

# **The Evolution and Current State of Arranged Marriages in Casablanca (Morocco): Social and Educational Aspects**

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## **Abstract**

Moroccan society faces a situation in which the family is undergoing many changes. Factors such as migration, the access of women to the labor market and the widespread integration of women into the education system, among others, have led to the reorganization of family relationships over the last couple of decades. Bearing in mind the above evolution, this paper explores the socio-educational changes taking place in the family. On the basis of a comparative, diachronic and longitudinal analysis, the evolution and current state of marriage in Casablanca is analyzed.

**Key words:** Marriage, Education, Social, Morocco.

## **Evolución y estado actual de la conformación de los matrimonios en Casablanca (Marruecos): Aspectos socioeducativos**

## **Resumen**

La sociedad marroquí ha de enfrentarse a un proceso donde la familia se encuentra sometida a una ingente cantidad de cambios. Los fuertes movimientos migratorios, el acceso de la mujer al mercado laboral, la incipiente industrialización, y la generalizada escolarización femenina, entre otros factores, han propiciado que asistamos a una reorganización de las relaciones familiares. Siendo conscientes de esta evolución, profundizamos en los cambios socioeducativos que se vienen originando en el ámbito de la familia. Analizamos a través de un estudio longitudinal comparativo de carácter diacrónico, la evolución y el estado actual del matrimonio en la gran metrópolis de Casablanca.

**Palabras clave:** Matrimonio, Educación, Sociedad, Marruecos.

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## **Introduction**

Moroccan society faces a situation in which the family is undergoing many changes both within the family itself and in its social environment. Some factors such as internal and external migration, the access of women to the labour market, emerging industrialization, the extensive use of birth control methods, the widespread integration of women into the education system and improved educational levels of women, among others, have led to the reorganization of family relationships over the last couple of decades.

Such changes taking place in the heart of the family have a bearing on the affective and psychological stability of the people involved, and so must be taken into account when trying to achieve a balanced development of society. Certainly the traditional model of the Moroccan family has reached a delicate situation that must be faced head on.

Since there are great disparities between different regions of the country, -even within the same city- the pace of change varies from one place to another. So, family relationships and structures are diversifying in a way never experienced before in Morocco, which leads us to talk about family life as a plural phenomenon and making it difficult to pin down.

Bearing in mind the evolution taking place in the Alaouite kingdom and the premises stated above, the aim of this paper is to explore the underlying socio-educational changes in one of the most important institutions in Morocco: the family. The approach adopted in this study is comparative, diachronic and longitudinal and in this paper we shall analyse the evolution and current state of marriage in a specific context: the metropolis of Casablanca<sup>1</sup>.

### **1. Working Hypotheses**

- Moroccan marriage has undergone major structural transformations over the last couple of decades.
- Homogamous marriage is the normal model in Casablanca society.
- The educational level of couples has a direct bearing on types of courtship/engagement and marriage.
- Women and men perform clearly differentiated roles and functions within the institution of the family.
- Religion plays a pivotal role with regard to the establishment of matrimonial relationships.

## **2. Data Collection Instruments**

Three main instruments were used to gather data and carry out the present research: A. interviews; B. questionnaires; C. direct observation over the past four years.

A. Interviews were undertaken in two time periods to 50 wives and 50 husbands from Casablanca: in 1985 and in 2006. The main aim of the interviews was to discover the matrimonial strategies employed in the city of Casablanca and the opinions of the spouses.

B. A combined questionnaire was used, distributed by Mostafa Aboumalek<sup>2</sup> (Aboumalek, 1994) in 1986 and by the author of this paper in 2007. The questionnaire was based on 172 items with different types of questions: yes-no, multiple choice and open-ended. This questionnaire constitutes the core of the research.

The questionnaire is structured around three interrelated fields. The aim of the first 74 items was to gather personal information, such as age, school attended by both the informant and spouse, qualifications obtained, professions of each, and so on. The rest of the items were organized under the following headings:

- Courtship and engagement (23 items). The aim of this section was to explore the socio-educational aspects of betrothal as well as the nature of the relationship prior to marriage.
- Marriage (22 items). This section dealt with issues such as the way matrimonial strategies were put into practice, opinions about marital life, agreements made after getting married.
- Opinions and attitudes (50 items). The aim of this section was to find out the opinions of husbands and wives on key aspects of marriage such as the roles each fulfilled, the established marriage ritual, sexual matters, religion, the freedom to choose a partner, pre-nuptial contact, virginity of the woman and the man.

C. Direct observation over the last four years was also a major element of the research. The use of observation as a technique arose from the need to study the subject of the research *in situ*, to analyse the central theme in its actual context, so as to complement and enrich the data obtained from interviews and questionnaires.

## **3. Data Samples**

In the research carried out by Professor Mostafa Aboumalek in 1986, 1400 married couples were surveyed in Casablanca (700 men and 700

women). Two decades later, in 2007, the same questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 1264 married couples (632 men and 632 women)<sup>3</sup>.

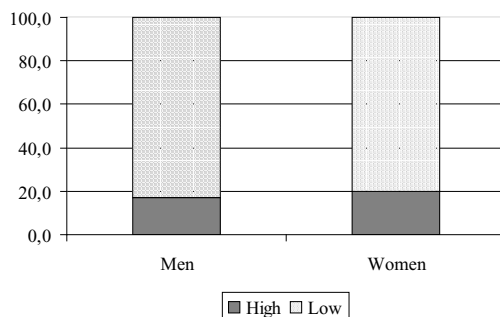
Gender was an important variable in the sample, since we considered that distinguishing the views of husbands and wives provided a divergent yet complementary approach to the phenomenon under study, namely the development of marital trends.

#### 4. Data Analysis

In this article we present the most significant similarities and differences between the data and results found in the surveys referred to above. The relationships between the variables studied in the 1986 and 2007 surveys form the focal point of our work, enabling us to highlight the specific social, educational and cultural aspects that influence the shaping of marriages that have either been changed in the present or have retained traditional customs.

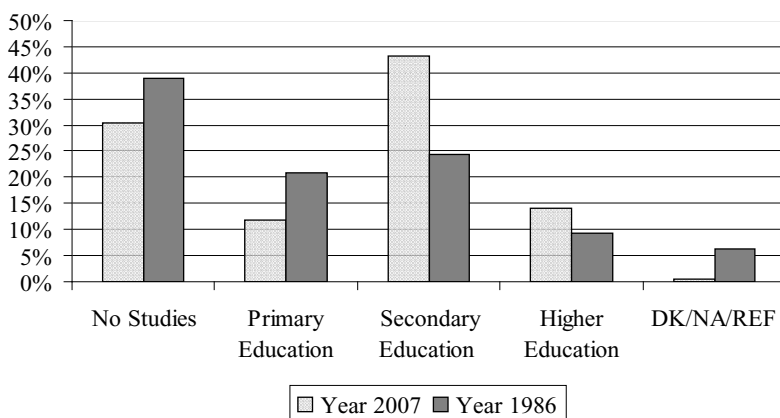
Before examining in detail the main themes of the research such as engagement, marriage, opinions and standpoints held, we highlight variables of interest which help frame our conclusions more accurately.

The first variable is the *economic level* of the districts in Casablanca where the married couples in the 2007 survey lived. Needless to say, despite the heterogeneity of Moroccan society, the economic level of the population is clearly split into a sparse upper class and an abundant lower or very low class; there is virtually no middle class. In a developing country, the population tends not to show a uniform distribution, in terms of economic level. Clear evidence of this supposition was found in the families surveyed. Of the 1264 people who filled in the questionnaire, 83.1% of men and 80% of women lived in lower class neighbourhoods and only 16.9% of men and 20% of women regarded their neighbourhood as upper class.



**Fig. 1.** Economic level of the neighbourhoods.

Secondly, samples were analysed according to the *level of education* of those taking part in the survey, since this variable further enhances the interpretation of the data and the results obtained. In addition, “the level of education” is regarded as one of the major independent variables of this research.



**Fig. 2.** Educational Levels of those surveyed in Casablanca in 1986 and 2007.

The graph above clearly shows that there have been major changes in the level of education in the intervening years. The data are even more relevant if we take into account that samples were taken from subjects of similar social standing.

Given that more than two decades have passed since the first survey, it is logical to assume that the educational level of the citizens has risen and, indeed, the high percentage of illiterates sampled in 1986 (39%) had dropped in 2007 to (30.5%).

As can be seen in the graph, there are differences at all levels of education; perhaps the most interesting variations between 1986 and 2007 have occurred at the secondary and higher levels. In the first survey (1986), 24.3% had received secondary education, and 9.4% higher education, whereas in the second survey (2007) these percentages rose to 43.20% and 14% respectively.

These changes in educational levels will certainly have an effect on specific aspects of the process of arranging and establishing their families, as well as on the matrimonial strategies adopted.

In Morocco, primary education is considered by all social classes to be a basic need which does not involve any changes regarding the respect students have for their customs and traditions. However, as secondary and higher education frequently give rise to personal reflection, they can exert a strong influence on a young person while maturing, and so they are considered a potential cause of changes in behaviour outside the school environment.

#### *4.1. Marriage and Engagement*

##### *4.1.1. Homogamy according to educational level*

We focus next on several features involved in marriage in the Casablanca area. According to Mostafa Aboumalek, homogamy is the norm in these marriages. This term refers to a type of marriage in which social, geographical, educational or economic aspects are shared by the married couple.

**Table I**  
**Marriages in Casablanca according to educational level in 1986**

		Wives				
		Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Higher Ed.	Total
Husbands	Educational Level					
	Illiterate	452	69	35	3	559
	Primary Ed.	110	76	41	2	229
	Secondary Ed.	99	98	169	19	385
	Higher Ed.	8	12	66	78	164
	Total	669	255	311	102	1.337 <sup>5</sup>

Analysis of the table above reveals that the educational level of spouses tends to be similar, a tendency, moreover, which is most marked at each end of the scale (illiterate couples and couples with university degrees). Thus, it can be seen that nearly all men with a low level of education tend to marry illiterate women, whereas at the opposite extreme there are hardly any cases of couples where one is illiterate while the other has had the benefit of higher education.

Most men marry women of a lower educational level than themselves, a fact directly related to preferences when choosing a partner and partly the result of the generally higher educational level of men in comparison to women.

**Table II**  
**Marriages in Casablanca according to educational level in 2007**

		Wives				
Husbands	Academic Level	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Higher Ed.	Total
	Illiterate	308	41	16	12	377
	Primary Ed.	32	44	36	36	148
	Secondary Ed.	55	92	294	63	504
	Higher Ed.	3	15	33	118	169
	Total	398	192	379	229	1198 <sup>6</sup>

After comparing the index values of the couples surveyed in 1986 and 2007 for homogamy according to educational level, we found that the situation remained the same: the marriages in the study still showed homogeneity of educational level between husbands and wives. Homogamy is stronger at the extremes of the social samples than in the centre.

The following operations were carried out to calculate the index (Boudon, 1976):

The index value for homogamy in 1986:

$$\frac{452 + 76 + 169 + 78}{559 + 229 + 311 + 102} = 0,65$$

The index value for homogamy in 2007:

$$\frac{308 + 44 + 294 + 118}{377 + 148 + 379 + 229} = 0,67$$

In the light of these results there are two possible explanations, which are not mutually exclusive:

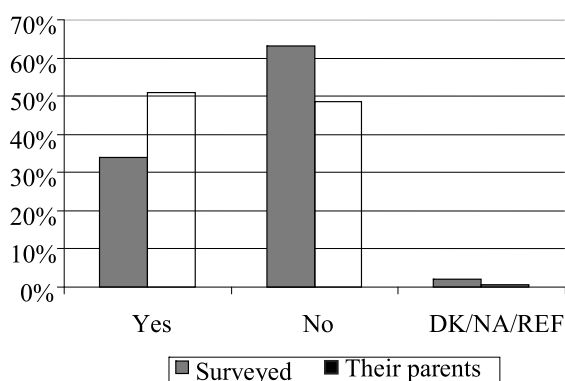
A. To a large extent, educational similarities between married couples are due to values inherited from parents.

B. Choice of partner is influenced by the individual's own circumstances, wealth, sentiments, and the structure of the so-called marriage market.

#### *4.1.2. Endogamy*

This is a very common type of marriage in Moroccan society, where both husband and wife belong to the same family group; the usual prac-

tice is for cousins to become engaged. Unions of this kind are gradually decreasing in the larger urban centres, although they are still prevalent in rural areas and the Moroccan hinterland. So we discovered that a significant percentage (50.8%) of the parents of the people surveyed in 2007 were married to somebody from their own family, whereas our analysis of their children's responses on this matter showed that the incidence of this type of marriage had dropped to 33.9% of cases. Of these endogamous cases, 44% were marriages between cousins.



**Fig. 3.** Kinship relationships in marriages in Casablanca in 2007.  
 Parents and children

The influence of the family on the choice of spouse is obvious, but when and under what circumstances is this influence brought to bear? Why do individuals who are not particularly young, those from a rural environment and those from lower class backgrounds allow their families to influence them the most? The answer, it seems, is to be found in the limited sources of information used by young people to form an opinion, sources which barely extend beyond the family circle.

Choice of husband or wife is strongly influenced by factors external to the prospective couple, mainly the parents, to the extent that even the parents' socio-professional status has a direct bearing on the family model that their own children establish and on the opinions they hold about whether to opt for polygamy or a mixed marriage<sup>7</sup>.



#### 4.1.3. *Circumstances that Influence the Establishment of Couples*

The aim of this section is to bring together the multiple circumstances affecting the way couples in Morocco are established and at the same time to find out the extent to which parents and relationships with neighbours influence initiation of courtship and engagement.

**Table III**  
**Circumstances under which you met your husband / wife**

	1986 (%)	2007 (%)
Go-between	31.80	5
Proposal without meeting	14.75	6
Family meeting	14.67	14
Relationship with neighbours	12.69	17
Public place	10.24	22
Party	0.84	2
Workplace	06.49	16
Place of education	04.35	7
Wedding ceremony	02.67	1
Trip	01.45	6
DK/NA/REF	0	4
Total	100	100

After analysing the information given by those surveyed, we see that some of the most popular means of bringing a couple together have been retained over the years: with *the family meeting* (14.67% of those surveyed in 1986 and 14% in 2007) and *relationships with neighbours* (12.69% in 1986 and 17% in 2007), in particular, standing out.

Nevertheless, we can observe several differences which are especially important for our research. After two decades, the percentage of married couples who met through a go-between (5% in 2007) has dropped dramatically to 8<sup>th</sup> place; in 1986 *the family meeting* was the most common practice (31.80%). Similarly, with those who proposed marriage without meeting their future spouse beforehand: this option represented 14.75% of the sample in 1986 whereas by 2007 it had fallen to 6%.

On the other hand, two different sets of circumstances for bringing couples together have become more prominent in present-day marriages: meetings taking place in *public places*, which have risen from 10.24% to 22%, and those in the *workplace*, from 6.49% in 1986 to 16% in 2007.

#### 4.1.4. *Circumstances of the Meeting and Educational Level*

Certainly, one of the variables involved in the changes witnessed is the educational level of the spouses, since it is closely related to their marriage strategies and their opinions about polygamy, prenuptial relations, women going out to work, marriage to a non-Muslim, and so on.

The link between the educational level of the spouses is significantly related to the way the couple is established. In the group of illiterate people surveyed in 1986, family arrangements (35.2%) and the presence of a go-between (41.6%) were customary, whereas couples of higher educational levels tended to meet by chance (62.4%) and, in the second place, in an arrangement made between families (16.5%).

**Table IV**  
**Circumstances of meeting according to educational level in 1986**

Educational Level		Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Higher Ed.	Total
Family meeting	f %	180 35.2	83 29.6	88 25.8	22 16.5	373
Relationship with neighbours	f %	62 12	37 13.2	51 14.7	13 9.8	163
Go-between	f %	214 41.6	96 34.3	83 23.9	15 11.3	408
By chance <sup>s</sup>	f %	58 11.2	64 22.8	124 35.8	83 62.4	329
Total	f %	514 100%	280 100%	346 100%	133 100%	1273

The 2007 responses showed a similar relationship between the variables. 60.3% of couples with no schooling mainly met by chance -basically in public places- and through relationships with neighbours (27.1%). Moreover, most of the couples with experience of higher education also met by chance (77.5%), mainly in public places and the workplace.

**Table V**  
**Circumstances of the meeting according to educational level in 2007**

Educational Level		Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Higher Ed.	Total
Family meeting	f %	40 10.7	27 19.4	96 18.5	13 7.5	176
Relationship with neighbours	f %	101 27.1	21 15.1	78 15	18 10.4	218
Go-between	f %	7 1.9	25 18	26 5	8 4.6	66
By chance	f %	225 60.3	66 47.5	320 61.5	134 77.5	745
Total	f %	373 100%	139 100%	520 100%	173 100%	1205

In summary, the higher the educational level of the spouses the less likely it is that the circumstances of a pre-matrimonial meeting will be traditional ones, i.e. family meeting, relationship with neighbours or using a go-between.

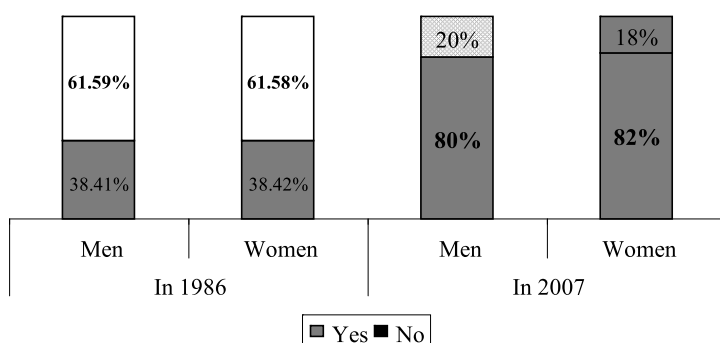
#### *4.1.5. Prenuptial Relationships*<sup>9</sup>

The kinds of prenuptial relationship found in the Alaouite kingdom, and mainly in the large cities, constitute another variable which is changing over time. In the old days, choice of partner was regarded as a strategy for establishing links and alliances between families. Contact between the engaged couple before marriage was minimal and they usually met for the first time at the ceremony itself.

It should not be forgotten that the family is governed to a great extent by religious and cultural influences. As in other areas of married life, tradition and Islam have established the rules for the pattern of behaviour when a marriage is being arranged; a pattern that considers contact before marriage as not strictly necessary. In the past the spouses' parents and the possible alliance between the two families involved have influenced the match to a considerable extent and this still holds; the opinion of the couple in the matter has not been regarded as important. It must be noted, however, that outside the rural areas this situation is undergoing a great change.

Nowadays, marriage is understood by many sectors of the population as a serious, but expensive, transaction that ensures the stability necessary for progress;<sup>10</sup> it is an investment for which guarantees must be sought to avoid failure.

As we can see in the graph below, in 1986 more than half the people surveyed claimed never to have had prenuptial relationships (61.59% of men and 61.58% of women). By contrast, in 2007 the vast majority of the people surveyed claimed they did have this type of relationship (80% of men and 82% of women).



**Fig. 4.** Prenuptial relationships in 1986 y 2007.

The changes taking place in the structure of the Moroccan family and the strategies that this institution has established for its self-preservation are certainly striking. Variables such as educational level, women joining the labour market and the economic situation of the family, for example, all play crucial roles. When reflecting upon such variables, we must ask ourselves whether there is any connection between the type of situation that brought the couple together and whether or not there was a prenuptial relationship or not.

As can be seen in table VII, a high percentage of individuals in 1986 (88.04%) and 2007 (56.5%) claimed that there was no prenuptial relationship of any kind when the marriage was arranged in any of the traditional ways mentioned above. Nevertheless, changes in specific marriage strategies over the last couple of decades explain the decrease shown in the latest survey.

On the other hand, couples who said they had met “by chance” claimed a higher incidence of prenuptial relationships (49.58% in the first survey and 66.3% in the second). Mostafa Aboumalek emphasised the fact that in 1986 the immense majority of couples who met in this way went on to have a prenuptial relationship. However, it is noticeable that nowadays this has changed. 43.5% of couples who met “by chance”, rather than in the traditional way, nevertheless decided not to have a prenuptial relationship.

It is also true that there are many more couples nowadays who meet at work or in public places; however, from the data, this fact does not imply that most boys or girls who are friends end up in prenuptial relationships as was the case some decades ago. Despite the fact that the concepts of courtship and engagement are changing, there are still many people who see choice of partner not as a personal decision but as a consensual family investment not requiring, a priori, any contact before the wedding.

**Table VI**  
**Connection between the circumstances of the meeting and prenuptial relationships**

Circumstances of the meeting	prenuptial relationships			
	1986 (%)		2007 (%)	
Family meeting	Yes	No	Yes	No
Relationships with neighbours	18.93	35.59	17	4.4
Go-between	15.43	11.08	12.4	41.7
By chance	16.04	41.37	4.3	10.4
Total	49.58	11.94	66.3	43.5
	100%	100%	100%	100%

#### *4.2. Change of Mentality*

The situation of women and the role they play in Moroccan society is evolving constantly. Their role in the community is obviously closely linked to social structures – dominant social values - and cultural practices that have been transmitted down the years (Feliu, 2004).

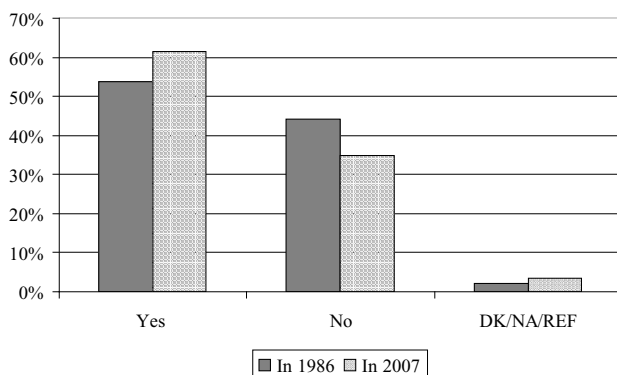
Women's access to the labour market and education, together with the reforms undertaken by the Moroccan authorities in the last couple of years are leading to significant changes in the role and functions that women perform in social and family contexts. The idea of both spouses taking joint responsibility is gradually being accepted.

We shall now consider some variables that will help to explain the change of mentality in husbands and wives in Casablanca.

##### *4.2.1. Parents: a key role in choosing a partner*

It can be stated as a generalization that moral support by parents is crucial in the process of choosing a partner and formalizing the engagement, to the extent that parental consent or absence of it has an irrevocable influence on whether the relationship is consolidated or not. Even though

the burgeoning degree of independence experienced by many young settled married couples may lead us to think the opposite, and despite the fact that, in the towns, it may look as if hierarchical differences between generations have diminished and the future bride and groom enjoy a greater degree of independence, this model is still common throughout Moroccan society and in both urban and rural areas. In this regard, we compared the opinions of those surveyed about the degree of freedom enjoyed by engaged couples in choosing a partner.



**Fig. 5** In your opinion, should everyone be free to choose their partner without their parents being involved?

At both points in time, more than half of those surveyed supported freedom of choice on the part of the couple (53.82% in 1986 and 61.60% in 2007) with those demanding intervention by the family being 44.05% (1986) and 35% (2007). In the matter that concerns us, we do not see any significant changes over time, confirming our earlier view. At the present time, parental involvement and approval in the choice of a partner is valued positively by future husbands and wives.

If we look at the survey responses from the point of view of gender we can say that a significant change is taking place in the way women think. In 1986, of those surveyed who were in favour of the family acting as intermediary, the majority (55.10%) were women. By 2007 these figures had changed considerably with a majority of women demanding freedom to choose a partner (58.5% answered 'yes' to this question and only 25.6% preferred the family's involvement). Such data support the information

obtained by other means, and leads to the conclusion that women are becoming agents for important changes in Moroccan urban society, especially in regard to the gender issue.

#### *4.2.2. Polygamy*<sup>11</sup>

In Morocco, polygamy is clearly in decline. In 1997 women in polygamous marriages represented 3.5% of the total female population, having dropped from 5.1% in 1992 (Royo, 2003). With the new Family Law in force, the conditions required for polygamy are so complex that, in practice, the situation is becoming extremely difficult (Article 40)<sup>®</sup>. As an example we can provide two implications of these regulations: A. For a man to marry for the second time a judge's approval is required. B. Moreover, a woman is allowed to add a clause preventing the husband from marrying other women.

In 1986, 13.3% of the husbands surveyed had been prepared to have more than one wife. They were mostly illiterates, old men and those from rural areas and of low social position. The absence of economic means to keep two or more wives happy is the main reason alleged by those who do not pursue polygamy as an option. In big cities, polygamy tends to be an ethnographic oddity which is dying out.

Nonetheless, despite the strengthening of the law regarding polygamy, 16.5% of men surveyed in 2007 would have been prepared to have one more wife; a percentage that has scarcely changed over time. It is also true that, in most cases, this is just a male fantasy, since 79.4% of women would not approve of their husband having a second wife in the marriage. Nonetheless, a significant 17.4% would not mind.

However, in certain social and family-related circumstances, polygamy appears to be an option worth considering. Frequently, children constitute the marriage's *raison d'être*. When the family does not produce any children, several possibilities, including polygamy, are considered in order to obtain the longed-for child. Likewise, both illness and old age are considered good reasons to have recourse to this kind of family institution.

#### *4.2.3. Effect of Sterility on the Future of the Couple*

Usually, women in Morocco identify themselves with the roles of wife and mother. Marriage is their *raison d'être*. Their social status largely depends on the number of children they give birth to, and it is particularly advantageous if the offspring are boys. The average number of children per woman has dropped dramatically in the last couple of decades; nowadays

the average is 2.3 in cities and 4.1 in rural areas (Royo, 2003). Bearing in mind the importance of having children in Moroccan society for both women and married couples, what alternatives would be considered by the couple if one of them were sterile?

**Table VII**  
**If your partner is sterile, the solution would be**

	1986		2007	
	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Continue	29.57	57.07	41.9	55.7
Divorce	20.79	9.75	41.9	38.0
Marry again	39.23	3.57	6.7	3.2
Adoption	10.39	29.59	9.5	3.2
Total	100	100	100	100

Most men surveyed in 1986 (60.02%) considered divorce (20.79%) and polygamy (39.23%) as the main alternatives to their marriage failing to produce children. These figures show that a high percentage of men consider the possibility of giving up their marriage rather than live without children. In a country with such traditions, the fact that more than 40.000 divorces take place every year represents a serious social problem with a strong impact on the upbringing children receive, as well as showing a crisis in the traditional Moroccan family (Az Zahra & El Boukhari, 2005)., Adoption, however, is not regarded as a suitable measure to compensate for the absence of biological children.

Oddly enough, the solutions preferred by women with no descendants are: “to carry on with the marriage” (57.07%) and “adoption” (29.59%). Obviously, a Moroccan wife in 1986 would not consider divorce as a positive alternative, since divorced women at that time were rejected by society and faced an uncertain future.

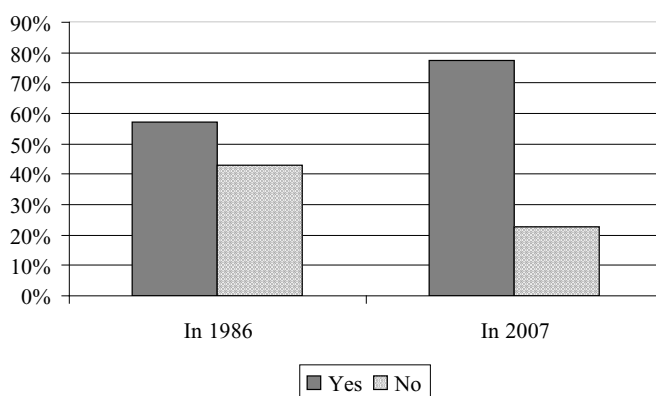
The time variable in the present issue has played a significant part. The responses of both men and women in 2007 were more homogeneous: when faced with the lack of children, both considered the most logical alternatives to be to continue with their marriage (41.9% of men as against 55.7% of women) and to divorce (41.9% and 38% respectively), whilst polygamy was not considered a feasible solution by either spouse when faced with sterility. Finally, despite the fact that twenty-one years have elapsed, adoption is still not considered a good option.



#### *4.2.4. Love in the choice of a partner*

Traditionally, the concept of “falling in love” as a prelude to a good marriage, as it is understood in the west, is still not perceived as a prerequisite for marriage in rural and popular areas in Morocco. It is understood rather as arising once the couple live together, come to know each other, and respect each other.

In 1986, 42.81% of the population surveyed did not, in fact, understand love as an emotion essential to making a marriage. Over time, this percentage has dropped to 22.70%. From the perspective of western ethnocentrism, these figures may, at first, seem inconceivable in this day and age, but in a traditional society where Arabic culture and Islam dictate behaviour and lifestyle, both within the family and outside it, they are synonymous with change. In recent years, whether due to the influence of the many satellite dishes in Morocco, or of returning emigrants or the industrialization of Casablanca, we see that “love” is gradually becoming a feeling to be taken into account in the conventions of marriage. Nonetheless, we should like to make it clear that when it comes to interpreting the data, the word “love” in this part of the world is not equivalent to ‘passion’, ‘falling in love’ or ‘sex’. As a result of frequent stays in Morocco, direct observation and living among Moroccans enable us to assert that, in the specific areas mentioned above, until basic needs such as daily sustenance, health, shelter from the weather, a minimum income, work, and so on, are met, “falling in love” constitutes a second rank variable when setting up a marriage.



**Fig. 6** The need for love in making a good marriage

#### 4.2.5. *The nature of the changes in marriage*

When analysing the perception of change in marriage, it can be seen that, in both 1986 and 2007, most people surveyed thought that married life was undergoing major transformations (95.74% and 75.6% respectively).

As regards the nature of the changes, we have to point out significant differences in the results from the two surveys. In 1986, opinion was divided: 50.12% described such change as positive and 49.88% as negative. In 2007, however, most individuals (83.5%) felt they constituted a favourable evolution in the institution of the family.

We now compare those elements in marriage that are considered to be changing the most.

**Table VIII**  
**Changes affecting married life in 1986 and 2007**

	In 1986 (%)	In 2007 (%)
Living standards	36.31	21.4
Equal opportunities for men/women	31.10	62.0
Parents/children relationships	16.62	4.4
Sex education and birth control	15.96	8.0
Misc.	-	4.2
Total	100	100

Although the respondents agreed, both in 1986 and in 2007, that the areas of greatest change in married life were in “living standards” and “equality between men and women”, there were significant differences in the degree of priority given to each. In 1986, the most significant changes centred on living standards (36.31%) and equal opportunities for both spouses (31.10%), whilst, in 2007 the most significant changes tended to focus on gender equality (62%). This important fact is linked to a thorough modernization of the country undertaken by the Moroccan government and the third sector<sup>13</sup> of Morocco in favour of promoting the role of women in society.

The importance of the measures implemented by the Moroccan authorities can be easily understood if we highlight the conditions before the new Moudawana. So, for example, until January 2004 a woman could easily be repudiated by her husband but found it hard to prove aggression on his part since she had to find at least twelve qualified witnesses to testify

before a judge; in the past, repudiation and divorce were prerogatives of the husband, who tended to exercise them with a certain degree of restraint, whereas only in exceptional cases did men accept divorce petitions from their wives; children born out of wedlock were not legally recognized, and so on. Once the new Family Law was passed, this series of extremely sexist regulations and contingencies disappeared from the statute book.

## Conclusions

In general we conclude, in line with our first hypothesis, that: *Moroccan marriage has undergone major transformations in the last couple of decades*. These transformations are closely linked to the educational level of the spouses, the access of women to paid employment<sup>14</sup> and government policy on gender equality, among other variables.

The traditional family model where women devote all their energy to caring for their husband, home and children is still widespread in Morocco. However, as time passes the Moroccan family is spearheading major changes, especially in urban areas.

We now present a series of partial conclusions, contributing to the general conclusion stated above.

- Over time, married couples in Casablanca are demonstrating more and more that they have prenuptial relationships.
- Although endogamy remains a common form of marriage in present-day Moroccan society, this type of union in the city of Casablanca is gradually disappearing.
- Polygamy is one of the family institutions clearly in decline in urban areas in Morocco. It has even ceased to be one of the alternatives traditionally resorted to when a wife was sterile.
- Another variable that has changed over time is that couples consider “love” as a necessary basis for marriage. Most people surveyed in 2007 claimed that love was an important emotion in a couple’s relationship, although as we have said, we must bear in mind what is understood by “love” in order to interpret this statement.
- At the same time, however, these changes do not imply in the least that the more traditional marriage strategies are being lost:

A. Although “workplaces” and “public places” are becoming new ways of meeting a future husband or wife, traditional procedures such as the “family meeting” and “relationships with neighbours” have been retained.

B. The involvement of parents and their approval of the choice of a partner are still highly regarded by the couple, although the woman of the twenty-first century demands a greater degree of freedom from her partner than the man. Even though relatives are still involved in arranging a marriage, the couples themselves are now, more and more, taking an active part in the process, usually in the choice of the partner. In fact, we observed a clear tendency for individual wishes to prevail over those of the family. Sometimes they seek advice from their family and follow it, whereas on other occasions this procedure is merely a way of confirming a decision already taken. The habits and ways of yesteryear are definitely being modified by new ways of living together.

C. Homogamy associated with level of education still scores highly; despite the passage of time, it continues to be a prominent feature in present-day marriages in Morocco, confirming our second hypothesis.

However, as we stated in our fourth hypothesis, *women and men perform clearly different roles and functions in the institution of the family*. Women are mainly assigned the roles of mother, wife and teacher of their children, while men are the protectors and providers of the family. Following Islamic teaching, women are assigned the fundamental mission of taking care of the family, with a pre-eminent role in raising and educating their children. The husband however plays a more important role "in public" -in society- being responsible for the economic support of the family. Even if the role performed by the husband means he is frequently away from home, it does not mean that he is free from his obligations or the need to control the activities taking place there<sup>15</sup>.

In a society controlled by men, the way women play an extremely important role in the upbringing and education of their children is striking. This basically amounts to discipline, imposed by men but carried out by women. Hence, mothers accept having children in a situation where roles are perpetuated and functions differentiated according to gender. In this situation questions arise such as, "Is it possible for women in these societies to have a key role for themselves? Is what is being transmitted simply approval of male domination of women? Or is it the case that representing women as oppressed is not an accurate definition of this complex social network?"

The role of the groom's mother in many prenuptial events and later in her home, where, in many cases, the couple start their life together, usually because they cannot afford to buy a house, makes her quite a lady. From that moment, the social standing of the mother-in-law increases since a young woman works under her command and will probably give birth

to her grandchildren. These women are treated like “queens in their own homes” and benefit to a great extent from the patrilineal descent to which they have been subject. Limitations on women holding public and economic posts disappear within the family, where their work is fully recognized.

Just as in western countries, except for social benefits, when women gain access to the labour market there is no complementary re-distribution of the household chores or the raising of the children. The excessive workload that many women are subjected to, both at home and in the workplace, is at odds with the new vision of the world and the role they are expected to play in it. The new vision enters their homes via the enormous number of satellite dishes that can be seen everywhere in Morocco.

Female unemployment rates have gradually been dropping over time and, parallel to this in urban areas, quantitative and qualitative professional improvement for women is taking place. This state of affairs helps to confirm that women are crucial agents for change in Moroccan society and, as might be expected, in the institution of the family.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Research carried out in collaboration with D<sup>a</sup> Maria Teresa Terrón Caro (University Pablo de Olavide) and D<sup>a</sup> Verónica Cobano-Delgado Palma (University of Seville).
- <sup>2</sup> Research student in the Faculty of Legal, Economic and Social Sciences, University of Casablanca. Within the framework of his PhD Thesis on the sociology of the family, he undertook research on matrimonial strategies in Casablanca during 1985 and 1986. It was later published in: ABOUMALEK, Mostafa (1994). Data related to 1986 were taken from this research.
- <sup>3</sup> Only 1264 out of 1400 were properly answered.
- <sup>4</sup> Basic education includes the first cycle of Secondary Education, for this reason many people have answered that have studied at secondary level, even though they have only received basic education. We have chosen the term "studies at secondary level" so that the data are homogeneous and therefore comparable with those obtained by Professor Mostafa Aboumalek of the University of Casablanca.
- <sup>5</sup> The rest of the sample filled in the option “Doesn’t know/Doesn’t answer”, and thus it was not included in the table.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ídem*.
- <sup>7</sup> A mixed marriage is one where the spouses are of different religions.
- <sup>8</sup> “By chance” includes the options “proposal without meeting”, “public place”, “work”, “place of education”, “party”, “wedding celebration” and “trip”.
- <sup>9</sup> We are not referring to sexual encounters but only to contact of a much less intimate nature. Contacts of this type are non-private meetings to enable the

engaged couple to get to know each other better. According to Eric Royo "Any sexual relationship between two single Moroccans of the opposite sex is considered fornication by Sharia law and a crime of prostitution by the Moroccan penal code", p. 92.

- <sup>10</sup> According to Yolanda Guardione: "An old Moroccan proverb says that Christians spend their money on lawsuits, the Jewish spend it on religious parties and the Moroccan on weddings. Indeed, no other event is more celebrated than a wedding", taken from <http://www.funci.org/es/1999/03/05/marruecos-tierra-del-sol-poniente/>, August 11th, 2007.
- <sup>11</sup> "And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hands possess; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course". *The Koran* (Sura, 4:3), translated by M.H. Shakir and published by Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, S.A., in 1983.
- <sup>12</sup> "Polygamy is forbidden if injustice is feared among wives. Likewise it is forbidden whenever a clause is included by the wife in the marriage certificate stating that the husband agrees not to have a second wife". Article 40 from the new Family Code in Morocco.
- <sup>13</sup> Non-profit-making organization.
- <sup>14</sup> It must be stressed that since time immemorial very many women have carried out unpaid agricultural work and have worked in domestic service while being housewives, and yet are not counted as part of the work force.
- <sup>15</sup> Aesha recounts that the Holy Prophet said: "The best of you is the one who treats his family best." (Hadiz de Abu Dawud).

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