

Rethinking Moroccan Social Hierarchy and Ritual: From Colonial Ethnology to the Postcolonial Historical Anthropology of Abdellah Hammoudi

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Abstract: This paper traces a historical anthropology of Moroccan social hierarchy and ritual from colonial ethnology to the work of Abdellah Hammoudi. I examine how postcolonial Moroccan anthropologists like Hammoudi have responded to the sacralization of “Berber” places like the southern Dra’a/Draa valley and High Atlas mountains into ethnographic exemplars of social reproduction and segmentation in earlier French colonial documentation and British social anthropological theorization. Instead, they insist on a phenomenological and historical framework in which ritual and social hierarchy are produced and transformed through the actions and interactions of multi-ethnic, spatio-temporally situated actors. In so doing, they remind of the need to account for both the larger, changing Moroccan dimensions of power and dominance under pre-colonial, Protectorate, and independence eras, as well as the localized meanings and significations that animate local inhabitants of various backgrounds. I point to the implications and impact of such insights for later studies of North African social life, drawing on my own fieldwork on the emergence of postcolonial Amazigh politics in southeastern Morocco.

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This special issue of *Hespéris-Tamuda* critically evaluates the history of anthropology in and of Morocco and its contributions to the discipline as a whole. While one can surely laud generations of scholars for their progressive documentation of the socio-cultural diversity of the country – or criticize them for the ways such documentation has been put to the service of (post) colonial state rule – a more fruitful line of inquiry might be to explore how their ethnographic and historical projects indexed and engaged theoretical and methodological developments in the field of anthropology and, in a number of cases, directly added to them. In this paper I will particularly signal studies of social hierarchy and ritual which have narrowly addressed thorny questions concerning Moroccan kingship, Islam, and Berber heritage central to both colonial ethnology and postcolonial criticism but, in the process, have also contributed to broader debates in social theory over the relationships between structure and history, between rules and practice, and between culture and social action.

In so doing, I will focus on a generation of Moroccan ethnographers of Morocco who have worked to make anthropology their own, to domesticate a field, broadly associated with Euro-American imperialism, *as* Moroccan and *for* Moroccans. Paying particular attention to the work of Abdellah Hammoudi, I will explore the shift from static models of social reproduction and segmentation, characteristic of French colonial documentation and British social anthropological theorization, to phenomenological and historical frameworks in which ritual and social hierarchy are produced and transformed through the actions and interactions of multi-ethnic, spatio-temporally situated actors. In so doing, anthropologists like Hammoudi remind of the need to account for both the larger, changing Moroccan dimensions of power and dominance under pre-colonial, Protectorate, and independence eras, as well as the localized meanings and significations that animate local inhabitants of various backgrounds. I point to the implications and impact of such insights for later studies of North African social life, drawing on my own fieldwork on the emergence of postcolonial Amazigh politics in southeastern Morocco.

From Rural Sociology to (Post)structuralist Critique

Abdellah Hammoudi, like a number of Moroccan social scientists of his generation including Hassan Rachik and Mohamed Tozy, collaborated in the development of the field of “rural sociology” (*sociologie rurale*) alongside the French-Moroccan scholar Paul Pascon. In contrast to what they took to be colonial ethnology’s presumptions about Moroccans as mere enactors of static, ahistorical cultural mores and social institutions, they instead emphasized the dynamism of Morocco’s social, economic, and political structures and approached all Moroccans – even those on the rural periphery – as engaged, if often victimized, actors within broader social dramas. The result was a complex, “composite” model of a Moroccan society that was very much part of capitalist modernity but also layered with Islamic religious practices and intellectual traditions, imperial forms of governmentality, genealogical (“tribal”) alliances, and the cultural sedimentations of historical migrations of ethno-linguistic groups from the Mediterranean, Near East, and (sub-)Saharan Africa.¹ Their documentation of rural life derived less from an academic game of filling a gap or lacuna in the ethnographic record (as Bernard Cohn² famously parodied with the characters of Philius Filagap and Lucy Lacuna) than from an engaged effort to contribute empirically to agrarian policies that would foster inclusive development and social mobility for those

1. Paul Pascon, *Le Haouz de Marrakech* (Rabat: Éditions Marocaines et Internationales, 1977).

2. Bernard S. Cohn, “History and Anthropology: The State of Play,” *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 22, 2 (1980): 200.

most vulnerable to the depredations of the notable-turned-capitalist class. In the process, they contributed to an emergent political ecology approach which side-stepped ongoing Anglo-American debates between structural-functionalists (e.g. Ernest Gellner and David Hart) and culturalists (e.g. Clifford Geertz and Lawrence Rosen) that were preoccupying anthropologists of Morocco. Their social model, in contrast, understood both structure and culture as historically situated, phenomenologically embodied, and inflected with relations of power and interest.³

Hammoudi's intellectual trajectory traces and extends these developments. Like (and with) Pascon, he participated in collaborative ethno- and socio-graphic work in the Dra'a valley and High Atlas Mountains of southern Morocco as part of government-sponsored agrarian development projects, before completing his education in Paris. There, again like Pascon, he complemented his social scientific training – in the milieu of structuralist anthropology around Claude Lévi-Strauss – with the study of academic biology, thus gaining insight into the logic of classification and the environmental embedment of social life and cultural schemas. Such philosophical positioning put him at odds with earlier French ethnologists or British social anthropologists who sought the functional mechanisms of socio-political reproduction. It set the stage for an immanent critique of any social science that ignores the phenomenological framework in which ritual and social hierarchy are produced and transform through the actions and interactions of spatio-temporally situated actors. In so doing, Hammoudi outlined a historically-grounded practice theory that seeks to account for both the larger, changing Moroccan dimensions of authority and dominance under pre-colonial, Protectorate, and independence eras, as well as the localized meanings and significations that animate rural denizens in their social and ritual life.

Hammoudi's 1985 essay, "Substance and Relation: Water Rights and Water Distribution in the Drā Valley" provides a good starting point.⁴ On the one hand, it is a magisterial exercise in political ecology, demonstrating in deep empirical detail and theoretical sophistication how something as seemingly mechanical and legalistic as irrigation practices and water rights can subtend an entire, complex social world, underwritten by constitutive and

3. Mohamed Tozy, "Paul Pascon: Un pionnier de la sociologie marocaine," *Sociologies* 20, February (2013): <http://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4322>; see Paul Pascon, "Segmentation et stratification dans la société rurale marocaine." *Bulletin économique et social du Maroc* 138-9 (1979): 105-19.

4. Abdellah Hammoudi, "Substance and Relation: Water Rights and Water Distribution in the Dr'a Valley," in *Property, Social Structure, and Law in the Middle East* ed. Ann Elizabeth Mayer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 27-57.

consequential conflicts. On the other hand, it represents a shift from a mode of anthropological inquiry that had long emphasized institutions, customs, and their functions to one that pays attention to an emerging and dynamic sociality – a shift, in other words, from substance to relation or, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, from rules to strategies.⁵

“The description of the process of distributing water and the examination of how it is shared show the extraordinary complexity of a situation where, nevertheless, behind the official rules, one discerns the social relationships and, ultimately, the power relationships that exist and are necessary for the process to work. The geographic environment imposes itself on particular historical events. In turn, historical events may impose themselves on the geographic environment when they emerge from a wider context.”⁶

The above paragraph comes from the introduction to the essay, and in it Hammoudi signals to the reader that the story he is about to tell is more complex than it might otherwise appear. It is a story not of a set of customary “rules” that one can merely simply enumerate and apply, much as French Protectorate ethnologists and Indigenous Affairs officers attempted, but of a dynamic process through which social position and the capacity to exert social authority matter and change over time. It is a story of a shifting hierarchy: a “fluid and malleable system” as he would go on to describe it, in which “lineage and other identities are constantly oscillating between pure categories and being real groups that can be mobilized for practical purposes.”⁷ It is a story that cannot be told in the abstract, but only by taking account of the particular circumstances of both an historical and ecological nature, determining factors that are themselves mutually intertwined and co-constitutive. What is at stake is a wider social “process” that is enlivened, reproduced, and transformed in a particular social “situation.”⁸

In this short piece, Hammoudi calls forth a particular kind of anthropology, an anthropology that is deeply historicist and empiricist, one which takes seriously what people say and do in particularly locales and circumstances, much of which they inherit, some of which is of their own making, on most of

5. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

6. Hammoudi, “Substance and Relation,” 28.

7. *Ibid.*, 52.

8. Such a shift from social structure and function to process and situation parallels similar developments in British social anthropology following Marxian and structuralist critiques. See, in particular, the work of Manchester School anthropologists, Max Gluckman, “An Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand,” *Bantu Studies* 14-15 (1940): 1-30, 147-74 and Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

which they have some purchase and stake. Through archival documentation, extensive interviewing, household surveys, geographical mapping, detailed descriptions of participant observation, and other rigorous and exhaustive qualitative (and sometimes quantitative) methodologies, he records the precise ways in which a particular irrigation system – or, in other essays, an architectural form,⁹ Sufi *zāwiya*,¹⁰ or ritual performance¹¹ – takes form, develops, and transforms over time. Moreover, he charts how such dynamics relate to particular changing socioeconomic, political, and ecological conditions – a measure of correlation that requires explicit comparison and control groups. For Hammoudi, it was not enough to examine the socioeconomic processes of and avowed motivations for what has become known in Moroccan social geography as the “splintering” (*éclatement*) of a set of oasis multi-family habitations (*kṣour*) in one part of the Dra’a valley, but that data needed to be controlled with a survey of thirteen other *kṣour* elsewhere in the valley.¹² One description of a Bilmawn masquerade among the Ait Mizane in the western High Atlas mountains might prove idiosyncratic, so he not only returned twice to the same village to observe how it played out in successive years, but also systematically compared those enactments with a carnival in a nearby village observed during the same period by a fellow Moroccan anthropologist. Such empirical precision explicitly rejected totalizing categories of “Berbers” or “Islam” long reproduced by the primitivizing gaze of European ethnology or instrumentalized in the unilineal narratives of modernization theory implicit in Moroccan state development programs. It deployed the scientific method as a riposte to colonial science.

But the anthropological project of Hammoudi’s generation was never solely a descriptive one, not merely an attempt to rigorously and faithfully counter Orientalist stereotypes by describing a complex, meaningful, and changing social world. At its broadest mandate, the postcolonial Moroccan anthropological project was also concerned with the more general processes through which humans collectively build those worlds and those worlds build us. For Hammoudi in particular, semiotic or social structures should not be approached, *pace* Lévi-Strauss, as a set of abstract, universal “rules” that are “out there,” self-perpetuating, or somehow agentive, but rather must

9. Abdellah Hammoudi, “L’évolution de l’habitat dans la vallée du Draa,” *Revue de Géographie du Maroc* 18 (1970): 33-45.

10. Abdellah Hammoudi, “Sainteté, pouvoir et société: Tamgrout aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles,” *Annales* 35, 3-4 (1980): 615-41.

11. Abdellah Hammoudi, *The Victim and Its Masks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1988]).

12. Hammoudi, “L’évolution de l’habitat dans la vallée du Draa.”

be studied as emergent in concrete courses of collective action and world making, and thus, as Marshall Sahlins¹³ might say, are “always at risk” as they are put in action in contingent contexts, changing circumstances, and unforeseen events. Actors, for Hammoudi, are not unconscious dupes to rules and structure, but, as Clifford Geertz¹⁴ has insisted, active interpreters and pragmatic deployers (or even Bourdieuan improvisers) of them in particular personal and political projects.

Such a practice-oriented anthropology needs to be distinguished from the postmodern turn that was concurrently being elaborated in American anthropology of the 1970s and 1980s. As Hammoudi expressed in the preface to his study of the Sufi foundations of Moroccan kingship, *Master and Disciple*,¹⁵ he is deeply skeptical of any poststructuralist move that would equate culture with discourse and representation or reduce it an effect of power; he decries such a move as both hypocritical (insofar as it is making an even larger meta-truth claim) and irresponsible to people’s concrete material lives and situated political struggles. Indeed, throughout his work he takes historical and semiotic structures – or what he would come to call “cultural schemata”¹⁶ – very seriously, as the very framework under which discourse and representation become collectively legible and power is configured. He borrows directly from the structuralist method (as laid out by Lévi-Strauss¹⁷ in his analyses of the myths of Oedipus and Asdiwal) in identifying the particular syntagmatic and paradigmatic units through which these frameworks are organized and diagramming how they come to take on meaning through dyadic relations of resemblance and difference. Thus, Dra’a valley irrigation systems and the social hierarchies from which they derive and to which they contribute are structured around a “cosmological vision” outlined by a “series of oppositions between day and night, handsome and ugly, good and bad.”¹⁸

The Bilmawn ritual, in Hammoudi’s analysis,¹⁹ likewise plays principally on the constitutive binary oppositions of young/old and male/female, but also on a set of related theological dichotomies of *ḥalāl/ḥarām*, soul/blood, angels/*jnūn*, humans/animals, freedom/slavery, belief/unbelief, and birth/death that

13. Hammoudi, “Substance and Relation,” ix.

14. Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” *Daedalus* 101, 1 (1972): 1-37.

15. Abdellah Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Authoritarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), vii-ix.

16. Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple*, 4.

17. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth,” *Journal of American Folklore* 68, 270 (1955): 428-44; idem., “La geste d’Asdiwal,” *Annuaire 1958-1959 de l’École Pratique des Hautes-Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1958), 3-43.

18. Hammoudi, “Substance and Relation,” 52.

19. Hammoudi, *The Victim and Its Masks*, 108-39.

connect the masquerade to a broader Islamic calendar and cosmology. These are not merely nodes within a generalized Moroccan classification system, but sites of localized struggle and tension, ambivalence and inversion: for the young on whom the future of the village depends but whose autonomy is delimited by elder men; for men whose patrilineal continuity depends on the ultimately uncontrollable reproductive capacities of women; for “free” Amazigh and Arab social castes whose relative freedom and genealogical honor in the oases depends on the agrarian and domestic labors of various dependent clients, notably the racialized Ḥarāṭīn; etc.²⁰ It is around and about these tensions that the Bilmawn drama (and, in his later work, the master-disciple *diagramme*)²¹ not only takes its structural form but emerges as “a story people tell themselves about themselves,” as a “meta-social commentary” in which (unlike in Geertz’s analysis of the Balinese cockfight) actor and audience are decidedly blurred.²² Or, to put it more generally, such logical oppositions are very much of the world, imbuing in concrete speech and actions, and thus subject to various elaborations and possible change.

These methodological commitments and theoretical propositions constitute a kind of response, or at least sustained engagement with, the dilemmas of structure and history, of synchrony and diachrony, that Lévi-Strauss identified in his argument with Sartre in the final chapter of *La pensée sauvage*.²³ Lévi-Strauss’ solution, *grosso modo*, was to reduce the latter to the former, to understand the inevitable passage of time (and the contingencies it entailed) as a problem for which different societies had different structural solutions: “cold” societies which ritualize diachrony or transform it into myth so as to neutralize it structurally; in contrast to “hot” societies which embrace “historical becoming” (*le devenir historique*) as the “motor of their development,” but do so via the structural forms of calendars and chronicles.²⁴ For Hammoudi, myth and ritual remain central even in a society like Morocco that tells its story in authorized historical genealogies and through elaborated historiographic traditions (imperial chronicles, biographical dictionaries, Sufi chains of authority [*silsilat*], etc.) of its own making. In meticulously deploying such historiographic resources both

20. Abdellah Hammoudi elaborates on this rural Moroccan quasi-caste hierarchy of *imazighen*, *igurramen*, *shurafā*, and *ḥarāṭīn* in his critique of Gellner’s segmentary model and its egalitarian presumptions. See, “Segmentarité, stratification sociale, pouvoir politique et saints. Réflexions sur la thèse de Gellner,” *Hespéris-Tamuda* 15 (1974): 147-80.

21. Abdellah Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Authoritarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), viii.

22. Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” *Daedalus* 101, 1 (1972): 26.

23. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 324-57.

24. Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, 309-10.

to historicize myth-making and to analyze past events which functionalists like Gellner²⁵ took to be but (and can indeed serve as) foundational myths,²⁶ Hammoudi not only called into the question the hot/cold societal dichotomy, but demonstrated just how imbricated history is within structure, diachrony is within synchrony.

In this sense, Hammoudi, like other postcolonial Moroccan anthropologists, went a step further than the practice theory solutions proposed by Bourdieu and Sahlins. Unlike the latter, his ethnographic work ignored neither the literate traditions which connect the societies in question to broader worlds, nor the historical individuality of the social actors who animate them, nor their capacity to reflect critically on the worlds in which they live, even outside of moments of dialectical crisis.²⁷ Throughout his work Hammoudi insists on an anthropology that is fundamentally inclusive, skeptical of temporalizing divides, refusing any distinction between the history-making capacities of anthropological observer and observed. The anthropology he and his colleagues have endeavored to bring into being is an anthropology *for* Morocco, rather than merely *of* Morocco; it is a cosmopolitan and critical anthropology: one that is fundamentally of this world and has a responsibility to self-reflexively reveal and in some way contribute to the struggles of those within it.

As student of Hammoudi in the late 1980s, I was certainly attuned to the intervention he and his colleagues were making into ongoing anthropological debates over structure, agency, and history, which I regarded independently of the particular Moroccan context from which they emerged. I did surely understand that the issues at hand were not purely abstract musings but deeply impacted how we approach – as anthropologists and citizens of the world – not just our academic objects of study but also our ethical commitments and engagements. I internalized the lesson Hammoudi modeled in his work and his teaching that methodological and analytical rigor was the necessary starting point for any critique, whether cultural or political (and, indeed, that the cultural and political were always co-constitutive but not reducible to each other).

25. Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

26. Hammoudi, "Sainteté, pouvoir et société;" idem., "Segmentarité, stratification sociale."

27. For a critique of Bourdieu's de-historicization of Kabyle society, particularly his sidelining of Ottoman forms of governance and Islamic literate traditions in the region, see Abdellah Hammoudi, "Pierre Bourdieu et l'anthropologie du Maghreb," *Prologues* 19 (2000): 6-10; idem., "Phénoménologie et ethnographie: A propos de l'habitus chez Pierre Bourdieu," *L'Homme* 184 (2007): 47-83,

However, it was only much later, in the early 2000s, when I switched my own ethnographic field site from suburban Paris to a southeastern Moroccan oasis valley only a few hundred kilometers from the areas where Pascon and Hammoudi had begun their work, that I realized just how alive and salient these ostensibly theoretical and methodological issues were in rural Morocco. Local residents were more than aware of the primitivizing caricatures that they, as Tamazight-speaking “Berbers,” had long been subject to under the rule of both the French Protectorate and the modernizing Moroccan state. They proudly highlighted local technologies, modes of governance, religious life, and everyday practices – from certain crafts they attributed to the community’s former Jewish residents, to *Khettāra* subterranean irrigation channels, to the representative *jma’a*, to fertility rituals, to the licit public interactions of adolescent boys and girls (*taqrefeyt*) – which they claimed antedated Islam but whose incipient secularity, many asserted, provided a bridge to modernity. These subsistence farmers, artisans, shopkeepers, and teachers may live on the margins of Morocco in often quite precarious economic conditions, but – given generations of local education, out-migration, and media consumption – they presented themselves to be at least virtually cosmopolitan.

Moreover, however marginalized, local residents understand themselves as historical actors within unfolding national and international dramas. On the one hand, they attest to the sense of living within a recurrent set of natural cycles which keeps at bay the intrusion of historical “events.” As one of my local friends Ali bemoaned, “Seasons follow one another and repeat themselves; people are born; others die; couples come together and others break up (...). That’s life in the oasis. I have the impression that for us events take place elsewhere.” On the other hand, such a phenomenological experience of “duration” (*la durée*), of feeling outside of the development of history and trapped in a forever present,²⁸ does not preclude a poignant, shared historical consciousness of the region’s past. Residents recount moments of resistance to various forms of exterior domination, of local participation in the 1973 failed coup attempt against Hassan II and the 1957 revolt of governor Addi ou Bihi against the imposition of Istiqlal party rule. They brag of their ancestors’ armed uprising to the French military “pacification” of the region, of their participation in the final battles of Bougafer and in the High Atlas. They recall pre-colonial restive times when the valley’s agricultural riches were contested

28. On the phenomenological treatment of time (*le temps*) and duration (*la durée*), see Henri Bergson, *Durée et simultanéité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968 [1922]). For an ethnographic exploration of these temporal attitudes in rural North Africa, see Pierre Bourdieu, “La société traditionnelle. Attitudes à l’égard du temps et conduite économique,” *Sociologie du travail* 5, 1 (1963): 24-44.

by the Ait Atta and Ait Yafelman tribal confederacies. They maintain the fields, buildings, and finances of *zāwiya*-s, long inactive in the region, but which once constituted alternative centers of authority and allegiance. Such living memories underwrite an ongoing sensibility – at least for some local activists – of still living in a “land of dissidence” (*bled es-siba*) and perhaps still answerable and accountable for it.

History is likewise materialized in the local landscape. The various adobe, multi-family *kṣour* across the valley – many of which now stand in ruins as residents have built cinderblock houses in their fields, gardens, and collective grazing lands – testify to successive migrations and settlement of various ethno-linguistic groups from across the country. These groups, whose presence in the region long antedates the arrival of dominant Ait Merghad lineages, maintain distinctions through largely endogamous marriage practices and a cultivated attachment to micro-local cultural practices (dress, music, ritual visitations, etc.). One such *kṣar* houses the descendants of a regiment of the *jaysh al-bukhārī*, the so-called “slave army” of Moulay Ismail, who were stationed in the wake of one of the king’s military campaigns (*ḥarka*-s) in the region. Much like the common grave markers on the surrounding hillsides or the undated architectural vestiges generally called *l-bartgiz* (Portuguese), the particularities of these histories have been largely lost to local residents. In contrast, the rubble of the colonial-era school or the re-purposed French church built in the village center are more vibrant mnemonics which call forth living remembrances of childhood or relatives. In either case, the ruins materialize a history which connects the *durée* of valley life to the *événements* of an elsewhere and an elsewhere.

Oasis residents do not passively imbibe historicity but actively produce its forms and contours. They curate websites dedicated to the valley’s past, inviting participants to upload historical photographs and identify the individuals and occasions pictured therein. They readily accompany visitors on tours of the sites mentioned above, even as their narrations are more anecdotal than professional. One artist living in the formerly Jewish quarter (*mellāḥ*) of one of the *kṣour* has opened a “museum” to local Jewish life, including artisanal products (storage jars, looms, door locks/keys) and artifacts (fragments of gravestones) which he intersperses with his own painted representations of Jewish figures and Hebrew calligraphy. Others have recorded the oral poetry of elderly bards who had maintained the longstanding practice of memorializing past deeds in song. Indeed, Ali himself spent much of the 1980s and 1990s working with one such bard, transcribing and translating his historical poems. This was no idle or amateur hobby; it was central to his outspoken activism within the nascent Amazigh cultural movement. His militant words and

deeds eventually brought about his prosecution and imprisonment, with the ensuing national and international outcry eventually putting pressure on the state to liberalize its language policies – a chain of events that ultimately led to the creation of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) and the recognition of Tamazight as an official language of Morocco. In other words, while Ali might occasionally parrot colonial ethnology in describing the oasis as having an excess of culture and a lack of history, he himself became a historical actor, making national history through local culture.

As I have described elsewhere,²⁹ activists like Ali operated as native anthropologists, rigorously documenting local social life and implicitly elaborating their own culture concept. Unlike their Euro-American counterparts, however, Amazigh activists did not have the luxury of approaching culture as an inert academic category. Simply speaking Tamazight publicly or organizing local festivities was, in the context of decades of state Arabization policies, risky and possibly even courageous. To go as far as to objectify local “culture” (*idles*), name it as such, and make it an object of political struggle amounted to a veritable act of defiance. The personal was cultural, and the cultural was political.



Fig. 1: Tifinagh graffiti at the entrance to the Ait Guetto *ksar*, Goulmima, 2008.

(Photo by author).

29. Paul Silverstein, “The Cultivation of “Culture” in the Moroccan Amazigh Movement,” *Review of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, 2 (2010): 168-77; idem., “The Anthropologist and the Activist,” in *Encountering Morocco: The Anthropological Experience of a Muslim Society* eds. David Crawford and Rachel Newcomb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

Likewise, to be able to connect local—often oral and heterodox—practices to a broader, authorized, entextualized “Amazigh” tradition constituted a powerful claim to belonging, to being part of a historical civilization, to speaking a “language” rather than a mere “dialect.” Ultimately, the specific author or genre of a given text mattered less than the overarching narrative to which it contributed. The colonial archive was not rejected *in toto*, as it had been for nationalist ideologues, but rather scried for what it could reveal of the region’s history and traces of past traditions in present practices. When I asked a Zagora-based activist about the region, he handed me a tattered copy of General Georges Spillmann’s 1936 treatise, *Les Ait Atta du Sahara et la pacification du Haut Dra*, and informed me that my answers could be found therein. I had similar experiences elsewhere in the broader region, with activists routinely referencing even later scholars like Gellner, Waterbury, Geertz, and Pascon, knowledgeable about their analytical models whether or not they had actually read the texts in question.

They similarly had a stake in my own field research. While fully welcoming my presence, they directed me to areas of immediate concern in their own struggles. They taught me that the cultural struggle did not end with the incorporation of Tamazight in the national media and school system, but would be fought over land and water rights as well. “Our identity is in our language and our land,” became the local motto, as activists fought against the sale of 5 hectares of collective grazing land to a private developer. They called on me to witness the ruinous conditions of the local *kṣour*, and the broader deterioration of local architectural patrimony at the expense of state-funded mosque building, which they took for a form of imperialism at least as powerful as that of the French Protectorate or earlier Arabization policies. They helped me understand that ultimately what mattered was not some folkloric preservation of language, folktales, and customs (which they feared was the end-goal of the IRCAM), but rather the capacity to determine one’s own future, to build a life under conditions at least partially of one’s own making. Culture was not a static set of forms but a living, evolving dynamic. The past was usable not as past, but as a frame to chart a path forward.

In this sense, local activists continued the education in postcolonial anthropology I had begun to receive under Hammoudi. They helped me refine a methodology that could empirically account for cultural systems not as compendiums of forms and rules but as embodied dynamics, as fields of contestation. I became increasingly attuned to complex, local social hierarchies that went well beyond a colonial ethnic dichotomy of “Berbers” and “Arabs,” but were also determined by intersections of race, class, caste, and genealogy. I came to see how struggles to preserve Ait Merghad dominance in the region in the face of the social mobility of Iqablin/

Haritin could be seen to underwrite Amazigh activist exclusivist claims to territorial autochthony, much as they do irrigation and land tenure politics.³⁰ I gained new insight into the secular discourse of certain Amazigh activists as an attempt to counter a state authorized Islamic historiography and Salafi orthodoxy that had long treated Berber heterodox religious practices (e.g. *ziyāra* visits or *moussems* celebrations around the tombs of a *wālī* saint) as survivals of *jāhili* ignorance to be eradicated.³¹ Inspired by Hammoudi's analysis of the Bilmawn masquerade, I found myself even more fascinated by local *Ashūr'a* masquerades which activists have explicitly sought to purge of any Islamic connotations and re-present as a celebration of the valley's lost Jewish character. For local residents, playing Udayen allowed them to connect to an imagined past of multi-confessional solidarity, and, in so doing, project a possible cosmopolitan future beyond the racial and religious boxes in which they felt trapped. By putting on Jew face, participants claimed, they became their true, critical selves.³² Canonical anthropological themes of social hierarchy and ritual proved to be necessarily interwoven and co-constitutive through a dynamic process of historical becoming.



Fig. 2: *Ashūr'a* masquerade performers dressed as Udayen (Jews) and displaying a framed Amazigh flag, Goulmima, 2004, (Photo by author).

30. Hsain Ilahiane, *Ethnicities, Community Making, and Agrarian Change: The Political Ecology of a Moroccan Oasis* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America 2004).

31. Paul Silverstein, "In the Name of Culture: Berber Activism and the Material Politics of "Popular Islam" in Southeastern Morocco," *Material Religion* 8, 3 (2012): 330-53.

32. Paul Silverstein, "Masquerade Politics: Race, Islam, and the Scales of Amazigh Activism in Southeastern Morocco," *Nations and Nationalism* 17, 1 (2011): 65-84.

Ultimately, the broader research question I have been pondering is how “culture” becomes an object of recognition and struggle in the first place. What ecological conditions and historical contingencies lead to a particular remote oasis valley becoming a hotbed of Amazigh activism? Inspired by Hammoudi’s practice theory model and impelled by my activist interlocutors, I have sought an historical anthropological methodology that allows me to think through centuries of material and political transformations in the valley as neither an inevitable dynamic of modernization nor an unforeseen revolution but as yet another set of instances where men and women of different social groups with different interests seek to manage changing circumstances with the shifting set social and cultural tools at their disposal. In many ways, that was the central lesson of Pascon’s rural sociology and of the postcolonial anthropology developed by his Moroccan colleagues and students. It is a humanizing lesson worth repeating and one from which Euro-American anthropology, obsessed once again with radical ontological difference, still has much to learn.

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إعادة التفكير في التسلسل الهرمي الاجتماعي المغربي: من الإثنولوجيا الاستعمارية إلى تاريخ ما بعد الاستعمار، أنثروبولوجية عبد الله حمودي

ملخص: تتبّع هذه الورقة الأنثروبولوجيا التاريخية للتسلسل الاجتماعي المغربي والطقوس من الإثنولوجيا الاستعمارية إلى أعمال عبد الله حمودي. لقد درست كيف استجاب علماء الأنثروبولوجيا المغاربة في فترة ما بعد الاستعمار مثل حمودي لتقديس الأماكن "البربرية" مثل وادي درعة الجنوبي وجبال الأطلس الكبير إلى نماذج إثنوغرافية للتكاثر الاجتماعي والتنجزة في الوثائق الاستعمارية الفرنسية السابقة والتنظير الأنثروبولوجي الاجتماعي البريطاني. وبدلاً من ذلك، يصرون على إطار ظاهري وتاريخي يتم فيه إنتاج التسلسل الهرمي الطقوسي والاجتماعي وتحويله من خلال ممارسات وتفاعلات المتدخلين متعددي الأعراق والمكان والزمان. وبذلك، فإنهم يذكرون بالحاجة إلى مراعاة الأبعاد المغربية الأكبر والمتغيرة للقوة والهيمنة في ظل عصور ما قبل الحماية وبعدها وفترة الاستقلال، فضلاً عن المعاني والدلالات المحلية التي تحرك السكان المحليين من خلفيات مختلفة. وتجدر الإشارة إلى انعكاسات مثل هذه الأفكار وتأثيراتها على الدراسات اللاحقة للحياة الاجتماعية في شمال إفريقيا، بالاعتماد على عملي الميداني الخاص بظهور السياسة الأمازيغية بعد فترة الحماية في جنوب شرق المغرب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإثنوغرافيا، الاستعمار، ما بعد الاستعمار، التسلسل الهرمي، الطقوس، الثقافة الأمازيغية، باسكون، حمودي.

Repenser la hiérarchie sociale marocaine et le rituel: De l'ethnologie coloniale à l'histoire postcoloniale. L'anthropologie d'Abdellah Hammoudi

Résumé: Cet article retrace une anthropologie historique de la hiérarchie sociale marocaine et des rituels depuis l'ethnologie coloniale jusqu'aux travaux d'Abdellah Hammoudi. J'examine comment les anthropologues marocains postcoloniaux comme Hammoudi ont répondu à la sacralisation de lieux "berbères" comme la vallée méridionale du Dra'a et les montagnes du Haut-Atlas en exemples ethnographiques de reproduction et de segmentation sociales dans la documentation coloniale française antérieure et la théorisation anthropologique sociale britannique. Au lieu de cela, ils insistent sur un cadre phénoménologique et historique dans lequel la hiérarchie rituelle et sociale se produit et se transforme à travers les actions et les interactions d'acteurs multiethniques situés dans le temps et dans l'espace. Ce faisant, ils rappellent la nécessité de prendre en compte les dimensions marocaines plus larges et changeantes du pouvoir et de la domination à l'époque précoloniale, du protectorat et de l'indépendance, ainsi que les significations et interprétations localisées qui animent les habitants locaux de divers horizons. Je souligne les implications et l'impact de ces idées pour les études ultérieures de la vie sociale nord-africaine, en m'appuyant sur mon propre travail de terrain concernant l'émergence de la politique postcoloniale amazighe dans le sud-est du Maroc.

Mots-clés: Ethnographie, colonialisme, postcolonialité, hiérarchie, rituel, culture amazighe, Pascon, Hammoudi.