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Multicultural Narratives: Language as a Site of Struggle for Amazigh Rights Activism in Morocco

Joyce Lee

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Multicultural Narratives

Language as a Site of Struggle for Amazigh Rights
Activism in Morocco

Joyce Lee

Academic Director: Taieb Belghazi
Advisor: Driss Moulay El Maarouf
Home Institution: Hamilton College
Major: World Politics

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Abstract

The Moroccan constitutional monarchy's officialization of the Amazigh language in 2011 was its response to a building coalition for Amazigh rights, which simultaneously narrowed and broadened the scope of the Amazigh Rights movement. This study's purpose was to analyze Tamazight as it has currently manifested in the urban space of Rabat as a site of struggle for Amazigh people. The questions the study attempts to answer are: a) Has the Moroccan government found success in its chosen goal of standardization of the Tamazight language in schools? b) Do Amazigh activists share this same goal? c) Whose needs do the goals of Tamazight standardization include and exclude? *If* it is true that they have not found success, *if* the activists agree, and *if* these goals are not inclusive of the populations, what are the narratives utilized to justify this misaligned mission? The qualitative research to answer this question took the form of ethnographic fieldwork at Amazigh rights protests, IRCAM officials, and associations like AMREC, in order to examine the processes of institutional goal formation. Additionally, by bringing into play the case study of *Moul Hanut*, the study weaves real narratives through the institutional-level findings, grounding the research. Through twelve interviews with Moroccans from various backgrounds and in various languages (English, Arabic, Tamazight), the study discovers that Amazigh activists and government officials alike utilize different multicultural narratives to justify their narrow aims for the Movement that suit an urban, educated elite. This furthers the urban-rural divide in Amazigh needs and highlights the identities of the spokespeople for the movement. It confirmed that the needs of the Amazigh population are complex and splintered, and that continued research can assist in their cause. However, the gatekeepers of the Amazigh rights movement and Moroccan government ultimately need grounded communication with the people it serves, rather than research that reinforces an informational loop, in order to fully address what facilitates a multicultural society.

Key Words: Regional Studies: Middle East and North Africa, Amazigh, Berber, Peace and Social Justice, Political Science, Sociology

Introduction

Morocco's eclectic lingual composition is marked by its social and political complexities. Since 2011, the Constitution has included Modern Standard Arabic, Tamazight and French as its official languages. Avenue Mohammed V, located in Morocco's capital city Rabat, demonstrates this dialectical variety as a center for social and economic activity of the medina. Named after the King of Morocco in 1957 (two reigns prior to its current ruler, Mohammed VI), the street is lined with various *hanuts*¹, with their owners selling their wares of produce and *rghifa*. Though the average tourist might not recognize this, approximately ninety percent of *Malin Hwanat*² (*sing. Moula Hanut*) are and speak Amazigh, a marginalized majority language in Morocco. They largely originate from rural areas heavily populated with other Amazigh people, such as the Souss Valley, the Anti and High Atlas mountains, and have learned Darija and French only upon moving to urban spaces for work. Omar, a twenty-nine-year-old from Taroudant in southern Morocco, lives in the *hanut* he works at as a cashier and re-stocker. His living situation exemplifies the stereotypical image of the Amazigh shop owner in the Moroccan collective imaginary: speaking a broken Darija, accented lyrically with the tones of his Amazigh ancestry and learned for the purpose of selling trade, and forever occupying the *hanut*, in both employment and habitation as an alien provider of food.

On April 21st, 2019, crowds of activists, journalists, university students, and citizens all occupied this same avenue, in order to protest the injustices committed by the government in regards to Amazigh people in Morocco's capital city. In their walk to the Parliament building,

¹ Meaning informal "shops," whose appearance can range from having a physical, indoor space, to a hole-in-the-wall construction.

² Meaning "shop owners"

they chanted directed at their elected officials (but not the King), such as: “Our protectors are mafia” and “Steal, steal, rob the people” in their mother tongues. But back in the medina, *malin hwanat*, the owners of these street shops, are still in their stands - and for some, homes. Voices like Omar’s are not amplified via megaphone atop slow-moving trucks before the masses.

When the King nationalized Tamazight, one of the main dialects of Amazigh people, in a 2011 constitutional reform, many Amazigh activists saw this as a breakthrough. Many audiences framed this action as unprecedented for the rights of the Amazigh. Their demands were central to the 20 February Movement, an offshoot of the wave of protests that took over the Middle East and North Africa generally described as the “Arab” or Democratic Spring. However, there has been a lag for institutional reform to take place. The aims of the movement have changed, as the needs of Amazigh people become increasingly complex. Presently, IRCAM, the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture functions as a branch of the government, while new movements like the Hirak protests in the Rif Mountains have sprung up, and marginalized members of the community like the *moul hanut* are not advocated for. The current status of the Amazigh rights movement leaves much to be examined.

The purpose of this study is to gather qualitative data analyzing the relationship of the Moroccan state, as represented by IRCAM officials, and its Amazigh activists, while simultaneously threading the realities of *malin hwanat* to ground the institutional gatherings with individual lives. The questions the study attempts to answer are: a) Has the Moroccan government found success in its chosen goal of standardization of the Tamazight language in schools? b) Do Amazigh activists share this same goal? c) Whose needs do the goals of Tamazight standardization include and exclude? *If it is true that they have not found success, if*

the activists agree, and *if* these goals are not inclusive of the populations, what are the narratives utilized to justify this misaligned mission?

Before data collection, I expected to discover the failures of IRCAM as a branch of the state, that the officials' research entailed nothing but stagnation and the unfulfillment of splintered Amazigh needs. I also predicted that the Moroccan exceptionalist and multicultural narratives would color their discourse in why Tamazight teaching and standardization was chosen as a goal of the movement. The political implications of this would be that the Moroccan monarchy attempts, only on an official level, to change the power imbalance between its national languages. I also hypothesized the "needs" of Amazigh people would continue to be varied across geography and biography, as demonstrated by the 20 February Movement. Due to this, I expected the university educated activists to advocate mainly for the preservation of the language (with generational differences varying opinions of the usefulness of the Tamazight language).

While there has been plenty of literature on the linguistic breakdown and hierarchy of the Amazigh language, this study is not solely focused on linguistics. It is primarily geared towards the analysis of the institutional forces at play in societal change, examining the relationship between society and the state, utilizing language as one site of analysis.

The social and political implications for groups who are not served by the mainstream Amazigh rights movement are numerous. The relationship between the research and the preservation of human rights cannot be overstated. When the state claims responsibility for the equality between languages, it is required legally to uphold these rights on its citizens. The unequal rights that some citizens possess over others based on lingual and ancestral differences must be addressed. However, in order to find solutions, there must be sufficient knowledge of the

particulars of Morocco's pre and post-colonial history, current regime and its relationship to the Amazigh.

Historical Context

The *Imaghizen*³ have been inhabitants of Northern Africa since the nation's pre-colonial origins in 7000 BC. The historical trajectory of the Amazigh people and language is pertinent to the study of their current legal rights, as some actors within the Amazigh activist movement claim legitimacy in being a central part of the Moroccan national identity through their ancestral roots in the country (Boukous 2005). This historical narrative is also utilized and deliberately deployed by Amazigh activists to try to reshape and transform ways of looking at otherness, that there is a history of various ethnicities and languages before the constructed view of an Arab Moroccan nationalism existed. The relationship between the Berber people⁴ and those in power is fraught with tension, permeated with scenarios of power (i.e. being under the control of Arab figures of authority; the Arabo-Islamic conquest, French colonization, and the post-independence Moroccan monarchy. The distinct Berber language belongs to the Hamito-Semitic group, and the presence of Judaism and Christianity, alongside Islam, in the country further bolsters the broad narrative of a multicultural Morocco. Their distinct culture and language have been distilled through years of intermarriage and prioritization of other languages and cultures by authoritative institutions. This narrative of religious diversity, paired with a narrative of ethnic purity, provides a component of historical narrative for the cause of Amazigh activists. However, as revealed

³ Plural of Amazigh, meaning "free people"

⁴ This study will use Berber and Amazigh interchangeably, due to the movement's reclaiming of the word Berber, once used in a derogatory manner

through research, this big-picture ancestral narrative erases the current smaller, marginal issues of Amazigh like the *Moul Hanut*.

When the Arabs invaded in the seventh century A.D., they spread Islam to the originally pagan Berbers (Bentihala 1992). The building of the foundation of Koranic schools and teaching of Classical Arabic brought the language to the forefront of the socio-lingual hierarchy.

However, this religious impact did not affect the maintenance of other tribal customs and language (Gellner 1973). This religious argument also adds itself to the trajectory of narratives: historically, the state has utilized the Arabic language's close ties to Islam, the Qu'ran being written in Arabic, to justify its cemented and continued usage (Bentahila 1992).

The French colonization period had a significant impact on the Amazigh as well, as firstly any component not taught in the French educational system was considered of low prestige (as demonstrated in the phrase *le utile Maroc*, or “the useful Moroccan”, anything not French was judged as practically useless, particularly Amazigh). In 1914, France issued the Berber *Dahir* (Decree), which once enacted in 1930, aimed to produce a new generation of Berbers and intensify the separation of the two ethnic groups. However, in effect this moved Moroccans to double down on their reaction with current activists and historians criticizing the *Dahir*, labelling the event “the biggest political lie in contemporary Morocco” (Mounib, 2002).

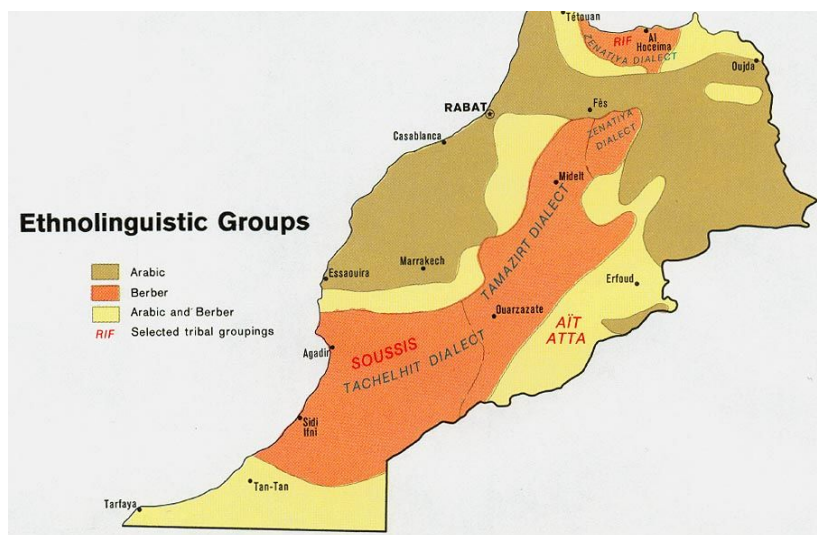
After gaining independence in 1956, the establishment of the Moroccan state constructed as a player in the role of legally imposing their structural lingual components on the Berber people. Under periods of national stress, the state called for a strengthened pan-Arab identity, underscoring Arabness to foreground n a unified national identity (Katz 2011:150). In the Constitution of 1962, Arabic was made the country's official language and Morocco's status as a

Muslim state was established (Aissati 2005). In addition, the mobilization of the Berbers through a shared identity brings them in as a player as well, able to respond to impositions on their rights. In the 1980s, the Berber Spring inspired the largely educated, urban, and elite movement across Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and other North African countries to centralize their secular political message; by changing the movement's name from the Berbers to the Amazigh, they put their message on a transnational scale. However, they eventually came to concede parts of their original core ideology when Moroccan Amazigh activists came into contact with the monarchy in the 1990s. They presented the Amazigh population as one component of the pluralist Moroccan culture, and the Tamazight language as equal to Arabic. The Amazigh Manifesto of 2000 referenced God and the Qur'an to incorporate Moroccan Islam into the movement's identity (Aslan 180). The irony of this lies in the fact that secularism was central to the Amazigh movement, but activists had to use religious reasoning, in their appeal to the Moroccan state. In addition, several institutes were created in order to celebrate and preserve Berber culture, including the *Academie Berber* (in Paris), IRCAM, the "*Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe*", and AMREC, the Moroccan Association for Research and Cultural Exchange (Aisatti 2005).

In the Constitution adopted on July 1st, 2011, "the Amazigh is recognized as an official language, alongside Arabic. The current state of the Moroccan linguistic market is marked with diversity in the speakers want to aspire to learn and speak socially valued languages. The competition between the languages, Tamazight (Berber), standard, colloquial Arabic and foreign languages including French, Spanish and more currently English, highlight the power disparities that the social uses of the language imply; "These relationships are in constant entropy in the social field and are underpinned by issues related to the ownership of symbolic capital"

(Boukous 2005:86). It is also difficult to account for the precise outlines of the language and ethnicity, for multiple reasons. Firstly, Amazigh and Arab are overlapping components of Moroccan ethnic identity. Secondly, though the King nationalized the Tamazight dialect in his 2001 decree and 2011 Constitution, there are multiple Amazigh dialects, including Tashlehit, and Tarafit spoken in heavily Berber populated rural areas, such as the Rif mountains, High and Anti Atlas mountains, and the Souss Valley (Bentihala 1992).

This historical background gives context to the complexity of power dynamics and lingual settings of Morocco. In addition, it informs why Amazigh identity and language is not simple to pin down and categorize, and why continual research must be conducted on the state of Amazigh rights.



http://images.nationmaster.com/images/motw/africa/morocco_ethno_1973.jpg⁵

⁵ This image, though chosen for its visual explanatory power, also demonstrates key issues Amazigh activists take with historical and current accounts of Morocco's linguistic breakdown: 1) Their opinion that most of Moroccan are Amazigh, but have simply lost their mother language. 2) People who talk Tamazight are everywhere. 3) "Arabic" should not be used in place of "Darija," as they claim Darija is not an Arab language, but a mix between Tamazight, Arabic, French and Spanish.

Literature Review

There is a breadth of both historical and current scholarly literature done on the topic of Amazigh rights that have informed this research question of multicultural perceptions of Tamazight in urban spaces. It is organized by literature analyzing Morocco's monarchy from a state level, as the ways the Amazigh language became legalised begins from actions taken by the state, literature outlining *moul hanut* as a social and ethno-lingual category, and literature on the Imazighen as a marginalized group and ways to bring their voices to the forefront of activism movements.

The research done on multicultural state narratives provides context to the teaching of Tamazight in Rabat. Aslan's *National-Building in Turkey and Morocco: Governing Kurdish and Berber Dissent* argues that the Kingdom of Morocco's more flexible conception of national identity was more tolerant of the Amazigh marginalized majority, leading to less military coercion in state—Amazigh relations. While the Moroccan state did not always have peaceful relations with the Berber population, as demonstrated by the violence of the Berber Spring in 1980, it preserved the monarch's legitimacy through displacing blame to the *maghzen* (Aslan 168). Eventually, the state went on to utilize a method of selective co-optation of the movement's demands as an instrument to moderate radicals. This strategy can be seen in the formation of the 1990s feminist movement, and the creation of IRCAM, the institutional culmination, and symbol of fulfilling Amazigh demands (Aslan 183). However, the state's official inclusion of the marginalized majority in national discourse does not fully reflect societal reality.

The Kingdom of Morocco effectively utilized flexible nationalist ideologies that tolerated the Amazigh movement; by giving them the opening to participate in the government, the state successfully co-opted the movement which led to compromise and moderation. Morocco first experienced the wave of protests that spread across the Middle East and North African region during the “Democratic Spring” in 2011, (labelled so due to the more common “Arab” Spring being contested by Amazigh activists, with the nominal “Arab” creating a label excluding those identifying as Amazigh and African). Over the course of history, the Amazigh movement has gone through many periods of direction, with the February 20th Movement (20FM) and the Rif Movement marking two major moments of change within the trajectory of its activism. However, as with many political movements, the splintering of the movement’s goals have posed as a hindrance for its successes. Rather than using repressive military tactics to exclude the minority population, the Moroccan monarchy utilized state co-optation of activism and a pluralist nationalist ideology to redraw borders of national identity to include the Berber population. This provoked the moderation of the Amazigh movement’s political message.

Amazigh activists made strategic concessions to the state to capitalize on political openings in the state structure. This is supported by Desrues’ work on *Mobilisations in a hybrid regime: 20th February Movement* (2013). Discrimination against the Amazigh permeates into local state structures, like in the linguistic domination of Arabic in education systems, and local officials’ biases against Amazigh baby names (Jumet). By constructing the label of a multicultural Arab-Amazigh state, the Moroccan monarchy has been able to dilute the strength of Amazigh identity, while still retaining control of the state. Pertinent to the subject of the Moroccan education system is that the parental choice to educate children in the Tamazight

spoken language often produces an accented Darija or Arabic. Though Amazigh families might be more likely to teach the language to their kids at home, they risk their children facing discrimination which draws on stereotypes that correlate accented Darija to poverty or lack of intelligence.

Desrues contends the hybrid configuration of the Moroccan political regime, and the interaction between the state and its contesting groups resulted in what he categorizes as the failure of the 20 February Movement. In terms of the actions taken, the King's offensive was the constitutional reform, which Desrues paints as though it were a chess tactic, where on March 9th, 2011, Mohammed VI announced a constitutional review. Decreeing vast constitutional changes that the King claimed acquiesced to activists' demands allowed him to maintain control over the monarchy, as "People sympathetic to the cause of the Amazigh people, human rights... interpreted a willingness on the part of the Monarchy to consider their demands" (418).

The mixture of "new" and "old" actors created a domino effect set off by protests (Desrues 412). Desrues argues the large number of people claiming one collective identity is an explanatory factor for both successes and failures of the 20 February Movement. Thus, the diversity of repertoires of contention made available by hybrid configuration explains how the state managed the protests. The hybridization contributed to satisfying sectional interests, and led to the monarch's creation of the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture in Morocco, which officially recognized Amazigh language and culture (Feliu, 2004; Vairel, 2005). The Monarchy recognized the pluralism of Moroccan society, while simultaneously awarding itself a monopoly over deciding how it can be legitimately expressed, as well as who can participate in public

affairs (414). The relevance to my research on the manifestation of Tamazighity is in its predictions of IRCAM's lack of functionality as an arm of the monarchy.

As Masbah argues, however, the Hirak al-Rif protests are distinct from the February 20 Movement in its repertoires of contention (6). The Amazigh population residing in the Rif has been subject to decades of marginalization, particularly in the Moroccan state's inability to address their socio-economic concerns. This is tied to the socio-economic issues of Amazigh people, which are often unaddressed when addressing language issues in urban spaces. In the al-Hossima region, there have been over 700 events, demonstrations, with authorities closing entrances to cities to ban protesters from entering. After Mohcin Fikri, the Amazigh fisherman, died in a garbage compactor, Amazigh identifying people who felt disillusioned by the Moroccan government's ability to serve their needs banded together to resist. This was a moment of extreme shame and humiliation, combined with death, that both revealed the legal discrimination and violation of human rights against a poor fisherman; this is why it was a trigger for the *hirak* movement (El Maarouf & Belghazi 2018:5).

The Rif mountains are in the northwestern region of Morocco, where there is a large Amazigh-Rif identity, and provide explanatory power for how modern Moroccan protest movements need a unified center in order to succeed. This helps me to further understand how Amazigh activists will need a socio-economic grounding and unified goal and mission in order to successfully achieve their goals. However, activists require a collective identity and numbers to power the movement. Zafzafi was an iconic leader (who was eventually jailed for what activists dispute to be religious reasons) detached from political authorities, which also gave the movement a sense of legitimacy (Masbah 2017).

Katherine Hoffman (2008) argues in her book *We Share Walls* (2008), it is women up in the mountains and in remote areas who guarantee the transmission and the protection of the language and culture in a natural environment, rather than the centralized IRCAM in Rabat. Hanou is a current female Amazigh activist living in rural Morocco. She uses social media, and new technology in the form of videos posted on YouTube, in order to reach audiences across geographical distance and in urban spaces; this demonstrates one way for marginalized voices to exit the periphery (Najwa 2017).

Spivak also contends that marginalized peoples, what she refers to as the subaltern who can speak but cannot be heard, are those who are not at the forefront of an activist movement but are critical to the movement's or group's actual needs (2006). Hanu creates videos from the mountainous regions of Morocco, in harsh weather and with rural scenery behind her, she speaks to politicians and the Parliament about lived experiences of people. She uses social media in order to project her individual voice and amplify it, putting her causes on a stage to help minority groups articulate their voices. This is one reality, for people without access to hospitals, women who fail to deliver, with particularities of community. She constructs herself as the spokesperson of rural areas, pointing out to cases of embezzlement and corruption, whereby donation to remote villages get ultimately taken elsewhere.

Bentihala (1983) discusses beliefs about Berber language and willingness to shift to Arabic historically. Though his main argument surrounds Arabic and French bilinguals and the hierarchical structure that defines the Moroccan lingual field, he states the low status of Berber in his current context of the 1990s. Maddy-Weitzman (2015) discusses how in February 2012, a Moroccan Foreign Minister, Saadeddin el-Othmani, was an Amazigh from the Souss region,

indicating the variety of Amazigh experiences in Morocco, and that not everyone in Morocco's Islamist current is irrevocably hostile to the upgrading of the Amazigh language and culture. Even more noteworthy in this regard was the Istiqlal's endorsement of one of the demands of the Amazigh movement, that the Amazigh New Year, Yennayer (13 January), be proclaimed a national holiday.

Other literature on specifically teaching Tamazight includes research done in universities, such as El Aissati et. al (2011), who identified preconditions like availability of materials and teaching time, the familiarity of teachers and students with the Amazigh and Tifinagh script, and the timing of the implementation of Amazigh at school.

In view of the foregoing, there are multiple interpretations of what a multicultural society is. On the part of the government, perhaps it means its ability to advocate and accommodate its marginalized communities. The literature reveals there has been a fair amount of analysis on the successes and failures in implementing Tamazight, using language as the site of analysis. However, some people see the successes of the Amazigh movement not necessarily being successes of the people. Interestingly, some Amazigh people object: "Our culture, socio-economic problems have nothing to do with us being Berbers..." Another thread of thinking about Amazigh rights is that the previous narrative is too isolated from real Amazigh people, that the spokespeople for the movement are isolated in urban areas, removed. Thus, their knowledge of the Berber people's needs is misfounded (Gagliardi 2019). Perhaps those living in villages have an unconscious experience rather than a politicized one. Gagliardi's study finds that Amazigh women do not primarily find allegiance in their specific group movement and leaders, revealing that the "Amazigh group identity can be regarded as an 'imagined community

of postcolonial oppositional struggles' that fails to represent the lived experience of non-elite Amazigh women" (2019).

Additionally, the literature provides an opening to social media's ability to connect rural Amazigh people with the gatekeepers of the movement but lacks depth. Things that are not accented by the media become invisible in plain sight. The research undertaken crystalizes the problems of perception and position in how one is situated. To be sure, the Amazigh rights thesis, as suggestive of effort to preserve the language, is mostly a site of struggle among urbanites and people living and being educated in urban areas.

Scholarly reflection and work done around the issue of Tamazighity indicate that there is a complex history of Amazigh identity and that it can be unified at times by particularly powerful movements in order to contest the state. It is obvious that there are changing legal interpretations of Berber identity and language, and differing attitudes toward it. These attitudes toward the language depend so much on the where, as in the geographies populated by the Amazigh people, within (*moul hanut* as a case in point) and outside of the city. All of this informs the idea that the preservation of Tamazight is a project without gaps, challenges, and even paradoxes. Speaking of it as a project, it remains to be seen whether the Moroccan government is doing enough, and whether the goals Amazigh activists have set for themselves are actually being implemented. Though institutions like IRCAM and Amazigh associations exist, this study exists to pursue further research done on how these institutions set goals for the movement, and whether or not they properly address Amazigh people's needs.

Methodology

The data collection process proved one of my main original assumptions to be true: there is difficulty in drawing concrete conclusions about the perceptions of Amazighity in Rabat, despite extensive planning to cover the gaps of the limitations. In order to determine the social and political implications of the post-2011 nationalisation of the Amazight language in urban spaces like Rabat, I conducted in-depth ethnographic fieldwork and interviews. As I was unable to conduct a statistically representative (random) sampling of either Amazigh people, nor Arab identifying people, I utilised the resources I did possess as an SIT student. I will make a statement about my positionality at the end of this section first, which will be built upon in the content of the analysis itself. When conducting research on a topic involving identity and language, it is crucial to acknowledge that life experiences contribute to a person's beliefs and motivations.

I conducted the first set of interviews with several Amazigh activists and scholars, whose close positionality to Amazigh issues revealed both illuminating information for my research, as well as issues in historical narrative bias. The interview process revealed their familiarity with Amazigh identity, often through biography and career path, which enabled their utilization of certain historical narratives that biased their information. This did also produce knowledge, ultimately, about the informational loops that revolve throughout Amazigh activist circles, and the narrowness of the issues. Through these contacts, I ended up attending an Amazigh rights protest in Rabat, a march from the medina, down Avenue Mohammed V, to the Parliament

building on Sunday, April 22nd, 2019. During the protest, I was able to conduct four interviews and gather ethnographic data on the Amazigh rights activism, and one particular way to demonstrate against the government.

I also spoke to two shop vendors (Sousiya speakers), about their integration in the urban landscape of Rabat. I interviewed these vendors at a local *hanut* next to The American Language Center. I chose people from this occupation because 90 percent of grocery store owners in Rabat and Sale are Amazigh. In order to discuss the multicultural perceptions of Tamazighity, I found economic, spatial and emotive links to the event of Mohcin Fikri's death and what happened in Hoceima. There is an accumulation of stereotypes surrounding *moul hanut* (stinginess, illiteracy, shop-centeredness, shop-imprisonedness, speaking a broken darija, etc.) that prompts reflections around the paradoxes of being that not only transform a shop and its owner to a microcosm for and a representative of a great chunk of the population, but also serves to arrest a plethora of contested meanings shooting through the condition of being an Amazigh. *Moul hanut* embodies a scope of identitarian Amazigh *everydayness*, that comprise the linguistic, semantic and spatial suppressions endured by individual and collective Amazigh subjectivities in the urban landscapes of the capital, Rabat. Through the case of *moul hanut*, I would like to point out to the marginal elements that operate invisibly on the body of power, to the wasted lives of Imazighen, who operate betwixt stunning ironies: providers of food, yet victims of structural and systematic marginalization. It is interesting to see how *Moul hanut* embodies the absurdities of state efforts and Amazigh activism. *Moul hanut* is an example of a child who becomes a man in the shop, of a child whose work at the shop is his only possibility of play, a man who visits his wife and children in the village twice a year, because he has committed himself to the shop. It is not the

case that *moul hanut* does not aspire for better life scenarios; he is simply perpetually running short of options. Of course, there are exceptions, characterizing successful Amazigh traders, but mine here is a deliberate attempt at bringing into our academic attention the social elements that both activists and power have pushed, either deliberately or unknowingly, below the surface.

In the absence of a specific Amazigh case study, I feared I would not do justice to the topic, especially because of my limited time frame for research and my outsider positionality. But through this case study, I was able to erect a bridge between the historical framework and the literature review. These interviews provided further analysis on the position of the Amazigh who speaks to all, the Amazigh everyone knows, but that everyone fails to *see*.

I also interviewed IRCAM officials, through contacts gathered from my advisor Moulay Driss El Maarouf and Mustapha, an activist, about the “culture of Amazigh population” in order to ask questions about the official stances of how the teaching of the Amazigh language is being implemented, as well as if they believe this is the main mission of the Amazigh population as a whole. I expected to gain insight on what the urbanite population deems to be the main goals of the Berber population to be, as well as what the role of the government is in supporting their rights. I also inquired about their beliefs on the state of the current Amazigh activist movement is, and whether they will be transparent on the monarchy’s previous action in sectionalizing the 20 February Movement, and their take on the Hirak al-Rif Movement. I would be interested to see if they make any comments on the rural and urban elite divide, in terms of the needs of the Imaghizen.

Finally, I attended private Tamazight lessons and interviewed members of AMREC, an Amazigh rights organization that hosted these lessons held in Dar Chabab in Kenitra, a suburb of

Rabat. The four interviews I conducted there were illuminating in the non-protest methods of activism that were possible in fighting for these rights.

Some limitations of my methodology involve the sampling process through which I gained contacts and people to interview. Though originally aiming to interview Amazigh activists and IRCAM officials, as well as *Moul Hanut*, only having two hanut owner narratives in a case-study structure seems to be lacking something. Additionally, the mechanism through which I was meeting more activists was through one original contact, whose generosity bolstered the information gained, but the personal connection might fall into the traps of snowball sampling. This likely biased the information gathered, as the personal and ideological connection (membership of the same organization, AMREC) has influenced the narratives of the individuals to convolve onto more singular, shared beliefs.

Positionality Statement & Ethics

As a researcher, my own identity and beliefs on multiculturalism and human rights have the possibility of affecting my analysis of the status of Tamazight in Rabat. A big question I had to ask in the process of doing research was: How do I relate to this? As someone coming into Morocco doing research, of course I will carry with me all the perceptions of multiculturalism from the United States. Delving deeper into my identity as a Korean-American woman, I have closely experienced the interexchange between cultures and assimilation, as well as language preservation in my own life. This happened to also lead to a verbal disagreement over the course of my data collection process, which I recognize as an overstatement, and emotional reaction to, my personal connection to the lingual narratives of the Amazigh people I was interviewing.

Though I do not believe the emotional tie to the subject matter had a deleterious influence on the data collection, I recognize it impeded my unbiasedness at times. Thus, the study leans into and depends on the foundational fact that people form their beliefs, and construct stories to support those, based on their identity and language. The identities of activists observed influenced their value formation, constructing justifying narratives that have implications for the movement. For the officials at IRCAM, their government roles would constrict their answers.

This is also why both the visibility and the question of the *Moul Hanut* are so central to my project. Consistently pursuing research with the gatekeepers of a movement does not provide criticism into the leadership and direction of social change. The only way to accurately gather data and depict the Amazigh activist movement was to recognize where the marginalized voices of a population are. To tie this to my national identity as an American citizen, the lingual hegemony in the context of the United States contains similar multicultural discourse, surrounding a “melting pot country of immigrants,” which consistently raises the English language above others. I do believe it is the responsibility of the creators of law and upholders of justice to reverse such inequities. In an American context, immigrants are expected to assimilate to the dominant American identity, shedding their ancestral languages by generations. In the Moroccan context, although Amazigh people are legally integrated into nationalist discourse, the realities do not reflect this.

Analysis

Case Study of *Moul Hanut*: Lingual, Social and Economic Struggles in Urban Migration

The experience of the *Moul Hanut* is central to demonstrate the many issues that the Amazigh population faces, in the narratives of their own lives. I met Omar and Youssef through Farouk, a Moroccan university student pursuing his Master's degree in Cultural Studies, who also served as my translator for the thirty-minute long interviews. In my walk down to the hanut, I was majorly grateful to be guided by Farouk, who acted as my translator as I recognized the need for aid in my communication with the hanut owners. Though my American identity explicates my lack of ability to communicate with the *moul hanut*, most average Moroccans living in Rabat also have limited communication. Because of their largely migrational backgrounds, they generally speak only Amazigh and learn Darija, French and other languages as their trade requires through experience.

Omar is a twenty-nine-year-old Amazigh man originally born in Taroudant, near Taghumart, in the south of Morocco. Youssef is twenty-five years old, and was born in Sale and has lived in the Rabat-Sale area his whole life, speaking Darija and Arabic as his first languages. These following conclusions about the foundational issues of Amazigh people is not to reduce a whole group to a stereotype, as several interviewees pointed out as a flaw of this case study; Rather, it is to project individual stories to a larger platform, and breathe life into the narratives created by larger institutions who have the power to create change.

That being said, several of the phenomena Omar and Youssef described, regarding generational language loss, rural to urban migration, difficulties in learning the language, the community found in language and identity, can all be tied to stories told by the IRCAM and

AMREC officials as well. Though my interviews with institutional advisors were meant to draw conclusions about their associations, of course, each of the members and administrators had their own personal Amazigh biographies as well. Thus, in the following sections, I will intertwine quotes and stories gleaned from individuals, before moving onto the patterns of narratives drawn from AMREC, IRCAM, and other Amazigh activist groups. Finally, I will draw conclusions about what lies in the future for Amazigh rights activism.

Language as a Generational Experience

Tamazight's low status in the hierarchy of languages that characterized Morocco has been proven in several studies cited previously (Bentahila, Aissati). But the question remains: when Amazigh is the primary language one speaks, how can they assimilate or enter the mainstream of society? Amazigh's position on the periphery of society can be seen in Omar's background, having moved from his hometown of Taroudant, in southern Morocco, to Fes when he was ten years old. After ten years of living in Fes, he moved to Rabat, then Tetouan, then back to outside of Agadir (where he met and married his spouse), and eventually moved back to Rabat. He justifies as such: *itinerariness*, as a persistent search for a suitable spouse, and the ultimate move to Rabat as an endeavor to make enough money to support his family. He also describes a tight-knit, though informal, employment network of *hanut* owners: "There's a community of Amazigh... that's how [they] will recruit him."

He describes having only learned to speak Arabic to customers, as he speaks Tamazight, "his language," to his two children and wife (who live in Souss), and anyone he meets who speaks Tamazight. This is something else that struck me while interviewing other individuals.

Mustapha, my translator for the IRCAM and AMREC interviews, would often speak in Tamazight in order to greet and interview other people.

Youssef, twenty-five years old and born in Sale, demonstrates the effects of this locational and geographical shift a generation down the line. As someone who speaks primarily Darija and Arabic, having grown up in the Rabat-Sale area, he does not speak Amazigh with many people but his own family. He describes the issues of communication for Amazigh people generally:

“What happens is in the beginning, when they come here, they find true problems in terms of communication. So even if, let’s say he doesn’t want to be an Amazigh person, but he cannot speak, so it is better to speak to someone who speaks the language for better communication in order to learn Arabic. For him, it was not the case because he spoke Arabic, but it was better for him — his family members, his relatives, when they come here, they have to go to someone who speaks the same language in order to communicate.”

A story from an AMREC member demonstrates experiences of targeted racism, as well as draws ties from *moul hanut* to the institutions meant to serve them. I met Nawfal⁶ during a Tamazight language class and was able to speak to him with the help of Mustapha, who originally brought me to the class. I met him in the bare bones of a room on the second floor of Dar Chabab in Kenitra, in the outskirts of Rabat; this is also where his story takes place. It goes as follows:

When [I]⁷ was about in secondary school (about 11 or 12 years), there [was] an Arabic teacher, who told him, Could you please answer me about something we had last time? When [I] didn’t answer, he said, ‘Oh you are ‘Chleugh,’ (an aggressive of saying Berber) and ‘Could you tell me [the price of] oil?’ They think Amazigh people are only in the shop. And he started beating [me].

The other time in high school, it was [the] Amazigh new year, [I] went to the movement in the center of the public school. And [I] started to [discuss my] culture,

⁶ I have changed several AMREC members’ names in order to retain their privacy.

⁷ I have changed the pronouns to narrate the story in the first-person, but the transcribed interviews use third person, due to my use of translator.

and why [we are] related to this land. Then the... head teacher... responsible for the school stopped him... There was actually a movement over there about Palestine, and they let them [demonstrate]. But when it's about Amazigh, our culture... This is racism. When [I] finished, they called [me] and told [me], 'The police are coming to arrest you'... But [I] said, 'Tell them what you want'.

There is also a difference in generational experiences, for *moul hanout* and IRCAM officials alike. This was a crucial experience that drove individuals to activism and passion, the ability for mothers to have a possibility of their children to lose their ancestral language. There is a particular forced change that came in the post of moving to urban spaces, particularly for *Moul Hanut*, as well as for Amazigh women who might marry a non-Amazigh man, thus making it harder to teach the younger generation of Amazigh people.

Conceptions of Family, Home, and Space

There are also geographical distinctions to be made between the Amazigh who live in urban and rural spaces, mostly having to do with the interplays of language and culture. Factual experience has it that the Amazigh in urban spaces are the ones for which language preservation is a predominant issue, as they are surrounded by educational, economic and social structures that prioritise the use of other languages, such as Darija, Arabic, French or even English, over Tamazight. Going further, generationally, as Amazigh parents raise their children in their urban spaces, the children narrate having constrained notions of who their family is.

"I only went once back home [to Souss], because [my] grandparents came here. For [me], the family is restricted to cousins, and that's it. So most of [the people I see as my] family are here. But [my] parents go back, for them, the family extends to other people.
(Youssef, *Hanut* worker)

The embodiment of the site of trade and dwelling is related to the imposition of Amazigh occupation of space. There are reasons why the Amazigh cannot make themselves heard, as the

mainstream will not make space for them in everyday life. Thus, the relationship between space and power is cemented further. I found out that Omar lives in the *hanut* that he works at, and Youssef will stay over certain nights if it is too late to return to Sale. The *hanut* case hopes to capture this spatial marginalization. One finds it hard to think of how official texts on freedom of expression and human rights can be read against the ground realities of Imazighen everywhere. In view of their burdensome everydayness, Amazigh individuals in *hwanat* (shops), and Amazigh collectivities in mountains and villagers continue to suffer from spatial violence. The *hanut* here serves as a metaphor, that typifies cases of modern incarceration, whereby the space occupied is denotative of the space one truly occupies in society. By extension, the spatial reality of the Amazigh language in educational programs is of prime concern to the current analytical strand.

Amazigh Economic Struggles

Omar describes his academic struggles, both due to environment and language reasons:

“[I] actually studied a few years in elementary school, but [I] was a ‘delinquent’ (something like that)⁸, but did not pay much attention to [my] studies. [And] the thing is, studying in school is in Arabic, but [I] couldn’t learn Arabic.”

This description ties the social perception of its low status and usefulness of Tamazight language to the economic disadvantage that the *Moul hanut*, and more broadly Amazigh people, face. The difficulties they face in schools, the necessity of their move to urban spaces to work, and specifically for the *hanut* owners, their occupation outside of what is seen as ‘le utile Maroc’ reinforces their marginalization.

⁸ Farouk had some difficulty finding a direct translation for this word.

Mustapha Ouhnini, an Amazigh member of AMREC, was also present at the Tamazight language class. He spoke to migration as an economic issue, stating his incentives for leaving his home of Zagura to study, attend university so he would have a chance to work:

“If you [stay] in the south, there are really no chances to study after Baccalaureate, so if you work, you will just work in Agriculture. So if you really want to realize your dreams and make them come true, you have to come here... I [would] prefer to stay in my city, in my home... But I [would] not study... [The] best situation, I will become a truck driver. So there [is] immigration from the rural areas... to urban territory... [and] they become Arabs. By this rate, unfortunately, we lose the culture, so today [there are] 55 million [Amazigh people]; after 10 years, if we don't have associations or organization that encourage people to learn about this culture, maybe it will be less. Maybe someday, it'll disappear from earth.”

Activist and State Repeating Narratives

There are common denominators between IRCAM and AMREC activists in that they both utilize these historical narratives in order to make the aims of their organizations central to the cause of the Amazigh movement as a whole. This implies for activist movements in that choosing goals and choosing audiences is crucial for what their successes will look like.

“Tamazight language is a part of our goals. we are not protesting just Tamazight language, it is identity, history, language... and our symbol is (three fingers), you can see in Amazigh flag, “qrad” means three, it means Akel, Awal, Afghan. Akan is the land, if there is no land, there is no Tamazight, no human beings. We cannot say to a person, you are not Amazigh if you are not talking in Tamazight. Maybe he lost the language, but if he is in Morocco, he is Amazigh by land. So land first. Second, Awel, is language. We have to go back to identity and history, we are not Arab, we cannot be Arab... So we have to go back to our history to be a great country. And we don't care about [the] king or president, we care about a king who is credible, cares about his people, education, hospitals, we don't care if he is Muslim or Amazigh. Afghan, is a human being, has his rights and education.” (Hassan, Tawada)

Though these are not the narratives that draw on negative stereotypes of Amazigh people that perhaps other actors who are trying to detract from Amazigh movement (those of lesser intellect, those that apply to the one-dimensional *moul hanut* image that has been previously

described), they are still reductive. They still are used to justify circular discourse and oftentimes academic and esoteric research on the people that cannot be used for greater change. The following sections describe several repeating narratives I found from the interviews conducted over the past month with Amazigh activists.

“We are all Amazigh”

The first narrative Amazigh activists drew from to justify their centralization of Tamazight standardization is historical: that all Moroccans were Amazigh by origin.

One implication of this narrative lies in the issues the Amazigh rights movement takes with Palestinian Independence. This, too, embodies some of the interesting findings of how social change works; attention to one cause during a protest takes away attention from the others. Multiple activists mentioned this point, which was brought to attention during my attendance of the protests on Sunday, April 22nd, 2019. One could see Amazigh flags being held proudly and high by many activists, with several presidents of Amazigh organizations there, such as Tawada, Jemma Asafiya.

“We are actually not against Palestinian people, we support them as humans, but actually Palestine has Arab-phobia. So [their] main purpose is... to support Arabs, Arabic in their thoughts... they want to make Algeria and Morocco Arab countries. Over here we are against that, because... they help countries to destroy Amazigh people. That’s why we’re against that. But we support Palestine emotionally, as humans. [When] Palestine [asks], Please Arabs, help us, what does that mean? Are they talking to me? No, they’re talking to Arabs. And when they raise Palestine flag, they are saying Arabs. When they say that, it is action — what we call racism. By holding that flag, it is racism. Also, we cannot raise that flag because it is not our aim— Palestine is far away. There is no good education over here, no good health. But Palestine there is ... Therefore, we have to solve our problems first.” (Hassan, Tawada)

The controversy among the Free Palestine movement relates back to the politics of attempting to progress a movement in the context of a hybrid regime. As the President of Jemma Asafiya said, “We are protesting in Rabat, not in the countryside, because [this is] a political protest. If you want to send your message, you have to come [to] the capital of Morocco. [Here] is [the] king, social media... you need to protest over here to be general and to be famous. If you [protest in] Agadir, it’s not going to be as famous.”

“Darija is not Arabic”

For Mustapha, Amazigh identity is language, as an activist. Many activists take issue with the labelling of Darija, the Moroccan colloquial language, as “Moroccan Arabic,” as they dissociate with the Arab categorisation of Morocco in general. One limitation in the generalizability of this finding lies again in the translation aspect, as my translator had implicit hold in the topic itself. However, as the researcher, I decided to acknowledge the potential risk of the narrative being non-repeating, as the presence of it occurring even once implied contributive findings.

“In Morocco, we are not Arab. Why? If you see someone speaking in Darija, it’s not Arab. Its a mixture between Spanish, Portuguese, French, Arabic, we are not Arab, but we are talking in Arabic. They lost their languages. When they lost their languages, people thought they are Arab. And some people if you ask them, they’ll say yes because they are talking in Darija. But if you go to their great great grandfather, they lost their language. And most of the people here, 95% were talking in Tamazight. But people lost their Tamazight, and people who came to Morocco, were 2 kinds of people; they [was a] small group of 500 who came over here were Arab. [That] small [group] made all people Arab? Those people were Amazigh, just a few people who were Arab, and a mixture between the two.” (Hassan, with Tawada)

One contrasting narrative came from Kadery Mustapha, an Amazigh political and anthropological historian and scholar. During our meeting about Amazigh’s context and history

in Morocco, he stated that he still will use Tamazight in every shop and restaurant he inhabits, to the extent he “can forget Darija exists.” He went on to say this applies also to “shop-keepers, restaurants, cafes; if they don’t own them, they’re working in them.”

“Rights for Imaghizen Means Democratic Rights for All.”

Another main foundation of activists’ narratives includes the widening of their cause to the rest of Morocco, in order to cause general criticisms of the King. This narrative is one that most would imply inclusion of smaller subsections of marginalized groups, such as *Moul Hanut*.

This can be seen in the President of Jemma Asifiya’s quotes:

“Amazigh... rights is not just focused on Amazigh language but also on democracy, health, education, our rights. So Summer Campus [Jemma Asifiya] is actually democratic, so they believe in Education, health, and the rights of human beings and Amazigh people.”

What’s next for the Amazigh movement?

I wish to now draw generalizations from the breadth of Amazigh activists I interviewed on what they see as the main goals of the Amazigh movement. The whole of the representatives and members of the associations I interviewed had a breadth of missions, and reasons to be at the protest. Though the interview guides were definitely tailored towards issues of language, there is more to be said.

“Our government [is] doing very bad about Tamazight language. From 2011, Tamazight language was in our Constitution. They didn’t actually make it in our practice. They don’t make it in school, just making it late. To disappear. The more you didn’t make Tamazight in our schools, the more it disappears. In about 30 years, the government won’t teach it. We are against that, we see how they are going to teach Tamazight in public schools.” (Mohamed Belmoumen, AMREC)

“There is some achievement, but we need something else. The things we achieved is Tamazight is in our constitution, there is Amazigh channel, there is some teaching Tamazight in public schools — but there is Tamazight in our constitution. But we don’t find it in our society, in our reality. There is just in the paper, so we need to see

Tamazight in our education, in our schools. We haven't achieved what we want exactly, we need a lot." (President of Jemma Asifiya)

This case study of *Moul Hanut* reveals larger issues in the movement as well, as their experience of marginalisation do not allow their voices and narratives to be expressed by the leaders and activists who are elevated by the platform of the movement.

Conclusions

The findings from the thirteen interviews conducting in April 2019 contain the potential for the future evolution of Amazigh rights activism, as well as providing an alternative lens of analysis for the course of Amazigh research. Additionally, the data collected for this study partially confirms previous research on the relationship between the state and its activists, though provides a more nuanced characterization for the quality of the discourse between IRCAM and AMREC. The answer to the original research question is that yes, the standardization of Tamazight is seen as a major goal for both the government and activists, for differing nuanced reasons. As hypothesized, the government's public statement of their aims, with the creation of IRCAM, is part of what makes them able to co-opt activists, while only conducting passive research, instead of real action. In this process, activists and Amazigh rights associations also have agency in the marginalization of voices on the periphery, like *Moul Hanut*. The narratives they employ in order to progress the standardization of Tamazight do not reflect the reality of the central issues for all Amazigh people, such as the issues involved in rural to urban migration patterns. The projected fulfillment of their goals does include broad statements about equality, multiculturalism, and democracy. But, this ultimately ends up excluding other minority populations, such as the Palestinian movement.

This study's conclusions should not totally minimize the efforts made by Amazigh rights activists so far. Again, during the Years of Lead under Hassan II, any mention or usage of the Amazigh language would be grounds for arrest and jailing. Now, the standardization of the official status of Tamazight has been taken on as a major goal, in order to maintain and preserve the ancestry and history of a huge portion of Moroccan people. Progressing in history, the

context of Moroccan activists during the 20 February Movement highlight the difficulties in creating a uniform aim that unites citizens to mobilize, while simultaneously serving all of their needs in a successful and productive manner. In fact, these findings raise questions about the ultimate ways to facilitate activism; is it the choice of feasible and generally helpful goals, as the standardization of Tamazight would be? Or should agents of social justice instead focus on uplifting of voices of marginal social beings like *Moul Hanut*, whose issues and perspectives are not usually heard? These provide implications for the structure and organization of activist movements, how to serve the needs of everyone but simultaneously provide a uniform aim.

This paper links the rights of the Amazigh people with the spaces granted to them. The concept of space is central to the current debates on revolution and social mobility. The corporeality (reality of the body and the space it occupies) (El Maarouf and Belghazi, 2019) of remaindered people (Zita Nunes) is symptomatic of the traces of an underlying politics of subjugation that result in the maintenance of minoritism, against all forms of democratization and attempts at defending human rights locally and beyond.

To reiterate, my positionality as a researcher provides constraints on being able to make concrete suggestions on where the trajectory of Amazigh activism should head. Having only been observing AMREC activists for a month, I do not wish to misrepresent their aims or causes. But Moroccan and foreign researchers alike must constantly challenge the mainstream discourse for what the missions of social change are. When analyzing the relationship between state and society, the government must be held accountable for the narratives it produces to justify its actions or lack thereof. However, the various activists (who in the case of Amazigh rights, have often been co-opted to share the same mainstream/shallow goals as the government ministries)

must be held to those same standards. Though these various actors do not necessarily draw from precisely the same narratives, it remains that groups have created stories to tell themselves about the Amazigh people, from their own biographies and experiences. But each person must also be able to acknowledge their knowledge is informed largely by their own experience, and further work must be done in collecting a larger breadth of narratives.

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Appendix A

Interview Guides

I) Interview guides for Amazigh Activists

1. What is the organisation you're with, and what is its missions?
2. Are the goals of the protest today aligned with the goals of the organisation?
3. Do you think the presence of urban space reflect the needs of Amazigh people who are living outside cities as well?
4. Do you see the teaching of Tamazight as a primary goal of the Amazigh movement, if not what is the primary goal?
5. Where do you see the Amazigh movement going, and Tamazight language going?

II) Hanut Owners

1. Where were you born?
2. How & when did you decide to move to Rabat (if you did)? Was it influenced by family? Did you want to be a shopkeeper?
3. When did you start working in a hanut?
4. Tell us about your family? Do they live with you?
5. Are you married? Married to someone from home/countryside (blood) or the city?
6. What languages do you speak? Do you speak a different language at home than with family? With customers?
7. Did your use of language change (if/when) you moved to city? In response to working in an urban space?

8. If you have children, do they work with you or go to school? What languages do your children speak?
9. Do you feel you face difficulties due to language in Rabat?
10. What is your relationship with other shopkeepers? What language do you speak to them in?

III) IRCAM

1. How would you describe the relationship between languages in Morocco? (Is there a power disparity between Tamazight and others?)
2. Does geography play a role in how much language and culture play into identity?
3. How would you describe the Amazigh movement?
4. What are the main goals of IRCAM?
5. How is Tamazight being implemented? Where is language preservation considered most necessary?
6. Why is Tamazight being preserved?
7. Do you believe language preservation is the primary way of addressing the Amazigh people's needs? Is this enough?
8. On what levels is the Imaghizen marginalized (surface level discrimination against language, non-institutionalized language)? How else does IRCAM address this disparity?
9. Are there efforts to inform the public about what the government is doing for the Amazigh? Or to coordinate with the rural areas?

Appendix B

Photo 1: Protests on April 22nd, 2019, intersection of Avenue Mohamed V and Hassan II, Rabat

Photo 2: Joyce Lee, researcher, in front of IRCAM, taken on April 25th, 2019

Photo 3: Protesters in front of Parliament on Avenue Mohamed V, Rabat

Photo 4: Amazigh activists in front of Parliament



