

Mobilised diasporas: Kurdish and Berber movements in comparative perspective

OFRA BENGIO*

BRUCE MADDY-WEITZMAN*

Abstract

This study is a comparative analysis of the role of diaspora communities in the political and cultural activities of the Kurds and the Berbers (Amazigh) - the two most prominent cases of ethno-national "imagining" among the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region's two main "non-dominant" ethnic groups. Berbers and Kurds, however heterogeneous and varied their multiple historical experiences, all operate within the realm of territorial nation-states dominated by different ethnic groups which have been historically hostile towards alternative conceptions of the political and social order. Kurdish and Berber diaspora communities have engaged in important intellectual, cultural and political activities on behalf of their respective causes. Inevitably, this has also sharpened the hybrid nature of their identities, in ways which distinguish them from those still residing in the "homeland." Overall, the Kurdish diaspora is far more mobilised on behalf of the homeland, politically and ethnically, than the Amazigh, a reflection of the advanced state of the Kurdish ethno-national cause.

Keywords: Kurds, Berbers, diaspora, identities, nationalism.

Dûrvelatîyên birêxistî: Bizavên Kurd û Berberan ji perspektîveka danberhevî

Mijara vê lêkolînê hûrbiniyeka danberhevî ye li ser rola civakên dûrvelatî/diyasporayê yê Kurd û Berberan (Amazîg) di çalakiyên wan ên siyasî û çandî da. Ev her du civak du nimûneyên sereke yê xeyalkirina etno-neteweyî ne di nav civakên etnik yê ne-serdest li herêmên Rojhilata Navêrast û Afrîkaya Başur (RNAB). Her çend bi serboriyên xwe yê dirokî ew ne hemcure û ji hev cuda bin jî, Berber û Kurd xebatên xwe di qada netewewelatîyên de dîkin ku tê da komên etnik yê din serdest in. Ev komên serdest jî mêt ve ye dijberê konseptên siyasî û pergala civakî yê alternatîv in. Civakên dûrvelatî yê Kurd û Berberan li ser nava gelên xwe, xwe têkilî çalakiyên girîng ên ronakbîrî, çandî û siyasî kirine. Bivê-nevê vê yekê bandoreka mezîn heye li ser nasnameya wan a durehî/hybrid ku wan cihê dike ji kesên ku li "welatî" mane. Bi giştî, Kurdên dûrvelatî li ser navê hemî welatîyên xwe ji layê siyasî û etnikî pitir birêxistî ne ji Berberan ku ev yek ji nişan dide bê doza etno-neteweyî ya Kurdan çendî kemilî ye.

دییاسپۆرای مۆبیلیزه‌بوو (وه‌خۆکه‌توو): بزووته‌مه‌وی کورد و بیری‌ز له‌ رۆنگه‌یه‌کی به‌رناوردکارانه‌وه

نهم تۆزینهمیه، لیکدانهمیه‌کی به‌رناوردکارانه‌یه له‌ سه‌ر رۆلی کۆمه‌لگای دیاسپۆرا، له‌ په‌یوه‌ندی له‌ گه‌ل نهم چالاکیه‌ سیاسی و کۆلتوریه‌یه‌ی کورد و بیری‌ز (نهامزیغ) - دوو که‌سی هه‌مه‌ به‌رچاو له‌ "خه‌یالکاری" نینتیکه‌-نهمه‌یه‌ی له‌ نیو دوو گرووبی نینتیکه‌ ژێرده‌سته‌لات- له‌ رۆژه‌لاتی نیوه‌راست و باکووری نه‌غریقا. بیری‌ز و کورد که‌ له‌ بۆاری نهمونه‌ میژووبیه‌وه‌ جیاواز و فرمه‌ش، هه‌ردوکیان له‌ چوارچیه‌ی خاکی نهم ده‌وله‌ت-نهمه‌وانه‌ دا ژبان به‌ سه‌ر ده‌یه‌ن که‌ هه‌م شوبه‌ی ژبانه‌ی گرووبی نینتیکه‌ جیاوازان و هه‌م له‌ بۆاری میژووبیه‌وه‌ له‌ ناست چه‌سکه‌گه‌لی جیگر له‌ به‌رامبه‌ر ره‌وشی سیاسی و کۆمه‌لایه‌تی هه‌نوکه‌یه‌ی دا دوژمنکاریان کردوه‌. دیاسپۆرای کورد و بیری‌ز، له‌ په‌یوه‌ندی له‌ گه‌ل په‌رسی نهمه‌یه‌ی خۆبانه‌وه‌، به‌رده‌وام چالاکی ره‌وشه‌نبیری، کۆلتوری و سیاسیان له‌ خۆبانه‌وه‌ نواندوه‌. به‌ شیوازیکی، هاشاهه‌منه‌گر، نهم چالاکیانه‌ بوونه‌ته‌ هۆکاری به‌رجه‌سته‌بوونه‌وه‌ی سه‌روشتی هه‌یری‌دی یان دوورمه‌گانه‌ی شوناسی وان، هه‌تا نهم ناسته‌ی که‌ نه‌وان له‌ خه‌لکی نیشه‌مجه‌ی ولاتی خۆیان جیاواز ده‌کاته‌وه‌. به‌ شیویه‌کی گه‌شتی، دیاسپۆرای کورد له‌ به‌رناوردکاری له‌ گه‌ل دیاسپۆرای نهامزیغ، له‌ لایه‌ن ولاتی خۆیه‌وه‌ گه‌لیک موبیلیزه‌تر، هه‌م له‌ بۆاری نینتیکه‌ی و هه‌م له‌ بۆاری سیاسیه‌یه‌وه‌، نیشه‌اندهری گه‌شه‌کردن و پێشکه‌وتنی په‌رسی نینتیکه‌-نهمه‌یه‌ی کورده‌.

* Ofra Bengio is Professor Emeritus and Senior Research Fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, where she heads its Kurdish Studies Program. E-mail: bengio@post.tau.ac.il.

* Bruce Maddy-Weitzman is Principal Research Fellow at the Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, where he heads its 'Maghreb Forum'. E-mail: bmaddy@post.tau.ac.il.

Introduction

Throughout the modern era, diaspora communities have played crucial roles in the shaping of modern ethno-national identities among their compatriots “back home”, both culturally and politically. Their inputs have been as varied as the circumstances surrounding each particular case. The motivations underpinning this involvement have been just as varied, but almost universally connected to the identity-building needs of emigrant communities. This is particularly true for intellectuals, whose ties with their “home” communities had inevitably been altered but not entirely broken, and for whom complete and total assimilation into their new environments was generally not an option (Kostantaras, 2008). The result, as Paul Silverstein points out, is that “diasporas and transnational social movements have become constitutive features of the contemporary political landscape” (2004: 238).

This study is a comparative analysis of the role of mainly European diaspora communities in the political and cultural activities of the Kurds and the Berbers (Amazigh), the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region’s two main “non-dominant” ethnic groups, who in recent decades have been engaged in sustained ethno-national “imagining”¹ that pose major challenges to Middle Eastern and North African states. In elucidating and analysing the complex dynamics involving diasporas, homeland communities and European and MENA states, our comparative study extends and complements the work of Senem Aslan, which compares Turkish and Moroccan state policies towards their respective Kurdish and Berber populations and the resulting responses, in terms of the degree of ethno-national mobilisation of each (Aslan, forthcoming). It draws on our own, and others’ research on the two respective communities, combining analysis of published studies and reports with first hand observations and interviews, as well as data drawn from a variety of media sources.

Why is such a study of interest? Berbers and Kurds, however heterogeneous and varied the historical experiences of each Berber and Kurdish community are, all operate within the realm of territorial nation-states dominated by other ethnic groups (Arab, Turk, Persian), ones which have been historically hostile towards more inclusive conceptions of the political and social order. In the increasing globalised world, and in the face of repression by “national” governments, members of each group have migrated in significant numbers to Western Europe, and to a far less extent, North America and Australia. In the Kurdish case, many have also been compelled to migrate to Kurdish regions in neighbouring Middle Eastern states. Those who moved to the West have benefited from political freedoms and a new global discourse on minority lan-

¹ In the sense used by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, NY: Verso, 2006; new edition).

guage and cultural rights.² As a result, they have been able to engage in important intellectual, cultural and political activities on behalf of their respective causes which, at their core, challenge the hegemonic ethos of existing national-territorial states in the MENA region. Inevitably, this has also sharpened the hybrid nature of their identities, in ways which distinguish them from those still residing in the “homeland.” With the boundaries and political-cultural content of the post-World War I MENA state system under increasing stress, Silverstein’s insight regarding the importance of diasporas and transnational social movements is more relevant than ever.

Such a comparison points to both similarities and significant differences. The Kurdish diaspora, overall, is far more homeland oriented, ethno-national in its self-view and seeking to advance a concrete political-territorial agenda than its Berber counterpart, whose agenda, both for the “homeland” and diaspora, is defined primarily by cultural and linguistic concerns. These differences stem from myriad factors, but essentially mirror the differences between both the historical trajectories and current realities of Kurdish and Berber communities in their respective homelands.

Discussing diaspora

Diaspora studies have provided a variety of themes and concepts useful to specific case studies, including the Kurdish and Berber experiences. Rogers Brubaker identifies “three core elements that remain widely understood to be constitutive of diaspora: 1) Dispersion; 2) Homeland Orientation; and 3) Boundary-Maintenance, allowing the community to define itself vis-à-vis all others.” This last point is controversial. In Stuart Hall’s view, the “diaspora experience...is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity: by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*”³ (as cited in Brubaker, 2005: 6). Both concepts are useful: diaspora communities, in order to exist, require boundary maintenance, but given the dynamic environment in which they live, their hybridity requires a constant re-examination of the appropriate boundaries between their community and others. What this also means is that not all ethnic groups which originated in other locales should be considered diasporas, even though the original limited meaning of diaspora, as referring to communities forcefully expelled from their homelands, has been expanded to include much larger numbers of communities dispersed beyond their places of origin. From a different angle, Brian Keith Axel takes issue with the primary analytic focus on “place,” noting that “very often it supports an essential-

² It is worth noting that France is not a signatory to the EU convention on minority languages, which helps explain the Congrès Mondial Amazigh movement’s critique of the French state’s policies, cited below.

³ Original source: Stuart Hall, 1990: 235. *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. In Jonathan Rutherford (ed), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart. (Italics in original.)

sation of origins and a fetishisation of what is supposed to be found at the origin (e.g., tradition, religion, language, race)” (Axel, 2002: 411). In analysing the Sikh diaspora, he proposes an “imaginary” which emphasises not the community’s place of origin but a process of identification formed by the very real violence inflicted upon the community by the Indian state. Disparate Sikh subjects, he argues, “have been constituted globally through torture and the production of knowledge about that torture.” In this case, at least, it is not the homeland which creates the diaspora, but the diaspora which creates the homeland which, as a utopian destination for Khalistani activism, must be understood as an affective and temporal process rather than a place (Axel, 2002). Martin Sokefeld’s study of the Alevi movement in Germany also cautions against essentialist and monolithic constructions of identity, even as they are part of the reality constructed and lived by movement activists (Sokefeld, 2008).

In his important PhD dissertation on the Kurdish diaspora, Khalid Khayati introduces two important notions. The first is *assabiyya* (“solidarity”). Khayati suggests that this term, which was originally brought to prominence in the 14th century by the renowned Ibn Khaldun, is also useful for describing the ties that bind together diaspora immigrants:

Apparently traditional but modern in their performances and ambitions, the solidarity networks of assabiyya (tribes, clans, extended families, sects, brotherhoods, etc.), which observably originated predominantly in central Asia, Africa and the Middle East, not only are the manifestation of various social constructions but function also as a device of identity assertiveness, a sense of togetherness and internal allegiances that are embedded within diasporan populations and transnational social fields. (2008: 35)

In addition, Khayati emphasises the dynamism of the diasporan reality, i.e. the on-going process of change “from a mono-dimensional, victim-related perception of the Kurdish diasporic identity to a more modulated, dynamic and active form of it” (2008: 239). In other words he depicts the change from a negatively-conceived conception of homeland-oriented diaspora discourse to a positively conceived multi-dimensional approach towards the Kurdish diasporic identity (Khayati, 2008). Indeed, this conceptualization may fit not only to the Kurdish diaspora but the Berber and other diasporas as well, emphasising their dual role as nation builders of their original homeland and the struggle for identity and place in their new society. At times, the two roles complement each other, at other times they are at odds. The Kurds tend to belong more to the first category, while the Berbers more to the second.⁴

⁴ From a different angle, the very dichotomy of “home” and “diaspora” may have to be at least supplemented with something more supple, for as James Clifford notes, “if there are diasporic aspects of indigenous life, the reverse is also true. For something like an indigenous desire animates diasporic consciousness: the search for somewhere to belong that is outside the imagined community of the dominant nation-state. In diaspora, the authentic home is found in another imagined place (simultaneously past and future, lost and desired) as well as in concrete social networks of linked places.... This fuzziness suggests a certain open-ended historical dynamism.

The statistical problematique

Determining the precise number of Berbers and Kurds is a veritable mine-field, for it immediately touches on the core questions of “who is a Berber?” and “who is a Kurd?”⁵ One may nevertheless make a number of workable estimates. There are approximately 30 million Kurds and 20 million Berbers within their core territories (Greater Kurdistan, encompassing parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria; and “Tamazgha”, the land of the Amazigh (lit. “free men”), stretching from the Siwa oasis in Egypt’s Western Desert westward to Morocco’s Atlantic coast, and from the shores of the Mediterranean in the north to the habitus of the Touareg in the Sahara-Sahel Region.⁶ In addition, there are perhaps 2 million Berbers and more than one million Kurds outside of their “home” territories, mostly in Europe. The Kurdish population in Europe numbers approximately 850,000, with ca. 650,000 residing in Germany: overall, the European Kurdish diaspora constitutes the most politically vocal group of all non-native European communities. In the US there are ca. 35,000,⁷ while elsewhere, there are small Kurdish communities in countries such as Russia, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Australia and Israel (Jews of Kurdish origin, some of whom still carry attachment to their “Kurdishness”). For its part, the Berber population outside of North Africa is concentrated mainly in France, as well as Holland, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Scandinavia, with much smaller numbers in Canada and the US. As with the Kurds, a small number of elderly Berber-speaking Jews reside in Israel.⁸

Chronologically, the diaspora experience began earlier for Berbers than Kurds. Berber out-migration, which commenced at the end of the 19th century and became significant during World War I, was a direct outcome of French colonialism, which had a transformative and lasting impact on all of North Africa, including the Berbers. The Kurds, by contrast, had no such ex-

People are improvising new ways to be native: articulations, performances, and translations of old and new cultures and projects. The increase of indigenous movements at different scales—local, national, regional, and international—[was] one of the surprises of the late 20th century.” James Clifford, “Varieties of Indigenous Experience: Diasporas, Homelands, Sovereignities,” in *Indigenous Experience Today*, Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (eds.). (Oxford, NY: Berg Publishing, 2007), 197-223, quotes on 205, 198.

⁵ For the difficulty in attaining the number of Kurds, see Ayata (2011a).

⁶ The Canary Islands are also included in Tamazgha, although the Tamazight dialect spoken by the aboriginal population disappeared following the Spanish conquest and colonisation, beginning in the mid-15th century.

⁷ According to Mehrad Izadi, the first Kurdish immigrants to the US arrived in the 1930s to Michigan and the upper Ohio Valley, fleeing from the wars and uprisings in Anatolia. Numbering c. 1000, they are believed to have assimilated entirely. The second wave occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly from Iraq, after the collapse of the revolt in 1975 and the outbreak of the Iraqi-Iranian war (Izadi, 1992: 99-101). According to another source, the Kurds in Europe numbered between 1.2-1.5 million (Candan and Hunger, 2008: 129).

⁸ Kamal Hachkar’s recent film, “From Tighir to Jerusalem”, documents a portion of this community. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LcZoLaMvaP0> (last accessed on October 15, 2013).

perience, and hence there is no colonial legacy, per se, shaping their diaspora, only criticism of the British for having given preference to the Sunni Arab community in Iraq at the Kurds' expense. Indeed, at the end of World War I Great Britain encouraged the growth of Kurdish nationalism in the Vilayet of Mosul, which was populated by a Kurdish majority, only to forsake this idea in 1925 when it assisted in the annexation of the Vilayet of Mosul to Iraq. Overall, Kurdish out-migration, which only began in the middle and latter part of the 20th century, was carried out in two important waves. The first, which started in the 1960s, was that of Kurdish migrant workers from Turkey to Europe, mainly to Germany. The second, which started in the mid-1970s following the collapse of the Kurdish revolt in Iraq, was a by-product of the conflicts between native Kurdish communities and Middle East states.⁹

The impact of France on the Berbers will be treated in more detail later on. Here, one may say that however traumatic colonialism was, Berber out-migration during those years, and after independence as well, was not, in the main, the result of their persecution as Berbers per se. The Moroccan state's repression of the Rif rebellion in 1958-59 may constitute an exception: although the degree of out-migration generated by the episode has not been documented, Rifians have long viewed their economic straits, the primary reason for continued out-migration over the decades since then, as a function of the state's deliberate neglect. The Kurds, by contrast, in addition to migrating for economic reasons, have frequently been victimised by persecution and violence, migrating for safety and shelter both to the West and within "Greater Kurdistan" (e.g. the flight of Iraqi Kurds to Iran following the collapse of the 1975 Kurdish war against the Ba`th regime as well as after the 1991 Gulf war). The Kurds from Turkey belonged to a great extent to the working class who moved to Western Europe in the 1960s (Hassanpour, 1992: 71-175), following more the pattern of other Turkish and Berber migrants, i.e. migrating in search of economic benefits and social and political stability. By contrast, the Kurds from Iraq were to a great extent refugees who started to emigrate to Europe and elsewhere following the collapse of the 1975 rebellion. According to Hassanpour, this Iraqi Kurdish refugee population consisted of a large number of educated, urban middle class Kurds who were politically active in the Kurdish national movement. Before 1979, the Kurdish diaspora consisted mainly of Kurds from Iraq, Turkey and Syria. After the Islamic revolution in Iran and the ensuing conflict between the central government and the Kurdish movement, Iranian Kurds began emigrating as well (Hassanpour, 1992). Today, nearly 85% of the Kurdish diaspora are from Turkey, followed by those from Iraq. Sweden, with its generous immigration policy initiated by Prime Minister Olaf Palme during the 1970s and 1980s and material incentives for publication and artistic creation, was able to attract a major part of

⁹ A small number of Kurdish male members of the Ottoman aristocracy, as well as Kurdish political dissidents, found their way to the West in the second part of the 19th century (Hassanpour, 1992: 217).

the Kurdish intelligentsia while Germany mainly took in immigrant workers.¹⁰ Sweden is also among the few European countries which registers the Kurds as Kurds (Baser, 2011: 10).¹¹

With this background in mind, and in light of the emergence in recent decades of articulate Amazigh and Kurdish identity movements, one may pose the following questions: How has the Diaspora experience shaped their respective collective identities in both the “homeland” and the “new” countries? What are the political dynamics of the two-way street: how do the diaspora branches of the Kurdish and Berber movements, respectively, interact with their “home” branches? What is the nature of the relations between the two diaspora movements and European states?

Mobilisation in diaspora countries

France has been an indispensable location for the forging of modern Amazigh identity. In particular, it was the (Algerian) Kabyle immigrant community, the oldest and largest of all North African communities in Europe, which provided crucial strategic depth, intellectually, culturally and politically, vis-à-vis the newly independent (as of 1962) Algerian state. For militant Kabyles, these were difficult years. After brutally repressing the Kabyle-based opposition led by Hocine Ait Ahmed in 1962-65, the Algerian revolutionary national project left no space for alternative socio-cultural visions. In effect, there was a symbiosis between the “inside” and “outside” with regard to Kabyle Berber militancy. The first organisational developments in this regard came with the establishment in Paris of the *Académie Berbère* in 1967 and the *Groupe d'Études Berbères* (GEB) in 1973. The *Académie* was the work of a small collection of Kabyle luminaries drawn from the worlds of scholarship, arts and politics. Its primary objective was to make the general public aware of the history and civilization of the Berbers and to promote their language and culture (Dirèche-Slimani, 1997, 92-3; Silverstein, 2004, 71; Goodman, 2005, 37-40; Maddy-Weitzman, 2011, 73-75). The *Académie* also established a presence among the Kabyle immigrant community, often giving unemployed immigrants shelter for the evening, teaching interested Kabyles a modified *tifinagh* script for writing in *taqbailit* (the Kabyle dialect), and publishing pamphlets, whose readership was overwhelmingly between the ages of 18-30. Activists made the rounds of 2000 Kabyle-run coffee houses in Paris alone to distribute the *Académie's* monthly bulletin. Moreover, its publications circulated informally and clandestinely within Algeria, often being brought into the country by re-

¹⁰ Interestingly, Khayati, for example, mentions that the number of writers in Sweden surpass those in Kurdistan (Khayati, 2008: 50).

¹¹ Other countries which register Kurds as Kurds are Finland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Switzerland. Wahlbeck, O. (2012). “The Kurdish refugee diaspora in Finland”, *Diaspora Studies*, 5 (1), 44-57. <http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/jDQaI3Hjh9zymxRiTsjz/full>, (last accessed on 15 October, 2013).

turning travellers. Overall, its efforts helped to lay the ground for the development and dissemination of a historical consciousness and modern cultural identity among Kabyles, which radiated out to other North African Berber communities as well (Direche-Slimani, 1997: 94-97).¹²

The *Groupe d'Études Berbères* was made up of university students and scholars who had split from the ranks of the *Académie* in 1972 over the latter's overly politicised approach. The GEB had a not dissimilar agenda, but expressed it in a more dispassionate manner. One of its chief successes was in achieving intellectual and scientific legitimacy from the French academy for Berber language and culture studies, as it forged links with various scholars and institutions, and not just from the Berber community. In fact, its academic sympathisers and participants in its scholarly work, would come to include such leading intellectual luminaries as Ernest Gellner, Pierre Bourdieu, Germaine Tillion and Lucette Valensi. One outcome would be the Paris-based journal of Berber studies, *Anal*, founded by Mouloud Mammeri, a towering figure and perhaps the single most important contributor to the rise of the modern Berber culture movement (Maddy-Weitzman, 2011: 73, 76-79). Other bodies were spawned as well during this period. In turn, the GEB's organisational framework would provide important political support during the seminal Berber Spring events in 1980, which constituted the first sustained challenge to the Algerian authorities by the fledgling Berber identity movement (Goodman, 2005: 29-48) and GEB members would also subsequently take an active part in the Kabylia-based political parties, Ait Ahmed's *Front des Forces Socialistes* (FFS) and, following its creation in 1989, the *Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie* (RCD). The flourishing of Amazigh movement activities following the abortive Berber Spring in 1980, and the sudden opening up of Algeria's political system in 1989 permitting associational activity was paralleled by a similar flourishing in France. The ensuing brutal civil strife in Algeria during the 1990s had a major impact in the Kabylie region, and hence on the Amazigh community in France, further strengthening Amazigh identity and resulting in increased mobilisation on behalf of the homeland in distress (Silverstein, 2004: 180-82, 220-23, 238-40; Maddy-Weitzman, 2011: 111-17).

Among the Amazigh diaspora communities, organisational manifestations have been numerous as well, ranging in focus from the global to the local. On the global/pan- level, there is the Congrès Mondial Amazighe (CMA), first established in 1997 and made up of over one hundred different associations from both North Africa and the diaspora. Headquartered in Paris, the CMA was explicitly designed to be a non-governmental international organisation, independent of all governments and political parties, one which was peaceful, democratic and dedicated to the defence of human values, while rejecting totalitarian, sectarian, racist and sexist ideologies. Not surprisingly, diaspora Berbers could be found in considerable numbers in the body's institutions: at

¹²See also the interview with former *Académie Berbère* activist Ould Slimane Salem, *Izuran-Racines*, 8-21 January 2007.

one point, for example, the 39 member federal council, the Congress' official legislative arm, included 10 persons from the diaspora, mostly of Kabylean origin, and the 10 member World Bureau, the Congress' executive arm under the president's authority, included two persons from France and one from Germany.

For all of its limitations and internal splits, the CMA framework provided a meaningful vehicle by which to promote the Amazigh agenda, both in North Africa and in the diaspora, vis-à-vis other international organisations. For example, Kabylie's "Black Spring" in 2001, a period of unprecedented violent confrontation with the authorities that resulted in more than 130 fatalities prompted a number of CMA protests to various international bodies and leaders, including UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, the UN Working Group on Autonomous Peoples, the Durban international conference against racism, the UN committee on economic, social and cultural rights, and European Union officials. A number of Berber associations, both in North Africa and the diaspora, have made the advocacy of the Berber cause in various international forums a central thread of their activities. As such, they sought to bring pressure to bear not only on the Moroccan and Algerian states, but also to highlight the repressive policies of Mu`ammar al-Qaddafi's Libya towards its largely marginalized Berber population, and the dire straits of the Touareg in Mali and Niger. Indeed, Touareg representatives, usually based in France, have participated in the CMA from its inception in the mid-1990s, and diaspora Touareg have established a number of associations of their own. Defence of the Touareg against the repression of Malian and Niger governments in the 1990s, and since the renewal of conflict in 2006, was an integral part of the France-based Amazigh associations lobbying efforts directed at UN and European institutions and international NGOs. Doing so gave further tangible expression to the "pan-Berber" imagining of the homeland of Tamazgha and voice to the Berber community most distant from modern Amazigh stirrings. More recently, the (short-lived) establishment in northern Mali of the breakaway state of Azawad by Touareg rebels was celebrated by Amazigh organisations in North Africa and the diaspora and which sought to lobby international organisations and governments on its behalf and organised demonstrations of support in a number of European cities. (The Islamists/Salafi component of the Mali rebellion, and the rebels' previously close alliance with Libya's late dictator Qaddafi are inconvenient facts that are studiously ignored or downplayed by the Amazigh movement).

Benevolent associations dedicated to specific, local concerns of particular villages and groups back home (e.g. arranging the return of bodies of deceased community members for proper burial arrangements) have long been a part of the Amazigh overseas communities' experience, but have expanded in scope as the Amazigh identity movement has gathered steam in recent years. This phenomenon provides further indication that the line between "outside"

and “inside” is often blurred. One indication of this is the continued presence of deeply embedded political cultural norms which derive from the historical centrality of tribal forms of social organisation, resulting in the failure to go beyond local concerns and work for the broader good of the Amazigh community. A more general caveat is that, as with all social movements, one should be wary of conflating Amazigh movement activists with the community (or communities) they purport to represent (McDougall, 2006: 184-224; Mundy, 2010: 81-111).

As with the Berbers, the Kurdish overseas communities have functioned as cultural, political and economic lifelines for the Kurds in the homeland regions. Again, similarly to the Berbers, the Kurdish language was historically almost exclusively oral and suffered severe repression by independent national states, making it difficult for the Kurds residing in the different parts of Kurdistan to construct a national project and make their case known to the world. In such circumstances, Kurds outside Kurdistan fulfilled an indispensable role of developing a Kurdish national consciousness and a sense of solidarity among the Kurds in the diaspora and the homeland as well as internationalising the Kurdish cause (McDowall, 2004: 455; Candan and Hunger, 2008: 130; Khayati, 2008: 67). In Khayati’s words, “it was in the diaspora that the idea of nationalism took advantage of the democratic circumstances in the West and systematically advanced and reproduced itself” (2008: 76).

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One of the first examples of such efforts was the Kurdish journal, "Kurdistan", which first appeared in Cairo in 1898 (altogether, there would be 31 issues published). The publishers were members of the Bedirxan family which played an important part in the Kurdish national movement. Its first publisher was Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan, whose life story paralleled that of the paper. As he moved from place to place, the journal moved with him. Until 1902, it appeared sporadically in Geneva, London and the English town of Folkestone. Eleven issues of “Kurdistan” were published in Cairo between 1917-18 (Fu’ad, 1939). Bedirxan explained his motivation thusly:

*They [the Kurds] are not aware of what is happening in the world and in their neighbourhood. [Therefore], I have put myself to the task of producing this newspaper, God willing, every fifteen days. I have named it ‘Kurdistan’. In this newspaper I emphasise the importance of education and science.*¹³ (cited in Kurdish Commentary, 2009.)

Few Kurds could read Kurdish at that point in time, and even fewer had access to the journal, hence its impact was negligible. But for modern-day Kurdish nationalists, it stands as an important early symbol of Kurdish nationalism.¹⁴

¹³ Original source: Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan (1898, 22 April). *Kurdistan*, 1.

¹⁴ The Bedirxan Foundation has of late compiled the 31 issues of “Kurdistan” into a book, which was displayed at a Kurdish cultural festival in June 2011 in Paris.

This early sign of Kurdish ethno-national activity outside Kurdistan was followed up in Europe only in 1956, with the establishment of the first Kurdish student union in West Germany. The Union included members who hailed from different parts of Kurdistan and studied in different European countries. A much larger organisation was the Confederation of Associations from Kurdistan in Europe [*Konfederasiona Komeleyen Kurdistan li Ewropa*; KOMKAR] the first Kurdish workers' association, which was established by students in the 1970s and in the course of time grew into a federation with branches in many European countries (van Bruinessen, 2000).¹⁵ However, the strongest and the most effective Kurdish organisation was that of the Kurdistan Workers' Party [*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*; PKK] which started its activities in the 1980s and during the 1990s became the dominant Kurdish group in Europe (Baser, 2011: 14). These organisations and others used Kurdish cultural centres across Europe as a cover for raising money for Kurds in the homeland. In this regard, the most successful one has been the PKK: according to one source, half of its budget during those years came from the diaspora (Hoffman, 2007: 2).

On the cultural level, Sweden has served as a crucial setting for organised Kurdish activity, just as France has for the Amazigh movement. One notable difference is that Swedish authorities have been unabashedly supportive of Kurdish culture and communal activities, while the French establishment has been ambivalent at best towards the Amazigh movement, so as not to antagonise North African governments. According to Mehrdad Izadi (1992):

in Sweden, the government has devised its own comprehensive educational program for its Kurdish immigrants and now publishes textbooks, newsprint, and other materials in both north and south Kurmanji and in two alphabets [Arabic and Latin] catering to the Kurdish immigrant communities from Iraq and Turkey. (p.100)¹⁶

For his part, Martin Van Bruinessen (2000) provided the following details:

Presently, some 40 to 50 books in Kurdish are published each year in Sweden alone, about half of them in the northern dialect (Kurmanji) spoken in Turkey. The number of periodicals is even more impressive. By the latest count, between the years 1956 and 1998, no less than 98 journals and bulletins in Kurdish (and another 25 journals addressing Kurdish audiences in other languages) were published in Sweden.

Meanwhile, Kurdish organisations and cultural centres mushroomed in Europe and beyond, contributing significantly to identity and nation-building of the Kurds. These organisations include: The Kurdish Institute of Paris [*Institut Kurde de Paris*], founded in 1983 by Kurdish intellectuals living in various European countries; Kurdish institutes founded in Brussels (1989), Berlin (1994), Moscow (1996) and Washington DC (1996); and a well-endowed

¹⁵ Initially, KOMKAR focused on concrete needs, not on political developments in their "home countries". As it became more political in orientation, tensions with the PKK rose accordingly.

¹⁶ See also Hassanpour: 217. The two most important Kurdish dialects are Kurmanji and Sorani. Kurmanji itself has two dialects, the northern and southern (Izadi, 1992: 169).

Kurdish library in Stockholm (1997), with “each differing from the others in constituency and types of activity, but all of them contributing to the consolidation and strengthening of Kurdish language and culture” (Bruinessen, 1999). Similarly, the National Union of Kurdish Students in Europe was established in Munich in 1965; the Kurdish Academy of Science and Arts established in 1985 in Stockholm; the Kurdistan National Congress (KNC) was formed in London in 1989 (Nebez, 2004: 74); and the Kurdish Studies and Students organisation, which was established in 2005, also in London. A Kurdish umbrella organisation directly involved in political issues is the Confederation of Kurdish Associations in Europe (*Avrupa Kürt Dernekleri Konfederasyonu*; KONKURD). Established in 1994, KONKURD comprises more than 165 associations throughout 11 European countries (van Amersfoort and Boutylkova, 2009). These associations publish c. 80 Kurdish newspapers and magazines (Baser, 2011: 15), all of which are devoted to preserving the Kurdish identity, language and culture as well as their links to the home regions. In recent years, pan-Kurdish tendencies began to develop among diaspora Kurds. One of its most important expressions was the Kurdistan Parliament - in exile-, established in 1995 in The Hague. It included 65 members: 59 men and 6 women (Kutchera, 1995). The oath which they took in both the Kurmanji and Sorani dialects is telling: “I swear to take into consideration the will of my people in all circumstances... and to work for the liberation of Kurdistan” (Holgate, Keles, Kumarappan, Pollert, 23). In 1999, the parliament dissolved itself, merging into the Kurdistan National Congress [*Kongra Netenjiya Kurdistan*, KNK] in an attempt to create an organisation more representative than the parliament had been. Interestingly, a recent convention of the KNK describes the organisation as “forming a higher body of the Kurdish people to protect the interests and unity of the nation of Kurdistan,” which was called “an international colony in the Middle East” suffering under “the repressive colonialism of the states of Turkey, Iran and Syria” (Gunter, no date: online dictionary).

Generally speaking, one can say that the demands and aspirations of the Kurdish activists in the diaspora have been more far-reaching than those in the “homeland.” One reason for this is that Western democracies allow them to express themselves freely, while similar behaviour in the homeland entails considerable risk. The best example is in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan where, notwithstanding the autonomous entity which has emerged there, the leadership is very careful not to raise separatist slogans, let alone openly advocate independence. By contrast, the KNC advocates both, with the declared aim of achieving “the independence for Kurdistan, that elementary right that does not need any evidence or proof” (Mella, 2005: 10). To that end, the KNC established “the Western Kurdistan government in exile” in 2004 in London, whose aim was “to realise the sovereignty of the Kurdish people in their own historical homeland [and] to create a state of Kurdistan” (Mella, 2005: 245). On the whole, the Kurdish diaspora has been able at times to influence policy-making both in the host countries and in the homeland, playing a double

role of contributing to the struggle for Kurdish rights in the homeland and mediating between the host state in the diaspora and their brethren in the homeland, or between different Kurdish factions there (Baser, 2011: 4). As van Bruinessen has put it:

Kurdish institutes, Kurdish print media, and Kurdish language courses that operate in Western Europe outside the control of the Turkish state [and for that matter in Greater Kurdistan] have provided the Kurdish movement with instruments of nation building comparable to those normally used by states (1999).

Another important role played by the Kurdish diaspora is the internationalisation of the Kurdish cause, expressed most vividly by the European Parliament, which for nine consecutive years has held an annual conference to discuss the topic of Turkey and the Kurdish issue (Casier, 2011).¹⁷ Can Mutlu (2007) summed up these efforts thusly:

As a result of active lobbying in Brussels and constant pressure on Western European governments, the 'Kurdish question' became a cause célèbre in Europe. Due to activities outside Turkey, the Kurdish cause evolved from a domestic Turkish matter to an international cause, thus bringing global attention on the day-to-day lives of Kurds living in Turkey. The increase of actors involved in the conflict stems from the mobilisation and political involvement of Kurds in the diasporas. This involvement served to increase global interest in the conflict, thereby bringing the global into the local (p. 120).

The impact of political developments in the homelands

The Berber identity movement is an amorphous, many-headed phenomenon with a clear core demand: the recognition by state authorities of the existence of the Amazigh people as a collective, and of the historical and cultural *Amazighité* (Berberity) of North Africa. The most immediate and concrete manifestations of that recognition focuses on making Tamazight an official language, and redressing the multitude of injustices which have been inflicted on the Berbers over the last half-century, through corrective educational, social and economic policies. Regardless of the specifics in each country, the Berber culture movement wants nothing less than to re-fashion the identity of North African states, to rewrite their history, and fundamentally change the basis of collective life there.

Nonetheless, the specific developments on the ground within the core territorial regions affect activities in the diaspora. For example, the Amazigh question in Morocco has historically never had the same harsh confrontational overtones with the state as it has had in Algeria. More recently, the Moroccan state has gone to considerable lengths in legitimising Amazigh identity,

¹⁷ On 5-6 December 2012, one of the authors of this piece (Professor Bengio), was invited to address a European Parliament session on the Kurdish issue. One was left with a very strong impression of the high degree of pan-Kurdish cohesion and mobilisation on behalf of their ethno-national project.

culminating in the adoption in July 2011 of a new constitution which explicitly recognises the Amazigh language as an official state language, and included the Amazigh in its definition of Moroccan identity (Maddy-Weitzman, 2012). These very different Moroccan and Algerian historical contexts are reflected in the activities and discourse of their respective diaspora communities. More generally, the concrete political goals of the Amazigh movement are tentatively expressed and encompass, at most, demands for autonomy and federalism by a few Kabylean luminaries at home and in France, and the occasional Moroccan Riffian and Soussi.¹⁸ Within the Kabylean French community, divisions during the 1990s tended to mirror those in Algeria, as associations often constituted branches of the two competing Kabylean political parties.

Kurdish diaspora groups, by contrast, are extremely political in their orientation, as befitting the bloody conflicts in Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan, and severe repression in Syria and Iran. Thus, for example, the Kurdish community in the UK has a high percentage of political refugees (Holgate, et al, 2010: 2) and is among the most politicised groups of emigrants there (Roj Women's Association, April 2011: 6). Kurdish emigrants carried with them the Iraqi Kurdish Democratic Party [*Partiya Demokratî Kurdîstan*; KDP]'s long-time advocacy of autonomy and federalism, articulated as early as 1946, and expressed it more freely and clearly than they would or could have back home. Even more widespread and encompassing have been the activities of the PKK. Its European activities were significant, "as it allowed it to draw the support of the Kurds in Europe and the funding it collected enabled it to finance and expand its guerrilla activities in Kurdistan" (Gunes, 2012: 109). Indeed, the PKK's activities in Europe, especially in Germany, constituted a significant part of its political mobilisation. The main body that organised these activities was the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan [*Eniya Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan*; ERNK]. Thus, ERNK organised numerous events such as rallies, demonstrations, hunger strikes, and Newroz festivals, which helped raise public awareness of the Kurds' struggle. The PKK also established a publishing house in Germany, which enabled it to disseminate its ideas (van Bruinessen, 1999). In addition, ERNK established links with socialist and working class parties as well as human rights organisations that "gave the PKK leverage in a diplomatic sense to put pressure on Turkey" (Gunes, 2012: 110).

More recently, the implosion of the Syrian state has generated an unprecedented level of self-assertion among Syria's traditionally ignored Kurds. Salih Muslim, the leader of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party [*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokratî*; PYD], has been criss-crossing Europe during this past year seeking to mobilise support among the Kurdish diaspora as well as drawing international attention to the plight of Kurds in Syria

¹⁸ In 2010, the veteran Kabylean activist and singer Ferhat Mehenni went beyond these bounds, proclaiming the establishment of the "Provisional Government of Kabylie", whose purpose was to bring about the establishment of an independent sovereign state in Kabylie.

Diaspora-State dynamics

There are obviously many positive aspects of living in the West for both the Amazigh and Kurdish movements: the freedom of association and speech, freedom to use their spoken and written language, the ability to organise festivals and openly celebrate national days. This freedom enabled the Kurds to establish the MED TV station in 1995 with studios in London, England and Denderleeuw, Belgium, which became an important tool for social and political mobilisation both in the diaspora and back home. The Amazigh have sought to copy this success, through the Paris-based satellite BRTV station.

Broadcasting in six languages, including in Kurmanji and Sorani as well as in Turkish, the MED TV reached a wide range of audiences back in Kurdistan, rendering it a thorn in the side of Turkey. Accordingly, a certain dynamic was set in motion whereby Ankara pressurised host countries to close the station, but shortly after doing so a new one would emerge under a different name. Thus for example, when MED TV was closed in 1999 under the allegation that it was the mouthpiece of the “terrorist” PKK, the name of the station was replaced with MEDYA TV, and when this was banned in 2004 it was replaced by ROJ TV. Then, in February 2012, Roj TV was superseded by Stêrk TV. This cat and mouse game illustrates the triangular relations that developed between the state, the diaspora and the host countries. The fact that Ankara established its own Kurdish station, TRT6, in 2009 is just one indication of how diaspora-based actions have an effect on governments at home (Ayata, 2011b).¹⁹

The organised Kurdish presence in Europe also serves as an important pressure group, for example regarding Turkey’s accession to the EU or the treatment of Kurds in Iraq, Iran or Syria (Mella, 2005: 277). More recently, Kurdish grievances have found new channels of expression, including appeals to the European Court of Human Rights (Bilci, 2009: 31).

More generally, the existence of a large Kurdish diaspora in Europe and the US served as a catalyst for internationalising the Kurdish issue in Iraq during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The West’s change of heart toward the Kurds went through two phases: the first was after the Iraqi army’s chemical attack on the Kurdish town of Halabja in March 1988 in which 5,000 Kurds were killed, while the second followed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the March 1991 Kurdish uprising following the Gulf War. The wide coverage by the international media of Halabja brought the Kurds sympathy and humanitarian support from certain NGOs and individuals, the most prominent of whom was Danielle Mitterand, wife of France’s then-president, Francois Mitterand. In January 1989, six months after Halabja, President Mitterand convened a conference against the proliferation of chemical weapons. In November of the same year, Danielle Mitterand assisted in the holding of a

¹⁹ Roj TV, which broadcast in 70 countries, was outlawed in mid-2013.

conference promoting the Kurdish cause. She also travelled to Iraqi Kurdistan, expressing publicly her sympathy with the Kurds. No doubt, the activities of the *Institut Kurde* in Paris, headed by Nezan Kendal, helped bring the Kurdish cause to her attention and that of the French people.

The same trend continued even more forcefully after 1991, when the Iraqi Ba`th regime was internationally ostracised. This fact facilitated two important developments for the Kurds: Kurdish representatives became *personae gratae* in those countries and the Kurdish narrative was acknowledged and legitimised for the first time. As a result, Kurds became an important lobbying force for the Kurdish cause at home, as representatives either of Kurdish self-governing institutions in Iraqi Kurdistan or of organisations in the diaspora.²⁰ No less important was their role as intermediaries in various economic and business transactions between companies in those countries and Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish region's economic flourishing after the collapse of Saddam's regime in 2003 owes much to these activities.

Certainly, relations between Kurdish communities and their host states have hardly been free of tension. Western government attitudes towards the Kurds have partially been a function of relations between host states and the home state. For example, Germany's close ties with Turkey led Berlin to adopt the official Turkish doctrine of not recognising Kurds as a distinct ethnic group, which put the migrant Kurds in an especially difficult situation (Blatte, 2002). Nor was Berlin more forthcoming towards the PKK. No doubt, the violent activities of PKK in Germany itself did not help endear it to the German government which outlawed the organisation in 1993.

Relations between the various Kurdish diaspora groups have also been fraught with problems, reflecting the existing fragmentation among Kurdish communities in Greater Kurdistan. As with the Amazigh communities, the fact that Kurdish dialects are not always mutually intelligible certainly does not make things easier. Moreover, the various groups do not necessarily have a common agenda. For example, a Kurdish Syrian diaspora group named itself the "Western Kurdistan government in exile", in order to emphasise that it deals mainly with the problems of Syrian Kurds. Similarly, it vows to struggle for the independence of Kurdistan, "foremost of which [is] the part occupied by Syria" (Mella, 2004: 3). More generally, there is not a strong, visionary and legitimate leader around whom all Kurds can unite, something which most political movements require at some point in their history in order to succeed.

A particular weak point for the Kurds regarding its image in the West is that their strongest component in the diaspora is sympathetic to or even part

²⁰ For example the European Parliament discussed in March 2012 the genocide of the Kurds under Saddam. Halabja conference in European Parliament discusses Kurdish genocides, in *KurdPress* http://www.kurdpress.com/En/NSite/FullStory/News/?Id=1093#Title=%0A%09%09%09%09%09%09%09%09%09%09%09Halabja_conference_in_European_Parliament_discusses_Kurdish_genocides%0A%09%09%09%09%09%09%09 (last accessed on October 15, 2013).

of the PKK, which has been widely viewed in the West as a terrorist group, hence stigmatising the Kurds in general. But with the opening of negotiations between Ankara and the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, in March 2013 these negative dynamics began to change. It is therefore possible that if these negotiations succeed, European countries might drop the PKK from the list of terrorist organisations and thus endow the Kurds in general with a more benign image.

Overall, Kurdish activities in Western countries demonstrate a steadily increasing degree of mobilisation in support of the Kurdish cause in the homeland regions. Thus, the Kurdish diaspora in Europe and elsewhere has been tirelessly active in awakening the world's conscience to the Kurds' traumatic experience under the Ba'ath regime and in encouraging European countries to view the Halabja massacre and more generally the Anfal campaign during the 1980s, in which c. 180,000 Kurds were massacred, as constituting an act of genocide.²¹ Members of a number of European parliaments who are of Kurdish origin have been instrumental in bringing the Kurdish voice to their institutions. These efforts began to bear fruit in November 2012 when Norway became the first country to affirm that Iraq had committed genocide against the Kurds, followed by Sweden and Britain. Other countries such as Canada, the Netherlands, Germany and France have also been considering the matter.²²

By contrast, organised Amazigh diaspora activities are more focused on relationships with their host states, particularly France. France has long evoked ambivalence among the Amazigh, stemming from the colonial experience in which they were singled out for "special treatment" designed to make them junior collaborators/participants in the *mission civilisatrice*. This has created a complex situation, in which some Amazigh militants have adopted wholesale the French colonial discourse ranking the Berbers above the Arabs, and the more general French laïc worldview. As Judith Scheele and Hugh Roberts both note, in doing so, the movement's secular militants risk alienating the larger, more Islamic-centred portions of the Amazigh community (Scheele, 2007; Roberts, 2001).

In any case, the Amazigh movement's critique of France was laid out in a lengthy 2005 report submitted by the Congrès Mondial Amazighe (CMA) to the UNHCR's Committee to End Racial Discrimination (CERD). The document was an alternative report to an earlier French government one on the subject of discrimination in France. Noting that their immigration to France had begun at the end of the 19th century, and that they had played a crucial role in the industrialisation of the country, the report declared that there were

²¹ For the Halabja attack and the Anfal campaigns, see Ofra Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State within a State* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2012), 181-191.

²² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGjFz11iL0A>; <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/british-parliament-officially-recognizes-kurdish-genocide-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=42182&NewsCatID=351> (last accessed on 30 December, 2012).

around two million Berbers [“Imazighen”] residing in France, two-thirds of whom held French citizenship, and who had significantly contributed to all facets of French life. Moreover, the essential values of French society, the report claimed, conformed closely to Amazigh society’s own societal foundations: “democracy, liberty, secularism (*laïcité*) and equality.” French government policy, the report declared, negated the very existence of an Amazigh community, and therefore was in league with those who sought to erase Berber identity. More specifically, France’s sins included enabling radical Islamist groups to expand their penetration of their communities, at the expense of Berber identity and values, housing policies that resulted in ghettoisation, acquiescence to the intimidation of Berber girls regarding the donning of a head-covering, and consigning social and educational responsibilities, in some cases, to individuals and groups linked to radical Islamists.

Similarly, on the cultural and educational levels, the report lambasted France on a variety of matters. Especially disturbing was the state’s agreement with North African governments to send teachers to teach Arabic to “French-born children” of immigrants, “based on foreign programs”,²³ while not recognising Berber, the fourth or fifth largest language group in France, as one of the country’s fifteen minority languages which could be studied in the country’s high schools, a number which the government’s earlier official report to CERD had noted with pride. For those 2,000 students who pursued the study of Berber for their baccalaureate exams, they could do so only through Berber associations, not their schools. Among CMA demands was that France add to its list of officially sanctioned holidays the Yennayer (Amazigh New Year, a traditional agricultural festival) occurring in mid-January and the “Amazigh Spring,” occurring on April 20 (the date of the Algerian authorities crackdown in Kabylie in 1980). In addition, it called for the establishment of Berber Civilization departments in universities, the allocation of an AM or FM radio frequency for a Berber-language station, the creation of a Berber Cultural Centre in Paris to promote Berber culture and undertake exchanges between it and other cultures of France, and the additional creation of French Berber cultural spaces in major cities of France where an important Berber population exists, to promote a multicultural message of peace, citizenship and tolerance.²⁴

The CMA’s report to CERD summarised the overall worldview of Franco-Berber associations, one which sought to fashion a hybrid Euro-Mediterranean identity rooted in France, modernity, democracy and *laïcité*, while being proud of its Berber origins and desirous of cultivating and rejuvenating its Berber language and culture. In that vein, the response of the Berber associations to the massive car-burnings and disturbances in Parisian sub-

²³ The CMA’s push for Berber rights was partly a response to France’s efforts to establish links with North African states and institutes of Islamic culture, while it simultaneously participated in the US-led “war on terror.” Thanks to Paul Silverstein for pointing this out.

²⁴ France: *Discriminations à l’égard des Amazighs*. http://www.congres-mondial-amazigh.org/-/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=535&Itemid=51 (last accessed on 15 October, 2013).

urban *banlieues* and other cities in October–November 2005 was instructive: they completely disassociated themselves, and Berbers as a whole, from the events, blaming it entirely on Islamist and criminal elements. At that moment, it was simply not prudent to emphasise the Berber origins of a significant percentage of French Muslims.

Experiences across Generations – Identities

The experiences of specific diaspora generations among both Berbers and Kurds have hardly been uniform, but some patterns can nevertheless be discerned. Immigrant institutions during first generations are often more informal, and locally focused. At the same time, mobilising for the homeland helps them keep their ties with the old world as well as to face difficulties and crystallise their own identity *vis-à-vis* the new world. Younger generations, on the other hand, do not have an automatic frame of reference towards their homeland, and generally see themselves as belonging to the host states. They are therefore confronted with identity questions different than those faced by older generations.²⁵ Their identity is likely to develop in two contrary, but sometimes also simultaneous ways: either in the direction of assimilation due to “boundary erosion”, namely that they increasingly identify themselves as belonging to the place they now live, along with having lost proficiency in their mother tongue, and/or greater attachment to the homeland because they feel rejected by the society in which they live. Hassanpour points to the danger for Kurdish continuity posed by the fact that the second and third generations of immigrants stop using Kurdish as a spoken language. However, according to McDowall, the second generation showed stronger interest in its origin than their migrant parents (Hassanpour, 1992: 456; McDowall, 2004: 456). Curtis too maintains that the second generation is much more nationalistic than the first generation (Curtis, 2005). Regarding the younger generations of Algerian Berbers in France, 80% of the so-called Beur militants working for a more inclusive liberal definition of French identity during the 1980s were Kabyles (Pföestl, forthcoming). Sayad notes their profound ambivalence and confusion against the background of racism, Islamophobia, and debates over what it means to be “French” (Sayad, 2007: 264–277).

A recent study by two Dutch academics on Moroccan Berbers in the Netherlands concludes that the political orientation towards Morocco has lost some of its importance in the course of generations and that “maintaining a core Berber identity among the immigrants has become the centre of the organizations’ activities in the Netherlands.” Initially, Amazigh organisations in Holland had a political orientation towards the country of origin, motivated by the political circumstances of suppression that existed at that time in Morocco; as time passed, they became more oriented towards questions of identi-

²⁵ On the experience of Kurdish youth in the diaspora, see Eliassi (2011 and 2013).

ty and solving social problems in Dutch society, such as helping younger brothers and sisters in the Dutch educational system. At the same time, they also found that, in general, “Berbers in the Netherlands are not proud of their culture, but try to behave as Arabic as possible” (van Amersfoort and van Heelsum, 2007: 247-248); of course, this doesn’t apply to the activists - like the Kurdish movement, the Amazigh movement is extremely hostile to the ideology of pan-Arabism. More generally, both communities share the common fate of having to contend with anti-Muslim biases and racism in western countries. In addition, both the Berber and Kurdish communities have to struggle with stigmas, some self-imposed, and some held by others. According to a Kurdish activist, “Our oppressors have described us, unjustly and successively, as primitive mountain people refractory to civilisation, lawless, nomadic, tribes without any national consciousness...”²⁶

For a younger generation of Berber activists in France, the search for a viable identity formula during recent decades combined a number of factors: a vigorous privileging of Kabyle symbols of authenticity through which a nostalgic vision of their culture could be reproduced and transmitted, the adoption of new symbols of struggle, such as the Berber Spring and the “martyrdom” of Lounès Matoub,²⁷ and a highly ambivalent view of the French state.²⁸

But as one can discern from the CMA’s critique of French policy, the deck is stacked against the Berberists. It was difficult to “sell” this type of modern Kabyle identity to French-born youth who felt adrift, without roots in either country, suffering from an inferiority complex and in a generational conflict with their own parents, and were thus especially vulnerable to religious fundamentalists who offered them easy solutions. More generally, Berber children were not learning their parents’ maternal language to a sufficient extent. According to a recent study of the transmission of Arabic and Berber to the children of North African immigrants in France, only a little more than 40% of Berber speakers reported doing so, and in the many cases of mixed marriages, this was even less likely (Fihon, 2009: 191).²⁹ From a different angle, a German study of Moroccan immigrants noted a difference between those Berbers who had arrived in the country in the 1960s and 1970s and those who

²⁶ We have refrained from including the details of the interview and identity of the interviewee, in accordance with the latter’s wishes. In general, our many discussions with Kurdish and Amazigh activists have provided us with important insights which have informed our analysis throughout this study.

²⁷ A militant Kabyle singer and activist who was killed in 1998, apparently by Islamists. Algerian officials are widely held by Kabyles to have colluded in the killing. His killing, and the commemoration of the death of 18-year old Massinah Guermah while in police custody, which sparked the 2001 “Black Spring” events, suggests the applicability of Axel’s foregrounding of violence against Sikhs in determining the diaspora imaginary to the Kabyle Amazigh case.

²⁸ For a discussion of the traditional Kabyle house (*axxam*), in the context of uprooting and migration engendered by the encounter with colonialism, migration and modernity, see Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, chapter 3.

²⁹ Interview with Amazigh activist in Paris, October 2003.

had come after 1980. The latter tended more to have been raised in an Arabic-speaking milieu, a consequence of the state's increasing penetration and integration of the Berber-speaking regions, resulting in a weaker Berber identity among the immigrants (Schüttler, 2007).

Meanwhile, recent studies suggest that “digital nation-building is a real phenomenon, especially in diaspora communities without a nation-state.” Furthermore, “these groups use the internet to introduce themselves to the international community as independent ethnicities or nations” (Candan and Hunger, 2008, 125). The internet, the symbol, *par excellence*, of the contemporary global information revolution, has become an additional important tool in the construction of a “landscape of group identity,” i.e., the building of “imagined” Amazigh and Kurdish communities worldwide. The number of internet sites and listservs devoted to their matters has mushroomed, as has the uploading to YouTube of a full range of Amazigh and Kurdish-related events. These new technologies have enabled the dissemination of information and images, often in real-time, as well as stimulating discussion and contacts between activists worldwide (Merolla, 2002). If the building of modern imagined communities was made possible by the spread of print capitalism, the latest technological advances have taken imagined community-building to a whole new level. One concrete outcome has been the forging of organisations whose agenda is explicitly “pan-” in nature. In a study of 103 Kurdish websites, it was found that the symbols of Kurdistan were dominant, including the map, the Kurdish flag and the three national colours, yellow, green and red, all of which helps in transporting national identity (Candan and Hunger, 2008, p. 133. See also Sheyholislami, 2011). Ironically, Berber activists often characterize their fight as “part of the vast movement of resistance to globalisation, which is a movement that is in essence against cultural identities.”³⁰ Can Mutlu summarised the role of the new media for the Kurds thusly: “it can be argued that without mobilisation of diaspora Kurds through modern media and the Internet, Kurdish nationalism would not have received the international support it is enjoying today” (Mutlu, 2007).

In essence, a two-way street was created, as the cultural, social and political activities of Berbers and Kurds, respectively, living beyond North Africa's and Greater Kurdistan's confines both helped strengthen and deepen the self-awareness and activities of their communities back home, and reinforced their own hybrid identities. The outcome was a significant contribution to determining the multiple meanings of being “Berber” and “Kurd” in the modern and increasingly globalised world.

³⁰ Final declaration of the 2nd Amazigh World Congress, Brussels, 7-9 August, 2000 <http://www.tamurt.imazighen.com/tamazgha/index - eng.html> (last accessed on 15 March, 2001).

Conclusion

Looking at developments in historical perspective, one may say that both Kurdish and Berber diasporas are now far more organised and politicised than they were a few decades ago. This reflects the myriad of changes that have taken place in their homeland states, in Europe's willingness to make space for diaspora activities, and in the input of the diaspora movements themselves, vis-à-vis both the homeland states and their new abodes. The Berber and Kurdish diaspora experiences, both in terms of their roles in promoting their respective ethno-national projects and agendas, and in terms of the importance that this activity has for shaping individual and collective identities of the communities, appears to be broadly similar. The veritable explosion in means of communications through new media, particularly the creation of virtual trans-national communities, promises to further intensify the interaction between "home" and "diaspora" with corresponding impact.

Overall, the Kurdish ethno-national cause is far more politically advanced than that of the Amazigh: in Iraq, where an independent Kurdish state appears to be more a question of when than if, and in Turkey, where the Kurdish question remains enormously charged and fraught with political significance. In Syria too there is a significant Kurdish awakening since the upheavals began more than two years ago. One may also note an additional distinction between the two movements and diasporas, centring on the notion of interdependence. In recent years, the veritable explosion of Kurdish political activities throughout Greater Kurdistan profoundly deepened the degree of interdependence between the Kurdish diaspora and the homeland. Kurdish parties and movements in the home countries heavily relied on the lobbying efforts of Kurdish diasporas throughout Europe. In addition, they were influenced by the inputs of diaspora-based Kurdish activists who helped to introduce Western values into the Kurdish political discourse. Conversely, the progress in advancing the Kurdish cause in the home countries strengthened the diaspora's on-going mobilisation efforts, provided it with a new sense of pride, and increased its identification with the Kurdish homeland. Nevertheless, one may suggest that the centre of gravity of the Kurdish ethno-national project has shifted in recent years away from the diaspora to the homelands.

In comparison, the Amazigh movement trails behind politically: its challenge to North African states is more muted, expressed more in linguistic-cultural terms. Unquestionably, the Amazigh "idea" is increasingly visible in North Africa, not only in Morocco and Algeria, the traditional bastions of the Amazigh movement, but also in Libya, Tunisia and among the Touareg of Mali. Nonetheless, the fact that some Amazigh activists have taken to sporting Kurdish flags along with their own at demonstrations and in cyber-space, but not vice-versa, illustrates the greater degree of political mobilisation achieved by the Kurdish movement, and the extent to which the Kurdish ethno-national project is a source of emulation and inspiration for Amazigh activists. In addition, the progress made in the homeland has not generated the same

degree of intensified interdependence between the diasporas and the homeland communities, as in the Kurdish case. The focal point of the movement, on the other hand, does appear to have shifted to the Amazigh homeland countries, as it did with the Kurds.

Summing up, one may suggest that the role of the diaspora for the homeland is so crucial that had it not existed one would have needed to invent it. At the same time, it is the homeland which serves as the sun around which the diaspora planet revolves, radiating warmth and exerting significant and ever increasing gravitational pull.

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