

7 Representations of Tunisian Undocumented Migration on the Internet: Methodological Approaches to a Digital Anthropology of Facebook¹

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we aim to analyse the representations of Tunisian undocumented migration on the internet. Even after the events of the ‘Arab Spring’ and its popular demands for dignity and liberty, the desire of young men to ‘burn their papers’ (*barga*), to leave their country of first citizenship and to reach Europe still persists. Undocumented mobility is by no means a one-dimensional, single-layered process, but reflects a transnational social imaginary and its various cultural resources. By beginning our investigation on Facebook, we are able to view (potential) migrants as actors rather than labelling them victims. Here, we present the methodological approaches we used to explore the audio-visual imaginary linked to Tunisian undocumented migration on YouTube and Facebook. Step by step, we show how we gathered a corpus of Facebook pages in order to analyse the circulation of representations on the internet. Finally, we discuss the prospects for further research.

Introduction

How is Tunisian undocumented migration depicted on the internet? Which methods should be developed and applied in order to analyse the imaginaries linked with this topic on the web? In this chapter,

- 1 We would like to thank Arnaud Demaison for helping us during the process of collecting web data and creating all the graphs presented in this chapter. We also thank Farida Souiah for helping us with the last phase of the Facebook research and we are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers who generously offered their comments and suggestions. This chapter is based on data collected as part of a project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Our research was also supported by the Laboratoire de cultures et humanités digitales de l’Université de Lausanne (LADHUL).

we aim to analyse representations of Tunisian undocumented migration through images, music and videos that circulate online, by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. This in turn forms part of a broader research project² that investigates undocumented mobility in the context of recent developments in Tunisia (Salzbrunn 2012). Even after the events of the ‘Arab Spring’ and its popular demands for dignity and liberty, the desire of young men (*harragas*) to ‘burn their papers’³ (*harga*), to leave their country of first citizenship and to reach Europe still persists. Such a desire to escape one’s daily life cannot be reduced to merely economic motives (Mastrangelo 2019). Undocumented mobility is by no means a one-dimensional, single-layered process governed by ‘push-and-pull factors’, but reflects a transnational social imaginary and its various cultural resources (Friese 2012). The methodological approaches that we have developed while working on our corpus of digital media are part of a digital anthropology⁴ of Facebook.⁵ Starting our research on Facebook allows us to view (potential) migrants as actors (instead of victimising them). We view their creativity and their capacity to circulate information and images as part of a broader striving for emancipation and empowerment.

- 2 This project, under the supervision of Monika Salzbrunn (ISSR, University of Lausanne), was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Farida Souiah has been a postdoctoral fellow and Simon Mastrangelo has completed his PhD as part of the project.
- 3 In the Maghrebi dialects, those who leave without documentation are called *harragas*, literally ‘those who burn’ the borders. This name reflects that fact that they do not respect the mandatory steps for legal departure. Also, they figuratively ‘burn’ their papers to avoid deportation once in Europe’ (Souiah, Salzbrunn & Mastrangelo 2018). *Harga* is the type of migration that is used by *harragas*.
- 4 To us, digital anthropology is the study, from an anthropological perspective, of data collected on internet, which is linked to a human action. We also take into consideration artificial-intelligence mechanisms based on the measuring of human action, for example, the analysis of most popular websites generated by YouTube-algorithms, since they are related to users’ preferences.
- 5 For a comprehensive overview of the debates about digital anthropology, see Horst and Miller (2012).

Migrants' own life plans and their capacity to act on their ambitions have not only been under-estimated by much of mainstream research, but also by politicians (Salzbrunn 2013). Our broader research design takes the migrants' agency and imaginaries into account, asking how they negotiate and develop their representations of a 'good life' (Salzbrunn 2012: 1). Furthermore, we seek to understand how digital resources are used as information channels, as cultural and symbolic capital and as a vehicle for disseminating and creating a social and cultural imaginary of the desired place of residence. This chapter focuses on the representations of Tunisian undocumented migration that can be found on the internet, mostly through images, music and videos, focusing on citations and connections between websites, which allow us to distinguish the most popular audio-visual sources. It further develops the pioneering work by Heidrun Friese (2012). In particular, we analyse the links between internet pages that deal with *harga* and illustrate them using innovative computing tools. As Rosenbloom (2013: 224) writes, the 'social sciences focus on humans, their products, and their cognitive and social processes. The computing sciences focus on information and its transformation.' Our reflections feed from both disciplines in order to advance the emerging field of digital humanities (Terras, Nyhan & Vanhoutte 2013). During the whole research process, we had to adapt our setting to the findings, 'drawing on a family of methods ... that acknowledges the role of theory as well as the researcher's own role and that views humans as part of object/part subject' (O'Reilly 2005: 3, cited by Pink et al. 2016: 3).

Overview: Crossing Ethnographic Fieldwork with Digital Fieldwork

New media such as social networks, blogs and YouTube help disseminate the forces of mobilization, dissent and disagreement, creating a transnational sociocultural space and public sphere(s) in which current (and past) situations are negotiated and contested. As explained

by DiMaggio et al. (2001: 320), 'the Internet supplements and complements rather than replaces traditional sources of political information'. Pictures, videos and cartoons are (re)assembled by highly creative actors in order to deliver messages of resistance. These artistic forms of empowerment tend to counter-balance feelings of frustration and suffering related to the overall political and economic situation. Furthermore, they can encourage potential *harragas* to cross the Mediterranean border between the Maghreb and Europe by boat or other means of transport, namely through a highly risky journey to the Italian islands of Lampedusa and Pantelleria. Imaginaries and documentary films about these journeys are part of the visual material used on digital networks such as Facebook and YouTube.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Tunisia and Switzerland (and, to a lesser extent, in Italy), this research project deals with the increasingly important role of the digital spaces by also conducting digital anthropology fieldwork, and thus contributes to an innovative approach that links undocumented mobility, (political) mobilization, transnational practices and the (gendered) social imaginary.

The desire for a better life abroad has been emphasized in the wake of the 'Arab Spring' by the development of a transnational youth culture mainly disseminated via Facebook and YouTube (Najar 2013a). Representations of success in Europe also circulate thanks to transmigrants (Pries 2008; Salzbrunn 2016) who bring back images and symbols of a higher social status to their places of origin. These images and symbols are sometimes videotaped, transformed and used in music clips uploaded onto the internet. Cultural resources (Salzbrunn 2011) have given rise to the development of a common artistic language of exclusion, resistance, dreams and representations of a better life. Videos, soundscapes and images bridge the gap between the street, the sea and virtual space, empowering highways and gates through which multiple belonging processes (Salzbrunn & Sekine 2011) take place.

The Internet in Tunisia

In recent years, the internet has become accessible to a large percentage of the Tunisian resident population,⁶ and has become very important in the lives of the current Tunisian generation.⁷ Next to YouTube and Google, the most popular website is Facebook.⁸ According to Asma Ben Jebara (2013), logging onto Facebook is now part of young Tunisians' daily schedule and that most of the time, they use Facebook to chat with people they know in 'real life' and who live close to them.

Some authors have used Facebook profiles to study the ways people perform their multiple belongings on this online platform (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin 2008). In her study of Tunisian Facebook users, Sihem Najar (2013b) developed a typology of Tunisian Facebook users who do not live in Tunisia. She distinguishes three categories of users: the first category is *rooted expatriate Tunisians* that have a Facebook profile that only displays references to Arab-Muslim, and more specifically Tunisian, culture. Najar notes that it is 'as if the expatriates wanted to replace their 'real' day-to-day life with another reality that brings them back to their origins' (2013b: 52, our translation). Najar calls the second kind of 'diasporic' Facebook users *bipolar Diasporians*: their Facebook profiles show that they 'express their attachment to both their country of origin and the host country' (2013b: 52, our translation). The last category is *cosmopolitans*. This category of users usually has a very international list of contacts. Their social network is widespread and they make use of varied identity references, among them

6 It is difficult to obtain accurate information on the number of internet users in Tunisia. According to *Internet World Stats*, there were 5,472,618 Tunisian internet users as of June 2016 (48.1 per cent of the population). Source: <<https://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/>>, accessed 21 June 2019.

7 See for instance, Melki (2013).

8 The number of Facebook users in Tunisia is also difficult to determine. According to *Internet World Stats*, there were 3,328,300 Tunisian Facebook subscribers as of 31 December 2012. Source: <<http://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#tn>>, accessed 12 January 2019.

According to Aline Mayard (2013), '[t]he 3 most visited international websites are Google, YouTube and Facebook' and '3, 4 million Tunisians use Facebook, for a penetration rate of 33%'.

references linked to the Tunisian context (2013b: 52–3). They ‘create their own symbolic, imaginary social world’ (2013b: 53, our translation) which allows them ‘to transcend material borders’ and, in return, to determine in a new way ‘what belongs to “We” and what belongs to “Others”’ (2013: 53, our translation).

Many authors have analysed the impact of social networks and the role played by Tunisian web activists before and during the so-called ‘Arab Spring’.⁹ Romain Lecomte (2013) has shown how Tunisian web activism developed, first on web platforms such as Takriz and subsequently on blogs, Twitter and Facebook. Lecomte employed the methods of digital anthropology (following the content published on the internet), as well as more classical socio-anthropology (interviews with web activists), to capture an evolution towards more online political activism. He has worked at the level of a collective web space as well as on a more individual level (as in the case of the blogger Lina Ben Mhenni).

Until 2011, Tunisian Facebook users had not often published political content. After the ‘Tunisian Revolution’, however, politics began to take up much more space on Facebook (Ghosn & Lahouij 2013; Triki 2013). Many political activists started using Facebook as a platform to express their political opinions. Racha Mezrioui (2013) explains that some of the young Tunisians who are politically active on Facebook use a specific language meant to be ‘heard’ by the young Tunisian generation. They also write in Tunisian Arabic dialect, using a mix of Latin letters and numbers in the same way as the young generation does, especially on Facebook.¹⁰ The academic works cited above focus on the ‘Arab Spring’ and/or migration and on the technology of information, but no long-term study exists yet that has put the emphasis on *harga* and its representations on the internet.¹¹

9 See for instance, Lecomte (2009, 2011) and Béchir Ayari (2011).

10 For more information about Tunisian Arabic writing on Facebook, see Achour Kallel (2012).

11 A notable exception is the work of Heidrun Friese (2012), which was very inspiring for us. Friese laid the ground for researching music (especially Rap and Raï) and self-made video-clips from Maghreb countries concerned with *harga* and the representations of a ‘better life’.

Transnationalism and Multiple Belongings

Many authors have shown that the internet is a place where migrants can display their multiple belongings and transgress national boundaries. Dominique Cardon (2011: 142) mentions that several factors of one's 'identity' are displayed, which contributes to the success of networking websites. According to Cardon (2011: 144), the way people show their multiple senses of belonging on the internet is intended to generate social links. Mihaela Nedelcu, who has followed the lives (both online and off-line) of Romanians migrating to Canada, notes that information and communications technologies (ICTs) 'allow migrants to form multiple belongings, to capture cosmopolitan values, to develop deterritorialized identities and biographies and to act at a distance in real time'; at the same time 'ICTs also enable migrants to defend particularistic values and to claim a particular belonging while living as global citizens' (2012: 1341; see also Nedelcu 2009: 13). This study is valuable, but it concerns regular migrants who prepare for migration with the help of a stable social network. In the case of Tunisian undocumented migration, which we study here, this level of clarity in the migration process is lacking. As we have shown in another article (Salzbrunn, Souiah & Mastrangelo 2020), the *barragas* make use of a variety of social networks and tend to follow opportunities as they arise.

The Web as an Ethnographic Field: Some Examples

Network Analysis

Within the field of network studies, some studies have sought to visualize migrants' social networks, which 'are not the mere sum of social relationships' but 'the structure of interrelating ties' (Fuhse 2009: 62). As in classic network analysis, the research focus can be put on nodes as connection points in order to understand the circulation of information. The question here is to understand if nodal points are the results of connections of

(living human) agents. As some researchers have shown (Héas & Poutrain 2003; Rice et al. 2014), it can be useful to use a combination of methods, collecting data online and offline to better understand social networks. For instance, Gluesing, Riopelle and Danowski (2014) have combined two methods in order to analyse the networks inside several global organizations. They first collected data online by an automated process of email invoices. To validate and to ground the results, they crossed the data collected with the analysis of qualitative interviews where they discussed social networks with members of this network.

Some authors have conducted ethnographic research on Facebook, looking for social networks. With the permission of the owners of the Facebook pages studied, Lewis et al. (2008) collected all the Facebook social network (anonymized) data of a specific group of college students. Using certain characteristics of the private profiles studied, the researchers were able to analyse which factors influence the structures of Facebook 'friendship' networks. As we will later explain, we have decided to base our own network research on collective and open-access Facebook pages, which is a different process. As we are looking for the diffusion of cultural resources (audio-visual representations surrounding the topic of Tunisian undocumented migration), we did not need to include the whole 'friendship' networks of the owners of the Facebook pages we have studied.

Elsewhere, we have taken into account private Facebook pages' content. This was made possible through meeting people in the course of our fieldwork. This allowed us to maintain contact with them via Facebook and to frequently check their posts. On their private Facebook pages, they publish (share) content which, most of the time, has been published elsewhere before. It is nevertheless instructive to frequently examine their Facebook activity as it allows us to gain an overview of their use of the internet as a space for sharing audio-visual representations on various topics, including different aspects surrounding their migratory project. (For an example of the research we conducted on private Facebook pages, see Souiah, Salzbrunn and Mastrangelo (2018).)

E-Diasporas Atlas Project

There are many tools for audio-visual data visualization (Reyes-Garcia 2015). We drew inspiration from the work of the e-Diasporas Atlas Project – more concretely, its methodology, rather than the data collected. This project aims ‘at mapping and analysing the occupation of the Web by diasporas.’¹² Before explaining our own methodological approach, we will describe how the e-Diasporas research team creates the maps they publish on their website. Firstly, they ‘build (and circumscribe) a corpus of websites’, a crucial phase that gives focus to the entire project. The second phase consists of ‘various “enrichment processes”’¹³ where researchers link the data to categories such as the language used or the geographical location of the webpage’s administrator. The data collected are then used to create interactive maps with the graph visualization software *Gephi* (Bastian, Heymann & Jacomy 2009). One of the maps focuses on the Tunisian diaspora. Teresa Graziano defines the goal of the study of the Tunisian diaspora as follows (2012: 12): ‘[T]he main aim of this research is to evaluate which kinds of connections can be found on the web between the Tunisian diaspora and its homeland with regard to political activism.’ It focuses on data collected on blogs, websites and forums.¹⁴ The goal was to study web data linked to political activism, which is why the type of web spaces chosen was of relevance. For the purposes of our own study, we have selected other types of web spaces, as we will explain later in this chapter. Nevertheless, we have chosen a similar approach, analysing the connections between different types of websites and then creating a graph which allows us to visualize the data collected and to search inside a defined corpus.

12 Section ‘The concept’ by Dana Diminescu: <www.e-diasporas.fr>, accessed 09 December 2019.

13 Ibid.

14 See, for instance, the ‘Type of website’ graph (Graziano 2012: 15).

Visualization of the Data Collected on the Internet

Other studies have been based on the analysis of web maps. Esther Weltevrede and Anne Helmond (2012) have for instance analysed the way the 'Dutch blogosphere' has evolved over time. Several maps allow the audience to visualize various aspects of the data collected. Similarly, Severo and Giraud (2013) have shown the dynamics of the Tunisian and Egyptian blogospheres during the events of 2011. In the case of Egypt, they have created maps that allow viewers to explore the blogosphere by type of blogger as well as by type of language used. This helps us understand the links between national and international blogs that share an interest in the same topic (political activism). In another article, Severo (2013) analyses the participation of Egyptians living outside Egypt in a Twitter debate surrounding their right to vote while living abroad. On the one hand, she has sought information about the Egyptian users of Twitter and, on the other hand, she has looked for the content of online publications. The results can be visualized thanks to a graph. Web maps have been used by several scholars to show the most recurrent topics discussed on Twitter in various contexts (Bruns 2012; Greene & Cunningham 2013; Maireder & Ausserhofer 2014).

In a previous publication, we worked on the question of assembling an internet corpus related to migration and the methods and techniques that can be used to archive this type of data. A crucial question was the choice of websites to be included in the corpus. As we argued, the main criteria for assembling a corpus are its coherence and understandability (Lafraquière et al. 2005: 76). As we will detail below, for the present research, we proceeded by defining pertinent keywords related to undocumented migration in order to assemble our corpus.

Studying Migrations on the Internet

The internet is a place of considerable interest for researchers working on the topic of migration. As Reips and Buffardi (2012: 1,406) state, 'the rise in the popularity of social media can provide migration researchers with a

unique insight into migrants' thoughts and behaviours that are occurring naturally in their social networks.' They explain that the kind of data that can be found on social media are 'non-reactive data.' The main advantage of using this kind of data is that 'it is (almost) impossible for the data to be in any way biased from reactions to knowledge that these data will be used in research. Most often, at the time when the data are generated, it is not even planned that they will later be used for research purposes' (Reips & Buffardi 2012: 1,409). However, one could object that participants could be aware of the potential for journalists or researchers to take interest in their posts. In our case, we asked our informants if they were conscious about it and if they cared about the public availability of their posts, since several could be regarded as risky. None of our informants shared our perception of a presumed risk, so that they seemed not to consciously filter their publications. In their article, Reips and Buffardi (2012: 1,417–20) present different ways to collect data on the web. They give an example of how to conduct internet research starting with Facebook, where they suggest collecting different kinds of data, notably photos from Facebook profiles.¹⁵

In an article published in 2012, Friese explores some of the audio-visual representations of undocumented migration that can be found on

- 15 In an article published in 2010, Gilligan and Marley explore visual representations of migration. Gilligan notes (2010: 2): 'One of the things that initially struck me about visual representations of immigrants in the Western media was the way in which they mirrored the binary representations of immigrants, as either victims or threats, which I had encountered in text-based mass media.' Gilligan shows how pictures mostly serve either to cast a negative light on migration or to victimize the migrants. The latter is not always useful because it tends to create a new problem: 'The representation of immigrants as victims may counter the idea of immigrants as a threat. They [the pictures] do so, however, by robbing immigrants of their agency by presenting them as defined by what is done to them, rather than by their own actions' (2010: 5). Another technique used to reflect positively on migration is focusing on positive images. However, this produces a fake image of migration as a whole and leads the viewer to forget the 'harsh realities' (2010: 7). 'Both positive and negative representations of immigration tend to focus on the exceptional and the dramatic' (2010: 7). Our own research seeks to go beyond such a binary representation by following day-to-day communication in a long-term perspective (Salzbrunn & Friese 2012). This approach allows us to follow the emergence and circulation of representations in detail.

the internet. Friese develops a typology of the videos related to this topic that can be found on YouTube (2012: 254–68). This typology includes two main categories: videos made by the migrants themselves while crossing the Mediterranean Sea and slideshows made of images collected on the internet and put together with music. The lyrics of the songs used are very often related to the topic of undocumented migration. To Friese, a ‘youth culture’ [‘Jugendkultur’] exists, linked to a ‘hopeless situation’ and the ‘desire for another life’ (2012: 239). This culture has its own specific ‘symbols’ and ‘semantics’, which can be found in some Rai and Rap songs. Friese illustrates this idea by giving a few examples of songs that belong to this ‘youth culture’. She analyses the lyrics of some of these songs as well as the videos related to this music (2012: 244–55) and the comments published on YouTube.¹⁶

In her PhD thesis, Farida Souiah (2014; see also 2011) has studied the topic of Algerian undocumented migration, notably by analysing data collected on YouTube. Souiah explains how she managed to create a corpus of videos by searching for certain keywords.¹⁷ She distinguishes the same two main categories of videos (2014: 266) elaborated by Friese with regard to representations of undocumented migrants in general. Souiah uses YouTube videos – among other types of material¹⁸ – as a way to analyse how topics such as the image of the country of origin or the experience of crossing the Mediterranean Sea are depicted (2014: 263–332).

According to Friese (2015: 300), undocumented migrants make use of cultural digital resources to give shape to their imaginary: ‘[I]n the context of current socio-political transformations, *Harga* is a gendered practice of freedom and an integral part of dynamic and creative transnational spaces that use cultural resources and are also developed in the contemporary environments of digital media.’ Web spaces enable frustrated young Tunisians to express themselves. Friese talks about a ‘transnational contemporary public space in which suffering, indignation about injustice, dissent and resistance

16 As stated by Phil Benson (2015), YouTube not only contains videos, but also includes extensive textual information that can be very interesting to take into account in research, specifically users’ comments on videos.

17 Here, the keywords chosen were ‘harga’ and ‘harraga’ (Souiah 2014: 265).

18 The other types of material used are songs, caricatures, novels, movies and artworks.

as well as political consensus and the transcultural social imaginary of a good and just life are articulated in everyday life' (2015: 301). In the present project, we go beyond the pioneering work of Friese by deepening the link between digital anthropology and intensive ethnography on the ground with *harragas* in Tunisia, Italy and Switzerland. This allows us to be more cautious when comparing different types of data such as political blogs, street art and Facebook pages. We use the *harragas*' discourse and use of the internet as a starting point in order to approach the reality of their day-to-day use of digital-cultural resources. Furthermore, our knowledge of the (potential) *harragas*' life worlds allows us to better understand their Facebook posts than somebody who exclusively focuses on the Internet, since 'media are part of a wider set of environments and relations' (Pink et al. 2016: 9).

Methodology

Here, our main goal is to understand how Tunisian undocumented migration is depicted on the internet. In this section, we explain how we conducted this study. At the outset of our project, we planned to analyse audio-visual data available (1) on YouTube and (2) on blogs. Exclusively digital research could lead to assumptions overestimating the impact of blogs. However, ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Tunisia and Italy on the way *harragas* use the Internet has shown that it is more crucial to focus on Facebook because the popular social media platform has a much wider audience than blogs on undocumented migration. Therefore, we chose to focus our research on (1) Facebook and (2) YouTube as the most popular websites among young Tunisians. As we are interested in the cultural production linked with the topic of undocumented migration, particularly in musical production, we focus on videos with music.

Description of the Phases of Research

We started our digital research on YouTube, searching for keywords in a mix of French and Tunisian Arabic:¹⁹ our first task was a linguistic challenge, since we needed to decipher the way *harragas* communicated about their (potential) actions, and, specifically, the Roman transcriptions of (Tunisian) Arabic terms. This enabled us to collect thirty-six videos with musical content linked to the topic of undocumented migration with the specific context of Tunisia. We classified these videos according to the following categories: (a) music videos, (b) slideshows (images and music), (c) news reports, (d) videos taken by *harragas* during their trips and (e) other types of videos. In the next research phase, we selected ten videos (criteria: large number of views and music in the background) and used them as starting points for our first graph in order to see which videos were most popular, and which are related to each other. The 'next up' feature on YouTube²⁰ helped us collect videos similar to the ten videos

19 These keywords were 'migration', 'exile', 'harraga', '7ara9a' and 'Tunisia', which we also partially combined. The final combinations of keywords were: 'migration' – 'exil' – 'harraga' – 'harraga + Tunisie' – '7ara9a + Tunisie'. The results obtained by combining the keywords 'migration' and 'exile' were not interesting because the combination was not precise enough. The results for 'harraga' were quite interesting, but almost all of the videos were related to Algeria (whereas we focus on Tunisia) and were mainly TV documentaries or movies, with only a very small number being music videos. Linking 'harraga' with 'Tunisie' under the category 'harraga + Tunisie' was useful, and we began to find Tunisian music videos on relevant topics. Our results improved even more when we tried '7ara9a + Tunisie' using numbers to replace some Arabic letters in a way that is very common on Facebook. On this specific way of writing Tunisian Arabic, see the reference cited above, Achour Kallel (2012). Later on, we added two new keywords. The first one was 'Houmani', the name of a very famous Tunisian rap song. However, against our expectations, this did not lead to any interesting new videos. The second new keyword was 'mousi9a', which means 'music' in Arabic. By using this new keyword and linking it to other keywords, we ended up with a new combination: 'mousi9a har9a Tunis', which rendered interesting results. Because the category 'mousi9a har9a Tunis' rendered the most interesting results (thirty-six videos), we decided to focus on the results linked to it.

20 Every time a video is watched on YouTube, a selection of similar videos automatically appears on the right side of the screen.

order to see what a similar graph would look like if it was based on data collected on Facebook instead of YouTube. Our reasoning was that it may be more interesting to start our research on Facebook, as it is much more common to find weblinks to YouTube videos on Facebook pages than links to Facebook pages from YouTube videos. Furthermore, actions on Facebook represent direct interventions from the owners (who publish the links) and the users (who view and/or comment the videos). We thus believed that this could be a way to link the data available on these two social media. Our decision to study Facebook pages is also linked to our ethnographic fieldwork, which allowed us to gain acceptance as ‘friends’ with some of our interlocutors (undocumented migrants) on Facebook. Thus we could gain a deeper knowledge of the nature and the meaning of audio-visual content published by Tunisian *harragas* on Facebook.²² This knowledge allowed us to ‘select what is representative, to translate what is relevant, to emphasize what is peculiar, to cut out what is redundant, and to protect what is sensitive’ (de Seta 2020: 91). We also discovered collective Facebook pages on the topic of undocumented migration. Hence, we selected ten collective Facebook pages²³ based on the following criteria:

- Large number of subscribers (more than 500)
- Numerous audio-visual posts (related to our research topic, representations of migration)
- Posting of music videos
- Posts related to Tunisia and viewed by Tunisian Facebook users

These Facebook pages became our starting points. First, we made a list of all audio-visual data published on these Facebook pages. Then, we again used the Gephi software to create a graph including data from all ten Facebook pages. This graph gives the user the ability to directly open the

22 We cannot develop further digital ethnographic work we conducted on private Facebook pages here, but briefly refer to this aspect in the second section of the present paper. This point has been discussed in other publications (see, for instance, Souiah, Salzbrunn & Mastrangelo 2018).

23 This research phase, particularly the selection of the new Facebook pages to take into account, was carried out with the help of our colleague Farida Souiah.

weblinks by clicking on the map.²⁴ It also allows the viewer to look for content in the graph through a word search-engine.²⁵

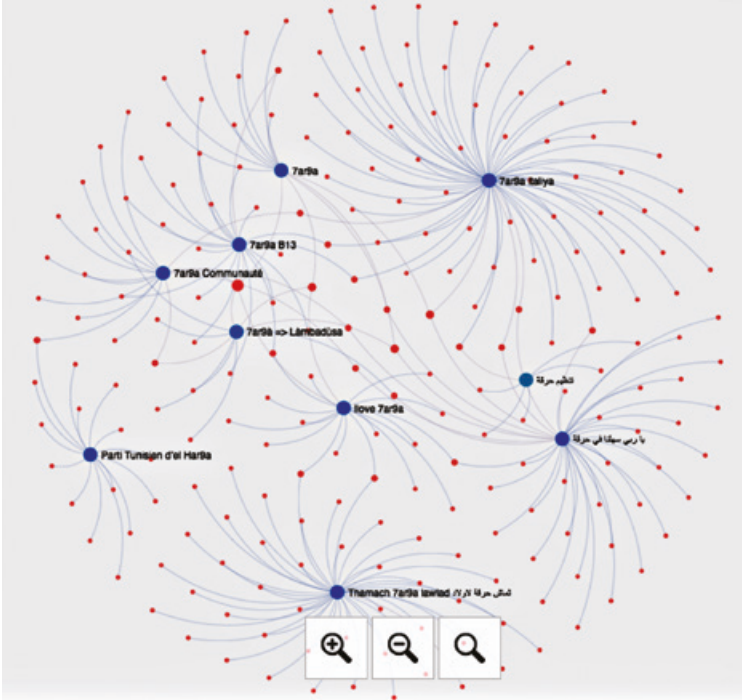


Figure 7.2. Map based on ten Facebook pages

- 2.4 The size of the nodes correlates with the number of views, but the distance between the points as well as the structure of the graph are random. Here, there are also three different colours: links to YouTube (red), to other Facebook pages (blue) and to other kinds of links (green).
- 2.5 We noted that there are some limitations to creating a graph based on weblinks. Sometimes, similar videos with the same title were spread out on more than one red node. Hence, the graph sometimes showed a video (red node) published on two different Facebook pages even though the video had been shared on more than these two pages. The weblinks strategy did not show this clearly, which gave the false impression that the same videos were not being posted on the Facebook pages as often as they actually were. We gathered all the videos that were the same and had the same title but were spread out across different weblinks. This eventually enabled the visualization of all the data that the Facebook pages had in common.

On this map, we see which of the Facebook pages are linked to each other and which pages remain isolated, without any citation or shared content. These findings allow us to analyse links and common points between the related pages (see footnotes for technical details and section below for further analysis).

Results

The graph based on data collected on Facebook (Figure 7.2) helps us understand which of the videos are most frequently posted on the Facebook pages in our corpus. It shows an average of 23,5 per cent of shared posts. In the case of two of the Facebook pages of the corpus, more than 40 per cent of the videos published can be found elsewhere in the graph.²⁶ Most frequently, the videos can be found on only two different Facebook pages in our corpus. However, in a few cases, videos are shared on more than two pages: three videos are found on three out of ten pages and one video is found on half of the ten pages.

What follows is a description of the four most widespread videos in our corpus. First, *Haraga tunisien*,²⁷ which is the most commonly shared video in our corpus, is an adaptation in Arabic of a TV report entitled *Les naufragés de la Révolution* [‘the shipwrecked of the Revolution’] produced by Envoyé Spécial and broadcast on the French TV channel France 2 in 2011. In the report, the journalists interview a young Tunisian man who wants to become a professional football player and who believes that his prospects are better in Europe. We see him planning and then setting off on his journey. There are three main moments: crossing the Mediterranean Sea by boat, crossing French customs by car and arriving in Paris. The report thus allows the audience to follow the path of a *harraga* from his city of

26 *7arga*: 42,8% and *7arga Lampedusa*: 50%.

27 Here *Haraga tunisien*, with the word *haraga* written with a single <r> is the title given to the video on YouTube. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCCcYTZi6IY&feature=share>> (694,098 views on 21 June 2017).

origin to the city he was dreaming of. However, viewers are not shown what happens to him after his arrival in France. We found many similar representations of an imagined destiny in Europe on our corpus of private Facebook pages.

The video *7arga en live men ma7res le 13/03/2011*²⁸ belongs to the category of videos made with smartphones by *harragas* themselves during the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. One of the *harragas* is filming the others on the boat. The passengers seem self-confident and some of them smile while being filmed. The video ends with the arrival of a helicopter close to the boat and the passengers saying hello by waving to it. These smartphone videos are often integrated in audio-visual montages published on private Facebook pages. In other publications, we have analysed the coexistence of images illustrating the (male) hero who succeeded in Europe with those representing the risk to die, the mourning mother longing for his son and the racist and downgrading treatment of immigrants.

*Baster*²⁹ is a collage of various types of visual content, including several parts of the TV report *Les naufragés de la Révolution* (the same version as in the video *Haraga tunisien* presented above). This ready-made video serves as the music video for a rap song in Tunisian Arabic by the group Baster and Malek. In general, the video is rather pessimistic and mostly shows the negative sides of *harga*, such as the challenging crossing of the Mediterranean and the suffering of the family members of the migrants.

*Lampedusa 25^{ème} gouvernorat*³⁰ shows the life of Tunisian *harragas* on the Italian island of Lampedusa (probably in the year 2011). The video's title presents Lampedusa as an administrative region of Tunisia (*gouvernorat*). This video lends a positive image to the arrival of Tunisian *harragas* in Lampedusa, showing some of them camping on the island after their arrival

28 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6J9gbU7opBg>> (300,490 views on 21 June 2017).

29 <<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=268703826530679>> (total amount of approximately 20,000 views on the different versions of the same video published on YouTube) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ah3rGiWRQ4>> (June 2017).

30 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnlH_J6-8r8&feature=share> (138,919 views on 21 June 2017).

as if they were on holiday. Most of the people that are filmed smile and laugh, giving the impression that they are happy to be there. One of them says ‘Buongiorno Italia!’ to the video camera with a smile³¹ and some others shout ‘Bye Tunisie, bye Tunisie!’³² These images contrast with others which highlight disillusion and failure.

These four videos all belong to categories that are very common on Facebook: TV reports, videos made with smartphones during the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, slideshows and collages of images with music. If we consider them in terms of the type of video, they do not have any specificity. However, these are the videos that our corpus of Facebook pages currently has most in common. Does this mean that these videos have a higher number of views on YouTube than others found in our corpus? Analysis shows that these four videos have each been viewed between 20,000 and 400,000 times, which represents a large amount. However, there seems to be no direct correlation between the number of views on YouTube and the videos’ presence on a large number of the Facebook pages that belong to our corpus. In fact, these four videos are not the most viewed content in our corpus. Among the four videos in our corpus which have the biggest number of views on YouTube³³ (between 4,000,000 and 81,000,000 views), all of which are songs, is the Tunisian song *Mchaou* [‘they left’] by Samir Loussif and Balti (2011), two very popular artists in Tunisia. This is a video directly linked with the topic of undocumented migration; *Mchaou* is a song about *harga* that emphasizes the risks and the sufferings linked with this type of migration.³⁴ The two videos with the largest number of

31 At 0:42 in the video.

32 At 0:57 in the video.

33 The four videos found on our corpus that have the biggest numbers of views on YouTube are: (1) *Khaled – C’Est La Vie* – 81,711,302 views (21 June 2017) – <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dWeeUIZFgA/>> / (2) *PSY Gangnam Style Official Video* – 60,901,645 views (21 June 2017) – <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH1XGdu-hzQ>> / (3) *Balti & Samir Loussif – Mchaou* – 6,046,653 views (21 June 2017) – <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otjotAI97a8>> / (4) *Hakaiti nersamaha bedm’a* (Riadh Bakkar) – 4,790,602 views (10 June 2015) – <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-Ig9iujItE&feature=share>>.

34 Elsewhere (Salzbrunn, Mastrangelo & Souiah 2015), we have written specifically on the theme of undocumented migration in Tunisian popular music and have

views are not linked with the research topic. They are very popular songs, one of which is closely linked to the context of Maghreb countries (Cheb Khaled), and the other of which (PSY) has been a huge international buzz.

How can we evaluate the impact of a video on the mental representations of the people who watch it? Is the number of times that a certain video has been watched on YouTube the main indicator of its popularity? If not, how can we find out which videos are important for the construction of the imaginary of the Tunisian *harragas*? Fieldwork in Tunisia, including on the ethnography of day-to-day Facebook use, has allowed us to answer these questions by following the users' daily use of Internet as well as their life-worlds, where a similar coexistence of resignation and longing for new, though highly risky opportunities could be observed (see Salzbrunn & Mastrangelo 2014; Salzbrunn, Mastrangelo & Souiah 2017). As we have already stated fifteen years ago (Lafraquière et al. 2005), in digital humanities, netnographic work cannot replace, but rather compliment (multi-sited) fieldwork amongst the actors. Only participant observation and face-to-face encounters allow us to estimate the impact of websites on someone's mind and life projects. Therefore, our overall research project includes four years of multi-sited fieldwork. However, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to include all the aspects of ethnographic fieldwork and website network analysis. Instead, we focus here on the circulation of representations of *harraga*.

Future Prospects

Like other researchers, we³⁵ believe that socio-anthropological research conducted on the internet must be complemented by offline ethnography (Licoppe & Beaudoin 2002; Lafraquière et al. 2005; Nedelcu 2009, 2012).

taken into account a large corpus of songs which includes *Mchaou* by Samir Loussif and Balti.

35 In our first contribution to digital humanities and new information and communication technologies, we already concluded that a long-term ethnography

As Maurizio Teli, Francesco Pisanu and David Hakken state (2007: 2), '[t]he ethnography of online groups should not be strictly the ethnography of the groups online (or the online ethnography of groups), but it could be the ethnography of both online and off-line situations'. We think it is useful to get to know the people who post on the webpages we analyse as well as the people who visit these webpages.³⁶ In an article published in 2007, Greschke explains how she first acted as a passive observer in her webfield and then moved to a more active role by talking to the people who were using the website she was studying in order to learn more about their views on migration. This digital anthropology was then completed by fieldwork, during which she personally met the people she already knew through the internet. Through this process, Greschke (2007) shows how online and offline ethnographies can be complementary. In our research setting, we have already conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Tunisia, Switzerland and Italy. Among other topics, this enabled us to understand how our interlocutors use both YouTube and Facebook. One of the results mentioned above, gleaned from our exploratory fieldwork, was the decreasing importance of blogs for the daily digital diet of our informants. If we had only examined the number of visits to these pages, for example, we would have had the misleading impression that blogs are an important space for political discussions; this was only (partly) true for the events surrounding 2011. The encounters with Facebook users also allowed us to discuss with them some of the audio-visual material we collected on those social media (on both collective Facebook pages and on YouTube). In addition to the material collected through the methods explained in this article, we also discussed audio-visual material that has been posted by the interviewees themselves on their private Facebook pages. From a study of digital networks and viewing statistics, we could determine which videos and sites are connected to and mostly watched, but we could not go further with our understanding of the reasons why

is indispensable for understanding the analysis of websites (Lafraquière et al. 2005: 88).

36 Nedelcu (2009) explains her contacts with the admin. of the forum she analysed. She also met some of the Romanian migrants who used the web forum she studied to obtain information about their future country of residence, Canada.

they had an impact on individual actors. Only the conversations held with our interlocutors (or observed between them) have shown that Facebook is a space where migratory projects are discussed and where representations of personal achievement are exposed. Even though the *barragas* are aware of the risks they are taking, the *mise en scène* of courage is crucial and empowering for them. The in-depth analysis of the audio-visual data collected on the internet, which we link with ethnographic fieldwork, is being discussed in other publications (Salzbrunn, Mastrangelo & Souiah 2017; Mastrangelo 2017, 2018, 2019).

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have focused on representations of Tunisian undocumented migration and the related social imaginary of Europe on the internet through the analysis of most popular websites and posts. Representations evolve and circulate mostly on Facebook, where sounds, photos, cartoons, slideshows and moving images are appropriated and combined in a multitude of creative ways. Here, we have presented a description of our anthropological methodology of Facebook, showing step by step how we conducted our research. Our study allows us to understand the dynamics of Facebook pages that focus on Tunisian undocumented migration, and to understand the difference between isolated pages and those which are cited elsewhere. Furthermore, it enables us to understand which types of audio-visual content are the most widespread and have the largest audience.

Self-made video-clips of *barga*, particularly boat trips, and images of male accomplishments in a European environment with very stereotyped symbols representing material success and (hetero-)sexual fantasies were the most frequent representations we found.

Our ethnographic knowledge of the day-to-day use of the internet by Tunisians allowed us to avoid overestimating the impact of blogs, which was exaggerated in other studies. The latter were seen as a crucial source of inspiration and communication in the aftermath of the 2011 popular

uprising (Friese 2012), but merely relying on the number of visits to these sites (without complementary ethnography investigating internet use on site, in Tunisia and Europe) would have been misleading. Thus, in accordance with the results of our multi-sited exploratory study, we decided to give priority to analysing Facebook pages and YouTube videos, which proved to be the most popular media followed by Tunisian youth in general and by (potential) *harragas* in particular. The use of the Gephi software allowed us to visualize the links between Facebook pages and the sharing of relevant YouTube videos.

Working with digital social media is useful and necessary when looking for representations of undocumented migration.³⁷ Through the internet, we have managed to collect a large amount of audio-visual data, which is an important step in our research. In sum, it is not sufficient to focus only on digital ethnography. The data must always be crossed with ethnographic fieldwork. Therefore, the knowledge of individual ways of producing and consuming the representations helped us to understand how the representations of Europe circulate and to get to know the extent to which the images of (male) accomplishment through *harga* are a source of empowerment. The combination of both 'classical' and digital ethnographic fieldwork allows us to analyse the presence and the circulation of multiple and diverse imaginaries surrounding the topic of Tunisian undocumented migration.

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Approaches to Migration, Language and Identity

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PETER LANG

LANGUAGE, MIGRATION AND IDENTITY

This book foregrounds the use of different methods for the study of migration, language and identity. It brings together studies from fields such as ethnology, linguistics, literature and religious studies. The scenarios investigated range from Czech-German language contact in nineteenth-century Vienna to Eritreans living in the present-day America, and also include studies of migrants in the Ruhr Valley in Germany, far-right discourse in Italy, Yugoslavian and Tunisian migrants in Switzerland, racializing discourses in Brexit Britain and identity assignation of Palestinian dancers. The volume thus displays a wide array of scenarios linked to language, migration and identity as well as a variety of predominantly qualitative methods that have been applied from different disciplinary perspectives.

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Approaches to Migration, Language and Identity

LANGUAGE, MIGRATION AND IDENTITY

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Anita Auer and
Jennifer Thorburn



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