

Writing Culture: The Dynamics and Ambiguity of Ethnographic Production

SAKAMOTO Toshiko*

Abstract: This paper explores both the dynamics of dialogue in anthropological interviews and some ambiguous space in the ethnographic production of *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (1980) by an American anthropologist, Vincent Crapanzano. The book presents a life history of Tuhami, a Moroccan Arab tilemaker, who claims to be married to a she-demon. Crapanzano raises the problematic of the 'reality' of personal history and the 'truth' of autobiography because the 'reality' of Tuhami's life history, he observes, is metaphorical rather than real in the Western sense of the real and the truth as objective existence. Along with records of Tuhami's recitations, Crapanzano includes a mode of interactive narrative in which the anthropologist is presented as an active participant-observer of the Moroccan man's life. This explicit authorial presence as well as their discourse within the text suggests the essential questions of observation and representation in ethnographic writing because the 'reality' of Tuhami's personal history is reconstituted through the dialectical negotiations between the anthropologist, his informant and his field assistant. I discuss the dialectic or the dynamics of anthropological dialogue between them and how it encourages representational shifts and creates ambiguity in the production of the portrait, *Tuhami*.

Keywords: Anthropological Fieldwork, Ethnographic Dialogue, Representing Other Cultures, Life History, Colonial Dialectic, Intersubjectivity

Introduction

Interviews in anthropological fieldwork have a primacy of importance because anthropologists inevitably base their understanding of other cultures upon informants from the societies they study. As Barbara Tedlock comments on communicative interaction through ethnographic dialogue, anthropologists 'depend upon ethnographic dialogue to create a world of shared intersubjectivity and to reach an understanding of the differences between two worlds.'¹ *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (1980) by the American anthropologist, Vincent Crapanzano, presents a personal history of a Moroccan Arab tilemaker, Tuhami, who is illiterate but an excellent story teller and claims to be married to a camel-footed she-demon, 'A'isha Qandisha. Crapanzano's portrait of the Moroccan demonstrates an interactive narrative approach to ethnographic writing in which both the authorial identity as an interlocutor and the dialectical process of their communication are explicitly constructed in the text.

* Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ritsumeikan University

The portrait of the Moroccan also represents some ambiguity because the anthropologist is not only an observer of Tuhami's life but becomes an active participant in their ethnographic encounter. The book suggests to me the essential questions of observation and representation in ethnographic writing because the dialectic between Tuhami and Crapanzano and their 'shared intersubjectivity' profoundly affect both the informant's recitation of his life history and the ethnographer's understanding as well as articulating their encounters.

In order to understand both the dialectic or the dynamics of anthropological interviews and the ambiguous space in the portrait of the Moroccan, it is crucially important to examine the psychological aspect of their interpersonal relationship or what Crapanzano calls 'creative mutuality'² between the anthropologist, his informant and their mediator, the field assistant, in their communicative interaction. The book also draws my attention to its narrative techniques not only as anthropological writing but also as narrative ethnography.

1. The Dynamics of Dialogue in Anthropological Interviews

Claiming his book, Tuhami, as an experiment, Crapanzano is obviously moving away from conventional forms of ethnographic representation in interpretive anthropology towards a more interactive narrative approach to ethnographic production of the life history. He argues that analytic strategies of anthropological methods tend to serve as 'rationalizations for the objectification of the negotiated reality and its attribution to the Other' and that such strategies 'frequently presuppose a degree of lucidity that is impossible for any participant within the ethnographic encounter' (x). He criticizes ethnographers' eliminating themselves from their ethnographic encounters and their authoritative constructions of other cultures through 'the constitution of the ethnographer's authority: his presence at the events described, his perceptual ability, his "disinterested" perspective, his objectivity, and his sincerity.'³ Commenting on Clifford Geertz's study of a Balinese cockfight,⁴ for example, Crapanzano argues that the presence of the ethnographer 'does not alter the way things happen or, for that matter, the way they are observed or interpreted.' He continues to argue that the ethnographer 'assumes a Hermes-like invisibility that of course he cannot have.'⁵

Geertz, who apparently attended many cockfights, never describes a specific cockfight. He constructs the Balinese cockfight and interprets his construction: "the Balinese cockfight." His conventional tale of entry serves as a deictic function....It gives the illusion of specificity when there is no specific temporal or spatial vantage point. It attests to the ethnographer's having been there and gives him whatever authority arises from the presence.⁶

However, Geertz claimed, about 15 years after his study of the Balinese cockfight, the significance of "Being There" authorially, palpably on the page⁷ for ethnographic writing:

The ability of anthropologists to get us to take what they say seriously has less to do with either a factual look or an air of conceptual elegance than it has with their capacity to convince us that

what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life, of having, one way or another, truly “being there.” And that, persuading us that this offstage miracle has occurred, is where the writing comes in.⁸

Crapanzano’s experimental strategy of writing ethnography as dialectic focuses on the interactive discourse and the complex negotiations of reality between the interviewer, his informant and the field assistant. His text then avoids traditional forms of analytic or descriptive ethnographies in which the ethnographer with monological authority tends to efface himself in the name of neutrality or objectivity, giving a static and inaccurate picture of the people he has studied. *Tuhami* demonstrates what Barbara Tedlock defines as the shift of genre from the ethnographic memoir toward narrative ethnography. Tedlock notes the significant shift since 1970s in anthropological practice ‘from participant observation toward the observation of participation’:

In the observation of participation, ethnographers both experience and observe their own and others’ coparticipation within the ethnographic encounter. The shift from the one methodology to the other entails a representational transformation.⁹

Crapanzano presents, in *Tuhami*, the discursive process of ethnography in the form of a dialogue between the participants. He makes not only his own presence but all the participants’ visible as interlocutors. His narrative thus takes on a dialogic structure with what Mikhail Bakhtin called ‘dialogism.’¹⁰ Bakhtin’s notions of ‘dialogism’ and ‘heteroglossia’ provide the primary model for Crapanzano’s approach to ethnographic writing because dialogism is ‘the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia’ which assumes that ‘languages’ of all social dialects ‘do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many ways....As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically.’¹¹ Crapanzano’s ethnography displays this dialogic or interlocutory character of narrative which represents various perspectives, positions, relationships and tensions dialogically.

The dialectic or the dynamics of anthropological dialogue encourages representational shifts in the style, the structure and the idioms of the ethnography and they represent some ambiguity in the production of the portrait, *Tuhami*. Crapanzano represents more explicitness of his own presence as the interlocutor in the course of the fieldwork and how it affects the actual process of their interchange. He juxtaposes Tuhami’s symbolic stories with his own questions, interpretations, analyses, and theoretical explanations of the stories. The nature of their interviews is the dialectic in which both the interviewer and the interviewee negotiate the ‘reality’ of Tuhami’s stories:

Not only did my presence, and my questions, prepare him for the text he was to produce, but they produced what I read as a change of consciousness in him. They produced a change of consciousness in me, too. We were both jostled from our assumptions about the nature of the

everyday world and ourselves and groped for common reference points within this limbo of interchange. (11)

Crapanzano becomes not simply an observer of Tuhami's life but an active participant, and he presents Tuhami's life history as the interactive process of their dialogue. The portrait of Tuhami is thus constructed of the dynamic exchange between the ethnographer and his informant:

Despite his denial, Tuhami was clearly very angry at his mother. It was she who abandoned him....

Did your mother help you find work?

No....My mother thought I was walking the street and doing nothing. (*Tuhami looked disgusted.*)....People kept telling me to visit my parents, but I said, "Never." (*Tuhami emphasized the "never" with a sweep of his hand.*)....

What happened the day you ran away?

Nothing. (*Tuhami was very evasive.*) I saw that my stepfather didn't want to feed me. (*He paused.*)....

How did you feel when you learned that your mother had died?

It meant nothing to me. (*He moved his hand downward in defiant dismissal.*)...

Were you sorry to leave?

No! I could have done nothing. She wanted me to leave...(39-44)

The dynamic interaction of their dialogue develops an intersubjective relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee in the context of anthropological fieldwork. Because they share the similar isolated situation as outsiders in the Moroccan society, they respond to each other with mutual transference and have created the world of shared intersubjectivity. What has brought Crapanzano to Morocco is his interest in the study of the Hamadsha, the Moroccan brotherhood and the she-demon, 'A'isha Qandisha. He was directed by a number of Moroccans to Tuhami who claims to be married to the she-demon:

They told me that Tuhami knew a lot about 'A'isha's way and the ways of the Hamadsha. He was not, however, a member of the brotherhood, and that intrigued me. He could not participate in their rituals or undergo their cure....He was an outsider. (6)

Because Tuhami is not a typical Moroccan but rather an exceptional, alienated character, Crapanzano is interested in him as his informant. Tuhami could be a good interpreter of the society because of his individuality. Crapanzano's own presence as an anthropologist from outside granted Tuhami some kind of autonomy as an informant:

Encouraged by the ambiguity and the unfamiliarity of our initial encounter and by my "neutrality" as an anthropologist, he permitted himself greater freedom of expression during our meeting than in the structured encounters of everyday life. He was able, in other words,

not only to create the relationship he desired but to create me for himself as well....I was, so to speak, created to create him.¹²

Crapanzano displays his special interest in ethnopsychiatry or ethnopsychology in relation to spirit possessions. He is particularly concerned, throughout the book, with psychoanalytic approach in his ethnographic representation. He frequently uses, for example, psychoanalytic vocabulary like 'transference', 'resistance', and 'free association', and repeatedly refers to the Freudian psychoanalytic theories to interpret Tuhami's recitation. His questions in the interviews also have psychoanalytic orientations. His relationship with Tuhami is also defined as a psychotherapeutic relationship in which Thalami takes the role of a patient and Crapanzano that of psychiatrist or psychotherapist in the interviews. By introducing psychoanalytic interpretations of their interactions, Crapanzano tries to analogise the ethnographic interviews to psychotherapeutic sessions and emphasises their transference and intersubjective relationship as the dynamics of the interviews.

In their reciprocal creations of roles and intersubjectivity between Tuhami and Crapanzano in the dynamics of the interviews, there seem to be a power relationship between them in which both are assigned symbolic roles. Their relationship of power is well represented in the ethnographer's idiom. Crapanzano defines their interpersonal relationship in psychoanalytic terms as mutual transference in which Crapanzano is given the role of psychiatrist or curer and Tuhami that of patient or victim. Michael M. J. Fischer also observes the dialectic of their interviews as 'one of mutual transference, with Tuhami placing the ethnographer in the uncomfortable role of curer.'¹³ Fischer makes a significant observation that transference is a mechanism of power. Recognising the reciprocal creation of mutual roles between Crapanzano and Tuhami, Fischer notes their collaborations of power or what I call 'the colonial dialectic' of power relations in discursive terms:

Informants present and tailor information as if the anthropologist were a government official, a physician, or other agent of aid or danger; the anthropologist is placed in positions that constrain his actions and he, too, creates roles of the informant. In other words the emergence of ethnographic knowledge is not unlike the creation of ethnic identity....By recognizing such dynamics of gaining information and insight, anthropologists' informant-collaborators gain a more dynamic role, and we begin to see our own bases of knowledge as more subtly constructed through the action of others. Our knowledge is shown to be less creation of ethnic identity objective, more negotiated by human interests.¹⁴

George E. Marcus also understands the book in the context of colonial and post-colonial Algerian society, especially in its modernist form of 'reciprocity of perspectives' and 'the dialogic context of fieldwork.'¹⁵ Marcus writes that 'in *Tuhami*, the form of the text as well as its subject a spirit-possessed proletarian tilemaker serves as a statement about colonial and post-colonial Algerian society.'¹⁶ *Tuhami* can be defined as the text of 'the colonial dialectic' within which the anthropologist and the informant collaborate with each other to create symbolic roles for each

other. In these collaborations, the anthropologist takes the agent position of power and the informant the role of his collaborator.

The relationship between Crapanzano and Tuhami becomes a kind of allegory of the colonial relationship between the American anthropologist and the Moroccan informant. It is represented as being established through the complex Self/Other negotiations. For example, their relationship at times turns out to be a reversal of power between the observer and the observed '*through the power of the word.*' As Crapanzano often remarks, Tuhami is very much a storyteller who uses the rhetorical devices as if he were trying to 'entrap', 'captivate' and 'enslave' the Western anthropologist:

There was always something captivating about Tuhami's discourse. It was as though he wanted to entrap me, to enslave me *through the power of the word* in an intricate web of fantasy and reality to reverse, if you will, the colonial relationship that I as a foreigner, a *nasrani*, must have suggested to him. (140)

In their allegorical relationship of power, the more Tuhami reveals about himself and his sufferings, the more difficult it becomes for Crapanzano to maintain his anthropological perspective and distance, with which he guarded himself before. Crapanzano then puts himself in a paternalistic position of a protector-therapist to restore their colonial relationship of power:

Tuhami was relieved, too. He yielded to me. He came to speak my language the language of the "real" rather than the "imaginary"....The colonial relationship was restored. I was secure and could rationalize my position as protector-therapist. (143)

The ethnographic distance between the anthropologist and his Moroccan informant disappears and Crapanzano becomes subject to Tuhami's rhetoric and Tuhami to Crapanzano's protection. They become more interdependent upon each other. The allegory of the colonial relationship between them is a continual negotiation of power in which they create the intersubjective reality of ethnography. Crapanzano and Tuhami establish the colonial allegory in which Crapanzano always places himself in the paternalistic roles as protector, therapist and curer and Tuhami as the protected, patient and the cured. As James Clifford argues, 'while ethnographic writing cannot entirely escape the reductionist use of dichotomies and essences, it can at least struggle self-consciously to avoid portraying abstract, ahistorical "others":

It is more than ever crucial for different peoples to form complex concrete images of one another, as well as of the relationship of knowledge and power that connect them; but no sovereign scientific method or ethical stance can guarantee the truth of such images. They are constituted the critique of colonial modes of representation has shown at least this much in specific historical relations of dominance and dialogue.¹⁷

What Crapanzano engages in his encounter with Tuhami is with their collaborations of power and

dialogue between the ethnographer and his informant and they expose the dynamics of their colonial dialectic. He also reveals consciously the colonial dependency of both himself and his informant upon each other.

Crapanzano's text even displays authorial uneasiness that arises from having to leave Tuhami and return to where the anthropologist belongs. The element of the anthropologist's departure from his involvement in the fieldwork represents a crucial moment when the mutual dependency between the anthropologist and the informant reveals itself in terms of their symbolic roles as a protector and a victim. Crapanzano's knowledge of his own imminent departure makes it difficult for him to maintain 'ethnographic distance' from Tuhami: 'I was nervous and at times stiff in my new role, less because of its newness than because of my imminent departure' (143). He is so emotionally involved with Tuhami that he not only sympathises with his condition as a victim of the she-demon but also empathises with him. His response to Tuhami's situation is more emotional than scientific showing even his anger towards his passivity before the force of 'A'isha. His imminent departure again affects their relationship by putting the anthropologist in the position of a protector who offers the victim advice with a knife, a symbol of power or protection:

I gave him a large steel hunting knife. I told him that I hoped the knife would give his strength and be the key to his liberation. He was at a loss for words and put the gift quickly away....His last words were a promise that he would be strong. (172)

Crapanzano's imminent departure affects not only his relationships with Tuhami and his field assistant but also the subjects of their interviews. It is well reflected in such repeated topics as 'separation', 'death' and 'abandonment'. The more deeply the anthropologist enters into the life of the Other he researches, the heavier the psychological burden of departure becomes. Crapanzano's anxiety and guilt about his departure come from his guilt for abandoning Tuhami and retreating from his roles as a healer and a protector. His "therapeutic" interest in Tuhami's marriage manifests his own anxiety over departure and abandoning Tuhami: 'Was I seeking to get myself off the hook by providing him with the possibility of a substitute for me?' (150) The account of his separation from Tuhami is given from a therapist-protector's point of view. The account is not so much an anthropological representation of the fieldwork as story writing:

He accepted my departure with resignation, just as he accepted the innumerable disappointments in his life. At dinner that night_ and unlike most of my other friends who came Tuhami maintained a strong sense of himself, of his independence and his dignity. He kept the conversation gay when the others would have turned it maudlin and sentimental. When I drove him home....Lhacen and I watched him make his way down the narrow path that led to his house. We were both crying. (172)

The element of departure in the ethnographic encounter is a burden the ethnographer would carry not only at the moment of the departure but for long after the departure because

ethnographic encounter never ends but continually demands interpretation and accommodation. The book demonstrates an elegiac quality in his recreation of their encounters because it is not, in fact, an immediate creation of his experience but a recreation some ten years after his departure:

As I look back over my notes, and as I attempt to recall my meetings with Tuhami some ten years ago, I am immediately struck by the impoverished quality of my emotional response....I have difficulty, both stylistically and psychologically, in distinguishing the time of encounter from the time of writing. For Tuhami, I have my notes; for myself, I have only my memory. I do not know when my theoretical confabulations, my observations and explications, result immediately from the encounter and when they result from the literary re-encounter. (139-40)

The reader is then left with the question whether the writer's interpretations and articulations of their ethnographic space result immediately from their encounter or from his memory of it. Crapanzano is trying, in his writing the ethnography, to fill in the spatial as well as temporal gap between the times of his encounter and re-encounter with some fictionality. He is recreating a past in his literary re-encounter with Tuhami with his later 'theoretical confabulations' of their encounter. The element of retrospection in his writing gives his memory a more novelistic image and his literary scheme more nostalgic quality. It thus leaves another ambiguous space in Crapanzano's portrait of Tuhami between their past encounter and the present memory of that encounter.

Another factor that influences the ethnographer's writing is the shock of returning home which awaits any anthropologist after the departure from his fieldwork. Crapanzano defines the ethnographic encounter as a particular 'confrontation' between ethnographer and his informants, which is anxiety-provoking and threatening to the ethnographer's sense of self.¹⁸ The process of learning the ways of the Other through a complex dialectical negotiation is a process of self-dissolution and reconstitution for the ethnographer because he also learns through the negotiation to take on their standpoint which leads to a new conception of self. In returning home when he must return to his old self and once again take up the standpoint of his own culture, the ethnographer reconstitutes himself through the writing of ethnography because the act of writing is an act of communicating with one's self and the self shared with others. The writer communicates with the Other who has a more or less altered sense of self. Thus, the ethnographic encounter is a particular confrontation and a complex negotiation of self and other between the ethnographer and his informants not only in the location of fieldwork but in the context of writing other cultures back home:

The ethnographer wants to reconstitute his old self or his professional self through an act of writing that is addressed to the significant others within his own world. He wants, too, to address, and must inevitably address, those illiterate others on his fieldwork not simply out of good faith, professional responsibility, integrity, guilt, irritation, resentment, hatred, or the desire to fill an obligation, but also out of a necessity to declare them worthy of having been

and continuing to be that silent audience by which he identifies himself as an ethnographer and obtains his sense of self.¹⁹

In writing, the ethnographer is affirming an identity for himself by addressing an Other and reifying that Other. Then, we must ask to whom his text is addressed. *Who is this other, whose standpoint the ethnographer takes in his act of self-constitution?*²⁰ For Crapanzano, the Other of ethnography is 'a bifurcate other'.²¹ It means that the ethnographer is addressing the double audiences: the literate audience from his own cultural world and those illiterate Others on his fieldwork. What makes his text even more ambiguous is the fact that it is 'doubly edited during the encounter itself and during the literary (re)-encounter' (8). Writing is, as I have discussed, an act of affirming one's own self as well as the Other's. Tuhami thus reveals much of the ambiguous nature of the ethnographer's writing within his dialogic relationship with the Other(s) as well as in his internal dialogue with aspects of otherness within himself.

2. The Ambiguous Space in Ethnographic Writing

By beginning the Moroccan's portrait with fragments from his recitation, Crapanzano raises the questions of the reality of personal history and the truth of autobiography because Tuhami's tale speaks a truth of the kind that can only be defined as autobiographical or metaphorical in the Western sense:

It was Tuhami who first taught me to distinguish between the reality of personal history and the truth of autobiography. The former rests on the presumption of a correspondence between a text, or structure of words, and a body of human actions; the latter resides within the text itself without regard to any external criteria save, perhaps, the I of the narrator. (5)

Tuhami's recitation collapses the Western sense of the real and the truth as objective existence. When he speaks 'the truth', the anthropologist tries to listen only for the real mistaken for the true: 'The truth was for me the real masked by the metaphor. Such was my cultural bias' (129-30). The reality of Tuhami's personal history is metaphorical rather than real and his real persons serve a symbolic function within the allegory of his tale:

When he talks about people such as the pasha's son, his wives, and his own mother and father, the Westerners will be tempted to accept them as "real," as I did. He will not easily recognize that for Tuhami, at least in his conversations with me, such "real" persons were metaphorical; they served, as did the demons, a symbolic interpretive function...Tuhami's tale of the pasha's son revealed to me the presumption of our collapsing the real and the truth. (22)

The subjects of Tuhami's tale are different from those of Western tales. The essential differences between them are not simply formal but culturally constructed. His relationship to society is reflected in the particular experience of his colonial world, in his thematic

preoccupations in his tale as well as in the style and structure of his recitation. One of the most common themes expressed in his tale is that of seduction by women or female demons. This seduction theme works as a metaphor for power and control:

Seduction by a woman leads to control, to enslavement, by a woman. "If Lalla 'A'isha wants a man and if he refuses," Tuhami told me once, "she will tie him up and then make him very thirsty." This theme of enslavement by a woman – the inverse of the articulated standards of male-female relations, of sex and marriage – pervades Moroccan folklore. It is an even more common theme, so to speak, in Tuhami's folklore. My notes are filled with stories of seductions by *jinniyyas*, *ghulat* (female ghouls), and real women. Their names change – usually it is Lalla 'A'isha or one of her refractions – but the story remains the same....The theme of enslavement is also found in magical beliefs, tales of poisoning and witchcraft, and in the lore of sex and marriage. (102)

Tuhami's tale in dealing with the stories of seduction reflects the power relationships that derive from the entire social order of Moroccan society. The theme of seduction is a symbolic form of desire for control particularly for those who are bereft of power and control in society. Barbara Babcock remarks that 'what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central.'²² If Tuhami's tale is a verbal objectification of the tension between reality and desire, his stories of seductions and enslavement by the she-demons or real women are symbolically reversed forms of the social reality in which women are located in its periphery. Other Moroccan men who also claim to be married to 'A'isha Qandisha share with Tuhami the common features of peculiarity and inadequacy due to the fact that they are all her victims:

Tuhami was married to a capricious, vindictive, she-demon, a camel-footed *jinniyya*, a spirit,...who kept a firm control on his amorous life. His arrangement with 'A'isha was rare, but by no means unique. (Other Moroccan men were said to be 'A'isha's husbands; they were all peculiar in their way –loners, sexual inadequates, physical misfits, eccentrics, or men who for one social reason or another were unable to marry.) Lalla 'A'isha, that is, "Lady" 'A'isha, as Tuhami always called her, was a jealous lover and demanded absolute secrecy in her marital affairs. (5)

Tuhami's tale sexualises his relationship with the she-demon within the discourse of power and control. Sexualisation is an effective means of producing human subjects and regulating human relationship because sexuality always has political implications of power and control. As in his stories of seduction, Tuhami and other 'A'isha's husbands are placed in the subordinate position in their sexual and marital relationships with the she-demon. Sexuality is a culturally charged category with a variety of meanings, values and attitudes, and discourses of sexuality function as one form of defining relationships which may be governed by the assumptions that cultures and societies have created around sexual difference as a way of determining sexual roles and defining relationships between the sexes. Sexuality in Crapanzano's portrait is used as a way

of determining Tuhami's relationship with the she-demon, 'A'isha, within the site of control and power. His inability on 'A'isha and the power of the spirit fatalise his relationship with her. Tuhami and other 'A'isha's husbands who are under the firm control of the she-demon are placed in the periphery of Moroccan society disempowered in both their actual lives and their relationships with 'A'isha' Qandisha.

Crapanzano has done a substantial amount of pre-study about Moroccan society and culture before writing Tuhami. Rather than generalising experiences of Moroccan men or social phenomena, he highlights, in the text, specific experiences of Tuhami who is not a typical Moroccan but an anti-heroic figure. The theme of circumcision, for example, has a great symbolic importance for the portrait of Tuhami because it is said to make a man and a Muslim of a boy. It is delineated in the text as a symbol of manhood:

It [Circumcision] gives tone, emotional cathexis, to the experience of life to sex, manhood, one's mother and father, and, of course, to the figure of the stranger, the barber, who, according to Tuhami, possesses great magic and the knowledge of many cures. In Morocco, circumcision is a precocious ritual (Crapanzano 1980).²³ (51)

Charged with Western cultural assumptions and knowledge and given a variety of representational modes in its 'realism', Crapanzano's account of Tuhami's circumcision demonstrates Bakhtin's notions of 'dialogism' and 'heteroglossia'. The story presents multiple visions and perspectives through the ethnographer's narrative voice. They are also juxtaposed with ethnographer's anthropological comments. Tuhami does not remember his own circumcision. There is, therefore, much space for the writer to re-construct the picture of Tuhami's experience of circumcision:

The circumcision was obviously painful....Tuhami was dressed in his best clothes a new white *jallaba*. His mother had bathed him carefully. He was put on a horse and led through the village....Tuhami was the center of attention. It was his day. He had no idea what was going to happen (as Moroccans who remembered their own circumcisions stereotypically reported to me)....His father disappeared. His mother led him through the crowd of relatives, friends, neighbors...past the young girls, still virgin, who had let down their long black hair (a circumcision was the only time they could ever do this in public)....He was led into a small room....Tuhami's chemise was pulled up to his navel. He was told to look up at the birds. The barber deftly put a bit of manure between Tuhami's glans the head, he called it and his foreskin and with a single movement cut off the foreskin....His desires and the Freudians would have much to say about the oedipal implications of this are stymied. His manhood is declared by the act of mutilating destroying the very proof of his manhood. (49-51)

The circumcision scene is narrated by Crapanzano with much dramatization in the past tense, and, therefore, it sounds as if it were really happening. He also gives Tuhami's spontaneous responses during his recitation as well as his own ethnographic commentaries on the spot that

depict a lively picture of Tuhami and of himself. The reader is required, however, to operate double perspectives to distinguish the 'reality' of Tuhami's experience from the fictionality of the ethnographer's accounts. He reconstructs Tuhami's circumcision ritual based on his anthropological experience of observing the rituals, other Moroccan men's subjective as well as 'stereotypical' accounts of circumcision, and, most importantly, Tuhami's own conceptualization of the ritual. Crapanzano gives some kind of autonomy to Tuhami's discourse and respects Tuhami's conceptualization of experience and of his world. There is, however, some ambiguity in the picture of Tuhami's circumcision ritual because it is not simply a reconstruction by Crapanzano himself but a kind of collaborative work by the ethnographer and his informant.

Crapanzano's fundamental assumption about the life history is that 'it is an immediate response to a demand posed by an Other and carries within it the expectations of that Other' (8). The Other for Tuhami is in some way an empty space of desire to be fulfilled. His tale reflects his desire for recognition by an indeterminate symbolic Other, and it is a demand for recognition by that Other which includes not simply the concrete individual like the anthropologist who stands before him but all that he stands for symbolically:

He did not in fact want *me* or anyone else. That would have been too immediate, too burdensome, too demanding for him. What he wanted, I have come to believe, was rather the imaginary fulfillment of emptiness, a lack, a *manque-à-être*, to use Jacques Lacan's (1966)²⁴ phrase, that he suffered. I became, I imagine, an articulatory pivot about which he could spin out his fantasies in order to create himself as he desired. Tuhami wanted fulfillment through the metaphor without denying the essentially unreal quality of the metaphor. (140)

As it is well demonstrated in the reconstruction of Tuhami's circumcision ritual and his stories of seduction, his recitation is a product of intersubjective reality negotiated between Tuhami himself and his symbolic Other, the ethnographer or those that he stands for symbolically. Tuhami responds to the demand and expectations posed by the ethnographer in the name of science which he does not understand. He also integrates his desires into the 'real stories' which culturally construct the Moroccan values and social symbols. Tuhami's tale thus can be located midway between the fairytale and history because it is concerned with reality that is a 'blend of the imaginary and the real,' or 'the infusion of desire into reality' (7). His tale as a form of personal history does not make the clear distinction between the imaginary (the product of desire) and the real (as objective existence) but it objectifies the tension between the real and the imaginary, which requires interpretations of its symbolic meanings. *Tuhami* thus registers much of ambiguous space in terms of its metaphorical and, at the same time, intersubjective representations of the real as well as its symbolic subjects which constitute a hermeneutic reality of the life history.

3. The Field Assistant and the Limbo of Interchange

Another dynamics and ambiguity emerge from the fact that the interview situation is not a

two-way interaction between the anthropologist and his informant but actually a kind of tripartite process intermediated by a field assistant, Lhacen, as in many cases of anthropological fieldwork. This triadic relationship is another element that suggests some limbo of their interchange and another ambiguity in the production of *Tuhami*. Crapanzano is writing as if he ignored Lhacen's presence. There is no indication of Lhacen's intermediation in presenting their dialogues. Crapanzano is, however, certainly aware of the significance of Lhacen's presence and of his role as an intermediary in his dialogue with Tuhami:

In my field work I have worked both alone and with a field assistant. I have found that there is a qualitative difference in the material obtained in the two situations...the material I collected with a field assistant...had intimacy of tone and detail that I did not obtain when I worked alone...We could not go on without him, but in our diverse ways we bracketed him off....He was, for Tuhami and me, the Third, who rendered us, in Sartre's (1964)²⁵ words, an us-object. (144-48)

The presence of the field assistant thus calls our attention to the role of an assistant or an interpreter in the situation of anthropological interviews. The presence of this third person likely affects the dual and essentially conflicting relationship between the American anthropologist and his Moroccan informant and hence the result of the fieldwork:

He [Lhacen] did recognize and was puzzled by Tuhami's peculiar character. The two of us discussed it at great length, and I am indebted to Lhacen for much of what I have to say about Tuhami. (12)

What Crapanzano calls 'our discoveries' is often filtered through his assistant's conceptions and interpretations. Thus, the portrait of Tuhami is rendered through the complex interactive and intersubjective processes of dialogues between Crapanzano, Tuhami and Lhacen and there are profoundly interpretive elements in their communication as well as in their representation of Tuhami's tale, the elements which constitute an even more hermeneutic reality of the life history.

Lhacen's presence as a field assistant is a complex one because he is not a member of Tuhami's community in Meknes, a Moroccan town, but a Berber, a different tribe from Tuhami's. He is, therefore, an outsider like the ethnographer himself who plays, in the dialectical process of their communication, the symbolic role of the Other who facilitates Tuhami's recitation. As I have discussed earlier, Tuhami's tale is a product of intersubjective reality negotiated between himself and his symbolic Other, the ethnographer. Tuhami responds immediately to the demand and expectations posed by this symbolic Other in the context of anthropological fieldwork. In the actual interview situations, however, questions, demands and expectations are mediated through the third person who is an outsider for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Lhacen is thus assigned another symbolic role as an outsider.

While both Crapanzano and Lhacen are outsiders for Tuhami, they are not totally strangers to him. This ambivalence in their positions renders both lucidity and ambiguity in their

interpretations and representation of Tuhami's recitation. They share, in their relationship with Tuhami, common features as outsiders, the 'unity of nearness and remoteness' (144) in Crapanzano's terms. They are both strangers to Meknes, to Tuhami and to each other, but they are both interested in Tuhami and the Hamadsha and fascinated by Tuhami as a person and by his great knowledge of the brotherhood, she-demons, and other cultural phenomena in Morocco; they also share a kind of objectivity or detachment in their early relationship with Tuhami, which is rationalised by science for Crapanzano and by the job as an assistant for Lhacen. Thus, while they are strangers to the informants they work with, they are not totally strangers to them. This ambivalent neutrality in their positions permits them a more direct entry into the world of the Moroccans, because they are free from the common defensive representation by inside members of any group against the total outsiders: 'These representations [by insiders] frequently become the stuff of superficial ethnographic description and bolster the stranger's stereotypic view of an alien people.' (147). Nonetheless, this claimed lucidity need closer attention.

Lhacen's role as a field assistant is diverse, and the relationship between Crapanzano, Tuhami and Lhacen change with time through the course of the research. It was Lhacen who first discovered Tuhami and introduced him to Crapanzano, which affirmed the anthropologist's dependency on his assistant. Lhacen later becomes a protector for Crapanzano who at times takes refuge in his presence:

There were times when my relations with Tuhami specifically or with Morocco and the Hamadsha more generally...were such that I could not permit myself any response but the most distant. It was at such times that I took refuge in my difficulties with Arabic and exploited, I suppose, the presence of Lhacen. (139)

While Lhacen at times plays as a protective shield for both Crapanzano and Tuhami, he also needs to restrain Crapanzano's ethnographic passion: (Lhacen frequently corrected my haste with his sure sense of tact and his indomitable patience; he too was excited by our discoveries) (141). While he is an active participant as an interpreter-observer, he, at the same time, has an ability to efface himself. As a controller of the word, Lhacen comes to embody the transcendental Other who occupies 'the place of God in Sartre's terms, the place of the unrealized Third' (150-51) who makes intersubjective communication possible between the anthropologist and his informants. There is also a fundamental instability in this triadic relationship in which 'there is a constant shifting of alliances and objectifying gazes' (149). After the first meetings, the instability in their triadic relationship 'tended to be subsumed under an intentionally validated, an ad hoc conventional frame' (149) within which he establishes a frame of a spokesman, representing 'the constancy of the frame' of anthropological fieldwork, and he is able to mediate the essentially conflict nature of the dual relationship between the anthropologist and his informant:

The meetings were between Tuhami and me. Lhacen was a kind of spokesman for one and then the other of us; that is, he was identified seriatim with each one of us as we addressed the other. (149)

Lhacen thus plays a key role to govern or stabilize the dialectical relationship between the anthropologist and his informant.

Crapanzano and Lhacen thus gradually establish a kind of rapport which is well represented in the 'we'-relationship between them: 'We were fascinated and pleased with the constant deepening of our awareness of Morocco that came through Tuhami and many of my other informants' (141); 'We shared a common intention: to learn as much as we could about the Hamadsha and about the people, like Tuhami, around them' (144); 'We had rehearsed, so to speak, "our" research' (145). The field research thus becomes another intersubjective process between the anthropologist and the field assistant who share common awareness, intentions, fascinations, pleasures and, most importantly, common discoveries.

However, this interactive relationship between the anthropologist and his field assistant does not necessarily mean that there are correlative experiences between them. What Crapanzano writes about his informant's and his assistant's subjective experiences is rather hypothetical.²⁶ Throughout their interchange, there is in no way a shared experience within them, in a strict sense, but there is only an intersubjective collaboration and a complex negotiation of 'reality' between them. It means that their discoveries are 'their' negotiated reality of Tuhami's life history. Lhacen thus plays out his symbolic role as an Other for both Crapanzano and Tuhami in mediating the ambivalent relationship between them in their ethnographic encounter.

Conclusion

Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan is a challenge to analytical and descriptive forms of ethnographic writing. One of the ethnographer's challenging strategies is his attempt to present the dynamics of dialogue in anthropological interviews. Crapanzano presents some explicitness of his presence as an interlocutor and the dialectics of his and his informant's discourses. Given the psychological aspect of their communicative interaction, the relationship between the anthropologist and his informant can be defined as mutual transference and the reciprocal creation of roles in the dynamics of the interviews. This interpersonal relationship can also be referred to as a colonial dialectic as in the colonial context of Moroccan society because their relationship is always described within the framework of power relations in which the anthropologist is given the paternalistic roles of psychiatrist and healer and Tuhami the subordinate positions of patient and victim.

There is, however, some ambiguity in this ethnographic situation because both Tuhami and Crapanzano play mutually created roles and negotiate 'reality' of Tuhami's life history through their communicative interchange. Since there is no direct access to the world in which Tuhami inhabits, Crapanzano fills the ambiguous space with his dialogic narrative method with much of Tuhami's conceptualisation of his experiences as well as his own explications of his recitation. There are, however, some other elements in *Tuhami* which render much ambiguous space within the text. The element of retrospection in ethnographic writing gives the ethnographer's memory more elegiac or fanciful images and his narrative more fictionality. The question of the role of the field assistant or the element of the third person also creates crucial ambiguity in Crapanzano's

definition of Otherness within the triadic relationship between the anthropologist, his informant and the field assistant and the intersubjective reality negotiated and constituted through their dialogues. While the portrait of Tuhami thus represents essential dynamics of anthropological interviews, it also demonstrates much ambiguity in the ethnographic situation and in the ethnographic construction and representation of other cultures.

Notes

- 1 Barbara Tedlock, 'From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography.' *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 47, 1991, p.70.
- 2 Vincent Crapanzano, 'The Life History in Anthropological Field Work.' *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly*, 2, 1977b, p.6.
- 3 Crapanzano, Hermes' *Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire: On the Epistemology of Interpretation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1992, p.45.
- 4 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- 5 Crapanzano, 1992, p.45.
- 6 Ibid., p.68.
- 7 Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988; Reprinted in Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989, p.23.
- 8 Ibid., pp.4-5.
- 9 Tedlock, p.69.
- 10 Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogism' was first presented in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (first published, 1963) and well explored in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1992; first published, 1981). Bakhtin provides stylistic analyses of characters' utterances and reveals various ways of transmitting meanings and of framing contexts.
- 11 Bakhtin, p.262; 292.
- 12 Crapanzano, 'Communications: On the Writing of Ethnography.' *Dialectical Anthropology*, 2, 1977a, pp.5-6.
- 13 Michael M. J. Fischer, 'Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory.' *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, p.208.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 George E. Marcus, 'Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World System.' *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, p.190.
- 16 Ibid., p.192.
- 17 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1988, p.23.
- 18 Crapanzano, 1977a, p.69.
- 19 Ibid., p.72.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.

- 22 Barbara A. Babcock, *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1978, p.32.
- 23 About Crapanzano's research on circumcision in Morocco, see 'Rite of Return: Circumcision in Morocco', 1980b.
- 24 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, Paris: Seuil, 1966.
- 25 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, translated by Bernard Frechtman. New York: Mentor, 1964, 418.
- 26 About hypothetical nature of Crapanzano's statement about their subjective experiences, see Crapanzano, 1980a, p.148.

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