

The Purpose(s) of Transcription: Transcription Practice in Three Books

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1. Introduction

In each of my three books—*Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question* (1982), *Arab Voices: The Human Rights Debate in the Middle East* (1991), and *Beyond Casablanca: M.A.Tazi and the Adventure of Moroccan Cinema* (2004)—I transcribed extended sections of speech, although in each I did this in a somewhat different manner. In many respects these different transcription practices are related to an issue that, at first glance, may seem an altogether different one: what is the larger purpose of the text? Also, transcriptions, by their nature as transformations of oral communication into written form, pose significant problems for readers. Not having been party to the communicative interactions on which the transcriptions are based, readers may know very little about an interaction's context and may need guidance in order to interpret the transcription in any meaningful way.

In this paper I will explore these issues with reference to the three books named above, asking how transcription and a text's larger purpose are related, and what forms of guidance may be offered to readers. To do this we need, first, to get some sense of the fundamental purpose and basic structure of each book.¹

2. Three Books: Purpose and Structure

Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question (1982)

Purpose

When I went to Morocco for the summer of 1975, after having done research there twice before for extended periods, my objectives were simply to

¹ Transcribed texts, where they occur, are inevitably part of a broader textual construction that involves many other elements, some required, some voluntary: among them, title, cover, acknowledgments, table of contents, epigraph, preface, introduction, conclusion, epilogue, chronology, cast of characters, footnotes and/or endnotes, index, visual material (e.g. photographs, maps), etc., all organized into some overall structure (parts, chapters, sections within chapters). There is also the question of the relationship between the text and the world outside it (lived experience, theory, broader significance).

It would be interesting to explore text-construction and the place of transcriptions with regard to these elements, but this would take me beyond the length limits of this paper (and beyond many other limits as well). However, interested readers might refer to a delightful book by Kevin Jackson (*Invisible Forms*, 2000) which, in an anecdotal rather than theoretical manner, deals with many of the items mentioned in this note's first sentence.

confront my dissatisfaction with traditional anthropology and to spend time with people I had come to care about and who seemed to care about me. I came to record a series of conversations with a Moroccan farmer, Faqir Muhammad, each growing out of a particular event that occurred while I was there. As the summer progressed and afterwards, I continued to turn my attention to these events and dialogues, finding that the “event + dialogue” motif helped me understand my dissatisfaction with traditional anthropology and articulate the direction in which I thought my own work should go. In *Moroccan Dialogues* I tried to chart the course of this experience from my initial dissatisfaction, through my tentative and then gradually more explicit fieldwork project, to the theoretical argument and the considerations and conclusions about experience and textual form that all this led to.

My theoretical argument was roughly the following. Traditional anthropological genres adopt a contemplative epistemology that effectively divorces Self from Other and places the Self beyond criticism. This leads anthropologists to systematically neglect, in their transformation of the field experience into text, three crucial “dialogical” aspects of the experience: its temporal dimension (the fieldwork experience unfolds over time and in particular sequence); its contingent nature (rupture and discontinuity are constitutive components and the experience is not, as it often appears when transformed in traditional anthropological works, simply the effective implementation of the anthropologist’s prior intention); and that, as with all human action, anthropological practice is “embarked” (it is necessarily tied to social forces that transcend personal action, its success or failure depends in part on such forces and, in its own way, it contributes to them).

These dialogical aspects seemed to me best summarized in the notion of the “wager”: that human action inevitably occurs in situations of risk and possible failure, that the anthropologist’s work is inevitably related to (although not necessarily supportive of) the interests of the society and institutions from which s/he issues, and that success depends on forces beyond our individual control. Neglecting the wager nature of anthropology reinforces the anthropologist’s self-serving view of the discipline’s power and limits potential challenges posed to anthropological practice and to the anthropologist him/herself.²

Moroccan Dialogues, in its focus on events and dialogues, on certain aspects of the common experience of Self and Other, and in the subsequent theoretical reflections on the encounter, attempted to make explicit its wager on a particular way of engaging with anthropology and with the other, and also to make explicit the possibility that the wager would be a losing one. Encouraging readers to engage in their own dialogue with the book was meant to open anthropology and the book itself to critical examination: “To the extent that the Self’s conceit may be here more visible, the Self’s defenses less hidden and more easily probed, the individual’s ties to the interests of his own society more obvious and clearly exposed: to that extent should this book point the way toward a critique of interpretations of the Other where the immunity of the Self is more subtly promoted

² My discussion of the wager owed much to Pascal and to Goldmann’s classic work (1964).

and, also, toward a critique of itself" (xxiii).

Structure

Moroccan Dialogues has both a Table of Contents (see Appendix 1) and, immediately following this, a Detailed Table of Contents (see Appendix 2 for an excerpt). The Table of Contents shows a book divided into two main sections, "A 'record' of fieldwork" and a theoretical reflection ("On the dialogic of anthropology"), as well as a number of supporting introductory and concluding sections. The Detailed Table of Contents allows us to examine more closely the structure of "A 'record' of fieldwork" (the section containing extended transcriptions). We see here that each chapter is divided into three sections: an event's description, a middle section where the anthropologist poses some questions to himself about various aspects of the experience (for example, Chapter 3, "A project ventured: events and dialogues" and Chapter 4, "Opening questions about events and dialogues") and then a dialogue between the anthropologist and Faqir Muhammad. We also see that the dialogues contain several elements designed to help the reader navigate: subheads (in bold) indicate the general topic of the section and, within these, we find a list of the anthropologist's prepared questions (in the text itself these prepared questions are in boldface—see Appendix 6 for an example). However, the Detailed Table of Contents does not show unplanned questions that arose during the interview, nor is there any hint of the nature of the informant's answers.

Arab Voices: The Human Rights Debate in the Middle East (1991)

Purpose

My purposes in *Arab Voices* were quite different. After five years of teaching anthropology in universities in New York City, I went to London in 1978 to work for the human rights organization Amnesty International, directing their Middle East research department for the next six years. There, I was concerned with day-to-day violations of human rights throughout the area from Morocco in the west through Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States to the east. In the course of this work several rather far-reaching questions arose: can there be a universally applicable notion of human rights? Is there any evidence that a human rights consensus is gaining ground? Does an emphasis on "universal" human rights ignore the variety of human beliefs and hide what may be substantially different notions of human rights held by different peoples? Might not a universalist approach weaken rather than strengthen forces seeking to improve the human rights situation in various parts of the world? After leaving Amnesty International in 1984, over the next decade and a half I carried out research and writing projects on these and related issues, with particular reference to the Arab world.

In the Arab world, the people explicitly using (or criticizing) the notion of "human rights," articulating it, working with it (or against it), are almost always intellectuals of some sort or other (that is, people whose actions involve publicly

formulating and promoting certain ideas and points of view)—journalists, writers, political and religious figures, academics, students, lawyers, certain kinds of militants and activists, and so on. Given the tense relationship between the West and the Arab world, many people I interviewed expressed the hope that my research might contribute to dispelling what they felt were unfair and inaccurate Western attitudes towards Arabs. We discussed at length how “orientalist” fallacies contributed to these attitudes, fallacies like presuming the West to possess a rationality superior to that of other civilizations, distilling a supposedly general “underlying world view” (be it phrased as “Arab,” “Middle Eastern,” or “Islamic”) and in this way inevitably oversimplifying the diversity that constitutes any living society, imputing “underlying meaning” to what people say and thereby claiming to have deeper insight into people than they have into themselves, segmenting life into separate analytic domains (such as “the economic,” “the political,” and so on) and thus losing a view of the whole, and, finally, assuming that one researcher is capable of surveying, objectively and comprehensively, the full extent of a very complex society and is able to construct a representative sample of all opinion and give each of them their due.

With this research subject and the character of relations between the West (and particularly the U.S.) and the Arab world in mind, I felt it made the most sense to try to write for a general, literate audience rather than for a narrowly academic and professional one, to seek a focus that was situated somewhere between the day-to-day events that journalism attends to and the deeper but often esoteric matters that scholars study, and to concentrate on and present in the book the words my interlocutors spoke to me. Not only would adhering to their spoken words counter many of the orientalist fallacies mentioned above, but, also, there is a vitality to the spoken word, and a currency, that is often lost in academic discussion of human rights. Also, I was more interested in the everyday, common use of human rights notions and the spoken word would have a responsiveness to my questions that the written word could never achieve. Therefore I adhered closely to people’s testimony and presented extended transcriptions of it.

Structure

What might a text on this subject look like? I rejected the straightforward chronological form that I had used in *Moroccan Dialogues*—here that would be too confusing and disorderly, given my many interlocutors (ranging widely in age, occupation, social experience, ideological perspective, attitudes towards the West and the U.S., and so on), and the three countries I was exploring (Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt), each of which I visited a number of times. At the other extreme, a rigorously analytic presentation summarizing, reworking, and putting into my own words what had been said to me would negate the very purpose of the research, which was to hear how people in the Arab world themselves thought about and worked with notions of human rights.

One solution I considered involved taking a strictly “national” approach, limiting each chapter to a discussion of one country. But this would mistakenly isolate each country and insulate each country’s intellectuals from those in other

countries, despite the fact that socially, economically, and culturally, deep and significant ties exist among these countries and among their intellectuals. Another solution might be to structure the book thematically, perhaps along the fault lines of various international conventions and treat, for example, civil and political rights in one section and economic, social and cultural rights in another. But this would tend to abstract discussions from their national and cultural contexts and would have the added disadvantage of forcing ideas into a framework my interlocutors had little role in constructing.

As I wrestled with this problem, I mulled over words spoken early in my research by Muhammad Guessous, a sociologist at the University of Rabat, in Morocco. Guessous had said, "The fundamental problem [here and in the Middle East]...is that there are three great areas of unexamined, even forbidden territory.... They are so vast that I call them continents—the continents of power, of religion, and of sex." Thinking about this idea over the following months, I came to revise it as a number of issues emerged, as different speakers gave different emphases to problems and developments in their societies. The continent of "religion" came to look more like a broad territory of key concepts a community uses to articulate a notion of itself—ideas related to religion of course, but also ideas about "identity," "history," "continuity and rupture," "the nation." The continent of "sex" began to look more like a domain where the private and the personal reign, and where the key issues are ideas about the "individual" and the role of liberty. And "power" came to look more like the terrain where individuals come together in groups, in civil society, and seek to engage in public activity and influence public life.

Although these three themes came up in a significant way in all three countries, one theme seemed to dominate discussion in each country—"identity" in Egypt, "the individual" in Morocco, "public activity and civil society" in Tunisia. So I decided that, along with having each chapter focus on one country and on the main theme that emerged during my discussions in that country, I would introduce speakers from the other two countries when their comments on the main theme seemed relevant. In this way, I hoped each chapter would reflect the particular problems and provide a deeper discussion of one country, but would also set the discussion in its regional context.

What can we see from *Arab Voices's* Table of Contents (see Appendices 3a and 3b for an excerpt)? (*Arab Voices* had no Detailed Table of Contents—at the time I thought this might be too cumbersome and perhaps distracting for the general readers I hoped to reach.) Since most of the people I talked to framed their discussion by pointing to the profound crisis they saw their societies confronting, I began the book with the notion of "crisis." After that the text as a whole is divided into three main parts, each focusing on one particular country and one broad theme. When particular subsections within these main parts involved testimony from another country, that country was indicated in parentheses. One sign of my effort to remain close to interlocutors' spoken words is the fact that the headings of many of the subsections within chapters consisted of quotations from these testimonies.

Beyond Casablanca: M.A.Tazi and the Adventure of Moroccan Cinema (2004)

Purpose

As an anthropologist, I had always been interested in the broad question of how culture shapes human behavior and how people create and shape culture; during my work in the human rights field a related issue was of great urgency—how new ideas and visions, such as those related to human rights, are elaborated and communicated, how they enter the public sphere and become part of a people's shared culture. In exploring these kinds of issues, I began to look more closely at how cultural products were created in the Arab world and the kinds of visions they conveyed. Within this broad domain I decided to concentrate on cinema and feature films and soon came to focus on Morocco.

Initially I had no intention of writing a book that centered on any one or even several Moroccan filmmakers. However, as I began to learn more about Moroccan cinema, I began to consider such a project and to think that Muhammad Abderrahman Tazi, whose career spanned the entire history of Moroccan national cinema from independence in 1956 to the present, and who had made the most popular Moroccan film ever, might provide an excellent lens for exploring this subject. When I suggested the project to him—proposing that we go through his entire career, then each of his films in turn, and then some of the themes the films conveyed—he answered, “I have a different idea. I’ll tell you stories about my experiences on my own films, on foreign films, and so on, sort of a ‘behind the scenes’ approach.... The best way to do this is just to have a free-wheeling conversation. Of course, after that you’ll have to do a restructuring, a reworking.” We ended up, some two years later, having accomplished 16 taped interviews in all, each lasting about two hours.³ By the end of our time together, our discussions, although still following a question-answer format, took on a more conversational, give-and-take, flavor. By then I had decided I wanted to present Tazi to the reader mostly in his own words.

Structure

Beyond Casablanca has a short Table of Contents (see Appendix 4) which, like the one in *Moroccan Dialogues*, fits on one page. In it, as in *Moroccan Dialogues*, we see no indication of transcribed speech, no quotation marks, etc. And as in *Moroccan Dialogues*, there is a Detailed Table of Contents (see Appendix 5 for an excerpt), but, rather than immediately following the Table of Contents as it does in *Moroccan Dialogues*, in *Beyond Casablanca* it is found among the end-matter, following the Conclusion and a Chronology.

As we see from the Table of Contents and the Detailed Table of Contents together, the book consists of a series of chapters, each exploring a particular stage in Tazi's career (although not in strict chronological order), and intro-

³ Each interview took place in Tazi's home in Rabat, either early in the morning or in the evening. Tazi set the time and place and his aim, explicitly, was to position the interviews so they not unduly disrupt his other work.

ducing relevant aspects in the political, economic, institutional, and/or cultural environment. Then, in each chapter's final section and in interview form, Tazi expresses his views concerning that stage and those aspects. Four chapters are followed by a complementary section, an "interlude" (also in interview form), where we address either a specific cinematic issue or Tazi's experience in producing and directing a particular film. It is clear from the Detailed Table of Contents that there are many transcribed sections and these, for the most part, are headed by quotations from the dialogues that follow.

3. Transcription Issues: Chronology/Comprehensiveness/Context

In deciding what practice to follow in transcribing and presenting oral speech I faced a number of problems common to the three books, among the most important to me being the extent to which I would preserve overall chronology (retaining the sequence in which interviews/dialogues occurred) and particular interview chronology (retaining sequence within a dialogue), how comprehensive the presentation of testimony would be (what, if anything, would be left out and how would I transcribe or otherwise convey my own participation), and how to contextualize these transcribed sections so that readers would not lose their footing.

These aspects were particularly important for me in light of the concerns I had highlighted in *Moroccan Dialogues*. As I wrote each subsequent book, I decided I wanted to follow some of the same general guidelines, including showing the intersubjective situation of fieldworker and informant as well as the broader societal and cultural context of the research encounter. In this effort to go beyond what I would call depersonalized, decontextualized, and non-reflexive perspectives, I did not want to overemphasize the subjectivity and/or interiority of Self (that is, of the anthropologist and his/her own society), nor did I want to foster the illusion that there could be an "objective" transcription of lived experience into a text supposedly faithful to it—on the contrary, I believed it to be quite obvious that the very idea of a text "faithful" to lived experience was oxymoronic.⁴

Let me now explore these issues below, focusing on chronology, comprehensiveness, and context.

Chronology and Comprehensiveness

In studies of narrative, a distinction is often made between "story-time" (the sequence of plot events) and "discourse-time" (how these events are presented in the text). These would correspond, in anthropological research of the

⁴ I had said in *Moroccan Dialogues*—and I believe this applies to all written works—that since "experience is inevitably transformed in making it into a text...the effectiveness of this book should be judged...not in the light of a necessarily mistaken criterion of fidelity to experience, but in terms of the significance of taking certain aspects rather than others as essential, and the book's success in displaying them..."(xviii-xix).

sort I have been discussing, to the chronology of events in real life and the sequence as presented in any particular piece of writing. To which we should add a third aspect—"research-time," or how the research process unfolds.

Moroccan Dialogues (see Appendix 6 for an example of transcription)

In *Moroccan Dialogues* I had emphasized the need for the anthropologist to seek a form of writing that reflected the nature of the fieldwork experience, since only in this way could the fieldwork experience, the discipline of anthropology, and the role played in these by one's own society, be open for the reader's critical examination. For these purposes to be fulfilled I felt it important for discourse-time to reflect both story-time and research-time. Events were described and conversations transcribed in the order in which they occurred; within the conversations themselves the order of the conversation was retained. Also, an effort was made for the dialogue to be presented as comprehensively as possible: all the questions and answers voiced during the dialogue were transcribed fully and editing of these conversations was minimal.

Arab Voices (see Appendix 7 for an example of transcription)

In *Arab Voices* I attempted to carry this perspective forward into the domain of human rights in the Arab world while recognizing that neither the wager perspective nor the transcription procedure I had used in *Moroccan Dialogues* provided a recipe. Although *Arab Voices* and *Moroccan Dialogues* are both built upon interview material, the two books differ radically in form, because in each the author faced a different set of problems. Yet both books retain important elements in common—the attempt to preserve the tie between the research materials and the situation in which they were produced, the attempt to enable readers to hear other voices in a direct manner—and thus both go some way, at least, in the direction of opening themselves to criticism and making it more difficult to over-simplify and stereotype these materials.

Unlike *Moroccan Dialogues*, where reproducing conversations word-for-word and a strict chronological ordering were aided by the unity of time, place, and character, in *Arab Voices* fully maintaining chronology and striving for dialogic comprehensiveness would have made for an extremely unwieldy text: after all, I was moving among three countries and I was talking to many individual speakers, seeing many of them several times. Also, although human rights constituted a unified central subject-matter, there was no agreed definition on its meaning and it was an object of great contention and debate.

Therefore in *Arab Voices*, I edited the spoken word more actively, trying to blend its advantages (spontaneity and sensitivity to human interaction) with those of the written word (coherence of presentation and stylistic control). While not nearly as comprehensively transcribed as the testimony in *Moroccan Dialogues*, and although I gave a new order to the sequence of testimonies—placing testimony wherever I thought it most effective, within any given section of testimony—I attempted to retain the order of words and thoughts, trying to

remain as faithful to the manner and content of expression as I could. With the main purpose of the book being to convey to a broad readership the thoughts of a wide variety of Arab intellectuals on a very complicated issue, I felt that transcribing my own questions would complicate the text unnecessarily, so I paraphrased my questions or else put them into a more narrative form.

Beyond Casablanca (see Appendix 8 for an example of transcription)

In *Beyond Casablanca*, where the author was trying to bring to the reader an understanding of one particular domain of creative activity via the experience of one exemplary figure within that domain, there is little overlap between story-time, discourse-time, and research time. Although the “story-time” of Tazi’s life is presented in a mainly chronological manner, this is not strictly so, since the opening chapter focuses on a period in the mid-1990s—a watershed in Moroccan film history—when Tazi made Morocco’s most popular film and when the Moroccan public first began to show strong support for the nation’s films. This leads to a discussion of Tazi’s youth; thereafter we follow his own career in mostly chronological order, as we move into the present.

Yet this “discourse-time,” while bearing some relation to the “story-time” of Tazi’s career, bears little relation to “research-time,” that is, to the actual order among and within interviews. Arranged here in a “fictional” sequential order, the interviews have been fragmented, edited, and recomposed. It is only in the final chapter, which presents our last interviews, that “story-time,” “discourse-time,” and “research-time” come together: here, at the end of the research period, the interview’s order was largely maintained and the interview was placed chronologically where it occurred, at the end.

In this book Tazi speaks to the reader at length and the question-answer format is retained. However, unlike in *Moroccan Dialogues* where the question-answer format contained all the material (with only slight editing) and proceeded chronologically, in the *Beyond Casablanca* interviews much has been left out and what has been included has been recomposed, although the question-answer form largely reflects the interview content of those sections and subjects that are included.

To summarize the chronology and comprehensiveness of the three books: in *Moroccan Dialogues* the three “times” overlap; in *Arab Voices*, speakers are grouped according to the relevance of the subjects they are discussing, and their testimony is recomposed, but, within each section of testimony, an effort was made to preserve it largely as it was spoken, while reworking the anthropologist’s interventions so that they appear in a narrated manner rather than as transcribed questions; in *Beyond Casablanca*, story-time and discourse-time mostly overlap, but research-time has been radically re-ordered and significant sections of testimony recomposed, recombined, edited, or eliminated.

Context

Seen historically, *Moroccan Dialogues* was part of what came to be known as “the experimental moment in anthropology”—a period beginning in the late 1970s and continuing today, with many different works challenging traditional forms of anthropological presentation.⁵ These works attracted a significant amount of attention in the discipline and a number of them were criticized for, among other things, placing too much emphasis on the anthropologist’s subjective experience at the expense of presentations of the “other,” and for not paying sufficient attention to broader phenomena, for focusing on raw, immediate experience at the expense of context.

I do not feel the first criticism to be relevant to my own work where there is little emphasis on the anthropologist’s subjective experience, other than discussions of how the author’s research interests developed, and reflections on how his background and orientation contributed to structuring particular research encounters.⁶ However, I would like to take some time here dealing with the second criticism, the question of context.

Moroccan Dialogues

Dennis Tedlock, an early commentator on and contributor to this “experimental moment,” directly addressed the question of context in a sensitive reading of *Moroccan Dialogues*, itself published in question-answer form.

Q. Well, it’s just that Kevin Dwyer’s *Moroccan Dialogues* struck me as nothing but field notes, or lightly edited interviews. Where’s the ethnography?

A. Those interviews are ethnographically informed and shaped at every step, and they would be even if we stripped away Dwyer’s commentaries, which some people seem to have overlooked. In fact, the commentaries take up 45 percent of the book, so I take it that 55 percent dialogue is already too much for readers who are used to traditional ethnographies. But perhaps the most radical thing Dwyer did was to engage in dialogue about events both he and Faqir Muhammad had witnessed. What better way could there be to explore the differences between ethnographers and others close up? And finally, Dwyer discussed the project of the book itself with Faqir Muhammad and included this discussion in the book. He kept the dialogue

⁵ The term “experimental moment” gained currency when Marcus and Fischer used it in the subtitle of their book (1986). For a discussion of the role of *Moroccan Dialogues* and of several other books that challenged traditional anthropological forms, and for a view of these books as symptoms of cultural shifts in anthropology and in U.S. society as a whole, see Trencher 2000.

⁶ As I pointed out in *Moroccan Dialogues* (278-280), I did not share the view that one of the central goals of anthropology was “the comprehension of self by the detour of the comprehension of the other” (Rabinow 5, quoting Ricoeur 20), but was more in sympathy with the view that “[t]here is also a value, coordinate with tact and respect for the other, in pushing the swing of comprehension back to the other” (Crapanzano 139).

going. (Tedlock 328)

As Tedlock points out, “commentaries” occupy almost half the book.⁷ In addition to contextualizations presented in the preface, prologue, chronology, cast of characters, and so on (as well as those that are part of an event’s description), there is also the role played by the numerous footnotes the author believed essential for the reader’s understanding of both the events and Faqir Muhammad’s speech. Had the notes been placed as endnotes their important contextualizing function would have been weakened or even lost.⁸

It is also clear that many of the questions the anthropologist posed to the Faqir sought answers that would contextualize the discussion—for example, when a returning emigrant serves as focus for an event (see Appendix 6, Chapter 4), the anthropologist inquires about relations between Muslims and Christians and about more general aspects of emigration; later, in Chapter 6 (not in the appendix), where the event involved a bicycle theft, the anthropologist asks about relations among different Moroccan ethnic groups—Arabs, Berbers, and Jews.

There was, too, the contextualization of placing the research project’s development as part of a questioning of anthropology as a whole. This is seen in the middle sections of each chapter (again, see Appendix 2: Chapter 3, “A project ventured: events and dialogues” and Chapter 4, “Opening questions about events and dialogues”; for an example of this in the text see Appendix 6: “A project ventured...”). I might point out, as well, that these sections were reconstitutions of the research process, rather than reflections of it.

Arab Voices

Within the transcribed sections in *Arab Voices*, in addition to seeing the anthropologist’s questions in the form of narrative paraphrases (rather than in the strict question-answer form found in *Moroccan Dialogues* and *Beyond Casablanca*), I often introduced explanatory passages and connecting material to enable the reader to better understand and contextualize the testimony. Other than that, my own thoughts were limited to the preface, to introductory sections to each chapter which provided some historical, political, and cultural context for each country, and to the conclusion. With all this contextualizing material, especially the explanatory passages I was free to insert in order to join or introduce sections of testimony, footnotes did not seem essential and note-related material was put in the form of endnotes.

Although the book’s Conclusion appears on the surface to satisfy a conclusion’s usual function, its main section begins in a way that calls this function into question, “In the guise of a conclusion let me try to avoid...simplifications ” (213).

⁷ I am not sure how Tedlock went about this calculation, but, following his example, I made a similar estimation for my two subsequent books and came up with comparable figures, with roughly half of each book composed of transcribed material.

⁸ Publishers prefer the less-expensive endnotes; the author is grateful for his editor’s and publisher’s understanding of the importance of footnotes in this case.

This responded to one of my main aims in *Arab Voices*—to convey the complexity and diversity of views in the Arab world, to deliberately avoid simplifications, and to seek, instead, ways that would make it difficult for readers, reviewers, and commentators to package, to “commodify,” the views that were being expressed to me. I felt this to be particularly important for the subject of human rights in the Arab world about which strongly held stereotypes already abound.

In attempting to find a form that would make this “commodification” difficult, I tried to make clear that the people I interviewed were not representative of society as a whole or even of intellectuals as a group, to avoid any implication that my own view was a comprehensive one, to clearly situate each speaker in his or her own national context while at the same time attempting to allow the regional and local resonance of testimony to be heard, to allow each speaker to play a formative role in structuring the discussions, and to make clear the personal and professional itinerary that led me to the subject and to writing a particular kind of book.

Some of the early reviews of *Arab Voices* show that I had some success in achieving this aim. In general, reviewers have not offered summary, stereotypical images based on the material in the book. The reasons for this may vary: perhaps some tried but were unable, others may have thought it a poor idea in any case, still others may have been convinced by the book’s arguments that such an effort was ill-advised.

In any event, reviews tended to contain phrases like: this book “make[s] generalizations and conclusions difficult” (Baacke 1991); “challenges the reader to draw his or her own conclusions if arriving at a definite conclusion is possible” (Al-Muhanna 1992); “[among] the finest studies [in that it] raise[s] more questions and offer[s] more directions than [it] resolve[s]” (Moore 1992). Some, however, were disturbed by the unorthodox nature of the presentation and had difficulty understanding both the considerations involved in the form and the form itself: one reviewer, although finding the interviews “conducted with patience and skill,” and the testimony characterized by “the richness and authenticity of the words,” nonetheless felt that the result is “sometimes irritating because of the lack of order in a presentation” (No author 1992); another called the book “informative, thought-provoking,” but found that “the rambling interview style can be confusing” (Baacke). Some, at least, saw the main point and found it difficult to use the word “Arab” in a generalizing manner: “The Arab world is so diverse and colorfully complex that by lumping together a standard Islamic perspective or even a common Arab perspective in the case of human rights would only prove that Dwyer’s attempt at tackling this debate was not understood at all” (Al-Muhanna 30).

Beyond Casablanca

Tazi comes to the reader in his own words—detailed and self-referential, necessarily so since my questions pushed him in these directions. He discusses his films, his career, and the circumstances within which these were carried forward, in answers to questions posed by an anthropologist born and raised in

New York—someone whose questions inevitably reflect his own interests concerning how the creative effort gets shaped by a specific economic, political, and cultural environment, as well as thematic interests such as the position of women, the colonial experience and the relationship between Morocco and “the West,” and so on. Unlike in *Arab Voices*, here (as in *Moroccan Dialogues*) the anthropologist does not introduce explanatory passages that interrupt the dialogue.

In the first section of each chapter the anthropologist establishes a historical, political, cultural, and social context for the various interviews, which deal with, for example, “Distributing and screening films in Morocco” (Chapter 1), “Morocco and Moroccan cinema: the first decades of independence” (Chapter 2), “Foreign productions in Morocco” (Chapter 3), and so on. In this book, as in *Arab Voices* but unlike in *Moroccan Dialogues*, the notes were appropriately placed as endnotes since much of the contextualizing was accomplished by the text itself.

4. Conclusion

In the guise of a conclusion (again!), I would like to emphasize that transcription practice needs to be related to the text’s larger purpose as well as to the importance of providing readers with the explanatory and contextual material necessary for them to reach meaningful interpretations. These needs have consequences for the particular transcription rules that are followed, and there are no easy recipes that can be followed for all transcription needs.

There are also ethical aspects that need to be attended to. With reference to *Moroccan Dialogues*, presenting a comprehensive transcription of the Faqir’s words and my own, while obeying his express wishes about what to exclude, pushed me to include matters irrelevant to normal anthropological argument, and to eliminate much of what I thought most interesting (discussions of politics, for example, both with regard to broader governmental structures as well as more immediate local power-holders). I therefore had to abandon the full control over the text that traditional anthropological conventions usually afford. But sticking close to the Faqir’s words and only minimally editing them also led to a series of problems regarding the acceptability of this material for other members of Moroccan society. This has resulted in some discussion, regarding a translation of *Moroccan Dialogues* into Arabic, of the advisability of including transcribed sections which criticize the behavior of particular individuals (even if these individuals were well-disguised in the text) or which might open Morocco itself, or some of its regions and localities, to accusations of deviance from accepted norms.⁹

In *Arab Voices*, most of my interlocutors were public figures, used to speaking for public consumption, practiced in phrasing their thoughts in ways that did not raise these sorts of problems. Also, this research project was structured in a way that would not put my interlocutors in difficult positions on what was,

⁹ I discuss this issue in detail in a forthcoming paper, “Familiar Genres, Diverse Audiences, Shifting Experiences: Some Ethical and Practical Considerations in Anthropological Life Histories,” soon to be published by the International Life History Workshop, University of Palermo, Italy.

potentially, a subject entailing significant risk. Here, questions regarding specific human rights violations were not posed, nor were opinions sought on contemporary governmental figures or other persons of authority. In the course of this research only one person preferred to remain unidentified; another, when he became a member of government, preferred to keep his distance from me.

Muhammad Abderrahman Tazi too, in *Beyond Casablanca*, was a public figure, well-practiced in giving interviews and in maintaining what he saw as a proper balance between intimacy and reserve, between disclosure and discretion. When I gave him copies of transcribed sections to review, the only changes he made involved correcting specific details and, occasionally, eliminating a name we both felt better left unmentioned. When the book was published and I presented him with a copy, he asked whether I had written anything in it that might be taken as insulting the monarchy and was relieved when I assured him I hadn't.

In addition to its ethical side, anthropological practice also has, obviously, a political side, in that it directly touches other human lives and deliberately initiates and restructures human relationships. In the three books discussed here, my aims, in providing extended transcriptions of testimony and dialogue, have resembled those articulated by Chinua Achebe, who has referred to "dialogue" as constituting an appropriate model for relationships between North and South, a model he saw as clearly rejected, often violently, by colonial as well as neo-colonial forces. In a related manner Tzvetan Todorov has pointed to dialogue as one of the fundamental characteristics of democracy (even if, I would add, it is not much in evidence in actual, current "democracies"), and he has identified a dialogically-based consensus as an ideal more suitable to the construction of modern society than other ideals, such as beauty or charisma, that have frequently been offered for such a purpose.

While neither reifying "dialogue," nor seeing transcriptions of it as the main "authentic" reflection in writing of interpersonal interaction, I believe a focus on what I have called a "dialogical" approach provides a useful way to emphasize the importance of hearing, directly, what people have to say, of placing this expression in the context from which it emerges, and of recognizing the relationship between individual action and social forces. It is a wager on this approach, with a faith in its possibility but also a recognition of its inherent risks and likelihood of failure, that has governed my own affinity for transcription and for the particular ways I have practiced it.

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Appendix 6:

56 / A "RECORD" OF FIELDWORK

back to normal. The others took longer; some suffered pain three weeks later, particularly when they urinated. For the youngest boys, the memory of the operation did not fade naturally, for they were frequently taunted by the other kids, and by adults as well, with threats such as, "Watch out, or I'll take you to the circumcisor." For weeks afterward, it was not uncommon for me to be asked, within earshot of the youngest, whether I had brought scissors with me. Such teasing was very effective, and the children would immediately burst into tears. In addition, the young ones remained for some time in terror of the courtyard in which the circumcision had been performed and stubbornly, almost in a tantrum, refused to enter it.

☒ A PROJECT VENTURED: EVENTS AND DIALOGUES

The circumcision took place only a few days after Sidi Ali's visit. By now, I was thinking that the sequence "event + dialogue" might be worth continuing: I would write a draft of the event soon after it occurred, to make what happened clear to me; that event, which the Faqir and I shared and which took place in the normal course of the Faqir's life, would furnish a clear focus for discussion. The discussion would extend, in a natural way, a relationship that had been nurtured on questions and answers, as one would expect in the interaction between anthropologist and informant.

I prepared for this dialogue as I had for the previous one. I came up with questions about details of the circumcision and the Faqir's views on the practice of circumcision ("The circumcision . . ."); about the Faqir's attitude toward his children, particularly toward a young son who had recently died ("Your children . . ."); and about his opinions and practices in raising children ("Parents and children . . .").

☒ THIRD DIALOGUE

THE CIRCUMCISION . . .

I'd like to ask you today about the circumcision that you did for the children, just four days ago. Why did you do it then?

When the moment is ready, you do it.

What do you mean, "ready"?

When you have the time, when we have the time.

Who is the fellow who performed the circumcision?

A faqir; he's called Faqir Muhammad b. l-Hajj.

Has he been doing this for long?

He's always been doing it, for about twenty years, or even thirty.

Is there anyone else in the region who does this?

There's one up there in the mountains, but he's too haughty.

Appendix 7:

178 *Tunisia: organizing for human rights and the rights of women*

about, they'd attack you by saying, 'You're not pious, we didn't see you every Friday at the mosque', or 'You're attacking one of the foundations of religion, and these foundations aren't open to interpretation'. You know, that is the sort of thing that bothers them the most, because it takes away their monopoly on interpretation.

As Muhammad Charfi explained it, the closeness of the voting had less to do with deep divisions within the League than with the awkward way proposals were phrased and voted upon, and he was quite critical, and indeed self-critical, of the League's careless handling of the voting procedure. He went on to say, 'The press campaign mentioned none of these difficulties and, instead, made every effort to convince the public that the League was divided right down the middle'.

It was clear, from what Muhammad Charfi and others involved in the charter discussions told me, that the League as a whole had found this a very difficult experience. Not only had the public campaign in the press put the League on the defensive, but also the disputes within the League had left many with a bad aftertaste. The League decided to hold a second national council meeting, on 22 September, to reconsider a number of questions raised in the campaign, as well as to recover the initiative.

Muhammad Charfi described what happened:

By the time of the second national council meeting, the League had recovered its unity. All we did at that second meeting was find a new formulation for article 8, which now states that 'Men and women, upon reaching legal majority, have the right to freely choose their spouse and to begin a family on the basis of their own personal convictions and consciences'. It also specifically states that the Tunisian Personal Status Code constitutes an important advance as regards the rights of women and the protection of the family.

We also replied to the argument that the UDHR had a Western spirit by saying that the UDHR didn't represent only Western views but expressed at one and the same time the views of the capitalist world, the communist world, Africa and Asia. The UDHR, therefore, was a compromise between the great world civilizations. And furthermore, contrary to what some people were arguing, the League stated its view that the UDHR was not an ideal that we should gradually approach, but constituted the minimum universal human values that one had to accept if one called oneself 'a man of liberty'.

Of course, we recognize that the UDHR is something that itself will have to be modified, and maybe some day when we have more weight on the international level we'll be able to make some contribution to that. But for now, the attitude of the League, as we developed it in the national council, is that the UDHR constitutes a minimum and that it is not a Western document, but was elaborated by communists, capitalists, Africans, Asians, etc.

Appendix 8:

Interlude: A First Feature—*The Big Trip* (1981)

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tion—the radio, the roads, exchanges between people—and just as often the lack of communication.

“A SCREENPLAY IS LIKE THE FLOWER BEFORE THE FRUIT”

K. How faithful was the film to the screenplay?

M. Nouredin always says, “A screenplay is like the flower before the fruit.” Once you have the fruit, no one thinks anymore about the flower that gave the fruit. Naturally, every film has to adapt the imaginary of a screenplay to the reality of shooting, to the circumstances, to the terrain. This often enriches the screenplay, which, coming as it does from the domain of the imaginary, is necessarily circumscribed and enclosed.

On the whole, the film is very faithful to the screenplay, except in a few of the details; also, there were some things I felt were too clear in the screenplay and there I tried to introduce a degree of ambiguity. You have to realize that Nouredin knew my concerns, my capacities, my potential, my orientation, and he wrote the screenplay keeping in mind that this was my first effort to make a fiction film. In my later films, where I took a much more active role in creating the screenplay, the changes I introduce are much more significant.

“A VERY SMALL CREW”

K. How did the shooting of the film go?

M. We completed the shooting in four weeks in spite of the weather, which was really terrible at times, particularly in Tangiers where, during February and March, it was still very cold.

Nouredin was with us the whole time, both because he had to redo the dialogue and rewrite scenes as we went along and also because he was in charge of production. All in all we had a very small crew, just six or eight people: an electrician, a gaffer, the sound recorder; I also had someone taking care of production tasks and an assistant director. That was all.¹

CHARACTERS AND ACTORS

THE “STAR COMPLEX”

K. Let’s talk for a moment about Omar’s character, a difficult one on which to base a film: he hardly speaks, his face is rather expres-

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