

Jean-Pierre Rossie and Khalija Jariaa

Moroccan boys' play inspired by TV 'the gendarmes and hashish smugglers'

On August 16th 2009, in the village Ikenwèn at 29 km from Tiznit along the road to Tafraoute in southern Morocco¹, Khalija Jariaa² observed and photographed this play activity from the flat roof of her parents' house situated next to where the boys are playing. The play area is situated between the flat roof on which clothes are drying and the old house with a tower seen in front and to the left of the pink colored house in the background (fig. 1).



Khalija doesn't know who started the play because the boys were already playing when she noticed them. It takes place in the evening and the observation lasts for about one hour until it becomes too dark to make photographs. The boys decide together what and how they will play. Their pretend play is inspired by the Moroccan TV series *barnamaz l buliz*, the police investigation, made in Casablanca and broadcasted by the channel 2M International on Thursdays at 21h. This channel must be captured with a parabolic antenna.

Four friends play at being policemen investigating a case of hashish smuggling or being hashish smugglers. They speak Tashelhit, an Amazigh language spoken in the Anti-Atlas and Souss region. The playmates seen on figure 2 are eight-year old Mohamed with a blue sweater holding the steering wheel of his police car, nine-year old Ahmed with a cap and white T-shirt, and six-year old Smaïl, Ahmed’s brother, wearing a yellow T-shirt with blue sleeves. The fourth player is ten-year old Lahoucein who lives in a village about forty km away and came with his father visiting the father’s sister in Ikenwèn. He appears on figure 3 dressed in a red sweater and holding a plastic revolver.

The observation starts when the gendarmes use their police cars (fig. 2).



Lahoucein, dressed in a red sweater and holding a plastic revolver, is playing to be a gendarme. He asks Smaïl, in the role of a youngster, if he didn’t see one of the smugglers. Smaïl answers “yes, I saw him running into the canalization under the track”. At that moment Lahoucein drops his car, enters the canalization and becomes a smuggler instead of a gendarme (fig. 3, p. 3).



Now Mohamed, the inspector with the plastic revolver, pretends to be angry with Lahoucein, the smuggler, and says: “where is the hashish”? Lahoucein replies as if he is afraid: “I don’t know it is the others who have hidden it”. Ahmed then threatens Lahoucein “if you don’t give me I shall hit till you say where is the hashish, you like it or not”. Mohamed, the inspector, tells Ahmed, the gendarme: “take Lahoucein and Smaïl to prison”. Meanwhile Smaïl switches roles from being a youngster to being another smuggler.

Lahoucein comes out of the canalization (fig. 4, p. 4). While shaking of fear he says: “no, I don’t want to go to prison, it is not me but the others like Smaïl, Hassan, Brahim, Saïd who have smuggled the hashish”. Mohamed becomes angry and tells Lahoucein: “now you bad Lahoucein, now you explain all the things”. To which Lahoucein, still shivering, replies: “no, no I shall explain because I don’t want to go to prison”. Smaïl, the other smuggler, interferes and says: “I prefer to go to prison”. Lahoucein answers: “no, prison is not good”. Smaïl continues saying: “in prison there is food, TV, shower, playing football, it is better than the village”. Lahoucein replies: “no the village is better than prison”. Smaïl then says: “prison is better for me than going each day to the mountains with the goats from eight in the morning till six in the evening”. Smaïl refers here to his and his friends’ more or less regular job of herding the goats when there is no school.



On the next figure Ahmed brought the two smugglers to prison and tells them “you must stay in prison till I return after we have searched for the other smugglers” (fig. 5, p. 5).

Ahmed returns to Mohamed while Lahoucein and Smaïl stay a while in prison. Mohamed returns with Ahmed and his car to the prison and opens the prison door saying “come out”. Lahoucein comes out and stretches himself while Smaïl is rubbing his eyes as if the sun blinds him. Mohamed tells the smugglers “come with us”.

Mohamed and Lahoucein change roles whereby Lahoucein becomes the inspector and Mohamed a smuggler. This change comes forward because Lahoucein said: “now I want to change (role) with Ahmed or Mohamed”. Mohamed answers: “I shall be the smuggler”. However, before changing roles, Mohamed, still being the inspector, shows Lahoucein, the forthcoming inspector, how the revolver must be used (fig. 6, p. 5).



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Mohamed tells Lahoucein: “you must quickly turn the revolver around your finger like an inspector does before shooting” (fig. 7). Lahoucein replies: “if I turn the revolver like that the bullet could hit me”. Mohamed answers: “you are crazy, these are not real bullets, they only fall down (on the ground)”. Lahoucein says: “OK, in my village we don’t play like that” and then he turns the revolver.



In the next scene Ahmed with his cap is still playing the role of gendarme. The other players don’t stimulate him to change role. Khalija, the observer, explains this by explaining that according to the other boys of his village Ahmed is seen as a too serious boy. So his playmates don’t see him playing the character of a smuggler. They tell Ahmed: “you should stay a gendarme because you cannot play to be a smuggler”.

Inspector Lahoucein and gendarme Ahmed are now searching for the hashish. Mohamed sits already down in the canalization and so he is not visible in the next figure. Smaïl, the other smuggler will do so immediately. Mohamed hides a plastic bag with the imaginary hashish (fig. 8, p. 7).



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Lahoucein and Ahmed have found the smugglers in the canalization. Ahmed, the gendarme, orders the smugglers: “you’ll stay here while we search for the hashish” (fig. 9, p. 8).

Smaïl says to Mohamed: “I shall stay here, so that the gendarmes will not give me many years in prison”. Mohamed asks Smaïl: “why don’t you run away with me?” Smaïl replies: “I am the smaller one, the gendarme can take me quickly”. Mohamed answers to Smaïl: “OK, do as you like! But you must not be afraid and shiver like that, I shall bring you regularly something to eat”. Smaïl reacts by saying: “No, no, there is a very strong guardian in this prison”. But Mohamed answers: “Don’t be afraid, I shall talk to the director of the prison”.

A bit later, Mohamed has taken the revolver out of the hands of Lahoucein who held it carelessly. Immediately, he points it to Ahmed, the gendarme, saying: “hands up, I’ll take you to the prison or I’ll shoot you”. Ahmed replies: “OK don’t shoot me”. Meanwhile Lahoucein shouts: “attention Mohamed, if you shoot Ahmed I shall kill Smaïl by hitting him in his neck”; whereupon Smaïl immediately reacts by bowing down his head.



The two smugglers change role now. Mohamed pretends to be also an inspector just as Lahoucein who is holding the revolver. Smaïl becomes a gendarme and Ahmed remains a gendarme, the role he keeps during the whole play. They search the canalization to find hashish. They pretend that the canalization is a dry riverbed closed in on both sides by mountains (fig. 10, p. 8).

While Khalija is changing the batteries of her digital photo camera Saïd, a friend of the players, approaches them and asks: “what are you playing”. The players answer: “we play the Casablanca gendarmes investigating hashish smuggling”. Saïd replies: “you all are gendarmes, who will hide the hashish now? Close your eyes. I shall hide it and who will find it will be the big chief”. Immediately afterwards Saïd’s father calls and tells him he must go to the shop buying washing powder because the washing machine is working. Saïd replies to his father: “no not now, wait a minute” but his father insists. Now Saïd conforms angrily and while weeping leaves his playing friends.

The play activity continues and Lahoucein shouts: “I have found it”. His playmates reply: “OK now you are the big chief”. Then Ahmed gets the car and comes to pick up the big chief (fig. 11). While Lahoucein, the big chief, is waiting for the car brought forward by Ahmed, he and Mohamed are still looking for hashish.



The play continues but Khalija stops observing the boys because it becomes too dark for making photographs.

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11. The gendarme got the police car to pick up the inspector who claims to have found the hashish and therefore became the big chief, Ikenwèn, 2009, photo Khalija Jariaa.

References

Publications, a map of Morocco and many photos on Moroccan children's play, games and toys are available on Jean-Pierre Rossie's website www.sanatoyplay.org

¹ The small village *Ikenwèn* (meaning twins in Tashelhit), where Khalija Jariaa was born in 1975, is part of the village *Id Boulhana* that belongs to the village *Id Baha*. *Id Baha* together with several other villages constitute the rural commune *Tighmi*. These villages are situated on the lower mountain slopes of the Anti-Atlas. This small village with about 30 inhabited houses and 150 persons lives from agricultural and livestock activities. Almost each house has at least one cow and some have a few donkeys. Other inhabitants are retired and some persons receive support from their children living in Morocco or in Europe. There is a primary school with six classes but no 'preschool'. *Ikenwèn* certainly is still more traditional than Douar Ouaraben at the outskirts of Tiznit, but all houses have one or more TVs with eventually two and up to four parabolic antennas. The number of TVs and parabolic antennas in each house is explained by the number of nuclear families living in one house. Tiznit and Tafraoute being touristic places, some tourists driving a camping car or a hired car are passing by on the asphalt road that runs between these two towns. Sometimes the tourists stop in *Ikenwèn* and even stay overnight in their camping car. The children come to see the tourists and regularly receive sweets, pens, balls, soft toys, second hand cloths or something alike. Adults who are living in important Moroccan towns like Agadir, Marrakech and Casablanca or in Europe but grew up in *Ikenwèn*, and their children, surely influence the adults and children from *Ikenwèn* when visiting their village of origin.

² Khalija Jariaa developed since 2002 from being a housekeeper to an informant and an ethnographic research assistant. About 2008 she became a trained observer and since then does this independently making photographs and sometimes short videos with a digital photo camera. Her training and the supervision of her fieldwork is the responsibility of Jean-Pierre Rossie. The questioning of Khalija and the writing out of the observation protocol was done by Jean-Pierre Rossie with the help of Boubaker Daoumani. The languages used in this process are Tashelhit (Khalija Jariaa, Boubaker Daoumani), Moroccan Arabic and French (Khalija Jariaa, Boubaker Daoumani, Jean-Pierre Rossie). The final English version has been written by Jean-Pierre Rossie who is also responsible for the research and its results.