
Young *Amazighs*, the Land of *Eromen* and Pamela Anderson as the embodiment of modernity

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Introduction

This article comes from ethnographic research that investigated the relationship between young Moroccans' consumption of western media texts and their desire to emigrate to the West. Fieldwork was conducted in Casablanca and in *Ait Nuh*, a small *Amazigh*¹ *Douar*² in Morocco's Atlas Mountains from 2000 to 2002. Research targeted four subgroups of young Moroccans between the ages of 18-35 from different socio-economic and cultural strata. These included, young Islamists, young people from working class quarters of Casablanca, young people from *Gautier* 'a middle class area in Casablanca' and young *Amazighs* from the *Douar* of *Ait Nuh*. The ethnographic material demonstrated that the subgroups had different readings of the West, western media texts and western modernity. For the purpose of this article, I will only draw on research conducted in *Ait Nuh* and argue that young *Amazighs*' desire to emigrate to the West is the product of interplay between socio-economic and symbolic dimensions. The article will also demonstrate how long-term consumption of western media texts provides the young *Amazigh* with a new contested space of identification where Islamic and *Amazigh* traditions are ceaselessly troubled and re-negotiated vis-à-vis modernity and its mediated messages.

Ait Nuh

Ait Nuh is situated some three miles from the Atlas Mountain town of *Khunifra*. The *Douar* cannot be reached by car, as it is quite high up the Mountain. Over the two-year period during which I was in contact with young people of *Ait Nuh*, I was able to converse with many of them and to take part in a number of *Douar* events. The last time I was in *Ait Nuh*, in summer 2002, young people of the *Douar* invited me to a wedding ceremony. *Ait Nuh* weddings follow formal ritual proceedings that have been passed on from one generation to another for centuries. All members of the *Douar* are invited to take part in the proceedings which last over a period of three days. On the first day of the ceremony, a selected number of young men are set the task of finding a good, long bamboo-stick, which they then bring to the home of the husband-to-be, chanting and dancing on the way. Once they are there, the most skilful is given the task of turning the long bamboo-stick into a money collector. How is this done? The long bamboo-stick is carefully incised from the middle throughout its length to create a crack that would accommodate bank notes from the people of the *Douar*. This experiment is repeated many times until the notes are firmly and securely placed inside the bamboo-stick. Once this is successfully completed, the young men, followed by children, carry the now-bamboo-money-collector in turns, chanting and playing with their *bandirs*³, sometimes stopping to perform well choreographed folkloric dances. They move from house to house to collect the money. The process of money collection is very democratic; each family in the *Douar* gives exactly the same amount of money. In the case of this wedding, a 10 *Dirham*⁴ note ‘about sixty pence’. All the notes are placed vertically within the crack so that there is a procession of them. The young *Ait Nubians* performed these rituals with great care and joy. They all sang in *Tamazight* and when the long-awaited band came in, they too sang well known *Amazigh* songs.

My informant, Saeed, explained that things were previously done differently. Now young *Ait Nubians* wear jeans and T-shirts, whereas before, young people of the *Douar* wore adorned traditional costumes and rode elegantly embroidered horses. Many sheep were then killed, and sometimes the ceremony went on for more than a week. According to Saeed, the people of *Ait Nuh* have changed. He said: ‘people have become so selfish...one day I will not be surprised if someone died and no one bothered to bury him.’ The drought, which the *Douar* endured for many years; the government’s disastrous policy of centralisation which has led to the cultural and economic stagnation and marginalisation of the countryside, not to mention the advent of a new alienating mode of production, can all be said to contribute to the dissatisfaction of young *Amazighs* with life in the *Douar*. Weddings have now become one of the rare occasions where *Ait Nubians* can enjoy themselves. Most of young *Ait Nubians* leave school at the age of 12 or before to help their parents farm the land. They work under very harsh conditions and most of them are not paid for their hard work. By the time they are adults they

will have no qualifications and nothing to hope for but inheriting a small piece of land. Moreover, Young *Ait Nubians* mistrust the Moroccan government, its politicians and the Moroccan media. They are also discontented with the centralisation of the big city, which remains the core of political, cultural and economic life in Morocco. No one has access to a phone or satellite dish in the whole *Douar* (although a very small number of people have access to mobile phones) and the nearest hospital is some seven kilometres away. The divide between the city and the countryside in Morocco reflects the stratification of Moroccan society, which is manifest, among other things, in unequal access to media technology and information. Young *Ait Nubians* who have access to television have no choice but to watch the two Moroccan channels *TVM* and *2M*. These two channels do not reflect the material realities of the young *Amazigh*. Both *TVM* and *2M* dedicate only a very marginal portion of airtime to *Amazigh* programmes. *TVM* and *2M*'s failure to reflect the material realities of young *Amazighs* throughout Morocco and the bad quality of its programmes (especially *TVM*) make them irrelevant to the majority of young people. Young *Ait Nubians*' dissatisfaction with Moroccan television is reflected in the discussion below which took place during a focus group discussion:

Moderator: Do you enjoy watching the Moroccan channels?

Musa: 'We have two channels full of nothing'.

Bashir: 'They are full of news'.

Muhammad: 'What news? Nobody wants to watch the news...they are so boring. If it is not the king, it is the government, if it is not the government it is the king...all these Members of parliament are crooks anyway. In the last election, we helped an MP...we worked with him day and night for two months...we even lied for him...he promised us jobs and a lot. It is six months since he won. We have not seen him since; not even once'.

Musa: 'What's on TV anyway, *Omo* 'a soap product'.

Group: *Laughter*

Aziz: '*Omo* and *Always*'

Moderator: 'What's *Always*'?

Aziz: 'Women's thing when it is the time of the month, you know?'

Hamid: 'It's embarrassing. You sit down with your mother and father to watch television and they start showing *Always* ads (...) not only that, they show how they put them on and everything (...) There are no good educational programmes' (*Ait Nub*, 2000).

Showing adverts that sell western products such as *Always* where a woman demonstrates how the product is used, indicates the insensitivity of Moroccan television to the traditional cultural structures inherent to Moroccan society. Many Young *Ait Nubians* perceive Moroccan television to be a mere vehicle for

advertising and the platform for a corrupt and irresponsible regime. *Ait Nubian* society is still a very traditional society where the showing of the *Always* advert and programmes with sexual content disrupts viewing habits in the *Douar*. Moroccan media, television especially is made to target the mass of Urban Morocco which is more westernised and more likely to afford products of modernity. When people of the Atlas appear on Moroccan television, it is often with the aim of entertaining the urban mass. They are objectified and reified, as their existence becomes synonymous with the old, with folklore and tradition or, to use Gassous' words, they become part of the 'live ontological museum of the other' (Gassous 1988, 48).

Young Amazighs' conceptions of the West

A range of factors influences young *Ait Nubians'* conceptions of the West. These include: education, history, the family and long-term consumption of western media texts. We can also add communicative interactions with the westerner, the *Ait Nubian émigrés* (most of whom live in France) and also the latter's material possessions and changing appearance. Most of the *Amazighs* I talked to in the *Douar* never ventured beyond *Khunifra*. So isolated are they that, since the installation of electricity in the mid-1990's, television had become their main window on what they call the 'people of the outside', which comprises westerners, émigrés living in France and Moroccans living in big cities such as Casablanca and Rabat. With the exception of the odd tourist making her way to *Fez* or *Mekness* or young *Amazigh* emigrants living in France, television is for the young *Ait Nubian* the window to western modernity. Here, I will concentrate exclusively on examining meanings of the West as they are decoded by the young *Ait Nubians* through their consumption of Western media texts. Young *Ait Nubians* are transfixed by the West. For most of them, the West is the *Kharij*, meaning the outside. Westerners are referred to as the *Eromens*, from the Arabic *Roumy*, which means Roman. Many young *Ait Nubians* described the West as that which exists in France, largely because historically most people who migrated from the *Douar* went to France. Hardly any described the West as a space outside France or Europe.

'The West is in France' (Ahmed, 23, Ait Nuh: 2001).

'People in Europe are happy'

'They [Westerners] have paradise in life'

'Westerners are rich and lead satisfactory lives.'

'In Europe they have everything.'

'The West can give us leisure...time to enjoy life'.

(Ait Nuh, 2000)

From the above-mentioned conceptions, *Ait Nubians* have used the words happy, satisfactory, enjoy, leisure, rich, paradise to describe not only westerners, but also the way they lead their lives. Most of young *Ait Nubians* I talked to described westerners and the West in a positive light. These conceptions of the West as

decoded from the western media text, and other channels of communication, are better understood and analysed through an exploration of Young *Ait Nuhians*' socio-economic strata.

Western media texts, the production of meaning and socio-cultural strata

Young *Ait Nuhians* are poorer than young Casablancans from the working class. The subsistence economy on which their parents and grand parents relied for centuries can no longer neither sustain, nor satisfy, new needs and desires brought about by the advent of a new mode of economic production: capitalism. In this new system, land that has sustained *Ait Nuhians* for centuries, has now become irrelevant, even a burden. The fulfilment of new desires and needs brought about by the advent of capitalism has become far more important to the young *Ait Nuhians* than land, as this extract from a discussion illustrates:

Ahmad: 'We have nothing here'.

Moderator: 'You have land'.

Ahmad: 'What can the land do for us? We work from 6 am till 6 pm (...) we get burned in the sun, for what? Working in my land is not going to buy me a new car (...) it won't allow me to put money in the bank. I work so hard to plant coriander, for example, (...) it takes me months of hard work before it is ready. When I finally go to the souk 'traditional market' to sell it, people want to haggle!' (A look of disbelief and anguish) (Ahmad, 23, Ait Nuh, 2001)

For the young *Amazighs* of *Ait Nuh*, *happiness* as a western *signification* is measured and conditioned by the fulfilment of the new desires and needs that their subsistence economy cannot fulfil. The *happiness* they have decoded from western media texts is a new kind of happiness. It is unlike the happiness the elderly of the *Douar* have talked to me about. It is not based on traditional care-structures such as intimacy, friendship, singing and strong family ties, but on how much money you have in the bank. Young *Amazighs* from *Ait Nuh* with whom I held many discussions share the conception that everyone living in the West is rich and happy. The happiness of the Westerner, according to them, is not only due to material richness but also to their access to *leisure* time. The idea or concept of leisure is especially attractive to young *Ait Nuhians* because it is a rare commodity in the *Douar*. Young *Ait Nuhians* fantasise about the idea of a holiday, free time where they can enjoy life. The average daily wage for an adult working in the *Douar* is no more than 30 *Dirhams* (£2). Besides, opportunities for work are very scarce and there is no welfare system to support the unemployed. The whole area, as is the case with most of the Moroccan countryside, is marginalised both culturally and economically. This is why the idea of *leisure* is appealing to them and that is why it is more important for them than for other young Moroccans who live in the city and do not have to work from a very early age. When young *Amazighs* watch

western programmes they compare their material realities to those of the young westerner, who is often portrayed as happy, rich and with a lot of leisure time to enjoy life. Ahmad and Mustapha, two young *Ait Nubians*, remarked:

Ahmad: ‘(...) it is impossible to make anything happen here, we can barely afford to buy meat, in Europe they have everything. They are happy’

Moderator: ‘How do you know this?’

Mustafa: (interrupting) ‘come on, you see them in films’

Ahmad: ‘I see them [westerners] on television sleeping on soft beds made of cotton and silk (...) when I look around me, I see my bed full of *halfa* ‘hay’ (Ait Nuh: 2001)

The traditionaliser and Pamela Anderson as the embodiment of modernity

Thinking, mind, consciousness, conceptions and conceptualisations are all mental elements and processes. Significations of the West such as *freedom, happiness, progress, luxury* and others are the invisible materials and the basis through which a mental geography of the West and the *Eromens* is built or drawn. The mental geography of the West functions at a mental level. It is unlike its physical geography where the emphasis is more on borders, lights, sky scrapers, etc. The mental geography of the West dwells in ideas, conceptions, thoughts and all these dwell in our minds. For young *Ait Nubians*, the spatial geography of the West dwells in and is limited to France and Europe. These, regardless of their physicality, not only dwell in the physical geography of the West, but also in its mental geography. Europe, for example, is not only a continent but also an idea. For young *Ait Nubians*, France is not a mere physical geography; but also accommodates an *ensemble* of imaginative significations that are embedded in narratives such as ‘coolness’, ‘freedom’, ‘lights’, Luxury, richness, sexual freedom, among others, which are all disseminated through the media text and other forms of communication. The kind of thinking I am trying to present here is that for us to understand the mechanisms of emigration in the twenty-first century, we can no longer solely rely on physical trajectories without examining the mental trajectory: the trajectory of ideas and their dynamics. Stated below is an interaction that took place between the moderator and a group of young *Amazighs* from the *Douar* of *Ait Nuh*. This communicative extract illustrates how meanings decoded from the consumption of *Baywatch*, an American Series, have problematised the ‘ordinariness’ of *Ait Nubians*’ concept of female beauty. Inherent to this communicative interaction are two active sets of dynamics representing two different discourses.

Mohammed: ‘When I watch Baywatch, I go mad’.

Group: *Laughter*

Mohammed: ‘Those women they show everything (...) they are so beautiful (...) their shape, their breasts’.

Group: *Laughter*

Moh: 'Where can you find that beauty in here? The women here are so unattractive. They spend all the time cooking and making bread'.

Mohammed: 'In our religion you are not supposed to see a naked woman'.

Aziz: 'Yes, but girls in big cities are already imitating these women (*Baywatch*) and the way they dress...'

Moh: 'Now men are looking for something different in a woman (...) they are not content with a woman wearing a *hijab* or a traditional dress'.

Abdelwahd: 'Beauty is not in the face (...) if you want the truth beauty is in the heart (...) Allah does not look at your images or pictures but your hearts and deeds. In Islam, if your eye meets that of a woman, you should not look up twice.

Musa: 'This is ridiculous, we already live in hardship, no money, no nice clothes, no holidays and you are asking me not to look at a girl if she passes by'.

Abdelwahd: 'That is not Islam'.

Musa: 'I agree with what you are saying but it is not easy to follow'.

Musa: 'Tradition in the *Douar* is dying' (*Ait Nuh Douar*, 2000).

These comments point towards a kind of shift from one set of values to another; a kind of emigration from one set of cultural particularities to another. This 'mental emigration' is facilitated through the young *Ait Nubians'* consumption of western media texts, and this constitutes the first set of dynamics. The second set of dynamics implicit in the extract is embodied by the *active* role played by one of the participants, Abdelwahd, who acts as a traditionalist and a channel of resistance to the discourse carried by the western media text. His role within this particular mental migratory trajectory is indispensable. It is one of intervention and resistance. The young *Ait Nubians'* consumption of the American series *Baywatch* has enabled them for the first time to view almost naked women on Moroccan television. The series, whether its producers admit to it or not, is considered to be soft pornography; it is an intentionally produced Scopophilia (see Mulvey 1989, 16) for the world's 'male gaze'. Here, as Mulvey argues, 'the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly' (Mulvey 1989, 19). The young *Amazighs* did not know Pamela Anderson by name, but were able to describe some of her physical features. What the stylisation of Pamela Anderson, and her American female co-artists, epitomises for the young *Amazigh* is not only the new object of sexual desire *par excellence*, but a new kind of aesthetics, a different kind of beautification: that of the western woman, the '*Gawria*'⁵ A woman who reveals almost all is more desirable, more beautiful. The *Gawria* is sexual; she is blond, slim and sexy. The women of the *Douar*, who because of Islamic and *Amazigh* tradition have to cover their bodies, are by contrast seen as less desirable, less attractive and therefore less sexual. Unlike the female lifeguards whose *raison d'être* among other things is to save lives, young women of *Ait Nuh* 'spend most of their time cooking or making bread'. Here Abdelwahd, the young

traditionalist intervenes to remind his peers of the wisdom of Islamic culture by quoting from the Koran. Yet his intervention, as the comments show, is challenged strongly. While tradition in the *Douar* may be ‘dying’, as Musa put it, it is, however, constantly revitalised by the intervention of the traditionaliser, in our case Abdelwahd whose father, incidentally, was an Imam. Abdelwahd’s role within this symbolic trajectory—that of countering western discourse—may or may not be successful, what it does, however, is confirm that tradition is not as many western sociologists consider it, i.e. as a social fact often associated with ‘ruralism, passivity and ahistoricity’ or, as in the case of Weber, a ‘simple fidelity to the past’ (see Laroui 1974, 35). Rather, in the case of Morocco at least, tradition is a set of values that were and still are used to negate and oppose outside threat. A better understanding of tradition necessitates that we deal with it not only as social fact, but also and most importantly as a social process: that of *traditionalisation*. As the Moroccan historian and sociologist Abdallah Laroui (1974) observed in his book *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*:

In a traditional society the obstacle to progress is not entirely internal; rather it is a resultant, composed of an outside influence, always manifested as a threat, and a reaction peculiar to the society in question. If the outside pressure persists or intensifies, traditionalisation also intensifies. That is why all the static models proposed by the sociologists—models that do not take into account this factor of outside pressure—must show tradition as an insurmountable obstacle (Laroui 1974, 43).

Laroui also argues that ‘a rigorous, well founded analysis of this mode of tradition has nowhere been undertaken; the ostensible studies to be found in the works of sociologists’, he adds, ‘are merely reverse images of modern industrial society’ (Laroui 1974, 42). By mentioning ‘outside threat’ Laroui refers to coercive French colonialism (1912-1956) and the other threats that preceded it. Perhaps, in the case of Abdelwahd, a different kind of threat is foreseen: a non-coercive threat from western carriers of meaning. It is this kind of threat that has prompted Abdelwahd’s *traditionalisation*. However, regardless of Abdelwahd’s intervention, a kind of mental emigration has already occurred. Here mental emigration has taken place from one kind of aesthetics to another. It is an emigration from the appreciation of the unseen (beauty in modesty) to the appreciation of the seen (beauty in revealing all). The first wisdom—that of Islam—teaches that a woman must dress modestly, the second wisdom—that proposed by the model of *Baywatch*—champions beauty that lies in extravagance, the bareness and nakedness of the human flesh.

The *Douar* of *Ait Nub* is, regardless of the shock of modernity, still governed by socio-cultural relations that are inherently traditional. Using participant observation as an ethnographic method, I was careful not to undermine the customs practiced

in the *Douar*, which meant I could not speak to the women about their media consumption. Women in *Ait Nuh* deal in commerce, ride horses, farm the land and share almost similar roles with the men of the *Douar*. However, they are not supposed to socialise with, or talk to, strangers. This unfortunately means that their views and voices are silenced in this research. Here I was pressured, as a last resort, to prompt the boys of the *Douar* into speaking about the girls and their media consumption.

Musa: 'These Mexican soaps have put fire into the young girls here'.

Group: *Laughter*

Musa: 'They show all the love stuff, kissing, and the girls like the stuff (...) they show women with short skirts you know?'

Moderator: 'Do you think these soaps have an influence on the girls of the *Douar*?'

Aziz: 'Definitely, when they are getting water from the trough, they sit and talk about what they saw in the soaps (...) they use the same language like 'Babibbak' ('Egyptian' dubbed from Mexican, meaning I love you').

Moderator: 'I noticed nothing different about the way women and girls dress in the *Douar*'.

Mohammed: 'They wear the *Jellaba* (Moroccan traditional dress) here, but once they make it into the town they get rid of it, put their lipstick and western clothes on.'

Moderator: 'Girls from this village?'

Aziz: 'Yes, but only few of them'.

Musa: 'I was told about this girl who studies in Mekness (...) She wears the *hijab* (covering of the face) when she is here. A friend told me that she changes all her clothes when she gets to the train station. She wears a short skirt and puts lipstick on. That's not Islam'.

The comment made by Musa that 'Mexican soaps have put fire into the young girls of the *Douar* calls for an explanation. In the Moroccan cultural context, Musa's comment suggests that the girls of the *Douar* have become less timid about expressing their sexuality and sexual desires. For *Ait Nubian* young girls to utter the phrase 'I love you' in front of boys is unprecedented in the common culture of the *Douar*. According to the boys, this change in attitudes about 'the sexual' and 'desire' has been brought about by the influx of Egyptian and South American Soaps that are largely consumed by the women of the *Douar*. When the young *Amazigh* girls utter 'I love you' to tease and provoke the boys of the *Douar*, they do so mimicking an Egyptian accent, and not an *Amazigh* or Moroccan one. The suggestion that the consumption of Egyptian and South American soaps has affected the way young girls of the *Douar* dress is, however, questionable, especially as this may be the influence not only of the media, but of a whole range of

variables. The *Ait Nubian* girl who studies in *Mekness*, the nearest big city to the *Douar*, may have chosen to wear a skirt, not merely because of consuming Egyptian and South American soaps, but perhaps also because of other socio-cultural variables. Girls in the city dress differently to those in the *Douar* and so the young *Ait Nubian* girl may have been pressured to dress in a modern and liberal fashion so she could fit in.

The changing appearance of the Ait Nuhian émigrés

Talk of and about emigration in the *Douar* is rife. When I was recently doing fieldwork in *Ait Nuh*, Mulud, had just been deported from France. He was very lucky, his friends told me, that he did not come back in a coffin. Mulud nearly died of suffocation when his French-Moroccan cousin tried to smuggle him into France in a suitcase. The story of Mulud had spread from France to *Khunifra* and from *Khunifra* back to the *Douar* where Mulud was born. His story had become a folk-tale. I was told many other stories about other attempts at ‘burning’⁶. I was also told astonishing stories about the *Eromens’* machine that was used by imperialists from the French protectorate (1912-1956) to recruit workers from the *Douar* during the 1950’s and 60s. ‘This machine had a big chain... You had to pull it very hard to lift a piece of iron...The higher you lifted it, the better chance you had of getting a working contract in France. Only the strongest men of the *Douar* made it and a lot of people from *Ait Nuh* went to France that way’, a young *Ait Nubian* told me. The strong *Ait Nubians*, who had conquered the machine by their physical strength, had in turn been conquered by an even bigger machine in which they worked as alienated cogs for meagre wages and were denied rights. So, the story of emigration to the West from *Ait Nuh* is long and predates the installation of electricity and television in the *Douar*. Hitherto *Ait Nubians* relied on interpersonal communicative interaction with the émigrés for acquiring information about France and the land of the *Eromens*. Even today, the second generation of *Ait Nubian* émigrés often gather with young people of the *Douar* and recount their adventures in the West. Fieldwork in the *Douar* of *Ait Nuh* pointed me towards the fact that young *Ait Nubians’* desire to emigrate to the West is not merely the product of drought or poverty, but also the product of a complex communicative interplay between different channels of communication. The latter takes place between *Ait Nubians’* interpersonal communication with the émigrés of the *Douar*—including their wealth and changed appearance—and the conceptions they have cultivated about the West through their 10-year consumption of western media texts. These elements enter a dialectical relationship that produces different meanings for young *Ait Nubians*. Ahmed, a young *Ait Nubian*, said during a discussion:

‘Those émigrés left here looking brown and came back looking *white*. They brought with them new expensive cars, clothes (...) they bought more land

and opened shops in the city (...) they tell us everything about the other world' (Ahmed, 23, Ait Nuh: 2001).

Many young members of the *Douar* endorsed descriptions made by Ahmed of the *Ait Nubian émigrés* and their changing appearance. Ahmed's descriptions of the *émigrés* could be divided into three inter-relational statements. The first statement made by Ahmed denotes the changing colour of the *émigré*: from brown to white. 'The *whiteness*' of the *émigré* in this context is a symbolic signifier, the decoding of which is anchored by confirmations in the second and third statements, and the socio-cultural *milieu* of the *Ait Nubian*. *Whiteness* as decoded by the young *Ait Nubian* connotes good health, richness, fortune and happiness. *Whiteness* as a communicative knowledge is anchored by Ahmed's second statement: 'they brought with them new expensive cars (...) bought more land and opened new shops in the city.' *Whiteness* of the *émigrés* is, for *Ait Nubians*, proof of their good living conditions. Young *Ait Nubians* who are mainly of a white complexion, some with blond hair and green eyes, only look brown because of their toiling throughout the day without any protection from the sun. As such, *whiteness* for the *Ait Nubian* signifies less hard-working conditions and signs of a comfortable life. *Whiteness* also signifies transformation, a transition and a change from one condition to another; from *brownness* to *whiteness*. It is as if to say, they left here looking like *us*; simple, brown, poor and hard-working peasants, and came back looking white, sophisticated, rich just like the *Eromens* 'westerners' and the ways they appear on western media. This knowledge that is communicated through the changing appearance of the *émigrés*—*whiter, healthier, and richer*—is a fetish that conceals the hardship, alienation and exploitation of the Moroccan worker in Europe, in this case France, and acts therefore as myth. The last statement made by Ahmed—'They tell us everything about the other world'—is a form of interpersonal communication and could either support the myth of the *émigré's* changing appearance and wealth or could demythologise it, depending on what they are told about life in exile. The three forms of communication—the changing appearances of the *émigrés*, their material possessions and the stories told by them about the West to other members of the *Douar*—are anchored by conceptions cultivated by young *Amazighs* about the West through their long-term consumption of western media texts. In addition, the *émigré* is transformed into a fetishised commodity, for who they are in relation to members of the *Douar* becomes less important than what they possess that other members of the *Douar* do not. This is encapsulated in the following statements made by young *Ait Nubians* about the Amazigh *émigrés* living in France. (Please note that some of the comments were made about members of family living abroad):

Moderator: 'What do you make of the *émigrés*?'

Musa: 'They are dogs; I swear they are dogs'.

Moderator: 'You can say what you like'.

Musa: 'I am not shy of anyone. 'They come here, and will not bring you even a good pair of trainers. They'll bring a shirt and a small packet of cheap cigarettes. What would I do with these cigarettes? They have millions stocked in the bank'.

Mohammed: 'They change a lot'.

Moderator: 'Do you think their status in the *Douar* changes because of what they have?'

Musa: 'Of course, they come back for that very reason, so they look and feel superior to you. They do not come to see you (...) they have to show off (...) "we come from France!"

Aziz: 'The girls, when they come back here, they do not want to even shake hands with you'.

Mohammed: 'The racists' (Ait Nuh: 2001).

Young Amazighs and the incoherent acceptance of western modernity

It is on the harsh economic reality; together with the young *Ait Nubian's* long-term exposure to western media texts and their contacts with the Ait Nuhian émigrés living in France that their structure of feeling about western modernity is constructed. Their poverty and lack of education encourage young *Ait Nubians* to see promises of the wealth, comfort and luxury, they so desperately desire in western modernity.

Western modernity manifests itself for the young *Ait Nubian* as a promise of happiness that is wholly built on, and motivated by, the possession and accumulation of material goods: cars; money; new western clothes; shops; businesses...etc. This kind of 'mental emigration' brought about by capitalism and its culture has not only altered the young Ait Nuhians' structures of feelings about their world and their position within it, but has also transformed their very world by altering its pre-capitalist social structure. Those from the tribe who emigrated to the land of the *Eromen* have come back looking different; they came back looking like the *Eromen* they see on television: whiter, modern and prosperous. This has had a destabilising effect on what could be described previously as being the 'democratic social structure' of the *Douar*, which was never truly motivated by wealth or material possessions, so much as by structures of care, trust and play. Of course, there has always been the odd feudal lord who exploited ordinary farmers and stole land through coercive measures; I heard many such stories from the *Douar's* elderly. It is the 'organic solidarity' of the *Douar* that has been affected; what Ibn Khaldun refers to as '*Assabeya*'. To use modern terminology, the ordinariness of the social structure of the *Douar* is altered as relationships within it moved from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. The 'émigrés are dogs'; 'they are racists' said the two angry young *Ait Nubians*. The *Ait Nubian émigrés* are all shockingly, in a one way or another, related to both angry *Ait Nubians*.

Young *Ait Nubians* are aware of the change taking place in the *Douar* and of what has caused it. None-the-less, their aspirations to become as rich as, if not richer than, the *émigré* and his family is undiminished. For many young *Ait Nubians*, this is the dream promised by western modernity, and its realisation it is believed by many, regardless of the difficulties, could only materialise if they crossed the border, to the land of the *Eromen*.

Conclusion:

For Ahmed, the cotton bed, on which the *Eromens* sleep, is a rare commodity that symbolises the fortune and comfort in which they live. The media of the *Eromens* have brought to his attention a world of desires that subsistence economies cannot fulfil. The western media text anchors the changing appearance and social transformation of the Amazigh *émigré* and the latter, in turn, anchors the former. *Happiness, whiteness, fortune* and the good life communicated through different channels of communication are, for many young *Ait Nubians*, only achievable if they emigrate to Europe, where all the women look like Pamela Anderson.

¹ *Amazighs* are the natives of Morocco, many of whom live in the Atlas Mountains. In *Tamazight* (one of the four languages spoken by *Amazighs*) the word *Amazigh* means 'free'. However, the names *Barabira* (given to *Amazighs* by Arabs) and *Berbers* (a name given to them by the Romans and later European and American Ethnographers) have no significant meaning.

² *Douar* is an *Amazigh* name for a habitat (which usually consists of more than 15 houses) where most dwellers are related. I have intentionally avoided the term 'tribe' (used by most western anthropologists) because of the west-centric significations, 'baggage' and the discourse it carries. I am, after all, a native ethnographer and prefer to use local terminology to depict native anthropological space. Language carries cultural significance which is easily obliterated at the point of translation. *Douars* around the areas of *Ait Nuh* and *Ish buka* and others within the Atlas unveil structures of organization and self-governance that are very democratic and highly complex. It goes without saying that the term and anthropological space *Douar* lends itself to more analysis, which can not be adequately dealt with in a footnote. The point I am trying to make here however is that the term *Berber* is no substitute for *Amazigh* and the same must be said about *tribe* and *Douar*.

³ Circular drum made of sheep skin and wood, which needs to be heated on fire every 30 minutes or so to create a sharper and more amplified beat.

⁴ Moroccan currency

⁵ A Moroccan name given to western women.

⁶ 'People I asked gave two interpretations of the word. According to one group a burner is someone who burns his passport and all his identity cards before

emigrating illegally to a western country, so that, if caught, his or her identity will not be revealed. The other group traces the etymology of the word to an historical event in 711 AD when Tarik Ibn Zayad, an *Amazigh* soldier, burnt all his fleet on approaching Spain, so that his army would have no choice but to fight to conquer Spain. At the rock of Gibraltar, Ibn Zayad delivered his famous speech: ‘the enemy is in front of you and the sea is behind you, where is there to run?’ To burn in Moroccan popular talk is therefore a reference to a one-way journey where one attempts to enter a western country illegally’ (see Sabry, 2004).

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Focus Groups

Amazighs from the Douar of Ait Nuh

2x Focus groups (Summer 2000 – 2002)