FROM FORCED EMIGRATION TO DEFENSIVE NATURALIZATION

A Study of the Case of Tunisian Skilled Workers
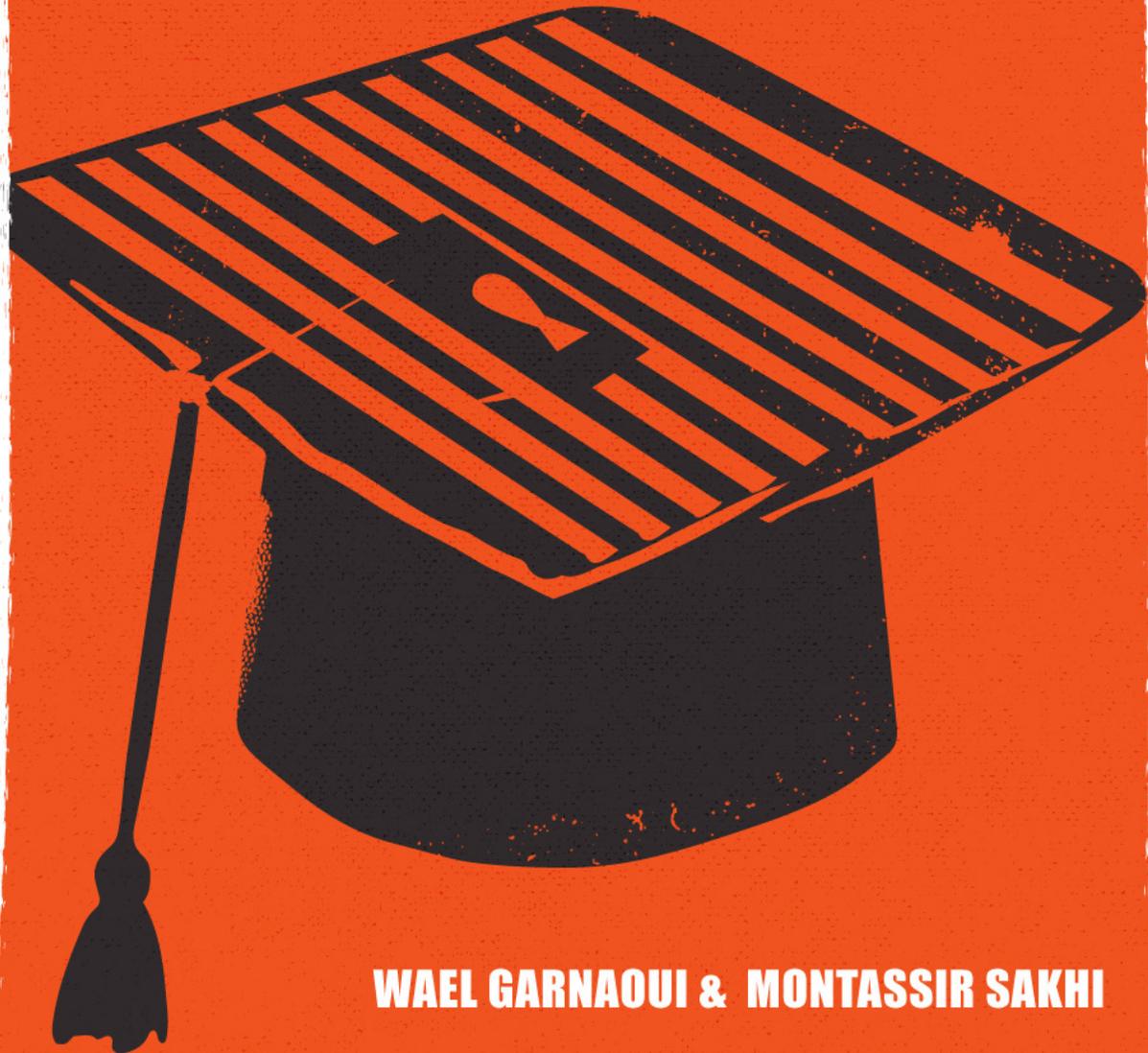
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Modern states may be divided into two categories: emigration states (countries of departure) and immigration states (host countries or countries of destination)[1]. This is particularly evident in the Mediterranean region, where long-standing colonial relations have transformed into tangible borders between countries. On one side of the border, mobility is guaranteed for citizens. On the other side, mobility is a matter of privilege and social standing.

The purpose of this general observation is not to dispel the nuances between these categories or between states in terms of immigration and mobility, but rather to highlight the importance of this distinction, which stems from the legacy of relations between former colonial powers and newly independent countries. At present, this predicament persists in deteriorating, exemplifying the anguish connected to migration and the belligerent mechanisms embedded in a development model centered on borders: in the Global North, a select workforce contributes to a highly structured economy; whereas in the Global South, wealth is frequently squandered, except when considering the remittances received by the families of migrants.

In this article, we examine the case of a target demographic for migration strategies devised by European governments that have chosen to implement selective immigration, specifically selecting skilled workers from the Global South. Our hypothesis holds that these policies can only be effectively implemented if there is a willingness among skilled individuals to emigrate to the North. For the aforementioned individuals, this emigration would be driven by multiple constraints, but particularly by border hardening and the introduction of selection mechanisms. This is further compounded by the risk of being trapped indefinitely within a society suffering the structural dysfunction of its economic services at a time of crisis for the post-colonial state.

Our analysis shall be guided by two questions:

First question : How is the emigration of elites and skilled workers perceived by the societies they are leaving?
In order to address this question, we identified two subquestions;
1. Has the state been made aware of the issue of skilled workers emigrating?
2. What are the perspectives of the individuals we interviewed who fall into this category on their motivations for migrating to Europe?

Second question : How do the migration mechanisms established in the North- within the framework of colonial and industrial policies- infiltrate the most intimate aspects of

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[1] Global migration statistics show that migrants represent no more than three or four percent of the world's population, depending on the definition adopted. Under the United Nations definition, which broadens the scope of migration to include undocumented migrants, the number of migrants worldwide stands at around 280 million. A migrant is defined as "a person who has been residing in a foreign country for more than one year, regardless of the reasons for their migration, whether voluntary or involuntary, and regardless of the means used, whether regular or irregular." See: François Héran, "Immigration: le grand déni" (Immigration: the Great Denial), Paris, Seuil, 2023.

individuals' lives in the South, compelling skilled workers to opt for emigration despite its heavy toll?

More specifically, what mechanisms trigger "anguish about staying"? What propels a fervent desire to leave among those who are regarded as national elites and the builders of the modern nation-states in the Global South?

1 "BRAIN DRAIN" OR "BRAIN GAIN" : A CONTROVERSIAL LITERATURE

In order to approach this issue, we conducted interviews with members of what sociology refers to as the petty bourgeoisie, i.e., a social group that, in the case of our postcolonial countries, is positioned at the convergence of two dynamics: the development of state functions and the desire to emigrate to the former metropolises of the North. Our objective in these interviews was to gain an understanding of the logic that drives individuals whose postcolonial mission should have been the economic reconstruction of the state- being the human capital needed to stimulate national investment in economic revolutions (agricultural, industrial, administrative, etc.) and reform public policies and economic institutions (hospitals, factories, ministries, finance, etc.)- to become "clients" of European migration systems.

In other words, our objective is to examine the rationales and methodologies by which these "brains," anticipated to assume pivotal roles in the postcolonial state during periods of crisis, elect to "flee" the country and, in the process, relinquish the responsibilities for which they were trained, driven by a system that paradoxically propels them toward emigration or exile.

The Tunisian example raises two key questions that would help in exploring this issue. First, what are the drivers? How do members of this class explain the circumstances surrounding their emigration? What resources were made available to them initially by the selection ("intermediary") agencies[2] operating in the country when the decision to leave was made? Second, the interviews highlight the specific difficulties encountered in the host countries, particularly with regard to mental health. We shall therefore be investigating this form of suffering, whether it be linked to problems with residence permits, experiences of downward social mobility, *Ghorba (Translator's note: "Ghorba" is an Arabic word that reflects a feeling of alienation, strangeness and homesickness)* or identity crises linked to the process of naturalization.

Hardly any studies address the issue of the emigration of skilled workers from a critical economic perspective that takes into account both the negative impact of border closures on the elites and the economies of the South. Quite the contrary, in fact: numerous official studies echo the hegemonic discourse on the diaspora, portrayed as a contributor to the national economy through foreign exchange earnings generated for weaker economies and low-income countries[3]. tCertain studies that examine the diaspora's contributions through savings and investments reveal that such investments are confined to sectors with limited economic contribution, namely construction, real estate, agriculture and trade[4], while underlining the structural challenges faced by all investment strategies in growth-generating sectors:

2   It is worth noting the growing awareness of the problems caused by these agencies. See Issa Ziadia and Nada Hammami, "Silent complicity: How are 'mediation agencies' bleeding Tunisia's youth dry amidst the lack of official administrative oversight?"(التواطؤ بالصمت... كيف تستنزف «مكاتب الوساطة» شباب تونس وسط عجز الرقابة الإدارية الرسمية؟), Raseef 22, October 31, 2025.

3   Julien Bouissou, Le Monde, "The diaspora has become the most reliable source of funding: the much-needed migrants' money" (La diaspora est devenue le bailleur de fonds le plus fiable » : l'indispensable argent des migrants), 15/12/2019, Hizaoui, N. "The Tunisian diaspora boosts the national economy. Significant potential for Tunisia" (La diaspora tunisienne consolide l'économie nationale. Un important potentiel pour la Tunisie), 09/12/2020 https://lapresse.tn/2020/12/09/la-diaspora-tunisienne-consolide-leconomie-nationale-un-important-potentiel-pour-la-tunisie/

4   INS (2021). Report of the national survey on international migration Tunisia-HIMS, National Institute of Statistics, December 2021, Tunis, p. ii 12.

"The implementation of projects faces several hurdles and obstacles: complex bureaucratic procedures, insufficient capital, corruption and clientelism, as well as poor financial support and limited tax incentives in Tunisia[5]. ."

However, this observation obscures another, even more illuminating one...

The report of the National Survey on International Migration (Tunisia-HIMS), published in December 2021 by the National Institute of Statistics (INS), in conjunction with the National Observatory on Migration (ONM), predicated on the Tunisia Population and Housing Census of 2014 and a series of questionnaires providing updated data on manifold issues (return, transit, emigration, and immigration), accentuates two findings directly pertinent to our issue.

In the first instance, it indicates a fundamental shift in the nature of Tunisian emigration to Europe: moving away from the colonial and postcolonial labor migration patterns seen from the 1960s to the late 1980s, we are witnessing a shift that, we argue, corresponds to Europe's adoption of "selective immigration" policies and the exertion of pressure on elites, tapping into the desire to emigrate among a new spectrum of candidates. The survey concludes:

"The level of education among current migrants is significantly higher than the overall level in Tunisia. One in three migrants has a degree from a higher education institution. The number of migrants with no education is far lower, at 3.3%. This trend has become more pronounced in recent years." [6].

These statistics are compelling and essentially indicate the state's predicament, as demonstrated by its failure to retain its elites, despite society's critical need for public healthcare, economic sovereignty, and democracy. The survey indicates:

"It is estimated that around 39,000 engineers and 3,300 doctors left the country between 2015 and 2020 to pursue employment opportunities abroad. At the time of the survey, 55.5% of current migrants reported being employed in their host country, with a higher percentage of males (68.1%) than females (28.2%) being employed. Prior to the pandemic, the proportion of employed migrants was estimated at 63.4%, which confirms the pandemic's negative impact on the employment of Tunisian emigrants." [7]

We believe that this initial observation demonstrates the destabilizing nature of visa policies and border controls on the selection of emigrants- which will be analyzed through specific cases in the second section of this article.

In the Tunisia-HIMS 2021 survey report, a second input that we deem crucial cross-references the concept of "desire for the West" and enables us to refine it. The survey reveals that nearly one-fifth of the non-migrant population aged 15 and above (19.9%) express a desire to emigrate with the intention of living, working, or studying in a foreign country, with a particular propensity

5   Ibid
6   Ibid: p. ill 12
7   Ibid

toward Europe[8]. However, the desire to emigrate diminishes with age. Young Tunisians are eager to migrate internationally, while older generations are much less inclined (39.5% of 15- to 29-year-olds wish to emigrate, as opposed to 2.2% of those aged 60 and older).

A notable finding that ties in with our discussion of elite emigration is that educational attainment is a determining factor, per the 2021 survey report. The percentage of uneducated individuals with migration intentions is 2.7%, while the percentage of those with higher education qualifications is at 29.5%. The percentage increases to 32.5% among people with vocational training[9]. Marital status also exerts a significant influence: individuals who are unmarried, separated, or divorced exhibit a marked propensity for migration. However, these intentions do not always result in concrete plans. A mere 3% of the non-migrant population aged 15 and above have initiated steps to actualize their emigration plans, and a mere one-third of those has taken action to obtain a visa. Lastly, 6.5% of respondents reported the option of irregular migration by sea *(Harga)*, although this figure is probably an underestimation due to the clandestine nature of the practice.

These figures provide further insight into what we term the *"desire for the West[10]."* In the case of Tunisia, the findings unveil two salient facts: first, the profound desire among the youth and the recent graduates to emigrate; and second, it is revealed that as soon as "selectability" diminishes (due to age, lower levels of education, starting a family- except in the case of family reunification- and economic integration), the intention to migrate concomitantly wanes.

Faced with this reality, the question is whether the state has the capacity to assess this phenomenon and capitalize on the desire to emigrate, with the aim of converting it into potential for economic development and growth.

Several studies have highlighted the surge in the emigration of skilled workers from the Maghreb to developed countries, beginning in the second half of the 1990s. These studies cite causes such as "the rise of extremism" or "political instability[11]," but they do not consider the responsibility of governments in the North. One example of this responsibility is the pressure exerted on these same skilled workers through the Schengenization process, coupled with a set of mechanisms for the recruitment of select emigrants devised in the North. Phases of political turmoil are favorable for amplifying this phenomenon. Consequently, in 2018 alone, Tunisia witnessed a mass exodus of its highly skilled workers, with thousands of these professionals leaving the country. According to the Office des Tunisiens à l'Étranger (OTE), which has been providing data on this type of emigration since 2000[12], 8200 cadres, 2300 engineers, 2300 academics, 1000 doctors -around 1450 doctors

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8   Ibid. p.4.

9   Ibid, p. 5.

10   In an earlier study, we defined this desire on the basis of a colonial dialectic, framing it as an attachment to Western values and ways of life without the need to emigrate...
«La fabrique du désir de l'Occident frontiérisé», Revue Ibla • Tunis • 2/2023 • n° 232 • pp. 189-209

11   https://www.admin.ites.tn/api/uploads/6682a454a5b34162629a93c6_0.pdf, p. 10

12   Kaies Samet, "Tunisia's Brain Drain: Evolution and Effects on the Tunisian Economy" (La fuite des cerveaux en Tunisie : évolution et effets sur l'économie tunisienne), Hommes et migrations, 1307 | 2014, published online July 1, 2017, accessed January 16, 2015. http://hommesmigrations.revues.org/2891

left Tunisia in 2024-[13] and 450 IT experts left Tunisia in 2018. According to other reports, more than 70,000 information and communication technology (ICT) specialists left North Africa between 2015 and 2019 to settle in high-income countries. In Tunisia, nearly 100,000 skilled workers have left the country since the 2011 revolution, according to a 2024 report from the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies (TISS) presented to the President of the Republic[14]

The figures indicate novel trends that have emerged in the aftermath of the implementation of new, more stringent migration and border policies in Europe, which had been the predominant traditional destination for Tunisian migrants prior to 1995. Migration is currently expanding to new destinations, notably to the Middle East (rising from 0.8% in 1990 to 13.1% for the period from 2015 to 2020)[15]. Notwithstanding the dearth of statistical data concerning the socio-demographic composition of the populations constituting this recent wave of migration, it is conceivable that, consequent to the termination of labor immigration and the hardening of European borders, lower-skilled labor is setting out for these novel destinations.

Nevertheless, a substantial body of literature exists that mitigates the *«brain drain»* issue by emphasizing the salutary effects of this emigration on the Global South. This trend is exemplified in Anglo-Saxon literature through the concept of *«brain gain,»* which is in contradistinction to *«brain drain.»* This literature emphasizes the pivotal role that skilled workers play in technological development upon returning to their underdeveloped or developing countries of origin. For example, students from Africa or Asia who were trained and graduated from European and American universities have contributed to various economic sectors. Returning migrants are regarded as a valuable entrepreneurial asset, a consequence of the substantial investment capital they have amassed through their professional endeavors in their host countries. They also possess a wealth of knowledge, relational capital, technological expertise and managerial, administrative, industrial[16].and other competencies. Brain gain also highlights the contributions of diaspora communities to the development of economic networks, particularly trade networks.

With regard to the case of Tunisia, Kaies Samet's research aligns with this school of thought, which views brain drain as an opportunity for developing countries. Drawing on econometric data, he highlights several advantages of skills transfer and predicts that this situation would improve

13 La Presse de Tunisie, "Exodus of doctors: Nearly 1,450 doctors fled Tunisia in 2024"(Exode des médecins: Près de 1.450 médecins ont fui la Tunisie en 2024), lapresse.tn, January 7, 2025, https://lapresse.tn/2025/01/07/exode-des-medecins-pres-de-1-450-medecins-ont-fui-la-tunisie-en-2024/

14 Kaies Samet, "Tunisia's Brain Drain: Evolution and Effects on the Tunisian Economy" (La fuite des cerveaux en Tunisie : évolution et effets sur l'économie tunisienne), p. 11.

15 Report of the national survey on international migration Tunisia-HIMS, p. 22. The report provides the following data on general motivations for migration: "employment (45.0%), family reunification (32.0%) and education (11.5%). Men emigrate mainly for professional reasons (58.6% compared to 15.5% for women), while women primarily cite family reunification as the main motive (68.8%). The proportion of study-related emigrations is almost identical for both genders. A breakdown by field of specialization also reveals that some 39,000 engineers and 3,300 doctors left Tunisia between 2015 and 2020 to pursue employment opportunities abroad» *(our summary)*.

16 Brinkerhoff, Jennifer M. 2006a. "Diasporas, Mobilization Factors, and Policy Options." In Converting Migration Drains into Gains: Harnessing the Resources of Overseas Professionals, ed. Clay Wescott and Jennifer Brinkerhoff, 127–53. Manila: Asian Development Bank.

following the 2011 revolution within a democratic framework[17]. Naturally, this prediction remains unfulfilled to date. It is important to note that there is an entire body of postcolonial literature that stresses the contribution of brain drain through comparisons between countries (from China to India, and from Africa to Latin America) that do not take into account the complexities and specificities of each situation. Authors such as William Easterly and Yaw Nyarko thus insist that *"brain drain has a positive effect on the accumulation of skills, which appears to fully offset the loss of skills due to [the emigration of skilled workers]... It is therefore hardly surprising that we fail to identify any negative effects of brain drain on economic growth."* [18]

Overall, the literature on brain drain is far from conclusive. On the one hand, a substantial body of literature regards Tunisian emigration as a valuable asset, constituting a vital and steady source of foreign currency earnings, remittances, and investments that elevate the standard of living for a considerable number of households. It conceptualizes emigration as a diaspora that operates within the world's preeminent economic hubs, proffering strategic networks of financial resources, information, and cultural connections. On the other hand, a second body of literature contends that the advantages of migration are accompanied by a mounting cost: a bona fide brain drain, with engineers, doctors and graduates of renowned universities all departing annually, never to return. Within this perspective, a research trend- a liberal line of thinking- has emerged that regards brain drain as a positive development, considering the return on investment generated by the return of the elite.

17   Kaies Samet, "Brain Gain, Technology Transfer and Economic Growth: Case of Tunisia", International Journal of Economics and Finance; Vol. 6, No. 9; 2014,

**18**   Easterly, William, and Yaw Nyarko. "Is the Brain Drain Good for Africa?" New York University, New York, Avril 2008, https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Knowledge/30753168-EN-WILLIAM-EASTERLY-BRAINDRAINAPRIL2008-111.PDF

  Pour une revue de littérature le Brain Gain, voir : https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/809011468315571160/pdf/430900BRI0Migr10Box327347B01PUBLIC1.pdf

2 *FORCED* EMIGRATION

The first issue we are addressing concerns the manifestations of emigration among skilled workers. We have classified this emigration as "forced." Admittedly, the term "forced" does not refer to police and military coercion as seen under direct colonial rule[19] with the Code de l'Indigénat (Native Code). The term "forced" is used to denote a novel and intricate reality, one characterized by a profound yearning to emigrate, propelled by a trepidation of being ensnared in the web of borders. It refers to a mechanism that identifies the desire to emigrate, and is underpinned by a set of migration and border control measures that screen individuals who are likely to migrate and embark upon the arduous journey towards integration. The same selective mechanism deprives some individuals of their mobility rights while consigning others to illegality.

The forced emigration of elites is the result of a dual policy that is planned in the North and suffered in the South. The latter has not yet produced an adequate response to retain its skilled workforce. It also has not yet developed a policy

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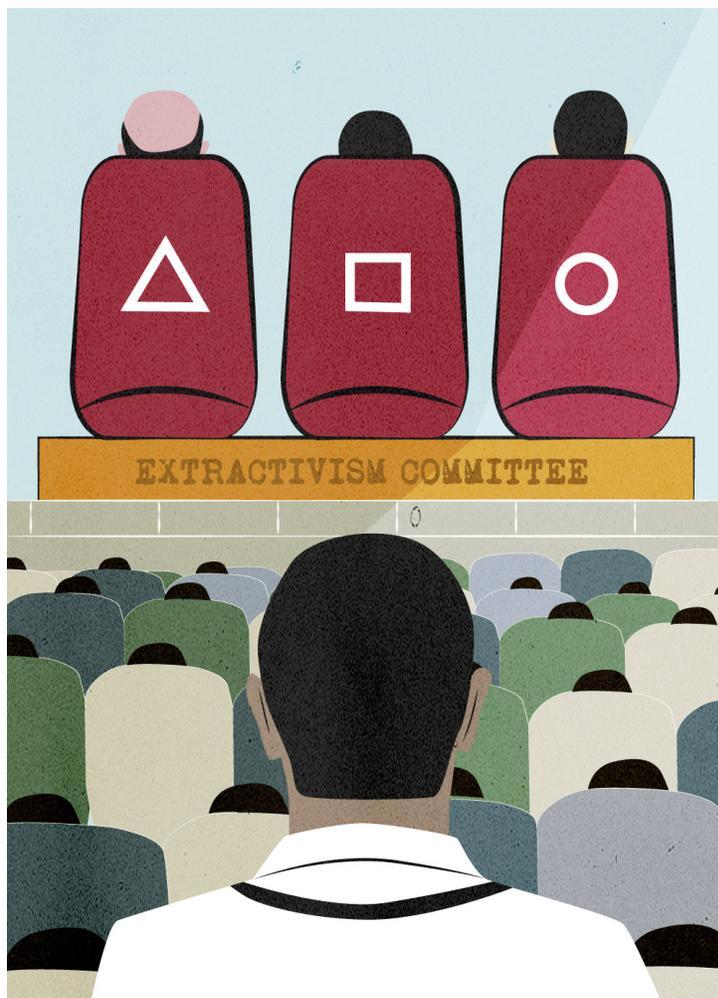
19   See: Marc Michel, Africans in the First World War (Les Africains dans la Grande Guerre), Éditions Karthala, 2003; Chantal Antier, "Recruitment in the French Colonial Empire, 1914–1918" (Le recrutement dans l'empire colonial français, 1914-1918), Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains, 2008/2 no. 230, 2008, pp. 23–36. CAIRN.INFO, https://shs.cairn.info/revue-guerres-mondiales-et-conflits-contemporains-2008-2-page-23?lang=fr.
Also see: https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/les-etrangers-dans-les-guerres-en-france/les-travailleurs-indochinois-en-france-pendant-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale

able to counteract the effects of border closures. An initial solution to this predicament is to raise collective national awareness of the ramifications of borderization *("Frontiérisation"),* and to study the link between border closures and emigration.

One general hypothesis regarding the attraction of elites from the South can be put forward as follows: since the Industrial Revolution, former colonial powers have profited from technological dominance, empowering them to establish hegemonic lifestyles that can be referred to as "the bourgeois way of life." Colonization has facilitated the universalization of the concept and imagery of this way of life, while concomitantly depriving the societies in the colonies- that is to say, the societies in which the imagery was disseminated- of these very lifestyles. The colonies were chiefly responsible for preserving and advancing the aforementioned way of life in the metropole. Once colonization came to an end, the overall economy of the colonial system was sustained by extractivism in the North and failed revolutions and national organizations in the South[20]. Another means by which this system endures is through the monopolization of technology and industrial capacity: the notion of sharing with former colonies has proven to be nothing more than a fallacy. Even worse, thirty years after the great wave of decolonization, the borders between EU member states have disappeared. Meanwhile, a new border of barbed wire, barriers, and bodies drowning in the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, the Sahara Desert, the forests of the Balkans, and on other routes has been established to the south and east of Fortress Europe.

Using this phenomenon as a foundation, we will present some general anthropological observations:

The question of migration begs further consideration : Europe and North America, whose modern politics originated in Europe, are among the few regions in the world that have made immigration a matter of public policy. This policy is complete with ministries, a standardized management of migration flows, naturalization processes, and cumbersome visa applications. These regions also have visa application centers that work alongside consulates and embassies, as well as measures for deportation, detention, talent management and recruitment. Due to the fact that citizens of the world's most populous countries (China, India, the United States, Brazil, and Nigeria) seldom migrate beyond their national borders, migrants remain a small minority of the world's population (3 to 4%). Similarly, several countries have not established distinct legal statuses for migrants and nationals. For instance, Libyans who arrived in Tunisia following the 2011 revolution and civil war were not considered "immigrants" under the law. This is a common occurrence across the African continent. The status of *migrant* and emigrant was first originated by the West. This status signals a substantial anthropological sea change in the manner in which the human right to mobility is exercised. Henceforth, this right to mobility is subject to the jurisdiction of a particular government that determines the nature, purpose, and bodies/nationalities involved in immigration and emigration.

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20   Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth ;
Also see: Samir Amin ; Aziz Belal

Since the 1990s, the elites and skilled workers from the Global South, particularly in former colonies, have experienced the rationale behind emigration and integration in a distinctively mortifying manner. Meanwhile, individuals of all social classes in the Global North who wish to emigrate or "expatriate" elsewhere in the world have not experienced anything similar. Apart from the factual issue of racial discrimination engendered by this system with regard to mobility, our interest lies in the question of labor and educational background in the case of skilled workers, and more generally, with regard to the emigration of the South's bourgeoisie to the North. We have frequently observed that, in the context of documents, residence permits, naturalization, and occasionally even visas, citizens of the South are often subjected to a frigid reception, both prior to and following their arrival in Western countries. In numerous instances, members of the upper middle class in the South- privileged in their own countries and far removed from the working classes- had to withstand the bureaucratic rigor of the prefecture. They were also treated as equals to migrants with whom they would never have crossed paths in their societies of origin. Notably, the ordeals suffered by bourgeois emigrants from former colonies have never been experienced by their bourgeois counterparts from the North. These ordeals include the dread of illegal residence status, the arduous task of meeting the eligibility requirements for residence (e.g., marriage or an open-ended employment contract 'CDI'), and the hardships related to applying for naturalization.

The interviews further highlight the forced nature of skilled workers' emigration, as evidenced by the deteriorating conditions in the fields where these individuals are required to work in their postcolonial societies of origin. The desire to emigrate emanates, in part, from a juxtaposition of the anticipated potential of the sector in which skilled workers are employed and the actual conditions they confront in practice. This incongruity frequently engenders disillusionment and an evaluation influenced by a specific narrative: one that bemoans the country's postcolonial future. For those forced to emigrate, the failure of their employment experience in vital public sectors (such as hospitals, factories, schools, ministries, and national development agencies) often evokes a sense of national defeat. In other words, it symbolizes the failure to fulfill postcolonial national promises. However, the decision to emigrate is based on circumstantial factors, such as a window of opportunity or a hasty decision before said window closes. The decision must be made before the market becomes saturated and the skills are no longer in demand. The goal is to emigrate before the opportunity has passed.

Tunisian skilled emigrants are often members of the middle- or upper-class, who, despite possessing certain educational and professional assets, feel trapped. In a context where European mechanisms for skilled workers' selection coincide with the dissolution of national prospects, migration becomes concurrently a strategy for social upward mobility and an existential response to a perception of downward mobility. This perception is firmly entrenched in the incongruity between the promise of modernity (in the sense of Westernization) and the intended transformative potency of a higher education experience on society as it progresses toward the West on the one hand, and the reality of a rigorously structured system featuring trivialized flawed approaches and an exodus to economically appealing countries in the North, on the other. Consequently, an alternative possibility comes to the fore: the emulation of those who, constrained by this limitation, partake in the selective immigration system.

3 THE CASE OF MAHMOUD

Politicization vis-à-vis a failing healthcare system: a post-revolutionary disillusionment

Mahmoud is a 38-year-old medical doctor who received his education in Tunisia. He presently resides in Belgium after having initially emigrated to France with the intention of pursuing a career in medicine. Wael Garnaoui conducted the interview with Mahmoud during the latter's summer vacation in Tunisia in 2025. Mahmoud gladly accepted our invitation given his interest in our ongoing research on migration issues.

Having been acquainted with Mahmoud since the 2011 Revolution, we were part of the same circles advocating for political overhaul. As part of the younger generation, he is fully aware of the long-standing dictatorship foisted upon Tunisia by a repressive regime. He had been involved in political activism since starting his studies at the Faculty of Medicine prior to the revolution. This activist conversion was prompted by the overwhelming reality of the health infrastructure and working conditions of a profession that is considered noble, at least according to collective belief in Tunisia:

> "I had been under the impression that I was a high-achieving student, but instead I was subjected to all kinds of humiliation. Personally, I lost all taste for it [...] upon commencing my medical studies, I swiftly became disillusioned. I had also been active in the syndicalist movement. Whatever lingering illusions I had soon faded. Commencing with the academic program; it is immediately apparent that the hospital infrastructure and the substandard treatment of patients and staff are egregious. Even before coming into contact with patients, one witnesses firsthand the mistreatment of medical interns. I remember how humiliated I was by department heads who had almost divine powers ("sala7iyet Ilahya"). One is left pondering, «What am I doing here?» Attaining the academic program with an unblemished sense of self-worth is a remarkable accomplishment in itself.

> Over time, a sense of disillusionment with the Tunisian healthcare system started to spread. I recall, for instance, during my medical externship ("Externat"), one person being "sent to the banishment room" for no particular reason. When I was a medical intern, the department head would threaten medical residents whenever we went on strike, 'This will cost you your thesis and your tutorials ('Travaux Dirigés') credits.' "

La situation décrite par Mahmoud reflète une réalité à laquelle se confrontent des étudiants « bMahmoud's portrayal of the circumstances is in line with the actuality of "high-achieving students" having obtained their school-leaving baccalaureate diploma and being on the path to medical studies. The distinguishing characteristic of this field of education is the conceptualization of students as elitist future civil servants. However, as we shall subsequently observe, it is precisely this encounter within the apparatus of the state that precipitates disillusionment, insofar as the working conditions reveal the state's true inhospitableness. Confronted with disillusionment, emigration becomes a viable option for a number of the medical doctors who have previously traversed this healthcare system and subsequently left the country.

In the remainder of the interview, Mahmoud discusses the state of an administrative apparatus in dire need of overhaul, should there be the political will for it to serve as an institution capable of attracting its own elites. The interview reveals that the objective of attracting the South's elites, in this case medical doctors, is contingent not solely on policies emanating from the North that offer positions as a means of redressing the predicament that is the "medical deserts[21]. ." Subsequently, Mahmoud elaborates on his personal experience, expounding on his medical internship in Tunisia prior to his emigration to France, and eventually Belgium. His activism elevated him to the role of spokesperson, voicing demands, while also establishing his expertise on the situation in Tunisia, drawing on his professional background and the nuances of the pre- and post-revolution periods. Our objective here is to elucidate the issues by means of exemplifications demonstrating the dysfunctional nature of a healthcare system, in which a failing administrative apparatus is exacerbated by the absence of political will for reform:

> *"People cultivate a certain image about medical students. However, upon entering the healthcare system, disillusionment swiftly ensues, marked by substandard education, deplorable patient treatment ("tariqat ta'amol"), and abysmal hospital conditions. Most hospital departments lack even the most basic standards of human decency. Faced with this situation, I asked myself, 'What am I gaining by staying? Will it be the squalor of working in these hospitals? Or am I opting for financial strain?'*
>
> *Before 2011, medical interns and residents earned 800 TND (approximately €230) per month, and that is after five years of medical studies. There was a slight increase in salary after the revolution. However, there is no real return on such an investment [22]. I recently met with the spokesperson for the Tunisian Organization of Young*

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21 CChevillard, Guillaume, et al. ''Medical deserts'' in France: Current state of research and future trends", L'Espace géographique, 2018/4 Volume 47, 2018. p.362-380. CAIRN.INFO, https://shs.cairn.info/journal-espace-geographique-2018-4-page-362?lang=en&tab=texte-integral.

22 Regarding the renewed health sector protests in 2025, see: Zainab Ben Ismail, "National Strike and Protests in Tunisia: The Anger of Young Doctors")إضراب وطني واحتجاجات في تونس: غضب الأطباء الشبان(Inkyfada, July 2, 2025. https://url-shortener.me/9UDW

Doctors (OTJM). Sadly, their demands are invariably the same."

I remember working 106 hours in one week. That was my personal record as a medical intern. I recall an instance of being on-call in pediatrics, resulting in my assuming the responsibilities of both the doctor and the nurse due to the absence of the latter. Another time, I was on-call in the surgery department. The nurse was late because he had gone shopping. The patients had not received their insulin, and they were distressed ("mfar3sin fi sokr").

We are left dealing with the healthcare system's shortcomings. Once, when I was scheduled to perform an analysis on a child, I stumbled down the stairs and sprained my ankle. I sought treatment at the emergency room, receiving an injection, yet I remained on call, as I had no alternative options. However, I was unable to finish the patient's chart due to the pain. The next morning, my supervisor came in, having slept soundly at home. During the staff meeting, she mocked and humiliated me. She ridiculed me in front of an audience when I presented a patient's chart [...]

I still remember the head of the neonatology department at a hospital in Tunis who was a true authority in psychological abuse. Our group included a Palestinian intern. The aforementioned head of the department berated him: "You are not a doctor, you are a criminal. I am going to report you to the Gaza authorities and warn them that you are an Israeli spy." This sort of behavior was extremely widespread, particularly between 2008 and 2011. After the revolution, however, fear began to set in, and these behaviors diminished somewhat, especially in their most grotesque forms. Nevertheless, humiliating practices, extortion regarding on-call shifts, tutorials credits, and placements (les stages) persisted.

[...] A feeling of working in a jungle is experienced, with all the problems encountered professionally, be it in private or public healthcare. The job proves even more difficult when faced with ethical dilemmas or consistency concerns. Were I to remain in Tunisia, I would, in all likelihood, earn more money. "How could you squander this opportunity and leave?" my brother snapped. He told me that I was being foolish. For me, it was more important to maintain consistency and act in accordance with my ethical principles, and also to pursue endeavors that I felt personally rewarding."

The interview highlights a recurring theme in our survey of other doctors: before 2011, generational differences were a significant barrier to communication within hospital departments, perpetuating a hierarchical system of domination and creating a pervasive feeling of humiliation. After

2011, these differences largely subsided as the revolution was perceived as an opportunity created by the youth who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country and ushered in change. The price paid became a symbolic debt owed within intergenerational relationships, imposing new standards of respect and open dialogue. Nevertheless, as our interviews and observations have revealed, the period following 2011 has been characterized by administrative disruption and an inability to address emerging issues. This has been a period of greater freedom of speech and demands, resulting in a significant mismatch between people's expectations and the state of administrations and public healthcare services in hospitals.

The period following 2011 was marked by political instability and the failure to implement specific healthcare reform projects that went beyond the slogans adopted by successive governments. Consequently, the healthcare agenda still lacks definitive policies. Therefore, the healthcare sector persisted in its structuring along the lines that had existed prior to the revolution, albeit with a modicum of salary increases to forestall a complete collapse. The growing number of young medical doctors opting to leave the country has been, in part, attributed to this, at a time when no policy has been implemented to prevent the emigration of medical professionals. Ultimately, the emigration of medical professionals and the resulting staff shortages are exacerbating the crisis in hospitals, further eroding trust in the institution by its future "guardians", namely the future hospital cadres:

> *"The idea of emigrating hadn't crossed my mind when I was in university. However, the more I worked within the system, the more convinced I became that I had to leave. Ultimately, I ceased to identify with my professional milieu entirely. Another concern was medical liability. To be candid, the situation had become rather unnerving. I kept thinking about what would happen if a patient died in a hospital lacking nurses, hospital service agents, or medical supervisors. It is not unheard of to be hauled before a court, or even imprisoned. This is precisely what befell the medical resident in the pediatrics department at Farhat Hached Hospital who was placed under arrest while working on call. I was also shocked by what happened to my cousin."*

Discovering the country of immigration (host country): becoming an emigrant

For Mahmoud, the notion of emigration does not stem from a personal standpoint. Instead, he places it within the broader economic context of the Tunisian middle class:

> *"I have always considered emigration. During my medical studies, the matter was not regarded as a meticulously formulated migration strategy, though it was a topic of thought for the Tunisian middle class. To put it another way, after graduating, individuals have the option to relocate abroad to pursue additional academic qualifications before returning to Tunisia to start a career. Indeed, the idea*

> *of permanently leaving the country was never given earnest consideration. Rather, emigration was seen as an opportunity provided by the medical profession."*

However, we shall subsequently demonstrate that it is the intrinsic structural characteristics of emigration (namely, the crisis in hospitals in the country of departure) and immigration (specifically, the bureaucratic intricacies of immigrant status and the pressure to integrate) that disrupts the migratory dynamic. An individual's desire to supplement their education or income abroad in order to return home and maintain an organic (professional) link with their country of origin has now been superseded by an entirely different form of immigration. Simply put, it is a model devised by migration policies in the North. The idea is to leave and permanently integrate into European hospital departments in dire need of labor.

Mahmoud applied for a general practitioner position and migrated to France in 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once accepted, he took on the role of "associate practitioner" *(Stagiaire associé.e)*. He was hired less than twenty-four hours after the submission of his application. He retells this "funny story" about his arrival in France:

> *"I want to share a funny story with you. I submitted an application for a position in Reims at 22h00 one evening during the COVID-19 pandemic, only to be granted the position the following morning at 9h00 **(laughs)**. At noon, the head of the department called me. He was keen to arrange my arrival. It is a department that is short-staffed, so recruitment is ongoing."*

Nevertheless, the migration project can be traced back to the earliest stages of education. The prospect of emigration is ingrained in the collective psyche and thought patterns. It is an option that influences the paths of "high-achieving" pupils earning the highest grades on their school-leaving baccalaureate exams. During major periods of "transition," emigration is a structuring factor that families and future elites alike factor into their plans. It impacts decisions and dictates how households manage their financial resources. It affects the decision to pursue language education, the selection of specific academic disciplines, and the degree of receptiveness to the cultural traditions of a particular European or North American nation as opposed to another. At this juncture, we observe a dearth of enthusiasm for the countries of the South, attributable to the latter's negligible pertinent function and strategies of soft power. Furthermore, there is a comprehensive learning process that encompasses bureaucratic procedures and the requirements of visa application centers. This is the initial challenge that emigrating elites must surmount:

> *"My initial plan was to migrate to Germany. For that, a blocked account for €18,000, which equates to €920 per month over a period of two years, was required. However, as I began to save, the Ministry of Finance reduced the exchange rate for the Tunisian dinar, which led to a decrease in the value of my savings.*

In Germany, which is a federal republic, each federal state (Land) is bound by its own laws. There is a sense of solidarity among Tunisian doctors who have immigrated to Germany, and advice can be sought on specific Facebook pages.

Medical deserts are associated with more abundant employment prospects. In order to seek employment in Bavaria, Germany, it is necessary to pass the requisite B2 (upper-intermediate level) German language test, possess €18,000 in a blocked account, translate all academic credentials into German, and obtain the Apostille stamp of approval, a process facilitated by the Apostille Convention, which enables European nations to recognize Tunisian diplomas. Therefore, the onus is on you to stand in line at the embassy and obtain the Apostille stamp for your documents. These trips are tedious and tiresome, and they bring back unpleasant memories of a horrible summer I spent in Tunis. By dint of consulting various sworn translators and consulates for verification, the back of my diplomas became covered with stamps.

Wael Garnaoui: *Was verifying that all affairs were in order the purpose of all this?*

Mahmoud: *Yes. I was "covered in stamps" ("khouk matbou3 de partout") [laughs]. Everything was verified because Tunisian academic degrees are considered worthless and because German states have different requirements. For instance, I myself desired to settle in Saxony, a state that is more receptive to migrants, governed by the left, less socially conservative, very welcoming to foreigners, and an actually charming place to live not far from Hanover.*

There exist two potential avenues for Tunisians seeking to relocate to Germany for professional purposes in the medical field. Typi-

cally, the first option is to pass the Kenntnisprüfung (KP), a medical knowledge (equivalency) examination. The second option is to pass the German medical language exam, the FSP (Fachsprachprüfung), which assesses the level of medical language proficiency. There were two methods to have medical qualifications recognized in Germany. The first, more straightforward option was to undergo a 3,000-euro evaluation process conducted by experts. The experts would review the applicant's higher education program. If any modules were missing, the applicant would be required to complete them in Germany before returning to finish the process.

Later, all Tunisians were required to take the Kenntnisprüfung (KP) medical knowledge examination. Following a document fraud scandal, the option involving experts was eliminated.

I was preparing to emigrate to Germany, but my documents were not yet in order when the COVD-19 crisis hit.

I originally planned to move to Switzerland or Germany. However, since I could not go there directly, I began applying for positions in France. This would allow me to obtain a Schengen visa and travel freely. However, I came to the realization that I needed to move and that remaining in Tunisia waiting for a visa appointment that was four to six months away was not a viable option. I remember people being nervous and constantly refreshing the visa appointment webpage. I thus resolved to make Germany my primary plan, but first I would travel to France and then make my way there.

[...]In conclusion, I would like to clarify that I emigrated for personal reasons. In the aftermath of the revolution, around 2013, a glimmer of hope emerged with the protests. But disillusionment set in at that point. All hope was lost."

Controlled immigration: Skilled workers, anguished by regularization

Mahmoud's experience with migration is precisely what we term "controlled immigration": emigration driven by a fervent desire for mobility and professional recognition amid failing public systems, such as healthcare, in postcolonial states. Nevertheless, it unfolds under the burden of European selection and regularization mechanisms. Upon his arrival in Europe, Mahmoud is confronted with the implicit hierarchization of nationalities from the South, which he refers to as "colonial hierarchization." He also faces bureaucratic complications and the requirement to accept precarious working conditions and social downward mobility in exchange for regularization and professional integration. In this section, we outline the process for attracting skilled workers; given

that their qualifications do not guarantee mobility or stability, they are subject to the regulations and expectations of countries in the Global North.

Upon arriving in France, Mahmoud was designated an "associate practitioner," a position that entailed a remuneration of less than the minimum wage (€ 1,280 per month) and the denial of access to supplementary medical education or university diplomas: "I worked for 35 to 40 hours a week, akin to French medical doctors, yet my workload was actually more substantial than that of my peers we did not have equal rights. We, foreigners, are also paid less. To make up for the income shortfall, I had to do what other foreigners do: work extra on-call shifts." This testimony reveals outright downward mobility. The academic and professional recognition earned in Tunisia is relativized, if not offset, by the hierarchical structure of statuses and nationalities in the North. Low pay, longer hours, and unequal rights compared to native doctors are all aspects of a professional working experience that is fraught with anguish and effort disproportionate to compensation.

This social downward mobility relates to the psychological sense of inferiority experienced as a result of exposure to complex bureaucratic procedures: skilled workers frequently find themselves in a predicament analogous to that of undocumented immigrants, despite their qualifications. Mahmoud shares the stories of other immigrant colleagues who found themselves in an irregular status because of the dysfunctional prefectural appointment services. He details the unpredictable wait times for visa processing and temporary residence permits, the length of which and the frequency of their renewal hinge on the economic climate and the local labor needs. *"Both my first and second residence permits lasted six months. Then, my supervisor struggled to secure a one-year permit for me. I was fortunate because it was during the COVID-19 pandemic, but I still only received a three-month receipt for a residence permit (Récépissé)."* Such periods of uncertainty are stressful and anxiety-inducing. They underscore how European migration policies control the mobility of elites from the Global South by converting regularization into a tool that exerts pressure on their integration and choice to stay or leave. The period of the pandemic, while exceptional, highlights the susceptibility of these mechanisms to opportunistic outcomes. The health crisis has enabled Mahmoud and other applicants to temporarily benefit from expedited procedures, although these remain unstable and contingent upon exceptional circumstances.

The issue of diploma equivalency (recognition) poses another major obstacle. Mahmoud explains the steps needed to have his qualifications recognized: translation, legalization through the Apostille process, an equivalency examination, and a series of costly and time-consuming procedures. These requirements make migration a controlled process, where approval depends as much on financial resources and patience as it does on academic qualifications or recognition by administrations in Global South countries. This system is far from being neutral; it perpetuates colonial hierarchies and imposes specific constraints on emigrants based on their nationality and social standing in their countries of origin. Mahmoud remarks: *"The entire system is built on exploitation. It is contended that Tunisian academic degrees are superior to those from Algeria or Cameroon, but that is utterly fallacious. All those degrees are the same because they are all non-European."* The stratification of nationalities and the selection of skilled migrants are not based on individual merit. Rather, they are based on a postcolonial hierarchy, in which degrees awarded in the Global South are only valid in relation to the needs and regulations of countries in the Global North.

Interviewing Mahmoud elucidates the double bind confronting skilled emigrants: the imperative to substantiate their professional aptitude in a milieu where foreign academic degrees are both prized to ensure the efficacy of specific societal sectors, and disparaged to uphold distinctions that serve the interests of the nationals. Stress and anguish are not merely incidental consequences; rather, they are intrinsic components of the migratory system. These sentiments often compel individuals to adopt behaviors that are conducive to adaptation and conformity, frequently resulting in their acquiescence to precarious conditions and the prospect of temporary or permanent social downward mobility.

It is crucial to emphasize here that a significant number of young Tunisian healthcare professionals are keenly aware of the connection between migration policies, the infringement of rights, and the prevailing crisis in hospitals. The protests of young doctors in 2025 are perhaps the best evidence of this political awakening and interconnectedness[23].

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23   See: Nawaat, "Young doctors stage protest against policy of intimidation and displacement" (الأطباء الشبان يحتجون رفضا لسياسة) (التهديد والتهجير), July 1, 2025.

4 THE NEW MEANING OF NATURALIZATION

In Chapter 11-titled *"Naturalization"*-of his book "*La Double Absence*" (The Double Absence), Abdelmalek Sayad makes the following observation:

> *"A dialectical link has been established between **immigration** (as a process and as an immigrant population) and **naturalization**, essentially between immigration and the nation. Naturalization is sustained by immigration. In turn, with the possibility of permanent return ruled out, immigration dissolves into and through naturalization."*[24]

This chapter explores the concept of naturalization in the context of immigration, with a focus on Algerians during the postcolonial era and the aftermath of a war of national liberation. The Algerian nationality earned through "blood" in a hard-fought national struggle, which legally transformed "natives" (les "*indigènes*") into independent citizens, culminates in the historical fact described by Sayad: "Those at the bottom of the social and occupational hierarchy [...]in other words, the most economically and culturally disadvantaged immigrants- are the most irrevocably hostile to the idea of naturalization[25]." Faithful to his method, Sayad observes that immigration is intrinsically linked to the conditions, historicity, and political and social context of the territories of departure (emigration). This observation points to the symbolic implications of resistance to naturalization. The latter was undoubtedly perceived- at least by the working classes from the former North African colonies- as tantamount to betraying the fledgling nation, or mutilating it. Sayad refers to the tension within migrant communities regarding naturalization. Attitudes differ from one social class to another:

> *"Conversely, immigrants who occupy relatively privileged positions within French society and the range of accessible professions are the most inclined, or perhaps the least reluctant to obtain French nationality. They are keen to present this naturalization not as the substitution of one nationality for another but as the subjective cumulation of two nationalities- the French and the Algerian- and the objective cumulation of the advantages associated with both. In general, the more elevated an individual's social standing, and consequently the greater the distance from the status of an immigrant, the more their naturalization approaches its legal essence. It is regarded and experienced by all: those seeking naturalization and the society that bestows it. It is regarded as a purely procedural, administrative*

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[24]   Abdelmalek Sayad, "The Double Absence: From the Illusions of the Emigrant to the Sufferings of the Immigrant" (La double absence; des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré), Chapter 11.

[25]   Ibid, p. 193 – 194.

mechanism, disregarding the other, ever-present meanings that we prefer to ignore. This conveys the impression that we have overcome them."

Key insights into the postcolonial dynamics of naturalization, particularly among the new migrant elites- skilled workers- are provided by Sayad's findings. It is remarkable to witness the significant transformations in this symbolic reality among this group in the here and now. That is to say, the novel attitudes that have emerged in the wake of the failed promises made by the postcolonial states of the South. From a psychological vantage point, it can be contended that the psychological barrier that is allegiance to the nation of origin has been breached by the perceived failure to fulfill the national promises made during the nascent years of independence. To put it differently, the significance of North African nationhood is waning as the new political realities, marked by corruption, underdevelopment, and persistent neocolonial relations, are becoming increasingly evident. For migrants, these realities-defined by tighter border controls, visas, and residence permits- have made naturalization a struggle for guaranteed legal status within an infernal and deeply demeaning bureaucratic system. Furthermore, the tougher requirements for residence permit renewals and the validity period, as well as migrants' rhetoric on the issue, make naturalization a much-coveted process.

Naturalization is forced due to the transformation of immigration management in postcolonial countries in the North and the political initiatives of independence in the South. Nonetheless, extending beyond this stipulation predicated on the objectivity and materialism of migration policies-where the incapacity to renew residency permits becomes an accelerating factor-naturalization is expeditiously metamorphosing into an individual and collective endeavor inherently associated with the concept of emigration. This signifies that even prior to emigration, and at times upon initial contact with European societies, naturalization becomes the objective of migrants across all social classes and categories. Naturalization is a distinctive feature in migrant circles and is seen as solid proof of residence and entitlement to the right to "stay." Our observations of Syrian communities that arrived in Europe after the 2011 revolution substantiate this trend; the sense of borders closing, of being surrounded by death during perilous journeys of risky crossings, the precariousness of "refugee" status, and the threat of deportation and hate speech has made obtaining nationality a pressing issue, despite the fierce struggle for the liberation of Syria. In the remaining post-colonial communities of Africa and the southern Mediterranean in general, naturalization has been regarded as a means of protection against the risks of heralded death, due to scenes of disasters and massacres at borders since the establishment of the Schengen Agreement.

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Consequently, naturalization is no longer a choice that can be negotiated as it was when visa-free travel was a possibility. It ushers in an era of tighter border controls and serves as a safeguard against visa refusals, non-renewals and revocations of residence permits[26]. In the communities we have studied, applying for naturalization has become a "way of life" that requires special training. Indeed, aspiring to become a naturalized citizen signifies an earnest endeavor to earn that right by scrupulously adhering to the nation's core principles, which are often either inculcated and adopted by native-born citizens, or are utterly alien to those among them who live at odds with

26 C'est dans ce sens que naît la relativement nouvelle problématique des déchéances de la nationalité qui est au fond une déchéance de la naturalisation. Voir Sakhi, Montassir

them. These principles become an onerous encumbrance for migrants aspiring to naturalization, and even the most trifling infraction could result in the forfeiture of this right, or even in deportation. Consequently, naturalization signifies an ascent beyond the level of assimilation.

The case of Marwan: Naturalization as a trial of alienation

The journey of Marwan's migration[27],is a poignant illustration of the exploitation of skilled workers and the alienation that often accompanies the naturalization process. Marwan, age 35, who holds a master's degree from a renowned Tunisian engineering school, bid adieu to his stable job and well-established social status in Tunisia, all for the sake of navigating the labyrinthine French labor market, rife with bureaucratic hurdles and job insecurity. He was driven by a feeling of being trapped in Tunisia. His story illustrates the tension, stress, and identity crisis that can accompany the pursuit of French citizenship. We will begin by examining his upbringing and socialization in Tunisia, which played a role in his decision to emigrate to France.

Marwan comes from a middle-class family; both of his parents are university professors. He was a pupil at the Lycée Pilote Bourguiba in Tunis (LPBT) before enrolling in the National Higher Engineering School of Tunis (ENSIT). He is fluent in three languages: Arabic, French, and English. Following his securing of an engineering position with a Swedish company operating in Tunis, he settled in the country's capital, content with both his job and his remuneration. After years of studies and sacrifices, Marwan could finally enjoy his youth and indulge his penchant for exploration through travel. He is passionate about rock music and dreams of attending rock concerts in Europe's major cities. Marwan traveled abroad for the first time for work: he acquired his first visa and spent a week in Stockholm. After that trip, he began planning more travels. First, he applied for a visa to France. Then, he considered visiting Serbia and, lastly, Algeria.

Visa refusals dashed these initial dreams. Marwan's application for a French visa through TLS Contact was rejected. He encountered a second rejection when he applied for a visa to Belgium with TLS Contact, the service provider for collecting visa applications for the Belgian consulate in Tunis. Both rejections engendered profound frustration in him. He decided to visit Belgrade because Serbia was the only European country that officially granted Tunisians visa-free entry. However, upon arrival, he was deported from Belgrade Airport on suspicion of being an irregular migrant attempting to enter the Schengen Area. He harbored no such intention.

Nevertheless, Marwan persisted in leveraging his professional standing as an engineer and his economic and cultural advantages in Tunisia. Instead, he chose to follow his passion for travel, leading him to a new destination: Algeria. At the border with this neighboring country, parental authorization was demanded by the Tunisian police. This arbitrary measure was introduced after the revolution as part of the counterterrorism strategy; men under the age of 35 are required to provide this document in order to be allowed to travel to certain destinations. He then returned to the capital from the border, obtained the requisite authorization, and proceeded to the border checkpoint, only to be denied entry once again by the Tunisian border guards, this time without any legitimate basis.

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27   We began tracking Marwan's migration journey during our previous research conducted as part of Wael Garnaoui's thesis in 2016. It is, if we may term it, a longitudinal study.

After enduring yet another humiliating experience, he embarked on the lengthy process of permanent emigration to France. His decision was a response to the rigid restrictions on his freedom of movement- a system that only serves to fuel the fervent desire to enter forbidden territories, a desire that becomes all-consuming under those very restrictions.

Indeed, the "engineer" status and the computer science education will be the decisive factors in "recruitment" through emigration to France. In other words, **Marwan's and thousands of other engineers and skilled workers' compliance with the prerequisites of the selective immigration policy adopted by the governments of the North ultimately determines whether they emigrate from the Global South.** This policy fosters the proliferation of intermediaries who function as "headhunters" and service providers for prominent European companies. In exchange for commissions, these intermediaries handle recruitment, "facilitate" visa procurement, and provide temporary accommodations for engineers, including salary advances, airport pickup, and provisional housing arrangements. The migrant engineers pay for these recruitment services in full once they receive their first salary.

> *"**Marwan:** For engineers like me seeking employment opportunities abroad, Tunisia marks the start of our journey. An ad is published in an unheard-of newspaper by some private companies, just to justify that there are no applicants for the position in France and that the job can therefore be given to a foreigner. They possess the power to expeditiously dispatch individuals abroad and engage directly with the authorities responsible for the issuance of work permits. I therefore began the process of organizing my affairs, adhering to the established procedures and updating my documents accordingly. By the autumn of 2017, my affairs were in order.*

> ***Wael Garnaoui:** How did you come across this opportunity? How did you contact the people in charge?*

> ***Marwan:** There exists a Tunisian company specializing in connecting job seekers with potential employers. It is run by S.M., a highly reputable individual who boasts a vast network of engineers located throughout France. S.M. runs a company called S'Integra Conseil and refers candidates to another company by the name of ESL. In essence, they are a subcontracting firm specializing in the recruitment of engineers. Upon signing an open-ended employment contract (CDI) with the said firm, the engineer will be assigned to a project for a period ranging from one month to three years. This process has generally proven most efficient in the banking sector.*

> ***Wael Garnaoui:** Does that mean that S.M. is the most renowned in this field in Tunisia?*

Marwan: *Indeed, S.M. is renowned in Tunisia and Morocco. He has worked in the field since 2010. He organizes conferences, schedules ESL officials to attend, and offers applicants advice and guidance on how to migrate. They even arranged and paid for my taxi transportation. Certain individuals were made promised that were not kept. For my part, they informed me that they would arrange for me to be driven by taxi, and they indeed did so. To be candid, the bureaucratic fervor that compels one to submit all kinds of documentation, undergo tuberculosis screening, or meet vaccination requirements can evoke the sense of being regarded as a malady-stricken patient arriving from Africa, with the onus of substantiating otherwise. Nevertheless, during my previous sojourn as a tourist, none of these stipulations had been imposed on me."*

Upon his arrival in France, Marwan was incorporated into a subcontracting system that gradually eroded the sense of professional affiliation and recognition. His employment through digital services companies (IT consulting firms) resulted in his transformation into an exchangeable component, with his subordination to the principles of profitability instead of merit. Marwan explains this transformation:

> *"Upon signing an open-ended employment contract (CDI) with the firm, the engineer will be assigned to a project for a period ranging from one month to three years. This process has generally proven most efficient in the banking sector. Their sole concern pertains to the client's feedback, not yours."*

This experience unveils a dual alienation: on the one hand, economic and bureaucratic reliance

on digital services companies (IT consulting firms); on the other, symbolic dispossession, whereby the competencies and expertise acquired in Tunisia are accorded diminished recognition. Marwan highlights the role of migration brokers- local figures who specialize in arranging the migration of Maghrebi engineers and facilitating access to Europe- while also reproducing structural labor inequalities between the Global North and South. He makes reference to one such broker:

> *"S.M. is renowned in Tunisia and Morocco. He has worked in the field since 2010. He organizes conferences and offers applicants advice and guidance on how to migrate. An ad is published in an unheard-of newspaper by some private companies, just to justify that there are no applicants for the position in France and that the job can therefore be given to a foreigner. Then, he would take care of the rest."*

Marwan expounds on the symbolic and bureaucratic violence that typifies this subordinate position, as evidenced by his dealings with "headhunters": mandatory health checks, examinations, incessant submission of documentation, and a pervasive sense of being regarded with suspicion for no discernible reason:

> *"The bureaucratic fervor that compels one to submit all kinds of documentation, undergo tuberculosis screening, or meet vaccination requirements can evoke the sense of being regarded as a malady-stricken patient arriving from Africa, with the onus of substantiating otherwise."*

Marwan's arrival in France marks his entry into a new system of domination: bureaucratic borders. His legal residence status is now regulated not by physical border controls but by an intricate and often inconspicuous administrative machinery. The uncertainty surrounding his legal status as a resident, the never-ending administrative procedures, and the anticipation of a contract all contribute to an enduring state of anxiety. These challenges are exacerbated by precarious living conditions upon arrival, including inadequate housing, limited financial resources, and a lack of support. Marwan recounts:

> *"Securing an appointment at the prefecture was always challenging. Each time I went, I was asked to submit a new document. I believe there was one time when I spent four or five days without a valid residence permit. Each step proved to be a struggle. They wanted me to crumble, to capitulate […] I was unemployed and unpaid for three weeks. I had nothing to do. I lived almost penniless in an unfurnished apartment. I shopped at the most affordable stores where I would buy a week's worth of groceries with only €20."*

Bureaucracy is thus transformed into an instrument of symbolic harassment, through which

racial and postcolonial hierarchies are engraved into the bodies and psyches of migrants. The dread of navigating bureaucracy, which was inherited from Tunisia's experience with repression, has been transferred to the new social milieu:

> *"I found myself unable to even sit across from a police officer... I have always been afraid of the police, even back in Tunisia."*

Naturalization as a protraction of alienation

The application for naturalization, which should be the pinnacle of a process and an entitlement, instead becomes another ordeal. Marwan draws parallels between this process and a compulsory assimilation mechanism, wherein he is compelled to portray the role of the "model foreigner" and adhere to the principles of the French Republic, all the while under perpetual and arbitrary scrutiny:

> *"I thought to myself, 'Perhaps I will become a French citizen, too? How will I answer questions about the national motto, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, during the naturalization interview? Will I have to lie like everyone else?' "*

This portrayal highlights the alienation experienced by migrants who were previously seen as potential elites in the South. To obtain citizenship, Marwan is compelled to adopt a narrative of integration that occasionally clashes with his personal experiences and his perspective on French society. The failure to obtain citizenship, subsequent to being arrested following a police raid during a demonstration against a controversial labor law, serves to exacerbate the prevailing sense of uncertainty and legal insecurity: *"I am concerned that being held in police custody in the past will negatively impact my naturalization application and result in its rejection."* Rather than ensuring the security of immigrants, citizenship functions as a means to coerce them into acquiescing to the dictates of assimilation.

Marwan's migration journey is indicative of his social and symbolic downward mobility. Having previously occupied a middle-class status in Tunisia, he has fallen to a subordinate and exploited standing in France, despite his skills. He states, *"In Tunisia, I was a member of the middle class, but here I am not."* Job insecurity and bureaucratic violence reinforce this shift in social standing, producing an internalized sense of marginalization. The receipt of social and professional recognition is now subject to conditions, being contingent on the goodwill of employers, prefectures, and administrative establishments. Marwan's case highlights the profound psychological impact of this dual alienation. Loneliness, depression, and anguish amplify in a context of minimal social existence, postponed recognition, and contested legitimacy: *"I would spend entire weekends without socializing... I felt lonely."*

Despite these ordeals, Marwan strives to become a naturalized citizen in order to gain recognition of, and protection for, his right to reside in the country where he has rebuilt his identity and family history. It is his attempt to integrate and remain in the country. He regards nationality (citizenship) as a bulwark against further humiliation, precariousness, and bureaucratic violence:

"Above all, nationality is a form of protection. In France, being a French citizen allows you a sense of security."

Consequently, naturalization functions as a conduit for contesting the prevailing administrative hierarchy and reclaiming autonomy, particularly in instances where an individual has relinquished their position within the overall economy of their country of origin- where the emigration of skilled workers has, in part, disrupted the "nation-building projects". In this sense, naturalization simultaneously signifies retribution against the system, a bulwark against discrimination, but also acquiescence to certain rules of the game, such as yielding to the dictates of assimilation.

Marwan's journey exemplifies that the naturalization process is not merely a legal formality; rather, it is a protracted ordeal rife with precariousness and instability. Skilled workers, who have already been displaced due to structural or postcolonial factors, are subject to more stringent administrative and symbolic control and scrutiny. The sense of vulnerability and inferiority is further accentuated by the failure to obtain citizenship after years of labor and compliance with norms. Naturalization is therefore emblematic of bureaucratic domination, necessitating that migrants perpetually demonstrate their worthiness and compliance.

CONCLUSION

The journeys of Mahmoud and Marwan, despite their specificities, shed light on a key feature of new middle-class migrants from the Global South: forced migration leading to an uncertain quest for recognition. Their experience underscores a fundamental paradox: emigrating out of a refusal to acquiesce to imposed immobility, only to subsequently contend, once they have established themselves in the host country, for a sense of belonging that their economic contribution alone cannot ensure. Naturalization is not a simple formality of legal residence; it is a prolonged ordeal and an internalized border that reasserts postcolonial hierarchies.

Concurrently, the meteoric rise of intermediary agencies that recruit healthcare professionals and engineers- under programs such as "Golden Visa Talent - Medical and Pharmacy Professions" and the long-stay "Passeport Talent" visa-has been concomitant with a surge in the establishment of French schools and German or Italian language institutes, collectively geared toward supplying skilled workers to the European labor market. The LMD education system, adopted in Tunisia since 2006, is predicated on a pedagogical approach inherited from the colonial model[28]. Brazilian philosopher of education Paulo Freire calls this model the "Banking Model of Education," in contrast to the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" approach he advocates.

These journeys exemplify that skilled workers from the Maghreb- engineers, doctors, and cadres- are ensnared in a dual alienation. This predicament has emerged as a consequence of the failed promises made by postcolonial states in the South and the tightening of the neocolonial border controls. They are harnessed as an invaluable resource for the economies of the Global North while being held in a state of administrative uncertainty and compelled to prove their loyalty and merit. Naturalization, esteemed as a bulwark against precarious legal status since the establishment of the Schengen Agreements, has been metamorphosed into a disciplinary instrument for affects and behaviors. Conversely, it entails both the assimilation of immigrants and individual and collective afflictions stemming from uprooting.

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28   Concurrently, educational approaches that prioritize liberation- conscious of the issues surrounding borders and ties to the North, and the pressing need to surmount them- have the potential to establish a liberating development model. This model would emancipate the peoples of the South from subjugation and alienation.