

RESEARCH
ARTICLE**Mapping Algeria's Borders: An Ethnographic reading****Fatima Nabila
Moussaoui**Dr. Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Department of Political Sciences,
Algeria Regional Policy and Security Informant for the Political Science,
Department of Oran University 2

University Mohamed Ben Ahmed Oran

Algeria

Email: moussaoui.nabila@univ-oran2.dz

Doi Serial<https://doi.org/10.56334/sei/8.6.54>**Keywords**

Migration, Harga, Youth, Algeria, Border, Ethnography.

Abstract

At the intersection of the sociology of migration and departure and the sociology of urban youth, the essential notion of the border and its importance in the field of migration studies is fundamental. From my earliest studies, I was confronted with the same discourse held by young people who asserted that departure (commonly called harga in Maghreb countries) was the best, if not the only, alternative for social success. The underlying meaning of the statements of young potential candidates for this mode of migration is "leaving to succeed—leaving to get by." This research aims to understand this motivation and the representation of the border of these hundreds of potential candidates for this mode of migration known as harga.

Citation

Taileb N., Boukhobza N. (2025). How to Read Tattoos Semiologically? An Attempt to Understand the Types and the Communicative Purposes. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(6), 517-521; doi:10.56352/sei/8.6.54. <https://imcra-az.org/archive/364-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-6-volviii-2025.html>

Licensed

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Science, Education and Innovations in the context of modern problems (SEI) by IMCRA - International Meetings and Journals Research Association (Azerbaijan). This is an open access article under the **CC BY** license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Received: 13.11.2024

Accepted: 05.02.2025

Published: 16.04.2025 (available online)

Introduction:

At the intersection of a sociology of migration and departure and a sociology of urban youth, I will develop this essential notion of the border and its importance in the field of migration studies.

From my former investigations, I have been confronted with the same discourse held by young men who asserted that departure (commonly referred to as *harga* in the Maghreb countries) was the best prospect, if not the only alternative, for social success. The deep meaning of the

statements of these young potential candidates for type migration typology is "to leave to succeed—to leave to get by." From these unanimous and recurrent responses, my curiosity as a researcher led me to question the explicit and implicit meaning of these statements, namely, the social logics underlying the idea of departure. It was important to delve into the deepest aspirations, to grasp and dissect expressions like "to get by," "to become someone," used by a heterogeneous urban youth (I refer to social gaps and the various parameters that we will develop throughout this research). As it also became a mandatory lead to approach them from the angle of social relations of age, class, and gender that structure youth situations differently and according to the place of individuals in these relations.

In this field study, I develop the path towards the construction of the research subject by crossing two fields of socio-anthropology. The approach consists of capturing the multiple meanings that the *harga* takes on, as the horizon of aspirations of young Algerians.

The initial subject has been inspired by the episodes of *harraga* migrants who left on *boté*, makeshift boats, towards France, Spain, and Italy. The French, Spanish, and Italian media treatment emphasized the need to close the borders to prevent the deaths of thousands of candidates and designated poverty (economic dimension) as the main cause. In first research I dedicated to this (2006), I developed the idea that migration policies were responsible for the influx of populations and that the latter were victims of a capitalist mode of production. In clear terms, young migrants constituted a reserve of labor, a representation more relevant to activism. This idea was determined by a theorico-political background anchored in the structural approach of dependency theory, as well as that of the "world-system" (E. Wallerstein, 1986) that emerged in the 1970s-80s. This approach, which analyzes world history, globalization, and the global crisis, modeled on the phenomenon of migration, sees migratory flows as the expression of global relations of domination and adopts a historical and global perspective, namely that of the expansion of the capitalist system from a dominant center towards dependent peripheral economies. The causes of migrations, according to this theory, would be external to the individual. The penetration of capitalist production relations from the "center" into "peripheral" societies would mechanically create a population ready to emigrate.

If these approaches focus on capturing the economic causes of migration, others invite us to examine the persistence of migratory flows through social networks.

I quickly put these approaches to the test upon arriving in my research field in Oran, whose choice has been explained by the change that occurred in the profile of emigrants departing from the Algerian coasts. Over the

years of fieldwork and research between 2009 and 2014 for a first thesis publicly defended in July 2014, with Algerian *harraga* individuals, men and women, from urban and rural backgrounds, aged between 14 and 60, I have been able to observe that migration had also relatively feminized. The preferred destination countries of both groups differ somewhat. *Harraga* individuals more often choose the countries of Southern Europe like France, Italy, and Spain, which became dominant destinations in the mediated migratory landscape. The expression of a "new" migratory wave widely used by the media, and in many studies on migration in Algeria, I will cite Z. Zemmour, H. Abdellaoui, or S. Musette, thus designates the turning point that migratory dynamics in this country have taken since the 2010s to 2019 and more recently, 2019-2023, where the *harga* is more than a desire to go elsewhere, it is a form of protest against a government that no longer communicates with this important category of young people, estimated at 75% of the population in Algeria.

The Tide of Departures

My first fieldwork in 2005, for research around informal activities at the Algerian-Moroccan borders, within the framework of a master's degree in anthropology, has been marked by the encounter with a group of young people aged 16 to 35 who had attempted the crossing by sea towards Spain and succeeded, before being repatriated. This fieldwork has been conducted to collect materials around the actors of smuggling and suitcase trade, and the involvement of the local society in these "normalized" practices due to the geographical situation and the lack of economic infrastructure in these marginalized border regions. However, several times, the issue of departures by sea from the children of these border cities resurfaced. These crossings took place from the Algerian and Moroccan coasts, where many candidates, many of whom were minors from both nationalities, attempted the sea adventure. This wasn't my research object, but I noted the emergence of the profession of smuggler as a new figure in the informal economy in the region.

In 2010, at the beginning of my research on the field for a first thesis defended in Algeria, the concept of *harragas* has been designated and used in the Maghreb. We note the works of Chadia Arab, Juan David Sempere for Morocco, Farida Souiah and Salim Chena for Algeria, and also Riadh Benkhalifa and Hasan Boubakri for Tunisia.

During the formal and exploratory interviews conducted, these young *harragas* explained their attempt to leave by the will to financially help their families and highlighted the importance of socio-economic factors in their choices.

Thus expressed, migration seemed to point towards the observations of those who support the network approach, considering the importance of the family dimension, as well as those approaches that presuppose the primacy of the role of economic incentives in the decision to leave. The first three months with my informants revealed other research leads and hypotheses. Their statements accounted for the predominance of aspirations for a new life that they equate with "departure." I also noted that realizing the individual project became their leitmotiv, and more broadly, that of a popular youth questioning family solidarity and community ethos, described as obstacles to their autonomy and emancipation. Their desire to emigrate seemed strongly motivated by a perspective of individualization.

These initial research leads were confirmed during the investigations conducted with informants who had recently immigrated to France. In the case of the latter, their emigration wasn't determined by the desire to "break away from the family" or to "emancipate themselves from their own," but rather to escape the conditions of existence structured by social relations of domination. It is in this sense that the individual domination of migration, on which the works of Mahamet Timera (Autrepart 2001/2) emphasize, became particularly enlightening.

According to this sociologist, the functions of emancipation, autonomy, and individualization are too often absent in the theories of international migration. Therefore, the correlation between poverty and emigration should be critically reviewed, as it does not account for the reality of the causes of the phenomenon. Moreover, the analysis has until now emphasized the collective take-over of the family, thus neglecting the possible individual approach. This lack of attention to this dimension of migration motivations, according to the sociologist, would be attributable more to the actors themselves than to the researchers. Thus, if migration is a collective strategy, family, or even village-based, it is also an eminently individual enterprise whose major function is individualization. It introduces competition between individuals, differentiation based on unequal access to resources, which it tempers to a certain extent by assuming a significant solidarity burden. Thus, if migration in the short term reinforces the family-lignage system, in the long term, it calls it into question. Finally, migration offers a means to circumvent the inferiorizing aspects linked to this collective and collectivist family structure in certain aspects, "the oppressive side of family solidarity"¹ (Mahamet Timera, 2001, p.46). He develops the idea that family and community support and

solidarity spare most departure candidates from individual misery but also tend to exclude "the recognition, respect, and consideration to which they aspire." This also explains that the search for financial autonomy to be able to carry out projects is one of the types of motivations for emigration in this new wave of the 1990s.

Finally, emigrating can become an "individual quest" and a "self-affirmation," even a "salvation" under the effects of the changes that have occurred in Algerian society.

Migratory Landscapes and Timelines

What logics govern the migration of young Algerians between the Algerian coasts and Europe, and what are the consequences, both in terms of social transformation and individual transformation? How do the processes of individualization materialize in the practices of mobility, specifically in the comings and goings of young urban migrants? These were the starting questions of my doctoral research. To conduct this research, I followed the prescriptions of A. Sayad, who defends the idea of grasping the migratory phenomenon in its entirety from a dialectical spatial and social perspective of emigration and immigration. I found in this approach the consideration of multiple spaces of fixed multi-situated terrains, as expressed by G. Marcus, necessary to answer the questions I formulated. The research terrain corresponded to the places of origin and arrival of the young *harragas* (geographical description of the terrain in France and Algeria). It was the neighborhood of these immigrants that delimited the terrain. Meeting their "we social" of reference allowed me to compare and objectify the discourses formulated by the candidates for *harga*. We observe, in the neighborhood as well as within the family habitat, the direct, material, and symbolic consequences of their migration. The temporalities imposed by the university institution obliged me to practice comings and goings between Oran and France. A certain number of researchers, to grasp migrations and the circulation of migrants, made their mobility their research method. I cite here Souiah F., Arab C., Péraldi M., Chena S., and other researchers interested in migratory movements between the Maghreb and Europe.

To think of migration as a perspective where the individual dimension is prevalent, approached from the point of view of those for whom the idea of departure nourishes the daily and future aspirations of success, recognition, and social achievement, it is useful to focus on the place of the hypothetical migration outcome, which is that of the possible departure, Oran and its youth, candidate for departure. Whether local or passing through, the desire to leave is there!

Being focused on youth implies some peculiarities, which includes determining if this ensemble of "youths," as I

¹ Mahamet Timera (2001), : Les migrations des jeunes Sahéliens : affirmation de soi et émancipation *in* Autrepart n°18, Les jeunes : hantise de l'espace public dans les sociétés du Sud, Éditions de l'Aube, IRD.

approach them through my surveys, forms a pertinent group, sociologically speaking.

Youth in the countries of Africa is a theme that has known a recent boom, becoming a multidisciplinary object of study in Anglo-Saxon countries via the *youth studies*, thus palliating the lack of studies on this topic². In Algeria, it has been largely addressed since its demographic explosion in the 1980s.

If they are more numerous, young people are also the most affected by the consequences of the various economic crises that have affected Algeria since the 1990s. Between the delay in accessing employment and financial autonomy, the postponement of married life, they face more difficult material conditions than their elders, even if one of the factors of the postponement of these stages is the prolongation of studies for those who have access to them. The difficulties that young people of all backgrounds face in finding their place in society, perceptible at the scale of the entire capital of West African countries, have also been observed in other parts of the world since the 1980s³. In that meaning, it is common to see young men of 30 years living with their parents without being able to contribute to household expenses, whereas the previous generation has been already working for a long time. It goes without saying that one is not "young" in the same way according to gender, manners, and traditions! In Algeria, as in many African countries, women remain under tutelage, former of their father, later of their husband. Even when they work, they take a back seat and remain under the responsibility of their father, their elder brother, or their husband.

In Africa, "being young" is primarily a social category; the status characterizes, more than the calendar age which matters little, the liminal state of youth. Respect of the rules dictated by the elders, lack of autonomy, intimacy, and independence are characteristics of "social cadets". This expression, rehabilitated by the political scientist J.F. Bayart⁴ as a tool to depict power relationships, characterizes "a specific generational position"⁵, a sort of local translation of the category "young" formed in the West. Youth, as a "category," should therefore be grasped from the place occupied in the scale of seniority, as an institution regulating status hierarchies.

It is not a question, of course, of making this hierarchy immutable and the system of seniority characterized precisely by its dynamism, but of adopting the perspective of the work "L'Afrique des générations" (B. Koenig, M.N. LeBlanc, 2012), that is, to show how intergenerational contributions change, how the legitimacy of the elders can be called into question, and how young people try to escape the difficulties and constraints. The articles in this work account for intergenerational dynamics, both on the "macro" scale—the civil society—and the "micro" scale—spaces of life and tranches of life. However, young people no longer present themselves only as cadets of age, but as "cadets social," a term that refers to the feeling of "*déprise*"⁶—no longer having a grip—expressed by Van de Velde (2008). No longer being considered as cadets social, becoming an elder social, and being considered as such could better summarize the will to "become someone" that animates these young people. I will not define the category of young people a priori, but, as proposed by Rivoal (2015, p. 2) and Peatrik (2015, p. 2), I will attach myself to "the study of a category founded on ethnography, putting the young in situation and in relation"⁷, taking as central dimension the aspirations to the accomplishment of these young people who remain on the threshold of adulthood, and whose state of youth is characterized above all by the pressing injunction to become respected, listened to, and successful people. Young people would be above all a "category under tension" that reveals the "necessity always expressed by these young people to get out of a situation of domination, dependence, the stake of which is to access accomplishment that the aspirations concurring with the will to emigrate, as well as those made public by social movements, reveals.

² Maxence Morel, Mark Cieslik, Donald Simpson, Key concepts in youth studies, London, Sage, series « Key concepts », 2013, 178p.

³ Galland Olivier, Sociologie de la jeunesse, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011.

⁴ Jean-François Bayart, L'Etat au Cameroun, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris, 1979.

⁵ Julien Kieffer, les jeunes des "grains" de thé et la campagne électorale à Ouagadougou", Politique Africaine n° 101, 2006, p63-82.

⁶ Cécile Van de Velde, Devenir Adulte. Sociologie comparée de la jeunesse en Europe, Paris, PUF 2008.

⁷ Isabelle Rivoal et Anne-Marie Peatrik, « Les « jeunes » dans le sud de la Méditerranée », Ateliers d'anthropologie [En ligne], 42 | 2015, mis en ligne le 17 novembre 2015, consulté le 04 mai 2016. URL : <http://ateliers.revues.org/9972> ; DOI : 10.4000/ateliers.9972

References

1. Mahamet Timera (2001), : Les migrations des jeunes Sahéliens : affirmation de soi et émancipation in Autrepart n°18, Les jeunes : hantise de l'espace public dans les sociétés du Sud, Éditions de l'Aube, IRD.
2. Maxence Morel, Mark Cieslik, Donald Simpson, Key concepts in youth studies, London, Sage, series « Key concepts », 2013, 178p.
3. Galland Olivier, Sociologie de la jeunesse, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011.
4. Jean-François Bayart, L'Etat au Cameroun, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris, 1979.
5. Julien Kieffer, les jeunes des "grains" de thé et la campagne électorale à Ouagadougou", Politique Africaine n° 101, 2006, p63-82.
6. Cécile Van de Velde, Devenir Adulte. Sociologie comparée de la jeunesse en Europe, Paris, PUF 2008.
7. Isabelle Rivoal et Anne-Marie Peatrik, « Les « jeunes » dans le sud de la Méditerranée », Ateliers d'anthropologie [En ligne], 42 | 2015, mis en ligne le 17 novembre 2015, consulté le 04 mai 2016.URL : <http://ateliers.revues.org/9972> ; DOI : 10.4000/ateliers.9972