

Morocco's Invisible Imazighen

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This paper asserts that Morocco's Imazighen (Berbers) are often ignored in current academic literature. When they are not ignored Berbers tend to be presented in historical or apolitical terms. This situation is in striking contrast to the French colonial fascination with Berbers, which was often expressly political; it is also at odds with contemporary Amazigh (Berber) activist contentions about the relevance of Berber identity politics. This paper suggests that undervaluing and misrepresenting Morocco's linguistic diversity skews our scholarly conceptualisation of the nation as a whole. This in turn stands to undermine governmental and non-governmental policy, especially in terms of rural development and education.

In the spring 2000 issue of this journal David Hart wrote, '...I agree fully about the ongoing Berber search for self-identity, especially as it has in very recent years moved into a more active phase.'¹ At first glance there is nothing controversial about this. Indeed, it echoes Geertz's 1973 proclamation that differences 'between "Arab" and "Berber" [remain] an important, if elusive factor in Moroccan national life'.² If we consider that Geertz emphasised this important 'factor' one year after his arch interlocutor in Moroccan affairs, Ernest Gellner, co-edited the volume 'Arabs and Berbers,' it would appear that for the last three decades we have had a broad consensus among scholars that at some level the fact of Berber linguistic distinctiveness matters in Morocco. Gellner may have argued that Berber identity was segmentary and tribal and unlikely to coalesce into a unified political movement, but he certainly thought being Berber was important, at least to Berbers themselves. If Hart is right about the more recent 'active phase' in the process of Berber self-identification, then surely Berbers (or Imazighen) would constitute a 'hot' political topic and a magnet for scholars. Curiously, they do not. My contention in this essay is that Imazighen are strangely absent from much academic work in Morocco, and when they do appear it is typically in historical –rather than contemporary and especially political – treatises. I believe this skews our view of Moroccan society as a whole.

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Of course, arguing that something does not exist is a vexed project from the outset, and so I begin by sketching a few examples of the kind of invisibility I mean. This constitutes not total objective absence but the portrayal of Berbers as being beyond or outside the Moroccan nation, or as being significant only in a historical sense. Work on contemporary Moroccan society seems to suggest that being Berber precludes being Moroccan, and being Moroccan does not include space for being or speaking Berber. This is not the case 'on the ground', of course, as is evident to anyone who speaks with Imazighen in Morocco. The Moroccan political establishment certainly recognises this fact, as both the late Hassan II and the present king, Mohammed VI, have made explicit public references to the demands of the country's large Berber speaking minority. In October 2001 the King established the 'Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture' in a speech where he said, amongst other things, 'The promotion of the Amazigh is a national responsibility, for no national culture can renounce its historical roots.'³ Even the BBC has written of Amazigh (or Berber) activism and moves for cultural self-determination.

Scholars, however, have tended to shy away from contemporary Berber politics. Below I give three published examples of what I mean by this: the issue of JNAS cited above, a 1998 article by Wolfgang Kraus on Berber 'segmentary identities' published in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, and a volume out of Harvard, *The Shadow of the Sultan*, edited by Rahma Bourqia and Susan Miller. These three items hardly constitute a survey of the literature, but they give a taste of the way Berbers are portrayed (and ignored) in contemporary scholarly work.

The academic portrayal I outline contrasts sharply with Amazigh activist accounts of their own self-identity and political interests, which is the concern of the second part of this essay. For activists the issue of Berberness (or Amazigh-ness) is central, even all-encompassing, rather than peripheral and unimportant. Amazigh rights to cultural and linguistic expression are seen as fundamental and are framed as basic human rights abrogated by the Moroccan government. The activist view is anything but apolitical. Historical visibility is part of their project, but activists are at least as concerned with bringing Amazigh history into the curriculum of the Moroccan educational system as with having it noted in obscure academic journals.

In the third part of the article I argue that to ignore the impact of linguistic diversity in Morocco is not merely an academic mistake. Millions of Moroccans are subject to governmental and international interventions of various sorts, especially efforts at 'development'. Few of these projects take linguistic differences seriously. This is not to say that the Amazigh activist vision of the significance of being Berber necessarily equates to that of the masses of mostly rural and often illiterate Berber speakers, but clearly there

must be some salience to speaking a language that is not officially recognised in courts, schools or political life. I do not explore the political identity of rural Berbers very deeply here, but suggest some conclusions from work I have done in a High Atlas village. I contend that a balanced understanding of how Berber language, culture and politics operate in both rural and urban Morocco is a crucial part of understanding the contemporary reality of the nation.

Scholarly Portrayals of Imazighen/Berbers

The spring 2000 issue of JNAS seems an odd place to begin discussing a lack of attention to Berbers. The issue contains two articles specifically on Berber-speaking people, and one on the protectorate era 'Native Policy Council' that involves Berbers substantially. In the first article, the example I cited at the outset, David Hart discusses the persistence and change in Berber tribal names from Ibn Khaldun's time to our own. He makes his comment about the 'active phase' of Berber self-identity rather off the cuff, his main interest being the complex ways that names are derived, claimed, mistranslated and maintained over the *longue durée*. This is one of the less ethnographic productions in Hart's astonishingly prolific work on Berbers. Next Michael Peyron discusses Amazigh poetry of the protectorate period, what he calls 'late-Heroic Age Berber poetry'.⁴ This Tamazight poetry captures the distress of Middle Atlas Imazighen at their military defeat by the French. Peyron asserts the usefulness of these transcribed poems to historians, arguing that they provide a 'vivid, authentic insight into the hearts and minds' of Central High Atlas Imazighen.⁵ Finally, William A. Hoisington, Jr provides an engaging and detailed account of the debates and policies of the French 'Native Policy Council' between 1921 and 1925.⁶ From the way the Council sought to deal with urban/tribal relations around Fes to the various Berber policies that led to the ill fated 1930 Berber *dahir*, again Imazighen figure prominently. All this in a single journal issue would seem a bounty to please any Berberist. These authors all attest to the enduring significance of Morocco's Imazighen, a population that occupied a place in Moroccan political discussions well into this century.

In the same issue, however, Mark Tessler reports on 'Morocco's Next Political Generation,' a generation that seems to lack any Berber component.⁷ This article begins with a discussion of the relative youth of the current political generation, and its increasingly urban location. It notes the increase in education, especially among urban young people, and the acute problem of the educated unemployed. There is a revealing summary of the political events of the 1970s and 1980s – the time period likely to have influenced the politics of the generation in question – including references

to a growing women's movement and the role Islamists played in political disturbances of the period. Tessler quite sensibly concludes that 'there is a significant measure of opposition to the prevailing political and economic order among ordinary Moroccans',⁸ and he notes that structural adjustment policies have disproportionately hurt the poorest members of society.

The article then turns to public opinion research in 1995/96 where 1,000 people living in the capital of Rabat were asked a series of questions. These included inquiries into Arabic and French newspaper readership, interest in foreign television programmes, affinity for Western music, likelihood of regular prayer and visiting marabouts, views on women working outside the home, notions of the ideal age of marriage, participation in civic associations, views on democracy and the value of Western governments. It is interesting and promising research. One assumes, however, that the questions were asked in Moroccan Arabic to people who considered themselves Arabs. They were asked in a city that – unlike Agadir or Marrakech – lacks a large Berber speaking population, and they were certainly not asked of the nearly half of all Moroccans who live in the countryside. Perhaps this makes no difference to national trends. My own research is limited to a small village in the High Atlas, and so I tend to view urban Morocco as a strange and alien place. But the absence of any acknowledgement of Berber-speaking Moroccans in the new political generation would seem a development worthy of comment. I have noted elsewhere that in the countryside speaking Berber matters in some ways to some people in certain contexts.⁹ It would be interesting to know if this is the case in urban areas also. Less than half a century ago the French were obsessed with urban/rural and Arab/Berber differences, and Berber politics were understood as vital to national politics. If the French concerns have evaporated, when and how this happened would seem important questions to entertain.

In contrast with the particular issue of JNAS, Kraus's more anthropological work among rural Berbers in the Middle Atlas offers a different set of problems.¹⁰ Here Berbers are not left out of Moroccan affairs, but the nation state is left out of the affairs of rural Berbers. Kraus's project is to extend the work of Ernest Gellner,¹¹ to argue that while the Ait Hdiddu of the Central High Atlas do not actually exhibit the segmentary politics Gellner ascribed to them, they do have 'segmentary identities'. This is to say that these Berbers imagine themselves as connected to one another in something like the ramifying, isomorphic groups Gellner outlined in his classic study. Gellner's point about segmentarity was that Berber groups resemble other groups of the same size, but also that the structure of larger, amalgamated groups mirrors that of their constituent parts, or segments. This is an extension of Émile Durkheim's notion of mechanical, as opposed to organic, solidarity.¹²

What Kraus sets out to do is to show that while these maximal level tribal groups do not actually materialise for any significant political purpose, this does not diminish the importance of Gellner's model. Indeed, as Combs-Schilling noted long ago, segmentarity as a conceptual model is something different than segmentarity as a political system.¹³ (This is hardly confined to segmentarity. After the last US presidential election we may more clearly see that 'democracy' as a cultural ideal is something different from democracy as a real political system.)

What Kraus also does, much like Gellner, is ignore the fact that the Ait Hdiddu live in Morocco, a nation in Benedict Anderson's conceptual sense, but also a powerful state. Kraus avers that landholding, for instance, is essentially the same as in the pre-colonial period.¹⁴ He does not mention the effects of migration, protectorate policies that sought to codify land rights for pastoralists, contemporary tax policies, state education, the impact of television and radio, and so forth. Segmentary identities seem to operate outside the contemporary Moroccan social, cultural and political world. If this is not the case, it would be interesting to see how the 'tribal' identities outlined by Kraus and Gellner have accommodated the modern world. It would be even more interesting to see how they fit within Morocco's 'next political generation'.

It is perhaps significant that Kraus published his piece in an anthropological as opposed to an area-studies journal. Most academic work in Morocco today makes no mention at all of tribes and is notable for an emphasis on the state, religion, and national character, the primacy of politics over economics, and the operations of royal charismatic leadership in a modern national culture. Most research is concerned with Arabic speakers and at least implicitly with 'Moroccanness' as expressed in urban areas or at least medium sized towns. Main themes include the relationship between discursive forms and state power, ritual and religious legitimacy, post-colonialism and national identity, gender, and the enduring potency of Alaoui royal power within these domains. Exemplifying these trends is an important book published in 1999 under the aegis of the Harvard Maghribi Studies Program, *In the Shadow of the Sultan*.¹⁵ The subtitle, 'Culture, Power and Politics in Morocco' is reminiscent of Gellner's *Culture, Identity, and Politics*,¹⁶ but the similarity in labels masks a radical difference in approach.

The introduction of the Harvard volume asks that we appreciate the 'ethnographic detail' of Robert Montagne's studies of High Atlas Berbers but 'remain alert' to his colonialist project.¹⁷ It notes, 'recent scholarly studies touch on some of the most sensitive areas of social and political concern, such as slavery, gender relations, ethnic and minority relations...'.¹⁸ Given these concerns, what is striking is that there is only one

indexed reference to 'Berbers' in 12 chapters and no reference at all to the terms Amazigh or Imazighen. Two full chapters, two-thirds of the section of the book entitled 'Peripheries', focus on Moroccan Jews, who would seem to comprise the 'sensitive... ethnic and minority relations' referred to. The general word for Berber language, Tamazight, fails to appear anywhere in the volume, though Tashelhit (the southern variety of Tamazight) is included on the one page that specifically refers to Berbers. Tashelhit is also included in the glossary. Even the largely Berber-speaking regions of the Rif and Atlas Mountains are absent from the index, as is any article exploring the importance of rural areas in general. Perhaps most revealing, the reference to an entry in the index labelled, 'power – role of language in', *does not mention any language other than Arabic being spoken in Morocco*. Abdellah Hammoudi, whose contribution is in part based on fieldwork among Berbers, clearly considers Berber language incidental to his argument. We only find out well on in the description that Hammoudi is working with Imazighen when he writes, 'The sacrifice of the two victims was the climax of the feast, called *tfaska* in Berber, which was the language of my hosts.'¹⁹ Perhaps this is why 'Berber' appears in at least four places in the book but 'Berbers' only once in the index: the existence of Imazighen is not significant to any point made by any of the authors in the collection. Ernest Gellner, who had a massive influence in Middle Eastern Studies and social theory generally, but who tended to ignore all Moroccans but Berbers, warrants two citations in the index, one fewer than Theodor Adorno.²⁰

In fairness to Professor Hammoudi there is perhaps nothing characteristically Berber or Amazigh about the feast and the masquerade he describes.²¹ In the Agoundis Valley, near where Hammoudi worked, I noted that this yearly event happens very differently from his version, a fact which would seem to undermine any essentially Berber quality one might posit for the ritual and masquerade. There is in my view nothing specifically wrong with respect to any of the work by the eminent scholars in *Shadow of the Sultan*. My point is that as a whole the book well illustrates the pre-eminence of the national frame of reference in Moroccanist scholarship, and the predominant view of Moroccan society as lacking certain dimensions of linguistic diversity or a significant rural dimension. This book reflects a trend in Moroccan scholarship generally: the fact that 40 per cent of the population speak Berber as their first or only language is seen to be irrelevant to the 'culture, power and politics' of the country. The fact that 50 per cent of the population is rural does not seem to matter much either. This academic perspective is of special concern in political economic terms because so many Berber speakers live in rural areas, and rural areas have the worst socio-economic conditions in Morocco.

Activist Portrayals of Imazighen/Berbers

Amazigh activists present a very different picture from that of scholars. Activists work against the various forms of oppression they claim Imazighen suffer, though their concerns focus overwhelmingly on issues related to language. In my own work I found that while villagers might agree on the existence of many of the problems noted by activists, they do not commonly associate their experience of those problems with being Amazigh. Activists are concerned with a spatial scale (all of North Africa) and a temporal frame (long-term history) that is significantly different from the spatio-temporal co-ordinates most villagers engage. This does not make activist accounts of Amazigh identity 'wrong', of course, only bound to their own contexts. As Terry Eagleton has remarked, 'As an idea, culture begins to matter at four points of historical crisis: when it becomes the only apparent alternative to a degraded society; when it seems that without deep-seated social change, culture in the sense of the arts and fine living will no longer even be possible; when it provides the terms in which a group or people seeks its political emancipation; and when an imperialist power is forced to come to terms with the way of life of those it subjugates.'²²

This is the difference between culture in the lived sense and culture as a potentially politicised idea. Put another way, it is the difference between nineteenth century German and later American notions of cultures – plural, unconscious, with a small 'c' – and cultural projects. The Amazigh rights movement is just that: a movement, a cultural project. It is arguably born of all the 'points of historical crisis' Eagleton outlines, except perhaps for the second one about 'arts and fine living'. The people of the village where I worked simply do not (yet) exist in conditions where Amazigh identity – as activists express it – seems most relevant: an urban, literate world dominated by Arabic, French, Spanish and/or English speakers. Villagers may some day come to see themselves broadly and significantly as Imazighen, especially given the preponderance of Arabic speakers in positions of power and the increasing incursions of these Arabic speakers into the high valleys. For now what Berberness we might attribute to villagers is mostly a lived and unconscious experience rather than a notable basis of political identity. This does not seem to be the case among the city-based activists.

The Amazigh movement has specific goals and presents these to the state and international organisations, and they have had some success gaining an audience. The basic complaint is that in reacting to the French vision of Berbers as France's 'good savages',²³ and the infamous Berber *dahir* that formalised 'customary law' for Berbers in contrast to Arabs, Moroccan nationalists became bent on removing Imazighen from Moroccan history, if not Moroccan society. The activist Zighen Aym puts the matter bluntly for all of North Africa:

When will the North Africa governments stop their repression of the Amazigh people by denying them the most basic human rights, which are the expression of their culture and the practice of their mother tongue? When will they admit that Islam was not spread peacefully in North Africa and that many Imazighen were murdered, their houses burned, and their women taken captives as war bounty to the caliphs in the Middle East? When will they stop their Arabisation program and let North Africans speak, write, and sing in Tamazight? When will they admit their mistreatments of and their failed attempts to uproot Imazighen? When will the governments provide financial resources (i.e. taxes paid by Amazigh people) so that an Amazigh does not have to learn a second language to live fully and freely in his/her land?²⁴

What is striking about this is the scope of the concerns: from women being taken captive in the eighth century to tax and educational reform at the beginning of the twenty-first. This quote is perhaps atypical in its critique of the spread of Islam and the association of Islam with 'caliphs in the Middle East'. It is absolutely typical in its leading charge of 'repression' and 'basic human rights'. Expressing concerns in this idiom catches the attention of foreign activists, where in any case the slight to Islam is not likely to make many enemies. For instance, on 10–14 January 2001 the International Federation of Human Rights (IFHR) held its 34th Congress in Casablanca, called 'Globalization and Exclusion'. The following resolution was taken at that conference and posted online at www.mondeberbere.com/

The State-Nation, a model invented in Europe, was exported around the world. It contributed to the marginalisation and even the exclusion of the languages and the cultures that could not acquire an official or national status in the states. The linguistic and cultural discrimination is in the heart of the modern state system. Today, the globalization contributes to the cultural homogenisation. However, there are languages and cultures that resisted this process of uniformity. Today, these languages and cultures are entitled to be respected and to exist in reciprocal equality.

We, defenders of the human rights, believe that it is our duty to save these languages and cultures. While Morocco is hosting the 34th Congress of the IFHR, we decided symbolically to devote this message to the Amazigh culture, totally marginalized by the recent education reform, considering that this is one – among so many others – of the threatened cultures in our globalised world. Hence, we request the recognition and constitutional protection of the Amazigh language in Morocco and in the countries of North Africa, in order to guarantee its integration in the public schools, the communication, the administration and the justice.

There is nothing here about Islamist leaders held under house arrest for years by the Moroccan government, and it is apparent to most observers that the Islamic movement is more widespread, and arguably far more repressed, than the Amazigh movement. But the Imazighen, wisely, speak the language of international cultural activism. If the discourse of 'saving threatened cultures' is widespread, the association of Morocco's Imazighen with this discourse almost certainly comes from members of the Amazigh movement, who in fact maintain the website where it is posted.²⁵ The 'requests' at the end refer to demands made by Amazigh activists. These include Tamazight instruction in public schools, as the late King Hassan II indicated was possible in an August 1994 speech and as Mohammed VI recently echoed. They also want to increase the number of radio and television stations in the different Tamazight varieties, the provision of Tamazight/Arabic translators in courts and other administrative domains, and the legalisation of Amazigh names. All of these are specific demands of at least factions of the Amazigh camp and are included in the manifesto posted on the same site where the above resolution was found.²⁶

To give a more mainstream example of Amazigh public relations success, the BBC published an article online on 2 January 2001 entitled 'Moroccan Berbers press for rights'.²⁷ In this piece we find that 'More than 60 per cent of Moroccans claim to be Berbers – the original inhabitants of North Africa',²⁸ a statistic that would seem somewhat dubious given the difficulty of undertaking studies of language identity in Morocco and the sheer impossibility of saying who is 'original' to any part of Africa. (Presumably, anthropologically, we're all 'originally' African.) Berber scholars such as Fatima Sadiqi put the number of Berber speakers in Morocco at something less than 45 per cent,²⁹ while the activist and scholar Salem Chaker believes it to be about 40 per cent.³⁰ Perhaps more people 'claim to be Berbers' than can actually speak the language, but given the mildly negative associations many Moroccans have of Imazighen this seems unlikely.³¹ Clearly such numbers are a political issue, which is why academics are so careful with their estimates. There is no citation for the '60 per cent' statistic in the BBC article, but the photos accompanying it are labelled 'Berbers are struggling against Arabisation' and are provided by the World Amazigh Congress.

The Pelham article goes on to cite 'Berber intellectuals like Hassan Ouzzat' who 'argue that Moroccans are facing a new Arab conquest'. Mr Ouzzat is quoted as saying-

Little did they realise that the pan-Arabism based in the Middle East would expand in such fury to North Africa and result in this pan-Arab hysteria, trying to obliterate anything that is native to North Africa and especially its language. This Middle Eastern movement generated

a movement of culturally genocidal proportions. It is actually trying to subdue local identity in order to augment the numbers of so-called Arabs.³²

The author, Nick Pelham, himself goes on to assert: 'The authorities say Arabic has long been the dominant culture. They accuse the Berber movement of opposing standardisation and thereby disturbing national unity.'³³ I do not necessarily disagree with Pelham's summary of the government position, or with the points raised by Ouzzat, but no 'authorities' are cited in the article except for Amazigh activists. The presumption is that this is the government position as understood by activists rather than the government's official stated view. The equation of language standardisation and the evident discrimination against Tamazight in Morocco is called 'culturally genocidal', a phrase intended to incite. And it is unclear why pan-Arabism would need to 'augment the numbers of so-called Arabs'. Well-intentioned and thoughtful Moroccans have argued to me that Imazighen must be schooled in Arabic if they are to be able to compete in the nation's economy. One can certainly disagree with this goal or the methods of achieving it, but it is hard to claim that such a position equates to genocide.

The most distinguished scholar associated with this movement, Salem Chaker, sums up the more balanced Amazigh position very well when he writes 'L'avenir berbère dépend plus que jamais du rapport des berbérophones aux éléments constitutifs de leur identité: leur langue et leur culture.'³⁴ I translate this to say that 'the Berber future more than ever depends on the connection Berber speakers have with the elements that constitute their identity: their language and their culture'. This is precisely the kind of identity that typically interests sociologists, what Castells calls 'resistance identity'³⁵ and Craig Calhoun invokes in 'identity politics'.³⁶ Professor Chaker's characterisation is surely relevant for many thousands, if not millions, of Berberophones across urban North Africa and Europe. I would say, however, that it has little to do with life in rural villages because villagers are not deprived of their language and culture in the way urban Imazighen might be. At least some Moroccan Berbers still live far enough from the centres of power to be secure in their language (and culture) and thus it has not typically occurred to them to be militant about such things. The sort of discourse we find amongst internationally connected Amazigh activists bears on rural, illiterate Berber-speaking farmers, but such villagers are not (and cannot be) included in the production of it. I do not see that this should prevent us from investigating the place of Berber language, and cultural activism in particular, in Morocco's next political generation. We need to understand both how urban Imazighen experience and value their linguistic heritage and how rural Berbers are coming to

understand themselves as such if we are to make sense of the contemporary fabric of Moroccan society.

If it is true that '... modernity is today a global experience... as varied as magic, marriage, or madness and thus worthy of scholarly attention and, more generally, of comparative study',³⁷ the comparisons cannot include only literate societies (or parts of societies) with relative technological sophistication. If the medium is the message, this 'comparison' doesn't get us very far towards a viewpoint beyond the analytical system we have built. In other words, comparison cannot be only between Amazigh and Arab identity, but between very different ways of being Amazigh itself. Farmers in the village I studied and philosophers in Paris evince strikingly different ways of being Berber. Surely we must contend with this difference if we want to understand what they have in common. As Eagleton writes, 'Difference, in the sense of individuation, is natural to the kind of beings we are, just as culture has its roots in (but cannot be reduced to) certain biological facts about us of which moles and badgers are both mercifully and unhappily free.'³⁸ One important difference between Berbers and badgers is that the former develop a sense of themselves in relation to other people, and to their material and political conditions. Activists can claim that learning some form of Tamazight confers a deeply significant Amazigh culture, but the interesting issue from my perspective is how different people experience their Amazigh-ness, the different ways 'a' culture is expressed through different media and in different contexts.

From this point of view the constructions of Amazigh identity disseminated by urban, literate Imazighen reveal interesting new ways of being Amazigh, and of making Tamazight matter in new political and socio-economic environments. This is critical if Berber is to survive as a language and culture. The conditions in which urban Amazigh identity emerges are not those of Berber-speaking society, however, but in living as Berber speakers in Arabic and French dominated societies. It would seem the case that such conditions augur the future even for those Imazighen who presently escape this fate. The practices by which such a literate *berbérîté* is built are oppositional –the inescapable contrast with Arabic, French, English and other dominant languages. This ineluctable modality, combined with certain social practices (reading, writing and talking about being Amazigh), bring linguistic distinctiveness from the realm of practical consciousness and mundane practice into discursive consciousness and representational practice.³⁹ I have written on this elsewhere.⁴⁰ Perhaps villagers 'constitute their identity through their language and culture', as suggested by Professor Chaker, but one rarely notices one's culture until one is outside of it. As Brett and Fentress have argued, 'Whether restrained in Morocco, defiant in Algeria or flourishing in Paris, Berber culture has been

apparent to its users only when they themselves are bilingual and bicultural.⁴¹ The 'only' here overstates the point, but it is the case that being Berber or Amazigh seems most powerfully evoked when Berber or Tamazight is thrown into relief by the presence, and especially the dominance, of other languages.

Amazigh activists work toward concrete political and social changes. It may be hard to define conclusively what an Amazigh is,⁴² but activists are clear about the issues that concern them. These may involve a 'place' in society, as when the sociologist Jean Ait Belkhir says, 'The Arabs can still teach their own history. But Imazighen must seek to shift and continue to shift towards centre so that their history, culture, identity, perspective, and language are not marginalised.'⁴³ Other times activists are more expressly political, whether this means changing laws about Berber names or providing money for education in Tamazight. Sometimes activists take up Friedman's point that the main issue with cultural identity and global process 'is not about the diffusion of ideas, recipes, clothing patterns, that is, cultural objects. It is about the structure of the conditions in which such things occur.'⁴⁴ Other times they give lip service to such 'conditions', but lapse into essentialist arguments. Activist and scholar Amar Almasude, for instance, writes about 'identity as a historical construct derived from changing socio-cultural and economic environments' but goes on to say that 'the focus of [this particular] study is the role played by [new communications technology] in *confirming the Amazigh identity*'⁴⁵ (my emphasis). It seems to me that only Imazighen who live in alien linguistic environments could need, want, or even understand such 'confirmation'. While the villagers with whom I worked did not seem particularly concerned with affirming who they are, around the globe identity politics are growing more powerful and more visible. This would seem the case for Morocco's Amazigh activists, although as yet scholars have mostly ignored them and the people they claim to represent.

The Political Economy of Berberness

In my view at least part of the problem with the invisibility of Imazighen in Morocco is the link to rural poverty. World Bank data show that the number of Moroccans living on less than a dollar a day, what the Bank calls 'below the absolute poverty line' has increased 50 per cent since 1991 to nearly a fifth of the national population.⁴⁶ Statistics on the relationship between linguistic groups and poverty are unavailable, and even the number of Berber speakers is controversial, as Salem Chaker has pointed out.⁴⁷ But in Morocco the 'absolutely' impoverished population is by all admissions disproportionately found in the countryside and particularly the mountains,

where Berber speakers are also disproportionately found. An issue like education – fundamental to both World Bank attempts to ameliorate rural poverty and a major hope of people in rural villages – would seem obviously tied to the question of how to teach rural Berber speaking children an urban Arabic curriculum. However, a Bank report on Moroccan education estimates that whereas 52 per cent of the country lives in rural areas, only 10 per cent of the education budget was spent in those rural areas during the 1980s.⁴⁸ As I note elsewhere, the unfortunate teachers who are sent to the countryside are often monolingual Arabic speakers, a situation that virtually ensures frustration among teachers and students alike.⁴⁹ The financial disparity between rural and urban areas is unfair to all rural people. Combining this with what would seem a misguided educational policy of sending Arabic speakers to Berber areas particularly disadvantages rural people who happen to be Berber speakers.

As of April 2000 the World Bank had 19 projects active in Morocco with a total investment of 1 billion US dollars. One searches the project reports on Morocco – even reports on linguistically salient projects like rural education – and finds no reference to Berber speaking Moroccans at all.⁵⁰ If Moroccanist scholars ignore or ascribe no significance to the fact that many Moroccans speak Berber, it is hardly surprising that agencies like the World Bank leave such people out of development considerations.⁵¹ As Remy Leveau has pointed out, 'Morocco has a 60 per cent illiteracy rate and in 1998 it ranked 125th in the world on the United Nations Human Development Index. It comes a long way behind Algeria and Tunisia, and even behind Egypt and Syria, looking at the statistics for schooling, health care and per capita GDP.'⁵² If the overall ranking is 125th, certainly the situation in the countryside, where only 10 per cent of the education budget is spent, must be that much worse. It seems inconceivable that this is entirely unrelated to the fact that Morocco is linguistically heterogeneous. Efforts to change the rural economic situation surely need to account for the fact that the Moroccan mountains at least remain largely Amazigh.

I want to reiterate that to argue that speaking Berber matters in some ways to some people is not to argue that there is an essential divide between Berber and Arabic speaking Moroccans. If Berber studies are generally invisible within Moroccan studies, Moroccanists who do acknowledge the existence of Berbers sometimes ignore the significance of the state, the larger economy, and the national culture, the very themes that preoccupy most influential Moroccanists. David Hart, as I have mentioned, was probably the most important ethnographer of Berber people in our day, and arguably one of the most important ever, but he is rarely cited in what might be considered the main body of contemporary Moroccanist scholarship. Part of the reason, I believe, is that Hart is often looking implicitly – and sometimes explicitly

– backwards, at the way Berber society used to operate rather than the way it does now.⁵³ Today there is simply no question that whatever ‘tribal’ or characteristically Berber ways of doing things exist, these articulate with a larger political, cultural and economic field. If the widely cited and generally urban-focused scholars concern themselves with ‘Moroccans’ at large, those who do work in rural Berber areas tend to give too little emphasis to the fact that these areas exist in a wider Moroccan framework.

There are exceptions, of course. Work by Ali Amahan,⁵⁴ Hassan Rachik,⁵⁵ Jim Miller,⁵⁶ and Mohammed Mahdi⁵⁷ does take into account localised political operations and the fact of Berber linguistic distinctiveness. Less consistently, however, do these authors grapple with the impact of changes in the national economy, the enduring influence of colonialism, and especially the post-colonial salience of the central government in Berber-speaking areas.⁵⁸ This work deserves a wider audience and has probably not been adequately or responsibly cited because much of it is published in French within Morocco and has had a difficult time finding its way into the wider currents of anthropological and Moroccanist scholarship, at least in the English-speaking world. It may also fall outside the interests of the urban Moroccan intelligentsia.

All studies concerning Imazighen suffer from a legacy of Moroccan nationalist backlash to French colonial ‘Berberphilia’. Indeed, for many years to acknowledge any distinction between Arabs and Berbers in Morocco was to risk associating oneself with the French colonial attempt to divide the nation into ethnic enclaves. Berber studies have today managed to slough off much of their colonialist stigma, but the urge to avoid political confrontation sometimes leads to the portrayal of Berber culture as innocuous and apolitical ‘folklore’. As Micaela di Leonardo has written, ‘The real key to the perception of cultural difference is politics.’⁵⁹ The conceptual separation of Berbers and the rest of the country obscures the significance of Berber language, and the real nature of the Moroccan nation in which Berbers live. Berber language and identity must be understood in the relation between local social forms and the larger economy, national culture, and the central state.

Conclusion

In 1973 Geertz could write ‘the distinction – partly cultural, partly linguistic, partly social, partly a kind of ethnopolitical myth, a traditional, almost instinctive way of perceiving group differences – between “Arab” and “Berber” remains an important, if elusive factor in Moroccan national life.’⁶⁰ In 2001 this once elusive hodge-podge of a distinction has been considerably sharpened, or at least amplified. On the Berber side, Amazigh

activists have sought to show Imazighen as a unified linguistic and cultural group deserving a place in the Moroccan national cultural landscape and the international family of distinct peoples. They protest the absence of Imazighen in the history books, the indignity of having Tamazight relegated to second-class status, and even being prevented from giving their children Amazigh names. Ironically, to fight for these ‘human’ rights, activists have had to carve themselves out as a unique group, a defined subsection of humanity. They have had to make strong claims of a shared identity, to present themselves as ‘a’ culture under threat. They have set out to put themselves in the consultable record. As Professor Salem Chaker writes, ‘C’est qu’être Berbère aujourd’hui – et vouloir le rester – est nécessairement un acte militant, culturel, éventuellement scientifique, toujours politique.’⁶¹ For scholars such as Chaker, simply to *be* Berber in North African states is a political act. The question I hope to have raised is why so many academic discussions of politics and culture in Morocco omit this consideration.

NOTES

1. D.M. Hart, ‘Persistence and Change in Names on the North African Landscape: Berber Tribes in Ibn Khaldun’s Genealogies and as they Appear Today’, *Journal of North African Studies* 5/1 (Spring 2000) p.127.
2. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books: New York 1973) p.302.
3. The text of this speech was found online at the Maghreb Arabe Presse web site, www.map.co.ma/ on 24 October 2001.
4. M. Peyron, ‘Amazigh Poetry of the Resistance Period (Central Morocco)’, *The Journal of North African Studies* 5/1 (Spring 2000) p.118.
5. Ibid.
6. W.A. Hoisington Jr., ‘Designing Morocco’s Future: France and the Native Policy Council, 1921–25’, *The Journal of North African Studies* 5/1 (Spring 2000) pp.63–108.
7. M. Tessler, ‘Morocco’s Next Political Generation’, *The Journal of North African Studies* 5/1 (Spring 2000) pp.1–26.
8. Ibid. p.6.
9. D. Crawford, ‘How Berber Matters in the Middle of Nowhere’, *Middle East Report* 219 (2001) pp.20–5.
10. W. Kraus, ‘Contestable Identities: Tribal Structures in the Moroccan High Atlas’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4/1 (1998) pp.1–22.
11. E. Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1969) and *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987).
12. É. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press 1964 [1893]) pp.174–9.
13. M.E. Combs-Schilling, ‘Family and Friend in a Moroccan Boom Town: The Segmentary Debate Reconsidered’ *American Ethnologist* 12 (1985) pp.659–75. Combs-Schilling notes that patrilineal ties are but one useful organisational principle in Morocco. See also the review of positions in the segmentary debate by J. Waterbury, ‘Bargaining for Segmentarity’ in E.G.H. Joffé and C.R. Pennell (eds.), *Tribe and State: Essays in Honour of David Montgomery Hart*. (Cambridgeshire: Middle East and North Africa Studies Press 1991) pp.4–13.
14. Kraus (note 10) p.6.
15. R. Bourqia and S.G. Miller (eds.), *In the Shadow of the Sultan: Culture, Power and Politics in Morocco*, Harvard Middle Eastern monographs, 31. (Cambridge MA, Distributed for the

- Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University by Harvard University Press 1999).
16. Gellner (note 11).
 17. Bourqia and Miller (note 15) p.3.
 18. Ibid. p.4.
 19. Ibid. p.156. This is not to say that Hammoudi is always unconcerned with Imazighen. Elsewhere he writes, 'Today's use of Amazigh resonates with the vibration of a radical freedom, but this redefinition may well have precedents in an old dialectic in which Berber/Amazigh stands vis-à-vis Phoenician, Latin, and Arab'. A. Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1997) p.115.
 20. Geertz is probably absent due to what is construed as his inadequate treatment of 'power', one of the main themes of the volume. For critiques of this aspect of Geertz's work see H. Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1993) and W. Roseberry, *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History, and Political Economy* (London: Rutgers University Press 1989).
 21. Hammoudi describes the variety of these masquerades in his book-length treatment of them, *The Victim and Its Masks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993).
 22. T. Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Press 2000) p.25.
 23. 'In fact – we may say so today with the serenity of hindsight – [France's] policy was derived purely and simply from a "National Park outlook". These tribes would be France's seqoias; her Berbers would remain good savages, worthy of love and respect, but whose ultimate promotion would consist in an N.C.O's stripes. Such a prospect, of course, was opposed by every instinct of these men, as well as by the general trend of things.' J. Berque, *French North Africa: The Maghrib Between Two World Wars* (New York: Praeger 1967) p.219.
 24. Z. Aym, 'It is time for an Apology from North African Governments', *The Amazigh Voice* 2/8 (Bedminster NJ: Amazigh Cultural Association in America, 2000) p.11
 25. This is hardly the only website given over to these projects. Another interesting one is www.tamurt-imazighen.com/
 26. See www.mondeberbere.com/
 27. N. Pelham, 'Moroccan Berbers Press for Rights' found at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid on 11 January 2001>.
 28. Ibid.
 29. F. Sadiqi, 'The Place of Berber in Morocco', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 123 (1997) p.7.
 30. S. Chaker, *Berbères aujourd'hui* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan 1989) p..
 31. Negative comments directed at Imazighen are, in my experience, no worse than other regional slanders in Morocco. My point is merely that there would seem few material reasons someone would want to claim to be a Berber if they could not speak or at least understand some variety of Tamazight.
 32. Pelham (note 27).
 33. Ibid.
 34. Chaker (note 30) p.7.
 35. M. Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell 1997) p.8.
 36. C. Calhoun (ed.), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell 1994) p.17.
 37. A. Appadurai and C. A. Breckenridge 'Public Modernity in India' in C.A. Breckenridge (ed.) *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1995) p.1.
 38. T. Eagleton, 'Five types of identity and difference' in D. Bennett (ed.), *Multicultural States* (New York: Routledge 1998) p.50.
 39. For a distinction between unconsciousness, practical consciousness and discursive consciousness, see A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1984).
 40. D. Crawford and K.E. Hoffman, 'Essentially Amazigh: Urban Berbers and the Global Village' in R.K. Lacey and R.M. Coury (eds.), *The Arab African and Islamic Worlds: Interdisciplinary Studies* (New York: Peter Lang 2000) pp.117–34.
 41. M. Brett and E. Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1996) p.281.
 42. The answer is usually, 'anyone who cares about their heritage as an Amazigh'. This is

- significant in that it includes foreign born Imazighen who do not speak the language and who are arguably part of very different cultures.
43. J. Ait-Belkhir, 'Interview with an Amazigh Sociologist', *The Amazigh Voice* 2/3 (1999) p.5.
 44. J. Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (London: Sage 1994) p.1.
 45. A. Amasude, 'The New Mass Media and the Shaping of Amazigh Identity' in J. Rehner et al. (eds.), *Revitalizing Indigenous Languages* (Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University 1999) p.117.
 46. These statistics were found on the World Bank website in a report entitled, 'Morocco in Brief'. See <http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/mna/mena.nsf/5d1f9bb6c6c4c660852567d600065a6a0/a3c12c72a8890b3b8525680c00024df1> (The page was posted in May 2000 and accessed on September 25, 2001).
 47. Chaker (note 30) p.9. writes that the number of Berber speakers is 'a major political game' in the Maghrib as a whole.
 48. This information comes from the World Bank website in a report by S.R. Khandker, V. Lavy and D. Filmer, 'Schooling and Cognitive Achievements of Children in Morocco: Can the Government Improve Outcomes?' *World Bank Discussion Paper No. 264*. 11 Jan. 1994. It was accessed 21 November 2000 at www.worldbank.org/html/extpb/abshtml/13046.htm
 49. D. Crawford, 'How "Berber" Matters in the Middle of Nowhere', *Middle East Report* 31/2 (Washington DC: MERIP 2001) pp.20–5.
 50. Obviously I have not searched every World Bank document, but I spent several hours searching their database using a range of search words and identifiers. For more on the World Bank and education see R.B. Mokhtar at www.worldbank.org/wbi/mdf/mdf1/morroced.htm (current as of 24 September 2001.)
 51. For an exception to this general trend, and an example of how differently the rural educational situation looks from the perspective of somebody who speaks both Arabic and Berber, see K.E. Hoffman, 'First-year Evaluation of Pilot Schools: Provinces of Al Hoceima, Errachidia and Sidi Kacem' *Report to Rural Schools Development Program* (Rabat: AMIDEAST 1997). It is also worth noting that the Peace Corps has in the past decade begun to train its volunteers who work in Berber areas to speak Berber and has developed a textbook for this purpose, at least in the variety called Tashelhit. To my knowledge, this is the first English language text devoted to teaching Berber.
 52. R. Leveau, 'A Democratic Transition in Morocco?', *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Dec. 1998). Electronic version available at www.monde-diplomatique.fr/en/1998/12/06maroc/ Accessed 21 Sept. 2001.
 53. D. Hart, *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press 1976) p.xix. He writes, for instance, 'Field techniques were oriented as much as possible toward direct, and even participant, observation; but in a good many spheres, such as the study of the whole ebb and flow of the bloodfeud, or other areas where historical reconstruction was necessary, this was manifestly impossible.' See also D. Hart, *Dadda 'Atta and his Forty Grandsons: the Socio-Political Organization of the Ait Atta of Southern Morocco* (Boulder: Middle East and North African Studies Press 1981); D. Hart, 'Berber Tribal Alliance Networks in Pre-Colonial North Africa: The Algerian Saff, the Moroccan Liff and the Chessboard Model of Robert Montagne' in *The Journal of North African Studies* 1 (1996) pp.192–205; D. Hart, *Tribe and Society in Rural Morocco* (London and Portland OR: Frank Cass 2000).
 54. A. Amahan, *Mutations sociales dans le Haut Atlas: Les Ghourjdama* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme 1998).
 55. H. Rachik, *Sacré et sacrifice dans le Haut Atlas marocain* (Casablanca: Afrique Orient 1990); *Le sultan des autres: rituel et politique dans le Haut Atlas* (Casablanca: Afrique Orient 1992); 'Espace pastoral et conflit de gestion collective dans une vallée du Haut Atlas Occidental' in A. Bencherifa (ed.), *Utilisation et conservation des ressources: Montagnes et Hauts-Pays de l'Afrique* (Rabat Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, Université Mohammed V 1993) pp.181–200.
 56. J.A. Miller, *Imilil: A Moroccan Mountain Community in Change* (Boulder CO, Westview Press 1984).
 57. M. Mahdi, *Pasteur de l'Atlas: Production pastorale, droit et rituel* (El Jadida and Casablanca:

- Imprimerie Najah 1999).
58. This general characterization is particularly untrue of Ali Amahan, who deals explicitly with the interactions of local political forms and various 'outside' forces, from powerful *qaid*s to the central government (see note 54, pp.272–7). Miller's work too is about a 'community in change' (see note 56).
 59. M. di Leonardo, 'White Lies, Black Myths: Rape, Race and the Black "Underclass"' in R.N. Lancaster and M. di Leonardo (eds.) *The Gender/Sexuality Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998) p.64.
 60. Geertz (note 2) p.302.
 61. Chaker (note 30) p.7. For other activist views on Amazigh identity see any issue in the list of activist newsletters and publications Professor Chaker provides, pp.143–4), or websites such as www.mondeberbere.com and www.waac.org.