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| T h e m e |

"The rules" in Morocco?
Pragmatic approaches to flirtation and lying

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This article explores the social contexts and strategies of flirtation, seduction, and relationship-building in Southern Morocco. It examines the epistemological constraints of different movements within the drama of seduction, and focuses on the ways in which people actively seek to unsettle or opacify such interactions so as to further their social ends. Uncertainty, it suggests, is not merely a social obstacle, but also a social tool. It further uses this investigation of seduction as an opportunity to explore some of the methodological shortcomings of the wider pragmatic project and adumbrate a potential remedy.

Keywords: flirtation, seduction, Morocco, opacity, pragmatism

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In 1995, Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider published their best-selling self-help bible, *The rules: Time-tested secrets for capturing the heart of Mr. Right*. The book, which encouraged women to play cat and mouse with potential suitors so as to ensure their affections, was variously decried as outdated, radically antifeminist, and coldly utilitarian. While rejecting the first two criticisms, the authors implicitly embraced the latter, arguing that their recommendations were not making any necessary claim about the nature of men and women; they were merely highlighting what sorts of strategies *worked*. Their approach was, in other words, pragmatic, both in its everyday sense of focusing on what is effective, rather than what is right or true, and in its simultaneously more precise and yet somehow much broader usage within the social sciences.

This latter, social scientific usage can, in truth, be hard to formulate or pin down. Where, for instance, is the conceptual red thread connecting the ideal-typology of modes of communication pioneered by Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) with William Hanks' (1990, 2009) phenomenological investigations of deixis, and Nicolas Dodier's (1995) ethnography of human/nonhuman relations on the factory floor? What unity there is to this eclectic array can be attributed to a common desire to break with analyses that start from all-encompassing and fixed oppositions between, say, society and the individual or domination and resistance.

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Within these binary pairs, one term (society, culture, structure) operates as an abstract determining force that sets an agenda for action, while the other (the individual or agent) either partially submits to this agenda or, contrariwise, creatively struggles against it and seeks to carve out a space of freedom. Pragmatism, in contrast, jettisons agency and the question of freedom as objects of analysis in favor of a renewed emphasis on the *context* of action and communication. It then proceeds to pick out the formal properties of particular contexts, or the strategies deployed by various actors in such contexts, and uses these as a means of mapping and interpreting interactions that straddle and encompass multiple social and conceptual scales, rather than merely oscillating between the social macro and the individual micro. So, in the case of *The rules*, the context of flirtation displays certain characteristics and these require actors to use strategies that cast them in a particular light by virtue of their appeal to abstract orders of value: "If she snubs my phone call, that must mean she is a modest woman who would make an ideal wife—I shall pursue her all the harder."

In this example, as for more academic forms of pragmatism, perhaps the key methodological question is how to identify or define the context to be explored. This, I suggest, is also pragmatism's principal analytical weakness, in that the context whose definition is the product of analysis is also, all too frequently, the initial object of study.[1] Take, for example, ritual, which was both the analytical starting point for this collection of themed articles, and also a particularly clear example of the tendency toward circularity. So if we look, for instance, at Højbjerg's (2002) discussion of ritual, he relies on the identification of a certain mode of reflexivity that then serves to distinguish it from other social contexts. Humphrey and Laidlaw's (1994) analysis of the term depends on a similar device, although this time ritual's *definiens* is a matter of opaque intentionality, rather than inner reflexivity. And much the same point could be made regarding the work of more explicitly pragmatic social scientists. Boltanski's (2009a) recent analysis of that slippery sociological object, the institution, concludes that the ambiguity he identifies as its chief characteristic can be attributed to the fact that it exists in a perpetual oscillation between instantiation and reification, and, at the same time, this oscillation constitutes the very definition of what an institution is.

In each case, the context of study—which is necessary for the elaboration of this study—is determined *ex post* by the study itself. Jörmungandr reigns.[2] The purpose of this article is not, however, to offer a critique of such analyses, whose immense heuristic value I fully recognize (it is difficult to discuss the night-sky without first breaking it up into constellations) and whose methodological subtlety I cannot do justice to here.[3] Nonetheless, the article takes a different approach to pragmatic

1. This problem is not, of course, restricted to pragmatism; it is merely that the especial emphasis on defining the context or ground of interaction serves to underscore a general methodological problem within the social sciences.

2. Jörmungandr, for those unfamiliar with Norse mythology, is the great world serpent or "sea-thread" which encircles Midgård and eats its own tail. It is rather similar to the Greek Ouroboros.

3. Notably the incorporation of actors' own notions of context into the resulting sociological definition, a procedure that bypasses many of the problems of analytical circularity. This approach, though, is most prevalent in sociology where the frequent

analysis by explicitly renouncing the appeal to a particular context. In part, this is in an effort to avoid, insofar as possible, presupposing my object of study, but it is also a product of the limitations imposed by the nature of this object and my own position as observer. As is frequently the case for anthropologists, my sample is not wide enough to elaborate an ideal-type of the romantic "affair" in Morocco.[4] Nor can I appeal to the sort of fine-grained linguistic and contextual analysis that anthropologists normally rely on in lieu of sociological breadth. One problem with exploring the development of a flirtatious affair is that much of it must necessarily occur outside the gaze of third parties. And one problem with exploring the development of a flirtatious affair in Morocco is that it is uncommonly hard to have access to both sides of the story—at least for heterosexual encounters. Above all, I do not wish to elaborate a one-eyed and androcentric ideal-type of what is, without doubt, a highly asymmetrical relationship.[5]

Instead, I appeal to an older, but also notably pragmatic approach to social analysis (and one whose aim was also, at least in part, to break with totalizing concepts of society): the case study pioneered by Max Gluckman in "The bridge" (1940). Working in an intellectual environment where the presumed context and object of analysis was society as a whole, Gluckman put forward the case study as an alternative analytical frame: one that did not presuppose its object, but allowed it to emerge from the material. So rather than assuming that there was such a thing as "Zulu society" and describing its characteristics, Gluckman related the inauguration of a bridge by "Zulus" and "Whites," concentrating on the conflicts and tensions characteristic of interactions between members of the society *described* by the case study—one that included both Zulus and Whites. My focus in this article differs from that of Gluckman in that I am both perfectly uninterested in describing "Moroccan society" and far from certain that such a thing exists, but its methodological purpose is very similar. What follows is *not*, in other words, an ethnography of *The rules* in Morocco, nor of what a French pragmatist might call "*la forme-flirt*,"[6] but rather a study of *a* flirtatious encounter and its unfolding over time. It proceeds by exploring the formal properties of certain junctures within the social drama and examining the strategies deployed by the two parties, situating them in the wider context (or contexts) of social interaction in Morocco. Particular attention is paid to the epistemological constraints present at different points in the story, as well as to the ways in which the protagonists actively unsettle and opacify social interactions so as to further their social ends. I thereby suggest that such interactional uncertainty is not merely something to be worked around, but rather something that people work *with*.

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overlap between the analyst's and the analysand's lay conceptual framework further complicates the issue.

4. I make this admission advisedly, having previously developed an ideal-typology of two forms of the premarital or extramarital affair in Morocco.

5. The gender asymmetry of such relationships is something I have discussed at length elsewhere (Carey 2010) and, for reasons of space, will not dwell on here.

6. A good deal of French pragmatism is concerned with the identification of particular sociological "forms" or templates of social interactions or events—e.g., the scandal, the affair, or the catastrophe.

Hicham and Suqayna[7]

My plane landed in Marrakesh shortly after five o' clock and I caught a bus to the city center, alighting at the main square in the old town—the *Jânn' lfnâ'*, famous for its food-stalls, musicians, traditional storytellers, and, more recently, terrorist bombings. I found a table on one of the café terraces, ordered a "half-and-half" coffee and set to calling various friends and acquaintances. First on the list was Hicham, a nurse from Beni Mellal, who now worked in the mountains around Azilal, three hours by coach from Marrakesh. To my surprise, he responded to my greetings by asking where I was in Marrakesh and then precisely which café I was sat at. Ten minutes later, he pulled up a chair next to mine.

Hicham, it transpired, was in Marrakesh to meet a girl, or rather had extended his stay in the city in hopes of meeting the girl in question. Their "relationship"—if we can call it that—stretched back five months to the New Year, when the miracle of modern technology had contrived their encounter. For a week over the holiday period, Morocco's principal mobile phone provider (*Itissalat Al Maghrib*) had offered free text messages to all national numbers. Few Moroccans are sufficiently moneyed to spend much time talking and so texts are extremely popular, but even they add up, and the offer was much appreciated. As well as saving them money, it also provided the bored youth of Morocco's peri-urban hinterland with something to while away their evenings. Several of the young men I knew had composed stock messages stating their name, age, and desire to strike up an acquaintance with practically anybody who was interested, and then proceeded to send these messages out to random numbers. They sat around each other's houses, drank cups of tea, and laboriously typed out countless variations on the standard ten-digit mobile number in the hope of striking it lucky.

And Hicham *did* strike it lucky, receiving no fewer than six responses to his innumerable text messages, though two of these were from men and so pointedly ignored. Of the four remaining respondees, three swiftly ruled themselves out on one ground or another (distance, class, etc.), but the fourth, a girl called Suqayna, claimed to live in Azilal, near to where Hicham worked. This point of convergence in their otherwise quite different life trajectories allowed the two of them to drive the acquaintanceship on, exchanging further texts before swiftly upgrading to MSN (Microsoft's instant messaging service). They even went so far as to make a few brief telephone calls. In short, they hit it off and after a couple of months of electronic communication, they arranged to meet for a cup of coffee in Marrakesh—Azilal is too small and its gossips' tongues too lively to allow for such public encounters. Since then, Hicham had been pressing her to come away with him, perhaps to the town of Essaouira, on the sea, where he hoped the change of air and exotic surroundings would work its magic. In this endeavor he had proved less lucky, her resistance having thus far proved quite equal to his persuasion.

7. For obvious reasons, these are pseudonyms, and I have also altered a number of other significant biographical and geographical details.

His efforts, however, had not been entirely in vain—as there he was, in Marrakesh, waiting for Suqayna to arrive. He had been expecting her that day, but a minor contretemps had apparently forced her to delay the journey, and she was now expected at nine o'clock the next morning. Hicham and I spent the evening with some friends and arose early to trudge through the spring rain to the coach station. There, we settled ourselves at the station café and waited. Nine o'clock came and went and at half past the hour, Hicham called her. She said that she had, once again, been delayed, but was on the coach now and should arrive at half past ten. And so we waited a little longer, not unduly concerned as we had plenty of catching up to do. But half past ten also came and went and there was still no sign of Suqayna. Hicham called her . . . no response. Again . . . no response. A third time . . . still nothing. At this juncture he paused and then asked for my phone, explaining that she was perhaps ignoring his calls because she had lied about being on the bus, but that she might take a call from a number she didn't recognize. This ploy also proved unsuccessful, however, and the mystery remained unresolved. She might be on the coach and unable to hear her telephone, or she might be in a mobile black spot, or she might, as Hicham had initially surmised, be ducking our attempts at communication. We waited some more and then at one o'clock we gave up and went for lunch.

This setback rather poisoned the rest of the day. We wandered around the city in a fug of intermittent drizzle and desultory conversation, punctuated by Hicham's escalating philippics against Suqayna and her presumed treachery. We reached his friend's flat, in one of the mushrooming suburbs that encircle Marrakesh, toward nightfall, and Hicham once more embarked on his sorry tale. Upon hearing it, the friend (who, I hasten to add, had only ever seen a single blurry photo of Suqayna, taken on a mobile phone) declared that he was quite sure he had spotted her in the neighborhood that very afternoon. There could be only one explanation: she had slipped past us at the coach station and gone to meet somebody else. The friend speculated ever more wildly about the reasons for her visit to this distant suburb: it couldn't be an accident, as her sister (with whom she was to stay) lived much more centrally; so it must be a man she had met online. Acquiescing to the implacable logic of his friend's exposé, Hicham grimly pulled out his mobile phone and methodically deleted every single text message he had received from Suqayna, before finally expunging even her contact details.

Shortly afterwards, my phone rang. It was Suqayna, whom I greeted warmly, before handing the phone over to Hicham. Suqayna had that very instant reached her sister's flat. She had left Demnate at the time she said, but the road had been cut off by the torrential rain, and so she had been forced to spend seven or eight hours in a small town along the way, waiting until the road was passable. During this time, her phone had been at the bottom of her bag and she hadn't heard it ring. The story was wholly improbable, but also wholly unverifiable, and Hicham was in a forgiving mood. We decided that she probably hadn't been visiting in the neighborhood and that Hicham's friend must have been mistaken. Probably she had just elected to stay at home in Demnate until the rain cleared and hadn't answered her phone as it would have revealed her earlier claim to be on the coach as a lie. Or perhaps not. . . . We

would, in any event, never know. Quite why she had phoned me instead of Hicham remained unclear, but we tacitly chose not to rake over those particular coals.

We set off the next morning at around the same time, walking to the *ville nouvelle* where we met Suqayna in a little modern café on one of the less frequented, and less attractive side streets. We sat and chatted for half an hour until I made my excuses and left. Later that afternoon, I ran into them in the *souk,* where Hicham was exposing Suqayna to the exotic delights of traditional Moroccan culture. Though she had often visited Marrakesh, she had never yet ventured into this notorious repair of thieves and tourists. We retired to a nearby park, in front of the Koutoubia mosque, and discussed her CV (Curriculum Vitae), which Hicham had been correcting and I was also to look over. She was in Marrakesh for a month's work experience in an accounts department and she wanted to make a good impression. I made a few minor alterations and then they took a taxi back to the friend's flat.

A few hours later, I received a text message from Hicham telling me that it was okay to return to the flat. I phoned to make sure there was no confusion and then did as instructed. Upon arrival, I found Hicham and Suqayna sitting around the low table in the living room eating last night's leftover *kefta* (meatballs). I joined them and we nattered away like old friends in the casual intimacy of commensality. Then as dusk fell, Suqayna declared that she had to return to her sister's house, as it wouldn't do for her to be out after dark. Hicham and I duly walked her home—they arm-in-arm, and I loitering a good few yards behind. Throughout, the atmosphere was good and the mood easy and relaxed. After half an hour's stroll, we parted company at the end of her sister's street, Hicham and I smoking a cigarette while we watched her to the door. On the walk home, Hicham asked whether I had seen the date of birth written on her CV. I hadn't. It indicated she was twenty-six years old, whereas she had repeatedly told Hicham that she was twenty-two. He proceeded to point out another couple of discrepancies between her declared and revealed identities. His tone was not one of malice, or recrimination, but a thoughtful and rather methodical reflection on the nature of the tales "we Moroccans" tell one another, and perhaps also a slightly barbed commentary on her naivety in having given herself away so easily.

The next day we caught the coach for his natal village near Beni Mellal, with the intention of spending several days there visiting a local *moussem* (festival) before he returned to his work and I proceeded to the Atlas Mountains and my principle fieldwork site. For three days, he exchanged text messages with Suqayna, but breathed not a word of their content, the evolution of their relationship, or the events of Marrakesh. Finally, the night before I was due to leave, he mentioned that Suqayna had suggested he visit her parents' house, adding for my benefit that this amounted to an injunction to him to propose. A few minutes silence ensued, before I enquired as to whether he was intending to go. He laughed uncomfortably and shook his head: "*I don't want to marry yet*"—by which I think he principally meant that he did not want to marry HER. "*So what did you say to her?*" I asked. "*That I have to raise the matter*

> *with my family and that it's delicate. I'm waiting for the right moment.*" The conversation petered out.
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> The following morning, we rose before dawn and he walked me a mile or so to the nearest main road. There we sat on the verge in silence, waiting for a bus to come by. The first two were full and didn't stop, but after an hour, one finally drew to a halt in front of us. As I loaded my rucksack into the hold, Hicham took my sleeve and said: "*You meet a girl, and everything's okay, and it gradually develops, but as soon as you sleep with her, that's where the lying starts. And you say to yourself: 'Why did you do it? You could have been patient . . . you could have suffered a while yet.'*"[8]
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> I met up with him a few weeks later and, in response to my questions, he informed me that he had told Suqayna that he was leaving to work in the mountains for three months and would have no access to telephone or Internet for that period. This, as far as I am aware, marked the end of their relationship.

What, then, are we to make of the various forms of interaction on display in this case study? How to separate out the different contexts in which the relationship evolves? Once more, I propose to eschew a typological analysis of the events in question, distinguishing instead between three *temps*, or movements, that provide the social drama with chronological structure. These three movements are those of encounter, seduction, and rupture and I explore the particular interactional strategies and constraints present in each case, as well as the types of social effect they produce. They are, of course, neither more nor less arbitrary than the contextual ideal-types in whose role they stand as vicars, but they have the advantage of not presupposing their own heuristic extensibility across a given cultural space. In other words, I am not suggesting that there is necessarily a form "flirtatious encounter," whose rudiments or subcontexts can be abstracted from the case at hand and used to identify other encounters elsewhere in Morocco. The movements I discuss are nothing more than narrative artifacts used to address questions of cultural repertoire and situational constraint characteristic of a range of different social contexts and interactions.

Encounters—or prolonging opacity

Hicham and Suqayna's encounter (i.e., the means by which they established contact), when observed from the outside, looks like the product of two remarkably bold attempts to reach out beyond their immediate social confines and establish a bridge with the unknown. Over recent years, much anthropological analysis has been poured into efforts to explore networks of people and things whose "natural" proliferation must ultimately be arrested by the limiting action of "culture" in order for new entities or ideas to emerge. Marilyn Strathern argues that transactions such as marriage (1996: 529), or claims of, say, ownership of a patent (ibid.: 524) operate by imposing limits on potentially endlessly ramifying networks. In the case of a marriage in a context of exogamic patrilines, marriage defines the precise point at which networks of blood must be seen to come to an

8. The verb *sbr*, tellingly enough, has the dual meanings of "to be patient" and "to suffer."

end and as regards the other, Strathern states that "social networks . . . are long, patenting truncates them" (ibid.). Networks, in short, must be cut in order to be productive. This vision of human interactions and exchanges depends on our accepting that these sorts of mycelial networks are the starting point for social action, and it may be that from the sort of analytical perspective advocated by actor network, or simply network, theorists, they are. But the analytical *Grundpunkt* of many small-town Moroccans is just the opposite. One starts out as a more or less atomized individual, embedded in limited and largely inert kin networks, and social action is the endeavor to make that network ramify and to link one network to another. This is not to suggest that kinship is ethnographically irrelevant (as we shall see, it functions as a useful idiom of relatedness), but Hicham's "automatic" kinship ties—those people whose claims he cannot easily avoid and vice-versa—do not run very broad, encompassing perhaps twenty individuals all told. If he is to "make it" outside the narrow confines of this world of blood, then he must follow one of two paths: the impersonal machine of postcolonial French bureaucracy with its *concours* and its *affectations*, or the hyper personalized activity of making networks proliferate and hybridize.

This is most evident in efforts to establish casual points of coincidence with significant figures who straddle multiple social worlds. Hicham's village is built just at the point where the foothills of the Central High Atlas begin to rear up out of the fertile Tadla plain. But until thirty years ago, its inhabitants lived a mile or so farther up the mountainside, only moving to the new village in the 1980s when they were offered electricity and running water to do so. Some families still live on the old site, however, and many others keep a summer house to which they retreat on summer evenings, to escape the sultry heat of the plains and seek out the dusk-wind that blows at altitude. On one of these evening walks to the old house, undertaken during a previous visit, Hicham had shown me around the ruined palace of the village's former *caïd* (government strongman),[9] pointing out the *cachot* (black-hole) in which he had flung those who flouted his authority. The caïd himself, along with his family, had long since moved to the administrative capital, Rabat, but the shadow of his former residence still hung over the village. Then, on a subsequent visit, when I was lounging around at home, Hicham suddenly emerged in the doorway, insisting that I dress myself properly as there was somebody "interesting" I had to meet. He took me to an electrical goods shop in the center of the village, and then through to the back room where we had tea and biscuits with an unveiled women of fifty or so, who spoke impeccable French (as she had been educated by nuns in Casablanca) and declared herself to be an artist—something of a sociological oddity in the immediate context. We stayed for twenty or so minutes, during which time Hicham said not a word and I bemusedly played my appointed role as art-loving Frenchman. It subsequently transpired that she was the wife of a descendant of the former *caïd*, who still owned significant tracts of land and properties in the village and surrounding area. When I asked

9. The exact institutional position covered by the term "caïd" has changed numerous times over the last 150 years. During the period in question, it was a combination of judicial, financial, and administrative roles usually occupied by the head of a significant (and above all wealthy) local family.

Hicham why it had been so vital that I meet her, he merely replied that one never knew when such relations might come in handy.

This encounter could easily be read as a classic opening gambit of a patron-client relationship, and with time it might yet reveal itself to have been one. On a number of levels, however, it fails to conform to the ideal-type of such exchanges. For one thing, no services were offered or asked for, we made no attempt to show our potential value to the *dame patronesse* and, above all, the connection established was most definitely not dyadic (contra Hammoudi).[10] Instead, Hicham had merely caused part of his network to coincide with the network of which the caïd's wife was a "condensation" or metonym. Not I suspect, in any great hope or expectation—he was only too aware of the limited appeal of a stammering young academic as a social lure—but because such attempts are a standard aspect of social activity and, as he rightly pointed out, one never knew.

This fairly canonical example of social promiscuity is, however, merely the most obviously instrumental of a whole range of similar network-ramifying activities, many of which are nowadays conducted via modern communication technology, whose web-like properties lend themselves admirably to such endeavors. And no opportunity for establishing social contact is too trifling to be seized upon. For instance, wrong numbers are a regular feature of Moroccan existence as everybody has a mobile phone, but as I mentioned, nobody can afford to call from one. Instead, people make calls from payphones and, in the process of copying numbers from chipped screen to damaged dial, digits are often confused. Even calls from payphones are expensive, though, and they rarely last longer than a few minutes. They are only made when it is absolutely imperative to speak to somebody, or to contact loved ones and potential lovers. And yet despite this, I have never seen anybody hang up on a wrong number. They try to strike up a conversation or prolong the interaction: implicitly letting on that it was the right number, but the wrong person answered it, or simply providing so little information that the caller is unsure of what to do. What matters is to draw the exchange out. "One never knows."

Indeed, one of the high points of my social integration was when I received a ribald text message from some young man to his sweetheart and immediately responded in a way that suggested that I was not the intended recipient, but gave no clue as to my gender, intentions, or potential openness to further exchanges. A friend leaned across, asked to see what I had written and then nodded approvingly, congratulating me on my having become a local, a "son of the soil" (*sâlîy, ou tamazirt at tgil*). Similar games are played with people's instant messaging accounts. I have frequently seen friends, acquaintances, or mere strangers in cybercafés assume a friend or brother's avatar (either because they know the password or because he has just left the room for five minutes) and to use it to strike up conversations with his contacts or indeed with random other people. The game

10. Hammoudi (1997: 5–14) argues that patron–client relations (and indeed *all* same-sex relations) in Morocco are hierarchical and dyadic, and are based on the cultural "diagram" of the master–disciple relationship in Sufi orders. The interaction under discussion here was, of course, cross-sex and so does not perfectly conform to Hammoudi's ideal-type, but my central point is that it was a nondyadic form of a potential patron–client relationship.

consists of then pushing the encounter as far as one can without giving up any information about oneself, playing a complex form of social battleship. And then finally, there are the endless, aimless text messages sent out for free over the New Year period and whose purpose is ostensibly sexual, but which also hold out the broader possibility of bringing together perhaps entirely extraneous networks.

What, then, unites these highly different instances of communication, beyond the simple fact that they all tend toward precipitating a relationship by manufacturing an encounter? It seems to me that their principal formal property is the extraordinarily minimal amount of information exchanged by the two parties. This is least clearly the case with the meeting in the electrical goods shop, but that encounter was fairly prolonged and, even there, Hicham distinguished himself by a tenacious silence, so much of the detail elicited from our host was the result of the fact that I am a nonproficient Moroccan social actor and asked polite questions to fill the gaps (although such an approach may well, in fact, have been better suited to her particular milieu). All the other examples—those which occurred by virtue of electronically mediated forms of communication—saw the participants give away so little about themselves that they remained little more than ciphers. The whole point of the conversations struck up with wrong numbers or via assumed messaging accounts is not to reveal anything about oneself, as to do so risks terminating the exchange. Indeed, what most surprised me about Hicham's text message sent out to random numbers was how little it said. "*My name is Hicham. I am twenty-eight years old. Would you like to get to know me?*"[11] Nothing more. In this sense, it was rather similar to the personal ads published in Moroccan magazines, many of which are also startling in their lack of descriptors. The following example is drawn from Morocco's best-selling national weekly French-language magazine, *Tel Quel*, and though perhaps a little more Spartan than most, is fairly representative of the genre: "*Young Moroccan man seeks woman for friendship.*" In both cases, there is no mention of profession, interests, looks, what kind of person one wants to meet, or even where one lives. *Tel Quel*, I remind the reader, is a nationwide magazine. Contrast these interactions with equivalent ones in Western Europe or North America, where, as Schegloff (1979) notes in his ethnomethodology of telephone opening gambits, the initial moments are invariably devoted to mutual identification,[12] and as even a cursory experience of dating websites will demonstrate, you will not get many responses if you reveal scant information about yourself.

As regards the formal properties of this cultivation of opacity characteristic of the opening movement, it is worth stressing that it is necessarily temporally restricted—i.e., it can only be deployed at the precise point of encounter and thus is particularly evident in forms of communication where the exchange is not seamless and analogical, but compartmentalized into discrete pockets of information (or quanta), such as text messages. In more open-ended exchanges, this initial stance is quickly subsumed by subsequent communicative strategies. In any event, its effect

11. *Je m'appelle Hicham. J'ai 28 ans. Voulez-vous faire ma connaissance?* The fact of writing in French was intended to exclude certain categories of recipient and appeal to others.

12. See also Bonhomme (2011) for a comparative discussion of the question.

is fairly clear: to hold open the possibility of . . . whatever. The point is, as Hicham repeatedly made clear, that one cannot know what might arise from an encounter, and so one must begin by enabling it. The minimal exchange of information maximally extends the field of potential partners. But in order to develop the relationship thus precipitated, one must cultivate it, and that requires different tactics—to wit, seduction.

Seduction—or the cultivation of uncertainty

The second movement of this social drama, which I am calling seduction, is far less clearly definable than the first. Granted, it does have fairly unproblematic natural boundaries, beginning shortly after the initial, and necessarily brief, act of encounter and encompassing everything leading up to the act of congress—be that deliberate wooing or simply the more general attempt to establish a relationship. It wanders, however, through a whole range of different interactional contexts (the more intimate of which I had no access to whatsoever) and these cannot simply be distilled into some "essence of seduction" whose formal properties are brought to the fore by the process of concentration. Instead, I wish to focus on one particular aspect of the movement: the manner in which the actors represent themselves and their actions to the other party, and the relational implications of the epistemological stances they adopt vis-à-vis of the "truth."

This process of self-representation begins just as soon as the initial encounter establishes the possibility of a relationship. Hicham sends out a text message; Suqayna responds; but to push things further, they must exchange information about one another that allows them to create social or biographical points of convergence, or "hooks" on which to hang the relationship. So Suqayna informs Hicham of her age (twenty-two), place of residence (her parent's home in Azilal), professional goals (secretarial work in a larger city) and so forth, and Hicham does the same. In this way, each revealed a range of aspects of their persona that gave the other party an opportunity to situate them socially and established a shared idiom that underlined their similarity. In their case, this similarity was based on a common social position as reasonably well-educated members of the numerically dominant but culturally subaltern Berber-speaking community, which acts as a buffer between the Arab-speaking plains and the more fully Berber mountains. So Hicham and Suqayna wrote to one another in French, spoke Arabic on the phone, and frequently switched to Berber (Tamazight) when they met in person, reinforcing their shared sense of identity in the process. But this identity could equally have been expressed in terms of religious practice or family origins; what matters is that it be shared. Morocco is a country in which the ideological foundation of a (horizontal) relationship is equivalence or at least similarity. For instance, if one wants to compliment or merely be nice to the anthropologist, one calls him "son of [our shared] natal village" (*ou tamazirt*—glossed above as "son of the soil"), and if one wants to establish closeness to a girl, one can refer to her as sister (*ultama*).

This general process by which similarity is established is one that has received a very great deal of attention in Moroccan anthropology, beginning with Geertz's (1979: 142) work on the concept of *nisba*, which he singles out as a critical and distinguishing element of Moroccan sociality. The nisba is, at heart, simply a grammatical means of transforming a noun or proper noun into another term that

is simultaneously noun and adjective. Thus, the city of Marrakesh (*mrâkush*) yields the nisba *mrâkshiy*, which is both adjective and a noun: a girl from Marrakesh is a *bint mrâkshiyya* or simply a *mrâkshiyya.* The same grammatical procedure can be used to transform a profession (e.g., carpenter) or even a physical characteristic (e.g., blindness) into a noun/adjective. What makes this so important, Geertz suggests, is that rather than attributing fixed identities to people—as members of such and such a tribe or family—it allows them to negotiate their identity by selectively highlighting different facets of it. As Nicolas Puig puts it, "*elle classe sans définir*,"—it categorizes without defining (2004: 265).

Now such an approach to the production of social relations is far from being restricted to Morocco, and Geertz's efforts to explain it with reference to a particular grammatical construction both smack a little of the sort of culturalism that pragmatic approaches within the social sciences have been so anxious to avoid and are undermined by the widespread existence of similar grammatical forms elsewhere.[13] There is, in other words, nothing so very remarkable about the fact of highlighting different aspects of one's personality in order to establish a relationship. It is, I suspect, something that we have all engaged in at one point or another. Two things, however, distinguish such encounters in Morocco. One is the aforementioned emphasis on establishing similarity or equivalence. And the other is the nature of the utterances made by the two parties. This is the subject of a book by Lawrence Rosen (1984). He suggests that statements made in the process of creating relationship are "bargaining positions" with no direct link to the truth (1984: 118). Instead, they are to be seen in much the same way as J. L. Austin (1962) describes "performatives" in English: the question of truth or falsehood is irrelevant to them; what matters is what they do. Rosen then proceeds to link this to wider elements of "Moroccan culture," pointing out that perjury is not a crime in the Moroccan legal system and utterances made in court have no truth-value until validated or contradicted (1984: 124). This, I would suggest, is somewhat overstating the case. Perjury may not be a crime, but the purpose of a court case is to establish the truth-value of a series of statements, and part of the game of relationship-building, as Rosen himself admits, is to gather enough information about somebody so as to be able to evaluate their utterances. Nevertheless, it is helpful for understanding at least part of the process of seduction in Hicham and Suqayna's case.

Thus we can think of the early stages of Hicham and Suqayna's relationship, the initial steps of seduction, in much the same way as Rosen and Geertz discuss the creation of relationships and relatedness in a market environment. The process of revealing different aspects of their social trajectories mentioned above served the dual purpose of situating them socially and allowing them to establish an idiom of common identity, principally based on shared geographical and linguistic characteristics. And Rosen's observation that the statements made during these exchanges have no necessary relationship to the truth also holds true. They each

13. Though English may be bereft of an equivalent to the nisba, most Latin languages have something similar. The French terms *parisien*/*Parisien*, *policier*, and *aveugle* are all derived noun/adjective combinations that people can wear as markers of identity. They may lack a common ending (unlike the Arabic *-iy*), but their usage is very nearly identical.

expect the other to misrepresent themselves and these acts of dissembling are *not* considered to be full-blown lies. (Note that despite Hicham having pointed several of Suqayna's misrepresentations out to me—about her age and so forth—he refrained from describing them as lies and even explicitly stated that "the lying" only begins after one sleeps with a girl.) However, Rosen is I think wrong to argue that notions of truth and falsehood are irrelevant to such statements. On the contrary, Hicham and I suspect also Suqayna went to great efforts to identify the other's misrepresentations, comparing different statements made months apart and poring over apparent aporia in the stories related. In other words, they do have a truth-value, but it is one that cannot be assumed and that only exists in potential or suspended form as something *to be* discovered.

The nature of the misrepresentations also went beyond any straightforward effort to establish a shared idiom of identity. In the case of Hicham and Suqayna, nothing it seemed was too trifling to be misrepresented. She, and also he, dissembled regarding their whereabouts, what they were doing, where they spent *l'ayd n tifeska* (or Eid al-Adha, the principal Muslim festival), and pretty much anything else. The crucial thing is that any statement made be possible and quite unverifiable. When Suqayna explained that she had arrived ten hours late in Marrakesh because the road had been flooded and hadn't answered the phone because it was at the bottom of her bag, the story was potentially true. It was raining and flash floods do sometimes tear down mountain wadis and wash away those roads. It was also highly improbable: it wasn't really that sort of rain and she would probably have used her phone to inform her sister of her late arrival. Although, if confronted, she could always have retorted that she had told her sister she would arrive in the evening so she could freely spend the day with Hicham. Either way, Hicham would never be able to know for sure and this, I suggest, is somehow the whole point of such deceptions. They are not merely instrumental acts of misrepresentation designed to manufacture a point of convergence or similarity; they also aim to produce a generalized sense of uncertainty. Had she been in Azilal, or in Marrakesh with another man, or even stuck halfway between the two as she claimed? How old was she? Where did she spend Eid? This uncertainty can be immensely personally frustrating for the individuals involved, but also extremely socially (and perhaps also emotionally) productive. By constant acts of misrepresentation or dissembling, one maintains the other in a state of suspense where a vast range of possibilities remain open. One does not know what to think of the other person, nor how to feel toward them and so nothing, or very little, is foreclosed.

Thus, contrary to Boltanski's general philosophical claim about social interaction that in "moments of practice" (which he contrasts with "moments of reflexivity"), social actors "actively cooperate to dispel the sense of disquiet that lurks in wait for them . . . by closing their eyes to differences in behavior that might introduce elements of uncertainty" (2009: 165), the practice of seduction engaged in by Hicham and Suqayna relies on their acting to produce a sense of disquiet regarding the other's identity and actions and, thereby, to generate relationally productive uncertainty. The acts of misrepresentation and dissembling that perform this task are not full-blown lies because their principal goal is not to actively mislead the other, giving them an incorrect idea about the real, but simply

to mystify, obfuscate, and generalize uncertainty. What though of actual lies that aim to mislead? For these, we must turn to the third movement: rupture.

Rupture and resolution—or the battle over definition

In Hicham and Suqayna's case, the process of rupture begins quite soon after the period of seduction ends. There is no particular reason why this should be so. I am not suggesting that this is a typical aspect of Moroccan "affairs" and I have witnessed others where the processes of seduction and rupture were separated by a year or more of an intercalary movement we might call "unofficial coexistence" or "established relationship." At some point, however, the production and cultivation of uncertainty will most likely be brought to a close and the affair resolved: either by being terminated or, conversely, by being socially recognized in the form of marriage. There are exceptions to this general rule, normally when one or both parties are either already or previously have been married. Then the affair can be pursued indefinitely without receiving explicit social sanction, as when a married man, for example, carries on with a local widow (cf. Carey 2010). Such cases, though, are the exception, rather than the rule, and for Hicham and Suqayna, there was never any doubt that the situation must be resolved one way or another. What concerns us here is by what means this resolution was achieved and what distinguishes the type of speech acts made in the movements of encounter and seduction from those of rupture.

For Hicham, as we saw at the end of the case study, the postcoital period is characterized by lying ("*as soon as you sleep with her, that's where the lying starts*"), but this simply raises the further question of what distinguishes the falsehoods told in the process of resolving the relationship from those integral to seduction. To answer this, we need to look more closely at what the two different kinds of speech act do. So where the misrepresentations of seduction can be seen as cultivating uncertainty in order to maximize possibility, here, I suggest, the opposite must occur: rupture or other kinds of closure (such as marriage) require that uncertainty be dispelled and that the situation and each actor's motives and behavior be somehow defined. The speech acts that occur after sexual union are, in this case, about defining the act that occurred and one's stance toward it. This is quite clear in Suqayna's rapid clarification of her position. She presented the act as a first step in a logical sequence that would lead ineluctably to marriage. And in so doing, she implicitly placed both the act and herself within a particular moral framework where each serves to define the other: as I am not the sort of girl who would simply sleep with a man for the fun of it, what occurred can *only* have been a prelude to marriage, and as it was just such a prelude, so I have invited you to visit my parents. The circle is closed and the uncertainty regarding her disposition is eliminated. There is only one thing that Hicham can be permitted to think of Suqayna—that she is a good girl.

The situation is much less clear-cut when it comes to Hicham's statements. He initially says that he will speak to his parents and then shortly afterward informs Suqayna that he has not done so and declares he will be three months incommunicado in the mountains. It is far from obvious in what way this is a clarification of anything. In other words, to return to our initial question, how do these misrepresentations differ from those offered by Suqayna on the day she failed to arrive in Marrakesh and which I have described as intended to cultivate

uncertainty? The short answer is that from an external perspective there is no difference between the two sets of statements. Nor can we merely say that the difference lies in the context of enunciation (seduction versus rupture), for that would be to reproduce the tautological approach to context that the article set out to avoid. To distinguish between them, we need to appeal to the two parties' assumptions regarding the other's interpretation of the statements made (and I, of course, only have access to Hicham's). So, when Suqayna likely misrepresented her day spent cut off by the floodwaters, Hicham assumed that she (the deceiving party) did not intend for him to believe the falsehood—i.e., she was using it as a smokescreen that he would recognize as such, but nonetheless be unable to penetrate. When, in contrast, he said he would talk to his parents, he (the deceiving party) hoped that she would believe him; and when he subsequently declared that he had not in fact spoken to them and was going to be uncontactable for three months, he hoped that she would recognize this as a falsehood *and* be aware of the actual message it purported to conceal—that he had no intention of ever discussing it with his parents and considered the relationship over. In other words, what made them lies was that they were both false and were intended to induce a particular, definite impression in the recipient, rather than being false and merely aiming to instill a vague state of uncertainty.

Here, just as with Suqayna's invitation to visit, the aim of the utterance was to make a specific claim about the relationship. The sincerity or falsehood of the statement is, from the analyst's perspective, quite secondary to their intended task: definition of the relationship. And on this note, it is worth pointing out that we only have Hicham's word for it that Suqayna was, in fact, sincere in wanting to marry him. The ease with which she accepted his putting an end to the relationship suggests an alternative, and equally credible explanation: that she felt obliged to define the relationship as a prelude to marriage because if she had not done so, then Hicham could have assumed she was a loose woman and dragged her good name through the mud. She, because of her vastly more precarious social position as a sexually active unmarried woman, was obliged to play on his sentiments as insurance against her reputation being destroyed. Hicham assumed she was sincere because, as he put it, "deep down, all women want is to get married," but it is, I would argue, rather more likely that she was simply a more proficient liar than he, and this because her social existence depended upon it.

Conclusion

Aside from the obvious ethnographic goal of describing the contours of an amorous interaction, charting its progression, and teasing out the social techniques deployed by the two parties at different strategic junctures, the aim of this article has been twofold. On a methodological level, it has sought to retain the central tenets of pragmatic sociology, with its overriding emphasis on situational analysis, while simultaneously problematizing the idea of context that underpins so much of the pragmatic conceptual edifice. Recourse to the case study is, of course, neither bold nor innovative—it has been part of the ethnographic repertoire for seventy years—but I hope to have shown that when redeployed in pragmatic analyses, it offers a potential solution to the tautology of context-driven approaches. Instead of predetermining the social and formal boundaries of particular sorts of event, it allows actors situationally to define the contours of their interactions and leaves

more room for the exploration of the ways in which interactional strategies can migrate across contextual boundaries. This methodological plasticity is especially important when analyzing everyday forms of interaction, such as the creation and cultivation of relationships, as opposed to more formalized and easily identifiable forms of actions, such as ritual.

On an analytical level, I have sought not to oppose, but perhaps to modulate the claims of authors such as Boltanski or Bakhtin that social action and communication (respectively) are first and foremost a matter of papering over the cracks of existential or semantic uncertainty that always lurk underneath interactions. As mentioned above, Boltanski argues that in moments of practice, social actors "cooperate . . . to dispel disquiet . . . and [ignore] uncertainty" (op. cit.), and in his discussion of heteroglossia, Bakhtin similarly contends that "a unitary language is not something that is given, but something that must be posited . . . [in opposition to] the *realities* of heteroglossia" (1992: xix, emphasis added). In other words, by behaving *as if* they meant the same thing by a word, speakers of a language ensure the ongoing possibility of communication. As far as I am concerned, these two related claims are—insofar as they place the management of uncertainty and potential multiplicity at the very heart of interaction—vital to our understanding of what it means to engage in society. Nonetheless, I would suggest that while this "as if" approach to uncertainty is undoubtedly the dominant mode, there is also space for the cultivation of uncertainty in contexts where it can be socially or emotionally productive. I have described one of these.

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Mensonges et séduction au Maroc? : une approche pragmatique

Résumé : Cet article propose une analyse des stratégies de drague, de séduction et de construction des relations dans le sud du Maroc, ainsi que des contextes sociaux dans lesquels elles de déroulent. Il explore les contraintes épistémologiques à l'œuvre pendant les différents mouvements du drame de la séduction, en se focalisant sur les façons dont les acteurs essaient de brouiller ou d'opacifier leurs interactions afin d'atteindre certains buts sociaux. Il s'appuie sur cette analyse de la séduction pour signaler certaines lacunes méthodologiques propres aux approches pragmatiques, ainsi que pour en esquisser des réponses possibles.

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