

# Premarital Female Sexuality in Morocco

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In the Arab world, the study of “illegal” and/or “anomalous” sexualities have disturbed the political powers. Indeed, studying these sexualities as social phenomena is a way to recognize their existence and the difficulties faced by the religious authorities to limit sex to the marriage institutions. Therefore the study of these sexualities could become an ideological weapon to contest the Arab/Islamo political power legitimacy.

This situation explains difficulties that researchers may encounter in the field of sexuality. Indeed, it was the apparition of AIDS in the Arab world that weakened this resistance by the states that have begun to see the need for sexual studies. Indeed, the threat of AIDS has obliged some Arab states to study sexual behaviors independently of their legality and normality in order to understand their logic and to produce adapted messages of prevention.

Premarital female sexuality is at the heart of what is considered “illegal” sexuality. Virginity remains the incontestable condition and proof of the general intolerance to premarital female sexuality. Let’s signal here the patriarchal reduction of sexuality to genital activity and to defloration. In fact, it is this view of sexuality that imports to the functioning of such a system since it determines filiation and inheritance. The other shapes of premarital female sexuality, non genital or without defloration, are not menacing. And in the setting of an incomplete modernity, an explicit consensus settled progressively around the definition of a virgin as some one who has not been deflowered. Such consensus means an effective recognition of the other forms of premarital female sexuality. In the context of

this incomplete modernity, medicine makes itself paradoxically an accomplice of both the girl and the patriarchal system while preventing pregnancy and proceeding to the suture of the hymen. To the girl, medicine provides the possibility of a sexual activity without risk of pregnancy and of recovering “virginity”, and to the patriarchal system it saves the male honor and guarantees the purity of lineage.

This paper that intends to synthesize results of studies on premarital female sexuality in Morocco structures itself into three parts. In the first, it is about showing how premarital female sexuality is the indirect output of Moroccan feminism even if such a feminism does not fight for woman’s right to sexual pleasure, as a basic human right independent of the matrimonial stature. In the second, we will view premarital female activity as a direct result of the age at the first marriage and describe it as a sexual substitutive practice because of the taboo of the virginity. We will expose some problems relative to this sexuality such as multi-partnership, homosexuality, virginity and prostitution.

## Feminist Struggle

My interest in sexuality emerged after writing a bibliography<sup>1</sup> that covers the notions of family, woman and sexuality (from 1912 to 1996). Owing to the emergence of AIDS, the subject of sexuality has currently shifted toward a kind of epistemological autonomy in the sense that it has begun to be studied independently of the subject of family and woman, and without being cautioned by the “morality” of family or woman. At the quantitative level, the pure sexual themes occu-

py a minor status in relation to family and woman as the following two figures demonstrate:

**Figure 1: Distribution of Writings on Family-Women-Sexuality**

Period Theme	Colonization 1912-1955 %	Independence 1956-1975 %	Neo-national 1976-1996 %
Family	41,2	31,3	15,6
Woman	41,0	47,3	58,4
Sexuality	17,8	21,4	25,0
Total	100	100	100

**Figure 2: Distribution of Writings on Sexuality**

Period Theme	1912-1955 %	1956-1975 %	1976-1996 %
Behavior	1,6	1,9	7,5
Body,	3,2	1,9	3,5
Virginity			
Prostitution	3,2	0,0	2,5
Fertility	9,8	17,6	4,5
STD-AIDS	0,0	0,0	7,0
Total	17,8	21,4	25,0

As one notices through these two figures, sexual themes have recently acquired a relative statistical importance. Initially (1912 - 1975) sexuality was presented mainly through the demographic perspective (fertility and contraception). It is only in the third period that the demographic prism relatively fades away so that notions of sexual behavior and risky sexuality attract more attention. Indeed, concentrating attention on the family meant studying sexuality only through its institutional demonstrations. Variables of social studies of family overlook behaviors and sexual practices outside marriage.

Women studies took precedence during the last two periods, after-independence (1956-1975) and the neo-national era (1976-1996). These studies are mainly focused on themes like the veil, education, employment, the use of contraceptives and virginity. Consequently, the object woman was a stage in the progressive discovery of sexuality as "object" by social studies.

The emergence of the object "woman" is indeed correlated to the public production of the female body in a society that had to break with one of its ideological foundations, the public eclipse of female body. Education and employment particularly raise the question of the veil while the absence of contraceptive use reinforces in the same sense the female body as a purely reproductive entity devoted to pregnancies. The veil

is in fact the socio-religious mechanism that serves to eclipse the female body from the traditional urban public space.<sup>2</sup> And it was quite normal that, after Independence, Moroccan society had to deal with the issue of the veil when facing the question of female education and employment. The construction of a modern Morocco could not be effectively carried out in a setting divided into two hierarchical worlds, one public and male and the other private and female. National powers anxious to give woman a role in the process of development waged a battle against the veil and the seclusion of women. In this context, and as early as 1952, Allal el Fassi wrote that "the veiled woman is not less exposed than the unveiled one to the danger of prostitution."<sup>3</sup> He went a step further to assert that homosexual practices<sup>4</sup> are related to the separation of spheres. In doing so, Al Fassi was clearly under the influence of Egyptian reformists (like Mohammed Abdou) or Egyptian feminists like Hoda Shaaraoui. But there was also the impact of the western<sup>5</sup> family model on the Moroccan family. Consequently, after Independence, the veil was no longer recognized as a sign of resistance to colonization. The battle of the veil is highly symbolic because it translated the historical necessity of the emergence of woman as a productive body in the productive space. The liberation from the veil was a kind of liberation from submission, from the patriarchal image of the home as the domain of woman. Indeed, public unveiling of the female body, reinforced by progressively extended contraceptive use, challenged the earlier definitions of the female body as "a trunk of pregnancies", as D. Chraïbi's refers to it,<sup>6</sup> to an instrument of erotic pleasure.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the recurrent theme of virginity indicates the will of the modern woman to enjoy premarital sex that challenges the patriarchal institutions.<sup>8</sup>

This public production of the female body began with the battle against the veil and is continuing through the battle against virginity. A. Bouhdiba<sup>9</sup> asserts that Arab-feminism went through two main stages: the liberation from the veil between the two world wars, and the right to flirt and to sex (critique of chastity and virginity). But according to J. Berque,<sup>10</sup> as early as 1927, the Moroccan reformist Allal al Fassi addressed a petition to the town council of Fez in which he demanded that the exposition of the bride's linen on the wedding night be prohibited. The petition reveals that Moroccan reform is precocious, having adopted a proto-feminist critique of the taboo of virginity since the 1920s.

Of course, the veil and virginity are two main themes directly related to the body and sexuality, which raises the general question of compatibility between women's liberation (modernity) and Islam.<sup>11</sup> For current

Moroccan feminism that is expressed essentially through reformist female associations,<sup>12</sup> there is no contradiction between women's liberation and Islam. For this elitist movement of the Moroccan female intelligentsia, women's liberation and integration into development can be achieved with Islam and not against it. In other words, Moroccan feminism never claims secularism. Nevertheless, some feminist claims are unacceptable for fundamentalists - the latter insisting that the veil does not mean that Muslim women have rejected modernity. Owing to massive access to academic education, the fundamentalist veiled woman is both involved in acquiring the positive western knowledge and maintaining Islamic ethics.<sup>13</sup> This ethics is the setting in which western knowledge must be made use of; it is also the setting that sets limits to female behavior in society. Consequently, the fundamentalist veil<sup>14</sup> is the symbol through which woman is both Muslim and modern in a mixed public space without arousing the danger of chaos (*fitna*) induced by the seductive powers of the female body.<sup>15</sup> According to some fundamentalist students of al Adl wa al Ihsane interviewed at Fez university,<sup>16</sup> the traditional veil means effectively woman's exclusion, but the "true" Islamic veil "protects" woman from being perceived as a desirable public body. This "new" veil does not prevent woman from participating in production, knowledge and power, and guarantees her free circulation in the public zones of the urban space. Hence insuring that the public space does not turn into a place of excitation and sexual harassment. That is why it is necessary to create the concept of veiled feminism<sup>17</sup> to understand the internal logic of fundamentalist feminism. Far from defining themselves as anti-feminist, the fundamentalists see the veil as a symbol that underlines woman's refusal to be reduced to a sexual and seductive body-object. Thus the moralization of relations between sexes is secured through a bodily discipline represented by the veil. Nevertheless, there is a gap between this ideal and reality: according to Dialmy, twelve percent of veiled young girls favor premarital sex.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to this drawback, Islamic feminism falls short when it comes to the claims of the Moroccan feminist associations concerning seven major points related to the family status and to sexual and reproductive health. These points were presented in the Project of National Plan of Woman Integration in Development<sup>19</sup> (1999) as non-secular claims and as possible Islamic options. These points are: the increase of the legal age of marriage to eighteen years for girls, the suppression of the matrimonial tutor, the suppression of polygamy, the transformation of repudiation into divorce, the allotment of conjugal wealth after divorce between spouses, the installation of condom distributors, and the protection of abortion outside marriage. Nevertheless, the general Islamic rejection<sup>20</sup>

of these points shows the limitations of an Islamic feminism in Morocco and the resistance of juridical Islam to sexual and reproductive rights for women, revealing an unhistorical definition of Islamic sexuality and family. Facing this resistance, Moroccan feminists cannot claim clearly the right to free sexuality for non married people. Perhaps Dialmy's book entitled *Toward an Islamic Sexual Democracy*<sup>21</sup> is the only work that demonstrates that the necessity to protect premarital sexuality against STD/HIV risk is not incompatible with Islamic law and with the spirit of Islam. In the chapter entitled "Sexual Health and Ijtihad", Dialmy argues that *Ijtihad* with both the available sacred texts and beyond the texts is necessary to protect sexual health as a central dimension of public health. Since premarital abstinence is unrealistic, it is less dangerous to use condoms, particularly that premarital sex is practiced in secret with or without a condom.

The religious resistance to the seven main feminist Moroccan claims shows that there is no difference between official Islam (ministry of Islamic affairs and Oulema) and Islamic fundamentalism as far as women and sexuality are concerned. One Islamic group that took the decision to struggle against gender liberation asserts that these seven points have already received a definitive Islamic answer: sexuality is dependent on marriage, and woman is dependent on man. This double dependency is supposed to be an Invariable according to juridical dominant Islam. Mystic Islam,<sup>22</sup> which shows the possibility of an Islam defined as a possible component of sexual rights and egalitarian family, is both excluded by Muslim scholars and fundamentalists.

#### Premarital Sexual Activity

Sociologically, the increase in pre-marital sexual activity is bound to dissociate sex from marriage. This activity is characterized by sexual substitutive practices that reconcile the modern principle of pleasure with the Islamic-patriarchal principle of non-defloration.

#### The Rise of Marriage at Middle Age

Moroccan social traditions make of a girl's marriage a major element in the sexual and procreative strategy inspired by a patriarchal reading of Islam. Nevertheless, the early marriage has several advantages. It is a mouth less to feed and a way to avoid the risk of premarital defloration, that is to say the risk of dishonor. Consequently the rate of single women is lower than that of single men; masculine celibacy is, in fact, more tolerated socially. Less than 1% of women remain bachelors at the end of their reproductive lives.<sup>23</sup>

But some social and economical factors have lead to

**Figure 3: Matrimonial statute according to the sex**

Statute Sex	Bachelor	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Indeterminate
Men	44,1	54,2	1,0	0,6	0,1
Women	39,0	53,8	5,5	1,6	0,0

the rise in the number of women who marry at a later age. Indeed, urbanization and schooling, though still incomplete, are gradually undermining the patriarchal paradigm of marriage at an early age. A tendency towards delayed marriages has been illustrated by the different socio-demographic investigations since the 1960s. According to the last National Investigation on the Health of the Mother and the Child (ENSME/PAPchild 1999)<sup>24</sup>, the percentage of women that married before reaching 26 years fell from 863 to one thousand among women aged 25-29 years. In the same way, this proportion fell further among married women at the age of 20 years, from 638 to one thousand among cohorts of women currently aged of 45-49 years, to 273 for one thousand among those of the cohort of 20-24 year women. Marriage among teenagers is decreasing at a fast rate. Investigation has revealed that marriage age varies according to different generations of women : Marriage at the age of 18 concerns 45% of women; between 45 and 49,19% among those who are between 25-29; and only 16% for those aged between 20 and 24 years. The rate of those who marry earlier than 15 years is only 8,4%.

The recession of marriage is confirmed by the female average age at the first marriage:

**Figure 4: Evolution of the female age at the first marriage**

Year	1960	1987	1994	1997
Average Age	17,3	23,4	25,8	26,4

During 1996-97, the average age of the urban women at the first marriage was 27,8 years (against 24,7 years in rural areas). Between 1994 and 1997, the rate of bachelor women increased: out of 10 women reaching approximately 30 years, 4 are single. The number of married women who prefer celibacy to polygamy is systematically increasing. The proportion of women living in polygamous unions regressed from 5,1% in 1992 to 3,6% in 1996-97. Polygamy is particularly decreasing among educated women.

One of the main consequences of the rise of the female average age at the first marriage is the emergence of female premarital sexuality, which is sometimes precocious, beginning at 14 years<sup>25</sup>. By the late 1970s the first survey on sexuality in Morocco by

Dialmy<sup>26</sup> revealed that only 8,7% adopted the Islamic law of premarital intercourse (2,2% among males and 18,3% among females). Moreover, premarital intercourse does not necessarily presuppose a marriage project and is practiced for itself, for pleasure (67,7% among men and 45% among women). In the 1980s, according to Naamne-Guessouss, "the majority of young girls (65,3%) have had one intercourse at least"<sup>27</sup>.

However, sexuality is a highly problematic issue. Legally, sex is prohibited for males and females before marriage, but, traditional standards are more unfavorable to females. Females are more submitted to familial and social coercion when it comes to the strict relation between sexuality and marriage. Usually, the males in the family lead this coercion, and, these males' manhood is evaluated according to the extent of their control over and coercion of "their" women<sup>28</sup>.

Yet, some men are adopting feminist attitudes to sex<sup>29</sup>. For this minority of men, premarital female sexuality is seen as the woman's right or a fact that has to be admitted. The girl who makes love in "a reasonable and respectable" manner is considered to be as virtuous as the one who does not make love. Sexual stability outside marriage can decrease the extent of social condemnation if sex is the result of love.

### Sexual Practices

The practices described below mainly concern the sexual activity of teenagers and youngsters.

#### Masturbation

Among boys, masturbation begins long before puberty, starting from the age of eight<sup>30</sup>, and takes place without ejaculation. Collective masturbation is also a game, "the challenge to determine who can last longer than others"<sup>31</sup>.

Girls speak less of their masturbation, but more of rubbing themselves against objects such as the cushion, the pillow or the table<sup>32</sup>. The factors that arouse the desire for masturbation are varied enough. The two main sources are watching sex movies, and the small size of the parental lodging. Indeed, many boys and girls feel a strong sexual arousal when they either see or hear their parents making love<sup>33</sup>.

## The Brush Stroke

It is a common expression by Moroccan youngsters to say that the penis operates like a brush between the big lips of the vagina or between the girl's thighs, penetration often being refused and feared. In this case, one could say that both females and males are convinced of the value of virginity as a non-defloration.

Girls find in the brush stroke a means that allows them to pass with success the test of "the good premarital sexual behavior", which means having sexual pleasure without defloration. By refusing the temptation of penetration, girls feel a kind of pride<sup>34</sup> and forget the shame and guilt that are socially associated with premarital sexual activity.

## Sodomy

Among males, heterosexual sodomy is common, but a large majority of females regret sodomy. The main reason for this originates in the social and religious vision of "the sexually correct" according to which sodomy is condemned. But females often have to let themselves sodomized,<sup>35</sup> since sodomy is a surrogate to vaginal penetration. It is a substitute that helps them to keep the loved men and allows the man to ejaculate inside, in an inside. Some females admit to have experienced it and express remorse and disgust in general.<sup>36</sup> No female admits to have enjoyed sodomy.

## Oral Sex

Oral sex constitutes another palliative for defloration. The woman's refusal to let herself be penetrated gives the man the opportunity to put pressure on her to get a fellatio.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, in general, the fellatio is a practice of substitution associated with premarital sexuality, or in some cases to an extra-conjugal activity.<sup>38</sup> But within the conjugal framework itself, the normalization of oral sexuality is admitted among a category of youngsters who have a high level of education, even though for others the fellatio reveals the sexual selfishness of the dominant male.<sup>39</sup>

## Sexual Satisfaction

As a result of the rapid increase in female literacy and the spread of TV since the 1970s, young women have more access to the themes of romantic love and sexual consumption.<sup>40</sup> In the same way, the expansion of video shops in the 1980s encouraged the consumption of pornographic movies that play a pedagogic role in the erotic domain,<sup>41</sup> and in the discovery of sexual pleasure by Moroccan girls. A girl relates one night of love: "All my family was sleeping. I left the house and I rejoined the driver of the truck. We descended toward the river, 500 m. away from our house. I told him that I drink wine... He went up then in the truck and fetched a lot of bottles of it... He also took out a mattress. We began to drink, then we fucked in all positions. It was

a magnificent night of love. All ingredients were there, the moon, the river, screaming of animals, wine, music, sex... It was romantic, in spite of the absence of love... We enjoyed each other four times... We didn't suck each other, my partner was only a countryman."<sup>42</sup>

For the "new" young woman, a lover or a potential husband is appreciated for both his sexual and economic potency. Furthermore, some young unmarried women go as far as to seek consultation for frigidity.<sup>43</sup>

## Socio-Sexual Problems

Four sexual problems related to premarital sexuality seem very important: multi-partnership, homosexuality, virginity and prostitution.

## The Multi-Partnership Model

For the majority of young people, the multi-partner relationships seem to be the norm. However, one can distinguish between a successive multi-partner relationship, that is change of the partner, and a simultaneous multi-partner relation that consists in having several partners at the same time.<sup>44</sup> The first type is more invoked by girls, like this student who asserts that : "When I was five, it was my teacher. Then my cousins kissed me frequently. When aged fourteen, it was a pupil in my classroom. After that, I met a taxi driver, one of my professors at Ghafsay, then another cousin who wanted to marry me. Then it was a boy in the high school, then another professor, the student whom I married, another professor at the university, and now a married man who works in a bank."<sup>45</sup> The three last partners she had affairs with simultaneously.

Another girl affirms that she tries not to have too many partners at a time. The sexually unsteady girl is said to be a "flirt". Indeed, she is compared to a prostitute even though she doesn't accumulate partners to accumulate money. She is said to be a prostitute because of her conduct. Sometimes the family, unable to face the accusing gaze of others, has to move out of the district. The girl's loose behavior "offends the masculine pride of the men in the family and reduces them to powerless males."<sup>46</sup>

But the simultaneous multi-relationship is more frequently invoked by boys: To have a "pure" fiancée and several dirty "occasional" sexual partners. This form of multi-partner relations saves morality, on the one hand, and satisfies the need for security on the other hand, ensuring an ego that is culturally submissive to the virility imperative.

## Homosexuality

Girls are discreet and allusive on this topic. For them, homosexuality is not considered a safer substitute for heterosexual love (eventhough there is no risk of defloration or pregnancy in comparison with the het-

erosexual intercourse), but rather an immoral behavior, a perversion<sup>47</sup>. Made indignant by the question on adolescent homosexuality, one pupil took it as an insult : “you are mad... I didn’t have intercourse with boys and you want me to have some with girls... It is impossible”. The general attitude toward homosexuality is negative: 90% reject male homosexuality while 87,2% disapprove of male homosexuality.<sup>48</sup> The perception of homosexuality as an anomaly is expressed by the current Arabic translation, *choudoud*, which literally means perversion. It should be noted here that masculine homosexuality is not referred to as *liwat* nor is lesbianism referred to as *sihaq* in spite of the existence of these two terms in Arabic. The reason for that is that *liwat* and *sihaq* are more descriptive, with less perverse connotations.

Nevertheless, homosexuality is accepted when individuals are faced with economic problems. Seeing that emigration is her only way out, a girl prostitute is ready for all “perversions”: “I had sex with women. At the beginning, I was astonished. The first one was a Western woman who taught me what to do. She told me: if I enjoy it with you, I will save you of this work and will take you with me to France. We spent five hours in bed.”

For males, the homosexual intercourse is practiced as a means to prove a double virility. The active homosexual (*louat*) makes love to women and men without defining himself as a bi-sexual person. For this reason, the Moroccan male would report his first homosexual relationship only if he had the active role, the penetrating role. No one speaks about his first homosexual experience where his partner has penetrated him.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the situation of the *hassass* (who likes to be penetrated) and the *zamel* (the homosexual male prostitute), the two figures of “passive” homosexuality, is different. Their sexual practices are not taken into consideration because they are socially depreciated.<sup>50</sup> The *hassass* is more depreciated because he likes to be penetrated. The *zamel*, on the other hand, is considered more as a worker, a prostitute. For some homosexuals, prostitution can be a stratagem to live their homosexuality in a less dangerous way.

### Virginity and Artificial Hymen

Dialmy asserts that it is necessary to distinguish between Koranic virginity and consensual virginity<sup>51</sup> in order to understand the evolution of sexuality as a socio-historical phenomenon. Virginity in the Koran means that the girl has no sexual experience, while consensual virginity is one way to keep the hymen intact. In the setting of consensual virginity, sexual activity without defloration has many advantages for the woman. She proves to her partner and the society that she is master of herself, worthy of confidence,

able to conform to requirements of her social environment, and respectful of taboos. Paradoxically, therefore, sexuality without defloration is a proof of the good conduct of the girl, an element in her strategy of marriage. It is about giving to the partner a foretaste of delights that awaits him, to enjoy oneself if possible without losing the hymen-capital.

Sexuality without penetration is therefore a construction of the consensual virginity by the girl. A worker of Fez maintains that “when I was young, my mother taught me that sex is shameful, illicit, painful... she especially taught me the importance of virginity and the fear of the man”. This type of education considers “the man as the real enemy of the woman” because “the girl is often the victim of the lasting sexual relation... Men are wolves... Virginity is the girl’s most important weapon... Thanks to virginity, the girl can prove her femininity, her chastity, her purity. And it is the only criterion that allows the man to distinguish between the prostitute and the girl of good family” (Law student, Fez).

The consensual virginity reconciles the demand for premarital sex and the demand of the neo-patriarchal man and the Islamic requirement for virginity. It is a compromise-test, an indication of social virtue, and a proof of restraint with the beloved man. Nevertheless, girls remain victims of a neo-patriarchal social order. Sexual modernization is far from being a complete process. For the vast majority “the goal of sex is marriage! and sex has to be practiced only with the husband, in legality... not in the street, like animals... It is better to suffer than to have sex with the fear of the police, of rumors, and of pregnancy...”

In the case where premarital sex leads to defloration, marriage becomes an obligation to avoid a social scandal particularly for the woman. The virginity-hymen is a form of capital for the girl’s family, through which she gains honor and profit. The hymen is convertible to financial capital when marriage is negotiated, and the dowry of a non-deflowered girl is always superior to the one of the deflowered girl.<sup>52</sup>

For this reason, males see premarital sex with girls as dangerous. They view it as a trap used by girls to force them into marriage. In certain instances, when the girl asks her partner to deflower her it is seen by many men as a feminine ruse that is more destructive than any male ruse.

However, gynecologists attest the existence of numerous girls who are deflowered and not embarrassed at all by it.<sup>53</sup> Among girls in higher education,<sup>54</sup> virginity must be preserved until marriage for only 9% of girls, and after engagement for 40%. Of course, opportuni-

ties of marriage decrease for girls of modest social origin (low classes and rural surroundings). In this case, consensual virginity is not a simple “bodily detail”; it is the only “capital”. In these surroundings, one even has to provide a certificate of virginity at the time of the marriage festivities.

Consequently within such circumstances, girls opt for an artificial virginity. According to the Director of Femmes du Maroc, the repairing of the hymen is the most frequent surgical “operation.”<sup>55</sup> It is a flourishing medical trade in the region of Casablanca-Rabat, costing “between \$US 500 and 600 per operation”. Some general practitioners perform the operation for lower prices<sup>56</sup>, \$US 50/60, but the suture may not hold and the husband discovers the subterfuge. For feminists, physicians who exercise the repairing of the hymen adhere objectively to a false notion of honor and, therefore, reinforce the patriarchal system<sup>57</sup>. Do they make the repairing to avoid a scandal for the girl, or do they do it for humanitarian reasons? Do they make it for merely financial interests? Further research on this topic is necessary to answer these questions.

### Prostitution

Sex marketing is correlated to the poverty of women and the impoverishment of families<sup>58</sup>. Very often, prostitution is the consequence of a necessity to survive and to support others (a family) and remains the most accessible means to face unemployment and a precarious life.

### Between Unemployment and Consumption

Trading in sex is one way to deal with the social and economical crisis (provoked by the Structural Adjustment Plan since 1983). Sex has become a means to earn money and to live up to the higher cost of living. The impoverishment of families forces numerous girls and boys, young women and men to sell their bodies in a market more and more organized within non-official networks. Indeed, prostitution remains a non-formal answer to unemployment and poverty<sup>59</sup>, and concerns girls, women, men and children. Since the Moroccan economy promotes itself so much through sex, one is able to speak of a “prostitution economy”. With the absence of a sustainable development policy, sexual work represents a solution or a relief from problems of unemployment. It creates a kind of dynamic consumption in certain regions and sectors (tourism) and serves to attract some foreign investors. All things considered, tolerance for prostitution remains the only option left for a realistic economic policy.

In Morocco, sex is growing into a business, a market, and an economically profitable activity providing a means of survival for several social categories. Girls (from age 14), repudiated women, students, unem-

ployed graduates, homosexuals, female workers in factories are the concerned social categories related to this phenomenon. Even victims of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), hide their infection from the customer in order not to lose him. Mothers take to prostitution, occasionally, at the beginning of the school year to be able to buy supplies for their children, or to buy the ritual sheep at the time of the Big Feast.<sup>60</sup> Masculine prostitution<sup>61</sup> is both heterosexual and homosexual. Women (not only foreigners) pay men for sexual services, a phenomenon that has started to be socially visible<sup>62</sup>. As for homosexuals, it is generally recognized that their number is increasing.

Sometimes, sexual work also responds to a need for luxury and consumption. Basically, a woman goes out with men because she needs to satisfy some elementary needs like a lipstick, perfume, a birthday gift. For girls coming from the middle classes, prostitution is not a means to make money, but a means to be able to consume more and better, to have a more comfortable and luxurious life<sup>63</sup>. Some women already financially independent use sex to enjoy more financial comfort. To be able to have better clothes, secretaries whose salaries are lower than the minimal salary, submit themselves easily to several men (though they do not identify themselves as prostitutes). The correlation sex/money has received a very strong boost owing to Arab Gulf tourism.<sup>64</sup>

### Condom Use

Within the setting of prostitutional relationships, very few are aware of the risk of MST-AIDS, and thus do not bother to use condoms. One prostitute asserts that “when I have some doubts concerning a customer, I ask him to use the condom... I have doubts when the customer is too skinny, with a pale face or someone whose skin peels.”

But the majority of female prostitutes do not think about any elementary clinical exam because they know that if they try to impose the condoms, they might lose the customer. The relationship between customer and prostitute indicates that “the possibility to protect oneself is limited (...) when there is no equality in the relation.”<sup>65</sup> An almost mystical surrender to God’s will on the part of the Moroccan prostitute, a resigned and fatalistic attitude, forces her to admit that she does not master her fate. Since she has no capability to control the situation, she is unable to take preventive measures.

### Social and Political Cautions

The transformation of sex into economic gain is done with social consent, that is to say with the approval of the community and the family. With the absence of adequate development policies, some poor families

have no alternative but to turn their children to prostitutes. Sometimes, children (including the males) are even encouraged overtly by their families.<sup>66</sup> In certain regions, villagers have demonstrated against police raids aimed at prostitutes, since “it makes people live” and improves the local trade.<sup>67</sup>

It is clear that the administrative authorities are conscious of the economic role of prostitution in certain regions. Indeed the banning of prostitution in these regions would produce a real crisis, and thus political decision-makers<sup>68</sup> turn the blind eye. Indeed, prostitution is a factor that delays a potential social explosion. This complacency and complicity on the part of the public authorities is ample evidence that prostitution is becoming a factor in the tolerated sexual liberalization. This policy of tolerance that consists of pretending not to see (prostitution) is interrupted by limited actions and campaigns by the government that serve several ends at the same time: to put pressure on the actors in the field, to remind the people that the authorities can lose their patience, and to prove to the fundamentalists that the state is fighting debauchery. Though it is generally unaccepted, prostitution and sexual liberation reveal a decided intent by the government to fight fundamentalism. Indeed, “prostitution rather than poverty” and “prostitution rather than the veil” would be the tacit slogans of the administration.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The socio-anthropological studies that describe sexual behaviors and practices in Morocco are generally qualitative. In fact, only four studies<sup>70</sup> have tried to assess quantitatively sexual behaviors and practices, and their sample is not representative. The political powers and the religious forces are clearly unequipped to assess Moroccan sexuality. The quantitative assessment of

“illegal” and “anomalous” sexual behaviors and practices would be an official recognition of their existence and their importance, an inconceivable thing within the logic of a state that essentially governs in the name of fundamentalist Islam attached to what must be.

These qualitative studies come to one essential conclusion: sexual behaviors and practices are characterized by an uncontrollability, not to mention anarchy.<sup>71</sup> Of course such a statement disturbs an Islamic state, which is unable to demonstrate the opposite. The last weapon is to declare the results of qualitative studies that are not representative.

But the sexual behaviors and practices described above are also referred to in two Moroccan newspapers, *Al Abhath al Maghribiya* (in Arabic) and *L'Opinion* (in French). “From heart to heart” and “Beyond taboos” are respectively the two columns through which personal sexual stories have appeared twice a week for more than 2 years. The magazine *Femmes du Maroc*<sup>72</sup> also deals regularly with feminine sexual themes. In doing so, these popular publications generate public discussion on sexuality through a story teller, the reader, the sexologist<sup>73</sup> or psychologist, thus undermining the social and political taboo of sexuality.

The main lesson that has to be learned from this paper is that the traditional hierarchical relationship of sexes is currently in transition. The traditional dichotomy between two hierarchical sexual identities is problematized by the evolution of the Moroccan society, and more precisely by the evolution of sexuality and reproduction. Female sexuality has been able to affirm itself outside the institution of marriage; it is a sexuality that is de-institutionalized and that is beginning to claim the right to auto-determination and independence.

## ENDNOTES

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70. I refer here to A. Dialmy's books *La femme et la sexualité au Maroc* (Casablanca, Editions Maghrébines, 1985, in Arabic) and *Logement, sexualité et Islam* (Casablanca, Eddif, 1995) and to Naamane-Guessouss's book *Au delà de toute pudeur* I refer also to Dialmy's study *Identité masculine et santé reproductive au Maroc*.
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