

Dreams Unrealised: A Synopsis of the Main Causes Of the Participation of the Amazigh in the Libyan Revolution and Its Outcome

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ABSTRACT: The recent history of the Arab world has been characterized by revolutions that have swept through and still sweeping through most of the countries. Despite this, each country is different from the other on the causes of the revolution and its eventual result. Even in its duration and consequences each nation is dynamic from the others. Libya was one of those countries that entered the revolution saga beginning on 17 February 2011, and ending with the entry of the revolutionaries to the capital of Libya (Tripoli) on 27 August, 2011, finally killing the president Muammar Al Gaddafi in the city of Sirte on 20 October 2011. However, there have been many events and developments that have made the Arab spring revolution in Libya different from those of other Arab countries. One of these issues is the participation of a non-Arab ethnic group in the Libyan revolution – the Amazigh. Ethnically and culturally different as well as different in the goals and aims they hope to achieve with the revolution. Thus, this paper aims to shed some lights on the participation of the Amazigh (non-Arab ethnic group) in the Libyan revolution by looking at the main reasons for their participation in the revolution.

Keywords: causes, participation, Amazigh, revolution, Libya, Arab Spring

Contribution/ Originality

This study contributes to the definition and issue of the problems of the stateless in Libya because the reasons for this statelessness, until today, are not known completely. Neither the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), nor any official sources offer any figure about the stateless people in Libya. Likewise, the statelessness issue did not receive any important concern in Libya. The emphasis on Arab identity in Libya and the policies of Arabization that had been implemented by Muammar Al Qaddafi (1969-2011) created obstacle and barriers for citizenship access by non-Arab minority groups. These groups are Toureg, Tebu and Amazigh – Amazigh is the major focus of this paper.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Amazigh (Berber) are located in Africa. They are surrounded by some well-known places as shown in Figure 1.1. From the north is the Mediterranean and the south is Sahara, from the eastward is Siwa Oasis and the west is the Atlantic Ocean, Amazigh ethnic groups are living in several countries in north Africa, including, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. The original people of this area extend to the fifth millennium BC. The presence of Arab goes back to 6 AD, more specifically, the seventh century. They entered the region as propagator and pioneer of Islam. The Amazigh are known as the native people of north Libya and Africa (Lee, 2012). As for the Libyan society, it is basically structured along tribal lines, same as other Arab societies.

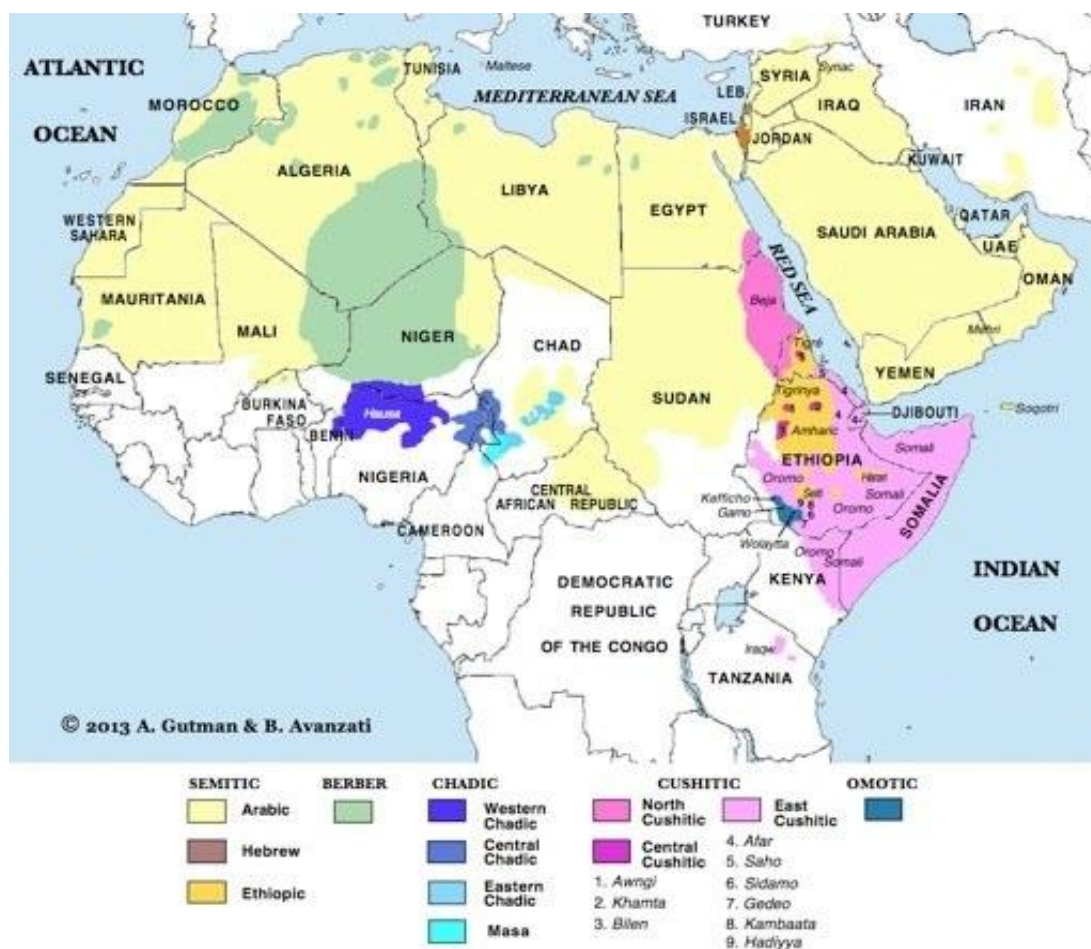


Figure 1.1 Amazigh locations in Africa

Source: <http://www.languagesgulper.com/eng/Afroasiatic.html>

The North African Amazigh are principally a conservative, marginal people who are living in the areas of refuge such as in the mountains, valleys and desert driven to these places by various successive waves of Greeks, Phoenicians, Arab, Europeans, and Romans emigrants. Around 40,000 live in Nefusa Mountain in the area of Tripolitania; they speak the Berber dialect (Zanatiyah or Zenata). This dialect is from the language family of the Afro-Asiatic languages. In the Nefusa Mountain, one half of the total population is from Amazigh and the rest is semi-Nomadic Arabs. Other groups of Berber live in some areas of Tripolitania like in Socra, Zuara, and Hun; and some Berbers live in the Cyrenaican Oasis in Agile. Also, a few numbers of Berbers live in Ghadames. Many Amazigh, especially, shopkeepers are bilingual; they speak the Arabic language as second language (Dupree, 1958). The recent statistics for Libyan population is estimated to be 6,653,210 (July, 2017). The number of immigrants is over 12% out of the whole population. As stated in the UN data (2017) the ethnic groups are as follows: Arab and Amazigh are 97%, for Amazigh, they are 3 to 10 % out of the estimated 97%. Others are 3% and they include Maltese, Greeks, Pakistanis, Indians, Turks, Egyptians, Tunisians, and Italians. The languages spoken currently in Libya are: Arabic, which is the official; English and Italian, these are mostly spoken in the main cities; Berber is spoken in Nafusi, Duknah, Tamasheq, Ghadamis, and Awjilah (Libya, 2018). The Amazigh and Libyan Arabs share the same religion (Islam), but they differ in their cultures and customs. They both were able to be assimilated into each other because of religion. Although some of the Amazigh are closer to Arab culture as they keep interacting with them and cultural diffusion keeps taking place. However, the Amazigh have their distinct culture and civilization which are different from Arab Culture and civilization and it spans thousands of years. The Amazigh culture and civilization had their own characters hence the reason why they had problems with the past regime of Muammar Al Qaddafi and it is the same reason why pressures were mounted on them to be assimilated into the Arab culture and civilization by Muammar Al Qaddafi (1969-2011).

II. THE TREATMENT OF THE AMAZIGH UNDER COLONEL MUAMMAR AL QADDAFI

According to Akademie (2011), when Libya got her independence in 1951, the Amazigh waited until everything settled. Then, Muammar Al Qaddafi came with his horrendous dictatorship and assimilation policies which remained for four decades of his rule. This policy was intended to make the society uniform and not to recognize the Amazigh presence in Libya as a different ethnicity (Zoubir and White, 2015).

To further press this home, Muammar Al Qaddafi in his speech on the ethnicity of the Berbers and the Libyan Berbers in particular said, on August in 1971, that any group of people that did not believe that Berbers are Arabs, are liars (Zoubir and White, 2015). In other words, although the Berbers may seem to be different, nonetheless, they are Arabs and should be seen as such.

In addition, he stated that the language of Berber is called the Himyaritic Language, a Semitic language spoken in Yemen during the Himyaritic period, and thus a form of the Arabic language. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Berbers are known as the indigenous people of North African nations, whereas the Arabs had arrived in North Africa in the 7th century AD (Amnesty International, 2011). Likewise, Muammar Al Gaddafi declared that the Berbers were the product of the invention of European colonialism, and he asked Libyan historians to write new texts that show that the Berbers are real Arabs (Zoubir and White, 2015).

In 1973, Muammar Al Qaddafi chose the city of Zuwara Amazigh as a venue to condemn the Berber identity, declared it the enemy of the people and burned Amazigh books (Zoubir and White, 2015).

In 2003, the Libyan authority stated in their submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ERD) that Libyan citizens are of a common racial origin and they profess Islam and also speak Arabic as a single language. Moreover, the report by the state added that all Libyans share together a common religion, language, and origin. According to them, this common heritage has been a factor which leads to the absence of racial discrimination in the whole country (Amnesty International, 2011).

Some groups that are based abroad like the World Amazigh Congress, the Libyan Working Group, and the Tabu Front for the Salvation of Libya disagree with the assessment submitted by the government above and they argued that the code of Libyan nationality is discriminatory in its way of eliminating other ethnicities and claiming that all citizens are Arabs. These groups also complained that the culture and language of Amazigh are not recognized and there are several obstacles that prevent the Amazigh community from preserving their own culture and language. For example, the Law No. 24 of 2001 allows only the use of Arabic in official documents, private enterprises, public spaces, and publications generally (Amnesty International, 2011).

Besides, the act 3 of law No. 24 prohibit the use of non-Muslim and non-Arab names as it is stated by the committee of general people-which is equivalent to the office of the prime ministers. Parents cannot appeal against the decision of this committee because the law does not provide them any chance for appeal (Amnesty International, 2011). The rule was stringently implanted that the violator of this laws is severely punished as follows:

Any person who violates the act 1 of law No, 24 of 2001 shall be punished by a fine of not less than five thousand dinars. The sentence of this penal code results in the revocation of the license and the closure of the concessions in which the violator is engaged; and his denial of a license to engage in economic activities for one year from the date of the sentence.

Any person who violates the act 3 of law No, 24 of 2001 shall be punished by a fine not less than one thousand dinars and not more than five thousand dinars. The penalty is to deprive the violator of obtaining passport, licenses and other personal documents, and his sons, who have names in violation of this law, are prohibited from enrolling in the educational institutions until the violation is removed (<http://aladel.gov.ly/home/?p=1244>).

The authorities of Libya show little tolerance to cultural rights and to activists including those who are based abroad. In November 2009, the authority of Libya deported the deputy head of the World Amazigh Congress 'Khaled Zerari' from Libya upon his arrival at the airport as he came from Morocco in order to attend a funeral for a known Amazigh figure inside Libya. They questioned Zerari for hours before he was sent back to Morocco. They used the law of Libya to force him to return back to his country. There were no official reasons for this kind of ban. But it could be that Zerari was not allowed to enter Libya because of his activism for Amazigh' rights in North Africa (Amnesty International, 2011).

III. THE BEGINNING OF THE REVOLUTION

On 17 February the Arab Spring started as a revolution against Muammar Al Qaddafi because of his dictatorship (Maddy-Weitzman, 2015). The events in Tunisia and Egypt affected other Arab nations in the region. After the fall of Mubarak in a few days, the protests against Muammar Al Qaddafi started in Benghazi (Dalacoura, 2012, Bhardwaj, 2012).

It can be said that the accession of Libyans into the Arab Spring was not directly impacted by the Egyptian or Tunisian revolutions, but these two revolutions encouraged Libyans to raise slogans against Muammar Al Qaddafi (Altir, 2014).

In other words, the timing of these two revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia influenced the Libyan revolution timing. However, if there were no cases of negative background and existing dictatorial tendencies which has sowed the seed of hatred toward Muammar Al Qaddafi, then, the Libyan revolution voices in Benghazi would not have been responded to and it would not have expanded to other cities.

However, Muammar Al Qaddafi misread the origins, strength and intensity of the revolt that began against him. After the demonstrations reached their third day in eastern Libya, Muammar Al Qaddafi stepped up to defend Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (John, 2011).

Muammar Al Qaddafi did not listen to the young people's voice. He appeared to the public with his fiery speech and he promised to punish the protesters harshly. The famous phrase in his speech was 'who are you' and he called them 'rats'. These statements led to increasing the people's anger and a large majority of people felt discontented with him. The young people started mobilizing in each region to form military teams. After many days, a civil war started in Libya, more specifically, the battle of the 246 days (Altir, 2014).

IV. EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE IN LIBYA DURING THE REVOLUTION

The war spread quickly in the whole eastern region of Libya and parts of the west. In addition, a small-scale uprising started in the capital. Then, the rebellion was led by NTC. The Security of the UN sanctioned a military intervention carried out by the NATO starting from March. After few months the war cost tens of thousands of lives of people and Muammar Al Qaddafi was brutally killed (Dalacoura, 2012). The security services of Libya had stood aside and they did not try to crush the protest, but the popular mobilization impelled the army to move against Muammar Al Qaddafi (Dalacoura, 2012, John, 2011).

Tripoli did not experience any kind of major protests until towards the end of the war and after overthrowing Muammar Al Qaddafi. According to Dalacoura (2012), the Libyan dictator's overthrowing could have been impossible without the intervention of NATO.

The fact that the army did not intervene may have been due to Gaddafi's policy towards his army. Muammar Al Qaddafi never trusted them. He kept the army units small and isolated from each other, with few weapons and ammunition, to prevent the development of personal loyalties within individual units. The development of the occupation profession and the institutionalization of the armed forces have been hampered by the rotation of the officers' unit from unit to unit on a regular basis (John, 2011).

The European and US powers' decision to intervene in the Libyan revolution on the rebel side was supported by the United Nations Security Council resolution 1973. This Council authorizes its own member state to protect civilian populated areas and civilians by taking into account all the necessary measures (UNSC 2011). This decision allows NATO to prevent the forces of the regime to use its power. In addition, it allowed those different rebels and militias to start regrouping and reinforcing themselves to be stronger in several areas so as to attack the regime (Poljarevic, 2016).

V. AMAZIGH PARTICIPATION IN THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION

The Amazigh young men, who live in the north-western highlands in Libya, more specifically, the highest part of Nefusa Mountain, took up their arms uniting themselves with their neighbors from Zintan, the Bedouin Arabs. They created a second front that complemented the thrust of the main rebel that is coming from the eastside. This action could provide them a legitimacy measure for their own future actions. As they became free from the grip of Muammar Al Qaddafi, they immediately asserted their origin 'their Berberness'. They started to introduce into opposition news broadcasts and the schools of the Berber language, displaying proudly the symbols of Amazigh and enhancing their collective recognition into the envisaged democratic system of post-Qaddafi order (Maddy-Weitzman, 2015, John, 2011).

The participation of the Amazigh can be recognized in their activities in the revolution against Gaddafi, where they are in an area of strategic importance as it has oil fields and also managed to occupy the border post with Tunisia, the crossing at Dehiba, and retained those two sites in their fierce fighting with the forces of Muammar Al Qaddafi (John, 2011).

The well-known Amazigh dissident 'Fathi Bin Khalifa' from Libya lived for 16 years in Morocco. Then he left to the Netherlands as he escaped from the pressure of Muammar Al Qaddafi on Rabat to hand him over. Bin Khalifa was elected as the World Amazigh Congress president. This was an international organization that started in 1995 and based in Paris. This organization aimed to protect the identity of the Amazigh. In October Bin Khalifa resumed his activities again from Tunisia when the Libyan revolution started and he became NTC representative. He was a significant part of its international delegation that was formed in order to obtain recognition among the international communities. Bin Khalifa later abandoned the NTC because of

insurmountable differences with the rebel committees. More specifically, because of some issues associated with the religion and the lack of recognition of the Amazigh rights and culture (Akademie 2011).

VI. THE RESULTS OF THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION

Even though the dictator was killed, however, the internal movements and the different actors and 'sectors' did not unify after the regime was brought down. In addition, the civil society and state institutions' longstanding weakness inside Libya as well as the absence of central authority, the numerous armed militias' presence, the civil war did not lead to the expectation of many of the people. It did not yield the expected outcome in terms of stability and continuity of the nation due to internal weaknesses. According to Dalacoura (2012) as reported in December 2011 that the Libyan Victims' number was more than 5000 and it was the highest number compared with other countries in the region that undergo revolution during the Arab spring.

The Amazigh in Libya played an important role during the revolution against Muammar Al Qaddafi. They say that they feel disappointed because the transitional government did not recognize the Amazigh culture and their language (Akademie, 2011). Bin Khalifa stated that in the Libyan constitution draft that has been approved on the 6th of August, neither the presence of Amazigh culture nor their language was recognized. The NTC claimed that we must focus more on the stability of Libya and that we should forget such things as ethnicity, language and culture. Bin Khalifa mentioned that the Amazigh are suffering from these issues and it cannot be swept aside even in the moment, so how can they be discussed later when they are fundamental to the survival of the Amazigh people? He added that how can the Amazigh be citizens in a country that does not recognize their existence (Akademie, 2011)?

Poljarevic (2016) revealed that after overthrowing Muammar Al Qaddafi, a conflict between ethnic groups such as Libyan Arabs and Libyan Amazigh including Tuareg and Tebu tribes in Fezzan area have taken and created other forms of tension. The NTC in Libya did not mention an official language for Amazigh in its "unjust" constitutional declaration even though the pivotal role of Amazigh in capturing crucial parts of Tripoli was well known (Berberism and Berber). Hence, the very critical issues which motivated the Amazigh to join the Libyan revolution in overthrowing the regime of Muammar Al Qaddafi remain unaddressed in the new dispensation.

VII. CONCLUSION

The participation of the Amazigh in the Libyan revolution against Muammar Al Qaddafi was natural because of the oppression and suppression that they experienced under the Qaddafi regime. The Amazigh had strong reasons to revolt against Qaddafi. These reasons are not the result of the moment, but they extended back to decades. The Amazigh had the opportunity to aspire to freedom and to gain some rights, especially cultural and linguistic rights as a result of the revolution. However, the post Qaddafi Libya shows that they did not achieve their full rights and did not achieve their full objectives which motivated their joining the revolution. Therefore, the issue of the Amazigh people still needs real solutions that will help them live as a different ethnic group with linguistic and cultural rights under a just and democratic government.

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