

Gender and Sexual Education in Morocco

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Abstract: For more than three decades, Morocco has been engaged in a major reform program in favour of gender equality. Several legal and institutional reforms have been adopted, and numerous policies to protect and promote women's rights in the socio-economic, political and educational spheres have been implemented. However, it turns out that unequal practices and differentialist representations that hierarchise men's and women's bodies have maintained the status quo. Men's and women's sexual experiences are still asymmetrical, and the female body is still under guardianship. This paper aims to analyze the educational discourse about sexuality in order to understand to what extent the school contributes to the (in)egalitarian building of bodies. This analyze concern textbooks, teacher's practices and representations of adolescents/students. As a result, it seems that the Moroccan school still remains one of the spaces of resistance against gender equality and thus contributes to the (re)production of gender inequalities.

Keywords: Gender, Morocco, Sexual education, Education system.

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Introduction

This paper tries to explore the articulations between the making of full citizenship and the educational discourse on sexuality. This interest is essentially due to the deep mutations and the paradoxes that Moroccan society is experiencing in terms of sexual norms and practices.

On the one hand, in spite of Morocco's constitution states that Islam is the religion of the country (Article 3), Moroccan society is undergoing a “sexual transition” (Dialmy, 2015). The sexual practices of Moroccans are being detached from religious norms. This distancing from these norms has given rise to the emergence of new sexual practices considered non-normative within Moroccan society (including non-heterosexual ones). Abstinence is no longer the dominant norm among youth and adolescents (Guessous, 2013). Sexual practice outside marriage is common, and especially with the advancement of the age of marriage, everyone knows and accepts it, even if it is a practice that remains socially unacceptable, legally sanctioned and religiously prohibited. The Moroccan streets, cafes and public squares are witnessing a proliferation of young couples who no longer hesitate to display affectionate gestures towards each other. Social networks, for their part, are full of discussions and testimonies about sexual relationships and performances.

In addition, Morocco has now homosexual movements, such as the ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) and the Kifkif association, which not only claims its rights, but also has its ambassadors, notably the writer Abdellah Taïa, whose “Le tarbouche rouge” (The Red Tarbouche) toured the world (Telquel, 2009) and the singer Fayssal Azizi.

On the other hand, the last General Census of Population and Housing of 2014 (GCPH, 2014) showed that despite the share of married people has increased in Morocco over the last decade, the fertility rate continues to decline, from 6 to 2.38 children per woman between 1960 and 2018 (Ministry of Health in Morocco, 2019). This means that the discourse that places women in a situation of being a reproducer or a “pregnancy chest” is no longer dominant. Thus, the conception of women's bodies as being essentially intended for fertility has reconfigured. And if contraceptives have contributed to this decline in fertility, they have also increased the involvement of women's bodies in sexual activity and in the decision to become pregnant because 73% of married women use them to control a possible pregnancy.

Within these changes, the mobilization of women, the action of human rights and feminist associations and the inclusion of Morocco in the universality of human rights have contributed to the adoption of several legal and institutional reforms and to the implementation of a policy for the protection and promotion of women's rights in the socio-economic and political fields in Morocco. Thus, gender equality has become an indispensable component of public policies, including education policy.

This whole process suggests that the environment is favorable for taking further steps towards the emancipation of women and the strengthening of their role in society, and that the boundaries between masculine and feminine are shifting and that the citizenship of full women/ girls is finally being created.

However, it has been found that unequal practices and differentialist representations that hierarchize the sexes on sexuality have maintained the status quo. Men's and women's experiences of sexuality are still asymmetrical, and the female body is still under tutelage.

The reports of Global Gender Gap Report 2021 and Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH, 2021) and High Commission for Planning (HCP, 2019) revealed the continuity of gender inequalities and differentialist representations are still conveyed in the spheres of socialisation: Education, media, culture, families...

Not only can we speak of the permanence of sexual violence against girls/women, but we also record a marked increase in the prevalence of this violence, regardless of age or marital status (General Directorate of National Security, 2021), adding of course the continuity of tolerance towards the sexuality of boys/men against intolerance towards that of girls/women, the increasing number of single mothers (National Institution of Solidarity With Women in Need (INSAF), 2020), clandestine abortions (Moroccan Association Against Clandestine Abortion (AMLAC), 2020), underage marriages (HCP, 2020) and resistance to the

decriminalization of abortion.

All these indicators show that these changes have not, however, fundamentally altered the representations of men's and women's bodies and have not contributed to the lifting of men's control over women's bodies.

In spite of the building of gender equality is a cross-cutting issue that involves several institutions and actors, I was opted to work school discourse. The choice of school is due to its dual mission. On the one hand, it is a place of socialization. In addition to its mission of transmitting knowledge, it is one of the privileged spaces for the adoption of norms and the construction of children's identity (Jourdan & al., 2002), insofar as the body is no longer judged as a prior essence, but an effect of "social regulations and normative assignments" (Fassin, 2005), and the activity of the body in human sexuality is no longer a matter of instinct, but of social learning (Bozon, 1999).

On the other hand, sexual education aims to equip learners of all ages with values, knowledge and skills that instill respect for human rights, social justice, diversity and gender equality, as well as to enable young people to adopt attitudes of individual, family and social responsibility (UNESCO, UNAIDS & WHO, 2009). It is indeed closely related to the making of full citizens.

Methods and Corpus

Addressing the issue of the building of bodies in and through educational discourse involves questioning several components of the educational system: its structures, its actors and its practices, because in addition to the knowledge transmitted in and by school textbooks, there are also issues linked to complex, unspoken and invisible mechanisms within the school, such as educational practices (explanations, choice of methods, media used, etc.) but also the representations of adolescents/students, since these adolescents are not only students, they are also involved in other spaces of socialization. Indeed, the development of a critical stance with regard to the contents of school textbooks and teachers' educational practices, as well as the taking into account of students'/adolescents' conceptions appear to be fundamental data to explore.

Firstly, this research began by analyzing the discourse conveyed in and by the school textbooks of the disciplines considered by the Moroccan Ministry of National Education to be the bearers of norms and values related to sexual education. These disciplines are: Life and Earth Sciences (LSE), Islamic Education (IE), Family Education (FE), French Language (FL), Arabic Language (AL), and History-Geography (HG).

Secondly, we analyzed the practices and conceptions of a sample of teachers from six school subjects, namely: LSE, IE, FE, AL, FL and HG. In order to give more objectivity to our exploration of the representations underlying educational practices, we considered it useful to diversify the sources of our data, basing ourselves both on the results of questionnaires distributed to these teachers, on in-depth individual interviews with them, and on participant observation by co-facilitating sexual education sessions. Thus, we collected the results of 306

questionnaires, 22 individual in-depth interviews and seven participant observations.

Finally, we tried to explore the students'/adolescents' representations as well as their needs and expectations. In order to target the whole of Morocco, we opted for the cluster survey technique with an equal number of units. Thus, we took a random sample of 100 secondary school students from each region of Morocco, i.e., 1200 students in total.

Table 1. Sample Of Students By Gender, Background And Age

		Rural	Urban	Total
Sex	Male	120	289	409
	Female	157	297	454
Total		277	586	863

The results of our various corpus materials, namely the analysis of textbooks, the exploration of educational practices and the analysis of students'/adolescents' conceptions, allowed us to deduce that gender equality is not taken into consideration in sexual education activities. This is manifested in the representations conveyed in and by these activities producing an asymmetrical building of bodies in matters of sexuality, including: the continuity of representations underpinned by biologism, the adoption of the risk-based approach and the dominance of the differentialist discourse.

Continuity of the representations underpinned by Biologism

We recall that the biological dimension of sexuality includes the sexual act/response, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, functional anatomy of the genitalia, biological development of puberty and genetics... Although the biological dimension seems “neutral” in view of its scientific character, we considered it useful to analyze the way in which these teachings are presented, since not only the content could contribute to the manufacture of a system of thought, but also their organization.

The authors of school textbooks (LSE2C and LSE5P for example) point out that lessons on human reproduction are merely an extension of the lessons on reproduction in animals and plants. This applies to all textbooks that contain lessons related to human reproduction. This view is expressed explicitly in the introduction to the various lessons where they have explicitly introduced animal and plant reproduction as a prerequisite. Thus, we send the message to learners that to understand human reproduction, it is sufficient to understand animal and plant reproduction. This extension, which establishes links between human, animal and plant reproduction, can only consolidate biologism, by considering these reproductions as similar, and that they are all biological and linked only to the effects of Nature.

With regard to sexuality in animals, the first remarks we recorded during the analysis were that the images

mobilized present the body of the 'male' animal as either larger or more attractive. They also present him as the “active” actor in the sexual act, insofar as it is he who takes the initiative in sexual intercourse after the courtship phase.



The fighting fish male is characterised by exaggerated colours. During the courtship, the male tries to impress and seduce female. (Translation: Author).

Figure 1. Representation of sexual behavior during reproduction in animals (School textbook: Life and Earth Sciences 2nd College.2013. p. 74)

With regard to reproduction in plants, from the very first lines and images, we wondered about the norms that botanists have mobilized to define the “sex” of plants, since they speak of the female and male reproductive systems. In fact, this sexuation, considered as an “order of nature” and a reference for the human being, is, in the end, only a projection of the representations of the human being on Nature. In other words, the sexuation of plants was done through a discourse based on the language norms applied to human beings. The “anatomy” of plants is in fact an object that is thought through in schemes of apprehension specific to a social space and informed by specific social representations (School textbook: Life and Earth Sciences, 1st Lycée. 2011. p. 91).

Thus, we believe that basing human reproduction on the conception of reproduction in animals and plants is an epistemological error, insofar as the former (sexuality in animals) does not contain the socio-constructivist determinants that characterize human sexuality, and the latter (sexuality in plants) is based on a discourse enveloped by human differentialist representations.

According to this view, sexual education should convey to learners how the biological/natural body functions in 'normal'/'natural' sexuality, similar to that of animals and plants. It is the process of disciplining a sexual body according to a pre-established pattern, considered natural/normal. And therefore, any conduct outside this framework is considered “abnormal” and/or “deviant” and/or “pathological”.

This tendency is then transformed into a norm, and the diversity that is present in nature is generally ignored: for example, the comparison between human and animal sexuality has the consequence of presenting men's sexuality as a force that cannot be controlled and must be satisfied immediately. Male desire is thus naturalized, and female desire is invisibilized. Therefore, we can say that:

The aim is above all to channel thought through the learning of biological functions, and then through moralization, which inscribes sexuality in the order of nature - which 'de-eroticizes' sexuality by concentrating on reproductive mechanisms - and which proposes the family model as a matter of course (Jourdan, 2002).

Adoption of the risk-based approach

In addition to the focus on the biological dimension, sexual education activities in textbooks, in educational practices and among students/adolescents are also underpinned by a risk-based approach.

This approach was started under the protectorate against venereal diseases and continued after independence under the paradigm of family planning by teaching children of the dangers that threaten pregnancy and cause infant mortality and the negative effects of successive pregnancies on the health of mother and child. It was accentuated after the emergence of AIDS. Urgency and social panic governed these discourses. Sexual education activities therefore had to be specific and pragmatic in order to be effective. They need to be more targeted at the so-called 'at risk' categories, i.e., populations that are likely to be at risk and/or may be dangerous. In line with the preventive trend in textbooks, for teachers too, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), AIDS, phenomena such as teenage pregnancy, violence and "sexual deviance", fertility control. "Sexual education should equip students with sexual knowledge and skills to protect themselves from STDs, teach women how to use contraception and how to have a safe motherhood" emphasized one FE teacher.

Thus, it is clear that this risk-based approach is underpinned by demographic considerations, which make women increasingly responsible through contraceptive methods, and health considerations, by mobilizing biomedical discourse but also religious discourse, which considers girls'/women's bodies as a risk.

While this vision aims to prevent risks, it contributes nevertheless to the legitimization of control over girls'/women's bodies, especially since the preventive discourse in school textbooks and educational practices is mainly underpinned by mythical and religious representations of these bodies as threatening (potential source of *fitna* (seduction)), considered as *âwra* (must not be totally visible), having an unlimited sexual desire, or a body that is inferior both physically and intellectually.

Girls are, in fact, the first recipients of prevention (contraception, abortion, protection against STIs, fight against sexual violence), considered more responsible than boys. Social control of sexuality continues to be exercised more firmly for girls than for boys. Girls are taught to hold back and stifle their impulses, to consider them shameful, abnormal and a source of sin. She is taught to preserve her body, to protect her genitals more than her eyes, and is warned against men.

This is in line with Isabel Clair's (2012) interpretation that women are collectively seen as 'whores' by nature, girls have a necessarily suspect sexuality and must be brought into line, constantly reminded of the gender order.

Dominance of the differential discourse

The Analysis of the results of our fieldwork revealed that not only are sexual education activities in textbooks underpinned by sexual differentiation, but also the educational practices and even conceptions of students/adolescents.

When it comes to the two sexes, sexual education activities are divided into two separate worlds. They are thus reduced to the teaching of anatomical, physiological and socio-cultural differences between the sexes in relation to sexuality (Family Education, 2nd College. 2004. p. 36).

But the problem is that this division is no longer presented only as a description of the characteristics of men's and women's bodies separately, but is transformed into a field of comparison between two worlds. This means that we move from the differences between bodies to their hierarchization, from the difference between male and female sexualities to their categorization and from the difference between social roles to their (de)valorization.

This is to say that if difference is a "natural" law, the choice of words and metaphors used to describe these differences can, nevertheless, illustrate the qualities specifically associated with the masculine and feminine in society. And so, if the author of the textbook and/or the teachers are not (or would not want to be) committed to the promotion of gender equality and does not take responsibility for making the nature of this difference explicit, discourse on difference will be categorizing.

This discourse, which seizes a biological fact and (in)consciously attributes to it a social order through language, gives itself as an imposed law to organize and order bodies, thus confirming the principle of the differential valence of the sexes (Héritier, 1996). The principle associated with the feminine is always the one that is devalued (Bourdieu, 1998), in this case the weak, the passive, the involuntary, the impure and the controlled versus the powerful, the active, the voluntary and the controlling.

Conclusion

The representations of sexual education in the Moroccan education system favor the legitimization of gender inequalities and reinforce control over girls' bodies and sexuality. Also, Sexual education that focuses on problems and risks is not in tune with the curiosity, interests, needs and experiences of children and young people, and will therefore not have the intended effect on their behavior.

Although sexual education contributes to girls'/women's empowerment and well-being, insofar as being able to make choices about sexuality, requires that they already have the power to say 'no' and that this decision is respected, girls/women in many contexts, including Morocco, may be economically dependent, ideologically

oppressed, or potentially abused, so that it is not possible for them to impose their choices or to explore their own desires.

Thus, Moroccan school reproduces historical norms and values and does not participate in transforming society and mentalities. Moroccans tend to change society through a silent demographic revolution and emancipated sexuality, but education refuses to acknowledge this evolution and the emergence of a new consciousness.

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