

Social Work and Anthropology: Moroccan Female Immigrants in Spain

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Anthropology has continuously contended with the politics of knowledge and its application. From its inception as a field in the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, anthropology was interwoven into the colonizing projects in various parts of the world. Even in our postmodern attempt to reflect upon our research and its application, we still fall short of any aspiration to remain objective and non-intrusive, particularly when our knowledge is used to serve immigrants who tend to be relegated to society's fringes. The fact that anthropology can contribute to immigration programs and to immigrants' lives may not necessarily be damaging.

Until time and the process of incorporation bring them closer to society's central concerns, immigrants often live on the fringes of their host society. Different fields have different focus on studying immigrants and immigration. Anthropology has contributed to immigration and diaspora research by looking at the continuity of cultural practices, the modification of old ones, and the invention of new ones. However, anthropology also has its applied side, its 'engaged' side that can contribute and assist immigrants in their incorporation into society. The knowledge anthropologists obtain from long-term ethnographic fieldwork can serve as a consultation on behalf of their informants/clients. Yet, applied anthropologists have noted that when applying anthropology, the term 'client' rather than informant is more appropriate (Chambers and Trend, 1981).

Applied anthropologists work with clients. If we use our knowledge to assist in their living situation, then we serve them, just as social workers serve them, which is where anthropology and social work merge. Both fields serve their clients to obtain the justice they deserve. Despite this point, the social worker's priorities, however, still place the State above the clients because they work for the

State in order to deliver services. Anthropologists, particularly those not funded by the State to carry out research, have the 'client' or informant as their priority. During colonial times, anthropologists working for the colonial powers had to answer to these ruling bodies. Nowadays, applied anthropologists serve their clients without being obligated to divulge information. Nevertheless, acting in both roles can complicate ethics, morals, and values.

Ethics, Morals, and Values Revisited

Regarding the ethical stance of anthropologists and social workers, there are more similarities than differences. The most important similarity lies in the ethical commitment to social justice. Anthropologists produce knowledge that promotes social justice, whereas social workers act and advocate for social justice on behalf of their clients. That is not to say that anthropologists also advocate for justice. In the applied sense of any field, which includes both anthropology and social work, the sense of ethics, morals and values permeate in its practices. Ethics pertains to the guidelines of practice, research, and conduct of a collectivity. Ethics usually have the notion of “justice” attached (Comitas 2000, Mead 1978). Morals has to do with the “right” and “wrong” with “good” and “bad,” which determined on an individual basis (Comitas 2000). On the other hand, values are the ranking of priorities in beliefs, ideas, etc.

The concept of “morals,” however, is defined and treated differently by Emile Durkheim, the prominent sociologist, who views moral collectively, in the collective consciousness of a community. What “good” or “bad” in Durkheim’s moral community is determined by its function of solidarity. Crime and suicide (or other “deviant” acts) function as the means to keep the community together as indicated by the boundaries of the community in defining deviancy or “anomie.” In terms of research, Durkheim does not separate the ethics of science from its morals, probably because morals are not viewed as individualistic or collective. He notes that the role of science is to present not just the facts but also to determine the direction through recommendations (Durkheim 1964). Hence, the “means”

determined by the scientist(s) is indicated in its “ends” or in the results, recommendations, interventions, etc. from the research.

On the other hand, many anthropologists also work with Max Weber’s ideas of “means” and “ends” (Comitas 2000) According to Weber, scientists, who by definition are people and hence, social, have ideas and cannot be completely objective. He refers to the tree of knowledge and the universe as infinite so ethics are not universal (Weber 1949). The “means” are multiple and are complicated as the universe itself. The role of the scientist is to research some “means” but the “ends” are left to the client, the community, or society to determine. The “means,” which includes the researcher’s values, cannot determine what is “right” or “wrong.” The scientist can only present the cost and benefit or the advantages or disadvantages (the “means”) and not the determinant (the “ends”).

In fact, anthropologist Lisa Peattie (1965) describes the two paths that anthropologists take within the dichotomy: one being closer to the science, a Weberian notion, and the other being closer to the humanities, a Durkheimian idea. Sol Tax, a leading applied anthropologist in the mid-twentieth century, deems his famous Fox Project (1958) a “participant interference,” which follows Durkheim’s opinion about science. Whereas other anthropologists would conduct research on a place, make recommendation, and then sit back to see what happen, the Fox Project had Tax and his students involved in the daily living of the Indians, assisting them, while probing and asking questions (1958).

To this day, Sol Tax’s legacy lives on. Anthropology continues to have an impact in today’s phenomena and dilemmas. In fact, the Wenner-Gren foundation has recently implemented a grant of ‘engaging anthropology’, whereby the recipients of their grant can obtain an extra stipend to disseminate or ‘engage’ their findings with their researched community. Indeed, we are here today because of our impact in the world.

Unlike anthropology’s diverging trajectory of action, social work is by definition, an applied field. In dealing directly with people, social workers also follow a code of ethics. One of the social

worker's responsibility is to promote the well-being of the clients. In general, clients' interests are the social workers' interests. Nevertheless, the social workers' responsibility to the larger society, in the form of their legal obligations to State, may supersede the loyalty owe to clients. Contrary to the independence of many anthropologists, social workers should not engage in dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the clients. Dual or multiple relationships occur when social workers relate to clients in more than one relationship, whether professional, social or business. Moreover, dual or multiple relationships can occur simultaneously or consecutively. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, social workers should take steps to protect clients. They are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.

On the other hand, anthropologist do not have such guidelines in demarcating roles and boundaries. Our fieldwork is enriched when boundaries are pushed and bypassed. We follow our client/informant home; sometimes we even live with them. We assist them, befriend them, and occasionally become fictive kins. Maybe the blurriness of boundaries in our profession leads to scandalous activities such as the infamous El Dorado fiasco.

So what happens when the anthropologist functions as a social worker? Or if the anthropologist apply his or her knowledge in evaluating programs or advocating for a particular group? Given this brief stance on ethics, morals and values of anthropological research, the imparting of anthropological knowledge can tread a thin line among the three criteria.

The Incorporation of Immigrants

Before delving into my research and experience in the field as an anthropologist and a social worker, I want to address our panel's theme: "Does anthropology work for immigrants?" Ironically, the beginning of applied anthropology in the United States stems from research on immigrants. Franz Boas, a Jewish immigrant from Germany, came to the USA with a plan to challenge the eugenics

research that had been dominating social theory in Western Europe during his time. Boas' physical anthropological research on immigrant children disputed the evolution of racism, particularly of people from non-Western European origins (Patridge & Eddy 1978, Ervin 2000). Although Boas' research was supposedly more "academic" and not so much as "applied," his findings of environmental changes on immigrant children's physical and "mental" capabilities by taking measurements of their brain sizes had influenced American society's notion regarding race as a determining factor (Wade, 2002). Knowledge regarding the effects of assimilation on immigrants triggered interests with other minority groups and the notion that these groups may eventually disappear spearheaded the need of "salvaging" their cultures, histories, etc. was necessary. In fact, Boas' students, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, continued his ideas through their own research with Native Americans and "natives" elsewhere in the world.

Nowadays, 'salvaging cultures' is embedded under the rubric of 'multiculturalism.' The incorporation of immigrants also entails respecting their cultural background in its juxtaposition to the majority culture. Assimilation projects or the 'melting pot' implementation in the United States have been under much criticisms after the late-1960s. Yet despite the host society's attempt to preserve values imported by new immigrants, complications may arise as values may contradict with those of the host society. More importantly, their values may harm internal group members. Anthropologist Unni Wikan's (2002) work on new immigrants in Norway exemplifies the hazardous effects of preserving some immigrant groups' practices at the cost of its female members.

Regardless, the incorporation of immigrants depends on how the host society views the immigrants and their country of origin. For Moroccan immigrants in Spain, the reception and perception have been mixed given the long, tenuous history between the two countries. Remnants of the Muslims' conquest of Spain's Al-Andalus for over 700 years still lingers in the collective consciousness. The Madrid train bombing of 2004 only serves as a confirmation of their violent and

tumultuous past.

On the other hand, Spain also looms in Moroccan history and its proximity. The Spanish government has yet to relinquish the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, which it had acquired from Morocco in the 1861 treaty of Madrid. The ongoing social, political, and economic tensions between the two countries only complicate the immigrants' experience in Spain.

Still, Moroccans have an undeniable presence in modern Spain. Before the influx of immigrants from Ecuador, Moroccans were the most numerous in Spain both legally and illegally. By July 2001, at least a quarter million Moroccans were working in Spain legally with many more residing illegally. Being pressured by the European Union to control its borders, Spain enlisted the Moroccan government for assistance in halting illegal immigration. Spain, for its part, launched a strong campaign against illegal immigration. The repatriation of Moroccan immigrants had led to more disputes due to reports of racism and abuse by Spanish police officers flooding the media in both countries (Diario 2009, El Mundo 2009). The ongoing tension have perpetuated the love-hate relationship between the two countries with immigrants being caught in the middle of the periodic crossfires.

Since Spain's entrance into the European Union, Moroccan immigration has been largely male. During the early 1990s, however, Spain had an economic recession in the building and construction industry that resulted in the lost of jobs for many Moroccan men. Concurrently, the increase in the Spanish female workforce continued to create a high demand for domestic services. This caused a shift in migration type from predominantly male to increasingly female. Unlike other European countries, domestic service in Spain is recognized as an occupation category, making it easier for domestic workers to obtain work permits. As a matter of fact, domestic services constituted 63% of the jobs of immigrant women in 2005. The surge of Moroccan female-initiated immigration has brought new challenges to the Spanish social service sector. With the majority of Moroccan women having little to no formal education, learning Spanish also meant learning cultural practices and decorum.

The Social Needs of Moroccan Immigrant Women

New immigrants with scant social network often approach civic organizations for resettlement assistance. For Moroccan immigrant women, access to government assistance is paramount to their survival in Spain. Advocating for these women is the core job of social workers while providing cultural insight into their predicament is the heart of applied anthropology. The case presented today will extrapolate the dilemma I have faced as an anthropologist and as a volunteered social work assistant at a local immigrant organization in Madrid.

Since I have conducted long-term research on the Moroccan community, I have access to in depth cultural and personal information that other social workers do not have. I first encountered the Spanish-Moroccan organization in 2007 through my informants who were attending the women support group held at the association's center. After spending over six months attending the organization's women support group and Spanish language classes with my informants, the director asked me to serve as a volunteer social worker in assisting their clients with their paper work as well as their medical, housing, and legal appointments. I also visited their homes to ensure their living situation was adequate. At first, I had agreed to help the organization because I thought I could offer concrete assistance to those who had provided me with such rich information of their daily practices and beliefs. I had built a nice rapport with many Moroccan immigrants and wanted to help, albeit in a different capacity.

Despite my minimal obligation as a volunteer social worker to the local Spanish government, resolving the conflict of interests was not an easy task. I frequently weighed my ethical stance as an applied anthropologist with the obligation as a social worker to share case information with my colleagues during staff meetings. Sometimes the sharing of information benefits the immigrants while at times it jeopardizes their access to resources. The following case demonstrates this point:

I had been accompanying Samira, a 28-year-old Moroccan woman, to her

medical and social service appointments for the past 3 years. She was an informant for my research on Moroccan immigrant women so I had known about her marriage to her distant cousin in order to help him immigrate. When he finally arrived in Madrid, he physically abused her and stole her family's money before leaving her for another woman who he had met on the internet. In spite of being the one responsible for arranging the marriage, Samira's mother blamed Samira for the family situation and eventually threw her out of the house.

Samira had wandered from one social worker to the next in hopes of obtaining housing and food subsidies. Due to her mistrust of Spaniards, Samira often withheld information and sometimes fabricated her background, particularly about the circumstances of her marriage. She gave conflicting information to various social agents, which resulted in delays of subsidies approval. Since I had more breadth and depth of information on Samira and her family, the director of the different centers would try to solicit information from me.

First, I consulted with Samira about divulging information in order to help her case. Knowing the cost and benefits of revealing certain information, I chose to reveal Samira's abusive marital relationship with her husband. I did withhold information pertaining to the family situation. Samira had to provide more information but did not know which ones to offer. The officials had difficulty approving a shelter placement for her since she had family in Madrid and refused to admit she was married. After six months of living with various friends and acquaintances, the head social worker placed Samira in a shelter for victims of domestic violence.

From my research, I have observed that the public social service sector in Spain and in other European countries has become a major part of social network for Moroccan women. Reliance on the social network for resources is common for Moroccan women. The initiation into Spanish society obligates some to seek help from their fellow countrymen (Heering et.al, 2004). Once they have acquired a better command of Spanish, they tend to go to social workers and associations for resources. With little or no familial social network in Spain, female immigrants often contact associations for

social services related to housing, food, employment, money, legal advice, education, and socialization. Hence, the immigrants view Spanish classes and cultural activities not only as opportunities to exchange and obtain information but also to build friendship and add to their social network.

In a sense, these associations may act as replacement of loss familial resources, a pattern which is common for single Moroccan female immigrants. Among the staff, the immigration lawyers and social workers are important agents in the resettlement process. Trauma and violence are common for these women. Thus, legal counseling sometimes leads to mental health counseling.

In the interviews with the Spanish staff, many Spanish workers believe that the women have grown too dependent on the associations and think it may not be productive for the women's functioning in society. Moreover, they complain about the women giving false or misleading information in order to take advantage of the system. What many workers misinterpret as dependency is actually the associations' growing importance as a family substitute. Yet, the immigrants cannot completely trust the staff for they are also agents of the State. For example, these women never divulge their illegal status to the staff on the first visit. Until they see evidence of the staff's sincerity in helping them, the Moroccan immigrants tend to tell them half-truths. Regardless, some staff members at these associations eventually become part of the women's social network and are even considered their fictive kins.

Conclusion

As an anthropologist functioning as a social worker, I have found the combination difficult to maneuver, primarily because I have limited authority in the service delivery outcome. However, I believe social workers with anthropological training and perspective will serve their clients better. My contribution to the immigrant community was more indirect as an educator than direct as a social worker. In the end, the dissemination of anthropological knowledge took a Weberian path rather than a Durkheimian one.

Ironically, in spite of my role as a social work assistant, my more important contribution to the Moroccan immigrant community has arisen as an 'engaging' anthropologist. Given the predicament related to marriage and family faced by many Moroccan immigrant women in Spain, I collaborated with a Spanish lawyer, specializing in Spanish marriage laws, and Moroccan organizations throughout Madrid to impart workshops to Moroccan immigrant groups on the differences between Spanish and Moroccan family laws. The purpose for these workshops is to provide Moroccan immigrants with information and resources regarding their marriage and family life. The workshop exposed them to the various options available as immigrant women who straddle two distinct cultural practices.

Regardless how anthropologists engage with projects and research on immigrants, having an anthropological view on immigrant communities can only enrich the knowledge of their beliefs and practices. Whether or not that knowledge is used for the benefit of immigrants depends on the role the anthropologist play within the program. Direct services to a disenfranchised group tend to be rife with controversy. Yet if anthropologists and social workers continue to work towards seeking social justice for our clients, society and its members will benefit . Nevertheless, the politics of knowledge still lingers in the application of anthropology, whether for State-run projects or programs implemented by civil society.

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