

Narrative Thread One

Tales of Identity and Self-Expression in the Workplace by Hind Bouqartacha

It was a sunny Thursday morning when I arrived at Amina's house to conduct the interview. As I walked up to her door, I couldn't help but notice the beautiful garden surrounding the house, filled with various flowers and plants. The front porch had a cosy swing with a colourful cushion, inviting anyone who walked by to sit and relax.

As Amina opened the door, I was greeted by the warm and inviting atmosphere of her home. The living room was decorated with traditional Moroccan furniture, with colourful carpets and pillows that gave it a welcoming feel. The room was filled with the sweet aroma of mint tea, which was served to me as we began our conversation.

"How long have you been working?" I asked Amina.

"More than 40 years," she replied with a smile.

As we continued our conversation, I couldn't help but admire the intricate details of the room. From the beautifully handcrafted lamps to the traditional artwork that adorned the walls, it was evident that Amina had a strong connection to her culture and heritage.

Curious to know more, I continued, "Have you applied to jobs before this one?"

A nodded and said, "Yes, only one, but I didn't get it. They weren't asking for a lot of candidates."

"During this 40 years of work, did your workplace know that you were Amazigh?" I asked.

"Oh yes, since day one," Amina replied confidently.

Intrigued, I probed further, "And have you faced any discrimination because of that?"

Amina replied with a smile, "Honestly never. I have been lucky enough. I was always open about that and proud of it, to say the least. I made it known that I'm of Amazigh descendant. I would speak on the phone with my family in Amazigh language, and nobody ever said anything. And if they did, they would never hear the last of it." She laughed heartily, clearly pleased with herself.

Curious to know if there were any other Amazigh individuals who had experienced the opposite, I asked Amina, "Have you ever encountered someone who experienced the opposite?"

Amina's expression turned sombre as she replied, "Yes, my co-worker of 10 years. She had a totally different experience."

I asked if Amina could elaborate further, and she obliged, "We have been co-workers now for 10 years, and I only knew that she was Amazigh last year, which surprised me because she always told us that she was Arab from Fez."

"And why do you think she hid that from you?" I asked, intrigued.

"I can't tell exactly," Amina admitted, "but one time, she told me that it had something to do with her childhood. She's an Amazigh from Sous, and they moved to Fez, where her father had a small grocery store. And you know the stereotypes around the owner of grocery stores from Sous, that they are cheap, and they die for money. She told me that the number of jokes the kids would tell her and her siblings were out of control, all of her childhood. So, one day, she just stopped mentioning it and blended with everyone, especially when she married an Arab. So yeah, that's all I know."

As we were deep in conversation, Amina's husband, Said, entered the room. Said, also an Amazigh, chimed in, "I remember when I was at the marines, I had a group of teammates, all men and Amazigh, and they never spoke a word in Amazigh. One of them told me one time that if the others knew, they would minimize them, exclude them. So yeah, maybe it's not only for Amazigh women, but men as well."

Amina interjected, "But I do believe that things have changed, especially now that the Amazigh language is officially established and is being taught at school."

Curious to know more, I asked, "Do you think now that Amazigh women can access employment without being discriminated against?"

Amina replied, "Yes, if they have a good education! Where I'm from, a lot of young girls have dropped out of school, by their fathers mostly, to help at home or to get married. You know Rabia?"

"Yes, I do," I said.

Amina continued, "Her father took her out of school and she got married at 15? Can you believe it? Same fate is happening to her sister now. That's what I think is the problem, the access to education is the problem. "