



8-2012

Does anyone here speak tashelhait? Perspectives on environment, identity and social change in south Morocco

Lewis A. Bradford

DePaul University, icaddison@yahoo.com

Recommended Citation

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Does Anyone Here Speak Tashelhait?
Perspectives on Environment, Identity and Social Change in South Morocco

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

January 2012

By

Lewis Bradford

Department of International Studies

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

DePaul University

Chicago, Illinois

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Robert Rotenberg, Dr. Clement Adibe and Dr. Aminah McCloud who made this thesis possible and allowed me the space to finish my thesis while continuing to pursue my academic goals. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Rotenberg for his patience and guidance in the pursuit of my Master's degree.

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Introduction

In the Sahara...they have a saying which goes, “No one lives in the Sahara if he is able to live elsewhere...”

-Paul Bowles

Hajj Ahmed was the secretary for a men’s association in the village of L’Kasbat Sidi Abdullah Ben M’barek.¹ L’Kasbat is located in the desert province of Tata along Morocco’s southern frontier with Algeria. From June of 2000 until the end of 2002, I served as a Peace Corps volunteer in L’Kasbat and Ahmed initially befriended me because he thought I might have access to resources that could assist him and his association with some of their many village improvement projects. Because the residents of L’Kasbat live a precarious existence, the association was established to organize village resources in hopes that through collectivity they might be able to solve some of the village’s problems. Water and land are extremely scarce resources and the village is entirely dependent on male migrants who travel north to find work and send remittances home.² Ahmed’s biggest dream was to one day be able to reclaim some of the land lost to the desert and establish a village farming cooperative in order to sell fruits and vegetables at the bi-weekly souk and produce enough grain so that the village could be self-sufficient in that regard. Although I was supportive of his vision, I did not view the landscape of his village from the same perspective. Where Ahmed saw a luscious oasis filled with healthy date palms, fig trees and barley I saw dry and parched earth. There were also many people within L’Kasbat who thought Ahmed was over extending the limited resources of the village on a mirage and I was never able to secure any type of funding because most of the foreign non-

¹ The anecdotes throughout this thesis are used as rhetorical devices to introduce and frame the larger issues being confronted by the people of the Akka oasis. They are only anecdotal and not intended to be understood as real data. In addition, although all of the episodes represent real events and real people all of the names have been changed in order to protect the individuals involved.

² The Peace Corps has difficulty placing male volunteers in these rural communities. Because a majority of the men spend the year away from the village, most village leaders are only willing to accept female volunteers.

government organizations (NGOs) I spoke with believed it was a project that did not have a secure outcome. However, I looked at L'Kasbat entirely from the perspective of a development worker and failed to understand the political, historical, and social forces that compelled Ahmed to make the choices he made. Indeed, my status as a development worker and, more specifically, as an American and all the racial baggage which that entails, dramatically colored my perspective on most of the social issues being confronted by Ahmed and his fellow villagers. I was continuously forced to reconcile my subject position and my corresponding understandings of race, ethnicity and the environment with what I was confronted with on a daily basis on the ground in Akka. Kevin Dwyer (1982) argues that this process of reconciliation is always present in the context of the anthropological encounter. The anthropological self and the anthropological other each represent cultural and societal interests outside of themselves and in the process of the confrontation both the self and the other are forced to question themselves and all that they represent. It is within this context that I attempt to interrogate the forces surrounding the confrontation between myself and the people of Akka.

My incredulity with regard to Ahmed's vision is based on the fact that beyond the edge of the oasis that gives life to L'Kasbat, dusty, rocky nothingness seems to spread out to the horizon in every direction. Walk two hundred yards in any direction away from the oasis and the bright green palm fronds that seem to explode from the top of their trees disappear from view, the sounds of civilization slowly vanish and you are left with the impression that you are the only one left in the world. This quiet serenity, however, masks the harsh reality of life on the Saharan frontier as people are forced to maintain a constant struggle with the landscape in order to maintain the health of the oasis and, by extension, the health of their villages.

L’Kasbat is part of an oasis community built around the small town of Akka, located approximately 60 kilometers south of the province capital, Tata. Located near the Algerian border, Akka presents as a town out of an old western movie. Flanked on the east by the Anti-Atlas Mountains and marked by the brown jagged peaks of the Jebel Bani, Tata Province is a barren and desolate place. It is extremely arid, with little to no precipitation and in the hot summer months the temperature can reach 130 degrees (Although the thermometers often did not have a high enough gauge to properly register the temperature). Its population of approximately 121,000 people resides in towns and villages built around desert oases that dot the landscape every fifty or sixty kilometers. Before the colonial period, Akka and Tata were major ports in trading networks that crisscrossed North and West Africa. Along with cities such as Abou Am in the Ziz Valley and Ktaoua and other oases in the Drâa Valley, Akka served as a way station of sorts for caravans that transferred their goods before heading south toward Tindouf and Timbuktu or further north to the cities such as Marrakesh and Mogador.³ “Imports from the Sudan included ivory, gold dust, gum, ostrich feathers, and, most important, black slaves. Southbound commodities arriving from Moroccan and Algerian towns for transshipment included an array of North African and European manufactures” (Dunn 1977, p. 107). Toward the end of the 19th century, trade through Akka and Tata began to diminish because traders began to move their goods through the city of Guilmim in an effort to avoid the Berber tribes who dominated the High Atlas mountain passes. With the exception of the transport of illegal slaves, trans-Saharan trade dried up completely when the French occupied Timbuktu in 1894 and imposed the international borders that still exist today.

Akka’s residents are predominately Ishalhin. Also known as Swasa or the singular Soussi, Ishalhin are Berbers who speak Tashelhait, the Berber dialect spoken throughout the south of

³ Mogador is the modern city of Essouira.

Morocco including all of the Anti-Atlas Mountains and the southern High Atlas Mountains stretching from Agadir on the coast to as far east as Demnat. In addition, it is also spoken in the deep south of Morocco from Ouarzazate to Guilimim, the last major city before the Western Sahara. The Berbers of Akka reside in seven villages that circle the oasis. Moving north from Akka and counterclockwise around the oasis the villages are Tagadirt, Taourirt, Earhan or Ait Rehal, Zawiya, l'Kasbat Sidi Abdullah Ben M'barek, Agadir Ouzrou and Tagadirt Lakhenetra. Zawiya, approximately six to seven kilometers from Akka, marks the northern boundary of the Akka oasis. The three other villages, including Akka, are populated by local Arab speaking Akkawis and civil servants and military personnel from the north. The two remaining Arab villages are Ait Anter and El Kebebat.⁴

In addition to Arabs and Ishalhin, the Akka oasis is also home to of high percentage of Black Moroccans, commonly known as Haratin or Drawi.⁵ Linguistically, Black Moroccans fall into the same categories as their countrymen. Simply put, they speak either Moroccan Arabic or one of the Berber dialects as their primary language. Within the context of Akka, a majority of Black Moroccans spoke Tashelhait as their natal tongue; however, there were also those residing in El Kebebat and Akka who spoke Arabic as their first language. In other parts of Morocco, Berber speaking Haratin are sometimes referred to as Rgaga, Iqbliyin or Isuqayn (Ilahiane 2006). Yet, despite their linguistic and cultural affinity with their countrymen, their skin color consigns them into a third ethnic category separate from both Berbers and Arabs. More specifically, being Haratin effectively relegates a person to the bottom of the social hierarchy because, historically,

⁴ With the exception of Akka and Ait Rehal, the names of these villages are not found on any maps. They are taken from observations made while I served as a Peace Corps volunteer from 2000 to 2002.

⁵ In Morocco, Haratin is a pejorative term and is often replaced by the term *Drawi*, a term used predominately in the Drâa River Valley.

they were not allowed to own land, the primary cultural signifier for Berber tribes in the desert south:

For the Ait Atta Berbers⁶, land tenure was the founding pillar of law and tradition, *azarf*.⁷ Land and tree tenure was virtually the decisive vehicle which the Ait Atta's social organization expressed itself...Someone other than a member of the Ait Atta and holy Arab lineages could never acquire land in the Ait Atta land, particularly Haratine (Ilahiane 2004, p. 80).

Land tenure has a deep symbolic significance beyond its economic value because embedded within it is the fundamental concept of *al-asl*, or origin. A person or household without property was judged as without *al-asl*. Black Moroccans are considered to be of dubious origin and lack *al-asl* because their origins are either unknown or considered to be outside of Morocco, namely the regions south of the Sahara. Anecdotally, whenever I mentioned in passing to someone that I lived in Tata Province, I was asked what it was like to work with Africans. Though these were always limited exchanges, it happened regularly enough that it provided me the proper framework for how to understand the social hierarchy and the importance of place in Morocco.⁸

In this thesis I analyze the historical and social processes that have produced the complex environment of Akka from the perspectives of the people who live there. In particular, it is a thesis regarding identity and how so many different markers of identity have developed in Akka. Of course, within the broader Moroccan context, the fact of Berbers, Arabs and Haratin living in close proximity to one another is not particularly remarkable. Indeed, they have been living and interacting with each other since the Arabs swept through North Africa in the 7th century. However, every individual and every place is distinct and this particular story is about Akka and the variables that, although present in other areas of Morocco, have had a unique

⁶ The Ait Atta Berbers were the dominant Berber tribe in the Drâa River Valley and the Tafilalt oasis and were one of the last tribes to be brought under control of the French. The Ait Atta also extended east into the High Atlas Mountains. For more see Gellner (1969), Hart (1981) and Dunn (1971)

⁷ *Azarf* is the Tashelhait word for law.

⁸ Lack of *al asl* is not limited to Haratin as dubious origins are also assigned to foreign researchers. For examples, please see Hoffman (2008) and Ensel (1999)

impact on Akka. The axis around which this story will be told is the oasis itself and it should not be viewed as either a simple blank canvas in which the culture of Akkawis is overlaid or a neutral background to human activity. Instead, the oasis should be understood as an active participant in the process of ethnicization. This theoretical approach was defined as the ‘dwelling perspective’ by Tim Ingold. “The landscape is constituted as an enduring record of -- and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves (Ingold 2000, p. 189). Put simply, the landscape and the bodies who dwell within that landscape are complimentary terms and cannot be understood outside of that relationship. Ingold is trying to eliminate the tendency of dividing the world into easy dichotomies. So, within the context of Morocco, and Akka in particular, instead of trying to understand the field as Arab or Berber, black or white, African and North African it is better to recognize it as an enmeshment of all of these various constituencies.

Ingold takes his aversion to easy dichotomies one step further and also suggests that instead of viewing these objects as discrete entities that came into relation with each other at some point in the past, they should be understood as only existing by virtue of the relationships from which they are constituted. This mode of philosophical thought is very similar to that of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1977). For them it is not

enough to speak of tangles, knots, or imbroglios; these still give a sense of combination and mixing whereby previously distinct realms are increasingly brought into relation, until they bleed into each other so completely that they become indistinguishable...what exists are flows and intensities that give rise to temporary effects that we mistake as static, ahistorical, ontological forms (Braun 2002, p. 265).

Of course, the landscapes in which these enmeshments are constituted are not ideologically neutral fields. According to Lefebvre (1991), space in its many shapes and forms represents the political use of knowledge to impose an ideology that is made to appear indistinguishable from

knowledge. Deleuze and Guattari's flows and intensities are used by those in power to discipline its citizens. Consequently places are not equally shared and experienced by everyone within a community. In a place like Akka, ideologically dominate notions of race, blackness and origin are used to discipline Arabs, Berbers and Black Moroccans.

It is also important to recognize that Akka cannot be viewed in isolation or as being separate from the world because in addition to "dwelling" in Akka, Akkawis also dwell in both the broader Moroccan context as well as the broader global context. As such, global and national level political and social processes impact social arrangements in Akka and need to be understood as part of the identity formation process. Consequently, Deleuze and Guattari's flows and intensities are played out on a global scale so that the processes that discipline Berbers and Haratin in Akka are rearticulated in order to marginalize Arabs in the international public sphere. For example, Akkawis spend an incredible amount of emotional energy pondering the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their identification as Muslims compels them, almost reflexively, to strongly articulate their support for the Palestinians to the point of stating that, if they were able, they would join the fight against Israel. Unfortunately, this rather standard and mundane political position coheres nicely with those Western narratives that generally equate Arabs and Muslims with backwardness and violence.⁹ Notwithstanding the recent uprisings throughout the Arab world demanding greater democracy and freedom, protests against the building of an Islamic community center two blocks away from ground-zero in New York as well as the attempts by many U.S. state legislatures to officially ban Islamic *Sharia* Law suggest that these narratives have become even more concretized since September 11th. Indeed, the standard myth regarding the perpetuation of autocracy in the Middle East is the old colonial

⁹ This narrative also allows Israel's activities in the occupied territories to go largely unnoticed in the United States because their responses are viewed as combating terrorism and upholding democracy as opposed to being acts of terror.

trope that Arabs and Muslims are not ready for full Western style democracy. In this context, the ongoing Arab Spring is constructed not as an intrinsically Arab or Muslim movement but rather as a move away from Islam and tradition toward the modern liberalism of the West. As noted by Charles Taylor, it is assumed by many that “the march to modernity will end up making all cultures look the same” and non-Western cultures like those in the Middle East and North African will ultimately looking a lot like the countries of the West (Taylor 2000, p. 366). However, the social complexities that exist in Akka serve to complicate these easy dichotomies that seem to serve politicians so well. As the experiences of Ahmed and his family suggest, the differentiations between Islam and the West, Arab and Berber, Arab and African are not so easily discerned.

Methodology/Fieldwork

The data provided for this thesis was collected while I served as a Peace Corps volunteer from 2000 to 2002. I was assigned as a Health and Sanitation Volunteer to the rural dispensaire in L’Kasbat where I worked with two male nurses, who, although they were both Berber speakers, were not from Tata Province. In this regard, L’Kasbat was quite fortunate because most Health Ministry employees assigned to rural outposts were not Berber speakers. This made providing health care extraordinarily difficult when most of your patients are Berber women who do not speak any Arabic. After living in L’Kasbat for one year, I moved across the river to a house with electricity in the village of Ait Rehal.¹⁰ Although I served under the auspices of the Moroccan Ministry of Health, my work as a volunteer often had little or nothing to do with healthcare or working in the dispensaire. Culturally, the health of the family is the responsibility of women; consequently, it is only women who utilize the dispensaire regularly, and, even then, they would visit only intermittently. As such, I spent most of my time garnering the perspective of men about the health and welfare of the village. Much of the questions for this thesis arose from discussions with men about the lack of jobs to support their families, migration and the health of the oasis. Indeed, the questions I have raised are taken directly from these conversations in an effort to understand the rather dramatic social changes taking place in that far corner of the globe. A place that, as it turns out, is not as far away from the world as it seems.

Because most of my time was spent living and interacting with Haratin and Berber speakers in L’Kasbat and Ait Rehal, the point of view of Berber speakers such as Ahmed will be given privilege over their Arab neighbors. Furthermore, because of the conservative Muslim theology of most Akkawis my interactions with women were severely limited. Consequently,

¹⁰ In actuality, my house in L’Kasbat was one of the few that did not have electricity. Most of the houses in the Akka oasis had electricity and the streets and passageways were lit with electric light until 2 a.m. every morning.

the perspective will be exclusively that of male Akkawis.¹¹ More importantly, however, is the radically different relationship Berber speakers and Haratin maintain with the oasis that is exhibited in the outlooks of individuals like Ahmed. Put simply, what value does Ahmed place on Akka that I, as a development worker, was unable to recognize? Historical circumstances have evolved in such a manner that Berbers and Haratin have defined themselves through their ties to a particular place; in this specific circumstance it is the Akka oasis. Consequently, they continue to invest money garnered through remittances into the maintenance of their villages or, in the case of the Haratin, into land acquisition with the goal of shifting the balance of power in their favor. Conversely, Arabs have an identity outside of Akka embedded in the Moroccan nationalist enterprise that is not directly impacted by demographic shifts brought about by environmental decline or economic scarcity.

¹¹ Although more conservative than their Berber counterparts in the mountains, Berber and Haratin women are more liberal in that they will interact with men in public spaces, particularly a foreigner. However, women in Arab areas are generally secluded. The only girls seen in Akka are generally those going to school.

Ethnically Berber

Historically, a significant amount of intellectual energy has been spent on trying to include Berbers into the greater history of Islam. According to Ernest Gellner (1973) this is an extension of the fact that, unlike their non-Arabic co-religionists in places such as Iran or the Indian sub-continent, Berbers did not maintain the memory of a history or culture before the arrival of Islam. So, although Berbers are the indigenous people of North Africa¹², they do not identify with their ancestors who lived in Morocco before the 7th century. Ibn Khaldun, in his historical treatise on the Berber people credited them with being descended from Goliath and following independence history texts taught children that Berbers were actually descendents of Arab immigrants from Yemen (Hoffman 2008, p. 14).¹³

Notwithstanding the failed attempt to introduce a pseudo-history of Berbers into the collective national conscious, Moroccan Berbers have historically been difficult to categorize because of what Stephanie Saad refers to as “ethnic quiescence” (Saad 2000). During the Protectorate period, the French attempted to employ a strategy of divide and rule in an effort to magnify the differences between Berbers and Arabs. With the “Berber dahir” of 1930, Berber tribes were given autonomy that allowed them to govern their regions utilizing Berber customary law as opposed to Muslim law. It essentially classified Berbers as noble savages and assigned Arabs to the role of deviants who needed to be watched (Hart 2000). The French were not entirely without precedent when they issued the Berber dahir because the strategy of divide and conquer worked somewhat successfully with regard to Arab and Berber groups in neighboring Algeria. Indeed, the Berber-Arab relationship in Algeria is quite volatile and has often resulted

¹² Testimony for this is found in the Berber language. The Berber word for foreigner or outsider is ‘*Romi*,’ or ‘*Aromi*,’ derivatives of the word Roman, one of the first invaders of the Maghreb. In some Berber areas, particular in the desert south, there are people who refer to Arabs as ‘*Romi*,’ a reference to the status of *Imazighen* (Berbers) as the first inhabitants of Morocco.

¹³ For more regarding the effort to include Berbers in the framework of Islamic history see Shatzmiller (2000) and Hart (1999).

in violence between the Arab dominated government and Berber activists in Kabylia. The most well-known is the Berber Spring of 1980 when Berber speaking students took to the streets of the Algerian capital, Algiers, demanding official language recognition. However, the French drastically misunderstood the nature of Moroccan cultural identity and instead of promoting Berber nationalism defined by its opposition to the Arab majority it ignited Arab nationalism and promoted the Arab-Berber solidarity that eventually resulted in independence in 1956. “The French...imported their own assumptions about the nature of ethnic groups into Morocco, assuming that the existence of markers of ethnic identity implied the existence of self-defined ethnic groups” (Saad 2000, p. 170). The French colonial enterprise, including the anthropologists they employed to better grease the bureaucratic wheels of their empire, misunderstood the distinction to be made between identity and cultural differences on the one hand and actual ethnic consciousness on the other. In the case of Morocco, the dramatic differences between the Arabic language and the various Berber dialects make obvious the cultural distinctions between Arabs and Berbers. However, this recognition did not necessarily correlate with any level of ethnic consciousness. Ethnic consciousness, according to John and Jean Comaroff, only emerges with the fusion of totism, the recognition of collective consciousness, and class, the assignment of these various cultural collectivities into hierarchical assigned positions within the division of labor; consequently ethnic consciousness emerges only as a result of specific historical forces (Comaroff 1992, pp. 50-52).

The French failure to understand the “ethnic quiescence” of Berbers inspired a wave of anthropological literature dedicated to understanding why Berbers did not define themselves as ethnically separate from their Arab countrymen. The two most prominent anthropologists in this regard were Earnest Gellner and Clifford Geertz. For Gellner,

The Berber sees himself as a member of this or that tribe--within an Islamically-conceived and permeated world—and not as a member of a linguistically defined ethnic group, in a world in which Islam is but one thing among others (Gellner 1972, p. 13).

Gellner developed much of his theory around the dichotomy that existed between the *bled al siba* and the *bled al makhzan*.¹⁴ The *bled al makhzan* was land under direct control of the central government whereas the *bled al siba* was not; more specifically, the government was unable to collect taxes in the *bled al siba* without significant military intervention. Because the *bled al siba* was dominated by Berber speaking tribes, most notably the Ait Waryaghar in the Rif Mountains and the Ait Atta and Ait Yafalman in the High Atlas and southern desert, the division between these two essentially cartographic categories has evolved to represent the ethnic divisions between Arabs and Berbers where Berbers are deemed as synonymous with rural, remote and ungovernable. Subsequently, the question then for Gellner was how did Berber tribal societies function outside of the reach of the state apparatus?

The most important aspect of Berber identity, according to Gellner, was the tribal unit; each consisting of segments of distinct agnatic-based family units which balance against one another. “Cohesion is maintained not by agencies of coercion at home but by a threat from outside; and hence at every level of size for which there is an ‘at home’, there must be a corresponding ‘outside’” (Gellner 1969, p. 42). The balance between these units maintains peace within society without any centralized authority. Within his conceptualization of the segmentary lineage model in the Moroccan context Gellner also included *sharif*-s, Islamic saints descended from the prophet Mohammed, who mediated disputes between various segments of the tribe. *Amazigh*, or Berber, identity, therefore, is centered more on the aforementioned kinship units

¹⁴ The notion of the *makhzan* has recently resurfaced in contemporary Moroccan political discourse. In its current form, the *makhzan* is a term used to describe the social and political elites surrounding King Mohammed VI. Instead of targeting the monarch, protestors calling for political and economic reforms have targeted the *makhzan* as the source of their problems.

which comprise his “tribe” and Islam. Anywhere a “notion of being Berber did exist, it was roughly co-extensive with the regional linguistic block” (Gellner 1969, p. 15).

Since its initial publication, Gellner’s application of segmentary lineage theory has been widely discredited mostly due to the fact that the basic theory of structural functionalism has fallen out of fashion. Like Radcliffe-Brown (1965) and Evans Pritchard before him, Gellner fell into many of the same theoretical traps by ignoring the historical processes which produced the unique cultural circumstances he discovered in the High Atlas. By arguing that Berber society is segmentary and premodern, Gellner essentially removed Berbers from the context of the modern Moroccan nation state. Furthermore, on an even more basic level Gellner was just empirically wrong. The Ait Atta tribe that was, for Gellner, the epitome of the segmentary and acephalous society bore little resemblance to Gellner’s theory.¹⁵ A fact borne out historically through the ascendancy of T’hami El Glaoui, the Berber Lord of Telouet. Before the arrival of the French, El Glaoui, with the help of weapons provided by Sultan Moulay Hassan, ruled over the Tizi n’ Tishka, the main mountain pass which connected Marrakech to Tafilalet, Zagora and the other main outposts of trans-Saharan trade (Brett and Fentress 1997, p. 187). In 1912 he helped overthrow the Sultan resulting in the French assuming power. “By 1925 T’Hami el Glaoui, appointed Pasha of Marrakech, had eclipsed all his rivals, and lorded it with legendary tyranny over the High Atlas as a partner rather than a servant of the Resident in Rabat” (Brett and Fentress 1997, p. 188).¹⁶ Much of the Moroccan independence movement was organized around opposition to El Glaoui’s collaboration with the French and membership in the primary Moroccan nationalist party, the *Istiqlal*, was only permitted if Berbers renounced their Berber identity as a colonial creation. As I shall discuss later, the Arab nationalism that swept the

¹⁵ For a more thorough critique of Geller’s theory of segmentation see both Henry Munson Jr. (1993) and Abdellah Hammoudi (1980).

¹⁶ The exploits of T’hami el Glaoui are documented in Gavin Maxwell’s *Lords of the Atlas* (1966)

French out of Morocco and Algeria has had a profound impact on the growth and evolution of Berber ethnic consciousness that was not prominent before independence.

Clifford Geertz provided an alternative to Gellner's theory of segmentation. As opposed to Gellner who completed most of his work in the isolated mountain villages surrounding Zaouiat Ahansal, Geertz along with his wife Hildred and his students (Lawrence Rosen, Paul Rabinow, and Dale Eickelman) worked mostly in and around the city of Sefrou, south of Fez. Geertz agreed with Geller in the sense that he recognized Berbers did not define themselves under the broad general category of Berber or *Imazighen* and acknowledged the importance of family and tribal affiliations. However, Geertz's theory ascribed more significance to dyadic personal relationships as opposed to abstract role based interactions (Saad 2000). In other words, people establish social ties whenever they are advantageous instead of creating divisions that inhibited the possibility of compromise or advancement.

Abstract markers of status, such as descent from the Prophet or advanced religious education, might or might not be significant depending on how an individual was embedded in relationships of...[personal obligation], and how skillfully those relationships were manipulated (Saad 2000, p. 172)

Laurence Rosen (1979) suggested the need for multi-layered social networks evolved due to the fluctuations in ecological variables. According to Rosen, both Arabs and Berbers are forced to maintain alliances and relationships of obligation as a type of insurance policy against environmental emergencies. For example, if there is little to no rain during the growing season both Arab and Berber farmers have to establish personal relationships and networks outside of their immediate family and village in order to counter this exigency. There are also scholars who, although they take on the "Geertzian" model of dyadic interpersonal relationships, argue that these interactions are not as easily negotiated as Geertz or Rosen suggest. Prominent among these is Abdullah Hammoudi who proposes that these dyadic relationships are hierarchically

structured in order to ultimately serve the state apparatus. In this respect, Hammoudi is describing power dynamics in a purely Moroccan sense and does not delineate specific Arab or Berber notions of power (Crawford 2005, p. 180).

Yet, despite their ethnic quiescence, Berbers do exist and have maintained their linguistic particularity in the face of a nationalist movement which viewed a unique “Berber” culture as a kind of colonial construct and, as a consequence, built its independence movement around a discourse that emphasized its links to Arab and Islamic civilization and a monarch who claimed his legitimacy from being a *sharif*, a descendent from the Prophet Mohammed (Crawford 2005, p 164).¹⁷ Remarkably, as Morocco has evolved, Gellner’s unwillingness to recognize Berbers as an ethnic group has been superseded by events. According to Bruce Maddy-Weitzman:

The political, social and cultural evolutions of Morocco...coupled with events within the Berber diaspora, have not only resulted in an increasing self-consciousness among Berbers as Berbers...but have also given that self-consciousness a more explicit political dimension (Maddy Weitzman 2011, p. 43)

The pressure placed on Moroccan authorities was such that, in 2002, King Mohammed VI created the Royal Institute of *Amazigh* Culture (*l’Institut Royal de la culture Amazigh*, or IRCAM). The King’s recognition of Berber culture as a prominent part of Moroccan national identity indicated that Morocco’s Berbers were not simply historical residue, but unique from their Arab countrymen.

Because the ethnic category of “Berber” was decided by Moroccan nationalists to be a creation of the French colonial regime, official statistics regarding the number of Berber speakers

¹⁷ A unique Berber identity is not necessarily a new phenomenon and many scholars have worked to establish that there have been moments throughout history in which a broader sense of Berberness has been articulated. Shatzmiller (2000) argues for the presence of Berber particularism as early as the 12th century during the Marinid dynasty. The Marinids published Islamic texts using the Berber language as well as performing public ceremonies in Berber. Of course, before the evolution of the modern nation state and the conflation of culture with the place and space of the nation, the presence of multiple linguistic practices and ethnic minorities did not produce the same level of paranoia that is present today. It is possible the Shatzmiller may be unintentionally projecting modern day conceptualizations of political formations on the past.

are unavailable and efforts made toward even an unofficial census are often met with hostility (Hoffman 2008). Amazigh or “Berber” activists often place the number of Berber speakers above 50 percent but the actual number is probably closer to 40 percent (Hart 2000). The Ishalhin of Akka are a part of one of three main subgroups of Berbers in Morocco that include the Imazighen and the Irifiyen. The Imazighen speak the Berber dialect of Tamazight although they sometimes confusingly refer to their dialect as Tashelhait and re-label the more southern variety of Tashelhait as Tasousit, or the dialect spoken in the southern Sous River valley. Tamazight is also the general name applied to all Berber languages and dialects. The Imazighen predominate the central and northern High Atlas Mountains, the Middle Atlas Mountains near the cities of Fez and Sefrou as well as the southern desert provinces of Zagora and Er-Rachidia. The Irifiyen reside mostly in the northern Rif Mountains and have a reputation as being isolated and separate from the rest of Morocco due mostly to the Irifiyen’s tradition of resistance against government authorities (Hart 2000).

Haratin and Ismkhan

Before being sworn in as an official volunteer I completed two months of community based training in a small village in the High Atlas Mountains, approximately 3 hours beyond where the paved road ends near the city of Demnat. The purpose of community based training was to acclimate us to the type of village we might be living in and to force interaction with Berber speakers in order to acquire knowledge of Tashelhait more quickly. Not knowing where I was going to eventually be assigned the structure of our training made sense. However, Berber villages in the High Atlas are not as heavily influenced by the complexities of race that exist in the desert villages on the Saharan frontier. During training no distinction was ever made between people outside of the categories of Berber or Arab speaker and nothing was ever mentioned regarding the notion of race. One of our Berber language instructors who I became quite good friends with was Haratin from the city of Ouarzazate but he always included himself when he discussed Berber speakers. In addition, the professor who administered our final language proficiency examination was Haratin from the village of Touzounine, thirty minutes south of Akka, also referred to himself as Ashelhi. Their perspective was quite nuanced and evolved from having lived most of their life outside of the oasis and working with Americans, a country made up almost entirely of people without *al-asl*. They recognized that the labels ascribed to them were arbitrary and that they shared the same cultural traits with their Arab and Berber countrymen. Their outlook is suggestive of Paul Gilroy's (1993) concept of cultural hybridity and the fact that cultures do not grow and evolve in a vacuum and instead are constantly changing, interacting and borrowing from one another.

When I arrived in Akka I was under the impression that if someone spoke Berber they were Berber and if they did not they were Arab. No one ever overtly disabused me of my

misunderstanding of the dynamics regarding the social hierarchy in Akka and it resulted in a lot of interesting conversations initiated by me in an attempt to understand the history of the area and whether people defined themselves as Arab or Berber. Hajj Ahmed, himself Haratin, once asked me if the people of L’Kasbat were *Shluh*, the Moroccan Arabic neologism for all Berbers. Coming from Ahmed, this question struck as quite strange for two reasons. First, why would Ahmed use the term *Shluh* to refer to Berber speaking Akkawis? In many Berber communities, the term *Shluh* is generally considered an insult and a Berber would not use this word to describe himself. Second, and perhaps more subtle because of the manner in which Ahmed framed the question, why was a Berber man asking an *aromee* for a definition of his community?¹⁸ It was not until later that I recognized that Ahmed was actually trying to understand my, or more specifically, the non-Moroccan’s perspective of the social dynamics of his village. He used the term *Shluh* because it was a common Moroccan word used to distinguish Ishalhin and he knew I would recognize it but also because he did not actually recognize himself as a Berber, despite the fact that Tashelhait was his natal tongue. He has no stake in the use of the word *Shluh*.

Part of the reason no one within the Peace Corps pointed out my mistaken belief was due primarily to the fact that they wanted us to perceive Morocco as a good and worthy place. In addition to the goal of “development,” the Peace Corps is also about cultural exchange and my supervisors wanted me to leave Morocco with a good impression of their home. This desire was emphasized in Akka as I was constantly asked what I thought about Morocco.¹⁹ To frame this concept anthropologically, the lack of interest or desire in discussing race stems from what historian Chouki el Hamel refers to as an embarrassment over Morocco’s historical enslavement

¹⁸ *Arome* is the Berber word for Christian and foreigner. It is a derivative of the word “Roman,” because the Romans were the first invaders of Morocco.

¹⁹ A friend of mine from Agadir Ouzrou, who coincidentally now lives and works in Chicago, always begins our conversations by questioning me what I liked most about Morocco.

of fellow Muslims, a practice expressly forbidden in the Qu'ran. Put simply, Morocco has never reconciled itself with either its slave holding past or its enslavement of the free born Haratin during the reign of Moulay Ismail, the second Alawite Sultan. A significant part of this, of course, is the wish to not air one's dirty laundry in the presence of an outsider so any questions involving race and slavery are often viewed as having hostile intentions. Given the history of colonialism, the negative stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims that circulate in the West and the continued military occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, this reticence is understandable.²⁰ Consequently, the issue of race is often concealed behind a curtain of Arabic and Islamic hegemony resulting in a remarkable dearth of academic literature dedicated to the topic of race and slavery in Islamic North Africa that is dominated mostly by scholars from Europe and the United States.

Most modern Moroccan scholars argue that because there is so much interaction and interconnection among the different ethnic groups in Morocco, Moroccans assert their identity under the umbrella of Arab-Islamic culture and a "black identity" so that racial issues do not exist (El Hamel 2002, p. 32).

John Hunwick also suggests that the lack of emphasis on questions of race is due largely to the lack of significant recognition on the part of people of North Africa of their "Africaness." Subsequently, in contrast with the amount of literature produced regarding the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the impact of slavery on the Islamic cultures of the Mediterranean has not been extensively explored.

The African-ness of the Algerian, which is attested by history, is something he is largely unconscious of; thus there can be no question of his admitting to it. He will only take interest in it when the black world becomes essential for him. Then Algeria will belong

²⁰ This issue is most prominent in the political sphere which was always a hot topic due to the second Palestinian *Intifada* and September 11th taking place while I lived in Morocco. Blame for Arab oppression was always placed at the feet of the United States or Israel. Though their arguments were valid there was little recognition of the lack of political freedom within many Arab countries that also carry much responsibility. This dynamic is changing with the development of Arab satellite television stations such as Al-Jazeera. For more see Lynch (2006).

not only geographically or even politically to Africa, but also culturally (Hunwick and Powell 2002, p. xi-xii).

While this is undoubtedly true, as evidenced by my regular interactions with individuals that questioned me what it was like to work with Africans, more blame should be placed on the Western intellectual tradition in Moroccan cultural studies and the limits it has placed on research in Morocco; particularly when dealing with the study of Black Moroccans. For example, academic stalwarts such as Earnest Gellner and David Hart made only brief mention of Haratin in their work concerning Berber tribal society. Unfortunately, one of the enduring legacies of colonialism and its intellectual corollary, Orientalism, has been the compartmentalization of the categories of African Studies and Middle Eastern Studies. So although Morocco is located in Africa and has a strong historical connection with West Africa, it is generally included into the broader political and scholastic category of the Middle East and North Africa. John Hunwick describes it thusly:

[I]t is a bold graduate student who would attempt to deconstruct it by working on the history of black Africans in the Maghreb, not least because s/he may have a hard time finding an interested (not to say knowledgeable) supervisor, but also because s/he may have an even harder time finding a job. (Hunwick 2002, p. xiii)

Consequently, Morocco is defined as an Arab country with a large Berber speaking minority and historically, little research has been done outside of these strictly defined categories.

How are we then to understand the place and space of Black Moroccans? When trying to explain the people of Akka to friends and colleagues back home it proved difficult to avoid the traditional racialized discourse that predominates in the West. However, it was not a matter of simply attaching a hyphenated ethnic identity marker because, geographically speaking, all Moroccans are African. Furthermore, conceptualizations of “Blackness” in Morocco are not solely determined by the color of one’s skin because distinctions are made between Arabs,

Berbers and Black Moroccans as well as between Sub-groups of Black Moroccans despite there being little to no discernable difference in skin color. Consequently, the accepted Western language of racial discourse holds little meaning in Morocco's desert provinces.

In order to answer this question I want to elaborate further on the many layers of complexity concerning blackness within Morocco. Black Moroccans are located primarily in Morocco's desert provinces including Ouarzazate, Zagora and Er Rachidia and are generally designated by the term Haratin. The term Haratin has evolved so that it has become synonymous with the *bilad-al-Sudan*, the region south of the Sahara; however, within the Moroccan context, there is a lot of confusion regarding the origins of Haratin and it has produced many different etymological interpretations. There are some historians who have argued that slaves who were sold at the slave market in Kaharta in West Africa came to be known as Hartani,²¹ while others have suggested that Hartani should be understood as a derivation of the words *Hurr* (free) and *tani* (second), indicating that, although the Haratin are free, they never lose their link to their slave past (Ensel 1999, p. 26). The latter explanation was the theory of historian Ahmed b Khaled al-Nasiri, a prominent Moroccan writer during the 19th century and an outspoken critic of Morocco's historical involvement in the slave trade (El Hamel 2006, p. 180). Still others have argued that the word Haratin is derived from the Arabic word *haratha*, which translates as "to cultivate," thus signifying the Haratin status of being sedentary cultivators, particularly in the oases of the Drâa and Ziz River Valleys, regions dominated by the pastoralist Ait Atta tribe. In all probability, however, the term Haratin probably originates from the Berber word *aherdan*, which signifies dark color, particularly in relation to skin color. This term is used to contrast the dark skinned *Aherdan* from the white *Imazighen*. The Berber speaking Tuareg of the Sahel region also use a similar word, *acherdan*, as an indication of bi-racial children. In Tashelhait

²¹ Hartani is the singular form for Haratin (Ensel 1999)

speaking areas such as Akka, the Berbers use the words *Isuqayn* (sing. *Asuqi*) and *aharadani* to label Black Moroccans. These terms are often used interchangeably and El Hamel (2006) suggests the possibility that these words may be used to differentiate between Haratin and *Ismkhan*, descendents of slaves who are still able to trace their lineage back to the *bilad-al-Sudan*. In the context of Akka, the term *Isuqayn*, loosely translated, means people of the *souk*. The expression has very negative connotations because it equates Black Moroccans with the dirtiness of the souk.

The common thread running through this line of reasoning is the assumption that the Haratin have origins outside of Morocco, specifically in the *bilad-al-Sudan*, and were brought to Morocco as part of the trans-Saharan slave trade. Although this narrative conforms nicely to racialized Western discourses that automatically equate Blackness with the space of sub-Saharan Africa it runs counter to the oral history of the Haratin which suggests that they have lived in Morocco's since before the Arab invasion and have always been free.²² There is also a growing literature which indicates the Haratin have lived in southern Morocco since before the Berbers. Haratin were probably indigenous to the oases on the northern fringes of the Sahara and were forced into a client relationship with the Berber tribes either when the Berbers were forced south by the Romans or perhaps on the eve of the Arab conquest in the 6th century (El Hamel (2002), Ilahiane (2004), Ensel (1999)). Their status as nomads and their knowledge in the use of horse and camel gave Berbers the advantage over the sedentary and oasis dwelling Haratin.

The quest for control of the trans-Saharan trade to supplement a resource poor ecology would, in the end, set in motion the mechanisms of the incipient social stratification structure in the region. Nomads, Jewish and Arab merchants controlled the organization of the caravan trade...while Haratine became the oasis tillers (Ilahiane 2004, p. 42).

²² For more regarding oral history please see Ilahiane, Hsain (1998)

This is a remarkably subversive ideological claim that challenges the hegemonic narratives that locates blackness outside of Morocco. In addition to confronting the bifurcation of the African continent into North and sub-Saharan Africa, this claim also challenges the hegemony of the Arabo-Berber historical narrative within Morocco.

Adding further to the confusion regarding the origins of the Haratin are hierarchical and taxonomic distinctions made between Haratin and the aforementioned *Ismkhan*. Sub-groups within both the Drâa and Ziz River Valleys continue to claim the title of *Ismkhan*, the Tamazight Berber word for slaves, in order to distinguish themselves from Haratin. The oral history regarding the slave trade, which did not end completely until the final defeat of the Ait Atta by the French in the 1930s, is still relatively fresh so there are many who are able to trace their origins directly back the *bilad-al-Sudan* (Becker 2002). Most *Ismkhan* indicate that they are recent arrivals to Morocco in that they came within the last three or four generations right at the close of the trans-Saharan slave trade. By doing so, the *Ismkhan* claim a specific *al-asl* and connect themselves to the myth that the people of the *bilad-al-Sudan* are all descended from Sidi Bilal, the first muezzin of Islam. The *Baraka*, or Devine blessing, received by Bilal from the prophet Mohammed allows for the acceptance of *Ismkhan* within oasis society even though they were slaves (Becker 2002). More importantly, the origin myth integrates the *Ismkhan* into the general history of Islam and gives them a direct link to the prophet Mohammed. The primary variable used by *Ismkhan* to distinguish them from Haratin is the color of their skin. Their dark skin is indicative of their recent arrival to Morocco; as opposed to Haratin who tend to have fairer skin indicating centuries of inter-marriage with Berber and Arab tribesmen.

The *Ismkhan* have chosen an identity cloaked in the well-established cultural framework of the African diaspora. They have identified themselves as being descendents of slaves from

south of the Sahara. However, despite their strong declarations of an origin in sub-Saharan Africa, there is a degree of insecurity in acknowledging one's slave past. It places one's origins outside of Morocco and delinks them from a potential connection to the prophet. It also indicates the possibility of pagan ancestors and a past mired in false belief. Being a part of the community of believers is arguably the most important part of Moroccan national identity. It is the reason that little is known about the Berbers prior to the Arab invasion and so much effort was made to integrate the Berber tribes into the history of Islam. It is also the reason why the *Ismkhan* have created an origin myth linking them to Sidi Bilal in an effort to distinguish themselves from the Haratin, the people without a history.

Within the broader Moroccan context, the difference between Haratin and *Ismkhan* should not be carried too far because, as Ensel (1999) points out, they are still placed in a subordinate category and, for a majority of Moroccans, Haratin are not distinguished from *Ismkhan*; a fact demonstrated by the continued debate surrounding the etymology of the word Haratin. This oversimplification relates back to that mentioned earlier regarding the discomfiture discussing the history of race in Morocco and the creation of an all slave army by Sultan Moulay Ismael.²³ Although Black slaves were often used in armies in Islamic North Africa, Moulay Ismail's *abid-al-Bukhari*, was "the supreme example if the use of such troops in the Mediterranean world" (Hunwick 1992, p. 19).

When Ismael ascended to throne in 1672, Morocco was a model of political instability. The Sufi orders in Fez openly challenged the legitimacy of the Alawite dynasty by questioning whether they were descended from the prophet Mohammed; the tribes of the *bled al siba* who controlled the lucrative trans-Saharan slaved routes refused to submit to Alawite authority and

²³ Ismael was renowned for being quite violent. One legend suggests that he would often randomly behead one his slaves while they were working in order to instill fear and compel them to always work their hardest lest they lose their head.

Morocco was under threat from the Portuguese in the port city Mogador and the Ottoman Turks in Algiers. Consequently, Ismael felt it necessary to strengthen his military to consolidate his hold on power. Traditionally, Moroccan Sultans depended upon soldiers hired from politically supportive tribes for favors from the court that generally included land grants and tax exemptions. However, Ismael believed this process to be unreliable and instead ordered the creation of the *abid-al Bukhari*, an army made entirely of slaves completely loyal to the Sultan. In order to fill the ranks of his army, Ismail ordered the enslavement of the free Haratin as well as the purchase of all slaves deemed to be appropriate. “No black person was spared, whether the person was slave or free black or Hartani. In one year 3,000 blacks were gathered from the area around Marrakesh alone. There, the color of skin was reason enough to be enslaved (el Hamel 2006, p. 191). The enslavement of the free Haratin was an incredible precedent that broke with all of the tenets of Islamic law that forbade the enslavement of free Muslims. Ismail justified his maneuvers by arguing that the Haratin were the same as slaves and had illegally procured their freedom or that the ranks of his army were built through military expeditions to the Sudan.²⁴ Despite protests by the Muslim *Ulama* (Islamic courts) in Fez, impressment of Haratin into military service continued well into the 19th century and the ranks of Ismail’s army swelled so that at one point it contained well over 150,000 troops (Ensel 1999, p 46). Like the Sultan himself, the *abid-al Bukhari* became renowned for a propensity toward violence and brutality and they were often used as an occupying force in the unruly lands of the *bilad-al-siba*. The fact that the occupying force was comprised entirely of slaves and Haratin cemented the resentment felt by “white” Moroccans toward their Black countrymen that endures to this day (el-Hamel 2006, p. 194). Indeed, the creation of the *abid-al-Bukhari* marked a major turning

²⁴ Again, this particular myth was perpetuated by Orientalist scholars who automatically equated blackness with the sub-Saharan Africa. For more on the sources of manpower and a more detailed overall analysis for the *abid-al-Bukhari* please see Meyers (1977).

point in race relations in contemporary Morocco resulting in the fusion of words so that *'abd* (slave) and *aswad* (black) and *Haratin* became interchangeable. According to al-Nasiri, the Moroccan historian critical of the trans-Saharan slave trade for its blatant trafficking of Muslim slaves,

People have become so inured to that, generation after generation, that many common folk believe that the reason for being enslaved according to the Holy Law is merely that a man should be black in color and come from those regions [the Sudan]. This, by God's life, is one of the foulest and gravest evils perpetrated on God's religion, for the people of the Sudan are Muslims having the same rights and responsibilities as ourselves (Hunwick and Powell 2002, p. 45).

One final elaboration is required to fully understand all of the variables involved in constructing Blackness within Morocco. In Islamic societies like Morocco, lineage is established by the status of the father and a child born to African concubines will claim the Arab or Berber identity of his father. Any notion of being African is abandoned. For example, Moulay Ismail was the son of an African slave concubine. Consequently, distinctions made based upon skin color can sometimes be quite arbitrary. *Ismkhan*, because of their recent arrival are considered to have the darkest skin color whereas *Haratin* are perceived to have skin color between that of "black" *Ismkhan* and "white" *Imazeghen* and *Shurfa* indicating their earlier arrival to Morocco and subsequent intermingling with the Arab and Berber tribes. However, each of the various sub-groups in southern oasis communities, whether they are Arab or Berber or *Haratin*, are all populated by dark-skinned individuals. Stephen Small summarizes it thusly:

Variations based on skin-color are in the eye of the beholder, but they are shaped by localities, prevailing understandings and subjectivities, themselves reflecting the particular histories of nations and cities. So who is Black is not something we should take for granted (Hine et al. 2009, p. xxvi).

It is partly through this lens which we should try to understand conceptualizations of race in Morocco. Race, in this sense, is closely connected with the concept of lineage and the absence

of genealogical connections to the historical or religious pantheon of Islam is what effectively rendered one as Black (Hall 2005). This formulation of race can be understood as race in the lower case. There is some debate regarding the origins of the concept of race and many have argued that it is a strictly Western concept that can be traced to the history of plantation based slavery in the United States. In this more widely recognized form, a race is differentiated by recognizable physical differences, i.e., skin color, and these differences manifest themselves in political, social and economic situations in such a way that a clear hierarchy is established. However, this imagined form of race privileges American and European formulations of race and does not allow for elaboration in areas of the world not defined by the black, white dichotomy. This westernized conceptualization of race was criticized by Takezawa (2005) and Dikötter (1994, 1997) who recognized racialized hierarchies in China and Japan that did not strictly conform to the western conception of race. Indeed, it was Takezawa who elaborated the broader definition of race in the lower case in order to include the experience of regions outside of Europe and the United States. She provides three general features: racial characteristics, both visible and invisible, are inherited across generations and cannot be easily changed by environmental factors; boundaries are drawn between groups in order to exclude the other and a clear hierarchy exists; the hierarchy manifests itself in economic and political institutions (Takezawa 2005, p. 7). Using Takazawa's framework allows us to better understand the nature of Morocco's racialized identities separate from that of the West.

The Arab Majority

Hassan was a teenager from the small Arab speaking village of Laqabeba. Laqabeba is located approximately 200 meters east of Akka and, with the exception of women, all of its inhabitants work in Akka as teachers or shopkeepers or migrate to the north. There was no effort made toward exploiting the land because the village was too far away from the oasis to make irrigation possible and no one in the village could afford a motorized pump. When I first arrived in Akka, there were approximately one to two hectares of land that had been plowed indicating the possibility that some effort was being made toward cultivation. However, when I left Akka for the final time, the ploughed land was in almost the exact same condition as it was when I first arrived two years before. Because no one worked in Laqabeba, it reminded me somewhat of an American suburb from which people commute to and from work every day.²⁵

Hassan's family owned a shop in Kénitra, a city located north of the Moroccan capital Rabat and his father spent most of the year working there. Hassan was a freshman enrolled in Akka's high school. The Moroccan educational system is driven by language instruction and after Modern Standard Arabic, mandatory French language is introduced in primary school and mandatory English is introduced in the first year of High School. Hassan was quite remarkable because he had studied English for a little less than a year but was already able to engage me in complex conversations in English. Indeed, his remarkable acquisition of English was such that his teachers asked me and another Peace Corps volunteer living in the area to explore the possibility of him attending University in the United States.²⁶ Somewhat ironically, he never really learned to speak French very well despite having studied it for several years through

²⁵ The obvious exception to this is women who always put in long hours completing the work of the house that included cooking, cleaning and childcare.

²⁶ Unfortunately, this dream was short lived because Hassan's father died of a heart attack, forcing Hassan to step into the space previously occupied by his father and work in Kénitra

primary and middle school. His reasoning for his success with English was that English just flowed for him. Hassan was also unique in that he spoke Tashelhait even though he came from an Arabic family. Indeed, this was the case for most if not all Akkawi Arab families. My “official” Tashelhait language instructor was actually an Arabic secondary school teacher from Ait Anter and one of the nurses assigned to the dispensaire in L’Kasbat spoke Tashelhait despite being an Arab speaking Hartani from Laqabeba. This phenomenon is not entirely without precedent as the language hierarchy has historically shifted back and forth and Arab speakers have switched languages after marrying into a Tashelhait speaking families. This is particularly true in the Sous Valley where Tashelhait and the southern dialect of Moroccan Arabic share many lexical features (Hoffman 2008).

However, this phenomenon has become less common since independence and outside of Akka, there are no longer many Moroccan Arab speakers who speak any of the Berber dialects. Aside from the occasional Peace Corps volunteer or visiting anthropologist, Berber is no longer spoken by outsiders. Arabic and French have become the dominate languages in North Africa, so there is little reason for a non-Berber speaker to learn the language. None of the Arab speakers from other parts of Morocco assigned to Akka in government posts such as the post office, the gendarmerie or the dispensaire spoke any Tashelhait.²⁷ Whenever I asked Hassan about his ability to speak Tashelhait he was never able to provide a very satisfying answer beyond stating he was Akkawi and had always been able to speak Tashelhait. Hassan’s relative indifference toward his ability to speak Berber was representative of the general overall attitude held by Akkawi Arab speakers who saw little significance in their bilingual ability. It was an afterthought born from the fact that they were never actually forced to speak Tashelhait, even

²⁷ The Akka oasis has two dispensaires or health clinics. The specific one I was assigned to was located in L’Kasbat. A larger one is located in Akka.

when interacting with Berber speakers in areas where Berber speakers are the overwhelming majority of the population. Hoffman encountered many Berber speakers who demonstrated significant anxiety over this fact:

You are forced to speak Arabic with them. If there are eight people in a room and only one person doesn't speak Tashelhait, you're forced to speak Arabic. Otherwise the Arab says, "What are you saying? Are you talking about me?" (Hoffmann 2008, p. 56)

The casual bilingualism displayed by Akkawi Arabs is illustrative of a change in the cultural hierarchy that has shifted heavily in favor of Arabic. Since independence, the symbolic capital associated with *dareeja*²⁸ has greatly outdistanced that associated with Tashelhait and Tamazight. Theoretically, this slow process of Arabization in North Africa and the subsequent marginalization of the Berber culture began when the first Moroccan dynasty was established by Moulay Idriss in the newly built city of Fez in 789. However, it was the Moroccan nationalist movement against the French that securely tied Moroccan identity to Arab and Islamic civilization and the monarchy's ability to trace its patrilineal lineage back to the prophet Mohammed. Arab nationalism was subsequently reinforced by the newly independent state's efforts to generalize education and allow access for everyone. "Moroccan schools favored the existing social class structure and helped reproduce it as well by consolidating material and symbolic capital among the urban, Arabic speaking elite" (Hoffman 2008, p. 23). "Access for everyone," unfortunately, did not include Berber speakers in areas such Akka where government schools were not built until well into the 1980s and 1990s. Of course, for individuals who identify themselves as Arabs, the increased marginalization of the Berber culture and language or the outright refusal to recognize the contributions of Berbers as intrinsically Berber is not necessarily significant. Their identity as Arabs is secure regardless of the continued desertification of the Akka oasis or their ability to work the land. Consequently, Hassan's

²⁸ Moroccan Arabic

relationship with the landscape and his “dwelling perspective” is markedly different when juxtaposed with his Berber and Haratin neighbors. In Akka, this is borne out in reality as the three Arabic speaking villages are completely disconnected from the oasis making any type of cultivation impossible without the use of a motorized water pump.²⁹ The fact that the three Arab speaking villages are Berber place names suggests the possibility that Akka, at one point in its history, was populated entirely by Berber speakers and Berbers have been unable to adapt to the demographic shifts initiated by the French colonial government and maintained by the post-colonial Moroccan government in Rabat.³⁰

²⁹ There was one family in Akka who had the economic wherewithal to purchase a mechanized well. The father was the director of the dispensaire and his son was an English teacher.

³⁰ It is impossible to speculate further on the historic cultural makeup of the Akka oasis. However, the village of Tagadirt was populated by Tashelhait speaking Jewish merchants as recently as the 1960s before they emigrated to Israel.

Demographic Shifts and Environmental Change

Ahmed and I were of two different mindsets when it came to how to approach the needs of his village. As a Peace Corps volunteer I technically served under the auspices of the Moroccan Health Ministry and I had regular contact with Ministry officials during its various health initiatives.³¹ Consequently, I was present for conversations which were quite derogatory toward the Berber speaking communities of Tata Province, particularly those populated by Haratin. Furthermore, discussions with elementary school teachers assigned to Akka also suggested that they did not have the children's best interests in mind when they took on the job. Consequently, I was always stressing education, finding Berber speaking teachers and promoting general Berber rights that would force government authorities to recognize the needs of Berber speakers mired in rural poverty. While Ahmed agreed the government had failed in its responsibility and always prefaced all of our discussions by demonstrating his love for his mother tongue he was always focused on general and immediate material needs through agricultural expansion. For Ahmed, all the Berber language allowed him to do was communicate with his friends and family in the village. It did not garner him access to the government machinery that would provide resources for L'Kasbat, nor did it allow him access to areas outside of Morocco where information was traded in languages like French or English. Indeed, in his mind Berberness was, on some level, a liability and he eventually pressured me into starting an English program for men in the village who might be interested. Being Berber meant little when compared to long term village survival. At some later point, in an attempt to counter Ahmed's rather salient argument, I questioned his son, Brahim, who had completed his teaching degree and was now an elementary school teacher in Guilmin, a city a few hours further south of Akka on the road to the Western Sahara. I asked him why he had chosen to work in Guilmin

³¹ These were semi-regular events and in Akka they focused primarily on Schistosomiasis and trachoma.

when Akka was in desperate need of Berber speaking teachers. Brahim also prefaced his point by stating that he loved his home, but stated there was nothing for him in L’Kasbat. He wanted to see more of the world than just L’Kasbat and then sagely pointed out that I, too, was living and working a long way from home. And, he added, in America there is actual employment.

Although Ahmed spent a majority of the year in L’Kasbat he also travelled regularly to Fez to help oversee the café that he managed with his brothers. Like most Akkawis, Ahmed and his family have long depended on the money earned from economic ventures outside of the village to help to support their families. This type of migration is not a particularly new phenomenon and the practices of Berber migrants have been a topic for Western scholars since before the end of the colonial period. According to John Waterbury (1973), the Swasa tribes of the Anti-Atlas Mountains have been dependent on South-North migration since the Second World War. So much so, that Tashelhait speaking Berbers have an almost ubiquitous presence in almost all of Morocco’s major cities and have virtually monopolized Morocco’s dry goods industry and stores which sell staples such as rice, sugar, flour and tea are dominated by the Ishalhin. It is somewhat remarkable that seemingly every *hanout*, or corner store, in almost every major city is managed by a Tashelhait speaker from the *Sus*. There is some doubt to when circular migration became the dominate form of survival for southern Berber speakers.

Waterbury suggests that the Swasa began their migratory lifestyle toward the end of the nineteenth century when a particularly severe famine completely devastated their already agriculturally marginal Anti-Atlas homelands. Waterbury cited environmental variables such as soil erosion, deforestation and population growth, in addition to social factors such as tribal maintenance, feuds and rivalries as the primary reasons forcing the Swasa to look beyond their

valleys for their material needs. Writing almost ten years earlier, E.A. Alport (1964) offers a similar explanation for Swasa migration:

The reasons for Ammeln and Swasa emigration are not far to seek. The slopes of the Jebel Lkest³² are completely denuded, except quite low down, and the valley bottom is stony and arid except close to the stream, the Assif Amel, or in places where trees have been planted or where springs provide irrigation (Alport 1964, p. 162).

Alport, however, places a lot of the impetus on the establishment of the Protectorate government which allowed easier modes of communication and greater security. Perhaps most realistically, informants for Katherine Hoffman (2002) do not really remember a time in which the Anti-Atlas Mountains provided for their families; although initial statistics collected by the Protectorate bureaucracy indicate that men from the village of Idda ou Zeddout where she worked were engaged in long distance trade by at least 1920s (Hoffman 2002, p. 938). For the Haratin, out migration is a more contemporary phenomenon. As noted earlier, the Berber tribes of the south prevented Haratin families from acquiring land as a means of reinforcing their status as outsiders. Since independence, however, infrastructure improvements intended to promote industrial development have opened up economic opportunities in the north for Haratin who had previously been confined to the oasis. This new reality, combined with the newly acquired status of full Moroccan citizenship convinced Haratin to migrate north to find work.

In desert areas such as Akka, which had historically been outposts for trans-Saharan trade it is somewhat more difficult to determine when the first major waves of out-migration began. Ahmed's father regaled me with tales about working in Fez during WWII, explaining that American troops were much better tippers than their French counterparts. This small anecdote suggests the possibility that migration, even for Haratin families, has been taking place since at least before mid-century. Alport also argues that Akkawis had established themselves as the

³² The Jebel Lkst, along with the Ammeln Valley are located just north of the city of Tafrouit in the Anti-Atlas Mountains.

predominate guild of charcoal makers in Fez by mid-century. Unlike the Ziz and Drâa River Valleys, Tata Province is not part of a major river system and has never been able to engage in the level of large scale agriculture available in those areas. The Drâa River technically runs southeast of Tata Province and marks Morocco's southern border with Algeria before emptying into the Atlantic Ocean. However, it stops running above ground just south of the city of Mhamid in Zagora Province and by the time it reaches Akka it is just a valley of stones. It is highly probable that, unlike their desert neighbors further north, cities and towns in Tata Province were entirely dependent upon trans-Saharan trade. Consequently, when the French imposed national borders on West Africa and put an end to all non-illicit trade in the late 19th century, Tatawis were forced to migrate north in order to survive.

Ahmed's younger brother, Omar, owned approximately one to two hectares of land on the outskirts of the village. Unlike much of the other farming plots spread throughout the oasis, Omar did not depend on irrigation from the river to feed his land. Instead he invested money earned from migrant labor in a motorized water pump and drew water directly from the large aquifer that provided the oasis with its drinking water. By doing so he was able to bypass the extraordinarily complex legal miasma surrounding the distribution of water for farming.³³ In addition, he was also able to utilize land outside of the main farming districts of the oasis that had historically been considered too marginal to attempt to cultivate. His farming plot was still in its beginning stages so it was too early to tell whether or not he would be even minimally successful. When I visited him one day I pointed to the initial successful growth of his newly planted date palms as an auspicious sign. He agreed that they were coming in nicely but added that it would not make much of a difference and he would still have to eventually return to Fez in

³³ The arrangements regarding water "rights" are too complex to go into great detail here. However, for a detailed account of the structure of irrigation agriculture in Morocco see Geertz (2008)

order to work. His current yield of barley would probably never provide enough flour for his family and his date palms were a long way from producing fruit for the souk. Omar placed most of the blame for migration on the national government and their unwillingness to invest in desert villages like L’Kasbat. He believed that tractors and other large farming equipment was necessary to make farming worthwhile enough so people would no longer have to migrate. Anything less than that, in Omar’s mind, was almost not worth the effort.

Considering the amount of backbreaking labor that was invested into trying to farm a piece of the desert for the small reward of never actually having any significant yield, Omar’s desire was quite understandable. It was also difficult to disagree with Omar’s assessment of the lack of investment in rural areas such as Tata Province. Morocco is functioning far below its agricultural potential as most investment in the agricultural sector goes toward the 15 percent the arable land that is actually irrigated (Swearingen 1996). Irrigated lands are favored by the government because they produce cash crops such as citrus fruits and vegetables which are earmarked for export despite the fact that this market has been undercut by heavily subsidized citrus fruit producers in Spain and Portugal. This policy includes only a very small minority and virtually eliminates access to government agricultural assistance to the thousands of villagers such as Omar who live in the mountains and the pre-Saharan desert oases and maintain more traditional techniques geared toward subsistence as opposed to mass production for foreign markets. Three quarters of rural households own less than two hectares of land and 16 percent of rural households have no land at all (Sabagh 1993, p. 32). Irrigated lands are also generally owned by clients of the monarch or by the royal family itself so that any profits from this sector remain in Rabat.³⁴ Consequently, there remains a large disparity in per capita agricultural

³⁴ It is this concentration of wealth in the hands of the *makhzan* that has fueled many of the protests by the February 20th movement throughout this spring.

income ranging from 35,000 dirhams to less than 1000 dirhams. Through actual land reform, reinvestment in non-irrigated crops such as cereals and a return to the cultivation of barley instead of wheat, Morocco might be able to significantly increase its production of staple crops, decrease its overall debt burden and limit the effects of drought (Munson 1988, p. 566).

Unfortunately, the Moroccan policy focused on developing an agricultural sector geared toward export to European markets is further undermined by trade agreements negotiated between Morocco and the E.U. Although certain aspects of globalization have the potential for raising millions of people out of poverty the methods and agencies employed often do more to maintain the status quo as opposed to alleviating poverty. In particular, Joseph Stiglitz (2003) argues that the developed world demands that developing countries open their markets completely while corporate interests in the West petition the World Trade Organization to inhibit competition from foreign producers. “The Western countries pushed trade liberalization for the products they exported, but at the same time continued to protect those sectors in which competition from developing countries might have threatened their economies” (Stiglitz 2003, p. 60). This is particularly true for Morocco’s farmers. Because of the massive subsidies provided to citrus farmers in Spain and Portugal, Morocco is virtually eliminated from the European Market.

The aggregate subsidies of the United States, EU, and Japan (including hidden subsidies, such as on water), if they do not actually exceed the total income of...Africa, amount to at least 75 percent of that region’s income, making it almost impossible for African farmers to compete in world markets (Stiglitz 2006, p. 85).

Besides Morocco’s inability to compete in world markets, the internal market for cereals is also undermined by these trade agreements along with the loan conditions enforced by the IMF. Morocco is forced to eliminate price controls and subsidies to its farmers while at the same time allowing unfettered access to its markets for subsidized cereals from the EU. Any attempts at

constructive agricultural reform are undermined because trade agreements prevent the Moroccan government from assisting its wheat and barley farmers.

Akka's agricultural economy is limited to low-level, irrigation-fed agriculture and an even more limited pastoralism.³⁵ The craggy, rocky cliffs of the Jebel Bani offer little in terms of grazing land so the Ishalhin must grow alfalfa in order to feed their small herds. Outside of dates, alfalfa is the primary crop of the oasis. Growing crops for consumption by animals contrasts with the long history of transhumance practiced by the Berber tribes further north in the Draa and Ziz River Valleys. I wondered aloud to Omar whether or not any type of large scale investment was worthwhile given the environmental constraints in Akka. On this point, Omar agreed but he challenged my assessment with the belief that until the last decade or so, the village had been able to maintain a minimal level of subsistence whereas now everyone is dependent on the products sold at the twice weekly souk in Akka. Walking southeast of Omar's plot of land allows you to see what Omar is talking about. You enter a virtual no-man's land filled with the crumbling remains of mud walls and the random solitary palm tree indicating that the oasis once extended further than its current position. This area, according to the oral history of the residents of L'Kasbat, used to be quite lush and has only recently undergone an extended period of decline. There are several variables contributing to the decline of the Akka oasis but the one in the minds of most Akkawis is *al bayud*, the date wilt virus. *Bayud* was first discovered in Morocco in the Dar`a oasis in 1890 and is triggered by the *Fusarium oxysporium* fungus. The fungus attacks the trees at their roots and younger trees are highly susceptible and will often die within weeks of contracting the virus.

³⁵ There are a significant number of nomadic families that maintain herds of camels, sheep and goats throughout Tata Province. They are not necessarily residents of Tata and speak a dialect of Arabic distinct from Moroccan Arabic. However, their presence indicates the possibility of engaging in a more extensive level of pastoralism not currently practiced.

Pereau Leroy, a French date palm geneticist, reported that by 1950 *al-bayud* had destroyed 10,000,000 palms...Regions that boasted a high density of 300 to 400 palms per hectare, and where intercropping was virtually unknown...were reduced to five to ten palms per hectare. The ravages of *al-bayud* have forced emigration of the population from severely contaminated areas (Ilahiane 2004, p. 141).

Date palms are more susceptible to *al-bayud* when they are inter-planted with subsistence crops as is the case in Akka. Reduction in the amount of irrigation water would slow the growth of the virus; however, this would not only make the tree less productive but also limit the already small amount of subsistence farming. Akka has been hard hit by *al-bayud* and much of the work done by Ahmed's association involved planting new palm trees in order to counteract the impact of the disease. Unfortunately, L'Kasbat does not have the money necessary to constantly replace newly planted trees if they succumb to *al bayud*. Ahmed claimed little knowledge regarding the date wilt virus. He did not know how it spread or where it came from. Indeed, the types of intervention being used such as cross breeding resistant palms were beyond the knowledge of most Akkawis. This is the type of information not available in Tashelhait.

In addition, because all oasis agriculture is maintained through irrigation the oasis is also susceptible to salinization; salt carried by river water from its mountain sources is deposited in fields through irrigation.

Evaporation of water sitting on the surface in hot climates is rapid, concentrating the salts in the remaining water that infiltrates through the soil to the underlying water table...conditions of excessive irrigation bring the water table up to within 18 inches, where capillary action brings it to the root zone and even to the surface, where the high concentration of salts would kill most plants (Redman 1999, p. 129).

Historically, in southern Morocco, seasonal flooding of the major river systems allowed for what Charles Redman (1999) refers to as "leaching the fields." Flooding is, of course, fraught with danger because along with the much needed water it also can destroy homes and take lives. Such is the case in Akka, when a large section of the village of Tagadirt was destroyed by flood during

the 1990s. Despite this, flood waters are essential for the maintenance of a healthy and sustainable oasis ecosystem. They replenish the water table and feed springs. Oases suffer without flood and because of the high occurrence of drought, flooding is sporadic.

On the surface, the precarious living conditions of the Akka oasis and the steady creep of the desert indicate the need for the introduction of conservation policies as opposed to agricultural extension. It was for this reason that NGOs were reluctant to invest money in projects like Ahmed's. Because human activity is believed to be the primary cause of desertification and deforestation, investment in agricultural extension projects in environmentally fragile areas like Akka would only contribute further to this decline. Development agencies are therefore much more willing to contribute funding to projects like that of Bilal, a bicycle and motorcycle repairman from the village of Agadir Ouzrou. Bilal was the head of his village's men's association and similar to Ahmed, his primary concern was the health of the oasis and he constantly explained to me that without the oasis there is nothing. However, contrary to their counterparts in L'Kasbat, Bilal and his associates focused more on conservation and wanted to cut back on use of the oasis outside of date farming. Specifically, this meant finding an alternative place for village women to complete their daily washing. Women used the oasis river and irrigation systems to clean their laundry and Bilal was concerned with the chemicals from modern detergents such as Tide entering the soil and the water table. His association wanted to build a wash house that did not empty dirty and soapy water back into the river and irrigation system. This was a popular project idea that had been implemented in rural areas throughout Morocco; however, many of the various incarnations and designs of this project often failed to significantly change behavior or inhibit the continued use of already established water systems for village laundry. Often the wash house failed to account for the amount of space and water

needed to wash clothes and was not considered an efficient or viable alternative and often ended up being abandoned. In addition, siphoning large amounts from the aquifer toward laundry may not be the best use of an already scarce resource. While the introduction of modern detergents into the oasis ecosystem is probably not a good idea, there is no established link between the possible decline in the overall “health” of the Akka oasis and women doing laundry in an irrigation ditch. Women have always used the oasis water systems for laundry and the primary reasons for environmental degradation, drought and disease, are unrelated to laundry.

Not coincidentally, none of the men in Agadir Ouzrou’s association were land owners and generally worked in Akka as teachers or, as in Bilal’s case, as mechanics or shop keepers and this perhaps explains the focus on conservation as opposed to Ahmed’s desire for agricultural expansion. In addition, the sons of the wealthiest family in the village either worked in industries in Casablanca or in the United States. More significantly, Bilal’s conservation based goals coalesce nicely with those of the Moroccan government and outside non-government organizations which tend to place the blame for environmental degradation at the feet of local peasants like Ahmed.³⁶ To be sure, blaming local place holders for environmental degradation and for the failure of various development programs has a long history within western environmentalist movements and improvement projects such as Bilal’s appeal to this bias; a bias often based on the belief in a dialogic relationship between pristine nature and destructive humanity where nature is defined as the antithesis of civilization. The consequence of this perspective is a modern environmental movement that allows no place for humans to make a living off the land leading ultimately to the untenable tautology that the environment can only be saved through the elimination of the human race. Cronon (1995) traces the development of this

³⁶ Indeed, it is definitely possible that the three previous Peace Corps volunteers, all of whom were based in Agadir Ouzrou, had suggested this as a possibility for a community project.

mode of thought by documenting the evolution of the “wilderness” myth from something desolate and barren and avoided at all cost to the now common virgin, pristine image of nature that currently dominates modern environmental movements. Cronon sagely points out that nature is actually unnatural and hides its unnaturalness by appearing natural. Put simply, nature is socially constructed. Cronon is particularly critical of the human versus non-human dichotomy that it produces. Not only does it allow for the formation of the illogical emphasis on the removal of human actions from so-called wilderness areas among environmental groups it also allows us to avoid the environmental justice problems in places like Akka where humans actually live.

Bruce Braun (2002) offers a similar argument to Cronon by stating that by focusing on wilderness as being separate from culture we lose the truth of its social production and subsequently are unable to proceed because nature everywhere is already marked by humans. Consequently, environmental groups focus their attention on areas that best represent the imagined “wilderness” and are unable to conceive of an environmentalism for all of those other areas that are obviously marred by human interaction resulting in conflicts such as those between international NGOs that want to limit human activity and local village associations who are trying to survive off of the land. However, Braun is also critical of Cronon because he believes Cronon does not take his understanding of the nature/culture dichotomy far enough. Cronon recognizes that the pristine wilderness is a fixation that masks the history that has taken place to produce a place such as Akka; however, Braun argues that there is no secure place of knowledge that allows for an absolute truth regarding the state of the world. Any demystification of socially constructed nature must be recognized as another consequence of culture and power and therefore susceptible to becoming a new instrument of power.

Scholarship regarding land use and cover change in the former colonized world indicates the insidiousness of socially constructed nature in places like Akka. A thoroughly racialized colonial discourse generally assumed pejorative views regarding native farming and forest practices and colonial scientists subsequently established narratives of ecological degradation based on these assumptions. This particular aspect of colonial policy was widespread and was instituted throughout the colonial period no matter who the colonial power happened to be. Blakie (1985) refers to the strong belief on the part of colonial administrators that third world peasants and pastoralists were stupid and cognitively unable to properly manage the land. Fairhead and Leach (1996) expose the dramatically poor understanding of local land use and cover change in Guinea, West Africa. Isolated forest patches were automatically assumed to be the remnants of a once vast forest that had been destroyed by indigenous land use practices; however, in most instances, local land use dramatically increased the amount of secondary growth forest. The authors make the rather obvious point that just because land is capable of sustaining forest does not mean that forest existed on that land at some point in the past. Although the more derogatory descriptions of local land use have declined, the belief that native farmers and pastoralists are still primarily responsible for environmental problems such as soil erosion and deforestation persists and colonial governments and their post-colonial counterparts have utilized this belief as a blunt instrument to institute draconian land reforms that limit the amount of land allocated to peasant farmers and pastoralists. These same restrictions were, of course, never imposed on white European settlers despite their clear cutting forests for agricultural expansion.

Diana Davis (2007) interrogates this phenomenon in North Africa and takes on the well-established, indeed ubiquitous, narrative regarding land use practices among *Maghrebi*-s in

Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco which states that poor land husbandry on the part of native farmers and pastoralists decimated a once abundant countryside. Davis argues that the environmental narrative regarding agricultural possibilities in North Africa are, in reality, part of a well-crafted piece of French colonial fantasy constructed for the primary purpose of disenfranchising the native inhabitants of the *Maghreb*. She begins by providing paleo-ecological data regarding the climate of North Africa over the past several thousand years which indicates that North Africa has always been extremely arid with unpredictable precipitation patterns. Subsequently, by engaging in limited sedentary agriculture and focusing primarily on pastoralism, the Arab and Berber tribes were well adapted to the idiosyncrasies of the climate. However, the French colonial apparatus, using the classical writings of Greek and Roman authors, many of whom never actually traveled to North Africa, in addition to selecting certain aspects of prominent Arab historians such as Ibn Khaldoun and Leo Africanus, created a narrative of declension in which natives decimated a once fertile landscape that provided the grain for the entire Roman Empire. In a statement that epitomized the mindset of colonial officials, Jean Colin taught recruits in the Indigenous Affairs Office that “France is the legitimate successor of Rome...the great Roman people of whom we are the heirs conquered this region well before the Arabs. Like Rome we will again expand the cultivable area and transform it into fertile plains” (Davis 2007, p. 5). Because Arab tribesmen were imagined to be poor environmental stewards, the French were therefore morally obligated to intervene and demonstrate proper land husbandry and many of the laws developed to expropriate land were enacted under the auspices of rescuing the land from the Arabs.³⁷ Of course, inherent in the

³⁷ The actual reasons for France’s occupation of the *Maghreb* are far less honorable. France incurred a large debt to Algeria during the Napoleonic Wars during Napoleon’s military escapades in Egypt. Thirty years later, Algeria attempted to call in its debt which ultimately resulted in a diplomatic row that served as an excuse for the French to invade Algeria and flex its imperial muscles. For more see Davis 2007.

creation of the Roman myth is the belief that the non-European “other,” is a lesser form of human being incapable of advanced civilization and it is extremely likely that the French would have developed some other excuse to dominate Moroccans and Algerians. Notwithstanding their belief in their advanced farming techniques, the greatest rate of deforestation occurred between the years of 1890 and 1940, the high point of the French colonies in Morocco and Algeria.

The most prominent aspect of the declension narrative involved deforestation. Europeans were obsessed with forests and over the several decades following colonization the forest service turned into one of the primary tools with which to police Moroccan and Algerian nationals.³⁸ The French created an incredibly onerous forest protection law that gave enormous power to forest rangers to regulate the behavior of their colonial subjects. French forest rangers placed significant restrictions on native pastoralists and trans-humants forcing many to abandon their herds. For example, many areas defined as “forests” were, in reality, brush and scrub well suited for grazing and often completely devoid of trees (Davis 2007, p. 83). By limiting access to quality grazing land the French were able to sedentarized nomadic populations. Ultimately, territorialized populations were easier to police than nomads living by their own rules in the desert.

Despite the fact that the declension narrative was based on poor evidence and generally made out of whole cloth and that a majority of negative environmental transformations took place during the colonial period as a direct result of colonial actions, it became established as the *de facto* environmental history of the *Maghreb* by the end of the colonial period in 1956 (Davis 2007). Convinced of their inherent superiority, the French instituted large scale capitalist farming methods that resulted in the increased use of marginal lands (land that receives little to

³⁸ In Algeria, the French also utilized this narrative to stoke conflict between Arabs and Berbers as well and defined Berbers as living in greater harmony with the land.

no annual rainfall), the reduction or outright elimination of fallow periods as well as mechanized plows that ultimately resulted in the desiccation and erosion of the soil. Furthermore, French farmers also relied heavily on irrigation and large dam construction that contributed to the depletion of ground water and increased salinization of the soil. Regrettably, the post-colonial government has pursued the same agricultural policies as their colonial predecessors.

[The declension narrative] has been embedded in numerous important and influential publications, including the forestry manuals, histories, botanical, and agricultural treatises, and geographical and ecological studies. Many of those authoritative colonial works continue to be read widely...and thus have laid the foundation for a great deal of subsequent education, research and policy formation (Davis 2007, p. 169).

For example, the post-colonial government constructed two large dams, *El Mansour* at the head of the Drâa River Valley near Ouarzazate and *Hassan Addakhil* at the head of the Ziz River Valley south of Rich in Er-Rachidia Province. The dams were built for the dual purposes of controlling the catastrophic floods that devastate the oases of the Ziz and the Drâa River Valleys as well as collecting water for use during extended dry periods. It has failed on both counts in that it has not prevented all floods and there is never enough rainfall to collect water for later use. As noted earlier, flooding, though at times catastrophic, is necessary for the survival of oases life and Ilahiane (2004) argues that water collected by the dam, although limited, is water that can no longer be utilized by oasis farmers thus creating another area of contention between Agricultural Ministry officials and local oasis dwellers. In addition, the government has pursued an agricultural policy developed to help support industrial growth in its major cities. This particular strategy is also born from the declension myth established by the French and was initially implemented in an effort to promote France's own industrial growth. Except that Morocco's actual ecological history indicates that it is not capable of a sustainable large scale agricultural economy. Indeed, this policy has instead resulted in an increase in drought hazard and a general

decline in Morocco's ability to be self-sufficient with regard to grain and cereal production and a series of subsequent food crises.

This narrative of environmental decline and desertification in areas such as Akka, Zagora and Tafilalet is so entrenched and ubiquitous that it dominates the contemporary policy debates regarding current environmental problems. The notion that local agricultural practices are especially adapted to local climate conditions impact is often disregarded when developing all manner of interventions implemented in the name of long term sustainability. Bilal's project is but one example of the type of work sponsored by NGOs located in southern Morocco that stress conservation through the use of fuel efficient ovens and water security. Although these are quality projects, the language used to market them as necessary is that of crisis. Similar to global environmental concerns, deforestation, desertification and ultimate oasis annihilation are presented as inevitable if proper agricultural and environmental practices are not implemented. More significantly, these apocalyptic outcomes are perceived as a direct result of local practices as opposed to global climate change, macro level national agricultural strategy or simply as part of a regular drought cycle. In reality, there has been no long term research into the relative "health" of the Akka oasis because the environmental declension narrative is so thoroughly integrated and is generally assumed as a given with the notable exception being the opinions of villagers such as Ahmed who believe in the possibility of extending agricultural practices.³⁹ Furthermore, these "improvement programs" deliberately ignore the political-economic and social processes that originally marginalized the populations that the programs are designed to help. Tania Li Murray describes it thusly:

³⁹ As noted earlier, most NGOs were unwilling to invest in Ahmed's oasis reclamation project because of their belief that previous agricultural practices had overextended the limits of the oasis resulting in the current state of erosion overlooking the possibility that villagers had abandoned farming because of opportunities elsewhere, e.g. jobs in the north, or that the oasis is mired in a regular drought cycle.

Although the design studies clearly identified processes such as increasing landlessness, impoverishment, debt accumulation...and practices such as corruption, illegal logging, stealing with impunity, incompetent planning...much of this knowledge was excluded (Li 2007, p. 154).

NGOs often exacerbate this failure by consigning the poorest and most marginalized people to the least profitable development alternatives. The elephant in the room that NGOs and aid agencies are avoiding is the seemingly blatant contradictions of capitalism. Indeed, if there is an actual solution to the problems of these marginalized communities it will probably require a total realignment of global economic prerogatives including a return to subsistence based agriculture as opposed to the current dependence on the cash crops.

The actual environmental reality is that northwest Africa is particularly susceptible to drought. According to Will Swearingen (1996), since the beginning of the French Protectorate in 1912, Morocco has experienced 27 years of agricultural drought. Drought is also not just a modern phenomenon as Morocco has endured 49 major drought related famines since the arrival of the Arabs in the seventh century (Swearingen 1996, p. 23). Furthermore, even when Morocco does not suffer significant drought conditions, farmers face precipitation patterns that do not actually display any remarkable pattern. According to Lawrence Rosen, between the years 1956 to 1958 in the region of Sefrou just south of Fez in the North of Morocco, there was an annual average rainfall of 55.6 millimeters in October, the primary planting season. However, in October 1956 there was only 7 millimeters of rain while in the following year there was 105 millimeters of rain (Rosen 1979, p. 10). The erratic rainfall of Northwest Africa was demonstrated more recently in 1988 when Morocco enjoyed its largest ever cereals harvest while Tunisia, its neighbor to the northeast, endured drought related crop failures and food shortages (Swearingen 1996, p. 20). According to Clifford Geertz, “not only is year-to-year variation in rainfall enormous, but also is the within year shape of it. To be a weatherman

in...Morocco...you need to be able to penetrate the mind of God (Geertz 2008, p. 191).

Unfortunately, the drought hazards experienced in the Maghreb are becoming more common and there is a concern that drought will increase as a result of global climate change. Climate change models indicate that drought hazards in Northwest Africa will increase as a result of global warming.⁴⁰ One particular model estimated a decline in precipitation by as much as 10 percent (Swearingen 1996, p. 17). During my two and half year stay in Akka, there was a total of three days of rain.⁴¹

Ironically, despite the concerns of climate change, most of the drought hazards experienced by Morocco have been the result of a schizophrenic development strategy implemented by the Moroccan government. Following independence the Moroccan government kept prices for its staple food crops artificially low. The rationale was that cheap food would allow for wages to be kept low thereby promoting urban industrial growth. However, an unintended effect of these price controls was that low crop prices acted as a deterrent to cereal farmers, resulting in declines in production and increased indebtedness because Morocco had to borrow money in order to purchase foreign produced cereal crops (Swearingen 1996, p. 27). Following a series of riots resulting from food shortages in the early 1980s, the government shifted gears and artificially raised cereal crop prices to twice the world market price in order to boost production and become more agriculturally self-sufficient. This prompted a dramatic increase in overall yields from 3.8 million tons in 1984 to 6.6 million tons by 1991. It also resulted in an increase in the overall land used for cereal production from 4.4 million hectares to

⁴¹ The three days it did rain resulted in significant flooding that cut off travel in and out of the village for several days in the spring of 2002. The river, which had always been a sea of stones, literally became a raging torrent. The flood produced a small celebration as everyone gathered on the river's edge and watched the water rush past. It also marked an end to a long drought period and the possibility of a better harvest later that spring.

5.4 million hectares. However, the increased yields did not come without a cost. The high prices promoted the cultivation of marginal farmlands prone to desertification and the reduction of fields left in fallow, leaving Morocco even more vulnerable to drought. Consequently, the 1992 harvest, one year following a record 1991 harvest, was the worst in a decade (Swearingen 1996).

This combination of environmental constraints imposed by the desert and a lack of a sustainable rural development strategy makes migration from rural areas such as Akka an economic imperative as there are simply not enough economic opportunities available via agriculture, small business or government to survive without leaving the village. Rural areas dominated by Berber speakers in the High Atlas Mountains and the southern pre-Saharan provinces feel these effects more than other regions and demonstrate the highest levels of poverty. Among the rural population, 63 percent have no water, 87 percent are without electricity, 93 percent have no access to health services and 65 percent are illiterate (Crawford 2005). Dale Eickelmann suggests that the poverty in rural areas is exacerbating rural-urban migration resulting in the creation of shanty towns commonly referred to as *bidonvilles* in and around cities such as Casablanca, Salé and Rabat (Knauss 1990, p. 436). People prefer the squalor of urban slums than the economic desperation which prevails in the countryside. There are additional studies which suggest that the poorest tend to migrate less than those who are slightly better off. People do not necessarily migrate to flee economic deprivation but because of the belief that they can find a better or more stable livelihood (de Haas 2007, p. 18). The desire to migrate is dependent upon an individual's ever-changing aspirations. Aspirations, according to Hein de Haas, "are typically not constant, but tend to increase with 'developmental' improvements in education and access to information (de Haas 2007, p. 18). In other words,

rural development and the access to information now available because of globalization have intensified the desire for migration.

This seems to apply to international as well as internal migration. Rural development and infrastructure programmes – such as the proverbial road construction project – can have the contradictory effect of stimulating migration...In this light it is not surprising that the attempts by...development NGOs and governments to stop the *rural exodus*...typically fail, or even have the opposite effect (de Haas 2007, p. 19).

If the economic opportunities of “sending communities” do not increase at a greater rate than the economic aspirations of its residents, then significant migration will continue because people will believe they can achieve a better life elsewhere, even if that reality does not actually exist (de Haas 2007, p. 19). De Haas’ research lends credence to earlier scholarship which suggested that infrastructure improvements initiated by the French and subsequently maintained and further promoted by the post-colonial government created an economic environment that allowed for migration to be considered a viable option for economic survival. It is this variable that compelled Ahmed’s son Brahim to find his future in Guilmin as opposed to the limited economic opportunities provided by NGO development projects.

The convergence of all these factors has produced a dramatic demographic shift in Moroccan society. The migration of Berbers and Haratin from Akka is part of a much larger trend of urbanization that began with Morocco’s independence from France. In 1956, the rural population of Morocco measured 71 percent of the overall population. Beginning in 1960 the percentage of the rural population in comparison to the overall population began to decline so that as of 2006, the rural population measured only 41 percent of the total population. In fact, since 2000, the rural population has begun to decline in actual numbers as it has demonstrated a negative growth rate of one to two percent. Contrast this with Moroccan cities which have displayed a growth rate of almost four to five percent since 1960 (World Development Indicators

Online 2007). This transition from a predominately rural population to a predominately urban one is also supported by the growth in the non-agricultural sectors of the Moroccan economy. While overall agricultural employment has declined to 43.1 percent from 78.1 percent in 1960, employment in jobs consistent with increased urbanization such as construction, industry, communications, transport and services has grown (Sabagh 1993, p. 32).

How do these macro-level factors impact the residents of the Akka oasis? How have the shifting dynamics of Morocco's efforts toward modernization as well as its attempts to reconcile itself with its colonial past coalesce to produce the complex cultural system that is Akka. In the following section I will begin to delineate how these larger processes have altered the landscape in Akka.

Cultural Consequences

After the war with the Polisario ended in the 1980s, the Moroccan government finally invested in the single lane paved road which now connects Tata Province with the rest of Morocco.⁴² Although the road was sometimes closed as a result of flooding it provided safe and convenient access to the world and contributed further to the migratory push.⁴³ When I arrived in Akka, there were two daily buses which went to Rabat and Casablanca and a third bus that went to Ouarzazate where it was possible to find buses to cities such as Fez and Er Rachidia. One of the more entrepreneurial companies, a Tata based firm named *El-Bani*, owned the route from Ouarzazate to Tan Tan and was able to open up a third route from Tata to Marrakesh. There were so many regular routes that Ahmed's son Brahim was able to return home every weekend with relative ease and migrants from further afield in the cities of Fez and Tangier did not have to spend so many months away from home. Regular transport combined with the introduction of modern telecommunications allowed Ahmed to manage his family's business in Fez and still spend a majority of his time in L'Kasbat. And for all of his talk about wanting to see the world, Brahim was still a regular at his family's dinner table.

The busiest travel days were those surrounding the main Moroccan holidays, Aid al'Kbir and Aid al'Sghir, literally the big and little Aids. Aid al'Sghir is the festival marking the end of Ramadan and Aid al'Kbir was the Moroccan Arabic neologism for the feast of Abraham which falls after the Hajj, the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca. Aid al Kbir falls approximately ninety days after the end of Ramadan. On these days, everyone travels home for a week to spend time with family and reconnect with their friends. For young men and women it also is a time to meet and

⁴² The Polisario is a Spanish acronym that stands for *Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro*. They were Saharawi rebels fighting for independence for the Western Sahara, a territory currently occupied by Morocco. They are currently under a U.N. monitored ceasefire awaiting a referendum to decide whether or not to remain a part of Morocco or become independent.

⁴³ Although seemingly mundane, the importance of safety should not be overlooked. Southeast Morocco was, for centuries, rocked by instability and banditry.

set the stage for possible marriage. A Moroccan friend of mine who works in Chicago budgets his time and money so that he can return home for the end of Ramadan and stay long enough to attend Aid al Kbir festivities. Travel during these two weeks of the year is incredibly difficult and bus stations and train stations throughout the country are absolutely mobbed and even tickets to an out of the way place such as Tata province are difficult to find.⁴⁴ This effort to get home is also displayed during other times of the year. My Moroccan counterparts in the dispensaire in L’Kasbat spent their yearly holiday at home. Indeed, one of them spent his summer holiday in his home near Zagora, one of the few places in Morocco that is actually hotter than Tata Province in the summer time.

During my first Aid al’ Kbir in Morocco I spent the afternoon with Ahmed and his family. His family had swelled to three times its normal size as I was introduced to brothers, uncles and cousins who had been in Fez and Marrakesh since the previous Aid al’Kbir. It was a momentous occasion and everyone in the village seemed to have a spring in their step as they travelled from house to house greeting people they had not seen in the past year. At one point during the feast the conversation inevitably turned toward comparisons between Morocco and the United States and Ahmed asked me if we had anything similar in the United States. The analogy my Moroccan supervisors always used to explain the significance and fanfare of their holidays was to compare it to Thanksgiving and Christmas in the United States.⁴⁵ In terms of the amount of people on the roads attempting to get home the analogy was suitable; however, it did not quite capture the true essence of Aid al’Kbir and Aid al’Sghir because the effort made by

⁴⁴ I made the mistake of travelling during Aid-al-Kbir. I fought with thousands of other Moroccans in the main bus station of Casablanca trying to find a ticket for Agadir, the closest major city to Tata. All tickets for buses directly to Tata had been sold out.

⁴⁵ This comparison was particularly appropriate during my service in Morocco because both years Ramadan fell in December and Aid al’Sghir coincided with Christmas. Ever the capitalists, Coca Cola issued special Ramadan editions of their bottles that share a remarkable resemblance to their special Holiday bottles from Europe and the United States

Akkawis to make their way home and the joy they felt in being there epitomized the Moroccan sense of place and rootedness.

Traditionally the anthropological understanding of space has always been rooted in images of barriers and borders and often takes on the appearance of a map or globe that neatly delineates one nation or culture from another. Furthermore, the cultures and nations of the world are conceived of in the plural because we conceive them as divided and separate from one another. Subsequently, as Malkki points out, “[T]he conceptual practice of spatial segmentation is not only reflected in narratives of “cultural diversity” but also in the international celebration of diversity” (Malkki 1997 p. 58). Eric Wolf (1982) used the metaphor of the billiard table to offer criticism of this perspective suggesting that anthropologists view the world as a billiard table with the differently colored balls representing the various cultures of the world constantly bouncing off one another. It is because of this segmentation that the use of de Crèvecoeur’s metaphor of the melting pot to describe the United States has been replaced by that of the tossed salad. Each individual vegetable maintains its own identity despite being part of a larger whole.

Related to the spatial discontinuity of peoples and cultures is the more abstract idea that nations and cultures are rooted in the land. The metaphorical connection between place and space has long been a standard part of nationalist discourse and in global hotspots such as Kosovo, Palestine and the Western Sahara place becomes an essential part of culture and nationhood.

Culture and nation are kindred concepts: they are not only spatializing but also territorializing; they both depend on a cultural essentialism that readily takes on arborescent forms (Malkki 1997, p. 58).

The territorialization of culture has also been a key component of ethnography because anthropologists have the tendency to tie people to places with the designation of terms such as

indigenous, autochthonous and native. Arjun Appadurai refers to this as the “incarceration” of the native (Appadurai 1988, p. 37). Natives are people who are from and belong to certain places. The anthropologist or the traveler never refers to himself or herself as native, even in their own homes, because the term native implies confinement while the anthropologist is free to move.

The incarceration of the native also takes on an ecological bent as natives are depicted as being specifically adapted to an environment that confines them to their place. Frederic Barth (2008) used the concept of an ecological niche to describe ethnic relations in the Swat Valley in Pakistan. Each ethnic group filled a particular ecological niche that was capable of sustaining each group’s social and political organization. Barth did account for movement across ethnic boundaries within the Swat Valley but argued that the nature of the social hierarchy between the three groups inhibited significant movement. Julian Steward utilized his theory of cultural ecology and levels of socio-cultural integration to testify on behalf of the U.S. government in front of the Indiana Claims Commission. In court he argued that the environment in which they lived prevented the Shoshone from integrating at anything above the basic family unit. Steward essentially condemned the Uintah Ute to forage the perilous lands of the Great Basin forever. In many instances, the incarceration of the native is done with the best intentions. For example, the Kayapo fight for land tenure rights over their traditional homeland in Amazonia became an international cause célèbre because they were viewed as the guardians of the rainforest who needed to be protected in order to help save the Earth. Their indigeneity became valorized to such a point that any attempt to break through this barrier was viewed as a betrayal of the planet (Conklin and Graham 1995).

In the Moroccan context, the effort on the part of the French to divide Morocco between Arab and Berbers was natural because it fit nicely with the traditional understanding of the world that was full of nice, distinct boundaries. There are many maps of Morocco that demarcate the space between Arab and Berber speakers. These generally take on the guise of amorphously shaped amoebas overlaid onto images of Morocco and North Africa delineating specifically where Berber and Arabic are spoken. Furthermore, Malkki's critique illustrating the tendency of cultural descriptions to take on "aborescent form" holds true as Moroccan anthropological discourse as often depicted Berbers as being constant and rooted to place. The Protectorate discourse described Berbers as "France's sequoias," deeply entrenched in their territories (Hoffman 2008, p 25) while others have characterized Berbers as a constant, "like the palms in the oasis and the sands of the desert" (Brett and Fentress 1997, p. 6-7). Of course, part of this is due to the fact that history has been written around the events of the invaders be they French, Arab or Roman while the Berbers remain mere witnesses to history, a remarkable feat considering that several of the great Moorish dynasties of al-Andalusia were Berber in origin.⁴⁶ But anthropologists such as Gellner also contributed to this mindset by arguing that Berber society is "segmentary and premodern and thus isolated from the Moroccan state and nation" (Crawford 2006, p. 178). For the Haratin, the historical confinement to place has been even more complete as their existence has been interlinked with that of *Ismkhan* despite the fact they have been present in Moroccan society since at least before the Arab invasion. They have literally been a people without history imprisoned by the desert and their place within the social hierarchy.

⁴⁶ Although I referenced this point earlier I want to reiterate the efforts by chroniclers and historians to incorporate the Berbers into the genealogy of Islam. It was only recently that the national government in Rabat officially recognized them as the indigenous people of North Africa with the establishment of IRCAM.

The return of Ahmed's entire family and indeed, the return of almost all of the sons of the village suggest the historical incarceration of Berbers and Haratin to their traditional homeland is no longer applicable if it ever was. Migration resulting from environmental constraints and emerging economic opportunities in the north has resulted in several consequences for the process of ethnicization. First, men who relocate their families to the cities retain their Berber speech; however, they have historically not made the effort to pass Berber speech on to successive generations, a fact recognized by Gellner. Because Berberness has been so intertwined with language, the inability to speak Berber or the failure to pass on Berber to successive generations translates to their children no longer being Berber. For example, an Akkawi family living in France returned for the holiday. The father relocated with his wife and children and his son did not speak Tashelhait; he spoke only French and identified himself as a Frenchman from Marseilles. I met another husband and wife who came from different backgrounds in that he was Ashelhi and she was Tamazight. Their children grew up speaking Arabic as a compromise. When I questioned them about the loss of their Berberness, they were not overly concerned and echoed Ahmed's point about the actual value of speaking Berber. The process of cultural reproduction, or, in this case, cultural transformation is not always this smooth and will often result in fractured family relationships, most often between parents and children. The discord between first and second generation immigrants is well documented both here in the United States and Europe. The Berber couple was from the city of Ouarzazate and did not have the same antagonistic relationship with Arabs that rural Berber migrants did. For a Haratin like Hajj Ahmed, in addition to the fact that Berber had little value in the linguistic marketplace, the essentialized Berber culture that has developed since independence in response to the Arab nationalist movement was not his own. Indeed, Berberness maintained a somewhat

negative connotation because it was representative of something that had historically denied him *al-asl*.

For Akkawi Berbers, however, the possible loss of their language and the movement away from the *tamazirt* is a growing concern.⁴⁷ Hoffman (2008) delineates the laundry list of concerns for Ashelhi regarding the future of their language. Young Ashelhi men working in the cities prefer to speak Arabic; writing Tashelhait seems impossible; Ishalhin from different areas have no solidarity around being Ashelhi and the national curriculum, until very recently, prohibited teaching in Tashelhait (Hoffman 2008, p. 55). Part of the response to the fear of losing their language and cultural heritage has been the fashioning of a national and, at times, international Berber movement organized around language and the experience of being Berber and speaking Berber in relation to Arabic speakers. The movement is not directly tied in with any specific place and, in this sense, is imaginary, “structured not only by a common heritage, origin, and, language, but also by similar structural positions relative...to those in positions of authority” (Hoffman 2008, p. 58). Logistically, however, this attempt toward a cohesive Moroccan Berber identity runs into serious problems because what it means to be Berber is different based on place. There is no real cohesive material for Berber nationalism beyond the fact they are not Arab and not everyone experiences “Berber” in relation to the “other.” In this instance the role of “other” is played by Arab speakers. There is also the inconvenient fact that there are three distinct Berber languages spoken in Morocco.

For Berber migrants, the city has become a metaphor for all things Arab and is representative of the breakdown of Berber communities because everyone is looking out for their individual interests. “In the rural father’s view...the **community** was visible, tangible, face-to-

⁴⁷ *Tamazirt* (pl. *timizar*) is the Berber word for homeland, place and countryside. Also, this word should not be confused with *Tamazight*, the Berber dialect spoken in the High Atlas Mountains, the Middle Atlas and the Tafilalt.

face, and performed; its members were in contact, under constant scrutiny, and this contact strengthened networks of interest” (Hoffman 2008, p. 55). For Hoffman’s informants, community required shared overlapping interests that bounded people together. In this manner the Berber notion of the *tamazirt* becomes significant in what it means to be Berber and the maintenance of the *tamazirt* becomes critical in perpetuating Berberness, particularly Tashelhait. Indeed, the *tamazirt* has been objectified to such a degree that in many places it has become the symbol par excellence of what it means to be Berber.

Amazigh activists in Morocco and abroad, as well as Radio Agadir programming in Tashelhait, presented and represented the Tashelhait-speaking community to itself and to Arab Moroccan, drawing heavily on images and sounds from the countryside to do so and erasing distinctions between individual villages (Hoffman 2002, p. 940).

The *tamazirt* stands in stark contrast to the cities which are dominated by the linguistic and cultural hegemony of the Arab majority. The *tamazirt* is the single place where there is no disadvantage to being a Berber and it is the Berber speaking man’s attachment to his *tamazirt* which makes the linguistic assimilation into the Arab majority less certain (Hoffman 2008).

The physical manifestation of this emotional attachment in the *tamazirt* can be seen both in the yearly migration for the holidays as well as in the manner migrants invest their money earned while working in the north. In addition to donating time and money to the village associations similar to Ahmed’s, Akkawi Berbers have also indulged in consumption patterns in line with those of the west and will often invest in large homes for their families or small businesses such as cafes or *hanout*-s. The village is under constant construction as old mud walls are slowly replaced with cement, satellite dishes are added on to people’s rooftops and new houses were springing up in the few remaining open areas. Many families will begin construction even if they do not have enough money to complete the project for many years. New constructions sit unfinished until enough money is saved in order to begin again.

However, the consequence of the objectification and valorization of the *tamazirt* as necessary for the maintenance of the Berber language is that Amazigh women and girls become responsible for transmitting the Berber language onto younger generations. Because of the linguistic hegemony of Moroccan Arabic, outsiders no longer take the time to learn Tamazight and it is very rare that a native Arabic speaker becomes a Tashelhait dominant speaker as an adult. In addition, migrant men will generally speak Moroccan Arabic when they are abroad and it is often the case that the children of Tamazight speaking parents who live in urban areas do not continue to speak Tamazight. Thus, Berber women have become the sole repository for the maintenance of the Berber language. More importantly, despite their significant position, these women do not take part in the broader discourse on Berber identity. Because they only speak with other monolingual Berber speakers, women are not compelled to articulate a particular Berber identity distinct from their Arab countrymen. Given the extremely difficult nature of life in rural areas and the strong correlation between the Berber language and the *tamazirt*, the question remains whether or not speaking Berber or even being Berber is important to rural women. For these women, the *tamazirt* is identified with the labor of tilling the fields, raising children and managing the household. Most of them long to move away from the hard life of the countryside and live with their husbands and sons in the big cities in the north (Hoffman 2008).

The conflation of the *tamazirt* with Berberness also contributes to the continued marginalization of Berbers in broader Moroccan society. Despite the fact that large percentages of Berber speakers live and work in cities and have participated in government, Berberness continues to be constructed as equivalent to the backwardness of the countryside in the public sphere. Following independence, Arab elites assumed the places left vacant by the French and rural areas occupied primarily by Berber speakers and Haratin were consigned to the space of the

pre-modern other. Despite the effort to fix their villages with the accoutrements of modernity, essentializing the rural *tamazirt* as the ultimate symbol of what it means to be Berber makes it difficult to argue that Berbers are able to be both Berber as well as modern citizens capable of participation in the Moroccan public sphere. The stereotype of Berbers as backward is perpetuated and the blame for the failure of alleviating rural poverty is shifted onto Berber communities. Berbers become responsible for their poverty. Social inequalities such as the lack of access to schools and health care are explained away as something intrinsic to the ignorance and superstition of rural Berber culture and Arabs are able to maintain the hegemony over the definition of modernity in Morocco they have held since independence.

Similar to Berbers, Haratin families like Ahmed's are equally invested in the long term health of the *tamazirt*. However, because they are not invested in the stability of a status quo that left them marginalized, the Haratin have taken advantage of the opportunities presented by the attempts toward industrial development made by both the French colonial government and the post-colonial government in Rabat and invested their remittances into land acquisition and farming intensification despite the lack of any real economic return. Instead,

[a]ccess to land "breeds" empowerment, identity, roots, and origin, *al-asl*. Without land one has no rights to speak of, and one is "like a walking donkey," and "your value or *qimtak* is not even zero in the eyes of the community" (Ilahiane 2001, p. 384).

The Haratin are buying *al-asl*. In addition, Haratin are also purchasing water pumps to avoid participating in the legal hassle of the division of water for irrigation. This effort to subvert traditional oasis society has also been reinforced by the establishment of corporate communities on the part of Haratin. In the Ziz oasis, this is represented by the organization of a burial fund in certain villages so that individual Haratin do not die in debt and leave their children at the mercy of their Arab and Berber patrons. In Akka it takes the form of village associations like Ahmed's

that are organized to try and overcome some of the village wide problems. As noted earlier, a majority of the projects are geared toward maintenance of the common property areas of the oasis such as planting new palm trees to replace those destroyed by *al-bayud*. They also use their funds to purchase school supplies for village children.

The development of Haratin corporate communities in Morocco to confront village wide problems is a dramatic change because historically, the access to public resources was governed by a complex code of laws to ensure access and prevent private owners from exceeding their water quota. In his short essay regarding the allocation of water for irrigation in Morocco, Geertz points out that although people “draw upon common water resources, they do so in a way about as far from the public corporation...as it is possible to get and still not fall into Hobbsean war” (Geertz 2008,, p. 196). Peasant corporate communities are a subject that has received considerable attention within environmental anthropology because local actors can have a significant impact on land use and cover change. Eric Wolf (1957) argued that corporate communities are developed primarily as a defense mechanism against external threats or internal domination by elites. In the sense that some Haratin are organizing against their traditional local oppressors, Wolf’s theory holds true to form. However, these corporate communities are limited in their scope in that they do not extend beyond the boundaries of each individual village. In Akka, each association is focused on the needs of their particular village and is disinclined to establish an inter-village association to address oasis wide issues. Nor is there a broader Moroccan wide notion of being Haratin or Haratin-ness. In addition, unlike the traditional homeland of the Kayapó, Akka is not contested space in the traditional sense. Although Haratin are challenging Berber hegemony in the *tamazirt*, Akkawis do not have to defend their land tenure rights against large multi-national corporations or a national government intent on

developing their land for the benefit of international markets. Although the activities of village associations are closely monitored by the national government--represented locally by the gendarmerie--and the legal restrictions regarding why an association can be formed are rather onerous, peasant corporations are not organized to challenge the legitimacy of the government in Morocco. Sheridan (1997) also illustrates the point that Wolf often overlooks the impact of local ecological and demographic factors. In this particular instance, the localized construction of a Haratin identity and its subsequent representation in the form of village associations, heretofore non-existent, was a result of political and ecological factors completely outside of their control: the access to jobs in areas such as construction and the decline in value of small-plot farms resulting from both ecological decline and colonial and post-colonial development schemes. Sheridan's theoretical stance is similar to that of Robert Netting (1976) who suggested that long-standing corporate ownership was more indicative of environmental adaptation than a response to external forces.

The purchase of *al-asl* on the part of the Haratin has not gone unchallenged by their Berber neighbors. The acquisition of land and the subsequent expansion of political power is perceived as a threat to a Berber culture already marginalized by a government policy of Arabization because despite the many cultural traits, including language, shared by Berbers and Haratin, Haratin view the cultural Berber movement with suspicion.

*Iqbliyin*⁴⁸ living in semi-urban areas where Amazigh activism is particularly present feel excluded from the social and economic promotion opened by Berber politics, being under-represented within the membership of IRCAM, the leadership of Amazigh cultural associations, and the ranks of journalists and other engaged Berber intellectuals now living in Rabat and abroad (Silverstein 2010, p. 92).

This fact is demonstrated by Ahmed's reticence in pushing for broader Berber rights in our discussions regarding the needs of the village. This reluctance is fueled further by a

⁴⁸ As noted in the introduction, *Iqbliyin* is another term for Haratin.

rearticulation of racist language on the part of Berber activists that suggests that the expansion of Haratin political rights marks the “death” of Berber culture. Berber activists have organized large scale protests against the transfer of “Berber” land to “Black” Haratin merchants for this reason. And although there has never been overt violence between Berbers and Haratin in Akka, tensions boiled over into open conflict in Er-Rachidia in 2003 when several Berber student activists were knifed for refusing to participate in a pro-Palestinian rally. Their refusal was based on their belief that support for the Palestinians represented another example of Arabic nationalist hegemony similar to that taking place in Morocco. However, because the perpetrators were Haratin, the incident was perceived as more closely related to political disagreements between local Haratin and Berbers than the broader issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Silverstein 2010).

For Akkawi Arabs, the ecological problems of the oasis and the preservation of the *tamazirt* are not of immediate concern because their identity as Arabs is secure regardless of the health of the oasis. The oasis does not maintain the same level of symbolic capital for Arab speaking Akkawis, and it has little impact on their daily life aside from providing water and an occasional walk to clear your mind. Subsequently, village associations are more concerned with obtaining books and computers for school children as opposed to focusing on planting trees or preventing women from doing laundry in the river. Nor does the increased marginalization of the Berber culture and language or the outright refusal to recognize the contributions of Berbers as intrinsically Berber carry any broader significance for Arab speaking Akkawis. Indeed, until 2001, it was officially government policy to deny the existence of Berbers as a unique cultural group. In addition, the Arab speaking villages of Ait Anter, Akka and El Kebebat are unable to practice any level of subsistence agriculture. Because of environmental degradation these

villages are no longer connected to the oasis. Similar to the land near L’Kasbat, there is a large swath of abandoned land measuring approximately 200m² directly north of Akka that separates the Arab communities from the oasis. This patch of desert is also littered with the crumbling remains of mud walls that at one point demarcated individual farming plots and irrigation ditches. There are a few families with the wherewithal to invest in mechanized water pumps and subsequently engage in some level of small scale agriculture but this is done more as a symbol of status than one of need. Consequently, Arab speaking villages stand in stark contrast with their Berber and Haratin neighbors. The buildings of Ait Anter, Al Kebebat and Akka are built with cement and cinderblocks as opposed to mud which dominates in the Berber villages.⁴⁹ Homes in the Arab dominated areas of Akka are all equipped with running water. Although some of the wealthier Berber families have running water, most still depend on wells dug by hand. Arab children will often finish high school, leave for university and attempt to find a job within the civil service or establish their own small business. Even Arab girls are generally allowed to finish high and many will attend the teachers college in Tata after graduation.⁵⁰ Berber speaking girls often stop after primary school. Furthermore, because the junior high school and high school are located in Akka center, many Berber speaking boys do not continue beyond primary school.

Many of the contrasts between Arab and Berber villages are indicative of the status of Arabs as modern Moroccan citizens. Unlike Berbers and Haratin, they have access to the basic utilities and amenities that we associate with modernity, a consequence of the marginalization of Berbers following independence and the historic marginalization of Black Moroccans. During

⁴⁹ As noted earlier, this has begun to change somewhat because money from remittances is used to build houses out of brick and mortar as opposed to mud. However, a majority of buildings are still built with mud.

⁵⁰ The teachers college is a school where people are trained to become primary school teachers. It is generally a two year program. There are no official statistics. The author worked in an after school center in Akka and interviews with girls indicated it was their plan to enroll in the teachers college.

the colonial period, the French established clear criteria for modernity. Through the introduction of modern transportation, healthcare, agricultural techniques and schooling among many other things, the French demonstrated their status as modern liberal individuals. As Chatterjee (1993) notes, to advance and to produce is to be modern. Conversely, the mythical, degrading portrait of the colonized becomes accepted as reality and they confirm the role assigned to them by the colonizer (Memmi 1965). Through the denial of a history worthy of entextualization and allowing space only for mimicry, the colonizer denies the colonized a place in modernity. In the case of Morocco, the colonized were separated into the two distinct categories of Berbers and Arabs where Arabs were consigned to the lower tiered category. In the post-colonial period, the role of the modern citizen was assumed by Arab nationalists and their monopolization of modernity that was once the sole preserve of French colonialists has provided them the hegemonic power to establish Morocco as an Arab-Islamic society regardless of the existence of millions of Berber speakers.

Conclusion

We wanted something thoroughly and uncompromisingly foreign—foreign from top to bottom—foreign from center to circumference...nothing to remind us of any other people or any other land under the sun...And lo! In Tangier we have found it.

--Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*

Following September 11th the Bush administration had the almost impossible task of trying to explain and make sense of what happened for a nation struggling to understand the whys and wherefores of one of the greatest catastrophes in the history of the United States. However, instead of attempting to delve into the complex muddle that characterizes relations between the West and the Muslim world (if such categories actually exist) Bush chose to cloak himself in essentialist “us versus them” rhetoric and embark on a war that at several points throughout the last several years has threatened to involve almost every Middle Eastern country. Of course, choosing to launch an invasion of Afghanistan and, subsequently, Iraq, might have been the easiest and safest choice to make politically because the narrative against violent Muslims was already well established in the American psyche. In the United States it is almost impossible not to think about the images of Arab violence that seem to permeate all levels of our political and popular discourse: Munich; the marine barracks bombing in Lebanon in 1982; Pan Am Flight 103; suicide bombers; the Lebanese Civil War; the U.S.S. Cole; the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania; Al Qaeda; Osama bin Laden; the first and second Intifada; Saddam Hussein; September 11th. Furthermore, it answered the basic reflexive desire on the part of Americans to strike back against those who had attacked us. A fact made more salient by the actions of U.S. citizens to celebrate the recent death of Osama Bin Laden as if the United States had just defeated the Soviet Union for the gold medal. The actual efficacy of Bush’s

strategy has proven to be horribly wrong as evidenced by the fact that ten years and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives later, U.S. troops are still stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

One of the more subtle consequences of the Bush administration's global war on terror has been the triumph of what Edward Said⁵¹ refers to as "territorial reductive polarizations" (Said 1978, p. xxiii). Although the former President made some effort to distinguish between what he defined as moderate and liberal Muslims and the fundamentalists the United States was fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, the fact that the nineteen September 11th hijackers were Muslim and from Saudi Arabia compelled many Americans to search for answers in the Koran. Olivier Roy⁵² points out that after September 11th, English translations of the Koran became popular as Americans felt compelled to discover what it was exactly about Muslims that would make them believe it was somehow acceptable to kill thousands of innocent civilians (Roy 2004, p. 10). There were also those who bypassed any effort toward cultural understanding entirely and reacted to the crimes of September 11th by committing crimes of their own. According to FBI statistics, hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims increased by over 1700 percent after September 11th.⁵³ Congressman Rex Duncan, a Republican from Oklahoma, was one of 24 members of the Oklahoma state legislature that returned a gift copy of the Koran stating that Islam's holy book condoned murder. Taking this perspective to its extreme was Lieutenant General William Boykin. In 2003, while serving as the Deputy Under-Secretary for Defense, General Boykin equated Muslims with the devil when he suggested that terrorists targeted the United States because it was a Christian nation and its enemy in the war on terror was Satan.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Before his death in 2003 Edward Said was a Literature Professor at Columbia University. He was most well-known for his book *Orientalism* in which he strongly criticized the work of Middle Eastern scholars whose work was strongly tied to imperialism and therefore suspect.

⁵² Roy is a French Professor who has studied Muslim culture and politics throughout Asia. He has been particularly critical of the United States and its Middle East policy.

⁵³ Taken from BBC News online, 19 November 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2488829.stm>

⁵⁴ Taken from BBC News online, 17 October 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3199212.stm>

The former President's efforts to placate those who argued his administration was inciting unnecessary aggression between Islam and the West were, aside from being disingenuous, particularly inadequate. The conflict in the Middle East has never been about Islam per se; particularly when considering there are Palestinian Christians who have chosen to become suicide bombers. It is not a clash of civilizations as some might suggest⁵⁵ and is more closely linked to ethnicity and the nature of Arab politics and history than anything particular about the tenets of Islam.⁵⁶ Furthermore, as Olivier Roy sagely points out,

[t]he key question is not what the Koran says, but what Muslims think it says. Not surprisingly they disagree, while all stressing that the Koran is unambiguous and clear cut. The issue here is not Islam as a theological corpus, but the discourses and practices of Muslims (Roy 2004, p. 10).

Roy's argument is made more salient by the prominent lack of Middle Easterners taking part in conversations about the Middle East, a criticism best articulated by Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* (1979). According to Said, what it means to be "Oriental" has historically been defined by Western intellectuals who often ignored the emotions, insights and history of the actual people of the Orient (Said 1979, p. 8).⁵⁷

The Middle East--not to mention the "West" in its broadest sense--is an incredibly vast collection of peoples, history, language and culture that cannot be easily cached under the label Arab or Muslim or Oriental. Limiting the debate to a discussion of the values of the West versus those of Islam is absurd because it also assumes that Western values are universally accepted. Given the current political climate in the U.S., this is clearly not the case. However, this is the constant refrain that permeates our public discourse. Remarkably, it has been over a century

⁵⁵ The clash of civilizations is an idea first argued by Samuel P. Huntington who suggested cultural and religious difference would be the primary source of conflict following the Cold War (Huntington 1993)

⁵⁶ A majority of the world's Muslims are not actually Arab although Islam has always been perceived as Arab. The words have been interchangeable despite the existence of both Arab Christians and Arab Jews.

⁵⁷ Said uses the term "Oriental" to refer to the people and culture of the Middle East and North Africa. In the United States the term "Oriental" is generally used in reference to the Far Eastern countries of Japan, China and Korea.

since Mark Twain wrote his chapter about the Moors and Morocco yet his understanding of the Middle East and North Africa, in many ways, still illustrates the West's understanding of Arabs and Islam: foreign, different, and often violent. One of the reasons for this is because it is intellectually easier to understand the events of September 11th and all that has proceeded from them as part of the unchanging dichotomy that defines relations between the East and the West. People often subscribe to an unchanging definition of culture and natural identity. Images of the U.S. military valiantly defending freedom and liberty against Muslim terrorists fit this idealized reality for most Americans almost perfectly until the evidence of torture surfaced and began to cast doubt.

And yet cultures do not grow and evolve in a vacuum. They are constantly changing, interacting and borrowing from one another; a fact brought home for me when I had the pleasure of breaking fast during Ramadan at a McDonalds in the city of Marrakech, the old imperial capital of Morocco; or, in the case of Berbers, the evolution of an international Berber rights movement when, only sixty years ago, they did not view themselves as ethnically distinct from their Arab neighbors; or the growth of Haratin corporate communities as a means of solving Haratin specific problems where previously notions of Haratin-ness were not articulated. Although the glaring obviousness of this reality is self-evident, there are many who still cling to notions of ethnic absolutism or broad cultural generalizations. One need only look at the most recent U.S. Presidential campaign in which John McCain and Sarah Palin suggested that certain parts of the United States were more "American" than others. The primary reason for this is simple fear. It is scary for many people to try and comprehend that their cultural reality is not what they think. It is always shifting and evolving, hopefully for the better. It is this fear that often prompts so-called fundamentalists of all religious persuasions to respond violently to those

who challenge their religious dogma. Perhaps more importantly, is that the political reality of the early twenty-first century has not given people much maneuvering room. It is extraordinarily difficult to argue from the perspective of the perpetrators of September 11th, a fact emphasized by President Bush when he argued that there was no room for neutrality in the war on terror.⁵⁸ Consequently, people are forced to choose: eastern or western, Muslim or non-Muslim, American or anti-American, Israel or Palestine (Said 1979, p. 324). Nuance is not permitted.

When tourists come to Morocco they generally always make the obligatory trip into the *souk*, the labyrinth of stalls and vendors selling everything from carpets and pottery to fruits and vegetables. If you need it, chances are it is somewhere in the *souk* and tourists are looking for a small piece of authentic Morocco to bring home with them. Indeed, the *souk* represents “real” Morocco and people seek out the opportunity to sip a glass of mint tea and haggle over the proper price of a hand-made carpet. Except, in many respects, the *souk*-s in cities such as Marrakech are representative of the essentialist dichotomy epitomized by the policies of the Bush administration and people always falls into their pre-assigned roles of tourist, tout and merchant. This pantomime works in its own fashion as people walk away with what they are looking for. Unfortunately, however, everyone is often wearing a metaphorical mask that prevents any genuine exchange from taking place. The mass produced realities of culture that represent individuals in the public sphere hide the day to day processes that produce and reproduce culture in all of its many guises.

In the spring of 2002 I, along with several other Peace Corps volunteers in the desert provinces of Tata, Ouarzazate and Zagora organized a men’s conference in the city of Ouarzazate. The goal, stated broadly, was to bring villagers from the community level together in order to share ideas and dialogue about problems being faced by people living in rural areas

⁵⁸ Taken from CNN.com on 6 November 2001, <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/>

on the Saharan frontier. People living in these areas all faced similar issues related to desertification, lack of health care, lack of education and lack of jobs. I asked Ahmed to attend and share some of his insights and perhaps discuss some of the obstacles he had come across while trying to develop his various community projects. While he agreed that he might be presented with some new information that he might find useful he politely declined my invitation. This was not the first time Ahmed refused to work collaboratively with people outside of L' Kasbat. Earlier in my service Ahmed turned down even the mere suggestion of working with other villages just within the oasis of Akka. It seemed like an obvious choice to make in order to avoid making the same mistakes as others and to perhaps pool limited resources if the projects were similar in nature, particularly given the fact that everyone in Akka was impacted by the continued decline of the oasis.

From the limited perspective of the development worker I believe I was correct in thinking it would be beneficial to organize a more collaborative oasis wide process for addressing issues related to the possibility of environmental change. In addition, I had the full-fledged support--in the form of grant money--of my Moroccan supervisors in Rabat. What I did not recognize was the cultural stratification which prevented broader collaboration from taking place. The village of L' Kasbat was composed primarily of Haratin, while villages such as Ait Rehal or Agadir Ouzrou were also populated by Berbers who still retained a stake in the social hierarchy which limited the opportunities available to Haratin. Nor did I take into consideration the opinions of their Arab neighbors who may or may not recognize Berbers as a distinct ethnic group. And this is just within the confines of Akka; these variables become even more complicated when Tamazight speaking Berbers and Arabic speaking Haratin from other parts of Morocco are included in this equation. I do not want to suggest that the people of southern

Morocco are incapable of collectivity; the growing success of the February 20th movement against the current incarnation of the *makhzan* proves otherwise.⁵⁹ However, the broader discourse that locates both Moroccan Arabs and Moroccan Berbers as part of bigger trans-national human-rights movements reveals only a very limited truth as it blurs the localized day to day struggles of individuals like Ahmed and his family. Not only does it obscure the many ways in which identity is articulated locally it also hides how the trans-national movements of people and information impact and transform those articulations; in the case of Akka, it completely eliminates the contributions of Black Moroccans and Africans more generally to Moroccan society.

Yet, even when the contributions of Black Moroccans are foregrounded, their marginalization cannot be explained away by simply overlaying the Western categories of race onto the Moroccan landscape. Although the lower tiered status of Black Moroccans as *Ismkhan* or *Haratin* seems to suggest that being Black carries a similar stigma as it does in the West, this explanation proves unsatisfactory because unlike African descended communities in the diaspora that utilize Blackness as the signifier of a shared belief in the commonalities of Western racial oppression (Hanchard 2001), Black Moroccans, particularly in the case of the *Haratin*, have not articulated a shared cultural space as either a means of defense against their marginalization or a cultural space that is defined specifically as Black. Put simply, being Black in Morocco does not carry with it the same racial and cultural ramifications that it does in the West and offers a significant challenge to the politics of the African diaspora that often fall victim to the same type of cultural insiderism that it was created to combat. As Gilroy (1993) notes “the idea of blacks

⁵⁹ The February 20th Movement is the name given to the pro-democracy protestors in Morocco. The movement has utilized the momentum created by the ousting of Hosni Mubarek in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia in order to bring about significant democratic change in Morocco. So far, the King has publicly called for reform and the pro-reform movement has specifically not targeted the monarch for criticism. Calls for demonstrations continue despite the fact that they have been outlawed by authorities in Rabat.

as a national group or proto-national group with its own hermetically enclosed culture plays a key role...and the misplaced idea of a national interest gets invoked as a means to silence dissent and censor political debate when the incoherence and inconsistencies of Africological discourse are put on display”. All of this does not mean that race does not matter; in addition to Ahmed’s reticence in participating in projects outside of his natal village, Moroccan historical discourse continues to define Black Moroccans as being from outside of Morocco, specifically the space of sub-Saharan Africa. However, what it does indicate to us is the need to expand our understanding of Blackness and Africaness in order to incorporate Black identities that do not explicitly align themselves with the space of the African continent. How do we define Blackness and Africaness when it is outside of its traditional juxtaposition with Whiteness, Europe and the West? What I hope I have demonstrated is that the physical genetic trait of “black” skin and all that it represents culturally in the West loses some of its salience when placed into contexts like Morocco and that the boundaries which we have historically used to define Blackness or Whiteness become easily blurred forcing us to question whether or not these categories continue to be anthropologically useful and if they were ever useful in the first place.

This brings us back to the beginning. What does the place of Akka tell us about Morocco, about Africa and about global racial discourse more generally? Anthropologists, keenly aware of the historical role our discipline has played in the marginalization of colonial peoples, are reluctant to provide answers to such interminably vague questions and will generally opt to provide detail of specific localities in lieu of providing broad generalizations and I believe I have adhered to that tradition by making the answers to simple questions more difficult. However, despite the innate reflexivity that comes from being trained as an anthropologist, I do not want to simply dismiss Western conceptualizations of race because, as Ferguson (2006) argues, this principled stand by anthropologists including myself does little to alter the image of “Africa” or “North Africa” in public discourse and only

results in the marginalization of anthropology from policy discussions regarding the African continent (Ferguson 2006). Gilroy again:

Commentators from all sides of political opinion...[fall] back on the idea of cultural nationalism, on the overintegrated conceptions of culture which presents immutable, ethnic differences as an absolute break in the histories and experiences of “black” and “white” people (Gilroy 1993, p. 2).

Here, instead, I want to argue for Gilroy’s theory of hybridity or creolization in which all of the “processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse” (Gilroy 1993, p. 2) are accounted for and embodied in individuals such as Ahmed and the people of the Akka oasis. Although Gilroy focuses his theory on the space of the “Black Atlantic,” his use of the Atlantic as a heuristic model can be applied to the space of the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean so that the terms African and Arab are no longer used as mutually exclusive categories where Africa begins and ends at some ambiguous border in the desert. Interrogating the place of Black Moroccans in this manner allows us the space needed to remap Morocco around the idea of “unassimilated otherness” (Soja 1996, p. 116). By avoiding the established false dichotomies that exist between Arab and African, North African and Africa and black and white, we are able to recognize that Black Moroccans do not fit easily into any of these categorizations and instead are enmeshed in all of them. The status that both *Haratin* and *Ismkhan* share at the margins of Moroccan society also allows them a privileged position in terms of negotiating new and unique ways of being in the world. Although unintentional, both of these communities reside firmly beyond the established boundaries and have the opportunity to explode the traditional understanding of race and ethnicity in Morocco and elsewhere. Indeed, this small place far away from the centers of power and activity provides us with the opportunity to thoroughly examine the discursive practices we use to explain the world. Furthermore, by revealing to us the dialogic nature of culture and identity more generally, Akka demonstrates the limits to our current discourse on global race. Identities are always open to contestation and there always exists the constant struggle to define and redefine how we live in

the world. Most significantly, it also allows us to examine the processes which have produced and reproduced the global discourse on race and provides a compelling counter-hegemonic narrative against the continent's colonial inheritance that places it on the outside of modernity looking in. Of course, because landscapes are not ideologically neutral, the option of choosing marginality is fraught with danger. People run the risk of simply reproducing the inside-outside dynamic. As noted by Foucault (1977) it is very difficult to work outside of the categories produced by state power. It is only because of their position in the margins that Black Moroccans have so far remained outside of the reach of disciplinary power. And as history indicates this has not always been the case; for a brief moment in time, the *abd-al-Bukhari* were the ultimate source of power in North and West Africa. However, the use of racialized histories to understand the continent has not gone away and the opportunity to break down those master categories should not be passed up.

Because the physical landscape is a significant partner in the unending processes of identity and cultural formation I want to end with a note on the environment. In the 14th century, Arab writer Ibn Khaldun completed his seminal work the *Kitab al-Ibar (Universal History)* that included several volumes dedicated to the history of the Berbers and the Muslim dynasties in North Africa (Davis 2007, p.55). Within his text, Khaldun provided an analysis of the environmental impact created by the Arab invasion of the 12th century. According to most colonial translations, Ibn Khaldun described the Arabic nomadic tribes of the *Beni Hillal* as a “plague of locusts” that “committed all sorts of abuses, looted to enrich themselves...and ravaged the whole county” (Davis 2007, p. 55). Although earlier colonial works had attributed the decline of the North African environment to the Vandal hordes of the sixth century, Ibn Khaldun's description of the Arab invasion and its environmental impact became the dominant narrative regarding the North African environment. Areas that had previously been sites of great gardens and forests had been changed into desert by the nomadic practices of the Beni Hillal. Of

course, Khaldun often referred to specific places, most in modern day Libya; however, colonial writers generalized these descriptions to include all of North Africa in order to solidify the narrative of how the Arabs, and to a lesser extent, the Berbers, had destroyed North Africa (Davis 2007, p. 57). Furthermore, despite the limited scope of Ibn Khaldun's original environmental analysis, his book became the foundation for a narrative of environmental declension that continues to manifest itself in contemporary environmental assessments of Morocco and Algeria in which local stakeholders continue to be excluded from the decision making processes in Rabat.

This narrative is important because as Arundhati Roy (2009) points out, the battle for land is at the heart of the development debate; however, unlike the *Dalit*-s or Muslims of India who have their land taken from them because they live in places that contain wealth in the form of minerals or timber, the development debate strikes a different tone in a place like Akka. Indeed, the insidious lie of development proves to be quite flexible; on one hand it allows for the theft of land in places like India in order to make way for vast hydroelectric projects, mining and other massive infrastructure projects done in "the name of the poor, but really meant to service the rising demands of the new aristocracy" (Roy 2009, p. 6). On the other hand, when the rural poor participate in the global economy in their own very limited way they are admonished for being poor environmental stewards when they are perceived as not using the land in an environmentally sustainable way and are forced to atone for the realities of a global climate change that they did not create as well as the failures of the nation state project by staying hidden in their small villages far away from all of the simple "accoutrements" of modernity like proper health care and schools. In Ahmed's case, his attempt to expand farming in the oasis is seen as a fool's errand. Either way, the rural peasantry, whether they are Black or White, Berber or Arab

speaker, remain on the outside of modernity looking in, dependent on the good graces of Roy's new aristocracy but ultimately being blamed for failing to succeed even though the deck is stacked against them. It is against this backdrop that Ahmed, Omar and their fellow Akkawis must contend in order to stake their claim for control of their future.

Going forward, the cultural and ecological landscape of Morocco continues to evolve. The growth of the February 20th Movement and its strong push for democratic reform and the transformation of Morocco into a constitutional monarchy similar to that of the United Kingdom promises to bring about change that was unforeseen just six months ago. How this impacts rural desert communities is, so far, unknown; however, the cultural complexities of Akka that I have outlined indicate that the call for democratic change in the north will not allow for sides to be chosen easily; indeed, the constant dialectic between the local, the national and the trans-national make the future anything but predictable.

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