**Winter 2022**

**Volume 24, Issue 2**

***The Newsletter of the Amazigh Cultural Association in America***

**Tayect Tamaziyt**

**Tasyunt n Tiddukla Tadelsant Tamaziyt deg Marikan**

**Inside This Issue**



*To submit an article, a poem, a letter to the editor, send an email to: av-editors@googlegroups.com*

# THE AMAZIGH VOICE

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## A New Year, a New Leadership

By Louiza Sellami

As the current leadership's term nears its end, it is worth taking a step back to reflect on the course it has taken, its accomplishments, and to examine some of the challenges that lie ahead. Founded on the principles of democracy and transparency, the Amazigh Cultural Association in America (ACAA) is seen as a model to follow and emulate by some, on the one hand, and, sadly, as elitist by those who prefer to operate on the margins with no structure, on the other hand. Among those that followed in the footsteps of ACAA are the *Tiregwa Foundation* in Canada, an ACAA partner on literary production and readership projects, and *Tiwizi* in Pennsylvania, which could be thought of as a "spinoff" of ACAA, with a specific regional focus. Being governed by an elected board of directors and bylaws is what has made ACAA relatively immune to breakdown and fragmentation over the years. Though a multitude of Amazigh associations exist in the US, based on what is present on social media, each with its own merit, most have a limited scope and are unfortunately transitory as they lack the very permanent structure that ACAA, *Tiregwa* and *Tiwizi* have.

Every two years for the last thirty years, eleven, often less, volunteers, scattered over several US states, with full time jobs and family responsibilities, take it upon themselves to devote what remains of their little free time to come together and run the daily business of an organization of some 150 members, via internet and phone. Some of these volunteers have never met in person nor do they know each other. They are, however, bound by a strong desire to save and promote their heritage. Often, due to a lack of volunteers, some of these members have served several terms and concurrently in more than one capacity. To all these volunteers we owe much gratitude, for their work is the true meaning of service.

Keeping up with ACAA tradition, on January 12, 2023, which corresponds to *Yennayer* (The Amazigh New Year) a newly elected board and president will be announced and will officially take over at the annual meeting late in January to carry on the mission of the association. For the first time, women will make up half of the board. Among them a first-generation Amazigh-American college student and a young Tunisian linguistic professor who discovered her Amazigh roots after coming to America as a graduate student. It is important to have gender and age diversity, as people contribute in different but complementary ways. Youngsters, for instance, bring fresh ideas, new skills and perspectives, and stamina while elders can take a more of a mentorship role as well

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**The Amazigh Voice**

*The Amazigh Voice* (***ISSN 1526-5730)*** *is a bi-annual publication of the Amazigh Cultural Association in America Inc., (ACAA).*



*ACAA is an international nonprofit, cultural, and scientific organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of the Amazigh (Berber) culture in the USA and abroad.*

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The cover page picture was taken by Rabah Seffal at the 2022 book fair held on July 26-31 at the town of At Wasif, Tizi -Wezzu, Algeria.

# Olive Tree - Tazemmurt

Sɣur

Ameziane Lounes

Old sages remember you
Dead or alive.
You wore foliage green
Which covered you in all seasons.
You faced harsh winters
And scorching summers.

You occupied the field of others
Without falling into negligence.
The harvests of your fruit,
Oil guarantees presence.
Your branches, during the night,
Ensures the fire permanently.

Under your vast shade,
The passenger finds rest.
He regains strength and courage,
With a short pause, soon
Will resume his journey
After a siesta, be ready.

For a widow, you were the inheritance;
All care was given to you.
She watched over your pruning
For your fruit to be harvested.
Now your branches wither
Since death snatched her.

Your fate was most cruel
And is never known:
One of those clever men
Came back from town,
To let his equipment through
Cut you below the trunk.

*Translated by M Kamel Igoudjil*

Cfan-am-d yimɣaren
Xas wa yedder wa yemmut.
Iferrawen-im ur ttɣaren
Cetwa, anebdu, tafsut.
Tqubleḍ adfel iweɛren
D uzɣal yessekwen taɣzut.

Xas ma d abandu i telliḍ,
Laɛmer i tḍaɛ lɣella-m.
Deg ustehzi, ur teɣliḍ;
Zzit-im telḥeq s axxam.
Leqcim yessebɛed asemmiḍ
S useḥmu deffir turam.

Amsebrid deg-m isteɛfa;
Tittaɛddaw-am tili.
Talwit, afud mi tt-yufa,
Ur yettaɛdaz i tikli
Bab-is i d-iwwin tanafa
Syin yeṭṭef abrid yuli.

Telliḍ d amur n taǧǧalt;
Ulac astehzi ɣur-s.
Tḥuder-ikem am tmellalt
Aẓar-im yezga yefres.
Tuɣal tuli-kem txellalt
Tamɣart, lmut mi tt-teḥweṣ.

Tawaɣit i m-d-yeḍran,
Am tinna zik ur d-ḍrint.
Yiwen deg widak yeɣran
I d-yuɣalen si temdint,
Igzem ikem ɣef yiẓuran
I wakken ad tɛeddi tmacint.

**Ameziane Lounès** *is a poet in Kabyle and French and a translator of works in Kabyle. In 1995, after the introduction of Tamazight in public schools, he was among the first graduating class of Tamazight teachers. He taught Tamazight for ten years in a middle school in Attouche, Algeria. Currently, he is an educational supervisor at a high school in his native region of Makouda.*

# A Summary of Funded ACAA Projects

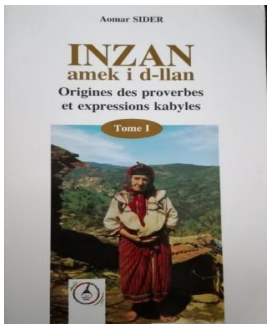
By Louiza Sellami

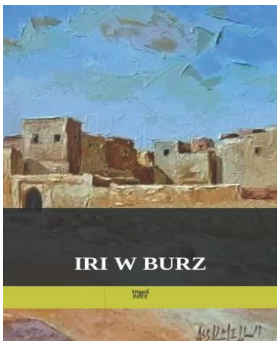
As part of its mission to promote the Amazigh heritage, the Amazigh Cultural Association in America (ACAA) has been sponsoring and funding projects in Algeria and Morocco, and more recently in Tunisia, for over a decade. What began as a small endeavor to help Tamazight writers by purchasing books from them directly and selling them to members, quickly evolved to include the purchase of hundreds of books, from an ever-growing authorship, and donating them to local schools, village libraries, and cultural associations. Over the years, both the number and the variety of projects funded grew to encompass documentaries, a literature prize, and an Amazigh culture summer camp in Tunisia, to name just a few. Below is a summary of some recent projects:

## Literature

- **Tawes Amrouche Literary Prize:** ACAA has contributed to the efforts of the Amazigh-Canadian foundation *Tiregwa* at encouraging Amazigh literary production in Algeria. For the last two years, ACAA has co-sponsored the newly created Tawes Amrouche Prize for children's books in four age groups. Additionally, ACAA has committed to purchasing a selection of books from the runners-up for distribution to various educational and cultural entities.


- **Publications:** ACAA has purchased several hundreds of books from Aomar Sider (Kabylia, Algeria), Moha Bensaine (Morocco), and Saida Abouba (Aures, Algeria). The first volume in a series of three, Sider's *Inzan Amek i d-llan (*On the Origins of Kabyle Proverbs and Expressions), published in December 2021, is a collection of 120 proverbs and expressions along with associated stories and fables in both Tamazight and French. The book is an important addition to previous publications on the subject by other authors, as it delves into the genesis and the stories behind these proverbs.




*Iri w Burz (*Treasure of Pride) is a 179-page novel written in Tamazight, using Latin characters, and published in May 2022 in Morocco. Through its five chapters, the author, Moha Bensaine, mixes imagination with reality to uncover historical events that shaped a young man's aspirations and actions.


Betta, *Le Combat d'une Auressiene* (Betta, The Struggle of an Auresian Woman) is Saida Abouba's second novel. The book recounts the life story of her mother in the 70's, which, she says, is also the story of every Auresian woman of that time. To these women, Abouba pays a tribute that interweaves humility, devotion, and bravery. Offering readers slices of Auresian life and female portrait, this story lifts the veil on an extraordinary mother figure, as well as on the traditions and customs that prevail in the little-known Aures region of Algeria.

### Audio-Visual Projects

- Artisanal Trades of Morocco, by Hassan Oubrahime, is a documentary series of four episodes of five to ten minutes each focusing on some disappearing ancestral Amazigh trades and art. The goal is twofold: preserve these trades and gather lexicon cor-

*(Continued on page 19)*

# An Amazigh in America

## Using Language and Culture to Stay Connected to Amazigh Identity

By Tiziri Seffal

It is 3am on a Friday night, and I cannot sleep. As I hear the pitter-patter of the raindrops against my window, I know that the only sounds of life at this hour are the motorists driving on the highway and the Chicago Transit Authority blue line that runs 24/7. I have grown accustomed to these sounds of the night which are usually able to lull me to sleep. Tonight, however, after tossing and turning, my restless mind wandered to the topic I was asked to write about for this article: my experience learning the Amazigh language (Tamazight). I have been grappling with this for months as it has become harder to put thoughts and feelings on paper than it is to hold an internal dialogue with myself. The reason behind my struggle is that language, culture, and identity mutually influence one another, which is why I cannot talk about learning the Amazigh language and leave out these other important factors. Thanks to my current and recent graduate classes at the University of Illinois at Chicago, I have gained insight on myself and my own language experiences as a young multilingual and can reflect on those years from a different lens.

### Identity

"It rhymes with misery." That is the first thing I tell people when I introduce myself. After years of following my introductions with the background of my name and educating (if not informing) people on what Amazigh is and who we are, I have become immune to the negative connotation that comes with using a word like "misery." After all, it is only for pronunciation purposes. But for me, it all starts with my name. If I had a different name, I would not be the same person.

My response on cue to being asked the origin of Tiziri is to say that "Berbers are the indigenous people of North Africa," and if I were given a blank stare, I would add an analogy of "like the Native Americans to America, the Berbers were there before the Arabs." But what also came with my name and our family heritage that is atypical to White monolingual mainstream students was the lack of connection to the source of my origins. In the U.S., we are the Algerian neighbors and friends, whereas in Algeria, we are known as the American nieces and cousins to the family we visited every two years in the summer. As a teenager, when I started to mold my sense of identity and community, it was difficult because I never truly "belonged" – which is all I wanted as a 16-year-old high school student. My skin was too olive, and my hair was too curly to be placed into a category that made sense. However, now as a 29-year-old, I prefer being unique and standing apart from the crowd. Being normal is boring and means that I would not be able to translanguage with family or have the perspectives and experiences that come with being an American-born Amazigh.

One of my favorite parts of my identity is being a "multilingual fly on the wall." During our trips to Algeria, I would often accompany my older cousins on their errands to deliver the traditional dresses that my aunt sewed for women in the village. Sometimes these *tiqendyar* (dresses) deliveries would take up to an hour, as the girls would naturally gossip. As they chatted away, I would sit next to them and listen but not speak and only occasionally respond when directly asked a question. When my cousins and I would leave, I would ask questions about specific details that I missed or perhaps give my reaction to the hot gossip. My cousins would stop in their tracks, turn to look at me and say "*tfehmaḍ d acu tenna-d*?" ("you understood what she said?") and then laugh. This is why I use the phrase "fly on the wall" or chameleon perhaps, because I can blend into the background and still soak up all of the information that is being shared. The presence of a slim foreigner accompanying her cousins is non-threatening, which allows them to feel comfortable and more likely to share secrets. Perhaps it was a little evil, but it was a handy skill when walking the village streets and hearing people's comments about me or my family.

### Language

I often get asked which language I consider to be my first. The issue is that there was no one language that I learned before the others, which is often unsatisfactory to those posing the question. Instead, our family used a combination of Tamazight and French as home-languages and my sister and I learned English through social interactions that took place outside of the home such as daycare, afterschool, public school, friends, and sports teams. In addition to French being a home-language, through material

provided by the French *Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance,* a public provider of distance learning, I was home-schooled in French until soccer tournaments took over my weekends. Additionally, I chose to learn Spanish as my high school foreign language and continued with it through my undergraduate program as one of my double majors.

How did I learn Tamazight being this far from the homeland? The answer is simple yet hard to express. I learned it through the strict use of Tamazight and French at home. My dad never – and I mean never – spoke to us in English. To this day, he does not use it with me nor my sister. He believed that we would learn English outside of the home (which is true) and that we did not need it at home. My mom was a little more lenient and flexible with her use of English in the home, but I may have been guilty of that; therefore, she is not to blame. Besides, any time my mom, sister, and I were sitting on the couch conversing in English, we would hear from the door leading to the basement a voice yelling out "*D acut l'anglais agi*?" ("What is this English?"). The man, my father, was downstairs on the computer working away, yet he was listening in on us! Now, I know where my "fly on the wall" mentality comes from. After several years of hearing him shout this phrase from the basement, I acquired a witty response of "*Eğğ imezzuɣen-ik ar ɣur-ek*" ("Keep your ears to yourself") which satisfied him.

In honesty, I can only imagine the difficulties my parents may have encountered, yet my Tamazight abilities only exist as they were adamant about maintaining their mother tongue within the household and passing it down to my sister and me. My father recognized the importance of learning the language for us to communicate with our extended family and creating a bond between our families despite residing an ocean apart. With grandmothers who were not taught French and cousins who may not learn it, it became necessary for us to learn Tamazight and, therefore, build familial connections. I am grateful for this; but during my most recent visit to *tamurt* (homeland) over the summer of 2022, I became growingly aware of my limited vocabulary. This is no fault of my parents and their efforts whatsoever, but I realized that at the age of 29, I have the vocabulary abilities of a 15-year-old. Our bi-annual summer trips could only do so much with growing my Tamazight vocabulary, graduating from college, and landing an adult full-time job led to a five-year hiatus of returning to Algeria.

When I first realized that I had a limited vocabulary, it was quite shocking because the extent to which Tamazight and French are used interchangeably within the Amazigh community blinded me to the idea that Tamazight words for things do exist and that French words are not actually necessary. One time I had traveled to Chicago from Florida for the annual ACAA Yennayer celebration, and I was outside talking with my Amazigh friend Messipsa when his mom came outside. While exchanging the typical greetings, she asked "*Labas, i kemmini? Imawlan-im, ça va*?" ("All is well, and you? How is your family?"). I learned the Tamazight word for family (*imawlan*) as a 23-year-old. Messipsa's mother was surprised that this was a new word for me, and so was I. The number of times the French word *la famille* (family) is used in conversations is astonishing. I remember feeling shocked and disappointed in myself as if I should have known better. If I am Amazigh, then I should know words in Tamazight, but again, the extent to which French is mixed into conversations can have a negative effect and almost create a subtractive effect to language speakers and learners. I have since come to terms with this and accepted that my Tamazight skills consist of an American accent and a restricted Tamazight vocabulary, but I would rather know what I know than nothing at all.

My relationship with Tamazight is an interesting one in that there are "happy accidents," as Bob Ross says, that occur not only at the lexical level but also at the phonetic level. Now, I understand more words than I can speak. My issue, however, arises with reproducing certain words. I can successfully pronounce the uvular /x/ as in *axxam* (house), the glottal /gh/ as in *uriɣ* (I wrote), and the /q/ as in *aqcic* (boy) that is also found in Arabic. What I am referring to is the three-letter or four-letter consonant combinations that exist. My internal dialogue knows what I want to say, and I can pronounce it in my head, but my tongue deceives me and has difficulties creating some sounds because of the consonant combinations. Additionally, I can easily get confused with minimal pairs. An example of a minimal pair would be two words where all sounds are the same except for one (consonant or vowel). In English, this could be "boat" and "bite" where the change is the long /o/ vowel to long /i/ vowel or "bug" and "mug" where the consonants are different. There are several minimal pairs in Tamazight as well that can be dangerous such as *azekka* (tomorrow) and *aẓekka* (tomb); *izi* (a fly) and *iẓi* (gallbladder); and *fecyaɣ* (I am exhausted) and *beccaɣ* (I peed). In addition to these examples, I would highly recommend knowing

the difference between *ɛarday-t* (I tasted it) and *ardiɣ-d* (I farted) and to not use it incorrectly while eating dinner at your uncle's wedding in front of other guests as I did when my mother asked if I had tried one of the dishes on the table. After her initial shock, the woman next to me heard me fumbling between the two words and realized what I had meant and chuckled at my "happy accident."

What speaks to the success of my parents and their teachings of Tamazight and French to my sister and me is our ability to translanguage. For those who are not familiar with this term, translanguaging is the utilization of all one's language abilities to communicate and understand the world and those around us. This requires knowing your audience and its language capabilities, just like how Gad Elmaleh uses French and English in his comedy sketches while touring in the US. Translanguaging, however, is something that not all bilingual or multilingual speakers can do. It requires morphosyntactic knowledge and understanding of both or all languages applied. A sentence such as "Papa, can you get *le livre nni sufella la table*" ("Dad, can you get that book on the table?") requires knowing the proper word order necessary for the question to make sense. Not all bilingual or multilingual speakers can do this as they may not be skilled at using languages interchangeably or with such ease. When my sister and I would create sentences like these, my dad would say "*Muqel kan ar mes filles, elles utilisent trois langues dans une phrase*." ("Look at my daughters, they use three languages in one sentence"). Even he was amazed with our abilities, but again this speaks to the efforts of my parents and their encouragement for home-language use.

Translanguaging is also the application of conjugation and grammar rules from one language to another. For this to successfully work, language speakers must understand parts of speech and suffixes or prefixes to correctly apply them. An example of this would be when my mother was putting eye drops into my eyes and as she walked away, she told me "*smarmuc*" ("blink"). Knowing that she could not see me, I responded to her by saying "I am *smarmuc* -ing! I am *smarmuc*-ing" ["I'm blinking! I'm blinking!"]. By adding the -ing suffix to *smarmuc*, I was applying English conjugation to a Tamazight verb, thus showing my understanding of rules of both languages and translanguaging.

**Culture**

Culture is the way of life, world views, values, identity and traditions that are shared amongst a community. Moreover, culture and language are intertwined in that language is a gateway to culture and identity. Through music, stories, food, and more, learning Tamazight was crucial in maintaining that link to understand our family and our people. Because culture is interwoven with language, identity, and community, I was able to experience certain aspects of Amazigh culture despite not having daily contact with the community.

Cooking Amazigh food provides me with a direct connection to my family as the recipes are my own grandmother's that she passed down. "*Tu veux apprendre? Arwaḥ a twaliḍ*." ("You want to learn? Come and watch"). These were the words my mom often spoke to me when she would make *seksu* (couscous), *ceṛba* (chorba), or my all-time favorite *recta* (an Amazigh pasta dish served with chicken and vegetables in a white sauce). Sadly, I never took my mom up on her offer while living at home. However, sometimes I just get a strong craving for traditional Amazigh food and, when I lived in Florida, I was hit by one of these cravings. With the help of face-time, my mom taught me how to make couscous and the delicious sauce that accompanies it. It turned out wonderfully, and I have since been making all the traditional foods that my heart desires. Am I making Kraft mac n cheese at the moment? Yes, but that is because another craving has hit, and I just had couscous for three days.

Music is another way that we stay connected with our Amazigh culture. My sister and I were, of course, introduced to the classics such as Matoub, Idir, Ait Menguellet, and Takfarinas at an early age. Nevertheless, as non-native Tamazight speakers, it was and still is difficult to make out the words in the songs. I cannot understand all of the lyrics unless someone else is singing along. Unfortunately, our family habits had unknowingly designated Amazigh music for two main occasions: weekly cleaning days when the melodic rhythms rang through the house and as "Highway Music." We often took road trips and during these short or long voyages, we would listen to CD after CD of classic artists. We would be serenaded by the classic songs within five minutes of driving on the highway, hence the assigned title "Highway Music." Although I could not make out the words, those beats are ingrained in my brain so much that I can hum the melody to any of those songs from start to end. Highway Music has a special place in our hearts and our cars. To this day, I still turn on some Amazigh or Algerian music when I feel the need or desire to dance, not just for cleaning days.

*(Continued on Page 20)*

# Tigzirt Rrif n Yilel

Sɣur

Yacine Meghzifene

**Asenked**

Tigzirt d yiwet n tɣiwant i d-yezgan di tnebḍit n Tizi Wezzu, gar kraḍ n tɣiwanin nniḍen . Ger umalu d Delles, yettekin ar ugezdu n Bumerdas s 26 n yikilumitren, ɣer usammer d Aẓeffun s 37 n yikilumitren, seg unẓul d taɣiwant n Tizi Wezzu s 40 n yikilumitren, ɣer ugafa d ilel agrakal. Di tallit n Ṛumman, Tigzirt yettunefk-as yisem n Yum Yum. Degs llant kraḍ n tɣiwanin: Iflissen m-uɣur azal n 38 tuddar, Mizrana s 17 tuddar, akked n Tegzirt n tura i as-d-yezzin s wazal n 12 tuddar. S umata Tigzirt ɣures azal n 36,000 imezdaɣen, tajumma ines ad tessiweḍ armi d 166,38 Km².

**Tiftisin**

Tigzirt ɣur-s aṭas n teftisin, garasent taftist tameqqrant yellan di tlemmast n teɣremt i yugaren ukk tiftisin yellan. Ger tama-s taẓelmat, ɣef lewhi n sin ikilumitren, ad tafeḍ taftist n Tsalast. Dɣa ma terniḍ srid akkin tewwiḍ abrid n Delles, teddiḍ azal n sedis n yikilumitren, ad tawḍeḍ ɣer taddart umi qqaren Amazar anida ad tafeḍ teftisin n Tiza, Bu Yilef, d Aẓru. ɣas akken tiftisin tiweḥciyin, maca aṭas n yemdanen i d-irezzun ɣur-sent.

Si tama tayeffust n teftist tameqqrant, s kraḍ n yikilumitren ad tawḍeḍ ɣer wemḍiq umi ssawalen Farɛun. Degs llant kraḍ teftisin, msettbaɛent kra u yerna yal yiwet s unekcum-is. Ma terniḍ srid akin tewwiḍ abrid n Uẓeffun, dinna ad tafeḍ iman-ik di tɣiwant n Yeflissen. Taftist tamezwarut ara tafeḍ qqaren as Sidi Xaled. S semmus n yikilumitren srid d taftist n Ubeccar i gellan. Ma terniḍ ɣer sdat ukuẓ ikilumitren, ad tawḍet ɣer teftist n Temda Ugemmun.

Tiftisin agi akkit ttilint seddaw n tɣellist n yiɣalen n laman, d yiɛewamen usellek. Ula d tiftisin nni tiweḥciyin ttilin deg-sent wat taddart, akken ad ḍemnen taɣellist n umerzaf. Deg sent yella uneɣsar i tkarrust, leqhawi, tiḥuna, d useccu.

**Imḍiqen i Yezmer Yiwen ad Iẓer**

Gar imḍiqen i yezmer ad yerzu ɣur-sen umerray, yella usagen n unecṛeḥ anda llan iɣaladen i yiɣimi, annar dgi tturaren igwerdan, d tzeqqa usarug. Yella daɣen yiwen wemḍiq yettaken sser i Tegzirt: wagi d aḥmil-nni azegzaw n wakal i d-yufraren ɣef waman. S kra kan lmitrat af usagen, sawalen-as Tigzirt n daxel. Tzemreḍ ad terzuḍ ɣur-s s teflukt. Degs yella unezwu d arusan, akked yimɣan d yifrax ixulfen. Sufella n usagen llan iɣerman d yigulaz n tɣeṛmiwin, iḥuzan Tigzirt, am taɣeṛma Tafiniqit, Tarumanit, Tabiẓantit. Ad tafeḍ dinna takaziṛnt n teswatut tis snat, afakan n umḥaddi n teswatut tis kraḍ, agadir Ibiẓantiyen n testwatut tis semmus seld talalit n sidna Ɛissa. Tzemreḍ ad ten tafeḍ diɣen berra n tɣiwant deg yiwet n tiɣilt di taddart iwumi qqaren Taqseft i d-yusan i tama usammar s ukuẓ ikilumitren anida tella dina yiwet n tqeṛṛabt umi qqaren Sumɛa, akked usedli umi qqaren ameqyas.

**Ansayen, Iremad d Yimezlan**

Taɣiwant n Tegzirt, am tɣiwanin niḍen n tmurt leqbayel, ttilin degs kra n wansayen i d-ğğan imezwura, ar ass-a n wussan mazal ṭṭfen deg-sen yimezdaɣ n tuddar. Gar-asen tella tazeqqa n Sebɛa Lḥeğan di taddart n Tifra i d-yettilin di tallit n ḥertadem. Tameɣṛa-agi tettili-d deg yiwet n tqubet iwumi qqaren taqubet n bu Sebɛa Lḥeğan. Yettunefk-as yisem-agi acku amdan-nni yettunetlen degs iḥuğed sebɛa iberdan. Ttemlilin at taddart dinna, sseccayen yal inebgi i d-irezzun ɣursen.

Tella lweɛda nniḍen, iwumi qqaren Nwel, id yettilin di tefsut di taddart n At Sɛid, di temnat iwumi qqaren Tawwurt n Mḥend Uḥend. Ula d nutni sseccayen inebgawen s yiwet n tgella d timeẓlit, wagi d seksu s yibawen. Diɣen ttilint lweɛdat nniḍen deg ussan imalasen. Sumata, deg wass n warim neɣ umhad, di tqubet n Sidi Bubekker (taddart n Cerfa) yettili usfugel n tmeɣriwin nniḍen am yennayer, ass agraɣlan n tmeṭṭut, taɛacuṛt, lmulud, akked timecṛeṭ deg was n lɛid. Ayen yerzan iremad d yimezlan; ttilin-d yiremad idelsanen, d temliliyin n dabex uḍar gar tuddar n tɣiwanin n temnat, ladɣa deg ussan unebdu.

**Yasin Meɣzifen** *d yiwen ilemẓi yettarun s tmaziɣt. Issaweḍ yewwi-d agerdas -is n Master 2 di tmuzzegt n tesnilest Tamaziɣt deg useggas n 2019. Di 2020 Yebda yettaru deg yiɣmisen n tmaziɣt gar-asen Tiɣremt akked Tussikt n Teqbaylit akken yella deg utekki deg usuffeɣ n yiwet n usegzawal amkerḍawal (Taqbaylit - Tafṛansist - Taglizit).*

# Some Facts About the Amazigh Question

By Salem Chaker

Translated from French by Rachid Dahmani

*Note: Though this article was published in 1994, the analysis, ideas, and opinions expressed in it are still valid today.*

Recent news in Algeria has shown once again that, as far as Imazighen are concerned, clichés die hard. Most of the French press has cheerfully drawn from Epinal's inexhaustible stock of images of the "good Amazigh," "the resistant and democratic Amazigh," who in these threatening times has become the last rampart against the obscurantist and fanatical wave. The imposing demonstrations in favor of the Amazigh language and democracy that took place in Kabylia and in Algiers in the midst of a state of siege reinforced this positive image: the "tolerant, modernist and secular Amazigh" against the Islamist "madmen of God." We even read in some weeklies quite lyrical descriptions of the current situation in Kabylia, worthy of a good western — "Fort Alamo" or "The Last of the Mohicans" where the Kabyle villages communicate by smoke signals while waiting firmly for the Tartars coming from the desert. In short, lines bring us back to the prophecies of the last century (in Algeria) and the beginning of this century (in Morocco) on the many qualities of this sympathetic Amazigh, entrenched in his impregnable mountains, ready to defend his ancestral freedoms with arms. The Amazigh always remains the "good barbarian." This does little to help us understand today's complex political realities.

What is the nature of the Amazigh question in contemporary Algeria, and what is its likely future? Is it a purely cultural claim, essentially linguistic, not calling into question the Nation-State and likely to find a solution within this framework? Or is it a nationalistic, even nationalist, claim in the process of being constituted, carrying within it the seeds of major geo-political upheavals?

The answer must certainly be nuanced and cautioned. First, because on a terrain of this nature, delicate and changing, the observer must show modesty and prudence and admit the necessarily subjective and dated character of any evaluation. The notions of "cultural/identity/national consciousness" are not essences but are historical and social phenomena subject to fluctuation, which can experience various outcomes. However, because Imazighen are diverse and integrated into very heterogeneous environments, the historical, cultural, and political contexts being different, the potentialities of evolution are undoubtedly not the same everywhere; it should be noted that Amazighophony concerns nearly ten countries of the North Africa-Sahara-Sahel group: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Libya, and Egypt. Algeria and Morocco are, by far, the countries with the largest Amazigh-speaking populations (25% in Algeria, 35 to 40% in Morocco), where the "Amazigh question" arises with real acuity.

Incidentally, we should emphasize the importance of these figures: 25% in Algeria, 40% in Morocco, that is millions of people (6 to 7 million in Algeria and ten million in Morocco)! In other words, the demographic weight of North African Amazighophony is considerable: it is not at all a question, neither in Algeria nor in Morocco, of insignificant minorities. The "Amazigh political risk" is, first of all, in the demography, which contains a formidable potential: independent states have been formed, and national conflicts have risen on the basis of much smaller populations. Basically, we can even affirm that if there were no geographical fragmentation of Amazighophony, there would already be an Amazigh State in North Africa! We will never lose sight of this fundamental fact because it allows us to better understand the debate's bitterness and violence as soon as we approach the "Amazigh question" in North Africa. Whatever everyone's point of view and commitments are, the stakes and the risks are considerable.

The current situations are also not identical in the various Amazigh-speaking regions within each country: in Algeria, the Aurès is not Kabylia, and in Morocco, the Rif or the Middle Atlas react and evolve without doubt differently than the Chleuh world in terms of the relationship to the Amazigh language and identity, not to mention the Tuareg world, torn between five distinct countries. This implies, in order to stay away from generalities and avoid abusive extrapolations or clichés, a particular approach should be devised for each country and for each region. We will strictly limit our focus here to the case of Kabylia.

## Algeria, a hostile ideological and political environment

Since independence, Algeria has been defined constitutionally as Arab and Muslim: the successive

constitutions since 1963 are perfectly homogeneous and constant on this level. The linguistic and cultural policy implemented by the FLN [*Front de Liberation National*, the dominant political party that has been in power since Algeria's independence in 1962] and the various governments was that of Arabization and re-Islamization. From this point of view, it is always good to remember that the Algerian Islamists "do not fall from the sky": They are very largely the concrete product of a cultural and educational policy pursued with constancy since independence. Further, the dominant Arabo-Islamic ideology, when it is made explicit, considers linguistic diversity a danger to national unity and a germ of division, and linguistic unification is supposed to complete national construction.

In fact, in Algeria, what has been at work since independence is nothing other than the political concretization of the old ideological options of the National Movement. From the origin of Algerian nationalism (1925/1930), the projected national identity and nation-state have always been defined as Arabo-Islamic. I believe that this option is all the more rooted in the Algerian ideological (and intellectual) universe in that it is based on a double filiation: the mythical model of the homogeneous Islamic city, united around the monarch, the legitimate head of the community believers, on the one hand, and the French model of the nation-state centralized, linguistically and culturally unified, on the other hand. Moreover, an asserted political radicalism (notably in the "populist independentist" branch of nationalism, see the work of Harbi) has considerably reinforced the tendency to reject diversity. This environment of exclusion and hostility has had decisive political consequences, especially during the last two decades, characterized by a clear awakening of Amazigh identity consciousness.

This period is, indeed, that of the major protest movements that shook Kabylia starting in March 1980. I have analyzed at length elsewhere the conditions, the remote and immediate causes, and the meaning of this "Amazigh Spring of Kabylia" of 1980 (Chaker 1989/1990). The essential point is to repeat that this event constitutes a real historical turning point and that it has indeed been experienced as such, not only by the Kabyles but also by most of the other Amazigh-speaking regions. In 1980, for the first time in the known history of North Africa, an Amazigh-speaking group clearly affirmed its right and its will to exist through a request for institutional recognition of its language and culture.

Kabylia, the main Amazigh-speaking region of Algeria, therefore, occupies a place that is both specific and pioneering in relation to the "Amazigh question." A tradition of autonomy and resistance to the secular central power, a deep and already ancient Western acculturation (through school and emigration), the seniority of the training, and the importance of the local elites have made this region the "spearhead" of linguistic claims. It is there, incontestably, that one can follow with the most precision the developments of the Amazigh aspiration, in particular its explicit, cultural, ideological, and political aspects.

**A very new situation since 1989**

After the "October events"of 1988 and the political upheavals they entailed, the Kabyle terrain underwent considerable changes. A political party — *Rassemblement pour la culture et la democracie* (Rally for Culture and Democracy) or RCD — was founded by a group of Amazigh activists in early 1989. Amazigh cultural associations have multiplied in Kabylia, the diaspora, and in other Amazigh-speaking regions. Several "culturalist" clusters have been set up: Amazigh Cultural Movement (MCB), National Federation of Amazigh Cultural Associations (FNACA). All this organic work added to the more traditional *Front des Forces Socialistes* aka FFS (Socialist Forces Front) [opposition political party with Kabyle implantation founded by Hocine Ait Ahmed in 1963] whose recruitment is almost exclusively Kabyle and which explicitly integrated the Amazigh cultural and linguistic question into its political platform in 1979.

It will be recalled that until the end of 1988, no Amazigh cultural association had ever been able to legally exist in Kabylia. We measure how new the situation is for an Amazigh movement which, since independence, had existed only clandestinely, almost permanent repression, and "relocation" to France: now, it expresses and organizes itself in broad daylight in Algeria. An Amazigh publishing house is painfully set up, newspapers are beginning to use the Amazigh language, and meetings, conferences, and festivals devoted to the Amazigh language and culture are multiplying. Also, two Amazigh language and culture departments have been created at the universities of Kabylia (*Tizi Wezzu* in 1990 and *Bgayet* in 1991). In short, the almost absolute prohibition has been succeeded by real tolerance.

**The central state: constitutional continuity/ political flexibility**

If the approach has been different since 1989, this does not mean that the central state has modified

its doctrine in terms of language and culture. The last constitution of February 23, 1989, unambiguously reaffirmed previous options in this area: —art. 2: "Islam is the state religion" — art. 3: "Arabic is the national and official language." Further, it takes great care to prohibit *a priori* the creation of political organizations on a regional basis (art. 9/2) or which could undermine national unity (art. 40/2). The law on "associations of a political nature" voted in July 1989 by the Assembly is even more explicit since it prohibits the formation of political parties on linguistic basis. The Amazigh political danger is always perfectly perceived and circumscribed by the central State.

Of course, the constitutional text of 1989, if it remains the last available reference, no doubt no longer has much political significance: this constitution has been, *de facto*, suspended since January 1992, when the electoral process was halted, and power was directly seized by the Army. Hence, the political situation has changed profoundly since then. The political and social polarization —with the Army on one side, and the Islamists on the other— has become extremely accentuated, and violence is well established. At the same time, all the other political and social actors, who were already organically very weak and whose representativeness was often problematic, were marginalized.

**Between culture and politics**

This new situation, where the contradictions have been exacerbated, obviously raises questions about the social and political meaning (subsequently about the future) of the Amazigh claim in Kabylia. Is it outdated? Is it soluble in the national political game?

**A constant: the aspiration of identity**

On the substance—the nature of the Amazigh claim in Kabylia—my opinion has been formed for a long time, and recent developments have only reinforced it: things are clear and can be easily identified because the Amazigh aspiration has numerous and varied expressions over an already considerable period of time (Cf. Chaker 1987 and 1989/1990). It is about the claim for recognition of a particular linguistic entity, which is basically a problem of a cultural minority. All Amazigh discourse (cultural or ideological) in Kabylia revolves around a very simple statement: "Tamazight is our language, not Arabic; we are Amazigh, not Arabo-Muslims!" What is demanded is the constitutional and geographical inscription of an objective particularism and the cultural rights that flow from it, particularly that of living in and through one's language. The Kabyles ultimately reject the founding thesis of "Arab and Muslim Algeria" to substitute another vision: "Algeria is Arab and Amazigh." Basically, it is indeed the so-called "Algerian Algeria" thesis of the Amazigh activists of 1949 that is succeeding in Kabylia, but it is forty years late (Cf. Carlier, Ouerdane, Harbi)!

**The "Amazigh" parties in Algeria**

Contrary to what journalistic writings may have led one to believe, there is no Amazigh political party in Algeria: there are political parties with Amazigh sociological roots but no party with an objective that is specifically Amazigh. All are expressly part of a national perspective, and the Amazigh linguistic and cultural claim is, for all of them, only one particular aspect of a more global political positioning. The latest of these organizations, the RCD, asserts itself insistently as a social-democratic formation and not as an Amazigh party, recalling on all occasions its national vocation. As for the FFS and its founder, they never expressly wanted "to lock themselves up in the Kabyle ghetto" and engage in a strictly Amazigh strategy. On this point, at least, there has been, until now, perfect convergence between the two political parties emanating from Kabylia.

Of course, these organizations will dispute this analysis and will insist on their Algerian nationalist good faith by putting forward an alleged national presence. This is, without possible discussion, either self-deception[1] or a gross falsification of reality. Neither the RCD nor the FFS, despite all their efforts, have succeeded in getting out of the famous Kabyle ghetto: even outside Kabylia, their electoral base is strictly Kabyle. The map of the results of the first round of the legislative elections of December 1991 leaves no doubt on this point; the FFS and the RCD exist electorally only in Kabylia and in the towns of strong Kabyle emigration (certain districts of Greater Algiers, in particular). It is not the few isolated Arabic speakers —always intellectuals— who have been able to join these parties who will change this overwhelming trend. We cannot, therefore, speak, for the time being, of Amazigh parties but only of the forces which rely on a widespread aspiration in Kabylia to constitute themselves organically and impose themselves on the national political chessboard, with strategies more or less independent of the popular aspiration behind them. The ideological and strategic gap between these parties—at least at the level of their official expressions—and their base is flagrant.

**An inevitable empowerment of the Amazigh claim?**

Can the Amazigh linguistic claim actually be channeled and integrated into an Algerian national strategy or alternative, whatever it may be? This is obviously a crucial question for the future of Algeria and, undoubtedly, of North Africa. For me, I doubt it more and more, and I would even tend to think now that such an evolution is undoubtedly excluded. In fact, the hypothesis seems quite inconsistent (or idealistic) for two types of converging reasons.

The first reason is that the assertion of Amazigh identity is developing in an ideological terrain that is deeply hostile to it. Overall, the dominant political culture in Algeria remains deeply marked by its adherence to Arabo-Islamism and, more particularly, to Arabism, all tendencies and sensitivities included. The reference to the Arabic language conceived as the defining parameter of the Algerian nation is an unquestionable dogma. Moreover, the Arab geopolitical environment is also marked by a structural hostility to Amazigh dimension: everywhere in the Arab world, and even in the Middle East, Imazighen are perceived as a danger to Arabism and Arabness. Whatever the evolution of the political balance of power, I am, therefore, quite skeptical as to the possibility of recognition by the Algerian State of Tamazight as a national language on an equal footing with Arabic. It would be calling into question the very bases of the Algerian nation-state, which is difficult to see how it could be envisaged and accepted by the ambient and dominant Arabo-Islamism.

The second reason is that, on a more strictly political level, the integration—and the resolution—of the Amazigh question in any national alternative would suppose that such an alternative existed. Indeed, this has been the strategy of the two Kabyle political parties (FFS and RCD) until now: to include this cultural issue within the framework of a national democratic project. It is now obvious, notwithstanding any idealism or hollow discourse, that here again, we do not see at all where the political and sociological contours of this hypothetical democratic alternative would be. All the objective data, in particular, the real electoral tests of 1990 and 1991, show this democratic alternative does not exist no matter what voting method is used. Based on the known data, the national democratic alternative in Algeria is purely theoretical, or at the very least, a very hypothetical and distant prospect. The reality may be unpleasant, but it is there and stubborn: democratic currents are very much in the minority, if not insignificant, in Algeria — especially if we do not confuse democrats with modernists!

Some dreams of a national democratic alternative centered on Kabylia and the recent demonstrations in Kabylia and Algiers —for "Tamazight" and democracy—seem to have given some hope to the proponents of this hypothesis. Still, Kabyle democracy will probably not become a chance for Algeria to emerge from the crisis because it is first Kabyle before being democratic or, if you will, democrat because of Kabyle.

For my part, I remain convinced that Kabylia and the Kabyle political leaders—including Aït-Ahmed despite his historical legitimacy—will never have the capacity to federate around them a significant current of opinion at the national level. They are and will remain Kabyle and, at best, will "bite" on a very small part of the Arab-speaking urban intelligentsia. All the available indices clearly establish that the Arabic-speaking/Amazigh-speaking linguistic distinction corresponds, at the level of global sociological data, to a political divide. The various attempts at democratic mobilization initiated by the Kabyle parties, in particular the FFS, have never significantly succeeded beyond the Kabyle populations, including in the case of the demonstrations that took place in Algiers. A democratic Algeria around Kabylie is a fiction, a daydream, without any sociological, ideological, or political consistency.

What can we conclude? Kabylia, increasingly isolated and squeezed between the pressures of the army and that of the Islamists, will probably be forced fairly quickly to develop a specific strategy which could take the form of an autonomist project within a federalist framework, or to disappear, first as a force and political potential, then, in the longer term, as an ethnolinguistic reality. Let us not forget that time, for thirteen centuries, has been working against Amazighophony.

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# Attending Book Fairs in Kabylia

The Highlight of a Summer Vacation

Written and photographed by Rabah Seffal

Soon after I arrived in Algeria at the end of April 2022, a brother-in-law reconnected me with my friend, Hamza Ould-Mohand, an Amazigh activist. I was excited to learn about two upcoming book fairs in the Kabylia region. The first was a children's book fair in the village of *At-Saada* in *Yatafen* held on June 23-25. The second was held in the town of *At-Wasif* at the foothill of the Djurdjura mountains on July 26-30.


*Figure 1: Primary school of At-Saada.*

## The Children's Book Fair of *At-Saada*

Under the theme "My book, my friend," the fair was held at the *At-Saada* primary school. It was organized by the cultural association *Tagmatt* (Brotherhood) and the *Collectif des Femmes d'At-Saada* (Women's Caucus of *At-Saada*).

After my arrival, a local resident mentioned that the primary school had been built in 1895. He then invited me to discover another use of the building, taking me through an iron gate to the back. We accessed two small doors that led us to a few underground rooms he described as torture chambers used during the French occupation. He pointed out the paradox of the same premises being built to teach children and torture the revolutionaries.

The book fair activities during the two days were numerous and attracted the locals as well as visitors from other villages. There were several bookstands from publishers from *Tizi-Wezzu* and Algiers, offering books in Tamazight, French, and Arabic. Several authors had brought copies of their books which they discussed with interested readers. One of them, Ahcene Mariche, whose poems have previously been published in *The Amazigh Voice,* showcased his books as well as four card games in Tamazight. He also delighted the audience by orating one of his poems.


*Figure 2: Ahcene Mariche displays his books and card games.*

*Figure 3: Display of Children's drawings: The colorful work is by Tinhinan Bourai, a member of the Association Idles Negh of Boudjima.*

The book fair also organized conferences and panel discussions focused on the teaching and learning of Tamazight and the difficulties and challenges to promote it. The speakers included Hacene

Halouane, Djamel Laceb, Ramdane Abdenbi, amongst many others. The main issue raised in the promotion of Tamazight was the lack of organic laws that include Tamazight in the Algerian governmental functions. A panel member highlighted the discrepancy in the promotion of Arabic compared to that of Tamazight. This is despite Article 4 of the Algerian constitution which declares Tamazight as a national and official language. Another issue is the fact that Tamazight remains optional in public schools, which is detrimental to its learning and promotion, and thus allowing parents to opt their kids out.


*Figure 4: Round-table about the teaching of Tamazight*

An audience member argued that Tamazight was now an official and national language, as if that should be the end game. Instead, Djamel Laceb responded by formulating the need to put Tamazight and Arabic on equal footing in terms of promotion. Further, he said that Tamazight should get more funding and promotion to make up for what had been confiscated during previous years. He indicated that what had been achieved by Tamazight throughout these years had to be dragged out of the government, which was not forthcoming.

Hacene Halouane, a French professor at the University of Mouloud Mammeri in *Tizi-Wezzu*, mentioned that Tamazight was not taught and, in fact, was even forbidden for many years. He added that today the history of the 1954 Algerian war of independence is not taught to young generations. As a case in point, he once showed the picture of an Algerian revolutionary to a student, and when the latter failed to recognize the man in the picture, Halouane told him that it was Krim Belkacem. Seeing no reaction from the student, he added that he was Michael Jackson's uncle.

Speaking on the teaching of Tamazight, writer and journalist Djamel Laceb talked about a child who wanted to sign up for Tamazight classes in school, but his father refused because he thought Tamazight would lead his son nowhere. Laceb said, "That brought tears to my eyes. I am a fan of the Arabic language, but we need Tamazight too."

Given that the book fair was geared toward children, the program included specific activities for them. I attended a workshop in writing and another in drawing in the morning. After lunch, the primary school students performed a song about the importance of book reading, after which they gathered around some village women in a room decorated with Kabyle artifacts for a storytelling session.

*Figure 5: Folktale session*

## Amazigh Book Fair of At-Wasif (*Tamsrit n Udlis Amazigh At Wasif)*

### The Press Conference

On July 23, a press conference was held at the Ferhat Oumalou room at the offices of the *Tizi-Wezzu* radio station. Three representatives from the organizing committee, Hamid Bilek, Hassane Halouane, and Salem Usalas, said that about 180 authors were invited to the book fair along with 28 publishers. They also mentioned the numerous sponsors, whose list could be found on the book fair program. They explained why the book fair dates were moved and provided the conference themes. Hamid Bilek, a former official of the *Haut Commissariat à l'Amazighité* (High Commission for Amazighity), presented the conference as a part of the renaissance of the Amazigh language and culture. With the goal of promoting reading, their association (*L'Hadj Mokhtar Nat Said*) was planning on donating books to local schools.

*Figure 6: View of Taletat of the Djurdjura range*

**The Book Fair**

The book fair took place on July 26-30, 2022, at the *Centre de Formation Professionnel et d'Apprentissage* (Center for Professional Training and Learning) of *At-Wasif* located at the foothill of the Djudjura range in the Atlas Mountains. A site view included the famously beautiful *Taletat*, meaning the little finger in Tamazight. The French reportedly referred to it as *La Main du Juif* (The Hand of the Jew) because the peaks resemble the fingers of a hand.

This was the second annual book fair organized by the association *L'hadj Mokhtar Nat Said*, this time dedicated to Samir Arkam, a lawyer and a strong promoter of Tamazight as early as 2000 who worked tirelessly to introduce Tamazight to the digital world. He passed away on July 26, 2021, from Covid-19 complications while in the midst of completing the announcements in Tamazight for passengers of the Algerian airline and rail transport companies.

L'Hadj Mokhtar Nat Said was a learned man and a poet who led Kabyle freedom fighters in 1830 to the battle of *Staouali* against the French invaders. In 1851, L'Hadj Mokhtar was one of the leaders of the infantry who fought the *Makhzen* horsemen of Abid Chemla. He remained in the resistance until Kabylia fell into French control at the *Ichariden* battle in 1857.

When I first arrived at the fair, I was struck by the large number of authors present, each one sitting at a table with their books on display in a shaded area. They certainly did not want to miss the fair in spite of the hot July weather. Then, I noticed several women dressed in colorful dresses appearing like flowers in a field of men. That is when I decided to capture the moments by asking the few I saw to pose for a picture with their books. Then, I proceeded to talk to the authors and interview them. Their books were written in French, Tamazight, or Arabic. In addition to non-fiction and fiction books, there were many poetry books. I found within these women both sensibility and eagerness to share their lives, dreams, and hope. Hiba Tayda, a French middle school teacher, wrote two poetry books: *Papillon de nuit (The Night Butterfly)* and *Un slow avec le destin (A Slow with Destiny).* Upon reading *Papillon de nuit,* I discovered that her writing was immensely powerful, drawing the reader into her world. Tayda writes, "a world without women is a world without sweetness," and "despite that they [men] beat us."

Author Ouarda Baziz Cherifi, a retired middle school English teacher, showcased her two books, "*Tu seras grand, mon fils" (You Will be Big, my Son) and "Principes et amertumes"* (*Principles and Bitterness*). The first title focuses on society and shares a mother's fight for her autistic child. The second title recounts the story of an Algerian man who leaves his homeland and forgets about his wife and children, only to be unexpectedly reunited with one of them.

*Figure 7: From left to right: Writers and poets, Ouarda Baziz Cherifi, Chabha Sider, Zaina Ifrah, Asma Hambli, and Fatiha Bouchiba.*

There was also Adila Katia whose writings appeared in the newspapers *Le Soir d'Algérie* and *Liberté.* Adila shares with her readers her experience of growing up in France as the child of an immigrant and who suddenly had to readjust to life in Algeria. Her book is titled *Beauvais: sur les traces de mon enfance* (*Beauvais: On the Trails of my Youth*).

Fatiha Bouchiba's journey to writing is unique. Without the benefit of eyesight, she is now a sopho-

more at the University of *Tizi-Wezzu* and has published several books. There was also Zaina Ifrah, dressed in a beautiful Kabyle dress and headscarf, who wrote a folktale book titled *Axxam n Tmucuha* (*The House of Tales*) and *Anyir n Ali bu Tlufa* (*The Forehead of Ali the Troubled*). Despite having only a primary school education, she has collected many lessons in her book about her difficult life growing up in a family that wanted to marry her off. Lastly, born in *Oum El-Bouaghi,* Asma Hambli, a university professor in *Mila,* showcased her book titled Pragmatic Presence in the Amazigh Theater in Algeria, written in Arabic.

**Round Table on Amazigh Literature by Women**

Lynda Hantour and Chabha Bengana spoke during the conference about Amazigh literature by women focusing on several issues including the status of women and sexuality in Kabyle society. Lynda Hantour, a journalist and writer, challenged the audience to recognize many of the obstacles and limits that hinder women's rights and freedom. She mentioned the fact that family honor is always at risk when a woman errs. Her first book in Tamazight is *Iseflan n Tudert (Life Sacrifices)* in which she presents a fictional story that depicts several "flaws" of Kabyle society.


Figure 8: *From left to right: Hamid Bilek, Said Chemack, Lynda Hantour, Moahmed Akli Salhi, Chabha Bengana, and Tanina Halouine.*

Both authors noted that, until recently, not many books in Tamazight were published. Still, the recent interest of people in reading and writing in Tamazight have surprised many. Lynda Hantour claimed that to write in Tamazight is not literature but a battle. In fact, she started to write her book in French. However, Professor Said Chemakh, who teaches Tamazight at the University of *Tizi-Wezzu* pushed her to stop and write it in Tamazight. Chabha Bengana indicated that her university professors gave her the courage to write in Tamazight. In her first book, *Amsebrid* (*The Traveler*), she tackles inter-generational problems. In her book she claimed, "I do not want to be a flower that will wane after its petals fall. I do not want to be a jewel which can be the object of a fight." A member of the audience inquired whether women authors could soon write about sexuality. Ms. Bengana, currently a teacher of Tamazight, mentioned she had challenged herself to do so, but the next morning she could not look at herself in the mirror, bringing the audience to a laughter.

*Figure 9: Writer Farida Sahoui at work after she attended Prof. Said Chemakh's novel writing workshop.*

**Cinema**

Bekacem Hadjadj, a renowned filmmaker, spoke about his experience in making movies in Tamazight. Having made *Macahu* in 1995, the first movie in Tamazight, he started his talk with a history of movie making, pointing out that in the days when movies were silent, acting was the most important ingredient that contributed to a good movie. He also pointed out that he was disappointed by the lack, or almost nonexistent, viewership in theaters in both Algeria and France for movies in Tamazight. That, unfortunately, resulted in fewer funds for fu-

ture endeavors, he said. He also mentioned the risks of not opening up to other peoples and cultures. After his movie *Macahu* came out, a friend asked him what his next project would be. When he told him he was working on dubbing it into Arabic, his Amazigh friend was appalled. Much later, Hadjadj learned that many people who first saw the movie in Arabic went back to watch it in Tamazight because they were curious to see the movie in the original language. He called on the audience not to shoot down Algerian movies in Arabic such as *Les Rameaux de feu* (*The Branches of Fire*), which now can be dubbed into Tamazight. Speaking on the current production of movies and series in Tamazight, he said that what he has seen so far does not qualify as movies. He also posed the question of what defines a Kabyle movie. Is it a Kabyle film if it presents life in a Kabyle society or if the spoken language is Kabyle?

Someone from the audience questioned Mr. Hadjadj about hiring a female actress who spoke Tamazight with an accent for his latest movie *Fatma N Soumer* (2014). He respectfully accepted the raised point; after he complimented the French-Lebanese actress Laëtitia Eïdo for learning Tamazight for her role as Fatma N Soumer, he said that, as a filmmaker, he did not have a choice of placing an actress in a role just because she could speak Tamazight without an accent. In other words, in filmmaking, reciting the lines is not enough. He indicated that dialogue in a book is different from that in a movie because of the impact of the image. Hadjadj explained that the first role of an actor or actress is to show stage presence. He went on to say that the number of female actresses who speak Tamazight without an accent is close to none. He energetically pointed out the Kabyles' reluctance to let their daughters and sisters become actresses is the main reason he had to employ a foreigner.

**Translations**

During the session about translations into and from Tamazight, the panelists presented several issues that authors and translators encounter in their work. Smail Abdenbi, an author of several books, mentioned his need to use as many as forty references for his news dispatches at the Algerian Press Services. Instead of being potentially blamed for inexact translations in Tamazight, he urged the audience and other panelists to provide suggestions and corrections. He emphasized the need of Tamazight to enter many domains to expose the problems and provide solutions.

One panelist proposed the idea of translating Tamazight into other languages. Another panelist suggested a strategy for translating certain books instead of individuals translating what they like. Another panelist indicated that many translations are


*Figure 10: Audience and speakers at the roundtable on the experience in the Amazigh film production*

*(Continued on page 20)*

# A Portrait of an Amazigh Activist: Yella Azzegagh Houha

By Meqqran n'Amer

This is the fascinating and moving saga of Yella Houha, a Chawi Amazigh activist steadfastly attached to his Chawi identity. He continues fighting for the preservation of his cultural heritage: "I am Chawi" and that matters a lot to him.

How is it that we feel so attached to our mother language? It is perhaps because, precisely, the mother language is what made us discover the world to begin with. It is so for Yella, who has a strong attachment to his identity as a Chawi and to the Chawi language, a variant of Tamazight spoken in the Aures region of Algeria.

A long-time Chawi activist, Yella is a founding member of the Movement for the Autonomy of the Chawi (MAC) and the creator of the Chawi flag, with a yellow background and the Z-Amazigh letter in black in the center. This is a flag specific to the land of the Chawis, known as the Aures region. The federal flag that represents all of Imazighen of North Africa has also the Z-Amazigh symbol. Note also that the Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylia has a distinct flag which is sometimes displayed along with the federal Amazigh flag.

Yella was the son of a Chawi veteran, Othmane Houha, who fought the French and was killed during the Algerian war for independence of 1954-1962. When the war ended, Yella Houha, by virtue of being an orphan of a martyr, was enrolled in the Cadets of the Revolution Academy to prepare him for a career in the National Popular Army that replaced the Army of National Liberation after the end of the war. It is in this academy that he started rebelling against the attempts to brainwash him with the ideology of the regime, denying his right to speak Chawi.

Having attended the academy at the age of ten in 1963, he realized that his identity as a Chawi was being replaced by an Arabic one due to the government systemic policy of Arabization. This is in addition to a forced Islamic education and adherence to Islamic practices, including fasting during Ramadan. Following his rebellious activities against the army treatment, he was advised by Colonel Mohamed Salah Yahiaoui, the second most powerful man in the military at that time and a friend of his father's to leave Algeria and go into self-imposed exile for his own safety.

In a long two-part interview given to the Internet TV TQ5, he talks about his journey as an activist, and his relationships with various Kabyle singers, including Idir, and his encounter with Youcef Amazigh who created the Amazigh flag. Below is an excerpt from this interview.

*Figure 1: Yella Houha, Amazigh Activist with the Chawi Flag.*

**TQ5**: This is our two-part series with you Yella Azzeggagh Houha. We would like you to tell our viewers how you became an Amazigh activist, how you entered the military cadet school, and why you left the army to end up in exile in France.

**Yella Houha**: After independence, in 1963 as a son of a martyr of the Algerian revolution, the army decided to enroll me in the school of the cadets of the revolution in Batna, without even the consent of my mother. My father died in the war of independence. I think they [government] wanted to pay their debt to the martyrs by taking care of the orphans. There were 28 of us, and as kids we were terrified.

I spent all my school years with the cadets of the revolution, first in Batna, then Annaba, Guelma, and finally Kolea near Algiers from where I left for good. In fact, I was never a military man. I was not an adult; I was a cadet and a minor. To serve in the military, you have to enlist, and you have to be old enough. I was ten years old in 1963 when I was enrolled. They took me and my cousin Belaid Houha. It was in the cadets school that I discovered my identity as a Chawi. In 1972-73, I was punished when I asked a classmate to speak to me in Chawi instead of Arabic. That was when my problems with the army started. Just so you know, my mother spoke only Chawi at home, and she did not know a word of Arabic. However, we were in

an elite school that was grooming future officers, and the only language allowed was Arabic.

That was how in 1972-73 I discovered that the Algerian government forbade the natives to speak their language. It was obvious to me that the Kabyles spoke Kabyle all the time, so I said to myself that I wanted to speak my own language *Tacawit*. Incidentally, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize my former Chawi classmates of that period, most of whom are currently serving in the high hierarchy of the Algerian army, and particularly Khemissi and Abderrahim who also decided to speak Chawi. There was at that time an officer named Ahmed who told me: "What is the matter between *Zwawa* [derogatory name for Kabyles] and the French? Why did they fight the French? Why are you all the time talking about the revolution? You are bothering me with your stories." The Algerian revolution was mainly fought by the Kabyles and Chawis, yet we were not even allowed to speak our own language; this was how, in my little head of a Chawi, my war with the Algerian military all began.

Figure 2: The Amazigh Federal Flag.

I wanted at all cost to get away from it. Still, it was not easy to just walk away; I was already espousing the leftist ideas, and I started doing some clandestine activities. One day I went to my commanding officer and told him that from now on, I did not want to attend the Arabic language classes. At that time, we were all bilingual, speaking French and *Tacawit*, and Arabic instruction was only one or two hours a week. I gained cause and was officially allowed to skip those classes, which officially earned me the little of a rebel. I have remained faithful to my Chawi identity; I am a Chawi, and I will always remain a Chawi.

**TQ5**: What is the name of your village? Tell us about it.

**Yella**: I am from the village *Tazeggaght* [meaning red] located in the countryside near the big town of *Khenchla*. I would like to honor the people of my village for always speaking *Tacawit*, even when dealing with the local authorities. I am the first Chawi to rise up to tell the world I am a Chawi, and if you do not understand what I have to say, hire a translator. That is what I also tell the Algerian police during any encounter with them. Unfortunately, we lived near *Khenchla*, a Chawi town that decades later became Arabic speaking due to forced Arabization. When we played soccer with a team from that city, they would say in a condescending tone: "Here come the Chawis," and that was upsetting to me.

One day in 1974, while I was still a minor, the paramilitary police came to arrest me in my village. I had absolutely no fear. They took me to the headquarters in the town of *Tebessa* instead of that of *Khenchla*, which was closer, and they mistreated me. From *Tebessa*, I was transferred to the military school in *Batna* where I was jailed for 15 days. After that, I was moved to the military prison *Al Koudia* in Constantine. I wanted to find out why they were doing this to me, but talking to the army was like talking to a wall, so I started a hunger strike. The captain paid me a visit to warn me that if I did not eat, he would put me in a cell with the most dangerous criminals who would rape me. Refusing to comply, a week later, they drugged me and transferred me to a worse prison in Algiers.

I was at the Maillot military hospital, in the basement of the psychiatric ward. Later, I learned that my family was anxiously looking for me, but they could not find me. Ultimately, Toto, a cousin of mine, was smart enough to visit all the prisons and hospitals asking about me, and finally he stumbled upon a Chawi draftee who directed him to the hospital where he got in touch with me.

♦

Today, there are no Chawis and no Kabyles; there are only Algerians. Algeria by its constitution is defined as an Arab and Muslim country. The Kabyles and Chawis were the main ethnic populations who fought against the French for independence (1954-62). However, when the war was over, the Algerian army of the borders that was groomed and trained by foreign powers (mostly Egyptian) entered

*(ACAA Projects continued from page 3)*

pus related to them. Devoted to pottery making, weaving, blacksmithing and silversmithing, these episodes will be subtitled in English and uploaded to YouTube and other platforms.

- *Imazighen Ten Years after the Tunisian Spring* is a short documentary by Tarek Laabidi that examines the evolution of the Amazigh identity in Tunisia. Since 2011, there has been a great revival of the Amazigh identity and cultural consciousness in Tunisia which has seen an increased awareness. The producer intends to document these in the towns of Sind, in the province of *Gafsa*, *Matmata*, *Tamezrut*, *Zarawa*, *Tawajut*, in the province of *Gabes*, *Sudwiksh* and *Qalala*, on the island of *Djerba*, and *Dwirat* and *Chenni* in the province of *Tatawin*.

- Amazigh Culture Camp for kids 8-15 was organized by Lights, Camera, Learn, a non-profit organization that connects cultures to empower children through the art of filmmaking to create unique edutainment content by kids for kids. The camp took place in the summer of 2022 in Tunisia to teach kids about their Amazigh origin, history, and identity and give them the creative freedom to design and create unique content on all things Amazigh.

- Video Animation Production: ACAA teamed up with Hamza Ould Mohand, a producer of animated videos in Tamazight and video production instructor, to partly fund a project. The goal is to create videos for children to help them improve their Tamazight and educate them about many subjects while keeping them entertained in their native language.

- *Tamurt Nnegh* Songs from Tunisia is a project that focuses on collecting old Amazigh songs, still sung in some areas, record, mix, and modernize them. Led by Hedi Ouertani, the project is nearing its completion, and the album will be available on social media.

**Louiza Sellami** *is a retired professor of electrical engineering. She is currently the Amazigh Voice editor-in-chief and ACAA secretary. In the past she served as a board member and vice president.*

*(A Portrait of an Amazigh Activist continued from page 18)*

the country and took power by force. Since 1962, the Algerian military regime, founded on the ideology that recognizes Arabic and Islam as the only official language and religion, has suppressed and continues to suppress the right of Imazighen for the use or their language and preservation of their identity as such.

The Kabyles in particular had many uprisings against the government, first in 1963, then 1980 (Amazigh Spring), and later in 2001 when the security forces killed 128 youth in Kabylia. Every year, the Kabyles commemorate these events on April 20. This year, 2022, is the first year that these commemorations have not taken place in Kabylia due to a very heavy security presence. The Kabyle diaspora, on the other hand, was able to commemorate the event in Paris, Geneva, Chicago, San Francisco, and Montreal.

Figure 3: The Kabyle Flag Adopted by the movement for the autonomy of Kabylia (MAK).

Sixty years after an independence that was fought mainly by the Kabyles and Chawis, the Kabyles are not allowed to commemorate their martyrs. To make things worse, everyday Kabyles are kidnapped and thrown in jail without due process. The struggle to preserve their identity continues and they can count on the solidarity of the brotherly Chawi people like Yella Houha who continues this ongoing struggle to preserve our shared identity.

**Meqqran n'Amar** *is a founding member of ACAA. He served as its first president in 1993-94, again in 2013-14, and was a board member during other terms. He was also involved in the publication of The Amazigh Voice and organized annual meetings, Tafsut, Yennayer, and other commemorative events. During 1988/91, he published and distributed the monthly newsletter The Bridge to inform the Algerian community of events following the uprising of October 1988.*

*(An Amazigh in American continued from Page 6)*

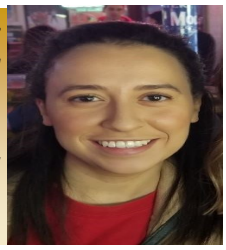
Naturally, weddings were one of the best parts as they are the coming together of tradition, music, and food. From the colorful, vibrant dresses and the traditional jewelry to the dancing and week-long festivities, I always enjoyed attending weddings of family members during the summer. In White mainstream society, we hear about how little girls dream about their wedding, but by attending numerous family weddings the thought of wearing seven different dresses crossed the mind of my younger self, and I imagined which seven I would want. The atmosphere the weddings created was a unique one which provided numerous fond memories. This included staying up until 4am and later waking up at 8am with full energy, helping my aunts with the cookies and boxes for guests to take home, mimicking the individual dance styles of each of my uncles, and dancing to the Amazigh songs with my aunts. These are just some ways how the Amazigh culture has stuck with me with the weddings I attended as a young girl. All of these and so much more are ways that culture is translated and spread.

**Conclusion**

It is well past 3am, the sun has risen, and I am thinking of how I never actually felt that I fully belonged to one language, one culture, or one people. The sense of identity and cultural belonging with multilinguals can be difficult to determine and people can associate themselves with one culture or with select aspects of several cultures. The in-betweenness I felt as a teenager could have led to internal struggles and, thus, the continuation of the suppression of one's identity in order to fit into the mainstream society. Still, the truth is that language expands our way of thinking, our way of meaning-making, and, therefore, it changes our identity and sense of belonging. An English speaker would only be listening to other English speakers and American cultural norms yet being Amazigh and learning Tamazight has allowed me to listen to other Tamazight speakers and experience Amazigh cultural norms. As a result, I find myself identifying not only with aspects of American culture but also with those of Amazigh culture.

It is impossible to discuss learning Tamazight without mentioning the vital connections to identity and culture that exist and to recount several core memories that have molded me as an individual. I take pride in the importance that language has had in my life, in my parents, and their efforts to teach me their mother tongue. Learning Tamazight and being Amazigh has had a large impact on my life. For me, it starts with my name. If I had a different name, I would not be the same person.

**Tiziri Seffal** *is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Educational Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, trying new restaurants, and taking photos of her trips abroad.*



*(Book Fairs continued from page 16)*

done by amateurs and that Tamazight is going through a critical period, and correct actions must be taken. Habib-Allah Mansouri brought up the need to avoid creating new technical and scientific words and, instead, use universal words that have been accepted globally.

**Conclusion**

Pictures and videos as well as the programs of these two events can be found on social media. I must note that the book fair organizers made sure guests who traveled from afar received meals given the lack of restaurants in *At-Saada* and *At-Wasif*. Further, free rooms were offered by the locals because of the lack of hotels in both areas. I personally enjoyed the free lunches that were provided.

Authors and poets, men and women, pleasantly surprised me by the willingness to share their stories. Hiba was kind and offered me a cup of tea and a cookie. Zaina Ifrah shared her wish to be invited by ACAA as a guest speaker.

I wish I had talked to all of the writers and poets and listened to their stories, for each had a personal story to share, attended all the roundtables, and gone to the evening events, which included a music concert, a poetry recital, a play, and a movie. Attending these two book fairs was the highlight of my summer vacation, which I took after retiring from Caterpillar where I worked for 24 years.

**Rabah Seffal** *is a retired engineer by profession and lives halfway between Chicago and St-Louis. He loves to read, write, and take pictures. He loves eating figs soaked in olive oil. To destress, he plays pick-up soccer with a multi-national group of people who, like him, are stuck in Central Illinois.*

*(Some Facts About the Amazigh Question continued from page 11)*

*Note sur la «crise berbériste» de 1949, AAN, XXIII, (1986): 347-371. Chaker Salem: 1984 - Textes en linguistique berbère. (Introduction au domaine berbère), Paris, CNRS, p. 292*

Chaker Salem: 1989/1990 - *Berbères aujourd'hui, Paris, L'Harmattan / Imazighen assa, Alger, Bouchène.*

Chaker Salem: 1991 - *Berbères: question nationale? Question culturelle? L'événement européen, 16 (Minorités, quelles chances pour l'Europe?) pp. 191-204.*

Chaker Salem: 1992 - *La question berbère dans l'Algérie contemporaine: la fracture inévitable? REMMM, 65 (L'Algérie incertaine): 97-105.*

Chaker Salem/Abrous Dahbia: 1988 - *Berbérité ou la dimension innommable, ROMM, 49: 173-197.*

Harbi Mohamed: 1975 - *Aux origines du FLN: le populisme révolutionnaire en Algérie, Paris, Chr. Bourgeois [notamment: 111-117].*

Harbi Mohamed: 1980/a - *Le FLN, mirages et réalité, Paris, Edit. Jeune Afrique, [notamment chap. 4: 59-68].*

Harbi Mohamed: 1980/b - *Nationalisme algérien et identité berbère, Peuples méditerranéens, 11: 31-37.*

Harbi Mohamed: 1981 - *Les archives de la révolution algérienne, Paris, Edit. Jeune Afrique. Harbi Mohamed: 1984 - La guerre commence en Algérie, Bruxelles, Editions Complexe. [notamment: 125-126].*

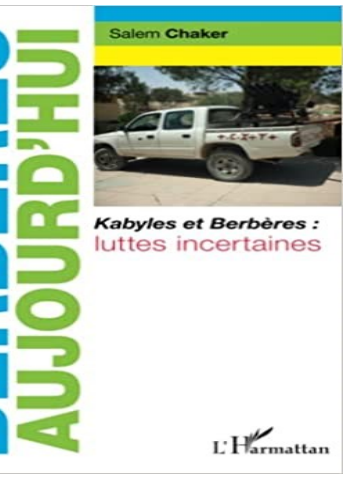
Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée [Aix-en-Provence]: 1987, n° 44 - *Berbères: une identité en construction, [sous la resp. de S. Chaker].*

Ouerdane Amar: 1987 - *La crise berbériste de 1949, un conflit à plusieurs faces, ROMM: 1987, n° 44: 35-47.*

Tafsut - *Etudes et débats [Tizi-Ouzou/Aix-en-Provence]: 1983-1987 (4 vol.).*

*Note: The hostile Algerian political ideology is not a simple academic hypothesis: the tendency toward political blindness is firmly represented among Algerian political leaders and organized activists. It is even undoubtedly a major psycho-sociological fact in the light of which it would be in our interest to reread all the political developments since 1988.*

**Rachid Dahmani** *is a physicist who serves as an Amazigh Voice editor and who has translated several articles in the past.*






*(Editorial continued from page 1)*

as provide experience and continuity. Parents, of course, have a central role to play in educating their children to get involved and staying connected to their identity. In fact, some of our ACAA families have done just that, which is the reason we have seen young people take an active role through writing articles for the *Amazigh Voice*, joining its editorial board, conducting elections, and running for office. This is very encouraging, and hopefully it will inspire others to do the same.

Despite some setbacks, much progress has been made, especially in terms of funding a variety of projects that promote Tamazight in Algeria, Morocco and, for the first time, in Tunisia. A summary of these projects is included in this issue. Perhaps the most serious setback suffered was the loss of the tax-exempt status in 2015, due to an oversight, and which luckily was discovered in 2021. This loss prevented any fundraising, thus limiting resources to only the membership dues and donations. Though the leadership worked diligently with an attorney to re-establish the tax-exempt status, the latter is still pending awaiting a response from the IRS. To generate more revenue, a committee of ACAA member with expertise in finances was created to oversee future investments.

Moving forward, we think mentorship should be a pillar in guiding the younger generation in leading ACAA into the future and so is providing a space within ACAA for this generation to connect, network, organize, and volunteer. We invite ACAA members to absorb these thoughts, and more importantly to think carefully and strategically about where ACAA is headed and join to steer the mission forward on the path drawn by the early founders.