

Fieldwork Insecurities: An (Israeli) Anthropologist in Morocco

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Abstract: Relying on my prolonged and ongoing fieldwork experiences in Morocco, as well as on my practice as an author of anthropologic texts, this paper discusses the ramifications of two contradicting anthropological discrepancies regarding the profession's (in)securities. On the one, fieldwork manifests insecurities in its actual *practice*. On the other hand, ethnographies produce *depictions* of the research as a well-crafted endeavor. I assert that the tensions resulting from these discrepancies are unsolvable; anthropologists oscillate between these two poles. Therefore, I use the fact that my own insecurities paralleled to those experienced by the people I studied (i.e., Moroccan Jews) to enable me to reflect on the tensions in real time by focusing on my interlocutors.

Keywords: Fieldwork, Ethnographic Insecurities, Casablanca, Jews, Israeli Anthropologist.

In this paper I discuss structural discrepancies between two anthropological predispositions, related to the profession's confidence. On the one, there are acute manifestations of insecurities in the *practice* of fieldwork. On the other hand, ethnographies are saturated with self-aggrandizing expressions that *depict* the research as a heroic endeavor. My discussion of these discrepancies unfolds while focusing on my own anthropological experience as an Israeli Moroccan conducting research in the city of Casablanca. I would like to assert that the tension constituted by these discrepancies are unsolvable and that anthropologists who experience it are bound to oscillate between its two poles. I will also demonstrate that in my particular case the tension was even augmented because I have experienced a wide range of insecurities that resembled to those experienced by the people I studied.

In the paper I therefore begin with a description of my very specific insecurities as an Israeli anthropologist in Morocco, then I link these insecurities in two separated contexts: (1) the anthropological profession, particularly its methodology (fieldwork) that contribute to a sense of insecurity, and (2) the parallels I drew between my experiences as an Israeli researcher and insecurities embedded in the lives of the Jews I studied in Casablanca. The combination of both contexts – the characteristics of the profession and

the those of the field – did not allow me an escape from a continuous sense of insecurity.

Personal Insecurities?

Let me open by a few disorganized, unarticulated scrawls excerpts from the first notes my field diary that clarify the emotional disposition I was in in the early stages of research:

July 11, 1990 (before the trip):

One of my most serious concerns in this journey is whether this project will at all succeed. Will the Moroccan authorities thwart – for bureaucratic, security reasons etc. – my goals? Will they let me in for an unlimited time? Will they return my passport in Spain?...

July 14, 1990 (one day after entry in Morocco):

Ok, that's it (...) we got in (...) The main feeling is one of fear, fear that comes from uncertainty, from the semi-legitimate feel of the study. One side of me says that the research is possible, and there is nothing to fear. My visa is not time limited. I could stay here all my life (...) on the other hand every time I have to present my visa I am in a state of anxiety. I feel comfortable on the street, where I am like any other tourist. It is precisely at the hotel where I feel threatened, I know they know (that I'm Israeli) and I know how easy it is for them to summon the authorities (...) During the flight my anxiety began to rise, and it increased as we got closer to Morocco. Before landing I noticed that on my blue bag the name "Jerusalem" was written in English and Hebrew. I found a good solution and held it upside down. A little (Moroccan) girl who was on the plane tried to guess where I was from. This added to my tension. Suddenly being Israeli is something that must be hidden...

As apparent from these disorganized notes above, the complex – sometimes troubled, always fluctuating – diplomatic relationships between Morocco and Israel were a critical context in which I operated during my long stay in Casablanca between July 1990 and September 1991. This political context evoked my concerns and raised my anxiety levels already during the formulating stage of my doctoral research proposal.¹ To be sure, these feelings were not only

1. For different (though not comprehensive) views on the nature and history of the diplomatic relationships between the two states see: Jacob Abadi, "The Road to the Israeli-Moroccan Rapprochement," *The Journal of North African Studies* 5, 1 (1): 27-54; M. Michael Laskier, "Israeli-Moroccan Relations and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1977-2002," *Israel Affairs* 10, 3 (2004): 41-73; Samuel Segev and Yvette Shumacher, "Israel-Morocco Relations from Hassan II to Muhammad VI," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 2 (2008): 49-60.

the fruit of a personal paranoia. Friends, colleagues, and even teachers have expressed their concerns about the plausibility of the research. The intensity of these expressions of worry increased exponentially as the date of departure got closer. Yet, in spite of these warnings, and although I was certain that I would be flooded with anxiety when approaching entry to Morocco, I was committed to accomplish my goal to conduct research amongst Jews in Casablanca. To be sure, my previous short trip (for my MA thesis) to Morocco had assuaged my concerns somewhat, making Morocco into a concrete, tangible, place. But unlike my early expectations, the fact that I was born in Casablanca did not sooth me. True, the opening of Morocco for Israelis of Moroccan origins marked the beginning of the healing of the wounds caused by the drastic separation in the 1950s and 1960s, but, apparently, healing was a long process.

Saying that, the short visit for my MA thesis *did* make a difference; during my short visit I have established relationships with a few Jews who later came for a visit in Israel prior my major fieldwork. When meeting them in Israel they reassured me; they promised to help me become acclimatized. One family in particular, whom I will call Elmakeyes,² was particularly supportive. They took care of me during the first months in Casablanca. They offered advice and assisted me with material that was much needs. The prosaic, mundane solution to problem they helped me to overcome encouraged me.

But, the period in which my fears somewhat subsided, did not last too long. Following difficult domestic political events and violent global developments that had their effect on Moroccan politics, the sense of calm evaporated and in its place a gnawing anxiety returned. Indeed, not only the bilateral relationships between Morocco and Israel had an effect on my research; the historical moments in which I entered Morocco was critical. It was a few days after my arrival, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and following this invasion a war against Iraq was looming.³ These events in and of themselves, and their implications for the internal Moroccan political scene, strengthened my sense of fear and anxiety.

Heroic Anthropologists

The feelings of personal distress that found their way to my field diary are not uncommon in anthropological writings about a research experience. I am referring not only to personal field notes but also mainly to published

2. As usual in anthropology, the names were altered although they kept their cultural flavor (i.e., French, Arabic, Amazigh, or Hebraic).

3. On political tensions during that period of time in Morocco see, for example, Henry Munson, *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).

ethnographies. Ethnographic report of feeling threatened, detached, dependent, loosing grounds, and transient as well as other hardships has become almost decorum in anthropology, to the point where it signifies somewhat a classic genre. Numerous anthropologists describe the period in which they conducted their fieldwork as a time full of hardships and obstacles which threatened to jeopardize their life's work and at times (although rarely) even their very lives. Ethnographies representing these themes frame anthropological research as a dangerous and heroic journey. This construction of the research period is not new; it continues an anthropological genre that began in the early days of the discipline. In fact, this writing style – this genre of anthropology as an adventurous and risky journey – began even before the institutionalization of anthropology as a field of academic knowledge. This genre glorified the researcher and his work by his being located in a dangerous, extremely confusing, and hostile environment. To be sure, it was almost always “his” dangerous journey, not “hers.” In these self-portraits, the anthropologist is seen as a gallant, lonely knight, who endangers his life for the sake of obtaining precious cultural knowledge for his Western readers. And by the very fact that their stories were published it is evident that the quest for the Holy Grail is a triumphant one.

This genre has been criticized by a variety of anthropologists. Note, for instance, how Clifford Geertz decries this type of story formulation by the acclaimed Claude Levi-Strauss. Geertz, himself a key figure in modern anthropology, refers to Levi-Strauss's monumental book *Tristes Tropiques*:

In the first place, it is, of course, and despite the ironic and self-reflexive denial of the famous opening passage, a travel book in a very recognizable genre. I went here, I went there; I saw this strange thing and that; I was amazed, bored, excited, disappointed; I got boils on my behind, and once, in the Amazon (...) – all with the implicit undermessage: Don't you wish you had been there with me or could do the same?"⁴

Partly, the epic roots of this writing are ingrained in form of the signifier of anthropological research itself: fieldwork.

Fieldwork and the Construction of Insecurities

Since Bronislaw Malinowski, the researcher who is credited with founding of fieldwork as the principal anthropological methodology, a prolonged “participation-observation” has become the ultimate test of joining

4. Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 33-34.

the professional guild. It became a rite of passage, says the cliché; a cliché that has more than a grain of truth. No wonder, that when I returned from my short fieldwork in Morocco, one of my supervisors called me “Hajj André.” In a way, it was a proper title as my initiation rite into the anthropological tribe occurred in a Muslim country. Moreover, like a mythical anthropological fieldwork, it involved a sense of novelty: I was the first anthropologist coming of a Israeli university to conduct research outside Israel, let alone in an Arab or Muslim country.

As part of Malinowski’s legacy, a tone for mental and physical difficulties was set as inherent in doing research. One of the most famous passages in anthropology illustrates this well:

“Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight.”⁵

Imagine, insinuates Malinowski, how secluded I was, how miserable, isolated, lonely, marching toward the unknown, the wild, and the dangerous, without any contact to European civilization. Following Malinowski’s death, his wife published his personal diaries, and these exposed personal revelations that he probably had no intention of publishing. In these journals he continuously expresses his dissatisfaction with the “natives.” Likewise, he describes loneliness, hardship, frustration, diseases which attack him morning and evening, and a physical and mental weakness that troubled him greatly. Of course, there is no need to seek evidence in diaries that were not intended for the public eye and therefore do not represent the public face of anthropology. It is enough to carefully read the above quote, designed for the readers, to entice them to join him in their imaginations on his wonderful journey to the Trobriand Islands. His methodological writings indicate that loneliness is at the heart of anthropological practice.

Intrinsic to Malinowski’s is a demand for a painful break away from familiar surroundings. Moreover, it is also crucial to maintain a reasonable distance, both spatial and emotional, from the “natives.” Without addressing the many problematic political facets implied in these recommendations, I wish to point out only that the isolation of the researcher is painted in heroic shades. This model of research reveals the foundation upon which anthropological genre was established and that was outlined by the ancestors of anthropology: the voyagers, adventurers, missionaries, and the other colonial delegates of

5. Bronislaw Malinowski, “Introduction: The Subject, Methods and Scope of This Inquiry,” in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), 4.

Europe and the “New World” in the “Third World” colonies. Heroism was given a variety of shapes and forms in anthropological reporting: a heroic journey to the unknown, a unique/first encounter with strange cultures, the surprise encounter with unexpected experiences, and so on, all of which find their way in modern tourism. One particularly popular form of this genre was the dangerous adventure or the singular encounter with the authentic “natives.”

Danger in the Field

Renato Rosaldo, a critical postcolonial and postmodern anthropologist,⁶ was influenced in his early studies by the genre of danger. In the opening of one of his earlier books, *Ilongot Headhunting*, he relates the history of the researcher that preceded him in studying this Philippines group (Rosaldo 1980). That very researcher, Rosaldo recounts, behaved in an inappropriate manner (according local standards) toward members of the Ilongot, which resulted in his beheading. The nonchalant and minimalist tone Rosaldo employs to report this unfortunate event frames his own research as heroic; he who was in the lion’s mouth succeeded in escaping in peace.⁷ This is, of course, a somewhat dramatic example.⁸ However, there are countless literary examples that are even more banal than this one; examples which insinuate great dangers, often casually inserted in the ethnographic text.

In spite of the popularity of this genre, Geertz is not among the followers of the danger genre; note the condescending tone when he presents Levi-Strauss’s (as well as other anthropologists’) writings:

“The anthropologist, as here, venturing where lesser souls – his café intellectuals in Paris; the orchid-elite of French-Quarter São Paulo (...) – dare not go, and penetrating forms of existence they can only read about (...).”⁹

Geertz himself, is very meager in relating to his own fieldwork. In one of the few mentioning of his own work he seems to ridicule himself:

6. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1989).

7. I do not relate here to other implications of Rosaldo’s account; for instance, the fact that his head was not separated from his body during the research means that he knew to behave according local cultural codes and therefore he has manifested a deep cultural knowledge of the *illongot*. For that, we should trust his monograph. See Renato Rosaldo, *Ilongot Headhunting, 1883-1974: A Study in Society and History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980).

8. Note that my interpretation shows no favor toward Rosaldo, since he abandoned the modernist perspective that characterized his very book. See, Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*.

9. Geertz, *Works and Lives*, 36-37

“(...) except for our landlord and the village chief, whose cousin and brother-in-law he was, everyone ignored us in a way only a Balinese can do. As we wandered around, uncertain, wistful, eager to please, people seemed to look right through us with a gaze focused several yards behind us on some more actual stone or tree. Almost nobody greeted us; but nobody scowled or said anything unpleasant to us either, which would have been almost as satisfactory.”¹⁰

Put it simply, this genre demonstrates an Orientalist predisposition towards the people under study.¹¹

My Succumbing to the Melodramatic Genre

My full awareness to the colonial roots of the anthropological oeuvre, including its representation as a dangerous endeavor, did not help me overcome the feeling that my journey was indeed full of perils. Against my will, I found myself joining the tradition of the tormented journey. My notes from my research period in Morocco support the classic heroic story. I couldn't put aside the fact that my research was conducted in a country which had no formal diplomatic relationships with Israel, and the reason for that formal state of things was due the latter's involvement in bloody wars against Arab countries. The complex historical circumstances which I found myself in, during my prolonged fieldwork period did not help either to my sense of personal security, as they set into motion a series of dramatic political events, both internationally and domestically.¹² Already after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, just a few days after my arrival in Morocco, I began to feel anguished. A long series of both small – and large-scale events seemed to place a threat on the existence of my study. Thus, I found myself in an emotional state that every knock at the door, every policeman on the street, or any unexpected gesture of a bureaucrat seemed a direct threat to my stay in Morocco. Although these events, on themselves, were totally indifferent to myself or my project, I could not shake the feeling that they posed a threat to me, or at least to my research. Indeed, there were moments when I confused the two. As this was the state of things, I will try to keep the presentation of the following hardships of my research to a minimum, while still maintaining my ethnographic faithfulness.

10. Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 412.

11. Edward Said, “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors,” *Critical Inquiry* 15, 2 (1989): 205-25

12. Henry Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

Partly, my inability to overcome the sense of insecurity, resulted from some characteristics of the anthropological research methods; these were added to the sense of vulnerability; I refer to a professional insecurity. In itself, anthropological seclusion brings with it to the writing a sense of acute insecurity. Let me explain: anthropologists must be in situ, in order to capture ephemeral life moments. Life moments that are not witnessed by the anthropologist are doomed to evaporate and moments that are documented are mediated through the personal writing of the anthropologist cum witness. Indeed, anthropologists try desperately to hold onto them and to “inscribe” them into the written word (compare: Clifford 1990). The anthropological work is therefore in chronic need of trust in its author. Without getting into a detail analysis I will only say that in order to gain this trust on the part of the readers, anthropologists employ a variety of literary techniques that strengthen this confidence. Except for the subjects of study, toward whom the anthropologist turns his/her back when pondering her/his theories, there is no one to witness those ephemeral moments. Thus, until quite recently (that is, before the widespread use of internet), the anthropologist was in a state of seclusion in foreign lands, cut off from his familiar surroundings. Within this demand, the seeds of feelings such as fear and anxiety were planted. To be sure, this style of a “working” anthropological study has deep historical roots in western European culture. Structurally, it can be paralleled to the style of grand voyagers and their stories which were published as adventure books. This modern form of storytelling preceded even the colonial project, in its type of discussion about places coined as “foreign,” “mysterious,” “incomprehensible,” and at times “dangerous.” These places were the objective of European adventurers as well as of their structural successors, the anthropologists. They, who glorified (and overstated) the cultural difference, reinforced perceptions about those same distant places that embody the ultimate “other.” One may presume that in this way they cemented their credibility as anthropologists. The more dangerous it was, the less the culture was understood and the more exotic, so the anthropologist was more credible. This process resulted from the anthropologists’ desire to put themselves midway between the culture, incomprehensible to the European reader, and the natives. Thus, they acquired the status of trusted cultural interpreters and overcame the lack of confidence in their unsupervised reports, while all the time paying the price of loneliness and fear while creating the heroism of the “secluded knight.” Anthropological tradition was not the only player participating in the construction of ethnographic texts combining fear and heroism.

The broader political context has also been significant in understanding the genre of anthropological heroism. Here I will refer only to nation-state countries, which constitute not only the continuous context for the anthropologist's work. The fact that nation-states have a central role, if not an exclusive one, in determining the exclusion and inclusion boundaries of national belonging has significant implications for the ethnographic genre and for anthropological practice. Anthropologists who strive for purposes of tradition and professional correctness to abstain from "fieldwork-at-home" need by definition to cross national-political borders. Simply put, they need a passport. This commodity is awarded only by nation-state officials, except that in the postcolonial period this bureaucratic fact became a crucial one for anthropologists. High-ranking officials in postcolonial countries are reluctant to allow anthropological research in their countries – a memory of the close connection that existed between colonialism and anthropologists.

In some places there is a tangible aversion to anthropologists. Thus, the ability to avoid doing fieldwork at home constitutes a significant currency in the anthropological community. In the case of my particular study, this difficulty was doubled and tripled due to Morocco's being a Muslim country whose cultural and political predisposition is basically Arab. Thus, I found myself joining that very same genre where the actual research was in itself an achievement. Despite the temptation, I will avoid referring systematically and in depth to this matter. It is enough that I unconditionally surrendered to the writing style of the voyager. Consequently, I will only say that throughout the months of research, I was totally disconnected from events taking place in Israel. It is hard to imagine this nowadays, but at the time there were no accessible internet connections (no e-mail, no Facebook...) and due to the absence of formal diplomatic relations, it was impossible to phone directly to Israel, or to send letters. From time to time I sent various materials to Israel through friends in Germany and every so often the occasional visitor came from Israel with greetings from friends and acquaintances. In retrospect, I can state that the feelings of threat and the thoughts that I was being followed bordered on self-centered paranoia. As with any paranoid thought, there was some truth to it and a core of egocentricity. The distance, the time that passed, and the pleasant coolness of my work room made this clear to me.

Beyond the Discipline: The Specific Context:

The tradition of anthropological writing was not the only to hold accountable for this existential experience in the field. Some specific, local occurrences were involved in my research difficulties. It is unavoidable to

present these research difficulties as they contribute to my main goal: the understanding of those whom I have originally aimed to understand – the Jews of Casablanca. Examining the intersection between anthropological methods and the field, a surprising structural parallel between my experience of vulnerability and one of the most basic experiences of Jews in Morocco: contraction. Briefly, contraction refers in my broad work to an introvert inclination of the Jews, an effort made to avoid whenever possible, an encounter with Muslims. Contraction is accompanied by a sense of vulnerability and at the same time is also the cause of it. One could say that, as a researcher, I was experiencing the same processes of contraction. I too, chose an introvert style of research, a style made to avoid whenever possible, negative encounters with Jews.

In the eyes of most Jews, any event that *seemed* to have the slightest chance of toppling the government in Morocco (and specially to threaten the royal family) was considered as a concrete and palpable danger to the Jews. During the first stages of my research, I didn't understand this relationship whereby political internal-Moroccan, regional, or global events were perceived as a direct threat. I was especially surprised considering the tiny size of the Moroccan Jewish community, in relation to Casablanca less than one-tenth of 1 percent. Just as I had clear signs which confirmed the sense of danger which I found myself in as a researcher, so too the Jews had clear signs that supported their egocentric perception that they were relevant, even central to public life in Morocco. Many were the Jews that were confident that there were those who plotted their downfall. Like paranoids, they felt the center of (negative) attention.

“Even paranoiacs have real enemies,” goes the saying. What were, then, the signs that reinforced the sense of centrality among the Jews? In what follows I will present a few of them.

Often senior Muslim bureaucrats take part in many community activities, even those of minor nature, and thereby confirming that the Jews are a priority. Indeed, government officials come every year to the central *Lag Ba'Omer ziyāra* to bless the Jews. The most senior officials came to the central synagogue, Beit El, to bless the congregation on major Jewish holidays like *Yom Kippur*. “They give honor to the Torah,” said one of the oldest representatives of Chabad in Morocco upon seeing the heavy police escort ensuring the security of a few tens of elderly Jews who made a pilgrimage to the grave of Rabbi Raphael Anqawa in the city of Sale. But one particular event in Casablanca clarifies how Jews mislead to think that they were central

to life in Morocco. One night, when a celebration took place in honor of the presentation of the OSE (*œuvre de secours aux enfants*) budget. The OSE is an institution that functions as a health center for Jews who are unable to afford private health care. This was an event that many of the city's Jews were not even aware of, yet when I arrived at the event, I came across a convoy of official cars outside the OSE. Security guards were everywhere. Disorder and confusion prevailed due to the mayor of Casablanca's participation in this event. To me his participation seemed quite unusual since this was a very marginal event, even for the community whose size, in comparison to the rest of the city, was tiny. The mayor of a major city of about 3 million people came to an event of an institution that served less than three thousand Jews, just 0.1 percent of the population. The mayor sat respectfully in the first row, showing a clear interest in the questions that came up from the budget presentation. He asked, for example, about the number of free dental fillings that were granted to poor Jews last year. His questions merited serious, to-the-point answers. Later there was a fundraising appeal, and the mayor contributed a handsome sum to the institution. His donation was received with enthusiastic applause. Beside the mayor sat his son, a young man of about twelve or thirteen, dressed as a boy his age in jeans, a t-shirt, and sneakers. At the end of the budget presentation participants were invited to go upstairs to the top floor and to partake of the rich buffet. Before they began eating, one of the city's important rabbis said a "Prayer for the Kingdom," a prayer usually said outside of the Land of Israel, wishing success to the leader of a country and asking God to protect him. The prayer was said this time with much intent and meaning for fear of the political developments that seemingly threatened the king. The mayor covered his head with a napkin and put his hand over his son's head. He was well acquainted with the prayer and knew when to respond "Amen." He, like the other guests, participated in the prayer with great devotion. After the prayer, the rabbi invited the guests to eat while reminding them not to forget to say the various blessings over the food. The mayor intervened and asked why the rabbi skipped the "Prayer for Welfare," which is the prayer for the welfare of the congregants. The rabbi smiled with pleasure and willingly obliged. Here too, the mayor covered his and his son's head, and knew when to answer "Amen." When this was completed and the participants lingered around the full table, the mayor turned to the rabbi and requested that he bless his son. The rabbi laid his hands on the young man's head; the latter bowed his head and closed his eyes with devotion. The rabbi blessed the young man, while his father, the mayor, repeatedly answered "Amen."

One can (and probably should) suggest instrumental explanations for such acts. Indeed, political scientists like Mark Tessler provide “rational” explanations for such governmental conduct.¹³ Some of these explanations put Moroccan politics in a rather negative light, as if it adopts a version of “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” In other words, because the Jews supposedly control Capitol Hill, and because these Jews are Israel’s proxies there, it would be wise to please them and to treat them with kid gloves. Thus, Morocco’s interests in the United States will receive a fitting response. There may be a grain of truth to these interpretations. However, it seems to me that they don’t provide a satisfactory understanding to the incidents described above. There are a large range of behaviors that might be considered appropriate and fair toward the Jewish minority in Casablanca; there was no need for the mayor to ask for the blessing of the rabbi. As stated, Moroccan Jews emphasize the fact that these events were not the norm; the attitude toward these events was dramatic and demands an explanation. Explanations seek to establish a fundamental truth about the cultural proximity “of two thousand years that was established between Jews and Muslims,” states Moshe Elmakayes, one of the central figures in a Jewish club. It is therefore not surprising that the episode with the mayor during the budget presentation elicited many explanations, all of which shared one theme: a common Jewish and Muslim history. After one of the participants expressed astonishment as to the behavior of the mayor, he added: “He was the mayor of Essawira.” This was his way of arguing that because this city was known for its prominent Jewish community,¹⁴ the mayor felt a strong closeness to Jews; he was familiar with their ways and respected them. Similar explanations of deep cultural affection were also expressed in regard to King Hassan II. Daniel Dadon, a community member about forty years old, offered an explanation of the king’s affection for Jews when speaking about the crown prince. Like many Jews, what bothered him were the facial features of the crown prince. The latter, unlike his father, has a “Negroid look.” In his racist language he wanted to express his worry that the son was not educated on the knees of Arab tradition in a love toward Jews. “I don’t know who his mother is,” he told me. When he realized I did not understand what he meant he added: “You know the King has a lot of wives (...) but the King loves us very much, and I’m sure he teaches his son how to behave towards us.” “The King loves us very much, do you know why?” he then asked and drew close to me, as if to tell me a secret. “It is because when he was a baby, when he was just born, his mother was unable to nurse him, and they took a Jewish wet nurse.

13. Laskier, “Israeli-Moroccan Relations and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1977-2002.”

14. Daniel Schroeter, *Merchants of Essaouira: Urban Society and Imperialism in Southwestern Morocco, 1844-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

So, the first food that ever entered our King's mouth was from the breasts of a Jewish woman. When her milk entered into his body, the Jews entered into his bloodstream!" The Jews acted as though they were central players in life in Morocco. Many claimed that they worked *aux palais* (at the palace). This feeling of centrality explains why King Hassan II's speeches in Arabic on the national television station were received by the Jews with severe criticism: "It is common knowledge that we speak French." The Jews saw themselves at the heart of Moroccan existence and entitled to the kingdom's protection; this of course, entailed a relationship of dependency. Some might even suggest that this dependency was dictated by the Jews' attitude. As such, Jewish life depended on the stability of the regime. During the first Gulf War this dependency had a particularly painful reminder. Many Jews feared that they were leaning on a bruised reed; it seemed to them that the government's stability was being quickly undermined by the king's complex attitude toward the war. On one hand, the king supported the Allied forces against Iraq, and he even sent troops to fight the invaders of Kuwait. On the other hand, the king held his task forces back from removing Iraqi forces from Kuwait and did not approve the entry of his troops into Iraq's borders. At the same time that he sent troops to Kuwait, the king saw to it that his daughter led a delegation of the Red Crescent, which collected medicines and blood for wounded Iraqi soldiers. This complex position demanded frequent explanations; and it seemed that the king was compelled to appear again and again on television in order to explain them. For many Jews, this necessity was a sign of the weakening of the regime. Indeed, many of the leaders of the Jewish community decided to leave Morocco until the storm passed. Many of the senior Jewish officials left, some for a defined period of time, until the danger passed, and some never to return. Precisely at this time, when the crisis was at its peak, as far as Jews were concerned, their sense of centrality was reinforced.

During the war, I too felt vulnerable and exposed. A feeling of uncertainty hung over me throughout the entire research period. Mostly, I worried that I would not be able to stay the entire time period I had planned for the research program. Unlike many Jews, I did not want to leave Morocco, for two reasons. The first was purely technical: I worried that because of my long stay in Morocco and the ambiguous policy regarding it, I would not be permitted to re-enter and complete my study. The second reason was essential to the research: I saw this time as a fascinating historic moment that would teach me a lot about the Jews of Morocco. Many of the Jews in Morocco did not agree with this assessment. For example, Richard Balili argued with me

quietly that the study had absolutely no validity since it did not reflect routine times. Either way, a sense of unease and insecurity in being able to implement the research study enveloped me with varying degrees of intensity, all the time. These feelings were fostered by a number of events: first and foremost was the war which was taking place far away, in the Gulf. Furthermore, in the time leading up to the war, there were several violent events, some on an economic plane, which undermined the sense of both personal and communal security. During this period, the leaders of the Jewish community gathered the Jews in clubs and instructed them on how to behave. The main directive was “Do not raise your head,” “Do not get into confrontations with Arabs, even if you are not guilty,” and so on. These guidelines wounded the pride of some Jews, particularly the young men, but they were compelled to swallow the bitter pill and obey. Indeed, except for a rumor, for which I could not find any foundation, of an elderly Jewish woman who was murdered by her housekeeper (interpreted as a sign of the rising tensions), there was no physical harm to the Jews.

Saying that, a few Jews received threatening letters: there was, for example, a portrait of Saddam Hussein known as “the dangerous murderer” and on the other side of the page was written “Jews Go Home.” These letters were given to the police for examination. Some Jews speculated that the Israeli *Mossad* was behind these actions, seeking to arouse panic among Jews in order that they would immigrate to Israel.

Due to my sense of insecurity during the war I took extra precautions and wrote my journal in duplicate, one copy I sent to Israel in parts via a third party. For a time, I disguised the names of people in my field diary. In retrospect, I humbly realize that, like the Jews, I was not important enough to bother anyone. But the sense of distress at the time was quite real and only dissipated upon my arrival in Israel.

My understanding of the parallels between my own distress and insecurities to those of the Jews in Casablanca was not in retrospect but in “real time.” It took me only a short time to grasp these parallels. Most importantly, the distress had a productive humbling effect; it forced me to be constantly attentive to what Jews were trying to say about their lives.

Complex Returns Home (Instead of a Conclusion)

At the completion of the research study I traveled to Ashdod to visit my mother, with whom I had had no connection throughout the entire period. She was interested in the technical aspects relating to the time I spent in Morocco. She expressed concern about the financing of the research, the weather, and

so on. One of the first questions on which she lingered for a long time had to do with my living arrangements. I told her about my troubles in finding an apartment to rent in Casablanca and how I finally received help. She asked where I had lived and was not content with a general description of the area, but wanted to know an exact address. While my mother was asking for exact details of where I lived, I tried considering possible explanations for her overactive curiosity. I knew where we had lived before (rue de Longwy, nowadays rue Saad Ben Abbi Ouakas), and I also knew that in my mother's youth she had lived in a newly built area next to the *mellāḥ* (the Jewish quarter or neighborhood) of Casablanca.¹⁵ The Jews gradually left the boundaries of the *mellāḥ* during the increased influence of French colonialism. In Casablanca Jews first left to adjacent houses, in order to be close to relatives who remained within the walls. My mother's family was apparently among the first to leave the *mellāḥ* in Casablanca in the early twentieth century. Later, my grandfather on my maternal side moved from that neighborhood to a "more modern" area next to the ocean, in *l'habitat* quarter. I suspect that the move to this neighborhood was not motivated by the comfort level of the residence, but mainly due to its proximity to the ocean, as my grandfather was an enthusiastic amateur fisherman. Therefore, I knew that my mother spent most of her childhood years outside the *mellāḥ*, first in close proximity to it and afterward next to the ocean. Later, after she married my father, she lived in a "Christian" neighborhood (the Europeans were called *Nṣārā*, Christians). Therefore, the possibility of something dramatic that would be unknown to me, relating to where I lived during my year of research, in the neighborhood where I grew up, or close to where my mother lived, didn't seem like a real possibility. My father lived in his youth in Marrakech. I pushed these thoughts out of my mind and continued answering her inquisitive questions. When I mentioned the name of the street, rue Eléonore Fournier (now rue Ahmed Akrad) – she insisted on knowing the number of the building. At this point my curiosity grew. My mother continued: What was the number? When I told her the number, she asked with some satisfaction: "Was there anything across the street, any interesting institution?" I thought she was referring to one of the Jewish institutions that was right next to where I had lived, the *Ittiḥād* (*Alliance Israélite Universelle*), or maybe the *Cinéma L'arc*, a movie theatre just a few steps away from the apartment on *Eléonore Fournier*. It was

15. Generally, in large cities the *mellāḥ* was walled and it had a large gate which was closed at night, while in small towns and villages it was usually a Jewish neighborhood, without walls (see, for example, Emily Gottreich, *The Mellah of Marrakesh: Jewish and Muslim Space in Morocco's Red City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Susan Miller, "Un *mellāḥ* désenclavé: l'espace juif dans une ville marocaine Tanger, 1860-1912," in *Relations judéo-musulmanes au Maroc: Perceptions et réalités* ed., Michel Abitbol (Paris: C.R.J.M., 1997), 123-47.

a movie theatre where they showed French and Hollywood movies when she was young. “No” she firmly replied. “I don’t mean around the corner. I mean opposite, on the other side of the street (...).” After a moment’s hesitation I answered: “There was some institution, but I never asked about it. From the colors of the inside walls that I could see from my window, I think it was a clinic (...).” “Yes!” confirmed my mother, “that was the clinic where you were born!”

What appeared as a rare fateful coincidence – gave me closure and closed upon me the area where I was actually born – touched, if even indirectly, on a wide if somewhat tiresome issue in anthropology of the late twentieth century: the native anthropologist and fieldwork at home.

But, how am I to think about a home during that period of time that for me was saturated with a sense of insecurity?

To be sure, there are no final closures. Since that period of time new circles were opened and others were closed or left behind. The sense of insecurity, for one, totally vanished. Instead new promising circles were opened. Surely, the publication of this article in a Moroccan professional journal closes one more circle and opens a new one; one filled with hope.

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انعدام الأمن في العمل الميداني: عالم أنثروبولوجيا (إسرائيلي) في المغرب

ملخص: بالاعتماد على خبراتي الطويلة والمستمرة في العمل الميداني في المغرب، وكذلك على ممارستي كمؤلف للنصوص الأنثروبولوجية، تناقش هذه الورقة تداعيات اثنين من المفارقات الأنثروبولوجية المتناقضة فيما يتعلق بالمصاعب الأمنية ذات الصلة بالممارسة المهنية للتخصص. ومن ناحية أولى، يظهر العمل الميداني عدم الأمان في ممارسته الفعلية. وأما من ناحية أخرى، تنتج الإثنوغرافيا صوراً للبحث كمحاولة جيدة الصنع. وأؤكد أن التوترات الناتجة عن هذه التناقضات لا يمكن حلها، إذ يتأرجح علماء الأنثروبولوجيا بين هذين القطبين. ولذلك، أتبنى حقيقة مفادها أن حالات انعدام الأمن لدي توازي تلك التي عانى منها الأشخاص الذين درستهم (أي اليهود المغاربة) لتمكيني من التفكير في التوترات إبان زمنها الفعلي من خلال التركيز على محوري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: عمل ميداني، انعدام الأمن الإثنوغرافي، الدار البيضاء، يهود، عالم أنثروبولوجي إسرائيلي.

Insécurité sur le terrain: Un anthropologue (israélien) au Maroc

Résumé: S'appuyant sur mes expériences de terrain prolongées et continues au Maroc, ainsi que sur ma pratique en tant qu'auteur de textes anthropologiques, cet article discute des ramifications de deux divergences anthropologiques contradictoires concernant les (in) sécurités de la profession. D'une part, le travail de terrain manifeste des insécurités dans sa pratique réelle. D'un autre côté, les ethnographies produisent des représentations de la recherche comme une entreprise bien conçue. J'affirme que les tensions résultant de ces divergences sont insolubles; les anthropologues oscillent entre ces deux pôles. Par conséquent, j'utilise le fait que mes propres insécurités se rapprochent de celles vécues par les personnes que j'ai étudiées (c'est-à-dire les juifs marocains) pour me permettre de réfléchir aux tensions en temps réel en me concentrant sur mes interlocuteurs.

Mots-clés: Travail de terrain, insécurité ethnographiques, Casablanca, juifs, anthropologue israélien.