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Undutiful daughters claiming their futures and the uncertainties of non-marital love in Casablanca

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Abstract. Having Casablanca as a field site, this article situates heterosexual love and intimacy in the lives of young women experiencing social precariousness, including the uncertain non-status of unmarried mothers. Ethnographic insights broadly question love ideals and practices in Morocco, suggesting that these are simultaneously informed by socio-cultural and political-economic processes. It will be argued that women imagine and craft potential futures from an uncertain condition at the intersection of normative boundaries to non-marital sexuality and childbirth and socio-economic inequalities.

Keywords: Morocco; love; uncertainty; unmarried mothers; future.

1. Introduction

Romance, love, sexuality, intimacy are at the centre of a thriving field of anthropological research South of the Mediterranean and broadly in the anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) [Abu-Lughod 1986; Fortier, Kreil, Maffi 2018; 2016; Kreil 2016; Adely 2016; Menin 2015; Carey 2012; Cheikh, Miller 2010]. The emergence of romantic love and the transformations of intimacy reveal processes of continuity, contestation, and change in the family order, kinship, marriage, gender and sexual rights, state policies, and ideologies [Maffi 2017; Tremayne 2017; Hart 2007]

In this article the category of romantic love is understood at the intersection of different dimensions, «not as the only possible form of love but as a specific mode of subjectivation which induces a ‘self conscious performance' [Hart 2007, 351] of feelings and a specific configuration of 'state policies, infrastructural improvements, new technologies, economic opportunities, and vehicles of expression» [Fortier, Kreil, Maffi 2018, 17]. This adds to the endeavour of departing from «ethnocentric conceptions of love» [Fortier, Keil, Maffi 2016, 97] to «inscribe the emotional relations in Arab countries in their specific contexts and in the intricacies of individual experiences» [ibidem]. My contribution specifically brings attention to how young women giving birth outside marriage experience love in contemporary Morocco and questions their spaces for imagining and moving towards potential futures within multidimensional uncertainty[1].

In postcolonial time, the rise of nation-states and reforms in family law promoted the model of the nuclear family – the *usra*[2] – which granted the relationship between the spouses novel importance, by dismissing the role of the extended family – *a'ila* –, by demanding the institutionalisation of marriage through formal registration, and by discouraging polygamy [Fortier, Kreil, Maffi 2018; Charrad 2001], while the «remaking» of women in the name of modernization was also rife with ambiguities [Abu-Lughod 1998].

Global socio-economic and cultural transformations, women's schooling, their access to salaried work and higher education, and urbanisation, all contributed to make heterosexual romantic love and companionate marriage – featuring the partner's choice based on emotional fulfilment and physical attraction – synonyms of modernity [Fortier, Kreil, Maffi 2018, 18]. This is yet to be situated in what has aptly been described as the «multiple and contradictory worlds of Moroccan modernity» [Pandolfo 2000, 142]. Here, as elsewhere, specific genealogies of modernity resulted from cultural, social, and political processes and re-appropriations within different socio-cultural and political agendas, at whose core are gender and body politics [Abu-Lughod 1998; Salih 2008][3].

Although in Morocco the ideal of love choice is reflected in the practices of – mostly – urban wealthy social contexts, it coexists and often conflicts with a widespread perception of marriage and romantic love as distinct and with the families' enduring role in the choice and match between spouses[4]. However, ideals of partner's choice are widely appropriated and, particularly in lower classes, challenge the status of marriage as the alliance between families [Capello 2008, 118-119; Bennani-Chraïbi 1995].

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[1] This article draws on research conducted within my PhD (University of Torino, 2014) and funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (2010-2012). My profound gratitude goes to the women at the centre of this work and to all colleagues and mentors with whom I discussed it over the years. I thank this issue's Editors and the anonymous reviewers for their appreciation and constructive comments.

[2] The terms in Arabic and Moroccan Arabic will be provided according to a simplified transcription.

[3] For a broader discussion on Moroccan modernity see Pandolfo [2000].

[4] As noted by Davis [1995], yet in other regional and historic contexts.

Hence, the legimitisation of love ideals hinges on generation, gender, and class and emerges in definite historic and socio-political conjunctures. «Romantic love», «love after marriage», «arranged marriage» are thus to be intended as categories needing broad questioning, along with the practices and imaginaries they generate [Fortier, Kreil, Maffi 2016; Maffi 2018], their inscription in capitalist economy and class [Kreil 2016; 2014], and the nexus between romantic love and individualism [Hart 2007]. Moreover, these categories take shape against the backdrop of Islamic revivalist movements' competing ideals of subjectivity, modernity, and gender underwriting their projects of societal transformation[5]. The relevant pedagogic practices and arguments seek to reform individual morality, including female and male youth's conducts and pre- and non-marital sexuality [Menin 2015]. In this view, non-marital pregnancies would materialise the educational and «development» crises, that secular human rights-based discourse fail to counter, while – local and foreign – popular representations of romance and sexual intimacy may appear problematic, when not «unauthentic» or overtly «corrupt»[6].

This resonates with Abu-Lughod's [2002] brilliant discussion of the ways melodrama in Egypt popularises «a distinctive configuration of narrative, emotion, and subjectivity» colliding with other forms of (notably religious) morality and «technologies of modern self-making» [ibidem, 116]. In Morocco, the press, literature, music, films, television – including soap operas from MENA countries, like Turkey, but not only[7] – have actually nurtured shifting ideals, idioms, and aesthetics of love, which also draw on local linguistic and cultural repertories [Cheikh, Miller 2010]. Finally, although their impact cannot be comprehensively emphasized – as in the case of my interlocutors – the spread of mobile phones has multiplied and transformed pre- and non-marital contacts in unprecedented ways[8], which the internet and social media have amplified.

This picture outlines the controversial and changing status of romantic love in Morocco, that I will situate in the trajectories of young women struggling with multifaceted relational and socio-economic uncertainty.

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[5] On political Islam see Tozy [1999] and Vermeren [2010, 89-90]. On the theological and ethical dimensions of contemporary Islamic revival see Pandolfo [2007].

[6] Accounts provided to me by female activists in (currents of) these movements.

[7] Notably from Latin America.

[8] See Menin [2018] – specifically on central Morocco – and Bowen, Green, James [2008].

2. Morocco. «Love is not a crime»[9]

In postcolonial Morocco the socio-demographic landscape drastically changed over a few decades, due to the overlap of the so-called demographic transition stemming from post-independence population policies, women's education and salaried work, urbanisation, inner and transnational migration, neoliberal capitalism, and political turmoil [Vermeren 2010]. These processes gave context to the emergence of youth as a category, celibacy, and the rising age of marriage [Bennani-Chraïbi 1995; Courbage 1995; Makhlouf-Obermeyer 2000; Rachik 2006; Engelen, Puschmann 2011; Aboumalek 2011; Bakass, Ferrand 2013; Bono 2015][10]. In a country characterised by sharp social and economic inequalities and by the commodification of marriage ceremonies [Capello 2008; Kapchan 1996], marriage can be a financial burden for families of lower and middle classes. Significantly, State formation in Morocco has been described as resting upon «constitutive asymmetries» [Bono et al. 2015, 11][11], which, as shown by Capello's ethnography among young *casaoui* men, Casablanca[12] emblematically exemplifies [Capello 2008].

Moroccan family law underwent significant transformation and contestation [Žvan Elliott 2015; Maddy-Weitzman 2005; Buskens 2003; Charrad 2001][13], while in the last decade the claims of unachieved women's, bodily, and sexual rights sparked heated public debates and momentous mobilisation [Skalli 2012; El Feki 2015; HRW 2019; Collectif 490 2019]. In this framework, informal relations are part of people's daily lives in Morocco [Carey 2012; Cheikh 2017; Cheikh, Miller 2010] despite the normative and legal boundaries that I will detail. Yet, their acknowledgement is unequal, according considerably to class and gender differences [Cheikh 2017; Obermeyer 2000], employment type, the rural/urban divide, mobility and (inner or transnational) migration, and the uneven access to education.

This contribution regards women of both rural and urban background living in urban Morocco or moving between the two. Urban settings offer youth a temporary – work or study – escape to the «grip» and the «supervision of their close kin», despite persisting «gender imbalance», in that familial and societal expectations of conformity to gender and sexual norms address mainly girls [Tremayne 2017, 4]. Regarding Tunisian urban youth, Maffi [2018] notes that both social norms and state policies – the latter meant as «a form of moral and political control over sexual and reproductive behaviour» [ibidem, 186] – work differently for female and male pre-marital sexuality, respectively through stigmatization or criminalization and emphasis or appreciation. Similarly, Morocco-based ethnographies show how pre-marital affairs are socially accepted and praised for males [Carey 2012; Davis 1995; Davis, Davis 1989].

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[9] Collectif 490, https://www.collectif490.com/blog/2019/12/05/lamour-nest-pas-un-crime/

[10] For relevant data see Haut Commissariat au Plan [2014, 17-21].

[11] Quote translated by Irene Capelli.

[12] *Dar El Baida* in Arabic.

[13] The 2004 Reform of the Moroccan family law – *Moudawwanat al-usra* – is an example of legislation aiming to consolidate the ideal of the *usra*, the nuclear family.

If this gendered differentiation of social and moral sanction towards non-marital sexuality has largely been analysed, less attention is brought in social sciences dealing with the South of the Mediterranean and Morocco, to how social class affects and differentiates the ways women conceive and experience sexuality and intimate relations[14].

Through the experiences of my interlocutors, I precisely wish to show how love ideals and practices are tightly bound to social class and to multi-layered inequalities. In Moroccan society, the spread of out-of-wedlock heterosexual relations illustrates the «banalisation of an illegal practice» [Cheikh 2017] in the context of an inequality-ridden social landscape. Therefore, illegality itself does not touch all Moroccan women equally. As Cheikh argues, the criminalisation of practices designated as illicit is not moral but inherently social [ibidem, 50]. This explains why, for instance, attending public places for leisure and/or for out-of-wedlock intimate encounters became legitimate for educated women of middle and higher classes, while it is cast as illegitimate and potentially deviant for poorer and uneducated women [ibidem, 50, 55].

3. Future(s) unfolding in Casablanca

I myself remarked the embodiment of this «sociospatial hierarchy» [Capello 2008, 56] of the city on several occasions while with my interlocutors around Casablanca, or through the emphasis some put on their staying «at home» or «at work» as «markers of respectability» for young women in a precarious socio-economic condition. This is crucial in shaping romantic imaginary and the intimate relations that these women experience in a non-normative framework.

During extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Casablanca in 2011 and 2012 I did participant observation with about fifty young women, with whom I sometimes developed closer relationships over the years. I encountered them in maternity hospitals, at the NGOs or charities, which hosted or assisted them[15], at their places or elsewhere in the city, so I was introduced to women sharing similar stories. In the field I mostly encountered women, but also some young men. At the charities I attended medical dispensaries, nurseries, and activities like professional training, legal and health education, and celebrations. 7 out of the 8 organisations I contacted allowed me to conduct research within their programmes; 4 of them – scattered in various centres – explicitly target unmarried mothers[16]. Fieldwork demanded the painstaking negotiation of my role as a researcher and building trust relationships with all actors.

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[14] A noteworthy exception is Cheikh [2009; 2011a; 2011b; 2017].

[15] These Moroccan organisations are called *jamaiyyat* in Arabic or *associations* or ONGs in French. I will use «NGOs» or «charities».

In what follows, I will give some background on non-marital pregnancy and maternity in Morocco. I will then consider how my interlocutors narrated their experiences by inscribing them in a temporal framework in which the meaning of love and intimate relations shifted according to various circumstances.

Imagining their future and acting upon it faced social, legal, gender, and material hurdles. Nonetheless, even when their lives seemed stuck or disrupted they mobilised multiple resources, which recalls resilience-based approaches turning attention from vulnerability to capabilities [Panter-Bricks 2014]. I thus acknowledged their subjective resources and strategies towards chronic uncertainty, while departing from interpretations of resilience focusing disproportionately on individual responsibility.

Johnson-Hanks' [2002] definition of «vital conjunctures» as «socially structured zones of possibility that emerge around specific periods of potential transformation in a life [...] temporary configuration[s] of possible change, a duration of uncertainty and potential» [ibidem, 871] also suits this reflection. The dilemmas of out-of-wedlock pregnancy disclosure – to partners and/or family members – imply different scenarios and exemplify a «contingent and anticipated future» [ibidem], as they anticipate, open up or preclude certain futures and possibilities. Childbirth occurs outside socially prescribed frameworks in a sort of exile, notably from one's family and sometimes at shelters for unmarried mothers. This configures a time during which women deploy plural understandings of love in living up to the unexpected «(non)status» of the unmarried mother in Moroccan society [Capelli 2016].

I will explore these topics through the experiences of four women. Mouna and Zineb struggled to inscribe love in their precarious living and working conditions and in their future, while experiencing maternity and threatening the relationship with their families who had invested on their education or who expected financial support. Whereas Sara's and Wafae's moves towards potential futures elucidate the stakes of out-of-wedlock maternity in distant social worlds and interrogate the gendered logics underlying intimate non-marital relations.

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[16] I drew on French as the most widely used language in institutional settings, and on Moroccan Arabic in all other contexts. Whenever possible and allowed, individual interviews and collective meetings were audio-recorded. I also met experts in the medical, legal, religious, and NGO sector and participated in civil society national meetings and workshops on non-marital births.

4. Inhabiting uncertain boundaries

In considering non-marital maternity in Morocco, representations of these as social anomalies are not uncommon [Naamane-Guessous, Guessous 2011]. Besides examining marginality, stigma, and the breach of norms by «unmarried mothers», I have analysed how non-governmental initiatives inform this as a category of care-deserving subjects, make it public, and govern this social question through what I called its «re-moralisation» [Capelli 2016]. Here, I will explore how these women mobilise the issues of intimacy and romantic love in rethinking their experiences and in prospecting their future, within what I identified as the «socially unplanned» event of non-marital birth.

At the time of my fieldwork, these women were between eighteen and their early thirties and generally considered and called themselves «girls» (*l-bnat*)[17], which distinguishes them from married women, *l-mra*. The French *mères célibataires* (unmarried mothers) is used in the non-governmental field, although it does not correspond neither to socially recognised categories of femininity, nor motherhood, nor social status outside that specific domain [ibidem].

The Moroccan dialectal term *l-azibat* broadly designates unmarried women in relation to virginity, but it is used for women giving birth out-of-wedlock combined with *al-ummahat,* mothers. The changing modes of referring to these women publicly in sectors of Moroccan society outweighs the ambiguity ascribed to this condition, that is often associated with deviant female sexuality, when not to practices labelled as «prostitution» [Cheikh 2009]. Representations of unmarried mothers channelled by local NGOs oppose their criminalisation and convey the image of women determined to raise their children despite hardship and socio-cultural stigma.

Islamic jurisprudence widely casts illegitimate sexual intercourse as a major fault (*zina*), and the Moroccan Penal Code (Art. 490)[18] criminalises any extra-marital sexual relation. Children lack of *nasab* – paternal descent and social affiliation – unless born within a union sealed by a marriage contract (*al-aqd al-zawaj*) registered at notaries (*adul*), which is the only framework for legitimate filiation.

Legal dispositions and moral norms do not necessarily impact on these women's lives nor on their conducts directly, but the media or NGOs tend to construe their condition following a moral script – the violation of sexual and moral norms as a source of inequality – and to govern it accordingly. This dismisses biographical heterogeneity and the fact that locally childbearing outside marriage often exacerbates stratified forms of precariousness [Capelli 2016]. After childbirth these women engage in everyday struggles like feeding, caring for, providing a safe environment for their children, which is usually extremely difficult, as most find unstable employment and/or are inner migrants in charge of supporting their families, as in Zineb's case. The stories of educated women from low to middle classes – Mouna's and Wafae's – nuance this perspective by illustrating different declinations of the socially structured boundaries women inhabit.

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[17] Meaning also «daughters».

[18] Text of the Moroccan Penal Code in French: http://adala.justice.gov.ma/production/legislation/fr/Nouveautes/code%20penal.pdf

5. Mouna, Zineb

Living outside one's home is critical if women want to hide from their social milieu, although they must justify distance through material support and visits. Some fashion fictive scenarios by pretending they are in one city while being in another, or by moving between neighbourhoods, as some women from Casablanca do.

These plots may be forged with the help of siblings and aim both to legitimise one's distance and to imagine and craft future stability as key to theirs and their children's family recognition. Multiple arrangements are enacted to deal with facts considered as shameful, that may even be known to the families, lest they remain distant or dissimulated, according to forms of «social wisdom» [Maher 2007].

Her conduct's visibility and publicity were at stake in Mouna's experience. She was studying at university in a city other than her hometown as she discovered her pregnancy, that she initially wanted to interrupt, but did not manage to[19]. When seeking help at local charities, she was addressed to NGOs which in Casablanca target unmarried mothers, some of whom arrive from other regions to give birth far from their social environment, or travel after hearing of organisations helping unmarried mothers prior and/or after childbirth. In Casablanca Mouna was assisted since childbirth within an NGO's programme including professional training, besides legal, childcare, and medical services. She was the first accessing university in her family, which after knowing – from rumours – about her pregnancy, harshly judged her and interrupted any contact.

Mouna suffered as she became aware of the disruption of her family's expectations. She never envisaged going back to her home or university town and stayed in Casablanca, where she started collaborating with an NGO[20]. In the meantime, she reflected on how she got to her current situation. In doing so and in imagining potential future scenarios, she mobilised her ideals of romance and intimate relations. Notably, Mouna would have continued her life and *alaqa adiyya* («normal relation») with her boyfriend. While at university, they had a three-year story without intending marriage. However, they broke up due to misunderstandings and Mouna started a new relation, which ended after she gave birth.

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[19] On this topic see Capelli [2019].

[20] This is not uncommon among educated NGO beneficiaries and highlights a specific trajectory.

Mouna still wished that her child was born from the previous relationship, idealised as «authentic» love. She had talked on the phone with her first ex-boyfriend, who asked if he was her child's father, but she told him he was not. She was now motivated to raise her child and strove to move out of the «dodgy» – but affordable – neighbourhood she was living in due to her financial constraints.

While catching-up on the second floor of a café a year later, Mouna told me how she got involved in new affairs, which disappointed her as some began with apparent – or hoped-for – romance, but ended up being short-term or «one night» ones. She blamed «mentality» and «society», arguing that sexual intimacy with her boyfriend rested upon «love» and «trust».

> I got to know a few guys recently. We have been dating [...] but they are not serious at all. I wish I could meet someone I can trust. They just take advantage of me. They knew I have a child, I don't hide that. Everywhere in Morocco it is so hard for a woman like me. This is *l-aqliyya*, people's and men's mentality. Families and society do not accept childbearing outside marriage. There are even unmarried mothers in jail. But many of us were in love, we trusted our boyfriends (Mouna, October 2012).

Hence, Mouna struggled to figure another life in which her ideals of love and intimacy matched the ways both sexual intimacy and maternity were conceived, legitimated, and experienced. Moreover, Mouna's education and familiarity with NGOs' discourses – that she seemed appropriating – suggests on one hand the widening gap between herself, her current social environment, and her family of origin. On the other, Mouna did not seem finding any «available» relational configuration suiting her ideals and condition, which reminds how «kinship logics, cultural conceptions, economic constraints, and political regimes are crucial to determining available models of love and patterns of feeling» [Fortier, Kreil, Maffi 2016, 97].

If Casablanca allowed Mouna to escape a troublesome situation and simultaneously a possibility to start over and prospect her future despite several uncertainties, Zineb's story looks pretty different. She was born in a smaller town on the Atlantic coast, left school early and was taken by her parents to relatives in Casablanca with the aim of finding her a job as a domestic[21]. In Morocco young women and girls are frequently taken to the cities – or are entrusted to relatives living there – to be employed as domestics [Bouasria 2016]. Some leave autonomously being attracted by the city's «promises», but all have to live up to their family's expectations, whether it deals with financial support or with all sort of investment.

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[21] Domestic work is among the main sectors of informal, underpaid, and sometimes seasonal employment for young (uneducated) women from the countryside or smaller towns.

Zineb recalled her one-year relation, although initially reluctant to do so in presence of her house mates, who were also unmarried mothers[22]. Their rooms overlooked the same court of a house in one of the city's deprived but thriving *chaabi* [23] neighbourhoods. Being perceived as unsafe and as *khayeb* (bad) by many living there – among whom Mouna – it sharply contrasts nearby business districts and villas. Twenty-two year old Zineb claimed that her partner intended to marry her and met her family: «He came to *darna* [to our home]. I trusted him», Zineb said by raising her hand and by waiving the finger of her engagement ring. She could hardly prove that they had a *khotba*, a legally binding engagement and legitimate union though.

Zineb acknowledged but minimised sexual intimacy: «*Gher marra wahda* [only once]», and admitted involvement exclusively in virtue of marriage. Emphasis on domesticity resonated with a normative view and with her self-representation as a respectable *bent* [daughter/girl], which her precarious situation may have cast doubt on – at least according to the dominant moralised social order discussed above. Notably, she repeated that while outside her parental home, she had stayed mainly at her maternal aunt's and at a shelter for unmarried mothers. Showing no complicity with her house mates, Zineb distanced herself from the *bnat* who overtly spoke about dating boyfriends and stated: «I don't want other relations...I am afraid of having more problems. Maybe, when my child grows older [...] Then, I might also tell my family» (Zineb, October 2011).

Zineb underscored that the condition her boyfriend set to eventually marry and have children was that she had an abortion, which was the reason why she refused. She had not heard from him anymore and maintained it was unlikely to happen. Although she had temporarily been supported by two NGOs, her aunt helped her with childcare when she worked «*fi diur* [in the homes]», i.e. as a domestic. As their relationship deteriorated, Zineb's aunt stopped helping her, hence – as it is frequent– she paid a neighbour for childcare or took her child to work. Zineb experienced various declinations of uncertainty, in the family, affective, relational, social, and economic realms. Notably, when being taken to Casablanca to embark in domestic work, then with her boyfriend and her family of origin due to pregnancy.

Uncertainty as mistrust imbued the relationships with her peers, while being let down by her once-trusted aunt and temporarily relying on NGOs' support further complicated the scenario. After dropping out of all NGO's programmes, Zineb increased her workload as a domestic. Being on her own outside her family home, supporting herself and her child through unstable jobs, and mistrust in potential partners were her major uncertainties. Zineb's struggle with overwhelming constraints hampered social and material family obligations and future introduction of her child to her home.

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[22] See Cheikh [2011b].

[23] The French *quartier populaire* also applies.

This also illustrates how the concept of *hchouma* – «shame» – refers to the multiple social arrangements aimed at maintaining a tacit knowledge of «shameful» matters. Feeling or displaying *hchouma* and maintaining one's honour do not only regard the women's virginity or sexual relations (*alaqat jinsiyyat*). It broadly encompasses the respect of one's family through the dissimulation of potentially transgressing behaviours [Cheikh 2011a]. These practices and dispositions strive to uphold one's social relations and networks of solidarity, notably through the complicity of female kin [ibidem]. Yet, Zineb showed how uncertain and demanding such adjustments can be.

6. Sara, Wafae

The controversial configurations of romantic love and non-marital intimate relations echo the stories of the women I encountered in the field. Most had a working-class background, but biographic details in Wafae's narration broaden the picture by suggesting an affluent social milieu. Sara's and Wafae's stories emphasise how women's narratives unfold in the tension between their past, their – uncertain – present, and their possibilities to re-imagine their future(s).

22 year-old Sara worked for five years as a seamstress in a *sharika* – a factory – in her hometown on the Mediterranean coast. «I started working at 7 in the morning and I was back at 5 in the evening», she stressed when introducing herself. She was living with her parents and eight siblings and – except work at the factory – cared about the house. Soon after discovering pregnancy, she quit her job and, carrying a bag with few clothes, took a train to Casablanca. Here, it was hard to find the shelter for unmarried mothers, where she was not admitted because she had not her ID card. So, she travelled back to get it. Once home, she hid her belly with a tight *samta* – a belt – and, before leaving again, her mother bluntly asked her: «*Fin ghadiya*? [where are you going]». Sara gave her the shelter's phone number, but said it was a family's, who hired her as a domestic for an undefined period of time. «*Chi chohr* [some months] ... » was the vague answer, or time lapse in which she hoped to be back.

Sara had a two-year relation with her partner, who knew about the pregnancy since the beginning and told her not to interrupt it: «*Khalli l-bebe 'andek* [keep the baby with you], he told me». He was childless and seemed willing to raise the child and marry, although he had not disclosed he was married to his first wife. Still at the shelter, three weeks after giving birth, Sara thought she would need to return home alone first: she could not take the baby along before her partner divorced. They had actually done an engagement celebration at Sara's home in the meanwhile, but he agreed to divorce only when Sara got pregnant.

The fact that births are not institutionalised by marriage causes travels back and forth from the women's homes and the places they live or give birth in. Such dynamics also suspend or erase the time that is usually ritualised and dedicated to the new mother's and the newborn's social reintegration after childbirth. This is motivated by bureaucracy or by the need to show up in one's hometown to silence potential suspicion.

Particularly, Sara was waiting for bureaucratic procedures to be finalised before making birth public, but feared that her family would not accept that she had given birth outside marriage within a relation with a married man – something Sara knew from rumours heard by her sister. Therefore, her trip to Casablanca was a strategic move to hide the exact timing of birth. It also aimed to ensure herself and her baby a regular status in the eyes of her family. The weeks spent at the shelter constituted a time of uncertainty at the edge of the future, in which her situation was suspended and many contingent factors had to match with one another. This made it hard for Sara to envisage a clear and linear future as a wife and a mother, unlike her engagement had prospected.

> He wanted this baby. Even now he would like to come here to *Casa* [Casablanca] and take us back north. I haven't had any other partner, *gher wahed* [only one] [...] My parents didn't want me to hang out with a married man ... But he's kind, he sent me money as I ran out of it. Anyway I want to work. *Wa mankhallech l-bebe dyali* [and I won't leave my baby]. When all will be sorted out with my partner I will tell everything to my family, but if they won't accept me, I won't go to them (Sara, June 2011).

Wafae had a different social background but also found herself being the beneficiary of an NGO in Casablanca, that she reached from her hometown. When introducing herself in fluent French[24] she mentioned she had given some interviews with the press and bluntly added: «*Mais ça sert à rien pour les Marocains. On pense qu'on est toutes pareilles, 'des prostituées'* [but this is worthless for Moroccans. People think we're all the same, 'prostitutes']» (Wafae, October 2011). She had arrived to Casablanca forty days earlier and stated she wanted to stay and could not return home. Unlike most unmarried women, who tell about mistreatment at childbirth at public hospitals, Wafae found doctors professional and even kind, although they knew she was unmarried: «They just call you '*madame*'», the 19 year-old said. Wafae, who was living until then with her widowed mother and two siblings, quit high-school – before obtaining her diploma – due to the pregnancy she discovered after four months:

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[24] Speaking French is a marker of one's social status and education, also among middle-class Moroccans.

> I was mentally sick [...] I left home and went to *khalti* [my maternal aunt] on the Mediterranean. Then at my uncle for some weeks. Just to pass the time. Nobody knew I was pregnant […] until the seventh month, as I talked to my general practitioner, a friend of my mother. She [the doctor] could not help me and just suggested me to turn to a women organisation linked to the Party [one of the main Moroccan political parties], but since my mother is well-known in that sector I could not do that at all! During Ramadan I had a crisis and told her everything. She took me to another town and rented a flat for me to stay (Wafae, October 2011).

Since the flat owner allegedly sent her away after knowing about her pregnancy, Wafae spent some days wandering around, before heading to Casablanca in search of a shelter ran by catholic nuns, but she ended up to another she had never heard of. After childbirth she had not met her mother yet: «She can't do anything. She didn't even want me to keep my baby. She says I can't leave our home. '*Tu peux pas laisser toute la famille pour une fille'* [You can't leave your whole family for a daughter], she said […] she finds excuses not to come to visit» (Wafae, October 2011).

Still sitting on the bed of the shelter's dormitory, Wafae envisaged staying in Casablanca, looking for a job, doing a mortgage to buy an apartment or rather initially renting one. She had never thought of having children but said she had always intended to keep hers. That was one of the reasons why she could not contact any relative in the city. She displayed self-confidence and outspokenness when expressing her feelings about the shelter, despite conveying a sense of being stuck: «I have talked to a psychologist here. Here you tell your story, then you're just told 'good luck'. That's it. Here every girl tells her story, we're all together. I have told my story» (Wafae, October 2011).

While talking about her past and her five-year affair, Wafae suddenly told that her pregnancy resulted from sexual violence, which occurred after she broke up with her boyfriend. In recalling her story, she sharply commented that the ways romance and intimacy are conceived and experienced by youth in Morocco undermine their future.

> My boyfriend and I never stayed alone, but always with other friends or in public places [...] I didn't tell him anything [of what eventually happened to me]. [...] After we broke up he got married. Sometimes I think why this [pregnancy] has not happened with him [...] My mother knew I had a friend. I wanted to have sexual relations only after marriage. We were considered a couple, we were lovers. In my hometown everybody knew we were together [...] But I wanted to study, to search for a job and maybe get married afterwards [...] I know guys otherwise leave girls after a while [...] *Ici au Maroc on vit une vie bizarre* [here in Morocco we live a weird life]: we know guys leave girls even if they are fiancés. And even if they get married, the girl is asked if she is a virgin. The mother-in-law asks about that. Your mother wants to attend the medical consultation. The mother-in-law wants to see the medical certificate of virginity. Even if it's her son who did that, she thinks the girl has done that with someone else. And if she is pregnant – if the guy wants – they get married. Otherwise, there's nothing you can do. People do hymen reconstructions if they

> know the partner very well [...] *Il faut aussi les moyens* [you also need financial means] (Wafae, October 2011).

Wafae further questioned non-marital relations in Morocco by shifting attention to their framing in a middle-class milieu by a young educated woman from an affluent family. Such a background is not necessarily an advantage if encompassing challenges like the opposition of family members – here Wafae's mother – who would prefer to preserve her daughter's affiliation and tie to a family having important connections in the city's and country's social and political life, rather than compromising it because of the newborn, as shown by the emblematic sentence «*Tu peux pas laisser toute la famille pour une fille*».

The situation depicted by Wafae diverged from the ones lived by women of lower social classes. Wafae hinted at the alleged publicity of the relation with her boyfriend as common in her social milieu, where young couples access education, afford leisure and hence access the socially acceptable spaces and means for romance. They also draw on the knowledge and financial means to manage events such as pre-marital pregnancy, the need of a certificate of virginity or an abortion.

Noteworthy is Wafae's representation of her next future, as she displayed self-confidence and seemed taking for granted renting or buying a flat in Morocco's main city. Her narrative is grounded in a still uncertain and emotionally strained situation, yet it distinguishes hers from other narratives, unfolding on a background of chronic precariousness.

7. Conclusion

I have discussed the concepts and ideals of romantic love as historically and socially structured categories in postcolonial Morocco. Here, the meanings of love, intimacy, sexuality, and gender relations have changed across decades of social, economic, and demographic transformations and are a matter of stratified social disparities.

This is the context in which young women negotiate the uncertain boundaries of non-marital sexuality and childbirth. I have argued that their insights must be understood also beyond the framework of the transgression of gender and sexual norms. Notably, I have suggested that their love ideals and practices are imbricated with the multilayered socio-economic inequalities characterising their whole life trajectories.

Besides, I have problematised the ways in which they acted upon recurrent uncertainty. I understood this far from a merely individual «resilient» adaptation to adversity, rather as a complex and non-linear socially informed process.

Women's perspectives on their future(s) emerged as often opaque, vague, contradictory or subject to manifold contingent and unpredictable events, in which love and intimate relations were a variable – sometimes a crucial one – in unravelling one sort of future or another.

Casablanca is an emblematic site for the display and embodiment of what I may call the «differential normativity», which makes specific spaces and places for living, socialisation, leisure, and flirtation the markers of class, of a certain kind of femininity, and of legitimate/illegitimate ways of experiencing romantic and intimate relations.

This is key in the reflection on the future(s) imagined by unmarried mothers. Notably, by those who – like Mouna and Zineb – did not wish to be «stuck» and hoped to move out from neighbourhoods they perceived as unsafe, although being the ones they afforded. Prospective moving meant going towards a possibility of a less uncertain future – irrespective of the reconcilement with their families and/or the relations with partners.

Despite their different trajectories, Casablanca was for Mouna, Zineb, Sara, and Wafae a place where to give birth and raise children far from home, with whom ties were strained or disrupted but not in an irreversible way. Except Wafae, all prospected a future family reconcilement. In Casablanca they outweighed the variables of a still unfolding future – especially in the weeks following childbirth (Sara and Wafae) – and here they started or continued living and working in yet distressful conditions (Mouna and Zineb). The diverse uncertainties they had experienced wove into their precarious present and affected the ways they shaped their future «horizons» [Johnson-Hanks, 2002], in which the spaces and possibilities of love emerged both as desired and as ambiguous, shifting, and contentious.

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