

Harga in Algeria: Burn to live *A Socio-Anthropological reading of Migration in Algeria*

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Abstract

By braving the sea, all the *Harragas*, or burners have a predefined itinerary and concrete motivations. Although the crossing may seem like an adventure where one "dives into the water" in the hope of reaching Eldorado, this form of migration follows a structured and deliberate organization. It is a life project because this sea departure is only the first step of a determined plan. Motivated by the desire to discover other territories, other experiences, and other populations, whether unknown or seen in the media, or simply territories of migration known and practiced by acquaintances in their families, neighbors, or others. Named as burners or *Harragas*, today, candidates for migration in all its forms pose a real problem at the national and international levels.

Keywords: Harragas- Algeria- Crossing- Europe

INTRODUCTION:

Since the 1990s, migratory flows crossing the Mediterranean have continued to intensify and diversify. The figure of the migrant has evolved, as have the modes of departure and crossing. The term "migrant" is widely used in scientific research and everyday life, encompassing a wide range of meanings. Field surveys conducted in recent years reveal a variety of terms: *refugee*, *asylum seeker*, *uprooted*, *stateless*, *expatriate*, *undocumented*, *illegal*, or simply "*foreigner*." Each of these terms implies movement within different temporalities and fluid spaces. The term "migrant" has become widespread in the media and political discourse since the phenomenon escalated in the early 2000s. Initially neutral in value, it presented itself as an equivalent or synonym for highly connoted terms mentioned earlier.

Given the intensification and internationalization of the migration phenomenon, a semantic reflection has become more than necessary. Laden with increasingly politicized and complex representations, the definition of the term "migrant" far from enjoys unanimity among researchers and institutions. Today, it can be said that there is no objective definition of a migrant due to several factors, where only the concept of borders remains a common denominator. This lack of consensus is indicative of the difficulties in approaching migration today. It reveals its complexity and the political and institutional tensions associated with its governance or lack thereof.

Faced with the complexity of the definition, a multitude of migratory forms have emerged since the 2000s, involving new actors of mobility with different motivations and expectations, and adapting their routes at each stage according to their means and the prevailing legislation in the countries they traverse. In this article, we focus on these new transnational actors, the *Harragas*, the border burners, who have become the emblematic figure of migrants departing from the Maghreb coasts to reach Europe by sea. This widely practiced phenomenon has become more than a practice; it has become an identity in itself!

Who are these *Harragas*? Where do they come from? And what are their motivations? We will attempt to answer these questions step by step in order to understand the logic of the *Harga* in Algeria, particularly in the region of Oran, the main departure port and my research field for several years. Departing in a cargo hold, aboard a ferry using someone else's papers who resides abroad, "burning" one's visa by purchasing another person's visa, an act known as "*doublette*" in the world of undocumented migrants; These methods no longer ensure a safe arrival in Europe. Today, migrating from Africa is done by sea, on board vessels purchased collectively or, more recently, on board a

speedboat known as The Fast Essarî. In the Maghreb, this mode of departure is referred to as Harga - burning-. We will come back to this term which carries strong and symbolic meanings.

Between *Patera*, *Cayuco*, and *Boté*, the Mediterranean has become an unavoidable route for African migration in recent years. The actors in this migration are thousands of young Africans from various North African and sub-Saharan countries who dream of Europe, work, money, and above all, "a better life", according to the testimony of an Algerian migrant.

"Harraga": definition and usage

The term "*Harga*" seems to belong to urban slang. Literally translated, "*Al-Harga*" means "burning." Those who attempt these departures are "*Harragas*": burners. The term carries significant meaning. Firstly, it can be related to the practice of clandestine migrants who... "burn" the steps required for legal departure to another country. Without a passport, visa, and often without paying transportation fees, the undocumented migrant bypasses these steps, choosing to "burn" them instead. If by chance the migrant arrives safely, they will quickly destroy or "burn" their identity papers. This act is intended to protect them from potential administrative troubles and simultaneously symbolizes the end of a (previous) life and the birth of a new one. Thus, "*Al-Harga*" encompasses the notion of transgressing spatial and legal borders and also self-denial, which these *Harragas* attempt as soon as possible.

By burning their papers in this way, the *Harrag* obscures their history in the eyes of administrative controls in the receiving country and in their own eyes. From the start and especially upon arrival, if they succeed in their adventure, the *Harrag* is ready to renounce their entire previous existence and is committed to moving forward without the possibility of turning back or changing their mind. The aspiring migrants have no choice but to keep going, to see it through to the end. Like Tariq ibn Ziyad, who gave his name to the famous Strait of Gibraltar known to Moroccan *Harragas*, or like the legendary hero of Arab conquest history, the *Harrag* burns their ships. They have only one choice left: to move forward. Chadia Arab mentioned Tariq Ibn Ziyad, who aimed for Gibraltar, while today's burners aim for Algeciras or Tarifa¹.

Like chakras, the gates of Europe seem to be the only source of well-being for the *Harragas*. The Andalusian coasts, Gibraltar, the Canary Islands, the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, as well as the Italian islands of Lampedusa, Linosa, and Pantelleria, have become the energy centers for thousands of candidates from the South who aspire to success and tranquility.

The term is widely used and even appears in official speeches. It has entered the online research portal Wikipedia, where the *Harrag* is defined as "a clandestine migrant who takes to the sea from Maghreb countries"².

Farida Souiah recalls that the *Harragas* have been elevated to the status of figures symbolizing the despair of Algerian youth during the 2000s. They are invoked as the ultimate proof of the dysfunctions affecting the country³.

This term, "*Harga*", also carries an affective connotation, as recalled by the popular expression: "*Hrak kebedti*"⁴ -he burned my liver/heart-, which could be translated as "he broke my heart". It evokes a feeling of internal torn, a lingering pain, felt by someone forced to leave their mother, their family, their country, and their culture.

For the *Harragas* themselves, *Harga* is just another *Hijra*⁵, and the most recurring argument is that even the Prophet Muhammad migrated!

Between *Harga* and *Hijra*:

If dialectal Arabic designates the phenomenon of clandestine migration with a specific term, *Harga*, standard Arabic, on the other hand, adds an adjective to the noun migration to define it. Sometimes it is the adjective clandestine (*Sirriya*) that is associated with the term migration (*Hijra*), and sometimes it is the adjective illegal (*La Shar'ia*). The expression may appear to be a simple

¹ ARAB, Chadia, « Le "hague" ou comment les Marocains brûlent les frontières ». In: *Hommes et Migrations*, N°1266, March-April 2007, Nouvelles figures de l'immigration en France et en Méditerranée. p.p. 82-94

² Wikipedia, Definition of Harrag

³ SOUIAH, Farida, « Les harraga algériens » In *Migrations Société*, 2012/5 (No. 143), pages 105 to 120.

⁴ "*Hrak kebedti*": The expression in Arabic designates the liver as a significant organ of the intensity of the affection. Kebda, cannot be replaced or torn off.

⁵ Means : Immigration.

translation into Arabic of its equivalents in the English language. When pronounced in a secular public space (newspaper, television, etc.), the word may be understood only in its denotative aspect, namely, the transgressive crossing of borders in violation of the laws in force. However, the same word *Hijra* may sound differently to the listener depending on the circumstances and context. When pronounced in a mosque or by a religious person, *Hijra* refers to the inaugural time of Islam when the Prophet migrated from Mecca to Medina. *Hijra* then signifies the founding event of temporality in Islam. By distinguishing between before and after, *Hijra* can be perceived as a qualifying trial, a journey towards a hypothetical betterment. It is in this spirit that the *Harragas* play on the symbolism of the act of departure, defying the dangers of the sea. They leave their land for a potentially better elsewhere. The *Harragas* make reference to the religious through the construction of the religious in acts that are illicit. They argue that even the Prophet Muhammad migrated, *Hajara*, from Mecca to Medina. This assimilation brings us back to the words of Sophie Bava, who asserts that religion generates new "modes of migration," and the condition of being a migrant generates new modes of religious investment⁶. The *Harga* assimilated with *Hijra* is clear evidence of this. A common argument in interviews with the *Harragas*, and one criticized by religious figures who see no common ground between *Harga* and *Hijra* in the religious sense. Sharing the same imagery, *Harragas* and imams play on the same ambivalences. It is based on such references that, as early as 2007, preachers, from their Minbars, resounded the walls of mosques by shouting in unison to denounce the phenomenon of *Harga* in Algeria

The Algerian migration landscape

Due to its geopolitical configuration, Algeria is an open country, both towards the Maghreb through its shared borders with Morocco and Tunisia, and towards Sub-Saharan countries such as Mali, Niger, or Chad, which have become sources of migration candidates in recent years. It is also open towards Europe, the main destination for these migration candidates.

With its 1,200 km of Mediterranean coastline, Algeria has one of the largest coastal areas on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Algerian ports have now become, in addition to their primary function of maritime transport and trade, transit spaces for Afro-European migration. Through its ports, Algeria has permanent connections with countries such as Spain, France, and Italy.

This geographic configuration has made Algeria the theater of a worrying reality in recent years: clandestine emigration, which has shaken the country. Mass departures of migration candidates from the Algerian coasts, particularly the East and West coasts, seem to align with the logic of informal activities prevalent in the region. Lack of prospects, unemployment, and social discontent have become the daily reality for young Algerians, for whom leaving appears to be the only way to improve their situation. Consequently, some make the difficult choice to clandestinely leave for foreign countries, risking their lives at sea, with unfortunate incidents claiming dozens of lives.

Using an interactionist and comprehensive approach, I question the logics of migrants who view migration as a starting point for a new life. But what constitutes a better life in this context?

The question will be how migrants manage to move by circumventing borders, reactivating old migration routes, or inventing new routes to navigate the constraints imposed by current legislations in the areas they traverse and aspire to reach. Furthermore, the temporal dimension is crucial in this research. Migration is also an investment in spaces with different temporalities. From the "*Harrag*" to the Sub-Saharan migrant in Algeria, we encounter a perspective of "long-term" where "Clandestinity" becomes an identity. To borrow Pauline Carnet's definition: " "Clandestinity" becomes a construct for migrants as well as sedentary locals and foreigners".

Profile of "*Harragas*"

To understand these burners, their motivations, expectations, and the means deployed for their departures, it is more interesting to present different profiles of various types of *Harragas*, following in detail the specific actions of each.

Investigations and contacts with *Harragas* who failed to cross have allowed us to establish different profiles of candidates for such expeditions.

⁶ BAVA, Sophie, De la « baraka aux affaires » : ethos économique-religieux et transnationalité chez les migrants sénégalais mourides, Les initiatives de l'étranger et les nouveaux cosmopolitismes, vol. 19 - N°2 | 2003

Let's start with the first type of *Harragas*: young urban individuals, educated, from modest backgrounds with average income. They typically attempt to reach Europe armed with some level of expertise, either through academic degrees or approximate training acquired in Algerian vocational training institutions.

Several types of these young burners fit this profile. Multiple interviews reveal commonalities in their stories. Most of them have similar reasons for their departure: unemployment, lack of means, and a lack of prospects.

To justify his repeated attempts to set foot on Spanish soil, Brahim, one of the interviewees, shouts out his bitterness: *"What am I still doing in Algeria? The money I manage to earn is not enough to live the way I want. I Can't ask my father for money to go out with my friends and go to nightclubs and stuff. We live in a society where a man must provide for his needs, ar-râdjal 'aybah d'jaybah..."*⁷. This expression came up several times in his mouth as if to punctuate and affirm his words.

It should be noted that in Algerian society, and more broadly in the Maghreb, a man is expected to take care of himself and his family. Therefore, unemployment or irregular income is perceived as a social failure. Ultimately, the ability to provide for the family's needs is associated with masculinity in the social imagination and the representation of men in society.

Convinced that they could go elsewhere and succeed for a triumphant return to their homeland ("bled"), some of my interviewees based their entire discourse on the example of a few Algerian immigrants who succeeded in settling in France or Spain.

The argument of success, especially economic success, often arises during the interviews. The interviewees even go so far as to make calculations based on the minimum wage imposed in Europe, comparing it to the minimum wage in Algeria⁸.

The field investigation conducted over the past few years in Oran, a northwestern region of the country, which is a popular starting point for *Harragas* due to its proximity to Spain, reveals that this type of *Harragas* is typically between 18 and 38 years old. They are often university graduates (with a bachelor's, master's, or engineering degree), or they have diplomas from vocational training centers where skills such as hairdressing, plumbing, painting, and aluminum carpentry are highly sought after, because they offer the possibility of finding work quickly once in Europe.

Most of them are unemployed or work in a different profession than their qualifications. Pressed by the need, some of these *Harragas* sometimes engage in illegal activities such as smuggling (trabendo), a widespread informal trade in Algeria, or other more dangerous activities like drug dealing or smuggling.

The second type consists of people aged forty and over, who have increasingly become candidates for migration in Algeria in recent years. They leave their families (as they are often fathers), their jobs, if they have any, in an attempt to change their lives. This category of candidates is more motivated in their approach, and their departure is determined purely by economic reasons.

The third type of *Harragas* is mainly made up of young minors who have barely left childhood and are often pushed out of the school system. They choose to embark on this kind of adventure with their main motivation being social ascent and success. They have seen someone from their neighborhood who, after leaving, has become a true model of success.

These candidates have a plan to one day ostentatiously display signs of their success: a brand-new car, preferably of German or French make, a beautiful house built in their homeland, displayed jewelry, branded clothing, and the ability to spend significant amounts of money on small details of daily life.

Illusions, a mirage, in which both young and older people believe⁹, as they clandestinely leave the country without their parents' knowledge, for the most part.

These are illusions and mirages that these embittered adolescents rush towards with haste, boarding makeshift vessels that in most cases cost them their lives, if not leading them into

⁷ "ar-râdjal 'aybah d'jaybah", the expression in Arabic designates "a man's flaw is his wallet", alludes to money, and to the responsibility of man regarding the financial support of himself and his family.

⁸ The minimum wage is around 1000 euros, the equivalent of 100,000 Algerian dinars, while in Algeria it is capped at 12,000 dinars or 120 euros.

⁹ It is estimated that there are more than 1500 Algerians, average age ranging between 11 and 18 years, figure given by ANSEDI, for the year 2007.

delinquency in case of a successful crossing. To address these issues, a convention has been signed between two associations: The National Association for Support of Children in Difficulty in Institutions (NASCDI) and the Association of Young Wanderers (AYW), a French association based in Marseille. Their goal is to combat clandestine migration, adolescent delinquency, and to reunite them with their parents as soon as possible.

It is worth noting that among these *Harraga* candidates, there are an increasing number of women who, despite the difficulty of the journey and the complexity of contacts in this predominantly male environment, manage to secure a place on one of the boats towards paradise. They come from different age groups and generally modest social backgrounds. They are usually between 20 and 36 years old, unmarried, widowed, and/or divorced. They are determined in their decision: to change their lives, they say.

The story of one of these adventurous women particularly struck us. Rescued at sea on October 12, 2017, off the coast of Béni-Saf, one of the beaches closest to the Spanish coast¹⁰, she was pregnant when she embarked on a motorized boat with eight other candidates. In the open sea, the engine failed, leaving them without water or food and overcome by fatigue. A fisherman aboard his trawler spotted them from a distance and launched a distress signal to call for help, leading to their rescue. Saved and brought ashore, they will be judged for illegal immigration. Our pregnant candidate was granted temporary freedom. The case of this woman, whose pregnancy did not prevent her from risking death, demonstrates the depth of the problem, to the point of sacrificing both herself and her unborn child. It reminds us of Mercy, a Nigerian-born baby whose mother had boarded a smuggler's boat in Libya when she was eight and a half months pregnant. She was later rescued by SOS Mediterranean and gave birth on the day the Aquarius arrived at the port of Catania, Sicily, with 946 survivors on board¹¹.

Among these four types of "*Harragas*", the recurring theme is the strong desire for improved living conditions, ranging from slight improvements to unrealistic dreams. However, what sets them apart is the question of return. Regarding the first type, the majority opts for a one-way journey. Ali, an informant, testifies that "*The dream is to find a job where we can thrive and prove that we are not worthless, but the conditions and Ezzman were not helpful...*"¹²

For Brahim, a *Harraga* who is determined to leave Algeria at any cost, it is a definitive departure. I have had several interviews with him, and our last encounter was in June 2021 when I asked him: "If you succeed in leaving, when will you return to Algeria?". After a long silence, he replied: "*My return will be conditioned by success. I have been humiliated too much; they would often forget that I was not responsible for unemployment, I was just a victim. But who will listen to all that? 'Andek doro teswa doro'*"¹³. With this expression, Brahim denounces a society that only gives opportunities to those who can take care of themselves. Everything is measured by income, and money is more important than a person in the eyes of this society.

Marouane, more categorical and determined, swears as if to convince himself of the rightness of his resolution that if he were to succeed in crossing: "*The first thing I would do is marry a Guawria*"¹⁴ for papers".

Kader, an atypical case of a *Harraga*, the son of a notable, is not driven by economic reasons to embark on this adventure but personal reasons: "*You work hard for your degree, and nothing changes. You live in the shadow of your father because you are so-and-so's son. You are entitled to what should be yours not because you deserve it, but because you are the son of... I want to leave to carve my own path, to prove myself and show my surroundings that I am deserving. There are no horizons there (implying a lack of prospects and alternatives), wallah bled el hogra mani ga'ad fiha*"¹⁵.

¹⁰ About four and a half hour crossing

¹¹ Mercy was born on the SOS Mediterranean boat (francetvinfo.fr)

¹² Means: Time or fate

¹³ Translation: "you have a penny you are worth a penny".

¹⁴ Means: foreign women

¹⁵ Translation: "I swear; I will not stay in a country where there is so much discrimination";
-Hogra: a dialect term, it's mean the repression of any type.

This last example shows that it is not purely an economic migration. The analysis of all the testimonies reveals a lack of prospects and suggests that beyond the material and economic aspect, these candidates seem to expect nothing from their country and its leaders. Despair grows every day, exacerbated by economic conditions and an identity crisis. These young people feel that they were not given a chance to prove their potential in society, that they were not given an opportunity. They cannot explain why the country is going through a crisis and do not feel responsible for it; instead, they see themselves as victims. "You only live once", they declare during interviews. Thus, they prefer to change their identity, their papers as they say, by marrying foreigners, for the luckier ones, to start a new life under different skies, with a new identity, a new job, a chosen reality.

The migrant: a border fact and a complex figure

Moving, migrating, and traveling within a space, known as territory, brings visibility to its boundaries, its borders. Thus, migration is the activation of the limits erected by states. It is from this perspective that I have been conducting my research for the past few years on "new actors of migration" from the Global South.

Embarking on an adventure is proof of being able to succeed differently and quickly. It is worth noting that success is not the sole motivation; the relationship with time is crucial. The sooner one attains material comfort, the earlier they will become visible within their home society, as this quest for self is primarily done in relation to the family circle.

The choice of such a destiny is often motivated by testimonies from former immigrants, people from "over there," who, despite limited or non-existent education and humble origins, have managed to carve out a place in society. They are respected, listened to, and accepted. To establish themselves in society, immigrants often rely on their audacity and their ability to return to their home country with *something* to show for their efforts. This "*something*" usually manifests as material comfort, such as acquiring luxury cars, constructing buildings in their hometowns, and openly displaying their wealth by showering their loved ones and neighbors with gifts. Some even invest in projects and create businesses in their countries of origin, providing employment opportunities for local youth. These endeavors serve as a means to secure their position, defend their status, and enhance their newfound reputation.

The "*Harga*": a new identity

By braving the sea, everyone has a predetermined itinerary motivated by geographical location, smugglers' networks, and active migration routes upon arrival on the other side of the sea. Although this journey may seem like an adventure where one "dives in" in the hope of reaching the promised land, this form of migration follows a structured and deliberate organization. It is a life project because this sea departure is just the first step of a determined plan.

Named adventurers¹⁶, burners, *Harragas*, or *pateristes*¹⁷, candidates for migration in all its forms pose a real problem today on a national and international scale.

Leaving is an expression of a desire for elsewhere, a desire for discovery, a search for change. Most young people who embark on the "adventure" of migration aim to go somewhere else. Motivated by the desire to explore other territories, other experiences, other populations -unknown or seen in the media- or simply territories of known "migrations" practiced by acquaintances in their families, neighbors, or others.

Experiencing the crossing:

Beyond its sometimes dramatic outcome, the *Harga* is not a thoughtless act; it involves a whole program with multiple actors. Once the decision is made, the *Harragas* move forward, only considering the travel arrangements. Thus, based on the results of investigations conducted within the *Harraga* community, all accounts converge on the question of preparing for the journey. This can be done in two ways: initiated by a group, in general, it can be carried out on a vessel previously purchased by a group, with the cost included in the travel expenses. The *Harga* can also be carried out on a commercial or liquefied natural gas ship, as is frequently the case, heading towards European countries, where the travel costs are much lower. Since 2019, an important date in Algeria, marking

¹⁶ Pian Anaik, *Aux nouvelles frontières de l'Europe. L'aventure incertaine des Sénégalais au Maroc*, Paris, La Dispute, 2009.

¹⁷ Interview done in Tangier, 2010.

the uprising of the street against the system; called the "*Hirak*," this popular movement has resulted in weekly protests against President A. Bouteflika's candidacy for a fifth term.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic, which plunged the world into uncertainty, has also changed the means of *Harga*. The sudden closure of borders and absolute control of land, air, and sea routes have paralyzed mobility worldwide and demonstrated that the border, contrary to discourse, remains the limit that separates states and negotiates who controls it.

In this context, *Harga* has been developed differently by renewing the itinerary and the means. At the moment, this is done in a slippery boat, this small boat with a very powerful engine, it is known in the community by the term "The Fast Essari" or in a more familiar a "taxi".

Although the costs of these journeys range from 3,000 to 5,000 euros, the chances of reaching Spain are considerably higher. The operators of these fast boats are known and conduct regular trips, sometimes even making up to three voyages per day.

Brahim: *Al- Harga* in the fast Botè

Brahim, a young man living in a working-class neighborhood in Oran, Algeria, decided to embark on an illegal migration journey to Spain twice. At twenty-five years old, he still lives with his parents, as is common for young people in Algeria. Brahim is also part of a regional volleyball team. Unlike other young people in his neighborhood, he organized both attempts in the same manner: contacting a smuggler, pooling money together with a group of friends who shared the same goal, and keeping everything secret from his parents. When asked about his experiences during the crossing, Brahim chose to recount the second attempt, which he considered the most challenging since he managed to set foot in Spain before being deported back to Algeria.

When asked how the trip went, he begins a long narrative: "*It was a Friday, around six o'clock in the evening. There were six of us waiting for the smuggler who was supposed to take us to Spain. Around seven o'clock, he arrived with three other people we didn't know, two from Algiers and one from Chlef, a city inland between Algiers and Oran. We got to know these 'new' people before another person arrived, who was responsible for providing us with the boat. Then, the ten of us embarked, and the adventure began*".

It should be noted that these departures are organized not by the candidates themselves, but by designated smugglers, as indicated by the situation where they board together without necessarily knowing each other. The list of candidates to depart is defined by the speed of payment for the services. The faster the money is collected by the smuggler, the sooner a boat becomes available on the planned date, and the sooner engines are purchased along with other supplies like life jackets, compasses or GPS devices....etc

Fuel, on the other hand, is the last item to be ready. On the day of departure, a contribution is made to fill enough fuel jerry cans for the crossing. "*We get diesel from different gas stations, usually far from the waterfront. Each person takes a jerry can and manages to fill it*", says Brahim.

Among the measures taken by the state to combat these illegal departures to European shores is the formal prohibition of selling fuel in jerry cans. The presence of the vehicle to be fueled is required at the gas stations. However, since parallel commercial activity is prevalent in Algerian reality, and gas station owners may be involved in the departure project of the candidates, fuel supply does not pose significant problems. At worst, the smuggler makes a phone call to the station, and the jerry cans are filled.

Our interlocutor continues his account, describing the conditions of the journey as follows: "*Once all the purchases are made: fuel, food... we start our journey. We are packed tightly in the boat, we talk, we pray... waiting for arrival.*"

During our investigations, all the *Harragas* we met mentioned the same food items purchased for the crossing. Dates, preferably in paste form because it is nourishing and alleviating thirst, Dates are the preferred food, along with dried figs and bread. Their sweet taste and appetite suppressant effect make them the food of choice for *Harragas*. As for water, it is necessary, but the quantity varies depending on the type of *Harga*. For those who sneak onto ships, water is available in large quantities; However, for those who use inflatable boats and other light vessels, water is in small quantities to avoid weighing down the boat. In case of urgent need, the "passengers" can always drink seawater.

In the provisions of the *Harragas* who leave on tankers and commercial ships, watches are inevitably included to keep track of time, and a flashlight is carried to move around the ship when the guard is down, in search of food and warm clothing when the temperature drops at sea.

To understand the feelings of the candidates at this precise moment, when they stand side by side in the boat, we asked Brahim, our interlocutor and candidate for departure, a number of questions: How do they perceive this departure? Are they aware that they are breaking the laws of the state? Are they fully conscious of their act, and are they prepared for the consequences in case of failure?

Our candidate responds with a strange detachment. Knowing full well that their act is punishable by law, he nevertheless insisted on carrying out his project: "*El Houkouma*¹⁸ knows that we are unemployed, and it does nothing, so I don't understand how it only punishes us. By leaving, we are doing it a favor", he added: "*You know, khti*¹⁹, I don't agree with prosecuting the 'harragas' who have failed in their attempt. Not only have they gone through a difficult time by not reaching Spain, but they have also lost significant amounts of money because if the crossing fails, the smuggler won't reimburse the fees paid. On top of all that, they are judged and liable to imprisonment. It's injustice".

This testimony shows that the candidates are well aware of the illegal nature of their act, but at the same time, they perceive it as a service rendered to the country. By leaving, they believe they are solving the problem of unemployment in their own way, without asking anything from the state.

Having failed twice, Brahim arrived in Spain in August 2021 aboard *The Rapide*. He had the right contact at the right time, and most importantly, the financial means to pay over 3500 euros, the savings of the entire family who firmly believe that *Harga* is the ultimate hope for their son and the whole family to succeed in life.

In conclusion, it is necessary to recall that *Harraga* departures have been intensifying in Algeria in recent years. After the "*Hirak*" movement that did not succeed and political reforms that struggle to materialize, Algerians only think about leaving. The costs of a "safe" crossing are high, requiring more time to organize the departure. "*Harga*", this polysemic term, reflects a deep social malaise where, in order to be heard, people throw themselves into the sea. "*Harga*" has now become a new identity and the ultimate form of protest for Algerians, as Farida Souiah²⁰ reminds us.

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¹⁸ Translation: government

¹⁹ translation: my sister

²⁰ SOUIA, Farida, Les harraga en Algérie : émigration et contestation, Doctoral thesis in political science Under the direction of Catherine Wihtol de Wenden. Defended on 06-12-2014 in Paris, Institute of Political Studies, within the framework of Doctoral School of Sciences Po (Paris), in partnership with Center for International Research (Pa-ris) (laboratory).

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