



**SPECIAL FOCUS ON AMAZIGH LITERATURE: CRITICAL AND CLOSE  
READING APPROACHES**

## **Taskla or The Creation of a New Literature<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

*Taskla* means literature in Tamazight. A neologism, *taskla* has been used since the 1980s by a group of Kabyle cultural activists, who had joined together in the academic association Imdyazen, to refer to modern literary genres that have been emerging in the field of Amazigh creation since at least the 1960s. Members of the Moroccan Association for Research and Cultural Exchange (AMREC) also adopted the term to encapsulate the work they were doing to construct the new Amazigh literature. This article reconstructs the choices that Moroccan Amazigh activists undertook to establish a full-fledged literary field between 1967 and the early 2000s. Contextualizing this new literature in a longer history of *lmāzghī* (Amazigh writing in Arabic script), the article reveals how a process of intentionality and active construction of the field has led to the development and current flourishing albeit changing, landscape of Amazigh literature.

**Keywords:** Amazigh; *taskla*; *lmāzghī*; Id Belkassam; identity

This article is a contribution to the knowledge of the Amazigh neo-literature written in Tamazight. This literature emerged in the contradictions of post-colonial Morocco, and this article highlights its accents as well as its evolution in relation to the situation of the Amazigh language and culture in Morocco. To better account for its novelty and its departure from the traditional literary practices in local Amazigh societies, it is important to situate its development

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a slightly modified version of an article entitled “Remarques à propos de la littérature écrite d’expression berbère au Maroc,” which appeared in the November-December 2013 issue of *Revue Europe* (pp. 45-55) dedicated to Moroccan literature.



in the context of the history of writing in Tamazight. This history is characterized in particular by the development of a religious literary tradition within the *zawāyā* since at least the 16th century. It is also important to recover the context of its emergence by highlighting the situation of Amazigh culture in independent Morocco and the function assigned to this literature in the modalities of action of the Amazigh movement. Let us first note that the term created to designate this new reality is *taskla*, which is a neologism. Derived from *askkil*, a locally attested word which means letter, *taskla* was proposed in the early 1980s by a group of Kabyle cultural activists grouped within *Imdyazen*, which was an academic associative structure, to translate the term literature into Amazigh. It thus designates the genres of modern literature, which have emerged in the field of Amazigh creation since at least the 1960s. Engaged in the same process of cultural acquisition, the agents of the Moroccan cultural renaissance oriented themselves towards this neological Kabyle experience Kabyle and started to use the term *taskla* in their turn to describe the first attempts at modern literary creation. In fact, writing in Tamazight is a very old activity and the use of a neologism in order to consider the literature emerging in the postcolonial context reflects the institution of a new way of looking at the act of writing, with different issues and meanings.

### From Imāzghī to New Literature

The use of such a lexical device does not mean that there are no other literary or at least writing terms or experiences in some variants of the Amazigh language.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to common belief among colonial and post-colonial observers, Amazigh culture is not strictly oral. This constructed representation of Tamazight as a purely oral language and culture is the product of the colonial conditions under which early research on the Amazigh world was conducted. Although the oral mode of production is dominant, observations of social life reveal the important presence in certain regions of writing practices with different functions and statuses. The situation in southern Morocco actually serves to contradict the image of an oral society where written practices are absent. Empirical realities show the mobilization of written documents in specific contexts, the existence of an orderly distribution of institutions for the maintenance of a literate culture, and the established existence of local specialists in writing. The traditional educational space, formed by a network of Koranic schools and community universities, has made it possible to establish constant links between society and literate culture, thus encouraging the development of significant written activity. Beyond the production of the pedagogical materials necessary for the functioning of these educational structures, the combination of these conditions favored the development of different types of writing, notably notarial practice and religious literature written in *Tashlḥit*.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the context and fundamental features of this production, see El Khatir Aboulkacem, "La production manuscrite des informateurs berbères à l'époque coloniale: le cas de Ssi Brahim Akenkou," *Etudes et Documents Berbères*, 35-36 (2016a): 31-51.

Notarial writing is referred to locally as *tawttaqt*. It includes a variety of forms, contracts, and legal codifications. The documents produced consist of individual contracts and collective agreements. Referred to as *arrātn*, *tidgarin*, *tifawin*, *lluḥ*, *l'urf*, etc., they cover numerous functional fields such as real estate transactions, personal status documents, and minutes of deliberations of local assemblies and their decisions. These documents are therefore utilized for evidence in legal proceedings and as instruments for recording collective decisions.<sup>3</sup>

Parallel to the legal mobilization of writing, the *zawiyas*, since at least the 16th century, have been the cradle of another kind of writing. Commonly known as *lmāzghī*, a distortion of the word *Amazighe* (“the Amazigh language”), it consists of texts for religious edification, often versified, that are written using an adapted Arabic alphabet but without obeying any orthographic or morphological rules.<sup>4</sup> These documents generally deal with the attributes of divinity, the foundations of its oneness or *tawḥīd*, ritual obligations and the law of social relations as well as the life and traditions of the Prophet, the ways and principles of mystical conduct, pilgrimage, the description of the hereafter, the pleasures of paradise, and moralization. They were intended to spread the principles and precepts of Islam and to promote the doctrines and conduct of some Sufi movements.

It should be noted that, from a historical point of view, there is evidence that this literature existed since the start of the 8th century, when the theological and political ideas of the Kharijite movement appeared in and spread throughout North Africa. Based on the extant documentation, the Qur’an composed by the Barghawatas is considered to have inaugurated this production. Used within the context of politico-religious disputes with the aim of establishing competing legitimacies, this literary activity reached its peak under the Ibadī kingdoms and principalities.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, it was used by other

<sup>3</sup> To get a sense of these kinds of documents and how they are used to study the legal structure, see Robert Montagne, “Un magasin collectif de l’Anti-Atlas. L’Agadir des Ikounka,” *Hespéris*, 9 (1929): 145-266 and, for their use in the study of social history, see Jacques Berque, *Structures sociales du Haut-Atlas*, (Paris: PUF, 1955).

<sup>4</sup> For additional information on the written tradition in Amazigh in Southern Morocco, see El Khatir Aboulkacem, “ssirt n Brahim Akenkou d lasl nns d nnsb nns et ttšlim x dar iclḥiyn n Wactukn de Ssi Brahim Akenku” in *Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe* (Rabat: Publication de l’Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe, 2010); Ali Amahan, “L’écriture en tachelhit est-elle une stratégie des zaouiās” in Drouin and Roth, eds., *A la croisée des études libyco-berbères, mélanges offerts à Lionel Galand et Paulette Galand-Pernet* (Paris: CNRS, 1993): 437-449; Nico Van Boogert, *The Berber Literary Tradition of the Sous, with an Edition and Translation of “The Ocean of the Tears” by Muhammad Awzal (d. 1749)* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1997); and Mohamed Medlaoui, *Raf al hijab ‘an maghmur taqafa wal ‘adad ma’a šiyagha l’aruḍay al ‘amazighiya wal mlaḥun/ la découverte de la culture et des littératures méconnues et l’élaboration des métriques de l’amazighe et du malhun* (Rabat: Publications de l’Institut Universitaire de la Recherche Scientifique, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Vermondo Brugnatelli, “Un témoin manuscrit de la ‘Mudawanna d’Abū Gānim’ en Berbère,” *Etudes et Documents Berbères*, 35-36 (2016): 149-174; Tadeuz Lewicki, “De quelques textes inédits en vieux berbère provenant d’une chronique ibadite anonyme,” *Revue des Etudes islamiques* (1934): 275-296; Mohamed Méouak, *La langue berbère au Maghreb médiéval. Textes, contextes, analyses* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016); Motylinski, “Le Manuscrit arabo-berbère de Zouagha découvert par

dynasties and especially by the Almohads in the social and political actions they carried out in their quest for power and to develop solid support networks.<sup>6</sup> Starting in the 16th century, the change in ideologies legitimizing access to political power and the appearance of other external signs of legitimacy meant that *lmāzghī* practice found its place in the operations of maraboutic movements, particularly in the High and Anti-Atlas and their desert margins.

These consistent, albeit circumstance-governed, uses of writing have allowed for the development of a rich cultural legacy as well as the appearance of a local class that responded to emerging needs by adapting the capital acquired to the different contexts for usage. Foreign scientists and explorers, looking to collect oral productions and generate linguistic and ethnographic notes on the social and cultural life of groups to establish knowledge about the countries to be colonized and dominated, have turned to this category of production in order to implement their scientific exploration programs since at least the 1930s. The inclusion of these skills contributed to the development of a particular type of written production that differed significantly from religious literature as it opened up to new themes such as ethnographic descriptions and the transcription of lyric poems. However, the context for this practical experience did not allow for full literary competence to develop, and it was not until another category of actors belonging to a particular socio-political universe appeared on the scene that writing activities took a turn towards literary creation.

When Morocco gained its independence in 1956, it instituted an official negation of Amazigh culture. The scholarly culture linked to classical Arabic became the standard for nation-building in Morocco and cultural development as a result of its importance for the the emergence and political realization of Moroccan nationalism in the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> The process of national construction has followed a logic of imposed homogeneity that has made Amazigh language and culture a negative and cumbersome identity that is to be removed from the cultural and institutional landscape of the nation. It is thus located on the margins of institutional distributors and is available to be used in strategies of political contestation and identity affirmation. The birth of literary activity in this language should thus be sought in the social and political practices of this negated culture.

In response to the negative effects from the symbolic and empirical national construction projects, cultural actors have organized into associations and

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M. Rebillet. Notice sommaire et extraits," *Actes du XIVe congrès des orientalistes (Alger 1905)* (Paris: Leroux, 1907), 2:69-78; and Virginie Prevost, "L'Ibadisme berbère: La légitimation d'une doctrine venue d'orient," in *La légitimation du pouvoir au Maghreb médiéval: De l'orientalisation à l'émancipation politique*, Anliese Nef, Élise Voguet, eds., (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2021), 55-71.

<sup>6</sup> Mehdi Ghouirgate, *L'ordre almohade, 1120-1269. Une nouvelle lecture anthropologique* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2014); Mohamed Méouak, *La langue berbère au Maghreb médiéval. Textes, contextes, analyses* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016); and Laoucine Ousgan, *ad dawla wa mujtama' fi l'asr al muwahidi (518h-668H)/Pouvoir et société à l'époque almohade (1125/1270)* (Rabat: Publications de l'Institut Royal de la Culture amazighe, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See El Khatir Aboulkacem, *Nationalisme et élaboration du postulat identitaire de la nation au Maroc* (Rabat: Publications de l'Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe, 2021).

started a movement to assert their identity, providing it with the main purpose of promoting Amazigh culture and demanding its institutional recognition.<sup>8</sup> By considering the culture that is being affirmed in comparison with the legitimate national culture that is the one of the school and official institutions, cultural activists necessarily end up viewing their culture as deficient; it doesn't have writing, it doesn't have literature, and it doesn't have the official "vestments" of consecration. They therefore set to work in order to fill the gaps and voids they perceive. This is the specific context in which the process of constructing a written literature takes place.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore conceivable that one of the first actions of any identity-building movement that relies on cultural elements, as is the case with the Amazigh movement, consists of this cultural work, which aims to use the cultural elements available through the actions of selection and invention in order to build a *refined* culture – a *new* culture – that is arguably capable of competing with the legitimate and dominant culture.

Turning to the history of the Amazigh identity-building movement in Morocco, it is possible to see that the process of cultural construction is marked by two important moments. Towards the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, activities were focused on the valorization and collection of oral productions along with a type of informal language development with the aim of producing a written variant of the language. The cultural activists assembled in particular within the Association Marocaine de la Recherche et de l'Echange Culturel (AMREC), which had been founded in 1967, and created an internal bulletin in early 1970 entitled *Arrātn*, which means writings or manuscripts. In so doing, they established a kind of workshop for the informal development of the language, with the establishment of a method for transcription using Arabic characters, *tayarast n warrātn*. It is important to note that the term used to describe these actions – *arrant* – reflects an attachment to the historical dimension of writing practice referred to above and that the current process is a part of the Amazigh communities' culturally historical continuum.

It was within this group that the first attempts at poetic creation appeared, and these were to inaugurate the project of constructing and inventing a modern literature. It is worth remembering that during this period of time, there was not this kind of production in Amazigh language yet. It only had a rich oral

<sup>8</sup> In particular, see Terhi Leitnen, "Nation à la marge de l'Etat." *La construction identitaire du Mouvement culturel amazigh dans l'espace national et au-delà des frontières étatiques*, Doctoral thesis, (Paris, EHESS, 2003), and Lahoucine Ouazzi, *Nash'at al-ḥaraka at-taqafiya al-amazighiyya. Sayrurat tahawul al-wa'y bi lhuwiyya al-amazighiyya min al-wa'y at-taqlidi ila al-wa'y al-ḥadati*, (Formation du mouvement culturel amazigh au Maroc, processus de la transformation de la conscience identitaire d'une conscience traditionnelle en une conscience moderne), Doctoral thesis in Political Science, (Rabat, AMREC Publication, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Regarding certain aspects of this production, see El Khatir Aboulkacem, "Action collective et production culturelle: le cas de la néo-culture amazighe au Maroc" in *Action collective en milieux amazighes* (Rabat: Publications de l'Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe, 2012), 11-78; and Abderrahmane Lakhsassi, "Amazighité et production culturelle" in H. Rachik, ed., *Les Usages de l'identité amazighe au Maroc* (Casablanca: Imprimerie Najah al-Jadidah, 2006), 93-127.

heritage, a written religious literature developed primarily in the Tashlḥīt area (High Atlas, Anti-Atlas, etc.), collections of oral productions carried out during the colonial period, a few linguistic and ethnographic notes, and two collections of oral poems transcribed in Arabic characters. This group of pioneers continued to be haunted by literary writing, as necessary and decisive as it was to succeed in the process of cultural achievement. After poetic fragments appeared in the *Arrātn* bulletin, the group proceeded with the publication of a modest collection of poems in 1974, entitled *Imuzzār* (“waterfalls”).

*Imuzzār* is a collective edition. It includes poems written by the main organizers of the *Arrātn* bulletin, such as Ali Sadki-Azayku, Abderrahmane al-Jishtimi, Brahim Akhiyyat and Moumen Ali Safi. In the preface, Ahmed Bouzid writes, “the collection contains poems written in Tamazight (Berber) by young poets who have had a modern education and are aware of the problems of modern man.”<sup>10</sup> It is therefore created by members of a generation that presents profiles differing both from those of the cultural producers of orality and of the authors of classical religious literature. Their products, meanwhile, also differ from oral poetry and religious poems. Bouzid maintains that these creations are therefore presented as a “new Amazigh poetry” that expresses the aspirations of modern Moroccans and translates their current concerns.<sup>11</sup>

During this period of laying down the groundwork, cultural activists focused their efforts on cultural achievements and, consolidating the experiences of *Arrātn* and *Imuzzār*, endeavoring to nurture this literary renaissance through new publications.

In this context, the AMREC Association helped, Mohamed Moustauoui, a young poet from the oral tradition to publish his poems in the form of a collection. The process of moving from oral composition to writing required adapting the poems to the new formal requirements (transcription, lexicon, etc.) of the written language that was under construction. Moustauoui’s poetry collection *Iskrāf* (“Shackles”) was published in 1976, and it made history as the first individual poetry collection in this literature-building endeavor in Tamazight. Although Moustauoui was an improvisational poet, who, in the tradition of performance, composed poetry on the spot, and despite the fact that his work bears the marks of orality, *Iskrāf* is a written work and makes use of certain features that differentiate it from oral poetry. This same author, who was committed to writing and literature-building, returned to publishing in 1979 and released a second collection entitled *Tadsa d imttawn* (“laughter and tears”).

### The 1980s Onward: The Development of Literature-Building

From the 1980s onwards, the project of literature-building developed gradually and became involved in endeavors that its main architects determined to be priorities: increasing the number of genres and progressively transforming generic identity.

<sup>10</sup> Ahmed Bouzid, preface to AMREC, *Imuzzār (recueil de poèmes d'intellectuels membres de l'Association)* (Rabat, 1974), 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

If poetic production proceeded with innovative approaches while simultaneously aiming to create a significant accumulation of works that would give the culture visibility on the market of cultural goods and to involve it in the genre's aesthetic and thematic transformations, some instead felt the need to experiment with the other written genres with a view to endowing this culture with a rich and plural literature. In terms of bringing this emerging field up to date, they considered it a priority to fill the literary voids.

Moumen Ali Safi's approach is worth noting in this experimental approach. A Casablanca-based lawyer and cultural activist who belonged to the AMREC, Safi published the first play in Amazigh, *Ussaan smmiḍnīn* ("Cold Days") in 1983. Drawing inspiration from German Romanticism, this play consistently proclaims the greatness of the Amazigh people, the genius of its culture, and its capacity for renewal and rebirth. *Ussaan smmiḍnīn* enriched with the first play to have been written and published in Tamazight, bringing Amazigh prose closer to writing. Along the same lines, Rabat-based Hassan Id Balkassam, also a lawyer as well as a cultural activist and founder of the *Association Nouvelle pour la Culture Populaire* (which became Tamaynut), joined the literature-building movement and published a collection of short stories, *Imarāyn* ("lovers") in 1988. With these new publications, literature in Amazigh language assumed a new form and progressively took on the image of a modern and diversified literature.

After this play and short story, translations of "world literature" came to drive the literary renaissance movement. The lawyer and leftist activist Ahmed Adghirni joined the movement and initiated the translation of *Romeo and Juliet*, which was not published until 1995. The development of work by associations, notably the 1991 adoption in Agadir of a collective text bringing together the main cultural claims, has made it possible for new talents to be discovered through the publication of newspapers and journals. Literary meetings organized by Amazigh cultural organizations also spurred creativity and increased literary output. These meetings made it possible for writers to meet, share their work, and discuss the problems they face. These are also places for giving readings and offering criticism. Cultural creation is thus carried out with enough enthusiasm to attempt an accumulation significant enough to render the culture visible on the market of cultural goods.

Amazigh periodicals have played an important role in promoting literary creation. If the journal *Amūd* ("Seed") is devoted entirely to Amazigh works (poetry and prose, translations into Amazigh, essays and collections) in Arabic script, *Tifawt* ("Light" or "Morning") is open to creators who, for ideological reasons, chose to write in Latin characters while newspapers such as *Tasafūt* ("Torch"), *Tamunt* ("Union"), *Tamaḡit* ("Identity"), etc. published the productions of young writers without any preference for the alphabet used to compose them.

Since then, significant production has flourished within the realm of literary creation, marked by a diversity of genres and writing methods. Those committed to this literature-building are aware of the work that must be done to build a rich and varied literary field and have risen to the challenge, producing an Amazigh field of Moroccan literature outside the official canon. It should be

noted that while the renaissance was initiated in the southern Moroccan linguistic variant of Tamazight, this field has likewise grown in the other variants of the language. In the North, it has benefited above all from the support of immigrants based in the Netherlands. The history of Moroccan immigration in this country is very rich, and Tamazight has been one of its beneficiaries. Indeed, the first Amazigh novel to be written is entitled *Reḥ ṭṭabu ad d teffegh tfukt* (Break the Taboo for Sunrise) was published by Netherlands-based author Mohamed Chacha in 1997.

In addition to the increase in literary genres, the 1980s also saw the expansion of a poetic production that was concerned with modernism and the rejection of the characteristic features of oral creation. The aforementioned Hassan Id Balkassam published a poetry collection entitled *taslit (n) unzar* ("rainbow") in 1986. Though Id Balkassam uses a direct language that has the aim of informing and denouncing and that does not have a poetic connotation, the writer inscribes in modernity and the poetic revolution by renouncing the traditional metrical rules. With this collection, he intended to revitalize poetic creation and to initiate a revolt against the aesthetic rules structuring oral poetry production.

Ali Azayku, a historian and research professor at the Faculty of Letters in Rabat, made an impact on this search for poetic modernism. His experimental works became a reference model for future generations of young poets. He helped initiate the construction of the written language, as mentioned above, and he endeavored to ensure the triumph of language and to give the agricultural metaphor, which had long been prominent, a striking and specific tone. He published his first collection of poetry *Timitār* (signs) in 1989. This collection is composed of 33 poems written in Arabic script. In order to signify his attachment to his mother-tongue, he dedicates it to all those who are deaf or have difficulty speaking, those who transmit the language in a deaf time, and invites them to sow the seeds of the word.<sup>12</sup>

The collection is as much a poetic quest as it is a hymn to identity and a refusal formulated in terms of insubordination and revolt (*ugix* "I refuse," *aruḡi* "rebel," etc.). Azayku poetic experience is a perfect combination of expression of discontent with the state and aesthetically-rich poetic language. As such, the rupture no longer takes place in the language at the level of the syntax and lexicon, but rather in the melancholic tone, fueled by revolt and hope. The poetic language retains its fundamental aspects but makes a complete break with the aesthetics of oral poetry. In this sense, the break with orality is no longer technical; it has become aesthetic and focuses on a linguistic revolution. Therefore, Azayku is the poet of rupture. With this work, the poetic project in Amazigh clearly announces that it has a place in a written modern literature, which developed alongside the oral tradition. By following in this poet's footsteps, the new generation of the 1990s and 2000s succeeded in liberating poetry from the weight of tradition and its social functions in terms of orality and in advancing this aesthetic and linguistic revolt.

<sup>12</sup> Ali Sadki Azayku, *Timitar: Collection of Poems*, (Rabat: Okad, 1988), 1.



In addition to the contextual constraints, the sociolinguistic position of the language and its structural condition mark this literary output with a set of particular characteristics. First of all, it is a form of protest writing, which is revealed in the identities of the authors. They are all members of or sympathizers with the collective organization for Amazigh identity affirmation. The pioneers of this literature were also the founders of AMREC, the first association dedicated to Amazigh activism. Azayku, El-Jishtimi, and Akhiyyat founded AMREC prior to publishing the *imuzzār* poetry anthology. This is likewise the case for Mohamed Moustououi, who was the author of the aforementioned first poetry collection in 1976. Meanwhile, Hassan Id Balkassam was the founder of ANCAP, which became Tamaynut in the 1990s. The same can be said about the writers of the 1990s and early 2000s. Mohamed Akounad, the author of the award-winning novel *Tawrgit d imik* (A Dream and Little More), was first a community activist before becoming a poet, radio host, and novelist.

### Scripts and Their Discontents

In addition, literary in a language that is under construction imposes very specific requirements. Unlike language used at school, where it is possible to refer to an established official standard and call on other services such as linguistic revision and spelling corrections as offered by the publishing industry, writing in a language that is under construction involves other processes and raises additional problems. The quest for the aesthetic dimension that makes a piece of writing literary goes hand-in-hand with problems linked to the constraints posed by the structural state of the language, which characterize the writing techniques as well as the form of the works produced. This means that at the time of writing, the author cannot refer to any fixed model. Such authors will attempt to choose between different options and themselves contribute to the renewal or the consecration of what is currently available. They participate in a form of language development.

The choice of a given script and transcription is important from the outset. Since the foundational phase, using adapted Arabic letters has not been a political matter. The long tradition of *lmāzghī* has certainly provided favorable conditions for its usage, with the great majority of the pioneers coming from the Tashlḥīt area. They made this available choice a transitional option as they awaited the strategic adoption of Tifinagh once its political and structural appropriation was possible.<sup>13</sup> As this shows, the script of writing Tamazight was insignificant until the early 1990s. However, since the social base of the collective organizing broadened and the regional and cultural origins of the community activists diversified, the script of writing took on new dimensions. Particularly, the arrival of young activists who founded *Tilelli* (Freedom), a new association based in Goulmima (south-east Morocco), challenged the natural and spontaneous choice that older activists had made in the 1970s. Thanks

<sup>13</sup> For more details about the debates regarding the script, see Brahim El Guabli, *Moroccan Other-Archives: History and Citizenship after State Violence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2023), 27-26.

to their training and their contacts with the Kabyle movement, *Tilelli* members adopted the Latin script and made it a symbol of modernity. They argued that writing in the Latin alphabet contributed to the influence and universalization of Amazigh culture. They were the first to oppose the use of Arabic characters, which they viewed as a form of expropriation that was detrimental to Tamazight. They called on the young activists of the South who were beginning to write in Arabic script, to opt for the Latin alphabet and break with the tradition perpetuated by the older generation.

In addition to the choice of the script, this project requires working on notation, spelling, and lexicographical research. Since this period, there have been many proposals regarding the notation of emphasis and the use or non-use of diacritical marks. The analysis of published texts and attitudes expressed in journals and newspapers provides an idea of the different tendencies present in the movement at this time in its history. In terms of the lexicon, literary creation and the exploration of other fields and semantic horizons lead to a sense of lexical deficiency. The desire to clear texts of borrowings from Arabic and other languages has led activist writers to increase their meticulous efforts to generate new works and neologism, which enhanced Amazigh lexical research. They have made philological nationalism, to borrow the term used by Hobsbawm,<sup>14</sup> the main key to linguistic reconstruction.

### The Quest for Identity in Amazigh Literature

The activist contest shaped the literary works, infusing them with Amazighity. These early litterateurs made literature the living voice of their affirmation, and writing became a marker of silenced speech, which is inhabited by anger. Within this context, poetry seems to provide the best characterization of the preeminent presence of the quest for identity. It reflects the constancy of existential deficiency and injury. When reading the poems, it is possible to identify the foundational metaphors of an era that is related to what can be called the world of the margin and uncertainty. In Azayku's work, for example, the quest for identity is obsessive and accentuated, since it is carried out in the re-denied language. Writing participates unwillingly in this quest and becomes a tool of resistance and struggle. In the collection *Timitār* ("traces" and "symbols") published in 1988, the author, facing the heartbreak and bitterness of life, seems possessed by the voices of language, mother, and past. The opening poem is entitled "Language" or *Awāl* (1988:5-8) and he states that his language is Amazigh. It is the witness to a past, of a memory, and also of a rejection.

Language is also the basis for the survival of those who use it; this is because identity is, first and foremost, language. In another poem, he states that it is language that makes a people what they are: *awal nmx ad ax igan igh immut nmmut/we are our language, and if it dies we will die*. It is his cultural parasol. Though it is denigrated and rejected, it becomes a companion: If we don't

<sup>14</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Program, Myth, Reality*. Reference for this article was the French translation *Nations et nationalisme depuis 1870. Programme, mythe, réalité* by D. Peters (Paris, Gallimard, 1992 (1990)), 108.

have a companion, he says, then the word becomes one for us. The reference to the glorious past and to the mountain, the birthplace of those who carry the torch, hope, and life, is strongly pronounced. His poetic creation is also marked by the image of the mother. She is present and creates a reference to a harmonious and glorious past. She is the garden of life and the seed of identity.

Prose also offers an ideal opportunity for describing worlds of the margin and the negative consequences of identity denigration. It results in the textualization of a cultural situation. Mohamed Akounad's novel, *tawargit d imik* (A Dream and a Little More'), published in 2002, develops an analysis of the linguistic field through the status of the speaking subjects and the traumatized development of the character of Ssi Brahim. As a politically engaged literary figure, the author's strategic position in society (a religious figure who is also a local representative of the legitimate language, etc.) allowed him to grasp the social and political stakes linked to the use of languages and to show the uncomfortable position of subjects who are at the bottom of the hierarchy. The texts also serve to remind us of the disadvantaged situation of the culture and their authors' identity and also remind us of the fundamental value that identity has in the life of a people.

Each publication becomes the occasion to affirm attachment to the denied identity. The writer is primarily an activist and concerned first and foremost with expressing a sense of identity and discontent. It is for this reason that this kind of literature is frequently presented as the aesthetic aspect of the protest discourse. Writing is as much a source of pleasure as a means of struggle. In short, the work of creation is inscribed in a logic of specific challenges and constraints that plays a determining and supporting role. The characteristics of a specific form of literature can be seen in what has emerged in the formal analysis of the peripheral problems that this kind of production poses.

## Conclusion

It is essential to point out that the constitutional recognition of Amazigh as an official language, its introduction into the school system, and the processes of its institutionalization have made it possible to liberate this literature from the weight of protest and the marginal. This also freed Amazigh literature from obsession with identity. The question then is to reflect on the current status of the Amazigh literary landscape. It is likewise important to note that the construction of the language, by providing writers with a graphic system and standardized spelling rules as well as lexical possibilities, has helped to reduce the weight of linguistic fatigue that burdened the precursors in this field. We are also witnessing the gradual abandonment of the theme of identity in favor of new subjects, such as the state of society, the condition of women, and gender, among others.

The identity of literary producers has also undergone profound changes. In addition to the massive increase of those majoring in Amazigh Studies in recent years, the literary field has been marked by the breakthrough of young women writers, who benefit from the support of public institutions such as the IRCAM and the Ministry of Culture. National prizes have also

been created to encourage Amazigh literary production and celebrate the achievements of those who charted unique trajectories. Meanwhile, writers have organized themselves into associative structures such as the Tirra Alliance, which was founded in Agadir in 2009. Since its inception, Tirra Alliance has breathed new life into literary creation by organizing writing workshops, encouraging first-time authors' publications, and publishing all manners of Amazigh output. All this has contributed to the affirmation of an ever-growing and rich cultural production, which is now driven by the creative work of a new generation.

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