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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Imazighen of North Africa, known in the West as Berbers; threats to their language and culture from schooling and the dominant Arabo-Islamic culture; and recent effects of mass media. As the indigenous people of North Africa, the Imazighen have been invaded frequently during the last 3000 years, but only the Arabs remained, along with their language and their religion, Islam. Given that Islam's sacred text, the Koran, is written in Arabic, the Imazighens' language, Thmazight (also known as Tamazight), has been considered illegitimate. As agents of the State, Moroccan schools dedicated themselves to homogenizing the population through promotion of Islam and Arabic, and indigenous students were forbidden to speak their language. Until the 1970s, Moroccan National Radio and Television had a monopoly on all media and encouraged an undignified cultural image of the Imazighen. The development of cheap audiocassette recorders gave Moroccans more control over their entertainment; facilitated interpersonal communication; and gave indigenous youth the opportunity to express their struggles with government, family, and self. Other forms of media influencing the Imazighens' identity and status were a scholarly history book affirming their separate identity, a missionary videotape about Jesus in Thmazight, hypermedia projects to promote maintenance of Thmazight and related instruction, and the Internet. A listserv and Web sites connect Imazighen from around the world and allow discussion of questions of identity and the implementation of Thmazight in education and technology. Contains 23 references and 25 related publications. (SV)

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The New Mass Media and the Shaping of Amazigh Identity

Amar Almasude[1]

ED 428 932

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Jon Allan Reyhner

First, this paper describes the Amazigh people of North Africa and threats to their language and culture from schooling and the domination of Arabo-Islamic ideology. Second, it discusses how modern technology is amplifying cultural safeguards, such as folklore, music, and some print media. Then the idea is developed that inherent in these new communication technologies is something more than an amplifier of the traditional, something that may be a new and extremely powerful force for preserving and shaping the identity of cultural minorities. The new technologies are impacting the knowledge and attitudes of individuals, both affirming cultural identity and developing a cosmopolitan perspective in a way that will spread through society.

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, new communication technology has revolutionized every sociopolitical and economic sector. This technological progress does not necessarily reflect social and economic progress; however, it does provide a means for the expression of oppressed voices that is less subject to government control than newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and movies that needed to be shown in theatres. Different ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups are using the new technology to reconstruct their identities. Hargreaves writes, "what we are witnessing here is the emergence, in the context of postmodernity, of the voices of those who have previously been unheard, neglected, rejected, ignored—the voices of those who have been marginalized and dispossessed" (1994, p. 10). Among those indigenous peoples who have been dispossessed and marginalized and who have suffered all sorts of repression are the Imazighen of North Africa. The Imazighen (meaning "free people") are commonly referred to in the West as Berbers, but I prefer to use their own name for themselves. The name for the language family is Thmazight. The masculine singular noun and adjective is Amazigh and the feminine is Thmazight or Tamazight.

Using an interdisciplinary approach, this paper addresses the question of identity as a historical construct derived from changing sociopolitical and economic environments. This approach is contrary to the traditional sociolinguistic view that considers a language and its speaking community in isolation from constantly emerging forces such as communication technology, including print, analog and digital media, and especially the latest telecommunication systems: satellite dishes and the World Wide Web. The focus of this study is the role played by these forces in confirming the Amazigh identity.

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Who are the Imazighen?

In 1000 B.C. the Imazighen people were already long established in North Africa (Shafiq, 1989). In Morocco for instance, they constitute at least 45% of the population distributed among three sub-ethnic groups and dialects (Sadiqi, 1997). Owing to their political and geographical position, the Imazighen have been invaded by Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, and Europeans. Eventually, they all left, except for the Arabs. The Arabs brought Islam, a universalizing religion, and stayed to become an integral part of North African population and heritage. Their language, however, changed and gave rise to what is known as Darija, Aammia, or Colloquial Moroccan. North African countries, including Morocco, are considered today to be an integral part of the Arab World. Constitutionally, these countries claim to be Arab-Islamic Nations. Today, most Moroccans claim Islam as their religion. Given that Arabic is required for the practice of Islam, most Imazighen feel they are Arabs as well, although those who claim to be Moslems are not necessarily Arabs nor do they have to know Arabic. This situation may have also a psychological impact on the self-perception of Imazighen. In June 1987, a missionary from the United States living in the province of Fes wrote to his colleagues in Melilla the following:

> As I began to compare notes with others in our region I realized that Berbers in our key cities and even in my rural town were often apologetic about their "berberness." It is especially true of Mekness and Fes whose imperial Arab history causes Berbers to hide their ethnic roots. This is quite in contrast to some of the other Berber regions of the country. But to a certain degree, I feel that those of us living in urban areas will confront this same thing, maybe not as a rule but at least sporadically. (Gill, 1987, p. 3)

Gill articulates a problematic situation leading to confusion, which is actually a confusion in identity that creates obstacles for the researcher who expects people to be what they say they are. With the fear of punishment and intimidation and the dominance of an Arab-Islamic ideology, in addition to about 50% illiteracy, the situation is even more problematic.

The status of Thmazight and schooling

Grabe (1979) reports that one Amazigh high school student told how God sent the angel Gabriel to distribute languages on earth. As he was flying home, an Amazigh saw him and reminded him, "We haven't received any language yet." Gabriel apologized and explained that he had finished all the languages he had brought from heaven, but would try to look for one. The Imazighen waited and waited, but he never came back. Finally, they tried to make some words, but they could not understand each other. The boy concluded, "I don't think they speak [a language]" (Grabe, 1979, p. 12).

Politically, Imazighen are regarded as lowly and their language, Thmazight, is considered illegitimate. Standard Arabic is held in higher esteem than any

other language. It is the language in which the "Qur'an" (Koran) is written, and since the Qur'an is a sacred text, told word for the word by Gabriel, Moslems do not hesitate to argue for the superiority of such a language. Thus Arabic became the official language of most Islamic countries. Standardized throughout the Islamic World, "Standard Arabic" is used as a first language in schools, for television broadcasts, newscasts, newspapers, magazines, and modern literature. For decades government and political leaders have invested tremendously in an effort to Arabize the masses. To stir up enthusiasm at a scholarly meeting, Abdel Hadi Tazi closed his speech with the following:

> If I had to summarize the process of Arabization that took place during the last quarter of a century in the life of modern Morocco, I would say: what the Kingdom of Morocco has achieved since the return of King Mohammed V from exile [1955] is far more than what Morocco achieved in the long historical period since [689 A.D. and] the conquest of Ugbat Ben Nafia'. (Shafiq, 1989, p. 96)

Lying between Standard Arabic and Thmazight, Darija or Moroccan Colloquial Arabic is the most common language in Morocco. While it is seen as better than Thmazight, in comparison to Standard Arabic it is judged "impure," "aesthetically and expressively inferior," and deformed as a language (Abbassi, 1977, pp. 188 & 230). This language is primarily an amalgam of Standard Arabic, Thmazight, French, and Spanish. It is almost never written, and there appears to be no aspiration towards such a goal. Since it lacks an alphabet and a unique identity, it is considered simply a dialect of Standard Arabic. For such reasons, although it is the most popular language and spoken by most Moroccans, it has no chance to be either an official or a national language. Abbassi (1977) reports that 94% of the participants in a survey reject the idea of integrating Darija in education. This attitude towards the language is common throughout the region, including every sociopolitical class.

Schools, as agents of the State, dedicated their forces to homogenizing the populations of North Africa through the promotion of Islam and Arabic. They usually emphasize that, "We have one religion, which is Islam, and one language which is Arabic" (Khlief, 1991, p. 117). To make the slogan a reality, teachers who were mostly non-Thmazight speakers expressed their hostility towards the indigenous people in several ways. In *Mountains Forgotten By God*, an Amazigh author recalls his primary school teacher:

> You are not even able to speak Arabic, he told us... "You are savages. How will I ever manage to civilize you when I have to start from scratch?'
>
> His words made us go cold and we suddenly felt lower than earthworms.... Only a few days after classes had started he smiled and seemed to have found a solution to our problems. "Come what may," he de-

> clared, "from now on I forbid you to speak even one word of Berber, either among yourselves or with your families...."
>
> We Berber [sic] children greeted his lofty decision with the frozen silence he loved so much, with our heads bent, hands folded, eyes red and bright with sadness and humiliation.
>
> I was already considering how I was going to tell my parents who were unable to understand the teacher's language. Should my parents see me suddenly deny the patrimony of my ancestors and my mother tongue? It would be far better to disappear along with that language. (Oussaid, 1989, pp. 48-49)

From folklore to political discourse

Until the 1970s, the image of Imazighen was associated with folklore, traditional dance, and the entertaining women of the Atlas Mountains. The government of Morocco, benefiting from tourism, the fastest growing industry in the country, encouraged the display of the images of an Amazigh without dignity. Through RTM, Moroccan National Radio/Television, the State had the monopoly over the production of music and all the other media. When the heavy record players and the reel to reel decks became popular, RTM allowed certain independent producers to market the folk music. Alongside Egyptian music and some of the national modern songs, folk dance and folk music were for a longtime the predominant form of entertainment.

When cheap portable audiocassette recorders came on the market, they began to replace the reel to reel tape decks and the record players. Cassette recorders provided Moroccans not only with the option to record and play their favorite music, but also to utilize them as a form of communication on a mass scale. The illiterate emigrants in Europe found the audiocassette recorders useful in corresponding with their family members. Instead of paying a stranger to write for them a letter to their families in Morocco, emigrants could now simply push a button and talk to the audiocassette recorder. When finished, they sent the tape back home, and the family gathered around to listen and respond individually or as a group. The family members in Morocco could share with the emigrant in Europe their activities, including religious ceremonies and family celebrations.

Within Morocco cassette recorders facilitated communication between men and women who found themselves locked behind the doors of their homes. Couples who were in love with each other found cassette recorders very useful for the exchange of their secrets. Most importantly, with the availability of radio cassette recorders ("boom boxes") in 1970s and after, indigenous youth took the opportunity to express their everyday struggle with government, family, and self. They produced hundreds of poems and songs on domestic recorders and distributed them locally. The success of such productions led to the creation of a dozen influential associations with interest in educating the public about the existence of Imazighen. After these groups became popular, music producers became interested and began to market the revolutionary music.

The concerns of the young artists include injustice, poverty, immigration, values, and government corruption. In their political discourse, the poets and singers revolt against the oppressive traditions regarding women. They reject the new sociopolitical and economic system that reduced Imazighen culture to a commodity for the foreign and local tourists. They also demand justice for the national patrimony and the restoration of the Amazigh identity (Almasude, 1993).

The role of music

Why music? It is perhaps the best vehicle to becoming acquainted with humans. It is the expression that is the most pervasive. In songs, human society is portrayed and everyday experiences are reflected. Their themes are usually social issues and historical events, including national and religious feasts and holidays. As children come into the world their skins discover temperature and shapes, their eyes discover light, and their ears discover rhythm, tone, and melody. Such experiences shape the perception of individuals and constitute their world. This phenomenon is what we refer to as the culture of the individual, and it includes various other interconnected elements. As individuals develop as social entities, such environments become more and more complex, but remain integral to one's life.

Thus, music is a fundamental element in human life; it is everywhere we go. It enchants the listener while involving his or her emotions, intellect, and imagination. When the affective domain is explored and sensations are engaged in high and positive experiences, stress and frustration are relieved. In communication, it helps the individual to develop skills in composing and interpreting complex symbols. In society, music is an ideal medium for the development of social skills, such as cooperation and working toward common goals (McCornack, 1984).

As a learning device, songs constitute an opportunity for the exploration of various domains. The most obvious is the venture into the affective domain, which is at the basis of successful learning. Bancroft (1981) contends that besides their benefits for the brain functions, songs provide an enjoyable and relaxed environment for students. They can be used in a variety of educational activities, including listening and comprehension, literary analysis, and the exploration of cultural, linguistic, and communicative content (Claerr & Cargan, 1984). In North Africa, music is the primary medium of entertainment. Music is everywhere: in homes and stores, in the streets, in the public market, and at weddings, feasts, and ceremonies. Loudspeakers are used to make sure the entire town is celebrating. In his description of one of the cities in Northern Morocco, McMurray asserts:

> Nador is awash in music. Over every telephone wire dangles the thin, brown-like remains of a music tape. Little kids play soccer in the streets using the same tape bunched up as a ball. The music stalls lining the street to the bus station blare out a cacophony of competing songs.... Sound saturates Nador. (1992, p. 396)

The challenge of print

In 1989, a book, written in Arabic, appeared in Morocco with a title of *lamhatun aan thalathatin wa thalathina qarnan min tarikhi el' amazighiyyin* [Highlights of thirty-three centuries of the history of Imazighen]. It was written by Mohammed Shafiq, a member of the Royal Moroccan Academy who was, until the appearance of his publication, unknown in the public arena. His book that normally wouldn't be published in Morocco caused a division in public opinion. Implicitly, Shafiq argued that Imazighen had a separate identity from the Arabs. Such a contention was, for a long time, neither a concern of Moroccan scholars nor an issue in the political arena. Morocco, according to the constitution, is an "Arabo-Islamic nation." That was the slogan of the State and the focus of political parties. The popular question in the public arena was that of "we" the Arabs and Moslems against the Jews and the Christians. The struggle of the political parties was primarily based on the distribution of the resources and economic structure of the State.

With his book, Shafiq may be considered the first scholar to break the silence regarding the Amazigh identity.[2] Through the texts of several writers, Shafiq narrates the history of Imazighen. He reports about the works of the pre-Islamic writers regarding not only the existence of an Amazigh people, but a civilization that had an important impact on many other civilizations including the Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. Through the works of archeologists, historians, and linguists, Shafiq explores, in a common language, the origins of Imazighen and their past position among the nations. With several illustrations of Amazigh monuments, architecture, textiles, and jewelry, Shafiq boasts about the great civilization of Imazighen and their contribution in philosophy, sciences, and arts.

Thus, the author summarizes the history of Imazighen and the various foreign invasions to their territory. Shafiq distinguishes between two eras in the history of Imazighen: one prior to Islam and the other after the establishment of Islam in North Africa. He presents Imazighen as a nation with a long civilization and history. Unfortunately, the "other" nations that had economic interest in the region were perpetually invading the Imazighen until the arrival of Islam. Shafiq, presents the Islamic invasion as "fat'h," different from that of the Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, and Byzantines. Although he recognizes the similarity in the method, he considers the Islamic invasion somehow legitimate.

The VCR and the challenge of the missionary

With the availability of VCR's in the region, a group of missionaries from "Frontiers" and "Wycliffe Bible Translators" seized the opportunity to sponsor the translation and the dubbing of *Jesus' Film*, a feature production narrating the life of "Jesus Christ" according to the Gospel of Luke. In 1991, this first movie ever in Thmazight was released on video in Melilla, a Spanish enclave in Northern Morocco. From Melilla, the video was smuggled to Morocco and had instant popularity.

At first, given that Islam recognizes Jesus as a major prophet with great powers from "God," the movie was perceived as a discourse for an Amazigh identity. Regardless of the efforts of the authorities to ban the movie, the Imazighen thought that their turn had finally come to join Modernity. In a sense, the evangelistic message of the movie was overlooked in the need for representation through media.

Two years later however, the Amazigh attitude towards the movie changed drastically. People came to realize the purpose for which the movie was made and began to write to the distributor of the movie in the Netherlands. The correspondents, who felt cheated, argued that the movie is based on the lies of the Jews and Christians who attempt to cause a division among Muslims. They also challenged the distributor saying that the movies they want to see should be Islamic (based on the "Truth") or at least they have to be "neutral."

Most importantly, the movie had an extraordinary impact on the region, especially in terms of redefining the Amazigh identity in relationship to Islam and their political affiliation. From this event, one may understand not only the importance of Islam in the Amazigh patrimony, but also the role of this event in alerting both the States of North Africa and the Amazigh people in terms of the question of Thmazight.

Hypermedia projects and Thmazight

In the 1990s microcomputers became powerful enough to process graphics, sound, and video. When Apple and IBM identified a fertile soil in schools, interfaces were created to make writing computer programming easier for the general public, especially teachers and students with no interest in the technicalities of computer programming and learning computer languages.. Thus, in 1987 Bill Atkinson introduced HyperCard, the first authoring application for Apple (Goodman, 1990). In 1989, IBM released LinkWay. Both authoring applications allow users to develop interactive programs including text, graphics, sound, and links to video players, without computer programming.[3]

Today, there are several authoring systems on shelves or under construction (including Hyperstudio, Authorware, and Macromedia Director) in addition to web editors, presentation software, graphics/drawing and painting programs, animation and audio/video processors, and so forth. Some of these authoring systems are made for small and personal projects and others are used for the development of major electronic publications. The personal systems are easy to master but have limited capabilities, while the professional authoring systems require systematic learning and practice. These application programs provide users with ways to customize or create their own material. Some educators found in such a technology an opportunity for a flexible and inclusive system for the expansion of the experiences of their students. These application programs provide users with the capability to create, manipulate, and store text, graphics, sound, and image. In an educational setting, as individuals or as a team, students can use these application programs to learn mathematics, science, languages, or make their own programs to express themselves using text, graphics, sound,

music, and/or images. From merely using the already made software, today with hypermedia applications, individuals with limited knowledge of microcomputers can compose their own material and distribute it on floppy disks, zip disks, CD-ROM, or publish it on the World Wide Web. Companies such as Geocities (1997) offer free e-mail accounts and several megabytes of space on their servers. Some companies such as Spree.net (n.d.) offer unlimited space on their servers. This is enough to host a large web site with text, graphics, animation, sound, and video files. Such companies also provide subdirectories to help their clients organize their files, a full set of tools, and technical support. Users do not even need to own a computer. They can use a school, business, or library services to access their e-mail and to develop a web site for free in most of the cases.

Currently, we are working at Francis Marion University on the development of an electronic encyclopedia for the preservation and the implementation of the Thmazight language in the public sphere. This project has the objective of encouraging the indigenous people of North Africa to preserve their language/culture. Visual arts, historical artifacts, and songs are the core of the program, which explores various pervasive symbols and metaphors. By listening to the enchanting music and lyrics of the Imazighen, the user will gain insights of their everyday lives. The project provides users with a selection of songs from North Africa. They are invited to browse through the stacks and explore the songs in Thmazight, English, French, and Spanish. Other stacks will include "Spelling Games," "Learn to Write," and "Understand Thmazight."

The Internet and Thmazight curriculum

With the availability of computer communication technology in the 1990s and the growth of an important Amazigh student body in the Western hemisphere, the Imazighen seized the opportunity to build worldwide forums. Through Amazigh-net, for instance, an electronic mailing list established in July 1992, the Amazigh cause took an international dimension (Bouzida, 1994). Currently there are also several dozen web sites that are concerned with the question of Amazigh identity and strategies to implement the Thmazight language into the curriculum and mass media.

Prior to the Internet, the Amazigh identity was an internal question, meaning that Imazighen in Morocco for instance did not know about their "brothers" in Algeria, Tunisia, or Mali. The countries of North Africa succeeded in censuring information regarding the Amazigh community. Given that Imazighen were divided and isolated regionally as subgroups (such as Riffians, Shluh, Twareg, and Kabils), each assumed that their problems were local and did not have any significance to others.

Through Amazigh-net, the different groups of Imazighen began to perceive themselves as one community and the question of Thmazight is no longer that of debating the existence of an identity separate from that of the Arabs, as Shafiq argued. Members of different groups log on daily to discuss not only the urgent situation of Thmazight and Imazighen, but also the plans for the implementation of Thmazight in education, technology, and science.

With the Internet, Imazighen from all over the world have established a Virtual Community through which they have access to the various issues regarding their culture/language and identity. While the Amazigh question has been internationalized, a number of influential scholars, researchers, and talented artists have committed themselves to serve the Amazigh cause. Consequently, several projects aiming at teaching and learning Thmazight have been completed in the last four years. These include the creation of several computer fonts pioneered by the American artist Jo Anna Pettit from Marietta, Ohio, and the development of audiovisual and electronic materials for teaching and learning Thmazight. As a result of such a commitment, North African countries found themselves at an impasse. Through various forces, especially the computer communication technology, they were pressured to recognize for the first time in history the existence of Imazighen as a separate cultural entity.

With a long history and an ancient alphabet, Thmazight is becoming one of the most important issues in North Africa, especially in Morocco and Algeria. The latter, after decades of struggle, was pressured to create in 1990 a Department of Amazigh Language and Culture (Departement de Langue et Culture Amazigh) at the University of Tizi-Ouzou (Lounaouci, 1994).[4] Moreover, in the summer of 1994, the King of Morocco, Hassan II, felt compelled by various sociopolitical forces to recognize the importance of the Amazigh culture and language in Moroccan identity. In his speech, he announced the necessity of integrating Thmazight in the school curriculum (Ennaji, 1997).

Summary

This paper has discussed the recent history of the Amazigh image in various media and described the relationship between cultural identity, language, and the technology of communication. Before World War II, the writings of the Greeks, Romans, French, and Spanish colonizers and the documents of the missionaries and anthropologists had extensively described the Imazighen of North Africa. Such writings set a precedent for indigenous scholars. With the Independence era, after 1960s some North African scholars committed their lives to establishing awareness of the Amazigh existence. Linguists and sociologists studied Amazigh society, language, and culture. But until the last two decades, the Imazighen remained as regionally isolated groups and tribes. The States of North Africa used various strategies to keep the Imazighen under control and even denied their existence. However, with the availability of audio cassette recorders, the Imazighen gained the opportunity to articulate their distinct identity, leading Mohammed Shafiq to publish a controversial text in which he exalts the Amazigh pride and argues that Imazighen are Moslems but not Arabs. Thus Shafiq helped resolve a confusion that for decades the State and political parties tried to impose on North Africans.

After the release of *Jesus' Film*, the Amazigh identity was redefined to prove Shafiq's argument for the crucial position of Islam in the Amazigh patrimony. Both the countries and people of North Africa were alarmed about the situation. With the new developments in computer communication technology and inter-

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active media, Imazighen established themselves both nationally and internationally as a distinct cultural group and called for the implementation of Thmazight in the school curriculum and mass media.

Notes

[1]I am grateful to professors Lloyd Hutchings of Francis Marion University and Jon Reyhner of Northern Arizona University for their constructive comments and ideas.

[2]Prior to Shafiq, a number of scholars had called for the recognition of the Amazigh identity, but their writing was primarily published in France in French. Some of those texts were censured and others were too expensive for Moroccan readers. Other writings represented linguistic and sociological research not available in bookstores or public libraries.

[3]Teachers found in this medium an opportunity to create presentations and interactive Hypermedia packages combining text and graphics, supplemented by video. At first Hypercard was black and white and very limited in terms of its capabilities. Later, it became sophisticated. Color was added, as well as the capability to carry sound, sophisticated graphics, and video. A few years later, HyperCard gave rise to HyperStudio, a similar application but very easy to use. Simonson and Thompson (1997, p. 318) describe this application as follows:

> Available for both Macintosh and IBM Windows environment, HyperStudio is designed to encourage student project use of hypermedia. Using HyperStudio, students are able to produce hypermedia projects that incorporate sound, graphics, video, scanned pictures, and several additional features. Easy enough for second graders to use, HyperStudio has become a valuable tool for teachers wanting to make interactive multimedia projects a possibility for their students.

[4]In July 1998, the Algerian government passed a law requiring that state agencies (including schools) and private enterprises (including political parties) use only the Arabic language for all official correspondence and all formal debate or deliberation (Khiari, 1998).

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