Intersections: Amazigh (Berber) Literary Space

Daniela Merolla

The interaction of artistic productions with several languages, literary markets and media is crucial in the Amazigh literary space. Focusing on writers who use the Amazigh (Berber) language, this study addresses contemporary directions in Moroccan Amazigh (Berber) artistic works set against the historical and literary background of the Maghreb as well as the Amazigh diaspora in Europe. It also discusses Amazigh elements in Dutch novels and short stories published by writers of Riffian heritage. The term “Berber” will be used throughout this essay to indicate the historical continuity of the field of study.

Amazigh (Berber) Literary Space

As in the past, manifold genres, languages, and media constitute the Amazigh (Berber) literary space of today. Writers since the beginning of the twentieth century CE have contributed to a contemporary literature written in one of the Amazigh language variants, while other authors of Amazigh heritage have published novels in French and Arabic.¹ Novels and plays published in Dutch by writers originating from the Rif have received public acclaim, while some Berber authors have started to write in Spanish. New waves of migration and migration patterns have produced works by Berbers in Italian and English as well.

This is not to say that literacy was unknown in the past. The contemporary developments in written literature are not isolated from broader innovations in the literary market; some Amazigh writers, storytellers and singers were and are involved in multiple circuits of written and oral literary production. If most narratives and poetry until the last century were orally created and transmitted, Amazigh speakers since antiquity have known forms of script (Libyan, Tifinagh) while traders and religious leaders were well versed in the area’s dominant languages.² Collections of tales and poems allow readers to enjoy elaborate oral literary traditions. Though some oral
genres seem to disappear along with their contexts of production, new forms have also arisen. Increasingly, the overwhelmingly varied and enormously popular genre of “modern songs” incorporates “classical” musical styles with inspiration and instruments from around the world. For example, the songs of Hindi Zahra, who sings in English, and Chleuh Berber incorporate Chleuh sounds with blues, jazz, American folk, Egyptian music, and the influence of African singers such as Ali Farka Touré and Youssou N’Dour. Another example is the music of the Tuareg band Tinariwen whose members play teherdent (lute), imzad (violin), tinde (drum) and electric guitar. Morgan argues that they merge the Tuareg style of assouf (“solitude” or “nostalgia”) with influences from Kabyle Berber contemporary songs, Malian blues, Algerian urban raï and Moroccan chaabi, pop, rock and Indian music.

Another example may be seen in the revitalization of folktales in family settings and schools through films, novels, children’s books, and cartoons. Not only are folktales documented in past collections, but they also represent a still vigorous oral heritage responding to the new contexts of school education and exposure to various media. Thanks to international attention, storytellers again narrate folktales and perform comic pieces in town plazas. For example, Djamaa el-Fna Square in Marrakesh, where storytellers gather, was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2001, while researchers, journalists, photographers and tour agencies have drawn attention to Arabic and Berber Moroccan storytelling in public squares and markets.

Told, sung, written, video-recorded, and spread online, Amazigh oral literature is taking on a new life.

The notion of “literary space” can help us to understand long-term as well as more recent developments, which include multilingual, multimedia productions that intersect and interact with literatures produced in one of the vernacular forms of Amazigh (the Berber language). Across languages of creation and variations in individual positions, we see numerous oral and written works marked by their authors’ family language and by scenes and characters (partially) set in Amazigh environments. The nationalist critique in Morocco and Algeria and the debate over the literary use of languages other than the author’s “mother tongue” notwithstanding, we see that the new political and intellectual climate of the Maghreb is leading to acceptance of the multilingualism that has resulted from long-term processes of expansion and migration. By recognizing the creative process that has resulted from interaction with other literatures and “literary spaces,” the umbrella notion of “Amazigh (Berber) literary space” transcends the distinction between “Amazigh literature” – i.e. created in one of the Amazigh vernaculars – and literary works in other languages.
Tamazigh/Amazigh/Imazighen in the Maghreb

Some notes on the denomination and geographical spread of the Amazigh (Berber) language may be useful at this point. Since the 1990s, the term “Amazigh” (or Amazigh language) has seen widespread use.\(^{12}\) It has gradually replaced “Berber” in daily use; and it is accepted in academic discourse.\(^{13}\) Amazigh is used in the names of the institutes created to study the Amazigh language and culture in Algeria (Haut Commissariat à l’Amazighité, 1995) and in Morocco (Institute Royal de la Culture Amazighe, 2001). Other terms such as Tarifit, Tachelhiyt, Taka’shek and Tamashek describe some of the language variations spoken locally from Morocco to the Egyptian oasis of Siwa, along the Libyan border, and from the Mediterranean coast to Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and northern Nigeria. In Morocco people speak Tarifit in the Rif mountains, Tamazight in the Middle Atlas, and Tachelhiyt (or Chleuh) further south in the Sous region. Amazigh people are estimated to number between 12 and 25 million, which makes Amazigh the second language of the Maghreb after Arabic.\(^{14}\) As a consequence of migration, there are Amazigh (Berber) communities in France, Belgium, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Canada and the United States. An estimated two-thirds of Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands speak Tarifit or come from a Berber-speaking region.\(^{15}\)

We can speak of related Berber “languages” on account of the scattered nature of Amazigh linguistic communities in the Maghreb, the peculiarities of local variants, and because only a few speakers in the past were conscious of the linguistic unity of Amazigh. At the same time, scholars use the term Berber “language” to denote its unity at the meta-linguistic level and to indicate extended inter-comprehension.\(^{16}\) Today, the terms Amazigh and Imazighen indicate a new awareness among Amazigh speakers of their linguistic unity and cultural specificity.

The present position of the Amazigh language in the Maghreb varies widely. Though their language is recognized as a national language in Mali and Niger, the once nomadic Tuareg s have borne the brunt of the creation of modern nation-states and their insurmountable borders.\(^{17}\) The 2012 Tuareg-led rebellion and declaration of the independent state of Azawad in North Mali are linked to long-standing socio-economic marginalization.\(^{18}\) In Kadafi’s Libya, there was no room for language minorities, and the current situation remains far from clear.\(^{19}\) More open attitudes have prevailed in Morocco and Algeria, where academic institutes have been founded committed to the study of Amazigh and Amazigh courses of study have been open at major universities. In Morocco, the pilot projects of alphabetization in Amazigh have been launched by the Moroccan Royal Institute for Amazighity, and the Amazigh
language gained official status in the new Moroccan constitution of 2011. Nevertheless, Amazigh is not yet fully integrated into mass education, and contradictory policies affect government recognition of multilingualism. Recent demonstrations in the Moroccan Rif in favor of economic, democratic and language rights have been met by military force. Although the demonstrations were part of a broader national movement for democratization, they also revealed the enduring difficulties experienced by regional minorities within centralized states.

Amazigh Literary Space in Morocco and the Netherlands: Novels and Short Stories

References to Amazigh languages and communities appear in the French and Arabic works of renowned Moroccan writers such as Mohamed Khair-Eddine, Mohamed Choukri and Ahmed Toufiq. Most known for its Chleuh setting is Khair-Eddine’s Légende et vie d’Aqoun’chich. In the first part of this novel, the narrator discovers and describes an impoverished region and its inhabitants whose minority culture is threatened by colonial and post-colonial economic and political systems. The narrator’s deep attachment to the Chleuh language and land takes form in a narrative that reconstructs a forgotten past from the perspective of a Chleuh outlaw villager. The recreation of tales and myths in a poetic and oneiric style questions the homogenizing and manipulative vision of cultural identity promoted by centralized power and politics. The initial narrator’s voice recollects long-term continuity and “métissage” in Africa, while the narrative is marked by violence, local and international conflicts, and loss of personal and social identity.

The tales of storyteller and painter Mohamed Mrabet present a particular form of oral-written interaction and take on an international, multilingual, and urban form in Paul Bowles’ English translation and “recreation”. Mrabet’s memories of the Rif and his attachment to his heritage are narrated in the first chapter of his autobiographical work with Eric Valentin. More recently, we find elements of Khair-Eddine’s oneiric approach in Mohamed Nadrani’s visual representation of social and historical themes in the cartoons “The Sarcophagus of the Complex: Enforced Disappearances,” on political repression in Morocco under King Hassan II, and “Emir Abdelkrim,” on the Republic of the Rif, claiming independence from Spain and the Moroccan Sultan in 1921.

A number of authors from the Rif have achieved public and critical acclaim for their works in Dutch, including Abdelkader Benali, Khalid Boudou, Said El Haji,
and Mustafa Stitou. Benali received major literary awards including the Geertjan Lubberhuizen Award in 1997, the Libris Prize in 2003, and the Best Foreign Novel in 1999 for the French translation of Bruiloft aan zee (Wedding by the Sea).\textsuperscript{31} Khalid Boudou won the Gouden Ezelsoor Prize in 2002 for Het schnitzelparadijs (The Schnitzel Paradise),\textsuperscript{32} while Mustafa Stitou received the prestigious VSB Poëzieprijs in 2004 for his poems Varkensroze ansichten (Pink Pigs Postcards).\textsuperscript{33}

The written production in Amazigh has grown in recent years thanks to Chleuh and Riffian writers. Although academic institutions do not yet consistently support them, cultural associations across the territory have supported the publication of poems and novels in Amazigh.\textsuperscript{34} Two of the oldest associations, AMREC (Association Marocaine de Recherches et Échanges Culturels) and ANCAP – Tamaynut (Association Nouvelle pour la Culture et les Arts Populaires – The New One), as well as the Agadir Summer University (AUEA), have played key roles in organizing cultural meetings for artists, activists, and scholars to discuss linguistic and literary themes. Since the 1970s, both AMREC and Tamaynut have published periodicals such as Amud (Seeds), Anaruz (Hope), Arraten (Documents), Tamunt (Togetherness), and TASFUT (Torch).\textsuperscript{35} Nevertheless, contemporary written literature involves acute problems of marketing given the size of the reading public. Whereas theater and stand-up comedians are able to bridge the communication gap and attract larger audiences,\textsuperscript{36} Amazigh novels and short stories are often self-financed and scattered across the small or ephemeral periodicals of cultural associations.

**Chleuh**

The first contemporary novel written in Chleuh was Mohammed Akunad’s Tawargit dimik (A Dream and a Little More) published in 2002.\textsuperscript{37} It addresses a “classical” dilemma of Islamic preaching in the Chleuh area: the need to use the language of the villagers to communicate religious ideas and values.\textsuperscript{38} But unforeseen consequences explode when the cleric Si Brahim begins to preach in Chleuh. The villagers want him to speak about government land-grabbing and corruption. Understanding the sermon, women do not recognize themselves in the feminine images derived from classical texts and ask him to preach about their actual lives and present needs. Si Brahim, under pressure from political and religious authorities, faces a new dilemma: give up his initiative and preach in Arabic or abandon his position as fqih of the village.\textsuperscript{39} By focusing on individual experience and avoiding didactic discussions of language rights, the novel joins a stream of Maghrebian works that explore the rural world. In
contrast to the works of Khair-Eddine and Ahmed Toufiq, Tawargit dimik focuses on the contemporary time and world.

Before Akunad, Mohamed Moustaatou, Hassan Id Belqasm and Ali Sedki-Azayku and others had published collections of poems in Chleuh in the 1970s, while Ali Mimoun Essafi published the first Chleuh play in the 1980s. According to several members of the writers’ association Tirra (Writing), there are discernible differences between older and younger generations of writers. Earlier authors, who usually began writing in Arabic and later switched to Chleuh, were influenced by Chleuh manuscripts and traditional poetry and rhythms. Younger generations tend to write in “standard” Amazigh, often in Latin or in Tifinagh characters, and make use of neologisms as well as the other Amazigh language variants of Morocco and Algeria. As there was no school curriculum in Amazigh, the acquisition of a “standard” written language is one of the effects of the remarkable activism of cultural associations that offered courses and information across the country. These younger generations do not necessarily follow Chleuh styles and rhythms, even though the language question is central in their work. The choice to write prose can also be seen as a significant departure from previous publications. One of the long-term debates on Amazigh has concerned the kind of language that could or should be used for literary, academic, and factual writing: a unified (non-existent in the spoken form) Amazigh, a standardized vernacular “purified” of loan words from Arabic and French (replaced by neologisms and outmoded terms), or a relatively standardized literary form close to the spoken language. The discussion becomes even more complex in the case of artistic expression since “working on the language” and innovation are themselves part of the literary project. Akunad’s A Dream and a Little More seeks a difficult balance between vernacular and standardized literary forms.

Currently there are some fifty novels and collections of short stories published in Chleuh, including Muzya and Amusu numalu by Lahcem Zaheur, Ijjigen n tidi by Mohamed Akunad, Jawwan n tayri by Brahim Lasri Amazigh, and Igdad n Wihran by Lahoucine Bouyaakoubi. Some of the titles seem to express, consciously or unconsciously, a position in the language debate since the writers choose neologisms and obsolete terms. Bouyaakoubi suggests that the titles of the younger generation more generally signal literary intervention as they innovate on daily language use.

If the language debate continues to inform chosen titles and themes, as in Akunad’s first novel, new writers, under the influence of international poetry and philosophy, focus on urban life and topics. For example, Brahim Lasri Amazigh’s “The Siroccos of Love” treats the social censure of sexual relationships out of wedlock and the consequences for a young woman, symbolically named Tilelli (Freedom), when
she gets pregnant and looks for someone to shelter her in the months preceding childbirth. Bouyaakoubi explains that this subject, when spoken of openly, is usually off limits in Amazigh literature. Moreover, the language of sexuality and the body used by Lasri is both upsetting and a renewal; instead of using classical Arabic or French, he uses Chleuh terms for the body that are only used in private.

Tarifit

Migration, travel, and memory are central themes in Riffian novels. There is significant continuity between the Rif and the diaspora in France, Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands, with the first novels and short stories written in Tarifit appearing in Morocco, the Netherlands, and Spain. In the Netherlands, writers from the Rif who publish in Dutch have won public recognition, while those who choose to or are able to write in Tarifit are known among the activist circuit or in the larger Moroccan migrant community when they combine writing with theater and music. A number of short stories and collections of songs have appeared in Spanish thanks to Mohamed Toufali. Many Riffian artists, in particular singers and musicians, are active in Melilla, the multilingual and multicultural Spanish outpost in Morocco.

Institutional support for Amazigh language, literature, and music is however lacking in Spain, which seems to indicate ignorance of, or disinterest for, the historical richness of reciprocal influences and the more recent colonial past.

While Fouad Azeroual, theater-maker from Nador, wrote seven plays and a novel in the mid-1990s, the first novel published in Tarifit was Mohamed Chacha’s Reżṭṭαbu ad d tefeğh tfukt. Chacha also published another novel and four collections of short stories and poems. Mustafa Ayned, musician, singer, actor, and writer, brought out ironic and tender short stories in Reḥriq n tiri. Other writers have produced both novels and theater pieces, including Mohamed Bouzaggou, Jar ujar, and Said Belgharbi, Aṣwad yebuyebḥen! Several collections of short stories have also been published in Arabic script by Bouzian Moussaoui and Mohammed Ouachikh.

Among women writers, Fatima Bouziane has published several short stories in Arabic, while Taṣrit n weẓn by Samira Yedjies is the first novel in Tarifit written by a woman. Its title refers to an oral tale, the story of a young bride kidnapped by the jinns and transformed into a rock. This is largely a story seen through women’s eyes though it also contains elements of a family saga spanning three generations. The first part concerns the village life and difficult marriage of Hniyya, the young female protagonist. The second describes the fighting spirit and military resistance of
Hniyya and her family during the war against Spain. The third part closes on a more optimistic note, following the difficulties experienced by the protagonist in adapting to urban life and her pain of separation from her children and grandchildren due to migration.65

Dutch

As mentioned above, authors of Riffian heritage have won critical acclaim in the Netherlands. Tarifit is present as a literary element in some of the works of authors such as Abdelkader Benali, Khalid Boudou, Said El Haji, and Mustafa Stitou. For example, “The Days of Satan” by Said El Haji addresses the lack of historical consciousness in the Rif.66 In a satirical dialogue between Satan, the village imam and elderly immigrants from the Rif, the reader is made to understand that they have never heard of the Berber King Juba II or other figures of ancient history and that they have also forgotten Abdelkrim El-Khattabi,67 the founder of the Republic of the Rif. “Nobody knew these names – and that said enough”, concludes the scene.68

Abdelkader Benali’s first novel Weddings at Sea takes on Rif migrants who try to cement their ties to their land of origin through marriage.69 The main character, Lamarat, is a young man who goes to the Rif for the wedding of his sister and uncle.70 His young uncle flees to a nearby town, and Lamarat is sent by his father to bring the bridegroom back, but the bridegroom’s temporary refuge in the local bordello irreparably wounds the pride of the bride, Rebekka, leading to a paradoxical end. The story is woven around an intricate sequence of events, past and present, narrated during Lamarat’s taxi ride from the house by the sea to the town. The inter-related themes that organize the narrative are introduced at the beginning of the novel: migration and the return to the “land of origin,”71 men’s fear of marriage, impoverished and degrading villages, and the cultural distance of returning migrants from their native villages represented by Lamarat’s tourist-like gaze.72 The family house built by Lamarat’s father deteriorates over the course of the narrative; its final collapse coincides with the failure of the wedding and the impossibility of recovery from the consuming consequences of emigration/ immigration.73 Different literary styles – childlike in some episodes and a stream-of-consciousness mode in others – submit the Dutch language to various forms of deterritorialization.

In Benali’s novel, the stereotype of the Rif’s backwardness is a recurrent theme treated with light irony. Lamarat’s birth and the love story between his father and mother are reminiscent of rural folktales.74 When Lamarat goes to Morocco, he dis-
covers that he is the only one who does not understand his Tarifit-speaking grandmother, and is therefore the ignorant ("illiterate") one in the family. The narrator playfully recollects a meeting between Lamarat and a Dutch salesman who wants to sell him plastic chairs. The vendor addresses Lamarat in a rather offensive mix of Berber, Arabic and Dutch, because he “knows” that he must address Berber highlanders in a “rustic” way. With Lamarat speaking standard Dutch and the Dutch salesman speaking coarse Arabic and Berber, the scene offers another ironic subversion of the expected ignorance of Riffian characters.75

As these examples show, the references to the Rif and the Amazigh language are not part of folkloric presentation, regionalism, or didactic teaching. These elements are involved in the narrative of contradictory pulling forces through plays on words, irony, and an often phantasmagorical style, while the characters construct, de-construct, and re-construct their social and personal lives in the Netherlands as well as their memories from an elusive “home country”. If deep “horseradish” roots86 counter the estrangement of migration, in these texts Morocco tends to become a place for summer holidays.

Conclusion

The rich and diversified literary production included under the umbrella notion of “Amazigh literary space” gives us a glimpse of a world in transformation. Thanks to cultural baggage developed in the multiple languages learnt at home, school or in emigration, Amazigh writers develop their artistic creativity and give poetic form to the difficulty of daily living in rural and urban contexts; they portray, mix, and reconstruct socially and individually scathing issues. A common trait is that, whether the setting of the works is an Amazigh region or not, the reference to the Amazigh language is not ethnographic or didactic, but rather integrated in the characterization and the narrative. The main difference occurs when migrant writers, such as those writing in Dutch, adopt a tourist gaze. Within the Amazigh literary space, there is a definite effort to create a written literature in Amazigh. Writers build on the experience of their predecessors, whether they used Amazigh, French, or Arabic. As the production of novels in Amazigh becomes increasingly “normal,” the language question is less and less explicitly treated. We also see that artistic effervescence – the myriad of cultural, journalistic, and academic activities together with the personal effort of diffusion – encounters difficulties known to all literary writing in Morocco.77 However, these difficulties are made more acute by
the extreme limitation of audience and the scarce funds for Amazigh publishing houses. In this respect, the situation does not appear to have changed over the last decade: songs and theater in Tarifit are widespread at the popular levels, and while the increasing use of new media – whether radio, television or the Internet – is certainly important, it does not yet fully support the publication of artistic writing in Amazigh.

Notes

1 Among others, Mouloud Feraoun, the Amrouche family, Mouloud Mammeri, Nabile Farès (in French) and Belaïd Ali Ait, Aliche, Si Amar-ou-Said Boulifa, Said Said and Amer Mezdad (in Kabyle) from Algeria; the poet Hawad (in Touareg and French) from Niger; and the novelist Ibrahim Al-Koni (Arabic) from Libya.


3 See the interview with Hindi Zahra published on Aujourd’hui le Maroc: “Je m’intéresse à toutes les cultures et j’ai envie que ma musique soit universelle et réunisse des gens de divers horizons. Je voudrais qu’elle s’inscrive dans la pluralité [All cultures interest


9 See Merolla De l’art, 71–74, 183–195. Tamazight, the feminine and singular form, means “Amazigh woman” and the vernacular spoken in the Moroccan Middle Atlas. As languages are usually feminine in Berber, “Tamazight” also indicates the “Amazigh language” as a whole. In Morocco, the masculine form Amazigh (instead than the femi-
nine form Tamazight) is used, to avoid confusion with the Middle Atlas vernacular. I 
follow this use in the present article.

The nationalist critique saw many “Berber” characterizations as regrettable forms of 
French acculturation, and these works were often accused of lacking patriotism. See 
Mostefa Lacheraf, La Colline oubliée ou la conscience anachronique, in Philippe Lu-
cas and Jean-Claude Vatin, eds., L’Algérie des anthropologues (Paris: Maspero, 1975), 231– 
232, texte 65, first published in Le Jeune Musulman (13 February, 1953); See also Chris-
tiane Achour, Littérature et apprentissage scolaire de l’écriture: influences réciproques, 
Littératures du Maghreb, Itinéraires et Contacts de cultures 4–5 (Paris: Centre d’Etude des 
Nouveaux Espaces Littéraires, 1984): 15–56; Jacqueline Kaye and Abdelhamid Zoubir, 
The ambiguous compromise: Language, literature, and national identity in Algeria and Morocco 
(London and New York: Routledge, 1990); Mohamed Saïd El Zemouri, Berbérisme dans la 
littérature maghrébine d’expression française (les cas de Driss Chaïbi, Mohamed Khair Eddine, 
Yacine Kateb, Nabil Farès) [Tétouan: Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1997].

Jean Déjeux, Francophone literature in the Maghreb: the problem and the possibility, 
Research in African Literatures 23.2 (1992): 5–19; Mouloud Mammeri, Littérature berbère 
anciens (Paris: Maspero, 1980); Albert Memmi, Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du 
colonisateur (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1957); Obiajunwa Wali, The Dead End of African Lit-

In Arabic and European languages, the terms “Berber / Barbar / Breber” have been 
known since the Eighth and Sixteenth Centuries CE respectively. The term “Berber” 
became established under the impetus of colonial ethnography of the nineteenth cen-
tury CE. It is increasingly rejected in North Africa because “Berber” derives from the 
Greek βάρβαρος and the Latin barbarus, and meaning “uncivilized.” See also Chan-
tal de la Veronne, Distinction entre arabes et berbères dans les documents d’archives 
européennes des XVIe et XVIIe siècles concernant le Maghreb, Actes du premier congrès 
d’études des cultures méditerranéennes d’influences arabo-berbères (Algiers: SNED, 1973), 261– 
265.

Amazigh is the singular form of Imazighen, usually translated as “free (noble) men” 
and is also used as an adjective (Amazigh language). The term Amazigh was known in 
Morocco and Libya and is nowadays accepted in Algeria and in areas where it was not 
previously used. Linguistically, Amazigh belongs to the Afro-Asiatic family along with 
languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic, Hausa, Oromo, and ancient Egyptian. See 

Its speakers number between 30 and 40% of the Moroccan population (Rif, Middle 
and High Atlas, Sous). In Algeria, between 14 and 25% of the population speaks local


Tuaregs live in a vast area across Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger, northern Burkina Faso and northern Nigeria.


A commission in Morocco proposed the Amazigh language as an official national language only after the 2011 “Arab Spring” in which Berber speakers participated in Libya and across the Maghreb.


Mohammed Khair-Eddine, Légende et vie d’Agoun’chich (The Legend and Life of Agoun’-chich) (Paris: Seuil, 2010).

“Quand vous débarquez dans un pays que vous n’avez jamais vu ou que vous avez déserté depuis longtemps, ce qui vous frappe avant tout, c’est la langue … Eh bien! le Sud, c’est d’abord une langue: la tachelhît (When you land in a new country or one you left long ago, what strikes you first and foremost is the language … Well! In the
south, there is one primary language, Tashelhit.” Khâir-Eddine (1984/2010), 3; “Cela [le problème de la pérennité culturelle] touche essentiellement les cultures de tradition orale, les langues minoritaires dont la richesse s’estompe faute de pouvoir échapper à l’oubli par simple retranscription … En dehors du Sénégal, qui commence à codifier ses quatre langues nationales, les autres pays d’Afrique ont tendance à dédaigner leurs attaches (The problem of cultural continuity primarily affects oral cultures, whose wealth is unable to escape oblivion by simple transcription … Outside of Senegal, where the four national languages have begun to be codified, many African countries have a tendency to show disdain for their languages)” Khâir-Eddine (1984/2010), 7.


26 “[La ville] C’est le point de convergence heureuse de deux cultures, la berbère et la négro-africaine. Cet art ce manifeste dans les moindres choses, les plus infimes gestes … À travers lui, on discerne le génie de ces peuples qui essayent d’oublier la haine, la traînai ancienne et actuelle et qui pratiquent le métissage biologique et culturel sans arrière-pensée [The town is the point of convergence for two happy cultures, the Berber and the Black African; Here art manifests itself in the smallest gestures … Here we discern the spirit of people who are trying to forget hatred, who are trying, without reservation, to understand their past and present conditions, both biological and cultural]” Khâir-Eddine (1984/2010), 16.


29 2005.

30 2008.

31 Saïd Belgharbi, Ašwaḏ yebuyebhën! (The Hoarse Look!) (Berkane: Trifagraph, 2006).

32 Khalid Boudou, Het schnitzelparadijs (The Schnitzel Paradise) (Amsterdam: Vassallucci, 2001).


See also the conference proceedings of the AUEA. The first associations were located at Sous, Rabat, Casablanca and in the Rif [Al-intilâqa]. The local or regional associations Izuran (Roots) at Ouarzazate, Tilelli (Liberty) at Goulmima, Ilmas (Source) at Nador and Numidya at Al Hoceima are more recent. They participated in the “Agadir Charter for Linguistic and Cultural Rights” in 1991. Some of these groups belong to the umbrella organization CMA (Congrès Mondial Amazigh/Amazigh World Congress). Currently some 40 associations are active in Morocco. See: http://www.europemaroc.com/assoc.html.


Moustouaoui’s first collection was Iskraf (1976); Ali Mimoun Essafi’s pieces are Ussan sem-
miŸnin (Cold Days) (Casablanca, 1983) and Tighrit tabrat (Reading a letter) (Casablanca, 1994); An overview of Amazigh publications in Morocco is in Lakhassi: http://www.rdh50.ma/fr/pdf/contributions/GT9–6.pdf; An anthology of Amazigh poetry is in Abdellah Bounfour and Amar Amezziane, Anthologie de la poésie berbère traditionnelle [Harmattan: Paris, 2010].

Interview with Mr. Akunad, Mr. Arejdal, Mr. Bouyaakoubi, Mr. Lahacem, and Mr. Oussous at the Hotel Aferni, Agadir (18 July, 2010). I would like to thank Lahoucine Bouyaakoubi, a young researcher and writer, for his help.

Interview with the author in 2002.

Lahacem Zaheur, Muzya (Agadir, 1994).


Mohammed Akunad, Ijjigen n tidi (Flowers of Toil) (Agadir: Aqlam, 2007).

Brahim Lasri Amazigh, Ijawwan n tayri (The Siroccos of Love) (Marrakech: Association Imal, 2008).

Lahoucine Bouyaakoubi, Igdad n Wihran (Birds of Oran), (France: privately printed, 2010).

‘Une autre catégorie [qui] se caractérise par l’emploi de néologismes ou de mots tombés en désuétude dans la langue amazighe, tels Imulantmekwtit (Ombres de mémoire) d’El Khatir Aboulkacem-Afulay ou Aggd n tidi (Ovaire de vérité) de Taieb Amgroud’ [A category characterized by the use of words or neologisms fallen into disuse in the Amazigh language, such as Shadow memory (El-Khatir Aboulkacem-Afulay) or Ovary truth (Taieb Amgroud)], Lahoucine Bouyaakoubi, Ijawwan n tayri de Brahim Lasri Amazigh. Un sujet tabou dans une langue taboue [A taboo subject in a taboo language] (2009), http://www.amazighnews.net/20090109289/Ijawwan-n-tayri-de-Brahim-Lasri-Ama.html.

Bouyaakoubi (2009) writes: “Depuis le début des années 1990 ... [le titre] ne tire pas son authenticité de l’héritage culturel commun mais de ‘l’étrangeté’ de la combinaison des mots. Il apparaît comme une expression littéraire formulée de façon à s’éloigner du langage courant; ‘Ijawwan n tayri’ se compose de deux mots connus dans l’air tachelhit. Ijawwan (Siroccos) et tayri (Amour) liés par la préposition ‘n’ (de). Dans cette combinaison de mots qui n’est pas courante, cette expression apparaît comme une pure invention littéraire pas très éloignée du langage quotidien sans pour autant lui appartenir [Since the early 1990s, the title has not determined authenticity but rather the common cultural heritage of ‘foreignness’ in certain combinations of words. This appears as a literary expression, formulated to depart from contemporary language ... ‘Ijawwan n tayri’ consists of two known words in Tachelhit: Siroccos and Tayri (love) linked by the preposition “n” (of). In this rare combination of words, the expression is purely literary invention: not far from everyday language yet not belonging to it].”

Brahim Lasri Amazigh, Ijawwan n tayri [The Siroccos of Love] [Marrakech: Association Imal, 2008].


Brahim Lasri Amazigh, Ijawwan n tayri [The Siroccos of Love] [Marrakech: Association Imal, 2008].


Melilla, geographically in North Morocco, is part of Spain but obtained Autonomous City Status in 1995. Its 65,000 inhabitants include Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and (small) Hindu communities. Besides Spanish, many residents also speak Arabic and Tarifit.


Mohamed Chacha, Reż ṭṭābu ad d tɛffɛğh tʃukt [Breaking the Taboo and Let the Sun Appear] [Amsterdam: Izaouran, 1997].

Chacha also published another novel and four collections of short stories and poems. His first attempt at writing was in Arabic before he arrived in the Netherland as a refugee in the 1970s.

Mustafa Ayned, Reḥrīq n tiri [The Pain of the Shadow] [Amsterdam: Izaouran, 1996].

Mohamed Bouzaggou, Ticri x tama n tsarrawt [Walking on the Edge of the Lace] [Berkane: Trifagraphe, 2001]; M. Bouzaggou, Jar u jər [Between the Two] [Berkane: Trifagraphe, 2004].


64 Though two chapters of Fatima Merabti’s Kabyle novel Yir Taqmat (Bad Brotherhood) were published in 1997 and 1998 by the journal Tizir, the novel remains unpublished: Fatima Merabti, Yir Taqmat (Bad Brotherhood), Tizir (Nov. 1997): 36–40 et (Jan. 1998): 35–38; the first novel published in Taqbaylit by a woman writer is Lynda Koudache, Aṭecciw n ′imes (The Fire Shelter) (Tizi-Ouzou: Editions Tasekla, 2009); many novels and poems by women writers from Kabylia (Algeria) have appeared in French, among them the well-known autobiography of Fadhma Amrouche and four novels by her daughter Taos Marguerite Amrouche.


66 Saïd El Haji, De dagen van Sjaitan (The Days of Satan) (Amsterdam: Vassallucci, 2000).

67 “Abdelkrim El-Chattibi” in the text by El Haji De dagen, 143.

68 Saïd El Haji De dagen, 144.

69 Abdelkader Benali, Bruiloft aan zee (Wedding by the Sea) (Amsterdam: Vassallucci, 1996).

70 Writer and scholar Fouad Laroui notes that this is a quite unusual marriage for Moroccan customs (personal communication); it can be interpreted as pointing to the author’s lack of knowledge of Moroccan marriage mores or to his voluntary “unsettling” choice.

71 “The taxi driver … [could have told] that the young man was linked to the region in a certain way, a kind of fat horseradish that oddly enough only got fatter the further it grew up from the root and tenaciously went on growing in a landscape that was otherwise bone-dry” (Benali, Bruiloft 5). This and following quotations are Daniela Merolla’s translation.

72 Distance is signaled for example by Lamarat’s inability to recognize the sounds of cicadas and local customs, such as the rear-view mirror placed in a downward position as a form of respect to one’s passengers.

73 “In this town Lamarat’s father … had ordered a house to be built, a house with five pillars and a water pipe that soon clogged with cockroaches and crumbling mortar” (Benali Bruiloft, 6). “But ten years later, when Lamarat came back to the region … he was told by everyone that after his house had fallen down many others had followed, everything is empty, the houses are in ruins and everybody is busy in the town (which is much more enjoyable, with all those casual contacts, etc.)” (Benali Bruiloft, 160).
“Lamarat … had been born one sunny Saturday to a father and mother who, before they were married, had lived in two houses one on top of the other in the centre of the village of Touarirt on the Mediterranean coast; at a faraway time for the one and only yesterday for the other, but far, far, far away from Thalidomide children and birth control” (Benali Bruiloft, 7).

“Salaam mulaykum, keen bak vie dhat!” “What you mean is that I should understand Arabic,” Lamarat said, thinking out aloud, “but unfortunately I do not understand that language of yours.” “Well, then, I’ll put it another way: ehlel ye sehlel oud wewesch e mis n tefkecht” (freely translated from Berber to Dutch: Good morning, go fetch your father, son of a king-sized portion of spite). “Floor knew that you should always treat Berbers insolently, rudely, otherwise you do not get your message across” (Benali Bruiloft, 65).

Benali, Bruiloft.

Fouad Laroui, Le drame linguistique marocain [Casablanca: Le Fennec, 2011].

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