

The Intellectual Economy of an Anthropology of Change

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Abstract

This paper raises issues of change in both highland Morocco and within the practice of Anthropology itself. The first part of the paper argues that at least some of the shifting boundaries in the social sciences offer opportunities for younger anthropologists, and that disciplinary change is not necessarily something to fear. The paper then explores what an anthropology of change might involve and discusses a particular situation of change among highland Berber speakers in Morocco, for whom migration, state education and development are producing economic, social and linguistic shifts, all of which are re-shaping local lives.

Changing Anthropology

This essay is mundanely anthropological in inspiration. It concerns an out-of-the-way place — highland Morocco — and the way that migration, state education and development are influencing linguistic consciousness there. It is based on long term fieldwork and participant observation and it employs the hackneyed theme of natives under threat. This is anything but unusual. But an earlier version of the essay was written for an area studies journal normally read by journalists, political scientists, activists and policy makers and it is unlikely that any anthropologist would ever have seen it. The journal that solicited the original piece is suspicious of anthropology. In editorial meetings and personal asides they heap scorn on our terminology, the seemingly esoteric nature of our aims and our generally apolitical presentation. They told me rather plainly they wanted something jargon-free, broadly relevant, and politically focused. I was thus required to write differently than I would have for an anthropological journal and this caused me to reflect on the state of my natal discipline and the practice of publication. In one sense the article below represents somewhat of a trend in anthropology: the tendency to look outside for inspiration, or at least an audience.

The nearby anthropological outside consists of many things, but notably today a constel-

lation of studies: gender studies, ethnic studies, environmental studies, global studies, development studies, area studies and so forth. The emergence of such upstarts has been much lamented, at least by some anthropologists who fear they will purloin our method and reduce us to apologizing for our colonialist ancestors. In times of financial belt-tightening there may be good reasons anthropologists fear a drain on our institutional resources. On the other hand, it seems to me that these new intellectual arenas also provide opportunities. Few disciplines followed by the word studies have been around long enough to become too rigid and thus remarks can often be made within their spheres from an anthropological perspective. Admittedly it's unclear what such perspective might be, but this only makes claiming to speak from one easier, and the opportunities for developing one wider. Such quasi-disciplines hovering on the edge of anthropology provide an important resource, especially for young anthropologists, because anthropology has a complex institutional history and so many practitioners and viewpoints that it can be daunting to find something to say that will be seen as interesting or novel. We have to contend with inertia, the weight of history. The exception to this is the novelty of writing about someplace nobody else has been, our oldest but ever more difficult trick, but

as the exotic becomes politically suspect even that ruse is becoming closed to us.

Publishing in the studies, however, is comparatively easy for anthropologists. If you happen to have been someplace non-anthropologists normally do not go, and if you have even a smattering of theoretical knowledge to make sense of what happened there, chances are you have something interesting to say. Due to the increasing specialization of all the social science disciplines, what may seem a routine observation within one circle might be useful to someone playing a different intellectual game. If you have been somewhere odd, especially somewhere very poor and perhaps illiterate, you have duty to pay back your research funding by making the concerns of that place known to the world. Surely anthropologists already know that brutally impoverished people well off the information superhighway still comprise the overwhelming majority of the planet's population and they may be tired of hearing about it. People outside of anthropology seem to forget this fact, however, and they deserve to be reminded. Moreover, and more cynically, publishing is critical to landing any type of academic job. Simple reporting from the vibrant human world outside of the etiolated mindset of academia is a useful way to build a publishing record without exposing yourself to the discouraging sighs of disciplinary Brahmins. Rather straightforward ethnographic reports used to comprise a great deal of what got published under the banner of anthropology. This is no longer true. It seems to me that one way anthropology must change to incorporate an anthropology of change is to get more voices heard more often, and in less pretentious language. This is partly possible by moving outside of the disciplinary boundaries.

Anthropology of Change

That said, there is the more vexing issue of what exactly an anthropology of change should be. I do not think I have provided a very good example below, which would seem to vitiate the claim that circumventing anthropology is the way to grapple with the issue. In the article I rely on the easy trope

of traditional natives battered by change from outside. I make some noises about the long-term dynamism of the society in question, but the overall impression is the confrontation of tradition and modernity. I might have emphasized the more durable processes involved, and the inherent dynamism and diversity within culture, but these are not easy to outline. I wanted to provoke my readers, at least some of whom may stand to influence the processes I describe. The division of outside and inside, like the division between tradition and modernity, can be a politically useful heuristic convention. It can also be a serious impediment to understanding.

As an anthropologist the things I think really matter to understanding people are nearly always dynamic. However we define culture and society they are things that have to be reproduced. In order to endure, all symbolic orders, productive relationships, and institutional arrangements must attend to the fact that the people who build and embody such phenomena eventually die. New people must replace these unfortunates and new people never come ready made. The mortality of bodies and minds is the motor that drives social process and requires the socialization of human beings. Understanding change means understanding how very intimate biological, social and cultural processes articulate and how tradition managed to be resurrected reliably enough that it seemed stable in the first place. It is an accident of methodology that anthropology has too often been freighted by an emphasis on stability and order or their short-term disruption. The temporal constraints of the anthropologist bear on the portrayal of the social order, rendering it static when compared, for instance, to the perspective of the historian. Biology might not be the only reason culture is dynamic, but it's a sufficient reason.

If the anthropology of change has to contend with the inherent dynamism of culture, it also has to deal with its inherent diversity and asymmetrical power relations. The interpretive turn has done much to render culture the final unit of analysis and the *sine qua non* of the discipline. We can't

blame Geertz for *geist*, obviously, but it's clear enough that selective and fawning readings of him have doomed many descriptions meant to be thick to end up merely inert. The introduction to Geertz's manifesto, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Geertz 1973a), which deals with Berber, Jewish and French misunderstandings of a sheep heist has been ignored in favor of *The Balinese Cockfight* (Geertz 1973b). This elegant, transcendently meaningful rendering of a cockfight had the unfortunate side effect of inducing a generation of students to forget that at least half the people in Bali have no cocks, and that those who do have them had to get them from somewhere. Geertz himself is too smart to wholly ignore power or diversity. Still, much anthropology continues in the blithe acceptance that in each particular case something like a generic culture exists and is worthy of interpretation and description. This is a broader problem with hermeneutic approaches to cultural phenomena. If culture is viewed as text, this implies that it's already written, probably from a single pen. This makes grappling with change awkward, necessarily evoking metaphorical expressions of emendations, of forces and authors outside the traditional original document (William Roseberry, personal communication). It is probably not surprising that anthropologists, as writers plagued by publishers, took to this textual metaphor like the proverbial ducks to water.

Change, if we accept that it necessarily comes at least partially from within culture and society itself, is tied to the differences between people and to their ineluctable mortality. Not just anybody will do to fill a social vacancy. Bodies and minds have to be grown, disciplined and (re)classified as they grow and change in different situations. They must be the right sex or age to perform their social work, they must be associated with certain properties or born into a certain family or lineage or within a certain territory. We cannot develop an anthropology of change without attending to the inherent dynamism of, and diversity within, both society and culture.

How Berber Matters in the Middle of Nowhere

In the rugged mountains south of Marrakech the lives of Berber-speaking farmers move in what seems a timeless rhythm. Men manipulate intricate stone canals, drawing water to small terraced plots of barley and maize. Women in bangles and bright scarves lash huge loads of wood to their backs and pick their way down precarious trails. Fires from family bread ovens send thin tendrils of smoke into the sky; cows low, hungry in their pens. Young boys throw rocks and lazily tend goats; girls sing as they gather water or fodder or wash clothes in the river, their younger siblings strapped to them. The people of the mountains seem to live in another Morocco entirely, one without the car exhaust and noise of urban life, or for that matter even electricity. The Arcadian surface of village life obscures much, however, both enduring facts like the brutality of physical labor and new developments, a veritable landslide of social, political and economic changes. These changes are related but not reducible to changes occurring elsewhere in Morocco and the world, processes of migration, formal education, and what is often called development. Bearing on these changes is another fact that is central to much of rural Morocco; the people here do not speak Arabic, the national language.

The linguistic distinctiveness of rural Berbers is not often thought to have much relevance in Morocco, and it's true that it may be overstated. But to assert that speaking Berber *somehow* and *sometimes* matters is not to say that Moroccan national politics and identity are insignificant, that class and gender are unimportant, that Islam is not central to people's lives, or that the monarchy is distant and meaningless. All of these things have their own significance in the everyday lives of mountain people. But in reacting against a colonial French fascination with the cultural distinctiveness of Berbers, nationalist and anti-colonialist scholars and writers have gone to the opposite extreme. They have ceased treating the distinctive language of the estimated 40% of Moroccans who are Berber speakers as

having any relevance at all. Urban Imazighen activists (Imazighen being the word for what English speakers know as Berbers) have been fighting against this, arguing that the Berber language (Tamazight) deserves a more prominent place in Moroccan history and some consideration in educational policy and practice. Occasionally activists overstate their case, making far-flung claims of Berber unity or lapsing back into colonial era rhetoric of a kind of cultural Berberstan wholly apart from the larger Arabic speaking society. Rarely does anyone have anything dispassionate or specific to say about how Tamazight language use matters in contemporary social and political processes.

Today it seems fair to assert that the significance of Berberness lies somewhere between the all-encompassing and the non-existent. Berber language — or in the instance I examine here, the variety of it known as Tashelhit — matters in some ways to most everybody who speaks it, and sometimes it matters in ways might be considered political. I would not claim the sort of importance I will outline here for Tashelhit-speakers in the Agoundis Valley for all Berber varieties at all times and places, but the Berber speaking regions of all of North Africa are experiencing many of the same changes as the Agoundis, and the associated relevance of language seems likely to bear comparison. The way that Berber language operates politically in the Agoundis may be idiosyncratic in some ways, but it cannot be entirely so. The Agoundis Valley is an out of the way nook of the world less than 100 km south of Marrakech. It sits at 5000 feet above sea level in a steep and forbidding canyon, but is well watered by snowmelt spilling off the great Ouanoukrim Massif around Jebel Toubkal, the highest mountain in North Africa. In the late 1990s there was no cultural activism or fundamentalist Islam. The people concerned themselves mostly with the complicated task of growing enough barley and maize to keep themselves alive, with tending goats and cows, and with harvesting the almonds and walnuts that remain their main source of income.

I visited the Agoundis Valley as a tourist in 1994 and was impressed mostly with the hospitality of the people and the verdant, seemly sustainable agricultural system. It was a drought year and most of the country was scorched to a dusty, dun colored haze. The cities were filling with farmers driven off the land. Tangiers was rationing water that could only be delivered by tanker, and the air conditioners of Rabat were working overtime. The Agoundis, however, was green and cool with the shade of massive walnut trees and flowering pomegranates. It seemed the very model of a contemporary, poor but vital subsistence economy.

In 1998 I returned to the valley to do research in a particular village, Tagharghist. It did not take me too long to realize life was not percolating along in the state of homeostasis I had imagined. In the short time since my previous visit the people of the Agoundis had built themselves a road that allowed trucks to access the valley, at least on market day. The village had garnered itself a Peace Corps worker, the first one in the area. With his help the villagers were busily constructing a potable water system. Also, after the men of the village chiseled a flat spot out of the mountainside with sledgehammers and iron bars, the Moroccan government came in and began the process of building a school, the first ever.

Thus after only a four-year absence I found that while men still followed mules back and forth through ancient fields, trucks now carried other men to and from jobs outside the valley. Boys still herded goats and girls hauled fodder and firewood, but their younger siblings could be heard counting in Arabic in the bright pink schoolhouse. Women still baked *tanoort* and men made tea for any visitor willing to sit long enough for water to boil, but national and international agencies had representatives swarming through the valley, asking questions and making promises. The people of these mountains have long interacted with the Arabic speakers of the plains, but now the outside seemed to be arriving more suddenly with more force than ever before. Through processes of migration, education and development the plain, often invisible

fact of speaking Berber was coming to matter in new ways.

Migration

Migration is perhaps the most salient social and political force in North Africa today. Much has been written about the *bidonvilles* of Casablanca, the agricultural labor force in Spain, the Arab quarters of Paris. What has been less often discussed is the effect migration has on the places that send the migrants, the homes that these traveling workers are so often working to support. The village of Tagharghist has been involved in these kinds of movements for nearly eight hundred years, and maybe many more. Of the three main families in the village, two are said to have originally been Berber-speaking groups from south and east of the mountains. The third family is thought to have descended from Arabic speakers originating in the region between Marrakech and Casablanca. All three families claim to have come to these mountains in the twelfth century. At this time these mountains were not the periphery they seem to be today, but were very nearly the political heart of all North Africa. Given this history there is nothing particularly new about travel and Berbers in this region, and not even anything particularly new about Berbers coming to speak Arabic or Arabs coming to speak Berber. What has changed recently is the scale and form of migration, and thus the way language plays into the process.

For instance, the road built by the villagers allows men to come and go more easily in motorized transportation and the cash economy gives them a reason to do so. Landless men can now maintain households in the village and commute for a few weeks or a few months to jobs in mines nearby or to commercial agricultural areas further away in the plains. Because they are landless, normally these men would not figure prominently in village politics, but now that some of them now have money they can buy influence in local affairs. The traditional system of dividing rights and responsibilities by lineage and land-owning households has to be adjusted for the more diverse economic base. If in the past subsections of the

village had to provide labor for communal projects, now some men can pay fines to be exempt from these responsibilities. As such, they can remain inside the village social and political system precisely because they have paying work outside of it. For men who send their sons and daughters to work outside the village, the road makes it far easier to insure that remittances make it all the way back to the mountains. Boys working in dairy farms as far away as the Middle Atlas and girls working as nannies in Marrakech can expect their fathers to arrive on payday to collect the wages, leave a small allowance, and return to the village. Improvements in infrastructure accelerate the pace and range of movement; the globalization of the Moroccan economy generates increasing work for those willing to do it cheapest. Together these changes bring the poor people of the mountains into wider contact with the languages and cultural practices of different parts of the country.

All this movement inevitably affects the way language is used and the way different languages are understood to matter. People who have spent any time in the city know well enough that *tafransist* (French) is the language of the educated, at least in its Arabized Moroccan form. Migrants also come to see that there are several equally Arab alternatives to *Derija*, the colloquial Arabic of the Moroccan cities, including the Egyptian version so often seen on television and the Modern Standard Arabic of news broadcasts and formal speeches. Migrants who encounter Berber speakers from other regions come to see their Tashelhit as but one variety of Tamazight (Berber) and are far more likely to say that they can understand other dialects. For example, Agoundis villagers who have not traveled tend to define *Tarifit* (the dialect spoken in the northern Rif Mountains) as the language of the north and feel it bears no relation to Tashelhit. People with more experience moving around Morocco more correctly see *Tarifit* and Tashelhit as varieties of Tamazight, the broadly conceived indigenous language of the country before the Arab invasions.

Travelers bring these understandings with them back to the village, on summer vacations, at the Aid al-Kebir, or during Ramadan. They bring bits of these other languages with them and valuations about what they mean. Linguistic consciousness is thus increasing and speaking Tashelhit has for some become an act of homecoming, an assertion of a local identity in an increasingly de-localized world. Where languages and dialects mix, the meaning of what is said becomes intimately bound to the language in which it is uttered. This process is only beginning in the Agoundis, but it is sure to continue. In the Moroccan south every person I ever met who felt passionately that speaking Berber mattered was a person who had spent time in places where Berber speakers were a minority. Increasing migration thus seems likely to increase a sort of Berber consciousness and with it the political potential of the Amazigh, or Berber culture, movement.

Education

The people of Tagharghist value education and worked hard to get a government school to augment the traditional education the children receive at the mosque. The men toiled for weeks in the hot sun, hacking at the boulders next to the road to create a flat platform on which a proper building could be constructed. Eventually the government workers appeared. Up went the schoolhouse, with a toilet (only the second in the village), glass windows, desks, blackboards, and a coat of shocking pink paint. The villagers were exuberant and became more so when the matriculating class received their government-issue backpacks filled with school supplies. Every child lucky enough to get one would not take it off, and for weeks they pranced around the village waiting for the first day of school. No rock or wall was safe from the newly acquired chalk and even I was pressed to do short arithmetic lessons in Tashelhit to mollify the students awaiting the arrival of the teacher.

In the past the children have only been educated in the mosque, where they focused on religion and some rudimentary math. This is seen as important work and the *fqih* or religious instructor is highly valued by the

community. As in other villages in the valley, the people of Tagharghist pay him a hefty supplement of wool, grain and sundry other items to augment his government salary. However valuable religious education might be, it is not by itself seen as adequately preparing children for life in contemporary Morocco. With immunizations helping more children than ever to survive childhood, and with the government requiring ever more literacy to function as a Moroccan citizen, it is clear to everybody that more a formalized, urban or modern style of education is needed. Parents know that there will not be enough land to feed the next generation. To marry and start families of their own children will have to move to the city. Life in the city requires a sort of training not available in the mosque.

Finally the government schoolteacher arrived. She was pious, wearing her scarf tight around her head at all times, and monolingual, an Arabic speaker from Casablanca. Her initial attempts to conduct class were hampered by an absolute inability of most of the students to understand anything she said. One girl who had lived part of her life in Marrakech did some translating, but there were many beatings administered to children who had a difficult time comprehending what they were supposed to be doing. Making things more difficult was the fact that the teacher had been trained to teach urban students and the materials were designed to facilitate that. The books, for instance, not only were entirely in Arabic, but they relied on pictures of things that were not familiar to rural children. Enthusiasm for school quickly faded and beatings were administered for absenteeism and tardiness. The school day was often shortened and sometimes eliminated entirely and vacations extended. Written school reports went home to parents who couldn't read them and anxious mothers asked me to explain what the various checks in the various boxes might mean. The teacher asked for a transfer, as most do who are assigned to desperately poor rural areas and the students were released for the summer to await the new teacher they would get the next year.

The impact of school was not restricted to the young children who endured it. For instance, despite the ambivalence most people seemed to feel towards the aloof, Arabic speaking schoolteacher, within days of her arrival the teenaged girls began to wear their scarves in her style. To them the teacher was a woman who had made her own way in the world, the only woman they had ever seen who did not have to haul impossibly heavy loads up and down the steep paths, who could buy her own clothes rather than giving money to a man to purchase them at *souk*, who could travel by herself. The teacher might be haughty, but men showed her respect, at least to her face. It was hard to parse whether it was her urbanity or her strident piousness, her government position or her lifestyle that they wanted to emulate. But her language was Arabic and none of the girls failed to notice that. The teacher made no attempt to speak Tashelhit and nobody seemed to expect that she should, despite the fact that the Peace Corps volunteer and myself had both managed to acquire at least enough to have reasonable conversations. For the schoolteacher Tashelhit was beneath consideration, something completely unworthy. The schoolteacher considered her own dialect of Arabic to be the closest possible to the language of the Qur'an, and thus very nearly God's language. She told people this. Tashelhit was a language scarcely better than the babble of children. To the dismay of at least some of the older women, teenaged girls could soon be heard addressing one another in simple Arabic, despite the fact they had no formal training in it.

Many Berber and especially Tashelhit students move through the traditional (mosque based) educational system to become religious teachers. The religious universities in Morocco are full of Berbers. All of the teachers in the mosques of the Agoundis speak Tashelhit as their first language; many are from this or nearby valleys. By contrast, none of the teachers in the modern government schools admit to knowing Tashelhit, although a few say that their mothers spoke it. This seems significant in that the most radical activists for Berber rights that I met were in areas that had had modern govern-

ment schools far longer than the Agoundis. These activists often describe ill treatment and discrimination in schools as factors that lead them to a more politicized Berber consciousness. Though all of them that I met spoke Tashelhit, I never met a teacher in a mosque who thought that children should only know Berber, that Arabic was not very important, or that Berber was any better than Moroccan Arabic. But they didn't denigrate Tashelhit and didn't seem to have a problem teaching in a bilingual environment.

One scene from the mosque school in Tagharghist illustrates this point. I was going to dinner with the *fqih* and so waited for him to finish his lessons. The children had completed their religion studies and had had some practice doing long division on a small, much abused blackboard. The *fqih* gathered the boys and girls around him on a reed mat and waited for them to fall silent. He said very quietly, in colloquial Moroccan Arabic, 'What would you like today?'. Evidently the children knew the drill well. The *fqih* needed only look at a student for them to reply with an imaginary item from a grocery store. If the child gave the name of the item in Tashelhit, the teacher would look to another eager face, and then another until somebody gave an Arabic name for a product likely to be in a store. There were no beatings or even raised voices.

This seemed to me a far more effective way than the official government curriculum to teach mountain children to survive in Moroccan cities. Unofficially and without anyone's pedagogical assistance, seated on the traditional reed mat on the roof of a mud walled mosque, the *fqih* illustrated how languages can be taught without being divisive. He imparted useful knowledge without degrading Qur'anic Arabic, Moroccan colloquial Arabic, or Tashelhit. He taught all three languages in a single day, sometimes in a single lesson. It would seem that the Moroccan government's attempt to build a Muslim citizenry through schools in village mosques works very well. At least in the mountains people take their religion very seriously. The government's attempt at a

more modern style education seems less successful when applied in a rural, Berber speaking milieu. In fact, the modern education system in the mountains appears destined to generate the very linguistic polarization it would seem designed to avoid, one that serves neither the interests of Amazigh cultural activists nor the nationalist interest in creating a linguistically homogeneous citizenry. It certainly doesn't seem to fulfill the needs of the village children.

Development

Arguably education and migration for wage labor are at least linked to what we broadly call development. Today, however, there are organizations pursuing specific development objectives in the Agoundis. The projects launched by these organizations articulate in important ways with the linguistic situation in the mountains, albeit different ways and to varying degrees. Here I will focus particularly on the linguistic element of government corruption, and the interaction of development projects, language, and local politics.

The word corruption is almost viscerally unpleasant in English and as such does not really capture the way this notion operates in Morocco, especially rural Morocco. The standard *modus operandi* simply requires the giving of gifts, and although many decry the practice everyone understands that this is how things work. Generally speaking villagers only become outraged at what they see as inappropriate exaction, and so what might be called bribery elsewhere is here more properly considered a complicated negotiation for the appropriate price of services rendered. The problem is that in Berber speaking areas these negotiations often occur across a linguistic divide. Many of the officials are from outside of the area and most of these are monolingual Arabic speakers, or speakers of Arabic and French. Many of these officials are perfectly honest and attempt to do their difficult jobs as best they can. If those below or above a particular person in the hierarchy are operating according to more traditional and less properly bureaucratic paradigms, the job

of the straight or *nishan* official is made harder still.

In the Agoundis and elsewhere bureaucratic exaction for various things and services is viewed in different ways by different people, ways that are not always easy to understand. Once, after a visit by a bribe-taking official, a man told me, only Christians are honest. Almost in the same breath he also told me that all Arabs were dishonest, which I took to mean Arabic speakers since the man who had exacted the bribe spoke only Arabic. I assumed this left Tashelhit speakers somewhere between Arabs and Christians. I was wrong, however, since when I pressed the question it became clear that what he meant was all Muslims were dishonest, a peculiar sentiment given that he himself was Muslim. In this conversation the man I spoke to was conflating Muslim and Arab and opposing this whole group to Christians, which he equated with all foreigners. As a monolingual, devout Muslim, Tashelhit speaker the man still considered himself Arab, at least in this context. My point is that it's not easy to comprehend exactly what people mean when they're upset and one thing that greatly upsets poor people is giving their scarce resources to corrupt agents of the state.

With this caveat in mind, it was the case that many people in Morocco made it very clear to me that different government agents were more or less corrupt. But some country people asserted that the Arabic speaking officials were generally more corrupt than the Tashelhit speaking officials. If this is true, it probably has more to do with the fact that the Tashelhit speakers are far lower in the graft hierarchy and that they are more likely to live locally and have family in the area. Relatives are no guarantee against opportunism, but the social pressure they exert provides some safeguard. As roads and other infrastructure expands, the central government gets more involved in ever more remote valleys and more Arabic speakers come in contact with Berber speaking citizens. To the degree that these officials are fair and impartial, there are few problems. When officials are not fair, the

blame for their avarice at least sometimes falls on their Arab ethnicity rather than on their government position or their personal ethical failings. Rural Berber speakers have few or no trustworthy channels of complaint. Their final appeal is to charge greedy officials with being bad Muslims operating contrary to Islam. Thus government corruption is an under-appreciated fountain of support for political Islam in Morocco.

International development agencies must deal with corruption also, but run into added layers of linguistic problems. The World Bank, for example, is funding a series of programs in the Agoundis and other valleys bordering the Toubkal National Park. The Bank is very concerned to insure that as much of their money as possible ends up being spent on the projects for which it is intended. To this end they sent a representative to Tagharghist to discuss the terms for disbursement of funds. The French-speaking representative was accompanied by nearly a dozen Moroccan bureaucrats from various government agencies. Most were very well intended. Most spoke French. None spoke Tashelhit.

When the two 4x4 trucks pulled up the track the villagers knew something important was up. Children were dispatched to call the men from the fields and they streamed in, gathering at the home of the one man in the village who could claim some fluency in Arabic. Women from several families were summoned to cook a meal. Meat and bread and tea were scrounged from various households and an impromptu feast was organized the likes of which local people would only eat once a year, on the Aid al-Kebir. The food was not for the local people, of course, but for the visitors.

The host of the meeting and presumed translator had gained his knowledge of Arabic only by listening to the radio and studying the Qur'an. As a landed, politically powerful patriarch he had not spent time in the cities since he had no need to work there. The men who had spent time working among Arabic speakers and might have some chance of translating were not there, of course, precisely because they were off

working. Thus the people most technically qualified to mediate between the illiterate Tashelhit speaking villagers and the highly bureaucratized and French speaking World Bank were unavailable, partially at least because the villagers were given no advance notice of the visit.

What ensued was somewhat farcical. French sentences that began as something like, we require transparent accounting were rendered into Moroccan Arabic by the coterie of officials and then into Tashelhit by the villager hosting the group. Such sentences emerged from the end of the translation chain sounding something like do you want money? . The answer, not surprisingly, was yes. Later, few of the men in attendance told me they understood very much at all. Most said they understood nothing.

The big and controversial question centered on whether the villagers wanted the money disbursed directly to them or whether it should be handled by an intermediate government agency. Both the Bank representative and the villagers knew that the Moroccan agency in question would skim some portion of the funds. The Bank was frustrated, therefore, that the villagers decided to let this agency deal with the funds. The representative from the Bank labored to explain the advantages of getting the money directly, and he seemed to think the villagers rather stupid for letting an intermediate agency into the mix. The villagers were not stupid at all. They knew that they would have to pay out a portion of the funds one way or another. They were afraid that if they got the money first they would have to pay the officials anyway and still be accountable to the Bank for all the money. They might end up in trouble with this Bank, a powerful agency they could not control or quite comprehend. From their perspective it made far more sense to just take what the agency in question did not skim and thereby avoid any question of impropriety on their part.

Language matters here in simple terms of comprehension, but also in the sense that people who can claim that comprehension

are in a powerful position. The man who hosted the party was not keen to take control of this stage of the deal and ask for the money directly. It is a safe bet, however, that he will have much to say about what to do with whatever money finally filters down. When local decisions have to be made about which canals to be improved or where to build a water storage cistern, he will have significant influence. The host managed to present a plausible claim that he had the linguistic resources necessary to lead the villagers in a rapidly changing political climate

Conclusion

Increasingly the social and political ambit of Tashelhit speaking mountain farmers includes Arabic speaking schoolteachers and government officials, French, German, and English speaking development agents, and rising numbers of circulating migrant workers. This expanding movement and interaction generates a real and increasing cognizance in the mountains that life without electricity, adequate medical care, or sanitation facilities is less than wholly adequate. Such social changes have also served to foreground what long remained a centrally invisible fact about these Moroccan farmers, that they are Imazighen (Berbers). They don't speak the national language. With religious, social and economic unrest dominating the news in and on Morocco, cultural politics has gone relatively unnoticed. Within the realm of cultural politics, developments in the countryside are perhaps the most difficult to ascertain. Aided by new communications media, urban Amazigh activists have managed to articulate a sense of cultural identity as Imazighen, but in the countryside there are no demonstrations and no press releases, no Internet discussion groups, magazines or newsletters. In much of the mountains radio reception is patchy and illiteracy is almost total. Still, here too there are shifts in how Berber speakers see themselves and their world and these shifts in perception articulate with larger processes of migration, educational policies and development projects. As Micaela di Leonardo has written, [t]he real key to the perception of cultural difference is politics (Di Leonardo

1997:64). It remains to be seen how these changes in cultural perception in the middle of nowhere will play out on the main stage of Moroccan politics. Surely they will have a role.

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