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

Don’t be bored, drag your sandals and walk in them proudly

We will be what we want to be

Tell others that we want to be

We will fix flags and walk fast\(^\text{160}\)

Tell others that we want to be

We are Imazighen. (Imtalaâ; my trans.)

This is an extract taken from the song ‘We Will Be’ by the band Imtalaâ, who currently live in the Netherlands. Many other Amazigh singers, such as Najib Amazigh, Sullit, and Qusmit, cover the same lyrics in their own versions of the song. The firm and imperative tone in it counters the state of uncertainty in which many Imazighen live as they struggle to articulate their identity. This song encompasses the core of current Amazigh identity, which is fluid and shifting continuously. It highlights the way this identity is celebrated through media.

Flags, in the song and as mentioned in the last chapter, are symbols. In this extract they become media that invite people to come and participate in, witness, and celebrate the re-articulation of Amazigh identity. Amazigh songs and media perform the same role as the flags raised on top of houses in the Rif area: signalling to the world that there is a reborn community that wants to be.

Social media, such as Facebook, Youtube and Twitter, played a major role in organizing the Imazighen of Morocco to what is known as the 20 February Protests, which demanded official recognition of Amazigh culture. Amazigh songs played a major role in the Libyan revolution, or what is also known as the Libyan spring: the singer Dania Ben Sassi became an icon of that struggle. With her two famous songs ‘Our Rebellious Star’

\(^{160}\) It is important to note that whenever there is a party or celebration in any particular Amazigh house, especially in remote villages in the Rif region, flags are raised on the top of the house. Any colour can be used for the fabric of the flag except the colour black.
and ‘Numidia’ (2012), she not only encouraged Imazighen in Libya to topple the regime but also contributed to the re-construction of Amazigh identity in this country.

The first big artistic event that took place in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi’s regime was an Amazigh music festival in Tripoli. For the first time in more than a century, Amazigh artists from North Africa and diaspora—like Khalid Izri (Moroccan diaspora), Takfarinas (Algeria), and Dania Ben Sassi (Libyan diaspora)—came together to celebrate the Amazigh New Year of 2963 (that corresponds to the Gregorian 13 January 2013). The symbolic event shows the role of media in raising consciousness and creating certainty among a population that was not allowed to celebrate its culture and identity before or throughout Gaddafi’s rule.\footnote{After the fall of Gaddafi’s regime, Amazigh media—such as TV channels (Ibrabren TV), radio channels (Tammurt), and newspapers (Libya Free Jadu)—began operations.}

It should be stated that Amazigh media like films, songs, and websites have contributed significantly in opening new spaces of debate in which both Imazighen and other communities interact and seek common ground. In addition, these media allow Imazighen a voice that was previously silenced in North Africa and ignored in host societies in which Amazigh diasporans live. Importantly, these media facilitate the re-articulation of Amazigh identity as well as a means to create spaces in which such a process can be materialised.

Whereas some works address Moroccan media and migration in general, my work addresses particular media—namely songs, films, and websites—of a particular community, the Imazighen from the Rif region. I uniquely offer research that addresses films and revolutionary songs created by diasporic Rifian Imazighen. Few works study songs, films, and websites created in Morocco or in Moroccan diasporas. The particularity of my work is that it addresses Amazigh media created mostly by Amazigh diasporas, the role of these media vis-à-vis the uncertainty characteristic of the experience of migration, and the creation and maintenance of this imagined community.

The Amazigh community has become an imagined community sustained by stories and imagined symbols which are represented in an array of media. In effect, as demonstrated through this thesis, Amazigh identity is a process enhanced by various experiences. The experience of migration is one aspect of the process, and media are elements that represent stories and imagined symbols that shape these identities. This
continuous process is the result of negotiations and interactions of multiplicities both in daily ‘life’ and through representations that the same multiplicities generate.

Although the Amazigh media I address in this thesis seek to pluralise societies in host countries and in North Africa, there may always be elements that struggle against such pluralisation. In Morocco there are a few positive changes, such as the inclusion of Tamazight as an official language in the constitution; nonetheless, this constitutional inclusion still represents a long way to go in combating individuals and groups who believe in homogenous Morocco. Similarly, in Europe, Amazigh diasporans try to contribute to the creation of a heterogeneous society in which everybody has a voice, and in which cultural groups live in harmony with one another, but there are and will always be elements that struggle against cultural pluralisation of the continent.

Through this thesis the reader may deduce that Amazigh songs, films, and websites not only shape Amazigh consciousness and create an imagined community, but also play a part in highlighting the issues that affect articulations of Amazigh identity in Morocco and in diaspora. As demonstrated through this thesis, the issue of uncertainty is a side effect of migration that can have severe implications both on diasporans and their loved ones in a country of origin. Amazigh media shed light on this uncertainty, alleviate it even temporarily, and try to draw attention to its causes and possible solutions.

That is, various Amazigh media perform various tasks. While a few try to highlight the uncertainty in which many Imazighen live, others seek to understand the origins of such uncertainty and present possible solutions. Additionally, there are media that provide temporary ‘homes’ in which these uncertain communities feel relative stability. In effect, migration has proved to be a complex process that endurably affects subjects. Importantly, the media I study in this thesis reveal how Imazighen strive to live, adapt, and articulate their identities in this porous process. That is to say, these subjects try to highlight and articulate their identities not in light of their ‘roots’ but ‘routes’.

As Amazigh subjects become transnational citizens, they create more fluid communities that can socialise, interact, and bond in shifting spaces that partly fulfil their needs and continuous development. The resulting identities, as is the case with the Amazigh diasporic community, are hybrid ones. These hybrid identities maintain a few cultural elements that create the sense of belonging and cultural identity as part of a process where new cultural elements eventually refresh the old ones.
Many Imazighen began to emigrate from Morocco more than a century ago, first to Algeria and later to Europe and the rest of the world. People left a country in which they saw poverty, subjugation, and despair. Nonetheless, they did not leave their homeland empty-handed. They brought with them ideas, images, and memories of this homeland that partly sustain their identities and become a virtual anchor as they continue to sail in the journey of migration.

These Imazighen left their country, hoping to find a better world where they, their children, and grandchildren can live in dignity, and importantly to be able to create spaces in which they can express their sense of cultural identity without any fear. The process of migration is still active among Imazighen of the Rif region, both legally and illegally, and the production of Amazigh media is on the rise to satisfy the needs of this growing, dispersed, and imagined community.