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Sabry, T.

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Emigration 2.0? Young Moroccans, Emigration and the Internet¹

Tarik Sabry

University of Westminster

Key words

Internet, communication, Europe, young Moroccans, emigration, globalization

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between young Moroccans' uses of the Internet and their migratory project to Europe. It frames its analysis within key debates on international migration and makes the case for a more systematic exploration of the symbolic dimensions of emigration. The research conducted, (2011/2012) including qualitative interviews, focus groups and a survey, shows that although an increasing number of young Moroccans are using the Internet to migrate into Europe, the majority are, unlike the findings of previous empirical research (Sabry 2003) have shown, less keen to emigrate. The research also shows how young Moroccans are more interested in communicating with other young Moroccans on social media than they are with young people from Europe or in other parts of the world. Qualitative material has also shown how young Moroccans' interactions with Arabs from the Gulf, using social media, has exposed serious contradictions between profane and sacred Islam. The story that emerges is not one of heightened global or westernised consciousness, but one of localization *par excellence*.

¹ A version of this article has been published in French in Sabry, T (2014) 'Émigration 2.0? Les jeunes Marocains, l'émigration et internet. Étude pilote' in Mattelart (2014) Médias et migrations dans l'espace euro-méditerranéen Editions Mare et Martin ISBN-10: 2849341584.

Introduction

The current research that I am about to present revisits an older question that I posed more than a decade ago (2003). The question was: ‘what is the relationship between young Moroccans’ consumption of western media texts and their desire to emigrate to the West?’ Back then, when I embarked on the research, I was startled by how mechanical and economically deterministic the compendium of research on migration was. Apart from Mai’s PhD thesis on Albanian migration to Italy (2002) and, later, Fujita’s work on Japanese ‘cultural migrants’ (2004), there was not much empirical work to go on that explored the relationship between media consumption and the desire to emigrate. My focus was, and still is, in this paper, on the exploration of symbolic dimensions of emigration, for what became clear to me as I embarked on the older research was that emigration in the age of mediated encounters with the other did not only take place at a physical level, but also at the mental and symbolic levels. This is what I called, back then, the politics of “mental emigration” (Sabry 2003, 2004, 2010). The privileging of the symbolic dimensions of emigration does not make them, in any way, the most important of migratory determinants, far from it. Socio-economic factors and human conflict still play a major role in international migratory processes. The current migrations from countries that are affected by war, such as Syria, are good evidence. However, just because the symbolic dimensions of emigration are not considered so important, it does not mean that they should be ignored or undermined as objects of scientific enquiry. Researching migration in the age of globalization and mass media, without paying attention to the allure of the ceaseless travelling spectacles of the other, is often laden with alternative discourses of *being* in the world, and these can only lead to a theoretical impasse in our thinking about migration in the 21st century. In earlier research (Sabry 2003, 2010), I focused on the role that is played by television in young Moroccans’ migratory project. The empirical material led to one main conclusion: that young Moroccans’ migratory project, both physical and symbolic, including their conceptualisations of the West, was determined by stratifications in class, habitus, and religiosity. The vast majority of the young Moroccans interviewed (with the exception of young Islamists, the only group to articulate meanings of the West in an historical context) saw the

West and western modernity as good alternatives to their lived and material realities. The West provided them with a phantasmagorical, libidinal space and a desire to be different in the world. Back then, Internet penetration was very low: only 15% of the respondents from a survey targeting 1000 young Moroccans said they had access to the Internet at home (Sabry 2003). The current study (see Sabry 2014)², which explores 300 young Moroccans' uses of the Internet and their migratory project, shows an astonishing increase in Internet penetration with all the respondents, this time, saying they had access to the Internet either at home or in an Internet café. The objective of this research is to examine, since the last few years has seen an exponential growth in Internet access, the relationship between young Moroccans' uses of the Internet and their migratory project. In a sense, the new research is a continuation of the exploration of symbolic dimensions of emigration through a focus on the Internet. I was almost convinced, prior to conducting this research, that the phantasmagorical and dialogical nature of the Internet, including social media, would amplify young Moroccans' engagement and encounters with the 'West' and 'Westerners', increasing therefore their desire to emigrate to the West, both physically and symbolically. However, as the data emerging from the current study will clearly show, almost the opposite has happened. Far fewer young Moroccans, according to quantitative and qualitative evidence, are interested in migrating to Europe and, rather than using social media to reach out to a richer, libidinal and desired West, most young Moroccans in the study use social media to communicate mainly within Morocco and with other Moroccans. So, the story that emerges is not one of westernisation or of heightened global consciousness, but one of localization *par excellence*.

Migration's symbolic dimensions

Although we have been witnessing what appears to be a positive emigration of 'migration theory' from Geography to Media and Cultural studies departments, this migration is, nonetheless, still of a clandestine nature that needs legitimising

² Sabry, T (2014) 'Émigration 2.0? Les jeunes Marocains, l'émigration et internet. Étude pilote' in Mattelart (2014) Médias et migrations dans l'espace euro-méditerranéen Editions Mare et Martin ISBN-10: 2849341584

and institutionalising. Neither Geography nor Media and Cultural Studies departments have wholly accepted this migration as being legitimate, and even where this acceptance has materialised, the emphasis has largely been on migration *within* Europe, rather than from the periphery to Europe, and other countries in the West.

Interest in the phenomenon of international migration from developing countries to Western industrialised societies, is not a new one. In fact, scholarly contributions to the compendium of research and analysis that deals with the subject of migration, its mechanics, causes and consequences, have now been accumulating for more than a century. Since Ernest George Ravenstein presented his work: *The Laws of Migration*, before the Royal Society of Statisticians (1885-1889), many scholars—demographers, geographers, anthropologists, economists and political scientists—have grappled with the meanings and causes of migration, both at a national and an international level. Although it was written more than a century ago, Ravenstein's two papers, ambitiously called 'the *Laws of Migration*', are still the foundation of migration theory. As Everett remarked: 'Ravenstein's papers stood the test of time and remain the starting point for work in migration theory' (Everett, 1966: 47). Since the 1950's, a myriad of approaches—'literally thousands of migration studies' (Everett, 1966: 48)—were introduced to unpack the complexity of international migration mechanics. The result is a compendium with a 'largely fragmented set of theories that have developed largely in isolation from one another' (Massey, 1996: 432). Examples include: neo-classical micro theories, neo-classical macro theories, dual labour market theory, world systems' theory, network theory, institutional theory, migration systems theory,.etc. Neo-classical micro theories and neo-classical macro theories occupy a predominant position in the compendium of research and analyses that deal with the causes of international migration. Neo-classical micro theory, which places a lot of emphasis on the 'individual' dynamics in the migratory process, advances that international migration does not take place in the absence of earning differentials or of employment rates between countries. Instead, it sees 'individual human capital characteristics', such as education, experience and language skills, together with others, such as 'social conditions' or technologies that lower migration

costs, increasing ‘the net returns to migration’ and, hence, raising ‘the probability of international movement’. (Massey et al, 1996: 435) Migration flows between the periphery and western industrialised societies are considered to be the result of ‘individual moves undertaken on the basis of individual cost-benefit calculations’.³ Furthermore, and most importantly, micro theory suggests that international migration decisions ‘stem from disequilibria or discontinuities between labour markets’.⁴ Substantially, neo-classical macro theory makes similar arguments, but instead of emphasising the role played by the dynamics of the ‘individual’ in the migratory process, macro theory emphasises the role of the ‘workers’. Macro theory advances that the international migration of workers is caused by differences in wage rates between countries in the absence of which international migration would not occur.⁵ Macro theory also advances that labour markets are the ‘primary mechanisms by which international flows of labour are induced, and that other kinds of variables do not have important effects on international migration’.⁶ It is evident from these two dominant theoretical perspectives in migration theory, whether their emphasis is on ‘individual’ or ‘group’ dynamics, that they are deterministically positioned within a rationalising framework that locates the mechanics of supply and demand at the core of its thesis, thereby downplaying all other methodological possibilities as being unimportant, if not irrelevant. In their critique of such methodological determinism, Bach and Schraml have argued that ‘our portrayal of migrants as social actors has not progressed far beyond ‘the iron filings’ of push and pull theories. No longer ‘metal pieces’, migrants are now treated more like empty grocery carts, wheeled back and forth between their origin and their destination under the hungry intentions of capital. Rather, they are mere agents of social change, carrying the necessary attributes of labour to satisfy the abstract requirements of ‘the general law of capitalist accumulation’” (Bach & Schraml [1982] 1996: 320). The compendium of research on migration theory, both here in the West and in Morocco, discloses a largely unquestioned consensus—that despotism, poverty and disequilibria between labour markets—are the main intervening variables or push factors that lead to the movements of people from

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*, 434

⁶ *ibid.*

the third world to the western industrialised societies. This consensus is also reflected in the analyses of many Moroccan scholars⁷, who have attempted to unpack the causes and mechanisms of Moroccan migration to the West. Inherent in their analyses is a methodological uniformity, where quantitative data is combined with historical accounts—some, for example, tracing the history of Moroccan migration to the 16th century⁸-- and deployed to rationalise the phenomenon of Moroccan migration. Migratory historical accounts given by Moroccan theorists rarely fail to establish an historical link between the French protectorate (1912-1956) and the migration of Moroccans to the West, especially to France. This is important because it reminds us that, in the case of Morocco, as with many other previously colonised nations, the migration of people from the Third World to the West was largely the result of Western imperialist intervention. As Belguendouz observed, 'In effect, Moroccan emigration is not the product of coincidence or fatality, it is, on the contrary, the result of a process initiated by a colonialism, which introduced and affirmed the modes of capitalist production'.⁹ The migration of people from the colonized nations to western countries benefited the colonizer, both economically and in battle during the First and Second World Wars. As we learn from Belguendouz, during the First World War, 223, 000 colonial and Chinese workers—of whom 132,321 were North Africans; 35,000 Moroccans, 18,249 Tunisians and 78,566 Algerians—were recruited by the French to work in factories, agriculture and other unskilled jobs. We need to add to this the almost 40,000 Moroccans who joined the French Army, of whom 9,000 died and 17,000 were injured. Research published by Belguendouz, which is situated within a politico-economic framework, provides the reader with very useful data about the history of Moroccan migration and also with a very useful up-to-date map of the Moroccan diaspora living abroad. However, combining quantitative data and migration history, as a methodological approach to understanding the mechanics of Moroccan migration, bears weaknesses that I would like to highlight.

⁷ See Belguendouz, 1993, 1999; Aklal, 1999; Ghalab, 1999; Ben Attahr, 1999

⁸ Belguendouz, 1993: 106

⁹ Translated from French, Belguendouz, 1993 p: 106

These are manifested on two levels: Firstly, although quantitative data remains extremely useful to the researcher; it does not help us to unpack problems or to answer questions of a qualitative nature. For example, we learn from the quantitative data produced by Belguendouz that, by 1993, there were on average 2.200.000 Moroccans living abroad: 80% in Europe, 51/2 % in the U.S., 131/2% in Arab countries, and 1% in other countries. We also learn that of the 1.800.000 Moroccan immigrants living abroad who had a legal status, 860,000 lived in France, 245,000 lived in the Netherlands, 160,000 lived in Spain, 105,000 lived in Germany, 15,000 lived in Saudi Arabia and 3,000 lived in the Emirates.¹⁰ This data is, undoubtedly, useful as an indication of the scale and the country of adoption. However, it fails to tell us why more than 85% of Moroccans emigrated to western countries, while only 13% chose to emigrate to rich Arab countries, with which they share a common language, religion and history. Furthermore, if the economic variable is the main migration determinant, as many Moroccan and Western social scientists assert, why is it that illegal emigrants today, from different parts of the world, are prepared to pay huge sums of money, in some cases £15,000, to be smuggled into Europe, when this is capital they could invest in their own countries? Secondly, historical accounts of Moroccan migration fail to distinguish between two essential phases in the history of Moroccan migration. Moroccan migration to France between 1914 and the early 1970's took place in a period where (apart from the spread of radio and a very small national newspaper and television industry) the media in Morocco were almost absent. By the 1970s, only a very small elite owned a television set. In a social survey that I conducted in Morocco (Sabry 2003), 99 per cent of the respondents said they had a television set in their households, and 80 per cent said they had access to satellite. Furthermore, the survey I conducted in Casablanca in 2011-2012 for the purpose of this article, shows a huge increase in Internet access¹¹. Regardless of these changes little or no, attention has been given by scholars working on Moroccan migration to the possible links between historical transformations in the Moroccan public sphere, flows of global communications, the spread of the Internet and Moroccan migration to the West. Ignoring this shift in the history of Moroccan

¹⁰ Belguendouz, 1993: 130; 2000: 12.

¹¹ See Survey data in this article.

communications, or detaching it from our understanding of migration mechanisms, is to overlook new theoretical possibilities and methodological alternatives that may hopefully free the theory of migration from its polarisation and provide new means for understanding its changing mechanics. It therefore becomes extremely important to distinguish between two historical phases of Moroccan (and international) migration. One took place before, and the other during, the rapid dissemination of western media texts through satellite and national television, and later through the Internet and social media.

In his book, *New Diasporas*, Van Hear comments: 'technological change has generated a revolution in global communications. One consequence of this is that images of life in the developed world—often heavily distorted images—have spread wider and wider, so that information, or misinformation, about new opportunities, real or imaginary, have become much more accessible to large parts of the world population' (Van Hear, 1998, pp.: 2-3). Van Hear's passing statement deserves our immediate attention. It makes three main points: 1) Technological change in the West has led to a revolution in global communication, which has helped spread images of life in the West in less developed countries. 2) These images are often heavily distorted. 3) Information, or misinformation, about the 'opportunities' in the west, real or imagined, have become much more accessible to large parts of the world's population. Van Hear's statement is very important and is worth pursuing, for to presuppose that there could be a link between media consumption and migration is to suggest the likely existence of a media effect, and, subsequently, the possible existence of a new pull variable: communications. This opens a door to new means and possibilities that could further our understanding of international migration mechanics in the era of global communications. In my view, more than any other subject that is taught in Media and Cultural studies, it is the study of the phenomenon of globalization that has paved the way for the interlocking of different fields of study. The study of the phenomenon of globalization reflects the very rich interdisciplinary nature of the fields of Media and Cultural studies. It is well known, for example, that globalization cannot be understood or taught in isolation of the other elements that influence it. In effect, the study of globalization is very much a study of

relationships within a whole. The phenomenon of globalization is not a problem for which we can find an answer, as with problems in the natural sciences. Instead, the phenomenon of globalization is a *problematic*, and it can be grasped only through a comprehension of its constitutive relational system. Appadurai's five scapes, which appear in his article, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', is a good example of the inter-relationality I am describing (Appadurai, 1990: 296). Some four years after Appadurai's article, Ian Chambers (1994) published *Migrancy, Culture and Identity*, in which he examined the complexity of the post-modern condition through an exploration of relationships between identity spaces, migration and culture. In their edited volume *Media and Migration* (2001), Russell King (a professor of geography) and Nancy Wood (then a senior lecturer in Media and European Studies), open their introduction with the following significant lines: 'Migration and Media Studies are two richly interdisciplinary fields of study. They overlap in various ways, but the interconnections have rarely been explored' (King, Wood 2001: 1). In the preface to their book, King and Wood also note that 'the linking of media and migration is... a relatively new and unexplored field of investigation'. King and Wood's *Media and Migration* had sprung out of the creative interdisciplinary venture at Sussex University and between the departments of Migration and Media studies. Their work, and Nicola Mai's Ph.D. thesis, which is entitled: 'Between Losing and Finding Oneself: the Role of Italian Television in the Albanian Migration to Italy' (Mai 2002) paved the way for a healthy convergence between cultural/media and migration studies, which not only promises to enrich these fields, but also offers a route out of the *cul-de-sac* in which migration theory finds itself. The convergence between migration studies and other fields of research, such as Media and Cultural Studies and anthropology is, however, still in its infancy¹². Encouraging such convergence, or the migration of ideas from one field of research to another, will undoubtedly help to solve the methodological problem facing migration theory and to provide us with a much better and deeper understanding of migration dynamics. This will also lead, one can only hope, to a shift from deterministic/reductionist thinking about migration,

¹² For a comprehensive introduction to theories and ethnographic research connecting media and migration, I recommend Tristan Matellart's opening chapter in his edited volume: *Médias, migration et cultures transnationales* entitled: "Médias, migration et théories de la transnationalisation" (2007: 13-56).

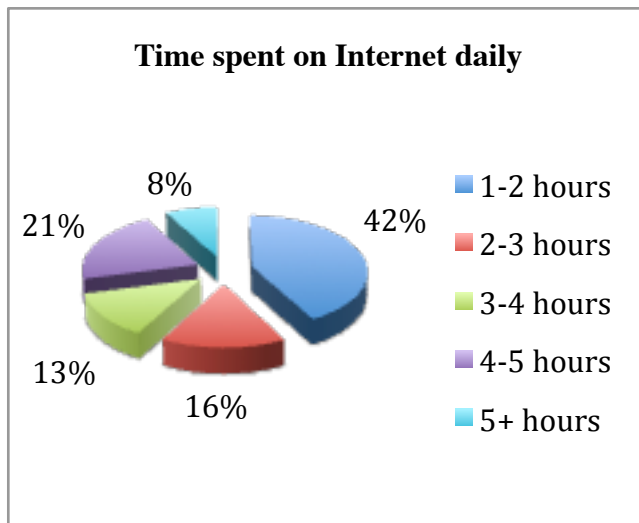
as a phenomenon that derives its meaning from the 'economistic', to a nuanced, conjunctive thinking, which positions migration within its wider relational structures. All this being said; it is important that this new approach – seeking to understand the symbolic dimensions of emigration in a relational conjunction – does not privilege a culturalist/hybridist approach over the socio-economic realities of migrants, as this risks producing what Tristan Mattelart rightly calls “un nouvelle essentialisme”. (Mattelart, 2007:56)

The initial research follows on from research I conducted in Morocco (2000-2003) where I dealt mainly with the role of television in young Moroccans' migratory project. This research, conducted in 2011/2012, focuses on the relationship between migration and the Internet in Morocco. It asks the following questions: What is the relationship between young Moroccans' Internet usage and their migratory project? What communicative strategies do they use? How do they form connections with virtual communities in Europe? What social media do they use? Do they use the Internet strategically to increase their chances of emigrating to Europe? If so, how? The aim of this research is to find out whether changes in media consumption (e.g., from TV, satellite to the Internet) require new approaches to thinking about the relationship between media and migration. The questions I ask also inform and highlight key methodological challenges: How does the ethnographer gain entry to young people's networks (public and private spaces), and the cultural/technical knowledge available to them, without affecting the ordinariness/facticity of talk/experience? How can mutual trust be built with the research subjects without reproducing researcher/researched power relations? Given the complexity of 2.0 audiences and the whole argumentation that ensues about the changing nature of audiences (audiences as 'prosumers' or, as Jenkins (2006) puts it in *Convergence Culture*: “producers and co-creators”), I devised an approach to conducting qualitative research that moves away from 'Advocacy' and the role of the ethnographer as a translator of identity (Hermes 2009). Two Moroccan university students from the Sociology/Economics department led the ethnographic research. The informants received training by the main researcher about how to conduct qualitative interviews, and they were guided throughout the research process. Each informant conducted 3 focus group interviews with

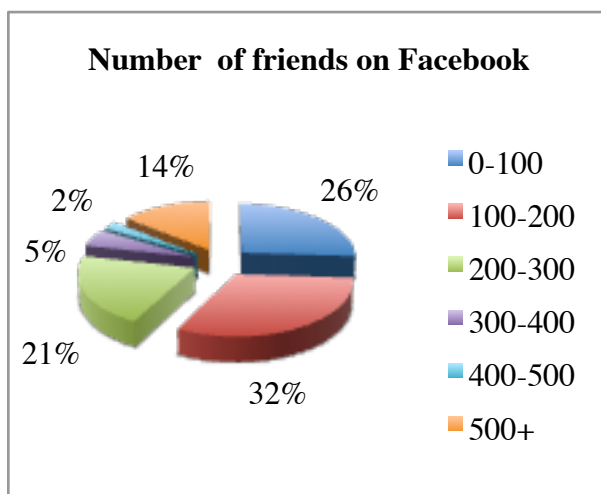
at least five Internet users in each group. The aim of this approach was to create a natural setting, avoiding the kind of problems that come with generational gaps, researcher/researched relations, and institutional power. The aim here was to create space for discussions that reflect Internet users' narratives of subjecthood from the point of view of their everyday uses and gratifications. Other methods included 10 qualitative individual interviews and a survey targeting 300 Internet users in three major Internet cafés in three different districts of Casablanca. 150 respondents were male, the other 150 female. All respondents were either university or college students. The research focused on individuals: self-conscious individuals, and on 'how they think,' rather than 'how they belong' (Aksoy and Robins 2003: 94). The survey and the interviews only targeted young, educated people and, as such, generalizations can only be made about this category and not about young Moroccans as a whole. The research was also conducted in an urban city, Casablanca, where Internet cafés are so numerous, and it does not in any way focus on rural Morocco, where access to the Internet is still low.

Examining media consumption by young people in Casablanca shows a very big increase in Internet access if compared to the research I conducted in Morocco more than a decade ago. 82 per cent of the girls and 71 per cent of the boys surveyed said they used the Internet at home. Added to which, 27% of the boys and 17% of the girls said they used the Internet in cafés. It is important to emphasise here that such a considerable disparity in the place of Internet use may well be attributed to gender politics in a 'transitional' society where conservative families still find it far more appropriate for the daughters to use the Internet at home, or in private, rather than in de-segregated public spaces. Gender difference in social media uses, however, shows no substantial disparity between the male and female respondents (with the exception of blogging, with forty per cent of the boys saying they had their own blogs, compared with the girls, 19% of whom only said they had their own blogs). When asked whether they had a Facebook account, 89 per cent of the boys and girls said they did. Only 11% of the respondents said they had never had a FB account. Concerning the time consumed using the Internet daily, 42 per cent of the

respondents said they used the Internet between 1 and 2 hours per day, but 21 per cent also said they used the Internet between 4 and 5 hours per day.

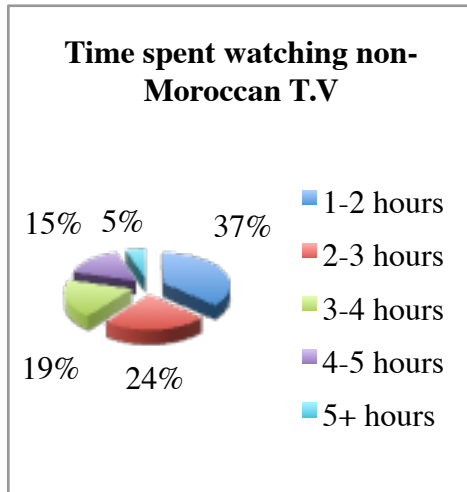


Many of the respondents, both male and female, found that using Facebook increased their chances of developing new romantic relationships with other young Moroccans. 38 per cent of the respondents said they used FB to make new friendships and keep up with friends, most of whom are Moroccan (70 per cent). 40 per cent said they used FB for entertainment purposes, and only 4 per cent of the respondents said they used it for political activism. 32 per cent of the respondents said they had between 100-200 friends on FB, 21 per cent said they had 200-300 friends, and 14 per cent said they had more than 500 friends.



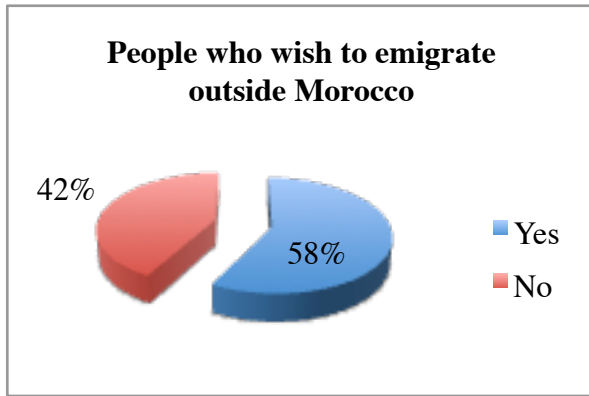
However, when I asked about the nationality of friends the respondents had on FB, I was surprised to learn (given my *a priori* wisdom, that young Moroccans would primarily use the Internet to reach out to other virtual communities from the West), that communication on the Internet among the 300 respondents was a very local affair. 71 per cent of the respondents said they communicated mainly with Moroccans (both in Morocco and in the diaspora), 18 per cent said they communicated with other Arabs from different parts of the Arab world, and 8 per cent only said they communicated with Westerners. 3 per cent of the respondents said they communicated with other nationalities that are neither Western nor Arab (Turkey and Japan are two examples).

I compared Internet uses to television and satellite consumption to test whether the Internet had taken over as the dominant medium of entertainment, and found that when asked about their consumption of Moroccan television, the majority of the respondents (63 per cent) only watched it for between 1 and 2 hours daily, and only 2 per cent said they watched Moroccan television for between 4 and 5 hours a day. However, 21 per cent of the respondents said they used the Internet between 4 and 5 hours daily. However, when asked about the consumption of non-Moroccan satellite channels, the number of hours consuming television increased considerably, 24 per cent of the respondents said they spent between 2 and 3 hours a day watching non-Moroccan satellite channels, and a considerable 15 per cent said they spent between 4 and 5 hours a day watching non-Moroccan TV. Although television is still popular as a medium, it is clear that young Moroccans are spending more hours using the Internet daily than watching television.

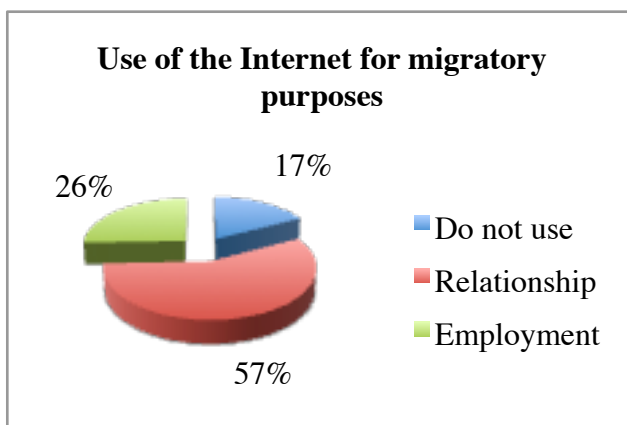


The main language used in communicating through the Internet is French [31 per cent], followed by *'aranssia* (a mix of Arabic and French) [19 per cent] and Moroccan colloquial [19 per cent]. It was also important to note that slightly more respondents said they used English [15 per cent] than standard Arabic [14 per cent] to communicate on the Internet. The data on linguistic communicative choices has to be taken lightly, since the survey and the interviews only targeted college and university students, who will have studied and been fluent in French and (in some cases) English. My assumption is that the majority of Internet users are likely to use *'arnassia* as a linguistic *metis*, which, in a sense, is neither French nor Arabic, but is a creative and carnivalesque *'bricolage'*, which I think is also a subversion of, and a resistance to, official Arabic and French.

Desire to emigrate to the West is not as strong if compared to the research conducted 13 years ago. In a survey (Sabry, 2003) targeting 1000 young Moroccans from Casablanca, 80 per cent of the respondents (students from different social strata) said they'd emigrate to the West if they had a visa. This time around, only 58 per cent of the respondents showed an interest in emigrating to the West and of this number only 25 per cent said they wanted to emigrate permanently. More young Moroccans are prepared to build their futures in Morocco.



For those who showed an interest in emigrating, Europe was the main desired migratory destination, with 59 per cent wanting to emigrate to Europe, 28 per cent to the USA, and 13 per cent to the Arab world. Furthermore, material coming from the focus groups and individual interviews, which I will discuss in detail in the second part of this article, suggests a possible conjunctural causality between the so-called ‘Arab spring’, and consciousness of an unfolding historical moment and the desire to be inside history rather than outside it. Access to the Internet and the myriad of news outlets has also, ironically, it seems, acted as a migratory deterrent because of the unfolding economic crisis in Europe and the USA. Of those respondents who are seeking, or who plan, to emigrate, 57 per cent said they used the Internet to make relationships with the potential to marry and move to the West, and 26 per cent said they used the Internet to find employment in the West.



The qualitative research, which I present below, supports the quantitative data in relation to uses of the Internet and emigration through marriage. Every

participant who was interviewed, either in the focus group discussions or the individual interviews, said they knew of someone (neighbour, family or friend) who emigrated to Europe through marrying people they'd met using Internet chat rooms and social media. So, while the Internet has opened up new channels through which young Moroccans are able to emigrate to the West, it has, paradoxically, also acted as a deterrent, since young people are more aware of the global economic crisis that has engulfed the West (especially the Euro Zone), and have strategically decided that they would be better off financially living in their own country.

The focus groups and interviews conducted in Casablanca unveiled key themes, including: the uses of the Internet and 'otherness', the Arab as 'other', the West as 'other', Islam and modernity. The story told through the qualitative material is one of localization and transnationalism, rather than globalization. The Internet has triggered a self-reflexive and critical discourse about the Muslim Arab as a de-sacralised/de-mythologised 'other', and it has magnified the superiority of the West as a civilised other. Rather than reinforcing globalization's magical dictum: 'that we now all live in a global village', young Moroccans are, because of their usage of the Internet and their openness to the world, if anything, more aware of their inferiority to a richer and developed west than they were before.

If television acted, for such a long time, as the main window on the West and its many constructed meanings, the Internet, according to young Moroccans' testimonies and experiences, provides an even bigger window, not only onto the West, but onto a new worldliness of others and othering. What is striking, however, as I will later demonstrate using evidence from the qualitative research, is that, with the exceptions of university research and a hunger for information and news from around the world, the main dialogical and communicative processes taking place on the Internet are between and among young Moroccans themselves. For many of the young Moroccans interviewed, the worldliness of the Internet has not delivered the preached utopia of a borderless world where people are able to communicate as equals. Young Moroccans felt that the act of dialogic communication alone does not compensate for the wide gap between the West and the developing world.

If we want to create reciprocal communication with the other, and by which I mean the westerner, we first have to look at our institutions and how they function. Reciprocity in communication is not possible unless there is reciprocity in structures of societies and economic development. I never feel equal to the other, I feel inferior. (Mohamed, Casablanca)

The virtual communicative process between young Moroccans and others from the West is understood reflexively, not as a neutral everyday sociability, but within a structure of power relations that position young Moroccans as automatic inferior others. The statements from the focus groups, below, question Appadurai's thesis of a de-centred 'West' (1990) and the more recent euphoric analysis that ensued after the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. In his recent book (2012), *The Arab Spring: The End of Post-colonialism*, Hamid Dabbashi states that 'we are at the inaugural moment of the suspension of all regimes du savoir...our interlocutor is no longer 'the West', for the West is dead'. (Dabbashi, 2012: 251). Declaring the death of the West, its symbolic power and *regime de savoir*, as the statements below by young Moroccans show, is clearly too premature.

No, I do not think that the Internet has been able to break the old barriers. On the contrary, I think the Internet has created a cultural gap. On the face of it, one might think that social media are available to everyone, and quite cheaply too. However, when we look at our language, Arabic, and our culture, it becomes clear that we are consumers, rather than producers or creators. Geographically, yes, the barriers have been broken. But when we put it within the context of globalization, we have to be careful. The idea that we live in a global village is flawed and serves neo-liberal ideas and ideologies. Selling the idea of the end of ideology is part of the narrative that the barriers have been broken. We may use the same technology, but are we using it in the same creative way as westerners are? We always follow the West. Our relationship with the West is one of consumption and unequal cultural exchange. (Zeinab, Casablanca)

The consumer of a product will never be seen in equal terms with the producer of the product. A gap will always be there. (Murad, Casablanca)

The sense of inferiority that is expressed by the young Moroccans interviewed evaporated temporarily when the subject of the Arab revolutions was brought up. Many of the participants felt that the uprisings had momentarily altered perceptions of the Arab in the world. The participants spoke of their pride in the Tunisians and Egyptians who had died for democracy.

The Arab uprisings have changed the power dynamics between 'us' and the 'West'. They look at us [Westerners] differently now. (Khalid: Casablanca)

Others felt that the Internet was only a tool, a neutral technology, and that what determined its use was class and habitus. Murad, below, makes the point that Internet use must not only be understood in relation to the disequilibrium between the West and the rest, but also through local dynamics and class structures in Morocco.

The Internet is a Web. This Web is thrown into the sea, the sea of knowledge, and there are users who are stuck or entangled in the web and those who are able to navigate through it. My habitus decides how I use the Web and how the web uses me. And habitus differs between Moroccans and Westerners, but also between Moroccans themselves. (Murad, Casablanca)

It's important to begin by stating that the Internet has made us more aware of borders. It did not break them, but it made us aware of them. It is a tool, and its aim is noble: communication. The breaking of borders takes place when people from different parts of the world start to interact within a kind of a global sphere. But FB is not used effectively. A lot of people use it because they do not have much else to do. There is also an exaggeration, or a communicative exaggeration: it's better to keep in touch with 2 people and get something out of that, than say 100 people. That is belittling the whole process of communication. (Myriam, Casablanca)

As the survey data showed, 89 per cent of the communication through social media, especially FB, takes place between Moroccans themselves and with other Arabs. Only 8 per cent said they communicated with westerners, and 3 per

cent said they communicated with other nationalities. The majority of the respondents use FB, and other social media, to communicate with other Moroccans in the first place, and so the story is one of localization rather globalization. However, those participants from the focus groups and individual interviews who intentionally reached out to communicate with other nationalities (including different Arab countries) felt that the Internet had allowed them, for the first time, to encounter and know the other outside local discourse/official media and its mediated narratives of the other. The Internet has allowed young Moroccans to converse with the other directly. Yet in so doing, they have also discovered new truths about the other and othering, which they expressed during the interviews. For example, whilst conversing with young people from Europe and the USA, some of the participants felt they were automatically framed as Muslims (or through their religiosity) and had therefore to justify and clarify many misunderstandings about their culture and religion (including their positions in relation to terrorism), when all they wanted to do was talk about music, film, and culture in general. It is interesting to note here how my previous research on migration in Morocco (2003) showed a high level of engagement with the West and the Westerner through the consumption of western media texts; a kind of engagement which I found to be unparalleled by the Internet, to which we often, unquestioningly, attribute hyper-dialogic and communicative qualities. Is it possible that the non-dialogic Western media text, as a point of encounter, is more engaging because of the polysemic nature of texts – their open-ended-ness, so to speak? It seems, in this case, that transition from an industrial information economy to a ‘networked information economy’ (Benkler 2006) has not delivered on the professed heightened global connectedness. The qualitative material emerging from the focus groups and the interviews also supports Lincoln Dahelberg’s view that ‘many online fora experience a lack of respectful listening to others and minimal commitment to working with difference’. (Dahelberg, 2001)¹³ Encountering the other dialogically had also, according to many participants, led to the de-mythologizing of Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia, its conservatism and its official narratives of Islam. The

¹³ Dahlberg, L. (2001) ‘Computer-mediated communication and the public sphere: A critical analysis’. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, volume 7, number 1, and at <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol7/issue1/dahlberg.html>

Internet has helped to expose the paradox between official Islam and profane culture in the Islamic world (see Sabry 2010).

For me Saudi Arabia was the apogee of the Arab world, but I have learnt from the Internet, especially social media, that there is an alarming paradox between the official Islam that comes from SA and the realities of everyday life in that country. The Internet has, for them, become an outlet for their sexual, social and cultural frustrations (Abdullah, Casablanca).

The thing that I learnt through my communication with the other over the years is that I was able to go beyond the kind of discursive language, racist or otherwise, that exists here about the other. As for people from the Gulf, the discourse and the reality are the same. Many of them use the Internet and FB for sexual purposes only. Many of them may have 4 or 5 kids. They do not have any interest in cultural exchange. They are mainly interested in sex. After one week, they say they want to come and meet. They are so repressed sexually and they find an outlet in the Internet. What they are after is sex. (Khadija, Casablanca)

I thought Saudi Arabia was the heart of Islam, almost sacred. But it's more of a profane world. The Internet has demythologised the image of the Gulf. (Kawthar, 20, Casablanca)

FB and the Internet have exposed the image of people from the Gulf. (Mohamed, 22 Casablanca)

The Internet, as the quotations above show, has exposed contradictions between official Islam, which is usually articulated through mass-mediated, un-problematized discourses of the 'sacred' and profane Islam. Many of the female interviewees expressed disappointment, not only at how men from the Gulf objectified them as objects of desire, as sexual objects, to be precise, but also at the fact that the Internet is now being used to facilitate sex tourism in Morocco. The focus groups' and interviews' discussions unveiled a decreased interest in emigration and, in the case of those who showed a strong desire to emigrate, their approach was more strategic. Many of the participants said they would only emigrate to the West if there were guarantees of a good job or a university scholarship. Many also have shown reluctance to emigrate because of the economic crisis in Europe and the USA, and because of the conflicts taking place in the Arab region. What was striking, however, is that almost everyone

interviewed, either in the focus groups or the individual interviews, knew of a friend, a neighbour or a relative who had managed to emigrate using the Internet as a tool.

I want to emigrate to study and marry, like my friend, who never took it seriously at first, but ended up marrying a Finnish Girl. When a girl comes to visit you from abroad, invests her time and money, romance follows and that's how many got married. I keep my possibilities open. Well, when we start communicating we begin with basic topics of communication, finding out about the other, then one thing leads to another. The next thing you know, the woman comes to Morocco. It took a year between the first day my friend and his Finnish wife chatted online and the day they got married. (Amin, Casablanca)

Some participants saw the Internet as being a strategic tool with which to choose and research the country of immigration.

The Internet facilitates a lot and can prepare you well in understanding the country of destination. (Myriam, Casablanca)

I know a lot of young people who use the Internet to find girlfriends from Europe. Many relationships have ended up in marriage. (Kawthare, Casablanca)

Khadija: many Moroccans have got married through FB and the Internet. I know a Moroccan woman who married a guy from India. (Khadija, Casablanca)

I am trying to make relationships with European girls through the Internet, and I hope to emigrate in this way. (Abderrahim, Casablanca)

However, many were either reluctant, or totally against, the idea of emigration. As the quantitative data showed, a large number of the respondents found the prospects of emigration to be unattractive, given the economic situation in the West.

I do not wish to emigrate. There is nothing I can do in Europe that I cannot do in my country. I am not convinced you can use the Internet to emigrate, I think only a small minority have managed this. Very few people made it through the Internet. You can get work through the Internet, and even marriage, but this is rare. (Abderrahim, Casablanca)

What is happening in the Arab world, especially in North Africa, has changed how we think about emigration. It gave us a kind of consciousness that we lacked before. I want to stay here and help to be part of this great change that is sweeping the Arab region. (Amin, Casablanca)

Conclusion

It is perhaps premature to engage with the role of the Internet and new media technology and their relationships to migration processes, both symbolic and physical, at a time when dominant migration paradigms continue to ignore even the role of old media and their symbolic migratory dynamics. However, as this study has shown, the Internet is already being used as a strategic tool by young Moroccans to find job contracts and potential spouses who can help them to live legally in Europe. The data has also shown the Internet and its usage by young Moroccans to produce contradictory results about the role of the Internet in migratory processes. While a number of Moroccans have managed to cross the 'border', thanks to relationships that they have built via Internet chat rooms and social media, global interconnectedness and access to the flows of news from different Internet outlets has heightened awareness among young Moroccans about the dire economic situation in the Euro zone, acting, therefore, as a major migratory deterrent. Young Moroccans' usage of the Internet emphasises the importance of the local and localization, and it downplays the euphoric/magical narratives of globalization and the global village. As the study has shown, most Moroccans initially use social media to communicate and to build relations with Moroccans, rather than with westerners. This has come as a surprise, since the research I conducted with young Moroccans 13 years ago showed more engagement with the West, mainly through television. Rather than acting as a global dialogical tool, the Internet has instead heightened a local consciousness and a desire for young Moroccans to connect locally rather than globally. Communicating with the westerner has been hampered, according to the data, by linguistic problems, as well as by orientalist representations of the Arab/Muslim, which has put a lot of young Moroccans on the defensive.

It is far too early to judge whether new media can mark a paradigmatic shift in our thinking about international migration, but new media and their usage have already, even in this modest study, offered a significant challenge to my previous work on “mental emigration”. While it is true that most young Moroccans find the West and western modernity to be desirable alternatives to their social and material realities, so far, they are using the Internet and social media to reach out, not to a phantasmagorical, libidinal West, but in order to communicate amongst themselves, locally. Moreover, while talk of emigration/migration 2.0 is clearly too premature, it would be a mistake to undermine the penetration of the Internet into popular cultural life in Morocco and its role as a space for encountering. The stories told by young Moroccans about others who have managed to emigrate through using the Internet are worth investigating, especially as these stories are now being re-told in different popular forms including jokes, animation texts¹⁴ and everyday talk (Sabry 2005). It is these symbolic dimensions that are often ignored by migration scholars. The Internet and its usage for migratory purposes, the empirical evidence provided in this study notwithstanding, have already become part of popular culture and everyday talk in Morocco.

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¹⁴ See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBPCtSQdB_g&feature=related

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