



# Dealing with Ethnography in the Context of Mediterranean Mobilities

## La etnografía en el contexto de las movilidades mediterráneas

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## Abstract

Today when working with mobilities, one is faced with the revision of a complete theoretical tapestry as well as entrenched methodological challenges of conducting ethnography; an endeavour which implies various tasks such as reviewing methodological nationalism, considering the essence of the research and the use of its adjectives, as well as problematising in the position of the researcher in a single-sited or in a multi-sited context of research. Therefore, this article takes its point of departure in ethnography as a production of knowledge, by working in two senses. First, by reviewing classic existing fieldwork. Secondly, by questioning the way we do fieldwork today in the context of Mediterranean mobilities. In order to provide some examples on such work on mobilities, this article tackles three main interconnected questions: the nature of ethnography as capturing new challenges, mainly through the mobility paradigm, the use of the adjectives of ethnography and its meaning, and finally considering some ethnographic reflections in the Mediterranean setting (fieldwork in Northern Morocco: Tangier and the Jebala Mountains) as a fieldwork illustration.

**Keywords:** mobilities, ethnography, Mediterranean, Northern Morocco.

## Resumen

Hoy, al trabajar con movilidades nos enfrentamos a una revisión completa de un contexto teórico así como con complejos retos metodológicos a la hora de realizar investigaciones de corte etnográfico; es una apuesta que implica varias tareas tales como la revisión del nacionalismo metodológico, el considerar también la naturaleza de la investigación y los adjetivos que atribuimos a esta, así como también problematizar sobre la posición del investigador en un emplazamiento único o en múltiples emplazamientos de análisis. Así, este artículo toma como punto de partida la etnografía como la producción de conocimiento, entendido en dos sentidos. En primer lugar, al revisar la tradición del trabajo de campo. En segundo lugar, cuestionando la forma que realizamos hoy el trabajo de campo en el contexto de las movilidades en el Mediterráneo. Veremos también como a través de diversos ejemplos este artículo persigue tres cuestiones interconectadas: la naturaleza de la etnografía para poder captar nuevos retos, especialmente a través del paradigma de las movilidades, del uso de la adjetivación de la etnografía y sus significados, y en último lugar, considerando algunas reflexiones etnográficas en el contexto Mediterráneo (trabajo de campo en Marruecos: Tánger y las montañas de Yebala), como una ilustración de la etnografía.

**Palabras clave:** movilidades, etnografía, Mediterráneo, Norte de Marruecos.

## 1. A point of departure

The main background to this work is the so-called globalisation context, i.e. the increasing interference of global capital on any particular scale; a social phenomenon which reveals sharp fragmentation processes together with intensified social inequality and increased human insecurity. In such a context, mobilities and globalisation find in a transnational perspective a way to understand connections between countries, connections that families find in many ways of remitting capital, objects, information, as well as through pendulous mobility patterns. Whilst transnationalism<sup>1</sup> is not completely new it did reach a particularly high degree of intensity on a global scale at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The reasons for this were the associated processes of globalisation, technological changes and decolonisation. If such increased circularity is to be thought of as one of the elements of global migration, the feminisation of international mobilities is another of its key elements, covering equally new paradigmatic regions and new migration poles (West Africa, Southern Europe, The Gulf, China), as well as emerging new spaces, like countries of emigration-immigration, new spaces of transit (Subsaharan Africa, Maghreb, Turkey, Mexico).

The point of departure in previous works that I conducted was that the Mediterranean was to be seen as a key place where to study with some of the insights of “the mobility turn”; it was what I have expressed in various occasions, as “The Mediterranean Caravansar”, meaning today a particular region of study for such social transformation (see for example, the most recent example of research in Ribas-Mateos, 2015, concerning the Eastern Mediterranean). Thus, such region was often represented as a very paradigmatic one, where the Mediterranean setting was key in where to see cross-border mobility as an axis of interpretation – historically and currently – and where borders are intertwined with mobility filters (strongly differentiating people) in a setting which is today one of the most militarised and heavily patrolled areas in the world, rife with unbalanced social representations. In addition, this Mediterranean setting (as an overall area of particular socio-economic crisis, social policies, borders

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<sup>1</sup> “Transnationalisation or transnational relations implies cross-border ties of individual and collective agents, such as migrants, migrant associations, multinational companies, religious communities, which constitute a social category. Transnational social spaces refer to sustained concatenation of cross-border ties and social practices, as exemplified, for example, in cross-border families, networks, transnational communities and organisations. Transnationality denotes a continuum of trans-state ties and practices, ranging from less to more intense and regular. Agents’ transnational ties constitute a marker of heterogeneity, akin to other heterogeneities, such as age, gender, citizenship, sexual orientation, cultural preferences or language use” (Faist, 2012: 51-52).

and mobilities) is also particularly challenging because it does away with rigid established area studies in favour of interrelations where the EU, southern Europe, North Africa, the Arab/Berber North Africa, the Arab Middle East, Turkey, the Balkans, etc. are all complex actors in an overarching global mapping, where mobilities can be traceable and mappable of physical movement. As mentioned, I have referred in the past to the idea of the Mediterranean Canvanserai that leads us to the idea of diverse and intensified circulation (Ribas-Mateos, 2005: 1). In such Mediterranean context, the Moroccan community must be considered as one of the most clarifying exponent of such circulation. This is why in previous studies I have considered the importance of remittances periodically sent for the basic physical reproduction of the household members, in order to give explanations on such movements and circulations. In such line of research, I have also taken into consideration the literature, which in the last decades has been the product of the agency-based approach, namely the role played by migrant women as agents of empowerment, or where migrant remittances and migrants organisations are seen as key actors or development.

In such Mediterranean setting, at first it was the research on mobilities coming from francophone literature that showed me how to first think about mobilities, thought in a broad sense, from motivations, rhythms, routes, social practices and conflicts, which were wide open to research. According to Peraldi (2001), contemporary migrations cannot really be considered as a single unequivocal form of mobility, in the sense of an institutionally organised social destiny. Whilst “controlled migration” (using Sayad’s terminology) characterises the essential nature of labour migrations during the Fordist age, today they have changed radically. There are a number of reasons for these changes: on the one hand, considering the entire range forms of movement, and on the other hand, looking at the fluidity and types of involvement in the economy. He tentatively puts forward three broad exploratory types. The first one deals with the circulatory movements, occasionally of a pendulous nature, between two or more points on routes that are always functional: routes of pilgrimage, trade or diaspora (in the case of the latter it must not be forgotten that there are large amounts of internal movements within the diasporas themselves: marriages, family celebrations, the histories of various families, etc). The second category replaces drifting in the traditional sense of the word, which could be defined as a kind of “wandering” (*errance*) mobility, in which the journey and movement are at once a beginning and an end, just like the classic figure of the Hobo of the Chicago School. Thirdly, according to him again, we must consider

actual migrations, carried out for a specific purpose of finding employment, yet one that differs from the first two in that the actors postpone the action of returning –in other words, the time to return becomes uncertain.

Although circulation, drifting and migrations might constitute three social experiences that are historically discontinuous, they have existed practically continuously throughout history, and have characterised the behaviour of certain populations and groups. These three forms may naturally become combined or superimposed; or to put it another way, follow on from one another in time. Evidence of this logic is to be found in his edited book on Marseilles and in relation to “the suitcase traders”, or using his French expression “commerce à la valise” (Peraldi, 2001). Such a case illustrates very finely the shift on employed migration towards itinerant trading circulations, especially amongst the Maghrebian population in Mediterranean Europe. Thus, following this same line of research I was able to observe how Moroccan migrants in Spain provided a dual incorporation onto the global as well as onto the European state they seem to choose. And this is a sharp difference for Southern Europe in comparison with Northern Europe, the fact that families are following now global patterns of mobility. For example, at the beginning of the nineties 63% of Moroccans in Valencia had close relatives in European countries whereas in France this figure was only 3% (Tarrius, 2000). This opens up the question of how to look at a form of transnationalism that challenges the rupture between emigration conditions and the classic social integration paradigm, and poses new questions to the perspective of international migration at this contemporary moment.

Along the same lines, and following with this francophone literature, one can witness how most of the complexities around the circular nature of migration have been inspired by Tarrius’ work on Mediterranean mobilities. He is able to elucidate, through his own research, how migrant identities are not reaffirmed as characteristically stable but through populations characterised by their movements; they function through a combination of territory and movements. Tarrius mints the term “circular territories” to refer to certain population groups who are hallmarked by movements, the coming and going, the type of entry and exit between worlds designed as different (Tarrius, 2000: 8).<sup>2</sup> Studies like the one developed by Tarrius enables us to open critical questions on the study of the social structure of migration on the line of the time-space geographies

<sup>2</sup> According to Tarrius these movements are highlighted by "stage systems", which are articulated by diversities in micro-places within the unity of circular territories, marking the modalities of mobile populations (2000: 244).

beyond the limits of the national space. Notwithstanding, those circularities can not only be expressed by the actual physical mobility of the people themselves, but can also be related to the circuits of information that bound transnational communities, flows of information with the help of today's technologies and bound peoples' social lives between those border cities and the migrants' dispersal over the globe. Therefore, the notion of territorial circularities will be underlined in order to give relevance to different groups of population for whom movement is an essential characteristic, the coming and going, the entrance and exit of worlds represented as different. Thus mobilities can be located at the case-study level when considering such categories in borderland Mediterranean settings, how people express them and how people consider them in managing their strategies of survival. Furthermore, Morokvasic-Muller (1999) remind us of how a new dynamic of mobility is playing a determinant role in the actors' strategies, specially detailed in circulatory or pendulum movements<sup>3</sup>.

More concretely, this first context is an approximation of my point of departure in this paper, a first point of discussion, where the interrogation comes from the research conducted in the early 2000. Nevertheless, as for my own research background, I have already previously outlined the role of mobility in a number of case studies ranging from "Mobilities au féminin" to teenage mobilities, to the understanding of the entanglement of mobilities at different scales (from cosmopolitan cities to rural towns), to the entanglement of borders and mobilities at different scales (external EU borders, intra-EU borders and border towns in different Mediterranean case-studies). Therefore, based on the experience on researching and writing on mobilities in the Mediterranean, the essay discusses the challenges facing practical ethnography, through some examples.

## **2. Ethnography as a way of engaging with new challenges**

So far, I have outlined the importance of the context of departure as a representation and research practice to the study of mobility, its theoretical nuisances. I

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<sup>3</sup> Her example is the explosion of transborder mobility in short movements, it is the "navette form" (shuttle) in Eastern and Central Europe during the 90s. They are petty traders, and many of them women, which really adapt to such circulation, the ones who choose the "economy of the travel" (*économie du bazaar*) as a form of searching for better strategies. She explains the strategy of such migrants circulating in a transnational space built up by their own itinerancy. Such strategy is based upon the ethnic business research where on the one hand observers refer to migration, immigration and integration, and on the other, the people concerned talk about "travel". With their circular work they combine both keeping their own jobs and keeping their family links. Furthermore, their migration is not only a survival strategy but also a research of sense, independence and social promotion.

have shown how each of these nuisances is implicated in the study. I would argue that the description of such a departure needs to be taken into account to provide accounts of mobilities at any given research study. In the following section I develop the ethnographic questions as a way of accounting for mobilities. In the recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in this question, and as we will see, how the debates have certainly become richer and more intense in the last years.

The first question we should ask ourselves is how ethnography can be a suitable method in contemporary time in the context of qualitative studies in social sciences – anthropology and sociology–. More specifically, I want to explore some of the problems that emerge from the encounter between ethnography and mobilities. I will start by addressing more specifically ethnography as a classic method which presents a practiced of participant observation that define issues like the access to social phenomena and the ambiguous relationships to those studied.

In this sense, back in the 80s, several authors in the field of anthropology started to shape new ways of focusing on anthropological fieldwork, in many ways different from the classical anthropological perspective. In 1986 Clifford, Fischer, and Marcus published two books that were instrumental in shaping a new culture of anthropology (cf. Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus and Fischer, 1986). Clifford made us think about such a change towards a new anthropology, a different cultural maker, when he observed the contrast of the way today we conduct research with the photo of Malinowski, in which he recorded himself writing at a table. As for Marcus and Fisher (1986) the turning point were two main books on such change, they indicated the book by Edward Said (1979), the classic “Orientalism” in cultural studies as a critic to Western representations of the Orient. The second book was the one by Freeman (1983), who criticised Margaret Mead’s lack of real knowledge of her research in teenagers in Samoa. The consequences of Freeman’s revelations shook public trust in the adequacy of using anthropological knowledge as a form of home critique. The third book would be the one by Eric Wolf (1982, putting forward the idea of an “outside connection”, an external one which remind us of the Wallenstein’s world system as narrative of world history which has had a tremendous impact in all social sciences, even in ethnographic terms; it is a view of capitalism without geographic boundaries, where national relationships are influenced by capitalism and inequality. Translating it into ethnography, Wolf argues how many societies had been treated by anthropologists as static entities (so, perceived as closed from the outside world, immune to external



forces), and how they were really produced and constructed in the course of the global expansion of capitalism (Wolf, 1982: 753), therefore being interconnected not only by their own history but by what was happening at multi-scalar levels, in our case in the context of a wider migration and economic crisis in the Mediterranean. Therefore, I indeed believe that ethnography is relevant to know what happens to the different actors “who are trapped in macro-processes”, and particularly here, when concerning global mobilities in a particular region of the world. Thus, this theoretical background shown by the different authors implies an emphasis on large processes regarding mobilities and also to rethink fieldwork practices in recent times.

In the line of Marcus, ethnography would be a way of choosing for an eclectic methodological choice, which privileges engaged research and scientific reflexivity, integrating a contextually rich and nuanced type of qualitative technique, in which fine grained daily interactions are the lifeblood of data. The contribution of Marcus here for our discussion is that he was able to propose an engaged participant observation, which also considers the complex relation of reciprocity from the research, in which one has to also include the idea of the Maussian gift (*le don* and *le contra-don*), underlining then the feedback from the researcher when conducting ethnographic work. Ethnographers typically do think of data as a gift from their informants, establishing a form of reciprocity which recalls a gift exchange. It is the question of what one leaves behind once the fieldwork is over.

Thus, in the first place, in this exercise of problematising mobilities through ethnography I should also reflect further on the idea of the field, the experience in the field and what the spatial site means. The use and conceptualisation of the field and the fieldwork or even of the field as a site (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997), is also a question to consider, especially when problematising about the field and fieldwork, especially when we think of how the field is outside us (or not), it is away from us, away from home, in bearing in mind the classic totalising idea of the field as a part in classic ethnography, away from interconnections, from mobilities.

Secondly, when engaging ethnography we must also interrogate critically about the changes regarding the new paradigm of mobility (Sheller & Urry, 2006), in my opinion a turning point in anthropological and sociological traditions, especially because it includes a hard criticism on methodological nationalism (in that respect, Bauman sees mobility as the topmost rank among the stratifying factors). Thus, the concept of mobility is presented as an essential key to understand connections,

assemblages and practices that contextualise and produce everyday life. This importance conceived on the ability to move people translates into a general ability to move and communicate and which today emerges as a fundamental social category to measure social inequality, which is related to known social categories but also to different spaces and historical periods. Therefore, mobility is a resource through which not everyone has an equal relationship and which involves different power levels of discourse and different practices of mobility when establishing movement and non-movement.

Thirdly, this paradigm is in many ways a contribution to the present discussion because it suggests a whole set of questions, theories, and methodologies rather than a totalising or reductive description of the contemporary world. Such an increase in mobility is also represented as an enormous geographical dispersal but at the same time it takes the form of territorial concentration of resources making place important in the description of today's world; in the same way as in the line of territorial concentrations of resources described by Sassen in her works since her first analysis on the Global city, at the network of territorial financial powers (Sassen, 2005).

With regard to its theoretical tools, Sheller and Urry (2006) think about a post-disciplinary field in which studies on space, place, borders and movements converge, where the new paradigm of mobility goes beyond sedentary and nomadic conceptualisations about location and movement. In order to develop these concepts, they registered six theoretical bodies within the mobility or the so-called "spatial turn" research in the social sciences related to: the human will to connection; the relationship in the social network, which is physically heterogeneous; to be able to see how things make up places, and which are places in motion; the body as an emotional vehicle through which we feel place and movement, to see how the nature of extensive weak ties that spread over time and space are key in the global connections, and to identify mobilities organised in a "disordered order" (which also includes a multi-scalar approach).

Of course there are several critiques which mitigate against an overwhelming sense of newness in mobilities research, often making us think of a sudden revolution, (also connected to speed claims at the heart of the globalisation debate). At least we can point out three levels: (i) regarding the historical background; when mobility has been already a classic concept for example, when we consider the Chicago School of

sociology<sup>4</sup>, showing how inequalities in mobilities are not completely brand new. Or when the new subject positions such as tourist, citizen, globetrotter, and hobo came into being as icons of modernity (when considering Benjamin's Arcades Project, see more in Cresswell, 2009: 27); (ii) regarding the construction of blockades. Criticisms can be also pointed out in such conception to mobility in relation to the complex connection to the proliferation of borders, reinforcement of local borders as well as the investment in security and control measures at many levels and creating new forms of surveillance; (iii) regarding the power structure underneath contemporary mobilities which are displayed on different scales, from the smallest to the global and which affects social relations with people, places, institutions etc. Thus, mobility practices are then also understood in a social hierarchy which differentiates people. In such relations, place is also very important, underlying the "fixity" of global capitalism.

In the last term, the new mobilities paradigm must be brought to bear its focus on ethnographic questions, not only on questions of globalisation and deterritorialisation of nation-states and the emergence of complex identities and belonging, but what is more, because such a paradigm helps us delineate the questions of what are the appropriate subjects and objects of social inquiry in ethnographic terms. Focusing on mobility rather than on migration in the Mediterranean, makes it possible to argue that what really creates problematisation in applied research is how these mobilities are construed broadly, and also by observing how they have become a key distinction to consider when researchers face applied research.

### **3. The adjectivation of the ethnography**

In the recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in multisited research and in discussing reflexivity in social sciences. In the following section, I will attempt to draw a few general examples from my confrontation with the adjectives of ethnographic practice. I will point out some adjectives of ethnography in a way that makes us review the qualities of the ethnography today and the different meanings added to it. One of the first qualities I would like to underline is reflexivity. Reflexivity

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<sup>4</sup> In this respect we can use here Cresswell's (2009: 29) quotation regarding the observance of the practice of mobilities from Burgess notes: "The world respects the rich man who turned to be a globe-trotter and uses first class cabins and Pullman cars, but has inclination to look over his shoulder at the hobo who, to satisfy this so strong impulse, is compelled to use box-cars, slip the board under the Pullman or in other ways whistle on the safety of his life and integrity of his bones (Ernest Burgess archives of the University of Chicago Special Collections, box 126, p.13)".

implies asking ourselves watchfully about how we conduct our ethnography and the impacts of the conditions and findings of it. Therefore, the challenge is introducing such a reflexive adjective in a self-critical tone, a methodological practice of reflexivity. Putting our efforts into reflexivity makes our research more credible and useful.

The second one is multisitedness. We have to question ourselves how research can be conducted in a multisited manner, particularly when we have to deal with different places simultaneously or not, or when we have to do research on a mobile community. Marcus (1995) replaces the image of the ethnographic residency with the perspective based on a “follow up” in different places. Therefore, multilocal ethnography would cover a wide extension of places and routes. In a way, one might argue, that the term ‘multilocal’ is a little misleading, for what current multilocal projects have in common is that they draw on the same problem, some formulation of a topic, which is significantly translocal, not to be confined within some single place. The sites are connected with one another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important for this formulation as the relationships within them; the fields are not some mere collection of local units (Hannerz, 2003: 206).

We can trace many authors who show how the global has an impact on the making of ethnography. Reading Marcus on the ethnography of the world system (Marcus 1995), we move from the conventional single-site location and macro constructions (e.g. the capitalism world system) to multiple sites of observation (which cross the local/global dichotomy). However, how should one go beyond “single-site research” without making it fragmented, and even involving in a multi-sited project within a discontinuous plane of movement and discovery among sites can be difficult. The reason is that one maps an object of study that is ultimately mobile and multiply situated. Therefore, we need to evoke clear ways to enable composite, multi-method, mobile works like multi-sited ethnography.

Thus, the multi-sited ethnography is content to stipulate some kind of ‘total world system’. Traditional ethnography typically situates a researcher in one field site for an extended period of time. The researcher does not move across many spaces but gets to know one setting extremely well. As Marcus (1995) points out differing from traditional ethnography, multi-sited ethnography follows a research topic across numerous spaces for shorter periods of time. The differences between traditional and multi-sited ethnography can be understood visually as following a topic across one space (vertically) or multiple spaces (horizontally).

Taking into consideration complex objects of study we have to ask ourselves what makes our ethnography global, and we have to deal with the connections between the macro and the local as well as the practices we engage considering time and place. Some authors do think of multi-sited ethnography as global ethnography (Burawoy, 2000a: 29). In this way, global ethnography would require a multi-sited field, to make the researcher follow the thing (e.g. circulation of commodities), the community, and/or the people of the research. According to Marcus (1995), multi-sited ethnography solves the need for a method to analytically explore transnational processes, groups of people in motion, and ideas that extend over multiple locations. Since multi-sited ethnography is concerned with movement of ideas, people, and commodities, consequently the sites are also multiple.

When conducting multi-sited ethnography, spaces can be geographic, social, or virtual, depending on what the researcher chooses to follow. Marcus (1995) writes that researchers can follow people, a “thing,” a metaphor, story, life/biography, or conflict. Following a “thing” is the most common type of multi-sited ethnography, and this involves tracing commodities, gifts, money, art, and intellectual property. When multi-sited ethnography focuses on following a metaphor, researchers trace signs, symbols, or symbolic meanings of a specific topic. Whatever a researcher chooses to follow will ultimately influence what spaces the researcher crosses. For example, if a researcher is following migrant labourers, a multi-sited ethnographic approach may involve following the migrants across geographic spaces as migrants move for work. If a researcher is interested in understanding social class dynamics of a hospital, he or she may move through different social spaces and interview people at the hospital who belong to different socioeconomic groups (e.g. maintenance workers, nurses, doctors, hospital administrators). Another example can be found in virtual research. Exploring virtual spaces may involve research that seeks to understand how technology is used cross-culturally, and may include following online chat room users through different virtual spaces.

The problematisation of place implies many difficulties in mobilities research. We have many open questions, being there... and there... and there... (Hannerz, 2003). We have questions on how to capture the multilocal, the translocal in a way that is not conformed to a single place. We can also find many limitations of multi-sited ethnography, involving: (i) the practice of intensive residency. Since multi-sited ethnography has multiple sites, it prevents researchers from getting to know one site in-

depth, affecting the quality of the data, or making it expensive to have various sites, or not having enough time to gain trust inside the community; (ii) The number of research sites. Since multi-sited ethnography allows research topics to be explored through multiple spaces, the number of potential site locations is seemingly endless; (iii) It is very demanding in terms of alternating many sites and trips.

Thus, addressing the difficulties in how to adjectivate the ethnography has interesting implications, by thinking if self-limitation to a place is a value attributed to fieldwork or not and by also looking at its reflexive nature. Therefore, the challenge is introducing such a reflexive adjective in a self-critical tone, a methodological practice of reflexivity. Putting our efforts into reflexivity makes our research more credible and useful, but such reflexivity has also to include mobilities. I plead for the exploration of the object and its terrains related to mobilities and to the attention to the focus on the site as a way to transform the perspective on how to analyse the reality, as the critical potentialities of such research.

#### **4. Examples in Mediterranean Mobilities**

I see ethnography in a context of mobility but also in a context of a dynamic spirit in the relations constructed through the ethnographic dialogue; one of that emerges from the encounter between ethnography and the people involved in it, both affected by different mobility issues. Due to the fact that the established relations between the researcher and the person or persons who she or he meet during ethnographic work have to be deeply explored, I could say that I have seen through practice how such relations between both reproduce the images in the mind of the researcher as for the people of the fieldwork; thus we have somehow to rethink such images, roles and stereotypes. For instance, we might consider the ethnographer's role as either the role of the host-ethnographer or the ethnographer as an intruder in somebody's life in the context of the study of mobilities. The borderline can be set between the role of the host and the role of the Western intruder in Moroccan hospitality culture (see in the case of Tangier, Ribas-Mateos, 2014: 79; and in the case of the Jeballa Valley, Ribas-Mateos, 2015). In both places I have selected an eclectic methodological choice, which privileges engaged research and scientific reflexivity (as well as reciprocity relations), considering in one side mobilities in a border city (the case of Tangiers), and mobilities in a Jeballa Valley, one that could be thought as that mentioned conception of the "outside world" (from Wolf, 1982), immune to external

forces, produced and constitute in the global expansion of capitalism.

In this section I only refer to some parts of the more extended research, which concerned Northern Moroccan migration to Europe. Those two examples allow me to deal with various questions concerning the nature of ethnography in a context of global mobilities, the interconnections with multi-scalar level, the idea of the Maussian gift, the methodological reflexivity and the practice of intensive residency, which are all important insights in this ethnographic exercise. The challenge here is that in the field we deal with groups of people in motion, and the movement of ideas, people, and commodities.

#### *4.1 Stereotypes and identities*

In such a reflection on the relation between informant and informed I also include “the curiosity of the Westerner”, shown in particular cases, in occasions it appears to be so strong that it can even be perceived as a threat. The examination of such relations lies here in a context of an obvious relationship of domination, also taken today in the context of recent changes –globalisation, the role of transnational agents and circulations through the Mediterranean, especially in the case of some rural settings and when dealing with illiterate people as informants. This type of relation follows the remarkable definition of Orientalism, which Said made in his book, published in 1979, which in time has become a classic: the perceptions of the “other” taking place in the context of a dominant and conquering West (so problematising in a way the distance between origins and places). The existing imbalance in the perception and lack of knowledge about what is called the East (languages, customs, etc.) means that the only advantage the Western investigator may have is the opportunity to benefit from keeping a distance of analysis, this way enabling it to an objectification of the subject of his/her study, thus balancing distancing and immersing. In this way, Jacques Vignat Zunz<sup>5</sup> recalls the imbalance between ethnography and science based on the “cultural distance” when doing research in Jebala (the mountainous North), in Morocco or in the Arab world. Hence, the “mobile” researcher as a foreigner has to make the critical effort of questioning his/her perspective considering the colonial past and the North/South construction, and be able to value the great civilization of the peasant society of Jebala, as well as opening modestly to the fieldwork in question.

In fact, it is difficult to explain my research role like the one I used to have with

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<sup>5</sup> An ethnologist interviewed during winter 2009 in Jebala, Northern Morocco.

selected families in Tangiers while conducting ethnography (Ribas-Mateos, 2014). In a similar context, in neighbourhoods heavily affected by international migration, Bourquia (1996), in her study on fertility in the neighbourhood of Lazaret in Oujda, explains how the image of herself as a researcher is linked to that of the educated woman or that of someone who is an official or a public health representative. I do reiterate here again how stereotypes are always there when interacting in an ethnographic dialogue. Hence, stereotypes are very much present in such a dialogue, in fact, they are at the core of the face-to face nexus researcher-informant, and display a central role in such interaction. We could think about a second example. In her doctoral thesis, López Lindström (2006) focuses on the stereotype of Spaniards who would make them of Libertines and that of the Moroccans according to whom they are rather chaste. Despite this opposition, Spaniards and Moroccans do construct themselves, each on their side, about how both sides deal with the idea of women. Moreover, it is through that idea, among others, that they think of themselves as morally superior to the other (López Lindström 2006: 162). In Morocco, the idea of *amfelsa* (morally dirty, impure) affects Moroccan emigrants in the sense that women are conceived as contaminated. Whereas in Spain, the idea that Moroccan female migrants are subordinated individuals to men is also widespread.

#### 4.2 *Ethnography as a micro-approach*

The multi-scalar approach has always been a constant in my methodology when analysing circulation in the Mediterranean. As for the Jebala valley that was particularly clear to me through the research process. Within the Jebala region there are numerous centres of population, small scattered *douars* (which could be translated as ‘small villages’, called *duar* or *dchar*), they are part of their everyday practices of mobility. They are primarily composed of traditionally built houses of adobe and stone, lime or lime-coated in blue, although cement and sheet metal roofs are also used. The valleys’ centres of population supply products and organise activities related to rural weekly markets. The population of this area is commonly called Jibli, which can be translated as ‘mountain people’.

Contemporary globalisation poses an important challenge to the way we elaborate the external links for local ethnographic practice. This particular type of conceptualisation brings to the fore how the role of patriarchal structure and domination in an ethnographic case (e.g. in the already mentioned Jeballa Valley) sheds light on the



ways in which mobilities, postcolonial and gender identifications are constructed and in constant dialogue. It is the global context and its new mobility practices seen in the ethnography what force us to reinterpret the immobilism of the “Orientalised postcard”. However, Orientalism’s ramifications are multiple. Here I take it into consideration only as a way to re-think mobilities in the contemporary world.

Rather than referring to the romantic sense of Orientalist otherness, as has been done elsewhere with reference to the world of the arts and literature (in the classic Orientalist way), I intend here to address the attraction of a new context yet to be discovered, when one first embarks on fieldwork. It is an attraction that also works as a point of interest driven by the search for information on a specific topic; I therefore think it necessary to work on this attraction, because it means examining the issue of motivation. We can also analyse the meaning of this attraction from a critical perspective. I have often pursued an interest in exoticism, orientalism or romanticism, as a brief reading of Edward Said’s<sup>6</sup> work would illustrate.

This kind of question emerged from the very beginning of my fieldwork. After my first week in the Valley, I went back to the city of Tangier completely impressed by what I had experienced during those days in the Valley. Upon reaching the city of Tangier, I felt that I had been greatly influenced by the experience, and yet wondered what exactly it had been that made me feel so transported. From then on, I thought that a new reflection on such issues had to be included, one that would combine a consideration of the multiple influences on the approach to the field, in order to understand the depths of everyday life in the Valley. This was especially so since a double romanticism, of the East and of the neo-rural, was present in my response. In reality, it did give me a pleasant tranquillity, in the sense that I felt my work would ‘divert me from the world’, with all the positive elements that this can cause.

I believe that it is difficult to resolve such issues, a conclusion that I have reached after many years of working in different places which are not my own place of origin, so constantly placing myself in mobility contexts. I think that in the end we must acknowledge the influence of Orientalism on our experience, without thinking that this is always a “kind of disease”, and that we need to try to have a different approach. In

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<sup>6</sup> Following Said’s (1979) main thesis we can understand how from the aftermath of the enlightenment, Orientalism has been configured as a discipline through which European culture has been able to manipulate and even direct “the Orient”, from a political, sociological, military, ideological, scientific, and imaginary point of view.

other words, it is important to try to find out how Orientalism permeates one's perspective and approach to the field of study, unless this means that we are not able to work with such an approach from a critical perspective. The debate about the relationship between 'native' or local people (also actors) and foreign researchers often highlights very positive aspects, including recognition of the humanity of people, the experience of hospitality and so on.

I consider such ways in the process of my local ethnography- Let's see for instance how I recall a particular moment. It is seen in the context of the arrival of an Italian anthropologist in the world of Islam. She often uses a specific way to introduce herself, that of a foreign young woman who is married to a young Muslim husband. She uses an approximation to the ground by mimicry. She tries to "eat like them, even if it is only a sardine". She bathes fully dressed instead of doing it in a bathing suit. However, she draws the line at smoking tobacco, as she herself says, since she is not renouncing her freedom to smoke cigarettes.

In this form of deconstruction of contemporary Orientalism, I refer specifically to foreign newcomers' constant fascination with Moroccan customs, for example, when they attend Moroccan weddings. In general, what strikes me the most is the contrast between the vision of those foreigners newly arrived in Morocco and those who are doing research and residing in the country. There are some people who show blatant rejection of the Other (showing the permanence of the idea of historical hate embedded in interpersonal relationships), while others show opposite reactions; letting themselves be carried away by the amazement they feel for the people they meet, even expressing a sort of mimicry with the people doing field work.

In any case, genealogies and kinship connections do show an indicative map of mobilities. Within these connections, there are multiple strategies and options for flexibility. In principle, the ideal marriage would be between cousins. The motivation behind this type of marriage is to maintain family links, ensuring the unity of property and land. A combination of factors, which can unite economic (including migration) strategies with reasons relating to the social order, explains this endogamic practice. However, there are cases of children who migrated to cities when they were young, as well as women who have married men from other parts of Morocco, even men not from the North of the country.

The central idea of this ethnographic effort was to elaborate a micro-approach in order to make it extensible in the future to a broader conceptual model. In addition to

the long research stays, there was also previous ethnographic work done in the form of revisits. In a way, that was also a practical way of mobility for the researchers. As Faist indicates: “The growing popularity of multi-sited ethnography can also be explained by pragmatic reasons. There has been a tendency towards shorter stays in the field, shorter stays in various sites- and, in order to gain depth, repeated short-term stints in the same sites. Multi-sited ethnography is also appealing for conceptual reasons. It does not, as world theories do, rely on a strong theoretical orientation to guide empirical research. Rather, the ethnographer develops a framework in the context of field research” (Faist 2012: 61). In my situation, such revisits were not simply an empirical review, but included study of changing structures and forces over a considerable time period.

## 5. Conclusions

Ethnography matters for contemporary society, as Fassin indicates (2013: 642), putting forewords the role of the ethnographer as a claim of the activity of the ethnographer –a presence both involved and detached, inscribed in the instant and over time, allowing precise descriptions and multiple perspectives (...) particularly relevant in the understudied regions of society, but can be significant also in spaces saturated by consensual meanings: in the first case, it illuminates the unknown; in the second, it interrogates the obvious.

Ethnography makes us think of place. Thinking ethnography means leaving apart the armchair and searching for a site or for various sites out in the world and then embed our notes with the overall reality but nor detached to it, not being isolated as researchers, but thinking about the interconnections again and again within such a multiple world and its actors. These difficulties, as we have seen, have interesting implications.

Ethnography makes us reflect on the question of time when conducting research. The ethnographic eye is sceptical of rapid studies and we have to solve such speed when engaging in multi-sited research. It is both a question of time and a question of the quality of participation. Ethnography helps us consider or reconstruct various challenging theories, representing an appropriate tool for the production of knowledge when considering the sites of everyday life.

Ethnography is then a question of time, movement, place and participation. Reflection, type of dialogue... Ethnography helps us consider or reconstruct various challenging theories. Ethnography, within its tradition of critical theory helps us reflect

upon our thoughts, like being aware of continuities of doing ethnography in a classic way as well as contemporary issues, trying to make us better understand notions of mobility, immobility and fixity. Be that as it may, these ethnographic sites are problematic in terms of the social sciences, but even more for what this implies for our understanding of the contemporary world.

Indeed, ethnography is also a question of taking the whole ideology of doing fieldwork and put it into question, concerning various issues within the context of Mediterranean mobilities. All these themes are put on the table when bearing in mind the context of the research (*long durée*, genealogy, intersectionality, scales), the type of site (the site-place, the field, the case of study, the border –territorial and maritime-), the vision (colonial/postcolonial, from inside/outside), the ethics (trauma and the self, human rights), the categories (transnational, re-emigration, transborder, informal sector, irregular migration, labour itineraries), theory construction (production knowledge, inductive theory –data first and theory a posteriori-).

In exploring this difficult realm –mobilities in ethnography–, the essays in this volume cover much historical, ethnographic and conceptual ground, but they do not by any means exhaust the relationship of mobilities within the fieldwork practices. Neither is the complete Mediterranean area covered in this volume. However, the spatial coverage is nevertheless fairly wide to open up this debate on the interrogations of today’s mobilities in the region.

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