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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Cultural Dissemination of North African Diaspora in Western Europe: From Pasts to Pixels

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| ABSTRACT

This study takes stock of the North African diaspora's experiences in Western Europe across four distinct generations. It draws on a tailored theoretical framework to deconstruct the interactions of the historical experiences, societal shifts, and identity negotiations these generations have gone through in the process of cultural dissemination. The central question of the paper revolves around understanding the ways digital platforms and social media influence the negotiation and preservation of cultural heritage, as well as looking into how these technological advancements impact the formation of diasporic identities. The primary objective herein is to shed light on the challenges, resistances, and adaptations experienced by the four generations (Pioneering, Integration, Globalization, and Digital Generations) in the face of cultural differences, discrimination, and the unique opportunities afforded by the digital age. Furthermore, the objective is to contribute to the existing body of literature by adopting a holistic approach that synthesizes various aspects of the diasporic experience, shedding light on the ways in which technology shapes the cultural narratives of North African communities, ultimately offering some insights into the broader discourse on cultural resilience, connectivity, and the evolving nature of diasporic communities in the contemporary world.

| KEYWORDS

Diaspora; Migration; Cultural Dissemination; Identity; Hybridity; Integration; North Africa; Europe

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### 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the efforts of cultural dissemination through diaspora engagement by Moroccans, Algerians, and Tunisians (Hereafter North Africans or Maghrebi) in Western Europe have significantly grown in both pace and volume thanks to the emergence of digitalization and the rise of social media. Spurred by economic opportunities and geopolitical shifts in the post-World War II era, the initial wave of North African guest workers to Western Europe in 1960s (de Haas 2009) faced challenges in the face of cultural differences, language barriers, and discrimination. Those were the ones who laid the foundation for a diaspora that has evolved across four distinct generations today. The second generation, born or raised in host countries, embracing dual identities, negotiating between their parents' cultural values and the societal norms of their new homes. The third generation embraced a globalized context, contending with the dilemmas of cultural hybridity. Growing up in the digital era, the fourth and current generation faces unique challenges and opportunities.

Collectively, the four generations have not only weathered the challenges of integration but have also actively participated in shaping the cultural fabric of their host countries. Comprising over 5 million Moroccans (MWN, March 2023, nearly 2 million Algerians (ICMPD April 2020), and 1.3 million Tunisians, (80% based in Western Europe), with significant concentrations in France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, they actively portray the Maghreb region as a cultural hub with a rich heritage, diverse and flavourful identities through culinary diplomacy, artistic endeavours, sporting successes, and intellectual achievements. Their efforts harness soft power, foster positive associations, and position the North African diaspora communities as global cultural ambassadors within Europe.

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Meanwhile, the rise of digitalization and social media has expanded the cultural reach and has enabled a substantial part of these communities to leverage digital platforms to amplify their cultural narratives. Festivals, exhibitions, and celebrations showcasing the Maghreb's diverse cultural elements now find resonance in the virtual world and extend beyond physical boundaries of Europe's metropolis capitals of Paris, Rome, Barcelona, Berlin, and Amsterdam, among others. Culinary diplomacy, too, is propelled into the digital realm through social media platforms wherein recipes-sharing, cooking tutorials, and virtual dining experiences are provided. Additionally, artistic endeavours and intellectual achievements have found new avenues in which artists, musicians, writers, and academics now engage with a global audience through online exhibitions, performances, literary initiatives, and academic contributions. Of equal importance is the emergence of diaspora influencers as cultural ambassadors who shape new narratives about their cultural identity in the online space.

In light of these transformations, this study takes stock of the North African diaspora's experiences in Western Europe across four distinct generations. The central question of the paper revolves around understanding the ways digital platforms and social media influence the negotiation and preservation of cultural heritage, as well as looking into how these technological advancements impact the formation of diasporic identities. The primary objective herein is to shed light on the challenges, resistances, and adaptations experienced by the four generations (Pioneering, Integration, Globalization, and Digital Generations) in the face of cultural differences, discrimination, and the unique opportunities afforded by the digital age. Furthermore, the objective is to contribute to the existing body of literature by adopting a holistic approach that synthesizes various aspects of the diasporic experience, shedding light on the ways in which technology shapes the cultural narratives of North African communities, ultimately offering some insights into the broader discourse on cultural resilience, connectivity, and the evolving nature of diasporic communities in the contemporary world.

Notably, while the focus of this chapter centres on the experiences of the North African diaspora in Western Europe across four generational phases, it is essential to acknowledge certain aspects that fall beyond the scope of this analysis. The chapter intentionally refrains from an exhaustive exploration of certain themes. For instance, it does not extensively delve into the comparative dynamics between different diasporas or provide an exhaustive examination of the broader concept of digitalization and its impact on various aspects of society. Additionally, while cultural identity is a central theme, the chapter does not aim to comprehensively cover every dimension of identity negotiation, particularly those not directly linked to the overarching narrative of the North African diaspora. This deliberate narrowing of focus allows for a more a focused unpacking of the selected themes.

Following this introduction, the following section delineates the historical context of North African migration and introduces the overarching theme of generational evolution. The subsequent section delves into a brief literature review, highlighting some salient work on diaspora studies, digitalization, and cultural identity. The chapter then unfolds the diasporic evolution from the Pioneering to the Digital Generation, elucidating the challenges, adaptations, and opportunities encountered by each cohort. Furthermore, we examine the digital influence on diasporic bonds, empowerment, and connectivity, drawing upon significant theoretical contributions. The chapter culminates with a discussion of the central question of the paper, then a general conclusion and a list of references.

## **2. Literature Review**

Diaspora studies have been widely investigated within the Social Sciences' fields during the last three decades. Likewise, there is no shortage of literature and research on the Arab diaspora in the West. Several analytical, comparative, quantitative, and policy-oriented studies have been crafted by both Western and Arab researchers. To state a few, Wisam Abdul-Jabbar (January 2015) explored the terrain of double consciousness within the Arab diaspora, drawing parallels with the African dispersion and revealing the interplay of historical and contemporary forces that shape ethno-cultural identity negotiation. Abdelouahed Kmir (April 2015) navigates the challenges faced by European Arabs. He offers insights into cultural detachment, educational crises, and identity struggles, while Ashraf Waleed Mansour (January 2022) illuminates the poignant stories of Arab diasporic women in Laila Halaby's "West of the Jordan," unveiling a dual role of diasporic experiences as both catalysts for uprooting and fortifying societal and cultural challenges.

Likewise, Sally Howell (March 2000) embarks on Arab American aesthetics transcending borders. The work unravels the complexities of ethnic identity within diaspora. Shifting focus to the economic and demographic impact, Aleksei V. Sarabiev's (2021) narrative unfolds a paradigm shift in Arab diasporas in Sweden, showcasing adaptive strategies and transformative changes influenced by geopolitical shocks. Other relevant contributions include works of Paul Silverstein, Alessandro Triulzi, Peter J. Aspinall, Karen Wessendorf, Maya Shatzmiller, Dadush (2015); Mahieu & Finlay (2017 & 2018); Arbouch & Dadush (2020) and Gerdien Jonker, among other. This non-comprehensive list provides blended perspectives of both Western and Arab scholars and creates insightful overviews of diasporic experiences in the context of cultural dissemination in the West.

Yusupova and Rutland's "Introduction: Transformation of nationalism and diaspora in the Digital Age" (2020) delves into the profound changes occurring in concepts such as nationalism, the nation-state, national identity, and diasporic transnationalism in the digital era. Examining additional literature discussed by Yusupova and Rutland, particularly the work of Sabina Miheji, Cesar Jiménez-Martínez, Paul Goode, Aya Yadlin-Segal, and Ivan Kozachenko, offers insights into the dimensions of digital nationalism. Indeed, Sabina Miheji and Cesar Jiménez-Martínez underscore the commodification of nationalism within online spaces as they emphasize the diverse exchange of national sentiments in a digital community.

Paul Goode's exploration of Artificial Intelligence's impact on nationalism draws attention to the challenges posed by identity manipulation and state control over national data, which extends beyond physical territorial boundaries. Aya Yadlin-Segal's study on Iranian migrants highlights the role of online platforms in providing diaspora communities with the freedom to express their ethnic identity, fostering courage for embracing cultural differences in the real world. Ivan Kozachenko's study on the Ukrainian diaspora, particularly after the 2014 Maidan Revolution, demonstrates how digital platforms can enhance diaspora engagement with home country politics and reinforce a sense of nationalism.

In "Digital Diasporas: Staying with the Trouble" Candidatu and Ponzanesi (2022) offer a profound examination of the evolving realm of diaspora studies, specifically in the context of digital media and technology. It encourages many, if not all, scholars to embrace the liveliness of diaspora, moving beyond definitions and acknowledging its capacity to represent diverse experiences and expressions of not only migration, but also belonging and the way it works. The authors' plea to "stay with the trouble" underscores the complexity of modern diasporic experiences and the necessity for further analysis. The article contributes to the continuous discourse in diaspora studies, highlighting the adaptability of the concept in the digital age and its potential to foster bonds of solidarity that transcend traditional ethnonational boundaries. This evolving perspective provides valuable insights into the dynamics of interconnectedness and belonging in an increasingly digital world.

Despite this expansive landscape of literary investigations, a discernible gap persists in the literature. While they provide valuable insights into the experiences of Arab diasporic communities, they often focus on specific aspects such as gender dynamics, economic impacts, or historical perspectives, resulting in fragmented narratives. Hence, the present research endeavours to contribute to bridging the gap by adopting a comprehensive approach that synthesizes these threads into a cohesive understanding. In other words, by exploring the intersectionality of various factors, the chapter paints a picture of the diasporic cultural dissemination and identity negotiations. Moreover, introducing the impact of digitization and the virtual space ('From Pasts to Pixels') on cultural dissemination is a facet relatively underexplored in existing literature. In doing so, this paper aims to enrich and expand the current narrative.

### **3. Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

Key concepts in the framework of this paper are "cultural hybridity", "generational analysis", "cultural dissemination", "identity negotiation", and "Digitalization". Firstly, the concept "Cultural hybridity" has been extensively examined by theorists across diverse disciplines. Through the contributions of Homi Bhabha's "third space" and "hybridity" in his influential work, "The Location of Culture" (1994), he unravels cultural identity in postcolonial contexts. Stuart Hall explores identity and cultural hybridity in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990). Néstor García Canclini significantly contributes to understanding cultural hybridity in his book "Cultural Hybridity" (1995) and emphasizes the intermingling of global and local cultures. Paul Gilroy delves into the cultural hybridity arising from the African diaspora in his work "The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness" (1993). Néstor D. Rodríguez focuses on migration studies, particularly the issues of identity and cultural mixing in his book "Latino Politics in the United States" (1998).

The main tenets of cultural hybridity theories, as analysed by these theorists, encompass the blending of cultures, challenging fixed and singular identities, viewing cultural expression as a site of negotiation, and addressing power dynamics and resistance. For instance, Bhabha's exploration of the "third space" (1994) challenges fixed cultural boundaries and emphasizes constant interaction and transformation. Additionally, Hall (1990) explores the fluid and shifting nature of identities due to factors such as cultural heritage and migration experiences within diaspora communities. The same applies to García Canclini's "Cultural Hybridity" (1995), acknowledging the fluidity of cultural processes.

Secondly, using "generational analysis", we delve into the distinct cohorts within the North African Diaspora, where each generation embodies a unique temporal and socio-cultural context. This uniqueness significantly marks distinct phases; and influences how cultural elements, comprising traditions, language, values, and practices, are transmitted, and transformed. Thirdly, the concept of "cultural dissemination" scrutinizes how cultural elements are being transferred across generations to preserve and evolve cultural identity. Fourthly, the concept of "identity negotiation" takes prominence, given its role, we believe, in shaping the dynamic evolution of self-perception and cultural heritage within the diaspora community amidst the influences of the host societies. Fifth, and finally, "digitalization" and the pervasive use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) emerge as catalysts for

change that redefine the very modes through which cultural dissemination occurs. It offers new avenues and impacts the speed, accessibility, and nature of diasporic cultural exchanges.

In tandem with these internal dynamics, major global events and trends serve as external catalysts of identity negotiation that unfolds at the crossroads of generational shifts and evolving technological landscapes. As such, the conceptual framework foresees analytical connections that spotlight how digitalization transforms cultural dissemination by introducing new channels and altering interaction dynamics and renders generational transitions as pivotal moments where identity negotiation navigates the ever-changing socio-cultural context and shapes a hybrid outlook. Global events and trends, accordingly, emerge not only as disruptors but also as shaping forces, steering the diaspora's response to evolving circumstances.

Theoretically, the analysis of the North African Diaspora's generational dynamics draws on various theories that explain the interactions of the historical experiences, societal shifts, and identity negotiations these generations have gone through in the process of cultural dissemination. Karl Mannheim's work, "The Problem of Generations" (1928), for instance, forms a bedrock for understanding how shared historical experiences shape perspectives within generational cohorts. Likewise, Howe and Strauss, in "Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069" (1991), introduce the theory of generational cycles. While focused on America, their archetypal classifications provide a broader framework to examine how historical events and cultural shifts reoccur in a pattern. This theory informs the examination of how major global events such as the Cold War, the Arab Spring, and the rise of digitalization impact each generation differently, creating cyclical patterns of cultural dissemination.

"Cultural hybridity" serves herein as a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining the preservation, negotiation, and dissemination of Maghrebi diaspora's cultural heritage and identities in a digitalized era. It acknowledges the challenges of preservation and emphasizes a dynamic process rather than static conservation. It also allows for an exploration of how minorities negotiate their identities by blending traditional elements with host country practices. Additionally, cultural hybridity, in line with theories such as those proposed by Gilroy in "The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness" (1993), unpacks the role of cultural expression in dissemination. In the digital age, Maghrebi diaspora communities leverage digital technologies for global outreach, as theorized by Chambers in "Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture" (2004).

Ortega y Gasset's concept of the "mass man," as presented in "The Revolt of the Masses" (1930), adds a historical dimension to the analysis. It allows digging into how historical events mould distinct generational responses within the diaspora. This perspective aids in understanding how the second generation, born or arriving at a young age in host countries, navigated their dual identity struggles amid evolving societal norms in their host societies in Western Europe. Finally, the concept of "identity crisis" by Erik Erikson enables us to underpin how the third and fourth generations negotiate their hybrid identities in the context of globalization and digitalization. Collectively, these theories prove valuable to grasping how Maghrebi diaspora engages in cultural negotiations and adapts to the host culture in Europe while preserving essential ties to their roots.

#### **4. Results and Discussion:**

##### **4.1 Diasporic Evolution from Pasts to Pixels**

The generational nomenclature herein —Pioneering, Integration, Globalization, and Digital— serves not only as a chronological marker but also encapsulates the core experiences and identity negotiations distinctive to each era. From pioneering the path to digital negotiations, the generational evolution reflects not only the challenges faced but also the resilience and adaptability of a community that navigates the intersection of heritage, identity, and the complexities of its adopted homes. In this section, we delve into the journey of these generations to gain understanding about some of their challenges, resistances, adaptations, and the overarching impact of globalization and digitalization on their identities.

##### *4.1.1 The Pioneering Generation (1960s-1980s)*

The roots of North African migration to Europe trace back centuries, with early movements facilitated by trade routes and military conquests. However, the post-World War II era witnessed a transformative surge, driven by economic opportunities in Western Europe, particularly in France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Responding to the urgent demand for labour during the post-war reconstruction boom, the first bulk of North Africans emigrants, predominantly from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, became integral to the rebuilding efforts, taking up roles in manufacturing, construction, and mining (Bommes, Fassmann & Sievers, 2014). The arrival of the pioneering generation was not without its challenges. The abrupt shift from familiar homelands to culturally unfamiliar environments presented hurdles to integration due to language barriers and heightening feelings of isolation. Moreover, the diaspora faced discrimination and racism, adding layers of complexity to their new lives (Anna Lindh, 2010).

Despite these adversities, the pioneering demonstrated extraordinary resilience in preserving its culture as a means of resisting assimilation and maintaining a connection to their homeland. Central to this resilience was the establishment of tight-knit communities, often revolving around cultural and religious institutions. Formed through shared traditions, proximity, and

organized events, these communities served not only as practical support systems but also as cultural bastions fostering a sense of solidarity that helped mitigate assimilation challenges (Levitt, 1998). Religious and cultural institutions, including mosques and community centres, emerged as focal points for passing down language, traditions, and values through generations. Language played a pivotal role in cultural preservation, with efforts made to transmit native languages within families, enabling the articulation of a unique identity in a foreign context. Notably, a small segment of the first generation sought a delicate equilibrium between embracing elements of the local culture while endeavouring to retain essential ties to their roots.

#### *4.1.2 The Integration Generation (1980s-1990s)*

Identity struggles and cultural negotiations are two underlying features that characterized the second generation - the Integration Generation - between the 1980s and the 1990s. It comprises individuals who were either born in the host countries or immigrated at a young age. Their struggles stemmed from the dilemma of reconciling their parents' cultural values to the societal norms of Western Europe. Challenging as it may sound, the process of navigating and negotiating this duality resulted in the formation of a hybrid identity, characterized by the incorporation of diverse elements from both ancestral heritage and the host societies in which they were raised. The negotiation process, although dynamic and evolving, was not without its moments of tension. This led to a range of responses within the generation; and the pressure to reconcile conflicting cultural values often impacted their self-perception and identity formation.

Furthermore, the constant negotiation of cultural expectations of origins and the societal norms of the host required a resilience that was not always met with success, because while some managed to blend, others could not reconcile the divergent aspects of their identity. In other words, some embraced their dual identity with confidence, viewing it as a source of strength and richness. Others, however, faced internal conflicts that could manifest in feelings of alienation, uncertainty, or a sense of not fully belonging to either cultural sphere. For instance, the "banlieues" communities in French cities like Paris and Marseille still witness to the feelings of alienation and internal conflicts this generation has encountered including social and economic barriers. Likewise, stereotypes and prejudices associated with guest worker legacy are encountered in Berlin and Frankfurt (Germany); or the multicultural urban Centres in London and Birmingham; and the impact of identity politics on the Integration Generation in the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

These challenges had repercussions on the perceptions of the host countries. While those who successfully incarnated hybridity held positive perceptions of the host countries, which in turn resulted in their ability to find acceptance and integrate; the perceptions of those who struggled were influenced by feelings of marginalization and discrimination. In short, the Integration Generation embodies cultural dichotomies incorporating a heightened sense of adaptability, resilience, and cultural fluidity.

#### *4.1.3 Globalization Generation (2000s-2010s)*

By 2000s, the evolution of hybrid identities became more pronounced in the third generation. Their identities became increasingly hybrid, influenced not only by the cultural heritage passed down from their ancestors but also by the globalized world in which they lived. Indeed, globalization has helped foster connectivity and facilitating exposure to diverse cultural influences from both their origins and the broader global community. This evolution has far-reaching implications and equipped diaspora members with a unique cultural adaptability, openness, tolerance, and a global perspective. These characteristics have translated into increased representation and participation in political spheres, challenging traditional narratives and contributing to a more pluralistic political environment.

Demographically, intercultural marriages and cultural exchanges have created a demographic landscape that reflects the interconnectedness of different cultural backgrounds and heterogeneous social fabric. Culturally, their ability to integrate diverse cultural influences has contributed to a fusion of traditions, arts, and expressions. Economically, this generation's adaptability and global perspective have resulted in a workforce characterized by language proficiency, cross-cultural communication skills, and a cosmopolitan outlook. This, in turn, positions them as valuable contributors to the globalized economy of their host countries. Likewise, back in their parents' origins, they acted as a catalyst for exchange between Europe and North African cultural heritage. The Diaspora engagement of the third generation has indeed fostered transnational exchange of ideas and cultural practices. Financially, they have contributed to their origins through remittances, investments, and entrepreneurial ventures and have become pillars in the economic development of their ancestral homelands.

In the context of globalization, major world events significantly impacted the livelihoods and representation of the third generation. For instance, the aftermath of the September 11 events triggered heightened scrutiny and stereotyping against Muslims and Arabs in Western media and communities due to the conflation of Islam with terrorism. The war in Iraq and the broader war on terrorism further fuelled these anti-Muslim sentiments and created an atmosphere of suspicion, surveillance, and discrimination in various public spheres, including the media, the street, the schools, and employment. In fact, the public sphere in major European countries became a climate where the Arab and Muslim diaspora's cultural and religious identities were often scrutinized and politicized.

Debates on national security and identity became more Islamophobic. Media portrayals often perpetuated stereotypes and stigmatized views that contributed to the marginalization of the third generation. Additionally, the 2008 economic crisis added another layer to these challenges. The eruption of the world banking system and the financial instability impacted the job market and increased the existing social tensions between the locals and immigrants.

Despite these challenges, the third generation has also responded resiliently to the globalized landscape. They have harnessed the power of connectivity through social media and online platforms to challenge stereotypes, foster dialogue, and build networks that counteract negative narratives. Additionally, the globalization of information has allowed them to engage in transnational activism, connecting with global movements that advocate for social justice and inclusivity. In essence, the conditions that shaped this generation render it a key contributor, not only to their own narrative but to the broader history of diasporic discourse in Europe and North Africa.

#### *4.1.4 Globalization Generation (2000s-2010s)*

The defining feature of the fourth generation's cultural identity is the omnipresence of digitalization. The internet and social media platforms serve as dynamic canvases where their cultural narratives unfold, and identities are expressed. This provides a virtual home that transcend geographical boundaries. Online communities such as language learning groups, digital storytelling forums, cooking lessons' pages, among many others become spaces where a sense of community and connection are harnessed. However, the digital era also presents unparalleled challenges. Navigating the digital realm requires a discerning approach as individuals are exposed to an abundance of perspectives, sometimes conflicting, about their cultural heritage. The challenge lies in preserving the authenticity of their identity amidst the cacophony of voices and narratives that shape the online space. Additionally, the omnipresence of social media brings the risk of perpetuating stereotypes, which could potentially distort genuine representations of the Maghrebi migrants.

The cultural identity of the fourth generation is further shaped by the impact of global events in the digital era. To state a few examples, the continuation of the Arab Spring, which took momentum digitally, influences the generation's understanding of activism, civic engagement, and the power of collective actions. Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic, marked by physical isolation and digital reliance, accelerates the integration of digital tools into their daily experiences, and it has influenced the perceptions of connectivity, community, and resilience. The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), however, raises various challenging questions with regards to the future of diasporic cultural preservations and representations along the channels of negotiating and disseminating identities. Central to these questions is what future scenarios are imagined for the construct of cultural identity and their impacts on both the host country and country of origins? And whether the diaspora will experience cultural unity or fragmentation, political engagement, or disconnection, or simply an emancipation of hybridity as an independent third space with unclear socio-cultural boundaries and institutional apparatuses.

#### **4.2 Digital Empowerment, Digital Divide & Emotional Dynamics**

Sandra Ponzanesi's work, "Digital Diasporas: Post-coloniality, Media, and Affect" (2020), represents a significant contribution to the exploration of the nexus between postcolonial identity, digital media, and the emotional landscapes within diasporic communities. Her articulated thesis in "Digital Diasporas: Post-coloniality, Media, and Affect," is relevant within the context of the North African diaspora in Western Europe as it deconstructs digital media and serves as a powerful tool for diaspora communities to challenge stereotypes, reclaim narratives, and navigate emotional experiences. In other words, the central idea of diasporic communities utilizing digital platforms to counter prevailing stereotypes and assert control over their narratives aligns with the challenges faced by the North African diaspora. Ponzanesi's insights suggest that leveraging digital media can empower North African diaspora communities by sharing their narratives, experiences, and perspectives through online platform. Hence, they can actively reshape the narrative surrounding their identity and foster a more accurate and authentic representations.

Still, the "digital divide" remains as an underling feature that the North African diaspora in Western Europe is subjected to. Disparities in accessing technological resources due language barriers and financial limitations especially among the second generation remain acute; and variations in digital literacy and socio-economic status influence a big chunk of Maghrebi immigrants in their engagement with digital media. Emotionally, and as argued by Ponzanesi, the affective connections and disconnections triggered by digital platforms remain a decisive determinant for maintaining ties or disconnecting with the homelands. Simultaneously, these platforms may evoke a sense of "nostalgia," reflecting the emotional complexities in exploring dual identities and the longing for one's native country.

#### **4.3. Digital Reshaping of Diasporic Bonds**

The ubiquity of digital technologies has induced a profound metamorphosis in the dynamics of North African diasporic communities. The former have fundamentally reshaped the interactions and affiliations. Bjola, Manor, and Adiku (2022) meticulously scrutinizes this paradigmatic shift in "Diaspora Diplomacy in the Digital Age". The essay highlights four paradoxical

trends that may influence the trajectory of diasporic relations in the digital age. A salient observation in the essay revolves around the recalibration of power dynamics, notably the transition from Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) to embassies, instigated by the ascendancy of digital tools and social media. In the context of this paper, the commodification of intercultural artefacts through digitalization can be seen as a form of cultural diplomacy, as it allows diaspora members to showcase their cultural heritage and identity in ways that are appealing, accessible, and influential to audiences in their host countries, which contributes to intercultural understanding and dialogue.

Indeed, the commodification of intercultural artefacts through digitalization can be seen as a form of cultural diplomacy and soft power, as it allows diaspora communities to leverage their cultural assets to build bridges, foster dialogue, and promote their interests in the international arena. The national governments of Morocco and Tunisia, for instance, have implemented diaspora policies aimed at leveraging contributions for financial prosperity and development. For example, the Moroccan government has launched several initiatives to promote Moroccan culture in Europe and beyond, such as the "Morocco in the heart of Europe" program, which aimed to exhibit Moroccan arts, crafts, and cuisine in major European cities (Akasbi & Touati, 2020). This evolving recognition is now prompting a more inclusive and collaborative approach that acknowledges their substantial contributions to home countries. This shift alternatively empowers embassies to directly engage with foreign populations, curate national images, and advocate policies, thereby harnessing digital platforms for cultural and political gains.

However, while presenting opportunities for interaction, these virtual communities pose challenges for diplomats and necessitate engagement across diverse platforms to authentically connect with dispersed communities. This can be lucidly observed in the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Moroccan Residing Aboard, concentrating on third and fourth generation diasporas through various cultural, educational, and mediated initiatives that aim at fostering emotional ties. This is so because the unique challenges posed by digital diasporas, manifested both offline and online, underscore the imperative for embassies to cultivate robust digital relationships. Social network analysis, in this regard, is identified as a strategic tool, encompassing the influencer approach, cluster approach, and complex contagion approach, as stated by Bjola, Manor, and Adiku (2022), with the aim of providing avenues for embassies to enhance their digital engagement strategies with diasporic communities.

#### ***4.4. Hybridity, Transnationalism & Diasporic Everydayness***

As stated earlier, "Cultural hybridity", as articulated by Bhabha (1994) and García Canclini (1995), encompasses the amalgamation and integration of diverse cultural constituents and gives rise to novel, hybrid cultural manifestations. It unfolds as a dynamic process wherein varied cultural traditions intersect, interact, and amalgamate; thus, creating distinctive expressions that assimilate elements from multiple cultural sources (Bhabha, 1994; García Canclini, 1995). The concept challenges the notion of static, unadulterated cultures by recognizing that cultural identities are malleable, dynamic, and in a perpetual state of evolution (Ibid). Within the daily livelihood experiences of the Maghrebi migrants in Western Europe, cultural hybridity transcends theoretical abstraction and permeates multiple facets of their daily lives.

Linguistic cultural hybridity, as exemplified by code-switching, is observed as migrants navigate multiple languages, blending expressions from their native language (Arabic or Amazigh with those of their host country (Gumperz, 1982). In the realm of culinary practices, migrants bring traditional recipes into new environments, adapting them to local ingredients and tastes, which gave rise to fusion cuisine (Kraidy, 2005). Moreover, the incorporation of traditional clothing from migrants' home countries with contemporary styles in the host country underscores the negotiation of identity through fashion choices (Root, 1996). These manifestations extend to religious practices, social interactions, media consumption, artistic expressions, and cultural celebrations, portraying cultural hybridity as a process of adaptation, negotiation, and creative synthesis within the fabric of migration experiences (Berman, 2010; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

Additionally, North African migrants now use digital technologies to engage with both their country of origin and their host society through blended cultural practices. For example, they use social media platforms to share traditional music or dance with their peers in their host country while also engaging with similar cultural practices in their country of origin. The hybridity that arises from this blending of traditional and modern elements create new cultural forms; a "third space" that reflects unique experiences. Meanwhile, they participate in transnational networks connecting with other diaspora communities, both within and outside their host country: for example, North Africans in France may connect with similar communities in the United States or Canada. This allows them to share and learn from others.

We can argue that there are several reasons that drive diaspora communities to resort to cultural hybridity and transnationalism. On one hand, many migrants experience a sense of nostalgia for their home country and culture. These feelings prove difficult to overcome during cultural and religious festivities and holidays such as Ramadan, Eid-Al-Fitr or Eid-Al-Adha. Thus, to maintain a connection to their roots and continue to engage with their native culture they resort to hybridity and transnationalism as an act of coping mechanism. On the other hand, some migrants (particularly the first and second generation) often face discrimination

and marginalization in their host countries; and their way of resisting dominant cultural norms is expressed through their subscription into small groups of peer migrants, constituting small circles that accommodates nationals of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. They are often visible in certain city squares of Bordeaux, Marseille (France), Rotterdam (the Netherlands), Stuttgart & Berlin (Germany), Seville & Alhambra (Spain), and Bari & Brescia (Italy), among others. Finally, other migrants also use cultural hybridity as a means of economic and social advancement or gaining social capital that can help them cope with everyday livelihood.

As such, hybridization of cultural transactions results in the creation of new cultural forms that enrich both communities. For instance, the omnipresence of diverse cultures and practices in Paris, Amsterdam or London not only promotes a sense of inclusivity and respect for differences but is one of the factors behind the rise of these cities as the world's most attractive metropolises. In other words, and conversely to the traditionally held view that associates immigrants with remittances, the cultural artifacts generated by immigrants have economic and social benefits for the host society, such as the development of new industries, such as cultural tourism or the sale of cultural products. Additionally, the cultural expertise and skills of migrants contribute to the development of new cultural and social networks.

Artistically, the hybridized culture of North African diaspora communities has enriched arts, music, and literature landscape of Most Western European countries. For example, the use of North African musical instruments and rhythms in contemporary European music has led to the emergence of new genres, such as Rai and Gnawa music. Similarly, the use of Arabic calligraphy in European arts has resulted in the creation of new forms of visual art. All these cultural exchange communities have immensely contributed to dismantling stereotypes and prejudices that have existed since the arrival of the first generation of immigrants.

Today, there are thousands of Moroccans, Tunisians, and Algerian YouTubers and Tik-Tokers whose mediated contents revolved around sharing stories about the everydayness of their intercultural marital lives including how they celebrated their wedding ceremonies, food, clothing, and music. The commodification of intercultural marriage as a mediated cultural artifact in the digital content becomes production and consumption that reflect hybridization. Marital life, therefore, is used as a symbol or a representation of the diasporic experience and the ways in which these communities negotiate social institutions such as intercultural marriages in the context of their host countries. In addition, intercultural marriages can also be commodified in the sense that they can be used as a form of cultural capital. For example, individuals who are in intercultural marriages may be seen as possessing a certain level of cultural knowledge and understanding, which can be valued in certain contexts. This cultural capital is leveraged by diaspora communities in their digital content as a way of highlighting their cultural diversity and positioning themselves as cultural ambassadors or experts.

## 5. Conclusion

As a catalyst for transnational and international communication, the Internet has redefined the boundaries that traditionally chart a nation-state. This has given rise to virtual communities that not only foster nationalism but also transcend geographical borders, consolidating a sense of national identity and broadening the real of cultural identities among individuals who share common interests and concerns. This idea is elaborately discussed by Yusupova and Rutland (2020), which also applies to the diaspora communities from North Africa in Europe who actively participate in diverse realms and contribute to the cultural and political landscape. The Algerian diaspora in France notably influenced the Algerian War of Independence and established political entities that advocated for Algerians' rights in France.

The integration of North African cultural elements into European design and architecture has produced innovative structures. Fashion becomes a medium for blending traditional attire with contemporary European styles, showcased through digital platforms. In film, immigrants produce narratives about identity, belonging, and migration. Intercultural marriages are commodified as mediated cultural artifacts, with couples using digital technologies to share ceremonies that fuse traditional practices with modern European elements. Furthermore, diaspora engagement extends to transnational political activism to advocate for community rights in host and home countries. Paradoxically, the socio-cultural challenges faced by the diaspora catalysed creative adaptation, leading to the emergence of a unique cultural synthesis. This fusion not only helped overcoming challenges but also enriched the diversity of cultural expressions in Western Europe.

While the future remains unpredictable, we can at least imagine five potential future scenarios. First, it could be that digital tools would enhance cultural resilience and foster unity within the diaspora through robust online platforms for cultural exchange and assertions. Alternatively, the second scenario might unfold risks of identity fragmentation and stereotyping perpetuations in the digital realm. Third, global events, such as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the rise of islamophobia steered by global media misrepresentations, the Israeli war on Palestine, and global pandemics, to mention just a few, might become catalysts for further new forms of digital political activism and civic engagements characterized by global trends that transcend geographic, religious, and racial boundaries that would discredit the West's long-held discourses about democracy, shared international values of human



right, freedom, and individual dignity. Fourth, and more optimistically, digitalization might continue bridging cross-cultural understanding, breaking down stereotypes, and contributing to a global community. Finally, the fifth scenario warns against technological dependence, where an overreliance on digital tools may result in disconnection from tangible cultural experiences, potentially leading to a detachment from authentic cultural practices of both sides: the host country and the country of forefathers.

In conclusion, the history of North African migration to Western Europe unveils a narrative of resilience and adaptation. Despite encountering substantial socio-cultural challenges, the diaspora has strategically employed various mechanisms to preserve and disseminate its rich cultural heritage. Recognizing these historical foundations is essential as we delve into the exploration of the ongoing cultural dissemination of the North African diaspora and strive to document how their cultural identities have been sustained and shared across generations.

### **5.1. Limitations**

Like any other academic undertakings, the present study remains subject to limitations at level of scope, analytical approach, and methodological design. First, the analysis could have optimally benefited from the inclusion of other North African or diaspora communities (Libya and Egypt), because there is no denying of the fact that their unique historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts as well as their migration patterns to Western Europe is worth narrating. Second, although we emphasize the role of digitalization and social media in the cultural dissemination and identity negotiation of the Maghrebi diaspora, it must be acknowledged that access to these digital tools is not uniform. Variations in socioeconomic status, age, digital literacy, and access to technology within the diaspora can influence the extent to which individuals can engage with digital platforms for cultural expression and community building. This digital divide may limit the inclusivity of the digital diasporic experiences captured in this study.

Additionally, the decision to focus specifically on the North African diaspora's experiences without a comparative analysis with other diaspora communities in Western Europe may limit the ability to draw broader conclusions about the unique or shared aspects of diasporic cultural negotiation and digital engagement. Third, and finally, drawing mainly on theoretical framework for this qualitative analysis without any resort to first-hand data collection method renders the study subjective as it may not fully capture the intentions and perceptions of the studied demography; and far from claiming any generalizable conclusions.

While recognition of these limitation is warranted, the latter are also plausibly refutable. For instance, while the study primarily examines the experiences of Moroccans, Algerians, and Tunisians in Western Europe, incorporating other communities would require additional resources and more focused studies due to their unique historical, cultural, and migration patterns. Likewise, the digital divide within the diaspora communities reflects the socioeconomic disparities and digital inequalities as pervasive challenges within society at large. Furthermore, relying mainly on theoretical frameworks has enabled the study to build a conceptual scaffolding for understanding the trajectories, evolutions and transformation of North African diaspora and unleashed valuable insights, even in the absence of primary data. Finally, these limitations open avenues for future research that can extend our understanding of diaspora dynamics, the impact of digitalization on cultural dissemination, and identity negotiation.

### **5.2. Avenues for Future Research**

In this regard, future research could the same topic but from a comparative approach that includes other North African countries like Libya and Egypt, as well as diaspora communities from different regions. Such studies would enrich the academic debate of the subject matter. Of equal importance is the exploration of how factors such as socioeconomic status, age, digital literacy, and access to technology affect individuals' ability to participate in digital diaspora networks. Research could also examine strategies to overcome these barriers and enhance digital inclusivity among diaspora members. Future research could also incorporate first-hand data collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, and case studies, because engaging directly with members of the diaspora would provide deeper insights into their personal experiences, intentions, and perceptions about their migratory livelihood. Finally, while the role of digitalization is critical nowadays, it is equally important to examine the non-digital forms of cultural dissemination and identity negotiation within diaspora communities by looking, for instance, at how traditional events, community centres, and personal networks contribute to cultural preservation and identity formation in the diaspora context. There are but a few, along many other, potential topic for future investigations.

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