

Rural Communities and Tourism Development in Toubkal National Park, Morocco

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While living in a mud and stone structure at nearly 2000 meters in altitude, I conducted 16 months of dissertation research with the Ait Mizane Amazighe (Berber) community in the village of Aremd in the High Atlas Mountains in Toubkal National Park, Morocco. Aremd has recently become a 'boom town' due to state-motivated tourism development policies that aim to alleviate poverty in rural communities and reduce pressure on natural resources. My dissertation in Anthropology examines the community's transition from a primarily agricultural subsistence economy to a predominantly cash and capital based tourism market economy. I assess how the global tourism economy articulates with non-tourism production strategies and previous socio-economic arrangements. My ultimate goal is to determine how specialization in a single tourism-based production strategy affects community resilience and vulnerability to disaster, whether natural or artificial.

Since participant-observation is the hallmark of cultural anthropology, I spent many days joining the women in agricultural and domestic chores. Within a short while I learned to cut barley with a scythe, gather and deflesh walnuts, and haul fodder on my back, leaving my hands blistered and calloused. However, a good deal of my time was spent in the kitchen, clutching a glass of Moroccan tea, or *atay*, and dipping a piece of bread into a tajine while talking with household members about their life in Morocco and my life in America. To penetrate the world of men and tourists in the nearby market place, I used a notebook and a pen to conduct interviews and collect data.

My research experience helped me

to develop a better understanding of the complexities involved with tourism development in rural communities in Morocco. Most tourism development policies rest on the expectation that increased cash and capital will elevate the standard of living and improve the quality of life for residents by increasing the availability of goods and services to residents. In Aremd however, tourism development is informed by pre-existing social and economic arrangements that are rooted in demographic variables such as age and gender. Such arrangements affect the flow of goods and services, and may limit or enhance a resident's ability to participate and benefit from tourism development. My research found that in some ways, tourism development



created, exacerbated and rearranged social inequalities in the mountain community. Therefore, within a single community, tourism policies may succeed for some and fail for others.

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