Global Campus Arab World

2023-2024

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# Pathways of Amazigh Feminism in Morocco: Unveiling Patterns of Empowerment, Agency and Ethnicity Rights

Master in Human Rights and Democratisation:
Arab Programme in Democracy and Human Rights

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*The Institute of Political Science at Saint Joseph University does not intend to give any approval or disapproval to the opinions expressed in this thesis. These opinions belong solely to their author.*

**Abstract**

This thesis delves into Amazigh feminism as a nascent alternative within the Moroccan feminist landscape, focusing on the interplay between empowerment and agency as part of the ethnic rights framework asserted by Amazigh women, especially in rural settings. This study is based on decolonial and indigenous feminist foundations to challenge the two mainstream Moroccan feminisms, Western/secular and traditional/Islamic, which have a fundamental role in the struggle of Amazigh women in relation to their discrimination, marginalisation and silencing of their experiences and contributions. Undertaking ethnographic research conducted in two regions of southern Morocco; namely, Dra-Tafilalet and Sous Massa, I sought to uncover the particularity of how Amazigh women navigate the intersectionality of their struggles and day-to-day experience. Having employed a mixed-method approach, with both exploratory and empirical research methods, my research helped me reveal how these women manage to assert their agency, engage in grassroot activism, and foster community building through empowerment strategies, despite the persistent challenges that revolve around their daily lives, such as gender inequality, socioeconomic obstacles or cultural and linguistic marginalisation. Accordingly, the results of this thesis advance the urgent need to incorporate the contributions and particularities of Amazigh women in the Moroccan feminist discourse. Ultimately, it advocates for their participation as active agents in their own struggle to mitigate gender inequality and and reassert their preservation of identity, tradition, language and culture. Finally, I hope that the preliminary work initiated by this thesis could encourage more research to be undetaken on these women, particularly, unveiling ways complex tributes of gender, ethnicity and rurality are intertwined in order to better understand the processes of agency and empowerment that indigenous women carry out locally, nationally and beyond.

**Keywords:** Amazigh feminism, agency, empowerment, ethnicity rights, gender inequality, ethnographic research, intersectionality, grassroot activism, identity, culture

**Acknowledgments**

This thesis has undoubtedly been a personal challenge. It represents the end of a very special chapter, while it is a topic that is very dear to me personally, which I have previously tackled in a different way. The completion of this project would not have been possible without the help and support of many people, to whom I would like to dedicate a few words.

To begin with, I would like to thank all the Amazigh women who have been part of this study. It has been an honour to provide them with a small space for reflection where I have been fortunate to count on their personal experiences, opinions and, on many occasions, their simple company accompanied by a cup of tea. To Khadija, Aïcha, Amina and Fatima, thank you for your hospitality. I would like to make a special mention to Samira, who opened the doors of her house to me and took the time to show me her land. To the Aminas, thank you for making me part of the passion you have for your work. You are all examples to follow in many ways, but your resilience and dedication to your families, neighbours and communities are to be admired beyond measure. To M. Chtatou for being a source of inspiration during his class on Amazigh culture to encourage me to write on this topic, thank you.

Of course, special thanks to Professor Najib Mokhtari for guiding me through the writing and execution process of my thesis. His support and input, as well as his constant encouragement, have guided me to better navigate the complexities of this research.

To my fellow travel companions, Matthijs, Ghofrane, and Hamda, thank you for being part of this unforgettable experience in Rabat, as well as to the rest of our colleagues for the countless memories in Beirut. Particularly to Marion, I am grateful for the bond we've built during this journey.

Finally, a special mention goes to my family, particularly my mother Paula, and my aunt Úrsula, as well as my friends Anna, Marta, Marina, Marta, and Karla, for their wholehearted encouragement during these months. To Gio, thank you for your unconditional belief in me and my work, I could not have done it without your support and for that I am eternally grateful. This thesis is dedicated to the younger generation of the Benissa family, my paternal side, who are fighting for a substantial change in the Moroccan women's scenario. To Lina, Soraya, Rhizlane, Nour, Inez, Nora, Aaliyah and Hiba.

**List of Abbreviations:**

**ACM** – Amazigh Cultural Movement
**ADFM** – Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc
**AGM** – Amazigh Girl Matters
**AMRAD** – Associació per l'Ajuda al Desenvolupament i la Solidaritat de les Dones Berbers (Association for the Development and Solidarity of Berber Women)
**AZETTA** – Amazigh National Association for the Citizens
**CEDAW** – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
**GOM** – Government of Morocco
**HRBA** – Human Rights-Based Approach
**IGAs** – Income Generating Activities
**IGPs** – Income Generating Projects
**IRCAM** – Institut Royal de la Culture Amazigh
**JBA** – Justice and Benevolence Association
**LDDF** – Ligue Démocratique des Droits des Femmes
**LGBTI+ -** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and others
**MCA** – Mouvement Culturel Amazigh (French for ACM)
**MENA** – Middle East and North Africa
**MSA** – Modern Standard Arabic
**NDM** – New Development Model
**NGO** – Non-Governmental Organization
**OADP** – Organization of Democratic and Popular Action
**OHCHR** – United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner
**PANIFID** and/or **NPA** – National Plan of Action for Integrating Women into Development
**PJD** – Justice and Development Party
**PPS** – Progress and Socialism Party
**UAF** – Union de l'Action Féminine
**UIR** – Université International de Rabat
**UN** – United Nations
**VAW** – Violence Against Women
**20FM** – February 20 Movement

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## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, much literature has been produced on gender issues, including studies on the condition of Arab, Islamic, African, or frequently referenced as women from the Global South, but always departing from narratives different from the academic focus we see when the mentioned women are Western. In this scenario, women from the Global South become victims of their systems and communities, being submissive or weak. As Fatima Sadiqi (2014) describes, in the case of Amazigh women specifically, they are labelled as either in need of being saved, a concept Lila Abu Lughod (2013) argues remarkably well in the context of Muslim women, or as illiterate, labelling them as victims of their contexts and stripping them of the power they hold within their communities (Sadiqi, 2014, p.1). Bochra Laghssais and Irene Comins-Mingol argue that there is a need for narratives that focus more on their firsthand experience, on their "agency and resilience and how they transform their daily reality and vulnerabilities into opportunities that empower them, their families, and communities" (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021a).

This condition leads us to ask our first research question: What is the real scenario that accurately exemplifies the role and dynamics of Amazigh women within their communities? To answer this question, further contextualization is needed. First of all, the historicity of Amazigh women has to be considered further than their role in preserving their culture and tradition within their communities, which I will analyse later in this thesis. As Laghssais & Comins-Mingol emphasize, "As well as supporting and participating in the cultural and anti-colonialist demands of their communities, Amazigh women have also recently begun to add a nascent, but increasingly vocal, feminist perspective to these demands." (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021a). This outlook firstly indicates that since they do not feel fairly represented by other feminisms, such as Islamic feminism, Arab feminism, or secular feminism, so they have had to resort to being covered in other ways. Furthermore, we must also consider the complexity of the situation of Amazigh women, who are part of a predominantly patriarchal Moroccan society, as Amazigh, that is, an ethnic group under indigenous conditions, and finally as rural, often being isolated from certain resources, opportunities, and privileges. As Laghssais & Comins-Mingol (2021a) explain, these three conditions make Amazigh women experience their vulnerability in amplified levels, for example, if we focus on education, health, and language.

In this line, it can be argued that the discrimination faced by Amazigh women is significant, coming from both a marginalization by the state and a further diminishment from civil society. This is reflected in this group's continued disregard within gender literature and human rights issues to narrate their experiences. (S. Gagliardi, 2018). Accordingly, my thesis aims to bring to the forefront a different narrative, where Amazigh women are active actors of their own empowerment, and participatory members of their communities, contrary to what some discourses indicate, which, if they address these women at all, do so portraying them as victims or merely bystanders.

Therefore, my motivation to explore this topic stems from a class in Amazigh history, culture and society, which I have been part of during my second semester of my master's degree in democracy and human rights at the International University of Rabat (Spring 2024). During this class, we studied the historicity of Amazigh women in society, and their fundamental roles. During one of the assignments, I took the opportunity to do a preliminary study on the current condition of Amazigh women and their actual role, not only their historical part, which is traced in most of the production about them, but also their struggle for independence and emancipation. Having already done my thesis on Islamic feminism in the MENA region, I am fascinated by feminist studies across Arab societies, with its diversities and particularities. The Amazigh case is undoubtedly an under-studied subject, which is why I wanted to contribute this small project to add to the discourse on them, relying also on their own experiences and voices.

**Topic Implication to Human Rights Studies**

Addressing the role of Amazigh women in their communities reveals a rich and complex narrative of resistance, agency, and empowerment. Throughout their history, Amazigh women have challenged stereotypes and limitations imposed by a patriarchal society and have proven to be active agents in the preservation of their culture and in the fight for their rights. Their participation in orality, poetry, art, craftsmanship or on a more recent note, through cooperatives and activism, has not only been a form of cultural resistance but also a source of social cohesion and economic empowerment within their communities. The legacy of female leaders they count with historically, and the contemporary engagement of Amazigh women through NGOs or women's groups in promoting linguistic, cultural, economic and social rights illustrates the continuity of their commitment to work towards implementing a degree of gender equality, justice and recognition.

Although significant progress has been made recently, such as the official recognition of Tamazight language and the increased mobilization of Amazigh women in the public sphere, more significant challenges still persist, such as the language barrier and the fight for gender equality in areas such as education and employment. It is crucial to recognize and value the unique voice and experience of Amazigh women within the global landscape of feminism and human rights. This includes advocating for and learning to grant them spaces where they can be heard considering their grassroot involvement in socio-economic development projects. Their history of resistance and empowerment showcase important lessons about women's capacity to transform their realities and build a more egalitarian future. Ultimately, the struggle of Amazigh women reflects a close simulacrum of the universal fight to achieve equal rights and opportunities. Indeed, their resilience and determination are an inspiration to all other groups seeking emancipation and the ability to freely assert their identity and reclaim their rights.

**Thesis Problem**

Amazigh women in Morocco are largely neglected, both structurally and socially. Although there has been a large feminist movement in Morocco, growing in the last decades, fighting for various reform agendas towards gender equality, these movements – a mix of Islamic feminism and secular feminism, there remains a large gap where Amazigh women do not benefit from this collective struggle. Furthermore, their status as rural women is often overlooked, quantifying these mainstream movements options only for mainly urban and middle-class women. Thus, the Amazigh women find themselves left behind, dismissed as victims and powerless, without considering their grassroot level fight for personal empowerment and community building. "With the advent of the twenty-first century and especially in the aftermath of the so-called Arab Spring", Sadiqi (2016) adds, the secular/Islamic paradigm is becoming too narrow a space that it fails to encompass the other growing and poorly understood feminist voices where concepts like 'diversity', 'online synergy', 'Berber', and 'rural' are increasingly gaining momentum across the boundaries of space, gender, and class" (Sadiqi, 2016a, p.51). Eventually, Amazigh women need to be included in contexts of gender and the struggle for equality, with an ardently utter to be heard and to be taken as actors capable of participating in discussions about their own rights (Gagliardi, 2018).

**Thesis Statement**

The world knows only one version of the lives and conditions of Amazigh women. Fieldwork research shows that there is limited literature on this question, and the few literature references that exist tend to portray them rather as passive women and beneficiaries of aid, instead of treating them as actors who empower, lead, and assert their rights. With most of the literature published on this social group being about their role in the entertainment arts and orality, transmitting Tamazight from generation to generation, few authors have chosen to give them a voice for themselves and listen to what they have to say about their own experience and situation.

Therefore, my initial thesis project aims to address the fact that Amazigh women are undeniably active actors who construct their own emancipation tracks, agency roles and empowerment capacities from a strictly local context. I therefore ambition to discuss the various terms and conditions of their empowerment and agency through what can potentially be interpreted as Amazigh feminist movement. It is then legitimate to attest that the contribution of Amazigh women's experience, in helping correct stereotypes against their struggle, is fundamental to human rights studies, taking into account their active participation to change their own local contexts.

**Objectives and Research Question**

The main objective of my thesis is to determine the current pathways towards the exploration of an Amazigh feminism within the Moroccan context. I will study this question through the dimensions of agency, empowerment and ethnic rights, mainly grounded in rural contexts. As such, I intend to investigate how these women manage the limitations placed on them in terms of gender, ethnicity and indigeneity, as well as their marginalisation as a result of their rural status. Particularly, this thesis aims to analyse how Amazigh women exercise their role in their communities and in the broader Moroccan society, including the way in which they pursue their rights, goals, and cultural identity.

Thus, the research question of this thesis is as follows: How do Amazigh women in Morocco construct their agency and empowerment within these challenging and complex socio-cultural contexts? A sub question will follow up on what this struggle entails for the broader feminist landscape in the country?

### 1.1. Methodology

The methodology I chose to meet these objectives is based on a mixed method approach combining exploratory field work research analyses and empirical theoretical methodologies. These two methods offer an extensive compatibility in dealing with issues of this type of topic. Hence, the exploratory method allows for the development of a detailed analysis of the historical and cultural factors of the Amazigh community, particularly of its women, as well as an understanding of their role and activities, basing these contributions from women case studies, as well as on existing scholarship provided by the different resource centres, I have had the chance to visit during my semester abroad in Rabat. This exploratory stage provided me with a basis for further analysis of the intersection of the elements of agency, empowerment and ethnic rights in relation to gender, rurality and indigeneity. This method then allowed me to bring an understanding of the socio-economic, political and cultural elements that directly influence the lives of these women.

As mentioned above, to complement the exploratory method, the empirical method ushered the need for ethnographic research carried out in two rural areas in southern Morocco: Dra-Tafilalet and Sous Massa, specifically in Takhiamt, near Aoufous, and in the Tiznit area. This fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews with experts on the Amazigh community in different fields: linguistic and cultural rights, history, the question of Amazigh women and their rights and emancipation, etc... Interviews have also been conducted with members and presidents of both rural and urban NGOs dealing with Amazigh women's issues. Furthermore, a large part of this thesis, especially part three, is based on observation notes on Amazigh women in rural areas, as well as a familiarity of their close living conditions, their family lifestyles and community dynamics, the relationship practices from within and, among others. In this line, a focus group was carried out in Takhiamt with the participation of 11 Amazigh women from the village to address issues of their context, perception and day-to-day life struggles. Thus, with this first-hand experience of Amazigh women in their local contexts, as well as other experts from urban contexts, a diversity of very valuable backgrounds is offered to shed more light on the topic. Ultimately, I was able to document the first-hand experience of these women and their experiences on ways of exerting their agency and constructing their empowerment, as well as understanding their perceptions of the challenges that they had to face daily. As such, I gathered enough ground to assess how their insights contribute significantly to the Moroccan feminist discourse by including their particular realities, which

are often ignored or actively marginalised, into the fabric of the national women's movements of freedom, equality and dignity.

Finally, it should be noted that given the sensitivity of the subject matter, ethical measures have been implemented throughout the entirety of this research. To begin with, the interviewees consented to participate in their interviews and the purpose of the study as well as the use of their contributions were explained to them. In the case of the rural Amazigh women who participated in the focus group or in informal conversations in their cooperatives, it was agreed to maintain their anonymity by using only their first names. While securing full respect for the cultural elements and social values of the Amazigh community, total transparency was maintained in explaining the project's subject matter. In this way, their utmost comfort was ensured during the conversations, where instead of bringing a translator, priority was given to maintaining a focal point from their circle, with whom they are already familiar in order to guarantee maximum trust, given the toughness of some of the topic questions. Thus, the ownership of ideas, mentions, and positions of these participants has been fully recognised, where priority has been given to portray their voices as truthfully as possible, providing a space for them to express themselves.

## 2. Literature Review

As mentioned in the introduction, the literature on Amazigh women is very scarce and presents a one-sided narrative, often with an unsympathetic and judgmental gaze without considering their personal and community contexts and experiences. Thus, my thesis aims to give a space to authors and scholars who have chosen to give voice to these women either through ethnographic research and direct interviews with them or through analysis of their complex situations. On the other hand, there is extensive published content on the identity, language and culture of the Amazigh – or *Imazighen* – a plural form of the word. This literature review therefore aims to collect the main authors on which this work is based, addressing the Amazigh cultural movement, as part of the history of this community in Morocco, as well as the particularity of the history of Amazigh women and their role in their communities. As a second part, I move on to analyse the various hegemonic Moroccan feminisms that prevent a broad inclusion of Amazigh women's rights and demands, turning then to Amazigh feminism through various forms of activism and collectivity that foster their personal and collective empowerment and agency. In other words, I chose to begin with a broad overview of the most significant contributions to post-colonial and feminist gender studies in the region, as well as a briefing on the emergence of Islamic feminism in the Middle East and North Africa, and finally close the overview with a focus on the Moroccan case.

The long Amazigh cultural and identity process has gone through several phases. Bruce Maddy-Weitzman (2001) focuses his work on the emergence of this cultural movement not only in Morocco, but also throughout the Maghreb, focusing on Morocco because of the larger Amazigh presence than, for example, in neighbouring Algeria, Tunisia, Libya or Egypt. His book includes a study of the Amazigh diaspora and a rich analysis the different dynamics between Amazigh communities and their states and societies, arguing that Amazigh activism was neither consistent nor organised until quite recently, dating back to the 1980s, "The Amazigh claim has gone through a long process of identity-building at the level of discourse (linguistic, literary and ideological production), at the level of organization (associations, coordination, internationalisation) and at the level of human rights claims (from cultural to political)"[1] (F. Aït Mous, 2011, p.122). In this respect, Aït Mous provides an extensive analysis of the different stages through which the Amazigh movement has gone through. Further to this reading, Paul Silverstein & David Crawford (2004) also focus their work on Amazigh activism,

[1] My own translation. The original text by Aït Mous is in French.

examining the development of the ACM (Amazigh Cultural Movement). They assert that the ACM emerged in the wake of the student uprisings of April 1980, the so-called Berber Spring, "that galvanized Moroccan Amazigh ethno-linguistic militancy into a public movement, with conferences and a published journal, *Amazigh*" (Crawford & Silverstein, 2004).

Bringing into the picture the element of language, and the struggle for its officialization and the impact it has, Moha Ennaji, as well as Maddy-Weitzman, M. Boukous, and Sara R. Fischer are major contributors. From the impacts of Arabisation to the creation of IRCAM– *Institut Royal de la Culture Amazigh* and its role in schooling projects in Tamazight, Moha Ennaji brings in his analysis a political vision of what this institute has meant for the ACM. Nonetheless, Fischer (2019) explains that "Morocco remains enveloped in the richness of its Arab and Amazigh cultural and linguistic identities. As entangled identities, they are performing a difficult dance" (Fischer, 2019, p.34), focusing her work mostly on an identity, cultural and language approach. Furthermore, IRCAM, being a state research centre and the highest official body representing the Amazigh language and culture, they have a wide range of content on Amazigh grammar, schooling, or the revitalisation of the language, as is the case of the work of IRCAM's president, A. Boukous (2012), who published a diagnostic analysis of Amazigh, and its most determining factors such as linguistic dependence or urbanisation (Boukous, 2012). On the other hand, M. Ennaji (2009) analyses the intersection of multiculturalism and citizenship in relation to the Moroccan education system, and how this affects Berber education (Ennaji, 2009).

With respect to the role of Amazigh women, the major literature reviewed tended to depict Amazigh women as the guardians and protectors of their ethnicity, language and culture. To illustrate, M. Ennaji, F. Sadiqi, C. Becker, M. Chtatou, and R. Raha, all incorporate this narrative into their discourses. Therefore, there is a handful of contributions published on this aspect of Amazigh women, with Cynthia Becker making valuable reflections with regard to their relationship with arts and crafts. Becker is a renowned scholar specialising in African and Amazigh art. In her 2006 publication, *Amazigh Arts in Morocco*, she provides a comprehensive overview of the historical contributions of Amazigh women to their cultural heritage. With regard to their role, whether as pioneers in the arts, crafts, orality, carpet weaving, or jewellery-making, Becker notes that "These women continue to make and wear art that stresses the association of women, fertility, and ethnic identity" (Becker, 2006, p.46). Furthermore, T. Yacine contributes to the discussion in the article *Women, their Space and Creativity in Berber*

*Society* (2001) on the limitations placed upon women due to their gender and the obstacles they face in developing their artistic abilities, particularly in the context of the Berber community. Eventually, the author goes on to discuss the oral contributions of Berber women, noting that "if the right to speak means symbolically accessing power, for women, this also means a symbolic reversal of the established order" (Yacine, 2001, p.104).

As a final point of reference regarding Amazigh women's artistic contributions, IRCAM has published a book titled *Créativité féminine dans les espaces culturels amazighes* (2022). This work provides a comprehensive overview of the various artistic domains in which Amazigh women have made significant contributions. The work of Amazigh artisans is discussed in a similar vein to Becker (2006), with a particular focus on material and musical productions, rather than on the role of cultural and linguistic careers, with the exception of the case of the IRCAM's production.

When focusing on the historicity of the role of Amazigh women, all the authors mentioned in the previous paragraph (M. Ennaji, F. Sadiqi, C. Becker, M. Chtatou, or R. Raha) contribute in one way or another to the better understanding or their unique circumstance. F. Sadiqi has produced a lot of content on Moroccan women, Moroccan feminisms, and gender politics and language dynamics. In this vein, Sadiqi adds:

> "Moroccan women have played an essential role in preserving Amazigh language and culture, a role that has only very recently started to be fully appreciated. Indeed, the complex question of the point where 'gender' and 'language and culture' meet, and the relationship between that meeting point and the general status of women, is still a subject very little discussed in Morocco, although the citizenship and status of women in this multilingual and multicultural country are closely tied in with the Moroccan languages and their usage" (Sadiqi, 2007, p.26).

On the other hand, R. Raha together with V. Romero collect in their book *Tamazight Women and Cultural Frontiers* (1998) several situations that represent the daily life of an Amazigh woman, in the first chapter of the book, M.D. Mirón Pérez adds "Studies on Berber women in antiquity are practically non-existent."[2] (Mirón Pérez, 1998). The book continues with mentions of several queens and goddesses, a theme to which M. Chtatou also contributes in several articles on Kahina, a queen and warrior who serves as an inspiration to Amazigh women, as well as other queens and goddesses that have been reflected in these studies, for

[2] My own translation. The original text by Mirón Perez is in Spanish.

instance, “Women are at the centre of Berber heritage and identity. They bring the Berber community into the socio-political landscape – internationally and in the global conversation”[3] (Chtatou, 2022a).

As another fundamental point to begin the second part of my thesis, it is worth considering the different feminisms in the MENA region. While this study focuses on feminisms in the Moroccan context, it must be considered that the trend of the region directly influenced the development of feminisms in Morocco. This includes Islamic feminism, as well as secular feminism. During the 1990s there was the most significant increase in feminist production in the region, mainly in relation to the processes of decolonisation and post-colonialism. As well as later in relation to Islam and gender issues to provide new interpretations of this interaction. In this line, the work of C.T. Mohanty (1984) is fundamental as it strongly criticises the contributions of white Western feminism as the dominant discourse as opposed to the majority of feminist discourses, these being indigenous, and from local contexts of the so-called ‘third world’ (Mohanty, 1984, pp.350-354). As far as Islamic feminism is concerned, one has to consider the contributions of scholars Barlas (2019), Wadud (1999), Ahmed (1992) and Badran (2005), who published extensively on the various interpretations of Islamic texts and modified their own perceptions along the way. On the other hand, E. Said’s (1978) *Orientalism*, along with L. Abu-Lughod’s (2013) *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* opens the door of debate for interpreting the Western imposition of both representation and feminism. Abu-Lughod (2013) questions the motives behind the West’s interest in “saving Muslim women and women from developing contexts”.

Turning to the question of feminisms in Morocco, it can be said that Fatima Sadiqi is the main contributor to this subject, starting from the different feminisms, related to language, gender, culture, identity, perceptions of Islam, etc. For example, in her work *Moroccan Feminisms: new perspecives* (2016) edited together with her husband, M. Ennaji and K. Vintges, Sadiqi offers in one of the chapters a broad overview of the different feminist discourses in Morocco, clarifying that the two mainstream approaches are secular and Islamic feminism. Thus, she offers an interpretation of the relationship between the two, where “While the secular movement is to a large extent a product of the leftist ideology where the political use of religion is backgrounded, the Islamic movement is the product of an Islamist ideology where the political use of religion is foregrounded” (Sadiqi, 2016a, p. 68). Furthermore, it

[3] My own translation. The original text by Chtatou is in French.

should also be remembered that "Contemporarily, the most well-known feminist leader in Morocco is Fatema Mernissi", writes M. Ennaji (2016, p.1). As a dedication to Moroccan Feminisms (2016), F. Sadiqi, M. Ennaji and K. Vintges add "To the Memory of Fatema Mernissi", being the date of Mernissi's passing the year prior to the book's publication. It should be noted that Mernissi's work was entirely groundbreaking, "Much like Wadud, Ahmed and Mernissi, there were other scholars who adopted a feminist analysis, aligned it with critical readings on women in Islam, but did not classify their work as Islamic feminism" (F. Seedat, 2013, p.406). Further, R. Rhouni contributes a similar approach to C. Mohanty (1984) by focusing on a decolonial feminism but centred on the case of Morocco in a chapter focusing on Mernissi's legacy, where "In her secular stage, we saw how Mernissi reproduced the Orientalist assumptions of an oppressive Islam, yet her critique of capitalism as an equally powerful structure of violence subverts the religious paradigm" (Rhouni, 2016, p.141).

If we now refer to Moroccan feminism related to concepts of equality, human rights and politics, there are several contributors that put the feminist lens on this focus. For example, Zakia Salime in her book *Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco* (2011), centres her discourse on analysing different elements such as family law, activism, veiling, or various gender movements. Salime (2011) explains the importance of recognising the ADFM (Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc), as well as the UAF (Union de l'Action Femenine), as the two pioneering entities of feminist activism that have been working since the 1980s. Thus, "By defining the women's movement as a challenge to the legal source of women's subjugation, these two organisations have shaped the whole range of women's activism and hundreds of women's groups, advocacy centres and research programmes active in Morocco to date" (Salime, 2011, p. 23). Similarly to Salime, S. Bordat, S. Schaefer Davis and S. Kouzzi in their article *Women as agents of grassroots change: Illustrating micro-empowerment in* Morocco (2011), bring to the fore the importance of focusing discourses and initiatives at the local level to deepen contexts and empower women effectively. They propose a model to follow to achieve this, where:

> "Given the stated interest and priority given to women's empowerment by academics, practitioners, policy makers and donors, it would be useful to hold the different stakeholders who use the language 'women's rights' accountable by developing tools to assess whether or not the methods and strategies employed in their programmes are in fact resulting in the micro-empowerment of women participants" (Bordat et al., 2011, p.112).

In the last section of my review of the literature produced, I turn to the particularity of Amazigh feminism, written and studied as such only by B. Laghssais (2023) in her doctoral work. On the other hand, there are several notions of Amazigh feminism but explained from other points of view, such as the analysis of S. Gagliardi (2018, 2020), who offers an approach towards human rights and the status of these women as a minority related to feminism and international law. Additionally, F. Sadiqi brings to the forefront her notion of "A Larger–than–Islam Framework for the Moroccan Feminist Discourses" (2015), where she sets out a critique of the predominant Moroccan feminisms, secular and Islamic, as they are designed to address the needs of a small fraction of Moroccan women, who are urban, middle class, and often educated. She adds that

> "The absence of the Berber dimension from the two discourses is systematic, which weakens the two discourses and widens the gap between them and the majority of women with new realities on the ground. This absence also dichotomizes the Moroccan feminist discourses, reduces the feminist geography of Morocco to the main centers of decision-making (Rabat, Casablanca) and opens the door to sterile confrontational debates that not only eschew the real issues of the majority of women but block any other alternative" (Sadiqi, 2015).

On the other hand, Laghssais and Comins-Mingol (2021a, 2021b) provide a more reflective view on the condition of Amazigh women, related to the concepts of agency, empowerment and vulnerability through practical examples such as education, health or instances of autonomy and emancipation such as the production of art, crafts, carpets, or agri-food products and how these activities benefit them positively. To conclude their article *Vulnerability or Agency? Resistances and empowerments of indigenous Amazigh women in Morocco* (2021b)[4], the authors write "Returning to the question posed in the title of the article, 'Vulnerability or Agency?', we can conclude that the complexity of the lifeworld of Amazigh women in Morocco cannot be reduced exclusively to that of illiterate women in need of help. Beyond the multiple vulnerabilities that affect the lives of these women—vulnerabilities that, on the other hand, we must denounce and reduce—it is important to also make their agency visible and recognized."[5] (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021b, p.25).

Amazigh feminism opens the way for a broader interpretation of the agency and female empowerment of this group of women, taking into account their distinctions among themselves

[4] Original title in Spanish: *¿Vulnerabilidad o Agencia? Resistencias y empoderamientos de las mujeres indígenas en Marruecos* (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021b)
[5] My own translation. The original text by Laghssais and Comins-Mingol is in Spanish.

as well, but who organise themselves to contribute their knowledge in a way that mainstream Moroccan feminism does not take into consideration. Laghssais (2023) writes, in this respect, that

> "The majority of existing knowledge on Amazigh people has always been from the perspective of non-Amazigh, yet Amazigh women have their own knowledge of the world and how they live their lives. It is translated into language weaved into carpets with symbols, documented in pottery, sewed as designs and motif onto clothes, and tattooed onto bodies, maintaining them for centuries. However, such knowledges, be it artistic knowledges and scholarship, and its socio-political impact are historically undermined by hegemonic forms of knowing and their associated power structures" (Laghssais, 2023, p.4).

While there is much literature available on Amazigh identity and language, including the role of Amazigh women under this theme, there is a clear gap regarding the recognition of indicators of Amazigh feminism. As outlined above, there is also much content on the undisputed role of Amazigh women as artists in their communities, being the main actors in the production of handicrafts, orality, poetry, storytelling and language transmission. On the other hand, there is hardly any literature on their capacity for empowerment and struggle to improve their situations and promote their fundamental rights, especially that bears witness to the first-hand experiences and experiences of these women. Thus, this thesis aims to fill this gap by contributing with an analysis of Amazigh feminism, its indicators and relationship to human rights, indicating that Amazigh women are active agents of their own rights promotion, expanding their personal and community empowerment and agency through their own work and advocacy initiatives. This paper will consider the status of Amazigh women as women, indigenous, rural, and human rights promoters, through ethnographic research in areas of southern Morocco.

"Ce qui fait la particularité de la femme amazighe aujourd'hui, c'est qu'elle est doublement agressée : agressée dans sa féminité et agressée dans son amazighité"[6]

Meryam Demnati, 2018

[6] My own translation of Meryam Demnati's quote: "What makes Amazigh women special today is that they are doubly attacked: attacked in their femininity and attacked in their Amazighity"

## 3. Theoretical Framework

To introduce this theoretical framework, I will begin by situating my subject of study within the broader spectrum of human rights literature, specifically in terms of implications and different practices in so-called 'third world' –to be discussed– or subaltern contexts. This context-bound perspective will help provide a space for addressing the particularities and obstacles faced by marginalised communities, emphasising the importance of localised understandings and inclusive human rights practices. To add to this base, I delve into gender and feminist studies, with a particular focus on feminist from the Global South – a concept to be introduced as well – along with those from the 'third world'. These contributions bring critical reflections on the first-hand experiences of women from these communities, offering concrete conceptions of expressions of empowerment and agency that directly challenge Western-embedded feminist conceptions and impositions. By bringing to the forefront the voices of these women directly, as well as their difficulties, I offer a comprehensive analysis of the complexity and contextually relevant strategies they exercise to combat both patriarchal and colonial manifestations and structures. I will then explore the intersection between cultural cohesion and structural violence through the work of J. Galtung (1969), building on the premise that the necessary agency and empowerment cannot be achieved without addressing these systematic forms of oppression that perpetuate gender inequality. From this point of view, I move on to discuss postcolonial and decolonial feminisms.

These theories are fundamental to understanding the historical elements as well as the ongoing impacts of colonialism on women's rights that generate a base for gender relations. Both postcolonial and decolonial feminist theories critique the universalist and mainstream contributions of feminist theories, through a bid to deconstruct colonial legacies and reclaim indigenous rights, practices and knowledge. As already detailed in the introduction and literature review, the theoretical basis of this section is primarily prompted by the contribution of F. Sadiqi's work (2014) but will also invoke the work of Spivak (2010), F. Vergès (2021), and Mohanty (1984). As a last point of this theoretical framework, through the study of Barth (1969), I include an overview of indigeneity and ethnic rights in order to shed light on the aspirations of ethnic minorities, which I deem pertinent in this particular research case of the Amazigh community. The latter approach aims to underline the importance of recognising cultural diversity, identity politics, self-determination, and collective rights as integral elements of feminist and human rights discourses.

Accordingly, this thesis incorporates throughout its different parts an intersectional theoretical approach to help map the "Pathways to Amazigh feminism", integrating interconnected concepts of agency, empowerment, and ethnicity rights. To begin with, I want to emphasise a point that Cornell (2010), referring to Spivak, brings to the forefront Spivak's input to human rights studies. Cornell explains how

> "Spivak returns to the limit of representation as both a political and ethical lesson in her recent work on human rights, highlighting the way in which we are already ensnared in a world picture that divides our globe into first, second, and third. Here she advocates the practice of an ethics that begins in what she calls the 'unlearning of our privilege', which paradoxically is always also our entitlement to speak, write, and represent in the first place" (Cornell, 2010, p.102).

With this insight in mind, adopting what is considered Spivak's anti-positivist approach, I intend to uphold, throughout this thesis, that the first-hand experience of Amazigh women deserves to be part of the broader system of human rights advocacy, prioritising the subaltern nature of locally marginalised voices in question. Corroborating the same position, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work (1999) pokes on ways to decolonise research and engagement with and about indigenous communities. It can be detrimental, as has been demonstrated on countless occasions, for travellers and other people passing by to serve as representatives of indigenous situations and experiences, this being the major source that "have informed Western knowledge and Western constructions of the Other" (Smith, 1999, p.78). As is evident from the perspective of most contributions from the humanities and social sciences sector, this literature continues to be largely dominated by Western productions; namely, European and North American, which opens space for experts from the Global South to contribute the appropriate specificities of their contexts, while rarely participating in the universal and generic contributions, which remain, according to Birla, consistently based almost exclusively on Western contexts (Birla, 2010).

To expand this theoretical framework, it is essential to draw on the concept of Otherness introduced by E. Said (1978) in his work *Orientalism*, which elaborates on how the West constructs the East as 'the other', referring to a phenomenon of inferior status, strange, savage, exotic and fundamentally different from 'them' (Said, 1978). This blunt conceptualisation has given rise to different binding variants to define the Other, such as the concept of the 'third world', which distinguishes developing nations from the rest, perpetuating these dynamics and hierarchies that devalue the experiences and contributions of the regions in question. Thus,

"Over the past two decades, the term 'Third World' has increasingly been viewed as obsolete, controversial, and misunderstood and has been largely replaced by more commonly used terms such as 'global South'" as defined by Ampofo & Beoku-Betts below:

> "The term 'global South' has therefore become the most commonly used term. This designation developed in the 1980s is from the Brandt Comission Report, an independent commission on international development issues. The term emphasizes the unequal economic and political power relations between rich nations (North) and poor nations (South)." (Ampofo & Beoku-Betts, 2021, p.3)

In this respect, Purkayastha (2021) explains that scholars from the Global North are much better positioned than those from the Global South, since they enjoy the privileges of structures that benefit them. As such, Purkayastha concludes:

> "While the histories of knowledge, from the vast and diverse region labelled as the Global South continues to be ignored, underrepresented, silenced, and rediscovered – partially at best– by powerful scholars in the Global North, vast structures of scholarly knowledge production also create associated material realities" (Purkayastha, 2021, p.27).

Focusing on the human rights dimension, Drucilla Cornell's (2010) analysis of Spivak's work offers a very critical approach, highlighting the complexity of human rights discourses. Thus, although technically human rights are universal in nature, they can also be instrumentalised to apply certain standards or ideological impositions in the name of rights protection. Cornell exemplifies the Iraqi case, where she explains that "as we have recently seen in the case of Iraq, it justifies full-scale war against leaders and peoples who supposedly do not live up to the human rights agenda" (Cornell, 2010, p.107). Applying this theory is intended to avoid enforcing preferences towards certain political, cultural, or ideological agendas over sheer exercises of human rights discourses. The human rights paradigm adds a fair ethical implication perspective to apply to the study of Amazigh women's rights within the human rights paradigm. Since this thesis focuses on Amazigh women's rights integrated within the scope of human rights, it is essential to incorporate a lens focused on HRBAs (Human Rights-Based Approaches) to development, as Jae-Eun Noh clarifies:

> "The UN showed its understanding of an HRBA as pursuing human rights realization by empowering right holders and duty bearers and by integrating the standards and

> principles derived from the international human rights system into development programmes and process." (Noh, 2021, p.1)

This critical review by Noh (2021) stresses the importance of processes of participation, emancipation and empowerment, which resonates with the focus of study, particularly if we relate it to the dynamics of marginalised communities such as Amazigh women. This perspective proposes to fill a large gap in the literature, intertwining both feminist and human rights praxes to address a largely ignored issue: the active participation and broader recognition of the human rights of Amazigh women by integrating perspectives of agency, empowerment and ethnicity.

Additionally, the concept of structural violence analysed by Johan Galtung (1969), which focuses on systematic inequalities and limiting social structures that place direct barriers to the situation of –in this case– Amazigh women, is included as a theoretical approach in my thesis. As Galtung explains, structural violence is often silent and invisible, unlike personal violence, which is clearly revealed. We can thus identify structural violence as the prevention of individuals from fulfilling their basic rights or needs (Galtung, 1969). Galtung's framework allows us to focus the discourse to properly address the systematic oppressions embedded in the Moroccan system, which prevent the full realisation of the rights and activities of Amazigh women. This group often endure a form further inequality, as their oppression remains not only external but also internalized, furthering the scope of the violence.

In this section I have tried to explore different theoretical perspectives to help provide a comprehensive understanding of social, gender, and human right studies, specifically postcolonial and decolonial feminisms with a focus on the particular situation of Amazigh women. These contributions are essential to understanding gender and feminist dynamics in the wider Global South, where the experiences and voices of these women, who suffer from various layers of oppression, must be unfolded. Cornell writes "It has become commonplace to say that women's rights are human rights" (Cornell, 2010, p.108 ), while the diversity of women's situations in the Global South remains overlooked, particularly in feminist productions of scholarship from the global north where one must not consider only issues of race, class, or sexuality, but also –in these contexts– "incorporate other power structures such as colonialism, nationalisms, religion, ethnicity, and globalization, in their analyses of how these processes shaped the experiences of women in colonized and postcolonial societies"

(Ampofo & Beoku-Betts, 2021, p.5). To elaborate on this, Mansoor (2016) goes on to explore the marginalisation of 'third world' feminism, which is completely sidelined, ignored and often disregarded by mainstream feminist movements. It is thus relevant to argue that the characteristics and particularities of the manifestations of agency and empowerment that women from the Global South manifest are often misunderstood and judged (Mansoor, 2016).

The concept of agency will be elaborated on in the last part of this thesis. To give it a contextual framework, Morris (2010) explains,

> "It is well, (in this context), to recall that Spivak's essay entered the American academy at approximately the same time as there occurred, in the interpretive social sciences, a new and powerful drive to discern and articulate something that was variously termed resistance, unconscious resistance, and, sometimes, the agency of the oppressed" (Morris, 2010, pp.11-12).

Referring to the article *Can the Subaltern Speak?* published in 1988 by G. C. Spivak, Morris reminds us that the concept of agency is not relatively new, though of considerable relevance today. The main challenge faced, then, is to gain recognition of the agency of women in the Global South, as Mansoor (2016) emphasises, not as an outcome of Western feminist production, but as an autonomous position that contributes to an inclusive feminism (Mansoor, 2016). On the other hand, regarding the theory of empowerment within a feminist perspective, Turner & Maschi (2014) contribute with an article where they argue that it is crucial to understand the importance of adopting a feminist position when addressing power dynamics that deconstruct gender inequality. Thus, "Empowerment has become an essential part of feminist theory and, as such, seeks to increase the personal, interpersonal and political power of oppressed and marginalized populations for individual and collective transformation" (Turner & Maschi, 2014, p.2). By examining the intersections of gender, race, and colonial pasts, both postcolonial feminism and decolonial feminism bring to the forefront critical frameworks for understanding the particularities of women who have been colonised and who remain part of marginalised communities. Postcolonial feminism focuses on analysing how colonial legacies continue to have a significant impact on women's situations, gender relations, and inequalities. Decolonial feminism, on the other hand, focuses on attempting to challenge the overwhelming dominance of Western feminism over other feminisms by advocating for local, indigenous and Global South feminisms.

To properly examine these concepts, we must start from the initial notion of feminism, as Turner & Maschi define it: "Feminism emphasizes the importance of the social, political, and economic structures that shape human societies and stresses that gender must be considered when examining the effects of oppression and domination and power and powerlessness in our society." (Turner & Maschi, 2014, p.1). With regard to postcolonial feminism, I first clarify that "The term 'postcolonial' is a similarly contested term applied to formerly colonized nations" (Ampofo & Beoku-Betts, 2021, p.3). Here, one must also note the criticisms of the term postcolonial, that the colonial process cannot be considered to be over as Birla mentions,

> "As postcolonial becomes a mere label in the representational politics of institutions (in academia and, more broadly, in the globalized space of nongovernmental and corporate elites), colonialism becomes a thing of the past, an unproblematized past that grounds a homogeneous 'postcolonial' identity and identitarianism. This version of colonialism, and, indeed, history, remains in stark contrast to the impetus of postcolonial criticism, attentive to present and ongoing colonial formations, to the failure of decolonization" (Birla, 2010, p.87).

The main commonality between the two concepts, feminism and post-colonialism, is the extent to which both terms exist outside of their own representation, which Ashcroft (1989) elaborates by referring to them as being part of a "region of otherness and non-being" (Ashcroft, 1989, p.23).

Referring to the double marginalisation of women in post-colonial contexts, Ashcroft argues that "For instance, one of the most insidious denials of the validity of post-colonialism is the suggestion that it demonstrates the outworking of a world-wide spread of post-modernism, and thus becomes simply another manifestation of a European cultural movement" (Ashcroft, 1989, p.24). If we contemplate this interconnectedness of feminism with postcolonialism, Abu-Lughod's (1998, 2013) contribution is very pertinent, bringing to the fore a rejection of the idea that neither white men nor white women should save brown and Muslim women, criticising the assumption that in order to adopt feminist models one must adopt Western standards, explaining that "It has become something of a commonplace in postcolonial studies to talk about the ways that the low status attributed by missionaries and colonial officials to colonized women – represented as the victims of traditions, whether Hindu, Muslim, or pagan – were used as a justification for rule" (Abu-Lughod, 1998, p.14). The great diversity and differences that exist within postcolonial and decolonial feminisms must be re-

considered. As Parashar (2016) argues, both critical theories have grown exponentially in recent years to embrace the widening diversity that can be seen not only in cultural, religious, geographical or ideological differences, but also in the different types of oppressions faced by women in these contexts, pointing to the importance of rejecting universalisms (Parashar, 2016). To conclude with the contributions of postcolonial feminist theory, M. Moallem (2001) stresses the relevance of considering that established dichotomies such as "civilised vs. barbaric", "Orient vs. Occident" and "Us vs Them" directly affect constructions of gender, race, and class, making the imbalances perpetuated by this system highly destructive to gender identity (Moallem, 2001).

Turning to decolonial feminism, this interdisciplinary approach is the fundamental basis applied throughout this thesis, dealing primarily with the daily experiences of the Amazigh community in general, particularly Amazigh women in Morocco, emphasising the direct impacts of colonialism and the importance of maintaining the indigenous customs and forms of empowerment and agency of these women, without having to adhere to Western narratives in order to be considered feminist. Thus, starting with Vergès (2021), who mentions defends "a decolonial feminism whose objective is the destruction of racism, capitalism, and imperialism, an agenda I will try to define more clearly" (Vergès, 2021, p.5). Spivak stresses on the particularity of women in contexts of the Global South, adding that

> "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world-woman' caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development" (Spivak, 2010, p.61).

In line with Spivak's and Vergès' position, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (1984) work advocates a critique of the tendency of certain Western feminisms to refer to the experience of 'third world' women as a single, homogenous experience, victimising and reducing them. Thus, she calls for the rejection of what she calls "'women' as a discursively constructed group" since "the discursively consensual homogeneity of 'women' as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women" (Mohanty, 1984, pp.337-338). By focusing on the first-hand experience of ethnic groups and indigenous communities, these feminist theories argue for a more inclusive and representative understanding of human rights. Elaborating Spivak's idea, Cornell argues that there is an ethical duty involved when working

with the voices of marginalised communities (Cornell 2010, citing Spivak, pp.100-113). In this spirit, Smith (1999) argues that discourses that speak to the experiences of women and other indigenous groups need to be inclusive and egalitarian, calling for this exercise through examining the critical impact of patriarchal and colonial systems on indigenous communities and ethnic groups alike (Smith, 1999).

To conclude this section on the theoretical framework used in this thesis, I would like to stress that it is worth adding Fredrik Barth's input (1969), highlighting the element of ethnicity as dynamic and interacting, rather than just a fixed and rigid structure. Thus, related to self-determination, identity, cultural diversity and collective rights, Barth establishes a comprehensive framework that includes a broader and more complex version of ethnicity rights (Barth, 1969). Finally, as mentioned above, this thesis will draw heavily on the work of F. Sadiqi, specifically at the theoretical level in her 'A Larger –than– Islam Framework', which rejects the fact that the Moroccan feminist base focuses solely on secular and Islamic feminisms, fostering a significant exclusion of other gender contexts, such as that of rural women. Sadiqi argues that "The absence of the Berber dimension from the two discourses is systematic, which weakens the two discourses and widens the gap between them and the majority of women with new realities on the ground" (Sadiqi, 2014, p.189).

> "We cannot know that it is crazy to dream the big dreams including the dream that the struggles of the gendered subaltern, as they endlessly challenge our current spaces of political and aesthetic representation, may take us to a world beyond the class apartheid that Spivak consistently demands we, as feminists and human rights activists, both confront and take upon ourselves responsibility for perpetuating"
>
> Cornell, 2010, p.113

## PART ONE. An Overview of Amazigh People in Morocco

This first part of the thesis introduces the history of the Amazigh community within the Moroccan context, going through the demographic, linguistic and contextual factors that have affected its evolution as a society, always keeping the focus on gender. Thus, it introduces the ACM, the evolution of Amazigh activism and the role of the IRCAM, as well as the different gender developments that have impacted Amazigh women in Morocco. To conclude the section, it elaborates on the role of Amazigh women, namely the activities they carry out both historically and today, and their role as community builders.

### CHAPTER 1. Historical Background

The Amazigh are the indigenous and native community of North Africa. Amazigh means "noble man" or "the free man", and they prefer to be called this instead of Berber, a word derived from "barbarian", imposed by the Greco-Romans upon their arrival (Chtatou, 2020). The Amazigh have been present throughout North Africa, specifically in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Canary Islands, for centuries (A. Colon, 2018 and Chtatou, 2020). Furthermore, Morocco has the highest percentage of the Amazigh community within its territory (Colon, 2018), with estimates suggesting they make up between 35% and 40% of the Moroccan population (Maddy-Weitzman, 2012), which leads to them being considered a "major minority" due to their high presence. Many argue, therefore, that they are not a minority but an ethnic group with growing recognition. As Amina Zioual mentioned during our interview, "We are not minorities as such, we have been advocating relentlessly not to be considered so. We are legal minorities, yes, but not in terms of numbers" (Zioual, Interview, Rabat, May 2024).

It is important to note that "Morocco has three large and distinct Berber communities, located in the south, the Middle Atlas Mountains, and the northern Rif region, which gives

them more weight but also impedes efforts to promote a common modern Amazigh identity" (Maddy-Weitzman, 2012, p.118). As Colon (2018) mentions, an important historical fact about Morocco is its colonial past, "Morocco has a long history of colonization by the Romans, Arabs, Spanish, and French. Each group had methods to rule the Amazigh, but the French's 'divide and conquer' technique continues to characterize perceptions and realities for the Amazigh today" (Colon, 2018, p.5). In another vein, before colonization, the Amazigh were subject to a process of Arabization and Islamization during the 14th century, but they managed to maintain their language and culture practically intact until today (Laghssais, 2023). Moreover, Sadiqi (2003) adds, "The history of Morocco shows that the country has never been totally 'homogenized', 'Arabized' or 'Islamized'. Morocco is a Berber, Arab, Muslim, Mediterranean, and African country" (Sadiqi, 2003, p.17).

The French protectorate was entirely established in 1912, lasting until Morocco's declaration of independence in 1956 (Sadiqi, 2003). As part of their divide-and-conquer policy, in 1930, the protectorate established the *Berber Dahir*, which legislatively divided the Berber community from the Arab community: "France's historic mistake in 1930 was to issue a dahir (royal edict) intended to place the Berber populations outside the jurisdiction of Islamic law. In doing so, it ignited a nationalist reaction – pushing the 'Berber-Arab' dichotomy in religious terms" (Maddy-Weitzman, 2012, p.115). This decree was followed by a succession of predominantly nationalist protests, which had a very specific vision of the state to be built: a nation with the Arabic language, Islam, and a king (Colon, 2018 and Laghssais, 2023). In this regard, Jonathan Wyrtzen notes that

> "In June, July, and August, nationalists used the traditional *latif* prayer in mosques, with the addendum 'and do not separate us from our brothers, the Berbers', to energize demonstrations against French efforts to curtail the jurisdiction of Islamic law over Berber areas of Morocco, prohibit the teaching and use of Arabic in large areas of the countryside, and ultimately (they claimed) Christianize the Berber-speaking portion of the country's population." (Wyrtzen, 2011, p.232)

It is important to consider that this narrative significantly harmed the Amazigh culture and language to this day. Colon (2018) mentions, "The Amazigh culture was characterized as backwards and archaic. These repressions significantly hurt the status and perpetuation of culture for the Amazigh" (Colon, 2018, p.7). Under the false pretext of post-protectorate unification, the new constitution of 1962 was significantly severe and discriminatory against

the identity, language, culture, and rights of the Amazigh. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) was established as the only official language, which led to the institutional marginalization of Tamazight, as this Arabization policy was implemented in the educational system, which was completely detrimental to the Amazigh community (Colon, 2018). Thus, Laghssais adds

> "These policies operated in many ways, such as excluding Tamazight from public schools, national media, and government administrations. To that end, it led to a sense of cultural and linguistic alienation, along with feelings of exclusion among the Amazigh population. This, in turn, has fueled the emergence of the Amazigh movement as a means of resilience and activism that led to the creation of the IRCAM in 2001." (Laghssais, 2023, pp.122-123)

## CHAPTER 2. The Amazigh Cultural Movement: The Question of Tamazight & the Role of IRCAM

Experiencing ongoing discrimination and exclusion, where Amazigh names for babies were banned, village names and cultural symbols were changed, historical figures were removed from school textbooks, and speaking Amazigh publicly was considered shameful (Colon, 2018), the community quickly organized to claim their rights. These mobilization movements began in the 1970s, where M. Moukhlis of IRCAM explains that he participated as an activist from the early days of the ACM (Amazigh Cultural Movement), to advocate for their linguistic, identity, and cultural expression rights (Moukhlis, Interview, Rabat, May 2024). These demands culminated in what is known as the Amazigh or Algerian Spring, a series of student protests that took place in the 1980s. According to Crawford & Silverstein (2004), these protests "galvanized Moroccan Amazigh ethno-linguistic militancy into a public movement, with conferences and a published journal, *Amazigh*" (Crawford & Silverstein, 2004). Thus, the 1980s brought a change in dynamic, where the movement became much more visible (Aït Mous, 2011).

With the increasing political repression under Hassan II, the ACM led other entities for Amazigh rights to the 1991 Agadir Charter, which called for the legitimization of the movement, as well as the democratization of the cultural and linguistic rights of the Amazigh community (Idhssaine, 2022), and the recognition of Tamazight as an official language in Morocco (Schwed, 2017). The Amazigh activist movement remained active throughout the rest of the 1990s, particularly in 1995 with the creation of the International Amazigh Congress, which organized a wide variety of meetings and conferences in collaboration with various

Amazigh entities and non-governmental organizations—across North Africa and beyond—through which they presented an official petition to amend the constitution to include Tamazight as an official language in Morocco (Laghssais, 2023, p.100). This was triggered, as Fischer (2019) comments, because "In 1994, the late King Hassan II verbally recognized the legitimacy of the Amazigh cultural and linguistic identity within Morocco. It was a monumental proclamation. He then promised reform. However, further development languished for years, incensing the MCA" (Fischer, 2019, p.34).

This continued omission of the Amazigh community's demands culminated in the issuance of the Berber Manifesto in 2000, "that set out a list of 9 specific demands that included: recognition of Tamazight as an official language in the constitution, economic and infrastructure development for Amazigh areas, for Amazigh to be required to be taught in schools, and an updated national history that includes contributions of the Imazighen" (Berber Manifesto 2000, cited in Schwed, 2017). The current king, Mohammed VI, ascended to the throne in 1999, and it can be said that his reign brought a sense of optimism for the movement. Following a new royal decree, *Dahir*, in October 2001, the king called for the establishment of IRCAM (Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture), which officially started its activities in 2003 to "safeguard and promote the Amazigh language and culture in all its forms and expressions" (Présentation de l'IRCAM, official website).

It is also important to keep in mind that at the time, there were significant internal and international pressures to maintain a government that complies with international human rights standards (Crawford & Silverstein, 2004). In this regard, there has been much discussion over whether or not IRCAM would mitigate and suppress the Amazigh movement or open up new avenues for the movement to advance its demands. Crawford & Silverstein write

> "Rather than assuring national unity, the establishment of IRCAM has arguably exacerbated the fragmentation of not only the Amazigh movement, but also Moroccan oppositional politics in general." The newly formed IRCAM was made up of an array of linguists—mostly—and Amazigh militants with the goal of advancing "linguistic standardization, pedagogical development, artistic expression, anthropological analysis, historical preservation, translation and media promotion, and communication". (Crawford & Silverstein, 2004)

It is evident that the Amazigh community would and has benefited from the establishment of IRCAM, including the restoration of their identity, language, culture, and customs as well as the validation and protection of their legal rights. Additionally, "The dahir thus serves to transform Amazigh militants into allies of the state in Morocco's local 'war on terror'", according to Crawford & Silverstein (2004). In an ideal scenario, ethnic diversity would not be seen as a source of division but rather as an asset that unites Moroccan society, as IRCAM aimed to strive for. The standardization of the Amazigh language and its codification using the *Tifinagh* script stand out as noteworthy accomplishments of IRCAM. However, the criticisms stem from the fact that the alphabet makes it more difficult for Amazigh speakers to promote their language and that the majority of them find the standardized form of Amazigh to be incomprehensible, making language acquisition even more difficult (Idhssaine, 2022). Furthermore, Amazigh-speaking populations in Morocco were not consulted in the decision-making process of the Royaume with IRCAM, indicating that political necessity rather than linguistic and cultural considerations may have been the primary driver behind the recognition of Tamazight (Colon, 2018).

Beyond that, the initial project carried out by IRCAM was the introduction of Tamazight into the educational system during 2003 and 2004. To this end, training programs were created for teachers in a number of majority-Amazigh regions, such as the Rif, the Middle Atlas, the High Atlas, and the Sous Valley (Crawford & Silverstain, 2004). By 2008, it was planned for the 317 chosen schools to have incorporated the Amazigh language in their programs (Aït Mous, 2011), but, as of 2024, this objective has yet to be accomplished. Since 2009, Mohamed Moukhlis has served as the Director of Communication services at IRCAM. He notes that in 2024, their primary objective is to establish university collaborations to promote the expansion of higher education in Tamazight at both the high school and university levels (Moukhlis, Interview, Rabat, May 2024).

Even today, the GOM (Government of Morocco) faces significant criticism for its lack of concrete actions in fully integrating Tamazight beyond superficial reforms, which as mentioned before, has led to accusations that the creation of IRCAM was merely a tactic to appease the movement without addressing its core demands. In rural areas such as Tiznit and Merzouga, where several interviews have been conducted for this study, there are ongoing complaints from communities who struggle to communicate effectively in hospitals, police stations, and government offices due to the lack of Amazigh-speaking staff. During our

conversation, M. Moukhlis mentioned that while efforts are underway to address this issue, implementing such resources on a large scale is challenging because it involves educating administrative professionals in the Tifinagh script, currently not having the possibility to do so (Moukhlis, Interview, May 2024). Another concern is that IRCAM's initiatives might oversimplify Amazigh culture. However, despite these criticisms, Chtatou (2019) notes that major Amazigh movements supported the establishment of IRCAM, viewing it as a step toward greater recognition of Amazigh identity in Morocco. This support is evident as many militants from the 1970s to 1990s, including IRCAM's current director, Ahmed Boukous, Amina Ibnou-Cheikh, and Mohamed Moukhlis, have joined the institution as researchers, as well as other government-led positions.

On the other hand, L. Feliu (2004) warns that integrating into certain institutions risks legitimizing a government that appears to change but does not actually do so, promoting its own image while getting away without bringing real progress. This explains why some factions within the Amazigh movement reject this collaboration, or even the mere establishment of IRCAM. It is understandable that IRCAM could be seen as a means for the government to control the demands of the Amazigh movement, leading some to view organizations like the AZETTA (Amazigh National Association for the Citizens) as a more credible entity (Makhoukh, 2019). F. Makhoukh (2019) notes that IRCAM is often criticized as being "less independent," which suggests the institute struggles to form meaningful connections with civil society activists, despite the grassroots demands. Another point to consider is that IRCAM is the main contributor to literature on the Amazigh language. For example, A. Boukous (2012) has made the most significant publication on the revitalization of the Amazigh language, discussing opportunities, challenges, and strategies. He asserts that urbanization is the greatest challenge to the protection of the Amazigh language, as it comes into contact with Darija, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), French, and sometimes English and Spanish in urban areas such as Casablanca, Rabat, Tangier, or Tetouan (Boukous, 2012). In this sense, it could be considered as a biased publication, although it is important. Moreover, Chtatou (2019) writes in his article "Although today the official IRCAM is in full decline, over the years the Moroccan establishment has used it extensively to subdue the Amazigh activists and keep at bay the vociferous voices who call for full recognition of Tamazight cultural rights" (Chtatou, 2019).

Moreover, IRCAM faces significant criticism from Amazigh activists for its limited efforts to enhance political representation for the Amazigh people. While the institute focuses on promoting language and culture, activists argue that political autonomy should also be a key objective. Representatives from southern cooperatives emphasize the need for greater representation to address the deep-rooted inequalities between rural and urban areas. Crawford & Silverstein (2004) argue that IRCAM's creation has radicalized some Amazigh militants and worsened the urban-rural divide. This has intensified calls for the establishment of an Amazigh political party to address these pending demands. Ms. Amina Ibnou-Cheikh, who handles the Amazigh dossier in the current government of Mr. Aziz Akhannouch, assures that being involved with IRCAM and being an activist are not mutually exclusive actions, suggesting that the institute provides a platform to further the struggle with better resources. She stated in the interview I had with her in April of 2024 that "If I am offered a seat at the table, I will never refuse it. I'm not going to feel bad or apologize for taking a position of power, even if I don't agree with all the conditions. Change happens both on the streets and within administrations, and I work from both places" (Ibnou-Cheikh, Interview, Rabat, April 2024). Echoing this message, M. Moukhlis acknowledges the criticism but stresses the importance of being pragmatic and recognizing the need for institutional resources to achieve meaningful change. He points out "After all, an institute has been established, a television channel launched, and the language officialized. It's crucial to utilize platforms dedicated to the Amazigh language and culture, as they play a vital role in advancing our cause" (Moukhlis, Interview, Rabat, May 2024).

The situation remained somewhat stagnant until the Arab Spring in 2010 and 2011, when there was a resurgence of Berber identity, triggered by the February 20 Movement. This movement brought what F. Sadiqi describes as the Moroccan ideological "center," which was neither Islamic nor secular (Sadiqi, 2016d, pp.22-25). It is generally said that Morocco did not experience a revolution like its neighbouring countries, such as Tunisia or Egypt, but the protests led the king to issue a revised constitution that significantly expanded the human and civil rights of its citizens (Aidi, 2020). As Chtatou (2020) mentions, "But with the crisis of Arab ideologies during the Arab Spring and the beginning of the ebb of radical Islamism, these important factors favored the recognition of ethnic and cultural particularisms in North Africa and led to a renaissance of the Amazigh movement, especially in Morocco and Algeria" (Chtatou, 2020).

These growing sentiments of exclusion and demands of political rights culminated in the official recognition of Tamazight as an official language in Morocco alongside Standard Arabic. However, as I have discussed throughout this chapter, there is doubt as to whether these advancements are genuine or merely facades to mitigate the root demands of the Amazigh movement. Since the officialization, there have been little to no concrete changes, especially regarding the widespread adoption of Tamazight across the territory, beyond just certain areas (Colon, 2018).

## CHAPTER 3. Recent (Gender) Advancements affecting Amazigh Women

Moroccan women, including Amazigh women, have been very active in all the demands for reform within the Moroccan society and GOM. Morocco has undergone several important reforms that have directly affected the lives of Amazigh women, addressing issues of both gender rights and cultural, linguistic, and ethnic rights. The February 20 Movement (20FM), which led to the adoption of the new 2011 constitution, as well as the adoption of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and the revision of the *Moudawana*, the Family Code by the GOM, are among the most important advancements in recent years that have brought about a change in the socioeconomic, political, and legal space for Amazigh women.

Thus, the 20FM presented an opportunity for various Moroccan factions, despite having different ideologies, to unite in the establishment of "an apolitical culture in which women were perceived as equals in the movement" (Laghssais, 2023, p.106). F. Sadiqi (2021) defines this concept as the ideological "center" that emerged from the 2011 uprisings in North Africa, noting that "I revisit this concept and suggest it as a framework for understanding the emerging female feminist voices and their distinctive contributions to the development of feminisms and gender studies in North Africa" (Sadiqi, 2021, p.34). With this, we understand the fundamental role that women have in these processes and their undeniable participation in them. Sadiqi (2016d) again frames it as a necessary role to address the great complexity of problems these women face, needing them as agents of action, while also considering the diversification of "new actors and agents gaining visibility" (Sadiqi, 2016d, pp.15-16).

The new constitution of 2011 also brought a more concrete gender action plan, where Morocco committed to adopting a mechanism to combat gender inequality and discrimination, "as well as the supremacy of international conventions over national laws" (Chekrouni & El

Nquirmi, 2023, p.5). Chekrouni & El Nquirmi add that this plan consisted of the following eight elements:

1. The institutionalization of the principle of equality;
2. The fight against all forms of discrimination and violence against women;
3. The upgrading of the education system;
4. Equitable access to health services;
5. The development of basic infrastructure to improve the living conditions of women and young girls;
6. The social and economic empowerment of women;
7. Equal access to political and economic decision-making positions;
8. Equal opportunities in the labor market. (Chekrouni & El Nquirmi 2023, p.5)

Ultimately, Morocco has made significant progress in its gender parity and human rights action plan, always keeping in mind strategies to comply with international standards. Morocco ratified the CEDAW in 1993, and since then, many measures have been implemented to protect women, particularly in the realm of gender-based violence (Chekrouni & El Nquirmi, 2023). Following this ratification, the *Moudawana*, or Family Code, was updated in 2004, which "emphasized the need for gender equality in all walks of life, including the domestic level through the conclusions of the report produced by the Equity and Reconciliation Commission on the 50th anniversary of Morocco's independence" (Laghssais, 2023, p.108). The *Moudawana*, as Salime explains, "This is the code regulating men's and women's relationships within the family, giving men the upper hand in marriage, divorce, and child custody, among other matters, and justifying these inequalities through highly patriarchal interpretations of the Islamic sharia, or legal code" (Moulay R'chid 1991, as cited in Salime, 2011, p.11).

Moreover, the 2004 *Moudawana* has been considered the first crucial step towards the emancipation of Moroccan women, marking a clear break from past dynamics. Examples of the most significant new measures include raising the minimum marriage age from 15 to 18 years, allowing women to file for divorce under judicial conditions, abolishing mandatory guardianship for adult women, and ensuring that mothers do not automatically lose custody of their children after moving or remarrying (Laghssais, 2023). However, it is important to consider that despite these reforms, challenges persist, especially in rural areas, where underage marriage remains a common practice (Jaldi & Isbayene, 2021).

As a final point regarding the *Moudawana*, it is important to note that it is published only in Standard Arabic, which means that most women, particularly those who are illiterate or from rural Amazigh-speaking areas, cannot understand the text (Laghssais, 2023). Thus, the limitations of the 2004 *Moudawana* are significant. Laghssais adds that "The *Moudawana* still had a lot of flaws and ambiguity concerning VAW [violence against women], inheritance, polygamy, and other issues not touched upon in this chapter. Thus, the *Moudawana* law, as ink on paper, does not mirror the vague situation on the ground where each judge depends on their individual knowledge to sort out cases." (Laghssais, 2023, p.123)

On the other hand, the NPA (National Plan of Action for Integrating Women into Development), or PANIFID in French—can be considered the first feminist reform with a significant actionable framework that could materially change the situation of women. This new reform was adopted in 1999 (Salime, 2011). In recent years, the NDM (New Development Model) (2018-2021) has continued this initiative, highlighting female emancipation and gender equality as the two fundamental pillars for this process of socioeconomic change in Morocco. Despite significant advances at the legal and political levels, legal and social limitations continue to directly affect the effectiveness of implementing these reforms (Jaldi & Isbayene, 2021). While these reforms may have brought positive changes for Moroccan women, including Amazigh women and their rights, their implementation remains often unequal, particularly in rural and Amazigh areas. For example, despite the protections introduced by the *Moudawana*, many women in these regions are not aware of these rights and advancements, leaving them at a disadvantage.

To conclude this chapter, the reforms initiated as a result of the 20FM, along with the adoption of the new 2011 constitution, the incorporation of CEDAW into national law, and the revision of the *Moudawana*, have collectively made significant progress toward advancing the rights of Amazigh women in Morocco. These developments have succeeded in recognizing the importance of cultural identity of the Amazigh community, their rights, and cleared the complexities of gender equality that affect these women in an effort to implement measures of change. While the challenges of concrete implementation reveal the ongoing tensions between calls for modernity and democratization, as well as cultural tradition in Morocco, for these women, the fight for the recognition of their rights remains an ongoing struggle.

## CHAPTER 4. The Role of Amazigh Women and Community Building

As we have determined throughout the theoretical framework and the literature review, most of the production on Amazigh women revolves around their role in artistic, cultural and linguistic preservation of their identity, given the immense relevance they have in this aspect. This section offers a compilation of the most relevant actions that Amazigh women have historically carried out, the activities they continue to carry out today and their role in community building. Moreover, as Mirón Perez (1998) mentions, the study of women who were not included in what 'the West' denoted as "great civilizations", has always been scarce and marginal (Mirón Pérez, 1998, p.13). While I will not go into details on the various economic, cultural and ethnic empowerment activities that Amazigh women typically carry out in rural areas both historically and today, I will highlight the most relevant activities below.

To start with, as Sadiqi (2014) elaborates, Amazigh women have the central and ancestral role of preserving their language and culture, "From ancient pre-Islamic eras to present-times, Berber women have always been genuine agents of change in their communities and societies" (Sadiqi, 2014, p.35). In the same line of thought, Becker (2006) explains that Amazigh society relies on women as the societal epicenter, among other things, for art, an element which is considered essential for the identity assertion of the Amazigh (Becker, 2006, pp.1-2). Thus, Amazigh women are the artists of their community, unlike in Arab societies, where men take on that role, considering the substantial importance it holds (Becker, 2006, pp.1-2).

It is also important to note that the agency of Amazigh women is not based solely on the preservation of this language and culture, nor solely on art itself, but rather on the whole sociocultural paradigm; for example, "[...]their role in religion and military leadership as well as in the creation and preservation of orality, rituality, and symbolism that underline the literature, art, and the ways of life of today's Moroccans" (Sadiqi, 2014, p.35). As Laghssais & Comins-Mingol (2021a) mention, which I find completely accurate, Amazigh women take example from their legacy from pre-Islamic queens, warriors, and goddesses from all over North Africa, to "make art and crafts that transform their lives" (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021a). Returning to the matter of language preservation, Chtatou (2022b) emphasizes that as the GOM has overlooked its responsibility as a protector of the Amazigh language and culture, the Amazigh community has had to step forward. Given the relationship that the Tamazight language has with the feminine gender, women, especially those who are illiterate and from

rural areas, have been in charge of protecting and passing on these elements from generation to generation (Chtatou, 2022b).

It is thanks to stories like that of the warrior and queen Kahina, that the collective memory of the Amazigh community yields power spaces to women, having roles as relevant as the ones we are addressing. Kahina was a military leader, warrior, and queen who managed to resist the Arab invasion of the 7th century thanks to her military tactics and charisma as a leader. She overcame male dominance in spaces of war and authority and is considered "a kind of female figure combining political and religious powers, a Berber warrior queen who fought to defend her people and her country against the Islamic invasion"[7] (Sadiqi, 2020a, p.24). Kahina, therefore, can be attributed to the origin of the matriarchal trend in the Amazigh community (K. Anasse, 2023). This translates into contemporary Amazigh women taking these examples and empowering themselves as women with decision-making skills (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021a). Laghssais & Comins-Mingol (2021a) add to this note "Today's Amazigh women express their sisterhood and gender awareness through ritual, oral histories and handicrafts, through the colorful rugs they weave, their handmade pottery, the tattoos they paint on their bodies, and the jewelry they wear" (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021a). Thus, after the Arab conquest, the dynamics of Amazigh women changed slightly, but their central role within their communities was preserved, although they had to combine their ancestral customs and traditions with their new faith in Islam (Sadiqi, 2020a, p.27).

If we focus on the various empowerment activities of Amazigh women, as I have mentioned before, the two central aspects are the preservation of language and the promotion of culture. As Sadiqi (2020a, 27) emphasizes, this is only possible thanks to rituals, art, and oral transmission. When talking about rituals, I do not refer exclusively to religious or spiritual actions, but rather to a wide range of ceremonies or customs that address issues such as fertility, mourning, various life cycles, healing, agricultural needs, strengthening family ties, among other educational and pedagogical objectives (Sadiqi, 2020a, p.27). As for the most significant private family rituals, "Birth, circumcision and marriage are the most important. The henna ritual is performed every time"[8] (Sadiqi, 2020a, p.28). On the other hand, we must always keep in mind the difficulty that can come with occupying these spaces. T. Yacine (2001) points out,

[7] My own translation. The original text by Sadiqi is in French.
[8] My own translation. The original text by Sadiqi is in French.

“Throughout history, women have been striving to occupy a space within the limits allowed by the dominating order. Within society, women are an anonymous body. They are voiceless. They are talked about. They are also depicted as a homogenous body whose members are all the same and identical” (Yacine, 2001, p.103). Thus, considering the great variety of roles and activities, as well as the presence in society and economic activities that Amazigh women have, we can say that at the very least they challenge this assertion.

Considering oral tradition, Sadiqi argues that apart from being a means of conservation, protection, and preservation of language, we can see its traces in literature, poetry, children’s stories, popular songs, or public oratory (Sadiqi, 2020a, p.28). If we think about it, it is truly fascinating that Tamazight has been preserved despite the many different influences that have actively tried to sabotage it, encouraging its disappearance. Neither the Greeks, nor the Phoenicians, nor the Romans, nor the colonial powers, nor the Muslims, nor during the Islamic era managed to have more power over Amazigh women to take away their determination to transmit their mother tongue to younger generations. As Sadiqi (2007) elaborates:

> “Amazigh owes its survival first and foremost to women. In fact, its survival is an exception to the usual development of languages. We have here a language that is several millennia old, but which has never been the official language of a centralized state that might have determined its linguistic standards and conferred on it the validation of legal status; a language which has managed to co-exist with far more powerful languages, for example, Punic and Latin in the past, and Arabic, French, Spanish and English today. The standardization of Amazigh and its teaching go hand in hand today with the promotion of women – here once again we find the correlation between language and women” (Sadiqi, 2007, pp.27-28).

An important element to consider is that the word “woman” in Tamazight is “*tamghart*”, which means community leader, reaffirming this matriarchal position we speak of and the connection of Amazigh women with their language (Sadiqi, 2014, p.49). As an example of this determination, Tabaamrant is considered one of the icons of the struggle for Berber linguistic and cultural rights in Morocco (Sadiqi, 2020a, p.30). In a Parliamentary session in 2012, Tabaamrant was the first woman to insist to use Berber as her native language, which was considered as an act of resistance (Sadiqi, 2020a, p.30).

Within orality, poetry has been a frequently used medium by Amazigh women, as well as songs and storytelling, to assert their condition as women, often creating spaces among

themselves where they can address feminine issues and create circles of solidarity and trust (Sadiqi, 2020a, pp.30-32). As explained by Chtatou, the fact that women participate in orality, songs, music, and broader cultural preservation not only serves to preserve the language but, as the most important element, "they constitute the very glue of society in a time when many Amazigh families are geographically separated" (Chtatou, 2022b). He highlights in his articles the fact that Amazigh women remain active participants of their societies despite the Islamization process they went through (Chtatou, 2022a). On another note, the role of older women, as they no longer have the direct duty of educating and teaching their children, often serves as links to their past, telling stories to the younger ones, "they are far from being naïve artists. They have a strategy, demonstrate deep thought and a great memory, and make skillful use of their knowledge of human psychology. Through storytelling, these women often manage to make the world more comprehensible"[9] (Sadiqi, 2020a, p.32).

Thus, we find that Amazigh women, illiterate and rural, promote the preservation of this tradition from generation to generation, with the transmission method being solely oral. Chtatou (2022) compares these dynamics within the broader of Morocco, where "Morocco's patriarchal society has largely silenced oral female genres, and Sadiqi characterizes the nature of Moroccan women's contribution to oral literature as 'unofficial' voices that circulate as 'anonymous' literature in the community without being officially recognized" (Chtatou cites Sadiqi 2003, p.13). It has to be noted that the vulnerability position in which Tamazight is situated, being completely at the mercy of its private and informal use in Amazigh communities and despite its officialization in the Moroccan state; the use of literary Arabic and Darija in public spaces leaves no room for Tamazight to be actively revitalized (Chtatou, 2022b).

Additionally, as another element of orality, Tizrrarin is an oral tradition where women are the protagonists. It consists of acapella narration of couplets, which are recited without music or percussion, and are usually accompanied by an active audience that participates in sequences of questions and answers (Chtatou, 2022b). The use of this practice is usually to update listeners on specific topics: news from families in the community, reminders of upcoming events, announcements of weddings or births, always returning to this factor of union among community members who are far away or not present (Chtatou, 2022b). Chtatou also mentions as an important point that this type of orality has never been commercialized and

[9] My own translation. The original text by Sadiqi is in French.

serves, among other things, as “forging bonds and bridging gaps across differences, thus mediating potential conflict. Again, this function, like others, illustrates the particular use of women’s oral and language traditions in sustaining Amazigh communities” (Chtatou, 2022b).

Having already established that Amazigh women are the artists of their communities, the predominant arts in which they focus their productions are “Along with carpet weaving and the argan oil cooperatives, the agency of Amazigh women, as active members in the local development of their communities, is also manifested in handicrafts, principally pottery, sewing and jewelry” (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021a). Everyone knows Berber carpets; they are increasingly recognized and sought after all over the world, mainly known for their vibrant colors and bold patterns. Regarding carpet weaving, what is not widely known is that these artists tell stories through their productions and that the weaving process and working with wool make them highly respected (Sadiqi, 2020a, p.32). Therefore, women who weave carpets have a deeply respected role in their communities. Returning to symbolism, Laghssais & Comins-Mingol (2021a) recount that many of these women’s productions represent the different stages of a woman’s life, where they quote Barbatti (2008, 24) “in some cases with a little imagination one can clearly recognize childhood and virginity, bridal state, union, pregnancy, birth pains, birth, and the newborn child” (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021a).

The book *Créativité feminine dans les espaces culturels amazighes* (Rabat, 2022), published by IRCAM, begins its presentation by reflecting on the importance of giving space to the experience and material and immaterial knowledge of Amazigh women, alluding to the little literature published on the subject. From carpet production to traditional medicinal practices applied in the High Atlas, these women have countless examples of how they exercise their agency and empowerment. Their role in their communities clearly exemplifies that they are the pillars of their societies, as Chtatou (2024) mentioned when I interviewed him, “They [Amazigh women] are the guardians of the culture, in the sense that our literature is women, songs are women, knowledge is women, and education of children is women, and obviously language, that's why we say mother tongue, not father tongue. So, women in Berber society are still to this very day, of tremendous importance” (Chtatou, Interview, May 2024).

To conclude, this first part of the thesis has provided an overview of the Amazigh community within the Moroccan context. Still focusing on the gender elements, it has traced the historical background that has directly affected the development of the gender movement

and the Amazigh Cultural Movement (ACM). Some examples are the creation and role of IRCAM, which highlights the resistance and activism of the Amazigh people, and the recognition of the active role that Amazigh women have played as protectors of the Amazigh language and culture, being the main mobilisers of the movement at the grassroots level. The history of the Amazigh people, marked by colonisation, Arabisation and the continuous obstacles to their full recognition as an ethnic group, sheds light on the complex struggle they have carried out and continue to undertake. Even so, thanks to their perseverance, the Amazigh people have achieved significant advances, such as the officialization of Tamazight and the very creation of IRCAM. However, these developments have not been without criticism, especially with regard to the implementation of reforms on the ground, in marginalised and rural contexts. Through art, oral tradition, and other cultural and economic activities, Amazigh women have played a fundamental role as bearers of language and culture, thereby erasing any doubts about their ability to thrive and empower, being the indispensable voices of their communities.

The persistence and resilience of Amazigh women despite the difficulties of their position exemplifies their character as agents of change in their communities, demonstrating their agency and empowerment. In this respect, the following part of this thesis will analyse the different Moroccan feminisms, starting with the two mainstream movements: Islamic feminism and secular feminism, and leading to the emergence of Amazigh feminism, passing through decolonial and indigenous feminism, as a fundamental element to understand the need to adopt an inclusive Amazigh feminism to address the unique issues of this group of women.

*"A woman is born a dove*
*in grace and freedom*
*Her wings will take her*
*Away*
*Anywhere she wants*
*To teach others what she learnt"*

Yacine, 2001, p.111; cites Tambaarant, N.D

## PART TWO. Amazigh Feminism: Pathways to a Narrative of Resistance

To begin with this part on the emergence of Amazigh feminism, I start by establishing a feminist precedent in Morocco. To do so, I begin by providing the major contributions to mainstream feminist currents in neighbouring countries or similar contexts, including the most important post-colonial feminist currents in North Africa and the Middle East. I will then preview the Moroccan feminist context, with Islamic and secular feminism, and end with a chapter on the particularity of Amazigh feminism.

In her article *Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond* (2005) Margot Badran identifies the main models of feminism that have emerged in the region as secular feminism and Islamic feminism. This is also reaffirmed by Asma Barlas (2019) and Leila Ahmed (1992). Secular feminism dates back to the late 19th century, while Islamic feminism, on the other hand, emerged in the late 20th century. Naturally, the rise of these feminist movements took place in periods characterised by colonialism, imperialism in some cases, and the significant economic, political and technological inequalities exemplified throughout the region (Badran, 2005). It should be noted that secular feminism emerged mainly in middle- and upper-class contexts, that is, privileged women often from urban contexts, a concept which I will also explore in the Moroccan case. Ahmed (1992), exemplifies Huda Sha'rawi in this context, having been a clear pioneer in promoting women's intellectual development on gender issues as she was able, due to her high rank, to create an association to foster these conversations, always keeping in focus the dichotomy between East and West.

The narrative that emerged around secular feminism had an activist and grassroots base, which sought to advance indigenous women's rights to the level of international human rights, especially in terms of their educational empowerment (H. Jawad, 2003). This relationship with

the concept of modernisation led to its attribution to Western standards, which was defended by some and criticised by many (Jawad, 2003). As Badran (2005) states, during the first half of the twentieth century, Islamic and Arab feminists advanced as leaders of their social causes, gradually taking positions of power in public spaces, intervening in politics and academic production. Thus, alternative voices quickly emerged advocating a more local feminism, rooted in Islamic culture and faith. On the other hand, we have to still consider that

> "it is essential to stress that secular feminists continue to be an important force to be reckoned with. They continue to expose and highlight the abuses to which women are subjected in parts of the Muslim world. Also, their efforts to eradicate these abuses and achieve justice are extremely valuable. As such, their contribution, both as intellectuals and activists, to the cause of women's human rights in the region must not be underestimated." (Jawad, 2003, p.109).

Thus, it can be said that Islamic feminism gained momentum in the region during the 1970s. To conclude this short introduction, Ndeye Adújar defines Islamic feminism as "an intellectually rigorous and socially transformative global movement that, through a variety of projects and initiatives, is advancing gender equality and empowering Muslim women in a range of contexts." (Adújar, 2013, p.59).

In the same regard, Seedat (2013) reminds us that scholars such as Barlas and Wadud renounce calling themselves feminists, although they do identify their work as such. This is due to the connotation and direct attribution of feminism to its Western origins, which have proven to be detrimental to the representation of 'third world' women (Wadud, 1992 as cited in Seedat, 2013). This phenomenon has also been exemplified on several occasions during the interviews for the development of my thesis, where when I asked, "Do you consider yourself an Amazigh feminist?" or "What do you think about the development or future of Amazigh feminism?", the answer was: "I defend the Amazigh cause in general, women, men and children", or "rather than Amazigh feminism, I would say female empowerment" (Multiple Interviews, 2024).

## CHAPTER 5. Moroccan Feminist Movements: Secular and Islamic Takeovers

We then dive into the duality of the dominant currents in the Moroccan feminist landscape, where secular feminism and Islamic feminism have established themselves as the two main currents in recent decades. Moroccan feminism emerged as a pioneer in the North African context, particularly with regard to its reforms of the Family Code, or *Moudawana*

(Salime, 2012). The new *Moudawana* of 2004, which we have elaborated on above, was one of the most progressive of the decade in the region in terms of advancing women's rights (Salime, 2012). S. Eddouada & R. Pepicelli explain that for several scholars, including Margot Badran, this reform in Morocco set a very important precedent, where the 2004 *Moudawana*, "it is to date *the* exemplary case of legislation based on the *Sharî'a* which implements, at least in part, the ideas of social justice and gender equality put forward by Islamic feminism on the basis of a renewed reading of the Coran."[10] (Eddouada & Pepicelli, 2010, p.87). As a counterargument, K. Ž. Elliot (2014) comments that the 2004 reform does not manage to improve the situation and position of women within the family context, but rather worsens it, "it reafirms societal understandings of gender roles" (Elliot, 2014, p.24).

The interface between secular feminism and Islamic feminism in Morocco is a complex one. E. Hunter (2006) summarises it as a complex negotiation between embracing modernity and rejecting the secular narrative as it is perceived as Western or foreign. As far as secular feminism is concerned, one could say that this discourse aims to correct and bring to the fore a better version of Shari'a law that is embedded in the Moroccan system by having a monarchical power that has authority over matters of religion and politics, rather than eliminating or replacing it (Sadiqi, 2014). According to Sadiqi (2014), secular feminism emerged in the mid-1940s, with what was later termed as the first wave of secular feminism, which lasted until the 1970s, followed by the second wave that took place during the 1980s and 1990s, and finally the third and final wave that started in the 2000s until the present.

Right after Morocco's declaration of independence, secularism was the reliable way to ensure progress towards gender equality, "However, today for many Islamists its links with the Western lifestyles and political systems that separate between religion and state are synonymous with imperialism and secularism, which are associated with secular-authoritarian regimes in the MENA region." (Ennaji, 2016b, p.2). On another note, the emergence of gender movements in Morocco is associated with upper-class women, a clear example being nationalist political parties. As an example, Feliu (2012) points to the case of the Istiqlal party, which established a Commission for Women, or the DPI (Democratic Party for the Independence), creating Sisters of the Purity – Akhawat Al-Safaa.

[10] My own translation. The original text by Eddouada and Pepicelli is in French.

Moreover, in order to elaborate on the Moroccan feminist movement, we must include in the discourse the fundamental role of feminist organisations that gave way to these gender reforms and advances. The first to consider is the ADFM (Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc) and the other one the UAF (Union de l'Action Feminine), about which Salime mentions that

> "These two groups have formed the benchmark of feminist activism in Morocco since the mid-1980s. By defining the women's movement as a challenge to the legal source of the subjugation of women, these two organisations have shaped the whole range of women's activism and hundreds of women's groups, advocacy centers, and research programs active in Morocco to date." (Salime, 2011, p.23).

The ADFM emerged out of the Communist Party and the PPS (Progress and Socialism Party) during 1985, and the UAF out of the OADP (Organization of Democratic and Popular Action) (Sadiqi, 2016a, p.56). This implied that public institutions would begin to undergo a significant change, the integration of women and feminisation processes to incorporate women's demands from a relevant position (Sadiqi, 2016a). Moreover, Ennaji (2016) comments, "To understand the nature and impact of Moroccan women's activism, it is important to relate it to the rise of Islamism in the region." (Ennaji, 2016b, p.2). This Islamist upsurge took place from the 1980s onwards, so secular feminists had to reassert their mission, as Sadiqi (2016a) comments, as they knew they could not reject Islamic conceptions or they would lose much of their support in rural, illiterate, and impoverished areas, as an alternative, the secular feminist movement has been adapting to embrace the new needs (Sadiqi, 2016a). This was the case a posteriori with its efforts to "bridge the generational gap...with the emergence of two new players on the public scene: youth culture and the movement for the recognition of Berber culture and language (Berber being a centuries-old women-related language which became an official language after the recent uprisings)" – referring to the 20FM (Sadiqi, 2016a, p.62). After the protests of the movement, the king announced the creation of a Royal Council for the constitutional amendment, also giving its recommendations to be applied to gender and equality issues (Salime, 2012). Moreover, Salime states that "The main feminist organisations such as the ADFM, the LDDF, the UAF, the L'association Marocaine pour la defense des droits des femmes, endorsed the constitutional reform and took part in the debate surrounding the institutionalization of parity and gender equality in the new constitution." – LDDF – stands for Ligue Democratique des Droits des Femmes (Salime, 2012, p.106).

Despite all these positive developments for the feminist movement and the approach to gender equality, feminist movements were growing as was the Islamist movement, which brought to the forefront new narratives that also offered new alternatives for women. Starting the 1990s, the new option of Islamic feminism came along (Salime, 2012). Before the Arab Spring, and the 20FM, the Islamic women's movement gained particular momentum; nevertheless, it has slowly decreased as the Islamist PJD (Justice and Development Party) did little to no advancements towards gender equality or women's rights (Ennaji, 2016a). One of the initial confrontations of the two feminist movements was the conservatives' disagreement with the PANIFID (National Plan of Action for Integrating Women into Development), "The Plan provoked a number of fatwas (religious decrees) condemning feminists as atheists (hence eligible to death) and depicting them as 'enemies of Islam' in mosques, as well as in cassettes distributed on the street and in public spaces." (Sadiqi, 2016a, p.63). The main criticism of the Plan was that it had no Islamic reference, which culminated in a march on 12 March 2000 to condemn this Action Plan (Sadiqi, 2016a). Sadiqi (2016a) explains that there are two variants of Islamic feminism, those that support the moderate PJD, and those of a more extremist type, which support the JB (Justice and Benevolence) Association, she adds on the other hand, "In addition to the PJD and JB Islamic feminists, two other types of Islam-based feminism are found in Morocco: 'self-based' and 'state-based.'" (Sadiqi, 2016a, p.65).

On the other hand, secular feminists question the autonomy and emancipation of Islamic feminists as they have turned out to be highly dependent on their political parties. This calls into question their feminist power and agenda as a separate element from political parties, which reaffirms that instead of prioritising women's advancement, it seems that it may be a matter of political strategy (Feliu, 2012). In this sense, Sadiqi (2016c) comments that today Islam and its understanding "may be qualified as overwhelmingly articulated from a male perspective, given the dominance of men in national and local religious councils, as well as in mosques and practically all public instances related to jurisprudence, such as courts of law." (Sadiqi, 2016c, p.46). In the conclusion of her article *Female Perceptions of Islam in Today's Morocco* (2016c), Sadiqi explains that following her interviews with a variety of both Arabic and Amazigh speaking women, their perceptions of Islam completely rule out that there is only one integrated idea in Morocco. To elaborate her idea, she informs us of the particularity of the female-Islamic experience within a context where men dominate in every sense, and the layer of difficulty this poses for the development of women's agency (Sadiqi, 2016c).

However, the objectives of the two feminist variants are different, so that *apriori*, they should not clash so much on a practical level. On the one hand, secular feminists, as well as their partner NGOs, directly address all women's rights. On the other hand, Islamic feminists "use preaching, charity, and global activism with the purpose of advancing the Islamist movement, not women's rights" as Sadiqi (2014, p.148) puts it. In this regard, while Islamic feminists use 'Family Consulting Centers' to deliver and promote the normalisation of Islamist values, secular feminists use 'Listening Centers' to advocate and educate women about their rights, Sadiqi (2014, p.149) critically comments. These centres thus seem to be used in widely varying connotations, where the discrepancy between the two discourses regarding the element of tradition and modernity is reaffirmed.

To conclude this first section on the two mainstream feminisms in Morocco, it should be noted that they do not address the needs and particularities of all Moroccan women. If we take the case of Amazigh women, because they come from rural background and are often marginalized, they do not have the support they should have from the feminist variants. In the following chapter, I will discuss decolonial and indigenous feminisms, in order to advocate for Amazigh feminism as an alternative.

## CHAPTER 6. Decolonial/Indigenous Feminism

As is frequently the case in contexts of anthropological, social and political theories, there is no unanimous definition of indigenous people. As Gagliardi (2018) mentions in her PhD dissertation: "the most commonly used working definition thereof was put forward by the former Special Rapporteur on Indigenous rights, José Martinez Cobo" (Gagliardi, 2018, p.51). Citing Cobo (1981), Gagliardi defines "indigenous communities, peoples and nations" as

> "those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems." (1981, as cited in Gagliardi, 2018).

In addition, as explained in the report *Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation* by the OHCHR (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner) (2010), while both minorities and indigenous people aim to protect and

preserve their identity, minorities do not have a direct connection to the 'ancestral' land where they are, while indigenous people do claim traditional connections to territory (OHCHR, 2010, pp.3-4). On the other hand, it is important to always take into consideration the context of colonialism, colonisation, coloniality and, on the other hand, post-colonialism and decolonisation. In this chapter, therefore, decolonial feminism will be addressed as an alternative to postcolonial feminism, as it is considered that the condition of Amazigh women indicates that they continue to have elements of coloniality in their daily reality, so I argue that a position that dismantles colonialism and coloniality directly benefits their emancipation and empowerment.

It is legitimate to affirm that in recent decades we have seen a surge in decolonial literature. "This current has developed a multitude of practices, experiences, and theories; the most encouraging and original are the movements for land rights that address issues in a transversal and intersectional way" writes Vergès (2021, p.10). These decolonial variants have emerged in the Global South, and bring to light again the difficulties already experienced by women from feminist contexts (Vergès, 2021). If we focus on the question of gender, the fact that descriptions of Amazigh women were at the hands of the French during the protectorate has had serious consequences for how they are represented and perceived today, even after the colonial process. In this sense, Smith (1999) explains that indigenous women were objectified, and that this "has left a legacy of marginalization within indigenous societies as much as within the colonizing society." (Smith, 1999, p.46). Said (1978) participated in early notions of the impact of Western representation on Eastern elements and contexts, where they are presented as universal cases, all the same without distinction, with violent men and submissive women. Further, Abu-Lughod (1998, 2013) elaborates that the rise in postcolonial and decolonial literature helps women in these contexts to be seen as diverse, varied, and complex groups of women who "thought about, argued for, and managed to transform women's lives in colonial, quasi-colonial, and nationalist contexts." (Abu-Lughod, 1998, p.6).

Then there is the question of modernity, a case we have seen exemplified also in Moroccan feminist paradigms. In this sense, the West is supposed to equal modernity, and the East outdated and conservative, but Abu-Lughod asks, "How might one become modern when one was not, could not be, or did not want to be Western?" (Abu-Lughod, 1998, p.14). So, it is not entirely clear whether changing the status of indigenous women is a Western appropriation or a natural phase in postcolonial societies. Considering that the mainstream discourse of

Western feminism depicts 'third world' women as "the veiled woman, chaste virgin, etc.", it simply indicates a disinterest on the part of this movement to contemplate more comprehensively (Mohanty, 1984, p.353). As Mohanty mentions, "Without the 'third world woman', the particular self-representation of Western women mentioned […] would be problematical" (Mohanty, 1984, p.353), since, without having another group of women, less privileged and from less developed contexts, they would have no valid source to be portrayed as 'liberated' women. In this regard, it can be said that the lack of production by scholars from the Global South on issues of gender, class, sexuality, and race has directly contributed to the production of "masculinist and Orientalist traditions of knowledge formations in the field." (Moallem, 2001, p.1266).

Turning to decolonialism, the work of Fatima Mernissi, a prominent Moroccan feminist scholar, is fundamental to consider in this context. Throughout the bulk of her work, she makes it clear that women's liberation –from patriarchy and the West– is a strictly decolonial and indigenous project, "that has, nonetheless, regressed as an effect of colonial aggression of Arab soil and culture" (Rhouni, 2016, p.131). Drawing a link between Mernissi (1992) and Spivak (1988), Rhouni (2016), urges us to consider that there are elements such as the veil, which exemplify the colonisation of "subaltern women's voices and struggles", (Rhouni, 2016, p.138).

In the context of decolonial and indigenous feminism, Spivak's pending question of whether *the subaltern can speak?* becomes all-important. In a later production (2010) Spivak challenges the ways in which the human sciences and Western feminist movements often impose universal and generic patterns of recognition that render the voices of these marginalised women in question dissipated (Spivak, 2010, pp.46-48). Thus, from a decolonial and indigenous theoretical perspective, there is a need to adapt and establish safe spaces where these 'subaltern' women can make themselves heard, resisting the external imposition of their contexts that do not know how to remain faithful to the diversity and complexity of their experiences.

## CHAPTER 7. Emerging Amazigh Feminist Narratives

To feel that you are embedded in the prominent feminist discourses of your country may seem self-evident, but in the case of Amazigh women, it is not. Sadiqi (2014, 2016, 2017) comments in several of her texts, as we have remarked earlier, that for a couple of decades

now, there has been a growing demand to embrace the particularities of this group of women in existing Moroccan feminist groups. Still, the diversity in question can be embraced if this intention is established. Soumaya Belhabib explains that "As feminists, of all ideological trends, reveal lucidity and intelligence in finding ways to bridge differences, they also demonstrate that they are attentive to the large variety of women's identities with diverse perspectives and expectations." (Belhabib, 2016, p.157).

### 7.1. The Particularity of Amazigh Women: Intersectional Dimensions

When we talk about the Amazigh women and their particularity, we refer to the intersectionality of the dimensions that directly dictate and influence their condition, context, and way of life. The major contributor to Amazigh feminism is undoubtedly Fatima Sadiqi, who considers herself an Amazigh feminist, as well as other women from Amazigh contexts, who have participated in their activist struggle, such as Meryam Demnati or Amina Zioual, they are still women from urban and educated contexts, as Laghssais (2023) rightly points out. On the other hand, I would like to highlight the different activities carried out by Amazigh women, focusing on the particularity of the situation of the majority of Amazigh women, who are from rural and less developed contexts. While urban Amazigh women have participated from their positions as academics, professionals, university students or NGO members who took part in protest movements, drafting petitions and other documents to the government or other agencies requesting an improvement of their rights and participation in Moroccan society. The role of rural Amazigh women is fundamental to take into account in this respect. As examples of agency and empowerment, some cases to highlight are their capacity for self-autonomy through economic activities, such as cooperatives or IGPs (Income Generating Projects), as well as NGOs in local contexts.

In this context, I deliberately use the word Intersectionality throughout this part of the thesis to emphasise the importance of knowing the condition of the majority of these Amazigh women, which is characterised by multiple layers of difficulty as being Women, Rural, Indigenous (Amazigh, in relation to their ethnic condition), and from marginalised contexts. "How such conditions used to represent the stereotypical image of the Amazigh women as presented by some research as illiterate, in need of aid, poor and rural", comments Laghssais (2023, p.68), as stated by the author in her final PhD thesis. I agree with Laghssais that we should include in the discourse the voices and experiences of these Amazigh women in order to bring to the fore the variety of their contexts, contributions, and

exemplifications of empowerment, agency, and identity. In this vein, it has been perceived through both readings on Amazigh feminist perceptions, as well as during interviews with both urban (Ibnou-Cheikh, Zioual) and rural (focus groups, cooperative presidents, NGO representatives) women, that intersectionality reinforces precisely these perceptions of identity and feminist affinities. On this note, Belhabib comments, "It is not surprising then to see different feminist agencies that stand for their own conception of what it means to be a feminist." (Belhabib, 2016, p.157).

In her publications, Sadiqi has always incorporated the Amazigh perspective. Whether dealing with questions of gender, identity, or language, the Amazigh approach and vision is always present. I will therefore base the incorporation of Amazigh feminism on her *Larger than Islam Framework*, which, along with other authors such as Gagliardi, Schaefer, and Bordat, criticise the failure to incorporate inclusive or rural dimensions in mainstream feminist movements, or otherwise, "being highly elitist and urban based" (Laghssais, 2023, p.177). Since the Moroccan 2011 Constitution, following the 20FM, with the officialization of Tamazight as the second official language in the country, there has been a growing demand for a Moroccan feminism that accurately represents the different feminist realities and struggles. Thus, Sadiqi (2014) explains the basis of her theory where "Including Berber in Moroccan feminist discourses forces a homegrown and historically legitimate counter-discourse of real importance to the overarching Moroccan feminist discourses that seem to be operating on the principle of unanimism." (Sadiqi, 2014, p.156). The systematic exclusion of the Amazigh past, from an indigenous, rural, and pre-Islamic and Arabized perspective is necessary, according to Sadiqi, avoiding discourses centred solely on Islam, or political Islam, whether to refute or defend it (Sadiqi, 2014). Thus, we can consider that rituality, orality, artistic, creative production, and transmission of Amazigh language and culture represent conceptions of Knowledge, as Sadiqi mentions in her chapter *Berber Women's Knowledge-Production* (2014). In her *Autobiographical* article, Sadiqi explains:

> "Being a feminist, I made a point of celebrating March 8. This day became a special day for me. [...] March 8, 2000, celebrations were overdramatized by the unusually turbulent and widely unfolding debates on Moroccan women's rights. For the very first time in Moroccan history, women's rights were a national issue and on a grand scale! Two camps—the conservatives and the modernists—were literally jumping at each other's throat, and the bone of contention was basically whether to adopt a conservative or a modernist reading of shari'a (Islamic law) in matters of women's rights. Even my

> aging illiterate mother was excited and concerned! She who never could understand the king's speeches (delivered in Standard Arabic) wanted to know his position on this one!" (Sadiqi, 2017, p.157).

This anecdote reminds us that issues of feminism in Morocco are the concern of all women, including Amazigh, rural, illiterate, and non-standard Arabic-speaking women. The three emerging issues in these new feminist voices in the aftermath of the Arab spring were the Amazigh question, the legal framework of Islam as a transnational vision, and sexual harassment (Sadiqi, 2021). Moreover, it is precisely this ongoing diversity in Sadiqi's texts that lead her to determine that the issue of the ideological *centre*, which is the issue of the ideological *Centre*, gives rise to young women of all backgrounds-rural and urban-as well as class, education, profession, province, and social status, creating a cross-cutting alliance to foster the "destabilization of an internalized patriarchy." (Sadiqi, 2021, p.50). We have established that the various layers of marginalisation of Amazigh women affect them in many ways: schooling, identity, maintenance of culture, use of Tamazight, and above all, their status as women. The limitations of the two main Moroccan feminist movements, secular and Islamic, have been identified, as well as how this fact opens doors for Amazigh feminism, taking advantage of it to adequately represent the experiences and voices of these women especially at the local level. As Laghssais writes, "Berber women are silenced in both hegemonic feminist discourses." (Laghssais, 2023, p.192).

To conclude this first section on Amazigh feminism, I would like to emphasise Sadiqi's position, where she mentions that her *Larger than Islam Framework*, establishes this ideological *Centre*, where secular and Islamic feminist projects manage to integrate the diversity in question independently of the ideologies behind it. "Being secular and not separatist, the Berber feminist discourse is best suited to help create a centre in the Moroccan feminist discourses." (Sadiqi, 2014, p.195).

### 7.2. The Role of Amazigh Women in their Feminist Struggle

With the growing ACM, the call for the promotion of Amazigh identity, and the implementation of the officialization of Tamazight, as well as the advancement of gender reforms and the creation of IRCAM, more and more Amazigh feminist NGOs were established. These new entities were inspired by human rights activist movements and the protection and defence of Amazigh culture and language, as well as the advancement of Amazigh women,

specifically in terms of economic emancipation in rural areas. Sadiqi provides a list of the entities that were created, one of which I will explore in the last part of this thesis:

> *"As larger Amazigh associations converted into development associations, such as Tamaynut (New), Azetta (Citizenship), Thaziri (Full Moon), Assid (Light), and Observatoire Amazighe des Droits et Libertés (Amazigh Observatory for Rights and Freedoms), nine feminist Amazigh NGOs quickly developed: Association Tin- hinan Khemisset (Tinhinan Khemisset Association), Voix de la Femme Amazighe (Amazigh Woman's Voice), Association Anaruz (Hope Association), Association Tinhinan Tiznit (Tinhinan Tiznit Association), Association Thaziri (Thaziri Asso- ciation), Association Tamghart (Woman Chief Association), Association Tayri (Love Association), Observatoire Amazighe des Droits et Libertés, Femmes (Amazigh Observatory for Rights and Freedoms, Women's Section), and Forum des Femmes Amazighes de Tamazgha (Forum of Amazigh Women in Tamazgha or Amazigh Land)."* (Sadiqi, 2016b, pp.122-123).

The rise in establishing these NGOs, indicates that a concretised need suddenly arose thanks to the framework already established previously with the Amazigh movement and its activist struggle, which gave way to a concretised Amazigh feminist framework of action. Thus, these NGOs also aim to expand Amazigh women's knowledge of their rights and their legal literacy, as mentioned by A. Zioual, president of *La Voix de la Femme Amazigh*, during our interview, which I will elaborate on in part three. Moreover, other issues addressed by these Amazigh NGOs are for example the intersection of language and gender, as well as traditional Amazigh values from an advocacy perspective, trying to establish a global movement "in accordance with international conventions" (Sadiqi, 2021, p.40). As a curious factor, it has been identified that many names of historical Amazigh –mostly female– representations have been added to different NGOs, research centres and other establishments (Sadiqi, 2014), "'Tanit', 'Kahina', 'Hannibal', and 'Juba' (an ancient Berber King) are among these names." (Sadiqi, 2014, p.184).

On the other hand, if we return to decolonial feminism, this intersectional feminist theory helps us better understand why the agenda of action of these NGOs is so rooted in dimensions of resistance to their identity and self-empowerment, through training and creating opportunities for women from rural and disadvantaged contexts with cooperatives and IGPs (Laghssais, 2023, p.60). These NGOs provide an opportunity to deal more directly with the complexities of Amazigh women within a feminist movement that embraces, guides and

protects them in a certain way. According to Laghssais and Comins-Mingol (2021b), Amazigh women have been involved in mobilisations for their language and culture for decades, leading in the streets with anti-colonialist demands through a feminist prism. According to these authors, as well as Sadiqi, it is these women who have made the most significant advances. In her article *From the adversity to the pride of being an Amazigh woman*, Fatima Makhoukh mentions that

> "The progress regarding the recognition of Amazigh people's cultural, social, political and linguistic rights was achieved by women's resistance; especially in the cultural field, where poetry, art, music and folklore were carried through a single common thread: Amazigh women." (Makhoukh, Nationalia, August 2019).

While these NGOs aim to reduce forced marriages, reduce the percentage of illiteracy, and promote the inclusion of girls and women in the education system and the labour sector, if they do not focus their work in rural communities and raise awareness in the most disadvantaged areas, this work will not be significant. Another barrier exemplified by Makhoukh (2019), is the difficulty women have when they have to go to hospitals, administrations, or other public services to make themselves understood, which ends up with them avoiding going to these centres, aggravating the original situation. In this vein, we spoke earlier of the language barrier imposed by the *Moudawana*, having been published in 2004 in MSA only, which automatically excludes Amazigh women, given their high percentage of non-comprehension of Arabic, as well as the illiteracy of many of them.

### 7.3. Urban vs Rural: The Challenges at Stake for Amazigh Women

As we have mentioned throughout this thesis, the differential issue between Amazigh women in urban and rural contexts is a direct leverage point for their condition. Sadiqi (2016d) refers to the Berber problem as a gender and class problem, referring to the fact that rural Moroccan areas, being predominantly Amazigh, do not seem to have a class system. In this sense, the issue of illiteracy is one of the main challenges to mention. While lack of or limited education and illiteracy are not equivalent to a lack of knowledge, it is clear, as Chtatou commented in our interview in response to "What are some of the most pressing issues facing Amazigh women in contemporary society?", he answered

> *"*Empowerment to become financially independent. Again, that is the biggest challenge, as well as empowerment through education, that is the second challenge,

> because women, when they become part of coops, they already become very important within society. When they get education, they become important within society. The society looks at them in a different way, and that gives these women more independence and a say within their communities", (Chtatou, Interview, UIR campus, May 2024).

Addressing this same challenge, in his article *Patrimoine immatériel: valoriser un référent culturel Africain* M. Souag argues that "Illiteracy does not imply a lack of culture or a lack of intelligence."[11] (Souag, 2023, p.3). This factor is directly related to the active marginalisation established by the French protectorate in Morocco, where Amazigh communities were isolated as they were branded as old-fashioned, conservative and traditional (Sadiqi, 2017). Sadiqi explains it as "The Berber regions, [...], remained without infrastructure and education, which fostered chronic illiteracy (especially amongst women), poverty, and unemployment. [...]. The only option left for unemployed and sometimes employed rural youth was migration to the cities and towns." (Sadiqi, 2017, p.148), the author explains in order to contribute to the rural-urban dichotomy.

Beyond that, if we now focus on the factor of Amazigh women's development, we can determine that access to school is the first step to promote it. As indicated by different Amazigh NGOs fieldwork reports, vocational training depending on specific context, is the second factor to tackle to reach financial independence. For example, in the southern areas where the majority of Amazigh women live, traditional activities are practised differently than in the Atlas or the North, where other Amazigh communities dwell. Mohanty (1984) exemplifies this with what he calls a 'simple solution', encouraging training in specialised sectors for women, fostering their joining or creating cooperatives, or training women in charge of rural development (Mohanty, 1984, pp.343-344).

On the other hand, we must note that the patriarchal structure that defines the Moroccan system, both at the institutional systemic level and at the social level, puts up barriers to these implementations. This is linked to social exclusion, where girls and women are automatically placed in a role inferior to that of men; for example, having less access to schooling compared to their brothers, cousins or friends. According to L. H. Skalli,

[11] My own translation. The original text by Souag is in French.

> "Many reasons are behind the exclusion of girls from education. These range from limited financial resources within the household to the burden of household chores assigned to young girls, particularly in rural areas, the absence of adequate educational, communication and transportation infrastructure, and the patriarchal ideology that prioritizes the education of the male child in the family." (Skalli, 2001, p.77).

Thus, we can state that living conditions in rural areas also play an important role. Being completely isolated, apart from socio-economic, educational, and infrastructural limitations, they also have limitations in the field of health, where if there is any emergency, such as childbirth, they are forced to solve it with the resources of their village, leading to vital consequences (Laghssais, 2023).

If we refer to the preservation of their customs, Demnati comments that "The specifity of Amazigh women is much more perceptible in rural areas, where Amazigh customs and practices, as well as Amazigh values, survive in the face of urban homogenization."[12] (Demnati, 2018). This brings us to the incorporation of the factor of tradition vs. modernity, already introduced in the discussion on Moroccan feminisms. Sadiqi (2015) comments that traditional communities are not static, so they evolve and adapt to the new contexts to which they are exposed. The fact that the evolution of the Berber movement in recent decades has incorporated a vision of social change with modern ideals indicates that these two concepts are not mutually exclusive but can adapt to each other. Further, Sadiqi mentions "The necessity to address the three timely and urgent issues of communication, female illiteracy and the tradition/modernity duality justifies a larger-than-Islam framework for Moroccan feminist discourses." (Sadiqi, 2015).

Despite this, this correlation can present a problem for Amazigh NGOs, the most prominent of which are based in urban contexts, as their incorporation of elements of modernity can negatively influence the exchange with women in rural contexts. As Sadiqi notes, "The Amazigh feminist NGOs' common goals and significance do not preclude deep divides that reflect the disparities in their larger contexts. Location is perhaps the most important dividing element. Whereas four of the nine NGOs are located in big cities (Voix de la Femme in Rabat, Observatoire Amazighe in Rabat [...])" (Sadiqi, 2016b, p.123). Having already benefited from the contribution of Meryam Demnati, who is in charge of the *Observatoire Amazigh des droits*

[12] My own translation of a document which the author shared with me by email. The original text by Demnati is in French.

*et libertés*, as well as that of Amina Zioual, President of *Voix de la Femme Amazigh*, who mentions in our interview that one of the main objectives of her association is to build bridges between urban and rural Amazigh women, in particular with regard to legal empowerment and cultural recognition (Zioual, Interview, Rabat, May 2024). Amina Ibnou-Cheikh, director of the newspaper *Le Monde Amazigh*, mentions after being asked "Are there differences in the efforts related to empowerment between rural and urban Amazigh women?", that

> "In rural areas, the focus is often on providing basic education and economic empowerment through cooperatives. Urban women may have more access to education and professional opportunities, but they still face challenges related to cultural assimilation and representation. Both groups benefit from initiatives that promote cultural pride and provide platforms for their voices to be heard" (Ibnou-Cheikh, Interview, Rabat, April 2024).

Then, I argue that Amazigh women working in contexts of activism, journalism or directly in NGOs related to Amazigh issues, are aware of the different barriers faced by Amazigh women, with a particularity in the case of women from rural contexts.

To conclude the second part of the thesis, I hope I have managed to showcase how the emergence and development of Amazigh feminism within the broader dynamics of feminist movements in Morocco, as well as some major contributions in the rest of North Africa and the Middle East, has been thoroughly explored. I have also tried to underline the existing interaction between the two mainstream feminisms: secular feminism and Islamic feminism and showcase the failure to integrate the particularities of Amazigh voices, within these two feminisms. The significant progress and advancement of Moroccan feminism, from its origins in secularism to the rise of Islamic feminism, sheds light on the consistent contestations between modernity and tradition that Sadiqi frequently discusses, with examples such as the reactions towards the 2004 *Moudawana* or the NPA (or PANIFID). It is after this exploration that decolonial and indigenous feminism is relevant to consider the experience of Amazigh women, considering the persistence of colonial tendencies towards their representation and treatment. The different challenges they face are considered, taking into account their multiple layers of marginalisation. Thus, these combined dimensions set out the crucial components for understanding the agency and empowerment that Amazigh women exercise, advocating for a more inclusive feminism in Morocco, considering their diversity of contexts and experiences, leading to the emergence of Amazigh feminism as such.

> "Although I am now accepted, nothing was given to me or could be taken for granted. Patriarchy and glass ceilings come to mind. I started at the lower end of the social scale, and from there I learned to navigate the whole spectrum—possibly better than someone born to a more privileged position who might see only her environment. I consider it empowering that I started at almost zero."
>
> Sadiqi, 2017, p.152

## PART THREE. Empowerment, Agency, and Ethnicity Rights of Amazigh Women in the South of Morocco: Ethnographic Research in Rural Areas

As I move into the third part of this thesis, I underline the dimensions of agency, empowerment, and ethnicity, specifically in their manifestation in local contexts among Amazigh women. Thus, this part summarizes the ethnographic research that has been carried out in two areas of southern Morocco, which brings to the forefront first-hand experiences of Amazigh women in both rural –primarily– and urban contexts. This third part aims to establish a nuanced understanding of the different ways in which agency and empowerment are exercised in local contexts. It also elaborates on the role of NGOs, cooperatives, IGPs, and other grassroots initiatives to foster economic emancipation, legal literacy, or cultural and linguistic reaffirmation, contributing to the Moroccan feminist movement as well as to the expansion of its framework for action, to include Amazigh feminism.

### CHAPTER 8. Definitions & Depictions of Empowerment, Agency and Amazigh Feminism

As I have done previously with other relevant concepts, I cannot begin this chapter without first providing the corresponding definitions of the elements to be discussed. In this regard, Bordat et all. (2011), comment that there is no single definition in use to conceptualise empowerment despite the fact that it is constantly used today in different debates and projects related to gender, development, or legislative fields. Thus, "It is important from the outset to establish a working definition of empowerment in assessing legal, social, and economic change for women in Morocco." (Bordat et all., 2011, p.91). There is much discussion as to whether empowerment is solely related to economic empowerment or emancipation or whether it must be underpinned by comprehensive changes in patriarchal relations or that systematically impede the evolution of such empowerment, to borrow the idea elaborated in both articles (Bordat et all., 2011 and Schaefer Davis & Yabis, 2016). From their perspective, empowerment

can be about legal advancement and its fair and systematic exercise to relate women's empowerment to the law, as well as the implementation of their human rights (Bordat et all., 2011, pp.91-94). The definition that Bordat, Schaefer Davis, and Kouzzi have chosen to consider for their publication is the following:

> "Empowerment…refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Changes in three inter-related dimensions which make up choice: resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency, which is at the heart of the process by which choices are made; and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices." (Kabeer, 2001, as cited in Bordat et all., 2011, p.92).

When talking about agency, Sadiqi provides the following definition:

> "The concept that the term 'agency' refers to may be defined as the ability to make specific choices and negotiate power within a socially rigid structure such as patriarchy." (Sadiqi, 2014, p.36).

Expanding on the concept of agency, Salime (2011) argues that one cannot reduce the work and successes of Moroccan feminist activism to the reform of the *Moudawana* only. While this development has had an impact on at least the perception of women and their rights as citizens, "Feminist studies do not limit the impact of the women's movements to their immediate outcomes." (Salime, 2011, p.66). In this context, Becker defines agency as: "This examination, in addition to revealing a rich body of art, is meant to illuminate the complexity of women's roles in the Islamic societies of Africa and to demonstrate the role of women's agency in negotiating complex social and religious issues." (Becker, 2006, p.1).

To follow up on the above definitions of agency and empowerment, one is led to believe that most of the discourses on women from disadvantaged or marginalised contexts tend to contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes that reduce them as victims, which condemns them to remain anchored to these contexts (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021a). Laghssais and Comins-Mingol, further argue that it is only recently that attempts have begun to mitigate these harmful, often unfounded narratives, and that they have come to represent them "as visible, as agents, as active participants, and not as mere passive objects." (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021a). Moreover, the GOM has been implementing concrete projects for decades in both urban and rural areas to promote the economic emancipation of Moroccan women. Sadiqi

(2016d) mentions several strategies to promote women's entrepreneurship, as has been the case in rural areas to promote IGAs (Income Generating Activities), especially in the field of agriculture (Sadiqi, 2016d, pp.287-288).

As illustrations of this scenario, Bordat et all. (2011) explain the action that some small local organisations have taken to address small-scale obstacles, adapted to the contexts of the women in question. Thus, they comment that, for example, in the Southeast region, in the Oasis area (which I had the opportunity to visit for this thesis, as will be elaborated in chapter 10), working mostly in the agricultural sector, they take advantage of lunch breaks and the shade of palm trees to hold empowerment sessions, teaching and informing them about their legal rights and related resources. Without a doubt, efforts such as these, being delivered by Amazigh women themselves in their own areas, contribute greatly to the exemplification of women's empowerment and agency as agents of feminism.

Another interesting aspect to consider is the self-identification of being a feminist or not; in other words, having a clear perception of feminism. It is worth sharing Sadiqi's comment on her own experience with this question:

> "A consideration of the findings I could synthesize from both the answers and the body language of my informants led me to the conclusion that although most of my young informants did not self-identify as feminists or gender experts, the contents of their topics and the nature of their strategies are feminist in the sense that they both address women-related issues (sexual harassment, gender equality in inheritance, etc.) and use strategies that promote them as women (e.g. art in the public space)." (Sadiqi, 2021, p.47).

I found it most interesting to interview a number of experts from different disciplines, involved in one way or another with this issue. Although contextualisation of some of the expert interviews has already been provided, I include a brief reminder below, except for the two cases of NGO presidents from the rural areas of Tiznit and Merzouga. During the months of April and May 2024, several interviews were conducted in Morocco to incorporate relevant information on Amazigh feminism into this thesis.

Experts interviewed:

- Amina Ibnou-Cheikh: Activist and director of *Le Monde Amazigh*

- Mohamed Moukhlis: Activist, researcher, linguist, and director of IRCAM's Communication Services area
- Mohamed Chtatou: Researcher, and lecturer in linguistics, anthropology and cultural studies at Mohammed V University and UIR in Rabat
- Amina Zioual: Activist and president of *La Voix de la Femme Amazigh*

When mentioning Amazigh feminism, the conclusions I can draw from the perceptions from these experts during my interviews with them are quite diverse, which I will detail in chronological order according to the list above[13]. To begin with, Ibnou-Cheikh (Interview, Rabat, April 2024) was quick to mention that while she respects the work of feminists and their efforts to achieve progress in the country through their activism and for the most part their NGOs (referring to the ADFM), she personally does not explicitly identify with the term 'feminist' as she has spent her entire career as an activist fighting for the broad rights of all Amazigh, including men. She believes that gender issues need to be addressed within the ACM and human rights. In a similar vein, Chtatou (Interview, Rabat, May 2024) avoids using the label of feminism during our conversation, where he preferred to refer to their empowerment and agency as *female leadership*, drawing a link to the natural matriarchal status of Amazigh society.

On the other hand, Zioual (Interview, Rabat, May 2024) does consider herself a feminist, but she clearly distinguishes between feminist activism for Amazigh women's rights and Amazigh feminism as such, as she sees it as being associated with other struggles for the rights of the LGBTI+ community, for example, among others that are not Amazigh in character. She adds that from *La Voix de la Femme Amazigh* in particular, they do campaign for all the rights of Moroccan women, especially Amazigh women, but also LGBTI+, black, disabled, migrant and other women. Finally, I did not ask Moukhlis (Interview, Rabat, May 2024) directly about Amazigh feminism given his competence as a linguist. Yet, when discussing the situation of Amazigh women, he stressed the relevance of linguistic and cultural agency to the construction and preservation of their identities as Amazigh women, and the fundamental role it plays in their lives.

[13] These interviews took place between April and May of 2024 in Rabat. The following contributions are added in chronological order as the interviews took place.

## CHAPTER 9. Adopting Ethnic Conditions of Amazigh Women: An Intersectional Approach

Throughout this thesis, the question of ethnicity has been used as a synonym for an identity tribute that constructs and protects the differential question of the Amazigh community, in this case, from the rest of Moroccans. This tribute is therefore of utmost importance to understand the relevance of the ethnic question of Amazigh women, as Becker demonstrates in her book *Amazigh Arts in Morocco: Berber Women Shaping Berber Identity*,

> "I use the term 'ethnic identity' in this book to refer to Berber attitudes regarding group membership. Ethnic categories, according to Nira Yuval-Davis (1998:169), are based on constructs of collectivity, centering on the notion of a 'common origin and/or destiny and engaging in constant processes of struggle and negotiation.' As I demonstrate here, Berber groups, who typically trace their heritage to a common male ancestor, attempt to guard female sexuality and fertility to maintain the purity of their group's bloodline and by extension its ethnic purity." (Becker, 2006, pp.1-2).

In this respect, we can assert that women take power in the construction and advancement of identity and ethnicity in their communities, often through the customs, activities or artistic productions that they develop. Elaborating on the importance of women's agency, Laghssais & Comins-Mingol stress on the importance of women's activities demonstrated in relation to identity construction, as explained below:

> "in their crafts, using their language, Tamazigh, and their pre-Islamic North African heritage as their main ornamental motifs. By recovering and safeguarding their tradition, Amazigh women are not only rebuilding the identity and cultural bases of the Amazigh people but are also contributing to the local development of their families and their own empowerment as women." (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol, 2021a).

When these women are denied such roles, denying their part and contribution both contemporarily and historically, it fosters the systematic violence previously discussed by Galtung (1969). These barriers prevent women from properly exercising their agency and empowerment, as agents of peace, as Laghssais & Comins-Mingol (2021a) refer to as symbolic violence. An example of this is the ongoing struggle of Amazigh women and activists for ethnic recognition in relation to the registration of Amazigh vs. Arab names. Makhoukh (2019) includes in her article the contribution of a journalist she interviewed, who comments: "Our freedom comes by calling out children with the names we want. The opposite of this is a violation of human rights. We demand that this issue be reviewed to guarantee the right to choose a name and acquire legal personality without discrimination" (Makhoukh interviewing

Zahra Ouhssain in 2019). This is an example of modern activism being carried out by both urban and rural Amazigh women.

Historical elements that have been influencing the evolution of Amazigh culture and identity, such as colonialism, systematic marginalisation, and nationalist narratives, must also be considered. On the other hand, it is precisely this that has led to the reclaiming of certain spaces to be part of the national discourse in order to foster their ethnic and cultural recognition. This resurgence thus implies a challenge to the power system to exclude them from Moroccan national identity, as well as a significant cultural reaffirmation (Wyrtzen, 2013).

## CHAPTER 10. Amazigh Feminism Portrayed: Modern Examples of Activism & Cooperativism

Having understood the elements that influence the ethnic status of Amazigh women, we now move on to analyse several interviews and observations carried out in the south of Morocco, specifically in the regions of Dra-Tafilatet and Sous Massa. As we move on to the last chapter, which examines the contributions of the different case studies, I will try to facilitate the understanding of these experiences I have gathered through ethnographic field work. I have divided them into Case studies 1, 2, and 3:

- Case study 1: AMRAD
- Case study 2: AGM
- Case study 3: IMSLI, a chat with Amina Zioual.

It is worth noting, that these informal conversations, interviews, and focus groups, depict only a very small part of the realities of these areas. Given the restriction of time, resources, language barrier and level of work, it has not been possible to compare more Amazigh women's settings in order to provide a detailed analysis, for a Master's thesis project. Considering these constraints, the three case studies have been meticulously selected in order to provide a diversified view of women's activities, whether economic or not, that Amazigh women carry out in order to foster their agency and empowerment, demonstrating feminist behaviours and commitments.

## Case Study 1: AMRAD[14]

The AMRAD association is a Catalan non-profit organisation that has carried out several concrete projects in two villages in the Draa-Tafilalet region; namely, in the villages of Takhiamt (Aoufous) and Hassilabied (Merzouga). It is a fairly young entity that initiated contact with a group of women from the village of Takhiamt in 2019 following a socio-cultural trip, which led to the initiative to establish the organization, which was formalized in 2022, after carrying out four small contributions through crowdfunding to bring to Morocco or buy: a bread oven, a herd of sheep, a machine to make date syrup, and a traditional machine for weaving carpets. On the other hand, in Hassilabied, they have set up a kitchen in a room used by the association so that they can prepare and sell their products. I therefore set out to go to the region for three days to meet the members of the organisation, as well as the group of women of the village to whom they give support through their contributions. The organisation is chaired by Mar Serra, together with Brahim Oulmenendi[15], acting as a representative on the ground. Mar's initiative and determination to establish the entity in order to gradually increase the contributions to promote the economic emancipation of the women of the village, allowed Brahim to focus on working full time for the development of the entity.

Takhiamt is a small village next to Aoufous with about 300 inhabitants. The village is surrounded by an Oassis that has been suffering from drought for about twenty years, which has gradually left its date palms lifeless. The villagers are mainly engaged in agriculture; they have some donkeys and there is a herd of sheep, but resources without the dates are very scarce. The women have always worked in the fields and now earn a living selling some local organic produce or artistic creations to sell to the few tourists who come to the rural guesthouse that Hamid and Khadija have recently opened.

I conducted a focus group with the four members of the organisation present in order to learn more about their aspirations and impact, as well as to gain more knowledge about the conditions in the area. During this first focus group with the AMRAD members, they mentioned that they are working to establish a cooperative in their Takhiamt location, where the women will be able to carry out various products and have a fixed income when it is settled.

[14] AMRAD stands for Association for the Aid, Development and Solidarity of Berber Women, translated from Catalan (Associació per l'Ajuda, el Desenvolupament i la Solidaritat de les Dones Berber).

[15] Brahim Oulmenendi has a brother, Hamid, who together with his wife Khadija are fundamental members of AMRAD. All three of them have a very important role within the association as they are originally from Takhiamt. They hosted me during my stay in town and Khadija was the translator during the focus group that I conducted with the women.

During my three-day stay in the village, three sewing machines arrived to set up in the premises and the following week a woman came to train some of the women to sew and do fabric work to be able to market later. A woman from the village, Aïcha A., was also selected to be in charge of supervising the rest of the group. I then had the opportunity to carry out a focus group with 11 women from the village who are linked to AMRAD; that is, women who have been able to use the machines, training or tools that have been brought to the premises or to their own homes, or who are candidates to join the cooperative as soon as it is set up. The idea of this focus group, since it was the only opportunity I had to talk to a large group of Amazigh women, was to find out about their socio-economic situation, their sense of identity, and their day-to-day reality. Khadija Tagla, a member of AMRAD, spent a few years living in Spain, so I was able to communicate with her perfectly, which made it much easier as she was able to moderate the focus group together with me to translate my questions, as well as the women's answers in order to simulate an informal conversation between friends. So, here is a brief summary of the most relevant information about this group, providing only their first names. Khadija is included in the list, as she also added her experience and opinion while translating.

Preliminary Context of the Focus Group Participants:

| Name | Age | Civil Status | N° Children | Husband's Situation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aïcha A. | 34 | Married | 3 | Doesn't work |
| Radia | 37 | Married | 3 | Doesn't work |
| Zahra | 40 | Widow | None | – |
| Raja | 36 | Married | 3 | Farmer |
| Aïcha G. | 40 | Widow | None | – |
| Hasna | 35 | Married | 3 | Military |
| Samira | 35 | Married | 4 | Military |
| Naïma | 29 | Married | 2 | Doesn't work |
| Hayat | 35 | Married | 2 | Military |
| Fatima | 50/51 | Married | 3 | Disabled |
| Khadija | 50 | Married | 2 | Rural hostel manager |

We started the discussion with introductory questions to break the ice, such as the town they came from, their marital status, number of children, the situation of their husbands, what a day in their life consists of, or what difficulties they face daily, among other questions. As we have already determined in the context of Takhiamt, most of the families in the village lived until a few years ago on the production of date syrup from the date palms of the Oasis, but, after the drought, they have had to subsist in other ways. This problem was the first element they mentioned: no water, no palms, and no palms, no money. This has left some of the husbands without any work and has meant that they have had to make a living and work alongside them. The women in the village seem to be generally hard-working, apart from also taking care of the house, the children and in most cases, their parents and in-laws. Another major daily problem they mentioned was the shortage of food sources found in the village. Most do not have access to any vehicle and there is a fruit and vegetable market only two mornings a week. Zahra mentioned that she has a small shop (Hanout) where she sells basic goods. I went to visit her in the shop, and she had quite a shortage of products, with most of the shelfs being empty. The last most significant issue they raised was the lack of access to a hospital, mentioning that the nearest one was an hour's drive away and that they have no transport. Therefore, they often only travel if it is an emergency and they travel by donkey, this being Fatima's, who works as a farmer and has several animals.

When we talked about the economic instability they have, since the situation in the Oasis is relatively recent, they informed me that they are still struggling to adapt to the new conditions. Most of the women explained that they did what they could, depending on the opportunities that came their way. For example, six of them explained that they made traditional black scarves with coloured decorations, this being a traditional Amazigh garment of the area, which many of them wore around their heads and backs. They explained that it was Aïcha A. who taught them how to make them in order to sell them, so they sell them to other women in the village or to ladies or tourists who may be passing through, and they share the money. Aïcha A, who is more skilled in sewing, serves as the town's sewer, sells fabrics and uses the leftover ones to make carpets. Two women continue to have access to the few remaining dates, so from time to time they work to make syrup and sell it, while the other two have too much work with the children and old people at home to do anything else. Khadija is the host of the rural guesthouse where I stayed, along with Hamid.

In the next section, I asked about issues of identity, language, culture, and religion. All the women affirmed that they feel Amazigh, that they speak Tachelhit with their families, neighbours and friends, that they are all believers and practice Islam and that it is a very important element in their lives. As we moved into the topic of education, we entered a very sensitive subject. Several women were moved to recall and explain their experiences regarding their education or lack of access to it. In the case of Aïcha A., as well as two other women, they were forced to stay at home to help their mothers look after their siblings and do the chores. Aïcha A. explained in detail and with commotion how it felt to go to school that first day, with great excitement and eagerness, only to return home in the afternoon and be told by her parents that she would no longer go, that they preferred her brother to go instead. Two of them were taken out of school at the age of six because it was too far to go alone, and they were afraid of them being kidnapped or raped. Two others did not want to continue from the age of six and were allowed to stay at home, while one left at fourteen to get married and another at fourteen because of the distance again, mentioning that as she was of marriageable age she was at great risk of being raped and would not be able to get married afterwards.

I must admit that it was a very hard discussion for the group, and several mentioned that they had never talked about it openly and that it was a wound they still had. Seeing that it was a collective experience made them automatically speak about their daughters and the fact that they are all going to try to keep them going as long as they can. Nowadays, school is closer so they can continue for a few more years. Two of them were able to go on to higher education, obtaining their Baccalaureate diploma. To sum up, now, four of them can read and write, although only three can read and write both Arabic and Tachelhit, four more or less, and three are illiterate. Of these, eight can speak only Tachelhit. They specified that the school now accommodates both boys and girls, and that there are some who continue to leave school at around fourteen to get married, although they will prevent them from doing so, the daughters over fourteen in the group being unmarried at the moment. Furthermore, the village school continues to study in Arabic, there is no Tamazight curriculum in place.

When asked about their aspirations, most of these women mentioned receiving an education, with some referring to reading and writing, and others to accessing a university degree or learning a language. Another common mention was to help other women; this question of solidarity has been shown to be present in many aspects of Takhiamt's neighbours. For example, the three women married to military personnel commented that they already had

enough money from their husbands, which allowed them to live a comfortable and simple life, but that they preferred to work themselves so that they could be independent and help their sisters and friends from time to time. Samira, for example, said that she earned her savings by tutoring several children in the village who needed extra help after school. For her friends, she did this for free, as there is always a reason or another to have a friend's help. Another aspiration to mention was for their children to have a better life than their own, something for which they were fighting. Fatima and Khadija proudly added that their children were studying or working in Rabat and Tangier.

To conclude my first case study, I would like to add that the women who took part in this conversation gave a resounding yes after being asked if they would be interested in being part of a cooperative, where they could carry out a collaborative action to produce a certain product and receive remuneration when the necessary sales are made. Schaefer Davis (2016) commented in her chapter on *Moroccan Feminism at the Grassroot Level*, "This supports my view of Moroccan women: give them an inch and they'll go a mile." (Schaefer Davis & Yabis, 2016, p.79). The resilience of these women, which contributes to their economic autonomy, survival and empowerment, will only expand further as they are determined to continue to contribute to their communities in so many different ways, all within their capacities. By establishing a cooperative through AMRAD, as well as amplifying local demands for a solution to the lack of water in the Oasis, these women exemplify what it means to be active agents in your community's reality.

## Case Study 2: AGM[16]

Amazigh Girl Matters is an NGO founded by Samira Bendriouch in 2019. It is an entity run exclusively by Amazigh girls from the Sous Massa area, its main area of action. Samira explains that

> "The primary goal of our association is to make our heritage, culture, and language recognized internationally and to ensure equal opportunities for girls in rural areas, similar to those in big cities. For the cooperatives, the focus is on providing logistical support, helping them commercialize their products, and accessing broader markets." (Bendriouch, Interview, Tiznit, May 2024).

[16] AGM stands for Amazigh Girl Matters

When I contacted Samira, she invited me to stay with her for three days around the Tiznit area to familiarise myself with her work and the women and cooperatives she works with on a daily basis. First, we went to Tahala, where Mohamed and Said, the presidents of the *Tazouknit* cooperative (Boutabi, in the territory of Tafraout), welcomed us to get to know their association. This cooperative started as a place where some women from the village could produce mainly argan and *amlou*. Nowadays, thanks to different projects and collaborations they have been part of, they have been able to expand their premises, having now a physical shop, the production workshop, a greenhouse, and they are also starting the construction of a rural house to expand their capacities. The two chairpersons of this cooperative, together with Samira, organised a training workshop for the provincial Union of Associations of *Irigh N Tahala Ighchan*, a group of women who separately manage several cooperatives, to encourage their smooth running and give them advice on their major challenges. They take advantage of these trainings or workshops to talk about different issues, such as raising awareness on child marriage prevention, education, empowerment techniques, mindset building, promoting economic emancipation, or the management of grants and resources, among other topics.

Samira, through her work at AGM, managed to create a provincial Union of Cooperatives to promote good practices, dealing with recommendations, the promotion of a space for communication, product development, product exhibition, etc. This Union is also a way to deal with the competitiveness that these women have, producing the same products in the same area, but on the other hand, it helps them to have a more organised base, they can register for agri-food exhibitions, among other things. All the cooperatives visited are part of this Union. AGM has also created a booklet that serves as a guide for them called *Orientation for cooperating women who need follow-up to establish their social enterprise*, it also helps them with their numerical, management, packaging, marketing, etc. skills. After the training session we visited two cooperatives in central Tafraout, the first being *Azrg Oudrar*, run by Aïcha, who gave me a small bottle of *argan* oil, and the second, *Tazouknit Atlas worgh*, run by Noura, both women in their fifties with six other women employed in their cooperatives. In both cases they mentioned that they have a problem of lack of raw materials, mostly argan, as they produce argan oil and other local organic products such as *amlou* or couscous.

Next, we headed to the Tiznit area, where AGM has its main premises where the different cooperatives are grouped together for their meetings, and where Samira and her team

carry out their main activities. Samira explains that the creation of the provincial Union of cooperatives is the biggest goal AGM has achieved so far, as Bendriouch explains below:

> "This union has achieved producing and marketing a wide range of local products from 10 different cooperatives from the Tiznit-Tafraout regions. This initiative not only provides economic empowerment but also instils a sense of pride and agency among the women involved. Another example is a project that involved setting up a digital marketplace, allowing women to reach a broader market and gain financial independence" (Bendriouch, Interview, Tiznit, May 2024).

Near Tiznit is Zaouit Aglou, a small village near the sea where we visited *Tizi N tawouei*, the last cooperative, run by Malika, who in addition to being its president also serves as vice-president of the commune of Aglou, as well as a member of the provincial Union of AGM cooperatives. Talking to Malika, she explained that there are currently nine women in the cooperative, although when there are significant orders, they can hire more women from time to time. They were selected to participate in an international argan exhibition, and thanks to the help of AGM they have expanded their market and now receive many orders from the United States, they are working to expand into the European market, but they lack the resources to get training in e-commerce and digital marketing. Malika, like so many other women who have created or work in cooperatives, is not focused on merely developing her cooperative, it is about an exchange of experiences, a constant solidarity and a cooperativism that goes beyond the production of a certain product. She explained that

> "Just now recently, one of the women working in the cooperative, her husband got severely ill, he might not get through it. Besides getting indefinite time off work of course, her colleagues, who are also her friends offered to maintain her share of the money we divide amongst us so that she can maintain it for as long as she needs to be off. They would cook and bring food to her house amongst other resources so that it would be easier for her to cope." (Conversation with Malika, Co-op Aglou, May 2024).

Malika mentioned with great enthusiasm that when they have had a large order, they take their workers on trips to areas of the country that they have not had the opportunity to visit, to spend a few days together, and to get away from their routine and responsibilities. These experiences in the cooperatives not only empower these women, but also give them a sense of purpose, pride in their work, and ambition; they become more independent and active agents in their own lives.

Samira proves to be a remarkable example of Amazigh female empowerment who devotes her energy and time to helping other Amazigh women. It is a very good exemplification of what Schaefer Davis (2016) explains as feminist contributions through grassroots action, and how they also contribute to feminist discourse through these efforts.

**Case Study 3: IMSLI**[17] – A Chat with Amina Zioual

I have left the case of *Imsli, La Voix de la Femme Amazigh*, as the last case study, because it is an organisation of such relevance as we have already introduced earlier. In this section, I intend to add to the discourse of the rest of the thesis through the brilliant conversation I had with Amina Zioual, the organisation's president. The other two case studies and interviews are based on a more grassroots perspective, direct action on the ground. On the other hand, Amina exemplifies the relevance of keeping the cause active on the ground at the level of activism and social engagement, despite being part of the urban context, as the organisation is based in Rabat. When I visited the headquarters of *La Voix de la Femme Amazigh*, Amina welcomed me with great enthusiasm, as did all the other associations and individuals who agreed to talk to me, but I saw a certain predisposition to share Amina's passion for this issue, when she quickly mentioned how important and positive it is that research and publications on Amazigh matters, particularly on Amazigh women, continue to be carried out. In the few publications on this subject, Amina Zioual or at least *Imsli* appears somewhere, either as an interviewee or as a mention of the fundamental role of the entity in the Moroccan feminist process. Some cases are Laghssais 2023, Sadiqi 2016, Laghssais & Comins-Mingol 2021, or Makhoukh 2019.

Thus, *Imsli* was established in 2009, being the first association dealing with the defence of the legal rights of Amazigh women. Before that, there were already a large number of organisations dealing with the protection of Amazigh language and culture or gender issues in general for Moroccan women, but none of them focused on the experience of Amazigh women in particular. Zioual's personal experience is what led her to focus the organisation, together with her colleagues, on mitigating marginalisation and promoting the identity and linguistic recognition of these women. On the other hand, Zioual explains that

[17] *Imsli* is the Tamazight word used to describe "The Voice of Amazigh Women", which is the most commonly used name of the organization. The members of the entity use both names interchangeably.

> "The current socioeconomic situation regarding Amazigh women is catastrophic. They face many layers of discrimination both as women and as part of the Amazigh ethnic group, which manifests in very high poverty and unemployment rates that directly affect their condition" (Zioual, Interview, Rabat, May 2024).

Along her ideas, the entity's main action today is the legal literacy of Amazigh women, insisting on the educational aspect to foster emancipation and empowerment. Speaking about the contributions of Amazigh women in Moroccan society and in their more local contexts, Zioual acknowledged their important role in the preservation of language and culture and their transmission from generation to generation but stressed that it must be remembered that it is Amazigh women who are on the streets protesting and engaging in activism, fighting for the wider recognition of their rights and their identity. On the other hand, she stresses that it is not an easy task, as they face several obstacles, the Moroccan society in general as a first barrier, and then within their own communities, where gender roles are still deeply rooted (Zioual, Interview, Rabat, May 2024).

Regarding activism, Zioual stressed in several questions the importance of working with other Amazigh organisations, especially feminists, to present a united front. She also comments that it would be interesting and necessary to foster an international or at least regional North African alliance to promote international recognition of their rights and their status. "I envision that *Imsli* is recognised not only at the national level, but also plays an active role in the global movement for indigenous women's rights", she comments specifically (Zioual, Interview, Rabat, May 2024). The work of entities such as this one ensures the continuation of the promotion of this 'female leadership' mentioned by Zioual, as well as Chtatou in their respective interviews.

To conclude this last part, if we look closely at these three case studies, two being grassroot NGOs dedicated to empowering rural cooperatives and Amazigh women to mitigate their vulnerabilities and expand their opportunities, as well as the case of *Imsli*, they all illustrate perfectly how empowerment through development projects can completely change the role and aspiration of these women, particularly when fostering their personal agency. The observations gathered through these interviews and focus groups bring to the forefront the opportunities as well as the obstacles faced by Amazigh women. By documenting these cases, this thesis aspired to offer a better understanding of how gender and ethnicity interact to be

better included in Moroccan feminism through an Amazigh feminist lens. Adopting this ethnographic approach, I managed to provide an understanding of the strategies that Amazigh women, mostly in local contexts, use to navigate their empowerment and agency through their role in their communities.

"Que signifie pour vous être Amazigh?"

"Être libre, tout simplement."[18]

Zioual, Interview, Rabat, May 2024

## 4. Conclusion

This thesis has been an in-depth exploration of a nascent Amazigh feminism, intertwined within a broader picture of an increasingly confirmed Moroccan feminism. Emphasis has been placed on the fundamental role and use of agency, empowerment, as part of the ethnic rights apparatus proclaimed by these women. Most of my research has revolved around the central question: How do Amazigh women in Morocco construct their agency and empowerment within these challenging and complex socio-cultural contexts? A I moved on with my analysis, a sub question came up engaging with what this struggle could entail to find a coherent niche within the broader feminist landscape in the country and beyond. In order to answer this question efficiently, I tried to delve into the historical, cultural and socio-political context that have consistently shaped and systematically affected the identity politics and day to day life-struggles of Amazigh women to assert their agency and affirm their position within the Moroccan feminist discourse.

The breakthrough of Amazigh feminism shows that it is not merely a minority group within the Moroccan feminist landscape, but an independent and singular current, which strives to challenge the ideals of the two mainstream, Western/secular and traditional/Islamic, feminisms. This novel, third way, model is thus deeply rooted in a nexus of intersectionality, where gender, ethnicity, and rurality become integral tributes, a home-grown, ascending cultural paradigm that is worth deconstructing. A focal point to remember is the multiple layers of these women's "daily battles" to borrow F. Mernissi's phrase, is pushed up to a national struggle to eradicate forms of exclusion, discrimination, and marginalisation, where ethnicity rights, cultural and linguistic recognition become added value to legitimate the Amazigh component to promote the nation's political agenda for democracy, human rights, social peace and political stability.

[18] This quote has been extracted from my interview to Amina Zioual carried out the 25th of May in Rabat. My own translation of the exchange: "What does being Amazigh mean to you?", to which she answered "To be free, quite simply."

The premises of such claim locates the foundations of Amazigh feminism on its historicity, in particular its struggle against different forms of colonialisation, the imposition of Arabisation, as well as a process of marginalisation within the state. It is only fair to attest for the emergence of different reform groups and associations, such as the ACM, as well as the creation of IRCAM, which have played a fundamental role, not only in the recovery of Amazigh past traditions and culture, but also the protection of Amazigh language and identity. Despite the breakthrough of the officialization of Tamazight as the second official language in Morocco, the lack of implementation of this commitment remains at the root of the failure to mitigate the systematic exclusion of Amazigh women from the Moroccan feminist scene.

The exclusion of Amazigh women from mainstream feminist discourse is thus a long-standing gap in the historical fabric of the Moroccan cultural epistemology. This outcome of this exclusion is clearly illustrated by the obvious division between rural and urban areas, and the Arab dominance in Moroccan mainstream systems, which helped widen the range of discrimination, gender roles and social in-justice. Such factors have ended up creating a significant gap where the voices and experiences of Amazigh women are discarded, silenced and/or ignored, and thereof their contributions are sidelined. One of the major objectives of my thesis was to bring to the forefront the importance of recognising and empowering Amazigh women in order to help develop an inclusive cultural landscape in Morocco, where a fair space of privileges, rights and equity are granted to all citizens of the country. Amazigh feminism is thus characterised by an ambition for collective empowerment, rather than a struggle for individual liberation.

This new trend of resistance comes up naturally to unveil the daily struggles of Amazigh women, spaced up as rural and illiterate, who find themselves prone to engage in strategies of agency and empowerment within the constraints they are confronted with, which are the patriarchal practices within their local communities, on one hand, and the denigration of ethnic marginalisation by society at large, on the other. Undertaking a kind of ethnographic research carried out in two rural areas of southern Morocco, in Dra-Tafilalet and Sous Massa, I was able to observe and applaud acts of solidarity, community building, through artistic creation and participation in activities as examples where Amazigh women exercise their construction and development project. These activities do not only foster their economic independence, which serve the main economy of their communities, but also help to preserve and expand Amazigh culture, traditions and language.

Beyond these observation phases, I conducted informal conversations, interviews, focus groups, and discussions in rural Amazigh, which led me to conclude that the women of these communities are, indeed, promoters of well-being and social cohesion, as well as resilience. This natural management of collective identity and community building, which is strongly emphasised in their narratives, actions and plans, as well as their commitment to the protection of their cultural identity, stand in stark contrast to what can be seen as rather detached feminist models represented in the two main secular and Islamic feminisms predominant in urban contexts. I can attest with confidence that what I have qualified as an Amazigh feminism transcribes a sophisticated model of a social activism that is community-focused and emphatically embedded in a cultural tradition, which is closely adapted to the socioeconomic realities of the women it potentially represents.

Taken seriously, Amazigh feminism ought to have a significant impact on the broader Moroccan feminist context. Firstly, it automatically challenges the hegemony of mainstream narratives centred on the Arab and Islamic experience, advocating for a more diverse and inclusive approach that recognises the experiences of women who are part of different ethnic, linguistic, and geographical contexts, among other differentiating elements. Moreover, it brings to the forefront the limitations of secular and Islamic feminism in incorporating the needs of indigenous women, particularly those from different backgrounds to their own, those from rural areas who are left on the margins. Another major finding to my thesis is that for Moroccan feminism to be transformative and create an inclusive impact, it needs to be informed by the concrete experiences of Amazigh women. What this implies is a brave recognition of the relevance of issues affecting Amazigh women's cultural and linguistic rights in direct relation to their needs and aspirations for gender equality. Therefore, all initiatives and reform projects should be accessible to this group of women, as well as adapted to their inclusion. My thesis advocates and defends a more intersectional approach in Moroccan feminist action, political discourse and narratives to include the voices, not only Amazigh women, but also those of other marginalised groups.

With these objectives, I hope this thesis has contributed to the demonstration that Amazigh feminism is an inspiring, unique and necessary component of other streams of thoughts that constitute the fabric of a feminist scene, which is entirely connected to the specific historical, political, socio-economic, and cultural context of these women. It challenges mainstream feminist movements and their narratives to offer a model based on inclusive activism based on

a rich Amazigh culture and a growing community service. If Amazigh women do utterly claim their rights of action and their capacity for participation in community building, their contributions and narratives must be regarded as integral action plans to the broader struggle against gender inequality, social peace and political instability in the country. Once these calls for greater recognition of the actions of Amazigh women as relevant components of the Moroccan feminist movement are heard, we can raise these voices to be part of a universal struggle for the advancement of women's human and gender rights, in general.

**Appendices:**

*****While conducting my interviews for this research, I gathered a substantial amount of data that has been of utmost importance to the contribution of the analysis carried out throughout this thesis. I have chosen not to include the full transcriptions of the interviews, adding in the following appendices only the interview and focus group questions. This decision is based on my commitment to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Moreover, the interviews are too lengthy and would not add new insights or clarity to the main discourse. For those interested, I would be happy to provide, privately, further data upon request.

**Appendix 1)**

Semi-structured Interview Guide for Master Thesis on the Pathways to Amazigh Feminism N°1 – **Ms. Amina Ibnou-Cheikh**, Director of *Le Monde Amazigh*

Interview Details:
Date – 19th April 2024
Location – Rabat, Morocco, *Le Monde Amazigh* offices

Introduction of the topic, grounds for interview, purpose of the conversation, request to record.

Interview Questions:

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself and your professional background and expertise?
2. Can you share with me your journey into becoming an Amazigh activist, as well as the director of *Le Monde Amazigh*?
3. How would you say that your background has shaped your perspective on the role of Amazigh women, particularly within society?
4. What specific experiences have shaped how you define the agency of Amazigh women's lives?
5. In what ways do Amazigh women exercise agency within their communities or within the broader Moroccan society?
6. How do you perceive the empowerment of Amazigh women? How does this intersect with the preservation of Amazigh culture, language and tradition?
7. What are some of the biggest challenges Amazigh women face? And what strategies or efforts have you observed to mitigate them?
8. How do Amazigh women in rural context differentiate from those from urban settings?
9. What does Amazigh feminism mean to you? How is it different from the two mainstream feminisms in Morocco?
10. How does Le Monde Amazigh contribute to the discourse on Amazigh women's issues?
11. Can you share any anecdote or positive experience of your involvement as an activist that advanced the rights and visibility of Amazigh women?
12. What role does the media have, as well as activism, in shaping the perception of Amazigh women in Morocco?

13. Is there any topic you would like to bring up that is important for me to take into consideration for this study?

**Appendix 2)**

Semi-structured Interview Guide for Master Thesis on the Pathways to Amazigh Feminism N°2 – **Mr. Mohamed Moukhlis**, Director of Communication Services at IRCAM

Interview Details:
Date – 6th May 2024
Location – Rabat, Morocco, *IRCAM* headquarters

Introduction of the topic, grounds for interview, purpose of the conversation, request to record.

Interview Questions:

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself and your professional background and expertise?
2. Can you share with me your journey into becoming a member of IRCAM?
3. Please elaborate on the work of IRCAM, and the goals and expectations you have of its role
4. How do you think linguistic agency is relevant for the lives of Amazigh women?
5. Can you discuss some examples of cultural and language empowerment for women?
6. What are some of the main challenges, sociolinguistic if you want, that Amazigh women face?
7. How do you think the lives of Amazigh women change depending on their urban or rural setting?
8. What do you think is needed to mitigate them and what is IRCAM doing within its agenda to help?
9. Can you elaborate on your experience as an activist within the ACM?
10. What is the current main goal at IRCAM to implement for the advancement of Amazigh rights?
11. Are there any upcoming initiatives that focus specifically on advancing the rights of women?
12. What do you think of the criticism that IRCAM has faced and continues to do by some activists and scholars, members of the ACM that consider the institute as 'less independent'?
13. Is there any topic you would like to bring up that is important for me to take into consideration for this study?

**Appendix 3)**

Semi-structured Interview Guide for Master Thesis on the Pathways to Amazigh Feminism N°3 – **Ms. Mar Serra**, President of *AMRAD*

Interview Details:
Date – 8th May 2024
Location – Takhiamt, Aoufous, Morocco, *AMRAD locale*

Introduction of the topic, grounds for interview, purpose of the conversation, request to record.

Interview Questions:

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself and your professional background and expertise?
2. What drove you to establish AMRAD, and how would you say the entity has evolved in the past years?
3. As the President of the NGO, what inspires you to work with this community? Particularly you are not from their context.
4. How does AMRAD specifically support Amazigh women in the area, particularly Takhiamt in both their personal and professional lives?
5. Please elaborate on the initiatives AMRAD has carried out so far
6. In what ways does AMRAD address the unique challenges faced by the women in town?
7. How would you say you contribute to their empowerment?
8. Can you share any success stories?
9. How does AMRAD create a sense of agency and foster their autonomy?
10. Are solidarity and community building important elements for the women in Takhiamt? How does AMRAD incorporate them?
11. What are the main challenges these women face? How is AMRAD impacted by them and how do you mitigate them?
12. What are the main goals that AMRAD plans to focus on in the near future? How are they related to the empowerment of these women?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding AMRAD's work and its impact on Amazigh women?

**Appendix 4)**

Semi-structured Focus Group Guide for Master Thesis on the Pathways to Amazigh Feminism

N°1 – **Focus group – 11 Amazigh Women from Takhiamt**, through AMRAD

1*This Focus Group Guide was taken from Laghssais (2023) semi-structured interviews that she conducted for her PhD thesis. Most questions have been modified according to this study.

2*These questions were used also when having informal, spontaneous conversations while visiting cooperatives

Focus Group Details:
Date – 8th May 2024
Location – Takhiamt, Aoufous, Morocco, *AMRAD locale*

Focus Group questions:

## 1. General information:

- What is your name and where are you from?
- How old are you?
- Do you have kids?
- Are you married/widow/single/divorced?
- Can you explain what a normal day looks like for you?
- Do you have any challenges in your day-to-day life?
- Are other women from your village in the same situation as you?

1.1. <u>Socioeconomic condition as rural women:</u>

- Do you go to, or did you go to school? Up until what level?
- Do your kids go to school?
- Is school accessible for girls in the village? Is it common to drop out? Child marriage?
- Are you literate or illiterate?
- Do you have an easy to access hospital? What do you do if you get sick? When you get to a hospital, what language do you speak, and do they understand you?
- Do you like living at the village? Would you prefer living somewhere else?
- Do you think living here affects your life condition? How?
- Do you work? Why did you choose this as your job?
- Would you like to pursue something else if you could?
- Do you think working is a positive thing? Or does it difficult your life?
- Does your husband support your decision to work?
- What are some examples of difficulties in your life?

## 2. Identity, language, culture, religion:

2.1. <u>Identity & language</u>

- What do you identify as? Moroccan, Amazigh?
- What does it mean to be an Amazigh woman?
- What languages do you speak? Do you want to learn more? Is it necessary for you to learn Arabic in order to be included in society?

- What language do you speak at home? And within your community?
- Why is it important to keep and speak Tamazight? Did you learn it from your mother? Did you teach it to your kids?
- Should Tamazight be taught in schools? Why?
- Do you face complications by not being understood in your language in public services? Administrative centers, hospitals, police stations, etc.
- Have you faced discrimination because of being an Amazigh woman or because of speaking Tamazight?

2.2. Culture & religion:

- Do you practice Amazigh traditional culture? Through which actions?
- Why do you think it is important to keep them alive?
- What are some of your favorite traditions? (tattoos, food, clothes, some type of art, rituals, orality, social gatherings, and events, etc.)
- Are you proud to be an Amazigh woman?
- Are you a religious person? Is religion important to you?
- How is Islam relevant in your daily life?

## 3. Resilience, solidarity, agency & empowerment:

3.1. Resilience & solidarity:

- How do you deal with difficulty or problems that come your way?
- What do you do when you have a problem? Do you seek help from your family, friends, or neighbors?
- Is it common to help each other in your village and to have solidarity to one another?
- In what ways do you help each other?

3.2. Agency & empowerment:

- How do you experience empowerment?
- How could you feel more empowered?
- Are you doing something to better your situation?
- What are some aspirations of yours?
- Do you think it is a global thing among women to have aspirations like these?

## 4. Amazigh feminism and women's rights:

- Do you think women's rights in Morocco need to be advanced?
- What are some challenges that women face in your village?
- Do you think that women have the power to change their own realities?

## 5. Sources of empowerment – cooperatives:

- Do you take part in a cooperative?
- Why do you like it or not?
- If you do not, would you like to take part in it? Why?
- Does it help manage your personal life? In what ways?
- How could it be reinforced? Do you feel like you need more training to do your job better?
- Does it foster a sense of community and solidarity amongst the other participants?
- Why did you decide to join the cooperative?
- What have you learnt from attending this cooperative?
- Do you feel like you are helping other women? Why is this important?
- Do you think the cooperative is a way to help address the difficulties of Amazigh women? If so, how?
- Do you feel empowered by working at the cooperative? In what ways?

**Appendix 5)**

Semi-structured Interview Guide for Master Thesis on the Pathways to Amazigh Feminism N°4 – **Ms. Samira Bendriouch**, President of *AGM*

Interview Details:
Date – 14th May 2024
Location – Tiznit, Morocco, *AGM office*

Introduction of the topic, grounds for interview, purpose of the conversation, request to record.

Interview Questions:

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself and your professional background and expertise?
2. Can you describe the main goals of AGM and the cooperatives you work with?
3. Why does your work focus only on rural women and settings?
4. In what ways is education one of the main drivers of empowerment in rural communities? Is there any specific educational initiatives AGM has carried out?
5. What are the main common challenges that Amazigh women in the area face and how does AGM help mitigate them?
6. Can you expand on the awareness-raising initiatives you carry out? What themes do you usually tackle?
7. In your opinion, what are the key qualities that Amazigh women possess to be active agents of change in their lives? How does this contribute to their agency and empowerment?
8. What is the role of the cooperatives within this? How do they impact the life of these women?
9. In your view, what are the main differences in the dynamics between rural and urban Amazigh women and how does this affect their agency and empowerment practices?
10. How does the association help mitigate or promote them accordingly?
11. How do you envision a future for Amazigh women in the area or in broader rural communities, and what are the needed steps to take to enhance their agency, empowerment and participation in society?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding AGM's work and its impact on Amazigh women?

**Appendix 6)**

Semi-structured Interview Guide for Master Thesis on the Pathways to Amazigh Feminism N°5 – **Mr. Mohamed Chtatou**, Researcher & lecturer at UIR

Interview Details:
Date – 16th May 2024
Location – Rabat, Morocco, *UIR Campus*

Introduction of the topic, grounds for interview, purpose of the conversation, request to record.

Interview Questions:

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself and your professional background and expertise?
2. Can you please introduce the historical role of Amazigh women within Amazigh society? How has it evolved over time?
3. What are the key societal factors, as well as cultural ones that influence the status and position of Amazigh women?
4. What are the most significant challenges these women have faced historically while asserting their rights and achieving (or not) equality within their society?
5. Can you mention some cases of resilience and empowerment exemplified by Amazigh women historically?
6. How do you think the misconceptions about Amazigh women affect their societal perception, roles and opportunities?
7. How do traditional Amazigh culture and values intersect with more modern elements regarding women's rights?
8. In what ways have Amazigh women proven to be agents of change within their communities, as well as active participants?
9. Can you think of any specific initiative initiated or led by Amazigh women that aimed at the promotion of their rights?
10. How do factors like education, economic emancipation, or political participation impact the agency of Amazigh women?
11. How does solidarity intersect with the empowerment of Amazigh women in their communities?

12. In your opinion, can we consider the lack of space for Amazigh women in the two main feminist discourses in Morocco, this being the secular and Islamic feminist movements, an opportunity for the emergence of Amazigh feminism?
13. How does it differentiate from the two mainstream movements?
14. Looking into the future, how do you envision the future of the situation of Amazigh women, and their agency and empowerment accordingly?

**Appendix 7)**

Semi-structured Interview Guide for Master Thesis on the Pathways to Amazigh Feminism N°6 – **Ms. Amina Zioual**, President of *La Voix de la Femme Amazigh - Imsli*

Interview Details:
Date – 25th May 2024
Location – Rabat, Morocco, *Imsli* headquarters

Introduction of the topic, grounds for interview, purpose of the conversation, request to record.

Interview Questions:

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself and your professional background and expertise?
2. Can you share the history and main goals of Imsli?
3. What inspired you to create the association? What are your main activities that you carry out?
4. How would you say the current socioeconomic situation affects Amazigh women in Morocco?
5. What in your opinion, are the most significant challenges they face in their daily lives?
6. In what ways do Amazigh women contribute to their society? And how has their role evolved over recent years?
7. How would you define Amazigh feminism? How would it differ from the other feminist movements in Morocco?
8. What unique cultural or societal elements build Amazigh feminism?
9. Can you please provide examples on how Imsli fosters the agency and empowerment of Amazigh women? How do you understand the empowerment actions carried out by Amazigh women?
10. Can you elaborate on some factors that could improve the lives of Amazigh women?
11. Can you elaborate more on the efforts of Imsli to provide legal literacy? What other relevant services do you provide?
12. What are the biggest obstacles you have faced while advocating for women's rights or during your activist engagements?
13. What reforms, solutions, or new policies do you think are necessary to overcome the challenges Amazigh women face we just discussed?

14. What are the future objectives that Imsli has within the broader Amazigh movement for women's rights?
15. How do you see the role of Amazigh women changing in the upcoming years?
16. On a more personal note, what has been so far the most rewarding experience of your work with Imsli?
17. What is your message to young Amazigh women who are reaching for more empowerment and equality?
18. What does it mean to you personally, to be Amazigh?

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