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Amazigh/Berber literature and “literary space” A contested minority situation in (North) African literatures

Daniela Merolla

Are the Imazighen/Berbers in a “situation of minority” in the Maghreb and in (North) African literatures? Although raising such a question may seem paradoxical in the case of language groups that suffered censure and gross violence in colonial and postcolonial times, the notion of Amazigh/Berber minority can be tricky to discuss and is largely rejected by the Imazighen themselves. Such an interrogation leads to questioning the relationships among historical actors and to avoiding essentialist interpretations of minority and majority groups in North Africa. The assigned “situation of minority” or majority needs to be reconstructed in the light of reciprocal historical dynamics by looking at cultural interaction and change and retracing inequality in power relationships which are not simply dichotomic (dominant/dominated) but very much articulated ([Bertheleu 2008](#): 29). Reflecting on “minor,” “minority,” and “minorization” in literature offers an entrance to such dynamic constructions. This article investigates Amazigh/Berber literature and “literary space” by looking at the articulation of identity construction and at discourses on minority and majority in North Africa.

Both the terms Amazigh and Berber are used because, since the end of the 20th century, the Amazigh (sg.) and Imazighen (pl.) tend to stand out in society and in current studies, while the term Berber remains inscribed historically in the discourse of the research domain.ⁱ The geographical space of the communities using Amazigh/Berber vernaculars extends from Morocco to the oasis of Siwa in Egypt and passes through Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. It also includes the Tuareg Berber-speaking populations in Mali, Niger, and the north of Burkina Faso.

Contested population figures

The estimated population figures for Imazighen were and are *loci* of political and scientific debate in both colonial and postcolonial sociopolitical contexts. The range of estimates indicates that censuses and any existing sources are either old or unreliable: Amazigh people are presently estimated to number between 12 and 25 million. The latter figure depends upon recalculation based on colonial sources, while the former derives from recent censuses that are unreliable concerning language use.ⁱⁱ Moreover, the large migrant communities in Europe are not always taken into account. While the colonial sources indicated about 40% Amazigh/Berber-speaking population in Morocco and 25% in Algeria, recent studies agree on lower figures today and with huge differences, as indicated previously. According to the *Atlas des minorités dans le monde* (Atlas of the World’s Minorities), Amazigh speakers number 17 million, and in 2008, they constituted 35% of the population in Morocco (Rif, Middle and High Atlas, Sous), 17% in Algeria (Kabylia, Aurès, Mzab), 2% in Tunisia (Isle of Djerba and

Chenini, Douz, Tozeur), 1% in Mauritania (Zenaga), and 6% in Libya (Djebel Nefusa). Such figures are much lower than those recalculated respectively by activists and by scholars, the latter usually working on the basis of colonial sources. The Tuaregs, who live in a wide Saharan and sub-Saharan area across Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, are estimated to be 83% of the inhabitants of such an enormous area, which is, however, very little inhabited: Tuaregs are estimated to be around two million speakers in all.

Even when all the difficulties are taken into account, it seems safe to say that the number of Amazigh/Berber speakers steadily decreased in the 20th century, as it is also doing in the present one. Considering the figures, Salem [Chaker \(1989a\)](#): 834) wrote: “*la berbèrité, la conscience d’être berbère, est liée à la berbérophonie et ne concerne plus qu’une minorité (importante) de la population*” (Berber-ness, the consciousness of being Berber, is linked to the Berber language and concerns only a [significant] minority of the population).ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time, the high percentages of Amazigh/Berber speakers in Morocco and Algeria make them “bulky minorities,” as Chaker writes in a later article ([2003](#)) reflecting on the fact that, as large and geographically concentrated groups, they are difficult to manage in national terms. Moreover, the notion of being in a situation of minority is not just linked to demographics but is characterized by inequality in power relationships and by the reciprocal representation of the minority/majority discourse over time ([Bertheleu 2008](#): 25). Subsequently, I attempt to delineate the historical relationships between and among linguistic communities in North Africa in the *longue durée* and in the recent past.

Linguistic and cultural arena: the dynamics of the *longue durée*

It is useful to remember what linguistic and cultural arena is being discussed here. The Amazigh/Berber vernaculars, such as Taqbaylit and Tachawit in Algeria or Tarifit and Tasoussit in Morocco,^{iv} have existed in environments where writing and literacy were diffused since antiquity. The interaction of Mediterranean cultures and languages is pointed to by archeological findings (e.g. bilingual Libyan and Punic or Latin stelae), by the Punic origin of the Tifinagh alphabet among the Tuareg Berbers in the Sahara, and by literary elements, such as the motif of “the ants helping Psyche” in the famous *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius ([Plantade and Plantade 2014](#)), who wrote in Latin but was born in Madaura (M’daourouch in present-day Algeria) around 123–125 CE. Historical sources, such as Procopius’ *Vandal War*, confirm the social and cultural interactions after the dissolution of the Roman empire, often in terms of violent clashes, and the presence of autochthonous populations called *Mauri* ([Camps 1984](#)) Although it is difficult to ascertain whether archeological findings and Latin sources point to the ancestors of present-day Berber speakers in North Africa ([Millar 1968](#): 128, quoted in [McDougall 2003](#): 70; [Rouighi 2011](#)), many studies find it plausible that – on the basis of linguistic elements present in the sources – at least some of the groups called *Mauri* used vernaculars that are called today Amazigh/Berber ([Camps 1984](#); [Modéran 2003](#); [Lee, Finkelpearl, and Graverini 2014](#)).

Since the mid-7th century CE, after the Arab conquest of North Africa, one finds the use of terms such as *al-Barbar* (the Berbers), *lisān al-barbarī* (Berber language), and *al-barbariyya* (the Berber) in Arab sources ([Chaker 2013](#): 227). According to Ramzi [Rouighi \(2011\)](#), the *Mauri* of the Latin sources do not correspond to the *Barbar* of the Arab ones, the latter term being used in a usually vague way: Arab authors began to create their “Other” during the progressive conquest of North Africa and Andalusia by “tagging,” under the label *Barbar*, heterogeneous groups and confederations of unclear origin, possibly tribal as well as political alliances, and by developing the idea of the autochthony of the *Barbar* in the 9th century CE.

Linguistic elements, on the other hand, point to the existence and use of vernaculars today called Amazigh/Berber by the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties in western North Africa. Building on previous studies, [Ghouirgate \(2015\)](#) shows, for example, that a “Berber” variant played a central role in the preaching as well as in the military action of the founder of the Almohad dynasty, Ibn Tumart – who, using it in writing, promoted it as a language for religious texts.

The language used by the Almohads was called *al-lisān al-garbī* (the Western language). The Almohads made the choice not to designate as “Berber” the idiom they used because this was a too derogatorily connoted term linked to the long-standing heresies of this people.

([Ghouirgate 2015](#): 580)

The use of the “Western language” by religious preachers and scholars in the 12th century led to the development of orthographic norms which continued to be used under the following dynasties, and an advanced bilingualism is expressed in linguistic elements that appear in historical and literary sources of this period.^v [Ghouirgate \(2015: 596\)](#) concludes by indicating that the use of the Western language and Arabic in religious, military, and administrative tasks under the Almohads opposes the leitmotif of the Berbers as a minority since the Arab conquest of North Africa and of the Berber language as only an oral language.

In the field of the literary tradition, the acquisition of Arabic literacy led to a religious written production in Amazigh/Berber not only in regions under the Almohad dynasty, such as the Souss (south Morocco) but also in the Mزاب in Algeria and at Djerba in Tunisia.^{vi} Several Berber manuscripts written in the Arabic script present religious commentaries, poems, and admonitions. Most of these manuscripts are preserved thanks to versions from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Over time, the diffusion of the Arabic language (Arabization) increased, and Arabic was acquired by larger strata of the population in North Africa. The social and political changes brought about by the diffusion of Islam and Arabic led to the formation of multilingual contexts, where oral languages were used for daily communication and literary production (Amazigh/Berber vernaculars and dialectal Arabic) as well as for commerce and communication between distant individuals and groups (dialectal Arabic), while a written, prestigious language (classical Arabic) increasingly became the vehicle for religion, scholarly literary production, and urban administrations. Judeo-Arabic languages were also spoken and written in North Africa. As noted before, writing in Amazigh/Berber disappeared or became limited, while Amazigh/Berber vernaculars, as oral languages, became subordinated to the prestige of written Arabic, the sacred language of the Koran.

When one looks at the cultural arena in the *longue durée*, the notions of majority/minority are inadequate when applied to the relationships between Arab speakers and Amazigh/Berber speakers, since they convey the idea of homogeneous and separate groups and of the Berbers as a historically minorized group. Such notions do not take into account the long process of creolization of the Maghreb. The examples given previously illustrate the presence of Berber dynasties in present-day Morocco, the role of the Berber variant called “Western language” as court language and written tool of religious communication, and the interconnectedness of the “Western language” and Arabic. Also, in the area corresponding to present-day Algeria, speaking a local Berber vernacular did not always mean being a member of a minority: pre-colonial relationships were governed by political and lineage affiliation, although language could play a role in these relationships. For instance, one can take the case of two large and powerful Kabyle Berber confederations (also called “kingdoms” in colonial texts) established at the beginning of the 16th century (Kuku, roughly located in present central Kabylia, and Beni Abbas, roughly corresponding to present maritime Lesser Kabylia). These confederations were rival and strategically allied with or opposed to the Ottoman empire in Algiers and the latter’s enemies (the Hafsid dynasty of Tunis and the Spanish army) in order to maintain their own power positions ([Roberts 2014](#); [Genevois 1974](#)). At alternating moments, they even defeated the Ottomans and imposed themselves in Algiers.

The making of minorities and majorities in North Africa

As developed subsequently, the minorization of Amazigh/Berber languages and communities is a colonial and postcolonial phenomenon linked to the creation of national states. The use of language as ethnic marker was applied – among other categories such as rural and urban, nomad and sedentary – during colonization, and the construction of communities united (and divided) by language increased under the postcolonial Arabization policy.

From the first half of the 19th century, the situation described in the colonial studies was that of a mosaic of Muslim Arab- and Berber-speaking populations, whose alliances and loyalties intersected and went beyond language groupings. Where Berber vernaculars were spoken, usually a limited number of Muslim literates used Arabic as written support for religious activities. Colonization superimposed the French language (written and spoken) in the Maghreb and introduced a divisive policy of communities defined as Arab, Berber, Muslim, and Jew.

Public and religious schools disseminated French-language instruction in Algeria and Morocco. Arabic teaching was suppressed in Algeria after 1870 and partially maintained in Morocco during the protectorate but for a very low percentage of the population.^{vii} Berber teaching was designed to train military personnel, administrators, and interpreters for the conquest and management of Berber areas. There was no French colonial

teaching of Berber to Berber-speaking populations, notwithstanding the creation of the so-called Franco-Berber schools that were “Berber” only for the recruitment areas of pupils and some teachers (Knibiehler 1994: 493). These schools were successful, however, in creating “a new francophone rural Berber elite” (Maddy-Weitzman 2011: 58).

The colonial discourse on the Berbers was Janus faced. On the one hand, Berbers were depicted as the *bons sauvages* of North Africa and as the Roman civilization’s heirs, who aspired only to be reintegrated into Western civilization thanks to assimilation to French colonization. On the other hand, Berber society was stigmatized as being more retrograde than the Arab one was. Women’s status was presented as particularly retrograde, since women were disinherited and they could be married off before puberty and even “sold” to their husbands (which Berber intellectuals denied). The Berber language and literature supposedly also expressed such a backward sociocultural position.^{viii} The representations of Berber society in and by colonial writings were called into question by a number of Berber writers, students, schoolteachers, and local intellectuals who had been educated in the French school system (such education was also diffused among their Arabic-speaking fellow countrymen). A number of these individuals – professionals, semi-professionals, and amateurs – began to learn and teach how to write in Berber, and to collect, transcribe, translate, and re-diffuse (in writing) Berber oral poetry and narratives. These activities, in synergy with the overall social changes, constituted a productive framework for the self-production of “Berber” local identities.

The divisive colonial policy aimed at opposing two imagined homogeneous groups (“Arabs and Berbers”) did not succeed, and anticolonial forces from all sides and regions joined political parties and military actions. Berber-speaking areas were often bastions of the anticolonial movements in Algeria and Morocco, such as in the case of Kabylia, the Aurès, and the Rif. In the latter region, a powerful military rebellion led to the constitution of the short-lived Republic of the Rif (1921–1926) under the leadership of Abdelkrim El Khattabi. Although various interpretations of the rebellion are possible (Pennel 2017), the Republic of the Rif was proclaimed in the name of Islam and of freedom from Spanish and French domination. Maddy-Weitzman (2011: 85) writes: “Berber population acted neither as a large cohesive unit, nor in the name of a specific Berber-Moroccan identity.” This applies by and large to North African anticolonial movements. The language question, however – although not explicitly mentioned – was probably involved in the conflicts within the Algerian FLN (National Liberation Front), which set the Kabyle Berber leaders on the margins of the revolutionary movement during the anticolonial war and during the unrest that took place just after independence, ending with the military occupation of Kabylia.^{ix} A similar pattern developed in the Rif region where, in 1958, the Moroccan army under the leadership of future king Hassan II repressed an uprising which had aimed at safeguarding the local economy and tribal autonomy. Although language was not a factor in the rebellion or in the repression, Hassan II strategically chose two spouses of Berber origin (from the Middle Atlas) to indicate the integration of such communities into his kingdom and, at the same time, enforced the *damnatio memoriae* of the Republic of the Rif from public spaces and supported the Moroccan Arabization policy aimed at replacing Berber with Arabic in the whole country.^x

In the post-independence period, the linguistic policy in the Maghreb indeed centered on the adoption of Arabic. If Arabization was seen as a form of national affirmation against the colonizer, the previous subordination of Berber (as oral vernacular) to Arabic as the sacred written language acquired a political connotation. Berber was stigmatized as the bygone language of local ancestors and denied vitality and public space. At the same time, Berber-speaking activists and writers started to demand recognition for Berber as a component of the national culture and its integration into school programs. Such demands were interpreted by Algerian and Moroccan governments and national elites as a risk to national identity and unity, which were represented by Arabic. Activists were accused of “localism” and of French “acculturation.” Their activism in favor of the Berber language and of improved political and economic conditions of life in Berber-speaking areas was presented as “Berberism,” manipulatively interpreted as foreboding requests for regional independence. As indicated previously, the large Amazigh/Berber-speaking communities – geographically concentrated and, one can add, with a history of military action as confederations of lineages and villages – posed a question of management to national centralized states. Inclusion and federation could have been a strategy but, instead, the label of “Berberism” became a weapon for police and military repression by authoritarian governments aiming to control and to suppress all political opposition.

Considering the post-independence policy, it is no surprise that until the late 1990s there was no Berber school education in Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia. University studies on Berber developed mainly outside the Maghreb, which contributed to configuring Berber speakers as a minority. Such a school policy was a

consequence of the colonial politics of division as well as the expression of the authoritarian character of the nationalist governments in North Africa. The exception of the recognition of Tuareg Berber as a “national” language in Mali and Niger from 1961 led to limited activities of schooling and an alphabetization policy, though this did little to contribute to modifying the difficult power relationships, and repeated violent clashes between national armies and Tuaregs occurred.^{xi} The epitome of the confrontations was the attempt, linked to long-standing socioeconomic marginalization and the diffusion of global radical Islamic movements, to create the independent state of Azawad in 2012.^{xii}

The recognition of Amazigh as a national and official language in Algeria (respectively, from 1995 and 2016) and in Morocco (from 2001 and 2011) was brought about after long years of activism, mass demonstrations, and state repression.^{xiii} Although it is impossible to speak of a homogeneous movement – because individuals with diverse political views and various fragmented groups participated in it – it is safe to say that, by and large, Amazigh/Berber activism has increased the production of identity discourses locally and nationally. At the same time, the transnational approach to “Amazigh-ness” has been strengthened by organizations aiming to cross national borders – such as the Berber Academy in the 1970s and later on the Amazigh World Congress – and was emblematically represented by the creation of the Amazigh flag in the late 1990s.^{xiv} Decades of Algerian state repression and economic deprivation of Kabylia led to the development of an activist discourse in terms of autonomy (MAK, Mouvement pour l’autonomie de la Kabylie; RPK, Rassemblement pour la Kabylie) and, in 2013, of self-determination (MAK) – somehow taking up the Catalan model (Tilmatine 2017). It seems sadly ironic that the fear of national division led to repressive policies that turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. It should be clear, however, that the MAK is just one of the political organizations in Kabylia and that the choice for self-determination is questioned by other parties – such as the FFS (Socialist Forces Front), the RCD (Rally for Culture and Democracy), and, recently, the RPK (Rally for Kabylia) – which inscribe regional autonomy in the national state framework.^{xv} In Morocco, the Amazigh/Berber language and identity were not among the demands of the Hirak movement in the Rif^{xvi} – somehow a follow-up to the previous national 20 February Movement.^{xvii} Hirak leaders asked for a solution to the economic problems and corruption in the region, but Amazigh flags were often visible during the demonstrations. This latter element was used by the authorities to accuse the Hirak movement of separatism – which is denied by activists (Wolf 2018: 5) – adding such an accusation to the reasons devised to crush the movement violently and arrest hundreds of participants.

If the minorization of Berbers/Imazighen coalesces in postcolonial times, the idea of separate minorities and majorities is at the same time countered by the Moroccan central authority’s strategy to manage Amazigh/Berber areas through the integration of the Berber elites and rural middle classes into the national politics and in the “patronage/spoils of power” system (*système de cooptation* in French) (Maddy-Weitzman 2011: 88, 96). Also, the postcolonial Algerian policy has strategically included individuals and families of the rural middle class in the power system. The consequences of the spoils system (linked to the economic boom of the 1970s) are differently interpreted as contributing to shaping an elitist Berber consciousness or, conversely, creating a class interested in its own social benefits and its own integration into the national power system (Roberts 1982; Chaker 1989b: 71–81). Either way, the consciousness of being Amazigh/Berber developed among local elites and the wider strata of population in regions such as Kabylia, the Souss, and the Rif, which renewed and modified previous identities derived from local lineages and confederations. Such consciousness developed under the impact of a number of intertwined processes: the divisive colonization policy and the anticolonial fighting, the social changes and migration flows caused by colonization and by postcolonial crises, the expected “death” of oral languages due to factors such as literacy and “modernization,” nationalism and Arabization, centralizing policies, economic marginalization, and postcolonial police and military repression.

A contested situation of minority

The inequality in power relationships and the economic and political marginalization of Amazigh/Berber-speaking regions in North African postcolonial states has led some activists to claim the status of “minority.” For example, the association Tamaynut and one of its leading founders, Hassan Id Belkassem, linked their demands for the recognition of the Amazigh/Berber language in Morocco to the United Nation’s legal status and definition of “indigenous minority people” (Maddy-Weitzman 2011: 132). The previously mentioned position of the MAK can also be seen as the implementation of the idea of a minority (or rather a regional “majority”) aspiring to self-determination.

On the other hand, most activists refuse to be seen as, and to be confined by the definition of, a minority. Taking the history of Arabization of the Maghreb as a starting point, such a position affirms that Imazighen/Berbers cannot be presented as a minority, because most of the North African population is composed of Arabized Berbers who “lost” their original language. Hence, in such an approach, Imazighen/Berbers are *de facto* the majority. Presenting themselves as the “autochthonous” people of North Africa, pre-existing the process of Arabization, activists challenge their minorization within their national borders. As indicated previously, a transnational approach to a pan-Amazigh/Berber identity has also developed. A widespread idea among Amazigh activists is their affiliation to *Tamazgha*, a North African autochthonous cultural space, *politically* and territorially unified, which is hoped for in the future and which otherwise has no historical existence. There is a weakness in this approach: presenting the Imazighen/Berbers as the autochthonous people of North Africa aiming to (re)construct a utopian cultural and territorial unity disregards the creolization of the Maghreb. As indicated by Karima Dirèche (2017: 81), presenting “Berber culture as original and authentic . . . would suggest that all those who claim an Arab genealogy must now assume altered, if not inauthentic, ancestry.” Moreover, activists tend to dismiss or ignore the contradiction between the national pluralistic model maintained by the Amazigh associations and the idea of the cultural continuity of a *Tamazgha* whose existence is justified by the autochthony of Imazighen (with respect to other groups) (Oiry-Varacca 2012: 12; Jay 2016: 72). The intellectually more extreme consequences of such an approach are limited, however, by the positions claiming Amazigh as part of the nation state. Many Amazigh associations and trends “consider Amazighity as a basis of identity common to all Moroccans and not as a substrate that devalues that which would come afterwards or as a prerequisite of an ethnical or cultural group” (Oiry-Varacca 2012: 12). Such a moderate position attempts to maintain the demands in favor of Amazigh/Berber languages and communities without posing them as internal “minorities.”

In summary, the process of minorization of Amazigh/Berber speakers and communities in the sense of limited rights and unbalanced political power is historically a modern phenomenon, developed in the colonial and postcolonial periods. Such a minorization is resented and opposed by several currents of Amazigh/Berber activism. The formation of an internationally shared Amazigh/Berber identity is also a modern phenomenon, which is articulated to equally modern local identities emerging from past linkages and strong feelings of belonging to specific villages and confederations. It is undeniable that the notions of majority/minority fail to take into account the long process of creolization of the Maghreb as well as the activist discourse reclaiming that the Imazighen/Berbers are the majority when the North African territory is seen as overlapping with an “autochthonous” Amazigh/Berber cultural space. As indicated previously, the latter cultural space is utopian and contested in the studies because it also tends to disregard creolization.

What Amazigh/Berber literature can tell us about minority, multilingualism, and transnationalism is the topic of the following sections.

Minorization and literature

Taking Franz Kafka as an example, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1975) developed their famous definition of “minor” literature, which refers not to what is produced in the language of a linguistic or other minority but to works written in the mainstream (dominant or national) language by authors who belong to a group that finds itself in a situation of minority or marginalization. Writers do not need to live in the place where the majority language is spoken (Kafka wrote in German and lived in Prague), but they express an “other” sensibility or consciousness *vis-à-vis* the canonical literature produced in the mainstream language. The definition of “minor” literature is not directly linked to demographics or to the idea of a “lesser” literature. On the contrary, Deleuze and Guattari celebrate the expressive and innovating force of “minor” voices creating counter-discourses to hegemonic, majoritarian, national narratives.

Literary and cultural studies agree on three main characteristics of minority literature, descending from Deleuze and Guattari’s work: deterritorialization, politics, and collective discourse (for instance, JanMohamed and Lloyd 1987; Bensmaïa 1994; Buchanan and Marks 2000; Ponzanesi 2004; Haines 2015; Laurie and Khan 2017). By deterritorialization is meant the distance of the “minor” voice from the mainstream literary language, which disrupts canonical ways of expression and creates a new literary language. This literary disruption can take place through an “accented” language, such as the use of Prague German in Kafka; through extreme forms of playfulness or gravity; and through questioning and weakening the sociological link between national territory, language, and identity (Lauri and Khan 2017: 3). The political character of minority literature is provided by the

attention paid to the holistic relationship between the individual and his/her community. Because of such a holistic relation, all events become collective in the form of a social and political drama – which allows the interpretation of minority literature as revolutionary with regard to mainstream literature which is (seen as more) individualistically oriented. According to such an approach, an aspect of this political character is that minority works are characterized by collective discourse, as the writers tend to express communal values and ideas more than individual ones. The latter characteristic strengthens the political effect of writing by inventing a collectivity which takes form in the minority literature.

The articulation of minority literature and cultural difference within the nation is to be found in Homi Bhabha's chapter "Time, narrative and the margin of the modern nation" (1994: 199–244). Bhabha writes:

Cultural difference, as a form of intervention, participates in a logic of supplementary subversion similar to the strategies of minority discourse. . . . The aim of cultural difference is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization.

(1994: 232)

As in the case of "minor" voices, cultural difference exposes the contradictions of the national, unifying, and homogenizing narration:

The very possibility of cultural contestation, the ability to shift the ground of knowledges, or to engage in the "war of position," marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification.

Designations of cultural difference interpellate forms of identity which, because of their continual implication in other symbolic systems, are always "incomplete" or open to translation.

(Bhabha 1994: 233)

Bhabha's reflection on cultural difference and minority discourse helps us to understand that the characteristics of "minor" literatures mentioned previously intersect and overlap with those of the so-called postcolonial literatures. Postcolonialism, as it is known, refers to art and literature produced after the encounter/clash following European invasions in Asia, Africa, America, Australia, and Oceania.^{xviii} Nowadays, the label "postcolonial literature" is criticized as yet another form of ethnocentrism, because it seems to say that European colonialism was, and still is, the most important moment in global history and in world literature. In fact, the opposite is apparent: many contemporary works are not at all concerned with colonialism and postcoloniality. Despite the criticism, some characteristics of "postcolonial" texts can be identified: thinking and writing beyond national, cultural, and social borders, with transnationalism as a central characteristic; questioning notions of "home," identity, and cultural affiliation, including fragmentation, alienation, and hybridity; rediscovering local knowledge (as opposed to dominating "Western" theories); exploring diversity and equality within a community, between communities, and between minorities and majorities; blurring genre and language boundaries; and bringing language creativity to the extreme by, among other devices, interacting with mother tongues when writing is in a mainstream language.

Studies largely refer to "minor" voices and cultural difference in literatures produced in the European languages of the colonial domination – and by extension in the languages of other dominations – but some studies have begun to apply postcolonial research to African language literatures.^{xix} In the following section, a reflection is offered on Amazigh/Berber literature and "literary space" in the light of the characteristics attributed by theoretical approaches to postcolonial and minority literatures.

Amazigh/Berber literature: beyond minority voices

As indicated in the previous sections, when one looks at the *longue durée*, both the religious manuscripts written in Amazigh/Berber and Berber as a court language oppose the stereotypes of Amazigh as an exclusively oral language and as a language reduced to a minority situation since the Islamization and the Arabization of the Maghreb. Moreover, literary analysis shows that Amazigh oral poetry and narratives are solidly anchored in their own vernacular and territory. Lexical loans (from Arabic and to a lesser extent from French) in narratives told in Amazigh and collected since the 19th century are indications of social and political interactions of such vernaculars with the broader context. Specifically, the use of poetic verses in Arabic shows the prestige of the

Arabic language. There is also a tension between Muslim universal culture and local heroes and values. For example, Camille [Lacoste-Dujardin \(1970\)](#), analyzing a corpus of the Kabyle folktales collected and published in 1893–1898, shows the presence of two kinds of heroes: the first a “traditional” defender of the local group and the second a “conquering” hero emblematically represented by the stories concerning Harun al-Rashid, the famous caliph of the Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad (8th century CE) and renowned personage of the *Arabian Nights*. Nevertheless, one does not find a questioning of belonging or a language “deterritorialization” in Amazigh folktales – rather the negotiation of multilingualism and Islamic references integrated into the narration of one’s world and identity. At the same time, such intellectual negotiations challenge the assimilation to homogenizing literary models arising from Muslim universal culture. The language of Amazigh poems and tales confirms esthetic codes and traditions, while their literary strategies sustain the ideal of social cohesion, the moral values, and the reproduction of the conventional norms of the local societies which produced such oral genres and shared the Berber vernaculars. Studies show that Kabyle, Chaouia, and Riffian folktales, for example, create and affirm, respectively, Kabyle-, Chaouia-, and Rif-centered worlds, while itinerant bards contributed to create a common and highly appreciated literary language and tradition in the whole of the Souss region.^{xx}

Innovation and change do exist in Amazigh oral genres, as they do overall in other oral literatures. An example is given by the introduction of the poem composed by a strophe of nine verses in the Kabyle poetry of the second half of the 19th century. As Lahlou’s research ([2017](#)) exemplary shows, the emergence of such a poetry can be explained in the context of the upheaval and disorientation induced by colonization. The colonizers’ expropriation of the land belonging to Kabyle villages and confederations; the later military defeat after the uprising of 1871; and the consequent disruption of previous social, political, and economic structures led to a weakening of the role of the professional “tribal” poets and their styles.^{xxi} The poet Si Mohand ou Mhand innovatively adopted the nine-verse strophe as an autonomous form of poem and intensified the literary language, in his case through sobriety and lapidary style, as in the definitions of minor literature. However, in contrast with the latter, Si Mohand ou Mhand also continued to use his mother tongue and developed themes leading to an “individualization” of his poems, not to a promotion of collective values. Moreover, although oral genres are usually marginalized on the national and global literary scenes, the poetry of Si Mohand ou Mhand is still well known, diffused, and appreciated among the Kabyles. His nine-verse strophe, or Mohandien *asefrou*, is today widespread in Kabyle poetic production, thus having become “mainstream” within such a cultural context ([Mammeri 1969](#); [Lahlou 2017](#)):

Si Mohand ou Mhand’s poems differ and oppose the long tradition of epic, didactic, hagiographic, and narrative poetry – for it is first of all an individual, personal, and spontaneous poetry, which essentially expresses the shocks of its existence and the echoes of its interior universe.

([Lahlou 2017](#): 376)

Another example of innovation and change is provided by the “modern” Amazigh songs and music groups. Although some oral genres tend to disappear along with their contexts of production, new forms have also arisen at the intersection of oral, written, audiovisual, and digital modes. Increasingly, the overwhelmingly varied and enormously popular genre of modern songs incorporates “classical” musical styles and poetry with inspiration and instruments from around the world. Singers such as Idir, Aït Menguelllet, Matoub, and Khalid Izri and the bands Djurdjura and Izenzren have innovated in terms of music, abandoning the orchestration diffused in the 1940s under the influence of Andalusian and Egyptian music and adopting the sound of acoustic and electric guitars, drums, and synthesizers. Another example is the music of the Tuareg band Tinariwen, whose members play *teherdent* (lute), *imzad* (violin), *tinde* (drum), and electric guitar. [Morgan \(2007\)](#) argues that Tinariwen merge the Tuareg style of *assouf* (“solitude” or “nostalgia”) with influences from Kabyle Berber contemporary songs (for instance, from Idir and Aït Menguelllet), Malian blues, Algerian urban *rai*, Moroccan *chaabi*, pop, rock, and Indian music.^{xxii}

In term of language, all these singers and bands sing in the Amazigh vernaculars of their families and communities, contributing to maintaining and developing them and resisting the enforcement of homogenization by Arabization and international global languages. Others, however, may increasingly participate in the global multilingual scene, as in the case of Hindi Zahra, who sings in English and Chleuh Berber and incorporates Chleuh sounds with blues, jazz, American folk, Egyptian music, and the influence of African singers such as Ali Farka Touré and Youssou’ Ndour.^{xxiii} In terms of themes, a large number of the Amazigh lyrics can be labeled

“protest songs,” but without pointing to didactic or pamphlet-like styles. Abdellah Bounfour (2006: 4438) aptly summarizes it as follows:

The contemporaneity of such poetry resides essentially in its renewed themes and, among them, that of identity is haunting: Who are we? Why are we dominated? Who is responsible for this state of affairs? The answers to such questions are given by re-reading ancient and/or recent history, by sociology, and so on. It can be said, without hesitation, that sung poetry popularized the ideas that Berber intellectuals, their creators, could not carry beyond their own circles.

Skillfully analyzing the song “*A vava inouva*,” Jane E. Goodman (2005: 49–68) shows that the singer Idir and the poet Ben Mohamed were able to vivify a traditional tale and refrain to engage the feeling of homeliness and at the same time to contest “the Algerian state’s discourse which positioned Berber culture as backward and at odds with the state’s modernizing projects” (49).^{xxiv} Goodman adds that Ben Mohammed sees such an innovation as deriving from their internal gaze “informed by neither the East nor the West but by indigenous modes of knowledge” (Goodman 2005: 49). Blending a traditional story with new attributed meanings and traditional sounds with European instruments, Idir and Ben Mohamed were able to counter the folklorization of Berber culture through an original synthesis of ethnographic continuity and change: “*A vava inouva*” became “an emblem of Berber identity, a sign of the rich heritage, legitimacy, and modernity of Kabyle culture” (Goodman 2005: 68). “*A vava inouva*” became a hit not only for the Kabyles but also in Algeria and in France, selling around 200,000 copies (Humblot 1978, quoted in Goodman 2005: 65). The Tuareg band Tinariwen also received international acclaim: in 2005, their album *Amassakoul* (The Traveler) had sales of more than 100,000 copies, and they were awarded the Best World Music Grammy in Los Angeles in 2012. Nadia Belalimat (2010: 155) explains that Tinariwen became internationally known for their particular style of music and for presenting a contemporary image of Tuareg society. Their songs are effective in creating internal bonding by expressing (past) military experience and a real political engagement (Belalimat 2010: 7) – for example, when songs and music gatherings were used to convey militant ideas and to spread them through cassettes and other media, such as radio and later on cell phones and the Internet:

*Friends hear and understand me
You know, there is one country
One goal, one religion
And unity, hand in hand
Friends, you know there is only one stake to which you fettered
And only unity can break it.*

(“*Imidiwen segdet teslem*,” 1978)^{xxv}

At the same time, the blend of Tuareg classic music style and instruments with electronic and international sounds, the images of four-wheel drives, camels, beautifully clothed men with veils and turbans, electronic guitars, and the marketing of “rebel” music have fascinated the international public, refashioning previous imagery of the Tuaregs as the grand warriors of colonial fantasies. If a recurrent theme is the nostalgia linked to the desert and the fatherland (Belalimat 2010), a major theme of the Tinariwen’s songs is indeed “rebellion” against Malian state oppression. Their songs castigate the harsh repression of the Tuareg uprisings particularly in the 1960s, recalling a courageous military image in terms of rightful rebellion against authoritarian governments. Besides themes of military bravery, Belalimat (2010: 5) shows that the Tinariwen also address the situation of exiles and refugees in Algerian and Libyan camps and contemporary complaints, such as in the song *Ahimana* (Oh My Soul):

*Oh mother! Since I left for Libya persevering,
I finally arrived! But I cannot settle in no way
I search for the necessary money through all means
But it desperately refuses to accumulate.*

Tinariwen, “*Ahimana*” (track 4), 2008^{xxvi}

Women as singers participate in the construction of contemporary Amazigh identities (such as in the case of the band Djurdjura and the singer Fatima Tabaaramte), but they also complain about and reflect on life from their own “minor” position vis-à-vis men, presenting or discussing the roles attributed to women and the norms concerning femininity in their own communities (Nouara, Cherifa, Tabaaramte, Djurdjura). This is something that one can also recognize in some of the Amazigh songs of Hindi Zahra, whose texts primarily speak of intimate experiences and urban youth culture. For example, her song “Oursoul” – a wordplay which can be interpreted as both “Our soul” in English and “Ursul” in Amazigh Tasoussit (Never again) – tells the story of her parents’ marriage but can be interpreted as a more generalized complaint against arranged marriages:

They told me: “Rest, your husband will come.”

They said to me: “Rest, he will come.”

I will never have what I want!

They told me: “It will work out.”

I will never have what I want!

(Hindi Zahra, “Oursoul,” *Handmade*, 2010)

I choose English because it is a way to create a space from the things I say. It would be very hard for me to sing my love stories in my mother’s tongue. In the Berber [language], I talk about different stories. Especially in “Oursoul,” when I talk about the story of my parents. They had to get married, not really forced, but the system was like this in the village. You had to get married. Berber was the easiest way to express and talk about this.

(Hindi Zahra. “Discovery: Hindi Zahra.” *Interview*, August 29, 2011, interviewmagazine.com)

A more complicated relationship to language than that of “minor” vs “major,” or hegemonic language, is expressed by Hindi Zahra in the previous interview: “another” language can also offer a space of liberty to express that which, in the eyes of the singer, is not legitimate or socially acceptable in her vernacular and in the community that such a language creates. This was a well-known point in literary criticism concerning Francophone literature (Bounfour 1990; Déjeux 1994: 130; Dehane 1992: Le Rouzic 1996; Gans-Guinoune 2010: 70; Yacine 1995). For example, the famous writer Assia Djebar says in an interview “the norm is not to talk about oneself [...], one never says ‘I’” (Dehane 1992 : TC 00:02:30 – 00:03:31)

The previously mentioned examples of innovations in oral genres and changes in literary and musical registers point to a process of literary and musical acquisition, negotiation, and subversion, which can be interpreted in term of cultural difference and global postcolonial features. If it is clear that contemporary poets and singers create in response and reaction to the pressure of hegemonic languages and political systems, at the same time, the focus on using their own vernaculars (or combining them with other languages) and on shared literary/music styles derived from still-loved literary traditions shows the will, and the practice, to affirm their “internal” gaze and cultural difference, even when participating in increasingly global scenes.

Writing in Amazigh vernaculars and in other languages

With the significant exception of the *Cahiers de Belaïd*, posthumously published in 1963 and 1964 (Aït Ali/Dallet and Degezelle, eds.), a new production of novels written in Amazigh/Berber started in the last decades of the last century as the engaged effort of writers who had been educated either in French or in Arabic. The first novels (*ungal/ungalen*) in Kabyle appeared in the 1980s. The interweaving between literary creation and historical context (the repression of the so-called Berber Spring) was underscored by the militant and identity tone of the novels *Asfel* (The Ritual Sacrifice, 1981) and *Faffa* (La France, 1986) by Rachid Aliche and *Askuti* (Boy Scout, 1983) by Said Sadi, as well as of the novels published later, such as *Id d wass* (Day and Night, 1990) by Amar Mezdad and *Tafrara* (Dawn, 1995) by Salem Zénia. Among the features of these novels, as analyzed by Abrous (1989: 81–100, 1992), are that they avoid loan words from Arabic and preserve the language through the use of Berber neologisms and ancient expressions, while, on the other hand, they show a lexical and syntactic influence from French. As Salhi (2014: 151) aptly notes:

the elements borrowed from Islam and the Arabic language and, more recently, from Western culture, particularly from the French language and culture, to mention only the most important elements, have been integrated and adapted by the Kabyle to such an extent that at present they constitute structuring parameters of their lived culture.

The Mammeri Prize (Tizi Ouzou), established for writing in Kabyle, and more recently new contests have helped to stimulate young writers. In the last decade, novels and short stories show a greater variety of themes, such as love, infidelity, children/parent conflicts, radicalism, and “recalcitrant” Islamists. If the language of the Kabyle novels is often difficult because of the high recurrent number of neologisms and the syntactic influence of French, some novels are more readable and close to spoken Kabyle (Salhi 2005) – such as *Salas d Nuja* (Salas and Nuja 2003, names of characters) by Brahim Tazaghart, *Lwerd n tayri* (The Rose of Love, 2004) by *Igli n tlelli* (Horizon of Freedom, pseud.), *Bururu* (Owl, 2006) by Tahar Ould-Amar, and the collection of short stories *Ger zik d tura* (From the Past and Today, 1993/2008) by Saïd Chemak. The theme of family relations in a poor and harsh Kabyle context is taken up in the text by Fatima Merabti, *Yir Tagmat* (Bad Brotherhood, first two chapters of a novel that were published in the journal *Tizir* in 1997 and 1998) and in *Aâecciw n tmes* (The Fire Hut, 2009), the first published novel of a Kabyle woman writer, Lynda Koudache. Koudache presents women’s magic opposing “love” in a traditional world in which, as in the world of tales, marriage is more than a meeting of hearts because it involves the social and economic roles of, and within, the extended family.

Amazigh written production in Morocco has seen the appearance of plays, novels, and short stories by Riffian and Souss writers. However, publication is limited, as the works are often self-published or scattered in small periodicals. After Ali Mimoun Essafi’s plays published in the 1980s, the first novel in Souss Berber is *Tawargit d imik* (A Dream and a Little More), authored by Mohammed Akunad. Published in 2002, this novel concerns the unforeseen consequences of an imam’s decision to pray and to teach in Amazigh. Currently, there are at least 20 novels and 20 collections of short stories published in Souss Berber, such as *Amussu n umalu* (The Movement of the Shadow, 2008) by Lahacem Zaheur, *Ijjigen n tidi* (The Flowers of Sweat, 2007) by Mohamed Akunad, and *Igdad n Wihran* (The Birds of Oran, 2010) by Lahoucine Bouyaakoubi. The first novels in the Rif vernacular were published in the diaspora. As in the case of Kabyle literature, there is a continuity of cultural production between the country of origin and the Riffian emigration in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Spain. Emigration, travel, and memory are central themes – for example, in *Rez ttabu ad d teffegh tfukt* (Breaking the Taboo and Letting the Sun Appear, 1997) by the late Mohamed Chacha (who also has collections of short stories and poems to his name). Several writers active in Morocco and the Netherlands have produced novels and short stories as well as theatrical productions and films, such as Mohamed Bouzaggou, Omar Boumazough, and Ahmed Ziani. The first novel published by a woman writer appeared in Tarifit: *Tasrit n wezru* (The Bride of the Rock) by Samira Yedjis n Idura n Arrif (pseud.), published in Morocco (Oujda) in 2001.

As a consequence of the colonial and postcolonial school policy, it is not surprising that a large proportion of Amazigh/Berber-speaking authors wrote in other languages until about the 1990s. An example is the genre of the novel. The novels of the first Berber writers were often written in French, such as in the case of the Algerian Mouloud Feraoun (1913–1962), Mouloud Mammeri (1917–1989), Fdhma Amrouche (1882–1967), and Taos Amrouche (1947–1976), and by the Moroccan Mohamed Khaïr-Eddine (1941–1995), or in Arabic by the Moroccan Mohamed Choukri (1935–2003) and Mohamed Mrabet (1936), and by the Libyan Ibrahim Al-Kûni (1948). Several studies have highlighted the use of Kabyle words and expressions and the transposition of oral genres in the works of Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, Fadhma Amrouche, and Taos Amrouche, linked to Kabylia as geographical and cultural space. Jacqueline Arnaud (1986) wrote that it was necessary to speak of “Francophone” Berber-speaking and Arabic-speaking authors “if one is interested in the linguistic substratum of the French language . . . and the perspectives envisaged.” Writer and researcher Nabile Farès (1987: 94, 96) raised this issue by referring to the Berber-ness of some works, even though they are written in French. Salem Chaker (1989b: 23) speaks of “French-speaking Kabyle writers” by considering the Kabyle roots of their works, the reception of the public, and the promotion of the Berber language by these writers through the collection and translation of poems, songs, and oral tales. In a number of cases, one can also add the production of grammars and dictionaries. Such a trend does not fade after independence but, on the contrary, continues in the production of writers who revendicate a Kabyle origin (see Merolla 1995). Similarly, there are several references to Berber languages and communities in *Légende et vie d’Agoun’chich* (The Legend and Life of Agoun’chich, 1984) by the Moroccan writer Mohamed Khaïr-Eddine and in literary texts written in Arabic by the Libyan writer Ibrahim Al-Koni. In more recent times, the productions of migrant authors in Europe have been largely written in the

languages of these countries: in addition to the vast production in French, there are new writings in Dutch, in Catalan, and in Italian by authors of Amazigh origin. However, the language and cultural references to Amazigh languages, contexts, cultural imaginary, and characters are never isolated from a broader context and reveal intercultural elements and references. More than an “ethnic” Amazigh/Berber discourse, these works narrate a quest for identity which resists cultural homogeneity endorsed by national and international intellectual and political powers. As said previously, the novels narrating such a quest for identity were accused of “localism” and of French “acculturation”. Notorious debates around the works of Mouloud Feraoun and Mouloud Mammeri included the nationalist critique of the supposed acculturation, regionalism, self-ethnography, and lack of patriotism of the authors.^{xxvii} The nationalist critique in turn has been debunked in its ideological elements.^{xxviii}

Writing in Amazigh Berber is a definitively “territorialized” endeavor. As in the case of Amazigh oral poetry and narratives, writing is solidly anchored in the vernacular, in the sense that authors use and promote their own linguistic variation and that their readers are usually speakers/readers of the same vernacular. As [Salhi and Sadi \(2016: 32\)](#) note:

Written in one of the Berber variants, its [the Berber novel’s] reception is realized only within the limits of this variant. Thus, we will speak of Kabyle novel (Kabylia and Kabyle diaspora especially in France), Chleuh novel (mainly the region of Souss where the Tachelhit [a Berber variant] is spoken and Chleuh diaspora mainly in France), and Riffian novel (the region of Rif and Riffian diaspora especially in the Netherlands). . . . We will say that the Kabyle novel, the Riffian novel, and the Chleuh novel compose the Maghreb novel written in Berber.

At the same time, one recognizes an Amazigh transnational effort, as neologisms are created from other Amazigh variations and from common linguistic roots. The questioning of national belonging and of cultural affiliation are central themes, as well as language creativity and the blurring of genre and language boundaries, as in the case of other postcolonial literatures. As mentioned previously, the influence of the languages of school education, such as French and Arabic, often appears in the syntactic structures, and the blending of genres, for instance, is revealed by the scientific debate on what can/should be defined as *ungal* or *tullist*, which are the usual translations, respectively, for “novel” and “short story” ([Salhi 2011: 86–87](#); [Ameziane and Salhi 2014](#)). However, when one looks at the institutional side, notwithstanding local and individual efforts, the recognition of Amazigh in Algeria and Morocco in the last two decades has not yet translated into organized support of literary writing in Amazigh ([Salhi 2011](#)). While this latter aspect is linked to the still-continuing status of “minority” attached to the Amazigh/Berber language, the territorializing, transnationalist, and identity discourse of the novels in Amazigh point to a cultural difference and, in Bhaba’s terms, to literature as a form of intervention aimed at resisting totalization. On the other hand, the choice of a written – and (inter)national – language in the arena of oral and written communication is symptomatic of the prestige and hegemony of literacy and an indication of the “situation of minority” experienced by oral languages and by the speakers of Amazigh/Berber vernaculars who were often educated in languages other than their mother tongue. Their novels in French and in Arabic, and later on in other languages of the diasporic locations, reveal the search for linguistic interaction with their vernaculars and for a renewed literary expression. This language interaction destabilizes the mainstream language and, at the same time, also establishes a form of “reterritorializing” the novels, which contributes to creating a community not only narratively but also in public reception.^{xxix} Such a reception also impacted nationalist criticism (see previously) and state censure, because these novels were perceived, whatever the themes treated, as politically motivated. The novels written in other languages by speakers of Amazigh/Berber vernaculars can therefore be interpreted as those of “minor” voices, characterized, as we saw, by destabilization of the mainstream language, community building, and political tenor. However, the production in French, Arabic, and other languages should not be understood as isolated from writing in Amazigh and from the cultural project to promote Amazigh/Berber locally, nationally, and transnationally, which to various extents is shared by those who narrate and sing in Amazigh vernaculars.

Conclusion: Amazigh/Berber literary space

The definition of Amazigh/Berber literature is usually considered equivalent to “literature in Amazigh/Berber” by the immediate identification of the literary corpus on the basis of the language of creation. Although it may seem simple and immediately applicable, language-based identification can be problematic. Questions arise from

the combination of political and theoretical approaches to literature definitions – for instance, in the case of British and American literature using the same language or in the case of the so-called Francophone/Anglophone literatures deriving from an imperial, nowadays rejected, distinction between the centers of colonial empires and their ex-colonies. Language-based definitions are justified through a form of relativism which sees language as the vehicle of a specific worldview and by nationalist ideas about the uniqueness of a language to express the feeling of national unity in literature.

Regarding the Amazigh/Berber literary productions, theoretical approaches and nationalism have led to an ignoring – for different and sometimes opposite reasons – of the fact that there have been multiple lines of literary creation. The usual definition of Amazigh/Berber literature tends to isolate texts that maintain intra- and extra-textual relations with several languages and literatures within one language field. Reflecting on multimodality (oral, written, audiovisual, and digital modes) and multilingualism, one sees that the oral and written texts discussed previously present the following traits: the “territorializing” of the texts by the use of Amazigh vernaculars in spoken, sung, or written form and by the marked reference to such vernaculars and their oral genres in another mainstream language (e.g. Arabic, Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish, and so forth); the linguistic interaction characterizing the texts, whatever the language, the media, and the location of the literary productions; and the reference to *tamurt* (the land and its inhabitants) and to its history as a form of intervention that creates an identity narrative and establishes the intertextuality of a variety of literary productions. Literary genres with such narrative characteristics belong to a continuum in which the Berber/Amazigh references and the discourse of its identity construction constitute one of the relevant readings (Merolla 1995, 2006: 13–16, 28–40). This continuum is a domain of multiple affiliations, which partially overlaps and interacts with different artistic traditions of the multilingual context of North Africa (Amazigh/Berber, classical Arabic, dialectal Arabic, French, Judeo-Arabic, and so forth). I define such a continuum by the notion of “Amazigh/Berber literary space,” a term which aims to go beyond the limits of the usual definition of Amazigh/Berber literature and to acknowledge the creolization of the North African context (Merolla 2006: 73; Merolla 2014).

A theoretical point needs to be mentioned here. The term “literary space” seems more appropriate for our approach than the notion of “field” commonly used in literary studies (Bourdieu 1991). The notion of field implies a rigid autonomy of “literature,” bestowed with a coherent economic and intellectual structure, a linguistically homogeneous readership, and common shared institutions (Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo 2006; Mouralis 2001). A shared language (one of the vernaculars) is therefore not sufficient to establish a field without the other structuring elements. The Amazigh case, moreover, presents cleavages among literary institutions related to different languages and different forms of “habitus” provided by oral, written, audiovisual, and digital media. I consider the Amazigh “literary space” a vague and floating continuum. On the one hand, the literary institutions of such a continuum are unequal and in competition; on the other hand, the range of individual positions is also differentiated and unequal. The situation is therefore at the same time more complex than, and less representable by, a structured “field” where each “atom,” each text or author, can be directly related to the others. What the continuum presents is the play of intertextuality and the evocation of a discourse of identity – through references to the histories, scenes, and characters attached to a specific Amazigh/Berber vernacular referring to (and, eventually, redefining) a specific cultural region. As seen previously, a transnational Amazigh community also takes form in many contemporary sung and written productions. The relations among the media of expression (oral, written, audiovisual, and digital media) and the languages (Amazigh/Berber, Arabic, French, English, and so forth) determine multiple dialectics of power among texts and authors. In other words, one can adopt the notion of field for the “literature written in Kabyle,” with shared literary forums and with works and writers who define each other, but it is more complicated to speak of the “field” of oral and written productions in Amazigh/Berber which do not share such forums and do not have a common “habitus.” The notion of “literary space” develops from this point and indicates the continuum provided by all the productions which, whatever the language (Kabyle, Tasoussit, Arabic, French, English . . .) and the medium (orality, writing, audiovisual, digital . . .) used, do share the Amazigh-Berber problematic and construction of “identity,” without being compelled to share literary institutions and the other structuring elements characterizing a “field” in Bourdieu’s definition.

In conclusion, the situation of minority attributed to the Amazigh/Berber language is a product of colonial and postcolonial historical processes. As indicated previously, territorializing, transnationalism, and identity discourse in literary (oral and written) genres in Amazigh/Berber point to cultural difference and to literature as a form of intervention which challenge totalization and (so-called) universal cultures in the present and in the past. Literary productions in mainstream languages, on the other hand, show the traits attributed to “minor”

voices, such as deterritorialization, community building, and political tenor. However, there is also the re-territorialization of these productions, which should be understood in a much larger “literary space” and not as isolated from the cultural project to promote Amazigh Berber, which is shared by those who sing, narrate, and write in Amazigh. The production of contemporary identities, local and transnational, in the Amazigh Berber literary space expresses a long process of re-appropriation and subversion of linguistic and cultural data produced during colonization and in the postcolonial period and is an example of the effort to discuss manipulative visions of cultural homogeneity promoted by various centers of intellectual and political power.

Notes

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- i "Berber" was increasingly rejected by activists because of its etymological links with "barbarous" in European languages and in Arabic. Complex political issues are involved in the state appropriation of the term "Amazigh" in Morocco and in Algeria; see [Chaker \(2013\)](#).
- ii [Maddy-Weitzman \(2017\)](#).
- iii All translations of items listed only in French in the References are mine.
- iv Tamazight is spoken in the Middle Atlas. In Algeria, the term "Tamazight" is used to refer to the Berber language as a whole, whereas in Morocco, to avoid confusion with the variant of the Middle Atlas, the term "Amazigh" was chosen when the IRCAM, the Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture, was founded in 2001. Taqbaylit (Kabyle) is spoken in Kabylia and Tachawit (Chaouia) in the Aurès Mountains (north Algeria); Tarifit (or Tarifiyt, also called Chleuh by its speakers) is the vernacular in the Rif (north Morocco) and Tasoussit (also called Tachelhiyt/Tachelhit or Chleuh) in the Souss (south-western Morocco).
- v [Ghouirgate \(2015\)](#): 598–599, 603).
- vi See *Études et Documents Berbères* [2016](#).
- vii Zouggari (2005) and Kateb (2004).
- viii [Hanoteau \(1867\)](#), [Basset \(1920\)](#), and [Coulon \(1930\)](#).
- ix [Roberts \(1982\)](#): 334), [Chaker \(1984\)](#): 174), and [Carlier \(1984\)](#): 347–371).
- x [Maddy-Weitzman \(2011\)](#): 86, 89–90) and [Mouline \(2016\)](#).
- xi The uprisings in 1962–1964, 1985–1990, and 1990–1996 were repressed harshly by national armies. Long-term disquiet and international pressure brought a relatively stable peace agreement in 1995 (Niger) and in 1996 (Mali), until new insurgent acts in 2007–2009 and 2012.
- xii See "Mali Tuareg rebels' call for independence rejected," *BBC News* (3 June 2012).
- xiii See the "Berber Spring" in 1980 and the "Black Spring" in 2001 and 2002.
- xiv The Amazigh flag presents three colors, yellow, green, and blue, with the red Tifinagh character ⵝ (Z).
- xv [Ilikoud \(2006\)](#) and [Tilmatine \(2017\)](#).
- xvi The movement was triggered in 2016–2017 by the dramatic death of Mouhcine Fikri while he tried to salvage his fish confiscated by the police in Al Hoceima. ([Masbah 2017](#); [Akarkach 2018](#); [Wolf 2018](#)).
- xvii Following the wave of demonstrations which swept through Tunisia in December 2010.
- xviii The following reflections are drawn from [Schipper, Merolla, and Brinkman \(2019\)](#): 341–342).
- xix [Barber \(1995\)](#), [Bourlet \(2013\)](#), [Irele and Gikandi \(2004\)](#), and [Merolla \(1995, 2006\)](#).
- xx [Lacoste-Dujardin \(1970\)](#), [Galand-Pernet \(1998\)](#), [Bounfour \(1999, 2005, 2018\)](#), [Kossmann \(2000\)](#), and [Merolla \(2006\)](#).
- xxi [Lahlou \(2017\)](#): 376).
- xxii [Culshaw \(2007\)](#).
- xxiii Hindi Zahra, interview, [2009](#) (stage name of Zahra Hindi) and [Tanti \(2011\)](#).
- xxiv "Oh my father"—standard transcription is a *baba-inu ba*, where the last *ba* is an alliteration on *baba*, father.
- xxv "Companions..." Translation by [Belalimat \(2010\)](#): 7).
- xxvi Translation by [Belalimat \(2010\)](#): 5).
- xxvii [Lacheraf \(1953\)](#), [Sahli \(1953\)](#), and [Achour \(1986\)](#).
- xxviii [Adam \(1987\)](#), [Khadda \(1991\)](#), [Elbaz and Mathieu-Job \(2001\)](#), and [Merolla \(2006\)](#).
- xxix [Berrichi \(2013\)](#), [El-Zein \(2015\)](#), and [Kizzi \(2019\)](#).