Amazigh culture and media: Migration and identity in songs, films and websites
Dahraoui, A.

Citation for published version (APA):
Dahraoui, A. (2014). Amazigh culture and media: Migration and identity in songs, films and websites

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Chapter V: Home Online: Websites and Dialogism

Introduction

In this final chapter, and similar to the previous ones, I address Amazigh identity and media. In light of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogism and polyphony, I argue that my selected Amazigh websites allocate spaces where different voices express their divergent perspectives on topics vital for Imazighen in the Rif region and diaspora (especially in relation to the idea of home and cultural identity). In addition, I highlight how these Amazigh websites assist the interaction of voices and elements at various levels addressing and reflecting issues of communal interest to Imazighen. I contend that home, which usually symbolises stability and certainty, takes another dimension online and becomes a complex process that involves various elements. In *The Media of Diaspora*, Karim writes, ‘Diaspora (re)create home by instilling such resonance into the spaces they occupy; they do it with their languages, customs, art forms, arrangement of objects and ideas’ (10). Here the meaning of home is the resonance of the livelihood of a particular community living in a geographical location carved in spaces occupied by subjects who are far away from this location and believe that they are part of that community. There are Imazighen throughout the world who believe they belong to *Tamazgha* (a politically and territorially unified Maghreb, or North Africa) and try to (re)create home in the spaces they occupy. For instance, there are Riffian Imazighen in diaspora who consider Amazigh websites homes because in and through these spaces they can gather, interact, re-articulate their cultural identity, learn the latest news about the Rif area, see the role of the past in the re-

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1. It is important to mention that in chapter three I addressed the role of cybercafés and internet in generating virtual mobility among Alhoceima’s inhabits, especially among women. Here I look at particular websites and their role as virtual spaces that assist in the process of articulating their users’ identity and provide temporary certainty.
construction of their current identity, and discuss and stimulate the use of their native language. Importantly, these websites provide provisional certainty for their Amazigh users concerning their identity and the idea of ‘belonging’.

Amazigh websites address a range of issues (including subjects I discuss in previous chapters, such as the evolution of the Amazigh migration from Morocco, the uncertainty of migrants in their host country, cultural identities of Amazigh diasporas, memory, mobility of both migrants and Imazighen in their country of origin, and fantasies and desires relating to migration). In this chapter I focus mainly on the subject of ‘home’ online on the Amazigh websites dalil-rif.com, agraw.com, and timazighin.nl. These sites allow their visitors to access free articles, music, and films. They also provide spaces like chat rooms and discussion forums where participants can interact and share data. In effect, I use a combination of media, literary, and social theories to show the dialogic nature of these Amazigh websites many Imazighen consider as online homes and the meanings that emerge out of these dialogues. I argue that home online—or the hominess procured online—for many Imazighen is an inspiration created by a necessity to interact and bond in an increasingly fragmented and chaotic world. Home online is also an idea projected by diasporic Imazighen into Amazigh websites to help to alleviate uncertainty, and sustain and assist them in the process of (re)articulating their cultural identity.

Acquiring qualitative research for all existing Amazigh websites is complex; therefore, I select only three sites for analysis. Nevertheless, as I research these three websites I incorporate a few examples from other Amazigh-focused websites to illustrate my arguments. Each of the three selected sites is constructed in a particular way. The first website (dalil-rif.com) primary uses Arabic, the second (agraw.com) uses English, and the third (timazighin.nl) uses Dutch. None of the three sites uses Tamazight and the Tifinagh alphabet, mainly because the Amazigh alphabet was only recently introduced in several primary schools and a few universities in Morocco. All three websites are well known in Dutch-Amazigh diaspora, and the first two in Morocco as well; they highlight cultures of Imazighen, and specifically of the Moroccan Rif region. For instance, dalil-rif.com (which is hosted from Northern Morocco) averages 20,000 visitors per day from mostly Imazighen

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2 Here I employ the idea of belonging consistent with what I mention in chapter two: it is an idea created by, among others, Amazigh diasporans to provide relative psychological security in this unstable world.
who live in Europe (Dahmani). In addition, each site has different materials and approaches to events.

This chapter includes three sections. The first addresses how dalil-rif.com keeps Imazighen who access the site informed about and involved in events in diaspora and in the Rif region. The second section looks to agraw.com through the content and the layout of the website, and studies the way the site engages the past of the Rif area and opens spaces for discussion of issues like identity and memory. My focus is mainly on the role of the interactions of participants in this site in the construction of Amazigh cultural identity in the present. Further, I search the materials posted on agraw.com and how they may affect visitors’ conceptions of ‘home’. In the last section of this chapter, ‘Language, memory, and identity in Timazighin.nl’, I scrutinise the use of language on timazighin.nl in the light of another website, amazigh.nl. Dutch appears as the primary language on the two sites, yet these two websites (and similar to the other Amazigh-focused websites I discuss in this chapter) enfold a complex system of utterances in which various languages interact. Here I investigate how this amalgam reflects the idea of home and the implications of this complex system for Amazigh cultural identity.

While I considered the concepts of memory and identity through songs and films in the previous chapters, my aim in this chapter is to shed light on these concepts mainly in websites. It is important to underscore that I use various theories throughout my thesis to address the same issues. Given that memory and identity implicate different issues in films and songs, it is necessary to use the right theories to approach them in websites. For instance, music and lyrics constitute a song and it involves a singer and listeners, but a website is an evolving process in which there are a range of active and passive subjects, and in which elements such as songs, films, articles, and videos are in continuous interaction and change. Thus, dialogism and polyphony can shed light on and tackle these concepts in a shifting space like a website. I read all the websites listed above dialogically and reveal how these readings highlight the various perspectives of divergent voices vis-à-vis each other, the websites, and their content. I also emphasise the various aspects and events in these Amazigh websites ‘now’, and demonstrate that these sites reveal three patterns. They accommodate divergent voices that reflect and express multiple and even contradictory perspectives regarding issues like home, migration, cultural identity, truth, memory, and language. Continuously updated, they are in the middle of an ongoing process that involves other media, and assist the interactions of multiple voices.
To keep in touch with one’s own ‘routes’, imagined community, and culture, many diasporic Imazighen make use of Amazigh websites where utterances regarding the journey or process of migration, the idea of homeland, and Amazigh culture are represented and discussed. Amazigh websites are in continuous evolution: they not only interact with changes in their surroundings and shift accordingly, but also keep a few cultural elements that evoke cultural identity and collective memory.\(^3\) In addition, websites are dynamic, have primary monologic qualities, a plurality of logics and voices, and involve broad connections to various networks in ‘real life’.\(^4\) Since both the content and layout of the websites continuously shift everyday, I investigate the utterances on the listed Amazigh websites and see their implications for both visitors and website designers at ‘present’. To this end, I regularly indicate the date I browsed the data on these sites.

Whereas in previous chapters I focus on the meaning generated by interactions of voices and utterances, in this chapter I focus both on dialogic interactions and their meanings in order to address the dynamic and interactive nature of websites as a location of culture. Dialogism and polyphony are the central concepts I want to use in this chapter, although dialogism proves to be a problematic concept itself. Mikhail Bakhtin’s use of it is always surrounded by ambiguity. In his works, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) and *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984), he emphasises the literary genre of the novel as an example of dialogism that conceives of meaning as both the interaction of various voices and a process in which language renews itself. Novels ‘become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extra-literary heteroglossia and “the novelistic” layers of literary language’, writes Bakhtin, and in approaching objects this way, ‘they become dialogized, presented with laughter, irony, humour, self parody and finally—this is the most important thing—the semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished still evolving reality [the openended present]’ (*Dialogic* 7). The crucial point in Bakhtin’s dialogism is interaction at various levels; it is an openended process that involves multiplicities. Bakhtin opposes dialogism with monologism, which he posits as single-voiced authoritative meaning. In *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, Michael Holquist further elucidates the meaning of dialogism:

\(^3\) I highlight cultural elements in chapter two. They are the shifting cultural parts that evoke a relative continuity and belonging among a particular group, which may include elements like rituals, languages, and memory.
\(^4\) By ‘real life’ I mean here a life not in the virtual world. ‘Real life’ is difficult to define because virtual life is also a real life for many Internet users.
Dialogism assumes that at any given time, in any given place, there is a set of powerful but highly unstable conditions at work that will give a word uttered then and there a meaning that is different from what it would be at other times and in other places. (69-70)

Several important elements in this quote reflect the particularities of this concept. Holquist argues that dialogism embraces the fact that the conditions in which an utterance occurs affects its meaning; therefore, an utterance can have various meanings in various circumstances. However, his use and combination of the words ‘powerful’ and ‘unstable’ suggest that the conditions at work resist categorisation and consequently remain indefinite. This indeterminacy exposes dialogism to the critique of a few theorists, who claim that this process remains open-ended. Leslie Baxter, a scholar in communication studies, focuses on this indeterminacy and claims that she initially tried to write a book that might articulate the concept of dialogism or ‘fix [its] meaning’, but she realised that pursuit’s impossibility in light of dialogism itself (44). Baxter’s statement shows that one cannot unravel dialogisms outside Bakhtin’s logic in which the end itself is part of a process continuously updated by a unique world. In concourse, Morson and Emerson write, ‘Real dialogism will incarnate a world whose unity is essentially one of multiple voices, whose conversations never reach finality and cannot be transcribed in monologic form. The unity of the world will then appear as it really is: polyphonic’ (61). Morson and Emerson underscore the way dialogism turns the world into a unity of divergences and multiplicities. It is a world in which an array of voices interact and exchange perspectives without one dominant voice overriding. It becomes a polyphonic world, and Bakhtin defines polyphony as ‘A plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world’ (Problems 6). This definition reveals the close link between dialogism and polyphony despite the fact that the two are slightly different. While dialogism is portrayed as an active process that ‘will incarnate the world’, polyphony is described as a phenomenon that depicts multiplicities in a world. Regarding this slight difference in the two concepts, Raj Nadella simplifies: dialogism hears what ‘occurs’ in a text while polyphony ‘describes what a text is’ (23).

Both dialogism and polyphony are two significant concepts in Bakhtin’s world in which there is not a thing by itself. Bakhtin considers all social processes as interactions between forces of unity and difference. In his comment on the idea of self and the other he
states, ‘I cannot do without the other, I cannot become myself without the other, I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me’ (Problems 287). For Bakhtin there cannot be a self without the mentioning of the other. It is in these interactions—between linear and multilayered forces—where multivocality and meanings emerge, and these give shape to both the self and the other. Importantly, for him there cannot be a single entity without reference to other entities, and this applies not only to subjects but also to language and all existing elements.

In addition, Bakhtin focuses not only on elements but also on their relations and interactions; that is to say, he honours both things and the relations between them—one cannot be understood without the other. The resulting simultaneity is not a private either/or, but an inclusive also/and. Mikhail Bakhtin considers text not as a process that evolves only within the field of literature but as part of dialogue that takes place in various spaces and evolves among a multiplicity of subjects. Thus, text is the fruit of encounters of subjects and of present and absent texts. Text for Bakhtin insinuates any cultural product that entails subjects, language, and dialogue, and Bakhtin attaches importance to the dialogic aspect of cultural products rooted in language and their simultaneity. That is, ‘the logic of Bakhtin’s simultaneity is dialogic’ (Holquist xxiii).

Simultaneity is the cornerstone of Bakhtin’s dialogism. According to Holquist it is one of the most complex elements in Bakhtin’s world, since it functions at various levels. Holquist tries to list a few levels on which this cornerstone works and argues that at the highest level it is a dialogue between centripetal powers that seek coherence and centrifugal forces that try to keep things separate. At a different level, he describes it as interactions between language at the level of given meaning and discourse. At another level he considers it as a dialogue between different meanings of the same element in various spaces and conditions. He also suggests that simultaneity can be found in a dialogue that takes place between author, characters and audience, and readers with characters and their author (Holquist 69). In effect, simultaneity is a dialogic exchange between various elements, spaces, levels, and times, and out of this simultaneity arises new meanings and knowledge. For Bakhtin a conclusion is understood in relation to various contexts and elements; therefore, the meaning remains momentary. This onginess, which is characteristic of dialogism, makes of this theoretical framework an adequate epistemology to analyse

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5 Bakhtin defines simultaneity as ‘the coexistence of everything in eternity’ (Dialogic 157).
websites. Given that websites are usually complex, versatile, fast moving, and constantly changing, dialogism can ‘articulate’ the way meaning emerges in this fluidity and continuity. Accordingly, I conceive of websites as spaces that are in the middle of an evolving process, a dialogue, and an encounter of voices, other texts, and contexts in everyday life.

News about Home on Dalil-rif.com

Diasporas and intercontinental networks of communication are two important aspects that currently characterise a globalised world. In the *Media of Diaspora*, Karim argues that to keep in touch and stay informed about ‘home’, diasporas develop a range of media, such as audiotapes, videotapes, satellite television, and the Internet (1). Today, migration flows are unprecedented, and the physical distance between individuals, communities and diasporas

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6 ‘Articulate’ should be understood as a temporary, and therefore changeable, action.
is large. The need to connect, socialise, and bond among one another has encouraged diasporas and other communities to create and develop vast networks of communications.

Dalil-rif.com is a news website that strives to inform Imazighen throughout the world regarding events in the Rif region, Morocco, and the Amazigh diaspora. This site is an initiative of an Information Communication Technology student, who has been experimenting with building and optimising websites. In 2006 this student, in collaboration with a group of friends who call themselves amateur journalists, built dalil-rif.com as an online news outlet. There are other Amazigh news websites created by a few enthusiastic individuals or groups in the Rif area (such as asdaerif.info, aljazeera-rif.com, rifnow.com, and arrifinu.net). Two Moroccan online newspapers—lakome.com and hespress.com—have gained popularity among both Imazighen and Arabs in the country. I analyse dalil-rif.com in the light of theses news sites. It is also important to mention that there are a few works that addresses the use of the Internet by Moroccan migrants, and these works are useful in highlighting my arguments in this section and the rest of the chapter.

**Layout**

Through an analysis of the layout of dalil-rif.com, I illustrate the polyphonic character of this site. The first impression a visitor may deduce from the address title is that this site is devoted to the Rif region, because ‘dalil-Rif’ means ‘Rif-guide’, and a visitor may expect to see and read news exclusively about the Rif. This feature seems monologic as it evokes the idea of exclusion rather than inclusion. The background of the site is light blue and there is a dark blue box at its top. There is also a map of the Rif area in the background at the right side of this box, and the title ‘dalil-Rif’ is placed in the middle of the map. Under the title, a statement that reads, ‘dalil-rif is a Moroccan electronic newspaper updated on the hour’, and at the left side of the box there is a picture of the globe. Inspecting this page—specially, the arrangement of elements like the name dalil-Rif, next to the statement that considers the website as a Moroccan outlet, and next to the image of the globe—shows the polyphonic aspect of dalil-rif.com in which the local meets the national and global. The site also includes a range of media such as videos, cartoons, still images, written texts, paintings, and audio records realised by various authors, filmmakers, painters, and

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7 It is important to note that the logic of Bakhtin’s dialogism in particular and his world in general is inclusive rather than exclusive, and it is in this inclusiveness where ‘heteroglossia and mulitple voices’ are (Bakhtin, *Dialogic 60*).

8 Dalil-rif last accessed on 15 November 2013.
photographers. This polyphony allows divergent voices and utterances regarding the region of the Rif, Morocco, and the globe to work in harmony on the same page. This polyphony in the layout can also be observed in sites like aljazeera-rif.com (‘the island Rif’) and asdaerif.info (‘Rif echo’), in which multimedia regarding local and global elements are not only placed next to each other but also try to highlight issues in various contexts. For instance, on asdaerif.info (accessed 15 June 2011), the title is at the top right side of the site and on its left there is a world map. On aljazeera-rif.com (accessed 15 June 2011), the title is printed upon the world map. Here, the noun Rif in combination with the world map demonstrates that the events in the Rif region are addressed at various levels, such as the hyperlocal, local, national, and international, and in various contexts, such as in live discussions at chartrooms, or in blogs, articles, and videos. In addition, the sites address national and international events.

The arrangement of elements on dalil-rif.com not only reflects the polyphonic aspect of this site but also shows the way ‘hominess’ emerges in this virtual world. This hominess develops from the ability of the website to accommodate local and global news and events. The printing of the Rif map next to the globe in the box at the top of the site highlights the character or the meanings of home online. The map is a symbol that stands for a real geographical location in northern Morocco and, on dalil-rif.com, becomes a symbol of the function of Amazigh websites as virtual homes Imazighen in both Morocco and diasporas can occupy. The Rif map is placed in the background of the dark box while the picture of the globe is depicted in the foreground. This demonstrates how locality tries to grasp space in this era in which globalisation is the main currency. In my interview with Abdelwahid Dahmani, one of the web administrators of dalil-rif.com, he comments on the layout of the site and its visitors and explains that the use of the image of the globe represents world news and that the majority of visitors of this website are Imazighen who live in Morocco, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Spain (Dahmani). Dahmani’s comment draws attention to the users of and participants on dalil-rif.com. Importantly, his comment underscores the role of the site in bringing together local Imazighen with Amazigh diasporans. Dalil-rif.com reflects a balanced view, because one may expect that the news on the site are linear (i.e., exclusively from and about the Rif region), but a visitor

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9 On the composition of diasporic websites, particularly Moroccan ones, see Merolla (“Migrant” 222).
10 To learn more on this issue, see Van Summeren.
discovers a range of news, varying between a feast taking place in a remote village in the Rif area, to a strike in the Moroccan capital, Rabat, or a bus incident in India. It is interesting to note that all the Amazigh websites listed above use the same approach, since they try to satisfy the needs of visitors who are eager to know the latest news regarding the Rif area, at the same time, they are aware of the need to post pieces of news regarding the rest of the globe.¹¹

Dalil-rif.com is a relatively coherent website that interacts with other media. The site has a top navigation menu and at the centre of the page there is a pop-up menu where the latest news is displayed. There is also a right-side navigational area for opinion articles, world events, and commercial ads. The left-side navigational area is for videos, sport news, and national and international news.¹² At least four individuals supervise the site, one of them, as indicated above, is a professional computer programmer, while the rest are amateur journalists. Generally, the layout of the site includes graphics and designs that reflect a modern appearance and professionalism. The website administrators gather and produce news, perform analysis, and edit stories before publication. Dalil-rif.com reposts news and other materials available from other media outlets, as well as data on the Internet but perhaps need time to be found. This aspect underlines the idea that Amazigh websites are part of networks in which various media interact. Importantly, the events and news that evolve on dalil-rif.com reflect the dialogic character of this site.

Content

While the layout shows the polyphonic aspect of dalil-rif.com, the content reflects the dialogic aspects of the materials posted on the site. For instance, a piece of news posted 14 August 2011 highlights this point. The site claimed it received a letter sent by the employees of a luxury hotel in Al Hoceima to the Moroccan king, Mohamed VI. The letter describes the dire work condition of the employees at the hotel, their meager wages, arduous working days, and need for health insurance. Six days later, dalil-rif.com publishes another piece of news in which they explain that the site received a second letter in the form of a statement written by the managers of the hotel accompanied by the signatures of many employees denying the existence of the first letter. On the same day three online outlets, asdaerif.net, aljazeera-rif.com, and rifnow.com post news regarding the second letter and

¹¹ On the approach that Moroccan websites use see Merolla (“Migrant” 224).
¹² The majority of videos are links to YouTube.
the first two sites accuse dalil-rif.com of publishing false news. On 23 August 2011, the news regarding this incident triggered many comments from readers on dalil-rif.com and rifnow.com. Many of the participants claim they are former and current employees at the hotel. They claim that the majority of the employees have temporary contracts, work more than 14 hours a day for less than 150 dollars a month, and do not have any health insurance. They argue that the employees were forced to sign the second letter under the threat of termination. Nonetheless, there were no comments under the article that was posted on the site asderif.net, and aljazeera-rif.com was offline at the time.

Here we see a dialogic encounter in which various voices interact without the domination of one single overriding voice. What started as a simple letter, supposedly written by a few employees of a hotel to dalil-rif.com, becomes a major event attracting attention both online and offline. Initially, we see that the letter interacts with a second letter and becomes involved in a discussion of legitimacy and truth. The second letter accompanied with separate lists of employee signatures renders the first letter an important element, because it draws attention to the idea of truth. Regarding the subject of truth in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics Bakhtin writes, ‘Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interactions’ (110). Bakhtin underscores intersubjectivity as far as truth is concerned, and that truth is to be found in a unity of divergences of voices. The example of the letter shows that truth can be the result of subjects’ interactions at different levels. On the one hand, employees claiming that they were confident the site would publish a letter and forward it to the king supposedly sent the first letter. They also claim that they sent it to this website because they consider it a second home, after their own homes, and believe in its integrity. On the other hand, the second letter is sent by the managers of the hotel accompanied with signatures of many employees. It does not refute the employees’ complaints mentioned in the first letter, but it denies the existence of the letter and questions the credibility of dalil-rif.com. It claims that the original letter is a fabrication of dalil-rif.com and that the problems at the hotel can be addressed and solved within the institution.

At a different level, we see that the letter has become the axis of interactions between various online outlets. Each of them tries to use this element to gain popularity and discredit the other. While asdaerif.net and aljazeera-rif.com maintain that dalil-rif.com lacks professionalism and works according to the political agendas of a certain party, the
 indirect response of the site can be found in the comment section under the news regarding the first and second letters. There, many commentators thank dalil-rif.com for its integrity and accuse the other outlets of defending the owner of the hotel and trying to discredit dalil-rif.com because they receive money from online advertisements from the hotel.

Whether the letter exists or not is trivial. What is important is that the incident highlights the way an utterance evolves and takes meaning. The meaning or meanings of the utterance here arise out of dialogues that involve multiplicities. That is, the meaning of the letter incident emerges out of interactions of various elements and at various levels. Regarding the rise of an utterance, in general, and the way it acquires meaning Bakhtin writes:

> The living utterance having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it. (Dialogic 276-77)

Bakhtin draws attention to the environment in which an utterance is born and evolves. It is a sphere where dialogue and interaction are crucial. In the case of the letter incident, which is the object of utterance or utterances, we see dialogues—what Bakhtin names ‘living dialogic threads’—and the historical/social environment. The letter triggers a social debate that begins offline and proceeds online. It is a debate that highlights work conditions in Al Hoceima and Morocco in general. Indeed, the letter incident has not only succeeded in attracting a large number of visitors to dalil-rif.com but also in opening a dialogue between the hotel employers, mangers, owner, media, and public. The letter becomes an issue because it is supposed to be sent to the highest authority in the country, the king, who has discharged various personalities from office in Al Hoceima since 2009. The letter also appears at a time when various protests of unemployed university graduates in Al Hoceima increase. In effect, the interaction between online and offline worlds is remarkable, since websites have acquired the power to affect the behavior and attitude of people in the Rif region. People are aware of the power of this new media, and any news published online can make or take the reputations of important businesses, persons, and institutions offline.
Consequently, many people in the Rif regard news websites as hidden cameras that trace their conduct in offline world; therefore, they are always careful about their actions.\(^{13}\)

The example of the story of the letter shows how a website becomes a home for its visitors since it accommodates their stories and allows its audience to interact. That is to say, the example of the letter shows the plurality of dialogues that can be generated online. It is an interaction between various elements and their ‘dialogical interrelationships’.\(^{14}\) The letter becomes an intriguing point that unleashes a dialogue online that involves website visitors and website administrators, and evolves offline to include other people. Dalil-rif.com’s audiences write the majority of the stories posted on the site, and it is in these stories the meaning of home is revealed.

Dialogism in dalil-rif.com can be seen in terms of the work mechanisms that characterise the website. That is to say, websites like dalil-rif.com prefer to confer part of its control to its audience to become a meeting point where audiences share information and news with the rest. A long-established distrust of the Moroccan mainstream press by Imazighen of the Rif has contributed to the success of many online outlets like dalil-rif.com. The Moroccan mainstream press always prefer to avoid publishing stories that may offend Almakhzan or important advertisers. Additionally, these outlets usually have complete control over the mechanisms of their publishing system.

People not only visit dalil-rif.com but also produce news that suits their own tastes. Significantly, many visitors have started to exercise the power they have earned as readers and participants. Regarding the power of the audiences in online news sites, media researchers Mark Deuze and Leopoldina Fortunati argue that audiences not only generally chose free news online, but also become owners of the production means as they make news about and for themselves (170). It is for the first time that the audiences begin to realise that they have gained some control over the means of production. Dalil-rif.com’s audiences mostly create the content on the site. Unlike the Moroccan mainstream press, where editors and managers both edit and police content, dalil-rif.com is a space directed by both the web administrators as well as the audiences, who are in constant dialogue and

\(^{13}\) To learn more on the ‘effectiveness’ of online-offline interaction as far as the Imazighen are concerned, see Merolla’s “Digital Imagination.”

\(^{14}\) The dialogical interrelationships between languages, images of languages, voices, other elements and their organization are the important tasks for stylistics as far as the study of novel is concerned, observes Bakhtin.
interaction. Dalil-rif.com has become a space where a subject may be the producer and consumer at the same time. This is another aspect of the dialogic tendency in dalil-rif.com, since the site allows its visitors and web administrators to be involved in a dialogue through the published material and share the burden of being producers, without the domination of a single individual or a group. In effect, what remains hidden in official media is exposed in online news outlets such as dalil-rif.com and lakome.com.

Dalil-rif.com and lakome.com generate dialogue by opening the ‘virtual floor’ for discussions and plurality of opinions that draw attention to the monologic character of mainstream media. These alternative media not only emphasise important issues ignored by state-controlled media, but also present valuable alternative views in a country where freedom of speech is still a new phenomena. The Moroccan state-controlled media are examples of monologic texts in which one single voice (Almakhzan) overrides the rest. While opinion in the jargon of state-controlled media means statements of Almakhzan, in the jargon of online outlets such as lakome.com and dalil-rif.com it means multiplicities of views regardless of their ideology, gender, or beliefs. Therefore, in a state like Morocco where media are censored, Almakhzan regards online outlets as threat to be contained or eliminated. On 3 June 2011 the Moroccan newspaper Alalam (the newspaper of the Istiqlal Party [‘Independence Party’], one essential element in the circle of Almakhzan), published an article accusing the founder of the website lakome.com, Ali Anouzla, of treason. The article explains how hackers successfully intercepted an email of a Moroccan dissident from the United States of America to Ali Anouzla, in which the dissident thanks Anouzla for his cooperation and attack on Almakhzan. Alalam explains that this email proves that lakome.com works with outside agendas and questions the legitimacy of the financial resources of the site. This incident highlights both the fearful conditions in which the managers and users of these online outlets operate and at the same time the fact that there are citizen-journalists and voices who do not fear persecution and threats and continue to develop these virtual spaces that allow people to express their multiple views. While state-controlled media prefer to have speakers and listeners, online outlets like dalil-rif.com and lakome.com chose to have speakers and respondents.

The innovative character of these online sites is that they try to dissolve the line or boundary between fact and opinion. It is an inclusive logic in which utterances and voices

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15 There is only one single ‘opinion’ in mainstream Moroccan media, which is the discourse of Almakhzan (Amaney 114-15).
are dialogic, and dalil-rif.com facilitates encounters and dialogues between fact and opinion. The majority of the stories posted on dalil-rif.com contain factual sources (such as eyewitness accounts and official documents) in addition to personal opinions and comments. Here the site accommodates divergent utterances that claim different narratives. The site publishes articles based on eyewitnesses or its citizen journalists. Under all articles is a comment facility in which many participants or eyewitnesses corroborate, refute, or support the content of the articles. Examining this simultaneity underscores the logic of the site in which opinion and fact are in continuous dialogue.\textsuperscript{16} It shows the logic of Bakhtin’s simultaneity at work in dalil-rif.com. It is notable that a small piece of news can generate a huge discussion in online dialogic outlets. An unlimited numbers of comments are possible on one single piece of news, and, usually, comments contain more news than the original article itself, since people corroborate, analyse, or contextualise the news. The fusion of facts and opinions is an aspect that has increased the popularity of sites like dalil-rif.com and lakome.com.\textsuperscript{17}

Dalil-rif.com opens channels for communication for its visitors and tries to motivate participation, dialogue, and interaction. It follows the motto of Cory Doctorow (a blogger for \textit{BoingBoing}), who affirms, ‘conversation is king. Content is just something to talk about’ (Doctorow). It seems it is for a similar reason dalil-rif.com gives importance to the comments section, because through this tool participants can discuss topics and articles. Importantly, the site opens debate to more voices and for a long duration. The site has an archive section where old news is gathered and visitors can comment on topics months or even years old. The archive on the site shows that there is continuity and interaction between past and present. Importantly, these past stories sometimes help contextualise current stories. For instance, on 29 May 2012, dalil-rif.com posted a piece of news entitled ‘Protests Against the Method of Auctioning Kiosks in Al Hoceima’, describing unemployed university graduates protesting auctions (my trans.). The article does not mention the date of the auction or the interested groups allowed to participate in the auction. The readers are also not presented a link between the unemployed graduates and the auction. Nonetheless, inspecting the archive, an article concerning the auction emerges on 27 May, entitled ‘Major Irregularities Characterise the Auctioning of Kiosks in Al

\textsuperscript{16} Dalil-rif.com always publishes all comments unless they contain threats or insults to other participants (Dahmani).
\textsuperscript{17} On the idea of generating dialogue on websites in which various perspectives are presented, see J. W. Anderson.
Hoceima’ (my trans.). It is in this article the reader can find the missing information. In the comments section of the two articles participants add other pieces of news absent from both articles. This is another dialogical feature in which the past stories interact with present and absent stories and in which texts and contexts are in constant dialogue.

The interaction of professional and amateur journalism is another form of dialogic encounter present in several websites hosted in the Rif region and the rest of Morocco. For instance asdaerif.com and lakome.com include professional as well as amateur journalists. Ali Anouzla is one of the professional journalists for lakome.com.18 Although dalil-rif.com does not retain any professional journalists, it reposts works from professional journalists who gather news in field (Dahmani). The combination of professional and amateur journalism is the new strategy many online outlets use in order to survive and develop. It is a step that usually boosts the production of consistent and high-quality information. On the need to combine these two poles Axel Bruns writes:

Neither professional nor citizen journalism is going to disappear any time soon (though the same cannot be said without confidence about anyone specific publication in either camp), and it is likely that the best opportunities for sustainable journalistic models lie in an effort to combine the best of both worlds—in the development of hybrid, ‘pro-am’ journalism organizations, which may substantially transform journalistic practices while maintaining continuity with a long history of (professional and citizen) journalistic efforts. (132-33)

This quote emphasises the need for both professional and amateur journalism to fuse in order to create a hybrid sustainable journalistic model Bruns names ‘pro-am’. This ‘pro-am’ media reflects the idea of inclusivity inherent in dialogism and its necessity in the rise of new media like these online outlets. Currently, these models are emerging in reality and have proven successful too: the best articles in Morocco are typically published on online outlets that have adopted the model of pro-am.

It is apparent that news sites like dalil-rif.com are dialogic in the sense that they present pieces of news that generate dialogue between online and offline worlds, speakers and respondents, and opinion and fact. They also generate other news, which is the product

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18 Ali Anouzla began his career more than twenty years ago at the daily newspaper *Asharq Al Awsat* in Rabat. He is the founder of lakome.com.
of a channel of communication between amateur and professional journalists that interact with pieces of news either on the same website or on other online outlets. Importantly, they attract visitors who later become active producers that publish news and other materials that suit their own tastes, create the basic material for interactions and attract new candidates for becoming future producers.

Memory, home and Amazigh Cultural Identity on Agraw.com

This section reveals the role of Amazigh websites concerning memory, the idea of home and cultural identity, and highlights the volatility of these elements as they shift between offline and online worlds. Here I study agraw.com as a dialogic space in which memory and cultural identity continuously interact at different levels. Additionally, I consider agraw.com in light of other Amazigh websites like anzuf.com.

Agraw.com is a website that promotes Amazigh culture. Mohamed Bounda, a university student, in collaboration with two other students, Hisham Boughaba and Miloud Ayadi, created the site in 2000. Mohamed Bounda describes the main idea behind the initiative of creating agraw.com and explains, ‘because of my love for contemporary Amazigh music and since Moroccan official media ignore this type of music has pushed me to gather the majority of the Amazigh artists’ albums and create a website in the year 2000 in which visitors can freely listen to Amazigh music’ (Bounda). Bounda’s main goal is to share the songs he loves the most with Imazighen and other visitors of the website. The creation of agraw.com can be considered a result of exchange of experiences and expertise
between a few individuals who love Amazigh music (especially revolutionary songs), and want to share this devotion with others. Importantly, the dream has evolved to become a virtual space that accommodates stories, forums, music albums, videos, and articles involving the visitors of this site.

**Layout**

Agraw.com is a polyphonic space that provides its visitors with symbols and structures that assist diasporans to remember and construct stories that enable them to (re)construct their identity in the present. Unlike the name of the site *dalil Rif*, which is an Arabic word, *agraw* is an Amazigh term that means ‘gathering’. Therefore the name of the website evokes collectivity and a meeting point, and anyone who understands the meaning of *agraw* enters the site expecting to find elements that suggest the idea of ‘a gathering’. The layout of the site is simple, yet sophisticated. At the top right side of the site there is an Amazigh flag which has blue, green, and yellow colours and a red Tifinagh letter \( \mathcal{Z} \) in its middle. While the three colours of the flag represent the nature of North Africa—namely: sea, forest, and sand—the red \( \mathcal{Z} \) in its middle stands for Amazigh language and culture. The red colour of the letter \( \mathcal{Z} \) is the colour of blood, which is a symbol of life that evokes continuity and sacrifice. Therefore, the flag not only evokes a unity of Amazigh culture and nature, but also represents an idea of a home in which Imazighen might live in freedom and prosperity. Given that it is almost impossible to gather Imazighen in a particular geographical location, an *agraw* (‘gathering’) is able to fulfil the task of assembling Imazighen from the entire world. The flag imbedded on the website becomes an innovative totem that symbolises the attachment of Imazighen to their culture and ‘routes’.

The layout of agraw.com, as with dalil-rif.com, evokes another aspect of dialogism: inclusiveness. At the left side of the flag, Tifinagh letters float in the light blue space. At the top left side of the site a woman dressed in a traditional Amazigh dress holds an *ajun* or *bendir*, Amazigh musical instrument. The picture of the woman indicates the site is devoted mainly to art. The masthead agraw.com is placed between the flag and

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19 Agrw.com last accessed on 12 October 2013.

20 Routes, as mentioned in chapter two, substitutes the idea of roots, because, in the spread of Imazighen throughout the world, understanding one’s position in the process of migration becomes an important aspect that may assist in the re-articulation of one’s identity.

21 This kind of layout is a recognizable characteristic of many Amazigh websites (Lafkioui, “Interactions Digitales”).
the woman, and under the title there is a statement written in English that says, ‘Portal dedicated to the Amazigh culture’. Initially the layout of the site seems exclusive and creates a monologic tendency on the site, since there are items only Imazighen may understand (such as the term agraw, the Amazigh letters, and symbols displayed). However, examining the layout shows that the website includes various voices and utterances that indicate otherwise. The combination of the Amazigh flag, the picture of the woman with an ajun, and the use of English as a primary language on the same page shows the polyphonic tendency on the entire site. In addition, in my interview with Bounda, he emphasises the fact that the site avoids posting local news unrelated to art and cultural events because it tries to speak to all nations and peoples, and the site focuses on art because this trespasses borders, ethnicities, and language barriers (Bounda). Here the comments of this web manger reveal the fact that the site focuses on art because it seeks to involve as many participants as possible and generate dialogue.\(^2\) That is, agraw.com tries to involve individual subjects and groups by using art as a basis for dialogue. It is no surprise to learn that the most visited pages in the site are music pages and chat boxes; therefore, the site becomes an umbrella that brings together communities from countries such as Morocco, the Netherlands, France, Spain, and Belgium (Bounda).

**Content**

For Amazigh diasporans home always emerges as a shifting idea in the middle of a dialogical process that involves both offline and online worlds. Realising that they live in the process of migration Amazigh diasporans invent new homes to provide relative certainty and sustain their identity. Highlighting the idea of home in diaspora, Karim writes, ‘Forced or voluntary migration diminish the physical link of those who leave the homeland, but they take with them the mythical and linguistic allusions to the ancestral territory’ (3). Karim describes a home that migrants take with them to their new host countries. They take with them allusions and ideas, and try to give shape for these ideas in order to maintain their identity. Means of communication and media are a few results of these evolving ideas, and currently the idea of home is imprinted onto the media that Amazigh diasporans make use of. There are Amazigh individuals who re-construct websites that evoke the idea of hominess online.

\(^2\) In fact, websites and arts are also regarded as a context for establishing local, national, and transnational dialogues from a gratifying or rewarding starting point and environment. For more on this issue see, Merolla (“Migrant” 224) as well as Van Summeren (291).
Agraw.com is a virtual space that evokes ‘homeness’ through art and art-related events. Importantly, the site succeeds in creating dialogue through what used to be monologic elements. That is to say, it renders elements usually depicted as being monologic into the basic material for discussion, analysis, and interactions. Food recipes, photos, and biographies are few examples that create monologic tendencies on a website. Nonetheless, on agraw.com participants are invited to comment or discuss them. Agraw.com fulfils the aspirations of web managers and Imazighen who want to have virtual spaces in which memories of home are evoked through art. ‘I have not created agraw.com to fulfil only my own dream, but also to satisfy the needs of Amazigh diaspora, because you know … when you are far away from your motherland you feel the urge and need to smell home’ (Bounda). Bounda emphasises the role of cultural objects, particularly websites, in the process of identity re-construction. The process of identity re-articulation is achieved through the interactions of participants regarding the material present on agraw.com. There is an increasing demand for websites on which Amazigh diasporans can interact, watch Amazigh films, listen to music, and read articles regarding Amazigh culture. This increasing demand is obvious because when agraw.com was created there were only a few Amazigh websites, but nowadays there is a large number of such websites. Currently, agraw.com is still considered a meeting point for ordinary participants as well as for artists. In an interview posted 20 March 2006 under the interviews section on agraw.com, one artist from the band Imatawen (i.e., Farid) claims that artists regularly visit the site because it accommodates their stories and works. He also emphasises the fact that the Internet in general and Amazigh websites in particular help promote Amazigh music because they post written materials like biographies and articles regarding artists, songs, and filmed concerts. Imazighen in the Rif region and diaspora attach importance to webpages that inform and involve them.

The issue of Amazigh cultural identity becomes a focal point discussed lengthily online. Here Amazigh websites generate dialogue vis-à-vis issues like Amazigh identity, which is not sufficiently discussed offline. That is to say, the issue of Amazigh identity is discussed in a few conferences and meetings offline, but websites broaden the floor for discussions to include multiple views from all continents and for a longer duration. It is another dialogic feature that characterises websites and allows participants to freely express their views. In fact, there are many examples of such topics on Amazigh websites. In the discussion forum on amazigh.nl, for instance, one participant under the username ‘Reader’
posted on 19 January 2008 a question entitled ‘what is Amazigh identity for you?’ Initially, no one answered, and they all threw the question back at the questioner. Then the question began to generate hundreds of responses. One user, ‘Dora’, wrote that Amazigh identity is equivalent to Amazigh language. This answer provoked another participant (‘izem_aghiras’) to write that individuals who encapsulate Amazigh identity in language are hollow individuals and their futility is the consequence of their devotion to Iraq and Palestine more than to their homeland. He or she blamed what he or she called an ‘Arab ideology’ that dominates North Africa for the uncertainty created among Imazighen. The prelude of the whole discussion, especially the inability of participants to answer the question, suggests that the issue of Amazigh identity is not sufficiently discussed offline and therefore few are able to understand their own identity. Importantly, its shows that spaces like websites are capable of facilitating online meetings in which issues of communal interest can be addressed. The discussions are usually lengthy and with multiple views. The example of the topic of identity illustrates the way identities are negotiated between online and offline worlds.

Memory is an element that regularly emerges on Amazigh website interactions. Past events interact with present ones and a text interacts with various contexts. This dialogic encounter between times—or, in Bakhtin’s words, ‘the interrelationships of times’—discloses the way by which ‘The interrelationships of times is important ... what is served here is the future memory of a past, a broadening of the world of the absolute past, an enriching of it with new images (at the expense of contemporaneity)—a world that is always opposed in principle to any merely transitory past’ (Dialogic 19). Bakhtin underscores the importance of temporal interactions to highlight the past and open it for dialogue in order to allow this past to escape fixation and death.

The following example taken from amazigh.nl illustrates the significance of interaction of times in highlighting the past of the Imazighen of the Rif region. On 6 December 2001 in the discussion forum on amazigh.nl, username ‘Tsaylal’ writes a topic under the section ‘Society and Politics’ entitled ‘should we forget what happened in 58/59 and 84?’ 23 This question raised a heated discussion among amazigh.nl visitors that lasted almost five years. The majority of responses are against the idea of forgetting the crimes committed against the population of the Rif region during 1958-59 and 1984, and demand

23 The dates refer to the uprising of 1958-59 and the unrests of 1984 in the Rif region.
formal inquiries for justice to prevail. Others argue that before opening any investigation the relatives and descendent of the victims should give permission for such an inquiry. On 6 May 2002 another participant, ‘Sister’, argues that there is no need for the permission of the victims’ relatives because what happened in the Rif region is part of the history of all Imazighen, their collective memory and identity; therefore, anyone is entitled to know it.

However, there are other participants who argue differently. On 6 July 2002 a visitor with the username ‘Zara’ argues that, while she or he would like to do something about the crimes committed, what happened in the past is vanished and Imazighen should not reinstate grief and sorrow in their lives in the present. The comment from ‘Zara’ is somehow paradoxical because she or he wants justice to be done, which implies remembering, but insists on forgetting. In his book *Memory*, US-American sociologist Richard Sennett argues that memories of past traumas open wounds that cannot be forgotten (11). Here Sennett emphasises the importance of memory but he warns against its difficult-to-heal wounds. The question from ‘Tsyalal’ plays on the same theme, whereupon both remembering and forgetting glide. We see that these issues are discussed in various spaces, such as chartrooms, forums, and in the interactive facility under songs and videos on both amazigh.nl and agraw.com. In effect, through the comment from ‘Tsylal’, we note that memory requires forgetting and vice-versa, and that elements like amnesia, memory, and identity need one another. Importantly, discussions of past events in Amazigh websites draw attention to the role of memory in highlighting past events at present. It is also noticeable that visitors of Amazigh websites like agraw.com and amazigh.nl want to articulate their identities by reading, listening to, and watching the materials and comments of others who corroborate, question, and refute the stories present on these websites (through pictures, videos, audio materials, and articles regarding Amazigh identity). Sometimes this process help subjects to articulate their identities, if they are able to manage and process information wisely, other times it adds to the uncertainty when a subject loses control and falls prey to amnesia.

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24 The events of 1958-59 are addressed in many websites and cultural artefacts, such as songs and films. I addressed this event and its implications on Imazighen either in the Rif region and diaspora in chapters one and two.
Websites like agraw.com not only contribute to the creation of what Benedict Anderson calls an ‘imagined community’, but also to the dissemination of imagined symbols that sustain such a community and their divergent perspectives (B. Anderson). The following example illustrates how these imagined symbols create dialogic tendency in a website like agraw.com. The Amazigh flag on agraw.com illustrates how elements—real and imagined—are crucial for collective memory and identity. In fact, individuals (alone or collectively) always perform the act of remembering, but collective memory can be described as the act of remembering in a group. The act of remembering is usually performed when a group of individuals believe they share certain symbols based on real and imagined elements and events. Allan Megill argues contemporary fluid identities lead to constructing memory with an eye on the construction of identity itself (47). Indeed, identity cannot be articulated without memory. Regarding the value of memory Bakhtin writes, ‘One may, and in fact, one must, memorialize with artistic language only that which is worthy of being remembered, that which should be preserved in the memory of descendents, and this image is projected on to their sublime and distant horizon’ (Dialogic 18-19). Bakhtin lays emphasis on selective memory by prizing the important elements that contribute to the well-being of descendents. Collective memory, in terms of symbols (like the imagined flag), provides stories that shape and re-shape the cultural identity of Imazighen not only now but also for future generations. Examining the example of the Amazigh flag shows the role of invented symbols in the creation of unity within divergence among website visitors. These types of symbols are usually dialogic with multiple interpretations and can generate intense discussions online. Currently, the (tangible) Amazigh flag is flown more often, and it has become a symbol Imazighen throughout the world ‘believe’ in. It was raised on the tanks that liberated Tripoli from the hands of Gaddafi, in the spring of 2011 by diasporic Imazighen demanding freedom of speech in North Africa in Amsterdam’s Dam Square, and in May 2009 at the Amazigh festival in Sydney, Australia.

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25 The flag was invented by a group of Amazigh activists few decades ago. They wanted to create an imagined community across borders and geographies through this flag.
26 The idea of ‘belief’ is what creates the sense of common belonging and identity among a group.
Importantly, this Amazigh flag has become a symbol of a transnational imagined Amazigh identity and creates the sense of unity among diversified people who identify with it; it also creates dialogue that involves its adherents and opponents. For instance, in the 2011 final game of the European Champions League, F.C. Barcelona won against Manchester United. When Barcelona players raised the trophy various players draped a flag over their shoulders and they were almost all national flags. Among the multitude of players there was an Amazigh flag on the shoulders of one player, Ibrahim Afellay. He could have chosen the Dutch or Moroccan national flags but he chose the Amazigh flag instead, a symbol of transnational imagined Amazigh identity. His act is not a rejection to the Moroccan and Dutch national flags, but a gesture that draws attention to Amazigh culture suppressed in media and public sphere for too long. Importantly, the symbol’s appearance at a major sporting event raised discussion.

This act was immediately posted almost on all Amazigh websites and generated intense debate, especially between Imazighen in diaspora, who cherished the act, and a few Moroccan Arab-nationalists who were in dismay because they interpreted his act as a betrayal to Morocco. On 3 June 2011 in the sub-forum section of ‘Sport’ on maroc.nl (under the title ‘Ibrahim Afellay waives Amazigh flag after winning the champions league final’), a commentator with the username ‘Marroki horr’ (which translates to ‘Free Moroccan’) condemned the footballer’s act. He argued that the act of the player shows that Afellay supports the policy of the anti-Islam and anti-immigrant Dutch political party (PVV), (my trans). The comment is somehow vague and paradoxical because there is no link between the flag and the Dutch party, and the flag was invented in North Africa and not Europe. Also, the flag does not represent any country, political party, or policy. Finally, the flag is an expression that underscores cultural oppression of Imazighen. The comment of ‘Marroki horr’ shows the absurdity that individuals and groups might make use of to try to silence or suppress others. While Moroccan Imazighen, who demand equal rights, are usually accused of separatism, diasporic Imazighen are accused of being anti-Islam. Yet, the importance of this flag incident is that it succeeded in generating dialogue regardless of the divergent perspectives of website visitors. That the flag may be read as a symbol that has untied divergences offline as well as becoming an intense topic online is significant.

Afellay is of Moroccan heritage, but was born in the Netherlands and previously played on the Dutch national team.
The flag example highlights the role of symbols in raising debate regarding cultures that have been undermined, and illustrates the fact that symbols are powerful elements within societies. The US-American sociologist Jeffrey K. Olick argues that symbols remain powerful elements as long as individuals treat them as such. Individuals and groups create and empower symbols to serve in the re-articulation of identities and shaping of collective memories (Olick). Symbols are among the basic materials of memory, and without them there might not be any collective memory. Similar to the Amazigh flag, the site agraw.com will remain a symbol that sustains Imazighen and their imagined community, as long as its occupants and dwellers regard it as ‘home’. Agraw.com has become important in the lives of many individuals because it enables them to interact, and the Amazigh community either in North Africa or in diaspora uses this space to communicate. Individuals who believe they belong to a certain community need to communicate with other individuals who believe or support this community. Communication theorist Arthur Berger argues that communication is the glue that holds a community together; therefore, a community always needs communication (10). As the Amazigh community is dispersed over a large geography, websites are ideal for this purpose. Here agraw.com becomes a space for conviviality and social bonding for the Amazigh community and non-Amazigh individuals who want to interact with this community.

**Dialogic memories and identities**

Noticeably, identities are usually dialogic, and in certain cases—and under particular circumstances—one or several aspects of one’s identity might be highlighted. Subjects may highlight certain aspects of their identity according to certain conditions. For example, subjects tend to underscore their job in a time of high unemployment. The fact that Amazigh culture has been undermined in North Africa is a factor that encourages many Imazighen, especially in diaspora, to remember and highlight their cultural identity (i.e., they underscore their ‘Amazighness’). The past is an important constituent that has contributed to the making of this identity. In 2005, Olga van Ditzhuijzen wrote an article in the Dutch *NRC* newspaper entitled ‘Am I Muslim, Moroccan or Berber?’ (my trans.). Van Ditzhuijzen describes the cultural position of Imazighen in the Netherlands and accentuates the fact that, because Amazigh culture has always been suppressed in Morocco, Imazighen

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28 ‘Amzighness’ means the *sense* of belonging to Amazigh culture.
in the Netherlands are increasingly interested in their past (Van Ditzhuijzen). The article highlights what characterises debates about Amazigh identity either online (such as with the case of the Amazigh flag) or offline. Importantly, the article ends with a quote written by Dutch anthropologist and Morocco specialist Paolo de Mas regarding the search for identity of Imazighen who live in the Netherlands. De Mas sees a particular risk in the trendiness of Imazighen-Dutch identity claims, wherein some see that their Amazighness sounds better than marking themselves Moroccan or Muslim. Here we see aspect of one identity interact with other aspects of the same identity, and how subjects accentuate one or another aspect according to a given context. That is to say, the focus on one aspect of one’s own identity, which is the result of the interaction among the other aspects, is generally temporary and occurs under particular circumstances, but it reflects a particular condition in a given time. Certainly, the debate online regarding the issue of identity raises questions regarding the role of Amazigh websites in raising consciousness among their visitors. Importantly, websites such as agraw.com, amazigh.nl, and anzuf.com not only illustrate the role of past in the making of current Amazigh identity but also emphasise the dialogic character of memory itself.

Memory is intersubjective and dialogic, and sites like agraw.com re-construct the past by recovering what was hidden and forgotten. In effect, memory on agraw.com involves appeals to the past to construct a present and future. Mikhail Bakhtin emphasises the idea that the world is always involved in a continuous process of clustering and unclustering to create new elements and aggregates that will interact and form new clusters leading to new interactions (Morson and Emerson 61). On many Amazigh websites there are historical materials: materials written in the past, and materials written in the present regarding the past. These materials form the basis for discussions, debates, and unforeseen interactions. For instance, there are Amazigh subjects who want to remember and recover what has been suppressed or confiscated in the past, and the current surge of memory can be attributed to a feeling that Imazighen have long been oppressed in Morocco. Indeed, the Moroccan regime has tried to suppress symbols of Amazigh collective memory. The refusal of the Moroccan regime to the return of the legendary leader Abdelkarim Elkhattabi’s remains to his birthplace in Al Hoceima, Morocco is one such example. In addition, hiding of pictures, filmed materials, and other evidence of atrocities committed by the Moroccan army during 1958-59 in the Rif region is another example that demonstrates how Almakhzan systematically hides and suppresses the past.
Websites recover and expose what is concealed and forgotten. Agraw.com’s homepage contains articles about history and civilization, with various articles written about Abdelkarim Elkahttabi and links to books written about him. Another example is an article entitled ‘Search for my Father, Uprising in the Rif Mountains’, written by Robert Chesal about the son of the leader of the 1958-59 Rif uprising, Mohamed Sallam Amazian. The son (Amazian Mohamed Jr), who was born in a Moroccan prison, recounts the search for his father, who spent most of his life in exile. Interestingly, there is a comment under the article dated 9 September 2009 written by the username ‘Majid Achalhi’, who writes, ‘Through the story of Mohamed Sallam Amazian we conclude that we should go and learn about the past to know about the rights of Imazighen in future, because you may forgive for what happened but not forget. The Father of Riffians (Mohamed Sallam Amazian) is dead but such as my love to the prophet Mohammed (Peace be Upon Him) he lives on in my heart’ (my trans).

The post from ‘Majid Achalhi’ is another dialogic encounter in which a multiplicity of utterances interacts on agraw.com. This encounter involves interacting individual subjects and groups and materials stocked or transiting the website itself. In fact, many Amazigh websites recently have become part of extensive Amazigh memory. These new habits have become part of contemporary life. Amazigh websites, as new media, have become part of such an extended memory, and Imazighen stock data in these websites and make use of them when they want to remember. Both the comment and the story of Amazian on agraw.com show how individuals and groups extend their memory by making use of material collected on websites to help sustain individual and group identities. ‘Majid Achalhi’ begins his comment by emphasising the story of Mohamed Sallam Amazian, which is partly based on an interview between a Dutch journalist and Amazian’s son (who is a journalist and historian too). In the article, Mohamed Jr describes his first meeting with his exiled father as a strange moment, because, while he expected a big, strong man to match the figure carved in his memory, he was surprised to meet a normal, humble person. Amazian Sr escaped from Morocco and never had the chance to see his son in this country again. Jr was still a baby when his father fled Morocco, and collective memory taught him

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29 Speaking of the ability of individuals to extend collective memory, Jeffery Olick argues that the ability of people to record things through media drastically increases their capacity to remember (228). Olick alludes to the role of media in general in assisting people to remember. Importantly, he emphasises the extensions created by people to allow them to stock data for later use in times of need.
about his father while he grew up. Here we see that the story of Amazian Jr is the result of dialogic interaction between pieces of individual and collective memories.

One learns about the nature of the dialogic memory websites evoke through the comment from ‘Majid Achalhi’. In his comments on the story about Amazian Jr, ‘Majid Achalhi’ uses the pronoun ‘we’, then the pronoun ‘you’, and ends with the pronoun ‘my’. Initially, the commentator regards himself as a part of Imazighen as a group who share the same past, and the story is one of those past elements. Then, switching to the pronoun ‘you’ addresses the readers and visitors of agraw.com as individuals and groups who are united under the roof of this virtual space and by their common collective memory. At the end of the comment, he lays emphasis on his own personal interpretation of collective memories. This website comment shows two dialogic aspects, both related to memory when subjects try to remember. The first is the way this collective memory affects subjects. That is to say, it has triggered a dialogue in the commentator’s mind that involves the ‘I’, ‘we’, and ‘you’. Secondly, this quote shows that memory involves a variety of discourses. The mentioning of a religious personality—the prophet Mohamed—in the context of the Rif events of 1958-59 seems incongruent. Nonetheless, this shows how memory works, since it involves various interacting discourses to which subjects are exposed. Through Amazigh websites like agraw.com, where documents, collections, articles, digitalized inventories, chronologies, and archives are posted, Imazighen interact and seek to re-construct and understand their shared past and its role in the present.

The fluidity of the events on Amazigh websites highlights the dialogic nature of these virtual spaces. The majority of Amazigh bloggers and visitors to Amazigh websites have not witnessed the atrocities that took place in the Rif region in 1958-59, but they remember them. On agraw.com’s discussion forum, under the subsection ‘History and Civilization’, there are many comments regarding the atrocities of 1958-59. In a small article entitled ‘the secret behind the hatred of Almakhzan to the Rif region and Rifians’, a participant describes the atrocities of agents of Almakhzan in the Rif area (especially the events of 1958-59). At the bottom of the article is a link to a Facebook page named ‘The Rif Republic 1921–1927’. The Facebook page focuses mainly on the Rif region’s past. After google.com, social media sites—such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—are the most visited sites on the Internet by Moroccans in general and Moroccan diasporans in particular (Kadri; Leurs).
It shows that even though a young generation of Imazighen, such as Amazian Jr, did not witness the traumas that happened in their region, they remember them through memories that presently circulate either in media or through personal experiences of survivors. Speaking of this phenomenon Mariann Hirsh argues that cultural and collective traumas are transmitted to the younger generations (who have not directly witnessed these traumas) through stories, images, and behaviours (Hirsh). These post-memories are imprinted in today’s narratives that circulate either in the Rif area or throughout Amazigh diaspora. Second, the article about *Almakhzan* and Rif in agraw.com highlights the role and position of Amazigh websites in a digital world in which various media are in constant dialogue, and they continuously exchange materials. Indeed, Amazigh websites are major source or transit of incoming and outgoing data regarding memory.

Agraw.com, anzuf.com, and amazigh.nl are few examples of websites part of media networks on the Internet through which Amazigh memories circulate. These sites not only form a part of other media (such as Facebook and YouTube), but also offer their visitors the chance to share the posted materials on a range of other media. The website designers/composers of the three sites draw aspects of daily life into the web pages to create a heteroglossic amalgam that gives rise to new meanings. There is almost always a comment section present at the bottom of each article, image, or video that allows visitors to comment either on the posted materials, the web managers, or on the comments of other visitors. For instance, on agraw.com under the discussion forum is a page for suggestions and feedback. On this page we can see the feedback of visitors and responses from the web managers. In fact, agraw.com, amazigh.nl, and anzuf.com attempt to share their content as much as possible with websurfers. For this reason we see that they always try to broaden the media network in which they operate. In general, the majority of Amazigh websites do not obligate their visitors to ‘sign in’ using personal information. Signing in is an optional feature on agraw.com, and visitors can access all pages without restriction.

Amazigh websites like agraw.com are popular because visitors are anonymous and the process of communication in them is relatively dialogic. While the Internet stands for anonymity and a liberating experience, it also includes participants who want to make their identity or culture known to other participants. Given that the majority of Internet surfers do not prefer to disclose their identity, agraw.com gives the opportunity to access content

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31 Anonymity is an aspect that encourages many Moroccans, especially women, to be active online (Brouwer, “Yasmina” 212).
without signing in: ‘we do not know about the age, gender or education level of the visitors of agraw.com, the only thing we know is the whereabouts of a visitor at the time of his/her access to the site, for instance, I know that the majority of the visitors are from Morocco, in the second place is the Netherlands, the third is France and fourth is Spain’ (Bounda). The web managers of the site prefer to gather as little information as possible regarding visitors of the site, apart from those who voluntarily identify themselves. The site does not want to be categorised as monologic communication, because this type of communication is usually regarded as a way to command, coerce, manipulate, and exploit others solely for the communicator’s self-serving purposes (Johannesen 69). In the top menu of agraw.com under the tab ‘About Us’ is a link to rules and guidelines. They are standard rules, such as avoiding insults to other participants, not posting links to pornographic material, and not using the site for commercial purposes.

In effect, websites like agraw.com allow its visitors to interact and generate a continuous dialogue that shifts between offline and online. This online dialogue on agraw.com becomes the space in which Amazigh identity is (re)articulated. Additionally, this dialogue becomes important in highlighting Amazigh collective memory with an eye on the divergent perspectives of Imazighen throughout the world.

Language, memory and identity on Timazighin.nl

In this section I study one of the most recurring aspects of Amazigh culture online: language. I argue that a website like timazighin.nl has a dialogic tendency as far as the issue of the Amazigh language is concerned. The topic of the Tamazight, or Berber, language has been the centre of an extensive debate throughout North Africa and among Imazighen in
It is no surprise to see that this topic has become the basis for intense online debates, especially on Amazigh websites. I select timazighin.nl because it accentuates the link between Tamazight and ‘home’, especially for women.³² Timazighin.nl is a website created by a group of Amazigh women in the Netherlands to promote Amazigh culture and provide Amazigh women with a space where they might feel ‘at home’.³³ The timazighin.nl team consists only of women (an act that seems to exclude men), but the site welcomes all participants—regardless of their gender, race, and culture—to contribute to the content of the site and help promote Amazigh culture and defend the rights of all women. Amazigh.nl is also a website based in the Netherlands that strives to involve Imazighen, especially in diaspora, in discussions regarding the questions of identity and culture.

**Layout**

The layout of timazighin.nl includes elements that evoke a polyphonic tendency.³⁴ It is a simple and minimalist website that includes a greenish box at the top of the page and a menu at the bottom. At the top right side of the box is a new picture of young girls performing folk dances in a row, clapping their hands. At the top left side is a picture, which looks old, of a group of adult women. The two groups in the green box face each other, with a red figure of a jumping woman between the two groups. I interpret this to symbolise freedom and happiness, and to insinuate that women should lead a joyful and autonomous life. The young girls in the picture have learned to perform an old folk dance from their predecessors. The picture of groups evokes togetherness and multiplicity, which is a crucial element in any struggle to achieve a communal objective. In addition, I read the folk dance performance by the young girls as implying the generational interaction and dialogue through which young people learn from elders and vice-versa. Importantly, the pictures highlight the importance of individuals in making groups and the importance of groups in any dialogue that involves other groups. The green in the box is the colour of nature, fertility, and life. This colour reminds the visitors of timazighin.nl that women are the source of life, and therefore, should be treated with the highest respect. Another important point is the fact that an old picture is placed next to a new one. This suggests that

³² It is important to note that in chapter three I addressed how women make use of virtual mobility to escape the confinement of their city in my description of *The City of Wait*.
³³ There are other Moroccan ‘female’ websites in Europe and Morocco, such as lamarocaine.com, femmesdumaroc.com, and yasmina.nl, which strive to involve Moroccan women in cultural and social issues (Brouwer, “Yasmina”).
³⁴ Timazighin.nl last accessed on 29 June 2011.
past pictures, or events in general, and present pictures and events are imperative in any dialogue that seeks to construct a future. This idea is highlighted through the content of the website as well.

**Content**

Many Amazigh websites are dialogic in the sense that they open the floor for large audiences and participants across borders and continents and contribute to extensive dialogues regarding issues such as cultural identity. In effect, the Internet significantly contributes to the discussion and promotion of the Tamazight language in particular and Amazigh culture in general. In the pre-internet era, each part of the Amazigh community, either in North Africa or diaspora, focused on its own separate agenda without regard to other parts elsewhere. Currently, a great deal of the Amazigh community makes use of websites to defend local agendas and participate in dialogues that involve Amazigh culture in other places. For instance, on 18 July 2007 in the discussion forum of marokko.nl was a topic entitled ‘Khaddafì is Anti-Imazighen’. Many participants on this forum—and with hundreds of other Amazigh websites—condemned the Libyan leader’s speech from 1 March 2007 in which he denied the existence of Imazighen in Libya and associated Amazighness with colonialism. Regarding this incident we see how websites assist the Amazigh community throughout the world to combine their voices and condemn Gaddafi’s speech. Interestingly, it draws attention to the role of websites in creating dialogue and interaction among groups worldwide.

It is through websites that Amazigh culture displays itself, and Imazighen tend to promote cultural elements, such as art and language, on them. Amazigh subjects in diaspora have created websites and other online networks to promote Tamazight and address their cultural identity. With regard to this promotion, Moha Ennaji and Fatima Sadiqi write, ‘with the Internet, Berbers from all over the world have established a Virtual Speech Community through which they have access to the various problems relating to their language and cultural identity’ (*Multilingualism* 180).³⁵ Ennaji and Sadiqi highlight the use of the Internet by Imazighen to create a virtual community through which they access problems related to their culture and identity. In fact, Imazighen do not access the Internet

³⁵ On the role of the Internet vis-à-vis Amazigh language and identity, see Almasude as well as Merolla’s “Digital Imagination”.

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merely to read and see materials, but to create their own spaces in which they discuss and provide solutions to their daily problems and speak of their sense of belonging and identity.

Amazigh websites, as innovative and interactive spaces in which dialogue is the main currency, contribute to the democratisation of the public sphere in countries like Morocco and among other cultures and societies. While in the pre-internet era regimes that controlled mass media and rejected democratic multicultural societies marginalised Amazigh culture in North Africa, Amazigh websites currently assist in the development of Amazigh culture. Through these media, Amazigh culture evolves to establish itself as a recognised culture in Morocco, North Africa, and worldwide. There are thousands of stories and articles posted on these websites written by Amazigh contributors who live in and outside Morocco. In addition, Amazigh women have used these new media to fight for equal rights in North Africa and diaspora. Timazighin.nl’s motto is ‘equal access to knowledge, power and wealth’. Although these women accentuate their ‘Amazighness’, they see their struggle as a part of the struggle of all women throughout the world to achieve rights as women as well as an Amazigh group.

As one crucial component of Amazigh culture, Tamazight is thriving in the Internet era and almost all Amazigh-focused websites devote pages to discuss and reveal its various characteristics. Importantly, many of these websites try to draw attention to the issue of language and place it in the centre of online dialogue. For instance, on syphax.nl (the website of an Amazigh association in the Netherlands), the website strives to bring to light aspects of Tamazight, Imazighen, Morocco, and North Africa. Here, language is placed as the first keyword since it represents a crucial element in Amazigh culture. The Tamazight language has been at the heart of a struggle for recognition in North Africa and diaspora for a long time. As Ennaji and Sadiqi argue:

Academics, linguists, researchers and artists contributed to the revitalisation of Berber language and culture. They have produced several textbooks, grammar, dictionaries, anthologies, music and art, as well as computer fonts. As a result of such commitment, the authorities in Morocco (and Algeria) have been pressured to recognise Berber language and culture. (Multilingualism 180)

The Tamazight language (Tifinagh) became an available user option for Microsoft’s Windows 8 operating system when launched in 2012.
The comment underscores three important elements. They list various media that Imazighen make use of in order to promote the Amazigh language and culture, such as books and computer-mediated technology. Second, they place the Amazigh language almost at the same level as culture, by using the coordinate conjunction ‘and’ to connect language and culture twice in this quote. Additionally, they use the present perfect to demonstrate the continuity and development of both the works of Imazighen and their struggle in North Africa. Speaking to this continuity, the past has always been important in the promotion of Amazigh language in the present.

_Ancient Amazigh script today_

After all, every great and serious contemporaneity requires an authentic profile of the past, an authentic other language from another time. (Bakhtin, *Dialogic 30*)

Bakhtin emphasises the significance of the past to create a porous and flowing present, where elements from the past interact with current elements to create meaning and significance. The following example shows how simple carvings become utterances that cluster and uncluster as they travel in time and across media—especially websites—to give birth to new meanings now. Currently many websites focus on ancient Amazigh artefacts to explain the evolution of the Amazigh language and culture. Under the heading ‘Messages and Memories of Sahara Rocks’, solane.org explains that Tifinagh scripts originated on carved rocks in North African deserts thousands of years ago. The website invites visitors to travel and see the deserts of North Africa, which they consider ‘the largest open-air museum in the world’, where art is everywhere. The Amazigh script rock carvings are important today because they significantly shape Amazigh culture. That is, without these Tifinagh scripts on carved rocks the Amazigh alphabet would not have prospered in Morocco and Algeria. The artefacts on the rocks have played an important role in settling the issue of Amazigh language in Morocco. In 2001 when the Moroccan king Mohamed VI created IRCAM (which translates as the Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture in Morocco) there was intense debate among Arab-nationalists, political parties, Amazigh

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37 Bakhtin defines contemporaneity as a flowing and transitory ‘life without begining or end’ (*Dialogic 20*).

38 It is important to note that though oppressed in Mali and Chad, Tuaregs have managed to keep the Tifinagh script alive in these countries.
scholars, and Amazigh activists about which alphabet Imazighen should adopt to write Tamazight. Eventually, the majority of Amazigh researchers, backed with the support of the king, supported the Tifinagh option because of its historical use. Evidence that Imazighen in North Africa carved the ancient script on rocks and caves in nearby deserts convincingly supported the existence of a written form of Tamazight.

Amazigh rock art in North Africa reveals the dialogical interaction between oral and written forms of language and of past, present, and future on Amazigh websites. In Morocco, for instance, Amazigh scripts on rocks in the Draa River valley have been vital in the redemption of Tamazight as a written language. While anti-Imazighen groups and a few political parties in Morocco claim that Tamazight cannot be equal to Arabic because it has always been an oral language, thousands of archaeological sites in Morocco and North Africa prove otherwise. A visitor to these sites can see that Tamazight has been a written language for thousands of years, and Tifinagh is its alphabet. In the 1970s, the Algerian regime persecuted Imazighen who tried to use and spread Amazigh magazines written in Tifinagh because the re-emergence of this alphabet would undermine the regime’s claim that Tamazight was only oral and therefore could not be a national language (Goodman 39).

Here we see that the interaction between oral and written forms of language is another point to be considered in the dialogical perspective. In addition, this interaction alludes to the important role of media, especially websites making the issue of language a main ingredient for their visitors to discuss. In the Arab-nationalist discourse in North Africa, prestige is attributed to written languages; as with other dominant discourses, the idea of an oral tradition is regarded as an inferior, ‘primitive’ cultural form in comparison with written languages. Therefore, regimes in North Africa attempting to frame Tamazight as an oral language is not surprising. In comparison, some Amazigh webpages post pictures of the ancient Amazigh scripts accompanied with extracts from academic research that analyses and deciphers the glyphs.

Debates about the ancient Amazigh script show how meanings arise through the process of clustering and unclustering of dialogue. That is to say, we notice that the meaning of the Tifinagh texts on the rocks is different from their meaning thousands of

39 There were three camps: the first supports the use of the Arabic alphabet, the second the adoption of the Latin alphabet, and the last supports the use of Tifinagh.
40 On the symbolic value attributed to writing in Tamazight, see Chaker.
41 Cfi-ouarzazate.voila.net is an instance of this type of websites.
years ago. While these carvings were most likely an art form that Imazighen performed in the past, these carvings, or Tifinagh texts, today mean hope for Tamazight as a written language. In other words, the scripts on the rocks have survived to rescue the written form of Tamazight from extinction today and assist its development in the future. Importantly, the texts lay the basis for the development of Tamazight as a written language. Nobody can deny the fact that it is due to the texts imprinted on rocks and walls of caves in North Africa that Tamazight currently thrives as a written language in North Africa, and particularly in Morocco. After the discovery of Amazigh texts written in Tifinagh in Morocco, researchers began to study them and examine ways to revive this alphabet for use today. The Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture in Morocco published their first book, *Tirra: Aux Origines de L’écriture au Maroc*, in 2003. *Tirra (Writings)* is a culmination of works from archeologists and linguists concerning written languages in ancient Morocco, with particular attention to Tamazight and its alphabet Tifinagh. This publication paved the way for IRCAM to propose the alphabet to King Mohamed VI, who adopted it as the official alphabet for Tamazight in 2004. Here the past has been crucial in shaping the present of Tamazight as a written language, and these acts ultimately led to its inclusion in Morocco’s constitution in 2011.

*Websites and Tamazight: revised Moroccan constitution*

There is still a long way before Tamazight can achieve the same status as Arabic in Morocco. A close look at the reformed Moroccan constitution regarding the place of Tamazight in the country reveals the worries reflected on many Amazigh websites. The way Tamazight is introduced as an official language in the modified constitution shows that there is a long way for it to become an official language, and its current precarity raises questions about whether it may ever achieve equal status with Arabic in Morocco. Many Imazighen on Amazigh websites reflect concern. For instance, on 21 June 2011 under the heading ‘Language’ on timazighin.nl, one participant with the username ‘Almanzah’ comments on the topic of ‘Tamazight as official language in Morocco’ and argues that she or he does not believe that there may be improvements as far as the status of Tamazight is concerned, and it may take decades before any change appears. What is assumed and not verbalised in Article Five of the reformed constitution is more worrying to ‘Almanzah’ and

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42 After the release of the last version of the Moroccan constitution on 30 July 2011, many Amazigh websites either posted a PDF document of the document on their main webpage or a link to Morocco’s Interior Ministry, where it is available.
other Imazighen than what is actually written. Regarding the intricacy of this duality of utterances, Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark argue that Bakhtin insists on the dual nature of the utterance, which consists of what is actually said and what is not said but assumed both by the speaker and addressee (206). Therefore, this duality is what makes utterances complex and difficult to grasp. Article Five of the Moroccan constitution states:

Arabic remains the official language of the state.

The state works for the protection and development of the Arabic language and the promotion of its use.

Similarly, Amazigh is an official language of the state as a common heritage for all Moroccans without exception.

A regulatory law defines the process of implementation of the official character of this language, and the terms of its integration in teaching and priority areas in public life, in order to enable it to fulfil its function as an official language.

There shall be a National Council of Languages and Moroccan culture; its main function is the protection and development of languages of Arabic, Amazigh, and the various Moroccan cultural expressions, which are an authentic heritage and contemporary inspiration. It includes all the institutions involved in these areas. A regulatory law determines the powers, composition and operating procedures. (my trans.)

An examination of this extract from the modified Moroccan constitution shows what Bakhtin calls ‘hidden dialogicality’.43 There are indeed many elements that support the opinion of those who lament the formulation of Article Five. The first line in the excerpt appeases Arab nationalists and political parties like the Istiqlal Party (‘Independence Party’) and the Aadala Wattanmia (‘Justice and Development Party’), who have raised

43 To explain hidden dialogicality Bakhtin compares this type of dialogue to the example of a dialogue between two persons in which one of the speakers is present invesibly; his words are not there, but traces left by these words have determining influence on the present and visible words (Problems 197)
fierce resistance against the recognition of Tamazight in the constitution. The two parties were opposed to the adoption of Tifinagh as the alphabet of Tamazight. The second clause in Article Five goes a step further, as it consolidates the position of Arabic in Morocco and guarantees that the state will protect, develop, and promote its use. This second clause can be read to imply that Arabic is endangered, as if it is on the verge of extinction, and both the state and a National Council of Languages and Moroccan culture need to protect it. This clause is indeed ironic, for Arabic is an official language in numerous countries and spoken by hundreds of millions of people; Tamazight, on the other hand, has never been an official language in any country but, while its written form was on the verge of extinction, does not here receive the ‘protection’ of the state. The third clause, which states that Tamazight is an official language, has another important element that refutes that claim that supporters of the constitutionalisation of Tamazight wish to divide Moroccan society. The phrasing of Tamazight as a ‘common heritage for all Moroccans’ aims to discard the idea of division in society, and it is one of the best elements in this Article. However, the clause that follows plants major obstacles for Tamazight to become an official language, because it associates its full official status with the outcome of a regulatory law that may be dictated by political parties, such as Istiglal and Aadala Wattanmia, who were against the constitutionalisation of Tamazight. In addition, the reformed constitution does not mention the period of time within which Tamazight should fulfil its full function as an official language. The article underscores the idea of an indefinite process that may take decades.

While the Amazigh alphabet, Tifinagh, has survived, its use online remains limited. Imazighen tend to use the Latin or Arabic alphabets online. The menu of the majority of Amazigh websites is written in the Latin alphabet, with few words or sentences written in Tifinagh. On amazigh.nl the main content is written in Dutch, and there are a few articles written in Tamazight with the Latin alphabet. For instance, on 21 August 2011, Said Essanoussi wrote an article entitled ‘Taneggarut n Kaddafi’ (‘The End of Gaddafi’) in Tamazight with the Latin alphabet. Similarly, on amazighworld.org, visitors can chose one of four languages from the menu: Tamazight, French, English, and Arabic. When Tamazight is selected, the content is written in Tamazight with the Latin alphabet, and the only element written in Tifinagh is the Amazigh calendar on the left side of the page. In the case of timazighin.nl, the main page is written almost entirely in Dutch with the Latin alphabet except one sentence written in Tifinagh, which translates as ‘The Association of Amazigh Women in the Netherlands’. The minimum use of Tifinagh as an alphabet on
Amazigh websites reflects the difficulty many Imazighen, who have never studied this language at school, face as they start to use an alphabet repressed by various rulers in North Africa for a long time.

Amazigh Websites and multilingualism

Multilingualism on Amazigh websites is another dialogic aspect in which languages interact, and this interaction can objectivise Tamazight. Bakhtin argues that the process of objectivising a particular language can be achieved only in the light of other languages (Dialogic 62). It is noticeable that Imazighen make use of an amalgam of alphabets and languages to communicate, especially on the discussion forums of Amazigh websites or in comment sections under articles. On timazighin.nl and rkempo.nl, participants make use of games to involve Amazigh visitors as much as possible, and to learn and teach Tamazight in a fun way. Under the subsection ‘Language’ on the discussion forum of the websites are various topics that address Tamazight through games, such as ‘Test your Amazigh Vocabulary’, ‘Funny Amazigh Words’, and ‘New Amazigh Words”. On 12 March 2010 on timazighin.nl, a participant with the username ‘Mohammedoen’ suggests a game to test the Amazigh vocabulary of participants. The game is simple: the first participant writes an Amazigh word accompanied with a Dutch translation, and the next participant has to use the last letter of the Amazigh word to suggest a new Amazigh word. For example, a participant writes ‘Asrem = vis’ (‘fish’), and the next participant writes ‘Mija = keel’ (‘throat’). The game attracted over 40,000 visitors. In this illustration we see that participants use two languages and one alphabet.

There are examples in which participants make use of various languages and alphabets to discuss one single topic. On 27 August 2011, dalil-rif.com published an article entitled ‘Great public sympathy for the homeless family’. Participants commenting on the article made use of various languages and alphabets. Regarding the multilingual nature of Amazigh websites, the researcher in African Literatures and Media Daniela Merolla argues that Amazigh websites are often multilingual, which is an aspect that demonstrates that these websites address individuals and groups who use different languages and live in

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44 This article addresses an incident during Ramadan in the town of Beni Bouaych in the Rif region in which a family (composed of a single mother and her three children) became homeless as a result of family problems. Many inhabitants of the small town showed their sympathy with this family and pressured the authorities to shelter them. Protests lasted more than a week and eventually the local authorities found a house for this family.
different parts of the world such as North Africa, Europe, Canada, and the US (“Digital Imagination”). Indeed, Amazigh websites make use of English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Tamazight, and Latinised Arabic. To comment on the article published on dalil-rif.com, participants used most of these languages with both Latin and Arabic alphabets. These instances show a dialogic tendency on Amazigh websites that allow participants to use all languages in order to share their opinions and interact with others.

Importantly these websites focus on the idea of interaction that involves various languages without the domination of a single one. Regarding the issue of interaction of different languages Bakhtin writes, ‘The period of national languages, coexisting but closed and deaf to each other comes to an end. Languages throw light on each other; one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language (Dialogic 12).” Bakhtin emphasises the importance of interaction of languages in order to highlight the particularities of each of them. Amazigh websites draw attention to the topic of language to involve groups and individuals in a dialogue regarding the re-articulation of Amazigh identity. Sometimes on these virtual spaces one single utterance can have various implications at different levels. For instance, on 30 September 2009 user ‘Eto’ posted a topic entitled ‘Learn Tamazight’ on the forum on amazigh.nl. ‘Eto’ wanted to learn Tamazight, and asks other participants for help. A respondent with the username ‘Lysa’ posts a few names of CDs and books in Tamazight. Then, two participants with the usernames ‘Gurkan’ and ‘Inuit’ entered the discussion forum and began to communicate with each other about private issues such as their jobs and school. While the main language of the discussion is Dutch, the two communicated in Turkish. Even if the two deviate from the topic, others continue to exchange information about how to learn Tamazight. Near at the end of the discussion, another participant with the username ‘Señor Canardo’ posted a picture of the wall built by Israel separating the Palestinians and Israelis in addition to an English-language article by a blogger that discourages learning Tamazight. The post infuriated another participant with the username ‘Alasyan’, who wrote that ‘Señor Canardo’ was ready to defend the identities and causes of others but does not care about his own Amazigh language and identity.

Through this example we see how Amazigh websites accommodate divergent perspectives and try to make a unity of differences united under one or multiple forums in which dialogue is key out of this amalgam. On the one hand are subjects who try to foster a coherent discussion about the materials to use and the best ways to learn Tamazight. On the
other hand are subjects who use the same topics to draw attention to things unrelated to it, such as the Israel and Palestine conflict, jobs, and school. At another level we see the difference between the meaning of language to ‘Eto’, who tries to learn few words of Tamazight in order to communicate in this language, and ‘Señor Canardo’, who addresses language in the context of ideology. For ‘Eto’ languages are key to learn about other cultures, and for ‘Señor Canardo’, languages like Tamazight are trivial because people should only learn languages that are dominant in the world such as English and French. At a different level, there are dialogues between various languages. Even if the main topic is Tamazight, the languages of discussion are Dutch, Turkish, and English. This reveals the role of Amazigh websites in involving various groups and communities, through the topic of language, in the re-articulation of Amazigh identity throughout the world. Importantly, the use of various languages in the discussion forum, especially Turkish and Dutch, refutes the argument of ‘Señor Canardo’ who argues that Imazighen should only learn the leading languages of international discourse such as English and French. At another level we see that there is dialogue between web managers, participants and readers. On 13 September 2011 one of the web managers with the username ‘Amnusinu’ posted a message under ‘Learn Tamazight’ in which he informs the other participants and visitors regarding educational material to learn Tamazight in both the Latin and Tifinagh alphabets. Usually, web managers do not participate in discussion forums, but in this case we see that they post information and two emails for visitors who need more information regarding Amazigh educational materials. This shows that Amazigh websites are dialogic as they create temporary homes for people who visit them regardless of their views, beliefs, and ideologies.

**Conclusion**

Indeed, Amazigh websites are a blessing to both Amazigh culture and community, since they give voice to people who have been silenced in Morocco and diaspora for a long time, and the content of these media reflect the multivocality of their contributors and audiences. They play a major part in the redistribution of symbolic power as they give people the licence to speak.\(^{45}\)

\(^{45}\) It should be noted that it may be a blessing for people able to access these websites, because there is also another category that does not have the know-how or means to access the Internet and these websites.
Websites like dalil-rif.com, agraw.com, and timazighin.nl have become spaces in which opinion and fact interact and in which materials normally are regarded as monologic become the basis for lengthy and intense debates that involve web managers as well as visitors. In addition, these virtual spaces use an amalgam of languages and alphabets to discuss issues like Amazigh collective memory, and it is on these online discussions or dialogues that Amazigh identity is (re)articulated.

Indeed this chapter shows that Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism is not only applicable to literature, but also to new media like websites. Through the many examples listed above we can see this concept at work. The listed websites are not only polyphonic, but their content generates continuous dialogues that involve a multiplicity of reactions and interactions that not only reflect the various perspectives of Imazighen in Morocco and diaspora, but also of all visitors to these sites. Importantly, through the analysis of the three websites I draw attention to the nature of ‘hominess’ these spaces provide for their visitors. This hominess not offers an eternal certainty, but a dialogic one. It is a temporal and relative certainty that partly contributes to the process of articulating the identity of website visitors. I highlight the idea that the selected Amazigh websites become a home for their visitors, since they allow them to interact, bond, and feel a kind of temporary certainty. Users may feel certain they belong to an imagined community that shares dialogic imagination and interaction online. I argue that ‘hominess’ online is a temporary remedy against uncertainty. This hominess is achieved through dialogical interactions in the selected Amazigh websites.