The Amazigh Question:
Transnationalism as Renegotiation of Moroccan Identity

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Introduction

The number of Berber speakers in the Maghreb is often estimated to be roughly 40% in Morocco and from 20 to 25% in Algeria. The Tuareg in Mali and Niger as well as small size communities in Tunisia, Libya and some Egyptian oases are also believed to share the same ethnic identity.[2] And a significant diaspora in Europe and North America plays a major role in Berber identity construction. In Morocco, an elite of intellectuals, students and active members of civil society represents the main source of advocacy for the Berber question. Demands center on pushing for the recognition of cultural and linguistic rights and raising identity consciousness within the country, although success in mobilizing the masses remains limited.

For Amazigh activists, the languages spoken by these various groups are believed to be contemporary versions of a single ancient language, and it is this language that determines and cements Amazigh identity. But the notion of a full-fledged 'Amazigh language' is rather "a linguistic abstraction rather than a socio-linguistic reality that can be identified and situated,"[3] mainly because of the extremely localized usage of the dialects. Given the multiplicity of variants of Amazigh language and the highly fragmented distribution of its speakers, it is remarkable that Amazigh militants have constructed an ethnocultural identity linking different communities together through a sense of shared past history – be it real or imagined – and a vision of common future. Indeed, over the years, the narrative according to which Berber groups in different states are actually part and parcel of one same nation known as Tamazgha – which is believed to extend from the Siwa Oasis in Egypt to the Canary Islands, and from the Rif

[1] The terms Berber and Amazigh are used interchangeably, regardless of the debate on their respective political correctedness.
[2] Salem Chaker, *Berbères Aujourd'hui*, (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1989), 14-16.
[3] Salem Chaker, "Langue et Littérature Berbères" Le Monde de Clio, May 2004, accessed November 1, 2013. http://www.clio.fr/BIBLIOTHEQUE/langue_et_litterature_berberes.asp

mountains to the desert[4] – became increasingly pronounced. Like almost all identity discourses, this narrative suggests the naturalness of Berber identity and its existence since times immemorial. But most importantly, by ignoring national state borders, it also adds a transnational dimension to the Amazigh identity and creates a sense of belonging to a nation.[5]

This paper argues that the transnationalization of the Berber question in Morocco, rather than reflecting a natural dynamic, is a response to the homogenizing policies implemented by the state and pushed for by urban elites. These policies conceived the country's future in pan-Arabist terms while excluding the Amazigh elements from the broader Moroccan identity. The construction of a Berberist counter narrative going beyond national borders is therefore an attempt to renegotiate Moroccan identity and emphasize the centrality of the Amazigh component. In elaborating this argument, the paper looks at how the conception of Berber identity has evolved from a tribal but at the same time broader religious affiliation to a national and later transnational identification, and how the transnational dimension empowers the discourse enabling more bargaining power in shaping national identity.

The Colonial Period and the Birth of Moroccan Nationalism

The historiography of Morocco has for a long time represented the Istiqlal and the urban elites as the forces to be credited for resistance to the colonial powers and the independence of the country. On the other hand, the official discourse's constant referral to the French divide-and-rule policy of 1930, better known as the Berber Dahir, managed to belittle the commitment of the Imazighen and depict them as collaborators who made the most of the French discrimination in their favor.[6] The rebellions led by some of Berber Caïds such as Thami El Glaoui and Addi Ou Bihi were also viewed as evidence that Berbers were unreliable and disloyal to the monarchy and the fatherland.

Yet long before the emergence of the nationalist movement, armed resistance to the colonial powers was to a large extent carried out by Berber tribes in the mountains. While it is inaccurate and anachronistic to claim that this resistance was motivated by mature Moroccan nationalist ideas, it was however deeply imbued with "markers of identity that were either

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[4] Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement and the Challenges to North African States* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 4-5.
[5] Ibrahim Akhiyat, "Al-mas 'ala al-amāzigyya : al-khitab wa al-ḥaraka" interview with Mohamed Hafid *al-nachra* 60 (April 1996) in *L'Amazighité entre Identité et Combat,* edited by CentreTarik Ibn Zyad, 1999.
[6] Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement,* 206.

broader or narrower than the essentially ethnic definition of identity as Berber,"[7] that is, a sense of belonging to both their tribal units and the Muslim *umma*. The French colonization was perceived as mainly a *roumi* – Christian – intrusion in the land of Islam.

But a pseudo-nationalist feeling was already growing as territorial conceptions of identity developed, thus binding together the mountain and plain parts of the land. In his analysis of Amazigh poems dating from the early years of the protectorate, Jonathan Wyrtzen shows that the structural alterations triggered by colonial intrusion produced a "context in which a national unit of political identity had become increasingly relevant."[8] The perception of a foreign threat posed by the Christians engendered a feeling of solidarity of the Berber tribes in the mountains towards their brothers in the cities. It also gave them the ability "to imagine a broad community at a national level" and it was around this time that a "corporate 'Moroccan' identity was crystallized."[9]

The study of Larbi Messari on the Rif resistance to the colonial powers in northern Morocco also illustrates this point. The Rif war was led by Muhammad Ibn Abdelkrim Al-Kahattabi, a Berber chief from the Ait Waryaghar tribe, who defeated the Spanish troops in the Battle of Anoual in 1921. In his book, *Muhammad Ibn Abdelkrim al-Khattabi: From Tribe to Nation*, Messari argues that whilst Abdelkrim is often known for his significant military feats, his real achievements were first the unification of the Berber tribes of the Rif using religious discourse, and second the contribution to Morocco's process of transition from the tribal system to that of nation.[10] In this sense, Messari's point is that besides being a military chief, Abdelkrim was really an "initiator of Moroccan nationalism."[11]

Thus the ethnic element was rather marginal for Berber speakers as a larger Moroccan nation was gradually taking shape. This idea was stressed by the contributors to Gellner and Micaud's edited volume *Arabs and Berbers: From Tribe to Nation in North Africa*, who viewed the Berber resistance to be motivated principally by new feelings of belonging that go beyond

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[7] Michael Willis, "The Politics of Berber (Amazigh) Identity: Algeria and Morocco Compared," in *North Africa: Politics, Region and the Limits of Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2008), 228.
[8] Jonathan Wyrtzen, "Colonial State-Building and the Negotiation of Arab and Berber Identity in Protectorate Morocco," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011): 231.
[9] Ibid, 244.
[10] Larbi Messari, "Le Génie de Abdelkrim Al Khattabi," interview with Rime El Jadidi. *Le Soir Echos*, 6 February 2013 (accessed 2 November 2013), http://www.lesoir-echos.com/actualites-2/presse-maroc/larbi-messari%E2%80%89-%E2%80%89le-%E2%80%89genie-de-abdelkrim-al-khattabi%E2%80%89/
[11] Ibid.

their specific ethnic identity. Louis-Jean Duclos for example noted that "they have without being aware of it steadfastly practiced nationalism [...] before, during and after the rise of conventional nationalism."[12] According to him, even though armed resistance to the colonial powers right after the beginning of the protectorate was carried out mostly by Berbers, this resistance tended to emphasize nationalist rather than ethnic feelings, thus contributing what Duclos calls "affective nationalism" to the creation of the modern Moroccan nation state.[13]

By the 1930s, the consolidation of this "affective nationalism" into a mature nationalist movement has been nearly completed. The establishment of the Collège Berbère d'Azrou to serve the Berber policies of the French protectorate aiming at separating the sons of Berber notables from the urban elites backfired since the school became a crucial base for Moroccan Nationalism. It provided an institutional framework that facilitated student mobilization and equipped the graduates with intellectual tools to question the protectorate. [14] The urban intellectuals of Fez and Rabat – both the reformists and the traditionalists – and the intellectual elite of the Collège Berbère were all united by "adherence to a sort of Moroccan nationalism."[15] In fact, when the school's Alumni Association was created, Mehdi Ben Barka was present at the meeting in order to secure loyalty and support to the Istiqlal.[16]

Another marker of identity was the attachment to the monarchy. Although made up primarily of Berber speakers, the Liberation Army did not emphasize Berber ethnicity and specificities.[17] In fact, its action was motivated by a simple political goal, that of "national liberation, which they idealistically and quite disinterestedly linked with what was to their minds its highest and clearest symbol, the king."[18] The struggle was thus centered on a vision a Morocco independent of colonial powers and united under the leadership of the Sultan, who came to be seen as the ultimate symbol of cohesion.

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[12] Louis-Jean Duclos, "The Berbers and the Rise of Moroccan Nationalism" in *Arabs and Berbers: From Tribe to Nation in North Africa,* edited by Ernest Gellner and Charles Micaud, (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co, 1973), 217.
[13] Ibid, 217-29.
[14] Mohamed Benhlal, *Le Collège d'Azrou: La Formation d'une Elite Berbère Civile et Militaire au Maroc* (Paris : Editions Karthala et Ireman, 2005), 349-50.
[15] Ibid, 362.
[16] John Waterbury, *The Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite – A Study in Segmented Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 118.
[17] Louis-Jean Duclos, "The Berbers and the Rise of Moroccan Nationalism," 226.
[18] Ibid. 227.

With this legacy of struggle and resistance, participation in the newly emerging Moroccan state and the nation-building project after the departure of the colonial power seemed an obvious development. Seeing "no contradiction between their Berber identity and Moroccan nationalism"[19] the Berber speaking elites took for granted their role in Moroccan identity construction. Yet independence would prove to be a big disillusion for them.

Post-Independence Exclusion and Demands for Integration

The years immediately following independence saw the different forces rushing to consolidate their positions in Moroccan politics and society.[20] The struggle for power also reflected competition over defining what the new nation state would look like, and the two main players were the Istiqlal party and the monarchy. The Istiqlal and later its more modernist UNFP faction both sought to impose their own Arabo-Islamic nationalist model, while the Berber members who had joined during the protectorate were expected "to put aside their particularist identity as a relic of the colonial past."[21] On the other hand, the monarchy used Berber rural elites as a mere counterweight to the Istiqlal challenge, while generally implementing a nation-building project similar to the Istiqlal's.

The successive constitutions adopted by the Kingdom of Morocco after independence have invariably stressed the Arab and Islamic identity of the country. For example, the constitutions introduced between 1962 and 1996 all stated that Islam was the religion of Morocco and Arabic its language but does not mention anything about the Amazigh language or identity.[22] It was not until the 2011 Constitution that the Moroccan identity was proclaimed to be "forged by the convergence of its Arab-Islamist, Amazigh and Saharan-Hassanic components, nourished and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebraic and Mediterranean influences."[23] While Tamazight became an official language by virtue of this constitutional amendment,[24] concrete actions to operationalize it remain to be seen.

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[19] Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement,* 59.
[20] Michael Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring* (London: Hurst & Company, 2012), 37-8.
[21] Maddy Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement,* 88.
[22] The Constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco 1962, accessed November 5, 2013. Available at http://www.righttononviolence.org/mecf/wp-content/uploads/1962/12/1962Morocco.pdf
[23] The Constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco 2011, "Preamble," accessed November 5, 2013. Available at http://www.constitutionnet.org/files/the_2011_moroccan_constitution_english.pdf
[24] Ibid.

Thus for more than fifty years, the state and the powerful elites refused to acknowledge the diversity and pluralism of Moroccan identity. The years following independence were characterized by an effective exclusion of the Berber dimension from the Moroccan national identity. Allal al Fassi, the Istiqlali nationalist leader and prominent figure in post-independence Morocco, envisioned an exclusively Arab Morocco, and asserted in 1966 that "none of us, whatever the preferred socio-economic model, would envision a Morocco that is neither Arab nor Islamic."[25]

The promotion of this purely Arab model was evident in the adoption of cultural policies that clearly discriminate against the Berber component. Public institutions in the audio-visual sector reproduced the official discourse regarding national identity by providing very limited space for the expression of Berber identity. It is worth noting however that the radio dedicated four hours a day to each one of the three Berber dialects compared to merely ten minutes per day granted by the Moroccan television for news bulletins and some representation in the traditional music night on Saturdays.[26] Yet, it remains that cultural production was not encouraged and that it tended to portray Berber culture as folklore and vestige from the past that was no longer relevant in modern times.

The educational system was another area from which elements of Berber identity were excluded. Policies of Arabization were carried out by the state, and pushed forward by the Istiqlal and later UNFP elites – the religious conservative and the left-wing Arab nationalists alike. One of the leading figures of the latter, Mohammed Abid al-Jabiri was a firm believer in the exclusively Arab identity of Morocco and the need to achieve the goal of Arab unity. Consequently, Arabization processes and policies were seen as "a necessary condition to confirm our identity [...] and must not aim just to get rid of French but also, and importantly, ... the local Berber and Arabic dialects, and the ban on using any language or dialect in the school, the radio, and television other than Classical Arabic."[27] The idea was that the enforcement of Arabization policies in the public space in general and the educational system in particular would result in Amazigh people socialization in and assimilation of Arabic, and variations of Amazigh language

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[25] Allal al- Fassi 1966, quoted in Abdallah Laroui, *Les Origines Sociales et Culturelles du Nationalisme Marocain 1830-1912* (Paris : Editions François Maspero, 1977), 433. (Author's translation)

[26] Jacques Leclerc, "Maroc," L'Aménagement Linguistique dans le Monde, last modifed February 27, 2013, accessed October 15, 2013, http://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/afrique/maroc.htm and author's interview

[27] Mohammed Abid al-Jabiri, *Adawa' `alaa mushkil t-ta`lim bil-maghrib* (Casblanca: Dar Nashr,1985),147, quoted in Elabbas Benmamoun "Language Identities in Morocco" *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 102.

would slowly fade away. Policies of Arabization were coupled by marginalization of the predominantly Berber rural areas, in perpetuation of the colonial distinction between the "useful" and "useless" Morocco. In efforts to dilute Berber identity, the state constantly presented Tamazigh as a mere dialect of lesser status and importance than Arabic, and even forbade the official use of Berber first names.[28]

While the Mouvement Populaire was predominantly made up of Berbers, it was not an avenue for Berberism and did not open up space to push for the inclusion of Berber identity as the modern Moroccan nation-state was being built. Instead, it was mainly a rural party created in contradistinction with the urban-based Istiqlal party. The Mouvement Populaire was merely an element in the balance of power politics orchestrated by the monarchy. Indeed, the party's alliance with the monarchy in the first years of independence, mainly gave birth to a Berber dominated armed forces, but did not lead to a "Berberization of the state"[29] or at least to the identity's representation. Thus although its leader Mahjoubi Aherdan occasionally called for the preservation of Berber identity, this demand was not central to the party's agenda, which mainly puts forward class-based struggle since "from the start, Mouvement Populaire took great care not to be seen as a purely Berber, radically-based movement, but rather as a spokesman of the rural masses neglected by the urban, bourgeois Istiqlal."[30]

Given that the Mouvement Populaire was to a large extent coopted by the state, the push for identity related demands was mostly the work of associations and the Berber elite made up of intellectuals and students. The number of associations established increased significantly since the creation of the Association Marocaine de Recherche et d'Échange Culturel (AMREC) in 1967. Most of these associations worked locally, and their demands tended to be more cultural than political. In fact, with the exception of a few, most of them shied away from the use of explicitly Berberist names and opted for more neutral ones.[31]

The assertion of cultural and linguistic rights reached a turning point in 1991 when a group of associations met in Agadir and issued the Agadir Charter of Linguistic and Cultural Rights, commonly known as the Agadir Charter. The charter deplored the "dramatic situation" of

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[28] Cynthia Becker, "Matriarchal Nomads and Freedom Fighters: Transnational Amazigh Consciousness and Moroccan, Algerian, and Nigerien Artists," *Critical Interventions* 5 (Fall 2009):75.
[29] Michael Willis, "The Politics of Berber (Amazigh) Identity" in North Africa: Politics, Region, 223.
[30] A. Coram, "Note on the Role of the Berbers in the Early Days of Moroccan Independence" in *Arabs and Berbers: From Tribe to Nation in North Africa*, edited by Ernest Gellner and Charles Micaud, (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co, 1973), 271.
[31] Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement,* 96.

Amazigh identity and language, which despite their historical and social saliency in shaping individual and collective identities, are marginalized.[32] The charter called on the state to undertake the necessary actions so as to promote a more democratic and pluralist conception of Moroccan identity and to recognize Berber culture as one of its constitutive components. While this was certainly an important step in the advocacy for cultural and linguistic rights, it was even more so in the development in the perception of Amazigh identity because it represented a "true identity claim,"[33] in that it asked for the nationalization and the officialization of Amazigh language.

The Charter also contributed to the consolidation of the Mouvement Culturel Amazigh (MCA) as a major structure for the coordination of Berberist associations at the national level. Although disagreement on goals and methods of action exist among the different associations, the MCA nonetheless played a major role in raising consciousness about the specificities of Berber identity and mobilizing to put pressure on the state. The National Coordination Council of the MCA was thus created in 1994 as a loose framework with the aim of aligning the positions of associations working to promote the Amazigh cause.[34] The state's response to the emerging Berber challenge to the dominant identity narrative ranged from turning a blind eye to repression, passing by cooptation efforts.

Going Beyond the Borders: The Transnational Dimension of Identity

Perhaps one of the most significant roles played by the MCA is its contribution to paving the way for the involvement of Moroccan Amazigh militants in the broader effort of shaping Amazigh identity at an international level. With the processes of Amazigh identity construction based on belonging to the same nation well underway, Moroccan Amazigh activists increasingly sought to connect with other militants from other countries to gain more support for their cause. Adding the transnational dimension marked a change in perception of Berber identity itself, which comes a long way from the colonial and the post-independence years. Steven Vertovec defines transnationalism as

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[32] Monde Berbère, "Historique de la Charte d'Agadir," accessed November 10, 2013. http://www.mondeberbere.com/societe/histocharte-fr.htm

[33] Rachid Ridouane Ziri. "Le Mouvement Amazigh ou la Réalité d'un Maroc Oublié," *Parimazigh* 5 (Juillet 1999), accessed online October 15, 2013. http://www.mondeberbere.com/PARImazigh/Parimazigh5/maroc.htm

[34] Brahim Akhiyat, "Al-mas ʾala al-amāziğyya : al-khitab wa al-ḥaraka" interview with Mohamed Hafid *al-nachra* 60 (April 1996) in *L'Amazighité entre Identité et Combat* edited by CentreTarik Ibn Zyad, 1999.

> "a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common – however virtual – arena of activity"[35]

Defining transnationalism in these terms suggests the existence of some identity consciousness and a sense of belonging to a community, which by ignoring national borders, poses a challenge to the state as the traditional articulator of identity and nation. Identity transnationalism has been to a large extent facilitated by the recent advances in the means of communication and the forces of globalization, which enable the establishment of transnational networks and the maintenance of contact between individuals and groups throughout the world.[36] In this sense, transnationalism carries an emancipatory potential, which Amazigh activists made use of in reimagining Amazigh but also Moroccan identity. This section will look at some of the channels through which Moroccan militants lifted Berber identity from the domestic level and placed it at the international one. These include the diaspora, contact with Algerian Kabyles, the World Amazigh Congress, and international institutions.

The Diaspora

Intensified immigration to Europe and North America gave birth to a significant and dynamic diaspora of people coming from the different North African countries. The pluralist character of the host countries gave them the opportunity to emphasize their Amazigh identity. According to Maxime Ait Kaki, the elastic character of the diasporization phenomenon brings new prospects for Amazigh group identity that can henceforth develop away from the restrictions and the watching eye of the home country.[37] Starting the late 1970s and early 1980s, some of the first associations promoting Berber language and culture were created in Europe, specifically in France, given the large number of Moroccan and Algerian Berberophones in this country and the

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[35] Steven Vertovec, "Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism" *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 22 no. 2 (March 1999): 447. Vertovec identifies six different yet connected understandings of transnationalism: as social formations and networks, a type of consciousness, a mode of cultural reproduction, an avenue of capital, a site of political engagement, and finally as (re)construction of 'place' or locality.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Maxime Ait Kaki, *De la Question Berbère au Dilemme Kabyle à l'Aube du XX^{ème} Siècle.* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 2004), 220.

strong solidarity bonds among them. One of these associations is the Paris-based Association de Culture Berbère, which provided cultural activities such as dance, theater, and Berber language classes.[38] In the 1990s, Amazigh associations in France tended to be explicitly political, with the most vocal being the Association Tamazgha established by Berberist students of the INALCO.[39]

Algeria: The "Grande Sœur Militante"

The evolution of Amazigh civil society in Morocco, Algeria coupled with the action of the diaspora formed the basis for building a transnational Amazigh connection. In Morocco the Berber transnationalist feeling was fueled by the events taking place in Algeria. The radical demands of the Kabyles have often been viewed by Amazigh activists in Morocco as a source of inspiration. Kabylia somewhat represents the "*grande sœur militante.*"[40] And although the development of the Amazigh question in the two countries followed different paths, what happens in one country does resonate in its neighbor.

The violence resulting from the refusal of the Algerian state to grant cultural and political representation to the Kabyles certainly generated feelings of compassion and sympathy. In April 2001, after the death of a high school student at the hand of the gendarmerie and the arrest of three others, a wave of riots broke out and was met by violent repression from the security apparatus in Kabylia. This triggered what came to be known as the Black Spring, thus plunging the region in a period of major unrest and bloodshed.[41] On May 1st in different Moroccan cities, many participants in the marches celebrating Labor Day waved banners expressing support and solidarity to the Berbers in Kabylia.[42] One Moroccan Berber activist said "we are proud that

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[38]Association de Culture Berbère, "Historique," accessed November 3, 2013. http://www.acbparis.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8:historique&catid=104&Itemid=464

[39]Tamazgha, "Qui est Tamazgha?" February 12, 2004, accessed November 3, 2013. http://tamazgha.fr/Qui-est-Tamazgha,1233.html

[40] Stéphanie Pouessel. "Une Culture Méditerranéenne Fragmentée : Revendication Amazighe entre Local(ité) et Transnational(ité)," *Revue Internationale de Sociologie et de Sciences Sociales Esprit Critique* 13, no. 1 (Summer 2010), 2.

[41] International Crisis Group, "Algeria: Unrest and Impasse in Kabylia" *Middle East/North Africa Report* June 10, 2003, accessed November 5, 2013. http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Algeria/Algeria%20Unrest%20and%20Impasse%20in%20Kabylia.pdf

[42] Thierry Oberlé, "Le Timide Réveil des Berbères Marocains," *Le Figaro* July 5, 2001, accessed November 3, 2013. http://www.mondeberbere.com/presse/lefigaro_reveil_amazigh_maroc.htm

some of *our people* [Berbers in Kabylia] rise directly against a power that refuses to recognize it."[43]

As Kabylia went through its Berber Spring in 1980, the Association de l'Université d'Eté d'Agadir held its first meeting in the summer of the same year. The meeting consisted of conferences on research in Berber culture, language and arts, signaling the first large scale and explicit action of the Amazigh movement. According to Mohamed Handaine, it was around this time that contact between the Amazigh movements in Morocco and Algeria was established, initially limited to intellectual exchange but formalized in 1993 when Moroccan and Algerian Amazigh associations signed a common note on cultural rights which they addressed to the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights.[44] The idea of creating the World Amazigh Congress (WAC) emerged from the activists' discussions then and later in 1995 as part of the Working Group on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Geneva.[45]

The World Amazigh Congress

The establishment of the World Amazigh Congress marked the de facto passage to a transnational understanding of Berber identity in Morocco. The first World Amazigh Congress took place in Tafira, Canary Islands, in 1997, and brought together delegations from countries as diverse as Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Morocco, as well as representatives of the diaspora.[46] The Congress represented an avenue for establishing relationships between Berberist militants throughout the world, but most importantly a milestone in the institutionalization of pan-Berberism.

The Congress contributes to shaping Berber identity through the production of transnational symbols and meaning. For example, it was during the first meeting that the Amazighs got their own flag, symbol of unity and belonging to a transnational homeland and "an African identity that extends beyond national borders and challenges the identification of the Maghreb with Arabs, Islam, and the Middle East."[47] The Congress' role is also manifest in its

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[43] Thierry Oberlé, "Le Timide Réveil des Berbères Marocains." (Emphasis added)
[44] Mohamed Handaine, "Tamāziğt bilā ḥūdūd: al-ijtimā'a al-tamhidi lil mū'tamar al-amāziğy al-'ālamy, hal hūa miilād al-ba'ṯ al-ṯaqāfy al-amāziğy 'ala mūstawā al-mağrib al-kabir?" interview with Mohamed Bahi, *al*-itiḥad al-ichtiraki (November 1995) in *L'Amazighité entre Identité et Combat,* edited by CentreTarik Ibn Zyad, 1999.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Gabi Kratochwil, "Some Observations on the First Amazigh World Congress (August 27-30, 1997, Tafira, Canary Islands," *Die Welt Des Islams*, 39, no. 2 (July 1999):149-50.
[47] Becker, "Matriarchal Nomads and Freedom Fighters," 71.

call on Amazigh people of the world to celebrate Yennayer – the Amazigh New Year. This is also an opportunity for the Congress to evaluate its past activities and reaffirm its engagement in the defense of Berber rights.[48] This celebration is imbued with meaning since it is, as some activists assert, the occasion "to never forget that we are a distinct nation, a majority with minority status, a besieged language, an oppressed identity, and an impoverished people [...] to reclaim our history."[49] Similarly, emblematic figures such as the Kahina and the Kabyle singers Lounès Matoub and Idir contribute to this new transnational narrative as Amazighs throughout the world emotionally relate to them. But the most significant expression of Berber unity was the development and standardization of the Tifinagh alphabet to be used by Amazigh people in the different North African countries and the diaspora.[50]

International Institutions

Amazigh activists understood what a useful tool international institutions would be for the purpose of advancing their cause after the attempts to do so on a domestic level yielded limited results. Sydney Tarrow noted the multiple new possibilities that reliance on international institutions opens up. These include providing militants with a forum to meet and exchange ideas and specific experiences within their respective countries. They also help activists to increase their visibility and legitimacy. But most importantly, they provide them with the needed political space to construct collective identities and return to their countries empowered by new alliances, shared programs and collective action plans.[51]

Ahmed Assid, one of the leading figures of the Amazigh movement in Morocco, argued that the Berber question could have been contained domestically had the state responded to demands of recognition, integration and equality. The efforts to transnationalize the issue were only a reaction to growing attacks on and marginalization of a group's identity at home. Thus it

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[48] Amazigh World Congress, "Yennayer 2952," Communiqués, accessed November 20, 2013. http://www.congres-mondial-amazigh.org/-/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=365&Itemid=28

[49] Driss Haboudane, Omar Chafik, and Rachid Beguenane, "Nouvel An Amazigh : Appel à Timazighine et Imazighen pour se Réapproprier ce Symbole Identitaire et Civilisationnel" October 4, 2005, available online at http://www.amazighworld.org/news/index_show.php?id=305

[50] Rachid Ridouane Ziri, "Tifinagh: L'Alphabet Berbère de A à ⵣ," Monde Berbère, accessed November 16, 2013. http://www.mondeberbere.com/langue/tifinagh/tifinagh_sommaire.htm

[51] Sidney Tarrow, "La Contestation Transnationale," *Cultures & Conflits* 38, (March 2000), accessed 24 October 2013. http://conflits.revues.org/276

was only normal to seek an outlet and support from ideological supporters.[52] Even those of the militants who opted for gradual change within the institutional limits of the system recognized the necessity to add a global dimension to the Amazigh question. One of them, Mohamed Chafik who headed the state-sponsored Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe (IRCAM), argued that "our right to exist as an ethnicity and culture, and what's more indigenous, is inscribed in a framework of natural and human rights. Thus, it is to the universal consciousness that we should appeal, starting with international bodies."[53]

Amazigh activists invested major efforts for the purpose of integrating the Berber demands in the framework of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This declaration states that "indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity."[54] As such, the declaration insists on the protection of the socio-cultural, linguistic, and civic rights of indigenous people.[55] The Moroccan Berberist association Tamaynut is to be credited for linking the Amazigh question and the rights of indigenous peoples during the Working Group in which it participated. However, despite multiple calls on the Moroccan government to sign the declaration, the latter continues to refuse the recognition of Berbers as an indigenous people because of the linguistic, participation and land rights it will need to grant them.[56]

Transnationalism as Renegotiation of the National Identity Project

The process of transnationalism "engenders negotiations between the transnational actors and states."[57] The first views transnationalism as means of political strength. On the other hand, the state, aiming to bring back the issue to the national level, finds itself obliged "to incorporate

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[52] Ahmed Assid, "Al-mas 'ala al-amāzigyya : al-khitab wa al-ḥaraka" interview with Mohamed Hafid *al-nachra* 60 (April 1996) in *L'Amazighité entre Identité et Combat* edited by CentreTarik Ibn Zyad, 1999.
[53] Mohamed Chafik, interview with Said Khottour, *Monde Amazigh,* May 22, 2005, accessed September 28, 2013. http://www.amazighworld.org/news/index_show.php?id=266 (Author's translation).
[54] U.N. General Assembly. 107th Plenary Meeting. "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," 13 September 2007, 61/295, Article 2.
[55] Ibid, Article 8.
[56] Groupe International de Travail pour les Peuples Autochtones. "Chronologie du Mouvement Mondial Autochtone," accessed November 22, 2013. http://www.gitpa.org/Processus%20GITPA%20200/GITPA%20200-30CHRONO.htm
[57] Riva Kastoryano, "Transnational Nationalism: Redefining Nation and Territory," in *Identities, Affiliations and Allegiances* edited by Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro, and Danilo Petranovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 177.

minority identities into their official discourse and 're-territorialize' politics."[58] While the establishment of a de jure Amazigh nation replacing the existing nation states in the Maghreb is extremely unlikely, the transnationalization of Berber identity is nonetheless an important development mainly because it puts pressure on the Moroccan state to take the Berber component into consideration. In fact, for the transnational movement itself, the creation of a stand-alone nation is not at the heart of action, although the production of national narratives, symbols and meanings might suggest the opposite. Rather, the respective home states of the activists remain the main site of struggle, as they to improve the condition of Amazigh identity, participation and representation in each one of them. This is evident in the WAC president's opening speech at the 5th Congress in which he said

> I solemnly call on the highest governmental authorities of all the states of Tamazgha to radically change their policies and grant full rights to Amazigh people. We, as an organization of civil society, are willing to support this change by indicating and guiding efforts to build a just society where all the cultures and peoples have their place.[59]

Thus the creation in 2001 of the IRCAM has been seen by many as a step further in the promotion of Berber identity and culture, and Tamazight started being taught in primary schools throughout the country in 2003. More recently, the 2011 constitutional reform recognized the Amazigh identity as an element of Moroccan identity and made Tamazight an official language of Morocco. While one cannot determine objectively the extent to which transnationalism can be credited for this recent liberalization in favor of Amazigh identity, its role in gaining visibility and enabling coordination cannot be denied.

Conclusion

This paper argued that adding a transnational dimension to Amazigh identity in Morocco came as a response to homogenization policies that seek to produce an official state identity that excludes a major component of Moroccan society and culture. Initially, Berberophones perceived themselves as part of an emerging Moroccan nation, the post-independence years witnessed their marginalization in favor of an exclusively Arab vision of the state. This prompted

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[58] Riva Kastoryano, "Transnational Nationalism," 177.
[59] Belkacem Lounes, "Allocution à l'Ouverture de Vème Congrès du CMA à Meknès," October 10, 2008, available at http://www.congres-mondial-amazigh.org/-/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=641&Itemid=50

demands for integration articulated by a dynamic civil society. As the state continued to ignore their pleas for recognition, activists developed a transnational agenda that constructs and promotes a broader nation beyond the existing borders, but which in reality only aims at renegotiating national identity within the state.

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