

Amazighs (Berbers) in Algeria: an ethnic majority yet a linguistic minority

By Abderrezak DOURARI

"North Africa is like an island located between the Mediterranean and the Sahara. Waves of human encounters and interactions have swept ashore and shaped the "island's" rich cultural and historical morphology. Accordingly, extraordinary peoples and histories have fashioned an impressive transcultural legacy" (Naylor, 2009:21)

It goes without saying that one of the most obvious components of identity customarily referred to by ethnographers and anthropologists is language. If it is an unquestioned criterion for them, it is even more irresistible for the layman in multilingual societies. In fact, identities are circulated according to the languages that are spontaneously spoken. In nowadays multilingual Algeria, a citizen is said Kbayli, Chaoui, Mzabi, Targui, Chelhi, Chenoui... (Amazigh) when he speaks anyone of these corresponding varieties of Tamazight (Berber) and, correspondingly, the one who speaks Algerian Arabic is declared Arab. Moreover, people would assign identities according to regional origins: Jijelis (from Jijel, East of Algeria), Kbayli (from Kabilya), Stayfi (from Setif, East of Algeria), Sahrawi (from the Sahara regions), Wahrani (from the western regions of Algeria) and pretend they have a clear cut idea of them so well that they would be able to predict their behavior.

From this point of view, the Algerians perceive their identity today as an intricate fabric mixing different languages, accents, colors, and regions, but nonetheless recognizable altogether as Algerians. In Parallel with this, the laws as well as the official discourse do not go beyond general statements on Amazighness while heavily insisting on the Arab and Islamic components, even though the revised Algerian Constitution in 2002 cites Tamazight as a national language besides Arabic.

Amazighs in Algeria and the Maghreb: continuity since prehistoric times

The official frontiers of modern Algeria were a creation of the 19th century French colonialism, cut in an ancient Amazigh territory stretching from East to west from Egypt (the Siwa Oasis) to the Canary Islands, and from North to South from the Mediterranean to the Sahara desert (Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Mauritania). These frontiers correspond, however, roughly to those it had during the reign of the Aguellid Massinissa by the end of 2nd century B. C. when the Maghreb was divided into three kingdoms.

The Amazigh space was divided into the *Massyle* kingdom, extending from Oued Cheliff (West) to Thugga (East); the *Massesyle's* from Oued Cheliff (East) to the Moulouya (West); and then the *Maure's* from the Moulouya (East) to the Atlantic Ocean (West), whereas the Getules lived in the South. The most marking personalities are no doubt the *aguellids* Syphax for the Massesyles, Massinissa for the Massyles and Bocchus for the Maures.

Keeping in mind this fact, we understand easily that the historic Amazigh population of this country could not have been dispersed to be replaced by an entirely new incoming Arab population. The immigrations into these territories, whatever their amount, could not be all that overwhelming to submerge the existing one centuries before.

The history of immigration into these territories – from centuries B.C. up to now and passing through the Arab conquest and the Berber dynasties of the Middle Ages, till the modern history with the arrival of the Turks – do not provide evidence for anything like a tsunami of incoming Arabian population to give substance to the hypothesis of an ethnic Arabization by overpopulation. Gabriel Camps (2007: 142) summarizes this situation by saying:

The history of this ethno-sociological transformation of a many million population of Berbers by some ten thousands of Bedouins is a strange and a truly marvelous one”

Subsequently, we are bound to conclude that often, in the kaleidoscopic Maghreb, language doesn't truly show the way to historic identity. In fact, it generally manifests a resulting linguistic and cultural superstructure characterizing nowadays society, but revealing no clear-cut clue about its origins. Philip C. Naylor (ibid) observes that:

“Studying North Africa offers...an exceptional opportunity to appreciate the formative and transformative role of historical transcultural relations”

Due to the consequential conjunctures of humans, cultures, and languages, the resulting society often makes out a fuzzy representation of it and builds up a perceived fantastical identity, partially reflecting the traces of the violently imposed one by the official hegemonic discourse, and partially that of its own true complex history. ¹

“Algeria” in prehistoric times

A brief outline of the prehistoric central Maghreb² (current Algeria) shows that the Ancestors of Algerians left traces during the Paleolithic era (2000.000 years before ours). The *Homo habilis* left round stones in the archeological sites of Ain Hnech near Setif and El-Eulma. The *Homo erectus* (Atlantrope: the Man of the Atlas) was present one million years near Oran, the Sahara oases, the Hoggar and the Tassili n Ajjer epitomized by the so-called *Man of Tighennif* near Mascara. Then the *Homo sapiens* left traces between 100 000 and 40 000 years B.C. in the Sahel, Tipaza, Mostaghanem and the region of Bir al-Ater in the Nememcha region (called thereafter the *Aterian*, a Neanderthaloid group). Around 22000 B.C., the *Man of Mechta Afalou* (between Bedjaïa and Chelghoum al-Aid) appeared and was also present near Maghnia. This Paleolithic culture reached its climax around 10 000 years B.C.

At the beginning of the 8th millenary B.C., the *Capsian* (from Gafsa, Tunisia) culture appeared. Scholars think that the fundamental composition of the current Maghrebi population is made of the Mechta Larbi (Ibero-Maurusians or Oranians) and the Capsian peoples (Mesolithic). The latter may have come from Egypt between 7000 and 5000 B.C. and settled in the east of present-day Algeria.

The Neolithic revolution began between 8000 and 4000 B.C. The cave engravings and sculptures in the Saharan Atlas (Djebel Amour, M'zab, Djelfa, and Tassili n Ajjer) are testimonies of this era. There comes the Bovidian era (5000 years B.C.), followed by the Cabbalian (2000 years B.C.), then the Camelian ones.

The Getules, who lived in the south of nowadays Constantine, became horse riders at the threshold of history. The Garamantes (of Djarma) of the central Sahara gave birth to the nowadays Touaregs. The Libyan characters appeared around the 5th century B.C. in the site of *Azib n Ikis* and in the 2nd century B.C. in Thugga (see Thugga Stone, engraved in two columns, one in Libyan and the second in Latin characters, now exposed in the Tunisian Chintou (Simitthus) museum, near the town of Thugga which is an archeological site of a Numidian sanctuary seemingly dedicated to Massinissa by Micipsa (149-118 B.C.)).

Herodotus thinks that the Amazigh population, which might have given present-day Algeria, is constituted of Libyans and nomads who lived down an imaginary line constituted by the Algerian and Tunisian salt lakes (chotts), and sedentary populations living in the north of it.

Many legends would draw the North African population from oriental origins. Salluste, compiling the Punic books ascribed to the Amazigh king Hiempsal (2nd Century B.C.), derives the origins of Amazighs from the myth of Hercules and the Medes people (erroneous transliteration of Mazighs, Amazighs?); the Greek geographer Strabo thinks they come from India led by Hercules. But Saint Augustine, an Amazigh Church Father born in Taghast, states that rural people (*rustici*) contend they are from Canaanian descent (who would have been chased by the Hebrew king Joshua around the 13th century B.C., before the foundation of Carthage by mythical queen Elisa in 814 B.C., continues another legend). Jean Perier (1870) reports the very words Saint Augustine would have said when he asked the inhabitants of Hippon (present Annaba) about their origins:

"Unde interrogati rustici nestri quid sint, Punicè respondentés Chanani, corruptà scilicet, sicut in lalibus solet, und litterd, quid aliud respondent quam chananoei?"

Al-Bakri, an Egyptian historian, Al-Mas'oudi, an Iraqi, as well as Ibn Khaldoun, a Maghrebi one, claim that the Amazighs are the sons of Mazigh, son of Canaan, son of Cham, son of Noah.

The Yemeni origin is still defended by Arabist ideologues in Algeria and the Maghreb despite the fact that Ibn Hazm Al-Andalusi, a famous Arab genealogist, asserts straightforwardly that the presence of Himyarits in the Maghreb exists nowhere else than in the lies of the Yemeni historians (Dourari, 1993).

These legends, assigning an Oriental origin to all civilizations, are common to that period of time. Based on genealogies rather than on the study of territories and peoples' localizations, these legends skip over the fact that all these migrations to the Maghreb did not find a space empty of people, but, on the contrary, had to combat them arduously before being able to settle.

4-Overview of Berber Dynasties in central Africa after the Arab conquest until the arrival of the Turks

It took the Arabs more than half a century to straighten out their domination over the Amazighs. They first appeared in Ifriqiya in 647 where the battle of Sufetula (Sbeitla) took place; then Oqba founded Kairouan in 670. Koceila, a Moslem Amazigh, followed after his death by Queen Dihiya, seemingly a Jew, led the Amazigh resistance against the Arab conquerors and failed.

From then on and until the Turks penetrated in the Maghreb in 1514, when Baba Aroudj captured Djidjelli, then Algiers, in 1516, and except from the Aghlabid dynasty (led by Arabs) that governed the one and only Ifriqiya province between 800-909, a succession of Amazigh dynasties have dominated the Maghreb.

The Amazighs were expelled out of history only when, in the 16th Century, the Turks took over the Maghreb.

However, three main events have disrupted the population of ancient North central Africa to a certain extent. First, there is the manifestation of nomad camel tribes in the south-east of the Roman Africa at the beginning of the 4th C. The second is the military conquest by the Arabs in the 7th century. The third, and certainly most determining, is the storming in of many Arab Hilalian nomad tribes who didn't go back like their Arab predecessors.

The Amazighs were constituted of different groups. The Zenata group, however, is not from Numidian or Maures descent, and their Tamazight language bears linguistic peculiarities. They settled in the places of the Getules and absorbed them through time. There have been so many rivalries between the Sanhadja group and the Zenata one who were the first Amazigh group to be Arabized. But the Tamazight languages, still spoken by the Nomad Touaregs, belong to the Sanhadja group³.

The Arab Moslems made many consecutive military raids against the Maghreb that didn't aim, in the beginning, to colonize the region (bring population settlements), but were limited to plunder and the making of booty.

Ten years after the death of Prophet Mohammad, the Caliph's army occupied Egypt and Cyrenaica. In 643, they penetrated in Tripolitania. Ibn Saâd, the foster-brother of Caliph Othman, led an army against Ifriqiya in time of disarray between Byzantines and Amazighs. The uncovering of the wealth of the country as well as its weak spots encouraged the constitution of waves of Arab troops according to historian An-Nuweiry. The army began in Medina with 5000 men, but it grew up to 20 000 troopers in Egypt. It confronted Patrice Gregory, leader of Byzantines, in Sbeitla (Tunisia) and killed him. Having gathered a fantastic booty, the Arabs went back in 648.

Caliph Moâwiya sent a troop commanded by Moawiya Ibn Hodeidj in 666. Three years later Oqba ibn Nâfi' founded Kairouan, the first Islamic city in the Maghreb. After a certain time he went to Tiaret, then to Tangier where he had been convinced to subdue the Amazighs of

the Sous depicted as "savages". He made a terrible slaughter and took with him a great number of Amazigh females renowned to be very beautiful. This episode is described the same way by the Arab historiographer Ibn al-Athîr al-Djazari in his *al-Kâmil fî t-târîkh*. But when Oqba was on his way back, Koceila confronted him, killed him in the village of *T'huda* near Biskra and then took over Kairouan.

Koceila was killed in 686, Carthage was subdued in 693 and Tunis was founded in 698. Thereafter, Dihya, of the Djerawa Amazigh tribe, resisted the Arab troops between 695- 700 before being slaughtered after her defeat, thus putting a term to the Amazigh resistance to the Arab successive invasion attempts. The conversion to Islam of her sons seems to have accelerated the settlement of Arab domination.

In 711, an Amazigh leader *Tariq Ibn Ziyâd*, a client of *Mûsa ibn Nuçayr*, crossed the Mediterranean with an Amazigh Maures' army to conquer Spain under the pennant of Islam. After the domination of North Africa by Arabs had been completed, many tribes have built up genealogies that hinge them to Arab origins. During the Almoravid period (11th century.) the Maghreb "*grew up forests of genealogy trees*" claiming descent from noble Arab origins, according to Mohammed Chafiq (see Chafiq, 1989 and Schatzmiller, 1983).

The Amazighs adopted Khâridjism because this school of Islam professes a kind of democratic doctrine: any person, whatever her origin or the color of her skin can attain high governmental posts if he or she is competent and honest. Khâridjism gives an outlet to the indigenous people to occupy higher functions in society and was preferred by Amazighs. It dominated the whole 8th and the 9th centuries.

The Amazigh Botr and Zeneta have, through time, occupied the higher plains, while the other branch, the Sanhadja, kept the mountainous territories of central and oriental Algeria. The Ketama tribe brought a missionary, Abu Abdellah, who advocated the coming back of the Mahdi. He built up an Amazigh army and freed Obaïd Allah who was kept prisoner in the far away Sidjilmassa in 909. He built a capital called Mahdia in Tunisia in 916 and sent Ketama troops to Sicily, then to Egypt which they dominated and later built Cairo in 973. The dynasty of Obaïd Allah, the Fatimid, dominated the whole Maghreb for a certain time. But Khâridjism was there under the leadership of Abou Yazid, who raised troubles.

The Fatimids left the Maghreb territories to their Amazigh lieutenant Bologhin Ibn Ziri; but in 1045, El-Moezz rejected Shi'ism and proclaimed allegiance to the Abbasside Caliph provoking in return, as a punishment, a flow of the Hilalian army and population (see below).

While the Sanhadja kingdoms of the Zirids and the Hammadids, in the central Maghreb, were declining, another Sanhadja branch from the Maghreb al-aqsâ emerged with a new religious ideology: the Almoravids. The nomad Sanhadja tribe of the Lemthouna (*al-moulathamoun* "the veiled" from Western Sahara) built a huge empire extending from Spain to Senegal and from the Atlantic Ocean to Algiers' meridian guided by Ibn Yacin- a religious reformer. He gathered his followers in a *ribât*- a fortified monastery- where they were trained for military

and religious actions by Youcef Ibn Tachfin. They took over Morocco and the majority of nowadays Algeria and Spain.

In less than three generations, the Almoravids have been destroyed by the Almohads religious reformers. The Almohads are another Sanhadja tribe- the Masmouda from the High Atlas. The initiator of this reform is Ibn Toumert, proclaimed *mahdi*, from the Amazigh Hergha tribe pretending to be Ali descent. His successor was Abdelmoumen from the Amazigh Koumia tribe (Nedroma). They took over Fes, Tlemcen and Marrakech in 1147, extending the tribal traditional law to their empire and were helped by Andalucian vizirs. In their Andalucian royal court, they had the support of Philosopher Ibn Rochd. They fought the Hilalian tribes (it was not a racial war), subdued them then adopted them as auxiliaries and so did their successors, who were the Zenata Merinids ...The Abdelmoumen dynasty disappeared in late 13th century, and Ifriqya became an independent kingdom governed by the Almohad Abu Hafç (around 13th century).

The long period of Sanhadja domination (Hammadid, Almoravid, Almohad) is now closed and replaced by the Arabized Zeneta Abdelwadid in Tlemcen, and the Beni Merin (other Zenata branch) in Morocco, who lived in constant competition, a tripartite division of the Maghreb that continues up to now.

As Islamic ideology was declining in the Maghreb, there were many colonization attempts undertaken by Portuguese or Spanish conquerors under the pennant of crusades. The Spanish outposts (presidios, like nowadays Ceuta and Melilla) on the Mediterranean coast are a testimony of this. It was time for the Turks to come and dominate the Maghreb for a long time excluding the Amazighs from history.

This brief overview gives us an idea of how modest was the Arab population immigrations to the Maghreb and how they were less influential in population than in language and religion.

The Tamazight identity denial in an Amazigh Independent State: a story of self hatred

As one can observe clearly, actual history goes one way, and representations go the opposite one. In fact, history is rational whereas representations are emotional; that's why the latter determine more decisively the person's attitudes. The violent controversy within political parties in the 1940s, the PPA-MTLD⁴, between partisans of the “Algérie Arabe” and the “Algérie Algérienne”, pervaded the Algerian national identity contests giving birth to a long-lasting political and cultural unease. In fact, this is a domain where linguistic, cultural, ideological and political factors overlap.

Historically, Algeria has always been multilingual. One can hardly imagine a country as big as Algeria with so dispersed human groups who would miraculously keep speaking the same language in an epoch where communication means were rudimentary!

Classical Arabic penetrated this space early among some townsmen elites but no any larger social tissue, however. The Arab conquest under cover of Islam succeeded after many trials, yet Arabs made no population colonization and generally relied on their Amazigh clients to run their local interests.

The Banu Hilâl, the Banu Soleim and the Banu Ma'qil (who arrived in 1051 century) have come to the Maghreb after their eviction from Egypt by the Fatimid Caliph. After the foundation of Cairo in 973, the Fatimid dynasty remembered the help of Ziri, leader of the Sanhadja tribe, gave them to counter the threat of the Kharedjit "Man with the donkey", Mahlad Ibn Kaydad (Abu Yazid), as well as their support in the conquest of Egypt itself. But the Zirids came to loosen their links with the Fatimids, and El-Moezz, leader of the Zirids, proclaimed in 1045 the supremacy of the Sunni Abbassid Caliph infuriating the Fatimids who sent the Hilalians (Djochem, Atbedj, Zoghba, Riyah, Rebia and Adi tribes) to punish the Zirids.⁵

The conflicts between the Amazigh cousins, the Zirids and the Hammadids, gave the Hilalians the opportunity to make alliances with one or the other cousin to combat the other one.

In fact, there was no systematic war between Amazighs and Banu Hilâl Arabs. They had conflicts but also alliances with the Amazigh fractions, tribes and dynasties through history. The Amazigh princes resorted to them as an efficacious ready Bedouin military force. So did the Zirids, the Hammadids, and later the Almohads.

The Hilalians settled with such small numbers, tens of thousands according to Gabriel Camps (1996) that they likely could not change profoundly the indigenous demography and revert it. Their language has spread since the 13th century C. for sociolinguistic reasons⁶.

For Camps:

"This Maghrebi Arabic derives from the Bedouin language introduced in the 11th. Century by the Hilalian Tribes; it is them who effectively Arabized a great part of the Berbers". (Camps, 1996:56, Our translation)

The author underlines later:

« the successive population contributions of the Beni Soleim, then of the Mâ'qil who settled in the Moroccan Sahara, did not bring the population of Arab origin to more than one hundred thousand individuals who penetrated North Africa in the 11th. Century" (Ibid: 57).

The hypothesis of an exclusive Arabic origin of the Maghrebi is contested by Abdou Elimam (2003), who thinks that it derives from Punic. Our hypothesis is that because of the diversity of the Tamazight varieties, communication and transactions were rendered difficult. The need for a common language would have made of the Hilalians' Arabic a *lingua franca* which shared the linguistic family with Punic and Tamazight and helped prevent cousins' jealousies due to the symbolic values attached to the social position of the holder of the norm. The Hilalians' language, mixed with Tamazight and Punic, may have given birth to the Algerian Arabic (or Maghrebi) now spoken by a majority of Maghrebis. This native language worked as an identity marker throughout time. Scholarly Arabic⁷ and French have become, for symbolic and historical reasons, the formal domain languages, while the native languages

(Tamazight varieties and Algerian Arabic) are overwhelming in the domain of interpersonal relations and popular art (Theatre, songs, folk tales, etc.).

With time, Maghrebi Arabic has become a kind of vehicular language in all the main countries of the Great Maghreb where Tamazight varieties used to be the major languages.

Marcel Cohen (1971:44) supports this idea and draws a kind of aphorism:

« In history, we can undoubtedly observe cases of a language overlapping another one, but of the same origin however...Arabic has expanded over other Semitic languages domain (South Arabic, Aramaic) or over other Hamitic-Semitic languages (Egyptian Coptic, Berber) »

Gabriel Camps, amazed by this apparently paradoxical identity and linguistic situation in the Maghreb, observes:

"In fact we can find today no Berber language, in the sense that this language would be the reflection of a community conscious of its unity, neither a Berber people and even less a Berber race...and however the Berbers exist".(Camps, 1996: 57.)

The Tamazight quest in the context of the anti-colonial struggle

Tamazight and all that is related to it, is so controversial in the Maghrebi states and societies that we can say it is one of the most keenly discussed issues. An overview of the recent historical contexts in which its controversial sharp debate evolved may render the idea of its future progression clearer notably in Algeria.

The first plain demand of Tamazight speaking Algerians for the recognition of the Algerian people- with an autonomous identity, history, culture and territory-, occurred in 1949 within the Algerian revolutionary PPA/MTLD. Asked to prepare a document on the Algerian people's authentic history and culture to be presented to the UNO as a cogent proof of the existence of the Algerian people (distinct from French Europeans), the MTLD sent an official memorandum in which Algeria is said to be "Arab", to which, frustrated Tamazight speakers, responded through a document called "*Idir al-Wataniy*" written by five scholars containing a historical and cultural argumentation.

The radical MTLD aimed at the independence of the "Algerian Republic". Algeria was then referred to by the official MTLD as "Algérie arabe", to make clearer the contrast with "Algérie française" defended by both partisans of assimilation and colonialists. In this confrontation between colonial plans and those of revolutionaries, the Tamazight identity had to be sacrificed for the sake of invoked unity. In the same move, the revolutionaries wanted to oppose to colonialists purported identity (French and Christianity), something equal in prestige (Classical Arabic and Islam).

The memorandum sent to the UNO by the end of 1948 began with this statement:

" The Algerian nation, Arab and Muslim, exists since the 7th century..."

Consequently, there was no nation before the seventh century! No trace of Amazighs!

The issue was blatantly clear in the minds of the revolutionary Tamazight speakers. They felt their identity was being denied completely and illegitimately. Subsequently, one trend of the PPA/ MTLD defended the slogan of "Algérie Algérienne" and wrote a manifesto called *Idir Al-Wataniy* with a subtitle, "L'Algérie libre vivra". This was, according to one of its authors (Yahia Hennine, barrister), to counter the interrogation of Leon Blum: "L'Algérie vivra-t-elle?" (Can Algeria survive?) This document had been written by Ali Yahia Saïd, Belhocine Mabrouk, Henine Yahia, Hadjeres Sadek and Si Saïd Oubouzar and was to be sent to the Central Committee of the PPA-MTLD by Ould Hammouda Amar.

One immediate consequence was that in April 1949, the PPA-MTLD Federation de France was struck by a thunderstorm opposing the followers of the "Algérie Arabe" and the partisans of the "Algérie algérienne".

The "*Idir al-Wataniy*"⁸ is meant to respond to this psychologically anguishing question. Having been completed in June 1949, after the death of Ould Hammouda (who was poisoned), discussions of identity and language matters had become impossible within the party. The document had been edited secretly from both the colonial authority and from the MTLD leadership. The promoters of this brochure all joined the FLN by 1955⁹.

Here are the main foundations of the long lasting struggle of Tamazight speakers for the recognition of the Amazigh identity of Algeria; an identity founded on historical, linguistic, and cultural facts and not upon ideological grounds of Arabism and Islamism.

This document, rejected by the charismatic leader of Algerian nationalism in that time, Messali Hadj, as well as by the Party leadership, triggered what later came to be called the "Berberist crisis", despite the fact that the term "Berber" had never been mentioned in the brochure.

During the 1949 crisis, partisans of "Algerian Algeria", and partisans of "Arab Algeria" came to grips. The 'Idir al Watany' brochure, produced in the heart of the Algerian nationalism, expresses the Algerianist stand:

"The linguistic factor has also contributed to the making of our national conscience; the spoken language, as well as the classical one...the Algerian person, Arabic or Berber speaker, uses nowadays his own mother tongue proudly and feels less the desire to speak otherwise, in French for example. He seeks, on the contrary, to study classical Arabic to know Islam and the Islamic culture to which our people have contributed". (Belhocine 2001:17).

The accusation of Berberism and separatism went even further and built a putative Kabyle party (PPK). Ferhat Ali (treasurer of the PPA-MTLD) declared in the newspaper *Alger-Républicain*, 21-22 August 1949:

« A Party for the Kabyle People has never existed. For the mere reason that there exists only one Algerian people, whose components are nevertheless different in origin and language, who lives brotherly united and animated by the same will of national liberation...As for me, I have always thought that Algeria is neither Arab, nor Berber, and could not be anything else

than Algerian and that in our homeland, all the cultures as well as all the components of our common heritage deserve respect and free development".

This brochure, however, provided, whether consciously or not, the doctrinal basis and the framework for the Tamazight claim all along the Algerian recent history (1980 crisis, 1990's opening horizons, and Kabylia citizenship movement in 2001-2003). The Amazighs felt an unfathomable injustice which independence had sharpened over the exclusive Arab-Islamist language and cultural policy uncompromisingly conducted by the successive Algerian governments.

Algerian Language policy in the aftermath of Independence

The Algerian language policy has completely been determined by the ideological and political controversies of the colonial period that put to grips the advocators of "Arab Algeria" and advocators of "Algerian Algeria". The National Liberation Front (FLN) elites in power since independence, mentally shaped in this ideological and political humus, imposed ruthlessly a monolingual policy on a historically multilingual society¹⁰.

The linguistic policy of Arabization was meant, surreptitiously, to uproot the Tamazight languages as well the expansion of the Islamist ideology to contain leftist remarkable influence and thought. The spread of Islamic ideology (over the sacredness of classical Arabic) was intended to make milder the merciless oppression of Tamazight languages. Statements of the kind "*I am an Amazigh arabized by Islam*" are recurrent in that trend of political speech.

But if this negative attitude of revolutionary elites toward native languages and cultures, particularly Tamazight varieties, could be tolerated to a certain extent by Tamazight speakers in the context of resistance to colonialism, how could it be after Independence? How could the Kabyles accept the outlawing of a simple lecture by Mouloud Mammeri, a Kabyle well-known scholar, on ancient Kabyle tales in Tizi-Ouzou University in April 20th 1980?

The interdiction entailed brutally crushed riots (called thereafter *Tafsut Imazighen*, Imazighen's spring). This contestation mainly demanded democracy, free expression of individual and collective opinions, free political organization, the recognition of Tamazight as national language along with Arabic (the classical and the Algerian one) within a united Algerian State.

Opening Horizons after 1989: lack of constancy

The imposition of the pan-arabist ideology, conjoined to a conservative perception of Islam, as unique cultural references, led through time to political and ideological crystallizations which transformed the linguistic query into a vital confrontation where the educative and the cultural policies became the favorite battlefields perpetuating the fundamental cleavage lines of the 1949 crisis.

After 1989, the superficial multipartism was spoiled by a disincarnated monolingualism. The 1976 presidential ordinance, affirming the necessity of total Arabization, was reinforced by the 1996 one imposing the immediate and total Arabization under penal sanctions if any other language came to be used.

The novelty, however, was the establishment of two Tamazight language and culture university departments in Tizi-Ouzou, in 1990, and in Bedjaïa in 1992. The popular slogan « *tamazight di lakul* » (=Tamazight at schools) is implemented in 1995 after the creation of the Higher Authority for Amazighness (HCA) - consequence of the "school bag strike" that rattled Kabylia in 1994.

Yet, the introduction of Tamazight in the educative system was hasty: with no standardization, no dictionary, no pedagogical program, no reader's book and no trained teachers; it was a big challenge.

The April 2001 *tafsut taberkant* (=black spring) contestation held by citizens' organizations and the Aarouch¹¹ - that lasted three years for reasons of unpunished crimes committed by police against young protesters, perceived as a crowning of cultural, social, and economic disarray, complicated by lack of democracy and corruption - resulted in the promotion of Tamazight to a recognized national language in the 2002 amended Constitution while the two Kabyle based parties Front des Forces Socialistes and Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie (FFS and RCD) boycotted the parliament voting.

By virtue of this amendment, the polynomial Tamazight acquires, after 23 years of dire struggles, what it naturally had by virtue of history and territory. But the obsession of total unity cultivated by the leaders of the state was not buried yet.

Standardization Institutions of Tamazight

Tamazight is now in the constitution, in school, the media, and political discourse. Three university institutes for teaching and research are dedicated to it, and the Ministry of National Education has created the National Pedagogical and Linguistic Center for Tamazight Teaching (CNPLET)¹² after the Higher Authority for Amazighness (HCA). The Ministry of Higher Teaching and Research publishes National Research Program calls for tender in the domain of Tamazight.

These Institutions suffer from diverse handicaps like the lack of researchers, as in the CNPLET, or the HCA, which is working with no head since the death of regretted Mohand Idir Ait-Amrane in 2004.

Tamazight now faces, after extending to some aspects of formal domains, qualitative demands: It's a polynomial language and is still taught with an appalling methodology. The teachers of Tamazight, who are university Tamazight departments' graduates, have no training in the field of pedagogy. The language is not standardized, and each teacher operates intuitively from his stock of knowledge of his mother variety using numbers of repulsive neologisms. Above all, there is no conciliation over the issue of scripts between advocators of the Arabic, the French adapted and those who covet the Tifinagh ones. The scholarly Arabic

specialists look down on Tamazight, but would prefer that it be written in Arabic script; the French specialists, who have been supporting Tamazight since the seventies, would like it to keep the French script, rejecting viscerally the Arabic alphabet; the Kabyle speakers constitute the elite in the Tamazight demand of recognition and symbolic elaboration, but they refuse that their language be written in Arabic script; the Chaouia and the Mozabites speakers prefer in a certain way the Arabic scripts and the Touaregs prefer the Tifinagh one!

On which criteria can this issue be decided so as to gain the users' acceptability and that of society in general?

Habib Allah Mansouri¹³ states in this context:

"They are surprised [the Oran Algerian Arabic speakers] that the Tamazight speakers use the French scripts to write their language; these scripts rid this language of any historic legitimacy and would link it to a foreign civilization sphere"

Another crucial concern: are we to teach Tamazight for Algerian Arabic speakers as well as to Tamazight speakers? What variety is going to be taught and to whom? Will that be obligatory or optional?

All these unthought-of endocentric issues undermine the planning of the linguistic corpus (codification) on scientific bases and bring up a fuzzy presence of Tamazight in the societal landscape.

Under pressure of urging demands, the Tamazight manuals are actually full of unauthentic texts, generally French texts (badly) translated into Kabyle for the mere sake to fit in a specific typology. Translations are plenty of frustrating neologisms due to the different encyclopedia backgrounds of the source and the target languages¹⁴.

Otherwise, recourse is made to the Kabyle folk tales whose rural and pastoral semantics are unfit for the present cultural context of pupils who are, moreover, confronted to the French and English modern methodologies and pedagogical contents!

In a study conducted by the CNPLET in 2009, the issue is presented this way:

The teaching of Tamazight has been introduced in the educative system syllabus since 1995. A teacher's textbook was handed over to the teachers and learners in 1997/98. Since then, three types of textbook have been edited. The last type in use was the one elaborated by the GSD members (inspectors and teachers) of the MNE (Ministry of Education). Up to now, all the stages from the primary school 4th year to the secondary school 3rd. year have had textbooks of this type. [...] In the programs the aims of the teaching of Tamazight as well as the competences and the learning contents are specified. The accompanying document contains details as to the way the textbooks must be used and how to construct a lesson. [...] Even before the beginning of the teaching of Tamazight at school, there existed pedagogical aids...

In addition to the Tamazight grammar book and the initiation to writing, one can note the use of authentic documents like folk tales, ethnographic texts, songs, oral ancient and modern literature, translations... The MNE proposed in the years (1995-1996) a booklet program of 07 pages containing methodological orientations entitled "A methodology Proposal for teaching Tamazight, third cycle; aims, contents, orientations". But whatsoever, this booklet has*

not been accompanied by tools for teacher's use. [...] The teaching of Tamazight made yet another step forward in 2003. The teachers have beforehand, for the first time, an official program and textbook. The programs of the MNE were based on the competence approach...

In addition, the Tamazight contestation has caused collateral psychological leftovers of the aggressive governmental propaganda which presented Tamazight as a "colonial plot to disintegrate the nation" and as "a backward language and culture that deserve no consideration".

Othman Saadi, one of the most resolute ideological denigrators of Tamazight, proclaims straightforwardly that the Amazighs don't even exist, because they are indeed original Arabs¹⁵, when everybody knows that even the Hashemite Prophet Mohammad is not considered an original Arab¹⁶

He derives the Tamazight lexicon from Arabic! "Tamettuth" (*woman* in Tamazight)¹⁷ is said to be derived from "Tamath" ("menstrual" in classical Arabic). He skips over these logical questions: did the Amazighs have a name for their women before the Arabs came to North Africa? Why didn't the Arabs call their women that way! Wasn't it easier to borrow the Arabic word rather than create a new one out of an Arabic different root?

This is how self hatred has been officially cultivated reaching nihilism. If any self esteem had to survive, the introduction of Tamazight in the educational system has severely undermined it because of its messy presence in the societal scene causing disenchantment.

Weak Institutional framing

Scholarly Arabic captivates the whole attention of the government who makes whatever effort to hand large budgets, an Academy, a Superior Council and many research centers within the ministry of higher education and research. Tamazight - the second national language - receives crumbs. The Academy project has been abandoned after being accepted by the council of government; the Higher Authority for Amazighness has no higher commissioner since 2004; there is no research centre depending on the Ministry of Higher Education, despite the fact that this language is dead in need of normalization institutions¹⁸

The teaching of Tamazight has begun in Algeria during the colonial period at the university level in the 19th century. Initiated by an Arabic speaker Belkacem Bensedira,¹⁹ this course has been continued by his Kabyle student Said Boulifa. The teaching of Tamazight has continued until the end of the sixties as a chair for Tamazight at Algiers University, held by late Mouloud Mammeri. Except from the Tamazight civic associations, the resumption of the tamazight teaching within the Algerian institutions was in 1995. This raised great enthusiasm before people disenchanted hence initiating the shrinking of the space where it was taught.

In a survey of the CNPLET²⁰, the decrease in the number of teachers can be observed in the following districts:

- Algiers where the number was 8 in 1995/96 evolved to 10 the year after and then decreased to 3 in 2002 and 0 in 2007.
- Batna : 9 teachers in 1995/96 then 8 in 96/97, and then 0 in 2002. But there was resumption in 2007 when 21 teachers have been recruited.
- El Bayed : 1 in 1995/96 then 0 in 2002, and in 2007.

- *Ghardaia* : 12 in 1995/96 then 1 in 2007.
- *Illizi* : 3 in 1995/96 then 0 in 2002.
- *Khenchela* : 6 in 1995/96 to 1 in 2007 ;
- *Oran* : 2 in 1995/96 then 0 in 2002. No change till now.
- *Oum El Bouaghi* : 6 in 1995/96 to 13 in 97/98 then 5 in 2002, and 08 in 2007
- *Sétif* : 3 in 95 to 8 in 2000 and 4 in 2002, then 05 in 2007 ;
- *Tipaza* : 11 in 1995/96 then 0 in 2007.

We also notice the feeble growth of the number of pupils and teachers in the primary, the middle and the secondary schools. The reports of the general Inspection of the MNE do not mention such data²¹.

In March 1990, in a colloquium held by the University of Oran on dialects in Algeria, the idea to teach each variety of Tamazight by itself was defended. It was suggested that an Academy would implement the language planning of this polynomial language, and that the teaching contents, the textbooks, the dictionaries would be made available, as great efforts were needed from the whole nation to recover its historic identity and avoid recoiling in a morbid self-loving²².

The setback of Tamazight in “the linguistic market”, following Bourdieu (1982) and “the stock exchange of languages” of CALVET (2002), is exacerbated by the necessity to modernize the state, which converge in favor of French, because it is well anchored in the national fabric. On the other hand, the Arabization policy, whose semantic content and references are well entrenched in conservatism,²³ has completely failed because of its functional inappropriateness to modernity and to the populations’ expression needs.

The nation-state model of the twentieth century has also failed as an alternative political system. But one political principle is necessary for building a modern democratic state: the respect of citizenship, democracy and individual and collective liberties, which must be at the very foundations of this state in order to cope with the kaleidoscopic differences within society.

Conclusion

The Algerian Amazigh populations, which used to be a majority before the arrival of the Arabs, have continued to practice their language (as a minority language), due to the strong influence of Arabic and French, but have adopted colloquial Algerian Arabic that they use as a vehicular, now native, language.

Today, neither the Berberist particularism, nor the mythical Arab-Islamic transnationalism can truly encompass the rich and multifarious resulting anthropological, social, cultural and linguistic reality of Algeria. The Algerian constitution, influenced by the genealogist point of view common to the Arab thought, features the identity components, namely, Amazighness, Islam, and then Arabness, as if they were geological layers that one could excavate as such in the Algerian soil.

But, in fact, the identity of Algerians can also be defined on the basis of nationality and territory: Algerianity, leaving any other dimensions to Algerians’ individual and collective liberties and representations.

Notes

¹ We mean symbolic violence as Pierre Bourdieu (1982) puts it, but surely physical violence as well.

² CAMPS G., Op.cit. ; MEYNIER G., *L’Algérie des origines, de la préhistoire à l’avènement de l’Islam*, Alger, 2007

³ See Dida Badi Ag Khammadine, *Les Touaregs de Tassili n Ajjer, Mémoire collective et organisation sociale*, Mémoires du CNRPH, Nouvelle série N°17, 2012

⁴ PPA-MTLD: Parti du Peuple Algérien, Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratique, at that time the leading Algerian nationalist party. The crisis took place in 1949.

⁵ Camps G., Op. Cit ., p140-141

⁶ see G. Camps, cited supra; W. Marçais, « Comment l’Afrique du Nord a été arabisée? », in *Annales de l’Institut d’Etudes Orientales d’Alger*, Tome iv, 1938 et tome xiv, 1956)

⁷ Scholarly Arabic is a modern derivation of the classical one formerly used in the field of religion, law, grammar and poetry...

⁸ *Idir* is a proper name of person, it means in Kabyle “will live” and is generally used by families who have lost a lot of new born male babies

⁹ This is roughly the point of view of Belhocine Mebrouk, one of the authors of the Idir Al-Wataniy brochure.

¹⁰ Abderrezak DOURARI, « Politique linguistique en Algérie : entre le monolinguisme d’Etat et le plurilinguisme de la société », in *Synergies Pays germanophones*, Coordonné par Peter Cichon et al, *Les politiques linguistiques implicites et explicites en domaine francophone*, Revue du Gerflint, Berlin, 2012, p 75 sq.

¹¹ See for the misleading term of ‘Aarch or tribe A. Dourari, « Réponse à Camille Lacoste-Dujardin », Internet Site Algeria-interface, *Les Malaises de la société algérienne, crise de langues, crise d’identité*, Casbah Ed., 2003, p125 sq.; “pratiques langagières effectives et pratiques langagières postulées en Kabylie, à la lumière des événements du “printemps noir” 2001”, in *Insaniyat*, Oran, N°17-18 Mai- Décembre 2002

¹² CNPLET, created in 2005, see web site <cnplet.net>)

¹³ Habiballah Mansouri is now a Tamazight inspector at the Ministry of Education; he conducted a research on Oran population with regard to the Tamazight scripts.

¹⁴ See *Timsal n Tamazight*, N°1-3, Sept-Oct 2011; September 2012, Magazine edited by the CNPLET/MEN, Algeria

¹⁵ Othman Saadi, *al-amazigh ‘arabun ‘ariba...* He is a Chaouia Amazigh from the East of Algeria, a well-known member of the FLN Party and once an Algerian ambassador to Syria: ‘arab ‘ariba, as opposed to « ‘arab musta’riba », (=Original Arabs / arabized Arabs).

¹⁶ Cheikh Ahmad Al-‘Iskandarî & Cheikh Mustafâ Annâni, 1927, *Al-Wassît fi l-‘adab al-‘arabî wa târîkhih*, , Ed. Matba’at al-ma’ârif, 6^{ème} edition, pp6-8

¹⁷ “*Tamettuth*” is derived from the Tamazight verb “*Tedh*” (root **TD** = “suck”), in the passive form meaning “*the one who is sucked*”. The phonetic assimilation process makes the link between the two words less clear

¹⁸ See A. Dourari, interview to the Daily national Newspaper: *La dépêche de Kabylie*, du 21/03/2009, electronic version at (<http://www.depechedekabylie.com/propread.php?id=68156&ed=2069>)

¹⁹ Belkacem Bensedira is the author of the *Cours de langue Kabyle, grammaire et version*, A. Jourdain, 1887, CCXIII. See for more, Ould-Braham O., Belkacem Bensedira et son cours de langue kabyle 1887 “, in *Etudes et documents Berbères*, 21.2003.pp 149-190

²⁰ Namely Akbal-Ibri Saliha, Imarazen Moussa, Sabri Malika, Berdous Nadia and Chemakh Said, (=A Study of the Profile of the Tamazight Teachers of the Districts of Béjaïa, Bouira, Boumerdes and Tizi-Ouzou)

²¹ see document entitled “1”*Enseignement de Tamazight, Etat des lieux*’, 2007, 14 p. (=The teaching of Tamazight, inventory of the fixtures

²² . See. A. Dourari (S/d), Actes du colloque international du CNPLET, *Tamazight langue nationale en Algérie : Etats de lieux et problématique d'aménagement*, Sidi Fredj, 05-07/12/2006 ; and international colloquia in partnership with the Laboratoire paragraphe de l'Université Paris 08 : *Tamazight dans le système éducatif algérien, problématique d'aménagement*, 2007 ; *Workshop sur la normalisation, la numérisation et le e-learning*, 2008 ; *Tamazight, Les TICE et les méthodes d'enseignement/apprentissage des langues*, 2009 ; *La dictionnaire des langues de moindre diffusion, le cas de tamazight*, 2010...).

²³ DOURARI, « L'impérite de la lexicographie/lexicologie arabe », in *Revue Langues et langages*, N° December 2013

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