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The Female Worker:

An Analysis of Women Residing along the Moroccan-European and U.S.- American

Borderlands

Marlen G. Renderos

SIT: Fall 2019: Morocco: Migration and Transnational Identity

Abstract

My independent research project is a comparative study focusing on women experiences among the Mexican-U.S. borderlands and Moroccan-European borderlines. For the Mexican-U.S.American context, I will focus on females maquiladora workers and stay-at-home wives. For the Moroccan-European context, I will focus on the *mujeres mulas*—women mules. My paper will discuss the ways in which society and governments run under a male-dominated lens contributing to the placement of women in vulnerable positions.

The Female Worker: An Analysis of Women Residing along the Moroccan-European and U.S.
American Borderlands

Introduction

My following topic became of interest to me after one of my class visits to an non-governmental organization in Martil, Morocco. I was shocked to learn about the situation of women being exploited for cheap labor. Among the borderlines of Morocco, Moroccan women from the specific northern areas are able to cross into Spain and back. Because of this, many women are hired to carry goods to and from Spain. By having these goods carried, the wholesalers avoid taxes. Many of these women, known as las mujeres mulas, are in need of work. Therefore, wholesalers take advantage and increase their profit by paying them so little. The organization I visited was personally working hard to fight for these women and their rights. What stood out to me when speaking with the representatives of the organization was how they have not discovered any other similar places in the world where something like *las mujeres* mulas takes place. Therefore, they are left without much guidance on how to combat and end this exploitation. This made me ponder in what similar or different ways are women experiencing borderlands throughout the world. Since much of my prior knowledge on migration comes from the American continent context, I decided to pursue this paper doing a comparative study among women in the Mexican borderlines to those in the Moroccan borderlines. Women and their experiences have historically been hidden from the migration discourse for so long that studies such as these help highlight those experiences. To pursue this fieldwork, I decided to interview two organizations and three individuals. One organization is a U.S. based, while the other is

Moroccan based. Two of the three individuals are volunteers who provide basic amenities and religious services to a border town in Mexico. The third individual is a scholar and professor focusing on gender and migration in Morocco. For this paper, I will first provide a literature review. Then, I will present my fieldwork process and challenges. Next, my findings and conclusion will follow. I will end the paper with a discussion on the limitations to this study and recommendations for further study.

Literature Review

Gender Dynamics within Mexico and Morocco

The United Mexican States, or better known as Mexico, remains a country rooted in patriarchy. Such male institutional authority is reflected all throughout Mexican society from politics, economy, to familial and sexual relations as stated by Juan Jose Bustamante in his article journal, "Transnational struggles: policy, gender, and family life on the Texas-Mexico Border". This patriarchal domination is often culturally referred to as *machismo*. *Machismo* is most basically defined as strong or aggressive masculine pride. However this definition hides the toxicity of how this type of behavior and livelihood can impact everyone in society. Out of *machismo*, comes *Marianismo*, which essentially outlines the role of women within a *machista* society. An ideal woman is saintly, good, moral, and self-sacrificing. Of course, women are not in complete subordination to men in the Mexican context. Many scholars argue that Mexican women use income as a tool to "unsettle established patterns of gender relations" (Bustamante, 2014). However, others claim that women's integration into the labor market and increase of income highlights the inequality experienced by gender. Similar to Mexico, Morocco is rooted in a patriarchal society. Women make up a small percentage within parliament and local

government. However, there are many organizations, communities, and individuals working on improving the gender rights. Seeing as to how this is the context for Mexico and Morocco, it is important to analyze how living in the borderlands challenges or reinforces the traditional gender dynamics of the rest of the country.

Gender Dynamics within Migration

Existing literature analyzes the notion of gender attitudes in accordance with home or destination countries for migrants. A study done by Pessin and Arpino concludes that first generation migrants hold onto the cultural context of their home country, while second generation migrants and child migrants associate a stronger relationship of cultural attitudes with the destination country. The following study also finds the possibility that immigrants, specifically adult immigrants, adapt their values and attitudes of the destination culture (regardless of length of stay at destination country). However, it may also conclude that adult migrants go to countries of their similar belief and gender attitudes. Therefore, gender dynamics may change when people situate themselves in a new location. But in what ways does the location of living near a border influence the experience of gender without necessarily crossing the other side?

Feminization of Migration

"The redefinition of gender roles in immigrant women: the importance of local spaces in global processes" reflects on the role of the female within the discourse of migration. Gomez and Yoldi's article reports on the gender notions of the "migrant woman". This article's introduction offers a great summary and insight into the feminization of migration and the role of the "migrant women". Meanwhile, articles published by Caritas presents how migration has been

coined as a male phenomenon, including the discussion of how the feminization of migration parallels with the feminization of poverty and the feminization of work. The term feminization of migration holds the connotation of the negative issues regarding migration for women such as categorizing these women as all domestic workers and/or victims of money and sexual exploitation. Such connotation hides the reality that an "increasing number of women migrating as breadwinners, make the feminization of migration more tangible" (Caritas). The following articles offer a great account of the ways in which academia and society overall generalize the "migrant women". Hence, how do perceptions of the migrant women further perpetuate the violence and exploitative nature of how society and governments treats Mexican women residing on the borderlines and *las mujeres mulas*.

Border Politics

Since the late 1990s, Spain has increased its border security with implementations of new radar, thermal camera, and night-vision equipment which ultimately militarizes the borderlands. Much of the strict border security stems from Spain's desire to prove to other states and itself that they belong as past of the European Union (EU). This national identity to feel like they are within the "ins" of the EU and fear of being ostracized as the "other" stems down to the way that many border agents interact with *las mujeres mulas*. Likewise, in the U.S.-Mexican context, the securitization of the borders has also increased. The lands have become militarized with high technological weapons used by agents to keep the lands "secure" and "protected". Across both regions, migration has been translated into a security issue. Governments are constantly trying to emphasize militaristic protection. Yet, as Banerjee assesses, "unless these insecurities are addressed, no amount of border fencing can make the region secure" (2010). Such insecurities

she references are "our traditional efforts to make geopolitical regions more secure are nothing but attempts to privilege a masculine definition of security that result in only feminine insecurities"(2010). Therefore, we must understand not only the ways these government, as masculine entities, produce and perpetuate vulnerabilities for women residing along border lines in both the American and African regions.

Role of Civil Societies

It is also important to analyze the way that civil organizations around the borderlands are working to fight the violence that such government entities bring to the area. Bickham's and Naples' article, although centered on women run organizations in the Indian borderlands, still brings insight into how civil societies, specifically women run organizations, in the Moroccan-Spanish borderlands have the possibility of combatting the violence that governments and government representatives produce through their policies and actions.

Gender and Policing

Regarding policing, it is important to understand the ways in which gender is experienced and understood within these forces. Historically, policing has been a male-dominated field.

Policing environments produce and thrive in a "hegemonic masculinity" bubble. This "hegemonic masculinity" produces an elimination of those who do not conform to the "brotherhood", which is why women and feminine men are less likely to become part of or survive the police force. Therefore, it is important to consider how this masculine environment creates certain behavior towards civilians; specifically women and migrants.

Commercial Activities along the Border

Along borders, commercial activity is a bustling economy. In the Moroccan context, women trans-border migrants, often referred to as *mujeres mulas*, present this daily commerce. The *mujeres mulas* are women who cross the Moroccan-Spanish border daily carrying over

hundred pound cargos with goods so business can avoid taxing fees. These women are not paid adequately and often experience harassment from law enforcement. In Mexico, after the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreements (NAFTA), maquiladoras, or factories were set up all along the Northern Mexican borders where companies could benefit from cheap labor and the elimination of tariffs. Many people from other parts of Mexico emigrated to the north sectors in order to obtain jobs at these maquiladoras. Similarly to las *mujeres mulas*, many of these workers are from rural communities with limited socio-economic opportunities.

Methodology

My approach to my independent student research project was to interview organizations who provide education and services within the borderlands of each region. Besides speaking to representatives of the respective organizations, I also interviewed three individuals who through their church provide services to mostly women and their children. The reason as to why I specifically chose these individuals/organizations to interview is because my topic surrounds a vulnerable population. I am an undergraduate student and am not qualified enough to interview certain people without imposing on certain triggers and creating an unsafe environment for the interviewees. The first two individuals work in Tijuana, Mexico. The third individual is a professor and scholar who focuses on gender dynamics and women in Morocco. The U.S. based organization is located in Tucson, Arizona, however, they work along both sides of the line throughout the Mexican-Arizona border. The second organization is located in Martil, Morocco, near the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. I chose the U.S. organization because I had previously done a week-long education program with them. This program was dedicated to bringing awareness to

the Arizona-Mexican borderlands and enacting social change for the fight on migration justice.

The second organization, I had the fortunate ability to visit with my class. We visited the organization to learn about ways in which women-run non-profits are providing for those women in their community.

After deciding on who I wanted to interview, my next step was to figure out my questions. I struggled deciding how to ask certain questions. I wanted it to be broad enough so my interviewees had space to answer and say as much as possible and as much as they wanted. However, then my questions were too broad. With the help of my advisor, I was able to solidify my questions. During my interviews, I was able to ask more questions as the interviewees informed me more and more about their work and organizations. Other challenges I faced was overall just setting up the interview, which I will discuss in further details later throughout my paper.

Findings

*Note: For identity protections, I will be using fake names.

**Trigger Warning: mention of violence and abuse in the interviews

Interview #1 [Monica]:

- Works with youth in Tijuana, many of these youth are very different from youth in the U.S.,
- these youth by ages 12 and 13 are already parents, many of these kids struggle to feed their children
- Individual has been working in this community for 3-4 years, 2 Saturdays every month
- Provide religious education to adults, provide advice classes for teenagers and youth
- After the bible study classes, an event (such as a movie night with food) is held, after the event, people are free to take from the donations provided

- Provides food, blankets, clothing, other basic necessities
- A limit on how many items an individual can take depending on how much Monica and other volunteers have brought
- Only one individual from the family, usually the mother, is allowed to go and choose
 what items they want, reasoning: if the kids go, then they will grab more than what's
 allowed, also it keeps the process more organized by only having one person from each
 family go
- The majority of people coming for these services are women
- Men do not come because of "orgullo"/ "pride", as told by Monica the men's viewpoint is that they don't need these clothes, they can get the clothing elsewhere
- Population that is served: babies seniors, currently 4 13-year olds who are mothers,
 mostly mothers who bring their kids
- Men in that specific community are machistas
- **Trigger Warning**
 - In some cases, these men tell their wives they are not allowed to go, yet these
 women still go to the bible study and go pick up donations, when they arrive
 home the husbands will verbally and physically abuse both the mother and
 children
- Some cases, women have to ask for permission to be able to attend the services and events put on by Monica and her fellow volunteers
- A few men do attend the sessions however they are distrustful, 2 elderly men who go more often than not
- Where they work is at a village near the main city of TIjuana, Mexico
- In this village, men tend to be working while wives remain at home doing housework
- The families make anywhere from \$10-\$20 a week; however, families have many kids to feed so money is tight
- The women who do work tend to be single mothers or elderly women

Interview #2: [Robert]

- Goes and works in Tijuana in order to spread the word of God, believes that a life with God can help the youth become better decision makers and not do drugs or have sex relations at an early age
- Has been working in Tijuana for 3 years, two Saturdays a month, in the middle of the month and at the end of the month
- About 180 people in the village near Tijuana attend the services
- Robert's goal: for people to learn to have a relationship with God, not a religion
- Provide one bag of food for each family (food includes: rice, beans, oil, pasta, sugar),
 also provide clothes, blankets, and whatever is needed, each time they bring different
 items
- Women usually attend, each with about 4 children
- For every 9 women that go, there is 1 man
- "Men do not want to go because they don't want to talk about their wrongdoings" Robert
- "Wrongdoings" referring to men spending money out with friends, going out with other women besides their own wife
- Some women go because they have been abandoned by their husbands, they go for spiritual reasons but also material reasons, they need food, clothing, and other basic necessities
- Married women attend, but their husbands don't, it is rare for couples to go
- "If men go, they are usually a lot older. They are no longer working, so they are now looking for God." Robert

Interview #3: [Moroccan Organization]

Unfortunately, I was unable to interview a representative of this organization. One of the difficulties of this field work is that at times, organizations are unable to respond and agree to have an interview with you. Of course, this happens for various reasons. Despite being upset, I also understood that organizations such as this one are busy organizing and providing for their

community. However, I was able to visit their organization throughout the semester. During the meeting, two representatives of the organization did a presentation on what their work is about. Later, there was a Q &A session where I and other fellow peers were able to ask them more in detail about their work. I will provide my notes from that session down below with a follow-up analysis. Note these notes are my personal notes and at times may not be as clear to others, but me.

- Wenf = violence
- Law 103-\(\frac{1}{3}\)?, shortcomings
- Have a listening center, human resources, and financial resources
- Lawyer comes every week to provide judicial consultation
- Have a social assistance worker for women
- Part of a greater network (12-RA- Insistence, Resistance, Resilience,) that helps women across Arab countries
- Organization provides help to other organizations that have similar goals (an example would be another organization located in Tanzania)
- Campaign coming soon Tetouan, Agadir, Marakesch, + 2 Caravan including theatre, raising awareness, meetings in public schools also targeting rural population and tribes and focus on law that does not provide enough rights for women (Law 103-1)
- Strategy to get known- go door to door
- Some women are afraid to visit the organization because of stigma and shame
- Lawyers do intakes, legal services are free
- 10% of moroccan parliament are women
- Levels of change (can't remember what exactly this list refers to, but basically the levels of change they want to go through as objectives of the organization)
 - o 1. Moroccan Law
 - o 2. Religious level
 - 3. Local male dominated-mentality

- Local mass media backlashed the organization
- Women mentality violence not a crime so not likely to take their case to court
- No legal framework for crossing of Moroccan women
- Working as transporters
- Women also harassed by spanisha nd moroccan police, no legality in situation so can't even fight it in court
- An issue particularly in this region in the worlds, no other case (such as the US-Mexico line)
- How do you regulate the crossing?
- They are asking the government to provide an alternative economic activity
- Those who get the true profit are the Moroccan and Spanish wholesalers
- Exploited by a men on both sides
- These items are not taxed
- This organization does not receive any funding from Moroccan government or Moroccan agencies

Interview #4 [U.S. organization]: Still awaiting response

I was in contact with this organization for five weeks. Because they are located in the U.S. and I am unable to physically visit their organization, an email interview seemed like the best option for the representative of the organization. Unfortunately, I am still waiting for the responses to my questions. However, I had previously done a week-long education program with them which provided me knowledge about the Arizona-Mexico border lines. This previous knowledge helped guide me through my research.

Interview #5 [Janis]: Still awaiting response

Conclusions

The following findings present the *machismo* that lives with Mexican households. Many of these husbands are too prideful to go and receive the donations, despite desperately needing them for their families. Usually the wives stay at home where, "housework is not [free labor]; it

is women's work" (Bustamante 2014). Through their identity these women are stuck in a bubble unrecognized as possible providers for their families because all they do is "women's work". However, living among these lines the women are left with no choice but to attend these sessions and get these donations in order to provide for their families. These women are contributors to their households, yet they remain unrecognized. Receiving help is shameful within a machista culture, yet these women are doing what their husbands do not have the guts to do. In some families, the women are on their own: "Some women go because they have been abandoned by their husbands, they go for spiritual reasons but also material reasons, they need food, clothing, and other basic necessities" (Monica). They are disrupting the notion that only men are usually the head of the household. However, the government continues to practice with this belief. If the government began considering the possibility that not every family is patriarchal, then maybe the government would invest more onto programs or opportunities for these women to better their and their families' socio-economic status. Such work would not only benefit women, but the overall family's life. The mere fact that these women have to seek assistance through outside organizations highlights the lack of government care and investment to these women from this particular region. As Banerjee explains, "governments continue to think in 'male categories" (2010). In fact, many of the women in this particular village near Tijuana have told Monica that the government has a lot of money, yet it does not want to invest in them. Therefore, these women are well aware that their value in the eyes of their husbands and government is quite low.

Similar to women located in Tijuana, women in the northern borderlines of Morocco experience stigma, shame, and backlash from their community. In both cases, these women are

shamed for receiving help. Women are stigmatized if they attend the workshops thrown by the Moroccan organization. Similarly, women are shamed by their husbands for going to receive the donations provided by Monica and Robert's group. In some cases, these women and their children face abuse of going. Many of these women also come from backgrounds of limited education and from rural areas. Limited education impedes these women from obtaining other jobs that could provide more financial security for themselves and their families. Yet, similar to in México, "Si el gobierno marroquí eliminará el contrabando, las autoridades tendrían que buscar otras oportunidades de trabajo para nosotros"/ "If the moroccan government eliminated the contraband, then the authorities would have to find other opportunities of work for us" (Mesa, 2011). However, once again, women are must go seek this assistance or work as *mulas* because their respective governments are unwilling to provide more support and create safe, non-exploitative financial opportunities for women.

The location of where these women reside is also an important consideration. Throughout the later half of the 20th century, migration has, "been recognized as a security issue, but with little understanding as to what kind of insecurities are created by securitizing migration. That such securitization affects a large number of women, but is hardly ever recognized in mainstream discourses blurring the gender dimensions of treating migration as an issue of national security" (Banerjee, 2010). Since its beginnings, border patrols worldwide are a mostly a male dominated field similar to most police systems worldwide. In many of these policing agencies, border and non-border focused, "masculine characteristics are assumed to be central to policing roles, are valued and rewarded, and are often exaggerated in terms of their applicability to the job" (Corsianos, 2012). In fact, police work tends to "embody 'hegemonic

masculinity' (Corsianos, 2012). If such a state of masculinity is not only expected but required to fulfill the job of policing then it is important to ask in what ways does over masculinity turn into toxic masculinity and how does this birth or continue certain gender dynamics? Border patrol agents are important to analyze as they also serve as representatives of the government. Many of these border patrol agents perpetrate the exploitation onto these workers. The "moroccan authorities require the women to pay them five dirhams in order to let them pass. In fact, agents fight to work at these frontier posts because their salaries end up doubling with all the extra cash they swindle from the women" (Mesa, 2011). These women are continuously robbed of their money. The agents take advantage of the fact that they control whether or not these women can get to the other side of the border. These agents, as government representatives, are continuously cheapening the labor they do. These women are left with no choice but to give the border agents part of their earnings. Another aspect to consider within this context is that many of these agents tend to be male; heightening certain gender power dynamics. These agents, as representatives of the governments, continuously exploit women located at the border. These governments are so focused on "border security" that they fail to realize that such "traditional efforts to make geopolitical regions more secure are nothing but attempts to privilege a masculine definition of security that result in only feminine insecurities" (Banerjee, 2010).

Similar to Morocco, many women in Mexico working in the borderlands experience exploitation. In the later half of the 20th century, Canada, U.S., and Mexico agreed to the North American Free Trade Agreement, which eliminated taxes on goods between the three nations. Many companies began locating their factories in the northern part of Mexico to take advantage of the more cost-effective labor. Many Mexicans believed NAFTA would bring lots of job

opportunities and prosperity to the region. With the implementation of the maguiladoras, many people from the South of Mexico moved to the northern borderlands believing they would find economic success. Unfortunately, many still struggle with making enough to cover their basic living expenses. Monica's cousin works at a maquiladora. She is always afraid to miss work because even missing just one day sets her back from the week's expenses of maintaining her family. Besides very little payment, many of these women working in the maguiladora experience lots of sexism and misogyny in the workplace. In fact, women are often hidden from the credit-giving process of these companies. For example, in Wright's study of "The politics of relocation: gender, nationality, and value in a Mexican maquiladora", companies often hid the fact that their "All-American" company had Mexican women making their products. In this maguiladora, "they would not only have to concern themselves with the Americanization of the product, they would also have to supervise its masculinity" (1999). Therefore in a company where their whole mantra is "American made" for the "American man", Mexican women as makers of these products become deeply contrasting values. Therefore, they are constantly undervalued as part of this operation, contributing to the exploitation of women among the borderlands. It is also important to consider how many view the simple implementation of women into the workplace as a step towards gender equality and progress, yet, "the marginal position of women in society is largely associated with the unequal structure of the Mexican labor market in which women's work opportunities are limited to low-wage maquiladora industry and many service sectors" (Bustamante, 2014). Therefore, the inequalities are actually highlighted in the workplace. These women, like las mujeres mulas, are undervalued for the work they do.

Among the borderlines, women are erased and undervalued. In Morocco and Mexico, women face shame if they go out and seek help. Women are exploited in their jobs as shown by *las mujeres mulas* and women working in maquiladoras in Mexico. In both cases, governments, as masculine entities, are failing to provide services for these women. Hence, male masculinity continues to disguise all the work and effort women do, especially among the borderlands. Instead, women are continuously abused and exploited by both their male co-workers, by their husbands, by agents, and by the government. Of course, many of these women are strong, hard-working, and continue to practice their agency. Yet, what they experience and face is a result of patriarchal society and government.

Limitations of Study

One of the limitations of this study is being able to interview those who I am writing about. As mentioned earlier, there are various reasons as to why this can not happen. However, not having those perspectives coming from those people themselves perpetuates how migration studies continues to hide women from the discourse. I believe another limitation was time. More research should be done; however, as this is only a four week project, only so much was able to be done. Also, many things were out of my control. Two of my interviews Another point I would like to address is that this study is not trying to generalize the "women" experience along borderlands. Of course, people have various experiences. I am just writing about certain experiences that tend to be popular among the two regions I focused on.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study can also be further depicted by expanding the experiences of various genders among the borderlines. My study maintained a very binary lens; therefore, in order to improve

this study, it is important to analyze how women and other marginalized genders are affected by such masculine states. Another small note would be to possibly do a comparison among the different experiences of women on both sides of each border. More specifically, how do the experiences differ for women on the U.S/ European side versus those on the Mexican/Moroccan side. Along with his comparison, it is also important to consider the intersectionality among the people and how various factors affect how each person experiences gender along the borderlines.

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Appendices

Individuals who work with the communities in the borderlands #1 and #2

- Why do you go to the borderlands? / Porque vas a las fronteras?
- How long have you been going to the borderlands? / Cuanto tiempo tienes de estar yendo a las fronteras?
- What does your work entail? / Que tipo de trabajo haces?
- With what population do you work with?/ Con cuáles poblaciones trabajas?
 - Ouienes son?
- What similarities or differences do you find between the borderlands and your home community? / Hay similarities o differencias entre las fronteras y de donde vives?
- Besides the communities you work with, what are other communities or individuals you encounter in the borderlands?/ Además de las comunidades en que trabajas, con cuales otros comunidades o individuales interaccionan?
 - What are you interactions with them? / Cuales son sus interacciones?
- (What are your likes about the borderlands? / Hay algo que te gusta de las fronteras?
- What are your dislikes about the borderlands? Hay algo que no te gusta de las fronteras? (it is one question)
- Do you see any differences among men/women among the borderlands? Maybe in terms of work?
 - How does this affect the relationships? Or community?
 - Are women working receiving adequate supplies, all they need?
 - How does the government react towards them?
- Is there something you want others to know regarding this topic.

Organization 1.1

- How long have you been working with [org name]?
- What made you want to work with [org name]?
- How is it like working with this type of organization given that it is located in the borderlands?
- Is there any interaction among your organization and ICE or CBP? If there is, how does that interaction play out?
- Given that the majority of CBP/ICE agents are male, in what ways do you think that affects the interactions either your organization or others have with these agents?
- Are there other ways you see gender dynamics playing out in the borderlands? How so?

- I remember doing a market basket workshop and learning about working in maquiladoras from a Mexican family while doing a program at borderlinks. In what ways do you think the implementation of maquiladoras has affected the family unit or gender dynamics in the household?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Organization 1.2

- How long have you been working with [org name]?
- What made you want to work with [org name]?
- How is it like working with this type of organization given that it is located in the borderlands?
- Is there any interaction among your organization and government agencies? If there is, how does that interaction play out?
- Your organizations helps better the lives of women in Morocco. In what specific ways does your organization particularly help las mujeres mulas?
 - How does your organization help sub-saharan women migrants? If not, why not?
- Do men do any of the mula-ing?
- Are there other ways you see gender dynamics playing out in the borderlands? How so? /How do you see that this type of job changes the perception of gender roles or dynamics in the Moroccan context?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Individual #3

- Name?
- What do you do?
- In your own words, how would you describe gender dynamics in Morocco?
- Do you know about las mujeres mules? What do you know about them?[this may be general, so please interpret it how you want]
- Do you think the situation of las mujeres mulas ascribes to the overall gender dynamics of morocco?
- How do you think working in the borderlands affects the livelihood of people residing there?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?