

“How Life is Hard: Visceral Notes on Meaning and Order”
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Abstract

This essay explores Clifford Geertz’s injunction to attend to the “hard surfaces of life” in cultural analysis, and the importance of how such surfaces are experienced, how they feel, in conveying their significance. Reflecting on his personal experiences in Morocco, the author examines how the corporal concerns of the researcher relate to the material dilemmas recognized among his Moroccan interlocutors, and how these change over time. The article concludes that anthropologists have tended to outline a disembodied “culture” at the expense of “hard surfaces,” and that scholars have had special difficulty expressing visceral understandings, especially of being poor in Morocco.

Introduction

In one of the most influential essays in the history of anthropology Clifford Geertz wrote that “The danger that cultural analysis... will lose touch with the hard surfaces of life –with the political, economic, stratificatory realities within which [people] are everywhere contained –is an ever-present one. The only defense against it, and against, thus, turning cultural analysis into a kind of sociological aestheticism, is to train such analysis on such realities and such necessities in the first place” (1973:30). The ethnographic vignette included with this admonition involved rural Berber tribesmen, a Jewish peddler, and a bumbling Protectorate that came nowhere close to appreciating the “thickness” involved in this multiple murder and robbery, and the transaction of sheep that followed. The French, it seems, could see only twitches while the Moroccans were winking at winks.

Rural Morocco has no shortage of hard surfaces, thus no shortage of opportunities to focus cultural analysis on them. The word for “hard” (*ishqa* in Tashelhit) is a somber refrain and key explanatory framework in formal interviews and everyday conversation in the mountains south of Marrakech, where I work. People are “hard” when they are ruthless or unkind; steep trails, drought, and cold winters are hard; the government can be hard. Most centrally, people tell me, life is hard. *How* life is hard is not a purely existential question, however. It is not something that is stable through individual lives or broader history, nor can it be neatly summarized by an algebra of lack (“poverty”) or division of labor (“patriarchy”).

What is clear is that hardness is something experienced, something *felt* more than seen. Anthropology has been much better at unveiling concepts than sensation, and attempts to illuminate sentiment or suffering generally devolve into ideas about them. We are intellectuals, after all, and our tendency has been to engage the intellects of our interlocutors far more than their bodies. The fact that we think of these as separate is telling in itself, and there is a hierarchy to the terms. Descartes suggests that he “is” *because* he thinks, and Paul Rabinow begins his “Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco,”

a watershed text about the experience of fieldwork, with comments about the books he had recently been reading (Thomas Kuhn and Levi Strauss, it turns out). The whole point of “Reflections,” Rabinow tells us in the 30th year anniversary addition, was to “retell Hegel’s chapter on sensory experience,” but despite this ambition the attempt to “situate” ethnography never quite situates it in bodies.

To get at the hard surfaces of life in rural Morocco requires attention to bodies, their corporality and transformation. What Searle calls the “first person ontology” of consciousness is in this case consciousness of poverty: heat, cold, and drudgery, the exigencies of lack (of things you need) or excess (of things you don’t). Such experience is undertaken by integrated mindful bodies / embodied minds. But human bodies are inextricably social, too, and some attention is due to the way suffering bodies are built through, and incorporated into, larger social bodies. Our own bodies can be obstacles (they drive us to do things, they crave, they fail) and vehicles for (more elevated?) desires. Likewise social bodies—households, families, even the State—can simultaneously function as the means of dealing with the difficulties of everyday life and be “stratificatory realities” in themselves. Patriarchy can hurt like dentistry without anesthetic, and for some Moroccans the inability to find work, marry, and have children is a sharp, enervating starvation. The complexly hard world in which and through which Moroccans make their lives demands *cultural* analysis because no human body is merely a body, and no idea every came from anywhere else.

Key to analysis of hard surfaces, then, is an explanation of how we feel (and thus feel for others), and key to this is providing some record of how we bring our fleshy selves to the ethnographic encounter. How each of us is calibrated as an anthropologist (and before that, as a person) has much to do with what we are able to measure, how we interpret, what we can grasp. There has been a great deal of work on how social position impacts what we *see*, how social relations of domination provide us with perspective, a place from which to see. The visual metaphor is revealing, and it has allowed anthropology to remain scientifically sanitary, observant of but not part of the travails of our subjects. But precept, affect, and concept live together in growing (and thus suffering, dying) persons. Our individual incorporation (our being-in-a-body that is constituted through a social body) has much to do with how we learn to feel, and thus how we come to empathize.

The following essay mostly involves reflection (impressions, sensations, visceral understandings) from nearly two decades of moving through Morocco, two decades during which Morocco and I have changed. This venture is obviously inspired by Rabinow’s “Reflections on Fieldwork,” but I intend to extend the ethnographic moment and try to show my own objectifying body as a process, too. Through slow moving change (of myself and the Moroccans who teach me) I hope to focus attention on the enduringly hard surfaces I have found in North Africa, surfaces Geertz long ago suggested might save philosophically informed ethnography from “sociological aestheticism.”

The First Time

I arrived in North Africa via Marrakech in 1988, alone with \$150 and no credit card. I landed in the dark and made the quick trip downtown apprehensive and silent. I

gave the address of some place right on the square, the old CTM building, but moved down the alleyways looking for something cheaper, or beyond that, very cheap. I landed in a room that was 25 dirhams a night, about two dollars and change in the those days, with a toilet two floors below me and a single cold shower if I dared. Each morning I purchased two boiled eggs from the *hanut* up the alley, four to six loaves of bread from women selling them out of baskets, and a pile of oranges.

It was January and it rained a lot. I drank two pots of tea each day while sitting around the shabbiest cafes, one in the a.m. and one after my lunchtime bread. I read used paperbacks, wrote poems about swallows and prostitutes, and fended off suggestions that I have sex, pay boys for sex, or let them take me to girls for sex. It became apparent that young male Europeans must go to Marrakech for sex, as that is what many people assumed I was doing. I had one month before my flight would take me back to Paris, and about five dollars a day to spend. I had a passport, of course, and could escape Morocco willingly, thus the strategic difficulties of my poverty amounted to a kind of game. For Moroccans it is no game, of course, and it does not involve a month alone so much as a lifetime entangled in family and economy and a struggle for making sense that is inevitably a struggle to stay alive. But we will come to that later.

For dinner each night I had *harrira* at a stand in the Jemaa al-Fna, two bowls or three. It was only a dirham or two. In those days there was no electricity in the square, no straight lines or numbered stalls, and the propane lanterns rendered the scene unearthly. That was its allure. It was here that I rescued a young boy (maybe six? eight years-old?) beaten savagely by his begging peers for some crime against the gang. He became my official guide, and I his protector. The Lords of the Flies were not anxious to tangle with tourists, or not anxious to tangle with *tourisme*, and my sidekick stayed fifteen feet away from me for at least a week, heckling my hecklers while remaining distant enough to avoid trouble with the police. It was illegal for him to talk to me, he said.

I milled about, read a lot, and met some bored guys my own age, early 20s, who wanted desperately to figure out what I was doing, and plied me with revolting homemade booze to find out. They packed it beneath their shirts in Coke bottles secured with rubber bands and cellophane. I was not at all sure that its intoxicating force did not come from gasoline. We choked it down, burning even with orange soda, but their method failed because I had no idea what I was doing and so no way to explain. I was avoiding Paris and all the trouble I had started there. My answers were unsatisfying.

I soon came to smell like the overflowing sewer in my street, the animals, sweat, my own clothes, so I learned to use the public *hamam*. This was harder than it sounds because I lacked the requisite undergarments and had to use a loaner Speedo reserved for country bumpkins and other idiots too stupid to show up with their own underwear. It turns out Moroccan men, like Americans, are deeply suspicious of the human body and do not bathe naked even though they bathe together. Wearing somebody else's cold, wet Speedo—many sizes too small, I am large for a peasant—was my initiation into the arcane rules of public bathing. I never got very good at it.

During the days and evenings I got pick pocketed frequently, or evaded pickpockets mostly, and then was robbed in a drug buy I agreed to conduct for a paranoid Dutch traveler in my hotel. This was humiliating as the Dutch guy had been bugging me for a week, asking “why is all the Moroccan hash in Holland?” So when somebody

offered me something, I followed him into the spice *souk* and with a frightening, furtive exchange came away with a chunk of a nut wrapped in plastic. I could only apologize to the Dutchman for losing his money and decided to get out of Marrakech.

I bought a seat on the cheapest bus for Agadir at some ridiculous hour of the morning. The bus circled the station, revving its engine and honking the horn, plying for more customers. None came despite the bombast and with the sun high in the sky we began the slow crawl over the mountains to the small station at the north side of Agadir. From there I wandered around the city looking for the local bus to Taghazoute, a little coastal village now filled with condos and surf shops. In those days, in January, the place would be deserted, which was exactly what I wanted. An offer of help finding the bus made me suspicious, but not enough to refuse. My new Agadir guide took me from bus stop to bus stop, querying the passing drivers, but the right bus never seemed to come. He told me a story of the city changing the bus lines so we eventually gave up and went to the main hub. There he insisted on buying me tea, then insisted on guiding me physically on to the correct bus and finding me a seat. He then conscripted the guy in the next seat to be my new guide, and to my utter amazement he left without accepting a tip. He worked at the fish market, he said, he had to go, just wanted to make sure that I found what I was looking for. In Morocco everybody is excruciatingly kind, whether they are taking your money or refusing to take it.

My new best friend on the bus had a six pack of beer hidden in a bag. He cradled it like a baby, patting the bag and winking at me. The bus disgorged us at the end of the line and he walked me out to Ankar Point to watch Danes and Australians surf. He offered me a beer. I was again suspicious. Having been calibrated in Los Angeles, Paris, and now Marrakech, I knew that too-good-to-be-true was nearly always bad. A single beer cost more than my hotel room, though at that point in my self-inflicted isolation I was ready to choose alcohol over lodging. But I didn't have to pay. He gave me two of his six beers and delirious I watched the boys in thick wetsuits slip down the reeling, right handed barrels one after another after another until it was too dark to see. The beer angel had to go. He gathered up his Stork bottles, said goodbye, and that was that.

The next day I was lying on the beach bundled against the wind, my bag of bread, two boiled eggs, and oranges next to me in a black *mica*. Two guys came my way, directly at me from across the sand in a manner that suggested I was the object of a plot. But my LA frame of reference again turned out wrong as the pair aimed at the big house just off the beach behind me. The big house was shut down for the winter, as it turned out, and Lahcen worked as a gardener and caretaker for the governor of the province (who owned the house). To augment his salary Lahcen subleased floor space in his cement shed out back to the two other guys, one in the army and the other studying religion. Lahcen himself had a degree in engineering, but could not find a job other than as caretaker of this empty mansion. The shed was gray cement, about fifteen feet long, ten wide, with a bright metal door and no windows.

I shared my oranges; they dug up some carrots, potatoes and other vegetables from the garden. They cooked and we ate. For the rest of my month I came back every day. We had fantastic, slow conversations in three languages. I could only do French. The army guy spoke Derija, the religion student spoke Tashelhit, and so Lahcen had to translate everything for everybody.

Lahcen's own themes revolved around unemployment, the pointlessness of higher education in Morocco, unfairness, inequality, corruption. He was obviously bright and overtly frustrated, but his gentle nature made him less militant than contemplative. The army guy lived for one thing and one thing only: sex with German women. He awaited the season when they would return like migrating flamingos. Licking his lips, losing himself in a reverie of misty-eyed memories, he could inject something into any conversation about the virtues and virtuosity of German sex bombs. His underlying refrain was that Germans were "not racist" like the French, by which he meant that French women would not fuck him. He was also a big fan of Ronald Reagan, who evidently had supplied the Moroccans with helicopter gunships and night vision goggles to hunt down dissidents in the extreme south, the means to kill Sahrawis as they ran blindly in the dark.

The religion student was not so much embarrassed by these graphic descriptions of military slaughter and Teutonic breasts, but anxious to convey to me deeper beauties: the transcendent poetry of the Qur'an. He would pray rhythmically beneath the olive trees in the dappled light of the garden, then come and repeat verses to me, and beg Lahcen to explain. The student focused on the excruciating elegance of the prose. He chose *sura* after *sura* about gardens and heaven and virtue and goodness and I tried to seem interested. He insisted I *listen* as he recited, and I did; the sensual thrill was in the flow of the words, he said, the sublime susurrus of God that breathes peace into your heart if only your heart remains open to it.

The roommates were not always there, but every day Lahcen and I would meet for lunch and a slow afternoon of talk. He occasionally managed to get fresh sardines from the port, which he would crank through a grinder then roll into balls with cumin seeds, parsley and other tidbits from the garden. We'd fry these in argan oil his family would send him from the mountains and it was the best thing I had ever eaten. Mostly we dined on oranges, eggs and bread, though. Lahcen made tea and plucked things from the earth and I provided the bread. At the end of my time I said a goodbye, gave Lahcen my Sony Walkman, and promised I would come back.

Returning to Marrakech I had to last one more day. I was hungry and broke and it did not look promising. I milled about the square in the dark inhaling the cooking smells and counted the hours until the plane left the next day. Irritatingly, one of the team that had robbed me in the drug deal (the initial contact, not the actual perpetrator) kept trying to rob me again. I explained over and over that they had already taken my money, that I didn't want any dope, but he didn't recognize me and didn't understand what I was saying. Finally, I robbed him, dragging the poor guy into an alley and stealing his stash when he took it out for me to see. It was all very polite by American standards. I explained that in my country we are responsible for the misbehavior of our relatives, and this got his attention. Now he remembered, he said; he was sorry; his brother could not always be trusted, but what could he do? It disturbed him that his brother was a thief, he said, and I felt bad. Then he complained that his brother had only robbed me for half as much as I had robbed him, so I split the chunk of hash, gave half back, and walked away. I sold my chunk to an Irish guy because the Dutchman had already departed. This provided dinner, breakfast, and the money to get the bus near the airport, so I only had to walk the last bit from the main road to the terminal.

I only thing I had ever read about Morocco at that point was Clifford Geertz. It had been assigned in a class on cultural theory and it did nothing to help make sense of the struggles of everyday Moroccans I had come to know. I had several more arrivals after this first one, but the idea that Moroccans lived a long way from American ethnography about Morocco was already taking hold.

Second Coming

I rode south from Madrid in early summer 1995 along with thousands of Moroccans carrying their wages home. On the bus I befriended a woman who lived in Spain cleaning toilets. She was on her yearly trip to see her children. She helped me figure out how to board the ferry in Algeciras, then shepherded me through the vicious throng on the Tangier side of the strait, where she and her kids, some strikingly young, were reunited in great sobbing bursts of joy. I moved away, embarrassed by all the emotion and got ripped off trying to change money, and was then swindled again at my hotel. I didn't care, though. I was in the country and set to head south to find Lahcen, to find someplace to spend my time and my money and begin what I hoped would be a "career." I had just turned thirty and it seemed time to have a career. I had quit my job as a "Kelly girl," answering phones in a doctor's office, gotten myself accepted to grad school (somehow, with no background at all in anthropology and no idea what I was doing), and was now looking for a research project by which I could become something... legitimate.

In the south everything had changed. The *Jemaa al-Fna* was tidied up, though they had not yet completely tamed it. The old cheap hotel was more expensive and less friendly. The bus to Agadir was orderly and they charged money to put your baggage on the roof, and then again to take it off. When I finally found Taghazoute it was utterly transformed. The beach had been colonized by millions of *baidawi* families, sprawled out over the sand like birds in the nesting season. Soccer balls shot like fireworks, music blared, huge, heaving women lumbered like mastodons after scurrying children, and skinny boys drunk on their own laughter staggered in circles throwing sand, groping each other, falling in the surf. It was hell and it was hot. A terrible drought gripped the nation and Lahcen was gone, of course, back to his home village somewhere in the hills, the new *guardien* explained. So I made my way sadly back to the bus terminal and kept pushing south, to Tiznit then Tafraoute.

The bus out of Tiznit was a rickety castoff from some defunct European public transportation system, and it ground noisily through the mountains to Tafraoute. It was stifling in the terrible heat and I was quietly terrified by the narrowness of the road; poor farmers in dirty *jellabas* wiped snot on the window curtains, and great arguments broke out about whether to open the windows for air or close them against the heat. I was sitting in the back, and could not track the angry debate until the guy behind me, another Lahcen, offered to translate. This Lahcen was retuning to his home village—like everybody, it seemed. He had been in Moscow studying for his doctorate in mathematics. Naturally, he asked me to stay with him at his mother's house, and naturally I accepted. The bus made it to the town center. We bought kilos of meat wrapped in bloody paper, put it into black plastic bags, and started walking south.

This, I thought, could be my research site if it were not so awfully hot. It was a modern village, built beyond the valley of Tafraoute on a small plain below an ancient, fortified hamlet. The French had bombed these villagers out of their hilltop redoubt in the early 20th century, and almost the entire male population had migrated. They now used European money to build an empty, idyllic village of cement, with little water towers and solar power panels, garages for the cars. Some women remained, especially the old ones, and a very few young children were installed to incorporate the values of village life. Great black Mercedes cars arrived with German license plates and tall women with \$400 shoes peeking out beneath their voluminous folds of inky cloth. All the women here wrapped in black, and they would rarely talk to Lahcen, much less me, especially the women who actually worked in the fields, the permanent residents. If Lahcen and I approached, they stopped all activity, turned away from us, pulled their expanse of black sheet into a seamless shroud around them and made muffled replies to our questions until we went away.

What a place! This was a homemade Moroccan Disneyland, Main Street, but alive and public and amendable to building. The two most successful men were fueling a housing boom, constructing competing Moroccan McMansions on opposite sides of the road, including whole separate floors for men and women and huge stables for sheep that could never possibly graze on the desiccated hills that surrounded us. These were Moroccan dreams materializing in the heat, dreams that could be visited maybe once every two years, but real enough to sustain men working somewhere in the far green and white north, in the cold among the Christians who did not seem to have dreams at all.

But I couldn't stand the heat. Even Lahcen had a hard time, probably because he'd adjusted to Moscow, and we agreed to take a trip to the high mountains in hope the altitude would provide some relief. Lahcen knew his village, Casablanca, Paris, and Moscow. That was it. He had never seen any of the rest of the country. I agreed to pay his way if he would help me find mine. We set off for Taroudant, which we saw as the gateway to the High Atlas and cooler climes. On the way I explicated the various ethnographies I had packed along, but when I saw how upsetting they were to him, I let anthropological matters drop. Lahcen was serious about his religion and his studies, and these strange cults, tribes, and issues of representation had nothing whatsoever to do with the practice of proper Islam, or what he saw as the reality of Morocco. The real issue in his country involved jobs, he made clear, good jobs that would save people from being forced from home, forced to live far from the soul-sustaining networks of kin and friends that made life worth living. Lack of jobs led to lack of morality. If you want to talk about Islam, he said, forget about *marabouts* and *moussems* and make it possible to worship *and* pay rent, to marry and raise a family amongst your own family.

Lahcen and I arrived in Taroudant just after market day, or after the particular market day when the trucks would come from the high mountains. We could wait a week, or develop another plan to get out of the valley, and I chose another plan. We'd take the main road by the daily bus, up and over the Tizi n Test, then get off at the first place where the road crossed a sizable river. We only had the Michelin map, so only major rivers were listed. It looked like some place called Ijoukak would be our destination; it sat on the intersection of the road and the Agoundis River. We left before dawn and arrived midday. The local residents could not figure out why we stayed off the bus—busses commonly stopped in Ijoukak to let the passengers eat, pee, and pray, but

nobody actually stays when the bus goes. We left the heaviest items in my pack with a shopkeeper (no need to carry *all* of my library up the hill), bought some canned sardines and a few loaves of bread, and started upstream.

From the asphalt road at Ijoukak a nondescript dirt track leads east along an alley of olive trees on the bank of the Agoundis River. The walls of the canyon grow steeper and begin to envelope you; the cover of oak and juniper becomes denser. Thickets of blackberries line the route and are punctuated by an occasional wild rose bush and clumps of bamboo. Ancient walnuts and almonds flourish in the riverbed and on terraces where there is more sun. Irrigation ditches are etched into the slope above, invisible in the overgrowth. The perennially leaking water inspires a chorus of birds and frogs. It was meltingly beautiful after the drought and heat in the rest of the country.

Then the road begins to rise above the level of the river, tracking its bends, and edging higher on the slope. We reached a fork and chose the branch that went north, up into the high country. This quickly went from a road to a path, though men were working with dynamite and jackhammers to etch out a proper road. We continued up the path until dark, then went down into the river and slept. Lahcen chose a spot in the sand. I took a large, flat rock in the middle of the river. We only found out later that people died this way from flash floods.

In the morning I awoke to find myself carefully observed by some ragged local boys. Torn clothes, dirty hair, black nails, skinny. They looked at us with wide curious eyes and I wrote in my journal something about feral animals. I found a rusty can and while Lahcen slept the boys and I invented a game throwing rocks into it. This was a new Morocco for me, under the great cool walnut trees with these boys who seemed to live in the earth rather than just on it.

Lahcen and I kept moving upstream, then found our way up the precarious terraces to the path again and into the sun. We had no idea where we were or where we were going. This was a vast blank area on our map, and were already running out of food. We met a man sitting in the shade selling candy and warm Cokes. We bought Cokes and he invited us to stay, but we declined. It was too early in the day. I got his name –Abdurrahman—and the name of the village, and told him I would be back. Three years later, I was. This became the village I lived in and have written about for the last ten years.

We passed through one dilapidated hamlet after another with clumps of wan women and sick children wearing rags and begging for money, for medicine, for anything. Lahcen clearly found this embarrassing, especially the questions from the women, the beseeching. In Lahcen's village in the far south women were silent and shrouded in black; in Taroudant they were standoffish and covered in blue. Here the women were brightly dressed in the most uproarious colors, sequins and spangles and were every bit as forward as anyplace else I have been. Women, alone or in groups, would stop us dead in the trail and pepper us (or Lahcen, really) with questions and demands. He'd stammer and shuffle his feet, staring at the ground. He could not make eye contact and was reluctant to translate. Their propositions were not things he would put into French.

Every village was clotted with trash, with old tea boxes and scraps of plastic, the petrified feces of goats, donkeys, chickens, and people, shards of pots and swatches of frayed cloth. Men would pass us sweating with huge bags of manure hoisted on their

shoulders; women staggered by with loads of firewood or babies, or firewood *and* babies. Everybody who was not gawking was busy, moving things up or down the mountains. They would stop when we came into sight, but the general bustle resumed in our wake. Here was a very different face of poverty than I was used to in the city, one characterized by a superabundance of labor rather than a lack of meaningful work.

Lahcen and I nearly died climbing over the pass to the Marrakech side of the mountains, he of hypothermia and me of altitude sickness. We parted at the French hiking refuge below Toubkal. I gave him his fare home and he zipped quickly down the mountain; I trod more slowly with my huge pack, still carrying a few of the ethnographies Lachen hated. I got a ride to Marrakech by befriending two Korean mountain climbers who could not speak French. They had been paying 100 times the normal rates for taxis, and were appreciative that I did the bargaining for them.

In Marrakech I began searching for a map so I could find out where I had been, but before I could lay my hands on one I was flattened by microbes. It remained unbearably hot. I vomited into the sink when I wasn't squatting in the toilet, and tried to drink from the taps to keep hydrated, but the taps only flowed periodically and the water made me sicker still. I could keep nothing in my body, not even water. I was alone and terrified and wrote a kind of will in my notebook as my insides emptied out, a letter to my mother. I lay panting, face on the cool tile floor, and mercifully slipped into unconsciousness. But I did not die, and upon waking gobbled handfuls of Imodium and traveled north to Fes, then tried to recuperate in the cooler climes of Chefchaouen living off vegetable broth and yogurt. Finally I gave up, swallowed more stomach paralyzing Imodium, and aimed to meet my girlfriend in Sebta, Spanish territory. She put me in the hospital as soon as she saw me. I emerged a week later having had no water or food, only an IV and the antics of my neighbors to sustain me: Fuad (an immigrant who believed the Spanish doctors were trying to kill him, and so only pretended to take his medicine) and Juan (a Spaniard who had Alzheimer's and deafness but no other reason to be in a hospital). I left for mainland Spain weak and thin, alive and happy. I could see there was much to write about Morocco. That had become all I cared to do.

Third Return

In the late summer of 1997 I made it back with a purpose beyond sampling the "intense" experience long ago promised by my Let's Go! guidebook. I was studying Arabic in Fes part time, living down in the old medina, and beginning to find my feet in the country. This was in one sense easy –Moroccans are friendly people, and the demographic pyramid is so flat you could mistake it for a speed bump. There are *lots* of young people to talk to, and lots who talk to you. Making sense of what they're saying is not always easy.

There were whispers. An acquaintance stealthily flashed me a picture of him praying at what he said was an underground Christian church. There are thousands of these around, he assured me, the countryside is full of Christians hiding from the government, Berber Christians who never succumbed to Islam, apostates and converts. There are secret churches in the city, too, he said. When I related this to other friends in the cafe everyone laughed, called it insane, and some muttered darkly that this was the

government testing me, checking to see if I was really doing what I said I was doing. What *are* you doing, Daoud? What is anybody *really* doing?

Stories circulated. The hotel on the hill had been burned down because it was owned by the royal family. Riots followed a hike in the price of bread, and Fes was not favored by the ruling elite, was falling behind, the young were leaving for Casablanca, and the Fassi *cultural* elite (as they saw themselves) were being undermined by the crass bourgeoisie. Then there were protests at the university. We were never able to find out exactly what happened, there was little in the news and the gossip contradicted it. Three students had been shot, one student had been shot, seven students had been shot; they had been shot at a demonstration, it had been after the demonstration, they were not even students, but students had run from the army into a neighborhood where random people, unaware of what was going on, were shot dead in front of their houses. The demonstration led to a fight between socialists and Islamists, the army had invaded a girls' dorm, a Leftist student had entered the dorm and the Islamists and the young women protested and it spawned a fight that the police had to put down.... Who knows? Who knew?

Two women studying with me were robbed –young men ran past them and grabbed their necklaces. That might have been the end of it, but one woman protested and one robber wheeled around and attacked her with a pipe. The women went off to the police and the police took them along on a raid, presumably to demonstrate their commitment to solving the crime.

The police vans raced through the night and pulled up to a group of youths with screeching tires. Young men ran, the cops grabbing and beating whomever they could, then throwing them in the back of the van --*with* the original victims, which we expatriates all found portentous. Off to the police station, some men silent, some begging –literally begging the women-- to tell the cops that they were not the perpetrators. They didn't know anything! They cried, sobbed in fear. At the station everyone is dragged before the everyday instruments of coercion –benches, rope, buckets of water. One young man is shaking uncontrollably, weeping, and literally shits his pants as the cops threaten and bluster. These unlucky boys had better come up with some information about this crime, and had better come up with it soon. The police beam proudly at the women. The young women are traumatized, trying to make sense. Is this about their proposed PhD research in politics? A local power show? A royal example?

I was comfortable down in the old medina. I had a large dilapidated old house, empty but for swallows and my bed in one room. I spent time with the owner of a hardware store, Abdelhai, who sold nails and other whatnot from what amounted to a small closet. He would teach me Arabic, we'd watch soccer on a small TV, and play chess. Abdelhai usually won, but not always. The merchant across the road sold beauty products for women, and he seemed far less interested in selling anything than in keeping as many women as possible standing in front of his store for as long as possible. Abdelhai and I appreciated this. I would climb in and take Abdelhai's seat when he would slink off to smoke cigarettes. Despite being in his mid thirties, he was furtive, trying to ensure that his older brothers and father did not ever see him. This would be terrible, he assured me, you could never smoke in front of a father or older brother, so I was instructed in how to lie convincingly if any family member came by looking for Abdelhai while I was watching the shop. I was a poor salesman of hardware as I never

learned all the words for different gadgets, straightened nails, and other bric-a-brac that people wanted to buy. I learned to say, “wait, Abdelhai will be back soon.” I kept people’s hands out of the till.

I was a lackluster student of formal Arabic at the school up in the *ville*. I had research money now, and knew I would need to know Tashelhit rather than Arabic to pursue it, but I was discouraged from taking lessons in Berber. Others had been arrested, someone had heard, we would have to ask the mayor, though one should never go see the mayor, but one should always see the mayor.... Better to stick with the Arabic. Abdelhai wanted to teach me proper Arabic, but never really used it himself, and he and his friends found it incomprehensible that I’d want to learn Berber. They openly mocked the one Soussi merchant down the *talaa*, but Abdelhai did introduce me to the guy and attempt to explain my plan. I spent long days on my roof, reading and sleeping in the sun, enjoying the privacy and the quiet. I came to love the call to prayer, the rising chorus that built to a crescendo in the city, like the walls themselves were speaking. It would be the end of my peaceful time in Morocco, however. It was time to get on with research.

Rural Return

I staggered into Tagharghist in bad shape. It was July of 1998. I was a nervous Ph.D. candidate with a backpack crammed with the paraphernalia of fieldwork, from cooking pots and a tape recorder to a camera and water filter, antibiotics and a sleeping pad. The village now boasted a Peace Corps volunteer, and a few tourists wandered around, so I was not the novelty I had been when Lahcen and I came through and bought cokes. There was a dirt road now, but I was still walking. The backpack weighed more than me, or seemed to, and I had been traveling since well before dawn by bus, crowded group taxis, and then by foot. I was growing older, less physically fit. Graduate school had softened me and the hike was a bother rather than an adventure. It was nearly dark at the final incline below the village. I doffed my pack, collapsed by the side of the road, and prayed for a mule, a truck, a miracle.

Instead, to my horror, a group of women rounded the bend below me, chattering and laughing. When they came nearer I saw they were not just returning from the fields but were traveling resplendent in their best clothes with sequins, bangles and scarves of every hue from luminous lime green and yellow to crimson, purple, gold and orange. They wore jangling tin jewelry, beads, and twittered all at once, musically, singing and joking. Their hands and feet were stained the burnt rust color of henna. They appeared to me like a flock of tropical birds, or bright reef fish. I thought I might be hallucinating.

The women were coming from a *mousssem*, they said, and they gathered in a circle to examine me. At first only the older women would speak, but my obvious helplessness and their festive mood soon had everyone peppering me with questions. I could not understand most of them, especially with the younger girls giggling hysterically, literally crying with laughter behind the skirts of their elders. They wanted to know where I was going, if I meant to go to Tagharghist, if I was looking for Abdurrahman (since I was obviously going to Tagharghist,

and he was the only one likely to know foreigners), and, most of all, what in God's name was in that huge pack. My *Tashelhit* was worse than shaky -- I'd only studied a week. I said, "I'm tired," which sent them into paroxysms of laughter. "My pack is big" also sent them into convulsions, and inspired one brazen woman to lift it with the wave of one hand and declare languidly that it was not heavy at all. She sauntered off with the pack slung over one shoulder like nothing more than a parasol and I was forced to stumble after her to take up my ridiculous parcel myself. Thus humiliated, shaking my head confusedly to the questions that kept coming, I shouldered my load and dragged myself up the road, prodded by the women like a decrepit mule.

Thus I arrived at Abdurrahman's door, the man who had invited me three years before. It was the first door of the first house next to the road, at the base of the village. By this point the women ran silent, melted into the village pathways, slid inside houses and disappeared into stables, their ebullience muffled by the weight of village propriety. I was bidden to enter Abdurrahman's small irregular door and passed into a dark hallway, then through a second door, then a third. I dropped my pack to the floor. Abdurrahman laid thick carpets on top of the plastic *tagertilt*, a red one, an orange one, and a striped white and black blanket too. I writhed out of my boots and collapsed. He asked, "Would you like some tea?"

It only took a day for Abdurrahman to get me set up with a house (rented from somebody who had migrated to the city), but it was much tougher to arrange eating and shitting. There were no toilets and the customary rules of who goes where and when were not immediately obvious. Worse, it seemed everybody wanted to feed me and I had no idea how I would reciprocate all this generosity. It took weeks --and some hurt feelings--to get it all straight, but finally I managed to make it customary that I eat with only three families, one relatively rich (Abdurrahman's) and two poor. These three families would receive equal parcels of meat and other rarities from me every market day whether or not I ate with them the previous week. Thus I avoided a quid pro quo that would disturb the nature of a gift, but managed to keep from further impoverishing people living on the very edge of subsistence. The children did not need any calories subtracted from their diet. I would send the parcels via children, usually, or furtively pass them to women, or leave them subtly behind like a forgotten trifle as I departed after tea. Thus families fed me with food I partly provided. They remained generous hosts, and I remained a grateful guest for the entirety of my stay.

I quickly came to see that the main point everybody wanted to make was that life was hard. They used this exact phrase again and again: life in the mountains is hard. As it turned out I did not need any special anthropological training to understand it, or any subtle linguistic preparation. I only had to listen. *Life. Here. Is. Hard.* Men would gather my hands in theirs, stare into my eyes, and repeat it slowly enough that they were assured I could not miss the message. Women would stop me on the trail, and between marriage proposals and rebuffs of whatever gossip they assumed I heard from somebody else, they would remind me life was hard in the mountains. My objective, then, became detailing how life was hard. The presumption of equality and the general horrific poverty masked

striking differences between households. Villagers were very focused on the diversity amongst themselves, not just their position in the larger political economy.

I began by building a kinship chart—standard old school anthropology I was now glad I had learned—and the old men loved this. They would quiz me on this or that long dead relative, and I would be able to tell them who his brother was, who his sister married. They pronounced me “smart.” I did a census, counting the household members of different ages as well as the number of migrants and other information like ownership of cattle. I mapped each of the 1,400 odd fields and assessed their ownership, whether or not they were irrigated, and whether the field was used for crops or fodder. I counted each almond, walnut, pomegranate, and carob tree owned by the villagers, and determined who owned which of them, a project that was complicated by various types of communal ownership in some areas. I mapped the canals, and determined water rights and irrigation rotations on all of them, and computed the comparative amount of time households owned on each canal.

While I worked to determine the shape of each household’s material substrate, and how households were linked together, I also tried to understand the positions within households, the way individuals experienced their tight social world. To this end I conducted a few taped interviews about life in the mountains. These were transcribed into *Tashelhit* written in Arabic characters, then translated into English by Latifa Asseffar, a friend in Taroudant. The first interview I did was with Abdurrahman, my primary host and emerging friend. The second interview was with my neighbor Fatima Id Baj. Fatima was so stunningly eloquent that every subsequent interview seemed flat. Her version of the difficulties of mountain life has become iconic for me, a consolidation of everything I tried to specify with numbers and pie charts and tedious observation. She constructed it for me with some care, I think. It did not seem extemporaneous.

What Time Necessitates

Fatima has a quick wit and an unfailingly cheerful disposition; she was one of my favorite people in the village, and remains one of my favorite people today. It was not easy for us to spend much time together—she is a married woman in a small Berber village and I was an unmarried *rumi* there on a mysterious mission that involved writing things down. But we managed short conversations nearly every day, and I asked if she would “make a cassette” for me, that is, let me tape her life story. She enthusiastically agreed, and a couple of days later appeared at my door and insisted I come to her house. We will do it *now*.

Fatima’s house is just below the mosque, which has the advantage of being very central and thus an unlikely location for a tryst or other misbehavior. The door is short, about five feet high, and the entrance hall is no higher. We had a running joke where Fatima would tell me to keep my head down and I would pretend to knock myself unconscious. This was funny because two or three times

I nearly did knock myself unconscious. When we reached the cramped living room I was surprised to find that Belaid, her husband, was not home, nor were the children. “Start the machine,” Fatima said tersely. She poured me tea and I worried about how this would look to the old men observing from the window of the mosque antechamber, or how it would look to her husband. We tested the microphone, played back the test to make sure it worked, then started.

David: Do you want to talk about women’s lives?

Fatima: You are asking about *my* life. I was born in Tagharghist and after Tagharghist I married to Imaouen. I stayed there for six years. I left two children there. One is named Mustafa, and one named Rbia. After that, I came back to my father’s house and I stayed there for a while. And then I married Belaid.

Here Fatima pauses for the significance of this to sink in. I had not known that she was married before; this was her way of telling me. Her first two children live with their father 21 kilometers away at the weekly market, where her father’s brother had long ago moved to make a living as a merchant. Fatima had been married to her patrilineal parallel cousin, but he smoked and was abusive and she came home. She wanted this to be known before she went on, and she wanted it entered into the record while her current husband was not in the room. She missed her children terribly, and only saw them on rare occasions. Missing her two oldest children is a central agony in Fatima’s life, but she never mentions it in normal conversation. Stoicism, patience, a resolute endurance is a central feminine ideal in the mountains. She continues.

I carry bundles [of grass and wood] and I weave. I grind barley and I grind corn. I gather wood. I bring fodder for the cows. After that I wash clothes... I come back to make food for the children and after I eat dinner, I go to bed. I only sleep a little. When I wake up, I make coffee and *askeef* [barley flour soup]. I go out to the fields and cut fodder for the cows and come back and feed the cows. I take the broom [a bundle of branches] and sweep the house, I change the clothes on the children, I serve breakfast and we eat it. We eat breakfast.

After breakfast I bring wood from the mountains, I come back and I work on the loom. The loom right here in the room [she points]. We only make the loom in the summer, in winter we do not because in winter work is very hard. Because we have to go to the forest, we bring lots of wood, always when it’s cold. When it does not rain a lot, we leave early in the morning. If there is rain, we do not leave early in the morning, we will stay until after breakfast, after we have tea and bread. After we eat, we bring wood. When we come back from gathering the wood, make lunch. We eat and go again to the fields. I went to the fields, and brought fodder for the cows. I give it to the cows. I fetch water for them with a bucket. I water them in the stable. I close them there and then I come back to prepare dinner. I prepare the oven [build a fire], knead the dough,

I make the *tajine*. I make the bread [literally, press the dough directly against the inside of the oven]. I serve the children their dinner so that they can go to bed

David: Do you eat the same food in winter as in summer?

Fatima: Oh no. It's different in winter when it's very cold. When it's very cold we eat lentils and beans. In summer we grow squash and potatoes, we do not eat lentils and beans. Summer no. We eat vegetables.

At this point Fatima's husband, Belaid, comes in with their two small boys. He is trying to be quiet, but the room is so cramped that he has to step over Fatima while she is talking. The children are talking, too, and Belaid is trying to quiet them, holding them in his lap. Brahim, Fatima's oldest child in the village, says, "in Ramadan we have *sahoor*" and Fatima shushes him and keeps talking.

After summer we sow barley. We water it until it is grown. We harvest it and carry it on our backs to the place where we thresh it. We leave it there for three months. Uh... no, before we store it we have to thresh it. We take some to the house. And then we plant maize, and care for it. It takes six months to be ready [grow and dry]. When it's ready, we break off the cobs one at a time and leave the stalks in the fields. We women carry the stalks on our backs and store it. We do not give it to the animals, we store it until it's very cold. Until December. Then we give it to them little by little. Because at that time there is no more fodder in the fields. The grass is gone, all gone. Do you understand? It's all gone.

David: Yes.

Fatima: There is no fodder. And then we bring *aori* [a local shrub?] and add it to the stalks we have. This is winter. And then we go back to summer. The work never stops, it goes on.... When we finish with the maize, we take the manure from the stables to each plot. We plow with mules. They sow it in rows. Today they finish the rows in one plot, tomorrow they go to another, tomorrow another. Every day another one. Because it's hard, and the fields are far. When they finish all of them, they come and stay and work their turns on the canals. The first day they work on Targa n Issreran, one day they work on Targa n Tafarikht, one day Targa Ijaneten [these are names of canals and their associated fields], one day they go up to Agouni and work the dam there [the shepherds' huts and fields above the village], one day go up to the mountains. After that they can irrigate the barley. The barley stays nine months in the fields before it's ready. They always irrigate it with their *tamadirt* [short handled hoe]. And when it's ready, we harvest it with a sickle. After the harvest, we irrigate the plots in order to sow corn. Once we harvest a plot, we take it away in order to irrigate. The plot we irrigated yesterday, we will sow it. The one we irrigate tomorrow, will be sown the day after. When we finish all of them, then we sow the corn. When the maize sprouts, we water it. After fifteen days, we water it. After eight days, they water it again, then they thin them [pull some of them out] because there

are really a lot of them. They reduce them. They *sousint* [thin them, pull some of them out]. And so then the corn grows. After *sousint* we water it, always. Before *sousint* they water it. They sometimes water in the morning, sometimes at night. They take candles and lanterns and they go to the fields until they have irrigated. For the far canals they take lanterns and stay there from eight until one in the morning. At one they come back and go to sleep. They sleep from one until four, when they get up and go to the mountains.

David: Is your work the same as everyone's work?

Fatima: Yes, everyone. Just the same. When men sow, women go there [to the fields] and gather fodder. Do you understand? When they gather fodder and bring it and put it down. Then they light the oven. All the work is the same, summer and winter. Same for men, same for women.

David: What is the difference between men and women?

Fatima: Between men and women? [She makes a face, looks at Belaid, who starts laughing. Then, indicating her son, and changing the subject, she says, "He is doing sports." Her son Brahim is jumping around.]

David: Well, I know the difference between men and women. What's difference between men's work and women's work?

Fatima: [Suppressing laughter] The difference between men and women is that men do not *taougat* [haul things on their backs]. Men don't carry a hundred kilos on their backs. Men, no, they will only take their *tamadirt* [irrigation hoe] and a *terialit* [sack]. He will not take a broom and clean the house, or wash clothes for their children. A woman will wash for children, and feed them. She brings wood on her back, and fodder. A man cannot do [or is not able to do] women's work. There is specific men's work and women's work. There is a difference.

David: Which one is harder?

Fatima: Women's is harder. [Belaid nods, agrees.]

David: Do you like your work?

Fatima: Yes, it's difficult, because women work from seven in the morning until midnight or twelve thirty. Then she sleeps. She never sits down, she's hurrying at night and during the day. A man, him, no. A man, if he works from seven until seven in the evening, then he goes to pray, enough. He changes his clothes. His work clothes, he take them off and throws them there [she points to where Belaid has piled his work clothes]. And he takes others he will pray in. Enough, he goes where he will pray [the mosque]. Enough, he rests at night. A woman, no.

[laughter] A woman she is rushing around, she doesn't sit down. Even if she is pregnant she still carries loads on her back. She is still rushing. If she has an infant, she straps him to her back and the load [of wood or fodder] goes here [she points]. She doesn't rest because 'what time necessitates be done must be done.' Even if it is raining, she carries her baby and her load of fodder or wood on her back. What she needs, she must bring it, whether it rains or not. Everything is outside. Because there is nothing here in the house that replaces it.

In winter that are differences. Winter is really hard. Summer no. In summer we only get wood when people are harvesting walnuts [and branches break off]. We bring some and cook the food with it. It's the same concerning fodder. We don't go to the mountains to bring *aouri*, just to the fields to the fields to get *tooga* [fodder, grass grown in fields too shady for other crops] and corn [she means the leaves from the corn]. Winter, no. There is no *tooga* in the fields, there is nothing to bring from them. In the winter, after breakfast you go to the mountains to bring food for the cows. You feed them, and then you feed the children. When you eat breakfast, you take the broom and clean the house. You straighten things, because the house looks like a threshing floor. [laughter]

At this point it is obvious that Fatima is discussing the details of her work, but I am missing the specific verbs for all the tasks. I am anxious to change the subject somewhat. Another neighbor who was very pregnant has disappeared from public view and I am trying to figure out what happened to her, and how childbirth is managed in the village.

David: Where do you give birth to children? In your house?

Fatima: Yes, they are born here. All of them...

David: Where, in the stable or up here?

Fatima: No, right here they are born [indignantly she points to the carpet we are sitting on]. If you want to give birth to a baby you have to do it in a room. Because, if a woman feels she will give birth to a new baby, she must not go outside, she must stay in her room until she gives birth.

Fatima and I then discuss the case of the neighbor who has just had a baby and why I have not seen her. Evidently this family has a storeroom built under the house beside the stable, and this is where the woman has gone to give birth. Belaid is coughing, Brahim is causing some sort of problem. We turn off the tape and eat dinner, discussing marriage and other aspects of how life is transacted in the mountains. Later we continue the interview. Fatima has an agenda for our tape that she has not yet exhausted and she is anxious to complete her statement.

David: Have you said everything you want....

Fatima: No, I want to speak about giving birth for new couples. When a child is born, he lives for two months. He dies. Another one is born. He lives for one month, he dies. Sometimes four or five die and then she has one that lives. The other ones are dead. And then time passes, she has another one that dies. Then another time there is again one that lives. Then women advise her to *qeed* her head [blister the scalp with a red hot iron]. May God protect us, they call this *tezdait* [bad luck]. And so if God finishes [fulfills] what she wants, she will have children. If not, they will continue dying. Until every child in her stomach is finished [she reaches menopause]. Until she finishes all the children that are in her life. All she

has given birth to dies. They die when they are still very little, still very new. Still very little, they die. There are those who have nine who die.

David: Nine children?

Fatima: Nine children, *wa Allah* [I swear to God]. There are those have five who die. Everyone has children who die, everyone has a different number. These die when they are still babies.

The Anthropology of Mundane Suffering

For nearly twenty years now I have been traveling to Morocco, originally as a tourist and later with professional ambitions. I began in the cities and worked my way into a particular village of people in the mountains. I was unmarried for most of this time, but more recently I returned with a family. With help from a Fulbright grant my wife, toddler son, and infant daughter moved with me to Tagharghist in the summer of 2004. Our very first afternoon in our new home we heard frantic whelping and discovered a group of boys torturing a puppy below our balcony. It had stolen eggs, we were told, and deserved its fate. I walked down and suggested a quick death rather than protracted agony might be more in line with the values of the Prophet, Peace be upon Him, but I was dismissed by the boys who extended the process gleefully. They eventually flung the dog off a cliff and stoned it to silence. It might have been a portent.

Days later I was working on updating my village census and heard commotion outside in exactly the same spot. There in the dirt, ankle swollen, one of my neighbors writhed in pain from snakebite. People argued about whether to apply honey, whether to give her tea. Women were beating their heads, and some of the toughest grandmothers I knew flashed frightened eyes and involuntarily covered their mouths with their hands. We sent a young man to fetch a truck from a few villages up, and I slipped Abdurrahman some money to pay the driver, to pay the hospital. People asked me what to do –I was the “doctor,” after all— but I did not know. Her ankle was the size of a volleyball and the fang marks were clotted black with dry blood so we could not suck the poison out. Fatima o Hussein might be saved if we could get her to the clinic at the base of the valley, and if they had medicine. Eventually, painfully slowly, we got her there via the truck, but the clinic was empty and so the truck continued on to the district hospital. They could do nothing there, either, so transferred her to an ambulance which set off to Marrakech. She died along the way. Abdurrahman had accompanied the ambulance, and when he returned I asked careful questions about the precise spot along the road where Fatima left this world. I do not know why this mattered to me.

This seems an infuriating, straightforward case of “structural violence.” My neighbor died in searing pain because she was *poor*, in the final instance, because there was no immediate transport, because she could not access a simple injection of antivenin that did not cost more than a cheap tin teapot. The saving *tesmi* that should have been in the clinic had been sold on the black market, some alleged; Fatima had died from the greed of others. But it mattered little. Fatima o

Hussein was dead and as the story further unfolded it grew more confounding and, for me, more gruesome.

Fatima o Hussein was bitten on her way *down* to the fields, it seems. She did not return to the village immediately, but continued to finish her work. A girl had seen it happen, another of my neighbors, and did not say anything to anybody back in the village, assuming that Fatima would do what Fatima needed to do. In fact, with her ankle blackening, and swollen and bleeding, the puff adder's poison searing in her veins, *Fatima went to work in the fields*. She stayed more than an hour, maybe two hours some said, and only when she could no longer work did she begin her staggering, swooning death march back to the village. That's why she collapsed in the road below my window. This, everyone agreed, showed just what a good woman she was. A great woman. A great woman *endures*, after all, she is patient. *Sber*. It might be extreme to kill yourself this way, but men shook their heads muttering that Fatima indeed was one good woman. She had incorporated values, embodied them, that cost her life.

Only weeks later my wife Hillary was stricken with dysentery and I did not want her to die a good woman. She became dehydrated enough to hallucinate, she thought she was in Santa Barbara having a baby, was verbally incoherent telling me that that I should cook cauliflower for her PhD advisor. She was too weak to drink any liquid, even from a baby bottle, and I was terrified and was pretending not to be. I was being officious, making decisions, trying to stay calm. Our babies were sleeping and it was quiet except for Hillary moaning. I woke one of the nannies to help me think, and before long most of the household was up. We debated what to do.

Just before dawn I tried to get Hillary in the truck to market, but they would not take her. No white woman was going to die in his truck, the driver said, so I got in to try and find an ambulance in the district capital, some way to get Hillary out. The other men stood while I sat in the back with my face pressed against my knees, angry, scared, not wanting to cry openly. At *souk* I managed to locate and wake the ambulance driver with difficulty, then fought with him when he insisted on stopping for a coffee in the café and a quick cigarette. He asked incredulously whether I really expected him to drive up *that* road without a coffee, while I burned with the rage of Rosaldo's headhunters (1989). Abdurrahman calmed me, pulled me away, held my hand, took me outside, and we managed to return to the village with the driver in the Land Rover, a dingy mattress in back.

Soon we bounced down the road with Hillary and the nursing baby, our daughter Lula, and arrived at the clinic that Fatima had visited, but again there was no medicine, nothing really they could do. It was an empty building. We continued to the district hospital. The doctor saw us ahead of dozens of waiting and very sick country folk, and we were not about to pass up white privilege. They put us in a bed in the back next to a woman with a wet new baby, and gave us oral antibiotics and suggested we try to get fluids to stay. The woman wanted Hillary to bless her baby, and while Hillary protested weakly that she was too sick to hold a newborn, the fluids would not stay. There was a clotted pool of afterbirth and blood on the floor before the pit toilet and we had to wade through

it. There was no IV. I contracted another ambulance to take us to Marrakech. I rode in the back with Hillary mumbling weakly and our baby gently cooing for her mother's milk. Abdurrahman rode in the front with the driver.

In Gueliz, in a sleek modern clinic with televisions and intravenous antibiotics, everything was fine. It was fine almost instantly and it cost about \$150—so little that I did not even bother filling out the paperwork for the insurance repayment. I spent the night to make sure all was well, then went back to the village to retrieve my son, our nannies, as well as a visiting anthropologist friend. I rented a car. No more busses. No more waiting. We have never as a family gone back to Tagharghist.

I returned in 2006-2007, however. A Spanish friend accompanied me for the *'eid* and as usual, everything had changed. New houses were being built, others had been abandoned; old people had died and new households were formed, property was reassembled amongst the new generation. Villages seem to be stolid places, but in an important sense this is not so. Life and death is transacted rapidly here, bodies are born and die at a pace that makes those of us sensitized elsewhere weak in the knees, sick to our proverbial stomachs.

When I asked, Fatima Id Baj told me her daughter Sumaiya had died just after I left in 2004, probably of dehydration; she had had a new boy after that, Hisham, and now a tiny baby daughter Salma. Salma looked sickly to me, white, goggle-eyed and unresponsive and I felt a chill when Fatima opened her swaddling to show the skeletal baby to me. Fatima wanted to ask about my family, though, about Hillary and whether she had fully recovered, whether my children were OK, whether they would ever come back. Fatima's brother had lost a baby since I had seen him, too, and as I started to ask around it was clear that, as Fatima had told me years ago, everybody has children who die, everybody has a different number. This statement hit me differently in 2007 than it had in 1998. I thought of my own babies far away in Connecticut in the snow. My four year-old boy had a terrible flu when I left (he was supposed to have come with me) and I did not know how he was doing, whether he was OK. My throat constricted; my eyes burned. I wanted to hug Fatima and weep for her lost baby and all lost babies, but I could not and did not. She continued making small talk, lightly detailing the comings and goings of village bodies since my previous visit and all I could hear was a high whine in my ears and the throb of my own blood pumping.

In 2008 I returned again. Salma had indeed died, Fatima told me, but she was about to give birth again. She prayed and prayed that God would send her a daughter, and I prayed Fatima would survive another birth. Only a few days passed. I was in Marrakech trying to get the solar hot water fixed in the mosque and Fatima's baby was born, alive. Fatima was fine, but weak. I left some baby clothes and a little money and went to America before anyone had chanced to give the new girl a name.

If my early impressions of the hard surfaces of life in Morocco involved the difficulties of young urban people—fathers all powerful and too strict, no jobs, no ability to marry, no way to have sex, to migrate, to escape boredom—I was now a parent. I was focused on the new tragedies that had become visceral to me,

and how these intersected the exigencies specific to rural life. Abdurrahman had lost two boys, but for him this was not so bad. After all, he told me with some pride, “we used to lose about three babies in ten, and now we barely lose one.” *One in ten babies dead...* This sanguine health statistic results in a rising population, of course, more babies living, and thus more children sent down to the city to work, a whole new set of hard surfaces to deal with. It is an excruciating world villagers endure.

Morocco has always seemed hard to me, and contradictory; it involves arresting beauty, kindness, and warmth, but more ugliness than I care to see, fear I do not want to acknowledge, and pain that should not be. What is hard about Morocco has changed over time, and it changes in different parts of the country, with differently situated people, among different classes, in rural and urban *milieux*. I cannot arrange the “stratificatory realities” of Morocco in a sensible architecture because the hardness does not align in strata so much as coagulate in clots. Tough situations are built of confused amalgamations, distressing amplifications of misfortune without unilinear precedents or simple responses. We tend to think of “power structures” and “relations of inequality” in clean graphical terms, but Morocco’s problems *feel* like great sticky piles of bad luck, skewed odds, and misshapen dilemmas. It is hard to know where to start.

This is hard to portray, too, hard to put into text, because the anthropology of mundane struggle is about the experiential, and it must be understood experientially. Hard surfaces are *felt* rather than observed, as I have emphasized. They can be documented in some ways, calculated, and I have tried to do this in at least one village, but documentation lacks visceral meaning, what Searle calls the “first person ontology” that stymies inquiry into the *experience* of consciousness. Human consciousness has a feeling to it, in other words, a sense of itself, and is not simply an idea or an arena for ideas.

This has been one of the central difficulties of the Geertzian notion of culture, as Unni Wikan and others have pointed out. We know that our lives are thoroughly cultural, that our bodies incorporate culture and are understood in cultural terms, but even Wikan is unable to explain how bodies speak back, what part they play in the dialectic of growth and history. We are rightfully dismissive of mute biological determinism, but this has left us poorly equipped to explain bodies as anything other than empty receptacles for culture, as containers that for some reason do not shape their contents. And this has left us sputtering in the face of our own everyday experience. My children crawl into bed with me virtually every night, for instance, their little bodies seeking the warmth of others, or maybe just following some primal directive to disrupt my marriage. I put them back in their own beds virtually every night, too; I attempt to install the discipline of my alienated society, impress upon them the importance of being alone, in your own space. Eventually my message is bound to penetrate, they will embody my

culture, but it is very clear to me that my exogenous instructions are in dialogue with something else, with my children's own corporal directives. My son even explains it this way. He says "my body wants to be in your bed," or, when he behaves badly he tries to avoid responsibility by claiming that his heart wanted to do it, or his tummy. It is not "him" but his body – not exterior cultural forces. He has on his own decided that his *'aql* is underdeveloped, in other words, he lacks a body that has had reason built into it. My argument is that the development I seek for my son is the inculcation of a *feeling*, a bodily preference for private space more than an idea about it.

For meanings to be meaningful they must be more than culturally logical, they must be *feelingful*, to borrow terminology from A.F. Robertson (2001:94). Thus when Geertz says dismissively that we need not come half way round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar, or when Rabinow asserts that it is not necessary to come to Morocco to learn that Moroccans are poor, they are only partly right. To learn *that* life is hard is relatively straightforward, but to learn how it feels requires significantly more. The question of everyday struggle demands more than material tabulation, but it also begs for something beyond an abstracted cultural schematization. Not only must theoretical assertions "hover low" over interpretations (Geertz 1973:25), but interpretations themselves should at least hover low over –if not try to actually grasp-- the bodies they reference.

We have developed a rich catalogue of concepts in Morocco, a range of sophisticated ways of thinking about what anthropology is and does, but I am not sure we have well evoked suffering, at least of the rural poor, the specific suffering by which growing, working, dying farmers maintain their cultural worlds. It has not been for lack of trying. Following Geertz, and reacting against him, Anglophone anthropology has developed a canon that is elaborate and conceptually elegant, philosophically sophisticated and deeply informed. The Moroccan canon has a number of ethnographic gems, masterpieces of the genre, but as a body it strikes me as too seemly, too Apollonian. Disembodied anthropological intellects are poorly equipped to engage the corporality of everyday struggle, and thus we have left the question of how life is hard –how it *feels*- for artists to evoke and development workers to ameliorate. This has had consequences far beyond North Africa.

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