Coping With Gender Norms. Constructions of Masculinity Between Autonomy and Dependence

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss gender identification processes as a dialectic of autonomy and dependence with respect to the production of hegemonic models of masculinity. The analysis which are proposed in this paper are based on results from a prolonged qualitative research on sexual conducts and construction of masculinities among young Moroccan and Muslim immigrant men living in Europe (France and Italy).

By discussing specific case studies, I will analyse predatory masculinity – one of the hegemonic representations of "being a man" among the young people interviewed – as a gender performance where heterosexuality is conceived as an "essential" attribute of men. The text will first explore how this model of masculinity is configured as a normative reference by scientific literature on Islamic masculinities and among the young Moroccans I met. Then, I will show how this model allows the production of different social relations, especially between men, in homosocial spaces within immigrant milieu, and between Morocco and Europe. Finally, I will study the case of those young men who come to terms with this predatory model of masculinity in order to negotiate subordinate sexual orientations, such as homosexual. The paper will try to show how young men both develop new margins of manoeuvre to perform their masculinities and experience the coercive power of gender norms according to their social backgrounds and family origins. The main purpose of the text is an attempt to highlight both constricting and productive power of heterosexuality and its plural forms of expression.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, heterosexuality, subordinated masculinities.

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1. Introduction

Why can it be interesting to study masculinities through questioning their relation to heterosexuality? How can this relationship between masculinities and the power of heterosexuality reveal the action of gender norms? These are two of the questions which inspired the research from which this article is based, and on which I would like to insist here in order to reflect on the relationships between gender norms and constructions of masculinity within migration (Wojnicka & Pustulka, 2019).

As we will see, in some culturalist and essentialised interpretations of masculinity (for example among men from the Mediterranean region), gender identification processes are often viewed as necessarily inseparable from heterosexuality (Ouzgane, 2006; Sehlikoglu & Karioris, 2019). One of the arguments which are used to justify this association is that men are made responsible for ensuring the perpetuation of the agnatic line by using their "reproductive power", especially through marital union with a woman according religious precepts (Mitchell, 2002). The closed link that such interpretations establish between heterosexuality and the fulfilment of a masculine ideal of domination seems worth to explore.

Starting from a reading of the rich literature on men and masculinities in the Mediterranean, and in particular on the construction of masculinities in Muslim areas of the Mediterranean, this article will first try to recognize if and how it is possible to rethink the heuristic value of this literature, not so much to justify its results but rather to understand the impact that hegemonic gender representations which have been produced by these studies can have on the concrete performances of masculinity nowadays. If doing gender means acting between autonomy and constraint, between power of action and capacity of resistance to gender norms (Butler, 1990, 1993), it also seems interesting – from the point of view of this article – to understand how gender standards are even negotiated and each time updated in their manifestations while reaffirming their hierarchizing and even discriminating power. Then, the article will describe the methodology of my research on sexual conducts and masculinity constructions among Moroccan immigrants in Europe. The experiences of a group of young Moroccan men on which I have been working on for ten years will provide the empirical framework to structure my argument. Finally, through the study of specific empirical cases, this contribution will interrogate the productive power of heterosexuality and gender hegemonic norms as well as their ability to shape masculinities and the biographies of the interviewees who do not identify with such a heteronormative standard.

2.   Thinking Mediterranean masculinities, rethinking essentialisms

Within the vast field of study which we use to call today *Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities* (CSMM) – which have developed from the 1990s after the season of the *Men's Studies* in the U.S.A. (Farrell, 1974; Fasteau, 1975; Kimmel, 1995; Sawyer, 1971) – the notion of hegemonic masculinity has a central role. In the programmatic article "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity" (Carrigan et al., 1985), the authors use the concept of hegemony to describe the dominant position occupied by men in the system of gender relations and the construction of an ideology enabling its social reproduction, especially within the patriarchal order. Later, Connell will precise her use of this notion where presenting the different types of relations between masculinities. "Subordinated", "complicit" or "marginalized" masculine profiles are described in order to explain how hegemonic masculinity works (Connell, 2005, p. 77-81). Complicit attitude of men participates in legitimising and sustaining the hegemonic masculinity, while other masculine profiles are defined in opposition to the hegemonic one. In the case of homosexuality, homosexual men are interpreted as "the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity" and the "most conspicuous […] subordinated masculinity" (Connell, 2005, p. 78-79). When masculinities are marginalized they embody a subaltern profile due to physical handicap or disadvantaged social conditions. Within this masculine gender order, heterosexuality is identified as one of the main features of hegemony (Fidolini, 2023).

Now, Connell uses the notion of hegemony working on Antonio Gramsci's *Quaderni del carcere* (Gramsci, 1975). Hegemony allows Connell to think about cultural and moral dimensions of gender power by referring on the processes by which a social group, or an individual, obtain a leading position by exploiting persuasive power and cultural control. Hegemony, indeed, is defined by Gramsci as "the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 80). Domination is thus not expressed through violence or coercion, but rather through attraction and through a permanent cultural control. In this way, through the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell defines gender relations as a complex system of powers which interact by hierarchising the actors which are involved in this same system. Within this complex gender order, individuals are both submitted to gender relations and have room for manoeuvre to cope with their dependence on it. Hegemonic masculine models can be explored in relation to their persuasive power on individuals, both men and women, and can be observed both in the practices leading to the reproduction of dominant

masculinities and to the refusal of their hierarchising power. Through Connell's analysis, masculine identifications can be interpreted as modes of relation rather than individual attributes.

Therefore, hegemony is particularly useful to study masculinity in a contribution likes this one, where – as we will see – ethnographic observation and qualitative interviews are central. If the forms of masculinity change according to interactions and the actors, males or females, which are involved in, the researcher needs flexible tools to grasp its multifaceted manifestations, in different contexts. The models of masculinity can indeed be said to be performative: they are staged, reproduced and performed, refused or reinvented through practical and discursive actions which shape gender relations (Connell, 2005). It is thus possible to move away from a purely top-down interpretation of masculinity, based on the monolithic relation between dominant and dominated subjects as in the paradigm of domination (Bourdieu, 2001), and adopt a horizontal approach which allows to analyse the positions of the numerous actors involved in the exercise of hegemonic masculinities (both men and women), themselves playing an essential part in the confirmation of their hegemonic power (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

I interpret hegemonic models of masculinity as normative ideals inspiring performative acts. Men attempt to embody standards of dominant masculinity (like heterosexuality or virility) to show they are indeed "real" men (Fidolini, 2019a). Those who were unable to meet these dominant profiles end up suffering the hierarchising power of the hegemonic masculinity. In addition, men who embody hegemonic features are themselves obliged to reproduce, permanently, their hegemonic position in the arena of masculinity. Through studying the relation that masculinities produce with heterosexuality, this article will show that gender norms work as a surveillance system which orients the way men act and express their masculinity in their relationships with women as well as with other men.

A study on Moroccan young Muslim men seems to me particularly pertinent to carry out in the light of what I have said until now. Indeed, since the 1980s, social sciences have become more and more interested in gender issues in North Africa, and have frequently referred to religion to tackle the issue of masculinities. As Lahoucine Ouzgane (2006) points out the study of gender and masculinity within the Mediterranean area has often been analysed using religion as a key theme to explain how a supposed Mediterranean patriarchal order works (La Cecla, 2010). As a result, masculinity in Southern Mediterranean area has often been interpreted as a form of power rooted in a supposed Muslim, androcentric ethos (Benslama & Tazi, 2004; Ouzgane, 2006) which was interpreted as the foundation for asymmetrical relations between the sexes. However, such readings overlook the complex nature of Islamic societies,

reducing their different historical and social expressions to a cultural, universal and timeless monolithic (and Muslim) identity.

Previously, the comparative anthropology of the Mediterranean that developed from the 1960s (Davis, 1977; Gilmore, 1987; Peristiany, 1965; Pitt-Rivers, 1977) had contributed to affirm the dominant representation of a supposed "Mediterranean" and "Islamic man". In this definition the concept of honour has a main role. La Cecla (2010) observes that according to this culturalist and essentialised approaches, literature has built the model of the Arab and North African "man of honour" which represents a sort of "incomplete" masculinity in so far as it is intrinsically tied to the role of the woman in Islamic societies – the mother in particular, but also the wife or the sister. Women are elevated to symbols of chastity and (sexual) purity, becoming the repositories of their male relatives' respectability, in particular the honour they are entitled to from other men (Mitchell, 2002).

Masculinity is thus characterised by its attachment to the conjugal family, based on the compulsory heterosexual union between a man and a woman. In other word, a man can only be said to fulfil his gender role once he has become a husband and a father, even better if he becomes the father of a boy. Family as a central institution reproduces the patriarchal social order through the subordination of women, but also of those men who are unable (or do not want) to embody that hegemonic masculine profile which celebrates virility, heterosexuality and the reproductive capacity of men, where masculine gender identity is viewed as inherently bound to the performance of a (hetero)sexual role and as the product of the naturalisation of social status. Furthermore, to the notion of honour we can add that of shame (La Cecla, 2010). The honour/shame complex constitutes indeed a major category for the observation and description of Mediterranean social systems and their models of masculinity (Mitchell, 2002). While honour is defined as an essential standard of masculinity, it is on the other hand an attribute which is in a way exterior to men, since it also depends on the sexual purity and modesty of his female relatives. Shame, indeed, reflects men's incapacity to protect their reputation by controlling the behaviour of women (Maher, 2001).

Obviously, the use of the notions of honour and shame and the reference to a supposed Islamic root to masculinity in the Mediterranean have been strongly called into question (as it was the case for the supposed Catholic roots of this same masculinities in other countries, like Portugal or Italy [Piña-Cabral, 1989]). Scholars have especially criticised the fact that the use of such culturalist categories to discuss Mediterranean masculinity lead to select, among many other possible analytical tools, preconceived "exotic" features which essentialise masculinity (Herzfeld, 1980). Such a culturalist approach, indeed, lead to think that the Islamic masculinities of the south of the Mediterranean can be defined

by a specific cultural essence, preventing researchers to focus on the multiple expressions of masculinity that run counter to these essentialist notions (Lin et al., 2017). This culturalist tradition, indeed, ignores the multiple contexts in which individuals interact, it forgets that men are not just men but can be – at the same time – young people, immigrants, students or workers, brothers and sons, sexual partners and friends, that they can belong to different social classes, with different social backgrounds, and that they may come different cities, from rural or urban areas, and so on. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is precisely useful to measure this multiplicity, which cannot be reduced to a unique and immutable essence of a monolithic Mediterranean masculinity (Fidolini, 2018).

However, the way the young men I interviewed during the fieldwork displayed their masculinity and the data I collected throughout the ethnographic research lead me to think culturalist categories and approaches also from a different angle. I tried to understand if the essentialist categories depicting the profile of a Mediterranean and Islamic masculinity may have an impact on the performances of masculinities of the young Moroccan men I met. Are these culturalist approaches mere abstractions or can they be said to possess some heuristic power to observe and interpret the concrete expressions of masculinities? Did this culturalist tradition as applied to masculinities in the South of the Mediterranean really only result in the definition of abstract masculine profiles? Or are these references to culturalist approaches part of the normative ideals of masculinity shared by the young Moroccans I met?

Anthony Giddens used the notion of "double hermeneutic" to refer to the double reflexivity of social science (Giddens, 2014). According to his reflection, sociological categories are inspired from the analysis carried out by actors about their lives and before being reinjected into the social reality these categories were meant to describe; In Giddens' view there is a "mutual interpretive interplay between social science and those whose activities compose its subject matter" (Giddens, 2014, p. xxxii). Sociological knowledge is shaped while reshaping the social world at the same time. The social observer participates in a social reality already constituted by the actors. However, the social categories produced by the sociologist are also appropriated by the actors themselves. This defines indeed a process of double reflexivity which produces a continual process of redefinition of categories by the social researcher as well as a process of appropriation of these social categories by the actors that the social researcher studies. Social actors reinterpret these categories and use them to orient conducts. As Giddens explains: "The theories and findings of the social sciences cannot be kept wholly separate from the universe of meaning and action which they are about. But, for their part, lay actors are social theorists, whose theories help to constitute the activities and institutions that are the

object of study of specialized social observers or social scientists" (Giddens, 2014, p. xxxii-xxxiii).

I certainly do not mean to say that the construction of masculinity by the young Moroccan men I met during my research exclusively derive from a culturalist body of research whose notions about masculine identifications became embedded into their conducts. Rather, I think that it could be interesting to question how essentialisms originate and how they can give rise to processes of re-appropriation of culturalist features by individuals in their everyday lives. Giddens's perspective seems indeed to encourage to take into account the part played by specialised knowledge in everyday behaviour and vice versa. Thus, the ways the interviewees I encountered display their sense of honour and shame, or insist on their Muslim belongings, may provide a field to interrogate the hegemonic models of masculinity as well as their forms of expression. The cultural references the interviewees mobilise are not borrowed from a fixed and unchanging heritage: they can be negotiated and used differently depending on the context of interaction and the participants, and can orient more or less powerfully the expression of masculinity.

In addition, individuals may be well aware of others' expectations about their masculinity performances, and may sometimes choose to lay greater emphasis on some specific features of their masculinities, linked to their Moroccan and Mediterranean origins, or they Islamic belongings. In other occasions, they may voluntary dismiss these references. Thus, the implicit or explicit references to Islam or to their presumed powerful virility and compulsory heterosexuality may become tools to stage their masculine identification within a specific context and situation, according to the interlocutors which are witness of their gender performances. They may draw from the vast repertoire of affiliations which are available for them, in order to construct and negotiate their position as man, Moroccan and Muslim, in immigrant milieu and in relation to others: other immigrant men abroad, sexual partners, family members, or members of the majority population.

3. Materials and methods

The analysis proposed in this article are from a sociological qualitative study on a group of 54 young Moroccan men, aged between 19 and 30, and was carried out between 2011 and 2015. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with immigrant men living in two European regions: Grand-Est, in France, and Tuscany, in Italy. These regions were selected because they are two privileged destinations for Moroccan immigrants to Europe. Indeed, in Grand-Est, Moroccans are one of the largest immigrant community from North Africa

and the age pyramid of the immigrant population reveals a strong presence of young men (INSEE, 2016). In Tuscany Moroccans constitute the largest immigrant group from North Africa and the age pyramid also indicates a strong presence of young men (IDOS, 2019).

Being bilingual French/Italian I carried out the interviews in the two languages and I did not use Moroccan Arabic. The most part of the young men I met were university students at the moment of the research and had left Morocco to study in Europe. They especially came from the urban centres of the country and had privileged social backgrounds. Those who came to France and Italy to seek for a job, alone or with their family, have more heterogeneous social origins and represent rather a minority within the whole population of study.

All of the interviews were recorded and took place in public or private spaces (student apartments, restaurants, cafés). They lasted between 1 and 3 hours and were all transcribed to be analysed in order to identify the central narrative patterns in the accounts of the interviewees. I did not use dedicated software to analyse the transcriptions. The whole population of study is constituted of 66 young Moroccan men, but in this article I will focus on few qualitative cases, and paying particular attention to one specific case study which is particularly emblematic to offer an overview on one of the main results of the study: the ways through which heterosexuality is produced and reproduced within constructions of masculinity.

The interviews have been paired with ethnographic observations. For two years I spent time almost every day with part of the interviewees (10-15) especially in order to build a relationship of trust with them, so as to be able to talk more easily about their sexual experiences without being in the position of an external observer who seems just to steal private accounts. The fact of questioning the constructions of masculinity also meant that I had to engage my masculinity within ethnographic relationship (Fidolini, 2019b). I took part in conversations in which the masculinity of other men was judged and assessed; I asked others for their stories and was myself subjected to homosocial assessments when, for instance, I was invited to tell about my intimate life or giving an opinion on flirting techniques.

Yet, interpreting and analysing their narratives often led me to deal with a sort of "normative account" when I asked specific questions about sexual practices of the interviewees and the ways through which sexual conducts may contribute to shape masculinities (Fidolini, 2017). Many of the interviewees shielded themselves behind the normative distinction between marital sexuality, were (hetero)sexual intercourse is admitted, and even expected, according to Islam, and non-marital sexual relationships where sexual intercourse is illicit. Such a rigid dichotomy based on a heteronormative standard was specifically

justified through reference to the "respect" due to one's wife and to the institution of marriage according to the precepts of Islam. Now, one of the aims of the study was to understand the influence of heterosexuality on the interviewees' stories to analyse the role played by heteronormativity in directing and defining strategies for the construction of masculinity (Fidolini, 2020). This scientific aim probably influenced the accounts of these young men, as well as the personal experiences I told during fieldwork (that I frequently used to "encourage" the interviewees' stories) conveyed a model of "sexual engagement" of the researcher (Broqua, 2000) that contributed in a way to the reproduction of the heterosexual standard. Given the impossibility of achieving neutrality, I decided to accept the risks of my approach and tried to question this hegemony of the heterosexual script, rather focusing on its capacity of producing interactions between men and between men and women (Flood, 2008) where different masculinities compete and confront each other.

4. Discussion

4.1 Showing compulsory heterosexuality as an essential feature

Within homosocial relationships the predatory man is with no doubts the prominent profile of masculinity the interviewees use as a standard to perform gender identifications. When I talk about predatory masculinity I refer to the process by which it is possible di observe how masculine identification processes are deeply connected to the expression of a man's (hetero)sexual impulses and desire for women (Ferrero Camoletto & Bertone, 2009).

The concept of "predatory masculinity" and the animal metaphor that it underlies would seem to be quite inappropriate to use, especially in a sociological study which aims at denaturalising gender relations. However, it helps to draw attention to the mechanisms of naturalisation which result from the competition between men and the need to control women's sexuality. Homosocial relationships, indeed, play a central role in producing predatory masculinity, showing with force how masculine identifications are socially constructed and negotiated (Ferrero Camoletto & Bertone, 2009). It is widely acknowledged that predatory masculinity best expresses itself in public spaces where the male performer can display his virile power over women as well as competing masculinities (Whitehead, 2002). The constant performance of (hetero)sexual attitudes – we cannot talk about conducts here as men especially talk about their sexual orientations rather than behaviour – contributes to reassert the distinction between complementary masculine and feminine sexualities and to bolster heteronormative hegemony. Indeed, what matters for

men seem to be less to engage in heterosexual acts than to show off their heterosexuality as a model, making of it a permanent and visible reference (Gourarier, 2017).

During my ethnographic observations I frequently observed the impact of the predatory masculinity model in the homosocial situations. The first times I met the young men who formed the study population, many of them often acted out their predatory masculinity as a way to establish a contact with me. Their goal was to grasp what kind of relation they could have with the researcher, to find common ground, to understand and interpret my motivations: why was I searching for Moroccan respondents? Who was I? What was my sexual orientation? A concrete example may explain much better what was the role of such a predatory attitude within the fieldwork. In 2012 I met for the first time one of the Moroccan students I interviewed, Fouad, 27 years old. After having explained to him that I was working on a PhD. on masculinity construction among Muslim Moroccans in Europe, this is what he replied:

> It's going to be fun for you! […] You'll see Moroccans who drink and Moroccans who don't drink. There are some who smoke and some who don't. Some Muslims who pray and some who don't pray. But there's one thing you'll find always: Moroccan guys, all Moroccan guys, like to fuck! It's not our fault, with women we're defenceless!

This naturalisation of the sexual desire of "Moroccan guys" was used in different ways by the interviewees depending on the situation. In this specific case, the goal was maybe to create a sort of complicity with me and the other young men who were present in the room in which we were talking. Again, the objective was to reinforce the idea that heterosexual script was the right one to play the role of the "real man" (Fidolini, 2019a).

In other cases, the performance of predatory masculinity was oriented at hierarchising the interviewee's masculinity and my own. This happened for example with another interviewee, Moussa, 21 years old. Before starting the interview, he asked me if we could sit at the terrace of the café where we had agreed to meet and have our recorded conversation, while I had suggested to go inside the café to be away from the noise:

> *Interviewer: If you like we can sit at the back, I saw there were tables available…*
> Moussa: At the back?!? We won't be able to watch the girls!
> *Interviewer: Ah, OK I get it…*
> Moussa: If you like we sit there, I don't mind, ask any question, I'll answer, I know this thing [the interview] is important to you. But I'll be here [he shows the inside of the café] and my eyes will be over there [he shows with his hands the square in front of the café]!

Again, women are not necessarily the real targets of the interviewees' narratives: they are rather used by these young men to assert their predatory masculinity in a homosocial context (Flood, 2008).

The heteronormative discourse on which are based gender performances of these young man also exalts heterosexual marriage as a context where a hegemonic model of masculinity can be expressed according to Islamic precepts. The use of heterosexual marriage as the unique licit context where masculinity can be realized may also lead these young men to criticise the European socio-historical evolutions of the family forms and sexual mores. This kind of rhetoric may favour heterosexist accounts, or even homophobic arguments. Rachid, who is a young PhD candidate from a wealthy family from Mohammedia (26 years old at the moment of the interview), offers an emblematic example of criticism towards the (so-called) European mores about intimate life:

> Sometimes I think that here [in Europe], in this corpus of freedoms that exist here in Europe, in relation to family, to sexuality, I think, I don't know if it is good. 'Cause it also includes homosexuality but that's against nature, right? […]. That's a known fact in all the universal religions, a union means man plus woman, it's a commitment between a man and a woman, it's not… What does it mean if a man falls in love, let's say, with a man. I don't get it! A man gets married with a woman! Getting married with a man is against nature, it means upsetting, breaking the balance […] and in Europe you are accepting it.

This kind of discourse may be used by certain young men in order to react against subordination dynamics through which they are racialized in Europe because of their cultural origins. Indeed, Arab immigrant men are frequently associated with hypersexualized and even violent virile profiles, both in France and Italy. These presumed violent conducts are frequently used to build up a racialization process through which part of the majoritarian population discriminate people coming (also) from Islamic Mediterranean countries (Guénif-Souilamas & Macé, 2004). By raising the crucial issue of homosexuality, immigrant men may use criticisms against European mores to deal with their subaltern position abroad and negotiate the stigma in Europe. Obviously, this kind of rhetoric against Europe is not shared by all the interviewees. In certain cases – as we will see through the example of Amine – Europe can be rather become the place where living freely one's sexual life. But, in the accounts of the young men I interviewed, the heterosexist dialectic is central and is supported by the explicit reference to Muslim marital union using religious

precepts to bolster the naturalisation of gender difference and justify the abhorrence of homosexuality.

Moreover, the use of religious reference and the vindication of the heteronormative order can also function as cover-ups for the interviewee's homosexual orientation, in order to hide a subordinate masculine profile behind the model of a predatory masculinity which allows to maintain homosocial bonds and being accepted by other masculinities. This type of strategy can be illustrated through the case of Hakim, 27 years old, who is from a wealthy family of Meknes and lives in France. He is university student at the moment of the interview. According to him, the homosocial logics which characterise masculine peer relationships are guided by the "need" to adhere to the hegemonic heterosexual model. This adhesion is conceived by Hakim as a sort of obligatory step to be taken in homosocial space if a man wants to negotiate a hegemonic position within peer relationships (Pascoe, 2007). Speaking about his story and the difficulties he encountered in his journey towards acceptance of his homosexuality, Hakim explains:

> […] there is always a period of research, a phase of your life where you research your identity, it's a personal construction you know, a personal reflection, where you go through different phases. There is the questioning of your sexual identity because you say to yourself that the sexual difference you feel is just ephemeral or temporary. And during this long phase, it may take years and years, you play comedy with your friends, with your relatives, even with girls […] you follow the heterosexual codes, it works like by imitation [...], you talk about girls with your friends, you make them understand you want girls, you pretend to have a relationship with a girl. I used to do that, but it was just social copy-pasting…

As we can observe through Hakim's account, others' expectations play a central role in producing imitative heterosexual roles where these same social expectations are finally absorbed and become the reference frame to organise one's conduct. If in the case of Hakim this subordination to the heterosexual script seems to be a step in a longer biographical path, for other interviewees it can become a permanent condition to negotiate not only masculinity with friends, but also relationships with relatives in Morocco, with the immigrant status in Europe and long-term life projects abroad. It is what happens to Amine, whose case will be analysed in the next pages.

4.2 Hiding homosexuality[1], dealing with cultural and family belongings

Amine, is a young student in architecture living in Strasbourg. He is a 20-year-old native of El Jadida, from a very wealthy family. His parents live in Morocco: his mother is a high school teacher while his father works in the civil service. The fortune of his family especially come from his grandfather's bequest. During our first interview, Amine told me he did not want to have any relationship with a woman before marriage in order to comply with Islam's ban on premarital sex (Bouhdiba, 1998). In his narrative, he explained that the choice of a wife did not appear to depend on his own wishes but rather on much more complex family issues:

> Let me explain. Sometimes in Morocco appearance [a woman's physical aspect] counts so little that you ask your parents to choose your wife for yourself. You don't ask "Find a pretty girl for me", you say "Find a good wife". It works this way, then you'll get a bride with a veil and you won't regret it […]. My mother always says "My son, I want you to get married with a Muslim girl" […]. You can't refuse it. You can't do that to your mother, you can't refuse to respect her wish, it's impossible, it's what she wants, I'd never contradict my parents…

In reality, during his second interview with me, Amine confessed his homosexuality. However, before his confession, his rhetoric was built in order to explain the impact of other people's expectations on the expression of a heteromasculinity (Fidolini, 2020). Indeed, during our first converison (before his coming out), Amine decided to describe the experience of a (supposed) homosexual friend of his in Morocco:

> Among my friends there's a homosexual guy. The problem is everywhere in the Arabic world. He said "At one point I'm going to tell my mother I'm getting married, but that's just to keep up appearances." 'Cause there, not like here in Europe, you get judged all the time. He's resigned to fitting in the system. My problem will be to choose one woman out of many women; his problem will be to choose a woman when he really wants a man! I'm actually sad for him […] it's a crime to be homosexual in Morocco. In 2010 someone broke into our house, and when the burglars were caught we arrived early at the court and before our case there was someone who was

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[1] In this part of the article homosexuality is analyzed from the point of view of Muslim precepts about same-sex relationships and the production of a subordinate model of masculinity. From this perspective, homosexuality will be discussed as a crucial issue for the interviewees to rethink their relation with masculine norms as well as with the home country (Morocco), culture and families.

charged with homosexuality. So you see, in Morocco it's not a laughing matter.

It would be unscientific to read this account in light of Amine's ulterior revelation during his second interview. It would lead us to think about his narrative as an indirect confession of his homosexuality. Rather, what I wish to draw attention to is the way Amine uses heterosexuality standards to make the expression of his masculinity fit the model of Islamic heterocentered marriage. Insisting on his belonging to a masculine pole defined through opposition to a radically both antinomic and complementary feminine universe, Amine situates his masculinity with a compulsory heterosexual frame (Rich, 1980) without referring to concrete sexual practices. Indeed, during the interview he confessed he is a "virgin" (precisely to respect Islamic precepts concerning illicit sex before marriage). His masculinity is thus not expressed through his sexual behaviour but rather through the celebration of an opposition with the other sex in the future horizon of marriage. Amine's masculinity is understood through its radical opposition to femininity, thus confirming at the same time the necessary adequation between biological attributes and gender roles which constitute part of the heterosexual hegemony (Rubin, 1975). The future prospect of marriage will free him from concern about his sexual orientation, since he will in any case be able to prove his masculinity to others through marriage, when his sexuality will "fit" into the gender order supported by the heterocentred marital union.

During our second recorded interview (one years and half later), Amine decided to confess to me that he was homosexual. Since I had spent a lot of time with him during my fieldwork, he considered that I had a sort of right to know his "secret". He had only disclosed his homosexuality to a few very close French friends and two Moroccan friends who lived in Strasbourg, but concealed his sexual orientation to other people in France as well as Morocco, and to his family in particular. He declared that for a long time the two major things that made it impossible for him to freely talk about his homosexuality were his parents' expectations and religious norms, since he claimed to be a practicing Muslim. During a trip to Mecca in the spring of 2013, he had finally understood that religion did not stand in the way of a free, fulfilling sexual life and that his Muslim identity was an inherent part of his personality, his education and lifestyle – he prayed regularly, ate *halâl* food (licit food according to Muslim precepts) and observed Ramadan. He had also realised that he was not a unique case, since in Mecca he had met two other young homosexual Muslim men with whom he had discussed the issue. Yet, his parents remained the most daunting obstacle.

During the second interview, Amine had the possibility to explain why he was obliged to deal with heterosexual marriage and hiding his homosexuality behind the heterosexual scripts, especially in front of his parents.

> It is the story of my family, my grandfather had to flee because of an inheritance issue, he gave up the money and my father had to rebuild from scratch the family's fortune […]. But the thing's even more interesting than this is that I'm actually the last male heir in the family […] there's only my sister. It's the lineage, it's the name of the family, it's a responsibility, you know. I use irony to talk about that, but it is a serious think for my family. My grandfather had only two sons, and my uncle got married well before my father and he had four daughters, so no male heir. My father got married and he had me, so my uncle became an asshole to his family, so he got married again and had another daughter. When I see the shit he went through to preserve the line and I just don't give a fuck, well that's irony…

In order to hide his homosexuality from his parents, and out of the fear of "being disowned or disinherited" by his family, Amine had tried for a long time to find out his parents' intentions and considered how best adapt his life to the heterosexual framework of Islamic marriage. Thus, once, he decided to use his immigrant status and his failure at university exams to deal with his parents' expectations:

> In February I got the result of the exam and the teacher said to me he won't give me a pass for this year either, so when I went home to Morocco in February […] I said to my mum[2], "Listen mum with foreign students, when they fail to pass three years in a row, they can be expelled." So, next year is going to be my third year, so I thought I really have the power to raise the issue of marriage, I'll use this argument and see what happens [being married with a French woman to be naturalised]. The first question she asked me was did I have someone specific in mind: "You're not in love with someone over there [in France] and you want to get married and you use that [failure at the university] to do it and remaining in France with a French, non-Muslim girl?" […] She thought I used university failure and the risk of being expelled to marry a French girl !
> [Once I was back in France] I took up the subject again on the phone with my mum. I started again, I changed a little bit my strategy, "Look mum, why d'you mind if there's like a woman who's glued to me and you don't want her? Otherwise, I've got buddies here [laughing], gay marriage is legal in France, I get married with one of my friends and that's it"… So that's how

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[2] Even if Amine knows that the point of view of his mother is the one of both his parents, with his father he did not even dare to deal with the issue.

> I dropped the hint, she said "no no no, absolutely, I don't want your name to be in the papers here saying 'this is what a Moroccan guy does in France'…".

Beyond his curious and someway abstruse attempts to talk about his homosexuality to his mother, we observe how the heterosexual script is central to build his masculine identification and how this identification is associated to marriage. Indeed, when I asked Amine whether he really could picture himself in the future as married to a woman to meet his parents' expectations while pursuing his sexual life outside marriage, he answered:

> The thing is it's contrary to my principles as a Muslim to marry a woman and cheat on her. If I get married, I'm not going to cheat on my wife, I'm not going to take advantage of her to hide and then live my sexual life with others. No, for me she would be the pearl of the world.

In Amine's story, masculinity seems to be considered above all from the perspective of the family, as an image whose function is to preserve the reputation of the family in the eyes of others, reproducing some of the essentialist and culturalist features which define Islamic masculinity and that we described in the first section of this article. The expectations of others are so important to him that his strategy is organised to successfully combine two levels of arrangement with heterosexual marriage norm in order to preserve the family's reputation: "What's good is the duality. In fact, my mother thinks that marriage [the marital union he evoked during conversation with her] is a façade for her, but in fact for me it's also a façade for me [to keep continuing to hide his homosexuality to his parents]", he explains. Amine's account is strongly influenced by his family's expectations as to the role he should play in the patriarchal structure. His masculinity is viewed as key element in reproducing a gender order in which femininity and masculinity are classified and hierarchised to confirm the heterosexual scripts. The power of heteronormativity, as a force of hierarchisation of gender relations and sexualities, results in imperatives to marry, to perpetuate the lineage and become a father, in the condemnation of celibacy or in debates over inheritance. According to Amine, homosexuality is viewed by his relatives as "an alien thing", "we don't know these people, it's impossible, they say". Homosexual masculinity, indeed, is considered as a "failed" and dishonourable masculinity, simply because it does not match the hegemonic model of virile and patriarchal masculinity, through which the lineage can perpetuate itself.

However, in Amine's story the social background of this young man seems to play a central role in his narrative and experience, since his family's

expectations mainly spring from their concerns over inheritance. His case clearly shows that negotiating gender norms is a privilege for people coming from upper class, highly educated, and from urban centres of contemporary Morocco. It is precisely by taking advantage of his wealthy social background that Amine may also elaborate his future plans to apply for French citizenship. Combined with financial independence, this step is conceived by Amine as a crucial goal which may allow him to reveal his homosexuality to his family without fearing their judgment or social disapproval, and to finally gain freedom from his family and the logics of social reputation:

> As long as I depend on my parents for a living I won't do anything to bother them. Now I need a good degree, as soon as I get it and I can earn my living, and if I can stay in France, here I will be free, from that moment when I'm free, from that moment I'm going to do what I want […] I can't tell them now [to his parents] about my homosexuality, but at the same time I'm thinking if I can't tell them then it means that it's not worth it for them […] I'm a very calculating person […] now for the moment my plan is to try to get French citizenship, it's a primary step for what's going to happen next.

In looking forward to the recognition of his sexual orientation, Amine testifies to his attachment to the values of a foreign "sexual democracy" (Fassin, 2006). He himself culturalises in a way his position by establish a stark opposition between his native country, Morocco, on one side, and France, on the other side, which is viewed as the cradle where obtaining social and political intimate rights (Puar, 2007). Financial independence from his family will allow him to become his own master and gain real freedom ("from that moment [when] I'm free"). Reaching full independence involves taking a distance from his native country and starting procedures to become a French citizen. For Amine, the project means leaving behind "the culture of exterior judgment" – as he describes Moroccan culture – as well as his dependence on his family: it is a way to free himself from his parents' views and to reject the subordinate role they have forced upon him in the patriarchal heteronormative order.

5. Conclusions

Two main results can be outlined here to conclude our analysis and to discuss how masculine performances are produced between autonomy and dependence on gender norms.

First, the study shows that masculinity construction is a changing practice. Hegemonic and subordinated status, for example, are not fixed conditions and

may vary according to social frames and interactions. Masculine identifications have been thus understood, here, as performative rather than merely expressive of gender difference. In this sense, I suggested that performance does not necessarily trouble gender binaries but, on the contrary, may participate in shaping hegemonic models of masculinity through reproduce and confirming heterosexual scripts and culturalist features. It is exactly through social relationships and interactions that gender norms acquire their power, as they become socially constructed and collectively shared tools which are used to make sense of one's and others' behaviour. The performance of gender ideals thus merely constitutes the last, most visible, stage of a process that began long before and that is never fully accomplished.

Second, the study sheds light on the close link between masculinities, perceptions of life phases and body, at least according to three main paths. First, the profile of a sort of "youthful hormonal" masculinity emerged when the interviewees tended to naturalise heterosexual power as an essentialist feature of masculinity by performing the role of predatory males with overflowing virility. We have observed how such masculine profile is rather a situated performance that young Moroccan men used within homosocial spaces and within peer group identifications processes, especially during youth and premarital phases. Second, on other occasions, the masculine body was rather presented in terms of "discipline", when the interviewees intended to display an adult model of masculinity which is able to wait for the conjugal condition as a space where living sexuality according to Islamic precepts. Third, the masculine body was also "culturalised" by these young Moroccan men themselves in order to emphasise their belongings, their Muslim culture or their family traditions and costumes. By referring to such belongings, these young men both establish a new relationship with their immigrant condition, and negotiate their immigrant status abroad in order to run away from stigmatisations (for example by criticise European intimate mores in order to overturn racialisation processes) or to distance their biographical paths from their home culture or family costumes to legitimate new sexual conducts in Europe.

Finally, the outcomes of the study lead us to reaffirm that the power of gender norms cannot be analysed without considering the forms of their individual expressions within social relations and interactional frames, where people may deal with different rooms for manoeuvre to cope with masculine standards and collective expectations about gender performances. In this sense, the article invites to further studies of heterosexual scripts among other social contexts and populations to encourage the analysis of heteronormativity, its ordinary power and the ways trough which people both resist to it and reproduce its hegemony.

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