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ETHNIC IDENTITY, LANGUAGE SHIFT, AND THE AMAZIGH VOICE IN MOROCCO AND ALGERIA

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Abstract: Although Berber is known to be the indigenous language of the populations of North Africa for over thirty centuries, it has never been promoted to the status of a standard language, let alone that of an official language of any of the states where it is traditionally spoken as a mother tongue. Since the late 1960s, a revival movement has been striving for official recognition of Berber. Some recent events in Morocco and Algeria serve as proof of a limited success of this movement; but as a result of growing urbanization, education (mainly in Arabic and French), and emigration inside and outside Morocco, the threat of a massive language shift is greater than ever. This paper explores the paradoxical constructs of ethnic identity and linguistic identity in Morocco and Algeria, and highlights their role in the revival movement. In the light of these constructs, it deals with (i) the factors that energize the revival movement, (ii) the factors that impede the official recognition of Berber and its standardization, and finally (iii) the prospects for the survival of Berber.

Keywords: Berber, North Africa, ethnic identity, linguistic identity, Marocco, Algeria.

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This paper is an attempt to analyze the situation of Berber in Morocco and Algeria, with particular emphasis on the construct of a Berber identity, its goals, claims, philosophy, and prospects. The issue whether the Berber identity is founded on purely linguistic claims or also on extralinguistic ones, like ethnicity and culture, will be explored. The paper addresses the following questions: 1)Why is there an increase in the revival movement for a Berber identity in recent years? What is the nature of the relationship between Berber, Arabic, and Islam? What are the chances for the official recognition of Berber? The attribute Amazigh will substitute for Berber when we refer to the language in general, disregarding the regional variants. The terminology for regional variants will follow the custom as found in the relevant literature; i.e., attributes like Tarifit, Taqbaylit, and Tashelhit will be used when warranted. For references to the people themselves, the plural form Imazighen will be used.

This change in attributes is an attempt to meet the demands of Amazigh audiences who insist on using the indigenous terminology, instead of the external appellation 'Berber'. The common reasoning one hears, mostly during public meetings, is that the term 'Berber' was initially used by the Greeks, then by the Romans, as a derogatory term to refer to people who were considered as 'barbarians'. We should note that Romance-language dictionaries, particularly French ones–where so much has been written on Amazigh--simply state that 'Berber' is the indigenous language of North-Africans, and reserve two different entries for 'Berber' and 'Barbare'. In Arabic, a language which is in intense contact with Amazigh, the same entry is used for 'Berber' and 'Barbarian', with derivations like 'barbara' "to babel" (See, for example, al-munjid fi l-lughati wa l-'a'lâm, Beirut: Dar Al-Mashriq.). This can perhaps explain in part the irritation that many Imazighen show when addressed as Berbers. Moreover, the term 'Berber' is not used in any of the Amazigh varieties to refer to an Amazigh.

LANGUAGE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Before dealing with the revival movement, it is necessary to define what is meant here by a linguistic and ethnic identity. In the case of Amazigh, there is some indication that the principals involved conceive of themselves as a different ethnic group than the dominant one, the Arabs. However, the most prominent index to ethnicity is linguistic. People define themselves as Imazighen once they speak the Amazigh language. This is not surprising since language does in general constitute a very strong factor in group identity. As Fishman

(1989:27) explains, a distinct language "is more likely than most symbols of ethnicity to become the symbol of ethnicity." Language is the recorder of paternity, the expresser of patrimony and the carrier of phenomenology." Other symbols can function as indices to an Amazigh identity, like dress, jewelry, and ancestry. In this last case, even people who do not speak the language can claim an Amazigh identity, on the basis of their parents own identity (See below under discussion of language shift.).

It is right to assume that language shift among Imazighen is the ultimate threat for an identity claim: once the speaker ceases to speak Amazigh, there remains little about him which would indicate his 'Amazighness'. This is largely due to centuries of coexistence between Arabs and Imazighen that have shaped the culture of North-Africa. If couscous was once an indigenous North African cookery masterpiece, it is now prepared and enjoyed by virtually every family in the area. Similar observations can be made about the djellaba. Amazigh jewelry, which is very distinctive, is almost never worn in urban contexts, and is being replaced by modern dress in rural areas as well. Physiological traits are also not that reliable in identifying in-group and out-group members, partly as a result of the wide practice of intermarriages, and also because of the nature of the population of North-Africa in general. A wide spectrum is available when comparing a Rifian (from the north of Morocco) to a Soussi (from the south of Morocco) to a Touareg (from the South of Algeria).

The observation that Amazigh traits, outside of language, either disappear (traditional jewelry) or become generalized in use (cookery) does not mean that these traits or other new ones cannot strengthen the ethnic identity of an Amazigh individual. There is a recourse to traditional jewelry among some female Amazigh activists, and there are ongoing debates on the indigenous North African cookery (e.g., on the Amazigh-Net, a mailing group created to promote the Amazigh language and culture). An extremely important cultural, and possibly political, new sign is the Amazigh flag: horizontal strips of blue (the Mediterranean sea as the Northern border of Tamazgha), green (the Northern fertile area), and yellow (the Saharan area, home of the Touareg populations), centered with the letter 'z' in Tifinagh (the indigenous North African alphabet, which stands for the center letter in the root 'mzɣ'). The red of the letter 'z' represents "the color of struggle, of combat, and of blood" (as announced by Tamazgha, an Amazigh cultural association in Paris, on the Amazigh-Net, October 30th 1998).

THE AMAZIGH REVIVAL MOVEMENT

Although it is widely believed that the Amazigh revival movement is a recent trend, this should not eclipse the fact that already by the beginning of the

20th century, manifestations of an Amazigh identity claim had seen the light. These are exemplified by the pioneering work of Boulifa (1897, 1909, etc), and the 1939 work of Jean Amrouche, "Les chants berbères de Kabylie" (cited in Chaker, 1997). In Morocco, writings in Berber go as far back as 1580, and are more than a couple hundred in number (Boogert and Stroomer, 1993). Older manuscripts have been traced in Al-Andalus, or Muslim Spain, which dates back to the 10th century. One of these is an Arabic-Amazigh dictionary by Ibn Tunart (1154) [Boogert and Kossmann, 1998]. These are exclusively written in the Arabic script, and have religious themes. The nature of the Moroccan texts is clearly different from that of the Algerian ones. The former ones were written with the goal of making Islam easily accessible to native speakers of Amazigh (here, of Tashelhit), whereas the latter were produced as an act de presence: to tell both the French and the Arabs that there is an identity which has preceded both, and which has every right to claim supremacy on its own territory.

This being said, there remains the question why only in the second half of the twentieth century did the Amazigh revival movement become a central issue in political and cultural debates. By resorting to the concept of 'cognitive alternative' (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977), we can easily understand why only recently did the claim for an Amazigh identity become so widespread. The developments in linguistic theory did provide an alternative to the idea that some languages are 'better' than others. A case in point is the widely taught dogma at school naming Arabic as the most eloquent language. When examining linguistic facts, anyone can see how complex the structure of Amazigh is, and what its capacities are: just like any other natural language. The French academic institutions did open doors to the Amazigh investigator, bringing forth advances in anthropological studies, showing how complex any so-called 'primitive' culture can be. The French institution did then benefit the Amazigh student, transforming him into an avid defender of his own language and culture, confronting the colonial institution itself (Chaker, 1997).

The Amazigh intellectual has obtained the tools necessary to redefine his own social group in positive terms, a phenomenon taken as one of the assumptions of social identity theory (Giles et al., 1977). That is, any social group strives for a positive self-identification. One of the ways to do that is through redefining some attributes that used to define this group as negative, like language or accent, skin color, etc. The contact of the Amazigh reader with texts on the history of North-Africa, or old Numidia under the Roman rule, or on the origin and native language of some glorious Islamic empires (Al-Mohades, Al-Morabitin, AL-Marinides, the Ziris, etc) has brought him in contact with his own historical heritage, which continues to be a source of pride and inspiration to many cultural and political activists. This historical dimension constitutes a direct challenge to the precepts of Islam, which stipulate that the history of any Muslim begins with Islam; before Islam was the period of ignorance and savagery (al-

jâhiliyya). Of course, it is not enough to know the indigenous history to consider it as a source of pride. To a lot of Muslim Imazighen, among whom are students of history, the period prior to Islam was simply a colonization period, beginning with the Roman one and ending with the Ottoman one. It depends on the conceptual frame of the interpreter of history. What is important here is the new possibility offered to the cultural activist, namely to be connected to his own history and to be proud of it. This is very visible in the practice of naming children: it is not uncommon to come across children named after Amazigh kings and historical figures, such as 'Massine', 'Juba', 'Jugurtha', and so forth.

Before moving to the second issue dealing with the nature of the relationship of Amazigh to Arabic and Islam, it is important to note the following two points. First, the contact of Amazigh with the French culture and academic institution is often used by opponents of the Amazigh movement as a piece of evidence that this movement is inspired by colonialists. The fact that the early Amazigh writers were among the most ardent opponents of French colonialism is simply, but not surprisingly, ignored. A second point relevant to the historical dimension is the Berber Decree, or the 'Dahir berbère', issued in May 1930 by the French administration. This decree was meant to institutionalize two different legal systems in Morocco: one for the Imazighen, deriving its essence from the local customary laws, and one for the Arabs, based on the Islamic law or the 'Shariâa.' This decree was fervently opposed by both Arabs and Imazighen and ceased to apply a few years later. This decree was a direct application of the 'divide and rule' maxim, and a direct attack on the Muslim unity of the Moroccans as well as of other Muslims (mainly in the Middle East), and on the nationalist identity of Moroccans, as well as on Arab-nationalism in general, which has difficulties recognizing individual Arab states, let alone tolerating further division of an Arab country. In recent years, this historical episode has been used rather systematically by the opponents of the Amazigh movement, as a reminder that French colonization was ready to recognize an entity called 'Amazigh' as an ideological weapon to rule Morocco more efficiently. It follows then, according to this view, that any one advocating any sort of separate or different identity is working in the same direction, that is, supporting a colonial ideology.

AMAZIGH, ARABIC AND ISLAM

In this section I propose to explain the multifaceted relationship between Amazigh, Arabic, and Islam. My goal is to highlight points of relevance to the Amazigh movement, with emphasis on whether or not it is possible for a language other than Arabic to be used for religious purposes, and how the Amazigh identity relates to Arabic and Islam.

The Languages of Islam

It is perhaps a moot point to even question whether other languages than Arabic can be used as the main language of Islam, when we know that Muslim Arabic speakers are a minority compared to Muslim non-Arabic speakers. The issue is important, however, in that it highlights that what is at stake is not really a Muslim-non-Muslim stride, but mainly a political stride using Islam as a weapon to silence its opponents. A first disclaimer in favor of the tolerance of Islam for multilingual and multicultural societies is noted by Borst (1957-63, I:325, cited in Eco, 1995:352); namely that the confusio resulting after the fall of Babel is to Islam a natural event, and not a curse. What an advanced statement in favor of a multilingual/multicultural society! In fact, this observation has been repeatedly made by the Moroccan scholar Mohamed Chafik, who quotes from the Qur'aan and the tradition alike to support this view. The relevant Qur'aanic verses are Al-Hujurat: 13 ("O mankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that ye may know each other.") and Al-Rum: 22 ("Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: verily in that are signs for those who know").

If Islam as a religion has never called for the exclusive use of Arabic, it remains that in practice Arabic is considered as a sacred language by Muslims, which entails that it would be highly valued. This is the case in many countries like Turkey or Iran, where Muslim scholars and clergy master Classical Arabic, even though they conduct their sermons and preaching in languages other than Arabic. Although Arabic is of vital importance to religion in many Muslim countries outside the so-called Arab World, it does not pose a direct threat to any of the national languages of these countries. On the other hand, Arabic continues to gain more territory in the countries of the Maghreb at the expense of Amazigh, namely in Algeria and Morocco. The authorities in these two countries are so reluctant, if not hostile, to any claims regarding raising the status of Amazigh to that of an official language. It should be noted here that in countries like Tunisia and Libya, once homelands of the Amazigh language, Amazigh speakers have been reduced in number to a few thousand, indicating the completion of the Arabicization process.

What is perhaps of crucial importance to the point being made here—highlighting the relationship of Islam to Arabic—is the fact that since the arrival of Muslim conquerors, all official documentation that is known to us is in Arabic. The massive campaigns of Arab-Muslim leaders against the Western occupations in the Arab World brought together inhabitants of the Maghreb in unconditional support of countries with whom they share religion and a big part of their culture, but mostly, with whom they could communicate in the same language, i.e., Arabic.

A recent publication of the leader of the "Organization for Justice and Benevolence" (jamaâat-al-'adl wa al-ihsane), Abdessalam Yacine (1997), has revealed the position of his movement and can be taken to represent, although partially, that of other Muslim movements. Yacine sees Islam as the top of a pyramid, supported by Arabic and Muslim believers. For him, there is no place for Amazigh next to Arabic when it comes to important domains. He does recognize that there is nothing wrong with speaking a mother tongue other than Arabic, but it should never be a matter of discussion to have a bilingual education for example, or write on religious matters in Amazigh, etc. He says nothing about Muslim countries where Arabic is a minority language: should these do their best and abandon their languages in order to become good Muslims?

The greatest impediments for the recognition of Amazigh as an official language in Morocco and Algeria have more to do with an identity conflict than with Islam as a religion. The majority of the populations of these two countries may view themselves as Muslims first, and as Moroccans or Algerians second. There is reason to believe, especially in the case of Morocco, that many Imazighen view themselves as Arab-Muslim-Imazighen. It is not uncommon to hear an Amazigh refer to himself as an Arab, and expressing this in Amazigh. I have personally witnessed many cases, and Bentahila and Davies (1992) report on similar cases. The advantages of adopting an Arab identity are numerous, among which is having access to the privileged market. The pride in being an Arab is sustained by the school, masses of publications, and practically all the official media. Claiming an Amazigh identity is usually accompanied by arguments based on the history of North Africa, arguments based on linguistic human rights, as well as on linguistic arguments showing that Amazigh is capable, like any other natural language, of dealing with complex matters and the like. These arguments are not accessible to the wide public. The massive campaigns by Amazigh activists aim at publicizing the type of knowledge which would make Imazighen aware of their rediscovered identity.

Language Shift and Linguistic Identity

From our previous discussion, we gather that there is an Amazigh revival movement in progress, but it is faced with serious challenges and obstacles. In this section I provide some data on the actual situation of the Amazigh language, in order to make clear the extent of the threat of a shift from Amazigh to Arabic. After that, we'll move to a consideration of the chances of success of the Amazigh revival movement. The emphasis on language in this context is justified by the major role that language plays in shaping ethnic identity, as said earlier.

The possibility of a complete shift from Amazigh to Arabic might seem quite remote when we consider that there are at least 20,000,000 Amazigh speakers in Morocco and Algeria. A closer look at the situation reveals that if

there is no official protection of this language, within the next few generations, its speakers will be scarce to find. The immediate counter-argument one hears is that a language that survived for thousands of years cannot disappear in such a short period of time. The answer to this objection is simple. It is only in the last few decades that technology has allowed the mass media to reach the homes of even those in the heart of the mountains of Kabylia or the Rif mountains. Public schooling is also a very recent phenomenon, which was generalized only after the independence of each of these two countries. Industrialization also contributes to the spread of the official language, by attracting more and more people to the city, where Arabic is generally the dominant language, except in the few cities in predominantly Amazigh areas, like Tizi Ouzou and Bougie in Algeria and Nador and Al Hoceima in Morocco.

Very little research has been done to investigate language shift among Amazigh speakers. Bentahila and Davies (1992) surveyed 180 families whose members use Amazigh varieties of Morocco, usually next to Arabic. They report that the youngest generation in these families has completely switched to Arabic, and that these informants do not feel sorry about the fact that they shifted from Amazigh to Arabic, "probably because it is not felt to affect identity, which is secure before and after the shift"(pp. 209-210). In fact, according to the same authors, "[i]n the interviews both Berber and non-Berber speakers [i.e., those who switched completely to Arabic, A.E.] expressed little sense of regret about the shift, and some described how their parents had actively encouraged them to use Arabic in preference to Berber in childhood, with remarks such as "Berber won't help you to earn your daily bread." None of those who were not fluent in Berber reported that their parents were particularly disturbed by this." Another significant finding of Bentahila and Davies is that only 63% of the their Amazigh respondents answered the question "Out of all the languages you know, which do you consider to be your own language?" with "Amazigh" ["Berber" in the source article], while 27% said they considered Arabic to be their own language.

Regarding self categorization, 30% of Amazigh respondents reported that they considered themselves exclusively Amazigh, while 47% used Amazigh in combination with Arab and/or Moroccan. The authors do not give the percentage of respondents who indicated that they are both Amazigh and Moroccan, an attribute that should raise no questions at all, unlike the one that combines Amazigh and Arab. Of those who don't speak Amazigh at all, 37% still defined themselves as Amazigh. We can see here, in fact, that this group of respondents does not equate language with identity, since they would exclude themselves from being Amazigh.

Another study that reports on the process of language shift among Amazigh speakers is Bouhjar (1994), cited in Boukous (1995). A few investigations in Morocco unanimously show that there are negative attitudes

towards Amazigh languages, even among students at university level. For example, Tounsi (1993) [cited in Boukous, 1995] asked 174 informants (of whom 34,48% were Amazigh) to indicate with a '+' the language to which the respondent has a positive attitude, and with a '-' the language to which the respondent has a negative attitude. The languages in question were French, Amazigh (the Tashelhit variety), Moroccan Arabic, Hebrew (Ladino? Yiddish?), and Standard Arabic. Only 10,34% of the respondents indicated a positive attitude, 32,75% a negative attitude, and the rest gave no answer. This means that slightly less than a third of the number of Amazigh respondents indicated a positive attitude towards Amazigh, but not necessarily all of these were Amazigh!

The results of the studies mentioned above would, of course, be very different if the informants had previously been informed about the possibility of teaching Amazigh, or if they had read about the history of North Africa, or if they had known that one could earn one's daily bread with Amazigh. Although studies on attitudes of Imazighen toward Amazigh are scarce, one can stipulate that the more ground the Amazigh movement makes, the more people change their negative attitudes towards Amazigh. In a sense, the Amazigh revival movement and the language attitudes feed each other and accelerate the progress towards an official status of Amazigh. In the next section we will see how attitudes, among other things, are crucial to the success of revival movements.

Reversing Language Shift and Reinforcing an Amazigh Identity

In one of his numerous contributions to the study of language shift and revival movements, Fishman (1989) traces an itinerary for the successful reversal of language shift. I dealt with this elsewhere (El Aissati, 1993), but since it is of capital importance to our topic, I shall deal with it here too. A successful reversal of language shift goes through eight stages, beginning with "an adequate ideological clarification" embodied by assembling material about the language in question, and accounting for its grammar, and ending with the stage where the cultural autonomy of the endangered community is recognized, and its language is used by the media, the government, and the educational system.

Stage 7 is reached when there are public ceremonies, theatre, readings, songfests, etc. The subsequent stage "consists of family-, neighborhood-, community-reinforcement, and consists of the heart of the entire RLS [Reversing Language Shift] venture." Stage 7, moreover, is the backbone of reversing language shift because it ensures transmission of the language and culture to subsequent generations. I should point out here that this is the stage that suffers the most in the Amazigh revival movement. Amazigh children's books are scarce, and there is no indication that parents, especially in urban areas, are successfully transmitting their Amazigh culture and language to their children. In immigration contexts, this becomes next to impossible, due to the dominance of

another culture, and the small amount of interaction between different generations of the same family, due to time constraints and the different prevailing atmosphere.

Stage 5 consists of developing formal literacy instruments and a kind of schooling that does not try to undermine the official school system. There is a beginning for this in Algeria, and the speech of the king of Morocco on August 20, 1994, can be considered as a promise that it will take place in Morocco, too. Cultural associations all over are busy offering lessons in Amazigh, like those organized by the Association Tamazgha and Association Azamazigh in Paris (France), and the Association de Cultural Tamazight in Granada (Spain).

Starting from stage 4, the RLS enters a phase of direct confrontation with the dominant culture. Although stage 4 also deals with education, its emphasis is on the formal type of education, which will obviously compete with the dominant one.

Stage 3 deals with the work sphere in general, but especially the type of work that is not limited to the neighborhood or the community limits. This stage is generally ignored in the Amazigh case, perhaps because it is too far advanced in the process of reversing language shift. It might also be the case that Amazigh activists see it as an automatic consequence of the official recognition of Amazigh.

The local mass media have a big role to play in Stage 2. They would also help RLS go through Stage 6, while at the last stage, as said above, the cultural autonomy of the endangered community is ensured. The order in which these stages are given should not be considered as a fixed one; it only provides an approximate and realistic picture of the itinerary of language shift reversal.

Looking at the situation in Algeria and Morocco with these stages in mind, we can easily see that the situation in Algeria is far more advanced regarding cultural and linguistic autonomy than in Morocco. While it is common to see street signs in Tifinagh on the streets of Kabylia, and while there are clear voices calling for cultural autonomy, the Moroccan activists concentrate more on the official recognition of the language, and its insertion in the school system. It is also not clear from the petitions of the Moroccan cultural associations whether they want a cultural and linguistic autonomy for Amazigh areas (how to define them is another matter). From the experiences of other linguistic minorities, it seems that the only way to secure their survival is through cultural and linguistic autonomy. This autonomy is relatively acquired in Kabylia, Algeria.

Chaker (1997) provides a clear analysis of this situation. Among the factors that define a symbolic autonomy of Kabylia, he cites the street signs in

Tifinagh, the massive will of people to use Tifinagh, and the attempts to modernize the language. Recent events also indicate that the Amazigh movement in Kabylia is not limited to an educated elite. Among these events are the school boycotting of 1994, and the recent demonstrations against the implementation of the 'Arabic only' law of July 5, 1998. A further piece of evidence on the widespread nature of the Amazigh movement cited in Chaker is the existence of about 300 Amazigh cultural associations in Kabylia alone! As a reinforcement of this autonomy, the Amazigh Association of America is currently circulating a list for signatures in favor of the linguistic autonomy of Kabylia.

While in Kabylia one can easily discern signs of a cultural and linguistic autonomy, in Morocco the Amazigh areas do not provide this scenery. The number of people using the Tifinagh script is expanding, but there are no street signs in it, or writings on any public building. It should be noted here, though, that this script is a favorite. In a survey conducted by El Aissati and El Ayoubi in 1996, some cultural associations were asked to distribute questionnaires designed to tap information on the desirability of the different scripts in use, namely Tifinagh, Arabic, and the Roman (Latin) alphabet. Of the 44 respondents from Morocco, 30 declared Tifinagh to be their choice for schooling, 7 chose the Latin alphabet, 4 the Arabic one, and 3 expressed no choice. Of all the 125 respondents (from Morocco, Spain, the Netherlands, and Germany), 65 chose Tifinagh, 29 Latin, 11 Arabic, 12 did not show a preference (any script is as good as the other), and 12 gave no answer. It is interesting to note that of these 125, 20 wrote the dictated sentences in Tifinagh, 51 in Latin, 50 in Arabic, and 4 did not write the sentences down. The popularity of Tifinagh can be considered an index of the desire for an autonomous identity symbol: Tifinagh is an indigenous writing system, and as such is void of the negative connotations that the other two scripts have: Latin and Arabic were once the language of the conqueror.

CONCLUSIONS

The paradox of the Amazigh identity movement is that, on one hand, there are more threats to language and culture preservation, due to urbanization among other things, while on the other hand, there is a rising stride among the Amazigh communities fighting for the recognition of their language and the re-evaluation of their culture. We have seen that revival movements find a lot of inspiration in scientific work, mainly in linguistics, anthropology, and history, which provides Imazighen with a new cognitive alternative, thereby allowing them to redefine themselves willingly and desirously in positive terms.

A case in point here is the frequent appeal of a lot of activists to use the term 'Amazigh' instead of 'Berber'. As we also deal closely with the major differences between the Amazigh movement in Morocco and Algeria, it becomes

clearer that the identity plea in Algeria has reached a stage where linguistic and cultural autonomy are being shaped by the Amazigh activists. Though we have noted that the Moroccan Amazigh movement has not explicitly dealt with the issue of cultural and linguistic autonomy, we also suspect that the Moroccan Amazigh movement might opt for a national recognition and institutionalization of language and culture, instead of pleading for regional cultural and linguistic autonomy. Other issues, such as how many Amazigh languages to recognize, how to proceed in developing school material (different material for different language varieties), how many languages should be used by the government, etc., are all perhaps premature, since the Amazigh world has not benefited from any sort of official recognition yet.

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