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Postcolonial Attunements: Decolonizing the Anthropology of Morocco

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Abstract: In this essay, I describe the contingent conjunctures of events that have contributed to my becoming an anthropologist who never quite feels at home within the discipline, except in its margins. I then attempt to articulate some of the ways in which I have tried to decolonize my feminist anthropological practice by using ethnography to write against teleological conceptions of modernity and to think about the tragedy of postcolonial subjectivity rather than to contribute to a better Western self-understanding through an encounter with the Other. In doing so, my aim is to complicate the story that gets told about the anthropology of the Maghrib by rendering its normative Western subject visible and suggesting ways of re-orienting the anthropological project away from the task of rendering the strange familiar for the West. My hope is also to invite those of us who are anthropologists both of and from the Maghrib to start telling our own stories in ways that take seriously the specificity of our positionalities and the epistemological implications of our (oftentimes ambivalent) relationship to anthropology as a field.

Keywords: Decolonizing Anthropology, Postcolonial Anthropology, Postcolonial Feminist Anthropology, Postcoloniality, Anthropologists of and from the Maghrib, Rethinking our Origin Stories, Secularism, Feminism, Tragedy of Modernity, Maghrib, Morocco.

I often say that although I was trained as an anthropologist, I am not a card-carrying one. Instead, I am a transnational and postcolonial feminist scholar of Morocco, who works on feminism, religion, secularism, postcoloniality, affect and subjectivity, and who also happens to be an anthropologist. In part, this reflects the fact that I am increasingly removed from the disciplinary rituals, conversations, and preoccupations of the field by virtue of being based within a Feminist and Gender Studies program where disciplinary gatekeeping is a practice that we actively try to resist. At the same time, this statement reflects some of the ambivalence and estrangement that I feel vis-à-vis the discipline of my training and research despite almost two decades of proximity to and engagement with it. This essay is in part an attempt to think about the conditionality of my identification with the field and to reflect on my positionality as a postcolonial Maghribi anthropologist of Morocco. In what follows, I first describe the contingent events that contributed to my becoming an anthropologist who never quite feels at home within the discipline, except

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in its margins. I then attempt to articulate some of the ways in which I have tried to decolonize my anthropological practice by using ethnography to write against teleological conceptions of modernity and to think about the tragedy of postcolonial subjectivity rather than to contribute to a better Western self-understanding through an encounter with the Other. My hope is that this essay will contribute towards complicating the story that gets told about the anthropology of the Maghrib by rendering its normative Western subject visible and suggesting ways of re-orienting the anthropological project away from the task of rendering the strange familiar for the West. It is also an invitation to fellow Maghribi anthropologists of the Maghrib for us to decolonize our relationship to anthropology as a field by telling our stories on our own terms and taking seriously the epistemological implications and particularities of our anthropological work as postcolonial subjects.

An Accidental Anthropologist

The U.S. Black feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins describes the notion of the outsider within as "highlight[ing] the tension experienced by any group of less powerful outsiders encountering the paradigmatic thought of a more powerful insider community."[1] Extending her analysis of Black sociologists within a predominantly white field to other marginalized subjectivities, she describes the insider-within as those who have become insiders to a field but "have never felt comfortable with its taken-for-granted assumptions."[2] Similarly, the British postcolonial feminist scholar Sara Ahmed describes "a sweaty concept" as "one that comes out of a description of a body that is not at home in the world."[3] In doing so, she renders visible the discomfort and struggle that can accompany knowledge produced from a space of marginalization, alienation, or out-of-placeness; at the same time, she highlights the generative nature of producing knowledge from the positionality of not being at home in the world. Together Collins and Ahmed help me describe some of my feelings and experiences as a postcolonial anthropologist of Morocco who has never quite felt at home in the discipline of anthropology, and who has been most inspired by critics of the field and those inhabiting its margins. The notion of a non-card-carrying anthropologist embodies within it a sense of being an "outsider within" anthropology. It is a conditional identification that recognizes a link and an intellectual debt but makes both contingent and agonistic. Indeed, what drew me to anthropology was not a belief in the superior merits of the field or in its putative benevolence.

1. Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems* 33, 6 (1986): 29.
2. Ibid.
3. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 13.

I did not become an anthropologist because I was committed to the idea of increasing the West's self-understanding through its encounter with a non-Western Other. I did not recognize myself in the writings of the forefathers of the discipline. My inspiration did not come from reading anthropological texts on Morocco or on North Africa. Instead, it was a series of accidents that led me to seek a disciplinary home in anthropology, or more accurately to seek a return home through anthropology.

Prior to enrolling in the PhD anthropology program at Columbia University, I had been in the U.S. for a little more than four years and had only ever taken two anthropology classes as an undergraduate at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. These classes happened to be an undergraduate seminar called "The Anthropology of Development" and a graduate tutorial on "The Anthropology of Imperialism." Both were taught by the Colombian-American Latin Americanist and postcolonial anthropologist Arturo Escobar, author of the groundbreaking book *Encountering Development*, to whom I owe my introduction to the field.[4] These courses helped me think critically about the development industrial complex as a new form of colonialism; they helped me realize that the so-called third world in which I had grown up was no more than a colonial construct meant to re-inscribe notions of Western superiority and to maintain global forms of inequality. Arturo Escobar also introduced me to the work of Michel Foucault (whose seminars he attended while a graduate student at Berkeley) whom I was taught to read as an anthropologist of the West, of modernity and modern forms of power (albeit one who underestimated the role of colonialism in his analysis). My entry point into anthropology was in other words through its margins, through critics like Escobar who turned the anthropological gaze against itself and used its tools, combined with the insights of post-structural theory, to interrogate modern Western power and hegemony. At the same time, I knew that I wanted to work on Morocco and that although the discipline of anthropology did not always encourage carrying out fieldwork in one's own home, it did value carrying out research in non-Western locations as well as language skills which I had as a trilingual speaker of Arabic, French and English. I also knew that I was interested in feminist thought and therefore applied to anthropology programs that had feminist scholars on their faculty. In search of a disciplinary space that would enable to me to carry out work at home in Morocco, that would value my language skills, and would enable me to carry out feminist work, I ended up in anthropology.

4. Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

What I did not sufficiently realize then was that the courses that introduced me to the discipline and convinced me of its critical potentialities were largely unrepresentative; not only that, they were deeply critical of the larger field which still defined itself primarily as the Western study of non-Western Others (or non-Western minorities within the West) and was preoccupied with something called culture rather than with structures of power like development and/or imperialism. I also did not sufficiently appreciate just how much the ethos of the field was tied to the epistemological goal of a better Western self-understanding rather than a postcolonial reckoning. Luckily for me in what turned out to be another fateful turn of events, the Columbia University anthropology department where I ended up doing my doctorate was going through a postcolonial turn. It had hired large numbers of faculty who were pushing the limits of what constituted anthropological knowledge. Many of them, like Escobar who first introduced me to the field, did interdisciplinary work and were trained in fields other than anthropology, which made them less invested in disciplinary reproduction or in gatekeeping. The department was also redefining the field by centering postcolonial critiques (with a focus on South Asia, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa) in its approach and curriculum. This was reflected not only in the makeup of the faculty, but also of the students. Many of my peers had no prior training in anthropology when they joined the program as graduate students and did not have the usual trajectories and credentials that made one legible at elite ivy league institutions (one of my peers for example was a post office clerk in South India who was interested in film and philosophy; another was a former anti-apartheid activist from South Africa interested in questions of political violence). They came from various parts of the Global South (India, Pakistan, Iran, South Africa, China, Lebanon, and Iraq amongst many) or from various postcolonial diasporas in Euro-America. While our training involved reading the classics of anthropology (Boas, Malinowski, Mead, Geertz, etc.), we also spent a great deal of our time thinking critically about colonialism and its legacies, race and imperialism, the blind-spots of liberalism, and the hegemony of rights discourse.

My graduate studies also coincided with the events of 9/11 and were heavily shaped by the intensification of Islamophobic and racist moral panic directed at people from the Middle East, North Africa and other parts of the Muslim world. This meant that those of us who focused on the Middle East and/or Islam did so with a heightened sense of what was at stake in our work. My graduate school peers and I spent a lot of our time organizing teach-ins against the war on terror and participating in various forms of activism;

professors from our department were very much involved and supportive of this activism. In many ways, we were less preoccupied with staking a ground within an academic discipline than in finding better ways of understanding the world in which we lived and the imperial forms of power that surrounded us. Seeing centuries-old Orientalist tropes and discourses recycled and revived in the context of the war on terror was to experience first-hand what Edward Said described as the "redoubtable durability" of Orientalism as a discourse.[5] This made many of us especially aware and weary of the limits of counter-knowledge and counter-discourses about the Other which, no matter how eloquent or sophisticated, could be completely ignored by dominant powers in the name of "security" and its many imperial cousins (often misleadingly referred to as democracy, freedom, and women's rights). This convergence of events was coupled with the fact that I was trained by incredible postcolonial and anti-imperial anthropologists like Lila Abu-Lughod, Talal Asad, and David Scott and by scholars of empire and colonialism like Mahmood Mamdani, Joseph Massad, and Partha Chatterjee, who taught me to think critically about modernity, capitalism, development, human rights, colonialism, (neo) liberalism, feminism, and secularism.[6] The postcolonial lineage of my teachers at Columbia invariably meant that my relationship to the field and subsequent anthropological work on Morocco would be differently inflected. Like in my undergraduate studies with Arturo Escobar, I was especially interpellated by their analysis of modes of power/knowledge that are not historically seen as necessitating a critique, let alone anthropological description.

It is also significant that I ended up in anthropology not because of a prior investment or faith in the discipline, but because of a preexisting attachment to and desire to conduct research in Morocco. Indeed, one could say that while I became an anthropologist by accident, there was nothing accidental about my becoming a Moroccanist. I was born and brought up in Morocco to a Moroccan father and American mother. While I left for the U.S. to go to college (after having studied at Mohammed V University in Rabat for two years and enabled by the privileges and mobilities conferred to me by my mother's U.S. citizenship and proximity to whiteness), I knew that I wanted to return and use the knowledge that I had gained to better understand where I came from. In many ways, and even though I do not think I quite realized

5. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 6.

6. Sadly, while Edward Said was still teaching at Columbia at the time and was very supportive of our activist efforts against the war and the escalating violence of the Israeli occupation, I did not have the courage to take a class with him given his reputation for being extremely demanding of his students. I of course wish I had not let my imposter syndrome come in the way, especially since he passed away a few short years after I started my graduate program.

this at the time, this was my way of following in my father's footsteps who was a sociologist of Morocco and a committed leftist public intellectual with deep affective and political ties to the country of his birth. This suggests not only a different trajectory (from Morocco to anthropology rather than from anthropology to Morocco) but also a different orientation towards the field, by which I mean both the field of anthropology and Morocco as a field site. It also suggests a different affective economy at work, one that emphasizes not the epistemic values of distance and objectivity but rather of proximity, attachment, intimacy, and investment. Indeed, I will never forget just how disturbed and viscerally scandalized I was to read that Clifford Geertz, the American anthropologist who turned Morocco into what Lila Abu-Lughod has called a "prestige zone"[7] in the anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa, and therefore helped authorize the anthropology of Morocco that I was later to undertake, practically stumbled into Morocco while having a drink in a Cambridge pub.

As he casually recounts in his book *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*,[8] Geertz was an Assistant Professor at the time and a member of the University of Chicago Committee for the Comparative Study of New Nations, which was formed in order to study the "new states" in a "realistic and sympathetic" way. He had already completed his fieldwork in Indonesia and was looking for a new anthropological destination. "The sixties in Indonesia were even more explosive than in America or Europe, and in the middle of them the massacres erupted. With two children, both under five, returning there seemed a dubious proposition."[9] Unsure of where to begin his next project, he was "reduced (…) to that most pitiable of conditions: an anthropologist without a people."[10] Then in 1963, while attending a conference of British and American anthropologists in Cambridge, he was at "some pub or another" when he "poured out [his] 'where next?' anxieties to one of the younger and less socialized British participants," who then replied: "You should go to Morocco: it is safe, it is dry, it is open, it is beautiful, there are French schools, the food is good, and it is Islamic."[11] After the conference ended, Geertz recounts that he immediately got on a plane to Morocco, drove around the country for several weeks, and decided "on the spot and with

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

8. Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

9. Ibid., 115.

10. Ibid., 115.

11. Ibid., 117.

almost nothing in the way of either a plan or rationale – it *was* beautiful and it *was* Islamic – to organize a long-term, multi researcher study there. The Java Project, II."[12] "Plunge and see what happens" was how Geertz described his foray into research in Morocco.[13] It is this research that inaugurated the work of American anthropologists in the region, and subsequently brought to Morocco a group of American scholars such as Hildred Geertz, Lawrence Rosen, Thomas Dichter, and Paul Rabinow. Morocco was thus put on the American anthropological map and became the fieldwork site of numerous American anthropologists – although not all connected to Geertz – like Vincent Crapanzano, Dale Eickelman, Henry Munson, Susan Davis, Brinkley Messick (who was later to become one of my advisors at Columbia), Stefania Pandolfo, Elaine Combs-Schilling and many others, because Geertz stumbled upon the idea of doing research there while he was bemoaning his anthropological homelessness in a pub in Cambridge.

As someone who became an anthropologist of Morocco with, if not because of, preexisting ties to the Moroccan context and a desire to follow in the footsteps of my Moroccan father, reading this passage could not be more alienating. It is not that I don't recognize the often-arbitrary trajectory of research projects that lead us to unexpected places and unanticipated questions. My disquiet is not motivated by an investment in an idea of the researcher as always purposive, all-knowing, intentional, and never spontaneous. My own research took many unexpected turns and required much improvisational skills on my part; my becoming an anthropologist was itself, as I described earlier and at the risk of undermining my own academic credentials, accidental. Rather, what strikes and disturbs me about this passage by Geertz is the imperial perspective and white male privilege that it so casually enacts. Indeed, Geertz feels sufficiently empowered to pick and choose a research location in the non-West (in this case in the Middle East/North Africa) based on variables that so un-apologetically center Western privileges, comforts and preferences including a warm climate and French schools. He was able to jump on a plane to Morocco following no more than a discussion in a British pub with an unidentified interlocutor, drive around the country for weeks with no knowledge about the area (and I imagine no language skills), and then decided to organize a long-term multi researcher study there. In re-reading this passage, I am struck by Geertz' total lack of commentary on the obvious Western privileges (a U.S. passport, no need for a visa, considerable financial means, and access as a Western white man with

12. Ibid., 117.
13. Ibid.

no obvious connections to Morocco) and imperial confidence that enabled him to do so. This kind of mobility, financial capability, and legitimacy is obviously not one that is equally available to all. I can't imagine a Moroccan or Algerian anthropologist deciding on a whim based on a conversation with a colleague at a pub or coffeeshop to hop on a plane to the U.S. or to Europe and drive around for weeks investigating research options. For one, they would need weeks (if not months) and financial resources just to obtain a visa and to afford such travels. They would have to overcome the gatekeeping practices of Western states that, in what is perhaps an extension of their own settler colonial imaginaries, tend to interpret any desire to travel to the West from non-Western subjects as a subterfuge for settling there. I also can't imagine a non-White American anthropologist being able to so easily get on a plane in 1963, navigate and travel around Morocco without any questions being asked of them. This makes me ponder a set of questions: How are we to think of these origin tales that are so intimately connected with Western (in this case white and male) privilege and that enact colonial perspectives on the world, treating various non-Western countries as interchangeable options for Western anthropologists to explore? What made someone like Geertz able to move so easily from Indonesia to Morocco despite the obvious differences between the two contexts? If anthropological work depends on a normative privileged Western (and again in this case White and male) subject for whom the non-West provides endless and interchangeable anthropological homes, how can this field be made hospitable to those who are not authorized or enabled by imperial privilege, financial resources, or proximity to whiteness – or at least not in the same ways? What difference does it make to our understanding and relationship to the field once we foreground the colonial ethos, Western, racial, and male privileges that so clearly played a constitutive role in putting Morocco on the U.S. anthropological map? How might we decolonize our reading of figures such as Geertz and thus by extension the anthropology of Morocco?

I of course recognize that Geertz' story is at some level an extreme case and that this anecdote does not capture the fullness of his eventual investment. I also recognize that many Western anthropologists of Morocco, including some writing in this volume, were not as flippant in selecting Morocco as their field site and thought long and hard about the ethics of their research and positionality. Many went on to develop and nurture deep ties with their interlocutors through collaboration, friendship, and in some case marriage, and this enabled them to produce insightful and nuanced works

about Morocco that are deserving of much admiration. Still, I think that the flagrant asymmetry of access and power that enabled Geertz' work (and thus subsequent generations of anthropologists who followed in his footsteps) is one that we need to continue more systematically thinking about. At the very least, I would suggest that the Western privilege and imperial relationship to the world that enabled the work of anthropologists like Geertz needs to be foregrounded in our readings and teachings of his work, especially in the Maghrib where he continues to be celebrated as one of the forefathers of the field. Indeed, these were the conditions of possibility for whatever legacies he left behind and should not be left out of the stories we tell about our field or about the anthropology of Morocco.

In addition, as a postcolonial Moroccan anthropologist whose research in Morocco has very little to do with Geertz' "plunge and see what happens,"[14] I feel that the specificities and epistemological implications of the kind of anthropological sensibility that I and others like me embody have yet to be sufficiently recognized. While my training and academic career in the US academy have of course made me a different kind of Moroccan subject, one whose habitus has been shaped by my Western education no matter how hard I have resisted its conscripting and imperial powers, this does not mean that my anthropological relationship to Morocco can be told through or alongside Western anthropologists like Geertz. Indeed, while our stories are intertwined for sure, they are not interchangeable. My anthropological story cannot be told through the familiar anthropological tropes of "journey into the unknown," "cross-cultural understanding," and "encounters with difference," or at least not in the same way. If anything, my hope is that this special issue will help those of us who are anthropologists of and from the Maghrib tell our own stories about the field in ways that take seriously the specificity of our positionalities, journeys, and (in my case ambivalent) relationship to it. Part of what I think we need to talk about amongst ourselves are epistemological questions about what makes our work anthropological and what (if anything) anthropology enables us to do for ourselves even though this was not the stated aim of the discipline which until recently saw us at most as valuable native informants. This discussion will of course need to grapple with the differences in our positionalities and trajectories, focusing for instance on the difference that it makes that some of us are producing anthropological knowledge from within the region while others are based in Western academic institutions.

14. Ibid.

In many ways, this is a very personal question for me. My Moroccan father who was a brilliant sociologist and leftist public intellectual frequently served as an interlocutor to many Western anthropologists of Morocco who sought his guidance, knowledge and insights about Moroccan politics and history. Because he spoke perfect English due to his doctoral training in the U.S. and had very wide knowledge about Moroccan politics, he spent countless days and hours helping foreign anthropologists (and other types of scholars) make sense of the various practices and histories that they were researching.[15]

Fig. 1: The late professor Mohammed Guessous with some of his former students in 2000, (Nadia Guessous private collection).

His name appears in the acknowledgment sections of numerous anthropological works on Morocco, especially in the seventies, eighties, and nineties when the anthropology of Morocco flourished thanks in large part to prominent figures like Clifford Geertz, Paul Rabinow, and Vincent Crapanzano. While he had a wealth of knowledge about power and politics in Morocco, he wrote very little in his own name. His students and colleagues have compiled some of his lectures and interviews into edited volumes, but his intellectual legacies remain largely unwritten. I have often wondered about this uneven

15. As a child, I remember experiencing this constant stream of Western scholars in our living room as making me feel that my father must have been really important; later, I came to recognize this valuing of Western recognition as yet another effect of Western hegemony and its conscripting impulses.

distribution of labor and recognition where local intellectuals and academics with deep knowledge of the complexities of Moroccan society enable the production of Western scholarship but do not have access to resources/infrastructures that would support their own scholarship. Of course, intellectual contributions need not take the form of written or published works. They can also include teaching, mentoring, giving interviews, and being a public intellectual. Still, the ways in which the labor of local Moroccan thinkers and intellectuals enables the production of knowledge about places like Morocco in and for the West is one that I continue to grapple with, especially now that I am an anthropologist of Morocco living and working in the U.S. Are those of us teaching and writing from Western institutions more likely to be recognized as contributing to the anthropology of the Maghrib because our knowledge is authorized by our proximity to the putative superiority of the West? If so, are we just reproducing the same story/dynamic but from different locations and out of differently configured bodies? These are questions that trouble me a great deal and that I am interested in further thinking about with other anthropologists of and from the Maghrib.

Fig. 2: The late professor Mohammed Guessous with some students and Rahma Bourquia in 2000, (Nadia Guessous private collection).

Decolonizing the Anthropology of Morocco

Given all this, what might it mean to decolonize anthropology as a discipline, practice, and way of apprehending the world? What difference

does it make that I think and write as a postcolonial Moroccan anthropologist of Morocco who paradoxically sought to maintain ties and reckon with her postcoloniality through a discipline whose ethos is so indebted to the legacies of colonialism? Is inhabiting a postcolonial subjectivity enough to produce a postcolonial anthropology? What about an anthropology of post-coloniality? If by post-coloniality, I mean living in the wake of colonialism with its legacies and assumptions of Western superiority mediating our subjectivities, self-understanding and relationship with the past and with each other, how does one think and write anthropologically about the postcolonial condition? What forms of listening and attunement,[16] refusal and resistance,[17] are required for and enabled by a postcolonial anthropology or an anthropology of postcoloniality? How might postcolonial anthropologists of Morocco reorient their anthropological practice away from the task of rendering the strange familiar for the West? If better self-knowledge through an encounter with the Other is the aim of Western anthropology, then what forms of knowledge can and does a postcolonial anthropology aspire towards? And if the encounter with difference is key in enabling the epistemological and ethical potentialities of Western anthropology, then what encounters might be crucial to a postcolonial anthropology? If being trained in Western anthropology as postcolonial subjects means in part encountering the construction of our own otherness as non-Western subjects who have been written about relentlessly by Western anthropologists set on capturing our "minds" and explaining our putative cultural proclivities, then can and does this encounter with our own otherness rather than with the otherness of other others, differently orient our anthropological work? Does this encounter with the construction of our otherness enable the decolonization of our knowledge? Is it necessary to it? These are some of the questions and queries with which I seek to grapple in this essay, offering preliminary ruminations and partial reflections more than answers or resolutions. Indeed, I use the verb grapple intentionally here, and throughout this essay, to emphasize that these are preliminary thoughts and that there are no easy answers to my questions. In addition, I don't think these questions can be answered in the abstract for anthropologists in general, or even for Maghribi anthropologists of the Maghrib whose trajectories, positionalities, and commitments are not homogenous or interchangeable. Rather, I think that differently positioned anthropologists will need to find different answers to these questions. The ruminations I offer here in other

16. Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

17. Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

words are deeply situated and partial ones, ones that I hope will contribute to a specifically and intentionally postcolonial anthropology of Morocco and of the Maghrib.

These questions and preoccupations are far from new. Thirty years ago, postcolonial anthropologists like David Scott asked similar epistemological questions. In "Locating the Anthropological Subject: Postcolonial Anthropologists in Other Places," he wondered if postcolonial anthropologists would be able to resist the imperative to direct their anthropological knowledge towards a better Western self-understanding and if they could amend the story that anthropology tells about itself.[18] Recognizing the disciplining effects and conscripting nature of Western academic training, as well as the unequal distribution of power, resources and legibility that remains entrenched within the field of anthropology, he wrote:

> "For if the hermeneutical movement of anthropological cognition is one in which the West is constituted as the locus of self-knowledge, how does the postcolonial anthropologist position her/himself in relation to it? Because, of course, the postcolonial presents us with a figure who has acceded to the languages of the West, to the sublime categories of its discourses, and even in this increasingly "post-national" world, to its cities and institutions. But not to its power or to its legend. How might this vitiate the postcolonial intellectual's engagement in the anthropological endeavour? Moreover, even with this assumption of languages, of cities, how profoundly do they displace other modalities of (postcolonial) identification? Those, for instance, that mark historical experience in the solidary representation of the "Third World."[19]

One way in which postcolonial anthropologists could endeavor towards decentering the West and decolonizing the field, he argued, was for them to focus on other postcolonial places: "One wonders whether there might not be a more engaging problematic to be encountered where the postcolonial intellectual from Papua New Guinea goes, not to Philadelphia but to Bombay or Kingston or Accra."[20] As a postcolonial anthropologist who has written about both Sri Lanka and Jamaica, South Asia and the Caribbean, this has certainly been one of the critical ways in which Scott's anthropological practice has moved away from centering a Western self-understanding and has foregrounded the epistemic potentialities of South-South intimacies and encounters. Other postcolonial scholars like the late Saba Mahmood

18. David Scott, "Locating the Anthropological Subject: Postcolonial Anthropologists in Other Places," *Inscriptions* 5, (1989): https://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/inscriptions/volume-5/david-scott/.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

have similarly highlighted the potentialities of decolonizing one's politics and subjectivity by doing anthropological research in another postcolonial location.[21] As a Pakistani anthropologist doing research among followers of the mosque movement in Cairo, Egypt, she not only disrupted the West/non-West binary that has historically structured the field, she also showed the capacious potentialities that can be opened up through cross-subjective engagement (secular and pious) and South-South (Pakistani and Egyptian) encounters.

But what if a postcolonial anthropologist wants to do research at home? Is it possible to use some of the tools and sensibilities of anthropology in a way that does not end up reproducing asymmetrical and colonial relations or conceptions of the field? What about postcolonial diasporic anthropologists based in the West? Can they carry out anthropological research in their communities of origin without re-inscribing all over again the notion that the West always knows best or simply using the knowledge and insights of Moroccan interlocutors in order to advance their own careers in the West? These are questions that preoccupy me a great deal and that in part explain my ambivalence to identify as more than a reluctant or accidental anthropologist. At the same time, I am interested in thinking about how I might build on and continue in the footsteps of postcolonial anthropologists, some of whom I mentioned earlier like Arturo Escobar, Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, David Scott, and Lila Abu-Lughod, who have used their anthropological knowledge to parochialize the West, render its universalizing assumptions strange, and decolonize their own subjectivities. Indeed, it is in their lineage and tradition of postcolonial anthropology that I recognize myself the most, and it is their work that inspires me to ask a different set of questions as a postcolonial anthropologist of Morocco.

In what follows, and without claiming to have reached satisfactory answers to these difficult and in many ways unresolvable questions, I describe how I have tried to decolonize my research and writing not by focusing on a postcolonial context different from my own, but by asking a different set of questions and becoming attuned to the complexities and paradoxes of postcolonial subjectivity. In addition to actively resisting the conscripting logics of the West that seek to incite non-Western subjects to reproduce notions of Western superiority, I argue that this orientation requires a willingness to take seemingly minor tropes, themes and narratives seriously on their own terms and to grapple with their unrecognized potentialities. It

21. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

also requires a refusal of the imperative to direct anthropological knowledge towards practices and ways of being that the West has deemed strange, crafting instead anthropological studies of Morocco that seek to intervene in Moroccan debates and knowledge production and to contribute towards their decolonization. By un-forgetting[22] tropes and narratives that challenge Western horizons of expectations, foregrounding traces that survive in the midst of and despite unrelenting projects of conscription, and at the same time asking questions about practices and ways of being feminist and secular in Morocco that are not seen in a modernist imaginary as necessitating an explanation, my project joins the work of scholars seeking to rethink the postcolonial/post-imperial condition and to imagine ourselves otherwise.[23]

In my own work, resisting the imperative to exceptionalize the patriarchal nature of the Arab and Muslim world has become central to my postcolonial anthropological feminist practice. For this reason, my research and writing have focused less on highlighting the sexism of Morocco (although I certainly don't shy away from critically writing about particular instances of it), an endeavor that risks essentializing and exceptionalizing

22. Gayle Wald, "Rosetta Tharpe and Feminist 'Un-forgetting,'" *Journal of Women's History* 21, 4 (Winter 2009): 157-60.

23. See for example Said, *Orientalism*; Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Zakia Salime, "The War on Terrorism: Appropriation and Subversion by Moroccan Women," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 33, 1 (2007): 1-24. Zakia Salime, *Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Zakia Salime, "A New Feminism? Gender Dynamics in Morocco's February 20 Movement," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, 5 (2012): 101-14; Asma Lamrabet, *Women in the Qur'an: An Emancipatory Reading* (Markfield: Square View, 2016); Amal Amireh, "Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26, 1 (2000): 215-49; Mohja Kahf, "Packaging Huda: Sha'rawi's Memoirs in the US Reading Environment‹" in *Going Global: The Transitional Reception of Third World Women Writers*, edited by Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj. New York: Garland, 2000. Mohja Kahf, "From Her Royal Body the Robe Was Removed: The Blessing of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East," in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, edited by Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire: Islam and the War of Terror," in *Women's Studies on the Edge*, edited by Joan Wallach Scott (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 81-114; Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Joseph Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015; Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Sima Shakhsari, *Politics of Rightful Killing: Civil Society, Gender, and Sexuality in Weblogistan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020); and Ronak K. Kapadia, *Insurgent Aesthetics: Security and the Queer Life of the Forever War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

what is in fact a universal structure of power, than on the ways in which the complexities of secular and leftist feminist politics and subjectivity challenge dominant assumptions about feminism in places like Morocco.[24] I highlight for example the ways in which the egalitarianism of traditional and pious father figures is invoked in the life history narratives of my leftist feminist interlocutors as having not only enabled but inspired their activism and commitments. Building on the work of Saba Mahmood (2005), I suggest that these invocations invite us to rethink our notions of feminist agency as resistance (to tradition, family, community, norms) and to better appreciate the continuities and internal support systems that were integral to making Moroccan feminism possible in the first place.

In addition, focusing my research on secular leftist feminist politics and subjectivity has been my way of resisting the notion that non-modern and non-secular ways of being require anthropological explanation while modernity and secularity are taken for granted as universal norms and normative goods. By writing about a generation of Moroccan feminists who embody many assumptions about modernity, progress, tradition, religion, the body, and feminism that are not only normalized but celebrated in dominant Western and progressive discourse, I hope to denaturalize assumptions and ways of being that are generally seen as not requiring an explanation. Rather than provide an anthropological account of "traditional" ways or of non-modern lives, I reflect on how leftist feminists are fashioned as particular kinds of modern subjects, on how they inhabit, discursively construct and sometimes problematize modernist constructions of "tradition." And instead of providing an anthropological analysis of the *ḥijāb* or of the Islamic Revival, I focus on leftist feminist aversion towards it in order to think about secular affect and the aporias of progressive politics. I therefore problematize the assumption that non-modern and non-secular practices need anthropological explanation while modern, progressive and secular ones require no more than description or celebration. By focusing on the paradoxes and aporias that are constitutive of modern and progressive subjectivities, my project seeks to participate in thinking about modernity in non-teleological ways by highlighting some of the tragic consequences that can accompany the search for its realization. In doing so, my work strives to participate in rethinking the historiography of postcolonial feminism in the Middle East/North Africa in ways that foreground the blind spots, paradoxes, sacrifices and missed opportunities that

24. For more details, see my "Feminist Blind Spots and the Affect of Secularity: Disorienting the Discourse of the Veil in Contemporary Morocco," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45, 3 (2020): 605-28.

are constitutive of it. This is also my way of refusing the dominant Western tendency to reduce knowledge about non-Western places like Morocco to something called culture, as if places like Morocco are governed by nothing more than cultural norms and traditions. I take my critique even further by focusing my work on secular leftist feminist conceptions of tradition, which I show to be burdened by colonial and Orientalist legacies that insist that tradition, culture and religion are major obstacles to rights and progress.

My work, in other words, uses anthropological tools and modes of inquiry (fieldwork, long-term research, ethnography, attention to the fabric of everyday life, etc.) not only to complicate Western representations and assumptions about the Middle East/North Africa and Islam, but also to participate in decolonizing Moroccan/Arab/Islamic feminist thought. Drawing on transnational feminist approaches, my work seeks to highlight the constitutive relationship between Western notions of superiority and civilizational discourses about non-Western Others. It also foregrounds the ways in which these discourses continue to mediate postcolonial subjectivities and politics in the present and to conscript postcolonial feminism to the disciplining and colonizing project of secular modernity. In doing so, my project aims to contribute to a feminist anthropology of leftist/progressive politics and of postcolonial secular modernity. My project also seeks to contribute to the anthropological study of contemporary Islam by focusing on internal debates about gender, feminism, religion and secularism within a Muslim-majority context. While recent studies on Islamic feminism and on pious and Islamist women have challenged *Western* feminist assumptions about the veil and about Muslim women's piety, my project draws on the insights of this rich literature to parochialize the politics of secular feminists in postcolonial Morocco. In doing so, my project is an attempt to think critically about the gender, sexual and feminist politics of secularism, and to contribute to an anthropology of secularism in the postcolonial Middle East/North Africa.

By using ethnography to provide a non-teleological account of feminism in Morocco and to highlight the blind spots of secular feminism, my hope is to contribute to the decolonization of the anthropology of Morocco. By embodying a different relationship to the field that does not reproduce assumptions of Western epistemological superiority or erase the colonial nature of the anthropological enterprise, and more importantly by asking a different set of questions about power, politics, subjectivity, feminism and secularism in postcolonial Morocco, I hope to trouble our understanding of what it means to be an anthropologist of Morocco or of the Maghrib. Like

the Algerian postcolonial critic Malek Alloula[25] who more than thirty years ago described his study of French colonial postcards of Algerian women as exorcizing his body/mind and returning the postcards to their senders, my anthropological work on Morocco seeks to render the traces of Western power and colonial modernity on our subjectivities and politics visible and strange rather than normative and familiar. While some might argue that this approach still centers the West in seeking to render its conscripting effects visible, my hope is that it nevertheless constitutes an epistemological re-orientation in centering a better postcolonial rather than Western self-understanding and in being attuned to the less told stories of and about feminism, but also anthropological research, in places like Morocco.

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25. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

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مواقف فترة الاستقلال: تحرير الأنثروبولوجيا المغربية من ربقة الاستعمار

ملخص: في هذا المقال، أصف الظروف العرضية للأحداث التي أسهمت في تحولي إلى باحثة أنثروبولوجية لا تشعر بتاتا بالراحة داخل هذا التخصص، ما عدا في هوامشه. ثم أحاول أن أوضح بعض الطرق التي حاولت من خلالها محو الصبغة الاستعمارية على صعيد ممارستي الأنثروبولوجية النسوية، وذلك باستخدام الإثنوغرافيا للكتابة بطريقة معاكسة للمفاهيم الغائية للحداثة والتفكير في مأساة الذاتية ما بعد الاستعمار، بدلاً من الإسهام في فهم الذات الغربية بشكل أفضل عبر اللقاء مع الآخر. ومن خلال القيام بذلك، أسعى إلى تعقيد القضايا التي تُروى عن أنثروبولوجيا المغرب بتحويل موضوعها الغربي المعياري إلى صورة مرئية، مع اقتراح طرق أحاول من خلالها إعادة توجيه المشروع الأنثروبولوجي بعيدًا عن المهمة الرامية إلى اعتبار الغرب أمرا مألوفًا. وآمل أيضًا دعوة الباحثين الأنثروبولوجيين من بيننا وأمثالهم في المغرب للشروع في سرد قضايانا بطرق تأخذ على محمل الجد خصوصية مواقعنا والآثار المعرفية لعلاقتنا (المتناقضة في كثير من الأحيان) مع الأنثروبولوجيا كمجال بحثي وعلمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أنثروبولوجيا التخلص من الاستعمار، أنثروبولوجيا ما بعد الاستعمار، أنثروبولوجية ما بعد الاستعمار النسوية، ما بعد الاستعمار، علماء الأنثروبولوجيا من المغرب وخارجه، إعادة التفكير في قصصنا الأصلية، العلمانية، النسوية، مأساة الحداثة، المغارب، المغرب.

Harmonisations postcoloniales: Décoloniser l'anthropologie du Maroc

Résumé: Dans cet essai, je décris les conjonctures contingentes d'événements qui ont contribué à mon devenir d'anthropologue qui ne se sent jamais tout à fait à l'aise au sein de la discipline, sauf dans ses marges. J'essaie ensuite d'articuler certaines des façons dont j'ai essayé de décoloniser ma pratique anthropologique féministe en utilisant l'ethnographie pour écrire contre les conceptions téléologiques de la modernité et pour réfléchir à la tragédie de la subjectivité postcoloniale plutôt que pour contribuer à une meilleure compréhension occidentale de soi. à travers une rencontre avec l'Autre. Ce faisant, mon objectif est de compliquer l'histoire qui est racontée sur l'anthropologie du Maghreb en rendant visible son sujet normatif occidental et en suggérant des façons de réorienter le projet anthropologique loin de la tâche de rendre l'étrange familier à l'Occident. Mon espoir est également d'inviter ceux d'entre nous qui sont des anthropologues à la fois du Maroc et du Maghreb à commencer à raconter nos propres histoires d'une manière qui prend au sérieux la spécificité de nos positionnalités et les implications épistémologiques de notre relation (souvent ambivalente) à l'anthropologie en tant que domaine.

Mots-clés: Anthropologie décolonisante, anthropologie postcoloniale, anthropologie féministe postcoloniale, postcolonialité, anthropologues marocains et spécialistes du Maroc, repenser nos histoires d'origine, laïcité, féminisme, tragédie de la modernité, Maghreb, Maroc.