

Apr 25th, 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

‘Free People’: Identity Formation Among the Imazighen in Morocco

Milany Duarte
Ohio Wesleyan University

Alana Guzman
Ohio Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.owu.edu/studentsymposium>

Part of the [International and Area Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Duarte, Milany and Guzman, Alana, "‘Free People’: Identity Formation Among the Imazighen in Morocco" (2019). *Student Symposium*. 9.

https://digitalcommons.owu.edu/studentsymposium/2019/poster_session/9

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Digital Commons @ OWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Symposium by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ OWU. For more information, please contact earutigl@owu.edu.



‘Free People’: Identity Formation Among the Imazighen in Morocco

By: Milany Duarte and Alana Guzman



Terms

Q: If you had to explain to someone who the Amazigh are, what would you say?

“I wouldn't say the Amazigh are indigenous because there is a bad connotation. I would say they are the native people who were already here living on the Suis region. Who had their own religion, culture, habits and they were then mixed with the Jews. Afterwards, the Islamic parts came as well, chased them from the cities they were and they went to the mountains. A lot of them gave up their religions and chose Islam...They still kept their own cultures even if they gave up the religion and their own languages. Each group who lived in different regions developed their own dialect of the Amazigh language.”

The terms vary by region and the dialect they speak.

Amazigh: The people group
Imazighen: Plural of Amazigh
Tamazight: The language and dialects

Introduction

We traveled to Morocco to learn about the Amazigh community and document the stories of Imazighen men and women who are impacted by both direct and indirect forms of cultural, political, and linguistic marginalization. We conducted four interviews with members of the Imazighen community living in Rabat and Meknes, two of Morocco's largest urban cities. All interviewees are from different Amazigh groups, regions of Morocco, and although all are fluent in English, they also spoke different dialects of Tamazight, French, and Arabic.



Who is Amazigh? Then and Now:

Then:

The Amazigh were never governed by French, but they were governed by a Sultan. Some Amazigh became resistance fighters once the Arabs came. In Amazigh history there were four main resistance leaders. They organized resistance movements, guerrilla resistance, in areas where the sultan did not have much reach. They were very successful until the central government began to take credit for the resistance. The central government tried to absorb the other movements. Due to the confusion everything becomes quite complicated as no one knows who is who. Once they acquired independence credit was not given to the leaders of the resistance, most of them were exiled and never came back.

Now:

Q: What would be an estimate of people in Morocco that are Amazigh?

A: “How do you say who is and who is not? Both of my mother and father are Rifi people, but I also have lineage on my mothers side that is Arab. Some others say that if they have one person in their family that is Arab they are Arab, it is very difficult to discern because it is really up to each person and each family”

Language

There are various different Tamazight dialects found within the Amazigh community. The use of the Amazigh language has been restricted throughout time by the Moroccan government. Through activism on the part of the Amazigh community the Amazigh language obtained legal status by the government to be taught in schools. Although the government has allowed the language to be legal one of our interviewees says “to have the language (Tamazight) doesn't really mean anything, because there is no follow up with it”. Suggestions were made stating that the administration should have at least one Tamazight speaking person at trials. People should be allowed to use it to testify in court, but the current system prohibits them from doing so.

Q: What would you say is the relationship between the language and the dialects?

“I would say that there is always a problem between dialects and central language. Wherever you create the central language is that you marginalize the diversity of the dialects. What's good with having an alphabet and not a language is that you can write it in whatever dialect you want. The alphabet does not define anything else.”

“If you read anthropology you would see that they categorize them (the dialects) into three.. The Higher Atlas, Rif Mountains and the Middle Atlas which is in the north. You could say that Morocco has a group of Arabic dialects and a group of Berber (Amazigh) dialects. Within that you could technically say three major groups but if you travel along it is kind of intelligible. A few things change but at some point (the language) is completely different and you can't understand it anymore.”



Religion

“Nobody now would say the religion is still alive. It's gone and now it's mostly cultural. Nobody really knows which religion they were following. There are hypotheses based on the drawings and poetry that refer to a certain women... a deity and religious leader. They refer to this woman who tried to unify the people. There are stories about her that she was in Tunisia but other stories that she was in Morocco. Theories that say she is a witch, a queen and a deity. But that's the only trace of religion other than Islam and Judaism.”

Q: How did the religion disappear?

“When the Arabs came there was a lot of destruction of the culture. If there were any manuscript they might have been burned. Any sign of paganism which is very antagonistic with Islam.. they were probably destroyed.”

Q: Tamazight is now considered an official language in Morocco. Has that helped in any way?

“If you get your papers in Tamazight and if you submit your papers in Tamazight they will not be accepted. If it's in French it will be accepted. It's an official language just for the status but it does not guarantee any rights. If I wrote poetry in Amazigh and wanted to legally register it, I would have to translate it. If I do, it loses its meaning.”

“making an alphabet is not helping anybody. It's a political problem.”

Q: How do you describe the progression of the Amazigh language?

“Writing Amazigh has a big discontinuity in history, it used to be written a long time ago with some specific letters and that's past, and then it used to be written with Arabic letters and that also stopped, and at some point it just became an oral tradition. Now there is a new alphabet with a new set of letters that people have to learn all over again. It is not being supported in a way that people will use it.”

