A Berber in Agadir: Exploring the Urban/Rural Shift in Amazigh Identity

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A *Berber in Agadir*:
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Introduction:

The Arab Spring has seen North African and Middle Eastern youth organizing against the status quo and challenging what they perceive as political, economic, and social injustices. In Morocco, while the Arab Spring may not have been as substantial as in neighboring countries, demonstrations are still occurring nearly everyday in major cities like Rabat as individuals protest issues including government transparency, high unemployment, and, for specific interest of this paper, the marginalization of the Amazigh people. The Amazigh, also popularly referred to as Berbers in most Western academia and literature, are regarded as the original inhabitants of Morocco and the rest of the Maghreb before the introduction of Arabic in the 7th century.\(^1\) This was only further complicated by the introduction of French colonialism and their issued *dahir*, an attempt at separating the Arabs and Amazigh by having each population adopt its own separate laws, and the subsequent rise of Arab nationalism. Since then, Amazigh actors argue that their culture has been historically underrepresented by the Morocco regime and that their communities are economically and politically marginalized.

While this marginalization ultimately resulted in a decline in the number of Amazigh speakers, as Bruce Maddy-Weitzmen explains, it also caused “a gradual increase in the self-conscious manifestations of Berber culture and the demands of the Berber groups.”\(^2\) This increase, he argues, is a result of a “threat factor,” as individuals became more aware of their collective Amazigh identity when it was being threatened.\(^3\) This increase in Amazigh consciousness has manifested itself into an Amazigh movement, a social movement focused primarily within cultural and linguistic grounds rather than political, placing importance on both

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\(^3\) *Ibid.*
recognizing the impact of Amazigh culture on Moroccan history as well as the importance of the Amazigh language, commonly referred to as Tamazight. The movement has been successful in some respects, placing enough pressure on the regime to create the IRCAM, the first government institution dedicated to Amazigh culture, and to have Tamazight recognized as an official language of the state in the new Constitution. In the context of the Arab Spring and larger Berber awakening throughout North Africa, the Amazigh movement is continuing to gain more traction as more and more Amazigh associations form and coordination with Berber groups in other countries has given the movement a transnational scope.\(^4\)

It is this transnational dimension to the movement that I have decided to explore for my independent research project. Although the Amazigh movement puts forward an image of them as a united population, it is evident that the Berbers are “not a homogenous group... [and] constitute a ‘bewildering number of cultures, economies and physical characteristics.’”\(^5\) While Berbers exist throughout Morocco, constituting an estimated 40 to 45 percent of the population\(^6\), they historically have been separated geographically into the rural parts of three distinct regions: the northern Rif, middle Atlas, and souther Souss. Yet, it is worth noting that the majority of demonstrations and actions undertaken by the Amazigh movement have happened in the urban sphere and big cities like Rabat, Casablanca and Agadir. Furthermore, the Berber population is not only separated geographically within Morocco, but also across borders as a significant portion of the large Moroccan diaspora abroad identify as Amazigh. However, this does not seem to hamper the movement, as any online search for the Amazigh movement will give you links to websites such as tamaynutfrance.org, amazigh.nl and tamazgha.org, all websites/associations in

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\(^6\) Ibid. 23.
Europe and the United States established by the Moroccan diaspora to support the Amazigh movement. These associations have been established along with a rise in interest towards Amazigh identity among young Europeans of Morocco descent who, as Anja van Heelsum explains in the case of the Netherlands, “are very conscious of the difference between them and others.... [and this] has provoked them to look for another self-determination.”

Thus, for my research project I have studied the urban/rural shift in the Amazigh movement as well as the effects of migration, both urban to rural and immigration to the Western world, on Amazigh identity. The Amazigh movement may be a social movement dedicated to preserving the culture and rights of a traditionally marginalized and rural population, but it is clear that the methods that the movement uses are much better suited to the urban than rural sphere. This shift would have to be associated with migration; by emigrating from the rural areas to Moroccan cities and other countries, the movement and the nature of the Amazigh people themselves has changed. By spending time in both urban (Agadir) and rural (Al Hoceima) areas associated with the Berber community, and by researching the Amazigh diaspora, I have come to better understand the relationship between two Moroccan realities: the Amazigh and migration. In effect, the urban and rural divides found in the Amazigh movement are perpetuated by migration, as rural Berbers migrate to the urban sphere where better resources and education give them the tools to develop stronger identities and commitments to the Amazigh movement.

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Methodology: Methods and Limits:

In studying what differentiates the urban and rural Amazigh movements and the effects of migration on Amazigh identity, I decided to conduct a series of in-depth interviews with Amazigh actors in Agadir, Al Hoceima, and the United States. These interviews varied in length and topics addressed depending on the subject and the general course of the interview, but they all shared the general theme of defining identity, discussing the role of the Amazigh movement, and getting their thoughts on the role of migration on Moroccan and Amazigh society. In the end, I was able to conduct eight interviews that I deemed informative, structured, and worth analyzing for this research paper.

While I had originally anticipated on interviewing more subjects, I found that fewer, yet more substantive interviews were more useful for two reasons: the personal nature of the subject matter and the general availability of subjects. Nearly all of my interviews were several hours long simply due to the complexity of analyzing identity. By not handing out a questionnaire I was able to use my base questions and adapt them with more specific follow-up questions depending on the course that the interview followed, and this allowed me to get much more specific and substantive answers on the role of migration and identity. Furthermore, while it would have been helpful to have conducted more interviews in order to draw more concrete conclusions, it was difficult to find Moroccans who identified as Amazigh who were willing to be interviewed. Especially in Al Hoceima, although many people identified themselves as Amazigh they did not consider themselves to be part of any social movement and thus did not want to be interviewed.

Interviews were conducted in both English and French with the presence and assistance of two translators: Abderrahim El Kalloussi, student at the University of Ibn Zohr in Agadir, and
Sietske de Boer, Dutch journalist based in Al Hoceima. Although I was not always able to pick up every word that was said, I am confident that I understood the general meaning of every response that I was given and I only quote direct quotes, not paraphrases, from the subjects. In addition, for the sake of linguistic integrity I have decided to keep the language spoken for direct quotes. I do not want to directly misrepresent any statement made by any of my subjects through my personal translation, so instead I will be keeping the language and including a translation next to it in parentheses.
Interviews in Agadir:

While in Agadir I had the opportunity to interview several students from the University of Ibn Zohr who are involved with the Amazigh movement. In our interviews I used a combination of questionnaires, follow-up questions and observations to reach my conclusions. Through our conversations I was able to get a better understanding of the role of the movement both in the university and urban sphere, as well as their own involvement and how they identify as Amazigh. To protect anonymity I will be referring to each student’s name with a random pseudonym.

Firstly, I met with two students, Ahmed and Jamal, to have a more informal interview over coffee at a café near the university’s neighborhood. Ahmed and Jamal are both third year Sociology at the University of Ibn Zohr who identify as Amazigh and are part of the Amazigh movement. Before I was able to ask any of my own specific questions, Jamal began with a strong statement: “l’identité de Maroc c’est Amazigh.”\(^8\) (“Moroccan identity is Amazigh.”) When I followed up his statement asking for clarification, my translator Abderrahim chimed in and said that Moroccan identity is mixed and that there is no way to argue that there is just one Morocco. At this, Ahmed countered that Abderrahim was thinking along the lines of Paul Poskan’s frame of “l’identité complexe,” and that while Morocco is made up of many different rural societies, that “sa société pure c’est Amazigh.”\(^9\) (“its pure society is Amazigh.”) Jamal went further in saying that essentially all rural societies in Morocco are Amazigh as well. According to him, Saharans are also Amazigh, but their community lost their identity and language along the way.

For Ahmed, an Amazigh individual is someone who loves his land, his region and his country. Ahmed loved the rural region of Tinghir, but infrastructural differences between the

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\(^8\) Jamal, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Agadir, Morocco, November 2011.

\(^9\) Abderrahim, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Agadir, Morocco, November 2011.
urban and rural areas pushed him and many other students to Agadir to better their lives. Both poverty and the political and social climate in Tinghir affected his decision to immigrate to Agadir, and Jamal added that another big problem is the poor education available in rural areas.

Even though both acknowledged that the Constitution’s recognition of Tamazight as a national language was an important step, neither of them seemed very impressed. As Ahmed stated, the language of the Constitution itself continues to marginalize the Amazigh as it sets a hierarchy where Arabic still ranks as the first language and Tamazight as the second official language. Furthermore, there is no timeline for the language to be instituted throughout Morocco. Even though “Tamazight c’est la langue des peuples Nord-Africains,” (“Tamazight is the language of the North African people”) you still can’t find it in government buildings or other Moroccan institutions, and the Constitutions’s stipulation that it will be adopted in a gradual manner means that there is no guarantee as to when it will be used.  

With the use of these more informal interviews, I gathered good base information in regards to the Amazigh movement in Agadir and I was better able to formulate specific questions for my subsequent interviews.

I later had a series of interviews with three students: Nabil, Rachid and Youssef. All three immigrated to Agadir from the Tinghir area, a rural region of the Souss area, to study at the University of Ibn Zohr. When asked about why they immigrated, Nabil and Rachid said that the lack of a university in Tinghir was the main push factor. As Rachid put it, those living in Tinghir suffer many things and thus all students must go to Agadir, Marrakesh, or other big cities for their studies. They all agreed that emigration out of Tinghir is a reality amongst all young people, and that students from the rural Souss and the Sahara must come to Agadir or other similar cities to study as there is no university for them to go to in their region.

10 Ahmed, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Agadir, Morocco, November 2011.
When asked what the effects of this emigration were, they also agreed that there were not very many effects. Nabil said that there were no negative effects; as he put it, while this emigration eliminated young people from rural villages, “cette migration est obligatoire.”\(^\text{11}\) (“this migration is obligatory.”) Youssef seemingly agreed with Nabil, saying that he and other young people from Tinghir are obligated to come to Agadir for studies. In addition, all three students said that they would consider immigrating to the Western world if given the chance. Youssef hopes to immigrate to another country, but he would stay in Morocco if not for the economic issues that the country is facing, especially in the rural areas. In his opinion, the first problem in Tinghir is economic, and the social and cultural issues are secondary but still important. Nabil and Rachid would also immigrate to Europe or the United States, even if it meant leaving the country “indefinitely.”\(^\text{12}\) However, as Rachid put it, they still love their country and hope to help it in the future even if they do immigrate. He knows of many young people such as himself who were involved in the Amazigh movement at the University of Ibn Zohr who immigrated to the U.S., France, and Spain and continue to be involved with the movement in some capacity.

In terms of identity, all three definitively said that yes, they do identity as Amazigh. For Nabil, the Amazigh are “des gens qui sont libres.”\(^\text{13}\) (“men who are free.”) Rachid brought in the historical nature of being Amazigh, and also said that Amazigh literally means a “free man.”\(^\text{14}\) In addition, all three students separately mentioned the concept of “three” in Amazigh identity. For symbolic purposes, the Amazigh have related their identity to three concepts: “l’homme, la terre, et la langue,” (“man, land, and language”) which they symbolize by holding up their index,

\(^{11}\) Nabil, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Agadir, Morocco, November 2011.
\(^{12}\) Ibid.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) Rachid, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Agadir, Morocco, November 2011.
middle, and ring fingers. As an Amazigh, they work to protect their identity and these three concepts which they hold important to them, and as Youssef put it, “they are ready to give blood for their rights.”

They all identified themselves as members of the Amazigh movement, but stipulated that their involvement is limited to just the university. As Rachid explained, there are two sections to the Amazigh movement: the movement in the university and the movement outside of it. The university movement is composed of student groups and demonstrators in all major universities throughout Morocco in cities like Agadir, Marrakesh, Meknes and Rabat. According to them, although the universities are separated by geography they are jointly organized and share the same rhetoric and techniques. Both Nabil and Rachid stressed that the university movement is primarily a cultural movement, not cultural, and that they talk about the importance of language and the role of Amazigh culture in Moroccan society. Youssef added that the university is an “appropriate place” for the movement, and that they use the grounds to organize protests and demonstrations. Moreover, Rachid said that the main difference between the university movement and the larger Amazigh movement outside of the university is that the university movement is more organized and employs the same methods, whereas the Amazigh movement driven by associations and organizations share different opinions in regards to Amazigh identity and the movement and put on different programs. When I asked if that meant that all universities shared the same opinions on the Amazigh movement, he answered that yes, they do share the same opinions. However, he said, while there are splits between the university movement and the movement outside of the university, in the end they share the same goal and “the target is one.”

15 Ibid.
16 Youssef, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Agadir, Morocco, November 2011.
17 Ibid.
18 Rachid, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Agadir, Morocco, November 2011.
Next, when asked if and how they were involved with the Amazigh movement back in Tinghir, all three stated that they were involved, but that the movement is very different in rural areas. When asked how their identity as Amazigh has changed since immigrating to Agadir, they all agreed that their perception of being Amazigh has changed. According to Rachid, while in university they “find new things, new cultural discussions.... [and they] develop [their] Amazigh conscience everyday.” Youssef said that being in Agadir has shown him that they have an “opportunity to have more.” They have learned about Morocco in a new way and they have increased their level of thinking and fighting for their culture. Nabil added that he has realized more about government suppression in Morocco and its rural areas in particular, and questions things more freely now, like why there is still military presence in Tinghir over 4 months since the height of the Arab Spring protests. The issue, according to Youssef, is that the educational system in Morocco is false. In primary school students learn “wrong histories” that are in favor of the government and those in power, and in the university they have the opportunity to “correct wrongs and learn new things.” Rachid now asks himself questions regarding heritage and language, such as if Arabs are obligated to be Muslim and how exactly Islam came to Morocco. By asking these questions, he believes that he is working towards finding the reality of the Amazigh in Morocco.

Regardless of what they perceive as better living conditions in Agadir, all three hope to return to Tinghir once they finish their studies. As Youssef explained, if there was a university in the region he would have never left and instead would have tried to improve the conditions there. In his opinion, the “educational system is on the side of the power in Morocco.” In effect,

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19 Ibid.
20 Youssef, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Agadir, Morocco, November 2011.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
Youssef believes that the government aims to make the rural region and particularly its young people poor. With no university in the rural south, they are obligated to come to Agadir, where conditions are better but still poor as the University Ibn Zohr has as many as 60,000 students and only 100 professors. Even though the university has helped them challenge Moroccan identity, they still feel that there is a sense of government suppression in the university system as teachers often refuse to teach certain topics and one cannot question their methods. If one hopes to earn a degree and find employment after university, one has to accept the status quo and in a sense, “vous êtes obligé d’être un homme d’État.”\(^{23}\) ("you are obligated to become a man of the state.")

\(^{23}\) Ibid.
Interviews in Al Hoceima:

While in Al Hoceima I discussed the Amazigh movement with several actors and scholars involved with the issue. For this research paper I will be analyzing two of those interviews: one with Mr. Omar Lemallam and Mr. Mohammed Mouha. Mr. Lemallam is a mathematics professor and former Rifi militant from Al Hoceima who is now president of l’Association Mémoire du Rif. The association is primarily cultural and works on preserving the history of the Rif region by promoting the region’s traditions, songs and other customs. Mr. Mouha is also a former Rifi militant and the former president of l’Association Mémoire Collectif. The association is also cultural and focused on preserving Rif history, as well as highlighting the history of Jewish-Moroccan relations in the region.

Even though I was put in contact with them because they were reportedly important Amazigh actors in the region, both insisted that they were actually not part of the Amazigh movement. Instead of the Amazigh issue, Mr. Lemallam said that he and his organization are focused solely on the historical marginalization of the Rif region and its people. Mr. Mouha agreed, repeatedly stating that for personal reasons he had finished his involvement with the political Amazigh movement.

Mr. Lemallam explained that the Amazigh movement is a social movement that has many divides and contradictions. According to him, “il y a le mouvement culturel Amazigh et il y a le mouvement militant Amazigh,” (“there is the cultural Amazigh movement and the militant Amazigh movement”) and the two are very separate.\footnote{Omar Lemallam, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Al Hoceima, Morocco, November 2011.} The cultural movement is comprised of the university and its students and Amazigh associations throughout Morocco. Even within this section of the movement there are differing opinions. Some members believe that the Moroccan people are united, that there shouldn’t be a split between the Arabs and Amazigh and that they
will find a way to get over their differences, whereas others are very adamant that there are
divides in Moroccan society. Moreover, some actors recognize that there are splits within even
the Amazigh community; due to geography there are many differences between the Amazigh
people and the culture of the Rif, Atlas and Souss regions. Regardless of the movement’s
tendency to unite all Amazigh people, they believe that “nous ne somme pas un peuple.”
(“we are not one people.”)

He argued that these splits within the Amazigh community were illustrated by the debate
over the formation of the Tamazight language. While the Constitution allowed for the
recognition of the Amazigh language, it never specified which form of the language and instead
allowed IRCAM to decide. The issue was in regards to the script that would be used as there
were arguments from different sides to choose Latin (to encourage Western learning), Arabic
(for nationalist purposes and because it is the only language spoken by all Moroccans) and
Tifinagh (which has historically been the symbol for the Amazigh language). In the end,
Tifinagh was chosen, but as Mr. Lemallam explained, it is only really used in the Sahara and
Souss regions and it is never used in the Rif region. In effect, by trying to unite the Amazigh
people he argued that this decision actually marginalized the Amazigh population of the Rif.

In addition to the cultural movement Mr. Lemallam explained the militant section of the
Amazigh movement. This section is made up of individuals who want and defend the Amazigh
community’s right to have its place in Moroccan culture. As he explained, some are in political
groups and have certain affiliations, but they are not a part of any social movement. They all
have their own different opinions on the matter and are not affiliated with any organization or
particular movement. This section of the general Amazigh movement is how Mr. Lemallam

\[25\text{Ibid.}\]
would characterize his involvement; “il le défend, mais il ne fait pas part de aucun mouvement.”

Mr. Lemallam acknowledged that there is a difference between social movements such as the Amazigh movement in the rural and urban sphere. Since there are no big cities in the rural region, people must immigrate to urban areas such as Fes, Casablanca, Rabat and Marrakesh to complete their studies and oftentimes to find employment. In a sense, this migration creates marginalization as many young people are leaving the region, however in many ways this migration is also helpful to the region. By immigrating to better-off regions, individuals from the Rif can use the resources available to them to defend the interests of the region. Especially in regards to Rif migrants in Europe, they can use the democracy found in countries like Spain and the Netherlands to advocate for the region and help ameliorate the conditions of the marginalized Rif.

Perhaps most importantly, Mr. Lemallam questioned the existence of Amazigh identity and the social movement in themselves. While he said that Amazigh identity has a rich history and culture, he argued that it’s significance is exaggerated by some people and that their attitude that everything good came from the Amazigh is “racist.”27 In his opinion the cultural movement at times goes too far and contains many contradictions. In addition to not recognizing the differences between the three distinct Amazigh regions, it’s use of the word Amazigh isn’t correct. As he explained, there is a historical differentiation between the Amazigh and Berbers, as the Berbers are the original inhabitants of Morocco and the Amazigh came later from the Middle East, in particular Egypt and Syria. The Amazigh movement has ignored this, he said,

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
and grouped together all Berbers and Amazigh into one ethnic group for the sake of the social movement.

Furthermore, he countered that the popular definition of Amazigh amongst the Amazigh movement is not exactly correct. While in Tamazight the word Amazigh translates to “quelqu’un qui est libre”\(^{28}\) (“someone who is free”) what it really means in practicality is a man who is free in contrast to someone who is not free, or a slave. Instead of using this definition, he argued that Amazigh activists have interpreted the definition in a way that better promotes freedom. The biggest issue surrounding the Amazigh movement, he argued, is that since it is based on race it is too absolute and there is no room for compromise. Mr. Mouha reiterated this by saying that within the movement, “question de l’identité et langue berbère ne sont pas négociables.”\(^{29}\) (“the issue of Berber identity and language are not negotiable.”) Yet, while Amazigh identity is rich in history, according to Mr. Lemallum it doesn’t have very much place in modern Morocco and is in fact “une identité imaginaire.”\(^{30}\) (“an imagined identity.”)

\(^{28}\) Ibid.

\(^{29}\) Mohammed Mouha, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Al Hoceima, Morocco, November 2011.

\(^{30}\) Omar Lemallam, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, Al Hoceima, Morocco, November 2011.
Interview with American Cultural Association of America:

I managed to conduct an interview through Skype with Mr. Hsen Larbi, an Amazigh activist from Philadelphia, PA and member of the Amazigh Cultural Association of America. The ACAA is a non-profit organization that is “organized and operated exclusively for cultural, educational, and scientific purposes to contribute to saving, promoting, and enriching the Amazigh (Berber) language and culture.” Based in the state of New Jersey, but with members across the United States, the organization is composed mainly of Algerian-Berbers, but also has many members of Moroccan descent. Its projects are primarily cultural and involve promoting Amazigh culture and fostering connections between different Amazigh diaspora groups in the United States, with projects including sending flags to and raising awareness of the Libyan-Amazigh population, supporting Radio Numydia, a North American Amazigh radio station, and supporting Tamazight literature and language tools.

It is important to preface my findings by stating that Mr. Larbi is actually of Algerian descent, from the Kabylie region. While it was not originally my plan to interview non-Moroccan Amazigh actors, given the transnational nature of the issue and the movement, and the fact that my project deals with the impact of migration on identity, I believe that the interview is still very much relevant and will shed light on many of my questions.

When beginning the interview and asking Hsen about the role of the ACAA, he insisted that in addition to keeping good relations between all members of the Amazigh diaspora, that it is important for them to get the word out about the role that the Amazigh face in North Africa to the greater U.S. community, as in his opinion “the existence of the Amazigh as a people is being threatened.” This type of rhetoric is very similar to the sort of language used by the university

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31 Hsen Larbi, interview held during SIT Independent Study Project, via Skype in Rabat, Morocco, December 2011.
32 Ibid.
students that I met with in Agadir, so it was not very surprising when I learned that Hsen immigrated to the U.S. from Algeria for university in the 80’s. The reasons were similar to those of the Agadir students: bad infrastructure, poor education, and a lack of opportunities in Algeria.

Just as in Morocco, immigration is becoming increasingly prevalent in Algeria, and according to Hsen for valid reasons. While conditions are poor throughout Algeria, things are particularly difficult for the young generation; unable to find employment many of them are looking for a way out. This even extends to the educated, as brain drain is a major issue in Algeria and many degree holders have left the country for better living conditions in Europe and the U.S., including Hsen. As Hsen explained, these young individuals are “the next ones to govern the country,” yet they remain marginalized and are forced to live in very bad conditions. While he himself is not sure if he made the right decision to leave the country, he does not regret anything and is constantly reminded by his relatives in Algeria that he made the right decision in emigrating.

When asked to define Amazigh identity, Hsen stated that it was a good question to ask, because as a foreigner it is difficult to recognize the difference between the Arabs and Berbers. According to him “when it comes down to it, North Africa really is one place... the borders should not really be there but were put in place by colonizers.” In his opinion, the people of North Africa are almost entirely Amazigh and the region’s culture is also very much influenced by Amazigh culture as well. In support of his statement that North Africa is Amazigh, he mentioned the Tuareg, a nomadic ethnic group that inhabit Niger’s portion of the Sahara. While their culture, which revolved around pastoralism and the desert, is significantly different than that of Amazigh in Morocco and Algeria, they share the Amazigh language and are thus Berbers.

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
who are separated by geography. Consequently for him the defining characteristic of Amazigh identity is language. Regardless of the cultural and geographic differences between the Amazigh, they all share the same language, which is why the movement has focused on Tamazight as much as it has.

When asked if and how his time in the United States has impacted his definition of Amazigh identity, Hsen is pretty sure that being abroad has helped him “better appreciate what is important to us as Amazigh.”35 By separating himself from the reality of the Amazigh situation in Algeria, he believes that he better knows what it is to be Amazigh and what it takes to survive as an Amazigh people. In effect, he doesn’t know if he has become more aware directly because of immigrating or if it is just a result of growing older, but he did concede that he is lucky for the amount of information available to him in the United States as opposed to Algeria. Even as a university student Hsen hardly had access to any books, but in Philadelphia he can go to the University of Pennsylvania library, which has books on many subjects and in all types of languages, many of which are relevant to the Amazigh issue in North Africa. This, he said, has “made a huge difference” in his perception of being Amazigh and has made him more aware of the marginalization that his community is subjected to in his home country.36

It is for this reason that Hsen believes that the borders and separations present in the Amazigh movement have actually been helpful for the cause. In some ways he concedes that the separations have had some negative impacts on the centrality of the movement and its message, but in his opinion the borders (physical, geographic, and cultural) are “historical facts that we have to accept.”37 Migration has been positive in many ways for the Amazigh as it has both improved living conditions for the Amazigh people and helped the movement gain traction.

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
While emigration results in an immediate loss on capital due to brain drain, in his opinion the end result is positive due to remittances. According to him “you can go to any Amazigh region in North Africa and find the effects of migration and diasporas.” Furthermore, Amazigh diasporas create awareness; through organizing Hsen believes that the ACAA can draw attention to the issues faced by the Amazigh people and hopefully influence U.S. foreign policy in North Africa. While he didn’t seem very optimistic about the U.S. stepping in and addressing Amazigh marginalization due to relations with the Moroccan and Algerian regimes, he did bring up the fact that it was the Algerian diaspora in France which mobilized the Algerian war many years ago. In addition, immigration has allowed for Amazigh communities who were separated by borders during colonialism to unite again and organize together. While the Moroccan/Algerian border has been closed for years and blocked contact between Amazigh groups in their respective countries, immigration has allowed for their populations to meet again and mobilize, creating institutions such as the ACAA and the World Amazigh Congress.

38 Ibid.
Analysis:

When analyzing the data I collected from my interviews and personal observations, it is difficult to draw upon concrete conclusions given the low number of subjects as well as the nuance and complexity of some of the answers that I received. However, I do feel that my information is sufficient enough to address some of the central trends and themes that have appeared consistently.

First, all subjects agreed that the Amazigh movement is not homogenous, and instead is composed of many different factions. While there was some disagreement, as Mr. Lemallam grouped the university movement with Amazigh associations, which the students insisted was separate from the university movement, it is clear that there is no one single Amazigh movement. Students, associations and militants are all involved with the Amazigh issue to some capacity with the same general goal in mind (preserving the rights and integrity of the Amazigh population), but the way they go about interpreting that goal and how the plan to achieve it can be completely different. In effect, it is perfectly possible for one to be political and Berber, yet still not a part of the larger Amazigh movement.

This seems to be due to the nature of the social movement itself: it is difficult to maintain harmony and a central message for a population that totals nearly half of a country’s population. When I initially conducted my interviews I was marveled at the consistency in answers that I received from the university students. Not only were their general answers the same, but even the language that they used was nearly identical when I asked them about Amazigh identity and migration. However, after going to Al Hoceima and getting a chance to analyze my data, it became clear that their responses were similar due to their belonging to the same part of the Amazigh movement: the university. Had any of them not been a university student it is fair to
wonder how their responses would have differed. Because of the fundamental differences between them and the other three subjects (age, region of origin, faction of the Amazigh movement), they interpreted Amazigh identity differently than the others, even though they all share the same identity in theory. This explains how the university students interpreted the term Amazigh to mean a free man, whereas Mr. Lemallam saw it as just meaning someone who is not enslaved.

Second, the interviews support the notion that migration has had an effect on their Amazigh identities. In particular, it seems that their studies at the university have been the most definitive factor in shaping their identity as urban Berbers. Although every student said that they were involved with the Amazigh movement before coming to Agadir, their involvement and rhetoric against the Moroccan regime has intensified while in the urban sphere. Their education at the university has taught them to question their identities as Moroccan and Amazigh, and they have learned new things about their country that they believe were not covered before university. They now have a better sense of what it means to be Amazigh and they are continuously learning new things and challenging their identity and the status quo. In some ways, it seems as if immigrating to the urban sphere is an essential part of being Amazigh. Many of the students discussed their migration as obligatory, as if it was they had no other choice or it was their duty to come to Agadir for studies. If this migration really is as obligatory as they described and if it has helped them develop their Amazigh conscious, I believe that one could argue that in order to be Amazigh one has to migrate to the urban sphere to develop a more complete identity.

While conducting my research in Agadir and Al Hoceima I had the chance to explore both cities and make my own observations based on daily life and casual conversation. If there was anything that distinguished the two areas I would say that the population was more willing
to address the Amazigh issue in Agadir than in Al Hoceima. In my opinion, Agadir acknowledged its Amazigh culture more openly than in Al Hoceima. Not only were there museums and institutions dedicated to Amazigh culture, but it was also very easy to come across Tifinagh on signs and buildings when walking down a street. While one could still find traces of Amazigh culture in Al Hoceima, it was nowhere near as evident. In addition, I had a much easier time finding Amazigh actors who were willing to discuss identity and the movement with me in Agadir than in Al Hoceima. Granted, I had more people available at my disposal in Agadir due to my connections with the University Ibn Zohr, but even the few people who I got in contact with in Al Hoceima who were supposedly big Amazigh actors were either hesitant or uninterested. Not only did both of the subjects refuse to acknowledge themselves as part of the Amazigh movement, but I also had several interviews canceled and was told point-blank by others that they had nothing to do with the Amazigh, even though I was assured that they were once very much involved with the movement.

This difference could be the result of many factors, but when taken into account with the responses I received during my interviews, I would guess that answer lies in the urban and rural divide. As the interviews highlighted, by going to the urban sphere and particularly having access to more information and the university, both the university students and Hsen from the ACAA learned to understand the issues they faced in their places of origin and how to better articulate their problems. I would attribute this to the concept of threat factor mentioned before; by moving to the urban sphere where they are no longer the majority and are more obviously surrounded by the makhzen and government establishments, individuals become more aware of their differences and are more willing to defend and honor them. As David Crawford explains, in his experience working with rural Berbers, “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." 39 Whether truthful or not, the Amazigh have seemingly become more aware of the state’s role in marginalization by migrating away from their rural regions, and have used the resources available to them in the urban sphere, such as technology and education, to question and challenge authority.

Third, I believe that it is important to note that involvement with the Amazigh movement is a seemingly lifelong commitment. While both Mr. Lemallam and Mr. Mouha insisted that they were not a part of the Amazigh movement, I think that it is still fair to say that although they may no longer be an active part of the organized movement, by simply being individual militants they are furthering the Amazigh cause. As the students and activities of the ACAA show, immigration does not mean an end with one’s involvement with the movement, but rather just a different avenue of approaching it. The students have found a way to remain even more involved with the cause when hundreds of kilometers away from Tinghir, and perhaps most importantly they all plan to return to and help their region when done with their studies. Although Hsen did not show much interest in returning to Algeria, he has found a way to continue advocating for the Amazigh even while across the ocean, and he continues to make trips to his country and works tirelessly in advocating for them and their rights. If anything, migration does not set borders separating the Amazigh movement, but instead it has caused reevaluation and amplified their personal identities and involvement.

Conclusion:

In effect, the urban and rural divides found in the Amazigh movement are perpetuated by migration, as rural Berbers migrate to the urban sphere where better resources and education give them the tools to develop stronger identities and commitments to the Amazigh movement. Neither the Amazigh movement nor Amazigh identity can be easily defined; both are complex constructs that have different meanings depending on the context, speaker, and audience. What is clear is that the Amazigh movement is only gaining momentum in Morocco and the rest of North Africa, and that Berbers are not allowing their economic and social marginalization to hold them back, and instead are using human mobility to go to where the resources are rather than waiting for the resources to be given to them. Regardless of the divides present in the movement between different regions, groups, and individual actors, their end goal is the same and migration is one of the best tools they have to develop their movement.

If given the time and resources necessary to conduct more research, I would suggest that any follow-up project include a dimension on studying the existence of Amazigh identity in itself. I touched on the subject by asking the subjects to give a general definition of Amazigh, but along the way I still questioned what Amazigh really meant and what purpose it served. While I do not have enough evidence to either support or disprove this statement, I was interested in Omar Lemallam’s belief that Amazigh is an imagined identity. This statement came just hours after Sietske de Boer and I had a conversation on imagined identities and her interest in studying if Amazigh identity is merely a social invention after being forwarded a scholarly article on the matter. While Maddy-Weitzman argues that the influence of colonialism on Amazigh identity is not enough “to say that modern Berber/Amazigh identity has been constructed, ‘imagined’ or

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‘invented’ out of whole cloth,” if the French dahir is so fundamentally important to the creation of Amazigh identity as it seems to be, I believe that the question is worth researching.\footnote{Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, “Contested Identities: Berbers, ‘Berberism’ and the State in North Africa,” The Journal of North African Studies, Vol. 6 No. 3 (Autumn 2001), 25.}
Bibliography


