

## **The Impasse of Modernity: personal agency, divine destiny and the unpredictability of intimate relationships in Morocco**

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Following the romantic vicissitudes of Ghizlan, a professional woman in her 30s, this paper explores the expectations and unexpected outcomes of love in a rapidly changing Moroccan town. Imagined as a pure and elective union between two individuals, love manifests itself in Ghizlan's lived experience as a dangerous adventure along the thin line between human agency and divine destiny, personal desires and social constraints. In the wake of the Islamic revival, a purified idea of 'Islamic modernity' provides the religious imagination and vocabulary with which Ghizlan recomposes the unfulfilled promises of love and discusses recent developments in Morocco. Interweaving love and destiny, Ghizlan's reflections reveal a perspective on agency and (inter)subjectivity that exceeds intentionality, desire and rational understanding. Highlighting the fundamental roles of human passions and transcendental powers in people's ethical and existential journeys, this paper hopes to contribute to an emerging 'anthropology of ethics and freedom'. It broadens current anthropological debates by interrogating the very meanings of choice, freedom and responsibility in a world where personal agency meets human powers, divinely preordained futures and material contingencies.

“Without satellite TV I would feel lost!”<sup>1</sup>, Ghizlan, would say while we watched television in the villa where she lives with her family in a middle-class neighbourhood of al-Azaliyya, Central Morocco. Ghizlan is a 33-year-old woman who graduated in economics and works in a bank. When she was a little girl, she dreamed of having a car, an office and a good job. Unlike her classmates who flirted with boys, she was a teenager devoted to her studies. Her family wanted the girls, like the boys, to be educated and build their future.

Originally from a rural village in the Tadla Plain, Ghizlan’s parents moved to al-Azaliyya when her father became a *petit fonctionnaire*, eventually rising to a managerial position. Her mother ‘Aisha attended school only until she reached puberty. Although this was common practice among peasant families, she never forgave her parents for withdrawing her from school. ‘Aisha was married off at 15 without having been consulted. During the first years of marriage, she moved to her in-laws’ home, where she worked in the fields and did all the housework, as a young bride was expected to do. After forty years of conjugal life, her marital bond with her husband is filled with affection and respect. Thinking over her experience, though, she said: ‘Every mother hopes her daughter is better than she is. She wants her daughter to be well dressed, educated and independent from her husband, with her own money in her pocket! [...] I don’t want her to carry on crying! Because we cried so much, and what scared us in our father we feared in our husband.’<sup>2</sup> Linking female education and economic independence with the hope of a better life, ‘Aisha’s

words evoke gendered aspirations intimately connected with images of ‘modern life’ (*ma ṭisha ‘aṣriyya*)<sup>3</sup> experienced and displayed in urban Morocco.

Unlike the older generations of village women who experienced marriage as a painful fracture in the female trajectory towards adulthood (Schaefer-Davis 1983: 26-39), for Ghizlan marriage is a project based on love and choice, which she hopes to pursue along with the search for self-realization and a professional career. In the last few decades, newly middle-class young women like Ghizlan could pursue aspirations in their intimate and professional lives unattainable for their illiterate or madrasa-educated mothers. As in other parts of the world,<sup>4</sup> in Morocco increasing access to schools<sup>5</sup>, salaried work and televised culture have all contributed to delayed marriage<sup>6</sup> and to changing ideals of conjugal and family life. Thus, at first sight, the comparison between Ghizlan and her mother might appear to be a rapid shift from a vision of marriage as an inescapable destiny to an ideal of married life as a site of emotional fulfilment and a choice based on love. Notwithstanding its promise of a happy ending, the ‘modern’ dream of love engenders ambivalence and unexpected outcomes.

Tracing how the unexpected manifests itself in Ghizlan’s intimate world, this paper explores the complexities that surround romantic love in al-Azaliyya in the light of longstanding debates on Moroccan modernity<sup>7</sup> and of the increased societal influence of the Islamic revival. At a time when the ethical reform of sensibility is at stake, Ghizlan’s quest for individual freedom and autonomy in marital choice does not simply collide with the ideals of social connectivity and the ethics of the subject cultivated as Moroccan ‘customs and traditions’ (*‘adāt*

*wa t-taqālīd*). It also competes with a ‘politico-theological imagination’ (Pandolfo 2007) that has profoundly reshaped religious subjectivities and has interrogated the meanings of being ‘modern’ in Morocco. Against the backdrop of revivalist discourses on the corrosive effects of modernity, I show how Ghizlan shifts between the worldly and the religious horizons in order to recompose the unfulfilled promises of love and to discuss recent developments in Morocco.

Alongside the vocabulary of freedom and choice infusing her romantic dreams, Ghizlan resorts to the Islamic notion of ‘destiny’ - intended as a person’s divinely preordained future - to reflect upon the unpredictability of intimate relationships and the limits of human agency under God’s will. Much debated in classic Islamic thought (Watt 1948; De Cillis 2014), destiny is a fundamental dimension shaping religious and social life in Morocco (Eickelman 1976: 125-128). People in the Tadla often evoke destiny to discuss future events, as well as to rationalize experiences of misfortune and failure as part of a divine design. The notion of destiny enables Ghizlan to make sense of unforeseen and painful twists in her intimate life, but also voices broader anxieties and disenchantment with the rapid pace of modernization in Morocco.

Concentrating on Ghizlan’s intimate worlds, my intention is not only to show how strands of Islamic revivalism are able to smooth over the contradictions triggered by the changing dynamics of intimate and social life. It is, also, to contribute to an emerging ‘anthropology of ethics and freedom’ (Laidlaw 2002, 2013) by drawing attention to the fundamental roles of human passions and

transcendental powers in shaping people's ethical and existential journeys. Ghizlan's thoughts on love and destiny reveal an emic perspective on agency, ethics and freedom that broadens anthropological debates (Mahmood 2001, 2005, Laidlaw 2002, 2013; Robbins 2007, 2012; Zigon 2009) and forcefully compels a reflection on modalities of agency and (inter)subjectivity that go beyond intentionality, desire and rational understanding.

In her influential work on women's participation in the piety movement in Cairo, Saba Mahmood (2001, 2005) posits agency, ethics and freedom as the central concerns of her inquiry. Her exploration of the bodily techniques through which women submit to God's will and cultivate a virtuous self demonstrates convincingly that certain types of agency and subjectivity cannot be construed in terms of the re-signification and subversion of norms. Drawing on Foucault's late writings, she argues that these emerge, rather, in "the variety of ways in which norms are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consumed" (Mahmood 2005: 23). This theoretical passage offers a significant contribution to anthropological theory insofar as it expands the notion of agency beyond the juxtapositions of subordination and resistance, constraint and freedom. Despite its theoretical sophistication, scholars emphasize the limits of the Foucault-inspired paradigm theorized by Mahmood, arguing that its focus on the coherence of the ethical self-cultivation under examination elides the complexity of everyday lives (Pandolfo 2007; Osella and Soares 2009; Schielke 2009). The richness and lived texture of Ghizlan's story testify to the multiple, and at times conflicting, aspirations that inhabit her subjectivity.

My argument, however, is not only about complexities, doubts and ambivalences. Close attention to multiplicities and contradictions has been at the core of feminist theorizations on subjectivity and agency, which have in turn contributed to the dismemberment of coherent visions of subjects and to the expansion of the notion of agency so as to include imaginative dimensions, desires and unconscious motivations (for instance, Kondo 1990; Abu-Lughod 1993; Moore 1994; 2007: 1-45). Ghizlan's story further enriches anthropological theorizations on agency and subjectivity by locating the vicissitudes of human life at the intersection of worldly and transcendental powers and rationalities. To elucidate this point, I engage with the notion of 'being acted upon' elaborated by Amira Mittermaier (2011, 2012). In her work on dream-vision in Egypt, Mittermaier shows how people grapple with the forces of the Elsewhere in their dreaming and waking lives. Shifting the theoretical focus of her analysis beyond the paradigm of self-cultivation - with its emphasis on intentionality and deliberate action - to the experience of being acted upon, she powerfully illuminates the role of the Elsewhere in constituting the subject and its mundane actions. Expanding Mittermaier's insight, this paper dwells on the unresolved tensions between 'acting' and 'being acted upon' that inhabit Islamic theologies of destiny. As I will show, Ghizlan's submission to God's will neither entails fatalism and passive acceptance of her situation (see also Eickelman 1976: 126; Hamdy 2009; Walker 2012; Gaibazzi 2013; Schielke forthcoming), nor precludes an overt criticism of the mundane powers that constrain people's lives. Creatively inhabiting Islamic theologies of destiny to discuss her intimate life, Ghizlan's story interrogates the very meanings of choice, freedom and responsibility in a world where personal

agency meets human powers, divinely preordained futures and material contingencies.

## **2. Modernity in question: the view from al-Azaliyya**

Situated in the Tadla Plain, al-Azaliyya is a medium-sized town that has undergone rapid change since the mid-1930s, when the French protectorate (1912-1956) took control of this rural region and initiated the modernization of agriculture (Prefol 1986). As elsewhere in Muslim worlds, in Morocco foreign economic and colonial intrusion triggered debates on how to counter European imperialism and to modernize society. While secularist and liberal currents never reached broad consensus, the *salafiyya* gained momentum in the nationalist struggle against the French, becoming a powerful ideology for social reform.<sup>8</sup> After independence, the Moroccan monarchy combined secular forms of government with the monopoly of the religious sphere. Nationalist ideologies of mass education and national development promoted the formation of a modern urban middle class (Cohen 2004: 35-66). Like Ghizlan's father, *petits fonctionnaires* who benefited from a French education could climb the social ladder in an expanding public administration; aside from the civil service, people moved from the surrounding areas to what seemed then to be a boomtown. In the wake of neoliberal restructuring (1983–1993), declining agriculture and the disengagement of the state, people from the Tadla started migrating to Italy and Spain (Harrami and Mahdi 2006). Transnational migration has favoured rapid urbanization and economic dynamism in al-Azaliyya. In addition to the close transnational connections with Europe, the

‘outside world’ (*l-brrā, l-kharīj*) has intruded into people’s lives and imaginations via hundreds of rooftop satellite dishes and the internet cafés that have mushroomed in every corner of the town. The radios of the yellow cabs that run back and forth throughout the city play the songs of the popular singer Shakira as well as the recorded Qur’anic recitations that fill the ‘ethical soundscape’ (Hirschkind 2006) of al-Azaliyya. In the narrow lanes of the *medina* and in the modern avenues, boys whisper sweet words to fashionable girls who have started donning the veil on the wave of the Islamic revival.

In the last two decades, revivalist movements have gained increased visibility in the public sphere (Vermeren 2006: 86-87; Cohen and Jaidi 2006). The Islamist *Parti de la Justice et du Développement*, which entered the political arena after the political liberalization of the mid-1990s, is now the main party in Morocco. Neighbourhood associations, Qur’anic lessons for women in the mosque, street corner Islamic markets and satellite religious broadcasts have all contributed to a renewed interest in Islam in everyday life. Contemporary revivalist movements promote the re-Islamization of society, the ethical reform of subjectivities and the rejection of western cultural values as the remedy to the material and spiritual crisis affecting both Morocco and Muslim worlds more broadly.

One prominent voice against the western-inspired model of modernity has been Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine,<sup>9</sup> the founder of the ‘Justice and Spirituality’ movement (*āl-‘adl wa āl-ihsān*), arguably the most influential Islamist movement in Morocco (Tozy 1999). Deeply inspired by Sufi mysticism, Yassine’s writings and teachings denounce the disruptive effects of western



modernity and condemn the corruption of the westernized elites that rule Morocco. In *Islamiser la modernité* (1998), translated into English as *Winning the Modern World for Islam* (2000), Yassine argues that, since colonial times, western hegemony has produced ‘spiritual dispossession, the flattering of one’s being, the disfiguration of the soul’ (2000: 24). The ‘Muslim mind’ is threatened by the secular, materialistic mind, ‘a mind preoccupied with worldly affairs and veiled from the realities of the *ghayb* [the Unseen, divine mystery], so long as it does not learn from Revelation and does not perceive the light of Revelation’ (Yassine 2003: xi). Unlike the twentieth century Salafi reformists who aspired to *modernize* Islam and prove its compatibility with modern sciences through its purification from ‘traditional’ practices, Yassine aspires to *Islamize* modernity. Only by submitting to God’s will and Islamic principles, he avers, can Muslims counter the ‘spiritual murder’ (Yassine 2000: 64) perpetrated by the secularist ideas that celebrate the individual as self-made and autonomous, blind to what exceeds mundane reality.

According to Driss Maghraoui (2009: 109—128), the polarization between the religious and the secular infusing Yassine’s prophetic message is the major recent twist in the longstanding debates around Moroccan modernity. Since colonial times, modernity, along with the experiences of domination and defeat, has continued to be a lived concern in the writings of novelists and intellectuals with different political visions.<sup>10</sup> In contemporary Morocco, while the ‘modern’ (*‘aṣrī*) surfaces in everyday lives as a historically situated set of ideas, aspirations, social practices and subjectivities associated with education, mobility, progress and cosmopolitanism, it is often depicted as a disruptive

force that conveys a sense of identity split and nostalgia for an authentic, bygone, past.

Under globalization and increasing tensions between ‘Islam’ and the ‘West’ (Herrera, Bayat 2010: 3), a purified idea of Islamic modernity provides an ethical horizon and a vocabulary through which Ghizlan reflects upon the tensions permeating her intimate worlds and discusses the consequences of globalized modernity in Moroccan society.<sup>11</sup> Before going into the complexity of her story, I will outline the contours of the troubled encounter between love and marriage in al-Azaliyya. Whereas romantic love has long been embedded in popular imagination and public culture, it was often depicted as a dangerous sentiment that leads someone to compromise their honour (Abu-Lughod 1986) and creates states of confusion and madness. At the turn of the nineteenth century, a vision of marriage based on love and choice entered the debates on modernity in Muslim societies. Tracing the historical entanglements of love and modernity, I situate the emerging ideal of love marriage in al-Azaliyya in relation to a longer history of the circulation of imaginaries of romantic love.

### **Amorous encounters and mass-mediated stories**

Ghizlan’s home is in a middle-class neighbourhood which originated in the inward migration of civil servants and schoolteachers during the 1960s and 1970s. On a lazy Saturday afternoon, while waiting for Ghizlan to finish her make-up to go for a stroll in the city, I switched on the television in her room and saw that *Titanic* was being broadcast on the satellite channel *Fox Movies*. Amongst the most successful romantic Hollywood films, *Titanic* tells the love

story of Rose, a girl engaged to a rich aristocrat, and Jack Dawson, a poor but charming young man, during the journey from Europe to America and the tragic sinking of the Titanic. When I asked Ghizlan if she had ever watched this film, she highlighted the naivety of my question in answering that she had watched *Titanic* several times on television as well as with her friends on the big screens of the cafés. She came to sit by me on her sofa and confessed that she had never managed to hold back her tears when Rose wakes up after the collision of the Titanic with the iceberg and realizes that Jack is clinging lifeless to the wooden panel that saved her, surrounded by the icy waves of the Atlantic Ocean.

While *Titanic* embodies a powerful image of romantic love in al-Azaliyya, Ghizlan also emphasized the longstanding literary and poetic traditions of love in the Arab world. She mentioned romantic tales, similar to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, that tell of the tragic story of two lovers thwarted by their families, such as 'Antar and 'Abla and Jamīl and Buthayna. She recited by heart some verses from the popular story of *Laylā and Qays*, which she had learned in elementary school. Still evocative today (Davis and Davis 1995; see also Schielke forthcoming: 84-89), the story goes that Laylā and Qays/Majnūn belonged to two neighbouring clans and fell in love, but her family opposed their union. Qays would compose poems for Layla and became possessed by love like a madman (*majnūn*). Being unconsummated, the love between Laylā and Qays remains eternal and pure. These tales belong to the 'udhrī genre and epitomize the ideal of chaste love, which was further elaborated in Sufi traditions and in the repertoire of love poetry (Allen 2000: 102-109). To emphasize the extent to which the trope of unfulfilled romance is rooted in

popular imagination,<sup>12</sup> Ghizlan recounted the Tamazight legend of *Isli and Tislit*. Isli and Tislit belonged to two different tribal groups, and because of the opposition of their families, they left behind their villages in the High Atlas Mountains to reach Imilchil, where in desperation they cried themselves to death. According to the legend, their tears formed two lakes. In these classic tales, the love of the protagonists defies the rules of their society and ends tragically, in madness, anguish or death, thereby becoming a potent reminder of the dangers of passionate love and the predominance of society over the individual.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the seductive dream of two individuals bound by love emerged as an ideal of married life in literary works (Baron 1991; Najmabadi 2005: 160—161) and entered the debates on modernity and the modernization of gender relations in Muslim worlds. The reconceptualization of marriage as a romantic union turned love into an aspiration of personal fulfilment and into a project of social reform (for instance, Ahmed 1992: Ch. 7; Abu-Lughod 1998; Najmabadi 2005). Beth Baron (1991) contends that the modern ideal of marital life based on love and choice spread in elite circles and amongst the middle classes in turn-of-the-century Egypt more as the result of changing political and social circumstances than of western influence.

After independence, the Moroccan Kingdom, in promoting a return to its Islamic roots, codified in the Personal Status Law a model of the family in line with that of the classical Maliki school. In 2004, after heated debates between Islamists and liberals, the Personal Status Law was reformed, to include a more

egalitarian vision of gender relations. The idea of the 'modern couple' based on love and choice spread across certain social strata and became popular in left-wing student circles in the 1960s and 1970s. The ideal of marriage as a love choice was popularized through magazines, novels and films. In general, though, the prevailing idea of love as a dangerous passion has continued to shape the dynamics of intimate relationships (Mernissi 1978: 108-120).

With the spread of smuggled decoders and pirate cassettes since the 1980s, and then the satellite dishes,<sup>13</sup> the stories of unhappy and unfilled romance have increasingly mingled with other love-stories conveyed by Hollywood, French and Egyptian films, and more recently with Mexican and Turkish soap operas. In these stories, love often has a happy ending or the protagonists struggle to overcome status incompatibility and manoeuvre to marry the beloved person. Susan and Douglas Davis (1989, 1995) investigated the engagement of young Moroccans with American, Arabic and European cultural products through television, magazines and music in a semi-rural town in the 1980s and 1990s. These authors contend that, in the context of mass schooling and changed patterns of leisure time, music and television cultures had provided young Moroccans with new imaginative horizons and ideals of married life. Meanwhile, their search for individual autonomy in marriage choice often clashed with family allegiance and societal values, a clash which created ambivalence and conflicting desires (see also Bennani-Chraïbi 1994; Davis 1995).

In al-Azaliyya, romance and dating are omnipresent but 'invisible' dimensions of social lives. Since gossip can endanger a young woman's reputation,

premarital relationships are generally kept hidden from parents and the public gaze. Moreover, my young interlocutors complain that love affairs rarely lead to marriage. Not only can parents oppose a love marriage, but also deceitful lovers may gain their trust only in order to have a sexual encounter and then often consider them unsuitable wives precisely because they engage in premarital affairs. As Matthew Carey (2012) notes, the dynamics of premarital relationships in Morocco are complex, opaque and unpredictable, and people often exploit opacity in order to further their social ends. The internet and mobile phones have recently brought about a digitized culture of dating which has transformed the experience of courtship and romance by multiplying the possibilities of male-female interaction (see also Bowen et al. 2008).

On the wave of the Islamic revival, these processes have become interwoven with changing Islamic practices and discourses (see also Smith-Hafner 2005; Marsden 2007; Schielke 2009), creating moral anxieties about what is perceived as a proliferation of ‘un-Islamic’ behaviour among young people, such as dating and having sex outside marriage. On some religious satellite channels, conservative preachers condemn the corrupting effects of foreign cultural products available on satellite TV and call on believers to return to a purified Islamic morality. On the more innovative channels like *Iqra*’ some charismatic preachers like ‘Amr Khaled advise their followers on how to live as Muslims in modern societies (for instance, Wise 2003; Moll 2010). Intimate relationships and male-female sociability are essential primary points of focus in the revivalist project for the ethical-political reform of individuals and society.

As both a flight from the everyday and an essential part of its construction (Abu-Lughod 2005), television culture disseminates competing imaginaries of romantic love that provide significant stories through which Ghizlan 'emplots' the vicissitudes of her romantic life. Along with the classic tales of unfilled romance, the 'modern' vision of marriage as a site of emotional fulfilment and a choice based on love has intruded on Ghizlan's imagination, shaping her innermost expectations and desires. Meanwhile, revivalist discourses on the corrosive effects of western cultural influence foster nostalgia for the time when love was 'pure'. Beyond signifying sincere sentiments and serious intentions to build a life together, 'pure love' evokes an idealized past and a sense of anxiety vis-à-vis the present.

### **The time when love was pure**

Ghizlan often discussed the implications of rapid transformations in people's lives and their sense of selfhood. In her opinion, the Arabization of education,<sup>14</sup> and a number of important political and social events that occurred in the past few decades in Morocco and in the Middle East, have led Moroccans away from western-inspired models of progress and encouraged the rediscovery of their religious identity. She said that her father's generation, who grew up in the dawn of independence, was formed within French culture, which was considered the model of civilization par excellence; in contrast, today, Moroccans want to return to 'their own culture'. For Ghizlan, the liberalization of national TV<sup>15</sup> and the arrival of satellite dishes have played a role in these processes by allowing Moroccans to get broader access to news

and to learn more about Islam. At the same time, she argued, certain entertainment programmes, films and music video-clips available on satellite TV have disseminated superficial messages amongst young people. When she was a teenager, Ghizlan loved watching Indian and Egyptian films on national television. These romantic films focused on the struggles of two lovers thwarted by their family, but, she added, were respectful: 'There was a boy who loved a girl, and he would sing and dance. It was a romantic story, not like today. Have you seen what the singers look like? There's Haifa<sup>16</sup>, the Lebanese singer. Nowadays, satellite TV is full of such things!' Contrasting her experience with the current situation, Ghizlan emphasized the extent to which satellite TV has reshaped the dynamics of intimate relationships. In her opinion, the pervasive presence of seductive singers and actresses on television has a negative influence on boys: 'When a boy sees a naked girl, what does he look at? Her brain? [...] Television always gives you models, whether negative or positive. Our generation had good models!'

Echoing revivalist arguments, Ghizlan argued that globalization has intensified the crisis that the family is undergoing in Morocco: the contemporary life-style takes parents away from home all day, so that supervising their children has become increasingly difficult, especially since digital technologies have intruded into daily life. She said: 'Nowadays you can talk at home on your mobile; with the mobile phone you can text about anything to anyone and you receive a message back, then the internet...now everything has got into our homes'. Mobile phones and the internet enable teenagers to talk and arrange meetings beyond parental control. In contrast, Ghizlan said that when she was an adolescent boys and girls had few opportunities to meet outside the school,



and so young men put love letters in girls' textbooks or delivered romantic messages to their beloved ones. Couples arranged secret meetings at the street corner or a few blocks away from their home for fear that parents or siblings might see them; they exchanged words of love, but they were shy and respectful. 'It was romantic indeed and that love was pure!' she commented. This idyllic picture of the past when love bonds were based on 'pure love' is contrasted with what Ghizlan described as the present-day commodification of love relationships: 'There are no more sentiments from heart to heart (*de coeur vers le coeur*); it has become body to body (*le corp vers le corp*). There isn't the ideal of marriage!' For Ghizlan, there is no seriousness or respect, but boys and girls jump from one relationship to another without thinking of marriage: 'Today, you find the girl who has so many affairs and a hundred phone numbers in her mobile.'

Ghizlan's words capture a broader sense of anxiety about the social and intimate effects of globalized modernity, which finds elaboration through a revivalist vocabulary. Her reflections, indeed, resonate deeply with Yassine's moral concern about western cultural influence, his critique of modernity and his invitation to cultivate spirituality and reject empty rationalism and materialism. Digital technologies and television culture have changed certain dynamics of premarital romance in Morocco, but Ghizlan's sense of nostalgia for an idealized past and its lost purity requires careful analysis. While being imagined as a pure and elective union between two individuals, in Ghizlan's lived experience love manifests itself as a dangerous adventure along the thin lines between human agency and divine destiny, personal desires and social constraints.

### **Love, agency and destiny**

One evening, I went to visit Ghizlan and we somehow started talking of love. She explained how complicated love is, in Morocco and in all Arab countries alike, because love affairs seldom turn into marriage. ‘According to Islam’, Ghizlan said, ‘marriage is a project (*zweġ huwa mshrū*) which both of you should desire. You should know the person you are marrying, see him, talk to him, discuss things, but you shouldn’t let too much time go by, as love diminishes (*l-ħōbb kāy-nqs*).’ Noticing that I looked puzzled, Ghizlan took a piece of paper and drew a flame on it: ‘Love is like a fire (*bħal l-‘afiya*). At the beginning, it burns brightly, then, it dies out’.

Ghizlan’s theory that love diminishes over time is in vivid contrast with the vision of love as a form of madness and a consuming desire celebrated in the ‘*udhrī*’ tradition, according to which the flame of eternal love is thought to burn forever.<sup>17</sup> ‘At first,’ she went on, ‘you’re lost in the thought of him. You think about what he told you, what he did. When he calls you, your heart thuds and when he doesn’t, you suffer so much. Then the flame dies out and you become like relatives.’ Given the transience of love, Ghizlan suggested that the important decision about marriage should be taken when the flame of passion is still burning intensely, arguably because it is in this very moment that people dare to struggle for love. This claim challenges the wisdom that warns against

illusory infatuations and the dangers of love. Notwithstanding the importance that Ghizlan accorded to love and choice in marriage decisions, she also stressed that the outcome of a relationship is not simply a matter of love or individual will. It is, rather, connected with *qaḍā' wa'l- qadar* - God's absolute decree (*qaḍā'*) and the destiny (*qadar*) written for each person long before their soul is infused into their body.

The contentious relationship between predestination and free will (*ikhtiyār*) has long captured the attention of numerous Islamic theologians, philosophers and mystics, raising compelling questions on the nature of divine, and human, will (De Cillis 2014: 1-18). Quranic passages support ideas both of divine omnipotence and of human freedom. “[T]he aporia of the secret of *qaḍā' wa'l- qadar*, despite being destined to be known by God alone, is also clearly manifest in the Qur’ān: the truth, disclosed for all believers, is encompassed in the totality of the verses which support both ideas of God’s predetermination and of human responsibility for their action” (De Cillis 2014: 227). “Is the human being free to choose or constrained? (*wāsh l-īnsān mukhayyar willā musayyar?*)”, my interlocutors would wonder, being aware that it is unwise to dig too deep in the mystery of destiny, whose knowledge pertains only to God. In general, major events in people’s existence, including marriage, are considered to be written in a transcendental temporality that exceeds human understanding. Far from setting divine destiny and free will in opposition, though, the widespread belief that people attain in life what God has preordained is combined with an insistence on freedom and responsibility for individual actions, which will be judged on the Judgment Day. Yet, intrigued by the way in which Ghizlan shifted from a worldly horizon of passion and

choice to a mystical one in which personal agency meets powers that transcend human control and rational understanding, I asked her to clarify the connections between love and destiny. In response, she went back to her piece of paper: 'Maybe you love Jack and then meet Michael. You thought of marrying Jack, but eventually you get married to Michael.' Since Ghizlan's example apparently contradicted her previous statements about the importance of freedom and passion in marital choice, I pressed her to explain further how destiny may affect such intimate decisions. She replied: 'Destiny means whether or not something is written for us. God knows everything, the day you will come to life, what will happen to you, when you'll get married and to whom.' Stressing God's omniscience, Ghizlan's words suggest that seemingly contingent events may be part of a divine design. To understand her viewpoint on the relations between predestination and free will, I asked: 'What is the role of free will? Put in these terms, is everything fated to be?' 'No,' she replied firmly. 'The two angels who alight on your shoulders write everything you do: the good and bad actions. There is room for responsibility and choice, but there are things that we cannot decide.'

In answering my questions, Ghizlan resorted to established sets of theological arguments about the paradox of acting freely to fulfil one's destiny. I could grasp the broader significance of Ghizlan's reflection on love, agency and destiny when I stayed overnight at her home, and she recounted to me a very sad story. When she was 24, Ghizlan received some text messages on her mobile, sent by mistake from someone she did not know. Persuaded that the message was important, she let the stranger know that she was not the person he was looking for. They started talking by mobile phone, and then, when they

realized that they were both living in al-Azaliyya, they decided to meet. After their first meeting, they started dating regularly and their accidental meeting developed into love. After three years together, they agreed to marry. Ghizlan informed her parents that a man would come to ask for her hand and they prepared special sweets to greet their guest. To her astonishment, no one came knocking at the door that day. Just a few days later, Ghizlan's sweetheart told her that he had not come to ask for her hand because he found out that he had serious heart problems and had to undergo an operation without any guarantee of survival. Aware of the complexity that surrounds the passage from love to marriage, Ghizlan did not trust him and jumped to the conclusion that he had changed his mind about their marriage without having the courage to face her. Deeply hurt by his behaviour, she decided to break off their relationship and avoid any contact with him. A few months later, Ghizlan learnt that her beloved had passed away. She went through a period of profound suffering. 'I was so shocked that after that I didn't date anyone else, in case that story might repeat itself again. It's hard to let someone enter your heart.'

Despite her despair for the loss of her beloved, Ghizlan gradually recovered herself and fell in love with another man. The failure of this second love story—which I detail below—triggered a profound crisis that has reconfigured her relationship with the divine. By recasting the tragic failure of her love stories in terms of destiny, Ghizlan's narrative draws attention to the unpredictability of intimate relationships and the fragility of human agency under God's will. In a world where transcendental powers are at play, human agency is not only located within the individual self (see also Mittermaier 2012; Mahmood 2005: 173-74), but is also thought to be part of a broader

divine design, which remains unknown and unknowable to humans. Far from denying the possibility of choice and responsibility, Ghizlan's words stress humans' limited power to choose and control over vital dimensions of their lives.

### **The love of the Arab man**

Two years after the death of her beloved one, one of Ghizlan's maternal relatives visited her family with her son Ahmed, to whom Ghizlan had been emotionally bound since childhood. Ahmed had left the village of his birth in the Atlas Mountains to study in Casablanca and had then found a job in Tangier, so they had not seen each other for ten years. When they met again, an intense feeling blossomed: 'I don't know if it was love or what...neither of us said a word, I felt something and he too – as you look into each other's eyes the fire is burning'. The words with which Ghizlan began her story, however, anticipated the tragic ending of their relationship: 'You can't change what is written (*mā 'andksh mā-t-bddly had shy lly maktūb*)...even if I love you and you love me, when God wants something for you...there is nothing you can do. Since then, I have believed in God'.

After their meeting in al-Azaliyya, Ahmed and Ghizlan kept in touch by the internet and mobile phone until his mother became very ill. Since his father was working far away and Ahmed has no sisters or female relatives nearby, he asked Ghizlan to help care for his mother. 'We were one family, one house', Ghizlan said to explain that the ties between the two families legitimized Ahmed's call for help. Recalling the time they spent together, she smiled and her eyes became dreamy.

I spent such a wonderful week! Outings, sweet words, beautiful conversations...I loved him, I was crazy about him, [and he said] “I love you, I’m crazy about you”. If he just saw someone turning to me, he shouted at him...at that time we were still beautiful, without the veil. You go out and he doesn’t want you to, you feel that the man is jealous of you...If you want to go out, he says “no, I’ll come with you”... the love of the Arab man [...] I spent a week as if I had set foot in paradise.

Noting that I was surprised that she was attracted to such a controlling man, expressing his love through jealousy and control, she tried to teach me about ‘the love of the Arab man’: as ‘you’re not Moroccan, you don’t know what the Arab man is like’. She said that a woman feels relaxed with a man who keeps his word and is resolute. ‘We girls want a man with these characteristics. Even if we say we don’t, we like the man who is determined!’ Then, Ghizlan returned to her story and explained that, after her flawless week with Ahmed, his mother was hospitalized and eventually died. After this shocking event, Ghizlan continued to keep in touch with her lover through texts and calls for a year until Ahmed’s father also died. In these tragic circumstances, Ghizlan and her family visited Ahmed’s home and on arrival she discovered that he had married another woman. She said that she wanted to cry and scream, but her parents did not know about their relationship, and so she kept silent until she became ill with a fever. Ghizlan’s immediate family was not aware of Ahmed’s

marriage because they had not been in touch with them since the death of his mother, and that the marriage was neither registered nor officially celebrated. Aḥmed's wife was a neighbour who would help his mother with her domestic chores and continued to clean the house and cook for Aḥmed and his father after her death. Since it was not acceptable for a young unrelated woman to drop in and out the home of two men, Ahmed's father forced his son to marry her. At this point, Ghizlan's tone became serious: 'I told you: you love me, I love you, but marriage is something else (*zweĵ hāja khorā*)'.

Shifting her narrative from destiny to hardship, Ghizlan gave voice to a subtle critique of the mundane powers that constrain people's choices and actions. She said that, despite the sentiments that bind two lovers, love and marriage follow different logics in Moroccan society, a common idea amongst my young interlocutors. Some families support a love marriage and the couples often succeed in marrying in the case of family disapproval by making their love match seem to be an arranged marriage. When marriage is at stake, however, pragmatic considerations about family respectability, honour and social class, and deference to parental authority may weigh more heavily than love. While Ghizlan could understand the transcendental and social forces at play in marriage decisions, she demanded responsibility and called for agency as a moral imperative, to which Ahmed failed to respond. 'I still haven't forgotten, he is a betrayer (*ghddār*), it shouldn't have happened! [...] we were tied together by blood' she concluded thereby.

Even though Ghizlan said that it is not in a person's power to change what is written, the complex ways in which divine destiny and human responsibility



interweave in her reflections express her disappointment with Ahmed's silence and misbehaviour. Her words above imply that Ahmed did have the power to make a choice and that, perhaps, things could have been otherwise. She could understand that he did not dare to challenge his father's will, but she never forgave him for betraying her love. Arguably, the idea of love thwarted by family opposition or destiny, a central trope in many tragic love tales, helped Ghizlan alleviate her suffering. Perhaps other stories could explain Ahmed's silence better, but these remain untold.

The tragic epilogue of Ghizlan's love with Ahmed made her aware of the need of God's guidance in everyday life. She said that it was time to 'follow God's pathway' and put on the veil, which she described as the starting point for cultivating spirituality. Despite Ghizlan's submitting herself to God's will and entering a path of ethical self-change, the conflicting desires and aspirations that inhabit her subjectivity seem irreducible to the individual ethics of the 'pious subject' theorized by Saba Mahmood (2001, 2005); nor can her agency be conceived as the intention to embody a 'perfected self'. Besides her spiritual aspirations, her words below express her uneasiness regarding the constraints surrounding female sexuality and her critique of the gendered dynamics of power in love relationships.

### **Women who outstrip men**

Moving between worldly and religious vocabularies, Ghizlan reflected upon the tensions between the sexes vis-à-vis changing gendered subjectivities and life expectations. For instance, she said that God made women from Adam's

rib, which lies near the heart, and hence they are more sensitive than men are. 'Men, however, do not want women who are also capable, as they do not accept that women can be better than them' she commented bitterly. 'Even in foreplay', she went on, 'men want to keep women underneath; they don't let them on top.' In her opinion, male sexual desire is inflamed as they cast their gaze on the female body. 'Of course, women think of sex, too. Perhaps they don't admit it as they're ashamed, but they think of it!' Whereas many young women deny their sexual desires in order to comply with the ideal of modesty, Ghizlan said: 'For me virginity is not essential, but you may have problems. Generally men don't accept a woman who is not a virgin. That's a risk, as you never know how your liaison will end. For you [Europeans] it's different. It's hard, don't you think? When there is no freedom it's hard'. Overtly discussing female sexual freedom, Ghizlan complained that not only can parents interfere and object to a love marriage, but also many young men do not accept women who are not virgins or who have a higher social position and a strong personality. Like other young women in al-Azaliyya, Ghizlan described virginity as a (male) social expectation. In other contexts, she mobilized religious arguments on virginity to distinguish between essentialized categories of 'Muslims' and 'westerners', stressing that the latter are lacking in values because they are far away from religion. On another occasion, Ghizlan discussed sexuality in the light of the contradictions brought into young women's lives by higher education and changing life aspirations.

I feel that *je veux faire l'amour*, but I don't; I control myself but it's hard to restrain myself. I can do it, but the man can't control himself easily. That's why religion says that we should marry young, why so? [...] If you delay marriage until 30, it gets harder and harder! But you study first – studying has delayed my marriage. I can't marry someone who tells me 'no' as I've suffered for studying, I was the first one.

Because of her pursuit of a professional career, Ghizlan has postponed marriage and hence passed the age regarded as appropriate for a woman to marry. Evoking religious arguments, she claimed that marriage at an early age allows the fulfilment of sexual and emotional necessities, and hence contains social disorder. She also thought, however, that early marriage would have prevented her achieving the dreams of career that she had planned for since childhood. Although Ghizlan believed marriage and family life are very important, she could not accept a man who would restrict her freedom.

Contemporary revivalist movements capture and smooth over the tensions that the socioeconomic transformations associated with 'modern life' have engendered in people, but a revivalist project does not entirely resolve Ghizlan's conflicts, nor does it completely fulfil her aspirations. The Egyptian TV series *Na'am, Mazelto Anisa* ('Yes, I'm not married yet'), which Ghizlan watched in her spare time, provided another discourse on women's difficulties in crafting their affective lives in worlds of changing gendered possibilities. Broadcast on Nile Television Network, the TV series tells the story of an educated woman who works as a teacher and lives alone in her flat. Despite her

cultured and bourgeois surroundings, she suffers from pressure to marry from her family and peers. Although Ghizlan made it clear that her family did not pressure her to marry, she identified this mass-mediated story with her personal predicament, thereby reframing it as a broader phenomenon that especially involves educated and independent women. In her view, this TV series addressed the uneasy condition of those women who have pursued their aspirations and then find it difficult to find a husband who lives up to their expectations. Ghizlan believed that a woman should not marry from fear of being considered a 'spinster' (*bayra*), a difficult condition in the context where she lives. She received some marriage proposals which she refused because they set unacceptable conditions, such as quitting her job and her friends, replacing her fashionable attire with loose-fitting Moroccan *jllāba*, or living with the groom's family in the countryside.

Ghizlan's previous reflections on love and passion gave way to more pragmatic considerations about the importance of economic stability, independence and equality in a marital bond. She said: 'Day by day, you begin to understand life, not the dream-world but real life, because when you are 30, life is real, while before you looked at *la vie imaginaire*: we eat potatoes and sleep serenely. Now you don't think so any longer; a man has to be serious, with his work and his money, and you with yours, the same level'. Her shift partly reflected her disillusionment with love and her belief that love alone is not enough to have a happy life. Ghizlan has been in a liaison with a man for three years. Their relationship was not official nor was it disclosed to her parents. She told me that they would like to marry in the future, but instead of calling for a quick

marriage, as she did at the beginning of our conversation, she now admitted that she has become suspicious about men and their love.

There's love between us, but all of them took something away from me, because it isn't *l'amour fatal*. I love him, but there is always a part of my brain that says I don't give you 100%, I give you 90% or 80%. Always this part of my brain keeps saying "he's lying" as *j'ai perdue toute la confiance à l'homme* [...] I tell myself maybe I love him, maybe I'll give you my heart, but another thing may separate us, as it separated me for the first and the second ones. Now one part loves and the other stays away - as if you were in a dark street and your brain is awake, that's what I feel.

Dwelling on the wounds in her heart, Ghizlan voiced her inner conflicts between her desire to love and the fear of suffering again. The unpredictability of intimate relationships urged Ghizlan to subordinate her feelings to rationality because, as popular wisdom suggests, passionate love makes people vulnerable and fragile. It, also, demanded prudence because the outcome of a love relationship transcends individual will and desire. Ghizlan's reflections voice a sense of impotence. But beyond that, she criticizes the predominant social modalities of femininity and masculinity shaping the dynamics of intimate exchange in Morocco and searches for individual freedom of choice and action in her intimate and social life.

## **Conclusion**

Ghizlan's story reveals the complex expectations and disillusionments that surround the lived experience of romantic love in the rapidly changing socioeconomic setting of al-Azaliyya. Unlike the classic tales of chaste love that tragically ends in madness, anguish or death, the 'modern' ideal of married life based on love and choice promises personal fulfilment and a happy ending. When Ghizlan lapses into the dream of love, though, she encounters the numerous powers that constrain individuals' lives and choices. As Ghizlan's disenchantment with modernity grows, a revivalist vocabulary and imagination enable her to articulate the tragic incidents that fragment her intimate worlds as transformative events that make her aware of the fragility of human agency and the need of God's guidance. Like the search for romantic love, though, the Islamic revival conveys a grand narrative laden with compelling promises that avoids both ambivalence and the conflicting values that permeate everyday lives (Schielke 2009, forthcoming).

Tracing Ghizlan's amorous ups and downs, I have tried to shed light on the theoretical implications of her ethical and existential struggles for anthropological discussions on agency, ethics and freedom. In anthropology and social sciences more broadly, an emphasis on 'unfreedom' has long eluded a theoretical and ethnographic engagement with the notions of freedom and

responsibility in different cultural traditions (Laidlaw 2002; 2013: 1-44). Engaging with Foucault's late writings on ethics and his rethinking of freedom *within* shifting configurations of power, instead of in its absence, Saba Mahmood (2001, 2005) invites us to think of women's agency in the piety movement as an ethical practice animated by the intention and desire to craft themselves as a certain type of subject within a specific discursive tradition. Whereas Mahmood problematizes the universality of the desire for 'freedom' assumed a-priori in much liberal and feminist thinking, the paradigm of ethical self-cultivation she presents leaves little room for exploring alternative ideas of freedom within the piety movement.<sup>18</sup> Conversely James Laidlaw, also inspired by Foucault's late work, explores the paths of ethical self-fashioning in Jainism *as practices* of freedom, thus making the possibilities of **human** freedom central to his ethnographic and theoretical inquiry. From different perspectives, both Joel Robbins (2007, 2012) and Jarret Zigon (2009: 263) maintain that ethics and ethical life also involve conscious moments of choice and freedom—the latter is intended both in terms of how the norms are inhabited and desired for, and of how these are creatively reimaged.

Drawing on the unresolved paradox of acting and being acted upon, which constitutes the core of philosophical, theological and mystical currents in Islamic traditions and beyond, Ghizlan's story reveals an emic perspective on agency, ethics and freedom that dislocates, and invites us to rethink, some of the very questions we are accustomed to ask about ethical lives and actions. It enriches current debates by interrogating the human capacity to act freely and make choices in situations shaped by transcendental forces, human powers and material contingencies. The notion of agency emerging from her story, indeed,

cannot be easily conceptualized as intention and desire to fashion herself as a certain kind of person by submitting to a set of ethical practices nor as creative attempts to go beyond normative expectations. Ghizlan's intimate narrative draws attention to modalities of agency and (inter)subjectivity that are submitted to God's will and that are not centred upon intentionality, will and desire but are beyond them (Mittermaier 2011, 2012). Even though, as I hope I have shown, these are all critical dimensions of her actions and thoughts, Ghizlan's story insistently points to what transcends human capacity to shape themselves and their complex lives.

Evoking a theological horizon that interweaves with and shapes mundane realities, Ghizlan gives voice to the fundamental human condition of being confronted by forces and powers that are beyond personal control and rational understanding. Beyond indicating divinely predetermined futures, Ghizlan's evocation of destiny also relates to events and situations that are experienced as inevitable, including various dimensions of life that cannot be chosen, controlled or struggled against, but must be accepted, lived with and worked through. Whereas Ghizlan says - rightly - that there are dimensions of life that cannot be decided, I have also traced the manifold ways in which her lived experience of being acted upon interweaves with, and at times calls for, agency, freedom and responsibility.

Within the mainstream Islamic theology of destiny to which Ghizlan resorts, freedom and responsibility occupy a central place. Far from being simply a limitation on human agency, the experience of 'being acted upon' becomes an essential condition for being an agentive and ethical subject, which leads



Ghizlan to reflect on the possibilities of choice and responsibility in situations of limited freedom. The complex relation between acting and being acted upon reveals a relational space where God's omnipotence both manifests itself and finds its limits in the possibility of human free will and ethical responsibility for one's actions. This does not entail a self-possessed subject, since human freedom is granted by God as the evidence of His magnanimity. It is precisely in the unresolved tensions between acting and being acted upon that the possibility of human freedom and choice resides.

As an unpredictable encounter with human, and divine, alterity, Ghizlan's quest for love offers us insights into an emic perspective that posits the paradox, the unexpected and the lived experience of limits as core dimensions of human existences and their ethical lives. This is an intrinsically relational perspective that recognizes the complex texture of human and non-human agencies, relationships, forces and powers, in relation to which people make choices, exercise freedom and strive to give their lives the desired direction.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from Ghizlan relate to numerous conversations we had between May and October 2010. Ghizlan spoke about the events discussed here in a



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long recorded interview in Moroccan Arabic (10 June 2010). I changed all the names of places and people, along with details about their lives, to protect the privacy of my interlocutors.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from 'Aisha are from a long recorded interview in Moroccan Arabic (9 June 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Terms and sentences in Moroccan Arabic are transliterated following the IJMES system. To respect the sounds of Moroccan Arabic words I have transliterated /e/ instead of /a/ for  $\text{َ}$  /  $\text{ِ}$  when necessary.

<sup>4</sup> Many scholars focus on recent developments and the ambivalences that accompany these changes (for instance, Ahearn 2001; Uberoi 2004; Palilla et al. 2007), while others draw attention to longstanding dynamics of change since colonial time (Cole and Thomas 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Public education was introduced in Morocco after independence (1956) and helped to narrow the gender gap in education. Girls' participation in university and high school has continued to increase in the last decade (2001-2011), although illiteracy among adult women remains high, see 'La Femme marocaine en chiffres: tendances d'évolution des caractéristiques démographiques et socio-professionnelles', available on-line <http://www.hcp.ma/downloads/>.

<sup>6</sup> In the 1960s, the marriageable age was 17;5 years for women and 24 for men; in 1998 this raised in urban areas to 27;9 for women and to 32;5 for men respectively. See Royaume du Maroc, Haut-Commissariat au Plan, L'adolescence en question: analyse des résultats de l'enquête sur les adolescents en milieu urbain (1999: 59-62), [http://www.hcp.ma/glossary/Enquete-sur-les-adolescents-en-milieu-urbain-deCasablanca\\_gw123.html](http://www.hcp.ma/glossary/Enquete-sur-les-adolescents-en-milieu-urbain-deCasablanca_gw123.html) 1999. In the urban

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centers of the Tadla-Azilal region, the average age of marriage in 2004 was 28 (31;7 for men and 25;8 for women), see Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat, 13 [http://www.hcp.ma/downloads/Demographie-Caracteristiques-demographiques-et-socio-economiques-RGPH-2004\\_t13063.html](http://www.hcp.ma/downloads/Demographie-Caracteristiques-demographiques-et-socio-economiques-RGPH-2004_t13063.html).

<sup>7</sup> Although highly contested and problematic, 'modernity' remains a powerful anthropological category to capture historically-situated societal aspirations for personal and social progress under conditions of global capitalism (see Knauf 2002: 4, 21). Modernity is also intimately embedded in Moroccan social and political history as a battleground for competing political projects.

<sup>8</sup> For an historical overview of the social reformist, modernist, liberal and nationalist movements that developed in Morocco since the 1910s and the 1920s, see Ruedy (1996).

<sup>9</sup> In 1973, Shaikh Yassine (1928-2012) addressed an open letter to King Hassan II challenging his religious authority as "Commander of the Faithful" and inviting him to repent. As a result, he was put into a psychiatric hospital for three years and then kept under house arrest until 2000, from where he continued to deliver his ethical-political message. For further detail, see Zeghal (2008: Ch. 4, 5, 6).

<sup>10</sup> Stefania Pandolfo (2000) offers fascinating insights into Moroccan debates on modernity through an exploration of the writings of Driss Chraïbi and Abdellah Laroui; in these authors' reflections, modernity remains a 'cut' (both a watershed and a laceration in the history of Morocco). From a materialist perspective, Jafaar Aksikas (2009) discusses liberal, nationalist and Islamist

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perspectives on modernity through the works of Abdellah Laroui, Mohammed Abd al-Jibri and Abdessalam Yassine.

<sup>11</sup> In elaborating this point, I was inspired by Pandolfo's article (2007) in which she shows beautifully how young Moroccans in Rabat inhabit a revivalist theological imagination and vocabulary in discussing clandestine migration and making sense of their disrupted lives.

<sup>12</sup> Other poetic traditions on love and passion have shaped popular imagination in Morocco, such as the genre called *malhun*, which developed in the 15th century. *Malhun* expresses feelings of passionate and extreme love, including the libertine and erotic registers, that continue to inform the vocabulary of love in Morocco (Cheikh et al. 2010). Significantly, Ghislan focused only on the classic tales of unfulfilled romance.

<sup>13</sup> French, Egyptian and Indian films were broadcast on national television, Radiodiffusion et Télévision Marocaine (established in 1962), although the national television network was strictly controlled by the state. In the 1980s, Moroccan public culture partly escaped from state control due to the spread of smuggled decoders, satellite dishes and pirate CDs and films (Pennel 2000: 384-386). In 1989, the predominantly French-language private channel 2M - the first private television station in the Arab world - was launched, devoted to entertainment.

<sup>14</sup> In 1977 King Hassan II (1961-1999) promoted the 'Arabization' of state education in order to undermine the basis of critical thinking which had influenced generations of left-wing political activists over the previous few decades (Vermeren 2006: 75).

<sup>15</sup> Cfr nota 13.

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<sup>16</sup> Haifa Wehbe is a Lebanese pop star and actress who is extremely popular in Arab countries, but is also criticized for her provocative and sensual video-clips and performances.

<sup>17</sup> I am grateful to Samuli Schielke for pointing out this aspect to me.

<sup>18</sup> As Laidlaw notes, this paradigm produces pious subjects by extinguishing their freedom of action, “through developing dispositions that restrict what one might be able to choose to do, in favour of the quite different value of positive freedom, in the realisation of one’s true self in absolute and involuntary fearful obedience to God” (2014: 154).