THE TRADITIONAL HAMMAM BATHHOUSE FROM MOROCCO TO FRANCE: THE BODY, PURITY, AND PERCEPTION [1]


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This dissertation explores what it means to be clean - spiritually, corporeally and psychologically, not only in the context of Moroccan traditional bathing practices, but also within the ethnographer's experience and perception. It gives a detailed account of the ethnographer as a subjective research instrument and the role of personal trauma in shaping perception in the field. The metaphysical and social implications of participation in the traditional hammam are illustrated through visceral ethnographic writing based on participant observation and interviews in urban Morocco. In addition to the exploration of traditional hammam practices in Morocco, this study also investigates the role of bathhouses in diaspora in France, in Paris and Marseille, and explores how various disparate desires - tied either to capitalism, religion, and/or socio-political position - motivate participation in the hammam tradition. Hammams in recent iterations in Morocco and in diaspora reveal re-appropriations of an Orientalist aesthetic established by the colonizer as well as additional enactments of power reversals. Throughout the study, ethnographic description is layered over a foundational story arc that reveals the ethnographer's geographic movements, follows her psychological unraveling and reintegration, and finally, provides a window onto her own self-reflection and psychoanalytic treatment once she has left the field. The psychological effects of trauma on the ethnographer as research instrument and how the condition of that instrument affects the resultant ethnographic process are at the heart of this work. Ultimately, this study has implications for the phenomenology of perception, affect theory, and psychological anthropology while also contributing to a body of knowledge about daily life, healing and the body in North Africa.