

كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking_The_Mold

Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Country: **Morocco**

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The Amazigh Movement in Morocco: A Linguistic and Constitutional Recognition | Rachid Touhtou |

BACKGROUND

In 2019, hundreds of people gathered in Morocco's capital Rabat to mark the start of the Amazigh New Year with a sit-in, calling on the state to make the celebration a national holiday. "This day is an occasion to highlight our strong attachment to the land and pay tribute to those who defended our freedom," Adil Adasko, an Amazigh community leader, said at the rally on Saturday. The first day of the year in the Amazigh calendar, rooted in seasons and agriculture, marks the anniversary of the ascent of Libyan King Sheshong to the throne of Egypt, according to historians. The New Year, also called Yennayer, which began on the year 2969. In 2019, 143 of 395 members of Morocco's parliament submitted a motion to Prime Minister Saad Eddine el-Othmani, asking for the Amazigh New Year to be recognized as a national day, a step already taken by neighboring Algeria. This step towards the recognition of an Amazigh New Year as a national holiday is one of the new demands of the Amazigh Cultural Movement (ACM) in Morocco after the creation of the Royal Institute (IRCAM) in 2004, the creation of the *Tifinagh* alphabet and after the constitutionalization of the Amazigh language as a national language in the new constitution of 2011.

The constitutionalization of the Amazigh language in the 2011 constitutional reform during the Arab Spring came as a result of a long struggle of the ACM in Morocco for the cultural and linguistic recognition of the Amazigh culture and language. The call for the constitutionalization of the Amazigh language started in 2000 with the famous Amazigh charter drafted by Amazigh associations and intellectuals. The year 2003 was a turning point with the creation of the IRCAM (Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture), and then the state reacted by adopting a standardization of the language, allowing it to become an official language in 2011, together with the Arabic language.

TIMELINE

In Morocco, the Berber nationalist feelings were embodied in 1957 by the creation of a political party, the Mouvement Populaire (Popular Movement); it was created by its charismatic leader, Mahjoubi Aherdane. The Popular Movement did not identify itself strictly as a representative of the Berbers, but rather of "Moroccan rural people." Since the overwhelming majority of the Moroccan rural population is in fact Berber, the Popular Movement was considered a Berber nationalist party. In 1993, Aherdane's party renamed itself as the National Popular Movement.

Berbers in Morocco perceive their identity to be threatened primarily by marginalization and exclusion from access to education and media exposure in the country. On August 5, 1991, in an attempt to reinforce the significance of their ethnic identity, a group of Berber cultural associations, including the Moroccan Research and Cultural Exchange Association (in Rabat), the Agadir Summer University Association (in Agadir), the Aghris Cultural Association (in Goulmina), the New Association for Cultural and Popular Arts (in Rabat), the Ilmas Cultural Association (in Nador), and the Soussi Cultural Association (in Casablanca), met in Agadir, where they signed the "Agadir Charter" which outlined Berbers' demands for the resurrection of the Institute of Tamazight Studies and Research.

Although the publication of some newspapers in the Berber language is allowed, editors are often subjected to interrogation by state officials. In March 1994, the Ilmas Cultural Association was prevented from holding a conference on Berber language and writing. Similarly, in April 1994, the Moroccan Association for Research and Cultural Exchange was refused permission to organize a special day for Berber theater in the city of Rabat.

A number of Berber activists have been arrested in a policy that is blatantly discriminatory. Four members from the New Association for Culture and Popular Arts, in Agadir, were put in prison because they published a calendar in the Berber language. On May 1, 1994, Mohamed Hrach Erass, Mbarek Tausse, Ahmed Kikche, Ali Aken, Said Jafer, Omar Darouiche and Omar Ochna were arrested in Er Rachidia after participating in peaceful Labor Day demonstrations. Even though the demonstrations were authorized by the appropriate officials, and the slogans were familiar to the government, the Berbers were charged with inciting actions threatening law and order and internal state security, chanting slogans attacking the principles of the constitution, and calling for the recognition of the Berber language as an official language.

On May 3, 1994, seven secondary school teachers were arrested because they participated in a Mayday demonstration organized by the Democratic Confederation of Workers. They were accused of holding banners in the Berber language and shouting slogans for the recognition of Tamazight in the constitution. Such repression demonstrates the vulnerability of the Berber culture and its advocates. It should be no surprise that the campaign to revitalize the Berber language and culture has begun to assume stronger forms of resistance. These types of resistance by the Amazigh activists were met with fierce confrontations by the central regime. The 1990s was a time of confrontation; however after the ascension of Mohamed VI to the throne, a strategy of cooptation and needs satisfaction was adopted.

In 1999, the Moroccan National Charter of Education referred to Tamazight as a language, and not a cluster of dialects. The complexities of calling the varieties spoken in the Rif, Atlas and Souss regions was overcome, paving the way to the institutionalization phase. 2001, Mohamed VI delivered a famous speech in Agadir region in the Middle Atlas calling for the creation of the Royal Institute.

Demands of the Amazigh movement featured prominently in the 2011 protests, which led to Morocco reforming its constitution and the king to devolve some of his power to an elected government. Morocco recognized Amazigh as an official language only with the new constitution in 2011. Eight years on, parliament has yet to enact the legislation required to establish its use in education and public life. Activists accuse the government of dragging its feet. While making up substantial populations in these regions, the Tamazight languages have only recently started to gain formal recognition. The word Tamazight refers to the spectrum of related dialects spoken by the Berber people. In the early 2000s, the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture was launched in Rabat, and Tamazight lessons were introduced in primary schools. An Amazigh TV channel was also launched in 2006.

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTOR'S ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT

After the Amazigh Charter of the 1990s, the 2000 Manifesto was a turning point and a real involvement of civil society in the cause. The ACM is made up of civil society associations scattered all over Morocco, mainly in the Rif region, High and Middle Atlas areas, the Agadir region, and Rabat. These NGOs main mission is the defense of the Amazigh culture and language. I believe that the main involvement came from intellectuals and activists. The first involvement was the drafting of the Berber Manifesto. The manifesto was written by Mohamed Chafik, who presented it to a series of personalities with the purpose of getting them to sign it. Among them are some of the main activists of this cause, as well as personalities connected to the regime, but who nonetheless sympathizers of the movement.



Although the text raised some questions, 229 people signed their name, and it was sent to the palace in March 2000, however it was only met with an indirect as opposed to a direct response. After its launch, the petition soon reached one million signatories. A Manifesto Follow-up Committee (National Amazigh Manifesto Committee, CNMA) was formed in Bouznika, bringing together 15 people, five from each of the three regions, who were responsible for publicizing and disseminating this text. An annual congress was convened, calling for the participation of all its supporters. While some seemingly more moderate initiatives are permitted by the authorities, others are harshly repressed, and there are innumerable examples of the ban on colloquia and demonstrations in recent years.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

The most important strategies used by the movement are first the foundation of local associations in regions where the Amazigh language is spoken, mainly in the Rif, Middle and High Atlas, and Souss/South of Morocco, for the purpose of being near to the people which they represent. The second strategy is the presence of Amazigh activists in university campuses showing and defending the Amazigh culture and language. The third one is memberships in international bodies, mainly in the UN autochthon bodies to put pressure on the government and the regime to abide by international covenants related to cultural and in linguistic rights. The fourth strategy is organizing protests and sit-ins on various occasions, mainly in Maydays and 20 February movement events, all while carrying the Amazigh flag, a symbol of the movement.

INFLUENCING FACTORS OR POLICY WINDOWS

In the climate of appropriation and institutionalization of the issue, the 2001 throne speech was the moment chosen by the king to address the Amazigh question and announce the project to create the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM). It offers a positive vision of the Amazigh contribution to the national culture, describing it as a "national wealth."

As announced in its 8th article, as well as for the Consultative Council of Human Rights (CCDH), all the decisions of the board of directors are subject to the approval of the king by the President of the IRCAM. To confirm the subordination to official policy, its budget, like that of the CCDH, comes from the budget of the royal court.

The actions taken so far to recognize the Amazigh language and culture remain to be evaluated; however, the Amazigh question in Morocco is differently dealt with compared to other countries in the Maghreb. Through the IRCAM, the process of institutionalization has taken place and affected the way forward in the recognition of the Amazigh language and culture in the future.

TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENTS

The first transformative moment was the introduction of Amazigh in curriculum in schools; it was introduced in the 2003-2004 school year, and the 'experimental teaching' was extended to 930 schools. According to figures from the Ministry of Education and Youth, the standardization of this teaching at the primary and secondary levels was promised to be done in 2008 but the promise was not kept, a forecast which seems very optimistic given the difficulties currently posed by the application of this measure (lack of specialized teaching material, of trained teachers, problematic of the standardization of language, etc.).

Another transformative moment during this period was the debate on whether to create an Amazigh party. For many years, the only parties claiming a Berber component as a specific trait were 'official-list' parties from the Popular Movement (PM), whose rhetoric was mainly about improving the rural areas, their activism being virtually non-existent. As for the promotion of Amazighity, the 'Berber officialism' was partly put forward to counterbalance the power of the parties from the National Movement, and was carried by conservative rural elites associated with power. After the 2002 elections, the various forces of the Mouvement Populaire decided to coordinate their actions in parliament, constituting the influential 'haraka' (MP, MNP and Democratic Union) unit of more than 50 parliamentarians, and it is very likely that his Berber counterpart is going to intensify its efforts. The third transformative moment was the Amazigh activists joining the 20 February movement. It then became a force of change by leading the 20 February movement in regions like the southeast, north and south of Morocco.

POLICY OUTCOME

The claim of Amazigh culture and identity is part of the agenda of the human rights movement in Morocco, and not only because it concerns the claim of cultural rights. The struggle of the ACM is part of the references of human rights as they are recognized internationally and makes this common heritage the basis of its activism. Any advancement in the human rights discourse and practice in Morocco meant the advancement of the Amazigh cause. The 2003 dynamism in human rights in Morocco paved the way for the ACM to harvest the fruits of this long battle, the constitutionalization of the Amazigh language in 2011. This culminated in the 2011 reformed constitution recognizing the Amazigh language as a national language.

Although the MCA's impact in Morocco has been modest in the symbolic and substantive domains and even rarer in the implementation of public policies, with regard to the symbolic dimension, particularly during the 1990s, the possession of an alternative discourse, clearly differentiated from official discourse, with significant critical potential, contributed to the identification and configuration of problems that until now have not been a true political objective. However, the consolidation of new values related to the acceptance of diversity, and the transformation of language and the political culture in general, remain distant goals.

As for the substantive dimension, it implies access to decision-making centers and determined governance networks. That is why it can only be accomplished when spaces of freedom, however small, exist. This 'reformist' path makes it possible to weigh in more

or less directly on the formatting of legally guaranteed decisions. A part of the Amazigh militancy, by deciding to integrate IRCAM and by accessing certain decision-making centers, the institute works on the standardization and diffusion of the Amazigh language, yet it so far has not obtained more ambitious objectives such as the reform of fundamental texts (constitution, education law, etc.). The option of entering into certain institutions entails the danger of converting them into a guarantor which never follows through, while the external image of this guarantor improves through this collaboration. This explains why some groups within the movement have refused this type of collaboration.

Lastly, with regard to the operational dimension – relating to the application of public policies and the collaboration of services provided by the government – it raises the question of the relative isolation of the movement's members within the political field. The movement moved from the cultural field to the insistence on having a political dimension and debate on the creation of an Amazigh political party; a prospective outcome that has so far been unsuccessful. Moreover, given the current situation of the struggle, both associations and Amazigh national networks present very general requests, without being able to enter into a discussion on specific public policies. It is true that IRCAM is a channel of influence on public policies, but its scope has remained limited (for example, to issues such as the teaching of Amazigh). The ACM faces an important challenge of accepting one's speech and becoming an influential player in the political arena. In spite of this, the contribution of the ACM was important, considering the progress made and the adversity of the dominant symbolic field.

CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

The constitutionalization of the Amazigh language as a national language in the last reformed constitution in 2011 demonstrated that in questions of identity, the policy framework in which the Amazigh claims manifest themselves is of great complexity. This is so clear now that despite its constitutionalization in 2011, the current government could not implement its introduction in all spheres of life in Morocco. Different visions intersect and determine the nature of the debate. The integration approach seems to be dominant among the Amazigh national organizations, that is to say those whose headquarters are in the big cities (like Casablanca and especially in Rabat). It seems that the state coopted the Amazigh leaders by constitutionalizing the language as a brake to the movement not to expand and become a type of separatist movement. This integrative approach succeeded in lessening the effect of the movement on marginalized regions.



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BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid-2018, the “Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World” program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project “Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making”. This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project’s goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media’s expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.

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