

Rifian diaspora in the Netherlands: trajectories and memories

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Overview of the research

The literature on Moroccan migrants or the Moroccan diaspora in the Netherlands is quite abundant from a disciplinary and theoretical point of view. The historical context of its establishment, the general characteristics and features of this community and issues of integration have been widely studied (Azghari, Hooghiemstra, & Van de Vijver, 2017; Bouras, 2013, 2018; De Haas, 2013; De Mas, 1995). While this classical aspect has been extensively studied and documented so far, other aspects have yet to be explored. The present project aims to contribute to the study of one of these little-studied aspects, namely collective memory and its relation to the migration of Moroccans to the Netherlands, with a focus on the Rifian diaspora.

Then, this project is a continuation of my research work over the past few years on the dynamics of memory and forms of national identity in the Rif. Since 2010, I have conducted several research projects in the Rif, first to prepare a thesis in sociology on collective memory and its uses (2014), and then by taking part in the study of the creation of a museum of the region as part of the collective reparation program of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER). From 2016, I continued my research on the social dynamics of resilience in relation to the history of violence in the region and collective memory (Nahhass, 2016, 2019). Hence my interest in the Rifian diaspora, its trajectories and memories. This interest was reinforced with the social movement (*Hirak Rif*) in the Rif region in 2017 (Rhani & all. 2020). This moment of the *Hirak* showed certain dynamics within the diaspora, which perhaps until then were not visible enough or perhaps the focus was put on other dimensions. If the mobilization of the collective memory of the Rif and the claim of a certain identity particularism was used by the diaspora. This mobilization of memory was and still is done in various forms of artistic expression (music, poetry, song ...) or cultural (claim of the Amazigh culture, including local symbols of this culture) and memory work on the traces of the local past (including the memory of colonial and post-colonial violence in the region). This mobilization was, in general, done within the framework of associations and in connection with certain local associations in the Rif, and it was a matter of the elites, some of whom had a certain militant know-how acquired at Moroccan universities before their migration. The *hirak* revealed the presence of new trends

within this diaspora. In addition to associative action, there has been the emergence of political demands within the diaspora, even if they are a minority within the diaspora. The diaspora has not only activated networks of solidarity with the *hirak* movement, but has created its own dynamics of protest. Thus, we have seen the emergence of this diaspora as a political actor (or at least the desire of certain trends to impose themselves as a political actor and/or as an intermediary between the Rif and the central power and between the Moroccan government and "their host countries" (even if this formula is not entirely meaningful). This situation has generated conflicts (competition for memories, competition for leadership) and new power relations, not only vertically but also horizontally, i.e. between the diaspora itself and between the diaspora and local Rifian elites.

The aim of this project is to try to understand these different dynamics, not only by looking at the memory of their trajectories, but also by studying their perceptions and uses of the past and the memory of their country of origin or place of birth. In this case, it is a question of studying what different memories are to be collected. In addition, how are these memories constructed? Are these the same processes of construction of collective memory in the Rif and among Rifian migrants in the Netherlands? Is there a circulation of memories between the two shores? How is the memory or memories transmitted to the descendants of migrants? Through which media (through songs and stories, music, dance or religion)? What are the issues at stake? How is the place of birth referred to? What links of belonging are forged, through these memories, with the nation (nations)? Can we speak of dual belonging or multiple spaces of belonging?

Positioning of the research

This research project mobilizes theories from the sociology of collective memory in order to study trajectories and diaspora experiences and memories over a long time. This research is also based on the literature of migration studies and theories of migrant transnationalism (Glick Schiller 2004; Levitt 2005)

The memory of migration/immigration has become a favourite subject in the social sciences in recent decades. The interest of researchers in this subject has echoed the various social movements of migration memory around the world. The aim of these migration movements was to document, publicize, preserve and enhance the memory of migrants. This also aims to promote and accept migrants and their descendants. The migration, transnationalism in an increasingly globalized world, where mobility creates multiple belongings, has changed the classical understandings of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992). The places of memory

(Nora, 1997) are no longer contained within the borders of the nation-state. Memory is becoming itinerant, transnational (De Cesari and Rigney 2014).

The transnational approach makes it possible to go beyond the traditional framework of the nation-state in relation to the problems of integration and belonging. It thus makes it possible to account for migratory practices, multiple identifications and loyalties. It allows us to address the issue of plural identities, multiple allegiances and forms of transnational political commitment.

Research design and Methodology

The objective is to document the dynamics and memory trajectories of the Rifian diaspora in the Netherlands by situating it in the long history of this community. The approach is essentially qualitative. It will consist in conducting semi-directed interviews and realizing the life stories of migrants by targeting different profiles. Generally, access will be through associations and collectives of the migrant community.

These collected testimonies and life stories will be complemented by the analysis of archival and documentary studies. Therefore, it will explore institutional archives: from institutions in the Netherlands that are competent in the field of migration, from archives of associations and collectives of immigrants, as well as from personal archives.

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