

Upon the completion of the field-work, the anthropologist has to mentally (and usually also physically) move away from the field, translating her or his data into writing that is meaningful in her or his society and profession. This withdrawal often produces great strain in field-workers. In the field, the commitment to personal relationships with informants would normally compensate for the instrumental use to which these relationships were put. During the process of writing up (which is often also a period of painful readjustment to one's own society after perhaps years of absence in the field), the subjects of enquiry risk to be reduced to just objects, categories. Given the arid conventions of academic prose, very little of the intensity of feeling that characterised the field situation is allowed to seep through in the written report. It is natural that at this stage many anthropologists feel guilty of betrayal.<sup>185</sup>

However, intimacy and subsequent withdrawal are built into field-work. To phrase in economic terms one's distress at the logic of the anthropologist's role is facile. The income and prestige accorded after field-work (but what about the increasing number of unemployed anthropologists?) are only symptoms of the field-worker having returned to her or his own affluent society. The international injustice on which such affluence is based may well bother the field-worker; but it should form a cause for political action, not for denouncing virtually the only means to truly participate in other societies, despite and beyond

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J.J. LOVE THY INFORMANTS. If I may give a personal example here: My first, and immensely passionate and rewarding, field-work was in the highlands of North-Western Tunisia, 1968 and 1970. When in the late 1970s I gave a paper on my statistical findings at a conference of colleagues having frequented the same region, our joint field supervisor Douwe Jongmans warned me afterwards:

'You must be more careful. You know what they are saying? "He does not even seem to love the local people at all" !'

I was shocked. How could I *not* love them? How could there be doubt about my commitment to these people who had shown me the beauty and meaning of the countryside, of peasant life, of popular Islam, of intercultural encounter, of peasant women with their defiant presence, their moving piety in the context of popular Islam, and with their unique body language and pitch of voice? But I had to admit: in my argument I had reduced them, even namelessly, to data points in a complex mathematical model. To make up for this one-sidedness, they surfaced again – with all the splendid attributes just outlined – in my poetry, in my novel *Een Buik Openen* ('Opening Up a Belly', 1988), and in the name of my first child, *نجمة Nezmā* – named after my principal female informant, invoking (with one of these inimitable and unforgettable hand gestures Berber women have contributed to the 'immaterial masterpieces of humankind') the full splendour of the star-spangled night-sky as she explained the meaning of her name to my wife, Nezmā's expectant mother. And after nearly fifty years, I still know by heart most of their names, patronyms and extended genealogies into five generations, and still celebrate the semi-annual festival (ألزردة *az-zerda*) for Sidi Mḥammad with my family, eating a *baraka*-saturated meal with kouskous and properly slaughtered lamb over which His name has been pronounced. How could I *not* love them? It was one of the first times that I began to regret and criticise the distancing stance of religious anthropology.