




**SPECIAL FOCUS ON AMAZIGH LITERATURE: CRITICAL AND CLOSE
READING APPROACHES**

Identity Poetics in Modern Amazigh Poetry: Dramatizing History and Memory in Ali Sidki Azaykou's Poem "Taketbiyt"

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Abstract

A pioneer of the Amazigh Cultural Movement and modern Amazigh poetics, and one of the first intellectuals to interrogate – from the margin – Moroccan official historiography, Ali Sidki Azaykou has produced two collections of poetry, *Timitar* (Signs) and *Izmulh* (Scars), in addition to a posthumous collection, *Indguiguen Aghaman* ("Eternal Sparks"), appearing in 2019. The present article examines "Taketbiyt" (1971), a poem about the Koutoubia Tower in Marrakesh. While considering the poem, I use Pierre Nora's notion of "site[s] of memory" and Paul Ricoeur's "trace of memory" to probe the significance of this centuries-old tower in Azaykou's poetry. I argue that Taketbiyt is evoked as a "site of memory" or a "trace of memory" to both remember and celebrate the forgotten Amazigh ancestry and history. I demonstrate that Azaykou's central concern, through such an act of remembrance, is to interrogate the biased representation of the Moroccan past in the present. As such, the poem complicates Amazigh cultural identity vis-à-vis the hegemony of Moroccan official historiography. Along with an abundance of metaphors, the poem displays an unparalleled allusive diction and a copious array of historical and geographical symbols. I conclude that, with its intellectually-informed theme and its self-consciously weaved form, "Taketbiyt" is a quintessential archetype of modern Amazigh poetry.

Keywords: Amazigh revival; Amazigh identity; history; memory; "site of memory;" modern poetry

The poet . . . is not likely to know what is to be
done unless he lives in what is not merely the
present, but the present moment of the past, un-

* **Note:** all translations from Amazigh, Arabic, or French are the author's.



less he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of
what is already living.¹

Ali Sidki Azaykou was born in 1942 in the village of Igran n Tuinkht in the High Atlas. After a successful primary school trajectory in his native village in Taroudant, he moved to Marrakesh, where he completed secondary education and entered the *Centre de Formation des Instituteurs* (The Teachers' College). Working simultaneously as a middle school teacher and continuing his higher education, he earned a Bachelor of Arts in History from Mohamed V University in Rabat. Having worked as a high school teacher for a short period, he joined the faculty of letters in 1972. Azaykou is known as a fervent defender of Amazigh identity. In 1967, he co-founded the *Association Marocaine pour la Recherche et l'Échange Culturel* (The Moroccan Association for Research and Cultural Exchange, "AMREC"). AMREC was established to reevaluate cultural heritage, literature, and popular arts as well as advocate for recognition of cultural diversity and the promotion of the Amazigh language and culture. In 1979, Azaykou left AMREC to create the *Association Culturelle Amazighe* (ACA), which was more politically involved than the purely cultural AMREC.

Throughout his life, Azaykou significantly influenced the Amazigh movement. When he died in 2004, he was able to witness the fruits of his long-term activism. The Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture ("IRCAM") was established in 2001, and the experimental introduction of the Amazigh language into the Moroccan education system took place in 2003. Azaykou was an acclaimed poet, a pioneering historian, and a sharp critic. In addition to his two collections of poetry, *Timitar* (1988) and *Izmuln* (1995), he authored several works on history, including *La montagne marocaine et le pouvoir central: un conflit Séculaire mal élucidé* (1990), *L'Islam et les Amazighes* (2002), *L'histoire du Maroc ou les interprétations possibles* (2003), and *Quelques exemples de toponymes marocains* (2004). Azaykou will be remembered as a prescient scholar who understood the intricacies of power in writing history.

With his two poetry collections *Timitar* ("Signs") and *Izmuln* ("Scars"), Azaykou pioneered modern Amazigh poetry – not only because he was among the first to compose Amazigh poetry in written form, but also because his verse was noticeably new. Although informed by oral poetics common in the Moroccan Souss region, namely the poetic genre known as *amarg*,² he

¹ T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Co, 1964), 11.

² Amongst the different meanings of *amarg* in the tashelhit variety of Amazigh language, Abdellah El Mountassir (2004) compares *amarg* to a "lyrical song filled with regret and sorrow, feelings often due to the remoteness of the loved one or to life far from the native country." Such poems are sung by poets/singers called *rwais* (sing. *rais*). "These itinerant poets," Elmountassir adds, "are always in perpetual wandering and, therefore, suffer from loneliness, which translates in the presence of a melancholy emotion in their poetry." In short, the different meanings given to *amarg*, that is, poetry, heartache, regret, nostalgia, etc., turn out to be, somehow, all interrelated. See Abdellah El Mountassir, *Amarg: Chants et poésie amazighs (Sud-Ouest du Maroc)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 14-15, author's translation.

consciously set out to renew the tradition through the written form. His poetic innovation can also be detected in the uncommonness of his diction, metaphors and imagery, and symbols. His treatment of Amazigh identity and Amazigh emancipation from an intellectually- and poetically-informed vision is another aspect of his innovation. As such, he clearly departed from the ordinary themes of his time, which mostly revolved around love and marriage, religious themes, social values, and lamentation of social hardships.

“Taketbiyt,” the poem I examine in this article, is the eighth poem in Azaykou’s poetry collection, *Timitar*, which contains 33 poems composed between 1967 and 1980.³ In this poem, written in 1971, Azaykou addresses Taketbiyt, the famous tower in Marrakesh, evoking the glorious history of the Amazigh ancestors who founded it and lamenting the amnesia to which they have been subjected. I take Taketbiyt as a metaphor for Imazighen, their language, and their incontrovertible contribution to Moroccan history and cultural identity. I will also consider the monument a “site of memory,” informed by Pierre Nora (1989), and a “trace of memory,” drawing on Paul Ricœur (2000). As such, the poem dramatizes not only issues of memory and history in their intersection or divergence, but also complicates questions of cultural identity and the hegemony of official historiography.

The appearance of the word *timitar* (“traces or signs”) in connection with the Taketbiyt tower on line 8 is the most telling symbol in the poem, for these words are pregnant with connotations that ultimately inform the theme and message of the text. The tower attracts the speaker’s attention, in the first place, because it is not an ordinary object, but one with a specific symbolic value. Like all historical monuments, as Pierre Nora proclaims, Taketbiyt is a “site of memory,” a “lieu de memoir.” Nora posits that “These lieux de memoire are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it.”⁴ Asserting that *il y a oublie là où il y a eu trace* [“there is forgetting where there was a trace”], Ricœur, in turn, emphasizes the fact that the thing remembered is present in the “unconscious”; that is, it only awaits for an “external stimulation” to reveal itself to the individual and lead him to the peaceful reading of memory in time, or to what he labels “happy memory.”⁵ Akin to every “site of memory,” therefore, Taketbiyt has a mnemonic function depicted in lines 8-10. As the lines read, Taketbiyt *biddent* (“Taketbiyt is standing”) / *ar ax takka timitar* / (“and giving us signs”) / *N willi zrinin* (“of the ancestors”). In what sounds like an epiphanic moment or Ricœurian “external stimulation,” the sight of the tower reveals memories of ancestors to the speaker. Paradoxically enough, the memories evoked in such a moment constitute a recognizable phase of Moroccan history, a phase that the poet – who is also a historian – knows very well.

³ Ali Sidki Azaykou, *Timitar* (Rabat: Okad, 1988), 38-44.

⁴ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Memory and Counter Memory* (Spring 1989): 12. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928520>.

⁵ Paul Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l’Histoire, l’Oubli* (Paris, Seuil, 2000), 374.

The poem thus becomes a site in which history and memory intersect and compete. History is to be seen, here, as “the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer”; that is, “a representation of the past.”⁶ Memory, on the other hand, is “a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present.”⁷ For Marie-Claire Lavabre, memory “has more to do with the truth of the present than with the reality of the past.”⁸ Memory, for Lavabre, does not restore or reestablish the past; it only shows what is selected from it, reworked by actors of the present according to their projects and their strategies. This view recalls Peter Burke’s position highlighting the subjective and selective aspect of both history and memory, their complex interrelation, and their ultimate connection to the present day political and cultural concerns. As Burke remarks,

Both history and memory have come to appear increasingly problematic. Remembering the past and writing about it no longer seem the innocent activities they were once taken to be. Neither memories nor histories seem objective any longer. In both cases historians are learning to take account of conscious or unconscious selection, interpretation and distortion. In both cases they are coming to see the process of selection, interpretation and distortion as conditioned, or at least influenced, by social groups. It is not the work of individuals alone.⁹

This contentious intersection between history and memory exists in Azaykou’s poem. On the one hand, Taketbiyt is a historical trace mediating between present and past. History is the main theme of the poem. Nora insists, in this respect, that “[w]ith the appearance of the *trace*, of *mediation*, of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory but of *history*.”¹⁰ On the other hand, as Nora advances, not just history, but memory, too, might grow out of objects: “Memory takes root in the *concrete*, in spaces, gestures, images, and *objects*.”¹¹ Besides, as Nora notes, “memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual.”¹² That is, memories ensure, as Riceur points out, a temporal continuity to the subject and allow him/her to identify and orient himself/herself in time. The possibility of memory’s emanation from concrete objects, which renders it close to history, and its individuality, which differentiates it from history marked by “its claim to universal authority,”¹³ point to the proposition that memory can be considered an equally central theme as history in the poem. Hence, in his poetic rendering of Taketbiyt tower, Azaykou *appropriates*

⁶ Nora, *Between Memory and History*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Marie-Claire Lavabre, “Entre histoire et mémoire, à la recherche d’une méthode,” in *La Guerre civile entre histoire et mémoire*, ed., Jean-Clément Martin (Nantes: Ouest Éditions, 1995), 43.

⁹ Peter Burke, “History as Social Memory,” in *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 44-45.

¹⁰ Nora, *Between Memory and History*, 9, emphasis added.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

Amazigh past, as *both* history and memory, in order to deal with current issues and intricacies of Amazigh identity and Amazigh revival.

The title “Taketbiyt” is intriguing because of its uncommon and counterintuitive nature. The word *taketbiyt* has been erased from Amazigh native speakers’ vocabulary, replaced by the dominant Arabic designation *al-kutubiyya*, or, at times, the French name *la koutoubia*. The tower is, in a sense, a “signified” or a “referent” lacking, oddly enough, a “signifier,” that is, a name in Amazigh language. Even as such, it still functions as a “sign” (*tamatart*), but only a “marker” of “absence”: absent Amazigh names and absent processes of naming in Amazigh language. The tower is, in this sense, a physical “witness” (*inigi*) to the epistemological and ontological violence meted out to Tamazight and its speakers. In lines 39-40, the poet addresses the tower: *kmmmin ayigan inigi / f wawalad nnix* (“you are the witness / to what I have said”).

From a historiographical perspective, being a permanent mark on the landscape, an *inigi* (“witness”) or *tamatart* (“trace” or “sign”) of history, *Taketbiyt* testifies to the fact that Amazigh people left a trace of their history on the world.¹⁴ More specifically, the tower attests to Amazigh people’s establishment of a cultural and civilizational transformation on the Moroccan landscape. It therefore destabilizes the “mission civilisatrice” and its claim of bringing culture and civilization to an assumedly cultureless people, a colonial claim that was made to justify the colonizing project. One crucial aspect of such destabilization is to be seen in *Taketbiyt*’s architecture. The form, durability, and aesthetic aspects of the tower exemplify an ancient distinctive Amazigh architecture antedating and simultaneously influencing Islamic architecture in North Africa and Andalusia. As Mohammed Chafik notes in this regard,

Moroccan Islamic architecture is . . . imprinted in the spirit of Amazigh art, which tends to simplicity and to durability seeking. This is best reflected in the forms of the square-based towers, as embodied in the three Almohad minarets, particularly Koutoubia in Marrakech, Hassan in Rabat, and Giralda in Sevilla.¹⁵

The peculiar French designation of *la koutoubia* in fact deeply dismantles colonial discourse and displays its internal inconsistency. While the name is coined to refer to a discursively constructed absence – an absent history, culture, and civilization – the object named, being a material trace of history, actually attests to an always already disavowed presence by colonial discourse.

¹⁴ I am invoking here Hegelian historiography’s view of history as, among other definitions, traces left by groups of people on a landscape and written documents working as archives. The African, for example, is produced by such a historiographical model as “unhistorical” and “historyless” because, for Hegel, the African, considered illiterate and cultureless, has left neither traces of history on the African landscape (monuments and otherwise), nor written archives to testify to his inscription in history. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans., John Sibree Kitchener (Batoche Books, 2001), 110-117.

¹⁵ Mohammed Chafik, *Lamhah aan Thalathatin wa Thalatheena Qarnan min Tarixi al Amazigh* [An Overview of Thirty-three Centuries of the History of Amazigh People] (Mohammedia: Alkalam, 1989), 77, author’s translation.

Azaykou accordingly derides the coined French name *la koutoubia* by the historically and culturally overloaded native alternative name “taketbiyt.”

Azaykou retrieves the indigenous name in a larger endeavor to renew Amazigh lexicon.¹⁶ His handling of the Arabic version of the name requires a careful linguistic treatment. Here, the Amazigh morphological marker of the gender/feminine singular noun, *ta-----t*, replaces the equivalent Arabic marker of the (definite) gender/feminine singular noun marker, *(al) -----tu*, or *(al)-----ah*.¹⁷ Through such a subversive reversal gesture, the authentic name, ‘*taketbiyt*,’ is recovered, replacing the Arabic, forced and normalized in the state’s official discourse of Arabization. Azaykou’s “de-Arabizing” of the term does, nevertheless, not mirror the process deployed to “de-Amazighize” the name. Azaykou’s act consists of liberating Amazigh language, albeit by following a reversal of the Arabizing process. Nevertheless, unlike the power-affiliated Arabizing act, Azaykou’s gesture did not have any hegemonic power nor was it an attempt to create room for Tamazight by erasing Arabic. The poem’s title “Taketbiyt” is, in this sense, a metaphorical manifestation of a recovered Amazigh linguistic identity that the process of Arabization had erased. It therefore points to a history and an identity condemned to invisibility and oblivion, but which can be read in and recovered from traces of history.

The first six lines of the poem describe the tower. Lighted, towering high in the sky, and resisting the devastating effects of time and erosion; these are the main characteristics of the tower. The light is described in the verse: *Taketbiyt hati terghamt / gis a tifawin* (“Taketbiyt, you are lighted”) (lines 1-2). The Amazigh term *tifawin*, taken literally means “light” – plural form – the physical light projecting from the tower. Metaphorically, this light suggests, and stands as a rem(a)inder of, the Amazigh enlightenment epoch, probably the glorious reign of the Almohad dynasty when Imazighen were the Moroccan state leaders and the producers of a civilization that exceeded the actual Moroccan borders and extended to Andalusia and most of the current Maghrib and West African regions. A striking allusion to this history, a great deal of which is lost, comes in Line 11: *Lulen gh udrar* (“Born in the mountain”), for the Almohad leaders originated in the High Atlas, known as *Adrar n Dern*. There, they started the process of founding what would stand as a great empire by taking intensive religious and political teachings in Tinnel, a school established by al-Mahdi Ibn Tumert (1077-1130), the spiritual leader and political founder of the Almohad dynasty.

Only when Ibn Tumert’s disciples ensured the Great Atlas tribes were fully converted to his doctrine did Abdelmoumen Ben Ali Algumi (r. 1130-63) call them to march on Marrakesh.¹⁸ In addition to evoking the glory of the

¹⁶ A case in point is his bilingual dictionary, *Petit dictionnaire Arabe / Amazigh*, ed., Annajah Al Jadida (Casablanca, 1993). Also, he was assigned to the IRCAM mission of developing and standardizing the Amazigh language.

¹⁷ Unlike in Arabic, or in French, there is no marker for definite/indefinite article in Amazigh language. There is, however, a marker of gender singular form: *ta---t* for singular feminine nouns; and *a---* for singular masculine nouns.

¹⁸ I have summarized here details in Ali Sidki Azaykou, “Tinnel,” in *Namathij min Asma’i al Aalami al Jughrafiati wa al Bashariati al Maghribiyyati* [Examples of Moroccan Toponyms] (Rabat: IRCAM, 2004), 53-58.

Almohad state, the light emanating from Taketbiyt also suggests the “learned” and “enlightened” character of Almohad leaders – the actual founders of the tower – their clear strategic vision, and their brave character.

The height of the tower is the second element that appeals to the poet’s eyes. Azaykou deploys the expression *tgan ixef gh igenna / zund aggu mac nettat* (“she raised her head ostensibly into the sky / soaring above everything like smoke”) (lines 3-4). This expression is literally used to mean that something stands outstandingly “high.” As an idiom, however, it is exclusively used to describe people, rather than objects, to imply that they are “proud,” or “smug.” Through this simple, but beautiful and intelligent, linguistic gesture, Azaykou makes a smooth transition from describing Taketbiyt as an object, with marked physical height, to personifying it, imbuing it with “pride,” the major distinctive quality of the Amazigh self. Indeed, “Amazigh” refers to “a free person,” and Imazighen can barely conceive of freedom without pride or conceit, for, as Mohammed Chafik notes, “the name ‘Amazigh’ is fraught with connotations of nobility, magnanimity, and pride.”¹⁹ As such, the description of the tower functions as a way to address the Amazigh self.

The poem displays an innovative dialogism. While the direct addressee is Taketbiyt, the metaphorical addressee is the Amazigh self. And everything said literally or metaphorically to or about Taketbiyt simultaneously applies to the Amazigh self. Both the tower’s survival of time (*treza imasen n uzemz*; “she has broken the tools of time”), and its outliving of wind erosion (*ajjawu tennerat*; “she emerged victorious over the wind”) may literally be associated to Taketbiyt, the object. Read metaphorically, these lines point to the Amazigh self’s overcoming of silencing strategies of Arabization and official historiography, which have had devastating and violent effects on Amazigh language and culture.

Azaykou provides a striking series of allusions and metaphors to celebrate his ancestors: *willi zrinin* (“those who came before us”); *Lulen gh udrar* (“born in the mountain”); *Asafu gh ufus* (“A torch in the hand”); *Agharas d ugayu fawen* (“The head and the road illuminated”); *ul iga Azawad* (“the heart is inflaming”). His poetry is replete with historical symbols and geographical symbols deployed to merely “allude” to these ancestors without naming them directly. One such geographical symbol is *adrar* (“mountain”), appearing in line 11: *Willi ugrenin isendar / Lulen gh udrar* (“Those who overcame the obstacles / Were born in the mountain”). This alludes to Amazigh people’s forced choice to live in the Atlas Mountains and hardly-accessible places to avoid the attacks of foreign invaders, such as the Romans, Vandals, and frequent waves of migrating Arab tribes.

In another poem entitled “Izenzam” (“The Mute”), Azaykou celebrates *Adrar n Dern* (the High Atlas). The mountain is portrayed as the mythical cradle of the Amazigh language and the site of the forthcoming Amazigh rebirth. He asserts that the glorious ancestral Amazigh kings will visit the mountain to replant the mythical Language Tree (*asghar n wawal*). The opening four lines declaim: *Aman adrar a tend ifkan iy uzaghar* (“Water: it is the mountain that

¹⁹ Chafik, *An Overview of Thirty-three Centuries*, 8.

provided it for the plain”) / *Iggig adrar agh ad ittala asin akal* (“Thunder: it is in the mountain that it is born to shake the ground”) *Tudert Atlas nnta agh asd mghin izuran* (“Life: it is in Atlas, indeed, that its roots are grown”) / *Timmughra d tizidâr, ghinn aghen munent* (“The greatness and power: it is in there that they meet together”).²⁰ Indeed, only for Imazighen does *adrar* symbolize the mythical origin of life (*izuran* and *tudert*), greatness (*timmughra*), and ultimately a nursery for Language Tree (*asghar n wawal*). As such, aspects of natural geography, like *adrar*, and the indelible myths that the native people have created about themselves and their places are symbolic guides for the recognition of ancestors. Hence the mountain symbolizes life, renewal, and power. If we replace the mountain with its inhabitants, then it becomes clear that Imazighen (Amazigh people) also have these qualities.

Azaykou’s use of *adrar* in “*Taketbiyt*” works in the same way. He does not name the Amazigh ancestors but he alludes to them by referring to the mountain. *Adrar* functions here as a geographical symbol that is replete with historical implications regarding Amazigh ancestry and works as a synecdoche for the rem(a)inder of the un-Arabized Amazigh names of geographical sites. Amazigh names are inscribed in topography, and *taketbiyt* is one of them despite centuries-old use of Arabic *al-kutubiyya*.

As a historian, Azaykou is tremendously concerned with the way Moroccan history has been produced. Particularly, he examined the ways in which entire periods and entire rural regions were left out of history despite the fact that they were the cradle of great dynasties. In a rare stance on Moroccan and Arab historiography, he writes,

Our first problem is the rewriting of our history, because the way in which it has been written is inaccurate and the specific circumstances under which it has been written make it that it has been written that way. Besides, it is a *foreign product*; which is to say that the history we read, study, and are influenced by, is written from a *foreign perspective*, a different mentality, and for purposes that are not only different from ours, but they oppose them. Our history is not yet written.²¹

Azaykou thus questions both colonialist and Oriental Arab approaches to Moroccan history. His misgivings about colonial historiography took issue with its affiliation with the colonial institutions and the broader uses of history for the colonial project of domination and exploitation:

Who wrote our history? Our history is the product of two opposite perspectives, both of which are foreign. The first is the European perspective dictated by our contact with the Europeans, especially *the French*. . . . To continue its *hegemony* and its *exploitation*, *the French colonizer* deployed an army of specialists in every field, especially in the fields of *history*,

²⁰ Claude Lefébure, *Méditerranéennes* (n°11, hiver 1999/2000, Paris).

²¹ Azaykou, “*Tarix al Maghrib bayna ma huwa aalayhi wa ma yanbaghi an yakouna aalayhi* [The History of Morocco as It Is and as It should Be],” *Majallat Al Kalimah* 1 (1971): 16.

sociology, and religion. . . . This kind of historiography is not expected to meet our social and cultural needs, for it is based on different premises and directed toward different objectives.²²

Most importantly for Azaykou, history writing has to emanate from the needs of the people whose history it is, which is not the case in colonial historiography.

The second category of historiography that is “foreign” according to Azaykou, is Oriental Arab historiography. This historiography has a Moroccan variant, which shares its perspective and assumptions:

The *oriental perspective* has the same objectives. The Orient has brought us a new religion, one that has become the religion of the natives. The defense of the religion and its believers has become a noble purpose. The defense of the new components of identity (Islam and Arabic) and the work to consolidate them has become the foundation and the objectives of Oriental historians and Moroccan historians sharing the same perspective.²³

What is implied in these words is that this category of historiography has been silent about the contribution of Amazigh people to Moroccan, Andalusian, North African history, and pre-Islamic history. Because, as Azaykou advances, the endeavor of converting Imazighen to Islam has largely been synonymous with the process of their Arabization, and Islam and Arabic have often been considered two faces of the same coin.²⁴

Azaykou further develops this issue when he pointed to the urgency of rewriting Moroccan history:

Both European historiography and Oriental historiography have undesirable effects on our history, whose roots going back to pre-Islamic times antedate the arrival of the Europeans and the Arabs. As a society, we are not boughs without roots. Rather, our thinking, behavior, personality, and value are linked to our distant as well as to our recent past. If we proceed from this consideration, the inevitable way to reach a sound solution to the issue is to rewrite our history and strip it of malicious ideas and the psychological war with which it confronts us.²⁵

²² Azaykou, “History of Morocco,” 17. Author’s translation, emphasis added.

²³ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

²⁴ See details of this position in Azaykou’s “Raddun aala Radd [A Response to a Response],” an article in which he reacts to Ahmed El Fahsi’s stance on his article about the problems of research in the field of history in Morocco, an article titled, “min Mashakili al Bathni al tarixi bi al maghrib [Problems of Research in the Field of History in Morocco.]” See next note. Mohamed Chafik also criticizes Moroccan postcolonial nation-state for denigrating Amazigh language and propagating Arabization by putting Tamazight in a mutually exclusive relation with the homogenized entity of Arabic/Islam. See Chafik, *An Overview of Thirty-three Centuries*, 102-05.

²⁵ Chafik, *An Overview of Thirty-three Centuries*, 18, author’s translation.

Rewriting history is therefore not a choice, but rather a crucial project for the assertion of the Amazigh identity. Taketbiyt represents, conceals, and conveys these issues of (un)written history. Specifically, the builders of the tower are sidelined in Moroccan history. Originating in the countryside, like most Moroccan dynasties, these ancestors have been almost wholly overlooked by what Azaykou has called “urban historians of official events.” The combination of these urban historians’ leanings and their bias toward “the ruling families at the expense of all other details” resulted in Imazighen’s erasures from history.

His two primary examples are the Almoravids and the Almohads, the greatest Amazigh dynasties. The former was a dynasty whose traces on Moroccan landscape have become exceptionally scarce:

The Almoravids, the product of the Moroccan southern country, who would reign over the entirety of the Maghrib and Andalusia, what do we know about their giant jump from total oblivion to the stage of history? We know very little which is, worse, unconfirmed.

The latter, which is the object of the poem, is disregarded as fanatical and much of its glory has been lost in small details about its identity, which missed the larger picture:

The Almohads who grew up in the heart of the High Atlas, to found one of the greatest empires that North Africa has ever witnessed; what were the conditions giving them birth? What obstacles did they face and manage to overcome? Information that is currently known is not enough to fill the large void that we notice when we are researching for those basic facts without which no history can be constructed.²⁶

In Azaykou’s analysis, this situation is pretty consistent in Moroccan history, allowing him to draw three conclusions: first, “[a]ll great historical movements in Morocco were originated from countryside areas about which we do not know enough.”²⁷ Second, “[t]he history of Morocco is the history of its countryside.” Third, “[n]othing of all that the Arabs wrote about Moroccan history is about the countryside.”²⁸ Together, these three striking conclusions summarize the deep factors behind the actual decaying state of Taketbiyt, which Azaykou, the poet, laments in the third part of the poem.

The third part of the poem (lines 19 to 32) contrasts the chaotic present with the glorious past. Strikingly, images of death and mourning are initiated by images of dirt, degeneration, and dejection. Azaykou produces, indeed, an extremely distressing image of the decomposition that surrounds Taketbiyt. This appalling state of affairs comes from the lifelong oblivion and marginalization that the tower has suffered. He declares: *Taketbiyt ghikkad Rmint* (“Taketbiyt, today, alas, is exhausted”). *Rmint* (“exhausted”) sums it all.

²⁶ Azaykou, “Problems of Research,” 19, author’s translation.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Unlike its exceptional capability to resist time and its effects depicted in the earlier part of the poem (lines 5-6), Taketbiyt is now too exhausted to continue the struggle. The pride symbolized by *Tgan ixef gh igenna* (line 3) is nowadays begrimed and tarnished by dirt. This awful situation has created dejection in this formerly proud place: *ur at issihîl Ulus ikka yas adâr* (“She is indifferent to the dirt smudging her leg”) (line 20). While she used to be a model of rootedness in time and geography, she now looks rootless: *azemz nnagh / Tga zun d igh ur ighwi/ uzûr nnes akal ad* (“in our time, she is crushed with contempt / As if she hadn’t taken / Root in this soil”) (lines 21-23). Unable to bear this sorrowful fate, she has one wish: to die and be buried – *Tra nit as tt iddel / uzemz s tillas nnes / Ghemkli iddel willit iskren kcmen akal /* (“She even wishes time cover her / with its darkness / As it covered those who founded her laying underground”) (lines 24-26). Metaphors of oblivion and death are closely connected in these lines. The expression *iddel / uzemz s tillas nnes* (“time cover by its darkness”) is both a metaphor and a euphemism of “die,” the same applies for the expression *kcmen akal* (“entered the soil”). Hence, Azaykou centers the imbricated motifs of time (history), soil (geography/region), and oblivion associated with death and loss in this poem.

Probably to comfort the tower, the speaker addresses Taketbiyt directly. The poet reminds her of her now-forgotten mythical past: *Taketbiyt gam nnem / gan ghila tallasin* (“Taketbiyt, your past/Is today a myth”) / *Isetmam d kemmi* (“your sisters and you”) / *d itran a tent issen* (“and the stars know it”). The speaker then places blame with everyone for the tower’s dishonorable situation: *Igh d ghayd am issutlen* (“Those around you”) / *han ur igi yat* (“are worth nothing”). Azaykou draws here an arresting contrast. Taketbiyt’s base, the rubbish dirtying it, and the people surrounding it are contrasted with Taketbiyt, her sisters, and the stars. Taketbiyt’s sisters probably refer to the Hassan tower in Rabat, Morocco, and la Giralda in Sevilla, Spain – monuments built by the Almohads in approximately the same period. These towers share with the stars an exceptional beauty and a physical height suggesting that the recognition of their precious symbolic value is beyond mundane people’s reach.²⁹ The two towers, especially, are symbols of pride, dignity, rootedness, and ancestral historical glories. In contrast, the dirt piling up around Taketbiyt’s base and the people surrounding her evoke ignorance of history and disregard for Amazigh heritage.

The disregard for Taketbiyt has other ramifications for Amazigh language. In his poem “Awal inu gan Amazigh” (“Amazigh is my Mother Tongue”),³⁰ Azaykou sadly reports the discouraging responses of those who do not believe that his language exists. The poet, in lines 14-20, relays that *Kra nnan iga tawar-git* (“Some said it is a dream”) / *Iddu flen ax* (“And left us”) / *Isem d iyyi d inna* (“Apologized to me and said”) / *Han ur ssar iffagh/ Kra nnan* (“One that will never come true”) / *Kra nnan* (“Others said”) / . . . / *Mdden ugin ad akw* (“And people do not want”) / *Adên mekli tudênt* (“To share your sufferings”).

²⁹ *Itran* (“stars”) has as its singular form *itri* (masculine form) and *titrit* (feminine form). Both are a common symbol and metaphor for beauty and charm in Amazigh language.

³⁰ Azaikou, *Timitar*, 5-8.

Hence, the poet is left alone to fight for the revival of his language and culture in the absence of solidarity with his co-citizens. Nonetheless, the poet persists, reaching a point where, in the penultimate section, a turning point happens and a shift that heralds a bright future or a radical change of the status quo is announced.

The final section of “Taketbiyt” involves a fundamental departure from the idea and images of death and decomposition constituting the backbone of the penultimate part. In this coda, the speaker heralds the emergence of an Amazigh renaissance and begs Taketbiyt to stand as a witness. While a marked alteration in mood and tone is noticeable here, the metaphorical and allusive language marking the previous sections also prevail. The section actually opens up with the speaker soliciting Taketbiyt to be a witness to a historical shift, or what would be like a birth in death; that is, people who have been for long muted and forgotten will eventually speak: *Taketbiyt i Rebbi bidd sul* (“Taketbiyt, I beg you, stay up”) / *Ad ur iqnêd ul nnem* (“Do not despair”) / *Azur n gam sul idder gitenx* (“The root of the past is still alive in us”). Taketbiyt is, as such, a witness to a Hegelian-like movement of history toward a predetermined and logical conclusion. Just as it has witnessed a golden age that was followed by a fall accompanied with a lasting oblivion, it will as well witness the next cycle of historical rebirth.

This Hegelian kind of logic is actually embodied in the structure of the poem: glory (thesis); fall (antithesis); renewal (synthesis). The speaker’s assuredness is justified by the structure as well as the enthusiasm that characterizes this part of the poem. The following four lines are indicative of such a conviction (emphasis added): *Iqqand I yan iddren assul isawal* (He who is alive will *certainly* / Keep talking) / *Mqqar akw ran as mdden* (Even if people want him) / *a t ittu wawal* (To be forgotten by the word). Moreover, as a “site of memory,” Taketbiyt also functions as a compass giving the speaker and his people a sense of temporal direction, linking them to their past and legacy and guiding their movement toward the future.³¹

Taketbiyt as a metaphor of Amazigh cultural and historical heritage works, following Hegelian historiography, to energize the group’s ultimate emancipation. In Hegelian terms, history and the cultural inheritance of a group constitute the spirit or consciousness of the group as a whole (the *Volksgeist*) and the spirit of every individual in the group (the *Geist*). The *agency* of the group and that of its interdependent individuals is realized – that is as consciousness and freedom – only in a cultural environment of freedom.³² These workings of Taketbiyt as metonymic or metaphorical of Amazigh historical and cultural inheritance are expressed in lines 33-38: *Azur n gam sul idder gitenx* (“The root of the past is still alive in us”) . . . / *Tiddi nnem a yekfisen* (“Your stature sowed”) / *gh ul inu mayad* (“This in my heart”). The last lines of the section

³¹ As Ricœur posits, in this context, one’s singular memories allow him/her to place himself/herself in an evolution of time, as an actor in this evolution, an actor being aware of time. Ricœur, *Mémoire, Histoire*, 115.

³² Alan Patten, “Freedom and Sittlichkeit,” *Perspectives on Hegel’s Idea of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 22.

(lines 39-48) include sets of agrarian metaphors and symbols evocative of fertility and productivity: *Tgit anzâr d wamud* / (“You are the rain and the seed”) / *iwula gh ufus* / (“The plow in hands”) / *Igh illa udêrf* / (“In plowing time”) / *Mnaggaren iwulla krzent* / (“The plows met and plowed”). These metaphors are further telling of that historical and cultural legacy which Taketbiyt symbolizes, namely, Amazigh historical heritage and cultural legacy, together with Amazigh language contributing to their preservation.

The condition for exploring this legacy and harnessing it is the unification of Amazigh people, a condition suggested in the metaphoric expression *mnaggaren iwulla* (“the plows meet together”). Indeed, following Hegelian paradigm, an individual’s self-freedom and a group’s self-freedom depend on each other:

It is . . . only when *Geist* as individual is free that a *Volksgeist* can be free; and it is only through a free *Volksgeist* that the *Weltgeist* can become free. Hegel summarizes this relationship by noting that “the end of the *Weltgeist* is realized in substance through the freedom of each individual”³³

The positive, optimistic, and enthusiastic characteristics of the tone in which the poem closes ostensibly point to Azaykou’s inscription in an uplifting mission, one that prepares for the historically predetermined Amazigh renaissance.

The last section is a model of Azaykou’s poetic conclusions. His poems would usually end with the resolution of a complex issue, an optimistic message following a state of despair, gloom, or degeneration, or a revolution against an undesirable situation. A set of metaphors would often ultimately depict a bright future, one to come only if Imazighen’s unification is accomplished. His poem “Izenzam” (“The Mutes”), which I alluded to briefly earlier, conveys the speaker’s wrath at the Amazigh people’s indifference to their cultural and linguistic identity. Particularly, the last part of the poem contains much enthusiasm and optimism as a result of the poet’s epiphanic vision aroused by the Amazigh myth of the Language Tree. As Azaikou puts it: *Akwey add ay igldan imazighen gh ismdal nnun* (“Rise from your graves! Come, kings of Imazighen”) / *Aglzim gh ufus gat adrar d ttaganin* (“Take the hoe and make a forest out of the mountain!”) / *Asghar wawal iga i izenzam asafar* / (“The Language Tree is a cure to the dumb”) *Awal ur gin assrgm issan a tent* (“Speaking your language is not a shame, know it!”) / *Nkki gix gh Imazighen Atlas ira dd irar* (“I am an Amazigh! Atlas will then respond to me”) / *Nttan ad gix iznzâm ur a-tn ttarux* (“I am also an Amazigh. I don’t give birth to the mute”) / *Gat zund nkkin, tudert n uzaghar nnun* (“Be like me, the life of your plain”).

In conclusion, “Taketbiyt” attests to the outstanding innovation Azaykou has infused into Amazigh poetry. Azaykou’s illustrious creativity and his long trajectory as an Amazigh activist-historian played a major role in his poetic innovation. “Taketbiyt” draws attention to his ability to combine historiographical issues with poetic sensibility to shed light on the state of marginalization of Amazigh language and culture. The poem thus conveys both Azaykou’s

³³ Patten, “Freedom and Sittlichkeit,” 22.

historiographical consciousness and his deconstructive approach to historical amnesia. Issues of Amazigh identity and Amazigh renaissance, he knows, are rooted in history and history (re)writing, and his treatment of the theme of “Taketbiyt” embodies this awareness. Not only is the poem exceptionally metaphorical, but it also contains a copious array of historical and geographical symbols along with a rich allusive diction. If “Taketbiyt” also draws attention to its form, its technique, and its aesthetics, that is because Azaykou – for whom form was as poetic as the poem itself – introduced the poem, five decades ago, to illuminate the modern poets of the Amazigh renaissance that had yet to see the light of day.

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