CHAPTER NINE

TRACKING THE MOTHER-TONGUE: TAMAZIGHT FROM THE MIDDLE ATLAS TO THE AMAZIGH DIASPORA

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Abstract

Militant dissidence does not always take a violent turn. Sometimes it is played out in poetry, song, and in the attempted rescue of yet another dying indigenous language. Dying languages are not a new phenomenon, but the contemporary struggle by indigenous peoples to revive or perpetuate their language is a last desperate attempt to maintain or retrieve their own distinct identity in an increasingly globalized environment. Globalization, however, has been both bane and boon. Bane, in that global political economy takes place in an increasingly monolingual environment, and boon, in that indigenous peoples, whether in their homelands or in diaspora, can mobilize internationally. The Tamazight language has been on the decline since the Arabs first entered and began to dominate North Africa. They brought with them not only Islam but also the Arabic language, sacred to the newly introduced religion. Tamazight was made illegal in many parts of North Africa and its written script proscribed. In the twentieth century, it has fallen upon the Amazigh diaspora to attempt to rescue the last remnants of Tamazight before it disappears. On the home front, what is at stake in the twenty-first century is the final loss of both language and identity of the indigenous peoples of

North Africa, who are "legally" labeled Arabs and Arabic speakers, and forbidden even to name their children Amazigh names. It is in the diaspora, therefore, that Amazigh identity is being reconstituted and revitalized.

But is it possible to standardize and globalize an indigenous language from out there in the diaspora? And what becomes of the multitude of localized, competing dialects and loosely linked identities of the dispersed Amazigh peoples? Is it possible to create a stronger, more "globalized" unified indigenous identity in the process of language reconstruction?

Here, we look at one example of this process in the Amazigh hinterland of San Francisco, California—and return to the Islamic philosopher, Ibn Khaldûn, writing in 1377, to help us understand why the struggle is at risk of being lost. This paper considers the frustrations, joys, politics, and blunders of well-meaning attempts at language restoration in situ—right there on the front lines of the indigenous language classroom—and home again.

> "Mother tongue is the most basic human right in literature and in all aspects of life." —Noam Chomsky, February 15, 2002 in Northern Kurdistan (Chomsky in Lezgin, 2002, 1)

> If people do share oppressions, are some more fundamental than others? Is it possible to ignore differences in order to form alliances against the powers that be? Which differences are to be articulated, and which are to be left for a later struggle? Around what points—moments, surfaces, events—are people to be mobilized? (M. Keith and S. Pile, 1993, 35)

Prologue

There are two ways to tell this story—experientially and scholarly. Somehow, I'm going to try to do both at once, for part of the story is how I missed it, while staring right at it, and another part is its recovery, or uncovering. And somehow, I believe that the slowness of my coming to awareness of what was right before me is part of the larger problem: why indigenous movements so often fail; why women's parts in the preservation of culture are both taken for granted and summarily forgotten. The "Movement" comes to be seen as comprised of heroes—men who die for causes. Women, who in silence write—or in this case, carve, or inscribe—their protest upon their bodies (or stew it up in their cooking pots) are not part of "it." Their preservation of language and culture is labeled folklore, decorative body art, ballads sung over a hot stove. It's just what women do. It is this very dismissiveness, however,

Fig. 9-1. Azouza, Fes. Photo © Rhonda Oxley (2000).

that allows their actions to be tolerated—tolerated until, at last, it is recognized as the politic that it is. It is then that this folklore becomes seditious and attempts are made more vigorous, not just to label it quaint, ignorant, backward, and rustic, but once and for all to stamp it out.

Perhaps we can only see, really see something, just before it is doomed; when it arrives at the brink of extinction, when we try to grasp it in that moment before it is gone. The attempt to preserve, revive and perpetuate the Tamazight language—and untold other indigenous mother-tongues as well—has reached that point.

Field Notes—August, 1979—Tebourba, Tunisia

> Wedding season.
>
> Ask about Azouza's henna patterns. Appears to be transmitted matrilineally. Grandma transmits these patterns down the female line, while virtually everything else is transmitted patrilineally.
>
> This is scratched out. There is a note on side:
>
> This has nothing to do with land reform. Stick to land reform.

Field Notes—December, 1980—Zouitina, Tunisia

Ask about Mounira's tattoos.

This too is scratched out.

Note on side reads: Stay focused on the land!!

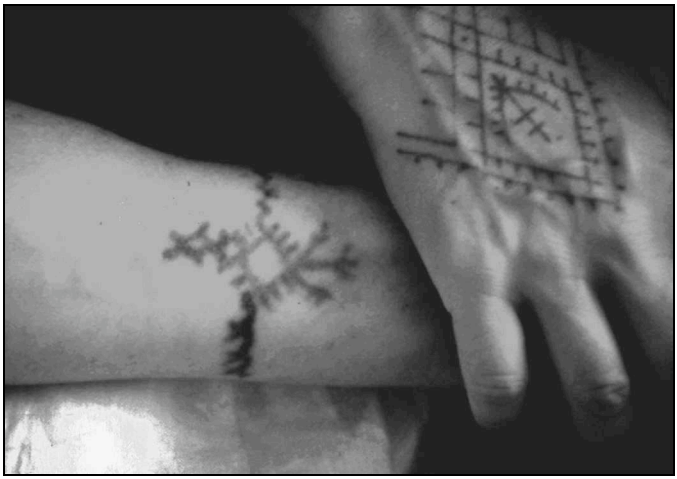

Fig. 9-2. Azouza and the Author. Photo © Rhonda Oxley (2000).

Surely a women's henna party in preparation for a wedding, and tattoos on the chest of a Tunisian peasant woman have nothing to do with land, state-imposed land reform, and indigenous languages. By staying focused on the issue of land, land tenure, and land reform in rural Tunisia —in what was (and remains), after all, the "Arab" Maghreb Union, or "Arab" North Africa—I missed an opportunity in the late 1970s and early 1980s to comprehend the connection between women, identity, land, and language in indigenous North Africa. I was busy counting cattle and sheep, chickens and goats. I missed, in fact, the seemingly irrelevant fact that the Arab people who surrounded me were not "Arab" at all. And the same turned out to be true in Algeria and Morocco as well. It turned out that even heavily Arabized Tunisia still held remnants of its pre-Arab conquest matriliny, as well as fragmented symbols of Berber identity, and bits of Tamazight language and culture, despite their vociferous avowals of Arabism and of Islam as the whole of their identity. "Ahna kul kif kif,"

they would say over and over again—"we are all the same." But slowly, over time, their profound pride in their tribal and regional "differences" would emerge. And their rivalries as well. One of the areas in which these separate identities manifested was in henna, tattoo, and pottery glaze patterns indulged in, the men-folk would say, for purely decorative purposes, by old grandmothers sitting on their haunches in their courtyards with nothing more meaningful to do.

Nineteen Years Later

Field Notes—December, 1998—Librairie Le Tiers Mythes—Paris

I've stumbled on a set of journals of *Revue Africaine* (1850 to 1936) in my favorite bookshop in Paris. There are reprints of articles, some over a hundred years old, documenting the ancient Berber writing system of North Africa—Tifinagh—along with its rules of grammar.

I'm struck, staring at these strangely familiar symbols. I remember suddenly Halima's tattoos and Azouza's henna patterns from long ago, and women's pottery glaze designs in Sejnane—all the wonderful symbols that I ignored in Tunisia while keeping my mind narrowly focused on land reform imposed by the State. Standing here, pen in hand in the bookstore, with Ahmad, the Iranian bookshop owner, pulling more volumes of the century-old journals up the ladder from the cellar for me, I develop this instant hypothesis:

What if—could it be?—that women in North Africa have preserved this ancient writing system upon their bodies, and held onto the knowledge of their own epigraphy for these past 1300 years—i.e. since the coming of the Arabs and Islam?

And, more than this—what do all the symbols *mean*? And if women have indeed written ancient messages upon their bodies, do they know what they have done?

I must go back.

Field Notes—March 1999—Rabat, Morocco

I've been given the name of this research organization—The Moroccan Cultural Research Association—AMREC—and have an appointment with the director. Shaking in my boots, I offer him my absurd hypothesis.

He takes my tattooed hand and kisses the tattoo.

"Well, of course," he says. "It is precisely that."

I can hardly breathe! I am, for once, on the right track. He smiles. He offers me mint tea and French biscuits.

The "Research Center" it turns out, is a euphemism. I have stumbled into the offices of what could then only be called the "Berber Liberation Movement" in Morocco. It was named thus, I am told, for when it was founded it was illegal to use the word "Amazigh," the indigenous word for "Berber"—and so, it was called simply "Moroccan" instead. How fitting. From the point of view of AMREC, Morocco is Amazigh territory. It is not "Arab" at all. "Arab" is an imposition of history.

I seem to have arrived at the very moment of the first publication of AMREC's demands to the government—which the organization will distribute at the first public demonstrations for Amazigh cultural rights since independence in 1956 (earlier than elsewhere in North Africa).

"In one hour from now," he says. "The movement begins anew. You must come."

The gathering is in an auditorium around the corner. There are speakers and an exhibition of modern Tamazight art incorporating the ancient Tifinagh writing system. I am introduced to Farhat Mehenni, the militant Amazigh folksinger from the Kabyle in Algeria, as well as Malika Matoub, sister of assassinated Amazigh protest singer, Lounes Matoub, also of the Kabyle. Malika heads the Amazigh movement in France. They've both flown in from Paris for this momentous event. I say something to Ferhat in Arabic. He gives me a sour look and responds in French. I didn't yet know his history.

Field Notes—July 2003—Azrou, Morocco

On one of my recent fieldtrips here some woman up the mountain at Ifrane told me there's an Institute for the study of Tamazight here in Azrou, and asked if I was here to study the language. I have since combed the town and the region from Ifrane to Ain Leuh, and from what I have gleaned, there's been no Institute here since Morocco was under French dominion. I'm beginning to think this woman was a figment of my imagination. But here I am again in

the mountain town of Azrou—in what turns out to be a bastion of Amazighité.

It's time for me to study Tamazight in earnest, but how—and where? I sit here in Azrou staring out the window of what used to be a French hunting lodge up here at the edge of the forest in the Middle Atlas Mountains. I stare between the trees and watch the Barbary goats roam the slopes just above the cemetery. I get sidetracked, and think about the goats instead.

Note on the side reads: Stick to Tamazight. Forget about goats.

Where the Goats Lead

One of the characteristic qualities of goats is that they can subsist in marginal environments—arid, rocky, mountainous, remote, and fairly inaccessible to the uninitiated and with meager sustenance, precarious to procure. They thrive, in other words, especially well in Amazigh, or Berber, territory—the remote domains of the indigenous peoples of North Africa. And while goats actually may not eat tin cans, they are one of the few creatures on earth that can subsist on the treacherous spines and fruit of the Argan Tree, the Amazigh Tree of Life, and are essential to the processing of the rare and precious Amazigh commodity, Argan oil. But that is, for the most part, another story.

Barbary goats lead us to the Argan Tree and Berber territory, far from the *bled el-makhzan*—what Ibn Khaldûn (1377) called the "land of royal authority." He was speaking not only of North Africa and the Middle East but also of the way governments rise and fall—anywhere. The *bled el-makhzan* embodies the land of government, opulence and corpulence, luxury and material comfort, the accumulation of wealth, and most of all, the domain of official proclamations, royal decrees, and the enforcement of centralized policies. Goats do not abide by these. Instead, what we learn from goats in North Africa is self-sufficiency, resourceful survival of those committed or suited to life in the hinterland, as far from centralized authority as possible. Goats are such as these: hardy, intelligent, mobile, and relatively docile unless provoked. They can, true enough, digest just about anything without too much of a bellyache, and can be quite good at defying imposed authority. Nevertheless they can be compliant, within reason and when not faced with coercion and force. They are at their best left, for the most part, to themselves and allowed their liberty.

Goats are, in other words, emblematic of Ibn Khaldûn's *bled es-siba*—the "land of dissidence"—the remote domain of free people living outside

and as far as possible from the jurisdiction of "royal authority," which is coercive by nature. Those who inhabit the *bled es-siba* are in grave opposition to that authority when it attempts to impinge on the autonomy of the untethered. The Imazighen—Amazigh people, or Berbers, along with the Bedouin—were Ibn Khaldûn's prototypes for his concept of the *bled es-siba*. The name "Imazighen,"—ⵣⵉⵎⴰⵣⵉⵖⵏ—which is what the Berber people call themselves, literally means "Free People" and the letter 'ⵣ' (Z) is the Amazigh symbol for the freedom emblematic of the *bled es-siba*. It was the name "Imazighen" that got Ferhat Mehenni put in prison for six years. He had deigned to name his folk music ensemble Imazighen when he began his singing group in the Kabylie of Algeria. The name of his people, the indigenous people of the Kabyle and North Africa, was banned by the Algerian government.

Goats lead us, then, to contemporary dissidents and medieval Islamic philosophy. Abu-Zayd 'Abd er-Rahman bin Khaldûn, known simply as "Ibn Khaldûn," the fourteenth-century Islamic philosopher and natural historian, most renowned as author of *Al Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, which first appeared in 1377. Here, Ibn Khaldûn contrasted the *bled el-makhzan* and the *bled es-siba* and posited the oscillation of elites between them (Fig. 9-3).

In short, the *bled el-makhzan* goes through a life cycle in which its members rule justly and competently, begin to accumulate wealth and luxury, and then become fat, corrupt, inept at statecraft, decadent, and eventually unable to sustain legitimate authority. Each succeeding generation of a dynasty is then less able to rule than the preceding one, for each generation becomes more used to palace life and less in touch with the needs of the people. According to Ibn Khaldûn, within three to four generations the dynasty has become both corrupt and bankrupt. What inevitably becomes the last generation of the dynasty attempts to amass resources through unsustainable taxation, eventually attempting to tax the untaxable (and fairly ungovernable) *bled es-siba*, which at first distances itself further (in the marginal ecologies of the mountains or deserts). It is characteristic of a decadent *bled al-makhzan* that its military is neither geared nor trained to effectively penetrate the remote "hideyholes" of the *bled es-siba*, and the ungovernable can elude the grasp of the royal authority (Ibn Khaldûn 1377).

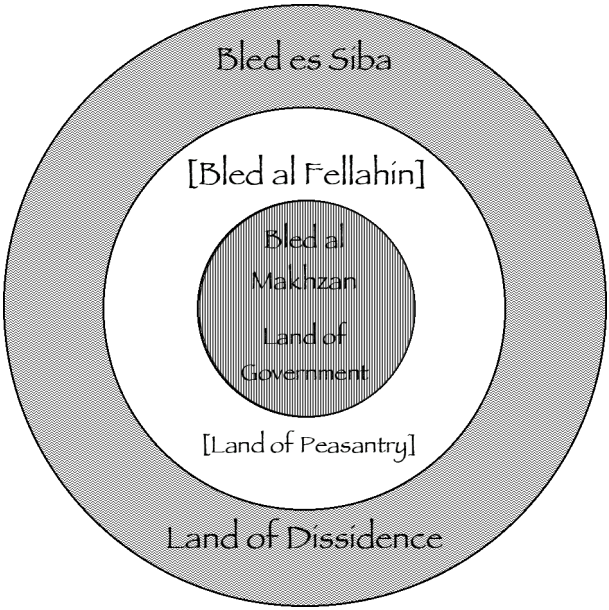

Fig. 9-3. Ibn Khaldûn's Model of Oscillating Elites. Author's image, based on Khaldûn (1377, 1999).

Ibn Khaldûn takes his model further, however, for he demonstrates the irony for which his model is best known: It is precisely the attributes possessed by the *bled es-siba* that are required for just and effective leadership: rigor, organization, loyalty, economy, knowledge of the environment, discipline and temperance. It is precisely the deprivations of marginal environments that make them, in short, more fit to rule. Should they turn and fight their oppressors, they have a good chance of success. They in turn become the first of a new dynasty—vibrant and efficient, charismatic and capable. There is an oscillation of elites: those at the margins of the centralized authority become the rulers; those of the ruling dynasty who survive flee to the margins, and the cycle begins again. The first generation rules well. The second generation, raised in the luxury of palaces, is more remote from the requirements of government, but can hold on to rulership because of the remembered charisma and ability of the more disciplined first generation. Ibn Khaldûn projects that it takes until the third or fourth generation, for the "royal authority," or government, to

become thoroughly self-serving, luxury seeking, fat, incompetent, brutal—and in dire need of resources from the remote places of the world (Ibn Khaldûn 1377).

Quaint, you say, and very fourteenth century. But what has all this archaic governance and talk of goats have to do with Berbers, language, and global society in the twenty-first century?

Now, Ibn Khaldûn's ideas are well known in the Middle East and North Africa (if not by our own leaders, who should take heed). In the second half of the twentieth century, much was made of Ibn Khaldûn's theory of the oscillation of elites in the anthropology of North Africa, especially in the work of Ernest Gellner and Clifford Geertz, who debated whether Ibn Khaldûn's model described the North African "situation" structurally or symbolically (see Geertz 1968; Gellner 1968, 5–14, 1969). Whether you were a Geertzian or a Gellnerian, however, certain characteristics of Berber society were agreed upon: they were quintessential *bled es-siba*. The Amazigh were historically matrilineal, tribally organized, and lived, for the most part, in those proverbial remote places. They were at the very least nominally Muslim, fiercely independent, and had a strong sense of *'assabiya*, that is, loyalty and tribal solidarity as well as competition—what in the English translation of Ibn Khaldûn has been rendered as "group feeling." These are qualities, in Ibn Khaldûn's terms, which should make a people strong enough to withstand the onslaught of centralized authority.

There is a distinction, however, between being "strong enough to withstand" centralized authority and being "fiercely anti-authoritarian." This distinction has plagued the Amazigh movement in the twenty-first century. However, the ability to resist independent governments or foreign ruling occupiers had mixed results in the twentieth century as well (e.g., Gellner 1970; Woolman 1968). And yet, the dialectic of Amazigh–governmental relations is, infinitely more complex. I speak here of *ideologies* of resistance. Amazigh tangible resistance has been minimally fruitful, and has not attracted global attention or concern. The movement has been, for the most part, nonviolent.

This is what made the "Amazigh Summer" of 2000 so important in Morocco, and its predecessor, the "Berber Spring" (ⵜⴰⵙⴷⴰⵡⵉⵜ ⵜⴰⵎⴰⵣⵉⵖⵜ) twenty years earlier in the Kabyle. Representatives of the dissident tribes of the Middle Atlas gathered at Ain Leuh in the field that served alternately as sports arena and weekly market. They lined the field with their nomadic tents, and the length and breadth of the field with a line of drummers, male and female, each dressed in the color worn by their lineage. Representatives of the national government, dressed in dark

Western suits, white shirts, and ties, met with them, announcing to the thousands in the crowd that their demands were being considered. It was a dramatic yet peaceful confrontation between *bled es-siba* and *bled el-makhzan*.

The allied tribes of the Imazighen, however, had not gathered to wage war or overthrow the monarchy. Instead, they demanded that their language be officially recognized by the government, that Tamazight be taught in the schools and allowed in the courts of the judicial system. They wanted the legal right to name their children Tamazight names. They wanted to rescue their identity from the slow death of picturesque postcards and indigenous collectibles. Morocco could no longer have it both ways: advertise Amazighité to promote tourism; suppress Amazighité to promote Arabism. Tattoos and henna patterns represented the politics of lost epigraphy. What was sought now was restoration of language in the public sector and reconsideration of what it means to be Moroccan.

The event at Aïn Leuh was orchestrated by a Tamazight woman dressed in blue jeans. Yet for all the rhetoric of Amazigh promotion of gender equality, there was little other female participation. With the exception of Malika Matoub, the modern Amazigh movement has been, for the most part, dominated by men at the same time as it has claimed the moral high ground in the Amazigh principles of egalitarianism (e.g., Hoffman, 2006).

While the militants of the Moroccan Amazigh movement have taken the milder path of activism—rallies over revolution, a call for education over arms—nevertheless, conflict with the governments of the Maghreb, especially in Algeria, has led to riots, arrests, imprisonment, fatal "accidents," and outright assassinations of Imazighen who have been bent on the preservation, promotion, and proliferation of the Tamazight language. The modern Amazigh movement began, after all, at a conference on indigenous poetry at the University of Tizi Ouzou in the Kabyle, in the spring of 1980. The Algerian government shut down the conference on its opening day, riots ensued, and the "Amazigh Spring" movement began. It was generated by Mouloud Mammeri, Amazigh poet and anthropologist of the Kabyle (see Moukhlis 1994,63-65). Mammeri was killed in a car accident nine years later on a road that some Amazigh nationalists say is one of the "safest" in the region.

Mammeri's idea was to begin modestly by preserving his own father's Tamazight poetry, and then build toward the preservation of the poetry, songs, and tales of Imazighen throughout North Africa, before the language died out entirely. One of the many problems in this Herculean undertaking was that of orthography. Should Tamazight be rendered in the

ancient Tifinagh epigraphy, and if so, which one? There was evidence of at least five different Tifinagh scripts (e.g., Haddadou 2000, 275) or should it be rendered in the more universal Latin script? As a scholar residing for the most part in France, Mammeri chose the latter (Mammeri 2001).

With the exception of Père Charles de Foucauld in his austere and solitary hermitage on a peak of the Hoggar Mountains at the center of the Sahara desert above Tamanrasset in southern Algeria, the study of the ancient epigraphy of the Imazighen was the principal domain of Capitaine Louis Rinn. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, he published piece after piece of his opus, *Essai d'etude linguistique et ethnologiques sur les origins Berbères* (Rinn 1885), which outlines how Tamazight epigraphy "works" both as orthography and semiotics. It is his work and the much later work of Makilam[1] (1996, 1999) that allow us to appreciate the extent to which Tamazight is tied to the feminine.

Tamazight Epigraphy and the Feminine

Tamazight, the generic name for all the Berber dialects, can vary dramatically from mountain top to mountain top, and even from village to village. As we have seen, it is still spoken to some extent primarily in the hinterlands despite centuries of intermingling with and formal teaching of Arabic. Imazighen in the High Atlas were surprised at what they called my "facility" with Tamazight, when in fact, I was struggling heartily with the language and filling notebooks with long lists of vocabulary along all sides of my notes. I still didn't get the language. Imazighen of the High Atlas were proud of their preservation of their mother-tongue at the same time that they were mixing the two languages. Much to my embarrassment, I was once again speaking Arabic, a Moroccanized rural Tunisian dialect, to be precise, and I was rusty, to boot. My hosts found it charming, but it was also painfully inadequate to the task. My Arabic language cocktail had stood me good stead for any other kind of research save this, and I vowed to rectify this deficiency at the earliest opportunity. Back in France, I discovered lexicons and grammars, reprinted hand-written dictionaries, cassette tapes, and children's primers in a variety of Tamazight dialects—none of which were available in North Africa. Each text or tape used a different vernacular, orthography, and grammar. What I needed most was a teacher. In the meantime, I plunged into the Capitaine

[1] Makilam is a pseudonym. In the text, she apologizes to her matriline for revealing the magic and medicine inherent in Kabyle epigraphic design in weaving, pottery, and tattoo arts.

Louis Rinn's late nineteenth-century introduction to the structure of Tifinagh—Tamazight epigraphy—for comparison with women's tattoo and "decorative" arts.

The letter ⵜ *(T)* in Tamazight is one of two symbols of Berber identity.[2] It designates the feminine in a culture that honors and privileges the feminine. *Amazigh*, after all, is a cognate of "Amazon," and the Berbers pride themselves on their putative circum-Mediterranean kinship with strong female leaders of the ancient past.[3] In Tifinagh epigraphy, it is a sign of matriarchy and matriliny, of clan and tribe. It represents Tamazight language, in every dialect. The letter ⵜ is generally placed both at the beginning and end of a word, enveloping them in the feminine to form nouns. Despite numerous other differences, each Berber dialect preserves this relationship:

m z gh	ⵎⵣⵖ	Amazigh people	*t*amazigh*t* language	ⵜⵎⵣⵖⵜ
ch l h	ⵛⵍⵃ	Chleuh people	*t*achelhi*t* language	ⵜⵛⵍⵃⵜ
k b l	ⴽⴱⵍ	Kabyle people	*t*akbyli*t* language	ⵜⴽⴱⵍⵜ[4]

The matrilineal clan is signified by the letter ⵜ (in this usage, the ⵜ is pronounced *Aït*), although there has been a long effort since the coming of Islam to North Africa to Arabize even tribal appellations from *Aït* to *Beni* (Arabic for "descended from") in its place. In this way, a number of Berber tribes and clans from the Middle Atlas Mountains have come to be known by the Arabic rather than the Tamazight appellation (e.g., the still nomadic Amazigh tribe, "Beni" M'guild). This "Arabization" of identity has been resisted to a greater extent in the more remote[5] High Atlas Mountains, where tribes like the Aït Haddidou, whether nomadic or sedentarized, have withstood explicit Arabization. What is at stake here is not only the removal of Tamazight in favor of Arabic, but also the

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[2] The symbol of the Amazigh people is the letter ⵣ, which represents the Tifinagh letter *Z* in all five writing systems. The letter *Z* is central to the words Tamazight, Amazigh and Imazighen, all signifying a free people.

[3] M. A. Haddadou (2003, 1–10), building on Plato, claims Athena (and other deities of Greek mythology) as Imazighen emanating from Libya. Athena—goddess of weaving, warfare, and wisdom—is a fine precursor to Dahia El Kahina, resistance leader against the Arab incursion into Tamazgha.

[4] Note, however, that the orthography above remains problematic. The Tifinagh above is Afus Deg Wfus, rather than the Tifinagh LS used by Rinn. Afus Deg Wfus is used here for consistency.

[5] Remote, that is, from the *bled el-makhzan*.

substitution of matriliny in favor of patriliny, for *Beni* explicitly indicates descent through the male line as *Aït* indicates the female. In this way, many Moroccans today with surnames beginning with the Arabic *Beni* presume that their own lineage was part of the Arab conquest of North Africa rather than the recipient of it. With one morphemic amendment they are Arabs rather than Imazighen, patrilineal rather than matrilineal, and aligned with the Arab world rather than alternatives. Those whose surnames have retained their indigenous form are more attuned to resisting Arabization at least to the extent of wanting to know and preserve "something" of their identity.

As Makilam reveals, the letter + has magical and healing properties as well, perhaps because of its association with tribal mothers and grandmothers. The epigraphic symbol has been used, albeit more and more rarely, as a medicinal tattoo, whether permanent, henna, or *harkous*. Halima, a woman of the Middle Atlas, had the symbol tattooed on her goitered neck when she was 18 years old. The goiter, she claimed, subsided and normalized as soon as the tattoo had healed. Her experience is shared by Berbers in the mountains, both female and male, over the age of thirty or so. The younger generation is much less likely to have traditional tattoos, medicinal, expressing militancy, or for any other reason. They find it either anti-Islamic or unscientific, or just plain old-fashioned.

Rinn demonstrates how in Tifinagh, letters become recombinant: ⊕ or ⊠, for example. The + (*T*) in combination with the letter ○ or ○̂ (*R*) stands for the stars and/or comets (*itri*), and by extension, "the Lord of the Stars" or "God"—rather more animistic a concept than Islamic, and wholly appropriate to a nomadic population. The combined letters also represent an invocation (*tter*) and a wish (*rtu*), as in a request for marriage (still in the high Atlas as much a woman's prerogative as a man's), or for support of the matrilineal clan—for the combined letters also stand for blood feud and vengeance (*ttar*), and the same symbol ⊠ calls out an alarm (*tiritt*), disorder, and revolt. Lastly, the combined letters stand for the marking of the sign of stars in henna upon one's hand (*titritin*) (see Taïfi, 1991)—likely also the binding of the oath.

This brief introduction into only two letters demonstrates the ability of Tifinagh to convey layered meanings upon the smallest mark, whether that be upon one's body or upon one's crafts. The epigraphy can "decoratively" convey devotion to the matriline and the requirement of its defense without an explicit verbal cry to arms. Grandmother's tattoos, woven tapestries and wedding pillows, and pottery glazing should suffice

as a constant reminder to preserve one's identity—but only if the old symbolic meanings have been understood as well as preserved.

To what extent contemporary potters or weavers are aware of this symbolic content remains unclear. Until recently, almost everyone I had encountered in the Middle Atlas Mountains had been unaware that Imazighen had ever possessed their own written language, let alone one of considerable antiquity. In the High Atlas, a number of weavers were certain that their designs held symbolic value, but they themselves were unable to deduce what those meanings might be. They were certain, however, that there were other women in the region who retained that knowledge. Some Imazighen in the Atlas had been taught at school that while Arab culture had given the world Islam, accompanied by a sophisticated and magnificent calligraphy, all the Berbers had were "scratches" which their mothers and grandmothers, in their ignorance, had placed upon their bodies and their crafts (in defiance of Islam). Imazighen were considered a culturally impoverished people without a writing system of their own. One Amazigh scientist recalled the hypocrisy of the other boys at school speaking Arabic "to pass" while he himself refused. He recalls, with undiminished bitterness, having been beaten up by these "Arab" boys on a daily basis for speaking Tamazight at school.

Abdelkebir Khatibi, the acclaimed Moroccan writer on indigenous language and post-colonial identity, on the other hand, explicitly acknowledges the epigraphic and semiotic value of those "scratchings" in tattoo and henna patterns, at the same time as he distinguishes them from a veritable—and sacred—writing system such as Arabic (Khatibi 1986; Khatibi and Amahan 1995).

Another Berber activist put the matter differently:

> Where you still find Tifinagh you will not find *l'oueshem* [tattoo symbols]. They have no need. If they have Tifinagh—they have a writing system they don't have to hide. Then there is no need [to inscribe it on your body].

He then waxed effusive on the bravery of Tamazight women, who would preserve their culture by incising it upon their bodies with blades and pot-black. And then he invoked Dhia el Kahina as the embodiment of Tamazight (female Amazigh) valor.

El Kahina-Dhia-bent-Tabeta, Maskina

"El Kahina," the Arabic appellation for the Amazigh Warrior-Priestess-Queen—dubbed "sorceress" and "diviner" by Ibn Khaldûn in 1390—was, according to Berber tradition, the last to militarily resist the

incursion of the Arabs and Islam into North Africa. But it was not she alone who made that last stand in the late seventh century; it was she and her sons—Mas Kahina. The appellation consists of *m* representing Kahina as mother and *s* as her sons, and together the two letters create *mas* denoting the matriline of Kahina (Rinn 1885, 251–8). The term *kahina* is not of Berber origin, nor is it Arabic. It is from the Hebrew, for the Amazigh warrior queen was, it appears, Jewish—a *kohen* (cohen), the priestly matriline of the Jews—and thus, by birth (again, tracing matrilineally as Jews continue to do) she was acclaimed as "priestess" as well as queen. Even in 1390, Ibn Khaldûn emphasizes the folkloric about her, the massacre that her militancy generated, and the benevolence of her Islamic foe. El Kahina died, along with two of her three sons, in the last stand against the invading Muslim tribes from Arabia. Some say she committed suicide. After the enormity of her defeat, the Berbers became Muslims, and by default, "Arabs." Ibn Khaldûn states that the survivors converted to Islam and were received honorably (1934, 192–4). Contemporary historians, novelists, and even comic book illustrators have variable renditions of her tale, emphasizing her heroism, self-sacrifice, and the slander and dishonor against her at the hands of Arab historians as well as the tolerance of Islam accounting for rapid conversion of the subjugated Imazighen (e.g., Cherbi and Deslot 2000; Haddadou 2003; and Nebot 1998).

Until the rebirth of the Berber resistance movement, where did any trace of Mas Kahina remain? She is obliquely or poetically present by allusion: First, in the names of the rivers, like the Meskiana. Second, in an Arabic term used constantly in North Africa: *maskina*, which has come to mean "oh, you poor thing." A bilingual pun, if you will, in which the "original" meaning is masked, forgotten, or newly reimagined by modern Amazigh patriots. *Maskina* is an invocation of pity, used often by women in empathy for the misfortunes and defeats of others. I do not believe, however, that the Berber and Arabized women of North Africa today know the derivation of their anguished invocation of the warrior queen's name. Third, and most interesting, is the folkloric hypothesis that the ululation of North African women is a reminder of El Kahina's battle cry against the Arabs and Islam. Nor is it forgotten that Dahia El-Kahina has long been held to have been a member of the Djeraoua tribe, which, Ibn Khaldûn is careful to remind us, was primarily a Jewish-Amazigh tribe in the seventh century C.E.[6]

[6] Dahia El-Kahina is claimed also by West Africans today as a symbol of indigenous resistance and autonomy. Her religious identity, like many other aspects of her life and death, continues to be debated.

Despite the diversity of tribal affiliations and nationalities attributed to her, Dahia El-Kahina appears to have existed. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s one heard no word of her, in the 1990s and 2000s she is revered through much of western Africa. Algerians claim she was from the Aures Mountains of Algeria. Mauritanians insist that she is Mauritanian. Tunisians boast that her last stronghold was at El Djem, in, of course, Tunisia.[7] El-Kehenna is the quintessential hero and freedom-fighter, and for this reason she is proscribed: In Morocco and Algeria it is not simply illegal but seditious to name one's daughters after her. It is considered an act of treason. And yet, she is being revived. Berber nationalists have begun to name their daughters for her in Morocco. She inspires the possibility of liberation.

Let us return for a moment to the historic demonstrations at Ain Leuh (Fig. 9-4).

Fig. 9-4. "Amazigh Summer" Demonstration, Aïn Leuh, Morocco. Photo © Mira Z. Amiras (2000).

Field Notes—August, 2000—Aïn Leuh, Morocco

> Aïn Leuh is an ancient Amazigh stronghold on the southern slopes of the Middle Atlas Mountains.
>
> I am surrounded by hundreds of drum-beating Berber tribesmen and Amazigh militants confronting government officials, who are dressed in dark Western suits. This is the first Tamazight Liberation Rally in the Middle Atlas Mountains since the French colonial period ended. First Rabat, now this. What's going on?

[7] El Kehina and the Berbers have captured the imagination beyond North Africa, and have been credited with originating the Polynesian "kahuna" tradition (e.g., Long 1948, 21–30; Maxwell 1996, 1–6).

There are thousands of Imazighen sitting or standing on the ramparts surrounding the field. By a fluke we've been invited down into the restricted area—the area where Berber militants will make their case to the government. We are the only non-Moroccans in Aïn Leuh; the only foreigners in the demonstration area.

It is here, in the most public of public places that the question finally catches up with me. Direct, clear, out of character, and no way to wiggle free of it:

"Are you Jewish?" Sadok is looking me straight in the eye.

It feels like the drums have skipped a beat, not my heart. I take a breath and think, okay, I can do this. Geertz never did. Gellner never did. Rosen. Rabinow. Jewish anthropologists in North Africa.

How can I say this out loud? *Do you understand the lengths and depths of Jewish paranoia? How fast we go into Inquisition-mode, Holocaust-mode, passport in hand, ready to run?*

He's waiting for an answer. I hold my breath. I take a breath. I'm actually not sure which. I take the plunge.

I say it with the exasperation of thirty years of avoidance of this question—that in thirty years I have pondered that it has never once come up and I have always wondered about this. I've noticed that North Africans tend not to ask a question if they think they won't like the answer. "Yes," I say, "YES, I'm Jewish."

He looks at me. And then slowly, hesitantly, he asks another question:

"Do you speak Hebrew?" [8]

I abandon all caution. We're in this vast public place…

"Yes. YES, I speak Hebrew."

A wide grin takes over his face. His eyes crinkle in delight.

"We have a story about the Jews in my village. We say that the Jews are like butterflies. Do you know why?"

[8] A few lines of this account appear in Zussman (2001, 444).

I can think of a number of reasons. Short life-span? Disappear quickly from place to place? I shake my head, "No."

"Because," he says, "we Berbers only wear one color—each tribe has its own color. But the Jews wear all the colors of the rainbow."

He's a Berber patriot, he says, and a poet from the South. He's taken hours of hot, sticky busses from his town at the edge of the Sahara to be at the Aïn Leuh demonstrations in the Middle Atlas Mountains. He's there with thousands of others to protest the illegality of his language, Tamazight, and to demand that it be constitutionally recognized as an official language of the Kingdom of Morocco.

"If *you* could do it, *we* can do it," he says cryptically.

If I could get my language back…?

They all look at me, smiling. He nods.

"You," proclaims the poet, "you lost your oral language, but you kept your written language. We, we lost our written language, but kept our oral language…" he hesitates.

"And you, you got your … "

I make him shush. We're in a public place. Can you say these things? But he is Amazigh—a free man, with free speech. He makes the connection explicit: The Jews got back both their language and their land. In his mind there is a causal relationship between the two.

This isn't just a language movement, is it?

"Come to my town," the poet says. "We're on the edge of the Sahara. Come for Achoura, and you will see: We're Muslims, yes. But one day each year on Achoura, we are Jews again like we used to be. We put on our masks and we are free!"

Are these descendents of El Kahina? But he doesn't mention her, and I don't get the chance to ask. They examine me, they question me. On Achoura, they sing my songs, they pray my prayers!

"Hebrew prayers are the most beautiful sounds I have ever heard," he is saying. "How wonderful for you that you have gotten your language back!" He asks more questions …

> I am the native, the indigenous one who has retrieved her language, and "her" land. I speak Hebrew. They call me by my Hebrew name. They are in awe … I am living proof that it can be done.
>
> And suddenly, I am not the anthropologist collecting data—I am the data being collected.
>
> He is taking notes in his notebook, and so am I.
>
> Time to study Tamazight, I write in my notebook. I don't know what he wrote in his.

The Tamazight Class

Journal Notes—October, 2005—San Francisco, California

> I was tracking the mother-tongue again. Online.
>
> Found myself suddenly reading articles on the relationship between the Barbary Goats and the Berber identity in the Anti Atlas of Morocco. Argan Tree in the production of the precious Argan oil, produced by a Berber women's cooperative in south-western Morocco. Was about to save the link when my hand must have slipped and I found myself at a different link far in the hinterlands from whence I began. I have no idea how I got there.
>
> "Tamazight Class" the caption read.
>
> Tamazight Class in San Francisco, California. New! at the Pacific Arabic Resource Institute. Now and one time only!
>
> Tamazight classes in my home town? I was there in a heartbeat, although I had missed three classes already.

Mind you, I had now been looking for Tamazight classes for the past eight years, somewhere closer than the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco and where some classes do exist each spring semester at Al Akhawayn University, exactly at the same time that I am teaching on my own campus each year. By now, I have a rather large collection of books on the Tamazight language at home. These include dictionaries, grammars, lexicons, militant manifestos, nostalgic booklets of proverbs, and structural treatises. And still, not one of these works has been useful in learning the language, except the semiotic Rinn, and his articles cannot help with pronunciation. Each author is fiercely loyal to his or her own dialect, typography, orthography, inflection—and alphabet. My library

includes Tamazight written in at least five different alphabetic systems—some of which go from left to right, and others from right to left. I was thrilled, therefore, to go to an actual class and learn the language at last—and not without trepidation. I took the trolley downtown to the Pacific Arabic Resources Institute to pick up my course materials and try to catch up before the next meeting of the class.

I arrived at Tamazight class that first Monday night, with a list of numerous questions. There were five of us that first night, two members of the class being absent. They never did turn up again.

Problem One. There was the question of the "Teacher." I was not sure who the teacher was supposed to be. There was, at our small table, the head of the language school, who was organizing the lessons. He was a Greek man who had taken an Arabic name (already problematic from a Berber point of view—since Arabic names have been forced upon Imazighen for countless generations. Would that play a role here?). Jamal Mavrikios, founder of the Pacific Arabic Resources Institute, was and remains deeply committed to the teaching and study of Arabic—the quintessential language of the *bled el-makhzan* in North Africa. Not surprisingly, then, he did not speak a single word of Tamazight at all. But he was open-minded enough to offer the class (provisionally), he knew how to teach a language, and he had developed Arabic resource workbooks for a number of dialects and comprehension levels. He planned to apply the same workbooks and methods to the teaching of Tamazight. This turned out to be a very bad idea on ideological grounds alone, given the longstanding struggle between the two languages. Tamazight, it turns out, is fairly resistant to codification. Be that as it may, this teaching methodology had worked for the Arabic Institute in the past and the Director expected it to work as well this time. He himself, however, would not be our teacher—he, too, would be one of the students, learning with the rest of us. His plan was to stay (at least) one lesson ahead and produce the workbook pages with a native speaker.

Problem Two. There was the question of the "Native Speaker." The "native speaker" turned out to be an Algerian from the Kabyle Mountains. More than this, he was a Berber protest singer and musician with five albums to his name, and quite famous in both his homeland and in France, but he was living, as it were, as far from Algeria authority as he could get. He lives, as you might imagine, in our own American *bled es-siba*, Berkeley, California, and he would take the train into the San Francisco to "assist" with the lessons. Our "native speaker," Moh Alileche, spoke the language, but did not know how to teach. More than this, he was certainly unfamiliar with using the materials of the Pacific Arabic Resources

Institute. Moh was, however, committed to the revitalization of the language, and thus, felt honor-bound to assist any way he could in this endeavor.

The other students had their own reasons for wanting to learn the language—all of those reasons having to do with friends or boyfriends. I was the only anthropologist. The first night I was there, there were six of us: the Director, the Native Speaker, and three students. The Director would engage us with the workbook; the Native Speaker would help with pronunciation and answer questions; the students would learn. Simple. But in the three weeks class had run before I joined them, two students already had dropped out. Something was wrong. All they had covered so far were part of the Tifinagh alphabet and a couple of dialogues ("Hello, how are you?") that could also be listened to on CD.

Lesson One: The Alphabet

The Tamazight alphabet used by the Pacific Arabic Resources Institute was a new one to me. It had been recently developed by IRCAM—*l'Institut Royal de la Culture Amaizighe* (The Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture)—founded and promoted by the new King of Morocco, King Mohammad VI by Royal Dahir in October, 2001. Perhaps it was that royal stamp of approval that had led Jamal to choose IRCAM's alphabet. And our native speaker, too, had been trained in it—although as it turned out, it did not suit his dialect.

The king, it is important to note, had been named for his charismatic grandfather, the great hero of modern Morocco, who had stood up to the French colonial powers and taken back the monarchy for an independent Morocco. King Mohammad VI is thus the third generation of the current Moroccan dynasty, and he, surely, has read his Ibn Khaldûn. He is trying to be very, very conscientious with regard to Amazigh rights—and human rights as well.

"IRCAM," says Moh, our native speaker, "was founded by the king to honor his mother. The Islamicists are resisting it."

It is a curiosity of the Moroccan "royal authority," that the patriline traces back to the Prophet Mohammed. It is not simply genealogically Arabian, but it is also of the holiest lineage in Islam—hegemonic to the core. Patrilineally speaking, the kings of Morocco are 100% Arab and of the family of the Prophet. But the Moroccan kings have until now always taken their wives from among the Imazighen, who, as we have seen, trace

their descent matrilineally.[9] Thus, the kings of Morocco are, from a matrilineal point of view, thoroughly Amazigh. The king, therefore, is in a position to play it both ways. And in this case, he has. He can impose royal authority and identify with dissident Amazigh activists at the same time. Newly on the throne, he has the opportunity to be proactive in the Tamazight conundrum.

The Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) contains in its title the irony of those two opposing forces so eloquently delineated by Ibn Khaldûn: "Royal" on the one hand, and "Amazigh" on the other. In terms of Ibn Khaldûn's historiography, IRCAM is an oxymoron. To bridge the gulf between these two opposing forces, the Dahir establishing IRCAM was not done in Parliament in the capital city Rabat, but instead in an outdoor ceremony, evoking a sense of Amazigh rusticity.

Moroccan analysts and intellectuals have noted the peculiar position of the newcomer IRCAM in the decades old Amazigh movement: "IRCAM is not a framework for activism. How could it be when the institution is linked to the central power? The two positions are therefore conflicting" (Bounfour 2004, 5). Abdellah Bounfour, professor of Amazigh literature at INALCO in Paris, has not just read Ibn Khaldûn's treatise on the opposition between the *bled el-makhzan* and the *bled es-siba*—he has lived it.

So too, in our class, Jamal Mavrikios, Greek Arabist head of the Pacific Arabic Resources Institute, had selected the official, *royal*, IRCAM alphabet to produce his workbooks in Tamazight language in San Francisco, California.

But how did IRCAM come to its idiosyncratic alphabet? In the formation of IRCAM, two opposing forces were set upon each other: Arab/Islamicists, who insisted that Arabic script be used for the writing of Tamazight—clearly the old *makhzan* position—and the "internationalist" Amazigh nationalists—who wanted the Latin alphabet used, so as to promote and spread Tamazight throughout the homeland and diaspora. The use of a modified-neo-Tifinagh was a compromise aimed at averting direct confrontation between Arabism and the West.

When I arrived in class, armed (innocently enough) with four alternative Tamazight scripts, I was brimming with questions. Why was the class using IRCAM's recently manufactured Tifinagh script instead of the pre-existing ones? What happened to the all the Tifinagh letters missing in the IRCAM alphabet? And on, my questions went. Our "native

[9] The kings of Morocco have taken their personal guards from among the Imazighen as well—another acknowledgement of the linkage between center and periphery.

informant" and Amazigh folksinger from the Kabylie Mountains of Algeria turned to the Director of the Arabic Language Institute, with that "I told you so" look in his eyes.

I had counted—and documented—no less than fourteen letters of other Tifinagh alphabets that did not appear at all in IRCAM's royally sanctioned Tifinagh. The head of school then began that slippery linguistic slope that probably held they key to our class' demise. He admitted that perhaps IRCAM's alphabet might need a bit of a tweaking here and there.

By the end of the night of my first Tamazight class, nine new (or rather, older) letters of the alphabet were admitted into our vernacular—although they had been excised by royal decree—and the workbooks were to be revised to reflect these changes by our next lesson. Revised, that is, only if Jamal had the time and could find a downloadable font set on the Internet reflecting the changes.

Lesson Two: Pronunciation

By lesson two, there was the Native Speaker, the Director, only one other student, and myself, now identified as the Anthropologist—only four of us in total. Jamal proclaimed that our tinkering with the alphabet was over, and that no new letters would be admitted into the workbooks. Tamazight now had a new West Coast version of its alphabet—one unlike every other Tifinagh alphabet in existence.

I had, however, diligently done my homework and discovered that there were letters of the newly revised, royally codified IRCAM alphabet that were now being pronounced differently than I had previously learned them. From the look on Jamal's face, I had to ask, as politely as I could, if questions were to be allowed. He said, somewhat glumly, and with undeniable irony, that he would be thrilled.

And so we ran full force into the fact that our "native speaker" was Algerian, from the militantly Amazigh Kabyle mountains, and that we were now using (modified) Moroccan Tifinagh letters, brought to us and approved by the King of Morocco—while learning to speak Tamazight as it is spoken in those distant mountains of neighboring Algeria. My question: how do we account for the disparity? Do we change the spelling or do we change the pronunciation? The answer was *dépannage*—a French term, referring to a "makeshift" solution. In some cases we changed the spelling, and in others we changed the pronunciation.

For example, Moh Alileche is from the Kabyle village of *Thighzhith* ⵜⵉⵖⵣⵉⵜ (or *Tighzit* ⵜⵉⵖⵣⵉⵜ, sometimes alternately written as *Tighzert*, depending on where you live and who you are). Either way, to

type the name of his village (which means "between the two rivers") into this paper, I've had to use two different font sets to put these "modified" letters together. The letter ⵅ (*th*)[10], the Director of the Pacific Arabic Institute grandfathered in on the spot. It does actually exist, appearing in one other Tifinagh alphabet that I have collected, that of the Amazigh journal, ⵜⵉⴼⵉⵏⴰⵖ[11] *Tifinagh*.

We had been given a Revised Tifinagh Alphabet Handout. The letters our class was now using would not be pronounced the same way in Morocco as they would in Algeria. Jamal, exasperated, allowed the addition of another two letters to accommodate this linguistic-geographical anomaly. The following week, if Jamal had time, and if he could find the fonts online, we would receive an Updated Revised Tifinagh Alphabet Handout. I noted the changes in my notebooks, and the one remaining other student in Tamazight Class seemed equally amenable to the change. The truth was, however, that she didn't really care about the writing system at all—whether in Arabic letters or Latin or in Tifinagh (of any persuasion). She was primarily interested in being able to surprise her expatriate Algerian friends with her spoken Kabylie dialect of Tamazight on her upcoming trip to Paris. I, on the other hand, was trying to learn the writing system. The spoken Algerian Kabylie dialect Moh was teaching us would not be understood in either the Middle Atlas or High Atlas Mountains of Morocco where my own research was being conducted.

My last remaining fellow student was also enjoying the irony that she, a native Arabic speaker, was "descending" from Arabic to Tamazight to accommodate her Berber friends, rather than her friends being forced (yet again), to communicate in hegemonic Arabic or colonial French. She was looking forward to the shock on their faces.

She had a real facility for spoken Tamazight, which she said came from spending a lot of her time listening to her friends—without understanding. This latter was about to change.

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[10] Despite the letter ⵅ being prominent in some parts of Tamazgha, and used by the Amazigh journal *Tifinagh* to distinguish *th* from *t* in some Tamazight dialects, the letter could not be found among five font sets available for word processing. Here, the ⵅ is rendered by using Papyrus script.

[11] Despite a search through the multiple font sets at my disposal, I cannot manage to duplicate the exact formation of all Tifinagh letters used by the journal *Tifinagh* even in the writing of its name.

Lesson Three: Rites of Reversal

We now came to possessive pronouns, which I found very exciting. Here, after all, was actual structure; something I could learn and perhaps find applicable to Moroccan Tamazight of the Middle Atlas. I had meticulously prepared my homework in the form of charts of declensions to be checked in class. Jamal appeared briefly, looked at my grammatical charts, and proclaimed that in fact, I should take on his role as facilitator in the class. Clearly, I knew how to teach languages. I thought he was joking. But by the following class session, Jamal was gone, caught with the flu, and also his desire to expend his limited energy on teaching Chadian Arabic for an expedition he was about to lead. There were no more revised handouts of the alphabet. No more Workbook Dialogue Lessons. No CDs with revised pronunciation. There were three of us, now, out of what I understood had been six before my arrival. Three had bitten the dust even before my first lesson.

In "correcting" my homework, I learned that there appeared to be no spelling rules. Each time Moh pronounced a word, he would write it the way it sounded in that moment. The spelling changed to make it easier for us to pronounce. Vowels, which feel the most random of all, may well be a fairly modern innovation. They seemed to vary from moment to moment. The language in its written form (along with its alphabet), was far from codified. I offered to bring in chapters of Capitaine Louis Rinn's work from the 1880s to help all of us understand structure. I offered the use of my entire collection of grammars and lexicons, and anything else that might help.

Understanding the grammatical rules was a nightmare. Moh, after all, was no grammarian; he was a folksinger. This was to be the last session of attendance for my fellow student. She was off in a day or two on her long-awaited trip to expatriate North African Paris. Under Moh's tutelage, she was well on her way to speaking Tamazight with her friends. I had made little progress in the search for structure.

The phrases that stick in my mind from this and subsequent lessons are: (1) "well, you could say it this way…or that way…it all depends," and (2) "well, you could write it this way…or maybe that way." And what would follow would be the context of nuance in the spoken language and how to manufacture that in Tifinagh. Thus, the variability. I appear to have taken very few notes in class except for vocabulary lists. There were simply too many variables. But I collected words that I could cling to with a modicum of certainty that they might, by next week, still mean what they seemed to mean this week. Here too, there were anomalies: I had

some numbers, but was missing some key ones. I had the names of some things, but with numerous and glaring gaps.

The following week, I vowed to fill in my vocabulary lists, so that they, at least, would be in order, if nothing else. I was seeking now a sense of coherence; a certainty of words—especially words that might be shared from the mountains of Algeria to the neighboring mountains of Morocco. Words like ⵖⵔⵓⵎ—*aghroum*—bread. Or ⴰⵔⴰⵔ—*aɣrar*—mountain. ⴰⵎⴰⵏ—*aman*—water. In other words, the basics.

Lesson Four: The Words We've Lost

By lesson four it was just Moh and me—my last fellow student off to Paris.

"What do you want to know?" Moh inquired. I gave him my list.

In going over our vocabulary lists, I discovered that I had some of what I thought the basics were, but not others. I had "mother" and "father"—ⵉⵎⴰ and ⴷⴰⴷⴰ—*ima* and *dada*. However, I had "grandmother" but not "grandfather." Grandmother was either *spi* or *yaya*—or maybe *stsi* or *yaya*—but I could not, for the life of me, find grandfather. "Aunt" and "uncle" were also missing, as were "October," "November," and many of the numbers. What happened to these?

Moh, who did not know, promised to call his grandmother in the mountains of Kabylia to retrieve some of the words that he himself had lost. But some Tamazight words, apparently, were simply gone. "Grandfather" was one of those. And how could "grandfather" have gone missing? He wasn't sure his grandmother would know.

Imazighen, remember, are matrilineal; Arabs patrilineal. Is it possible that because of this discrepancy, Imazighen were able to hold on to their words for grandmother in Tamazight, but lose grandfather to Arabization? "Aunt" and "uncle," and numerous other figures appeared to have been lost to Arabization as well. While Imazighen had been able to hold on to "mother," and "father," "sister" and "brother," "daughter" and "son" in their own tongue, they had been forbidden, by governmental decree, to name their children indigenous Tamazight names. Only Arabic names were acceptable.

When I asked how to say "Middle East and North Africa," I should have been able to predict the results. The words denoting the "Middle East" were always denoted only in Arabic, while the term for "North Africa" had quite adamantly remained, at least in private, ⵜⴰⵎⴰⵣⵖⴰ—*Tamazgha*—the land of the Imazighen, the Free People—despite the

countries of North Africa having been officially regrouped into the Maghrebi *Arab* Union.

Like other Tamazight speakers who write one form of Tifinagh or another, Moh Alileche, lyrical singer of the Kabyle, living in the hinterlands of Northern California, has had to fill in the many gaps in his own mother tongue. He has had to teach himself the lost Tifinagh script as well. His grandmother cannot help him with this one, for Tifinagh was lost generations ago in the Kabyle. Tattoo and pottery patterns are what remain.

"We are lucky to be able to even say 'ⵜⴰⵎⴰⵣⵖⴰ—*Tamazgha*,'" says Moh. And of course, he is right, both ideologically and linguistically. Ferhat Mehenni's six-year imprisonment for using the name "Imazighen" is now emblematic of the movement. And of course, Lounes Matoub had been assassinated for the pro-Tamazgha activism in his music, leaving his sister, Malika, to become one of the most passionate leaders of the Amazigh language movement in France. "Tamazight," "Tamazgha" and "Imazighen" spoken aloud, written, or sung, remain life-threatening words in many parts of North Africa. They all have at their root, quite literally, the ideology of "freedom." The young monarch of Morocco, King Mohammad VI, has understood this, and in the spirit of his mother's people, and his mother's mothers' people, he is embracing this freedom as best a monarch can. He is attempting to sanction it through IRCAM.

The language has been fragmented through both the force of the *makhzan* and the attrition of the *siba*. Tamazight exists in memory, ideology, identity, but it is not intact yet, neither on paper nor in a tongue that all (or any) can understand in some comprehensive fashion. And reclaiming some words takes precedence over others.

"We are lucky just to be able to say 'Tamazgha.'" That, I think is the key phrase. Tamazgha is the name of the land, not the language, claimed by the Imazighen. It is the whole of North Africa itself. And to invoke Tamazgha, and speak it aloud, has, until quite recently, been an affront to the *bled el makhzan*; an imprisonable act of sedition. This is what makes IRCAM, the Royal Amazigh Institute of King Mohammad VI, remarkable, and what must make its alphabet and grammatical rules hold sway over the alternatives.

Subsequent Lessons: The Lesson of the Lessons

In subsequent lessons, I acquired longer lists of words and missing words, forgotten words. I learned that Moh Alileche, my teacher of Tamazight and Tifinagh, personally favors adopting Latin characters to

write Tamazight, and not the use of Tifinagh at all. Mammeri, after all, published his father's poetry using Latin letters to render the Tamazight. Moh would like to see the language accessible around the globe, and feels that the obscure and problematic letters of Tifinagh could never be globalized. But they have strong symbolic value, he claims, and should not be lost. He has felt compelled, like so many other Amazigh nationalists, to teach himself the script of his ancestors, and to agree to teach any others who desire to learn it. A mission, if you will.

Ambivalence over options—and choosing the colonizer's script over your own—Ibn Khaldûn would say, is a sign of diminished *'assabiya*. It is the sign of a people who cannot hold themselves against the onslaught of a stronger force. For North African Imazighen the question remains: WHICH is the stronger force that will defeat them this time—if they are to be defeated? Is it, as in centuries past, Islam and Arabism? Is it their own inclination to take the "easy" path of Westernization even of their own obscure and contentious script? Or are they defeated by the sheer fragmentation of loyalties and solidarities, each on its own mountain top? Are they doomed ever to be dissenters accustomed to dissent, even among themselves? Or will it take an act by a North African monarch to unify the fragmented movement? Or the Internet to unite them? Or the classes that become more numerous each passing year?

I cannot forget that I am studying the language not of "Tamazgha," but of Moh Alileche's village in the Kabyle mountains of Algeria—using a script brought to us by the king of neighboring Morocco.

Since our lessons, there has been ever more to resolve at IRCAM, and more arrests over Amazigh activism even as I write. There have also been more websites with free downloadable Tifinagh fonts—all with slightly different letters of the alphabet. In class, I learned a bit of "who" and "what" and "where," some of the "past tense" and a bit of the "present"—but the "future" still eludes me. Is it possible there is none? Or will it, like the letters, come together to spell a viable Amazighité that works as well in the diaspora as it does in the hinterland.

Moh sings:

> Our tongues speak no more.
> There is nothing more to be said.
> The words are far too heavy with
> Frustration to be spoken.
>
> We continue to live in times when
> Truth is hidden deep
> And the injustice of our rulers

Pushes us down deeper.

Every new election brings forth
A new Tough Guy
To force his will upon us.

Is *this* the destiny of The Free—
Ancient People of North Africa?
Is this what we *really* deserve?

ⵜⴰⵔⵡⴰ ⵏ' ⵜⴰⵎⴰⵣⵖⴰ
Tarwa n' Tamazgha "North Africa's Destiny" (2001)
Sung by Moh Alileche to a traditional folk melody of
Kabylia (stanzas readjusted by M. Z. Amiras).
Used with permission.

Conclusions

When it comes to the Tamazight language movement in North Africa or in the Amazigh diaspora, even the language of discourse is Ibn Khaldûnian. Thus, to say "what went wrong" with Tamazight class at the Pacific Arabic Resources Institute, it is instructive to return to 1377, when Ibn Khaldûn first articulated the problem.

Militant dissidents do not, by definition, allow Royal sanction to appropriate the form and content of their dissent. And yet that is what modern governments try to do and sometimes they succeed: mediation, perhaps, and conflict resolution with "minority" populations (who are considered by some, in this case, also to be the majority population in North Africa).

The contemporary Moroccan *makhzan* attempts to play Ibn Khaldûn both ways: The monarchy can legitimately claim to be royal, Arab, and of saintly Islamic lineage on the one hand, and indigenous, Amazigh, and quintessentially North African, on the other. It is, perhaps, a valiant attempt to knit together the binary poles of society. But after years of the political woes at the *Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe* (IRCAM), seven members of the IRCAM Board of Directors resigned in 2005 for lack of any real results through the governmental Institute. And in March, 2006, arrests of militant Imazighen demanding an education in their own language, mounted in Morocco; in response to the continued split personality of the Moroccan *makhzan*—simultaneously promoting and suppressing the study of Tamazight—a new political party, the Amazigh Party, is attempting to form in the country. In 2008 more students were arrested, but not directly for Amazigh activism. Amazighité has ceased to

be quaint folklore in North Africa; the word is not suppressed; IRCAM has expanded rather than contracted its role and its offerings.

And where does the political process leave our Tamazight class in the California hinterlands of the Amazigh diaspora—our experimental class at Jamal Mavrikios' Pacific Arabic Resources Institute? Tamazight did not make it into the 2006 Spring Semester list of classes, nor into any of the course listings since then. Once more, the native speaker from Kabylia, Moh Alileche, is out there singing his lyrical Amazigh songs. And the anthropologist is out there writing about it. And where do the goats lead now? I suppose they lead right back to the mountains, to study the language exactly where it belongs. But here is the conundrum: While Imazighen have not entirely lost their land, (except in its repackaging as "Arab"), the heart of the movement is in the Amazigh diaspora. It is in the academic halls of universities in Paris and across France, as well as on ever-multiplying Internet sites and YouTube videos, that the preservation of Tamazight is proceeding with exponential haste, and thriving, not in the Middle Atlas Mountains, not at IRCAM—and certainly not in San Francisco.

What might be the key lessons of our unsuccessful San Francisco Tamazight class? Perhaps only that it was a class at the wrong place and the wrong time. Perhaps it was merely ahead of its time. But the Amazigh diaspora is growing. Tamazight, after all, is taught throughout France, in Belgium, Italy, Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Russia, and even Malta—all at the university level. It's been taught at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) in Paris since 1913 (Amazigh World 2002). Classes have commenced in North Africa as well, as we have seen, and at its heart is the Université Mouloud Mammeri at Tizi Ouou (UMMTO), in the Kabylie of Algeria—named for the Amazigh anthropologist who began the movement to restore Tamazight language and identity. Ibn Khaldûn would remind us that the proliferation of Tamazight study throughout the globe is an act of *'assabiya*, which means more than "group feeling" or solidarity: it means the ability to fight to defend one's identity.

Epilogue

Journal Notes—Spring 2008—San Francisco

> It's Passover, the Festival of Freedom, which reminds us not only of our servitude but also of the responsibilities of freedom. We're singing "aydg dc"—"Chad-Gadya"—in an ancient warbling mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic. Our language; the language

> Sadok was so impressed that I know. But at our table almost no one else can read the ancient words without stumbling to decipher the transliteration beneath.
>
> "Just One Goat" is the name of the song in English and it equates my own people with the young goat. The song, which we have sung from generation to generation each spring, tells the tale of our people in the form of a children's parable, an allegory, brutal but somehow bearable. How could we have survived our history?
>
> It is not the tribulations of the Amazigh people yearning for their language and their land. It is ours. Just One Goat.
>
> Passover retains its universal themes: the history of the preservation of identity in the face of domination, the Exodus and longing for one's homeland. The celebration serves, perhaps, as a prototype for liberation movements, and each people solves (or does not solve) the perpetuation of identity in a different fashion.
>
> My own family lost yet another land and language. We were forced into exile from Spain as well, in 1492, after untold generations in that land and after having merged our ancestral mother tongue with Castillian Spanish, forming "Ladino"—the language of the Sephardim.
>
> And this language, Ladino, I myself have lost, and my generation has lost, and my children's generation is losing. And the warbling of "Chad Gadya" makes me ponder:
>
> Why on earth am I trying to study Tamazight?
>
> This last is scratched out. In its place is written:
>
> Time to retrieve Ladino.
>
> For the present, at least, this is where the goats lead. The Imazighen after all, are doing just fine on their own.

Well, not quite. One of the things lacking in the study of Tamazight and Amazigh culture in North Africa itself is the availability of written sources. Ironically, these may be found easily on the Rue des Ecoles, which borders the Sorbonne in Paris, or even at the Institut du Monde Arabe, a few blocks down the road. But in the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco: next to nothing at all. The oral tradition may well thrive best in situ in the mountains, but the literature and scholarship certainly has not.

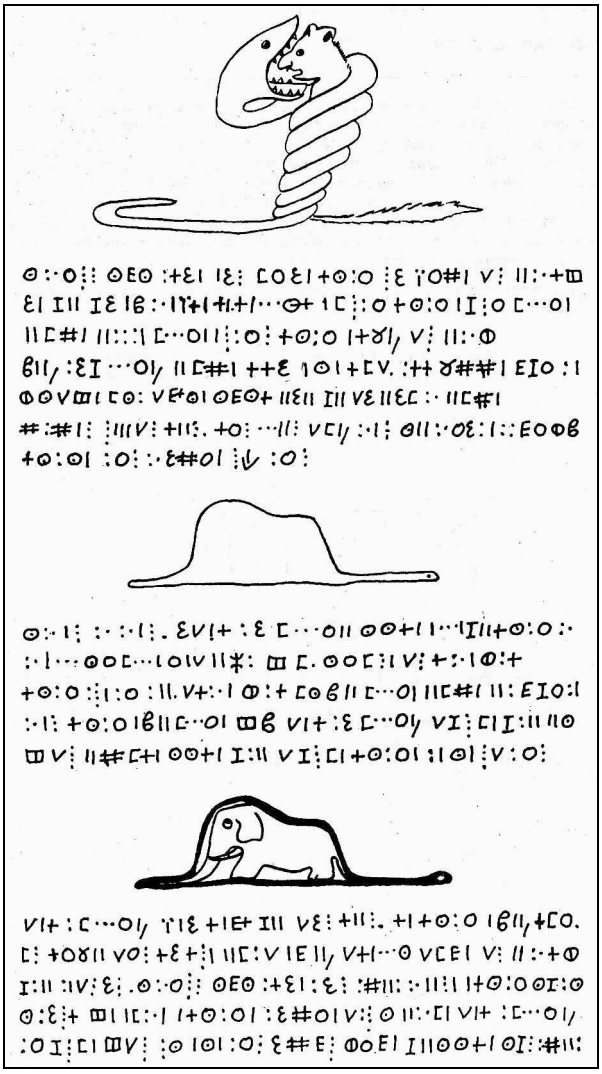

Fig. 9-4. Caption and photo credit, reprinted with permission.

One day, some years ago, I looked at my own library with fresh eyes. My library has always given me a sense of pride, and I have spent decades amassing these books, one by one. On that day, the books demanded a new approach to the problem of Tamazight revitalization—at least from me. Not for more Tamazight classes in San Francisco. Not for more fieldwork on the Amazigh movement. No, it was time to begin building a library in the Atlas Mountains, one for local people to have access to the resources that have long been available to scholars, militants, and patriots in Paris and the Amazigh diaspora. And so, I began bringing books to the mountains. And discovered too, that some of those academic bookshops on the Rue des Ecoles were willing to donate books, or heavily discount them, to help build up a collection. A small grant helped with purchase of the first collection, and the library began to grow.

You want to hear that there is now a thriving Amazigh library in the Middle Atlas Mountains. You want to hear the happily-ever-after fairy tale we all love to hear and tell. But, no, alas. That is not yet the case. For within a few years, this amount of cultural wealth became coveted, fought over, and dispersed within the community. The notion of bringing the books back to a central place for others to peruse was not yet institutionalized. I'd like to think that the first lot of books are indeed in circulation, moving from house to house and tent to tent without end. But in fact, I do not know what has become of all those books. The next attempt awaits the completion of an Amazigh Museum in Azrou—and the hope that the library can be housed at the museum, and that the books can find a permanent home. But who knows. Perhaps there's nothing wrong with nomadic volumes traversing the mountain paths, and children tending goats reading books, and children tending books—in their own language.

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