

**COVER-UP IS BETTER THAN EXPOSURE:
SCANDALS, FLEXIBLE NORMS, PROSTITUTION OR SEXUAL
DISSIDENCE IN MOROCCO¹**

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The pioneering work of Howard Becker (1963) and Erving Goffman (1963) argues that deviance and transgression only emerge as such through their identification by others. The working out of social relationships between individuals – the labelling process – produces deviant acts. No society is exempt from this. Contributions from anthropology, particularly in the context of work on moral economies (Fassin and Eideliman 2012; Fassin and Lézé 2013), have provided a useful reminder of how, in different situations, moral norms and values are inscribed at the heart of social relationships.

In Morocco, where prohibitions on premarital sex are still a prominent part of the dominant morality, it is worth asking what exactly is their basis: sexual practice itself or something else? In view of the banality of intimate relations between the sexes before marriage today, I would imagine that it may be based on something else. This unnamed banality is nevertheless attested in numerous studies. Although there are a few studies on sexuality from recent decades, they have not succeeded in developing a genuine sociology of sexuality and overcoming the essentialism that is common in discussing sexual dynamics in Muslim-majority societies. However, they do show the social dynamism in this area. All of them emphasise the existence of sexual activity before or outside marriage, particularly during adolescence - the age that concerns us here (Dialmy 1988, 1995, 2000). This particularly highlights the school population. Interesting figures on the issue come, for example, from some studies on these juvenile worlds (Bakass and Ferrand 2013; Naamane-Guessous 1992). They are interesting because they capture what is often hastily described as paradoxical or social hypocrisy. Indeed,

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- Cheikh, Mériam 2018. Scandales et ductilité des normes au Maroc : le cas de la prostitution vu par-delà les marges, in Philippe Chaudat et Monia Lachheb (éds.) *Transgresser au Maghreb : la normalité et ses dépassements*, 51-62. Tunis: IRMC-Karthala.
- Cheikh, Mériam 2019. Scandales, altérités et dissidences sexuelles au Maroc - colloque international 7-8 novembre 2019, *Altérités et résistances au prisme du genre en Méditerranée*, Aix-en-Provence : Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme.

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the results generally show that boys, on the one hand, mostly report their sexual activity without inhibition, while girls, on the other hand, do not dare (even in an anonymous questionnaire) to talk about their intimate practices (whether deflowered or not), and therefore minimise it.

This evidence of the banalisation of sexuality has been highlighted in particular by ethnographic studies. Observation and immersion have made it possible to talk about sexualities in the plural, i.e., to identify, observe and analyse all practices current in Morocco. These works, most of which are recent, increase our knowledge in this area (Fioole 2021; Cheikh 2020; Gouyon 2018; Menin 2018; Rebucini 2013; Carey 2012; Davis 1995, 1992; Davis and Davis 1989). Their use of ethnographic enquiry – necessary for any study of sexualities in countries without large-scale national statistical surveys on the issue – is the only method that allows for a detailed understanding of the banalisation of sex in hyper-moralised contexts. Ethnographic studies provide an analysis of the complexity of reality that is difficult to achieve from questionnaire surveys (El Aji 2018), although it is these which have been used in recent essays on sexuality in the country (Slimani 2017) or in journalistic reports.³ Moreover, ethnographic analyses adopt an approach framed in terms of social dispositions. This, for example, does not reduce sexual experiences to ‘sexual misery’, making the working classes sexual ‘misfits’ or the upper classes, the site of a modern and enlightened exercise of sexuality as developed by Abdessamad Dialmy.⁴ Nor are sexual experiences reduced to a question of identity (religious or national) that brings the increasingly recurrent scandals and debates about sexualities in Arab and Muslim countries back to a monolithic Islamic normativity (Feki 2014). However, those religious norms and the centrality of the nation-state cannot fail to challenge us. This centrality, bursting into the political, intellectual and academic debate when scandals relating to morality emerge, is less indicative of the widespread attachment to those norms than of the social transformations underway.

³ See the report on young people by the daily newspaper *L'Économiste*. This special issue is illustrated by a picture showing a couple kissing on the beach: Grande enquête sur les jeunes d'aujourd'hui, *L'Économiste*, March 2006, (online):

<https://www.leconomiste.com/sites/default/files/eco7/public/Grande%20Enqu%C3%AAtte%20sur%20les%20jeunes%202006.pdf>

⁴ Abdessamad Dialmy, in a survey postulating a process of liberalisation of morals, only interviews ‘literate people’, 61.3% of whom belong to the middle and upper classes, because this category is said to suffer most from the ‘sexual crisis due to their being torn between two contradictory cultural models, the traditional and the modern’. The ‘literate’ would have, more than the other groups, ‘the possibility and the habit of dealing, often orally, with the problems of sexual life’. They would also be better able to recognise ‘the cognitive function of the questionnaire and to distinguish between the social researcher and the administrative agent’. The survey is underpinned by the idea of a ‘natural’ propensity among educated upper-class youth to adopt and incorporate gender equality values. All this says more about the class distinctions assumed by the author than about the subject of his study (Dialmy 1988, 51-52). Despite the concern in accounting for differences in sexual experience according to origin and level of education, studies dealing directly with sexual practices in Morocco do not consider the question of practices from the perspective of class relations and respectability. However, the return through the social space offers an excellent tool for de-culturalising the sexual question and thinking about it in terms of the positions, resources and capital of individuals (Cheikh 2020).

Scandals

The first scandal in independent Morocco was the so-called ‘Tabit affair’, which broke out in the early 1990s and was named after a Casablanca police commissioner who was sentenced to death for the rape of a hundred girls and the recording of abusive sexual orgies to which his victims were forced to participate.⁵ This first public affair concerning the morality of a state official and leading to other officials symbolises the second era of Moroccan authoritarianism (the first era being that of the ‘*années de plomb*’, the ‘years of lead’ in the mid-1950s), which was characterised by a controlled political liberalisation. This liberalisation was characterised in particular by the opening up of the media sphere, which was supposed to transmit information on transparency, the dusting off of the Makhzen’s old techniques of power, and the moralisation of the public sphere, including political and bureaucratic life. As a result of the ‘Tabit affair’, several other scandals became public. These mainly concerned Moroccan financial circles and led to campaigns to clean up the world of entrepreneurs (Catusse 2004). With the continued growth of the press in the early 2000s, financial and politico-financial scandals continued to make headlines. By the end of the decade, with the emergence of new technologies and in particular the use of social networks, police scandals recurred. In the context of widespread social mobilisations (demonstrations against the high cost of living, the deep-rooted movement of unemployed graduates) and the transformation of the political field with the arrival and political participation of Islamist actors (who made the fight against corruption one of their main creeds), the denunciation of corruption among agents of the deep state took centre stage. These scandals continue, marking the path of protest that is fuelling uprisings in the Arab world.

During this decade, sexual and moral scandals did not blow up. What they do and give rise to “cases”, mainly concerning prostitution, seen through the prism of the Moroccan nation under attack by fornicating foreigners (Grotti 2005). Cases involving sex and sexuality, however, intensified from 2010 onwards. At irregular intervals and taking advantage of digital amplification, ‘scandalous’ information was propagated denouncing the immorality of a group or an individual in order to better reaffirm the moral values of the community. This series of scandals began with the so-called ‘Nador kissing affair’ which, in 2013, brought two teenagers to the forefront of national attention after they published a photo of themselves kissing in an alley in a district of Nador on their Facebook profiles (Soret, 2013). The photo was the subject of a complaint from a local, and the two young people were arrested and placed in a boarding school for difficult youth while awaiting trial. They were acquitted, but not without receiving a paternalistic ‘reprimand’ from the judge. This moral scandal very quickly went beyond the country’s borders. It also gave rise to mobilisations in the form of sit-ins, known as *kiss-ins*, because of the public kisses that were exchanged in solidarity with the two teenagers. The series of scandals continued in 2015 with the selection of the film *Much Loved* at the Cannes Film Festival, which is about the lives of four prostitutes living in Marrakech, whose risqué scenes forced the main protagonists to leave the country after being attacked and receiving

⁵ Yassine Benargane, *Affaire du commissaire Tabit ou la toute dernière peine de mort appliquée au Maroc*, *Yabiladi*, 10 October 2017, <https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/58262/affaire-commissaire-tabit-toute-derniere.html>

death threats (Alami 2015). The scandal caused by the film polarised society and led to national and international mobilisation for and against the film. Other scandals concerned the festivals organised by the country and the nudity thus promoted by the authorities (BBC News, 8 June 2015); moral transgressions such as the *Merendinagate*, named after the famous Merendina industrial snack, which put a company, known in every Moroccan household, on the hot seat for deciding to celebrate Valentine's Day by proposing new packaging honouring both the ways of speaking love in dialectal Arabic (*tan bghik/I love you*) and, in the form of drawings, young couples in love (El-Atti, 2022). Other public discourses denounced offences against modesty, which maintains conservative critical debates on intimacy and sex in Morocco. Personalities considered hostile by the regime are 'guilty' of these offences (as sanctioned by the penal code – which in turn raises questions about legally diligent trials, see Macé 2021). This is similar to – but does not quite take the same form as – the scandals that arise from the work of moral entrepreneurs.

While the scandals highlight the opposition between moralists/conservatives and progressives/defenders of individual freedoms, any potential politicisation of moral scandal blurs the effects of polarisation. On several occasions the protagonists have been Islamist leaders or conservative personalities caught in the act of immorality (for example, the adultery case of two executives from the preaching association of the Islamist party, PJD, which was then leading the government; see France24 2016). When scandals involve figures critical of the regime (mainly male journalists accused of rape), it upsets militant affiliations within the progressive camp, leading to opposition between those wishing to denounce the authorities' instrumentalisation of denunciations of sexual violence and those who refuse to deny women's voices. In the context of the *#metoo* mobilisations, ruptures along feminist lines are also at work. These recurrences invite us to question the conditions, functions and effects of scandals in a country that has been going through a demographic transition for three decades, involving a transformation of its sexual ethics. Before looking at what scandal does to emancipatory aspirations and mobilisations in terms of sexual freedom and gender relations, let us look at the very notion of *scandal*.

A scandal, the moment when the contradiction between idealised norms and the actuality of practices is made public, is also the moment when we take into consideration the state of things we thought were pushed to the margins. Scandals include deviance and transgressions, and through them, just as in photographic snapshots, it is possible to evaluate change but also to observe how, politically, different social forces mobilise to curb this contradiction or to advance the debate on individual freedoms. A scandal is first and foremost a moment, one of newsworthiness (*actualité*) and of the present. It occupies the temporal space of the public sphere in the present. The public is gripped by the scandal, which freezes the present time in an illusory manner. It is as if we are held in suspense by a plot that we follow and whose final twists and turns we await in order to mark the course of time. This is doubtless the quality of scandal that has led to its neglect by researchers, as the historian Éric de Dampierre (1954) pointed out. He sought to rehabilitate it by borrowing the analytical procedures used by functionalist anthropologists in their analysis of societies. In his approach, scandal is not understood as rumour, an open secret or gossip. Unlike these channels for the circulation of information, which are situated between the private and the public, scandal is

public. It needs a public audience that will feel offended by the transgression of its common values - to which they are supposed to adhere – by the guilty parties, those who scandalise. By being public, therefore, the scandal concerns the public opinion of a given society or community. When a scandal reaches a whole country and generates a polarisation between two opposing camps, the scandal becomes an ‘affair’. Thus, in French, newspapers very quickly talk about affairs rather than scandals, whereas in Arabic, newspapers (depending on their sensibilities) will speak more of scandal.

There are several types of scandal that can be distinguished according to the categories of values they offend. There are the scandals that offend against sacred values (blasphemy is a source of scandal); there are the scandals that contravene moral values and norms; and those that expose the corruption of those in power. While the last decade has mainly seen scandals related to morality, the other categories of values have also given rise to somewhat recurrent scandals at certain times. The era, and especially the political period, plays an important role in the emergence of one or other type of scandal. Scandal is part of the repertoire of ‘political action’ and, in the 2010s, it is essentially politico-sexual, supplanting the scandals of the 1990s and 2000s concerning public service corruption. This instrumental or strategic approach to values and norms highlights above all that scandal, contrary to what one might think, is not a reflection of a society that is ‘too moral’ or ‘too transgressive’.

Saying scandal in Moroccan: between *shuha* and *fdiḥa*

In Moroccan, scandal can be said by means of two terms: “*shuha*” (شوهة) or “*fdiḥa*” (فضيحة). A *fdiḥa* is, the dictionary tells us, a shameful action, the glare of exposure, the resulting infamy, scandal. The root of the word refers to the semantics of publicity or display. The word contains the idea of unveiling, bursting, disclosing or breaking through. ‘*Faire la fdiḥa*’ or making someone *fdiḥa* is equivalent to the slang expression in French ‘*s’afficher*’ or ‘*afficher quelqu’un*’ that is heard a lot among young people today: ‘showing somebody up’ in English. *Shuha* refers to the idea of nuisance, dishonour (we speak of tarnishing/compromising/damaging reputations). *Shuha* and *fdiḥa* are thus distinguishable from the theological and moral etymology of the word scandal (from the Greek *skandalon*), which refers to the idea of wandering, falling into sin as in the expression ‘scandal stone’. It is therefore the idea of displaying oneself by tarnishing one’s reputation, but also that of one’s relatives, which is retained in Moroccan Arabic. There is therefore an approximation to the idea of honour, which underlies that of scandal. The semantics of display refers to a norm that I have called the norm of (non-) disclosure or the norm of ‘non-saying’ (Cheikh 2011; Cheikh and Miller 2010) by borrowing the concept from Jean Jamin (1977).⁶ We can trace its ethical genealogy, at the heart of which is a *hadith* regularly and routinely mobilised by individuals to deal with the moral contradictions in their lives. This *hadith* explains and enjoins us to remember that

⁶ See also Marie-Pierre Anglade’s work on drinkers in public parks in Casablanca, which elaborates on the idea of being up-to-date (2015).

there is no worse sin than telling and disclosing transgressions God had forgiven, as long as they remained in secret or informal.⁷ Making visible and enunciation are at the heart of scandal. I do not intend to provide a cultural explanation of transgression by referring to the religious sphere). Rather, I want to emphasise the interactivity of normative work in making something a scandal. This reminds us that practices of deviance and transgression only emerge in interaction. They are not social states from which individuals cannot dissociate themselves. To recall this *hadith* is to show how religious reflection can join sociological reflection: sins do not exist as long as they are not caught in the flow of interactions, which then put the speakers at risk. *Shuha* seems to me to be as powerful as *hshuma* (modesty) or even more so.⁸ The prohibition of *shuha* prescribes that individuals should not show themselves in the open or, more precisely, that they should not disclose their wrongdoings in the open. It is a norm that aims to keep transgressive acts under wraps, not from society as a whole, but from the immediate social environment, i.e., the social network in which the transgressors live (family, neighbourhood, work, etc.), the only one that counts. Also, putting the emic concepts of *shuha* and *hshuma* face to face helps to account for the transformations that the intimate and the sexual have been undergoing in Morocco for several decades – otherwise described as the ‘sexual transition’ (Dialmy 2017) – and which has produced a new intimate and sexual ethic, or at least complexified the urban sexual order (Cheikh 2014).

The *shuha* (شوهة)

My work on sex work⁹ has shown that if there is one transgression that young women in prostitution fear more than the practice of premarital sex or the practice of prostitution, it is the exposure of these practices and, above all, putting them into words. This is why any talk about these practices to the uninitiated is forbidden and vigorously controlled. It is through the act of *not-speaking* that young girls manage their transgressions.¹⁰ In public arenas, it is easy to identify the young women in my survey as leading a ‘bad life’ because of the places they frequent (discos, bars), the late hour they are there and the use they make of them, i.e., flirting. However, the girls do not care about the gaze of strangers, except that of the police,

⁷ According to Abu Hurairah, the Prophet said, ‘All my community is forgiven except the *Mujahirin*. And it is part of *Mujaharah* if a man does something at night and then in the morning, while Allah has hidden him, he says, “Oh so-and-so yesterday I did such-and-such”. Certainly he spent the night hidden by his Lord and in the morning he discovers what his Lord has hidden’ (Al-Bukhari, sahih no. 6069, Muslim, sahih no. 2990). Cf. for example: http://www.hadithdujour.com/hadiths/hadith-sur-La-pudeur-du-Croyant-envers-soi-meme_186.asp

⁸ See Rahma Bourqia’s reflective review of the concept of *hshuma* in Morocco (Bourqia 2020).

⁹ This investigation is based on a longitudinal ethnography conducted between 2008 and 2015 in Tangier, where I shared the lives of young women who were prostitutes (who ‘go out’ to use their idiom). This long-term study allowed for an exploration of the adolescent lifestyles of the young women, also including discussion of female juvenile illusions, an analysis of the intimate economy by describing the spatial (the urban construction of prostitution) and social organisation of the prostitution economy and the intimate economy of Tangier. Finally, a reconsideration of housing for single females in the city of Tangier (description of shared flats, studios, etc.). Each of these themes questions practices that are clearly at odds with the dominant normative discourse: whether it be the illusions of adolescence, commercial and festive sexuality or living away from families.

¹⁰ Annerienke Fioule shows very well in her work on premarital love arrangements in a small Moroccan town the complexity of the gameplay surrounding the circulation of speech concerning the existence of premarital couples (Fioule 2021).

who may arrest individuals for prostitution or simply because they are moving around as a group together without being linked by marriage contracts or family ties. For the rest, the moral judgement of strangers is ineffective because it does not compromise one's reputation and, therefore, does not marginalise. One does not have to be decent in front of strangers: it is perfectly possible to talk out loud about one's sexual relations, prostitution or polyandry in a taxi, a shop or while walking through a crowded souk. It can also be done with people with whom one has an equal relationship (sisters, friends). What is important is to hide these practices from people in higher social positions who are close (parents, uncles, aunts, etc.). I will give some examples of this management. The first illustrates the importance of building trust in order to be able to talk about sexual practices, while the second metaphorically illustrates the reality of concealment:

My acceptance in the field was finally achieved when I was able to demonstrate my ability to keep my mouth shut, i.e., not to divulge to people who mattered (families and relatives) the girls' practices and not to say too much about their residential mode (the flat share) that I also shared. Thus, after running into one of my roommates with her cousin whom I did not know, I was congratulated for not revealing the fact that we shared the same living space.

In the summer of 2009, during an outing to the beach with her extended family, one of my roommates, Salima, asked me to hold a towel out in front of her to hide her from the eyes of her family members as she undressed to put on her swimming costume. The beach was crowded and I pointed out to her that the towel was too short, so that everyone behind her could see her undressing except her family. She replied: 'Who cares about the people behind us, the ones you have to hide from are in front of us', and accompanied her answer with a hand gesture, thrown backwards as if to signify her lack of interest in people (*I-bashar*), the anonymous.

Another roommate, Badiia, explained how she had to avoid a former client from Tangier who recognised her while she was on a family outing: "I saw one approaching me and I quickly said to my mother: 'Come on, let's go and see the slippers'. When he saw me deviate he understood. He heard me say "Mama" and he turned back. The men of Tangier have no gumption, they could come and greet you [lasciviously] in front of your brother. My brother was sitting on a low wall and I went to call him to stay next to us to avoid a man coming to greet me. And what's more, in Sidi Hrazem, as soon as my brother steps aside, you see one approaching you and saying: 'Give me the number' [description of street dating in Tangier].

The majority of the families of the girls I followed in my seven-year longitudinal ethnographic study know what their daughters are doing, but none of these families will talk about it openly, and each of these families will make sure it is never talked about. So when the mother of one of the girls reminds her while blessing her that she hopes the gifts she is giving her are not gifts bought with *hram* (illicit) money, she stresses the importance of not stating, while

understanding – which her blessing, or *rdat l-walidin*¹¹, translates – that her daughter is forced to fend for herself. She also knows that this solitary resourcefulness is the result of the inability of her family of origin to ensure the integration of their daughter through marriage (normally the family's prerogative).

So, what does this norm of not-speaking bring us in terms of understanding prostitution: is it at the same time transgressive, deviant and illegal? On the one hand, it makes it possible to realise that individuals are given room to manoeuvre. On the other hand, the anthropological interest of this norm lies in the importance it attaches to social relations. Mobilising Erving Goffman's analytical framework, with *shuha* avoidance, the other is at the centre; and if it is important not to disclose a transgression of the norm, it is not only to protect oneself but also to preserve the face of this other. Maintaining one's face and that of the other does not jeopardise the maintenance of social relations and the continuation of social life. The preservation of the social or interactional order is what guides the recommendations of the clerics: a cover-up is better than an exposure.

As Numa Murard and Jean-François Laé tell us, intimacy 'absorbs and reduces to details what otherwise would be scandalous, and authorises excesses because what one does there will have no consequences for the outside world. Intimacy is the non-consequence, the shock absorber of faults' (Murard and Laé 1996: 39). Managing tensions within the family and preserving relations with family members means that girls must preserve their privacy to avoid disclosing their transgressive practices and, in so doing, safeguard the honour of their relatives. Preserving honour is not simply a matter of deference to the family, but also consolidates the social capital acquired through social networks that promote the social integration of individuals, particularly by conveying marriage proposals. The point of not saying anything is to avoid the risk of weakening one's social capital. The notion of social capital is central here. Far from being new, it builds on previous anthropological analyses of honour and social action (Abu-Lughod 1986; Bourdieu 2018). These are helpful for understanding what is at stake in the new attitudes to intimacy and sexuality, which are becoming increasingly commonplace even as moral scandals intensify.

In addition to silence and the management of information about oneself, concealment can be practised with discretion: discretion in clothing and restraint in attitudes when the girls use familiar or everyday spaces. This is true of the neighbourhood in which they live in Tangier. The girls live in shared flats in new buildings or in neighbourhood houses dating from the 1980s (generally in neighbourhoods adjoining the old colonial city and the old Muslim working-class neighbourhoods from the international era). These neighbourhoods are popular places (in the sense of *sha'bi*) which today accommodate small middle- and lower-class families, Tangier families of Rifian origin who have been living in the city for three or even four generations, a few Rifian retirees back from Belgium or the Netherlands (one of them is the

¹¹ *Rdat l-walidin* literally means 'blessing of the parents'. It emphasises the bonds of filiation recognised before God and recalls the parental order derived from the religious order. Children receive blessing from God *through* their parents – i.e., moral support and relief from their anxieties about their success and future – only if they respect their parents by showing them respect and giving them help and support in all circumstances. The latest images of the Moroccan football team, which regularly show the players celebrating alongside their mothers (whom they would embrace in the stands or bring to the centre of the pitch to dance with or kiss) after each of the victories that led them to the semi-finals of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, are entirely in this register.

owner of the flat share I share with the girls) and young single people of both sexes living in flat shares. Many of the flats are rented to single girls who are 'going out' (as the young sex workers call it),¹² working (in industry or services) or doing both. Throughout my fieldwork in two shared flats, there were few altercations and scandals. On a day-to-day basis, the problems did not go beyond the flirting and harassment by boys loitering in the alleys: flirting which we avoided by not passing close to the groups of young men; and harassment which we responded to vigorously when confronted. The two scandals that led to altercations in the neighbourhood and the intervention of the public authorities concerned the 'indecent' display of one of the girls with her boyfriend on the roof of the house (they were embracing and kissing on the roof) and a punitive moral visitation of unprecedented violence against the girls in our flat. It was undertaken by a criminal who was under the influence of drugs and alcohol that day and ended dramatically with the rape of one of the girls. The girls in the flat share 'justified' the attack – in my opinion prolonging the violence of the rape – by saying that it was the result of the victim's lack of restraint and respect for the neighbourhood. For them, it was the breach of the tacit contract on the existence of limits not to be exceeded that led to the tragedy in this inner-city neighbourhood and left vulnerable the weakest: girls living alone. In other words, the transgression of the norm of non-saying, of not being exposed, led to the punishment meted out by the most marginal member (a *shemkar* or 'drug addict') from the neighbourhood, the immediate social network of our flatmate. *Dert shuha* (she exposed herself and by extension us), my roommates repeated. The possibility of public scandal is a powerful social regulator, through which the moral order is reasserted. It is not the failure to be modest or chaste that is the problem, but the fact that someone has crossed the line of tolerated shamelessness.

The strength of the fear of *shuha* persists even after one has distanced oneself from prostitution. There is a fear of being recognised as a former prostitute. It may be necessary to deal with unwanted encounters and to counter possible disclosures (inadvertent or not) that might occur. This fear of recognition by someone is the fear of losing a newly acquired respectable status. Thus, one of the young women, then in a relationship with her boyfriend, explained to me that five years after ceasing her 'going out' (sex work in the Moroccan sense), she had been slow to go out on the street again in Tangier. The fear of being recognised by former clients or by police officers in charge of moral sanitation kept her enclosed. So, as we were crossing a crossroads in the Tangier city centre, she stopped and looked at a policeman who looked at her without lingering and said:

Look at the policeman over there. He used to see me all the time at night. He remembered my face even though he didn't arrest me. He had recorded me for sure. Now, I walk by him, he doesn't recognise me. It's a change to stop going out, but above all I've learned something. When you go out at night you are different, you change and when you stop you become like everyone else.

¹² They refuse to use the term 'sex workers', hence my undifferentiated use of the terms sex work and prostitution. For an in-depth discussion of the terms see my monograph on 'going out' (*l-khrij*) in Tangier (Cheikh 2020).

The stakes of recognition leave a mark, judging by the comments made by those who have found the 'exit'. And recognition is *shuha*, which can be felt at the individual level and which is equivalent in this case to self-shame: shame of one's labelling but also of one's social downgrading. The ban on *shuha* is powerful because it affects the process of normalisation of women's trajectories more than the loss of virginity, which is not the cause of their banishment or entry into prostitution. Most of them recall that they were not deceived by false promises from men (a classic justification to explain the loss of virginity and mitigate social criticism) or stress that if they lost their virginity it was because *zigha* – which I translate as the desire to have fun, to discover intimacy and to be delirious in adolescence – pushed them to do so (Cheikh 2020).

Scandal and social climbing

Shuha is also a failure to neutralise the infamy of one's social origin. Here, *shuha* refers less to the scandal of exposing transgressions than to social shame and failure in the quest for social respectability. The young women I met were generally able to stabilise themselves in intimate relationships and some of these relationships led to marriages. When girls engage in sex work and the intimate economy in general ('dating'), they are seeking to improve their situation. They seek fulfilment but not at any cost. Thus, intimate relationships with poor boys are avoided. The avoidance of the latter, their social disqualification, establishes a hierarchy among men. The 'going out' of women determines the social relationship in a certain way. The intimacy and sexuality at the heart of the 'going out' device not only participates in the reproduction of gender relations (Gourarier 2016) but also in the social ranking of men by women. When they secure a lasting relationship with a suitable party, the ostentatious celebration of marriage is an opportunity to make one's entry into 'normality' known. Here, normality is synonymous with access to social respectability or social ascension. This is measured not so much by the passage from one social class to another but by one's insertion into the social fabric, into sociabilities that mean that one acquires a certain social value. Social value is still measured by one's ability to make alliances. The ostentation of matrimonial ceremonies in Morocco performs or stages the alliance of two families and thus the participation in the national ideology of the Moroccan family. The matrimonial success of a young woman can have a considerable impact on the social status of families otherwise socially disqualified. Sometimes these marriages, as well as the material and immaterial resources they allow, make it possible for boys also to gain: the brothers of these women (who have had to manage their sexuality on their own by dealing with the effects of the *shuha*) are taken care of more by their families than their sisters.

At a wedding celebration, a girl who wanted to show her continuing interest in friendship with her former disco mates invited them all. In this respect, the wedding was a brutal illustration of the break with the old social milieu that comes with social climbing. The limousine hired for the occasion, the sumptuous dresses and the royal feast were felt as a humiliation by the former 'going out' friends invited to the wedding. They were uncomfortable with the looks they received, feeling that their body language betrayed their membership to

the world of prostitution. The fact that one of the girls was dressed in a strapless Western dress (associated with disco outfits) rather than the traditional caftan was particularly damaging to the image of our group, who were seated separately on a table that the hosts had forgotten to set up for us, leaving us to wait standing in the midst of the guests who were leering at us disapprovingly while we improvised a place to sit. Indeed, revealing that one does not own a caftan is humiliating because this ceremonial garment is central to the Moroccan woman and family: it symbolises more than anything else the link to the Moroccan community according to codes defined by the upper classes.¹³ For working-class women, if it is not possible to own these very expensive dresses, it is nevertheless possible to rent them for the evening, which our friend unfortunately omitted to do. Anxious to do the right thing and carried away by the craziness of this wedding among my roommates, I was myself very embarrassed by my wedding outfit and had to bring in one of my sister's dresses from the south of Morocco at the last minute, as she was more familiar with traditional dress styles. The girls were surprised to see that I mastered the code *par excellence* of belonging and social respectability, having noticed, during our night out, the lack of interest I had in my 'evening' clothes (jeans and shoes without heels). Without having planned it, I was reproducing within the group the frontier that separated us.

During the evening, the identification of my friends as 'whores' and as being poor earned them particularly harsh treatment. While I was being sympathetically welcomed to pose for photos with the bride and groom, the sister of the bride addressed one of us in these unfriendly terms: 'How are you going to deal with your girlfriends? [...] See how you've got to do it because they're blocking the way [referring to the improvised dinner table that disrupted the seating plan] and spoiling the decor'. Similarly, their moral outbursts during the evening were treated with discrimination. On the dance floor, where my friends were relatively discreet, married women indulged in suggestive swaying that did not earn them any reprobation. However, when those who were 'spoiling the place' smoked in the toilets and talked to men in the car park of the party hall out of sight – and therefore careful not to provoke the *shuha* – they drew the ire of the bride, according to whom 'they thought it was the disco toilet'. Unsurprisingly, relations between the bride and the other girls became considerably strained after the wedding, as one of the girls complained:

I was her girlfriend. She used to say to me: 'You're better than my brothers and sisters'. The day she got married, why didn't she take me with her to her new house? Why didn't she tell me, 'Welcome and make my house your home and this and that?'

At the wedding, the vulgarity of dress and certain behaviours created *shuha* because they not only reintroduced into the wedding ceremony a bit of the bride's nocturnal past, which no one was fooled by, but they also disrespected the social picture being drawn. It was a matter of keeping the alliance of two families untainted, enhancing the status and respectability of each (one by marrying her daughter and the other by marrying her son to a girl with financial

¹³ On the symbolism of wedding ceremonies and ceremonial dress, see the work of Souad Azizi and M. Elaine Combs-Schilling (Azizi 2021; Combs-Schilling 1989)

means, obtained through ‘going out’ and in particular as a result of her relationship with a drug trafficker arrested in 2006), regardless of the fact that in each of these two families there were daughters who ‘went out’ to fend for themselves (the bride’s cousins but also one of the groom’s sisters).

The *shuha* that young women feel as a humiliation refers to the norm of not succeeding in becoming an adult, and in the case of those from popular backgrounds, of not becoming wives and mothers for lack of being able to come into one’s own through an experience of work that makes them autonomous and does not bind them like that of the factory or domesticity, which they have all experienced (Cheikh 2020). This shame of ‘not-becoming’ is also the shameful inability of families to ensure their role in the pairing-up of girls. The weakening in practice of the scope of the virginal norm is the result of the weakening of the capacities of popular families to take charge of the marriage of their daughters (a weakening process whose history can be traced throughout the 20th century). This weakening must be taken into consideration in order to understand the phenomenon of prostitution among young women or of ‘going out’ in Morocco, and to understand its evolution and reconfiguration in light of each of the major economic and social transformations that have taken place in the country during colonisation and since independence. The Moroccan intimate economy, which I analyse through the case of Tangier and which encompasses all intimate and sexual practices, particularly prostitution, is an economy that replaces the economy of matrimonial alliances. In other words, the *shuha* as I analyse it here reveals the transformations of intimacy and sexuality in Morocco, which are linked to the profound changes that Moroccan society has undergone, particularly in terms of gender. The metamorphoses of the *shuha* illustrate the shift that has taken place in the modalities of pairing up: we have moved from encounters in the family setting to a normalisation of encounters in the public space, which the protagonists (young people) must then adjust to moral expectations – no matter how much they have transgressed – in order to save face.

Conclusion

Following Cyril Lemieux and Damien de Blic (2005), I would say that scandal is a ‘moment of social transformation’. It puts the values and norms of society to the test. But testing these values and norms can produce a reaffirmation, a contestation of norms or both; they have already given rise to metamorphoses in the daily practices of individuals. What the sociology of scandal gains by going beyond a functionalist or strategic analysis to look at its effects is to show what scandal does, what it produces, what it creates and how it participates – with all the violence, confrontations and repression it brings – in the expression of resistance that is both emancipatory and conservative, but whose tension has allowed one thing: the formulation and visibility of sexual otherness and dissidence. The ‘going out’ of young women is one of these othernesses and forms of sexual dissidence.

However, in Morocco, discourse on sexuality and intimacy has never imagined the possibility of an articulation between prostitution and the sexual question. This linkage is nevertheless conceivable (and even necessary) as long as we consider prostitution – or ‘going

out' and changing attitudes to sexuality – as peripheral, isolated micro phenomena which, in the case of prostitution, would only concern poor women and, in the case of moral changes, only those associated with education, diplomas, modernity, individual autonomy, work, etc. The issue of prostitution is an integral part of the sexual issue, which itself is part of the general social, economic and urban issue in Morocco today. In this sense, the sex trade, as well as sexuality and intimacy in general, must be resituated in a line of questioning that takes into account social belonging (and social class). Discussion of sexuality in Morocco has so far ignored the intersectionality of sexuality and class, or when it is taken into account, reproduces social divisions – which it would have been preferable to analyse – by assuming an 'enlightened' sexuality practiced by the dominant social groupings and an 'obscurantist', scandalous or even anomic sexuality practiced by the dominated. Conversely, there are the specificities of social class, which although increasingly mentioned, remain unanalysed and therefore minimised in an approach that focuses more on common experiences linked to gender affiliations (violence, aggression). The multiplicity of sexual practices and the complexity of the sexual empowerment process at work in Morocco require this intersectional approach.

The girls who 'go out' are in registers of deviance, transgression, illegality and marginality. However, none of these notions manage to account for the totality of the experience that I have seen: the relationships with families, which do not lead, as one might expect, to break-ups or lies; the relationships with men, which are, much more than one might think, complex relationships (amorous, corporal and monetary); the relationships with the social environment – and in the case of housing, with the neighbourhood. To understand the current state of prostitution in Morocco, it is necessary to understand much more than prostitution. It is necessary to understand all the different social relations (intimate, family, political, professional, etc.). Within this articulation of prostitution and sexuality lies marriage, or rather, to quote Jeffrey Weeks, 'frustrated marriage' (2012). We are therefore far from a conscious 'sexual liberation'. We are more simply tracing the production of intimate and sexual lives that are brought about by specific social and economic conditions and these conditions are far from new. They are part of a process of continuities rather than ruptures that spans the entire 20th century. Clearly, the processes of transformation of gender relations are marked by economic transformations.

Through the economy of prostitution, practices, desires, attitudes, identities, norms and values are revealed in the course of their transformation. Today, in Morocco, where there is much more talk about sexuality, particularly with the great transformation of forms of media coverage, criticism is increasingly heard of the amalgam between prostitution and intimate relations outside marriage – an amalgam carried by the moral order of *zina* (the Koranic concept of fornication). The penal code in turn reinforces this conflation (Cheikh 2017).

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