

Berber Identity and the Crisis of Algerian Nationalism

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Berber (Amazigh) culture has ancient roots in the North African Maghreb. These roots, however, are not the catalyst of the flowering Berber political activism in contemporary Algeria. Modern Berber identity and its political salience are the consequence of relatively modern, out-group imposed differentiation and discriminatory state policy. Both the French colonial government and the post-colonial state have identified Berbers as inherently different from the Arab majority; the cultural policies embraced by these regimes exacerbated ethnic differences, psychologically framing Berber culture as intrinsically non-Algerian. Saddled with this disadvantaged, exogenously defined, oppositional identity, Berbers must fight for their deserved place in Algerian history, society, and politics. This paper will trace the development of constructed Berber ethno-cultural differentiation. Furthermore, by illustrating the unique nature of Berber grievances and demands, as well as the distinctive circumstances within modern Algeria, it will advocate a consociational solution for the Berber-Arab conflict.

Before continuing, it is necessary to establish the academic frame and research boundaries of this study. First, although ethnic Berbers live throughout the western Maghreb and Sahara, this essay specifically seeks to understand Berber identity as it developed within the geo-political territory of Algeria. In both absolute terms and relative to their kin in Morocco, Algerian Berbers have received little academic attention—a research trend that seems to be the residual product of antiquated ideas concerning the group's innate passivity. (For an example, see Montagne 1973.) A renewed focus on Berbers in Algeria is vital given the ethnic group's resurgent political activism.

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Moreover, Algerian Berbers provide a quintessential case study for the effect of exogenous actors and state policy on ethnic identity formation and group mobilization.

Second, the term “Berber” must be clarified and functionally defined. Roughly 6.5 million Berbers live in Algeria (constituting nearly 20 percent of the total Algerian population¹) but this categorization represents an amorphous and diverse group, divided loosely into four main tribal groupings. The largest and most influential Berber group is that of the Kabylis, who live in the mountainous areas east of Algiers and constitute over two-thirds of the total. Smaller, less politically active sects include the Chaouias in the Aures Mountains, the Mzabites of central Algeria, and the southern Tuareg nomads. The Kabylis are the vanguard of Berber political activism as they have traditionally had the most contact with mainstream Algerian society and the outside world. Thus, the study of Berber politics in Algeria is essentially the study of Kabylis activism.² This paper will follow the academic norm of consolidating all Berber sects into one cultural-political unit of analysis, casting the actions of the Kabylis as being indicative of general Berber behavior.

A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Berber Identity

The Berbers have existed, at least in name, as a recognized ethnic group for over 3,000 years. The word Berber is, in fact, a derivation of the ancient Greek word *barbaroi*—barbarian. This long history has driven many—Berber and outsider alike—to theorize a primordial basis for the Amazigh culture. There are multiple theories of Berber origin: the conquering Arabs of the 8th century believed the locals were immigrants from ancient Palestine; the Berbers themselves claim a common and direct lineage from the biblical prophet Noah.³ Obviously, a lack of reliable historical records makes it nearly impossible

¹ Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, “The Berber Question in Algeria: Nationalism in the Making?” in *Minorities and the State in the Arab World*, ed. Ofra Bengio and Gabriel Ben-Dor (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 33.

² Maddy-Weitzman, 34.

³ Maya Shatzmiller, *The Berbers and the Islamic State: The Marinid Experience in Pre-Protectorate Morocco* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 17-21.

to substantiate any myth of common origin. Nonetheless, many academics have attempted to use primordialism as the basis of their Berber analyses. This trend is epitomized by the anthropologist Robert Montagne (1973), who asserts that "...the Berber way of life remains impenetrable to external influences."⁴ His treatise, like many primordial studies, denigrates into shallow stereotypes regarding the group. In Montagne's own words, "[Berber cultural] features serve to emphasise what is one of the most characteristic aspects of the race: its lack of imagination and its creative poverty."⁵

Ultimately, investigations of origin and shared descent are unimportant and fruitless; primordial conceptions of Amazigh culture are theoretically dubious and provide little insight into modern Berber identity. Legends of common descent gloss over the reality that modern Berbers are a diverse and polyglot collection of regional tribes, loosely connected only by the fact that their spoken dialects share a common root.⁶ Moreover, primordial approaches fail to explain the significant malleability of Berber culture throughout history. During the Arab conquest of the 8th century, the Berbers adopted Islam en masse; in the modern era they embraced French culture more than any other group in Algeria. The static conception of culture inherent within primordialism simply cannot account for this proven cultural flexibility.

This essay adopts a more plastic, constructivist approach to Berber culture. It asserts that contemporary Amazigh identity is the variable product of outside socio-political forces. Essential to the model is the idea of exogenously-induced change. While many constructivists argue that in-group elites manipulate culture (for examples, see Brass 1996 and Hobsbawm 1996), the driving forces in this paradigm exist outside Berber society itself. Other ethnic groups, using hegemonic state power, have recast what Amazigh culture means in the larger political context. In other words, out-group imposed definitions,

⁴ Robert Montagne, *The Berbers: Their Social and Political Organization*, ed. David Seddon (London: Frank Cass, 1973), 21.

⁵ Montagne, 22.

⁶ William B. Quandt, "The Berbers in the Algerian Political Elite," in *Arabs and Berbers: From Tribe to Nation in North Africa*, ed. Ernest Gellner and Charles Micaud (Washington: Lexington Books, 1972), 285.

structures, and institutions have shaped in-group Berber identity. Brett and Fentress (1998) hint at this negatively-constructed identity when they note:

Berber culture has been apparent to its users only when they themselves are bilingual and bicultural. ... Such a perspective, from such a distance, has been necessary to the definition of the Berbers as a people, and especially as a self-conscious people aware of their difference from others in the world.⁷

This paper also suggests that there is a feedback loop in the exogenous construction of Berber identity. In molding Amazigh ethnicity in certain ways, the perceived meaning of “Berberness” has been reified for other groups in society.

In both theory and methodology, this model is comparable to Latitin’s analysis of Yoruba culture (1985) and Posner’s ethno-lingual history of Zambia (2003). As will be discussed in further detail, it is especially evocative of Mamdani’s study of Hutu/Tutsi relations in Rwanda (2002).

French Imperialism and the Exaggeration of Cultural Differences

Prior to French imperial colonization in the 19th century, Berber culture could best be described as a hybrid variant of the dominant Arab culture. Although they were recognized as a distinct ethnic group, Berbers shared many cultural identifiers with their Arab neighbors. Most important was the fact that the Berbers were Muslims. By adopting the Sunni Islamic faith, Berbers conformed to the principal identifier of Arab society, thereby minimizing the cultural distinction between the two groups. The high number of inter-ethnic marriages and the full Arabization of some Berber populations certainly suggest that contemporary Berbers and Arabs perceived only a small culture gap between their societies. This notion is further substantiated by an alternative legend of Berber origin, one asserting their common ances-

⁷ Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1998), 281.

try with Arabs, which arose in the 9th century.⁸ In this sense, “Berbers were given their legitimate place within the universal Islamic history.”⁹ The establishment of shared religious and cultural roots—even if not based in fact—testifies to a discerned similarity between the two populations.

This is not to say that there were no distinctions between minority Berber and majority Arab populations; certainly, there were key cultural differences between the two groups. This was especially true of rural and mountain-dwelling Berbers, who tended to retain their traditional language, *Tamazight*, and maintain customary social and legal structures. Additionally, they often adopted schismatic variants of Islam, incorporating elements of their traditional worship into the Muslim faith. By founding ‘maraboutic’ religious kingdoms, the Berbers adapted Islam to their traditional social organisation.¹⁰ Cultural differences undoubtedly led to tension, as evidenced by occasional rural revolts in the early years of Islamic rule. However, Arab and Amazigh distinctions were not tantamount to inherently conflictive identities. Being Berber, in and of itself, did not preclude individuals from participation in the larger religious-political community, and Berber culture was generally accepted as a rightful part of the organic whole of Maghreb Islamic society. This intercultural recognition is seen in a myriad of Arab sources, starting in the 13th century, which celebrated Berbers as noble indigenous harbingers to Islam and Arab society.¹¹

With the advent of French colonialism in 1830, Berber identity was recast to maximize differences with the Arab culture. The organic whole of the Algerian Muslim community was fractured by imperial policies intentionally designed to emphasize Berber distinctions. Berber policy in French Algeria was driven by two motivations. First, as in other colonial territories, the French adopted a “divide and conquer” strategy to weaken native resistance to foreign domination. The promotion of an Amazigh identity that was intractably non-Arab mitigated the possibility of mass anti-colonial revolt by pitting Berber and Arab populations against each other. Second, French colonizers

⁸ Shatzmiller, 19.

⁹ Ibid, 21.

¹⁰ Montagne, 10.

¹¹ Shatzmiller, 31.

had a particular ideological and sentimental attachment to Amazigh culture, which made the *mission civilisatrice* of Berber populations particularly important. Colonial policy was guided by the "...thesis of a [Berber] country and its people wrenched away from Europe by waves of invaders from the East..."¹² Theorizing that Berbers were the indigenous ancestors of pre-Arab Christian populations, the French regime was determined to bring the group back into European civilization.

The differentiation of Berber from Arab manifested itself in several ways. The French policy created—or formalized—separate legal and cultural institutions for Berbers, claiming these institutions to be part of "customary rule." As Brett and Fentress explain:

Codified and entrusted to the *jama'a* or village council instead of to the *qadi* or Muslim Judge, Kabyle custom was a means of building on pre-colonial divisions in order to prevent the development of Islamic unity into nationalism.¹³

Moreover, Berbers had disproportionate access to the colonial educational system, giving the group a significant advantage in the colonial regime, relative to their Arab neighbors. Widespread access to education resulted in Berbers using French as a second language, to an extent far greater than among Algeria's Arabs.¹⁴ These advantages produced quantifiable differences between Berber and Arab populations. Favret (1972) notes that preferential status created a modern Berber intellectual and administrative elite several decades before other groups.¹⁵ Prouchaska (1990) confirms that Berbers, despite representing only 20% of the population, constituted a majority of high-skilled labor, native civil servants, and educators.¹⁶ These constructed

¹² Brett and Fentress, 185.

¹³ Ibid, 184.

¹⁴ Maddy-Weitzman, 35.

¹⁵ Jeanne Favret, "Traditionalism through Ultra-Modernism" in *Arabs and Berbers: From Tribe to Nation in North Africa*, ed. Ernest Gellner and Charles Micaud (Washington: Lexington Books, 1972), 323.

¹⁶ David Prouchaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 169.

political, economic, and lingual distinctions would have long-lasting consequences on intercultural relations in Algeria.

French colonial policy was ultimately counter-productive. While educational policy increased the Berbers' use of French, this lingual growth carried little political significance—"...an increasing literacy in French did not carry with it an increasingly loyalty to France."¹⁷ Despite their cooptation into the colonial state mechanism, Berbers maintained a fierce anti-colonial nationalism. The first spasms of Algerian anti-imperialism occurred in Kabylia in the mid-1940s; by the 1950s Berbers "...held commanding positions or were disproportionately represented in nearly every political and military grouping involved in the struggle against French rule."¹⁸ Yet the constructed changes of Berber culture did have a significant impact in other, unintended ways. The Arab majority accepted, whole-heartedly, the French construction of Arab-Berber distinctions. The true legacy of French imperialism was the psychological conditioning of the Arab population—particularly Arab elites—that Berber culture was tainted by foreign influence and thus inherently anti-Arab. This colonial legacy has had long-lasting effects. Even today, "Arab and Islamist opponents to the Berbers accuse them of having received preferential treatment from the French, thus calling into question the Berbers' nationalist and Islamic credentials."¹⁹ The cultural tolerance which had defined the pre-colonial era was rejected. Within the Arab psyche, the Berbers' place in the Islamic community, Algerian nationalism, and the independent Algerian state now had dubious legitimacy.

Algerian Independence, Defining Algerian Nationalism, and the Rejection of Berber Identity

As mentioned above, Kabylia Berbers were amongst the earliest and most fervent participants in the Algerian anti-imperialist movement."²⁰ Berber enthusiasm for the anti-colonial struggle was driven

¹⁷ Brett and Fentress, 270.

¹⁸ Maddy-Weitzman, 37.

¹⁹ Ibid, 35.

²⁰ Quandt 1972, 287.

by an all-encompassing definition of Algerian nationalism which tacitly legitimized Amazigh culture:

Throughout the long and bloody history of the Algerian war, the *Front de Liberation Nationale* (FLN) had held out consistently for a definition of the Algerian nation which included all Native residents of the country, Arab Berber and European alike, irrespective of race or religion.²¹

However, just as a shared enemy makes a strange bedfellow, this multi-cultural definition of Algerian nationality was a temporary strategy for use against the French, not an entrenched ideological conviction. This is evidenced in the fact that shortly after independence, the definition of Algerian nationalism changed radically, becoming much more restrictive and exclusive. Recreating the racialized politics of the colonial era, the majority Arab regime implemented a tripartite definition for Algerian nationalism, based on territory, Islamic faith, and pan-Arab ideology. Rooted in the anti-colonial rallying cry, "Islam is our religion, Algeria our country and Arabic our language," and echoed in first Algerian President, Ahmed Ben Bella's declaration that "*nous sommes des Arabes*,"²² this ideal was concretely articulated in the constitution of independent Algeria. While the Berbers satisfied the prerequisites of Islamic faith and geographic residency, their use of *Tamazight* and their perceived non-Arab culture excluded them from national inclusion. As a result, Berber identity was recast as anathema to the ideal of national unity. Again, the Arabs' negative conception of Berber culture was not a rational appraisal of Amazigh political aims; instead, it was a vestigial psychological orientation stemming from the politics of ethnic differentiation during the colonial period.

The ideological exclusion of Berber identity translated into a majoritarian cultural policy after independence, with direct repression of the Berber population beginning in the early 1960s. Tamazight language radio stations were limited to 4 hours of daily programming,

²¹ Brett and Fentress, 195.

²² The irony that Ben Bella made this statement in French cannot be missed by any student of Algerian history.

the use of Berber names was declared illegal, and public expressions of traditional Amazigh culture were strongly discouraged by the state and its security apparatus. Language policy became the main weapon against Berber ethnicity. The first independent Algerian government (1962-1965) imposed a centralized, Arabic-only language policy. This authoritarian initiative ignored the country's diverse cultural make-up and polyglot linguistic composition.²³ The emphasis on Arabic language was explicitly designed to assimilate all minority identities into the majority Arab culture.²⁴ In total, "...the regime's promotion of Arabization further reinforced the outsider status of the Kabylis" ²⁵ The political effort to make Algeria a homogenous, purely Arab society framed non-conformist Berbers as innately alien and dangerous to the nation.

An Academic Digression- a Theoretical Comparison between Algeria and Rwanda

The historical out-group construction of Berber identity is not without precedence. Indeed, this paper borrows heavily from the research of Mahmood Mamdani and his analysis of Hutu-Tutsi conflict in Rwanda. In tracing the origins of the Rwandan genocide, Mamdani adopts a very similar model. He illustrates how Belgian colonial policy in Rwanda exacerbated differences between Hutus and Tutsis, recasting ascriptive-based ethnicities with politically-based racial identities. The Belgian practice of simultaneously framing Tutsis as a foreign race and endowing them with special benefits was a catalyst for ethnic conflict. Genocide in the 1990s was the product of these radicalized politics; Hutus, seeking vengeance and a Rwanda free of foreign influence, saw Tutsis as inherent dangers to society and reacted accordingly.

In the case of Algeria, the French asserted that Arabs were the racial alien invaders of primordial Berber Algeria. Berbers never attempted to make Algeria a culturally-homogenous Amazigh state.

²³ Mohamed Benrabah, "Language and Politics in Algeria," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 10 (2004): 64.

²⁴ Benrabah, 60.

²⁵ Maddy-Weitzman, 43.

Instead, it was the Arabs who accepted colonial racial categorizations and – perhaps to legitimize their presence in Algeria – strove to eliminate Berber identity. While the racial dynamics played out differently in Algeria and Rwanda, the root cause for both conflicts was the same. The colonizer-defined racial groups left a blueprint for racialized politics. This distinction of races and ethnicities made the categories real and created a path dependency for future ethnic relations.

Admittedly, the Algerian example has not reached the cataclysm of genocide as with Rwanda. Instead, ethnic conflict in Algeria exists as a low-intensity political conflict, with relatively little overt violence. One key variable that may account for the divergent result is that Berbers have been able to organize themselves politically and demand their rightful status in Algeria through traditional, peaceful means.

Emerging Berber Political Identity

Despite being marginalized from Algerian political society, Berbers have been remarkably loyal to the new Algerian state. Support for the young post-colonial regime is reflected in electoral results: 53% of all Kabyles supported the government in the 1963 elections, 57% in 1964, and over 70% in 1969.²⁶ Furthermore, during this time there were remarkably few demands for Berber cultural autonomy. This complacency can be explained in many ways. First, Berbers had a long-established sentiment for Algerian nationalism—even if this feeling was unreciprocated by Arab nationalists. This allegiance to the Algerian nation may have trumped ethnic-based Berber identity. Second, the regime went out of its way to placate Berber populations through massive infrastructural investments in Kabylia and other indigenous areas.²⁷ Perhaps most importantly, Berbers had little political opportunity to organize and act during the oppressive military dictatorship of Houari Boumedienne (June 1965 to December 1978).²⁸

²⁶ Quandt 1973, 301.

²⁷ Brett and Fentress, 273.

²⁸It would be interesting to study Berber political activity—and non activity—within the framework of Political Opportunity theory. Unfortunately, a paucity of data from movement participants makes such an analysis difficult. At best one can theorize that Berber activism was correlated directly to the general political openness of the Algerian regime.

Independent of its cause, the passivity of Berbers in early post-colonial Algeria was a temporary phenomenon. Arabization slowly politicized and radicalized Berber identity—"...once the state moved from 'Algerian' to 'Arab' the ethnic question could not be avoided."²⁹ It is an irony of Algerian history that the very efforts to promote national integration had the opposite effect of activating a distinct Amazigh political consciousness.³⁰ Alienated from national politics and treated as quasi-citizens, Berbers began to organize themselves and assert their place in Algerian society. By the early 1970s, Algerian Berbers were beginning to mobilize around identity-based social and political organizations. Expressions of Berber identity came in the form of festivals, illegal radio programs, journals, cultural colloquiums, and regional political parties. The growth of this distinct Berber civil-society was abetted by a loosely organized Berber cultural movement in France, composed of exiled intellectuals, students, and second/third generation Berber immigrants. Both in France and within Algeria, Berbers were mobilized primarily against the regime's compulsory Arabization policy. Crawford (2001) writes that:

Amazigh (Berber) activists [challenged] this nationalist project, pressing for what they [argued] are basic human rights: the freedom to speak Berber in schools and courtrooms, and for Berbers to take their deserved place in the official history of the nation.³¹

Particularly important for Berbers was the issue of the Tamazight language. As most Berbers speak some dialect of Tamazight rather than Arabic, the regime's monolingual Arabic language policy severely disadvantages Berber society. Crawford illustrates the problems inherent in the Arabized language policy in his case study of rural Berber villages; in their traditional hamlets, Berbers receive little to no education because they cannot communicate with their state-provided Arab-speaking teachers. Moreover, Arabic as the language

²⁹ Brett and Fentress, 274.

³⁰ Maddy-Weitzman, 38.

³¹ David Crawford, "How 'Berber' Matters in the Middle of Nowhere," *Middle East Report* 219 (Summer 2001): 22.

of Algerian bureaucracy limits the extent to which Berber communities can take advantage of state services.³²

The beginning of overt Berber activism can be traced to April 1980. It was the unusual combination of political liberalization following the death of Boumedienne, along with a particularly fierce crackdown on Amazigh cultural traditions, which sparked active Berber political demands. In the "Berber Spring," Berbers repeatedly took to the streets to demand greater autonomy in education, culture, and language policy. The harsh repression of these protests by Boumedienne's successor, Benjedid Chadli, only strengthened the movement; it further politicized the Amazigh population and "laid [sic] the groundwork for an outspoken Berber cultural movement with the potential of regularly rallying support from some 10 to 20 percent of society."³³ Since this seminal event, several Berber political parties have developed, as have the demands for cultural recognition and political openness.

One important characteristic of Amazigh activism is its exceptional lack of violence. Berbers may organize mass protests and strikes, but they do not commit aggressive actions against the state or the Arab populations. This pacifist approach to politics is partially due to a lack of resources relative to the state security apparatus. More importantly, their strategy philosophically reflects their ultimate political goal—a peaceful, multicultural democracy. Indeed, most Berbers view democracy as the best way to ensure their cultural and lingual rights within the existing state.³⁴

Over the last 25 years, the Berbers have been largely unsuccessful in achieving their goal of a multicultural Algeria. This is due not only to the regime's intransigence, but also because of the emergence of a radical Islamist political movement in the 1980s, which pushed for increased Arabization and Islamization of Algerian society.³⁵ This has

³² Crawford, 20-25.

³³ William B. Quandt, *Between ballots and Bullets: Algeria's Transition from Authoritarianism*, (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1998), 36.

³⁴ Maddy-Weitzman, 39.

³⁵ Quandt (1998) suggests that Islamism arose as a reaction against Berber political movements. This is a largely unsubstantiated claim. It seems more probable that both movements arose independently as the result of Algerian political openness in the 1980s.

forced the regime to restrict political participation and placate conservatives through even stronger majoritarian cultural policies. For example, in 1989 a new constitution was passed that reaffirmed classical Arabic as the sole language of the state, and in 1990 the regime mandated that all public facilities—including schools—be completely Arabized by 1997. In the ongoing conflict between Islamist radicals and the regime, “...the Berbers of Algeria stand somewhat apart, opposed not only to the Islamist who seek to affirm the Islamic identity of the nation, but also to the creed of the army and the FLN.”³⁶ Sadly, one of the few issues that the regime and fundamentalist insurgents agree on is that Berberism should be repressed.

The Current State of Ethnic Conflict – Defining the Problem and Identifying a Solution

Ethnic conflict between Berbers and Arabs in Algeria is driven by the state’s rigid and culturally homogenous ideal of Algerian culture, citizenship, and national identity—what this paper terms, “the crisis of Algerian nationalism.” Drawing on colonially-established distinctions between Arab and Berber, Arab elites have established a majoritarian and exclusive conception of Algerian nationalism. National citizenship (as opposed to legal citizenship) has become synonymous with Arabism. This definition inherently casts Amazigh culture as non-nationalist and alien, and frames Berber identity as anathema to state and social solidarity. Benrabah (2004) argues that this exclusive form of nationalism is intrinsic for a dictatorial regime which lacks historical or institutional legitimacy. Inheriting a multi-cultural country with arbitrarily-drawn borders, elites used Arab nationalism—and particularly Arabic language policy—to justify the new Algerian state. In this environment, rival languages and alternative cultural identities cannot be tolerated as they undermine the fundamental legitimacy of the state.³⁷

From a normative standpoint this Arab conception of nationalism seems unfair and unnecessary. Given the Berbers established history

³⁶ Brett and Fentress, 199.

³⁷ Benrabah, 63.

of loyalty to an independent and united Algeria, their exclusion from the nationalist conception is unjustified. It is important to reiterate that Berbers are, in no way, challenging the state or questioning the geopolitical legitimacy of Algeria. As one scholar notes: "...the Berberist agenda operates within the existing state framework, while seeking to institute a liberal, democratic, multicultural order in which their own cultural identity can be developed unhindered."³⁸ Berber demands are limited to calls for a multicultural definition of nationalism and requests for autonomy in education and language policy. Considering that the regime itself is attempting to democratize, these requests hardly appear to be revolutionary, inherently dangerous, or threatening to the cohesion or legitimacy of the state. Returning to the aforementioned comparison with Rwanda, the Berbers' political claims are very much like those of the Tutsis—they demand only that the identity which has been assigned to them be accepted and tolerated as part of the national community.

In view of the fact that the Arab conception of nationalism is the product of deeply engrained psychological conditioning, it seems quite unlikely that this orientation will change. Thus, relations between Berbers and Arabs will probably perpetuate as a low-intensity political conflict. Berbers will continue to demand equal cultural status in Algerian society and politics, while Arabs will view any substantive concession as the devolution of state progress. There may be some symbolic gestures of reconciliation, such as the 1996 constitutional amendment which recognized Berber identity as part of Algeria's common heritage;³⁹ however, until these symbolic half-steps are augmented with substantive policy changes, such as the recognition of Tamazight as Algeria's official second language, no true progress will be made in Arab-Berber relations. Given the repeated Arab hesitancy to accept any multicultural compromise, such a resolution is unlikely.

Yet, if the psychological, emotional, and largely irrational reservations of the Arab elite can be changed, Algeria has an excellent chance of resolving ethnic conflicts peacefully through a consociational model

³⁸ Maddy-Weitzman, 48.

³⁹ Ibid, 47.

of democracy. (Given the regime's recent attempts to liberalize, it is fair to speak of democracy as a possible development.) Arend Lijphart's (2002) model of ethnic reconciliation via power-sharing, regional autonomy, proportionality, and mutual veto seems ideal for Algeria.⁴⁰ Berbers would certainly be satisfied by regional autonomous zones where their language and culture could develop unimpeded. At the same time, the regime would have the ability to pursue its Arabization policy within non-Berber, Arab-majority territories without the inconvenience of recurring Berber protests and strikes. Some form of political power sharing, as well as equal and proportional funding of the culturally segregated educational systems, would need to be established to guarantee a multicultural equilibrium. Despite the obvious difficulty in implementation, in theory consociationalism is a sound solution for Berber/ Arab relations.

Unquestionably, the Algerian situation has certain unique qualities that make consociationalism a particularly attractive solution, and which mitigate many of the criticisms of the consociational model. (To review these criticisms, see Horowitz, 2002.) First, a 50-year track-record of failure with a majoritarian, assimilational policy indicates that a new idea should be tried. Arabization has, if anything, fortified a minority Berber identity. Today, "...the Berber 'genie' cannot be simply stuffed back into the bottle, a fact that seems to have been acknowledged, however grudgingly, by important components of both the regime and the opposition (even including some more moderate Islamists)."⁴¹ Second, despite their political consciousness, the Berber minority are remarkably loyal and dedicated to the concept of Algerian nationalism. The Berber parties do not seek political independence, only cultural autonomy—"...the battleground is [solely] linguistic and cultural."⁴² This fact significantly mitigates the threat of regional separatism which has derailed past attempts at consociationalism. Third, Berbers tend to live in geographically concentrated and isolated areas, and even those members who live in cosmopolitan

⁴⁰ Arend Lijphart, "The Wave of Power-Sharing Democracy," in *The Architecture of Democracy: Constitutional Design, Conflict Management and Democracy*, ed. Andrew Reynolds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 39.

⁴¹ Maddy-Weitzman, 48.

⁴² Brett and Fentress, 278.

areas tend to regard their tribal homeland as their area of political representation. This facilitates the drawing of federal boundaries and the assignment of zones of cultural autonomy. Finally, the ongoing civil strife with Islamist militants and the abject failure to co-opt these elements into the system creates an incentive structure for both Berbers and Arabs to cooperate in a coalitional government. For the regime, Amazigh support would only strengthen their hand against the truly dangerous fundamentalist insurgents; for the Berbers, continued cooperation with the regime would not only guarantee their status, but also help defeat an Islamist movement which is even more militant towards Berber culture. One would hope that the trust-through-necessity pact developed through cooperation against the common Islamist enemy would translate into continued good-faith after this menace is eliminated.

Conclusion

In 1931, Robert Montagne wrote that:

One may be sure that the Berbers, who have given such evidence throughout their history of their ability to resist and of their attachment to their traditional ways, will develop in the future without necessarily becoming either like the Arabs or like the French from the metropolitan country.⁴³

This paper has argued against such a primordial view of Amazigh culture. While Montagne suggests a Berber identity which survives *despite* out-group influences, this essay has asserted that Berberism exists *because of* these out-groups. The cultural policy of French colonialists and the independent Algerian state have artificially differentiated Amazigh culture from the Arab majority, thereby alienating Berbers from national politics and identification with the nation-state. Labelled as outsiders, Berbers have rallied around their traditional culture as a means to organize politically and reassert their rightful place in Algerian history and society. Montagne is correct when he says that

⁴³ Montagne, xliii.

Berbers have resisted becoming Arab; what he misses is that Berbers are willing and eager to be Algerian. It is only the continuation of constructed colonial racial distinctions which keeps Berbers from this objective.

