a result of our group engagements. I recognized that if I were to find my own space and build relationships, I had to separate myself from those that did not support me and acknowledge the sexist microaggressions I faced daily as a result of our working together.

The value I place on language regarding my sense of belonging and integration is very high. I found it ironic that I had more confidence speaking to people I barely knew, as opposed to those that I built strong relationships with. As I toured the South of Morocco with my parents for two weeks, I acted as a lingual and cultural translator, like what my LCF from Peace Corps did over a year and a half prior. Over these two weeks, I made sure that my parents understood the world around them and navigated it safely and sensitively. I was the mediator in business deals, typical travel negotiations, as well as a translator for conversations with my host family and friends. Perhaps the most difficult part of hosting my parents was speaking "fluent" English with them. While I speak in English regularly, with other PCVs and with Zaid and my other English-speaking Moroccan friends, there is heavy code-switching in these conversations. Including "God-phrases" such as "Llah ibarek fik, (God bless you)," "Llah-yawn (may God help you)," and others into my speech, became as natural to me as if I were Moroccan. I somehow struggled speaking English with my parents because I was constantly including Darija. I had more visitors during the Spring and early Summer, and this pattern continued, despite my being aware of it. The phrases I have adopted into my natural speech aren't simple phrases one can learn in a Lonely Planet's Guide to Morocco. They are culturally significant phrases that when spoken by me or another volunteer led to deeper conversations, or even the occasional tea or even wedding



invite. Language is necessary for integration, but the correctly timed and placed usage of language displays both cultural and linguistic competence.

I found that despite my insecurities and difficulties in interacting with others, the importance I placed on language and the effort I made in improving my abilities were not for nothing. It is through language that we make things known. We make our emotions and needs known, as well as our culture and values. Through steady improvement with Darija, I have put myself in positions I never thought possible; whether that is engaging in a cross-cultural discussion of women's health with a few women at the *Nedi Neswi* or having a thoughtful conversation about religion during Ramadan with a male neighbor. During a discussion at the end of our trip, my parents were recalling their impression of my language skills. My father said to me, "your language might not be perfect, but because you can have even a short conversation, and your ability to use the right words at the right time, people here find you familiar, and they appreciate that." It's through language, we become familiar, we can learn the similarities between each other. Even though I am a female, and initially faced hurdles, when I stepped out into my own, I put myself in a position where I had nobody else to speak for me, and nobody else could take the attention away from me. Through speaking with others, I opened doors to learn of shared experiences which became a foundation for building relationships and creating belonging.

### *Doing Development*

In migration studies, a key concept that researchers aim to focus upon is immigrants' sense of belonging (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2014). There is a significant weight on the shoulders of immigrants to successfully integrate into their new communities because of the subjective perception of belonging which brings life-satisfaction. A sense of belonging pertains to an emotional

attachment, a psychological feeling of “home,” or a self-identity tied to a particular place (De Bree et. al.,2010; Amit & Bar-Lev, 2014). However, transnational belonging refers to this same sense of belonging, but this sense crosses the borders of nation-states. A sense of transnational belonging requires transnational action: economic, socio-cultural and political activities that literally or symbolically cross borders of nation-states (De Bree et. al.,2010). As a Peace Corps volunteer, I share the agency’s 3 goals; provide technical help to my community, share American culture with Moroccans, and share Moroccan culture with Americans. These goals of Peace Corps are inherently transnational, meaning that they require the perseverance of pre- and post-migration attachments, identities and relationships. With the personal mission to do development through a transnational feminist praxis, my volunteer experience provides an opportunity to deepen my sense of feminist consciousness so I can perform sustainable, and locally beneficial change for my community in Morocco. While I do not consider myself to be a ‘migrant’ I am a temporary resident, and certainly due to the duration of my stay as well as the success of my volunteer work resting on my ability to integrate, I find that utilizing concepts of belonging regarding migration can be applied to my experience in Morocco.

Successful integration and a successful Peace Corps service both require forming relationships. Relationships are powerful because people hold power, and they hold community knowledge. Sheena Malhotra and Kimberlee Pérez in their journal article, “Belonging, Bridges, and Bodies (2005),” analyze how relationships can “bridge” those participating in the relationship to access new knowledge and opportunity. Of course, this “bridge-work” depends on a community ally to facilitate this new route. One doesn’t need a degree in civil engineering to know that a bridge allows transportation to flow across a gap, both ways; taking this fact and applying it to relationships, a facilitating ally would be able to both give and receive access to

new knowledge and opportunity. Researchers Malhotra and Pérez (2005) posit that bridge work happens along three axes in a relationship: community, power and consciousness.

As an American and Peace Corps volunteer, I have learned that I must be mindful of my bridgework. For those in my community, I am often utilized as a bridge to power. Malhotra and Pérez (2005) explain that the person acting as a bridge to power runs the risk of potentially embodying and reifying the power structure she is bridging to. As a member of the Global North- specifically an American- I have the possibility to embody western power and hegemony. As a PCV, it is my duty to provide technical assistance to my community, and without knowing anything about me as an individual, many in my community, my *mudira* included, assume that my role is to teach English, due to the belief that knowing English is a pathway to success; whether success is found in terms of employment or perhaps even migration to America itself. The consequences of the beneficiary of my bridge work are very real, as well as incredibly saturated in Western neo-liberal ideology. I struggled throughout my first year living and working in Ouarzazate, whether it was the occasional neighbor, asking me to tell them how they can travel to America, or my *mudira* insisting I teach more English classes.

Peace Corps encourages volunteers to perform some sort of community analysis tool, also known as a stakeholder engagement activity in community development. At the women's center, I immediately started teaching a basic fitness class, taking over for the volunteer I replaced. I had no idea what I was doing, and I wasn't even sure if the women enjoyed fitness, not to mention I was under extreme pressure by my *mudira* to begin teaching an English class. Many of the women were illiterate and so I decided to learn their interests by substituting their normal fitness routines with alternate styles of fitness- yoga, dance aerobics, outdoor fitness class- and engaging in one-on-one conversations with different women after classes about their

interests or what they felt was important to learn. My biggest take away was that the women loved fitness class; they loved the way they felt after a fitness class, they appreciated having a safe space to exercise, since it is not common nor necessarily appropriate for a woman to exercise in public, and most importantly- I believed- the women expressed interest in learning about health and healthy behaviors they previously hadn't ever learned about. One day after fitness class or *Riyada* in Darija, I ask the class, "Okay, so are we ready to begin English class next week? Which day is best?" The women's heads whipped to my direction, and I felt a hand grab my arm. "English? Will we still have riyada?" one woman asks, as another exclaims, "You can't cancel riyada! What about yoga? Is that canceled too?" With assurance that the fitness and yoga classes were not canceled, but rather a single English class was added to their schedule the women settled their nerves and returned to the sewing room. However, Aicha, a young woman who brings both desired energy and undesired distraction to my classes, asked me *why* they were going to learn English. I explained that Zobida, the center's mudira told me to teach English, and with a click of her tongue and a shrug of her shoulders Aicha responded, "*lli Zobida bghat* (whatever Zobida wants)"

Despite volunteering in the Peace Corps Youth in Development sector, all volunteers in Morocco are more or less trained in English teaching. We do not receive TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certification, and we are even instructed to explain that we are not certified English teachers. During our orientation week in Rabat we learn "what is youth development" and become to understand the purpose of life-skills programs to implement into our community centers. According to Peace Corps itself, the Youth Development program doesn't even directly address English; on the "What Volunteers Do" page on the official Peace Corps Website it states, "Volunteers work with youth in communities to promote engagement

and active citizenship, including gender awareness, employability, health and HIV/AIDS education, environmental awareness, sports and fitness programs, and information technology (Peacecorps.gov).” Meanwhile, volunteers are encouraged to teach English due to the English Education program tests in the Moroccan school system, and as a simple way to introduce oneself and programming into a community. Of course, if there is a local demand for English in my workplace, I would teach English. However, I was faced with a dilemma of sorts; the women- the community I am to serve- did not want nor need English education but the director of the center demanded English to be taught. Even when discussing the issue with my Regional Manager (an in-country Peace Corps affiliated supervisor), it was made clear to me that I had to please the director, because without her cooperation and pleasure Peace Corps won’t be invited to return to the community.

At a neighbor's house breaking-fast during Ramadan 2018 I found my opportunity and ultimately my focus for my service. Mina is a soft-spoken woman. In Morocco, she would be considered “*hadga*,” or hard-working. At the time, her sons were 8 and 2, and from the moment she woke up she was taking care of her boys, her husband, and her husband’s family- which included his parents, and his 3 adult (but unmarried) brothers. Every day she would mop the floors; flooding the stairwell of her building and pushing the water through hallways with a squeegee. This was the first night in Ramadan that I had broken fast with her, and I honestly couldn’t remember the last meal I had with her prior. Our conversations are never too lively, mostly we bonded through awkward giggles and embarrassed smiles. This time, however, she is asking me a million questions; “How many siblings do you have?” “How old was your mother when she gave birth to you and your sister?” “Did she eat anything crazy?” Eventually she tells me that she is pregnant, of course I congratulate her. It was after this moment that she confided

in me, “I don’t want to be pregnant. I don’t want more children I’ve had enough; my body is tired.” I gave her a solemn look, she continued, “But it doesn’t matter what I want, if God wills it, it will be.” Her eyes were staring at the floor with a look of exasperation, but quickly she looks at me and with a smile-so sudden it was as if she snapped back into reality- she said, “I hope I have a girl.” The next August I am invited back to her house, and I am greeted by the whole family. Mina walks over to me with her mop in hand and her body swollen and gives me a big kiss. She leads me into her bedroom where I find her newborn twin girls.

My Ramadan conversation with Mina that opened my eyes to the need of my community: health education. I was already engaging the women at the center in building healthy habits and behaviors when it came to the activities and discussions in my fitness and yoga classes, but after a few more conversations with friends, I learned that comprehensive health education- specifically women’s health education was lacking. I asked some fellow volunteers in Morocco if they knew of any health classes or clubs and luckily a volunteer told me that she had developed a health content-based English curriculum. Immediately I recognized that this was the solution to my English-teaching dilemma. My *mudira* embraced this class fully, and I felt relieved to be rid of the pressure of not fulfilling her demands. Not only did this health-thru-English class come from my conversation with Mina, but I became determined to provide sexual and reproductive health education to the women in my community. As the school year started, I began to develop a women’s sexual and reproductive health curriculum with the help of two other PCVs.

As a development worker from the Global North, and the ultimate seat of western hegemony-America, I have implicit bias and can unfortunately embody this power structure, as I have previously detailed. While this application of embodiment is done unto me on the part of

my Moroccan counterpart, I can hinder the reification of the power structure through intentional actions observant to opportunity for sustainable work. Bridging to power is unstable and unsustainable. Crossing this bridge may lead to an unfulfilled hope of migration to the U.S. or an English class abruptly ending unless there is another volunteer to refill the position. Honestly, even my fitness and yoga classes are unsustainable; there is no guarantee that after I leave Ouarzazate another person will lead fitness classes at the local *Nedi Neswi*. Working with the bridge of power has the faculty to lead to a resurrected, modern edition of the White Man's Burden. Bridging to consciousness has a greater capacity to lead to sustainable change. This bridge work is often done in classrooms, institutions, personal relationships or mentoring roles (Malhotra & Pérez,2005). A bridge to consciousness can be the most transformative since consciousness cannot be taken away if the bridge has disappeared. This bridge is also extremely equitable due to the reciprocal nature of consciousness transference. Using the metaphor of a bridge, on the bridge to power there is a gate with a security guard, and without a guest pass one cannot gain entrance, whereas on the bridge to consciousness there is open access, one just needs an available bridge- or according to Malhotra and Pérez, a facilitating ally. Women and I learned from each other; I gained a deeper understanding of the multidimensional struggle of women, and how to best serve communities, and the women in-turn gained greater perspective of their capabilities, knowledge of their bodies. Traveling back and forth the bridge of consciousness we were each other's allies, we joined our differences and similarities and transformed them into solidarity.

There is a third bridge, the bridge to community, or to people within a community. Malhotra and Pérez (2005) use the example of an African American woman, acting as a bridge for a white woman to gain access the African American community for personal, political, or

research reasons. For me, I found that Peace Corps acting as my bridge into the Moroccan community for the purposes of international development. This metaphor becomes more physical when considering Peace Corps provided me with my international flight to Morocco, language training, and even negotiated a work placement on my behalf. Without international development agencies like Peace Corps, those who wish to facilitate development abroad have much greater difficulty. Luckily there is great personal agency within Peace Corps, and so it indeed acts as a bridge to our host communities rather than the bridge, the train, and the passenger. Peace Corps doesn't do development, the volunteer does. True sustainable- as well as feminist- development goes further, and is truly owned by the community, where the community develops, and the volunteer or development-worker is simply a catalyst. I was able to use Peace Corps as an integrational tool, since it provided me with legitimacy. I used this bridge to community until I felt a part of my community enough that my legitimacy was not dependent upon it. The longer I lived in Ouarzazate, and the more I integrated, my relationships supported me enough that I was known as "Rania" first, and "Peace Corps Volunteer" as second.

This day in age our bridges and relationships can last longer than those of Peace Corps volunteers in the past. Due to technology and social media not only may they last longer, but they perhaps may shift and take a new form as either part grows, moves, or changes themselves. The development work that I partook in during my volunteer service was not grand, not quite a physical structure, and it isn't likely that I will ever witness the change that may come from my service work. However, both volunteer and development work aren't truly sustainable if it is not possible to remove oneself without creating a grand disturbance. I have found that while integrating into my community and working in the development of it as well, I have been caught in a precarious position. Luckily due to the ability to connect over social media my relationships



transcend physical space, minimizing the disturbance of my departure. Utilizing the metaphor of bridges, as outlined by Malhotra and Pérez (2005), gave me the vocabulary to best articulate my understanding of my development experience. Navigating my place in both a development agency and a new (foreign) community, furnished an opportunity to critically analyze my concepts of feminism, development and the relationship between the two. Following the transnational feminist praxis, allowed me to “practice what I preach,” so to say, which expanded my knowledge of inequality and empowerment, thus deepening my sense of feminist consciousness.

## CONCLUSION

Integration is a crash course in the dialectical nature of living. “Creating a sense of home implies mediating these kinds of boundaries with other identity markers, such as class, gender, ethnicity and age (De Bree et. al., 2010).” Identity markers hold value, and this value in Sociology is generally understood as resulting from the societal structure one belongs in. When I moved to Morocco, I was directly confronted with an unfamiliar value system assigned to my identity markers, and so in order to create a sense of home, or where I belonged in my community, I had to mediate, or negotiate, my boundaries. My boundaries refer to my relationships with others, or ontologies. It was through documenting my process of negotiation-written and voice-journals and blogs- and their analysis that I discovered the hot-spots of my experience; or most sensitive issues I came into contact. These hot-spots I have discussed, were time, space, and language and doing development.

Existing in such a liminal space, I found analyzing time space and language to be quite difficult. I felt as though I felt part of a whole in more than one space but couldn’t exist in them all at the same time. Through my Peace Corps service, I was constantly teetering on either side

of the fence; Moroccan or American time, or English or Darija. This always depended on who I was engaging with or where I was at that moment. On top of this, I felt pulled in two different directions between the expectations of Peace Corps and my community. The unifying matter of how I made sense out of environments and relationships, as well as working in development, was gender. Whether it was my gender, or the gender of those I worked with, it was ultimately through gender that I processed my experiences with time, space language, and how I navigated through the seemingly contradictory expectations of Peace Corps and my community regarding work. Ontologically speaking, I had to understand who I was in relation to others, in order to make decisions about how I was going to live and find belonging in my community. Nothing arises out of a vacuum, and when I had my profound experiences with time, space, language and development I utilized gender as a means to make sense out of them, and through this sense making- I learned where my place was, and how I fit into my community. Ultimately, I found that carved out a space for myself, rather than fitting in; leading me to believe that creating a sense of belonging is more about creating a space for yourself rather than asking for people to make room for you.

Moving abroad for such a time was motivated and facilitated by a volunteer service with the U.S. Peace Corps. Working within a development agency required me to be cognizant of agency-wide goals, rules, and restrictions as well as country-specific goals, rules, and restrictions. This service experience provided me an opportunity to add a practicum aspect to my analysis. This practicum was guided by the transnational feminist praxis as outlined by Swarr and Nagar (2010). This praxis has a foundation in women's agency within oppressive institutions or systems, and while Peace Corps and living in Morocco provided amazing opportunities to create relationships, and work in community development, it also guided and constrained my

behaviors and actions in repressive and oppressive ways. To circumvent a potential to lean into my implicit biases due to my social privileges, I worked to engage feminist praxis and deepen my sense of feminist consciousness.

In feminist development the navigation of individuals' personal development goals with those of the institution or state (Swarr & Nagar, 2010) is a central focus. My experience showed me that to achieve long-term or sustainable development, a compromise or negotiation between community need and institutional goal is necessary. I was trained in, encouraged, and pressured to teach English by the development agency as well as my center director. However, the community, specifically the women in my community didn't need or desire English instruction but rather they expressed the need for health education. Their expressions came to me through their anxiety over the potential cancellation of fitness classes, and the confession of an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy. Through my interactions with my community, especially the women in my community, I gained greater perspective of the consequences faced by women globally and adjusted my actions as a community developer in response.

“For all of us, and perhaps even for each of us, there will be many ‘feminist consciousnesses’ (Stanley & Wise, 1993:123).” To me, this refers to the deepening of my feminist consciousness. Despite my education in Anthropology and Sociology, I had only ever experienced life in a westernized, Globally Northern country prior to moving to Morocco. Facilitated by Peace Corps, I now have experienced life in an Islamic, Globally Southern country. Through my deliberate engagement of a transnational feminist praxis, and by virtue of experiencing with- and interacting within- an unfamiliar societal system I have had the opportunity to change my feminist consciousness to a deeper, global, rather transnational, feminist consciousness. Understanding of life is limited by one's interactions with the world

around them. When my interactions expanded to include my experiences in Morocco, my understanding of both myself and others expanded as well. I find that the dialogue between myself and time, space, language and development is based on seeing the big in the little; it wasn't until I focused my analysis so small- only me and my experiences- did I gain greater insights on the way grander social schematics work.

Through my analysis of time, space, language, and doing development I gained greater understanding of my relationships in my community, as well as my relationship with myself. The opportunity to perform autoethnographic work provided me with mechanisms to cope. By journaling I was able to review and relive emotions and memories. Along with astute observation, I then gained greater perspective to the position of myself and of women in a multifaceted way that I don't think could be gathered if not by a lengthy migratory experience. Much of my strategy to make sense of the world around me was to tear down expectations from my Americanized self. Relearning from a Moroccan perspective proved difficult, but not impossible, and proved to be necessary in doing my development work sensitively and sustainably. Navigating myself through a labyrinth of institutions and social forces was predicated upon my relationships and sense-making of the world around me. My experience as a Peace Corps volunteer- the sense-making and the navigation- combined with my personal foundation in feminist epistemology, were main factors in the raising of my feminist consciousness. Not until my analysis did I find that my research questions were like a staircase; each step leading me upwards towards a goal of contributing to the unfinished project of Feminism, towards understanding the ways women give and receive in the world.

## APPENDIX

Image 1.

Map of Morocco (Internationally recognized borders; excl. Moroccan Sahara). Point 1 displays location of Pre-service training site, Nzala Bni Amar. Point 2 denotes location of permanent site of Ouarzazate.



Image 2.

Map of Ouarzazate; full city limits. Point 1 shows location of *Nedi Neswi*; Point 2 shows location of Oued Dahab Neighborhood.

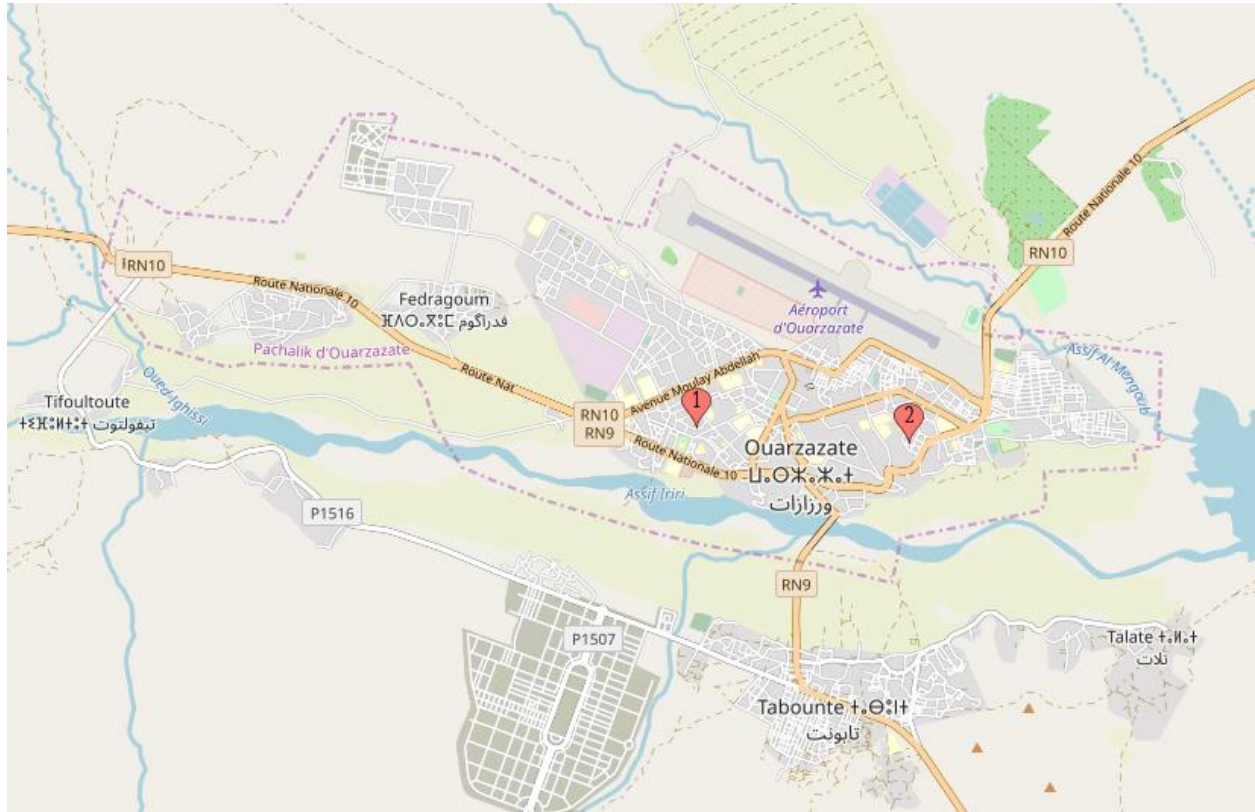


Image 3.

Map of center neighborhoods of Ouarzazate. Point 1 shows location of *Nedi Neswi*; point 2 and red better displays the neighborhood of Oued Dahab.



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