

*Shame of the 'im-propre'.*

**Procreative body and dying body:  
Recent developments of contemporary control over one's own body.**

**Dominique Memmi**

For the last three decades in Europe, the administration of the procreative body and the dying body has undergone a deep transformation through abortion, sterilisation, artificial procreation, euthanasia and palliative care. What was once prohibited now tends to be authorised, on one condition: that a physician be involved in the decision. Before helping to satisfy their requests, doctors are assigned the task of verifying the legitimacy of patients' reasons for making them. In place of the criminal authority responsible until now for punishing *a posteriori* transgressions of these prohibitions, there is now a medical authority exercising *a priori* control over the reasons for the procedure, on the basis of interviews provided for by law. Patients, who are induced to come up with reasonable auto-biographies to justify the proposed use of their own bodies, are now confronted by non-authoritarian physicians whose role is to provide information and advice. It is government through speech.

This speech takes for granted that the subjects are sufficiently capable of controlling the drives and emotions related to their procreative or dying bodies to produce a reasonable discourse about them from inside the situation. Are such subjects merely a myth produced by contemporary public institutions? An extensive survey in French hospital wards confirms the existence of a veritable duty of "self-regulation", together with a feeling of shame when patients fail to perform that duty. Yet the duty itself turns out to be the product of a long history, perceptible above all since the end of the 18th century. It has merely been accentuated since the 1960s, along with the requests made to the State to provide the technical instruments to ensure such "self-regulation" (birth control pills, accelerated end-of-life hospitalisation).

This self-regulation is not concerned solely with certain bodily functions or certain drives (sexuality, aggressiveness), but with changes in the organic datum itself. This datum generates a specific shame I called *la honte* (shame) not of the *non-propre* (dirty) but of the *im-propre* (not in possession). Sexual relations poorly protected against... procreation cause as much uneasiness as a poorly controlled end of life : obviously - and even when pathology is not involved at all - it is the corporeal datum that must not be left to evolve naturally. This demands of contemporary subjects considerable reflection and supervision, which than support institutions and caregivers in their contemporary and very reasonable "government through speech"....