

## The profitable business of adultery in Morocco

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Abdessamad Taghi gets out of his light grey car. He takes off his sunglasses revealing a look that is lively and attentive. A private detective is hiding behind this conventional appearance of a forty-year-old. This is an occupation about which not much is known in Morocco, at least as far as the general public is concerned. It doesn't matter. Agent Taghi, based in Mohammédia, already has a lot on his plate. "For months now I've been snowed under with work. I work on 5 cases at once," the detective points out.

Divorces, infidelities, people reported as missing, fraud, counterfeiting and passing off counterfeits, dud cheques... the list is long. "I've dealt with more than a hundred cases since I started to practise eight years ago," he goes on.

Even though this activity has only sprung up recently, enquiries carried out by private eyes is an up-and-coming thing in Morocco. "With 5,000 dirhams we can clear the ground, verify suspicions and get on with finding tangible proof," this particular detective emphasizes. "Lawyers often send me female clients looking for concrete evidence to accelerate the process of divorce. Sometimes all we need are a few good snapshots and the case is made that will win in court," announces another detective who prefers to remain anonymous. The investigators do the business with neither the hidden microphone nor the infra-red camera that they have in Hollywood movies. Problems between couples, especially adultery, make up the lion's share of the cases treated so far. These cases represent 90% of the office turnover of Detective Taghi. In this respect, women account for the overwhelming majority of clients.

The only thing is that recourse to the services of a private detective is not a female reflex: "If my husband is deceiving me, I'd rather not know about it. It would therefore be unthinkable for me to have recourse to the services of a private investigator," is the opinion expressed by a young woman from Casablanca. Other women, however, have no objection to it as soon as it can shed light on the truth of the matter.

Abdessamad Taghi, like his colleague Rachid Mounacifi, a private detective in Marrakesh, says that he is equally in demand with local enterprises: investigations into CVs, pilfering, receiving stolen goods, unfair competition, debt recovery – just some of the matters dealt with. There is liaison with foreign detective agencies, in Europe especially, asking for their help, above all with people disappearing within Morocco itself.

But in order to carry out their missions and to intervene on the ground, private detectives are obliged to have a close relationship with the police. Often police inspectors and detectives team up and intervene together. "We have quite a close collaboration with the police in order to obtain information, but unofficially of course," Mounacifi emphasizes. The only thing is that certain policemen take a dim view of the occupation of detective. They prefer to go down the official and conventional route. "Only the police are accustomed to carrying out enquiries. If we leave this kind of activity to others, there will be total anarchy with a needless taking of risks," warns a young police officer for whom graduation from a police academy remains a *nec plus ultra*.

Nevertheless Moroccan 'Columbos' are demonstrating their competence. In general they are former members of the Moroccan CID, the army or policemen having made a career in security, especially abroad. They have usually followed quite different career paths from each other. Taghi, for example, started work in security in Morocco. To hone his knowledge he had to follow a professional course of training sanctioned by a Belgian diplomat. As for Rachid Mounacifi, he had a long career in security in Sweden. In 2004 he decided to go back to his country to set up a business specialising in security and caretaking in Marrakesh. Mounacifi is also the chairperson for the Professional Association of Security Agencies in Morocco.

But the least typical career path belongs to Myriam Marzak, the one and only female private detective in Morocco. After passing her bac at the Lyautey High School in Casablanca, Marzak went off to study in France. In Montpellier she put her name down for the Faculty of Medicine and embarked at the same time on a course of training in research and investigation for private detectives.

In 1991 she got into a French ministerial department as an investigative agent owing to her dual nationality as French and Moroccan. One year after being taken on she was sent on detachment to follow a course of on-the-job training in Canada. It was in North America she sharpened up her armoury of skills.

Apart from courses in tracking down, covert surveillance, morphopsychology, photography and law, Marzak trained in the armed forces. By 2003 she had more than 10 years experience and decided to go back to Morocco to invest with her husband in a security and caretaking business in Casablanca.

#### Legal status

In the absence of a judicial framework, detectives have had to anticipate and get round the law by creating security businesses. This new activity has taken legislators by surprise who have not so far devised a legal text to cover it. "I've contacted all the bodies concerned, the general secretaryship of the government, the Ministry of the Interior in order to regularise our activity, but in vain," asserts Taghi. In the meantime, this is a grey area: "The profession is neither allowed nor forbidden," he adds. Officially they are referred to as 'agents of research and investigation'. Their authorisation to practise is given by the Ministry of the Interior. This judicial vacuum underlines a disinclination to develop this activity. For some people "it's a breach of civil liberty and people's right to privacy". This is a point of view supported by the opinion of a young woman from Casablanca: "It's not in keeping with our traditions. Moroccan collective memory, influenced by the stock images of Hollywood movies: Columbo, Sherlock Holmes, also has a large say in this. Right away the activity is perceived as being intrusive.

All the more so as the charges involved exclude a good part of the population. The services of private detectives are not accessible to everyone. The fees for an investigation vary on average from 5,000 to 7,000 dirhams. They can reach quite high amounts depending on the length and nature of the enquiry and the difficulty of the investigation.