

Ethnography and Demography: Moroccan Households and Cultural Change

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Abstract: This essay highlights the profundity of recent demographic change in Morocco, and explores its implications in a selection of ethnographic studies. The rural/urban divide is an especially important backdrop to this issue because of the distinct economic costs and benefits that children represent in subsistence versus capitalist contexts. Obviously, in subsistence-oriented agriculture, children are the main source of labor, and thus a necessary economic asset, while in capitalist contexts children are a net economic expense. Though not simply ascribable to this, in the areas of Morocco where the primary survival strategy remains household agricultural labor, high fertility rates continue. Everywhere else, things have changed dramatically. New ethnographic work attends to this significantly transformed demographic reality and how Moroccans understand it, and sheds light on some of the classic debates in Moroccan ethnography.

Keywords: Culture, Households, Morocco, Segmentarity, Demography.

Anthropology in and of Demographic Flux

While such numbers cannot be exact, scholars suggest the population of North Africa (including Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria) was relatively stable during most of the pre-modern era. It is estimated that 11.5 million people were alive in the region in 1000 AD, but this dropped to 7 million in some periods thereafter due to war, famine, and disease, with 9.1 million people extant in the year 1800.¹ From that point the region experienced dramatic, exponential growth: 21 million people by 1900, and 43 million by 1950. In other words, the population of North Africa more than doubled from 1800 to 1900, then doubled again in 50 more years. This is also the period when anthropology and most of the other social sciences emerged and established their disciplinary norms and assumptions.

While the relationship between social science, colonialism, and capitalism has been widely discussed,² less attention has been paid to the demographic context in which Western social science – and anthropology in particular – was invented and grew. In the simplest of terms, while anthropologists were

1. Dominique Tabutin and Bruno Schoumaker, “The Demography of the Arab World and the Middle East from the 1950s to the 2000s,” *Population-E* 60, 5-6 (2005): 621.

2. Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973), Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

studying “primitive societies,” those societies were in the throes of cataclysmic change, and not just economic and political change. The erstwhile “primitives” were having unprecedented numbers of babies, mortality was dropping, and this explosion of growing, eating human bodies made for a historically bizarre situation.

In Morocco specifically the total fertility rate in the 1970s remained “very high,” at an average of 6.5 babies per woman,³ or even seven live births per woman – a birthrate that is simply staggering.⁴ Rosen notes that the population of Sefrou, near Fes, totaled 3,000 souls in 1883 but rose to 20,624 by 1960 – a 700% increase in the space of about one human lifetime.⁵ The birthrate was still astonishing in the 1990s, with an average of four live births per woman, a pace that would nearly double the population each generation. But by 2010 the total fertility rate in Morocco had plummeted to 2.2.⁶ This barely exceeds the replacement level for a population. So, after the exponential demographic expansion from 1800 to 2000, a stunning transformation has occurred. What exactly happened? What impacts might this contraction have had socially and culturally, what were its causes, and what do ethnographers have to say about it?

Demographers of the region do not seem very sure about causes and consequences, and indeed no simple causation seems likely. Tabutin and Schoumaker note that both urban and rural women in Morocco have fewer babies than they think would be optimal (2.1 and 2.7 actual average births versus a desired 3.0 and 3.3 in 2005), suggesting a complicated interplay among contraception, culture, and economics.⁷ Ouadah-Bedidi, Vallin, and Bouchoucha make the case that the “the spectacular fertility decrease” of illiterate women, and the more general “ongoing fertility decline in Morocco” has “underlying causes” in the “economic, social and cultural transformations of society.”⁸ This might seem inarguable, but in contrast, as Sebti, Courbage,

3. Z. Ouadah-Bedidi, J. Vallin, and I. Bouchoucha, “La fécondité du Maghreb: Nouvelles surprises,” *Population et sociétés* 486 (2012): 1.

4. Agnès Adjamagbo, Agnès Guillaume, and Fatima Bakass, “Decisions about Unplanned Pregnancies and Abortion among Women and Men in Morocco and Senegal: Influence of Norms, Practices, and Institutional Contexts,” Working paper, IUSSP Scientific Panel on Abortion Research, 2014. Quoted in Rachel Newcomb, *Everyday Life in Global Morocco* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 41.

5. Lawrence Rosen, “Social Identity and Points of Attachment: Approaches to Social Organization,” in *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society: Three Essays in Cultural Analysis*, eds. Clifford Geertz, Hildred Geertz, and Lawrence Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 64.

6. Ouadah-Bedidi, Vallin, and Bouchoucha “La fécondité du Maghreb,” 2.

7. Tabutin and Schoumaker, “The Demography of the Arab World,” 643.

8. Ouadah-Bedidi, Vallin, and Bouchoucha, “La fécondité du Maghreb,” 4.

Festy, and Kursac-Souali point out, “although [Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco are] at different stages of economic development, all three countries have experienced closely parallel trends of fertility decline, increasing life expectancy and urban growth, suggesting that developments in health and the family are relatively *independent* [italics added] of the socioeconomic context.”⁹ Are the “underlying causes” of fertility change to be found in “economic, social and cultural transformations” or are the dramatic changes we have just witnessed “relatively independent of the socioeconomic context?” How do we sort out the cultural causes and consequences of the recent demographic change? While numbers may not lie, they fail to explain themselves very clearly. Ethnography may help shed some light on what the undeniable transformation of Moroccan households means in the lives of everyday Moroccans.

Basic Structures: The Household as a Social Unit

Elsewhere I have made the argument that the household, as an economic unit, is underappreciated in scholarship done in and on Morocco.¹⁰ Why this should be so is beyond the scope of this article,¹¹ but as opposed to “tribes” and the genealogical imagination¹² or “Moroccan Islam,”¹³ or even debates about the import, ethics, and aesthetics of ethnography,¹⁴ households seem to be of little interest to academic writers. This may be why demography has been relatively ignored. Demography and households are closely interrelated.

9. Mohamed Sebti, Youssef Courbage, Patrick Festy, and Anne-Claire Kursac-Souali, “Maghreb, Morocco, Marrakech: Demographic Convergence, Socioeconomic Diversity,” *Population & Societies* 459 (2009): 1.

10. David Crawford, *Moroccan Households in the World Economy: Labor and Inequality in a Berber Village* (Baton Rouge): Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

11. Lila Abu-Lughod, “Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (1989): 267-306.

12. Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969); David Hart, *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif: An Ethnography and History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976); Henry Munson, Jr., “Rethinking Gellner’s Segmentary Analysis of Morocco’s Ait ‘Atta,” *Man* 28, 2 (1993): 267-80.

13. Vincent Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Dale Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1976); Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Emilio Spadola, *The Calls of Islam: Sufis, Islamists, and Mass Mediation in Morocco* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

14. Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); Kevin Dwyer, *Moroccan Dialogues* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982); Kevin Dwyer, “The Uses and Misuses of ‘Culture’-A Comment,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 3, 2 (1998): 130-7; Anne Montgomery, “Voice, Boundary Work, and Visibility in Research on Sex Work in Morocco,” *Medical Anthropology* 34, 1 (2015): 24-38.

A Moroccan household, in Hildred Geertz's words, is "a set of people who pool their food budget and who eat together regularly."¹⁵ Remittances from migrants might complicate this definition, as might other dynamics, such as the way relatives outside the household rely on one another as a "bank,"¹⁶ but households in Morocco are straightforward relative to other social categories. Virtually everyone in Morocco belongs to a household, and everyone supports, or is supported by one at any given time. For most of us, most of the time, we both support and are supported by households, and their social salience is so fundamental that they have escaped much scrutiny. All societies, all economies, rely on the reproduction of human bodies; households are most often where this happens. If there is great complexity in the structure of households globally,¹⁷ they are analytically coherent in North Africa.

In Morocco a household is not the same thing as "family." Family – no matter the term used, from *ait* or *id*, *aith* or *famila* in Berber speaking regions to *ā'ila*, *nās*, *aṣl* or even *dyalna* where Arabic dominates – is a famously ambiguous concept. This issue is not merely linguistic. Newcomb tries to distinguish between "immediate" and "extended" family,¹⁸ for instance, and Hildred Geertz spends 65 pages explaining the nuances and subtleties of what Moroccans mean when they reference kin.¹⁹ We will have more to say about this below. The point for now is that while households are often built of such kinship relations, the emphasis is squarely economic. Indeed, the Greek work for "economics," *oikonomia*, has the word *oikos* –household – as its root. There is a long history of understanding households as the very basis of an economy. Family ties can be immensely complex, negotiated, mutable. Households are material and relatively easy to determine.

As economic units, one can change households, toggle between them, or support more than one, but in Morocco it is vanishingly rare to live apart from a one. The pooling of resources is "probably most stable way of identifying a Moroccan household,"²⁰ and this stability has analytical advantages in terms of comparing regions, social classes, and time periods. Clearly the practices of household membership vary, perhaps most starkly between the few remaining subsistence-oriented parts of the country and the capitalist

15. Hildred Geertz, "The Meanings of Family Ties," in *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society: Three Essays in Cultural Analysis*, eds. Geertz, Clifford, Hildred Geertz, and Lawrence Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 336.

16. Newcomb, *Everyday Life in Global Morocco*, 83.

17. Sylvia Yanigasako, "Family and Household: The Analysis of Domestic Groups," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 8 (1979): 161-205

18. Newcomb, *Everyday Life in Global Morocco*, 26.

19. Geertz, "The Meanings of Family Ties."

20. *Ibid.*, 336.

economy everywhere else. This is not exactly a rural/urban divide, since most Moroccan agriculture is now industrialized, but a difference associated with alternate modes of production. If you are growing crops and herding animals for personal ingestion, children are and must be net economic assets by a very young age. This impacts how households operate. There is no other source of labor, no market for labor power that such a farmer can engage. He takes little to the market, and gets little from it. Households need homegrown workers, they need babies. Since my early ethnographic work focused on the mountains in subsistence-oriented productive regimes, the outsized significance of households and children was obvious.

However, in the wage labor economy households are still – if differently – vital. They might lose their role in organizing productive labor, but they retain the central function of reproducing the next generation. Capitalist economic production – like all production – is dependent on biological and social reproduction. In urban areas, laws against child labor, and the increasingly poignant cultural injunction that children receive formal schooling, means that children and youth in most of Morocco are economic costs even if they are affective assets. You may be able to get “housework” out of children, especially girls, and you might oversee their “homework,” but children do not “work.” They are economically useless to the capitalist economy in the short term, by which we mean until they are more or less grown, and this happens very late in modern economies. Children eat voraciously, which is expensive for the household, and take up space in whatever structure one is buying or renting. They can also be noisy and annoying. They incur all sorts of other costs, from clothing to the expense of conveying various sorts of status necessary to maintaining the parents’ place in society. This can range from school fees to summer camp, parties to prestigious vacations. After years of underwriting, children move out and create their own households, at least ideally. No sane, wage-earning person begets children to benefit herself economically. At best, children “pay forward” their accumulated and costly care by lavishing attention (and huge sums of money) on the next generation. Still, any civilization that lasts longer than a generation must produce babies. This biocultural reproduction is primarily managed in Morocco by the social unit we are calling a household.

An Ethnographic Vantage

I came to understand households in a particular context, the Agoundis Valley, south of Marrakech. I wrote my PhD dissertation about this place,²¹

21. David Crawford, “Work and Identity in the Moroccan High Atlas,” (Ph.D. Dissertation in Anthropology, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2001b).

and a more focused ethnography linking it to the world economy.²² I composed essays exploring what the experience of the Agoundis could teach us about child labor²³ and globalization,²⁴ about women's roles in the reproduction of the social order,²⁵ the fieldwork experience²⁶ even about my own child's "disability" and what that meant cross culturally.²⁷ From the vantage of this small place I pondered everything from Amazigh identity²⁸ to my faltering affection for a truck.²⁹ By 2019, there seemed little more to write. But virtually everything I have surmised about Morocco had its origins in this small place, so in preparation for this anniversary volume, I walked up anyway.

This was not a research trip. I had not visited Morocco in seven years and my goals were nostalgic and personal rather than professional and focused. I decided I would traipse the 17 kilometers up from the paved road at Ijoukak, just as I had in 1998 with my ludicrous backpack and butterflies in my stomach.³⁰ My most recent academic writing has been U.S.-based,³¹ and I suppose I meant my pilgrimage up the Agoundis to be a kind of closure, a goodbye to a locus of inquiry I felt I had exhausted and to some people I still care deeply about.

The orchestration of my return was immediately confounded by the fact that the asphalt now extended ten miles further up the Agoundis River than it ever had before. The trees had been cut back (no more ducking branches

22. Crawford, *Moroccan Households in the World Economy*.

23. David Crawford, "Globalization Begins at Home: Children's Wage Labor and the High Atlas Household," in *Berbers and Others: Shifting Parameters of Identity in the Contemporary Maghrib*, eds. Katherine E. Hoffman and Susan Gilson Miller (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 127-49.

24. David Crawford, "Inventive Articulation: How High Atlas Farmers put the Global to Work," *The Journal of North African Studies* 13, 5 (2013b): 639-51.

25. David Crawford, "Making Imazighen: Rural Berber Women, Household Organization, and the Production of Free Men," in *North African Mosaic: A Cultural Reappraisal of Ethnic and Religious Minorities*, eds. Nabil Boudraa and Joseph Krause (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007).

26. Crawford, "Globalization Begins at Home;" David Crawford, "The Power of Babies," in *Encountering Morocco: Anthropological Fieldwork and Cultural Understanding*, eds. by David Crawford and Rachel Newcomb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013a), 195-212.

27. Hillary Haldane and David Crawford, "What Lula Lacks: Grappling with the Discourse of Autism at Home and in the Field," *Anthropology Today* 26, 3 (2010): 24-26.

28. David Crawford, "How 'Berber' Matters in the Middle of Nowhere," *The Middle East Report* 219 (2001a): 20-25; David Crawford, "Morocco's Invisible Imazighen," *The Journal of North African Studies* 7, 1 (2002): 53-70; David Crawford, "Royal Interest in Local Culture: The Politics and Potential of Morocco's Imazighen," in *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005); Paul Silverstein and David Crawford, "Amazigh Activism and the Moroccan State," *The Middle East Report* 233 (2004): 44-48

29. David Crawford, *Nostalgia for the Present: Ethnography and Photography in a Moroccan Berber Village*. With Bart Deseyn and Abdelkrim Bamouh (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2014).

30. Crawford, *Moroccan Households in the World Economy*, 34.

31. David Crawford, *Dealing with Privilege: Cannabis, Cocaine, and the Economic Foundations of Suburban Drug Culture* (Lanham, MD: Lexington/Roman & Littlefield, 2019).

by men packed standing in the back of a bouncing truck), the culverts were properly girded with cement and rebar, and a constant buzzing of mopeds and passenger vans made my decision to walk seem ridiculous, at best. Moroccans comfortably sliding by me in their vehicles stared open mouthed at the creaky old *rūmi* gasping in the heat.

At Maghzen, where the river turns north, the asphalt ended but metal signs from the government boasted of bold plans to continue the roadwork. Massive dingy-orange machines squatted alongside the expanding piste, quiet because we were still in the ‘*eid* holiday season. There were huge pulverizing jackhammers, excavators, backhoes leaking pneumatic fluid, dump trucks, bulldozers, what looked like generators, all akimbo as if giant children had been interrupted in their play. I was happy to trudge past unremarked in the silence.

Seven steep kilometers later I arrived at Tagharghist, or what I usually call Tadrar when I write about it. There, new electric poles delivered power to each house’s independent breaker box. The government school had doubled in size, and well-painted cartoon characters embellished the fading pink walls. I could see the cell phone tower high on a peak that gave everyone who could afford a phone access to *Itiṣṣālat al-Maghrib* phone service. Small motorcycles buzzed up and down (largely ascribable to holiday visitors), and passenger vans ran multiple times a day on almost dependable schedules. One intrepid entrepreneur even delivered fresh bread by motorcycle at five o’clock each evening. Once I’d returned to the plains and was asked how the village was doing, I answered that absolutely everything had changed. But it was also exactly the same. This sameness/difference is hard to explain concisely, but it is what inspired me to ponder the significance of the demographic transformation that is the focus of this essay.

A Particular Political Economy of Household Demography

My main interlocutor in Tadrar has always been Abdurrahman Ait Ben Ouchen. I have made the case before that part of his power – the fact that he had the time to work with me, and the time to politick with other outsiders – was demographic in origin. For instance, as the only son of his father’s fourth and youngest wife, Abdurrahman received the same share of land as each of his half-brothers (and twice that of his half-sisters) when his father died. For farmers, land is life, so this is important. Later, when his mother died, Abdurrahman also inherited his mother’s full portion of the original patriline’s property, as well as his rightful half of the land his mother brought to the marriage (he had to split the mother’s land equally with his sisters, but his

brothers got none of it as they had different mothers). So Abdurrahman did better than his sisters in terms of inheriting land, but he also did better than his nominally equal brothers. Abdurrahman has plenty of land to work.

He was fortunate, too, in terms of labor. Khadija, Abdurrahman's wife, blessed him with two girls and then five boys in succession. As the girls grew, they could help their mother with the younger children. As the boys reached employable age, Abdurrahman could send some to the city to work and remit wages, and others could stay home to work the fields. Moreover, Khadija had a slightly mentally disabled brother in the village who had his own fields. The labor and the property of this brother came under the control of Abdurrahman's household, strengthening it further. Having inherited land, married land (and labor, via Khadija and her brother), and by fathering a solid household labor force, Abdurrahman was poised to be "rich" in local terms. Here "rich" means comparatively leisured. Abdurrahman grew chubby during the time I was doing research with him because he rarely left the house for work in the fields, and he certainly did not need to shepherd the family herds. He spent untold hours doing the important political labor of drinking exquisitely sweet pots of tea with whatever bigshots were around.

What Abdurrahman chose to do with his spare time, in other words, was work with foreigners like me (and a Peace Corps volunteer, and development agents) and politick with other powerful men like himself. This politicking, too, was bound up in the nature of his household. Khadija was half-sister on her mother's side to the local *amghār*, the main government agent in the valley, who was based in a village about half way to the regional capital at Talat n Yacoub. Abdurrahman thus had the contacts necessary to get involved in local politics, the time to do it (because his boys were handling the agropastoralism), and, from his children working in the city, the modest amounts of cash necessary to host dignitaries (for tea and tajines, mostly, though the occasional political contribution was probably also necessary). The money from wage labor was crucial to this political equation, demonstrating the articulation of the subsistence and capitalist modes of production, and their mutually constituting nature.³² Abdurrahman's local power depended on a number of factors: his family history, the vagaries of Islamic inheritance rules, his wife's fertility, his wife's inheritance, her political connections, her sibling situation, and the larger capitalist, wage-labor economy. Demography is a key part of the mix.

32. Benson A. Mojuetan, *History and Underdevelopment in Morocco: The Structural Roots of Conjecture* (Münster [London]: International African Institute, 1995); Paul Pascon, *Le Haouz de Marrakech* (Paris and Rabat: CNRS, CURS & INAV, 1977).

None of this is static or stable. Even by the end of my 2008 book, Abdurrahman's daughters had married and one moved away, and two sons (married to two village sisters) had seceded from Abdurrahman's control and established their own separate household in Marrakech. This new household remained emotionally attached to their families, but gained economic independence. In fact, Abdurrahman told me, his sons managed this by turning over their family finances to their wives. Abdurrahman could and did demand income from his sons, but he could not successfully extract resources from his daughters-in-law. The boys are still friendly with their father, they call often, but they no longer support him financially. Their wives helped them to establish an independent, urban, joint household.

By 2019 more had changed. Khadija had died and Abdurrahman married again – to the aunt of his second youngest son's wife. This is the only son remaining in the village. The household was now: Abdurrahman, his new wife, his deceased wife's disabled brother, Abdurrahman's remaining son, this son's wife, and four babies that Abdurrahman and his remaining son had between their two wives. The drop in able-bodied male labor (along with the birth of new, consuming children) meant Abdurrahman was again, at age 70, working in the fields. He had no more children remitting wages and only one son and his brother-in-law to help with shepherding and farming. He was clearly in a much less financially stable situation than he had been when we were actively researching together in 1998. He was chubby no more.

The domestic cycle churns, and Abdurrahman's situation has entirely changed. He is no longer at the peak of his family trajectory, no longer searching for novel opportunities to leverage his advantages, as he had been when we first met. He is doing what he can to arrest decline. But in another sense Abdurrahman's household continues as it always has. There is still arduous labor to do, and it is still gendered and organized by age. Women still grind up and down the mountains harvesting barley and hauling fodder for the cows; boys still shepherd and men plant, irrigate, and later thresh the barley. And if the wife in Abdurrahman's kitchen is new, what she does all day is identical to what dear, departed Khadija did in that exact same place. As always, a key goal of rural households is to produce children. There were four living in Abdurrahman's household in 2019, all under age three. Whether this counts as nothing changing or everything changing is a question of perspective. Circumstances have changed, but have the structures of everyday life?

What *has* definitively changed are the views and behavior of the urban children, the ones who have opted to establish households in the wage labor economy. As I have argued elsewhere, they did not originally emigrate because of the “lure of the city.”³³ They came instead to pursue the classic village ideal – marriage, and consequently sex, with the autonomy of an independent household. They chose the uncertainly and immediacy of a cash income rather than waiting to inherit land, but their original goal was the same as everyone’s in the village: marriage and kids. But life in the city has changed these *ibudrarn*, these children of the mountains. Their urban offspring dream new dreams, and their parents have new goals for them.

In the household of the urban Ben Ouchen brothers, the two wives each gave birth to two girls; all four girls have gone or are going to high school (while nobody in the previous generation even finished elementary school), and at least one of these daughters is preparing for college. These parents did not continue having kids once they had two each. This could be chalked up to the government’s “highly successful” family planning program, with more than 50% of married Moroccan women using contraception by 2005,³⁴ but I found rural women had access to birth control technology like their urban sisters, though they sometimes did not fully understand it. The point is that urban families have clearly *chosen* to limit their fertility. The youngest brother, also in Marrakech, has only a single child. The oldest son had all of his children while he still lived in the village, and he has had no more since he moved to the edge of the plains for paid work. Abdurrahman’s rural children are apparently aiming to continue having babies at the maximum possible rate, as is Abdurrahman himself. He is a great-grandfather – thanks to his rural daughters – at the same time he has an infant and a toddler. Abdurrahman’s urban granddaughters, by contrast, are going to school, considering college, and are loathe to plan marriage before their education is complete.

Understandings of what a household does and should do are changing fast among those who leave the mountains, and in broader Moroccan society. My closest friends in Taroudant, for instance, clearly disapproved of Abdurrahman’s continuing production of babies, even if they understood the economic logic of his behavior. They had limited their own childbearing to two – a boy and a girl. I have another friend who has only one child, and that by a man who divorced her before the baby was born. I thought this would be considered painful, but instead a whole room of us laughed about it, with the single mother herself joking about the utter irrelevance of men

33. Crawford, *Moroccan Households in the World Economy*, 185-87.

34. Newcomb, *Everyday Life in Global Morocco*, 43.

to family life. This stands in striking contrast to the attitudes towards single parenthood documented by Bargach as recently as 2001.³⁵ (Obviously, being abandoned by one's spouse is not generally a laughing matter, but at least in this context my friends could find the humor in it.) If during my early time in Morocco in the 1990s it seemed that my personal view of parenthood and family life was very different than my Moroccan interlocutors, it now seems we all think alike. Perhaps "alike" is too strong a word, but the basic sense of how many children one should have, and the labor to which they should be put (essentially, school), are now part of the ideology of a "global middle class."³⁶ I am part of this class, as are my urban Moroccan friends. Those who are newly urban might not have achieved the economic dimensions of "middle" class, but they, too, have adopted the ideology. The norms and values of marriage and reproduction in Tadrar are being quickly abandoned by those who leave.

I would not argue that this is simply reflective of the costs of children in a capitalist economy, but it seems strange to suggest that it could be wholly unrelated. As one of Newcomb's urban informants says, "children are expensive (...) you cannot afford to have a lot of them like our grandmothers did."³⁷ In subsistence-oriented villages, babies are a vital necessity, and anybody lacking them must find ways to recruit from somebody who can lay claim to their labor. The alternative is a very miserable senescence. But that does not make the subsistence and capitalist systems independent and unrelated. In fact, the decision by emigrating children to opt out of rural households for urban labor – as many of Abdurrahman's kids have done – has had a tendency to increase fertility in rural areas. Villages maintained stable populations for a millennia, after all, at least as near as we can tell. The articulation with the capitalist economy seems to have incentivized the explosive rural birthrates of the past two centuries. Population expanded dramatically from 1800 to 2000, and the changes began *before* the impact of antibiotics and improved hygiene decreased mortality.

During the colonial era, "extra" rural, North African babies began to be put to work for wage labor rather than helping rural relatives who needed them. These new capitalist workers emigrated originally to help their rural households, but they eventually sought futures outside of the mountains. They came to constitute a swelling urban workforce, the human capital that fueled

35. Jamila Bargach, *Orphans of Islam: Family, Abandonment, and Secret Adoption in Morocco* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

36. Shana Cohen, *Searching for a Different Future: The Rise of a Global Middle Class in Morocco* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

37. Newcomb, *Everyday Life in Global Morocco*, 61.

capitalist growth, urbanization, both internal and international migration, and what we call globalization. My assertion that “globalization begins at home”³⁸ is meant to suggest that economic expansion begins with the production of children. In Morocco, what matters is the interaction between the “traditional” parts of the country and the “modern” economy, something analogous to the core and periphery arguments of world systems theory.³⁹ A rural exodus puts upward pressure on rural fertility rates. The possibility of urban wage labor introduces uncertainty into rural demographic strategies, uncertainty that inspires increasing fertility. It is a positive feedback loop, one that led to a rural fanaticism for having children, and that ultimately provided the human substrate of the contemporary global economy. Significantly, this pro-fertility ideology gripped the cities and plains, too, suggesting it is far more “cultural” than it is purely “economic.” In other words, urban Moroccans maintained their high fertility practices long after children became “expensive.”

Until they stopped. None of my urban Moroccan friends have more than two children and most of their friends and age mates have two or fewer. Clearly urban Moroccans have a very profound sense of the joys of family and children – they still very much desire them – but this is tempered by the costs of children and of a new, widely held belief that large families are undesirable, and very large families verge on irresponsible. This is significantly different than the attitudes expressed even a couple of decades ago. Whatever else is going on, there has been a huge cultural shift. Is this shift best understood as a consequence of economic change, or is the cultural change independent? Is cultural change around the issue of reproduction both a cause *and* a consequence of economic change? Ethnography is well positioned to engage these sorts of entanglements, and, fortunately, several contemporary researchers are doing just that.

In sum, anthropology and its allied social sciences emerged in the midst of an unprecedented demographic eruption. Like the proverbial fish in water, few of us realized this. That period is now over.

Ethnographic Reverberations

Rarely do ethnographers use the term “demography” even when their topic is intimately interlaced with it; usually they are fighting other battles,

38. David Crawford, “Globalization Begins at Home: Children’s Wage Labor and the High Atlas Household,” in *Berbers and Others: Shifting Parameters of Identity in the Contemporary Maghrib*, eds. Katherine E. Hoffman and Susan Gilson Miller, 127-49 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

39. A.G. Frank, *Crisis: In the World Economy* (New York: Holmes & Meier and London: Heinemann, 1980); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

arguing in different fields. Hildred Geertz, for instance, writes of “family ties” that “within Moroccan culture, there is no *kinship* ideology taken in its literal sense, no culturally patterned genealogical or ‘organizational’ chart (...).”⁴⁰ (emphasis original). Leaving aside the question of what a “literal” kinship ideology might be, Geertz clearly intended this as a riposte to Ernest Gellner. Gellner argued – infamously, to many people now – that rural Moroccan Berbers understand their social world as constituted through a ramifying set of patrilineal lines. The idea of this “segmentarity” was that the further one moved back in time, to more ancient ancestors, the larger the number of living people would belong to this ancestor’s eponymous group. Such groups can be separated at any “level” (thus: “segments”), and might coalesce ephemerally, for the purposes of warfare, for instance, and then dissolve. The only exception was a caste of “saints,” *igurramen*, who officiated at the geographic and social borders of the tribes. The notion that social organization could emerge at a very large scale via a simple structure, and then evaporate without becoming permanently instantiated like “the state,” stood as support for certain anarchistic political conjectures. Significantly, Gellner argued that this was the singular means by which rural (Berber) Moroccans organized themselves. He writes of their “segmentary purity” and “their remarkably pure segmentary system,” and concludes that “Here, at least, equality and liberty go together.”⁴¹ Geertz’s “no genealogical or ‘organizational’ chart” is meant to contradict this.

For our purposes, the relevant point is that neither Geertz nor Gellner attach significance to the fact that such a “chart” would only be possible with a rapidly expanding population. Indeed, a minimum of two sons per father (and thus, bio-mathematically, four children per woman, on average) would be necessary for such a system to work, materially if not conceptually. No demographic expansion means no segments; to have branching lines, you need more than one son per generation. Gellner’s idealized segmentary theory was dependent on a demographic doubling of the population every generation. (Anyone who has tried to demonstrate this sort of segmentarity to undergraduates by drawing triangles on a blackboard would know this. Nominal “segments” double at each level and you quickly run out of space, chalk, and patience). Even Rosen, who is arguing against Gellner’s understanding of kin relations in the same volume as Geertz, situates his study in a moment when the “population has risen and the limits of agricultural production have been reached.”⁴² He does not long dwell on this epochal circumstance.

40. Geertz, “The Meanings of Family Ties,” 355.

41. Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*, 64.

42. Rosen, “Social Identity and Points of Attachment,” 31.

The shared unconcern with demography unites Geertz and Gellner despite their differences, which, for our purposes, might not be as significant as each argues, at least in one sense: both suggest a stable set of cultural understandings. Gellner insists on his singular principle of social organization, at least in rural, Berber areas, while Geertz contrasts this with a more plural version, writing that “family, friendship, and patronage (...) are ordered by the same cultural principles.”⁴³ These are never clearly specified, but there seems a limited number, and this stable ordering undergirds the cross-cutting, negotiated diversity of family ties. A limited number of cultural principles can be assembled by social actors in an infinite number of ways, according to Geertz.

Rosen concurs, with kinship categories representing “available social resources.”⁴⁴ He argues powerfully for attention to the complex and nondeterministic relationship between “cultural categories and social forms.”⁴⁵ Still, Gellner has one principle, Geertz and Rosen more than that, but the consideration of the cultural categories *themselves changing* never arises. What both positions in this classic debate share (beyond ignoring demographic trends) is a reliance on cultural continuity, as evidenced by present tense verbs. Gellner’s “here at least” and Geertz’s “are ordered” and “is seen” reference a stable set of ordering principles. Rosen is concerned with the actor-centered, dynamic application of cultural principles, not their alteration or transformation. Gellner even says of his version of social order that “the condition is timeless.”⁴⁶ Such inattention to cultural change may have been justified during the long demographic expansion from 1800 through the 1990s; ethnographers need not see into the distant past, and obviously cannot see into the future. But the future is here. Current ethnographic work proceeds in a new demographic context; we might reasonably ask if this impacts cultural understandings.

Historical circumstances have always mattered to ethnographers (Hart 1976, for instance), and an explicit focus on social change has been at least a part of the canonical work in Moroccan ethnography.⁴⁷ But fluidity and transformation have come to matter differently in Moroccan ethnography currently. If much of the classic work in the region attended to major events like the arrival (and departure) of the French, there was little sense that such events changed *culture*, even if some forward-thinking anthropologists were

43. Geertz, “The Meanings of Family Ties,” 315.

44. Rosen, “Social Identity and Points of Attachment,” 20.

45. *Ibid.*, 28-29.

46. Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*, 60.

47. Daisy Hilse Dwyer, “Ideologies of Sexual Inequality and Strategies for Change in Male-Female Relations,” *American Ethnologist* 5, 2 (1978): 227-40.

looking precisely at the way Moroccan ideological systems might change, and how they should cause us to reexamine our Western “models for change.”⁴⁸ In general, however, culture was a repertoire of “conceptual entities” the locals used to deal with change,⁴⁹ and was not usually seen as a locus of change in itself.

Newer studies assume cultural change, and sometimes build its examination into the methodology of the study. For instance, when Aomar Boum seeks to understand how Moroccan Muslims see their Jewish brethren, he does not look to enduring cultural principles, but to politics and history, at how the view of Jews has *changed* over the last few generations.⁵⁰ Much of this can be attributed to world historical events, like the founding of the Israeli state, or to technology like the Internet and the social pathologies it nurtures. Boum is not making a demographic argument, but he explicitly foregrounds cultural change and locates it in a political and historical context. He seeks out the views of different generations of Moroccans to make his case. This goes beyond the localized “postmodern” privileging of specificity without succumbing to the crude generalization of a singular Moroccan spirit. It is a view of culture that is not “homogeneous or static.”⁵¹

Likewise, Hsain Ilahiane looks at the impact of cell phones, arguing not only that new technologies are avenues for cultural expression and economic change, but that they are also productive of new sorts of dynamics and relationships.⁵² Karen Rignall examines the role of “custom” in transforming relations of subjugation, but explicitly shows how this leads to “new meanings.”⁵³ Paul Silverstein shows how colonial ethnography is reimaged and put to work for various political purposes in the postcolonial present, thus developing new meanings.⁵⁴ Emilio Spadola looks at technology and broad processes of religious reassessment to understand the particularity of competing “calls” of Islam in

48. Dwyer, “Ideologies of Sexual Inequality and Strategies for Change in Male-Female Relations,” 239.

49. Rosen, “Social Identity and Points of Attachment,” 20.

50. Aomar Boum, *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013).

51. Hassan Rachik, *Le proche et le lointain. Un siècle d'anthropologie au Maroc* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, 2012), 250.

52. Hsain Ilahiane, “Mobile Phone Use, Bricolage, and the Transformation of Social and Economic Ties of Micro-entrepreneurs in Urban Morocco,” *International Journal of Business Anthropology* 2, 1 (2011): 31-69; Hsain Ilahiane, “Catenating the Local and the Global in Morocco: How Mobile Phone Users Have Become Producers and Not Consumers,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 18, 5 (2013): 652-67.

53. Karen Rignall, “Land and the Politics of Custom in a Moroccan Oasis Town,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 88, 4 (2015): 941.

54. Paul Silverstein, “The Pitfalls of Transnational Consciousness: Amazigh Activism as a Scalar Dilemma,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 18, 5 (2013): 768-78.

Morocco, and changes in religious understanding.⁵⁵ David McMurray examines the impact of migration on changing consumption patterns, social status, and the very point of economic life in Nador.⁵⁶ Alice Elliot also examines migration and new politics of marriage from the perspective of the women left behind.⁵⁷ This transforms understandings of marriage, family, and more. Virtually everyone working in Morocco today assigns some significance not just to the historical moment or political vicissitudes, but to changes that seem deeper, structural. All that was said to be solid is melting into air. This is not reducible to, or simply reflective of, the transformations wrought in the Moroccan household, but it is certainly “bound up” with it.⁵⁸

Cultural change is probably most apparent in work referencing “global” processes. In her book *Everyday Life in Global Morocco*, for instance, Newcomb discusses the impact of the International Monetary Fund and the role of structural adjustment policies,⁵⁹ as well as neoliberal trade and the Washington Consensus.⁶⁰ But she also explores concomitant cultural and demographic change. So, Newcomb’s interlocutors note that “children are expensive,” or “marriage today is different,”⁶¹ but this is not simply an epiphenomenon of capitalism. Many things contribute to the transformation of “everyday life” – from “highly successful,” government-sponsored family planning programs in the 1970s that changed ideas about procreation⁶² to shifts in family law, the *mudawana* reforms of 2004, and even to the fact that “the ideal family is almost always depicted as nuclear” in the Moroccan media.⁶³ Newcomb quotes Ginsberg and Rapp’s⁶⁴ assertion that “reproduction is inextricably bound up with the production of culture,”⁶⁵ but this does not mean that culture is reducible to demography or economics; the ethnographic project is precisely to interrogate how such changes are “bound up” together.

55. Spadola, *The Calls of Islam*.

56. David A. McMurray, *In and Out of Morocco* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

57. Alice Elliott, *The Outside: Migration as Life in Morocco* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

58. Faye Ginsberg and Rayna Rapp, *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

59. Newcomb, *Everyday Life in Global Morocco*, 18.

60. *Ibid.*, 10.

61. *Ibid.*, 61.

62. *Ibid.*, 43.

63. *Ibid.*, 68.

64. Ginsberg and Rapp, *Conceiving the New World Order*.

65. Newcomb, *Everyday Life in Global Morocco*, 63.

Newcomb builds on Shana Cohen's observation that the middle class in Morocco feels "detached,"⁶⁶ or "schizophrenic,"⁶⁷ though to me it's unclear why this should not be true for other classes, too. For Newcomb "The current moment in Morocco is (...) characterized by conflict, nostalgia, and a struggle to maintain local identity."⁶⁸ Cultural continuity is deemphasized, with culture becoming either hypostasized ("nostalgia") or vivified via "struggle." More specifically related to the theme of demographic change, she argues that "globalization has brought new discourses about marriage, family formation, reproduction, and infertility to Morocco."⁶⁹ Thus, "Moroccan women now live very different lives from those of women thirty years ago,"⁷⁰ and these "new lives" are newly understood. The material dimension of this change is exemplified in the demography of the family Newcomb is tracking: the grandfather had ten children, the father five. Of the five siblings Newcomb follows, only two seem to be in stable relationships and neither has more than two children. Newcomb sensibly portrays this as part of "a radical generational shift."⁷¹

Mary Montgomery explores the impacts of such demographic change even more directly in *Hired Daughters: Domestic Workers among Ordinary Moroccans*. This ethnography examines the impact of demographic contraction on household labor and organization. During most of the 20th century urban families would count on poorer, generally rural, relatives coming to work for the household. Most families had one or more "maids," young women who would shoulder the extraordinary burdens that proper, middle class Moroccan hygiene requires. (At least from my experience, urban Moroccan houses have to be among the cleanest on Earth, and from what Montgomery tells us the cleanliness borders on mania). Often these rural girls were explicitly conceptualized in kinship terms as daughters, and in so doing middle class women were involved in "the making of [middle class] persons through domestic service," a process that "echoes the colonial *mission civilisatrice*."⁷² For domestic workers recruited from the countryside, being conceptualized as "one of the family" could be deeply ambivalent. Being considered "family" could be advantageous, but also exploitative – highlighting the "ambivalent

66. *Ibid.*, 25.

67. *Ibid.*, 45.

68. *Ibid.*, 19.

69. *Ibid.*, 61.

70. *Ibid.*, 45.

71. Newcomb, *Everyday Life in Global Morocco*, 105.

72. Mary Montgomery, *Hired Daughters: Domestic Workers among Ordinary Moroccans* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019), 59.

economics” of household labor exchanges.⁷³ From the perspective of urban families, “the old ties that linked them to poorer people seem to have broken down, so they no longer *knew* anyone who was prepared to work for them” (emphasis original).⁷⁴ Thus has arisen the contemporary market in household labor. To me the ties seem less “broken” than withered. Just as segmentarity was not materially possible without an expanding population, neither is the traditional middle-class household structure. The plunging birthrate has radically narrowed the population pyramid. Far fewer vertical ties are possible, so domestic labor has to be sought beyond family ties in the market.

As yet, the “incomplete transition of this [domestic labor] sector into the marketplace (...) leaves arrangements to be regulate[d] by contradictory sets of values.”⁷⁵ Montgomery’s interlocutors, like Newcomb’s, clearly perceive a change. As one employer reported, “all relationships require work. You have to work to maintain your relationships (...) with your boss, with your family, with your maid even (...). *This high turnover [of maids], it [didn’t used] to be like that*” (emphasis added).⁷⁶ But Montgomery herself is not convinced of the utter newness to all this. “‘Family’ is clearly at odds with the market,” she tells us, “but this problem is most likely older than the narratives of recent moral decline imply.”⁷⁷ The “purported novelty,” as Montgomery puts it elsewhere, is still relevant in that what the natives are saying about their reality is itself part of it,⁷⁸ but only part. The question of cultural change remains a question.

What we know is that the material conditions of cultural production in Morocco, and in particular the demographic conditions, have changed. Whether “culture” has changed, as Newcomb seems to suggest, or how it has changed, is a more complicated question, but one that we cannot begin to address without acknowledging the manifestly new demographic context in which Moroccans now make kin and meaning.⁷⁹ Clearly households do not function as they did prior to the demographic transition. What this means for Moroccan culture is open to debate.

Conclusion

What can ethnographers learn from demography, and what can they contribute to it? The first part seems straightforward. Those of us working with

73. David Crawford, “Suburban Drug Dealing: A Case Study in Ambivalent Economics,” *Research in Economic Anthropology* 36 (2016): 197-219.

74. Montgomery, *Hired Daughters*, 94.

75. *Ibid.*, 87.

76. *Ibid.*, 53.

77. *Ibid.*, 59.

78. *Ibid.*, 87.

79. *Ibid.*, 56; Rosen, “Social Identity and Points of Attachment.”

ordinary Moroccans must grasp the statistical facts of our era. The structures of everyday life were very different a few decades ago than they are now. This will not impact all studies equally, but households are the crucible of human care, the practical conduits of love and sustenance across time, and changes in the constitution and practices of household life are bound to reverberate. Cultural continuity or change depends on the biosocial reproduction that happens largely through households.⁸⁰

It does not seem that economics directly “cause” a fertility transition, as the comparison of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco makes clear. These three countries are quite different economically, but share the same demographic revolution. At the same time, demographers have noted that a shift to wage labor accompanies a plunging birthrate almost everywhere it happens. When children become costs instead of material benefits, it seems to impact our calculation of procreation – whether we are Moroccan, Minnesotan, or Monegasque. Our anthropological interest in local dynamics, and the specificities of cultural perspectives, should not prevent us from connecting (or contrasting) local peculiarities with macro-sociological processes.

So we have something to learn from demography, but we have more to teach – if we are willing to engage larger processes and the questions others have about them. Why exactly have Moroccans collectively decided to alter their fertility practices so dramatically? Moroccan ethnography is far more concerned with social change than it used to be, far more interested in politics and economics, and far more likely to attend to international dynamics that impact the local. The demographic shifts of the last few decades would seem an anthropological gold mine since they cannot be exclusively ascribed to economics or culture, but we cannot discount either.

Ambiguity is what ethnography does best. Fertility decisions cannot be purely “cultural,” in the sense of being *sui generis*, detached from government policy and material concerns,⁸¹ but they are not derivative of material processes, either. (If they were then urban Moroccan fertility would have plummeted a long time ago.) The question is whether we are witnessing the transformation of societal “structural forms” that Max Gluckman long ago suggested we separate from other “kinds of change,”⁸² or do Moroccans exhibit only a novel configuration of the durable “conceptual entities” that

80. A. F. Robertson, *Beyond the Family: The Social Organization of Human Reproduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

81. Elvin Hatch, *Theories of Man and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 48.

82. Max Gluckman, “The Utility of the Equilibrium Model in the Study of Social Change,” *American Anthropologist* 70, 2 (1968): 223.

Rosen identified?⁸³ At the intersection of culture, politics, social reproduction, and economics, changing demographic trends provide an opportunity to demonstrate why anthropological vantages are useful to understanding our world.

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83. Rosen, "Social Identity and Points of Attachment," 20.

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الإثنوغرافيا والديموغرافيا: الأسر المغربية والتغيير الثقافي

ملخص: يسلط هذا المقال الضوء على عمق التغيير الديموغرافي الذي يشهده المغرب حالياً، ويستكشف آثاره من خلال استعراض مجموعة مختارة من الدراسات الإثنوغرافية. وتعد ثنائية التقسيم القروي/الحضري خلفية مهمة بشكل خاص لهذه القضية بسبب التكاليف والفوائد الاقتصادية المتميزة التي يمثلها الأطفال في سياقات اقتصاد الكفاف مقابل السياقات الرأسمالية. ومن الواضح، في مجالات الزراعة الموجهة نحو الكفاف، أن الأطفال هم المصدر الرئيسي للعمالة، ويعتبرون تبعاً لذلك أصلاً اقتصادياً ضرورياً، بينما يمثل الأطفال في السياقات الرأسمالية نفقات اقتصادية صافية. وعلى الرغم من أنه لا يُنسب إلى ذلك ببساطة، في مناطق المغرب حيث تظل استراتيجية البقاء الأساسية هي العمل الزراعي المحلي، تستمر وتيرة معدلات الخصوبة المرتفعة. وقد تغيرت الأمور بشكل كبير في بقية الأماكن الأخرى. ويتعامل البحث الإثنوغرافي الجديد مع هذا الواقع الديموغرافي المتحول بشكل كبير بالتشديد على كيفية فهمه من قبل المغاربة، كما يلتقي الضوء على بعض المناقشات الكلاسيكية ذات الصلة بالإثنوغرافيا المغربية وقضاياها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الثقافة، الأسر، المغرب، التقسيم، الديموغرافيا.

Ethnographie et démographie: Ménages marocains et changement culturel

Résumé: Cet essai met en évidence la profondeur de l'évolution démographique récente au Maroc et explore ses implications dans une sélection d'études ethnographiques. Le fossé rural/urbain est une toile de fond particulièrement importante pour ce problème en raison des coûts et avantages économiques distincts que les enfants représentent dans les contextes de subsistance par rapport aux contextes capitalistes. De toute évidence, dans l'agriculture de subsistance, les enfants sont la principale source de travail, et donc un actif économique nécessaire, alors que dans les contextes capitalistes, les enfants représentent une dépense économique nette. Bien que ceci ne soit pas simplement imputable à cela, dans les régions du Maroc où la principale stratégie de survie reste le travail agricole domestique, des taux de fécondité élevés persistent. Partout ailleurs, les choses ont radicalement changé. Un nouveau travail ethnographique s'intéresse à cette réalité démographique considérablement transformée et à la façon dont les Marocains la comprennent, et éclaire certains des débats classiques de l'ethnographie marocaine.

Mots clés: Culture, ménages, Maroc, segmentarité, démographie.