Amazigh culture and media: Migration and identity in songs, films and websites
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Introduction

The exodus of Amazigh people from the Moroccan Rif region and their settlement in Europe began five decades ago. Since then, the notion of migration is constitutive to their subjectivity. Imazighen perceptions of migration are usually ambivalent and problematic. Although parts of the Amazigh community tend to identify migration as a threat to their cultural identity and memory, there other parts consider it a journey or a process during which the identity of an Amazigh migrant is partially re-constituted. This thesis deals explicitly with this tension.

Although it is a never-ending endeavour to try to cite all the reasons that have driven Imazighen emigration from the Rif region, it is important to name few major events that accelerated the process. Either ‘voluntarily’ towards Algeria, or forcefully, such as the case with young Riffians who were kidnapped and sent to Spain to fight in the Spanish civil war, the Spanish occupation of the Rif area during the first half of the twentieth century undeniably played a major role in the exit of Imazighen (Casanova 225). The brutality of the Moroccan state after independence against the Rif population was another major factor that pushed many Riffians to leave the region.

Migration was one way to escape a bitter reality in the Rif region, and Amazigh cultural artefacts not only document such phenomenon but also discuss its causes and consequences. Importantly, media, such as songs, films, and websites, have been used as tools to raise consciousness among the Amazigh community as well as a weapon to resist oppression, subjugation, and injustice in the Rif region and in diaspora. These cultural artefacts highlight the condition of Amazigh subjects as they move between places and spaces in search of self and dignity.

In effect, migration is a fluid process that has a beginning and an uncertain end, and many Imazighen attempt to articulate their identity within this uncertainty. In this condition, many reify their culture, trying to create a sort of temporal certainty in their existence by portraying Amazigh culture as a stable, rooted culture born and developed in North Africa. However, these reactions show the attitude of a community in extremis struggling against oppression in Morocco and against rejection in diaspora. It is important to note that Arab nationalists oppress Imazighen in Morocco and North Africa, while,

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1 Imazighen of the Rif region migrated in the past to Algeria because of poverty and famine in their region.
2 After Moroccan independence in 1956, there were a few uprisings, such as in 1958 and 1984, in the Rif region against the central government as a reaction to oppression, poverty, and injustice. These incidents are addressed later in the thesis.
simultaneously, many European states are recently becoming less-welcoming places for immigrants. Like other minority groups in Europe, Imazighen have been the scapegoat of many extreme-right parties and their supporters. Diasporic Imazighen are now trying to articulate their identity in this uncertain condition.

In view of the contemporary uncertainty, I question the roles Amazigh media play in highlighting and assisting the construction and re-articulation of identities that concern the situations in which many Imazighen live. To respond to this questioning, I build on and extend Benedict Anderson’s model that regards a nation-state as an imagined community that acquires a political consciousness through the exposure of its inhabitants to printed media (B. Anderson 6). I argue that Amazigh media form a common ground for Imazighen both in Morocco and in diaspora, and that these media shape Amazigh consciousness and play a part in enhancing and (re)generating a transnational Amazigh identity. That is to say, this imagined community makes use of media, such as songs, films, and websites, to enhance Amazigh transnational identity.

Imazighen live in various countries and continents and make use of media to create their imagined community, which thrives across borders and defies geographical distances. However, this process is not without setbacks, and uncertainty is one typical hindrance that affects such process. Amazigh media not only highlight this uncertainty but also assist in the re-articulation of Imazighen identity. Identity is a dynamic process that changes continuously, but it keeps cultural elements to assist in creating a community. These elements give birth to new elements which become the cultural glue that bonds diversified identities to make a community and collective memory.

3 By cultural elements I mean parts and elements of a culture, such as languages, traditions, memory, art, customs, rituals, habits, and modes of life. These elements are continuously evolving; and they provide their users with the sense of belonging to a particular culture and identity. These parts help create cultural continuity among a community and might prevent its disintegration. I see the past as a limited source of cultural elements and the negotiation of this past at present requires as set of rules that can vary between one culture and another. I build on and extend Appadurai’s point in which he argues that the past is governed by a set of norms, therefore finite, cultural resource, and that the role of these norms which govern the debate about the past is to ensure that “when change does occur, it is not entirely at the cost of cultural continuity” (Appadurai ‘The past’ 218). I argue that parts and elements of a culture are the result of negotiations of the past at present. It is the past of a culture in which the idea of change is inherent and a culture that recognises division and debate.
My thesis is situated in the interdisciplinary fields of media studies, literary theory, cultural anthropology, and socio-economic theory. My methodological framework is intertextual reading, based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the dialogic interaction between what he calls ‘real and represented worlds’. On this issue, he writes,

However forcefully the real and the represented world resist fusion, however immutable the presence of that categorical boundary line between them, they are nevertheless indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction, uninterrupted exchange goes on between them, similar to uninterrupted exchange of matter between living organisms and the environment that surrounds them. (*Dialogic* 254)

Here, Bakhtin underscores the interaction between the real and the represented worlds, and he alludes to this interaction as the matter that unites the two regardless of the existence of a line that may separate them. Importantly, significance emerges in these interactions. Bakhtin, often regarded as the father of contemporary intertextuality, advocates an approach to reading that allows the simultaneous interaction of divergent voices. He emphasises the idea that dialogical interactions reveal the meaning of these voices (324). Bakhtin considers all utterances rooted in language as dialogue or dialogues, and they involve voices that represent various perspectives, social classes, genres, and ideologies.

This methodological framework is not just suitable for the analysis of novels and other literary forms but also for an analysis of many cultural phenomena where voices interact. Regarding the possibility of dialogic relationships among cultural objects in general, Mikhail Bakhtin writes, ‘Dialogic relationships in the broad sense are also possible among different intelligent phenomena, provided that these phenomena are expressed in some semiotic material. Dialogic relationships are possible, for example, among images belonging to different art forms’ (*Bakhtin, Problems* 184-85). Bakhtin speculates the existence of dialogic relationships among any cultural objects and intelligent phenomena as long as there are some forms of semiotics involved.

I make use of this methodology to highlight the meanings yielded from semiotic interactions within and resulting from cinema, music, and Internet forums. I build on Bakhtin’s idea of interaction to demonstrate that the media I address in this thesis have internal dialogues, dialogues with other texts, and dialogues with ‘the environment that surrounds them’. Further, these dialogic interactions have consequences for understanding Amazigh identity in the contemporary. For instance, I highlight the idea that a song
includes multiple voices interacting amongst each other as well as with voices in other songs and media: these discrete songs interact intertextually with the help of a dialogic analysis. The research I conducted through interviews (with singers, website managers, and a filmmaker) I consider as part of the contexts in which the selected media interact.

Using an intertextual reading to study the selected media helps me to understand them. This framework allows me to scrutinise each song, film, and website, as well as the stories present in them at the levels of content, rhetorical impressions, and overall meaning. Given that meaning emerges in interactions, the media I address in this thesis reveal the way represented, imagined worlds interact with real worlds. As I go through songs I focus on the meanings yielded out of the interaction of voices and utterances present in or around them. Various interactions bear meanings, and there are, among others: the interactions between characters, generations, Amazigh migrants and host societies, the artists and the songs, and the lyrics and music. Songs interact with other songs of similar or different genres, and they also interact with other media. In addition to these interactions in the films addressed, I expose the interaction of images and sound, the filming crew, and the filmed subjects or characters.

While in the first four chapters I use Bakhtin’s intertextual reading as a general framework to highlight the meaning yielded from interactions, in the last chapter Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories become crucial tools in my focus on and analysis of dialogic interactions and their meanings. That is, in this last chapter, Mikhail Bakhtin gets a more important role, another status, than in the previous ones, since I make use of dialogism to emphasise the interaction of voices of the official national media with voices of ordinary citizens in dialogic websites; in these websites, the local meets the national and global, and in written languages interact with sounds and images. These dialogic websites open the floor for dialogue between: amateur and professional journalism; Tamazight and other languages; web managers, speakers, and respondents; and past, present, and future.

Materials and thesis division

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4 I interviewed Elwalid Mimoun in Belgium, Khalid Izri and Said Essanoussi in the Netherlands, and Mohamed Bounda and Abdelwahid Dahmani in Morocco.
Amazigh cultural artefacts are endless, and I decided to limit my analysis to a few songs, films, and websites I submit are most representative for the issues of identity and migration. These cultural elements are polyphonic and incorporate heteroglossia. As I go through the materials, I will highlight the idea of interaction in which various voices are dialogically interrelated.

The songs are ‘A ḏwer-d a mmi-nu’ (‘Come Back My Son’, 1980) and Khalid Izri’s ‘Taçeṣṣiṣt Inu’ (‘My Story’, 1997). Elwalid Mimoun, an Amazigh artist currently living in Belgium, performs the first song. The song ‘Come Back My Son’ concerns the state of confusion of migrants in diaspora, and the example of the perplexed son in the song accentuates confusion and uncertainty. In addition, I select this song for analysis because, in addition to Elwalid’s ‘Ḍḍšar inu’ (‘My Village’, 1980) and ‘Aqbuš’s’ (‘Water Jar’, 1986), it has been one of the most popular songs among Riffian Imazighen. It encompasses feelings, such as confusion and uncertainty, which many migrants experience in their host countries. That is, ‘Come Back My Son’ reflects both the suffering Imazighen have endured in their homeland and their condition as migrants in diaspora. Khalid Izri, who is the most celebrated artist from the Rif region at the moment, performs the second song chosen. Khalid Ichou, or Izri, is a well-known artist in the Amazigh diaspora and throughout North Africa, and he is a migrant who lives in Belgium. ‘Taçeṣṣiṣt’ is a complex song, since it envelops stories that reflect the intricate livelihood of an Amazigh subject either in his or her host country or in his or her homeland. That is, it depicts the way an Amazigh subject negotiates cultural identity in a fragmented and hostile world, and highlights the importance of cultural elements in creating an Amazigh identity and community.

5 Although there is a Moroccan national television channel broadcast in Tamazight, I decided not to lengthily address it in this thesis because it is not representative of Imazighen of Morocco or in diaspora. It is a state-financed television channel that folklorises Amazigh culture at present.

6 Bakhtin defines polyphony as ‘A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses’ (Problems 6). Heteroglossia are multi-voiced discourses in which various voices dialogically interrelate (Dialogic 324). These concepts are addressed later in the thesis.

7 Elwalid Mimoun is a popular artist both in diaspora and Morocco. He is always invited to song festivals throughout Europe and Morocco. He has thousands of videos on social media such as YouTube, and his name and songs are present in many Amazigh websites. There are many articles and comments on his artistic works. For instance, his songs are available online in the section of Rif music on the website agraw.com.

8 Such as Elwalid Mimoun the name of Khalid İzri is present on all social media, he has thousands of videos on YouTube and all his songs are available on the website agraw.com.
The films I analyse are Jose Luis de No’s documentary *Ciudad De La Espera* (*The City of Wait, 2004*) and Said Essanoussi’s *The Lost Donkey* (1996). The first film, *Ciudad De La Espera* (hereinafter *The City of Wait*), is a documentary that accentuates the various facets of migration, mainly in Morocco. The filmmaker, in collaboration with the Amazigh artist Belkacem Elouariachi (Qusmit) and the Riffian migrant and anthropologist Dr Mohatar Marzok, explores the phenomenon of migration and its implications on the population in the northern Moroccan city of Al Hoceima. I select this online film because it is the first documentary that tries to show the effects of migration on the inhabitants of the Rif region, particularly in the city of Al Hoceima. The second film is *De Verloren Ezel* (*The Lost Donkey*, 1996), directed by the Amazigh filmmaker who resides in the Netherlands, Said Essanoussi, and is shot both in the Moroccan Rif region and the Netherlands. I choose this film because it is a didactic film that follows the path of an illegal immigrant seduced by the journey of migration and Europe. In addition, the film reveals what remains hidden in the Moroccan national media regarding the experience of migration, such as uncertainty and hardship in Europe, and deeply explores the journey of illegal immigration and its effects on Amazigh culture.

The websites I analyse are dalil-rif.com, agraw.com, and timazighin.nl, each of which is well known throughout the Amazigh diaspora and Morocco. They highlight Imazighen culture, specifically of the Moroccan Rif. For instance, the site dalil-rif.com, which is based in northern Morocco, averages 20,000 visitors a day, mostly Imazighen who live in Europe (Dahmani). In addition, each site relays different materials and approaches to events. Each provides spaces that build ‘hominess’ online for their users who are usually overwhelmed by uncertainty.

Many reasons motivate my selection of these types of media and these specific objects. First, all the objects I address in this thesis highlight in one way or another the theme of uncertainty. Second, the Amazigh websites I selected create spaces where Amazigh migrants and their compatriots in their country of origin interact. Third, the Amazigh songs and the documentary films listed above are available on the majority of the Amazigh websites and also on YouTube. One may easily access and listen to these songs or

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9 The Moroccan Rif region is known for its high rates of migrants in Europe.

10 It is important to note that timazighin.nl and its domain name have folded since the time of writing this thesis. However, the prior owner of the site, Vereniging Timazighin Nederland (Dutch Timazighin Association), still maintain a Facebook page (accessible at Facebook.com/Timazighin).
watch the documentary online. Fourth, these items encode and foreground the issues of migration and cultural identity. In addition, these objects reach an audience of multiple cultural formations. That is to say, the selected Amazigh films and websites use both Tamazight and European languages. The songs consist of music, a material, I contend, that has the power to overcome cultural barriers. Additionally, the selected websites, songs, and films typify the massively produced artefacts by Imazighen during the last two decades.

In chapter one, ““Come Back My Son”: History and Uncertainty”, I analyse ‘Come Back My Son’ (1980), a song constructed in the form of a dialogue between a mother and her son. While the mother is sad because her son migrated to Germany, the son himself is sad and confused: sad because he does not feel at home in this host country, and confused because he is unable to comprehend the experience of migration or life ‘in between’ two cultures. In this chapter I provide a historical overview of the migration process of the Amazigh community from the Rif. I see the role of Amazigh media—in light of Appadurai’s model of a ‘community of sentiments’ that describes community as a group who feel and imagine things together—in highlighting the uncertainty that engulfs Imazighen in diaspora as they try to re-articulate their identity (Appadurai, Modernity 8). Thus, I argue that uncertainty affects Imazighen communities in diaspora and that their media reflect such confusion and its implications for Amazigh identity.

In chapter two, ““My Story”: Memory and Cultural Identity”, I look at how Amazigh subjects in diaspora and their homeland strive to articulate their Amazigh cultural identity in an increasingly fast-moving setting through Khalid Izri’s song ‘My Story’ (1997). ‘My Story’ not only reflects the intricacy of the livelihood of Amazigh subjects, either in host countries or in their homeland, but also depicts the way subjects negotiate their cultural identity in this fragmented and hostile world. Therefore, I look at how cultural elements —parts from traditions, rituals, and memory represented in ‘My Story’—constitute, at least temporarily, a remedy that assists Amazigh subjects in articulating their identity in uncertain and unstable settings. Here, I build on Stuart Hall’s theory that regards identity as a continuous process that uses history and culture in ‘becoming rather than being’ (Hall, ‘Who Needs’ 4). I argue identity is about becoming, being, and belonging. That is, identity is not just changeable but also retains a few shifting markers that promise continuity for a person’s identity or a community; further, subjects, as social beings, have a natural need to associate themselves with their families, friends, cultural groups, and communities.
In chapter three, ‘The City of Wait: Mobility and Immobility’, I study mobility and immobility in De No’s documentary film Ciudad De La Espera (The City of Wait, 2004). The film, which is mainly a compilation of interviews conducted in the northern Moroccan city of Al Hoceima, explores the phenomenon of migration and its implications on the population of this coastal city. That is to say, the film highlights the state of uncertainty as an aspect which is not only characteristic of Imazighen living in diaspora, but also of their relatives, friends, and compatriots living in the Moroccan Rif region. While migrants are depicted as more mobile than their compatriots in Morocco, The City of Wait brings to light various levels of mobility that yield different uncertainties. In the light of Vincent Kaufmann’s articulation of the concepts of motility and mobility, I argue that the low levels of acquired motility and access to mobility in The City of Wait create uncertainty regarding subjects’ current and future existence. Vincent Kaufmann argues that mobility is social, spatial, and virtual and that there are people who have access to mobility and others who do not (Kaufmann 29). I propose there are various levels of access to mobility that affect subjects and their identities. To be precise, there are not only those who have access to mobility and others who do not, but there are also various groups who have different levels of access to mobility. Through The City of Wait I argue that the scarcity of possibilities in the Rif region, in addition to low levels of access to mobility, affect the identity process of many inhabitants in this region.

In chapter four, ‘The Lost Donkey: The Subject’s Quests in the Realm of Fantasy and Desire’, I analyse Said Essanoussi’s film De Verloren Ezel (The Lost Donkey, 1996). The film is shot in the Moroccan Rif region and the Netherlands. Mustafa, the main character in The Lost Donkey, sees immigration to Europe as the way to paradise, where he can lead an ‘ideal’ lifestyle. To fulfil his dream he begins his journey from the Rif region and crosses the Mediterranean to reach Spain and, later, his final destination, the Netherlands. The police catch him and send him back to his village in Morocco. This film highlights two kinds of media: media that incite people to immigrate to Europe (images of ‘paradise’, and an experience that might bring confusion and uncertainty), and media that help Imazighen comprehend the roots and routes of the journey of migration and assist subjects in escaping the monotonous uncertainty associated with illegal immigration. In light of Jacques Lacan’s and Slavoj Žižek’s articulations of the concepts of desire and fantasy, I suggest that the experience of illegal immigration depicted in The Lost Donkey is
the subject’s endless struggle with desires and fantasies.\textsuperscript{11} I highlight the emotional state of migrants as they move between various settings and journey in search of self as well as how the film depicts both the journey and the evolution of a migrant’s identity.

In the final chapter, ‘Home Online: Websites and Dialogism’, I study dalil-rif.com, agraw.com, and timazighin.nl. These Amazigh websites allocate spaces in which different voices express their divergent perspectives vis-à-vis subjects which are vital for Imazighen in the Rif area and in diaspora, especially in relation to the idea of home and cultural identity. In addition, I argue these Amazigh websites assist the interactions of voices and elements at various levels that yield utterances addressing and reflecting issues important for Amazigh subjects both in Morocco and in diaspora. I show that home, which usually symbolises stability and roots, takes another dimension online and becomes a complex process that involves various elements. That is, in light of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of ‘dialogism’ I contend that Amazigh websites create spaces for identity articulation and help elevate uncertainty, even temporarily, since they provide momentary homes online for their users.\textsuperscript{12} Although Bakhtin’s work serves as general methodology for the entire research, here it serves as a particular theoretical reference that allows me to unpack dialogical processes on the Internet.

With this research I hope to illustrate the stakes involved with contemporary migration among Imazighen (especially the feeling of uncertainty associated with it). The analysis sheds light on the roles that key media play in dealing with the process of migration and helping Imazighen in the re-articulation of their cultural identity.

\textsuperscript{11} I take my cue from Žižek’s \textit{The Plague of Fantasies}, Žižek in \textit{Interrogating the Real}, and Lacan’s \textit{Écrits}.
\textsuperscript{12} Bakhtin addresses dialogism in \textit{The Dialogic Imagination} (1981) and \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Novel} (1984); he refers to the literary genre of the novel as an instance of dialogism that conceives of meaning as the interaction of various voices.