

Amina Amharech

Évènements en 2021

Amazigh women form the inescapable pillar of the family and the Amazigh community. They are the guardians of ancestral knowledge and expertise, which they convey through their mother tongue, a vector of values and identity. The word “Tamazight” designates both language, territory and woman: a highly symbolic term which summarizes the Amazigh holy trinity of “Awal, Acal, Afgan” (Word, Earth, Human Being). Heirs to a long matriarchal tradition, Amazigh women continue to fulfil their role and preside over the education of their children, manage their households and preserve their heritage in terms of traditional knowledge (e.g. traditional medicine, education and crafts).

The rise of Islamism since the 1980s has, however, been detrimental to the status of Amazigh women. The pro-Wahhabi party's two successive terms in government up until the end of 2021 were a threat to freedom and to women in more ways than one.⁴

Although Amazigh women are capable of occupying positions and roles of representation,⁵ their possibilities remain limited by discriminatory practices against women in general and Amazigh women in particular. For example, in the 2021 legislative elections, women won only 96 of the 395 seats in the House of Representatives, or 24.3%.⁶

Rights to land and resources

The phenomenon of land and natural resource grabbing in Morocco is national, with no region or community spared, although several cases have affected Amazigh communities in particular in recent years.⁷ The main difficulty today lies in the absence of a database that could list all cases of actual dispossession in order to establish an exhaustive mapping of the extent of the problem.

As for Amazigh women, they are struggling to access their rights in the context of collective lands, renamed “*soulaliyates*”.⁸ In fact, the *dahir* (law) of 27 April 1919 on collective lands and ethnic communities was replaced in 2019 by Law No. 62.17 on the administrative guardianship of *soulaliyate* communities and management of their property. Although the new law provides for equality between women and men, its effects are slow to be felt by Amazigh women.

The reclassification of collective lands as *soulaliyate* lands (an Arabic word meaning “descendant”) has put women in a position of direct conflict with men, who view this feminization of land rights negatively. Many Moroccan men wrongly believe they are being de facto excluded in favour of women, who “are taking over”.⁹ To date, only the Jamaa Soulaliya of Ouled Ahmed Souk Laarbae has elected a woman as its leader.¹⁰ And throughout the Kingdom of Morocco, only women belonging to communities in the Kenitra region have gained the right to plots of land.

Moreover, the 2019 law only strengthened the Ministry of the Interior's control over collective lands. This guardianship was established by *dahir* of 1919, during the colonial period. The Ministry of the Interior now has full authority to freely dispose of collective lands without the constraint of inalienability. It can carry out “legal” acts of dispossession, sale or leasing, as decided and applied by the Central or Regional Councils of Trustees, whether or not there is opposition and without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the communities. Circulars issued in 2021 go further by imposing the criterion of residence on all rightful claimants aged 18 years or more. This clearly threatens all students and members who work and reside outside the

community with both a loss of their rights and their community membership at the same time.¹¹

The proliferation of fraudulent acts and illegal activities is such that there is what is commonly referred to as a “Land Mafia” rampant in all regions of Morocco aimed at monopolizing land to the detriment of the rightful owners. This plundering of fertile ground in legislation, impunity, power games, the fragility of communities, the inefficiency of the courts, the connivance of magistrates, and agricultural policy,¹² all of which mean that law and justice no longer have a place, especially in matters of land, either for communities or for women, the last link in a weakened chain.

The neoliberal agricultural policy adopted by Morocco¹³ has contributed greatly to the increased commodification and privatization of land and the new government led by Aziz Akhannouch (former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Rural Development, Water and Forest) is continuing to work in this direction despite the tragic effects on small farmers and agricultural workers, especially women, who form the first link in the agricultural food chain. The agro-industrial sector thinks big and favours large farms by putting all necessary means at their disposal, starting with the lands of the impoverished communities, for which they are never compensated.

Working conditions

Without land, vulnerability sets in and forced displacements occur, with all the burden of their consequences on the community, the family and the women, who are confronted with new realities and new living conditions. Many of them end up as farm labourers, working in unbearable conditions.

Other women find themselves living on the outskirts of large cities looking for poorly paid work in clandestine factories, exploited, harassed and with no social security cover. The accident at the textile factory in Tangier, where 28 people drowned and were electrocuted in a dead-end cellar in February 2021, is an example of the daily tragedies experienced by Amazigh women and girls who are forced to survive because they cannot live with dignity and because their rights are being violated. One mother lost four daughters in that accident.¹⁴

Gender-based violence

Since the start of 2021, 62,383 women have suffered violence in Morocco. According to the General Directorate of National Security, 7% of those cases were minors. Forty-one percent (41%) involved cases of physical violence, 27% economic violence, 26% psychological violence, 4% sexual violence and 2% violence via new technologies.¹⁵

This is certainly a significant increase but even this needs to be revised upwards because of the crimes and abuses that are not declared for fear of reprisals, what people would think, the socio-economic repercussions (stigmatization, discrimination...) and taboos, given that more than 90% of the violence takes place within the woman's close circle.

It is obvious that almost five years after the entry into force of Law 103-13¹⁶ on combatting violence against women, the situation is only getting worse. This is because the problem does not lie in the enactment of laws but in their enforcement and in a change in mentality by returning to Amazigh values of equality and respect between the sexes.

Access to health and education

In the Atlas regions, commonly known as “useless Morocco”, access to health care remains a real problem due to the lack of sufficient hospital infrastructure, qualified personnel, ambulances, and also practicable roads to access them. The winter of 2021 was no exception, and women in labour and their babies yet again died in Amazigh communities in the Imilchil area. The pandemic has shone a light on these regional disparities, on difficulties related to the right to health and the effects of a public policy of privatizing the two vital sectors of health and

education without taking into consideration the instability and paltry means of the majority of Moroccans and, particularly, the Amazigh.

In the city as well as in the countryside, the socio-economic situation of women is a major barrier to accessing health and education. Due to lack of resources, many girls continue to be forced to leave school and marry while still children. As exemptions can always be found to any law, child marriage is still on the rise because it is tolerated by religious leaders and legitimized by the poverty of families who see their daughters as a way of earning money. Early motherhood, socio-economic insecurity and ignorance are all elements that throw women into a spiral of vulnerability and make them the perfect victims. It is also important to note that this situation worsened during the pandemic when social isolation was even greater.

Apart from the psychological effects of the pandemic, the repeated lockdowns and state of health emergency have dealt a blow to the fundamental rights and freedoms of everyone, although more specifically women, whose burdens have increased and whose quality of life has decreased. Unfortunately, there is virtually no assistance provided to women. The isolation of women today is such that even when they try to take control of their lives and ask for a divorce, they very rarely have the right to the reparations provided for by law because the patriarchal justice system believes that a man has the right to rebuild his life and does not have to provide for his children and that the mother should not be for divorce but should instead continue to suffer.

Aid and organizations

The situation today is such that even the associations and organizations that claim to be focused on supporting women are, for the most part, more interested in funds and grants than in the fate of Amazigh women and their condition. This practice has spread since the arrival of the Islamists to power and has been encouraged by aid and funding programmes that pay insufficient attention to the content and ideologies of these organizations. The Amazigh women's associations that do defend their Amazighness are *de facto* excluded, do not receive grants and are better known as forming part of the Amazigh Movement (e.g., AZUL).

Amazigh women understand their context and reality better than anyone and are quite capable of proposing their own solutions: viable solutions for the preservation of knowledge, expertise and skills, and for protecting the ecosystems and ensuring sustainability of resources, hence the need for an inclusive, participatory and bottom-up approach.

Despite these constraints, the women of the Amazigh Movement, the Amazigh associations and the Amazigh activists are fighting, in their elds, with their own resources, day after day, on a local, national, regional and global level, to prove that they exist and that they are capable of bringing about change: change that is specific to them and in line with their values, culture, identity and, above all, their Indigenoussness, and which will allow them to effectively engage in global objectives while being themselves.

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Amina Amharech was born in El Hajeb, in the Moroccan Middle Atlas. She is a teacher, artist and poet, and a committed Amazigh activist. A 2018 OHCHR Indigenous Representatives Program Fellow, she advocates for the land, cultural, identity and linguistic rights of the Amazigh and Indigenous people more generally. She is a founder member of the ACALI Association (Action Culturelle Amazighe Laïque) since 2014, a founder member of the Amazigh community network AZUL (since 2013, and which she represented on the Global Council of the International Land Coalition from 2018 to 2021) and a founder member of the Feminist Land Platform since 2019. Contact: aminaamharech@gmail.com

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