

Illegal Migration in Tunisian Rap

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*This article explores illegal migration through Tunisian rap. It considers this music an aspect of resistance and protest against the socio-economic and political conditions obliging thousands of Tunisians to cross the Mediterranean in makeshift boats in search of better prospects and challenging the increasing security and legislative measures crippling mobility imposed by the EU and Tunisian authorities. This article contends that *harga* songs document the history of the working class in Tunisia and carve the identity of *harraga* as people who have been marginalised for generations. It concludes that EU-Tunisia security talks and dialogues remain ineffective as long as the root causes of illegal migration have not been addressed.*

Keywords: *illegal migration, Tunisian rap, resistance, marginalization, security, immobility, identity*

Introduction

Illegal migration is neither a new phenomenon nor a place specific issue. Whether in the Americas, Asia, Africa, or Europe, illegal migration is the order of the day, and despite the fact that the closing decade of the twentieth century was considered the ‘age of migration’ (Castles and Miller 1993) the twenty first century appears to be the century of illegal migration by excellence. This phenomenon is commonly referred to in Tunisia and in Maghrebi countries as *harga*. This word translates into Arabic as ‘burning’ and refers to the clandestine migration to Europe. It started with the ‘burning’ of Visas which refers to travelling to Europe on a tourist visa and staying there illegally. However, in recent years, *harga* has been used to refer to the clandestine migration to Europe in makeshift boats and the derivative *harraga* to the people engaged in this act, the illegal migrants.

The growing number of *harraga* led to growth of artistic and cultural production which documented this experience (*harga*). For example, the Tunisian film producer, Sarra Labidi, documented in her film *Benzin* (Petrol), the experience of a Tunisian IT graduate, from Gabes (a Town on the south eastern coast of Tunisia), who crossed the Mediterranean in a makeshift boat in search of better economic prospects, but was forced to return to Tunisia to sell smuggled petrol. The film epitomises the tragic experience of Tunisian families who lost their children in the Mediterranean Sea. In Algeria, Merzak Alouache, Algerian film producer, traced the journey of the Algerian *harraga* to Europe and illustrated the lost hopes of Algerian youth. Quite interesting, in Zarzis, a small town on the south eastern coast of Tunisia and a major departure point of *harraga*, a museum

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was established to document the memories of *harraga* by displaying some of the belongings they left behind (letters, clothes, shoes...etc). However, music remains the main cultural and artistic artefact which literally describes the plight of *harraga*. In this regard, a plethora of songs emerged as a history from below which delineates different aspects of *harraga*. These songs bring to the fore issues which were left on the margins in mainstream media and official history. Different music genres, in particular *rai*, rap and *mizwid*¹ focused on various aspects of *harraga* mainly nostalgia, estrangement, the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea, death and the deteriorating socio-economic conditions at home.

Music has come to be the focus of studies documenting and shaping socio-economic and political problems in Arab countries. Most of these works emerged after 2011 and explored the role of music in shaping change in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon... (Swedenburg 2012, McDonald 2019). For example, LeVine (2011, 2012) analysed the subversive cultural and political role of heavy metal which threatened the existence of autocratic regimes in the Middle East. According to LeVine, music scenes constituted a reversal of what was considered the commodification of art as these 'subcultural performances' played a liberating role for the marginalised groups in the Middle East. Other works, specific to the Tunisian context, focused on the role of rap songs in mobilising people during the Tunisian Revolution (Bouzouita 2013, Ovshieva 2013, Gana 2012, Barone 2016) and on the way music was used to articulate the grievances of the Tunisian working class mainly in the mining basin (Chamekh 2020).

More specific to this article is the work of Monika Salzbrunn, Farida Souiah, and Simon Mastrangelo (2017, 2019) on Tunisian and Algerian music. They described illegal migration to Europe both as an avenue for opportunity and as a source of 'disillusion'. The same authors explored the world of illegal migrants through Tunisian popular music and found it mired in loneliness, pain, danger and submission to Providence. It is interesting to note in this context that most of the studies on illegal migration focused on the condition of illegal immigrants in host countries, in particular the issue of integration, alienation and exile (Ketz 2016, Demerdash 2016, Tarr, 2019). This article, however, starts with the world of illegal migrants at home. It is in keeping with Sayad Abdelmalek's perception of the study of immigration, which stressed the need to start the study of immigration at home. In this context, he considered studies which do not start with the phenomenon of immigration at home as being limited and partial. In his words, 'by completely reconstructing the trajectories of the emigrants, it becomes possible to grasp the conditions which led to their departure and which produced a certain type of collective attitude towards emigration' (Abdelmalek 1977). Reiterating the same point posthumously, Bourdieu and Wacquant (2000) stated that the study of 'migration must ... start, not from the receiving society, but from the structure and contradictions of the sending communities.' In this context, this essay is focused on one type of *harraga* songs, namely those focused on the push factors which make thousands of Tunisians, especially young Tunisians, to cross the Mediterranean

¹*Mizwid* is a Tunisian popular music with instruments consisting of a bagpipe (from goat skin) and *tabla* (percussion).

Sea in search of better prospects. In the course of this article, illegal migration prompted a visit to Tunisia by the Italian Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese to discuss with the Tunisian President, Kais Saïd, the spike in the number of *harraga* reaching the Italian Island of Lampedusa (TAP 2020). Lamorgese pointed in her meeting with President Saïd that 11,191 migrants arrived to Italy this year, almost half of them were Tunisians (Associated Press 2020).

This paper uses Tunisian rap songs to study *harga*. This phenomenon is treated in this article from a cultural perspective. Special emphasis is laid on the way *harga* songs are used as resistance to the deteriorating socio-economic and political conditions at home, which make thousands of Tunisians embark on a journey fraught with danger, and which made of the Mediterranean Sea a crucible of death; more than 2,160 died on their way to Europe in 2018 (Mediterranean Migrant Arrivals 2018). This article is focused on the category of *harraga* as a marginalised group. It is done in a history from below fashion, looking at the marginalised and the way they use art to craft their own narrative and, therefore their history, especially as they were largely left on the margins in official narratives. It is in line with what Street (2003) considered the connections between popular music and politics. In this case, the way marginal groups (subaltern) use music to shape people's opinions about illegal migration and to reject a futile system of governance forcing people to escape the country in what is commonly referred to in local parlance as 'death' boats.

Tunisian Rap and Resistance

This article is focused on Tunisian rap songs that deal with *harga*. It considers this type of music to be a music of resistance and protest. Resistance and protest have been used in different contexts ranging from the political, the social, the economic to the individual behaviour and lifestyle (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). This in turn makes the definition of these concepts a daunting task. A quick search for the meaning of 'resistance' in *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, shows association between 'resistance' and fighting for, striving against, acting in opposition to, withstanding someone, a force, a state or a person' (Oxford English Dictionary 2020). Similarly, protest is linked to 'objection and dissent.' These definitions are echoed in a comparative analysis of the different definitions of resistance by Hollander and Einwohner (2004) who concurred that resistance is an activity that 'occurs in opposition to someone or something else.' However, the most important element in Hollander and Einwohner's study of resistance remains signalling 'political solidarity with the oppressed and downtrodden,' which gives the writer the possibility to take sides in 'power struggles.' In brief, resistance and protest are linked in this paper to the struggle against marginalisation and immobility.

Harga rap songs constitute an aspect of resistance songs. This connection is in keeping with what Habermas conceived as the inclusion of the 'cultural realm' (songs) in the 'public sphere.' This 'sphere' consists according to Habermas of music, art, and literature (Habermas 1991). The focus of this study is on *harga*

songs as aspects of a discourse which resists and protests against the ruling regime and the current state of affairs. *Harga* songs are calls for action to put an end to the ‘misery’ and its root causes which made a large number of Tunisians ride the dangerous waves despite the looming death and the increasing presence of border patrols on both sides of the Mediterranean. *Harga* rap songs are considered acts of cultural and political resistance. It is true that these songs were not performed in marches or in street protests, but these acts happen, ‘when people strum guitars and sing’ (Street et al. 2008). Unlike other songs of *harga* which stressed alienation, exile, loneliness, misery...etc., these songs encapsulate resistance against poverty, corruption and nepotism.

Harga Songs as a Resistance to the Pauperisation of Tunisians

Tunisian rappers decried in most of their *harga* songs the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of Tunisians. Rappers decried the ‘ruling mafia’ as the main factor propelling young Tunisians to ride the perilous Mediterranean waves to escape marginalisation and pauperisation at home. In his song *EL Harba* (escape), Psycho (2017) considered *harga* the last best resort for Tunisian youth because the country is not meant for the poor. He addressed his Mother, commonly referred to in Tunisian endearing terms as *loumima* or *yamma*:

Don't listen to them!
 They are the ones who made me cry,
 Those are the ones who kept silent,
 They turned a blind eye to injustice,
 I don't have a way out:
 Either I escape or I am burnt,
 They are the happy few
 They made their parents happy,
 And we are here just for the sake of company,
 We, either unemployed or imprisoned...

I have to cross the sea,
 Start a new life.
 I am escaping their draconian laws,
 Escaping the police,
 I am sorry the country is in ruins,
 Just so those with influence can live.
 This is their country!
 This country does not care about us!
 They threw us to the fish!
 Children of presidents in comfort, they live!
 They gave us promises,
 When in power, in neglect they left us,
 More pain, they inflicted on us!
 We thought they were men of honour!
 But they were devils with ties!
 Pray Darling: May Allah destroy them!

Claims by Tunisian rappers that poverty at home makes Tunisians cross the Mediterranean Sea in makeshift boats, or what they were referred to in other parts of Africa as pirogues², are given evidence in statistics by the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics. According to this Institute (2017), poverty rates in Tunisia reached 20.5 per cent in Tunisia in 2010. This percentage reached 36 per cent in rural areas the same year and the number of Tunisians living below the breadline reached almost two million in 2015, with the highest numbers in rural areas. The rates of poverty kept aggravating and in 2016 almost 30 per cent of Tunisians lived below the poverty line. It needs to be mentioned in this context that these rates were manipulated and distorted, mainly for political reasons, and sometimes statistics which document the huge scale of poverty have not been published (Nabli 2017). Most Tunisians expected better prospects in the wake of the Tunisian Revolution with the main slogan ‘employment, freedom and dignity.’ However, these quests remained largely unfulfilled after almost a decade of the Tunisian revolution and, as illustrated through these statistics, the socio-economic conditions of Tunisians, in particular the working class, continued to deteriorate and consequently thousands of Tunisians, including the highly skilled, strive for better prospects elsewhere.

The register of *Harga* songs is replete with expressions related to poverty, deprivation and marginalisation. Expressions like *hogra* (neglect/disdain), *maghour* (frustrated), *misère* (misery), *mout* (death), *mahrouk* (burnt), are common in *harga* songs. This diction shows that poverty and marginalisation are the main factors leading to *harga*. In the song *AL Borkan* (The Volcano), Klay BBJ decried, in vulgar diction, the condition of Tunisians:

People are queuing in front of your prisons,
Men escaping in boats,
They either die or they are kidnapped
We are living ... in sewers!

The same theme is echoed in other songs by the same rapper who stresses the fact that the conditions at home are leading Tunisian youth to escape regardless of uncertain outcomes. Furthermore, as a consequence of poverty, Tunisians have been portrayed as victims of drugs in most of rap songs. For example, Kafon (2018) raps:

My friends invited me,
I won't go!
Leave me here,
Leave me on my own,
Those who like me,
I need a joint!
My mind is brimming with misery,
I am fed up,
I want to escape!

²Apart from its literal meaning as a boat, the Pirogue is the title of a film about *harga* which describes the journey of a group of illegal migrants from Senegal to Spain by the Senegalese director Moussa Touré.

Kafon illustrated the experience of Tunisian youth as victims of drug addiction. According to a recent study by the Tunisian Ministry of Health, the consumption of cannabis more than doubled between 2013 and 2017 and the consumption of Ecstasy pills increased 7 times between 2013 and 2017. These rates show the sheer scale of this problem and the way the Tunisian authorities are turning a blind eye to the plight of Tunisians. However, rappers managed to bring to the fore the experiences of the Tunisian youth with drugs. This makes part of what Usama Kahf considered ‘the Emotional/Experiential dimension’ which is based on the experience of the artist who identifies with a cause and with an audience (Kahf 2007). In brief, most rap songs depict Tunisian youth as victims of poverty and marginalisation and drug addiction as a consequence of the continuous failure of successive governments to address the needs of Tunisians in an environment plagued by corruption.

***Harga* Songs as Resistance to Corruption**

In addition to resisting the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of Tunisians, Tunisian rap represents a huge reservoir of protest against corruption and nepotism. Almost all rap *harga* songs consider nepotism and corruption a major factor shaping the decision of young Tunisians to ride the waves to Europe. *Espoir Perdu* (lost hope) by Psycho and Gaddour (2012) is a good example. The protagonist, an elite university graduate, finds that for whatever job, you needed a ‘*piston*.’³ This common practice made this graduate look for ways and find *harga* to be his last resort. *Espoir Perdu* tells the story of many Tunisians who consider education a means of social uplift, but unfortunately they find themselves unemployed mainly because of cronyism:

I put all my dreams in my books,
I kept dreaming of a perfect future,
I focused on my studies.
My mother’s prayers were with me,
Thanks to her, I was successful.
Being the best became a habit,
Thanks to Allah I graduated,
Unfortunately, my joy was over.
My life a nightmare it became.
And you know the story...
A diploma was not enough
You need a *piston*!

The plight of this student is manifest in the number of graduates added to the list of the unemployed in Tunisia. According to the Tunisian Institute of National Statistics (2019), a third of Tunisian higher education graduates are unemployed. It

³This expression refers to people of influence as a key for getting a job. It is commonly known as ‘*wasta*’ (a medium) in other Arab countries; someone to help you establish the needed connections).

is worth noting that the myth of education as a means of social uplift for young Tunisians is 'dead', and this explains, to a large extent, the decision of many Tunisians to embark on their perilous journey in search of better opportunities. In this regard, it is interesting to point to the fact that, in addition to *harga* being a clandestine form of migration, Tunisia is witnessing a parallel brain drain. This drain consists of educated and well trained Tunisians who are marginalised at home, but have found proper channels to leave the country. A comparison of the factors leading to the immigration of both categories, *harraga* and educated Tunisians, shows a similarity of the push factors. For example, in an interview with France 24, Mondher Kouli, Head of the Orthopedic Department at Charles Nicole Hospital in Tunisia, lamented the immigration of Tunisian doctors as a result of the deteriorating conditions in Tunisian hospitals. Consequently, 50 per cent of newly graduated doctors left the country between 2016 and 2019. Similarly, in 2018, 72 per cent of highly qualified Tunisian graduates left the country in search of better and more decent work conditions, which was described as an unprecedented brain 'haemorrhage' (Dejoui 2018). Tunisian authorities, however, use expressions like 'mobility' (Blaise, Tili and Szakal) instead of probing into the factors pushing many Tunisians to look for an escape.

Espoir Perdu illustrates what Kahf (2007) considers to be the emotional-experimental dimension of rap music which uses the image of the 'victim,' in this case a successful student whose diligence did not lead to the improvement of his social-status after graduation, which is the plight of thousands of Tunisians. This song creates, as Kahf (2007) put it, "identification" with other people with similar 'conscience invoking experiences.' At the same time *Espoir Perdu* dispels the stereotypes of *harraga* as failures, social outcasts, lazy people, dreamers, drug addicts, and criminals. *Harga* songs served in this way as a voice of the thousands of Tunisians who ended up unemployed in an environment which has been for years plagued with endemic corruption. According to a 2018 report by the OECD, even those who want to start their own businesses face various administrative obstacles nurtured by corruption-related practices. Corruption changed, according to the same report, into a barrier to investment as it makes the cost of investment higher, hinders individual initiative and consequently hampers job creation (OECD 2018). The business environment in general has been affected by corruption and many other imperfections and uncertainties, and is not conducive for substantial investment and enterprise creation. Small entrepreneurs, who are not well-connected to the old political elite, have been particularly affected by the lack of clear rules and rampant corruption. According to a 2018 report by the Tunisia's National Authority for Combating Corruption, corruption remains among the top concerns for Tunisians. Similarly, according to Transparency International (2016), 64 per cent of Tunisians considered corruption in Tunisia on the rise and 30 per cent of Tunisians considered government employees among the most corrupt in the country. The same watchdog documented corruption in almost all sectors and administrations: agriculture, services, education, the police, transportation or health services. Whatever the sector, corruption is the order of the

day. The aggravation of levels of corruption in post Revolution Tunisia is well-illustrated in the song *Harrag*⁴ (2015):

Those who used tell lies are telling more lies.
 Those who used to steal are stealing more!
 Okay, I have to tell you: you stay on your own
 We will go!

This song epitomizes a faltering system of governance, which should under normal circumstances, combat all sorts of corruption. Unfortunately, this system is compelling young Tunisians to look for an escape regardless of the means, the ends or the costs.

***Harga* Songs as Resistance to Immobility**

Harga songs not only protest against corruption at home, but at the same time present a rejection of the EU draconian immigration restrictions. Europe started from the early 1970s to close its borders. The development of the Schengen Agreement in 1985 made entry into the EU a major challenge. However, with the adoption of the Schengen convention in 1990 and the adoption of a common Visa policy, *harga* became the last resort for people seeking to reach the other side of the Mediterranean. In most *Harga* songs, rappers consider *EL Babour* (makeshift boat) a source of ‘hope’ especially as the majority of working class Tunisians, sometimes even the middle class, cannot get a Schengen Visa through proper channels. Consequently, *harga* became the best option to reach their *El Dorado*. Mon3om-DMC FEAT and Akram-MAG’s (2015) song VISA illustrates the rejection of the Visa system:

O’ Boat! Mark my presence!
 I am on my way to the land of Romans,
 I tore up my passport and my documents too!
 The Visa is too expensive for me
 I want to make money!
 I travel, life might be better!

The song shows the rejection of the Visa system and instead, in a protest style, which is clear in the rhythm of the song, gives this young Tunisian the chance to dream of a better life beyond the confines of embassies. This song represents a rejection of the Tunisian law which criminalises illegal migration as it imposes restrictions on the movement of people. The law, putatively meant to protect people from trafficking, protects the European Union from illegal migration. The latter sought, through agreements with Tunisia, to externalise the control of immigration. This policy aimed to ‘outsource’ migration control to

⁴*Harrag*. (Illegal migrant) (2015) Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHHz8r4yRIY>. [Accessed 30 June 2020].

Tunisia to intercept immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees and arrest them before they reached Europe. This will help EU countries avoid any kind of obligations towards these people. Tunisia changed, according to crimmigration expert Badalič (2019), into a buffer zone and a pre-frontier to Europe. Badalič qualified this law as ‘illegal’ as it violates the human rights of irregular migrants. According to Badalič, the Tunisian authorities, on behalf of the EU, engage into illegal practices, which systemically violate human rights, and has perverse effects on illegal migrants to Europe. He concluded that by ‘by outsourcing migration controls to Tunisia, ... the EU avoided its international obligations towards asylum seekers coming from/through Tunisia.’

The resistance to immobility is given more legitimacy when we look at the EU/Tunisian agreements on immigration and economic cooperation. These agreements were mostly ‘opportunistic’ and served in particular the EU security and economic interests as the trade agreements with the EU, supposedly meant to combat illegal immigration through economic development, were uneven and slowed the growth of Tunisian exports. Most of these agreements protected EU markets, supported industries at the expense of agriculture and in turn aggravated ‘the underdevelopment of Tunisia’s interior’ (Kallander 2013). Tunisia’s agreement with the EU, meant to boost technology transfer, direct investment, and employment, brings minor gains to Tunisia. Instead, it gives advantage to European exports and forces Arab Mediterranean countries to open their markets to EU exports. In this regard, the benefits of the EU are 8 times higher than Tunisia. The EU agreements with the Arab Mediterranean countries in general, according to Yara Abdul-Hamid’s report (2003) to Oxfam, lead only to more unemployment. Béatrice Hibou (2003) criticised these agreements, which she conceded, were not conducive for more investment and development. She concluded that Tunisia, “*le bon élève*” of the EU, did not benefit from “cooperation” with Europe.

Rap Songs and the Identity of *Harraga*

In addition to the different aspects of resistance encapsulated in rap *harga* songs, these songs served to carve the class identity of *harraga*. It is true that the use of class is highly controversial with the frequent references to the ‘decline’, the ‘death’ and the ‘fall’ of class (Nisbet 1959; Pakulski 1993), especially as we are not dealing with a working class collectivity in a traditional manufacturing line. Nevertheless, ‘class’ remains relevant, as Rosemary Crompton (2008) put it, for the analysis of ‘late modern’ societies. For the purpose of this article, class refers to a social strata of pauperised people, the focus of *harga* songs, devoid of the collective political and social agency of the old working class collectivity. In simple terms, it is used to stress ‘social inequality and social differentiation’ (Crompton 2008). We use class to refer to a strata of people who found that they were neglected and alienated at home and therefore the only hope for them is escape (*harga*). This class of people appropriated *harga* songs because they represent for them their everyday travails. For example, It is common to find

Tunisians, sometimes even children from working class backgrounds, singing ‘*nhib ngataa*’⁵ or the famous Algerian *harga* song ‘*ya babour ya mon amour*’⁶ because these songs represent a mirror of their everyday world and at the same time their dreams of a better world.

The class identity in *harga* songs is reflected through language. These songs are in Tunisian *darja*, where the notion of the working class is manifest in the accent of rappers. The working class accent is clear and establishes the link between the accent (the voice) and the place of *harraga*, *houma* (working class conurbation in Tunisian dialect). This is a different space; it is simply a ‘different country’ to borrow the expression of Valerie Hey (1997) when referring to her experience with the Middle class, where the linguistic and the material converge to create the identity of *harraga*.

Tunisian rappers use the two main prongs of identity ‘sameness’ (the common) and ‘differentiation’. When they stress ‘sameness’, rappers tend to focus on ‘what they share with, and how they differ from others [so as] to persuade certain people that they are (for certain purposes) ‘identical’ with one another’ (Brubaker 2000). The stress on sameness in the context of *harga* songs manifests through the frequent use of ‘we’ in reference to people going through the same ordeal, *harraga*. The use of ‘we’ conveys identification with a common predicament and a common cause. We the poor, the downtrodden, the masses betrayed by successive governments, the people excluded from the mainstream media and convinced to quit.

However, when they stress ‘differentiation’, rappers use frequently ‘they’ and ‘them’. Both (they and them) are used to refer to those at the origins of the impoverishment and alienation of *harraga*, the happy few, who do not need to escape. Rapper DJ Costa, for example, used “they” in reference to the Tunisian authorities in particular their “misdeeds”:

They promised us!
 They reassured us!
 When they took power, they neglected us,
 They oppressed us!
 They were devils!
 They chased us out across the sea,
 They sank our boats,
 Your death is better, they said!
 And all the doors, to us they shut!
 Marble hearted, are they!
 A few they arrested,
 The rest, they drowned!

‘They’ is used throughout the song in an accusatory tone. The ruling authorities versus the people. They are at the origin of the people’s misery and as a

⁵This is a song by the Tunisian rapper Kafon. ‘Nhib ngataa’ translates into English “I want to escape.”

⁶‘*Ya babour ya mon amour*’ translates into English as “Oh Boat! Oh My Beloved.” This is an Algerian Rai song by Redha Taliani.

consequence, the pauperised class, left to their own devices, found no other option but ‘*EL Harba*’⁷. DJ Costa (2017) uses frequently “This is their country!” ... as a refrain throughout his song accompanied with sighs of despair. This dichotomy of the ‘we’, *harraga* (the pauperised class), versus ‘they’, the privileged, is common in most of *harga* songs⁸. This contrast defines the identity of *haragga*. They are the poor, the downtrodden, those left behind and omitted in official and political policy and discourse.

Harga songs create among listeners a sense of identification and even solidarity with *harraga*. In most of the songs, the country is plagued with corruption, nepotism, and drugs and the final solution is escape. It is a place where values and education are forsaken for money and estates. This is a condition that creates a sense of solidarity with *harraga*. Deceived and left to their own means, *harraga* opt for escape from the deteriorating socio-economic conditions at home. Therefore, *harga*, as a social act, should not be criminalised.

Conclusion

Harga songs document a missing chain in Tunisia’s history. It is the history of thousands of Tunisians who have left the country in death boats or those still planning or dreaming of joining them soon. These songs represent acts of protest against the persistent and systematic marginalisation and alienation of a large section of the Tunisian society. These songs challenged narratives of an economic miracle under Ben Ali and a democratic post revolution Tunisia, especially when we consider social contentment to be a major aspect of democracy.

These songs illustrate the history of the systematic subversion of truth as far as the EU-Tunisia relations are concerned. Despite the fact that it is clearly stated in the introduction to the European Agenda on Migration that the policy of the EU should be premised on using the EU global role ‘to address the root causes of migration’ including ‘poverty’ which does not stop ‘at national frontiers’ (European Commission 2015), security and EU economic interests continued to shape the EU relations with Tunisia. However, *harga* songs, as acts of social protest, serve to illustrate that the policing of the Mediterranean remains a failed solution as long as the root causes of *harga* are not properly addressed.

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⁷‘*EL Harba*’ is the title of the song. It translates into English as “escape.”

⁸See for example, Balti ft Akram Mag - *Chafouni Zawali*. Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pWHW-sItTg&list=RDZEHZ7c9JcOE&index=11>. [accessed August 22, 2020]. See also: Klay and ft. Rayen, Dima Labes. Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51uJNBsvsuU>. [Accessed August 22, 2020].

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