

The Mother-in-law/ Daughter-in-law Relationship in Moroccan Culture

Mohammed Dardar

Chouaib Doukkali University, El Jadida, Morocco

Abstract

This paper reflects on the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship in Moroccan culture. It particularly delves into the micro and macro structural factors that contribute to cementing or poisoning the relationship between the two women. The existing literature has evinced that the mother/daughter-in-law relationship remains restive and agitated in most cases across cultures and geographical locations. Within an Arab world context, the relationship is generally more problematic due to a variety of socio-cultural, economic and educational reasons which have a key role in the shaping of traditional Arab marriages. In Morocco, what has been written on the mother/ daughter-in-law relationship focuses on the negative representation of the mother-in-law in popular culture and how she is the one to blame for causing a restive relationship. This study, however, aims at investigating the factors that bring about such a troubled relationship from the perspective of both the mothers and daughters-in-law. The findings of this study are the results of qualitative data gleaned from 20 respondents (10 mothers-in-law and 10 daughters-in-law) in the El Jadida region.

Key Words: mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, restive relationship, Morocco, Islam, traditional marriage, popular culture, violence.

Introduction

In most cultures, the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is deemed fraught with thorny tension. Whether the two women live in the same household or in separate households, their relationship remains restive. The existing literature across the globe underscores this finding (Tarar, 2012; Brann, 2004; Averick, 2008; Adhikari, 2015; Rew and Gangoli, 2011; Lin and Sun, 2015). Such studies explore the causes and the consequences of this agitated relationship as well as the cultural, social and psychological factors which provide fertile soil to the continuation of this restive mother/daughter-in-law relationship. According to an international study

conducted on hundreds of families over two decades, more than 60 per cent of women admitted the relationship with their female in-law caused them long-term unhappiness and stress (Hill, 2008).

The present study delves into the root causes behind the restive mother/daughter-in-law relationship within a Moroccan context. Specially, the study focuses on the social, cultural, economic, geographical and educational factors which contribute to the cementing or poisoning of this relationship. For the sake of a methodologically fair representativeness, the data of this study is gleaned from both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The goal is to give space

to both parties to speak their voices and tell their stories.

Literature Review

In the Arab World, the mother/daughter-in-law relationship is a serious problem for most families. One explanation for this problem lies in the fact that most couples in Eastern cultures either prefer to or have no choice other than staying with their parents after marriage. This complex situation gives rise to many problems that affect not only the couple, but the family as a whole (Barari, 2011). In fact, when the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law do not get along, the resulting tension affects everyone in the family. Whether it is the father-in-law, son/husband, daughter-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, or children, every family member is affected. Each member of the family sees the situation from his or her own perspective; they bring their own personal history and emotional baggage along. As a result, it is difficult for any of them to remain neutral.

In most mother/daughter-in-law agitated relationships, the son tends to take sides with his mother even when he is convinced that his wife is the victim. The fact that a son must support his mother against his wife has roots in Islamic culture which fervently urges a son to be obedient and devoted to his parents, especially when they attain old age. In the Qur'an, Allah says:

Thy lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them

in terms of honor. And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: My Lord! Bestow on them Thy Mercy as they cherished me in childhood (Quran17: 23-24).

Islam has endorsed respect for parents by their children even if the parents are non-Muslims. They are still parents and gave birth to them and cherished them bearing the same pains and hardships which are faced by Muslim parents. Consequently, in spite of the religious differences, it is the duty of Muslim children to serve and treat them with kindness, respect and devotion. All parents should also be helped financially and should not be given a chance to complain about worldly affairs. If non-Muslim parents strive to convert their children to non-Islamic beliefs, the children are not to follow them, but they are still to be good to the parents. In this regard Almighty God says in Surah Luqman:

And we have enjoined upon man concerning his parents...his mother bore him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Give thanks unto Me and unto your parents. Unto me is the journeying. But if they strive with you to make you ascribe unto Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then obey them not. Consort with *them* in the world kindly, and follow the part of him who repents unto Me. Then unto Me will you return, and I shall tell you what you used to do. (Quran 31:14-15).

Amongst many sayings of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), there is a famous Hadith which tells about a man who came to

the Prophet (PBUH) to seek his advice about taking part in the Holy War (Jihad) with him. The Holy Prophet asked him whether his mother was alive. He answered in the affirmative. The Holy Prophet, then, told him: "Go back home and serve her as if heaven was under her feet." (Ibn-e-Majah, Nasai). Another Hadith evinces that the mother is three times more important than the father. In this Hadith, a man came to the Prophet and said, 'O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship? The Prophet said: Your mother. The man said, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your father. (Bukhari, Muslim).

Thus, it is clear that a mother deserves service, love, submission, obedience and gratitude from the children more than the father. This is because a mother generally makes more sacrifices and endures greater hardships than a father while bringing up the children. She feeds them and takes care of them by sacrificing her comforts in the day and her sleep in the night without any greed or compulsion but only out of sheer love and affection. This is the reason why the Holy Qur'an has given more importance to the mother and stressed upon the children to be more considerate and submissive to her in comparison with the father.

In Moroccan popular culture, the mother's existence in life is seen as a gift from God. She is the source of love, empathy, support and protection. Indeed, there are many folk proverbs and sayings which highlight the very important role of the mother in a

person's life. For instance, a famous popular proverb says: "Ila mat lwalid, twassed rukba; ila matet lwalida, twassed laatba" (if your father dies, pillow your head on your mother's knee; if your mother dies, pillow your head on the threshold). This proverb is very potent in terms of the vital role of the mother. Her existence in life is more important than the father's existence. So, if the father passes away, you still have a mother's knee to take as a pillow. The knee connotes comfort, support, defense, consolation and a refuge to take in critical hard times. A mother, according to this folk proverb, is always at her children's beck and call.

The mother's crucial role is also reflected in the son's marriage. She has a decisive role to play in terms of choosing the son's wife. This decisive role concerns at least most young men. She is the one who arranges everything related to the son's engagement and wedding. Even after marriage, the son is still dependent upon his mother in running his marital life. The mother has the power even to push her son to divorce his wife if the latter is deemed lacking the qualities of a good wife. In a Moroccan context, even highly educated men resort to their mothers when it comes to the issue of marriage. The mother's blessing and approval to the son's choice is very crucial. It is culturally believed that a marriage which happens without the consent of the parents is doomed to failure. It is not surprising to find some people attribute some divorces to lack of parents' blessing and consent to the son's marriage. Thus, the saying that "alli tbaa walidih ma'umru maykhsar" (he who follows his parents will never fail) is

relevant in this context. In other words, one has to listen to his parents' advice regarding marriage issues.

The mother is praised by Moroccan popular culture. There are countless popular songs, folk tales, proverbs and sayings which portray the mother positively. However, this positive picture does not remain when the mother becomes a mother-in-law. To wit, the mother/daughter-in-law relationship is often represented as bad in most cases. In a field study by Houssam and Lamkhanter (2016) on the representation of mother/daughter-in-law relationship in Moroccan popular songs sung by rural women, it is found that this relationship is characterized by conflict, hatred, jealousy and rivalry. In one song, the wife addresses her husband and speaks about his mother, calling her "the enemy". The wife speaks about the arrival of her mother-in-law. This arrival is undesirable because it is going to cause problems, quarrel, discord and disharmony. The song goes thus:

Your mother is coming!
Oh son of the enemy!
Your mother is coming!
Your mother comes to spread quarrel
Your mother comes to sow discord
Your mother comes to sow
misunderstanding
When my mother arrives, the poor lady,
I will prepare pancakes for her
Your mother is coming.
She gets a viper in her basket!
Your mother is coming!
And my mother is going to come as a
mediator!
And my mother is going to be a protectress!

And my mother is coming and will be the
reconciler!

(Houssam and Lamkhanter, 2016, p.176)

In another popular song that is famous among the Dukkali rural women, the wife speaks about her mother and mother-in-law. The singer wishes all good things for her mother; by contrast, she wishes all bad things for her mother-in-law. The song goes thus:

You give my mother! You give my mother!
I want a ram lamb for my mother.

I've bought a beautiful dress (qaftan) and
want to try it on my mother.

You give my mother! You give my mother!
I want a bag full of fleas for his mother (the
husband's mother)

I want an old ewe for his mother.

I want a burning, smoky bathroom for his
mother.

You give my mother! You give my mother!
I've bought a pair of slippers (sharbil) and
want to try it on my mother

There is another popular song in which the wife/singer addresses her mother-in-law, calling her mischievous and 'bucket-like headed' (ras dlu). The singer is straightforwardly outspoken about refusing the existence of the mother-in-law in her life. The song goes thus:

You mother-in-law! You are mischievous.
You mother-in-law! Your head is like a
bucket.

You mother-in-law! You are sour and your
son is sweet.

O My God! I don't want his mother.

I don't want his sister.

I want him alone with tea and pancakes.

You mother-in-law! You mischievous!

What is striking in these lines is that the wife mentions her sister-in-law too. For the wife, both the husband's mother and his sister are trouble makers. Their existence only brings about conflict, discomfort and even family destruction. In Moroccan popular culture, it is believed that both the husband's mother and his sister collaborate and plot against the daughter-in-law. When there is a quarrel between the husband's sister and the wife, the mother-in-law often takes sides with her daughter. This is why the wife expresses her rage and animosity towards her mother-in-law. She wishes her blindness, lameness and even disappearance. She addresses her husband:

I wish your mother will be blind
I wish your mother will be crippled
I wish your mother will be...
I wish your mother will be...
May God make her disappear.

This recalcitrant mother/daughter relationship is also expressed in Western folk culture. According to Volland and Beisie (2014), there are countless folk songs describing how havoc is wreaked for the family due to the hatred which the mother-in-law fuels against the daughter-in-law who has come into her life. Examples of these songs include 'she attempts to poison her son's bride,' 'she sows lethal seeds of discord,' 'she slowly torments her daughter-in-law's body,' and 'she transforms the young woman into a tree and orders her son to cut the tree down.' As for mother-in-law jokes, Davies (2012) writes that the mother-in-law jokes are numerous and have been told for a very long time and they are still going strong today. Most English jokes, for

instance, depict the mother-in-law as ugly, bossy, interfering and generally unpleasant.

In some cultures, the relationship between the two women is more complicated and difficult to deal with. In Taiwanese and Vietnamese cultures, once a woman is married, she has to live with her husband's family. The son's wife has the lowest ranking in these cultures; she must obey, take care of, and show filial piety towards her mother-in-law. More importantly, the daughter-in-law should not question the mother-in-law's decision (Hsu & Huang, 2006; Lin & Sun, 2015). The resulting tension of such violent relationship, Deana Brann writes, affects all family members, including the children who seem to be in a dilemma because they love both their mother and grandmother and they do not understand the issues being played out. What is dangerous is that children learn from the violent relationship between their mother and grandmother and they become violent in their marital life (Brann, 2004).

The existing literature highlights the causes and consequences of a problematic mother/daughter-in-law relationship. Adhikari's recent study, for example, focuses on limerence as the prime cause of conflict (Adhikari 2015). Kerner (2012) finds out that physical proximity may give the mother-in-law a great sense of access and ability to cross boundaries and meddle in the daughter-in-law's private life. If women are in close proximity with their in-laws, they are likely to get prevented from forming a unified and strong bond with their husband. Indeed, living in the same household or in the environs allows frequent contacts between the son's wife and his

mother. Such frequent visits bring about clashes between the two women who may argue over domestic chores or children's upbringing. An Italian study (Wingert, 2009), done by the National Statistics Institute, found that the odds that a marriage will last increase with every hundred yards that couples put between themselves and their in-laws. Italian courts found this evidence so compelling that they have ruled that a wife has the right to a legal separation if her husband is not effective in preventing his mother from "invading" their home.

Therefore, an effective remedy for the mother/daughter-in-law conflict may reside in choosing to live independently and far from the in-laws. Within a Moroccan context, it is undeniable that the couple who live in another city leads a happy, peaceful life. A friend of mine who works in Tan Tan (The South of Morocco) told me that he comes to El Jadida only once a year to spend the summer vacation in his parents' house. "During my stay," he recounted, "my mother and wife don't let a day pass without bickering and arguing over trivial things, so instead of enjoying my summer break in El Jadida, I find myself waiting impatiently for the returning day to Tan Tan."

Living together with the mother-in-law in the same household may not necessarily imply unsatisfactory in-law relationship (Chu Mai Lee, 1992). Instead, living in close proximity with the mother-in-law may have positive results on the daughters-in-law as in the case of new mothers who are facing a critical period of transition to parenthood. This transition experience requires a lot of assistance and support from the mother-in-law who has the necessary skills regarding

mothering. In the Moroccan context, most new mothers rely on the help of their mothers-in law in terms of rearing and other household chores. Working mothers may see the existence of their mother-in-law as a blessing because these working women prefer to leave their kids with a mother-in-law rather than a maid. It is believed that a maid does not fit in the duty of rearing and raising children because she lacks the necessary mothering emotions. By contrast, a mother-in law is deemed to be tender, caring and loving towards her grandchildren no matter how aggressive she may be towards her son's wife.

The existing literature also shows that there is a category of relationships where the daughter-in-law dominates her mother-in-law. Versa-Sanso's study (1999) concludes that in many Indian families social and economic developments are redefining relations between older and younger generations as well as between mothers and daughters in law. Such dominating daughter-in-law phenomenon is emerging in Moroccan culture, especially in families where the son's wife has economic and social power. The Moroccan reality show "Milahbiba" deals with this problem. Many old mothers, who have been thrown by their sons in Elderly Houses, speak out their hearts about the oppressive treatment of their daughters-in-law when they lived in the same household.

All in all, though we do not deny the existence of dominating daughters-in-law and submissive mothers-in-law in our Moroccan culture, it is generally accepted that the large majority of mothers-in-law are dominating their daughters-in-law. Whether

the daughter-in-law lives with her in-laws or not, she is likely to suffer from the squabbling of her mother-in-law. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between a dominating mother-in-law vis-à-vis a submissive daughter-in-law. This relationship is in most cases based on domination, tyranny and chaperoning. Such imbalanced power-relationship has enthralled the attention of researchers across the world. Nationally, Fatima Mernissi writes in her illuminating study, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, that “in a traditional marriage, the mother-in-law is one of the greatest obstacles to conjugal intimacy.” (Mernissi, 1987, p.121) Internationally, Susan S. Davis reported in *Patience and Power: Women’s lives in a Moroccan Village*:

I was surprised to see the harsh manner in which one ordinarily jovial friend treated a new daughter-in-law, ordering her about constantly and never praising but always criticizing her. One wonders if some of this behaviour is motivated by a feeling of retribution for hardships ... The daughter-in-law is expected to endure everything patiently, attempting to do the best she can to prove her worth to the household (Davis, 1983,p.131).

In the same vein, Derdar (2005) finds out in a field study on domestic violence against women in Morocco that only a few daughters-in-law (8%) described their relationship with their mothers-in-law as good, 15% said it was ordinary, and 41% said it was bad (Derdar, 2005).

Methodology

The data of this study was collected through using semi-structured interviews with ten mothers-in-law and ten daughters-in-law. The interviewees were from the El Jadida region. They were randomly selected without considering their social, economic and educational background. Some of them were not living in the same household; however, they were connected with each other on a regular basis. I started with the informants I know, and then these played the role of gatekeepers for reaching other informants, using what is called opportunistic snowball sampling. The interviews lasted between 1 to 2 hours. The questions I asked revolved around how the respondents evaluate their relationship towards their mothers-in-law or their daughters-in-law. What are the causes of tension? What are the consequences? What is the son’s reaction to the conflict?

Most of the interviewees kindly allowed me to record their speech using my smart phone. Those who declined my request to record agreed to let me write down their answers. Indeed, I am deeply grateful to all the respondents for their help and cooperation without which this work would not come into being. Also, the method of observation was of vital importance, for it helped me collect further information related to the research questions.

Findings and Discussion

The relationship from the daughter-in-law’s perspective

Most of the interviewed daughters-in law described their relationship, using words such as bad, aggressive, restive, and bossy. Also, when asked to describe their

relationship with their daughters-in-law, most mothers-in-law used the word 'bad'. Two mothers-in-law, however, said they had a good relationship with their daughters-in-law. Aicha concluded that she loved her son's wife and that they never argued or fought. Halima also said she had the sweetest daughter-in-law. She described their relationship thus: "we are like butter and honey" (hna bhal smen ola'sel), meaning that they have an ideal relationship. The expression 'like butter and honey' connotes comfort, peace, understanding and concord in Moroccan parlance. When I asked these two women whether they lived with their daughters-in-law in the same household, they both answered negatively. This shows that one of the causes of tension between the mother and daughter-in-law is living in the same household.

Most of the daughters-in-law who reported troubled relationships were those who lived with their mothers-in-law. Some of them reported conjugal violence where the mother-in-law was the main cause. They explained that they were occasionally beaten by their husbands because they believed their mothers' cock-and-bull stories. As the following accounts show:

My mother-in-law ('duzti) would tell her son invented stories. She would, for instance, tell him that I was outside the home without permission, or that I spent all the day sleeping around while she was doing housework. She would sometimes act foolishly. One day she came in the kitchen behind my back and added much salt to the dish. The food I was cooking was spoiled. My husband, who was expecting some guests,

got enraged and beat me almost to death. (Aziza, 35 years)

The problem is not with my husband; the problem is with his mother. In the house we are like cat and mouse. I don't know why she hates me so much although we are relatives. She usually provokes her son into beating me. She has recently sowed dissension between us by telling him that I was out without taking permission. "look, you have got to correct her, or you're not my son," she said. I received a great deal of violence that day. (Halima, 28 years)

I squabbled with my mother-in-law one day and she got very angry. When her son came home, she told him a completely distorted story. She informed him that I had been sleeping all the day and that I hadn't done my domestic tasks. That wasn't true. As usual, I cleaned the house, baked the bread, cooked the lunch meal, did the laundry, milked the cows, fed the bulls and dusted the stables. I did all these alone, while she [the mother-in-law] and her daughter Halima were watching my toiling. After lunch, I felt exhausted and took a short nap. You see, just a short nap. But she made a mountain out of a molehill (dart men lhaba quba) ; she told her son I had been sleeping all the day. I tried to defend myself by telling him the truth, but he was already too fiery to listen. He grabbed me by the throat and started to hit me as hard as he could, meanwhile la'duza (the mother-in-law) was watching. (Aicha, 42 years)

According to Aziza, Halima and Aicha, the physical and psychological violence they went through was caused by their mothers-in-law who reported lies, and therefore

instigated the husband to react with violence. This is because, as we said in the literature review, the son is required by religion and popular tradition to show respect, obedience and support to his mother whatsoever. Even when the son knows that his mother is to blame, he would say to his wife: “what shall I do? She is my mother; you must be patient. Do you want me to be called mother disobedient (maskhut mu).” In our culture, the expression ‘maskhut mu’ is derogatory. If someone is called ‘mother disobedient,’ this means he privileges his wife over his mother. Such behaviour is deemed a sin against the mother. It goes without saying, hence, that a son who listens to, obeys, cares for and takes side with his mother is religiously and culturally acclaimed and labelled ‘mother obedient’ (mardi mu). Nevertheless, his wife will call him ‘wald mu’ (son of his mother). This label has a negative connotation, for it demonstrates that he is still dependent on his mother. In such a social context, the wife of ‘wald mu’ does not feel she is married to a man who has the full freedom he needs to run his marital life.

The violent incidents reported above concern those daughters-in-law who live in the same household with their-mothers-in-law. Some cases, however, indicated that even when a wife lives independently, she cannot escape the mother-in-law’s trouble making: “when we are without her, everything goes all right; but when she visits us, quarrels with my husband start.” Conjugal quarrels will also arise when the couple goes to spend a holiday with the husband’s parents. A woman, who came from the city to spend her summer holiday

with her-in-laws in the country, said: “my husband and I always come to spend the summer holiday here. But, to tell you the truth, I don’t enjoy staying here due to my mother-in-law’s constant brutal treatment.” I asked this woman about her husband’s reaction and she replied thus:

I’m always the one to blame for any dispute. Even when sometimes he has no scruples about my innocence, he takes sides with his mother. If I protest, he will thump me and say at the end, “what shall I do? She is my mother and I must venerate her anyway. (Zouhra 38)

The mother-in-law’s harsh treatment may reach its peak if the wife is supposed to be a “ sag’a” (omen of bad luck). A bride is deemed “sag’a ” if some mishap befalls the in-laws after her arrival. Among the things the mother-in-law must do to stop other future misfortunes are forcing the son to divorce and using witchcraft:

My mother-in-law calls me “sag’a ”. She thinks I’m the cause of all the misfortunes that struck the family after my wedding. One day she said to her son: “look at her feet! How big they are! They can’t be a good woman’s feet. These feet are bringing us bad luck.” I’ve been suffering because of my feet. Is it true that big feet cause bad luck? I will be divorced if my mother-in-law keeps complaining about my feet. (Barka 43 years)

Another newly-married woman related:

In this village, people seem to relate bad luck and good luck to the bride. If she brings with her good luck, she is to be considered ‘mabruka’ (omen of good luck). By contrast, she is to be regarded “sag’a ” if some bad

luck strikes her in-laws. I've been called the latter name since the death of my brother-in-law Bouchaib, who died young in a road accident. Since then, my mother-in-law Rhanou has been venting her rage on me. She thinks I'm a bad omen in the family. One Friday evening, she tore off a piece of cloth from my dress and put it on fire. She thought it would purify me from bad luck (sgu'iya). (Kabira 50 years)

Some respondents reported that the mother-in-law's resort to witchcraft was not only meant to shoo bad luck out of the wife, but also to sow hatred between the couple so that they would get divorced:

My mother-in-law was a very wicked woman. She would do her best to cause problems to me so that I would be repudiated because, to her, I was a herald of mishaps. One day, I found her putting some sort of witchcraft in my bedroom. I asked her: "what are you doing? Do you want to ruin my life?" She answered calmly: "this is my house and I've the right to do whatever I want. If you don't like it, go to where you came from (Zineb 46 years)

My mother-in-law is the bane of my life. She is a very experienced witch. She uses all her evil powers to invoke hatred and dissension between me and my husband. I think she has succeeded in doing so, since we're now at the verge of divorce. (Fatima, 28 years)

The findings of this study have also revealed that some of the conflict reasons are tiny and even trivial. As this informant stated, "the problem with my mother-in-law is that she wants me to be at her beck and call every now and then; if she calls my

name and I don't answer in a flash, she will vent her rage at me and calls me names." Another informant says, "most of the conflicts with 'khalti' (she calls her mother-in-law khalti) erupt over the final say on menus, meal times, children's table manners, etc". Another 26 year-old-wife reported the reason why she hated her husband's mother: "when she comes to visit us, I become nervous and perplexed." I asked this woman why her mother-in-law makes her feel this way, she replied: "she watches me...she just sits down and keeps watching me."

According to the data collected from the daughters-in-law, the mothers-in-law share the following characteristics:

- They are always complaining
- They tell lies and exaggerate
- They put their noses in the couple's personal life
- They think they know more and better than the son's wife
- They give orders and offer ceaseless recommendations
- They keep bossing and giving their advice anywhere: in your home, in their home, at family gatherings, in social events, in shopping places, etc.
- They never admit their wrongdoings
- They talk ill about the son's wife
- They want to raise the kids their own way
- They are jealous of the gifts the son gives to his wife

All in all, the mother/ daughter-in-law social interaction remains, for most of women, a poignant experience that tugs at the heart strings. This experience may find expression in the famous popular saying

which was reiterated by many respondents: “ila kant la‘duza hbiba htta lef’a tkun tbiba ” (if the mother-in-law were a dear, even the snake would be a doctor). Such a saying is very telling in the sense that the relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is most of the time restive and fraught with hatred, dissension, wickedness and rivalry. To my question ‘do you wish to live independent of your in-laws?’ All the daughters-in-law answered with an emphatic yes. Some of them reported that they had begun to lead a peaceful conjugal life immediately after settling in their own houses. Therefore, a suggested resolution to this form of psychological violence where the mother-in-law is involved as a cause may lie in the couple’s agreement to live independently before they decide on marriage.

The relationship from the mother-in-law’s perspective

On the other hand, the data collected from the mothers-in-law show a range of conflict contexts where they are presented as victims. They describe their daughters-in-law as follows:

- My daughter-in-law is bad at cooking
 - She is bad at housework and doesn’t want to learn from me
 - She doesn’t treat my son well
 - She is a bad mother; she beats her children
 - She buys expensive clothes though she knows my son has a meager salary
 - Her relatives are privileged over ours
 - My son’s health deteriorated because of her bad treatment to him
- She prevented my son from visiting us and made him stop sending me money.
 - Her work is the cause of conflict with her husband; she doesn’t want to leave her job
 - She visits her parents very often.

A common theme that was raised by the mothers-in-law relates to the daughter-in-law’s lack of the skills regarding housework. As this mother-in-law recounted, “my son’s wife is terrible at cooking; she doesn’t know even how to make bread.” Another mother-in-law said that house cleaning was a weakness of her daughter-in-law: “she is not hardworking (mashi hadga); her house is always dirty; the kitchen is always in a mess.” A third woman complained about her daughter-in-law’s bad parenting: “she is bad at child-raising; she often hits the kids... one day I interfered and she shouted at me.”

Another recurrent theme relates to the stubborn and intractable character of the daughter-in-law. “She never changes her mind even when she is wrong”, a woman said. Another 65 years-old woman stated, “my daughter-in-law is hardheaded (rasha qaseh); she neither listens to me, nor to her husband.” When I asked about the age of this daughter-in-law, I found out that she was 19 years old. This very wide age gap between the two women (65 years and 19 years) is very significant to consider. The question is how two women who belong to far different generations understand each other. Of course, a 19 years-old- daughter-in-law will find difficulty in responding to the likes and dislikes of an old mother-in-law. They may have different opinions, tastes, attitudes and social practices. These

differences may turn their lived relationship into hell.

To deepen examination into such an agitated relationship, I asked the mothers-in-law about their dream daughter-in-law. One respondent said: “my dream daughter-in-law must come from a good family (tkun bent nass), must be well-educated, must have good manners, must be good at cooking, and must be a good listener”. Another respondent stated, “I want a beautiful, nice, well-educated daughter-in-law; I want someone who will make us happy and satisfied”. “We need a religious girl who knows her rights and obligations very well,” said another respondent. An old woman (Fatna, 76 years) who already has 3 daughters-in-law stressed that her forth daughter-in-law should be “a good girl who is willing to take good care of me.” When I asked this woman about her relationship with the other daughters-in-law, she replied that her relationship with them “knows some ups and downs; sometimes they treat me like a mother; other times they treat me like an enemy.”

According to the data collected from the mothers-in-law, we can conclude that the desired common characteristics in the prospective daughter-in-law entail good education, good manners, good cooking, beauty, religion, empathy, respect, and obedience. The frequent use of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ in the mothers-in-law’s responses evince that a dream daughter-in-law is one who melts into the husband’s family, one who feels inextricably linked with her-in-laws. Even when the son lives independent of his parents, his wife should take good care of cementing the relationship

through frequent visits and gifts. One of the most popular ways to keep the relationship healthy is thorough sharing food on a regular basis, especially on religious occasions. To wit, if the daughter-in-law does not seem to meet these social qualities, she is judged as “disobedient” by the mother-in-law, and her husband is labeled henpecked (ghalbah lamra) because he is unable to dominate her and make her obey his mother.

In the same line of thought, I asked the informants this question: “what do you want your daughter-in-law not to be like?” Some of the responses I received are the following:

- I don’t want her to prevent my son from visiting me.
- I don’t want a hard-hearted one that will stand between me and my son.
- I don’t want someone who is selfish, stubborn, rude and unsympathetic.
- I don’t like to have a daughter-in-law who is irresponsible, too open-minded in terms of dressing and social behaviour.
- I don’t want someone who will break the ties with my son.
- I don’t like to have someone who is bragging; someone who wants to live beyond my son’s economic status.
- I don’t like to marry my son to a girl who still lives under the dominance and control of her mother.

From these answers, it is clear that most mothers-in-law do not like to have a disobedient, obstinate, selfish, irresponsible, boastful, extravagant, and especially someone who still listens to her mother. The

latter is found to be a root cause of poisoning the mother/daughter-in-law relationship. Many respondents highlighted this issue through expressions such as “she listens to her mother”, “she follows her mother”, “she does what her mother says”, “her mother is her mind”, “*she* always calls her mother.”

Conclusion

In sum, the mother/daughter-in-law relationship within a Moroccan context remains a restive one. The root causes of such fretful relationship reside mainly in cultural, social, economic, historical, and educational factors. It has been found that when the relationship between the mother and daughter-in-law worsens, the consequences of such agitated relationship extend to all members of the family. According to the data collected, it has also been found that the mother and daughter-in-law view their relationship in a different light. The daughter-in-law sees herself as a victim who suffers from the tyranny of the mother-in-law, especially when the two women live in the same household. Even

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when the daughter-in-law lives independently, she cannot escape the bossy behaviour of her mother-in-law.

On the other hand, the mother-in-law sees herself as the real victim. This is due to the fact that she sees herself as the boss in the house whose rules and orders must be executed to the letter. When the daughter-in-law does not seem to meet her mother-in-law’s expectations, the latter feels that her authority is breached and her reverence is at stake. Accordingly, she will try all possible means to regain her jeopardized self-esteem. These means may include being too bossy, being aggressive, assigning much housework to the son’s wife, and instigating the son to beat her by reporting cock and bull stories. This relationship may aggravate if the two women live in the same household. Therefore, it is highly recommended for anyone to live in a house of one’s own after marriage. This is something guaranteed by the Moroccan family code which gives the wife the right to state as a condition living in a house of her own if she wants so.

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