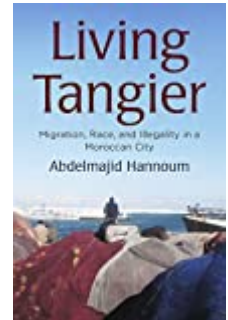


Abdelmajid Hannoum. *Living Tangier: Migration, Race, and Illegality in a Moroccan City.* Contemporary Ethnography. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. 312 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-5172-2.



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The Migration Crisis, Seen from Tangier

Let's look at three ways of experiencing the port city of Tangier. One: a Moroccan boy, without papers, stealthily approaches a truck boarding the ferry to Spain, slips under it, and holds on. Another: a young man from West Africa, holding a passport but no European visa, sits on a rock overlooking the Straits that he will soon try to cross in a rickety boat. Yet another: a European, having bought a house in Tangier, has his passport stamped on the ferry and arrives "home" in a city he loves. Anthropologist Abdelmajid Hannoum uses these dramatically different ways of living in Tangier to discuss how the clandestine migration exploding there since the mid-1990s affects its residents' experience of race and the law. In the process, he calls into question how "cosmopolitan" the city—once legally international—really is today.

Living Tangier navigates unusual territory by virtue of linking and contrasting European and

African migration. The comparison calls into question not only the racial dimension of migration but also the whole concept of legality (the state's interest) as opposed to legitimacy (what the populace thinks is just). Like his compatriot, historian Chouki el Hamel, Hannoum aims to contribute to newly burgeoning discussions of race and racism in Moroccan society and history.

Hannoum opens by explaining that the political and economic situation in Morocco has made local youth feel their only option to lead full, dignified, and free lives lies in making ("burning") their way to Europe. Too few well-paying jobs exist to give these youth (*harraga*) any hope to advance at home. So they turn their faces toward Europe and, despite being turned away again and again, keep their hopes alive by never relenting. "My body is here but my mind is in Europe," Khaled, an eighteen-year-old who has been trying to cross for seven years, tells Hannoum (p. 104).

Children as young as six can be found among those who are trying to fashion “free” lives by, for example, finding a relative in Europe, though they may not know exactly where. The solidarity among these *harraga*, as well as their hope, distinguishes them from the relatively hopeless but sometimes equally poor street children who may spend their days sniffing glue. Hannoum argues that the *harraga* are rebelling against the “structural violence” of a state that is in fact violating its own laws by not offering them basic security (p. 109). (The youth have no faith in public education, for example, because they see it leading only to a lifetime of unemployment.) They blame the *makhzen* (“the political elite” p. 29), not the king or Islam. More generally, they attribute their plight to the pervasive disrespect (*hogra*) that comes toward them from those in power.

In his last two substantive chapters, Hannoum turns first to West African and then to European immigrants. He depicts West Africans as victims of Moroccan racism, although he documents occasional acts of local kindness toward them. These migrants differ from their Moroccan counterparts because they are more organized, often having been sent north by their families to find their fortunes. Although holding passports, they nevertheless boldly elevate legitimacy above legality: as one eloquent Malian tells Hannoum, “Searching for my chance in life cannot be decided by their law. It is their law. And this is my life” (p. 142). The Europeans of Tangier interviewed by Hannoum are, not surprisingly, both clueless and arrogant: they don’t trust Moroccans and they remain aloof. Too few commentators, Hannoum suggests, have drawn attention to the fact that migration has been racialized: to be black is to be suspected of being illegal, a suspicion to which whites are never subject. On the contrary, he writes, the privileged praise the glories of cosmopolitan Tangier, ignoring the fact that they are adoring their own postcolonial privilege.

Hannoum prodigiously researched *Living Tangier*, often in very trying circumstances. Over the course of eight years (2008-16), he conducted ninety in-depth interviews and met hundreds of migrants from both Morocco and West Africa, especially in the area around the port. His dedication even led him to catch a skin infection from sitting at night on fishermen’s nets while engaging in Geertzian “deep hanging out” (p. 23). He inventively sought migrants’ postings in cyberspace to understand their lives and dreams more fully. The long passages from the author’s notebooks and taped interviews make the migrants’ stories palpable and the book engrossing. Hannoum brought to this research a high degree of empathy derived from his own feeling of exile. Originally from Morocco, he has long lived overseas and began this book to test whether he should or could return “home.” Because his own experience has taught him that the migrants’ lot is one of “unbearable suffering,” Hannoum is clearly touched that the boys are full of hope (p. 213).

Hannoum concludes admiringly that the youth are engaged in “a heroic act of the exercise of freedom” (p. 206). Refusing to “accept a destiny of injustice and fairness,” they have struck out to “build a new life at all costs,” one in which material riches play only a part (p. 206). Does this summation pay sufficient attention to the wisdom of Khaled, who told him, “Crossing is an addiction” (p. 103)? Perhaps Khaled is right. As his words suggest, their actions may be driven not only by dreams but also by the joy, to which they are addicted, of belonging to a band of brothers. To understand what is driving these youth, the reader needs to gain a rich, detailed sense of how *hogra* affects ordinary people’s lives, including in the boys’ points of origin. The boys use exceedingly vague words to explain why they are leaving and what they are aiming for. Their vocabulary cries out for illustrative detail: What was “boring” and “static” about their former lives? What exactly is wrong with the unnamed Moroccan “destiny” they are trying to escape? How, precisely, have they ex-

perienced *hogra*? What do they want to acquire in Europe, beyond the cars and money they have glimpsed or heard about? Despite their acts of heroism—defending each other against predators, for example—the boys seem victims of a delusion, sustained and perhaps to some extent created by their own “group feeling.”

Hannoum’s rich interview data and observations are often overshadowed by a tone that verges on, and sometimes crosses over into, the polemical. His sincere compassion for the migrants may have contributed to his tone of indictment. Whom or what does he blame? The *makhzen*, or government apparatus underneath the king, bears the lion’s share of guilt. He draws a causal connection that operates like this: burning is “nothing but an attempt to escape *hogra*,” and *hogra* is “nothing but the very system of the *makhzen* ... a system of cultural violence, symbolic and physical” (p. 112). The blame doesn’t end there. It may be embedded in Moroccan culture, he suggests. This violence, which Hannoum also calls “Moroccan authoritarianism,” may originate “within the Moroccan family itself,” though he does not develop this idea (p. 112). He also blames modernity. The modern state “needs” to waste or kill surplus laborers like the *harraga* by neglecting them, he writes, “in order to limit its own spending (on education, health care, etc.),” though he presents no budgetary data (p. 133). Hannoum’s ethnographic data is richer than the sometimes reductive and uncorroborated assertions surrounding them.

Hannoum is to be congratulated for serving as an assiduous and compassionate guide to the experiences of Tangier’s young migrants. He obliges his readers to pay attention to this painful contemporary face of global social inequality. He asks us to ponder a provocative question: Under what circumstances will an equal relation between Africa and Europe be possible, so that an African can move without a visa to Europe, the way a European can now easily settle in Tangier?

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