



BLOGS



“Only when taboos are broken will the fight against menstrual precariousness be won”

In Morocco, the fight against menstrual precariousness begins with the breaking of taboos thanks to several emerging initiatives in rural areas. in



by **Lina Meskine** — 24 January 2022 in **Files, In-depth**

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There is the red of passion, the red of love, the red of strength and power. The symbols of red are just as sublimated as its shades: scarlet, cherry-red, crimson, poppy... yet one of them is banished: the one of menstruation.

The word “menstruation” is whispered in secret. We veil the word like we veil the debate revolving around it, which, beyond prudishness, is concealed by shame and taboo. The red of menstruation taints the freedom and the emancipation of a woman. It abounds with popular myths, beliefs and legends.

Menstruation accompanies a woman’s life marking her transition to adulthood and therefore her ability to procreate, if she wishes to. However, no matter how biological and natural this phenomenon is, it can condition her socially, especially in rural areas, women are fighting a silent battle.





Workshop organised by HAPPIH in July 2021 for the National Day for the Fight Against Menstrual Poverty ©HAPPIH

What is menstrual precariousness?

Menstrual precariousness refers to the difficulty of accessing sanitary protection, due to a lack of means and resources. In Morocco, it is estimated that only 30% of women have access to sanitary products. This problem not only endangers the health of women who can develop serious infections due to a lack of hygiene, but it also leads to young girls dropping out of school in rural areas. Furthermore, due to the lack of sanitary facilities in schools and in public spaces (and therefore the difficulty in changing and washing), menstruation becomes a real disadvantage for the mobility of girls.

As most other countries, Morocco is just beginning to shed light on the subject. While the evolution of public debate has been considerable in recent years, it only concerns cities. In rural areas, where populations are more exposed to poverty and poor education, the need is enormous. There is no education on the subject, and above all a lot of misconceptions. The distress in the testimonies of several young girls is unequivocal.

“Several girls have confessed that they dropped out of school so as not to be ridiculed, after being betrayed by a bloodstain in class,” states Rita Sekkat, founder of the Happih association that fights for the protection of intimate hygiene. “There’s a girl whose period disappeared only to return a few years later. She was beaten by her family who thought she was pregnant.”

“Precariousness lies in the unspoken”



Distribution of sanitary protection products ©HAPPIH

The red spot syndrome: the pressure of taboos and the unspoken

“Menstruation blood has always been mysterious in history. When a man bleeds, he dies. When a woman bleeds, she gives life,” points out Soumaya Naamane Guessous, Moroccan sociologist and author of the book “Au-delà de toute pudeur” (Beyond All Prudishness). Thus, in Moroccan society, menstruation is a taboo, like everything related to the intimacy of women. Seeing a bloodstain is the greatest shame.

In the collective mind, a menstruating woman is considered as impure, even almost “cursed”. This explains why in Morocco, it is not recommended for the woman who is in her period to knead her bread, for instance, or to undertake anything since it will be doomed to failure because of her blood.



In Morocco, it is estimated that only 30% of women have access to sanitary products

This imaginary dates back to the history of monotheism, and particularly of Judaism that is very severe towards the menstruating woman who is perceived as defiling. Due to these taboos, women are very little informed about their bodies and their intimacy, considered “hchouma” (Shameful).

“In the past, some married women did not understand period blood. Today, in Morocco, women are better informed about their intimacy. They know what the period is, before they have it. This is already a big step forward,” says Soumaya Naamane Guessous. “However, they are not prepared. They must ensure good hygiene to be comfortable. What they are looking for is a sense of security, well-being and continuity.”



Awareness-raising workshop in a school ©HAPPIH

Awareness-raising Initiatives in favor of menstrual hygiene are flourishing in Morocco



undertaken by civil society, such as those conducted by the Happih association and the 7achak platform.

Happih – Humanitarian Action for Protection and Preservation of Intimate Hygiene – was set up by Rita Sekkat in 2019 to fight against menstrual precariousness in Morocco and elsewhere in the world: in France, in Brazil, and other countries. The project originally started in 2016 when together with four male classmates, Rita set up a competition for student humanitarian projects. “There was a real need at the time, no one was talking about it yet,” states Rita.

Since then, the association has implemented several actions, especially in rural municipalities and provinces in Morocco, such as Ouislane, Al Haouz and Ouled Tayeb. “We must ensure that girls become actors of their health,” explains Rita Sekkat.

These actions are divided into two types: awareness-raising days with the intervention of gynecologists, and personal development workshops to break taboos and popular beliefs. The young girls are therefore accompanied. They are listened to and the menstrual cycle, the possible dysfunctions and functioning of their body are explained. During these interventions, the association distributes free menstrual products that it produces itself.



"La trace humaine" (The human trace), a mural by the artist Samy Snoussi ©7achak

On social networks, awareness-raising contributes to the achievement of goals. Several Instagram accounts address the causes of feminism and individual freedoms in Morocco. [7achak](#) stands out as one of the most influential.

In dialectal Arabic, 7achak is a word used to refer to something repugnant, especially menstruation. Launched in 2019 by activists Sarah Benmoussa and Yasmine Lahlou, 7achak is above all, a movement to break taboos related to Moroccan women.

"We aim to advocate for free speech about menstruation, to democratize menstrual blood, to educate and support women," states Sarah Benmoussa, co-founder of 7achak.

Since it was set up, the platform has organized several events, conferences and actions. In Casablanca, the artist Samy Snoussi was invited to create a large mural fresco painted in shades of red: "La trace humaine" (The human trace). A way of shouting on the walls what we say softly, precisely through the palette of reds.





"La trace humaine" (The human trace), a mural by the artist Samy Snoussi ©7achak

The platform has also produced an awareness-raising clip that mocks the popular metaphors used in Morocco to talk about menstruation. Even more recently, a whole day was organized at the Dar Lamima Orphanage in Casablanca to distribute menstrual panties to 300 young girls coming from rural areas. During this day, gynecologists were present to accompany young girls and explain the menstrual cycle and its functioning.

Tags: [Women in rural areas](#)



Lina Meskine is specialized in architecture and is passionate about writing and journalism, which she explores as a self-taught person. Based in Rabat, she collaborates for several media, including Onorient: a platform that promotes the artistic momentum in the Arab world, Web Arts Resistances, or the magazine A+E: Architecture and Environment in Morocco.

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