

## **The Intimate Life of the Disenfranchised and Criminalised Moroccan Working-class Youth**

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**Abstract:** Scandals are a good thermometer for assessing the relationship a society has with its moral norms at a given historical moment. The recurrence of scandals and moral panics about immoral practices can be seen as a historical moment of social transformation. If this critical moment is not synonymous with a simple revelation of the ongoing deviance, but a lighthouse in the dark that casts a concrete light on the current change, who are the individuals who make this change; who flouts and transgresses laws and moral norms on a daily basis and view their dissent as a cultural characteristic of their individuality without feeling the need to convert it into a political mobilization? This is a question that this article attempts to answer by examining the daily transgressions committed by young people aged between 15 and 25 in cultural terms rather than in terms of deviance. I argue that their practices – undervalued by the insistence of the gaze focused on norms (virginity, chastity, modesty, reputation, honour), which alone would make the respectability of individuals possible – are above all the reflection of a counterculture. Ignored, this counterculture expresses itself in many ways and exponentially as the tools of communication develop and become accessible to all.

**Keywords:** Scandals, Immorality, Social Transformation, *Tcharmil*, Sex-Work

### **Introduction**

Since the beginning of 2000, discourses on sexuality, morality, individual freedom, social issues (single mothers, clandestine abortions, abandoned children) rooted in the criminalisation of sex outside marriage, etc. occupy a large part of the political and social debates animating the Moroccan public sphere and polarising it between conservatives and progressists. Indeed, the recurring scandals (the Nador kiss, Scoop Facebook pages, all the moral scandals involving Islamists public figures forcing them to face their contradictions toward individual freedom, etc.)<sup>1</sup> that have shaken Moroccan

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1. Théa Ollivier, “Maroc: La Journaliste Hajar Raïssouni Condamnée à Un an de Prison Ferme Pour “Avortement Illégal”,” *Le Monde Afrique*, Septembre 30, 2019. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/09/30/au-maroc-la-journaliste-hajar-raissouni-condamnee-a-un-an-de-prison-ferme-pour-avortement-illegal\\_6013681\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/09/30/au-maroc-la-journaliste-hajar-raissouni-condamnee-a-un-an-de-prison-ferme-pour-avortement-illegal_6013681_3212.html); Jules Crétois, “Maroc–Polémique sur le voile d’une députée islamiste?: “?Certains cherchent à déstabiliser le PJD?”” *Jeune Afrique*, January 11, 2019. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/702865/politique/maroc-polemique-sur-le-voile-dune-deputee-islamiste-certains-cherchent-a-destabiliser-le-pjd/>; Nadia Lamlili, “Maroc?: Le Bras Idéologique Du PJD Secoué Par Une Affaire de Mœurs,” *Jeune Afrique*, August 22, (2016): <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/350786/politique/maroc-bras-ideologique-pjd-secoue-affaire-de-moeurs/>; Monjib, Maâti, “Traquenards et calomnies contre les dissidents au Maroc–Sexe, drogue, argent et vidéo,” *Orient XXI*, March 30, 2015. <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/traquenards-et-calomnies-contre-les-dissidents-au-maroc,0847>;

news illustrate how, beyond the question of moral transgressions, it is the sexual question – in sociological terms as we understand it in French “la question sexuelle”<sup>2</sup> – that arises sharply in the country.

Scandals are a good thermometer for assessing the relationship a society has with its moral norms at a given historical moment. When the scandals are revealed, it is not so much the reprehensible practice and the identity of its author that are unveiled, but rather the existence and social anchoring of a contradiction between normative and practical ideal.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the underlying information of such a public revelation concerns the opening of a field of possibilities in terms of reform, challenge or restoration of moral but also legal norms. Thus, this now flagrant contradiction can be put at the service of a collective transformation of the society’s moral economy. As a tool of denunciation, the scandal serves to criticize both moral orders and disorders, as illustrated by the present case of Hajar Raissouni. And this denunciation as much as the problematic practices charged are part of the social transformation. However, to assess scandals and moral panics about immoral practices as a historical moment of social transformation, we need accounts – particularly sociological accounts – that are deeply rooted in individuals’ everyday experiences. Indeed, when scandals occur, the contents of the intense debates that ensue in the spheres of civil society, the media and politics, agree on the routine within the society of moral transgressions, but the perpetrators of the widespread transgressions, outside of those namely identified by the scandal, are hardly recognizable. To evaluate this social transformation indicated by the scandal, it is necessary to have some sociological accounts of the social groups concerned by the practices being blacklisted. In particular, it is necessary to have analysis that go beyond the classical perspective in terms of deviance and that embrace the fertile perspectives of youth cultures. Given that the scandals we are referring to mainly concern issues of sexuality and sexual freedom, we affirm that in order to understand the recurrence of scandals, it is essential to understand the situation of sexuality and in particular the process of its elaboration within different youth groups of the Moroccan society.

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Larbi Arbaoui, “The Kiss of Nador and the Hypocrisy of Moroccan Society,” *Morocco World News (blog)*. October 7, (2013): <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2013/10/107833/the-kiss-of-nador-and-the-hypocrisy-of-moroccan-society/>; Mohammed Boudarham, “Internet. Psychose à Marrakech,” *TelQuel*, février (2013): <http://www.telquel-online.com/Actualite/Maroc/Internet-Psychose-a-Marrakech/557%2>.

2. Éric Fassin, “Questions sexuelles, questions raciales. Parallèles, tensions et articulations,” in *De la question sociale à la question raciale: Représenter la société française*, eds. Didier Fassin and Éric Fassin (Paris: la Découverte, 2009).

3. Damien de Blic and Cyril Lemieux, “A l’épreuve du scandale,” *Politix* 71, 3 (2005): 3-7.

Moroccan sociology, in the wake of social sciences developed during colonization, has devoted itself since the beginning of independence to youth. However, empirical surveys of youth-specific issues intensified during the 1970s and 1980s. They developed mainly through themes such as adolescence, schooling, social integration and employment, but also juvenile delinquency and deviance. None, however, has been devoted to the analysis of juvenile subcultures and their symbolic forms of resistance. With regard to sexuality and youth, we can make a similar observation on the gap between the existence of an academic literature on sexuality and the weakness of knowledge produced about practices and their inscriptions in juvenile social worlds, holders of a specific culture. By youth cultures, I refer to the values, norms and practices shared by specific groups of adolescents and young adults characterized by specific social spaces, namely mass institutions such as school and leisure spaces where young people are separated and socialize away from adults. In other words, youth cultures are linked to values and identities that break with or contradict dominant norms.

In an article on the construction of adolescence around the world, one author commenting on the extension of the category to Morocco, concludes that “Moroccan youths (...) look to the West as the place of the glamour and freedom. However, they do not expect such freedom for themselves; they seem to be aware that their fantasies are just that and have little relevance to the realities of their present or future lives.” Elsewhere, she describes the adolescent values embodied by the youths as mere imitation. To support her analysis, she compares the Moroccan and Polish youth and shows that the latter embodies better than the former conceptions of youth cultures circulating around the world. In Morocco, the global diffusion of young people’s cultural ideas and their localized consumption would not translate into an incarnation of new values and identities.<sup>4</sup> This discourse, preponderant in the sociological analysis of the country, implies the existence of an irreconcilable conflict between the individual juvenile values and the dominant norms, of religious essences which would guide permanently the actions of the individuals. The strength of religious identity and norms, which concretely translate into laws criminalizing what contravenes good morality, leads to overinterpretation or simplification of reality, particularly with respect to youth, sexuality and intimacy in the country.

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4. Alice Schlegel, “The Global Spread of Adolescent Culture,” in *Negotiating Adolescence in Times of Social Change*, eds. Lisa J. Crockett and Rainer K. Silbereisen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81-85.

In Morocco, sexuality outside marriage, far from being a taboo subject in the academic literature, has given rise to several studies in sociology and anthropology over the last four decades.<sup>5</sup> When it is not the main focus of the study, sexuality is approached through surveys that focus more on the young and the different forms of building their intimacy,<sup>6</sup> their sexual identities<sup>7</sup> or on the social problem of illegal sexual reproduction as in the case of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and single motherhood.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, with the opening of the press in the 2000s, the subject has been widely debated in magazines and newspapers, as well as in activist essays for the general public<sup>9</sup> aiming to widen the sphere of social tolerance. All these writings and analysis agree on the fact that sexuality outside marriage is a reality in Morocco. However, these investigations still suffer from the shadow of normative analytical perspectives. In these studies, the break with such analyzes seems difficult, despite the development and accumulation of sociological knowledge about juvenile cultures and subcultures throughout the twentieth century (i.e. the

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5. Sanaa El Aji, *Sexualité et célibat au Maroc: Pratiques et verbalisation* (Casablanca: La Croisée des Chemins, 2018); Mériam Cheikh, “‘Bnât Lycée Dayrin Sexy.’ de l’amusement à la prostitution à Tanger,” in *Jeunesses arabes. Du Maroc au Yémen?: Loisirs, cultures et politiques*, eds. Myriam Catusse and Laurent Bonnefoy (Paris: La Découverte, 2013); idem., “De l’ordre moral à l’ordre social. L’application des lois pénalisant la sexualité prémaritale selon des lignes de classe,” *L’Année Du Maghreb*, 17 (2017): 49-67; Fatima Bakass and Michèle Ferrand, “L’entrée en sexualité à Rabat: Les nouveaux “arrangements” entre les sexes,” *Population* (French Edition) 68, 1 (2013): 41-65; Valérie Beaumont, Corinne Cauvin Verner, and François Pouillon, “Sexualités au Maghreb,” *L’Année du Maghreb* VI, December (2010): 5-17; Soumaya Naamane-Guessous, *Au-delà de toute pudeur?: La sexualité féminine au Maroc* (Casablanca: Eddif, 1992); Hannah P. Davis, *Unmarried Women and Changing Conceptions of the Self in Sidi Slimane, Morocco* (New York: New York University, 1992); Abdessamad Dialmy, *Sexualité et discours au Maroc* (Casablanca: Afrique-Orient, 1988); idem. *Logement, Sexualité et Islam: Essai* (Casablanca: Eddif, 1995); idem, *Jeunesse, sida et Islam au Maroc: Les comportements sexuels des Marocains* (Casablanca: Eddif, 2000).

6. Mary Montgomery, *Hired Daughters: Domestic Workers among Ordinary Moroccans* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2019); Laura Menin, “The Impasse of Modernity: Personal Agency, Divine Destiny, and the Unpredictability of Intimate Relationships in Morocco,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 21, 4 (2015): 892-910; Matthew Carey, “Entre rencontres et rendez-vous: Stratégies marocaines de sexualité hors mariage,” *L’Année du Maghreb* 6, VI (2010): 171-87; Mériam Cheikh and Catherine Miller, “Les mots d’amour: Dire le sentiment et la sexualité au Maroc. De quelques matériaux,” *Estudios de Dialectología Norteafricana y Andalusí (EDNA)* 13 (2010): 173-99.

7. Marien Gouyon, “*Ana Loubia*”: *Ethnographie des homosexualités masculines à Casablanca*. (Vulaines-sur-Seine: Éditions du Croquant, 2018); Gianfranco Rebutini, “Lieux de l’homoérotisme et de l’homosexualité masculine à Marrakech,” in *L’Espace Politique. Revue en ligne de géographie politique et de géopolitique* 13 (May, 2011): <https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.1830>; idem, “Masculinités hégémoniques et “sexualités” entre hommes au Maroc,” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 209-10, 1 (2013): 387-415.

8. Irene Capelli, “Cibler les mères célibataires. La production bureaucratique et morale d’un impensable social,” in *Le gouvernement du social au Maroc*, eds. Béatrice Hibou and Irène Bono, 199-232 (Paris: Karthala, 2016); Soumaya Naamane-Guessous, *Les grossesses de la honte* (Casablanca: Le Fenec, 2005).

9. Leila Slimani, *Sexe et mensonges* (Paris: Les Arènes, 2017); Shereen Feki, *Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World* (Vintage, 2014).

successive studies and theorizations produced by the School of Chicago, the Birmingham School and the cultural studies),<sup>10</sup> which have spread to the rest of the global South, and especially to the African continent, to take a close example.<sup>11</sup>

Let's go back to the interpretation of scandal presented above: if this critical moment is not synonymous with a simple revelation of the ongoing deviance, but a lighthouse in the dark that casts a concrete light on the current change, who are the individuals who make this change; who flouts and transgresses laws and moral norms on a daily basis and view their dissent as a cultural characteristic of their individuality without feeling the need to convert it into a political mobilization? This is a question that this article attempts to answer by considering religious/conservative norms and values not as a totalitarian system transcending time and space,<sup>12</sup> but as a system that allows accommodation with norms and laws. In examining the daily transgressions committed by young people aged between 15 and 25 in cultural terms rather than in terms of deviance, I maintain that their practices – undervalued by the insistence of the gaze focused on norms (virginity, chastity, modesty, reputation, honor), which alone would make the respectability of individuals possible – are above all the reflection of a counterculture. Ignored, this counterculture expresses itself in many ways and exponentially as the tools of communication develop and become accessible to all.

Through the ethnographic study of two social phenomena, I would like to explain how groups of young people from the working class resist the power of norms and create social change, while calling into question the social stratification at the basis of their limited opportunities of social inclusion. To do this, I will examine, on the one hand, the question of prostitution through the phenomenon of *khrij* (or “the going out”) and, on the other hand, the question of delinquency through the violent phenomenon called *tcharmil*. I consider these two phenomena as juvenile subcultures. Addressing the sexual practices and the norms and values that frame these cultures and putting them in parallel with the economic neoliberal turn and the rise of leisure economies, I will show how these practices rather than being criminal and

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10. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl, *The Post-Subcultures Reader* (New York: Berg, 2003).

11. Vered Amit, “Youth Culture, Anthropology Of,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 808-12; Sasha Newell, *The Modernity Bluff: Crime, Consumption, and Citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Jennifer Cole, *Sex and Salvation: Imagining the Future in Madagascar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas. *Love in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

12. Hassan Rachik, “Préface,” in *Transgresser au Maghreb: La normalité et ses dépassements*, eds. Philippe Chaudat and Monia Lachheb, 11-13 (Tunis: IRMC-Karthala, 2018).

deviant emphasize lower-class identity and legitimize it forcefully. This is the emergence and the consolidation of widespread working-class subcultures that I will analyze focusing on the tools of dissemination of specific identities (*tcharmil* and girls who go out), on their aesthetic performances and the forms of their appropriation (both class and gender-based), on their potential to impact the gender order and sexual politics in Morocco and on how they unravel the current struggle for cultural capital, respectability and thus a recognizable male, female and heterosexual subjectivity.

After a detour on the lack of scientific discourse on juvenile cultures and countercultures in Morocco, I will develop on the cultural practices of two youth groups: the young *tcharmil* and the young girls *who go out*. To support my argument about the constitution of transgressive practices as a juvenile culture, I will mobilize a material collected through two ethnographic surveys conducted online between 2017 and 2019 for the former and offline between 2008 and 2015 for the latter.

### Youth Cultures in Morocco

Juvenile cultures are cultures by which young people define themselves, oppose the adult world, build specific norms in rupture with the dominant ones, create specific spaces where to gather and communicate, embody specific aesthetic styles, recognize themselves within a specific genre of music, etc. The rise of youth culture parallels the economic, political and social changes (school massification, development of leisure economies and spaces of entertainment) as well as the international hegemony of western cultures, the circulation of globalized south cultures, the mass media. If in most countries around the world people can refer to and name one or more youth cultures, Morocco distinguishes itself by the lack of such recognition. No juvenile group is recognizable by name, practice or territory and to our knowledge no study has been dedicated to a group of young people from a youth culture perspective. Apart from cultural production through which youth groups are recognized per se, and given credits for who they claim they are,<sup>13</sup> no juvenile group is clearly discernable as the definition of youth

13. Mohamed Ben Moussa, "Rap It up, Share It up: Identity Politics of Youth 'Social' Movement in Moroccan Online Rap Music," *New Media & Society* 21, 5 (2019): 1043-64; Brian Trott, "Faouda Wa Ruina: A History of Moroccan Punk Rock and Heavy Metal," (MA Thesis. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2018); Cristina Moreno Almeida, *Rap Beyond Resistance: Staging Power in Contemporary Morocco* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017); Brian Seilstad, "Hip Hop Culture in a Small Moroccan City," *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies* 2, 1 (2015): 65-98; Mohamed El Marzouki, "Satire as Counter-Discourse: Dissent, Cultural Citizenship, and Youth Culture in Morocco," *International Communication Gazette* 77, 3 (2015): 282-96; Kendra Salois, "Make Some Noise, Drari: Embodied Listening and Counterpublic Formations in Moroccan Hip Hop," *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, 4 (2014): 1017-48;

cultures invites us to do. However, if, until recently with *nayda* or *tcharmil* terms examined below, no group is clearly labelled in Morocco, we can find disseminated in newspaper articles or in studies quick allusions to the existence of groups taking the names of western youth groups: for instance, the “blousons noirs casablancais.”<sup>14</sup>

This lack is probably due to the focus on young people through their political struggles and their successive uprisings. Juvenile expressions are those that defy dictatorship, economic conditions, price increases and austerity policies, privatizations and management reforms of large state or private enterprises that manage the public good, and so on. It is therefore from the political angle that the question of youth and rebellion is addressed. It is lurking in the studies on the bloody repressions that extended from the 1960s to the 1990s (Casablanca riots in 1965, Rif revolts in 1981, demonstrations in Fez and Casablanca in 1990).<sup>15</sup> It is also found, later, in research on social mobilizations (and their transformations) such as the movement of “diplômés chômeurs,” for the years 1990 and 2000,<sup>16</sup> and for the years 2010, in the interrogations raised by the uprisings, the *hirāks*, including those of the Rif (El-Hoceima) and the Oriental (Jerada), that cross the country and illustrates the formation of a youth connected to global political and activism trends.<sup>17</sup>

By moving away from strictly political expressions, it is possible to appreciate the emergence, from the beginning of the millennium, of Moroccan juvenile expressions, less directly linked, at first, to the emergence of political troubles. These expressions are closely related to digital development. For the digital social scientist working on Morocco, the over-representation of young

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Jamal Bahmad, “From Casablanca to Casanegra: Neoliberal Globalization and Disaffected Youth in Moroccan Urban Cinema,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 6, 1 (2013): 15-35.

14. The “black vests” is a French youth subculture that emerged in the late sixties. Zoulikha El Qortobi, “quelques aspects de la criminalité au Maroc,” (Toulouse: Université Toulouse 1 Capitole, 1983), 448-52.

15. Susan Gilson Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Jean-François Clément, “Les révoltes urbaines,” in *Le Maroc actuel?: Une modernisation au miroir de la tradition?*, eds. Jean-Claude Santucci (Aix-en-Provence: Institut de recherches et d’études sur les mondes arabes et musulmans, 2013), 393-406.

16. Myriam Catusse, Blandine Destremau, and Eric Verdier, *L’État face aux débordements du social au Maghreb: Formation, travail et protection sociale* (Paris: Karthala, 2009); Myriam Catusse and Frédéric Vairel, “Question sociale et développement: Les territoires de l’action publique et de la contestation au Maroc,” *Politique africaine* 120, 4 (2010): 5; Montserrat Emperador, “Les manifestations des diplômés chômeurs au Maroc: La rue comme espace de négociation du tolérable,” *Genèses* 4, 77 (2009): 30-50.

17. Thierry Desrues, “Moroccan Youth and the Forming of a New Generation: Social Change, Collective Action and Political Activism,” *Mediterranean Politics* 17, 1 (2012): 23-40; Sonja Hegasy, “Young Authority: Quantitative and Qualitative Insights into Youth, Youth Culture, and State Power in Contemporary Morocco,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 12, 1 (2007): 19-36.

people on social media is an evidence. This presence has been now well documented by researchers focusing on youth, digital practices and political activism.<sup>18</sup> Today, any study documenting these three analytical perspectives cannot spare itself from a questioning intersecting the three terms and as well as a specific focus on the Internet, its centrality and its role in the course of current social transformations. Morocco has been one of the countries in the region to undergo an important development and use of Internet from the onset of the world massification of Internet. The proliferation of cybercafes by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> are one of the most salient illustration. Internet use in Morocco is since then inseparable from the youth. It is part of their lives. As they develop these two last decades, the technologies associated with the digital (social media, smartphones, WIFI, etc.) give to the youth (but also to other generations) possibilities to communicate, to create and to spread all types of contents (music, videos, photos, messages, etc.).

The digital (re)-shape the ways by which Moroccan youth from all categories define themselves, create new territories and new frontiers for themselves, and impose their own language to transmit their thoughts. Through the digital, young people represent their singularities, independently from their age (adolescent or young adults), their social positioning (working-class, middle-class or upper-class youth), their geographical origin (rural, urban) and their literacy/education. Hence, it allows us to state that the 21<sup>st</sup> century Moroccan young generation is a generation visible by its diverse cultural practices more than any other young generations of the past thanks to the digital. Therefore, to youth seen through their link to political events and struggles and to political engagement (“les diplômés chômeurs,” “les militants de gauche,” “les étudiants islamistes,” “les jeunes du 20 février”) or through their socio-economic status (“les jeunes ruraux,” “les jeunes des bidonvilles,”) correspond a youthfulness state referring to the cultures they might represent. The *Nayda* phenomenon constitute the most known and marketized youthful cultural movement.

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18. Dominique Caubet, “Vers une littératie numérique pour la darija au Maroc, une démarche collective,” in *Studies on Arabic Dialectology and Sociolinguistics: Proceedings of the 12th International Conference of AIDA held in Marseille from May 30th to June 2nd 2017* (Aix-en-Provence: Institut de recherches et d'études sur les mondes arabes et musulmans, 2019); Bouziane Zaid, “Internet and Democracy in Morocco: A Force for Change and an Instrument for Repression,” *Global Media and Communication* 12, 1 (2016): 49-66.

A lot has been written on the *Nayḍa* “movement”<sup>19</sup> that literally means “it’s moving” or “we are on the move.” *Nayḍa* is a phenomenon more related to the emerging music scene of the 2000 decade and the “festivalisation”<sup>20</sup> that followed. This *darija* (Moroccan) term is the first term to make visible a social form gathering young urban people across the main cities of the country (Casablanca, Rabat, Marrakech, Agadir, Tangier). We can call this social form a youth subculture recognizable on the public space that becomes a juvenile space as well. Throughout the 2000 decade, we could recognise this presence of this subculture, named *Nayḍa* more by the press than those associated to it, through the occupation of public squares by young men and women with different aesthetics styles connected to a music genre (hip-hop, reggae, metal). Beyond style and music, *Nayḍa*, whose first meaning refers to the movement of the body that stands, marks the end of a period marked by the injunction addressed to young people to respect any moral decency: an injunction to behave well, to dress well, not to put their friendly relations at the center of their lives, to hide their sentimental relations, etc. *Nayḍa* is the motto that has been given to a youth who seeks to push the limits of its frustrations and to live freely.

As clearly stated by Sonja Hegasy, youth activities being in the field of music, NGO, media production, consumption, etc., reflect the participation in and identification of young Moroccan with processes of globalization.<sup>21</sup> Such an observation invites us to deepen the analysis by examining these activities and their course in terms of class and gender. Hegasy adds that young people actively work to “bring the North south.”<sup>22</sup> This is what we will see with the two sub-cultures, which concern us here, and which show how the youth of the working classes actively shape and formulate their aspirations at a time when the concrete migration towards the North has become difficult, expensive and mortal.

### **The *Tcharmil* Youth Culture**

*Tcharmil* is originally the name of a Moroccan sauce (*tcharmila* ou *tcharmoula*) that enhances the taste, adds flavour. By association, it therefore

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19. C. M. Almeida, “Unravelling Distinct Voices in Moroccan Rap: Evading Control, Weaving Solidarities, and Building New Spaces for Self-Expression,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 25, 3 (2013): 319-32; Dominique Caubet, “From ‘Movida’ to ‘Nayḍa’ in Morocco: The Use of *Darija* (Moroccan Arabic),” in *Artistic Creation at the Beginning of the 3rd Millenium*, eds. Stephan Procházka and Veronika Ritt-Benmimoun (Münster-Wien: LIT-Verlag, 2008); idem., “Génération *Darija!*,” *Estudios de Dialectología Norteafricana y Andalusí (EDNA)* 9 (2005): 233-43.

20. Aomar Boum, “Festivalizing Dissent in Morocco,” *Middle East Report* 263 (2012): 22-25.

21. Sonja Hegasy, “Young Authority.”

22. Ibid.

refers to the idea of good taste that those qualified as *tcharmil* followers are supposed to reproduce. Regarding this, *tcharmil* relates to cultural practices. These practices have gained visibility in the Moroccan public sphere in 2014 through a social-media propagated aesthetic that turns the stigma of social disqualification into a source of pride by extolling assertive masculinity and violence. Hundreds of Facebook pages and YouTube videos have been created by self-styled *tcharmils* displaying their street wear and sophisticated haircuts and delinquent behaviour (long knives, loot). However, *tcharmil* refers to a larger subculture that exceeds the petty criminal milieu from which it originated or to which different discourses reduce it. The word *tcharmil* describes the depth of various social experiences. By transforming the metaphor of fire, which allows sauces to gently simmer, the word refers to the burning pain experienced by young people with the experience of prison, which consumes as a fire; but also with the more generalized experience of the marginalization felt as a burn at the stake.<sup>23</sup> For some young people, the term refers to the notion of bubbling: *mchermlins* are boiling bodies trying to counter their social exclusion. In this perspective, bodies are privileged mediums and weapons (knives and swords) are bodily extensions to avenge the “fire” of a society that denigrates.

*Tcharmil* is also a subculture that pushes away the normative limits of intimacy, sexuality, and bodily practices. The production of sexual and intimate images allows appreciating the ongoing transformation of heterosexuality in Morocco. Starting from the analysis proposed by Teresa de Lauretis on the technology of gender in popular cultures, I postulate that *tcharmil*, although situated at the margins of society by the dominant discourse which sees in *tcharmil* only the emanation of delinquent gangs, encompasses disruptive and oppositional practices, discourses and images that introduce into individual subjects new modalities of knowledge.<sup>24</sup> In most published photos, the display of non-observance of religious norms is explicit and desired. In this way, we see couples slightly dressed or kissing, meaning their subscription to sex before marriage. Tattooed bodies and drinking practices are also proudly displayed. Curiously, what has been ignored during the national social panic that this digital exposure provoked, it is the everyday resistance to conservative mores that *tcharmil* fellows, both women and men, embody. For *tcharmil*, the goal is not the search for a lifestyle in accordance with the prevailing moral precepts. The dissident images create a cultural content that

23. Moussa Matrouf, “Tchahmil bayna Benkirane wa Armil,” *Alyaoum24*, March 27, (2014): <https://www.maghress.com/alyaoum24/173532>.

24. Teresa de Lauretis, *Théorie queer et cultures populaires: De Foucault à Cronenberg*, trans. Pascale Molinier and Marie-Hélène Bourcier (Paris: La Dispute, 2007), 72.

gives form to specific sexual experiences associated with specific working-class youth. *Tcharmil* imagery plays an important role in making adolescent and youth intimacy and sexuality a crucial marker of identity. The imagery sustains a process that oppose the social, moral, religious and legal repressive framework. The display of the body is therefore central. It is the territory that the youths are claiming control on by publicly displaying irreverent bodies. Claims are of different type. They can concern the female use of the street; they can concern sexuality, alcohol consumption, female dominance of the street.

The physical appearance and the behaviour that make the *tcharmil* are all related to one idea: style and appearance allow to claim control of oneself. Personal and moral values as constituted within the peer groups are built through the body. The body mostly serves to state a differentiation between one another. Indeed, where adults, conservatives see obscenity, immodesty, *tcharmil* fellows see differentiation through style and attitude.<sup>25</sup> On social networks, the intensive use of likes, comments, emoticons, is aimed to praise the singular creativity of each. Praise and positivity reinforce the acceptability and normalize destabilizing attitudes. They convert this work of differences in a culture, a specific juvenile culture that cannot be confined to the world of margins. The moralistic critics are, thus, unwelcomed as illustrated for instance in the exchanges of comments that follow the publication of photos showing the ostentatious and claimed use of alcohol. In the personal Facebook profile of a young *Mcharmil* I followed for two years, the publication of photos showing his satisfaction to buy, drink and share alcohol would give rise to critics from part of his followers. In one of these photos posted on the occasion of the end of Ramadan, we see this young man happily buying in a grocery a bottle of whisky to celebrate the end of fasting. Although he receives hundreds of like and celebratory comments, few followers dare to criticize him, but they are immediately firmly attacked by the page owner who state his rejection of the right to meddle with the lives of others. Male drinking binge is not a new practice in Morocco. What is new, however, is the production of content and social commentary celebrating consumption. Norms are not respected and especially the ones that force individuals to hide when they transgress.

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25. Robert Garot, *Who You Claim: Performing Gang Identity in School and on the Streets* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

### The youth culture of the girls *who go out*

In Morocco, sex-work expression is not used among the women involved in prostitution. The women use the expression “*l-khrij*” or “the going-out” as we can see it in this quote:

“I don’t go out (*tan-khruj*) [to prostitute] often. I go out mostly during the summer. And, in the winter, I would go out just when I need some money for my daily expenses (*bach nšaraf*): I have to eat. I have to pay the rent, I have expenses. [...]. And then, when I go out the thing is not that I go with one and then another one and so on. I try to be with one only, to create a relationship with him, stay with him and go out to the disco with him. You know dating someone (*l-mšahba*) is better. You feel hope, you feel it’s your man.”

The girl quoted here, is a “girl who goes out” (*tat-khruj*), which means a young woman who frequent nightclubs for a living. When she delivered me this discourse, one year after I first met her, she has already stopped the going out to dedicate herself to a relationship with a young French man from Moroccan origin she met in the disco.

Another one who was in the sex-trade says about her partner who prevents her from going out at night just to have fun, that she prefers to end this relationship rather than renouncing to have fun:

“I cannot marry him and stay locked at home. I cannot lie to you, I like going out at night to party (*nqasru*). I’m bored at home.”

Another one, a call-centre worker going out occasionally for money and fun, says the following about her arrest by the police and her two-days experience in custody:

“What I don’t understand is that they make big campaign of arrest against debauchery and whores, but I can go out and sleep with no one, I can go out for entertainment, go out because I want to have a drink and that’s all. But they [police and society] target us. For them, you cannot go out because you want to, you go out because you are a whore looking for money. That’s what they see.”

The call-centre worker is making here a point about how, as a person from the underclass, her presence at night in bars and nightclubs is only reduced to prostitution by police and observers of the nightlife. Therefore, the social background inscribed on the body, create a mark a divide between women in term of class. The social position legitimises or delegitimises the festive practice.

So, we see how in their speeches, different layers of experiences come to define what is ‘the going out.’ We see it being alternately associated with the very idea of commercial sex (“expenses,” “money,”) with the idea of dating (*l-mṣaḥba*), with the idea of fun (‘party’ or *nqaṣru*) and finally with the social position. They not only refer to the going out about a specific sexual practice (prostitution) but in relation to their entire intimate, sexual and social experiences. Although, they say that they go out to sell sex for money, they insist in making clear that their going out also refers to the values of fun, juvenile values rendered possible by a large leisure industry (development of cafes, bars, nightclubs).

Alongside the going out, there are different ways to express commercial sex. Women could use other verbal expressions which are “*tan dabar*” or “*tan dipani*” (to get by). What is interesting if we compare these expressions is what they convey. “*tan dabar*” or “*tan dipani*” refer to the economic conditions that force to prostitute in order to survive. The expression is compassionate, it euphemises the moral transgression by emphasizing on the economics. With “*tan khruj*,” the reference to precarity is absent. In saying “I go out,” meaning I go out to meet men and make money, the girls are not giving any justification or looking for compassion. They just state an action. The going out practice is one through which the individual is a subject and not one subjected or subdued. From *tan dabar* to *tan khruj* we move from an action of which we are the default subject to an action that we embody and of which we are entirely the subject not willing to give any justification. The absence of justification gives room to more complex understanding of the going out that shed light on the importance of its youthfulness.

Through the field of the going out they construct specific selves pursuing the formation of their subjectivities as it started when they were frequenting school. Schooling nurtured these imagined possibilities of becoming someone (a “person”) by letting the fun aspect related to youth and adolescence be part of the socialisation process a large majority of young Moroccans go through at school. Pointing at the youthfulness has the advantage of highlighting individual dimensions such as the valorisation of oneself through the amusement. I see the going out as a reflection of the historical constitution of a generation. Generation is not here reduced to a social group defined by an age group or the course of a particular historical event. It emerges from the common sharing of a set of representations on what a premarital intimate relationship is, on what femininity and masculinities are, on love and premarital sexual practices acceptable or not, on models of insertion available, on the ties to the family, on the relation to school and work and so

on. This set of representations inform the girls who go out and other youth groups not concerned by commercial sex, with other social backgrounds or with the same.

Prostitution remains an issue of socio-economic condition. It is related to labour and female labour in many ways. However, this link does not prevent to approach another dimension. The young women's narratives give insight on the way they engaged in it and invite to adopt a biographical approach to the activity of prostitution. Sticking as close as possible to the different elements of their stories, brings a more complex overview of it. For the very majority of the women I interviewed and lived with, if the going out meant gaining some money through intimate and sexual services, it was also seen as a mean to pursue youthful desires. Beyond the mere commercial transaction, accounts on the going out practices are first and foremost about youth, friendship and the discovery of intimacy and sexuality at adolescence. Being part of the nightlife was enabling the sentiment of self-worthiness. Young women felt they were constructing valuable and respectable subjectivities mirrored in the new leisure economies. Aimed at more privileged social groups, leisure avenues, that came to define more and more the urban economies of major Moroccan cities (Tangier, Marrakech, Casablanca) these two last decades, were also shaping new ways of expressing youthfulness. Fun and entertainment became criterion to assess and state who is acceptable to be seen as a young person living its youthfulness.

### **Conclusion**

Through this brief presentation of two different non-conformist youth practices, I wanted to illustrate how underclass youth are craving out spaces (social, digital and concretes) where their active intimacy and sexuality outside marriage is expressed. They are expressed out of fear of the authority, far from the forced embodied submission to the power and the dominants that have long been defining previous generations. *Tcharmil*, as the first ever group to be named by the insiders' fellow that share some cultural codes, is actually a good example of this claimed working-class youth space. *Tcharmil* and *the going out*, are not the only one, other juvenile youths produce their selves in many different ways. Expressions, experiences of being young are more complex and vary across cultural, class, gender, and other divides.

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### الحياة الحميمة لشباب الطبقة العاملة المغربية المحرومة والمتهمه بالإجرام

ملخص: الفضائح هي مقياس حرارة جيد لتقييم العلاقة بين المجتمع ومعايير الأخلاقية في لحظة تاريخية معينة. ويمكن النظر إلى تكرار الفضائح والذعر الأخلاقي بشأن الممارسات غير الأخلاقية على أنه لحظة تاريخية من التحول الاجتماعي. وإذا لم تكن هذه اللحظة الحرجة مرادفة لإعلان بسيط عن الانحراف المستمر، ولكن منارة مشعة في الظلام تلقي ضوءاً ملموساً على وقائع التغيير الحالي، فمن هم الأفراد الذين يقومون بهذا التغيير؛ ومن الذي ينتهك بصفة فعلية القوانين والأعراف الأخلاقية ويتجاوزها بشكل يومي وينظر إلى معارضتهم كخاصية ثقافية لفرديتهم دون الشعور بالحاجة إلى تحويلها إلى تعبئة سياسية؟ هذا سؤال تحاول هذه المقالة الإجابة عليه من خلال فحص التجاوزات اليومية التي يرتكبها الشباب ممن تتراوح أعمارهم بين 15 و25 عاماً من الناحية الثقافية وليس من حيث الانحراف. وفي رأبي، أعتبر أن ممارساتهم التي تم التقليل من قيمتها بإصرار من تبني نظرة مركزة على بعض المعايير (العذرية، العفة، التواضع، السمعة، الشرف)، والتي من شأنها أن تجعل احترام الأفراد ممكناً، هي قبل كل شيء انعكاس للثقافة المضادة. لقد تم تجاهل هذه الثقافة المضادة، وهي تعبر عن نفسها بعدة طرق تتجاوب في مواكبة مع تطور أدوات الاتصال الحديثة التي أصبحت في متناول الجميع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفضائح، الفجور، التحول الاجتماعي، التشريع، امتهان الجنس.

#### La vie intime de la jeunesse ouvrière marocaine criminalisée et privée de ses droits

**Résumé:** Les scandales sont un bon thermomètre pour évaluer la relation qu'une société entretient avec ses normes morales à un moment historique donné. La récurrence des scandales et des paniques morales sur les pratiques immorales peut être considérée comme un moment historique de transformation sociale. Si ce moment critique n'est pas synonyme d'une simple révélation de la déviance en cours, mais d'un phare dans l'obscurité qui jette une lumière concrète sur le changement actuel, qui sont les individus qui font ce changement; qui bafoue et transgresse les lois et les normes morales au quotidien et voit leur dissidence comme une caractéristique culturelle de leur individualité sans ressentir le besoin de la convertir en mobilisation politique? C'est une question à laquelle cet article tente de répondre en examinant les transgressions quotidiennes commises par des jeunes de 15 à 25 ans en termes culturels plutôt qu'en termes de déviance. Je soutiens que leurs pratiques – sous-évaluées par l'insistance du regard focalisé sur les normes (virginité, chasteté, modestie, réputation, honneur), qui seules rendraient possible la respectabilité des individus – sont avant tout le reflet d'une contre-culture. Ignorée, cette contre-culture s'exprime de plusieurs manières et de manière exponentielle, au fur et à mesure que les outils de communication se développent et deviennent accessibles à tous.

**Mots-clés:** Scandales, immoralité, transformation sociale, *tcharmil*, travail du sexe.