

Morocco 1967-1968: Memories, Reflections and Nostalgia

Vincent Crapanzano
City University of New York

Abstract: Here are reflections on my Moroccan fieldwork in 1967-1968 with the Ḥamadsha, a popular Sufi brotherhood, or *ṭarīqa*. My focus is on memory – images that evoke the surround of my research but never appeared in my ethnographic writings. They mark, as they create, what I have called the scene – roughly, the subjectivation of an “objective” situation that colors our response to it. They reflect the not altogether post-colonial atmosphere in the years immediately followings Morocco’s independence and, equally important, prevailing anthropological assumptions. I relate the images to my understanding, then and now, of such theoretical issues as – serendipity in fieldwork; suspense in reciprocal relations; the dynamics of gift exchange which includes the transfer of emotions as elements in the exchange itself; a socially active rhetoric that prioritizes the “freedom” of the potential over encumbering actualization in patron-client relations; the force of the supplicative oath (*‘ār*) in social relations; insight and the oscillation between idioms of understanding (e.g. the “spiritual” and the “real”) that each have their truth that is, paradoxically, at once the same and radically different. Implicitly, I argue for a skeptical empiricism – a meta-empiricism – that acknowledges the dangers arising from un-understanding and the arrogance of over-understanding.

Keywords: Field Encounters, Suspense, Gift-exchange, Reciprocity, Spirit Possession, Patron-client relation, Insight, Memoirs.

October 1967. On the Highway between Kenitra and Rabat

A Moroccan woman, dressed in a bulky white djellaba, starts across the highway without looking. She is about three hundred meters in front of me. Between us are two cars, one driven by a Moroccan man, who manages to swerve around her without losing control of his car and screeches to a halt. He was speeding. The second, a white Renault, driven by young blond French woman, hits her. I jump out of my car and rush toward the fallen woman, but by the time I reach her, several Moroccan men have appeared from nowhere, and before I can stop them, they drag her off the road. She moans. At least she is alive, I think. Another man arrives and takes charge. (Later, I am told he is an ambulance driver.) I am stunned by the silence – the leaden calm that pervades. I turn around. Two or three French women are hugging the French driver. She is clearly in shock – white, hands’ trembling, disoriented. I stand around waiting for the police. Perhaps they will need me as a witness. Finally, as some of the cars begin to drive away, I ask several men who

look knowledgeable whether I have to stay. They say no. One of them, a Frenchman, says accidents like this happen all the time. “The women are unable to judge the relationship between distance and the speed of a moving car.” The Moroccan agrees.

I hesitate to begin my reminiscences of my field research in the late sixties with a violent image, but the accident took place on the day after I arrived in Morocco to begin that research. It has lingered, like so many images, which were never recorded in my ethnographic writings – for the most part, not even in my field note – but they depict a surround that was never given form and yet must certainly have influenced my research and its ensuing interpretations. They are not necessarily epiphanic moments, though some are what Virginia Woolf might have called fertile facts and Henry James a medium that released his stories. But as fertile, as inspirational, as they may have been, they never came to fruition. Over time they – at least those that have been retained – have come to punctuate my memories and given them affective, if transient, resonance. They mark, as they create even through their disappearance, their ephemerality, what I have called the scene – that experience or refraction of the “objective” situation which colors and tones that situation and thus renders it other than we know it to be, if we bother to think about it objectively, and yet, however deeply colored, however intensely toned, rests on that objectivity.”¹

Was the accident, my memory of it, a portent of things to come? Did it come to symbolize my anxiety at the time? I am not sure. I do know that I had no idea how the villagers would react to the French woman. I thought, violently. It was not that many years after the struggles for independence, as peaceful as they had been in Morocco and as vicious as they were in neighboring Algeria.

As I drove on to Rabat, I realized how frozen those initial fears were. I was projecting, quite selfishly, my personal anxieties onto a tragic event that had nothing to do with me other than that I happened to witness it. What that accident did, what the reaction of everyone there did, was to break the distance – the dehumanizing distance – that, despite its humanizing intention, the anthropology I had been studying produced. I became aware of the defensive structure of the ethnographic stance and not just its methodology, as George Devereux maintained.²

1. Vincent Crapanzano, “The Scene Shadowing the Real,” *Anthropological Theory* 6, 4 (2006): 389.
 2. George Devereux, *From Anxiety to Method in the Social Sciences* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton and Company, 1976). I had met Devereux a few weeks earlier in Paris. Throughout my fieldwork, he wrote to me diligently, calling attention to ancient Greek parallels with the practices of the Ḥamadsha, the ‘Isawiyya, and other “confréries populaires.” The classical parallels – frequent in French ethnographic and classical

I could simply have noted that Moroccans gathered around the Moroccan woman and Europeans around the French woman. That would have been doing ethnography, bad ethnography to be sure, if only because it confirmed an expectation. It avoided, or at least deflected from, the multiple responses to accidents and potential death. I have no idea whether the woman survived.

No doubt these reflections are in a way true, but they tame the image, giving it symptomatic significance. As I noted, the scene – the subjectification of what we conventionally take to be objective or paramount reality – is in terrifying tension with that subjectification. I would write the space of the uncanny had the “uncanny” not surrendered its *Heimlosigkeit*, its homelessness, to its *Heimlichkeit*, its *Heim* – to the very home it has fled. Rather, I would liken it to the *barzakh*, that tension-filled point or line of contiguity that Ibn Al-Arabi likened to where two seas meet and where, to my puzzlement at the time, my friend Moulay ‘Abedsalem, an illiterate shroudmaker, likened to the razor-thin bridge over which the dead must cross to Paradise. Danger – terror – always lurks in the crossing of borders.

Fieldwork never begins the day you set foot in the field. It has a long, often fraught prelude. Its temporality is always anticipatory. I was lucky. I had visited Morocco five years earlier. At that time, I never thought that I would end up doing research there. In fact, I never thought of becoming an anthropologist. My memories of the time are of the sensuous nature of Moroccan society – of mystery (by now a literary cliché). I hated being a tourist, that is, until I spent a first evening in the Jemaa el Fna and I suddenly realized that almost everyone there, Moroccan or foreign, was in one way or another a tourist. It was a theater without a center, forcing everyone into a spectator, which, for me at least, defied a fixed perspective. I did notice that non-Moroccans tended to attach themselves to people like themselves. Aside from the hustlers and pimps, promising thirteen-year-old virgins, I was bothered by European tourists, who wanted to find anchorage in the confusion – their confusion – in me. Why me?

I suddenly felt the division between Moroccans and Europeans collapse. Stereotypy gave way to fascination with encounters and – to use a Sartrean expression – their viscosity. Sitting in a bar in Tangier run by an American beatnik, several drunken former British colonial officers regaled me with tales of the perversities of darkest Africa, that is, until a young American woman

studies (René Brunel, *Essai sur la confrérie religieuse des Aissaoua au Maroc* (Paris: Geuthner, 1926); Henri Jeanmaire, “Chiron,” in *Annuaire de l’Institut de Philologie et d’Histoire Orientales de l’Université Libre* 9 (1949): 255-65; Émile Dermenghem, *Le culte des saints dans l’islam maghrébin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954) – did offer me a perspective that broke with prevailing ethnographic assumptions and traditional Moroccan understandings.

in a starched blue and white striped dress appeared. She was a shirt designer who had made her way, oblivious of danger and without incident, by bus from Cairo to Tangiers. What was Morocco? Who was Moroccan? Identity lay in what was for me the unreadable expression on the face of the Moroccan dishwasher who listened to us talk. I have no idea how much he understood. Un-understanding was becoming a vibrant category for me.

If I must set a beginning to my research in Morocco, it was the discovery of an article in the 1923 volume of *Hespéris* by J. Herber, an archeologist working in the Roman ruins of Volubilis, in which he described the Ḥamadsha, their exorcisms, their head slashing, whose sanctuaries were on the nearby Jebel Zerhoun.³ Having decided to study anthropology for reasons I needn't enter into here, other than to say that my trip to Morocco was not foremost among them. Much to the distress of my professors at Columbia, my interest in anthropology turned toward the psychiatric – toward the cultural construction of “mental illness” and consequent modes of treatment. (Psychological anthropology had fallen out of fashion in America since the demise of the culture and personality school.) My problem was not theoretical, but where to do research. Talking it over with my advisor, Robert Murphy, who had recently worked with the Tuareg, he said, “Why not Morocco? You’ve been there. That would make it easier.” It clicked. I rushed to the library without knowing what I was looking for and came upon a psychophysiological analysis of the Raḥmaniya order by William Haas published in the “Moslem World” in 1943.⁴ That Haas was referring to an Algerian “confrérie” was of little importance to me at the time. What was important was the discovery of the *tariqa* and this led me through, among other writers, Michaux-Bellaire on the history of the Moroccan confréries,⁵ Brunel on the ‘Aissaouia,⁶ Dermenghem on the cult of saints,⁷ and to Herber.⁸ But, to be truthful, what fascinated me were not just the ethnopsychiatric possibilities of the confréries but to their relationship with Sufism – to a philosophical perspective that I found missing in the anthropology I was studying.

I did not know whether the Ḥamadsha still existed after France’s attempt to discourage, if not outlaw, the brotherhoods. I wrote to Ernest Gellner and Clifford Geertz for advice. Gellner wrote back that he knew nothing about the

3. J. Herber, “Les Ḥamadcha et les Dghoughiyyīn,” *Hespéris* 3 (1923): 217-36.

4. William S. Haas, “The zikr of the Raḥmaniya-Order in Algeria,” *The Muslim World* 33 (1943): 16-28.

5. Ed Michaux-Bellaire, “Essai sur l’histoire des confréries marocaines,” *Hespéris* 1 (1921): 141-59.

6. Brunel, *Essai sur la confrérie religieuse*.

7. Dermenghem, *Le culte des saints*.

8. Herber, “Les Ḥamadcha.”

curers I described, but should I to come to London, he would introduce me to people who might be of helpful. He did in fact – to, among others, a medical doctor in Oxford who was himself a Sufi and who plainly told me that I was simply on the wrong track if I wanted to reduce Sufism to barbarous practices or psychoanalytic categories. Geertz expressed interest, but said he had not found any evidence of such practices in Sefrou (!) and suggested that I might want to do a restudy of Berque’s work on the Seksawa.⁹ I knew better.

I have been a strong believer in the role of serendipity in ethnographic research. When my wife, Jane, who was writing a book about Allen Ginsberg, described my research, Allen immediately arranged a meeting with one of the most remarkable men I have ever known: the Moroccan painter Ahmed El Yacoubi. Ahmed became a close friend. He told that that the Ḥamadsha still existed. He had often seen their ceremonies in Fez, but he didn’t think they would talk to me. As he got to know me, he changed his mind. A French waiter in a café in Perpignan who regaled me with his “ethnography” of the “head-slashers” in Meknes confirmed that the Ḥamadsha were still active. I was relieved.

A more significant serendipity was a meeting of a Canadian doctor at the American consulate where I had gone to arrange research permission. They did, but it came eight months later. Dr. Brown expressed interest in my project and offered to introduce me to the Minister of Health who had just returned from Niger and was impressed by attempts there to integrate traditional and biomedicine. He in turn introduced me to the French *médecin-en-chef* at El Ghazi psychiatric hospital in Salé. During my interview with Dr. Mauponné, the minister called and asked him what he thought of me. Mauponné answered, “IL est sérieux.” The Minister arranged for me to meet the notorious interior minister Mohammed Oufkir the following day. He had my research permission in hand.

I was lucky. That the Minister of Health sought the opinion of a French psychiatrist was symptomatic of – and here I must be delicate – what I took to be reliance on French advisors in unusual cases (as mine apparently was in upper echelons of government). Given the status of my permission, I had to report to the governor of the province of Meknes who, along with his French executive secretary, determined how I should be treated. It was arranged that I have dinner with the pasha of Meknes and his family. They clearly wondered why I was interested in a “lowly” *confrérie populaire* and

9. Jacques Berque, *Les Seksawa: Recherche sur les structures sociales du Haut-Atlas occidental* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954).

came with such high authority. They feared that by “exoticizing” Morocco, I was tarnishing its reputation. The pasha looked dubious at my interest in the healing practices of the Ḥamadsha; that is, until his wife asked me about my family. When I mentioned that my father had been a psychiatrist, there was a sigh of relief. There was the explanation. The pasha arranged for me to meet several Ḥamadsha the next day. But where? At the police station! The Ḥamadsha were frightened; the police officers who were working in the room where I introduced myself and explained my interests were bemused; and I was certain my research had come to an end. Fortunately, as my field assistant Yousef Hazmaoui and I rounded the corner of the police station with sunken hearts, the eldest of the Ḥamadsha, Moulay Abedsalem signaled us and told us not to worry, and invited us to the Friday *dhikr* ceremony at the Ḥamadsha lodge, or *zāwiya*. All was fine, he said, and it was.

I met Yousef at lunch at David Hart’s home in Marrakech. Gellner had recommended Yousef, who had been his research assistant in the High Atlas, and Hart had arranged for me to meet him. We immediately got on and spent much of the afternoon talking as we wandered around Marrakech. I liked Yousef a lot, as did Jane, who joined us several months later. He was curious about the Ḥamadsha, and I soon found that he had that marvelous ability, so crucial in ethnographic research, to enter empathetically the world of the people under study without objectifying them and simultaneously preserving an external perspective. He was at ease talking to both men and women and had a way of inviting them to participate, as fellow searchers, in what we were seeking to understand. I think what conjoined us and the people we worked with was a shared curiosity and a delight in exploration, including (on all of our parts) self-exploration. I can’t, however, deny that there were many Moroccans who answered my questions more out of duty than interest. I did not realize at the time how important a contribution Yousef would make to my research. We became colleagues and, more important, friends.

Yousef and I traveled to the various Ḥamadsha centers – in Meknes, on the Jebel Zerhoun, in Fez, in the Gharb, Essaouira, and even in the Sous. Our reception was generally warm except in Essaouira, but when I returned there decades later during the Essaouira music festival, I found them warm and, to my amazement, several had read my book on the Ḥamadsha¹⁰ and wanted to talk about it. They were far more educated than the adepts I had worked with in the North. It was on that trip and a subsequent one that I realized how much Morocco had changed since the late sixties. It seemed to me to be free of

10. Vincent Crapanzano, *The Ḥamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

the subordination demanded by colonialism which, despite my and Yousef's best efforts, had colored some of those early interviews. I should add that the Ḥamadsha had a highly restricted role in the festival; for fear that they might fall into trance and slash their heads. One young man I met did remind me of the Ḥamadsha I had worked with then. He would not attend the ceremonies, appalled by what he saw as blasphemous exploitation. More important he thought it dangerous because it would anger the Ḥamadsha saints (*'awliyā, syād*).

I should add that I tried to meet my interlocutors more than once, often at month-long intervals. Rarely did I have a meeting with them that lasted less than three hours, sometimes all day. It was on my visits to Essaouira that I was taught the Ḥamadsha dance steps. No one had offered to do so on my first fieldtrip, and, given that I don't like to dance, I never thought to ask. Or, perhaps, it would have breached the etiquette that we had established among us. Unlike the Christian fundamentalists I worked with in South Africa and in California who were constantly trying to convert me, none of the Ḥamadsha ever did. They often told me about Europeans who had become Ḥamadsha. We were cajoled by the *moqaddem* of a *tāifa* (a team) in a poor quarter on the outskirts of Meknes to sponsor a ceremony (*lila*) for Jane. He insisted that she had been attacked by a *jinn* (when in fact she was suffering from giardiasis).

The *wulid siyyid* – the descendants of the two Ḥamadsha saints, Sidi 'Ali ben Ḥamdush and Sidi Ahmed Dghughi – were suspicious and at times manipulative. They did not like the idea that I would be working with the Ḥamadsha who lived in the shantytowns of Meknes. “They were not true followers of the saints.” They did not approve of their violent exorcisms. Later I discovered that despite their disapproval, they, at least the 'Allaliyyin, were demanding money from them. My discovery soured my relations with them.

In my writings on the Ḥamadsha, I stressed the importance of *baraka* (blessing) in curing the possessed.¹¹ I do not want to rehearse my argument other than to state that I saw – and see – that *baraka* was the “potentiating force” behind the cures. Unlike the purported aim of most exorcisms – to rid the possessed once and for all of the possessing demon – I found that the aim of the Ḥamadsha cures was the transformation of a possessing spirit from a malign force to a beneficent one. But, for transformation to last, the patient was obliged to follow the spirits' conventional commands: to wear, for example, colors pleasing to the possessing jinn; dance themselves into

11. Crapanzano, *The Ḥamadsha*.

trance when they heard the jinn's favored musical phrase (its *rih*, "wind" or "air"): to sponsor (if possible) a ceremony – a *lila* – each year; and to make an annual pilgrimage to the saints' tombs. If their commands were not followed the possessing jinn would attack again. I likened the possessing spirit to an extrapolated conscience.

I found that when I allowed the Ḥamadsha recounting their possession history time to reflect (free associate), they often identified their failures to adhere to the jinn's commands to what I saw as guilt-inspiring events in their real-life histories. In other words, the possession idiom was symbolic-interpretive deflection of what had affected them in their everyday life. They themselves did not acknowledge any relationship between the two. In this respect, the distinction between the two idioms precluded what we might call insight. Many, however, seemed to be affected by the juxtaposition. It was like a shadow of recognition crossing their eyes.

In my work on what I call indexical dramas, I look at the interplay between the semantico-referential message and the way that message serves to constitute its domain of relevance.¹² Unfortunately, when I carried out my research I had neither the linguistic proficiency nor the conceptual apparatus to look at the effect of these dramas. Hopefully, others might consider it. I have found supporting evidence for it in both psychoanalytic case studies and in my observations of other therapeutic encounters.

I want now to return to the potentiating role of *baraka*. As is so often the case in ethnographic discussions of religion, singular terms or concepts are abstracted from a people's beliefs and (not without justification) given central importance. This is certainly the case for *baraka* in studies of Moroccan religion. What is often ignored is how these terms figure in and are figured by prevailing epistemological and ontological assumptions. That *baraka* is understood as an actualizing force relates, I believe, to a worldview that focuses attention (at least in certain contexts) on the potentiating – on the process of actualization rather than on the actualized. I am not claiming that Moroccans ignore the actualized any more than the people in other societies ignore the potential. Rather I am referring to an orientation, whether borne by language or more elaborated cultural assumptions.

Let me give an example far removed from my study of the Ḥamadsha but inspired by that study. (I apologize here as elsewhere in this essay for generalizing. My arguments are meant to be suggestive.) It has been generally

12. Vincent Crapanzano, "Textual Self-authorization," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 23, 1 (2017): 175-88.

assumed by American and European social scientists that in patron-client relationships, the patron seeks as many clients as possible to enhance his or her power while the clients seek as many patrons as possible for all sorts of pragmatic reasons. I did not find this to be an adequate understanding of Moroccan patron-client relations. It seemed to me that Moroccan patrons did not seek clients so much as they did *potential* clients whose clientship could be actualized as needed. In other words, they tried to preserve a potential relationship without being burdened by the obligations that would come with its actualization. The same would be true of clients who wanted to be able to actualize their relationship only when they needed to – but not otherwise, when it would only produce obligations and not benefits. The rhetorical plays – indeed the power plays – between potential clients and patrons takes on a complexity – a style of exchange and a sense of time – that is radically different from that of those societies that focus on actualized relations.

Often, though not always, the actualization of any patron-client relationship is fixed through a formal or ritual act. I am thinking of the *'ār* (vow, promise, oath), making a sacrifice, tying a rag to a tree indicating a promise to hold a ceremony if one's wish is fulfilled (e.g., giving birth to a male child or passing an exam), or simply a handshake. The *'ār* is the most formal of these acts. It is often used by Ḥamadsha to refer to the sacrifices they make to saints when they visit their sanctuaries. Unlike the *'ahd* (pact or oath), which is usually between equals or presumes equality, the *'ār* is an act between unequals – between the empowered and the powerless. Westermarck related the *'ār* to shame and defined it as an “act which intrinsically implies the transference of a conditional curse for the purpose of compelling somebody to grant a request.”¹³ Westermarck's understanding, based on coercion, is legalistic. In my experience, the *'ār* was not always associated with a curse in its breach.

A more common understanding of the *'ār* is as a supplication in which the suppliant, usually by an act of – or a promise to – sacrifice, shames an individual (or a group) to carry out something he (less often she) would prefer to avoid. I found that it was usually simply a commitment – a guarantee, a promise – without regard to the consequences of a breach. Its purpose was persuasive – to convince its addressee – human, *jinn*, saint, or deity – of the commitment to act. At other times, when a gift (*hadiyya*) was left at a saint's tomb, it was referred to either as an *'ār*, when a supplication is made, or a *debiḥā* (a sacrifice). I do not recall anyone saying that an *'ār* was a way of

13. E. A. Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1926 [vol. 1]), 118.

shaming the saint into fulfilling a request. It would seem that reference to shaming might have a negative effect. Rather the '*ār*' seemed to confirm one's faith in the beneficence of the saint or, at times to whomever the '*ār*' was addressed. Whether my observations were correct or not, the '*ār*' guaranteed the completion of a sought-after act

Among the possible consequences of an '*ār*' is the depersonalization of both parties to the encounter. Whether the threat is explicit or implicit, it creates the possibility of avoiding consideration of good or bad faith, indeed of character, in those involved. This does not mean that character judgments and those of intention are not made. A parallel could be drawn with the two idioms I mentioned in my discussion of possession histories, but I am unwilling to insist on this parallel I am not even certain of the importance of the '*ār*' today in the milieu in which I worked. When I did my fieldwork, discussion of the '*ār*' and stories about it were frequently.

The '*ār*' produces a particular temporality, one of anticipation, which it serves to punctuate and offers a semblance of certainty of outcome. Still, the risk remains that the '*ār*' itself will not guarantee its manifest purpose. Though the responsibility to carry out the '*ār*' lies with the supplicant, his or her addressee can always refuse to carry out the supplication.

I often heard a story about one tribal leader in the High Atlas whose resistance to the French had outlasted that of all the other's. When the sheikh finally realized the hopelessness of his cause, he went to one of the leaders who had already surrendered and ask for mediation on his behalf. The leader, anxious not to undermine his own precarious relations with the French, ignored the request. That is, he said neither yes or no. The next morning he found a sheep sacrificed in front of his house. He ignored it. A few days later, he found a bull. Again he ignored it and then a camel. Finally, he awoke to find a baby – the sheikh's son – lying on a blanket. He had no choice but to accept the baby and agree to intercede with the French. I have no idea if this actually happened, but I still remember the awe that was expressed by the storyteller's audience. No one was able to tell me what happened to the sheep, the bull, and the camel. Nor did anyone consider the possibility of literally sacrificing the baby. The story seemed to have less to do with the '*ār*' than with the sheikh's boldness. The audience seemed to treat what I would have thought as his humiliation as his bravado – his victory over the reluctant leader.

In his discussion of potentiality, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben¹⁴ refers to Aristotle's observation in "De Anima" that with the actualization of a potential, all "impotentialities" (i.e. obstacles) are exhausted, and he goes on to argue that contrary to the traditional idea that potentiality is annulled in actualization, Aristotle is asserting that potentiality in fact "conserves itself and saves itself in actuality." It "survives actuality and in this way *gives itself to itself*." My point in citing Agamben's reading of Aristotle is to call attention to the fact that, given the dynamics of actualization, the sheikh preserves his potential – his power to coerce – through the actualizing gift of his son. He is then twofold the victor.

Most discussions of (gift) exchanges are based on Marcel Mauss' seminal *Essai sur le don*,¹⁵ and subsequent work, most notably by Lévi-Strauss. Put simply, the gift and other exchanges, including promises, alter the relations between the parties to the exchange. The gift-giver assumes or is assumed to have gained superior position to the gift-receiver who, upon accepting the proffered gift, is under an obligation to give in turn a gift that will equalize or more likely to perpetuate a chain of obligations. I do not deny this dynamic, but I am convinced that it is not universally valid. For prevailing understanding in the human sciences – though not necessarily of the exchanges themselves – seems more to reflect the idiom of debts and repayments in market economies. What needs to be explored is how the exchanges index their contexts and prevailing conventions of understanding in the society being studied. Is making an offering to a deity the same as giving a gift to a friend, spouse, daughter, or boss? Structurally, they are the same but in intention and implication they may be radically different and have very different consequences.

The complexity of exchanges was brought home to me in several informal studies of Moroccan marriages, some were rural and others urban, in the poorer quarters of Meknes where the choice of spouse was far looser. What struck me in both was how fraught the marriages were – much of it expressed in response to gifts (not to mention proof of the bride's virginity – a gift – and that of the man's potency, which was never in fact mentioned but joked about before the defloration).

In an Arabized Berber village near Meknes, where Jane was following a marriage, the villagers seemed to have only a particularized understanding of

14. Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 177-86.

15. Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007).

the exchange, which was promoted by the dramatic nature of the ceremony itself. They were unmindful of how it figured in a generalized system of exchange over time. (The brides moved unidirectionally through a sequence of five villages (from A to B to C, to D to E and back to A). Their failure to understand the system, promoted no doubt by frequent exceptions, produced near explosive tension, especially as the families and guests awaited proof of the bride's virginity. Again and again the men in the bride's village complained angrily. We give our women to village B. What do we get? Nothing! They marry their women to men in other villages.

There may be nothing particularly new in these observations, but they convinced me that studies of exchange that focus solely on tangible objects were not capable of appreciating their complexities. There is not only the movement of objects, including words, but a transfer of emotions that takes a contrary direction in the immediacy of the exchange itself. An exchange is always suspenseful – as slight as that suspense may be. A gift receiver may, for example, refuse the gift or the gift-giver may suddenly withdraw the gift. Such possibilities are frequent themes in folklore, comedy, and “serious” literature. Their consideration calls attention to the play of multiple temporalities in any exchange. I am suggesting that the relief that comes to the gift-giver with the acceptance of the gift can be conceived of as an affective counter-pretation. The same argument can be advanced for the relief that comes with the gift-giver actually giving the gift. We might argue that in the exchange there is a communion-like dimension even though it in fact perpetuates the asymmetrical relations of gift giving.

I remember taking an American acquaintance to the souk in Marrakech. He wanted to buy the woman he was traveling with an amber necklace, and when the merchant told him the extravagant price, he accepted it without bargaining. The merchant was surprised by the abruptness of the transaction. Rather than wait while the merchant made an adjustment to the necklace, we continued to wander through the souk. I felt a tugging at my back pocket. Thinking it must be a pickpocket; I swung my arms around to strike the thief only to discover that it was the merchant's little son who wanted to give me five dirhams, presumably because I had brought his father a client. I refused, puzzling the boy. When we returned to pick up the necklace, I noticed that the merchant had replaced one of the beads with a plastic one. I examined it carefully, indicating that I knew what he had done, and left without pointing it out to my acquaintances. I didn't particularly like them. It was my way of acknowledging a botched exchange. The merchant did not have the satisfaction of bargaining, always a jockeying for status. I had not

accepted the merchant's gift. The merchant felt put down. By substituting the amber bead with a plastic one, he was restoring his self-esteem. Of course, it could be argued that he was simply cheating his customer, as was clearly his habit, but even if that were the case, he would have restored his position. And I? I leave it to the reader.

I tell this story to stress the importance in anthropological research of mastering the conventions – the etiquette – of the people with whom we work. As awkward, as dangerous, as it may be, a breach of etiquette or convention can often draw attention to the forms it breaches. I could provide countless examples of the faux pas I committed in my research and indeed in those of the Moroccans with whom I worked. I found, for example, that while I could speak with some of the men about their sexual life, they did not like discussing their finances. This may have been the result of the idiosyncratic communicative conventions that developed in our meetings over time. The anthropological encounter was as alien to the Moroccans as their oral genres were to me.

Such negotiations were highlighted in my meetings with the tile maker who became the eponymous subject of my book “Tuhami.”¹⁶ At first, I approached Tuhami with questions about the Ḥamadsha. He was reputed to have extraordinary knowledge of the confréries without actually being a member of any. He seemed less interested in the information I was seeking than in establishing a relationship with me. At least, that is how I saw it. He preferred to entertain me with stories, especially stories about miracles performed by the saints or about his pilgrimages to various shrines. He wanted to fill me with wonderment. Just as I became intrigued by the way he used his stories to create our relationship, he came to realize that he could best seal it by providing me with data. And so our positions – our aims – vacillated until we came to an overriding therapeutic (my term) intention. It was becoming clear by this time that Tuhami was haunted by the she-demoness 'Aisha Qandisha and could find no escape from her tyranny through the practices of confréries like the Ḥamadsha. He preferred to find escape through learning as much as he could about them. I sympathized with him.

When Jane and I had finally to return to New York, we worried about how it would affect Tuhami. We decided to give him an especially meaningful gift – an elaborate iron-bladed silver dagger with which to confront 'Aisha Qandisha. It was believed that if you plunged an iron knife into the earth

16. Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.)

the first time she appeared, you would be free of her tyrannizing control. Of course, we both knew that the gift was belated, since she had already beset Tuhami, but we hoped it might still have an empowering effect on him. He was deeply moved, as I was when I gave it to him.

After we left Meknes, Tuhami met Yousef and asked him to write to me. He wanted me to know that since I had given him the dagger, he had been besieged by myriad demonesses – night-time refractions, I imagined, of ‘Aisha Qandisha – and was able to withstand their attacks. His message was a return gift to relieve me of the worry he knew I would have. It also reminded me that my worry was the result of infantilizing him. So at least as I understood it and have continued to do so since then. Sadly, Tuhami died before I could meet him again.

Although I felt awkward engaging with Tuhami in the spirit idiom, I came to realize that, however that idiom deflected from the give-and-take of the everyday world, it had a value in its own right that could not simply be translated into psychological terms, as a defensive masking of unwanted truths. It was too powerful for that. The insight I mentioned earlier as coming from the clash of two desperate idioms was only one possibility. Another was paradoxical, both idioms had their truth that were at once the same and radically different. Such is the artifice of our world constructions. What is demanded, I believe, is a skeptical empiricism, indeed a meta-empiricism, that recognizes the fragility of those constructions that so often inspire the violence that comes from un-understanding. And I should add, from the arrogance of over-understanding

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المغرب ما بين سنتي 1967-1968: ذكريات وتأملات وحنين

ملخص: هذه بعض التأملات التي تخص العمل الميداني الذي قمت به ما بين سنتي 1967-1968 حول الطريقة الصوفية الشعبية لحراشة. لقد ركزت على الذاكرة-الصور المنصوية في إطار أبحاثي والتي لم يسبق نشرها في كتاباتي الإثنوغرافية. إنها المحدد والمفرز لما أسميته المشهد-المتعلق أساسا بإضفاء الذاتية على وضعية "موضوعية" تلون إجابتنا. كما تعكس بنفس القدر الأجواء التي أعقبت مباشرة استقلال المغرب وما اكبتها من فرضيات أنثروبولوجية سائدة. وأنا أربط الصور بفهمي بين الأمس واليوم، أستحضر مشاكل نظرية من قبيل: الحظ في العمل الميداني؛ التشويق في العلاقات المتبادلة؛ دينامية تبادل الهدايا التي تحتزن نقل المشاعر باعتبارها جزءا من التبادل نفسه؛ خطاب متداول يفضل "حرية" الإمكانيات على التحيين المزعج داخل العلاقات بين رب العمل والزبون؛ وزن يمين العار في العلاقات الاجتماعية؛ التبصر والتأرجح بين معايير الفهم (مثلا "الروحي" و"الواقعي") ولكل منهما حقيقته الخاصة التي من باب المفارقة تشابه وتختلف جذريا. ضمنا، أنا أدافع عن التجريبية التشكيكية-ميتاتجريبية أو التجريبية الفوقية- التي تعترف بالأخطار الناتجة عن سوء الفهم وغطرسة الإفراط في الفهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: لقاءات في الميدان، تشويق، تبادل الهدايا، المعاملة بالمثل، حيازة الروح، علاقة رب العمل-زبون، تبصر، ذواكر.

Maroc 1967-1968: Souvenirs, réflexions et nostalgie

Résumé: Voici des réflexions sur mon travail de terrain au Maroc en 1967-1968 sur les Hamadshas, une confrérie soufie populaire, ou *tarīqa*. Je me concentre sur la mémoire – des images qui évoquent le cadre de mes recherches mais qui ne sont jamais apparues dans mes écrits ethnographiques. Elles marquent, comme elles créent ce que j'ai appelé la scène – en gros, la subjectivation d'une situation "objective" qui colore notre réponse. Elles reflètent l'atmosphère pas tout à fait postcoloniale dans les années qui ont immédiatement suivi l'indépendance du Maroc et, tout aussi important, les hypothèses anthropologiques dominantes. Je relie les images à ma compréhension, hier et aujourd'hui, de problèmes théoriques tels que le hasard dans le travail de terrain, le suspense dans les relations réciproques, la dynamique de l'échange de cadeaux qui inclut le transfert des émotions en tant qu'éléments de l'échange lui-même, une rhétorique socialement active qui privilégie la "liberté" du potentiel à l'actualisation gênante dans les relations patron-client, la force du serment supplicatif (*ār*) dans les relations sociales, la perspicacité et l'oscillation entre les idiomes de la compréhension (par exemple le "spirituel" et le "réel") qui ont chacun leur

vérité qui est, paradoxalement, à la fois la même et radicalement différente. Implicitement, je plaide pour un empirisme sceptique – un méta-empirisme – qui reconnaît les dangers découlant de l'incompréhension et de l'arrogance de la sur-compréhension.

Mots-clés: Rencontres sur le terrain, suspense, échange de cadeaux, réciprocité, possession d'esprit, relation patron-client, perspicacité, mémoires.