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Ontmoetingen tussen Marokkaanse Nederlanders en de Marokkaanse overheid: een antropologisch perspectief

Kahmann, M.J.

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Summary

Morocco has more than thirty million citizens, of which around ten per cent currently live abroad. The Moroccan government has developed policies which relate directly to the lives of these migrants who are living outside the geographical borders of Moroccan territory. Several institutes have been founded by the Moroccan government as a way of implementing these policies; they aim to construct and maintain bonds with these citizens, who mainly live in Europe. In political and societal debates in the Netherlands, the bonds that the Moroccan government forges with Moroccan Dutch are regarded with suspicion. Within these public discussions most attention is placed on scrutinizing the activities of the Moroccan government. The personal experiences of the Moroccan Dutch, however, are unfortunately given little attention. The focus of my research, therefore, has started to bridge this troubling gap by dealing with the perceptions, experiences, and reactions of this group of people.

For Morocco, as with other "sending states", three focal areas - regarding their relationship with citizens abroad - can be distinguished: their economic interests; political interests; and the interests they have in improving the reputation of the Moroccan state through their extraterritorial citizens. The Moroccan government uses several instruments in order to implement the policies; these include, a ministry for Moroccans abroad, cultural centers in countries of settlement, and programs to facilitate investments in Morocco. In addition, Moroccan enterprises – such as the national telecom service and the royal airlines – assist in enabling these policies to succeed.

I distinguish three possible arenas in which the Moroccan government and the Moroccan Dutch can meet: the economic, the national, and the religious place. The economic meeting place manifests itself through remittances, tourism, as well as investment and development projects. The national meeting place involves any interaction that deals with the Moroccan nationality and national identity. The religious meeting place is where the Islamic Moroccan state is able to meet Moroccans living abroad. What are the perceptions, experiences, and reactions of Moroccan Dutch in relation to these meeting places? I will summarize the results of my findings successively.

Economic meeting place

Money transfers, tourism, and the investments of Moroccans living abroad are vital for the Moroccan economy. Through banking facilities and tourist and investment programs, the Moroccan government encourages the Moroccan Dutch to maintain economic ties in order to contribute to the national income. My findings point to the fact that for the Moroccan Dutch respondents, this national policy is not the primary reason for their decision to remit money, or indeed to visit Morocco for summer holidays; for them, the economic security of their family and the need to maintain good kinship relations were of overriding importance. It is important to note, however, that the Moroccan Dutch certainly use the facilities of the Moroccan government when they consider them to be beneficial. Remitting money through the national Moroccan bank is one such example where there is a convergence of interests between the Moroccan state and the Moroccan Dutch.

National meeting place

The national meeting place can be said to revolve around two main themes: Moroccan nationality and Moroccan national (self-)identity. According to Moroccan law, it is not possible for Moroccan nationals to renounce their Moroccan nationality; this extends to include Moroccans living in the Netherlands. The way in which Moroccan Dutch respondents use their Moroccan nationality differs depending on their emotional and practical motives. As regards issues of national self-identity, overall, the Moroccan Dutch respondents feel more strongly connected to local identities than to a national Moroccan one. Despite the recent efforts of the Moroccan government to connect with this trend, by putting more emphasis on Berber identities, respondents prefer to invest in their own grassroots cultural activities.

Religious meeting place

Part of the Moroccan policy concentrates on the religious life of Moroccans living abroad and attempts to ensure that the religious line propagated by the Moroccan state is followed. The Maliki school, Ash'ari doctrine, and a Sufi understanding of Islam are the major elements of the religious life which are imposed by the Moroccan state. Claiming descent from Prophet Muhammad, Mohammed VI is the Moroccan King and the Commander of the faithful. Through the construct of this sacred kingship, political and religious authority is interrelated. The religious line imposed by the Moroccan government should, therefore, always be understood within a political context. Moroccans living in the Netherlands, however, perceive this fusion of Islam and Moroccan political interests as problematic. My research highlights that

from the perspective of Moroccan Dutch it is important to distinguish Moroccan traditional Islam from Moroccan state Islam. For instance, respondents may follow the Maliki tradition but will choose to maintain a distance from the state form of Islam, due to its political associations. Similarly, a mosque committee might employ an imam from Morocco while avoiding Moroccan state instruments in the process.

Main conclusions

Moroccan Dutch deal with Moroccan policy in a pragmatic way, based on their personal interests and desires. When the policy of the Moroccan government converges with the interests of Moroccan Dutch, they will choose to use the governmental facilities. The majority of respondents will, for instance, have a Moroccan bank account to remit money and to enable them to access repatriation insurance. When state projects do not meet with the needs of Moroccan Dutch, respondents disregard the state services. The relationship between the Moroccan Dutch and their Moroccan nationality plays out differently again, as in most cases the use of this national identity has no direct practical interest. Although for Moroccan Dutch who have social or economic aspirations in Morocco, Moroccan nationality is an important admission ticket. For example, in order to buy a house in Morocco, Moroccan Dutch need to possess their Moroccan identity card.

The personal contacts with, and the cooperation of, Moroccan Dutch are vital for the Moroccan government to successfully implement its policy. It was seen that Moroccan Dutch respondents react differently depending on these personal contacts with Moroccan authorities. They experience that Moroccan officials use preferential treatment based upon the personal traits and identity of the Moroccan Dutch person that they are dealing with; this might include their regional origin, or their economic and social position. Some respondents try to improve their relations with Moroccan officials in order to promote their own interests. Other respondents, however, actually give up their desires, for instance to own a house in Morocco, as a way of rejecting this impenetrable Moroccan policy.

To conclude, the Moroccan policy for Moroccans living abroad should not be seen as a static program, but rather as a dynamic process; it is the outcome of the interaction between the Moroccan government and Moroccans living abroad. In other words, Moroccans living abroad should not be perceived as subjects of the policy, but as actors that play a role in creating these policies, and who ultimately mediate its implementation.