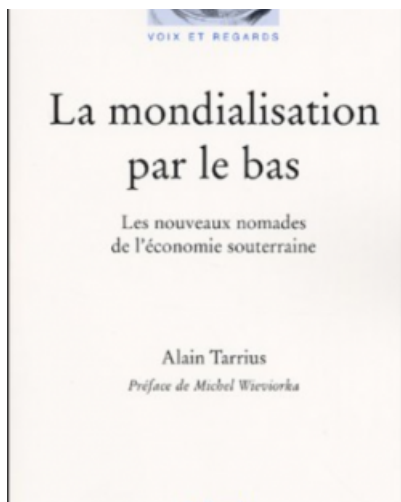


## ESSENTIAL READING

02/05/2018



## La Mondialisation par le bas

Les nouveaux nomades de l'économie souterraine

By Lamia Missaoui (Social Scientist) 5 February 2018

Alain Tarrus's investigation of the growing complexity of international migration since the 1980s helps us to understand the birth of two paradigms that have marked sociological research - mobility and circulatory territory - and to discover a lesser known history of globalization.

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Alain Tarrus, *La Mondialisation par le bas. Les nouveaux nomades de l'économie souterraine*, preface by Michel Wieviorka, Balland, Voix et regards, 2002, 168 p.

This book explores the complex networks of the Mediterranean basin's underground economy, centered on Marseille's Belsunce neighborhood, which consists of a system of trade that is considered a "black hole of misery" by local political and economic authorities. Based on the concepts of **mobility** and circulatory territory, Alain Tarrus's socio-anthropological research shows that the 350 shops run by Algerian and Tunisian immigrants in the neglected historic city center supply household audiovisual appliances, clothing, footwear, spare car parts and tires to nearly 700,000 buyers. In fact, this "globalized-place" is the largest commercial shopping area on the north shore of the Mediterranean <sup>1</sup>. North Africans from Marseille, the Midi Mediterranean and Northern Europe buy goods there during stopovers or weekend trips, as do Algerians and Tunisians

when their countries cannot import them.

Since 1991, the Belsunce system has spread to several circulatory territories following the wave of new migrants, who use mobility to distribute goods underground via large trade posts. Thus are born commercial outposts in regional and medium-sized French and Spanish cities - Alicante, Valencia, Perpignan, Montpellier, Nimes, Vienna and Lyon - along the Mediterranean and Rhône Valley trade routes created by Moroccans and used by nomadic and transmigrant traders. La Mondialisation par le bas (bottom-up globalization) therefore describes the birth and spread of these trade posts, stressing the influence of globalization that has allowed for the spread of flows, through the identification of new forms of transnational trade networks.

Tarrius also shows how the mastery of international flows enables free enterprise and, more specifically, widens the possibilities of escaping residential, economic and social enclaves. This path to physical and socio-economic mobility differs greatly from the institutionalized paths set out by public authorities. Government action, which is unable to facilitate such a break, is perceived as embodying another story: that of colonial heritage, whereas the trade networks described in the book tell of relational complexity we can hardly imagine. These "ants," to use the author's word, are bound by ethics that value word of honor so strongly that a written contract is not necessary. "Informal notaries" in the form of successful members of the community occasionally intervene to resolve conflicts and exert social control that safeguard the networks' efficiency, making it possible to distinguish licit networks (movement of products for everyday use) from illicit ones (drug trafficking, money laundering, prostitution, etc.) and avoid the overlapping of these networks, which nonetheless intersect at times due to crises and individuals' temptation.

Tarrius thus describes a new, original, almost imperceptible form of migration that enriches current French migration research. The first one, described by Gérard Noiriel, is migration born of the industrial era in the second half of the 19th century, which captured the mobilization of the international labor force, European initially and later colonial. The second major type of migration studied concerns identity-based groups driven out of their nations by war and repression, and who, as early as the French Revolution, brokered their social inclusion (both individual and collective), e.g. the Jewish diaspora throughout

the 19th century. The works of Dominique Schnapper are useful for understanding this type of migration.

## Foreigners: between migration and identity

Tarrius begins by affirming that our way of referring to foreigners, especially those who travel to Europe's cities and neighborhoods, is problematic. What distinguishes immigrants from migrants? Immigrants move within our ethical and legal spaces to converge at the consensual point of collective identity we call "citizenship." Thus the dual notion of immigration/integration makes sense to everyone, newcomers and indigenous persons alike. We ask foreigners to adopt our way of being, our way of doing things and our social norms. Migrants, meanwhile, are seemingly freer in this respect; their reference is the territory they build, travel through and sometimes conquer, without much concern for its values or practices: be they trans-migrants or nomads, they are above all foreigners, before eventually settling down and becoming an immigrant or a citizen.

The use of any of these terms implies taking a position that is not inconsequential. Since we cannot avoid referring to this "other," this person who travels the roads of Europe, Tarrius chooses to use the terms migration and territory, which today seem more relevant than immigration and integration. The former best reveals foreigners' initiative and role in the social construction of the city, as the "hyper-visible" space of our abstract citizenship does not allow us to access the social and spatial productions of these others who do not join us and stand (perhaps definitively) at arm's length from the identity we offer them. Moreover, this migrant, considered a "mobile being," constantly questions our indigenous certainties and makes us reconsider the relationships between mobility/**sedentariness** and otherness/identity, to better understand the links between singular trajectories, collective destinies and urban forms. Because their space is that of movement, migrants invite us to consider the city not as a place of sedentariness, but as a crossroads of mobility. The future of migrant populations therefore reflects an ability to maintain a relationship between nomadism and sedentariness that disturbs indigenous populations.

## From mobility to circulatory territory

The mobility paradigm developed by Alain Tarrus in 1989 combined three levels of space-time: mobility linked to social rhythms of the neighborhood (travel for shopping, administrative tasks, recreation and work), **residential mobility** in the course of one's life (moving from one city or country to another) and migratory movement as transnational mobility (travel to other cities/countries or international business travel between the host country, stopovers and the city of origin).

Alain Tarrus has thus reconstructed the continuities of social times <sup>2</sup>. This dynamic ethnography enabled him to identify the links between movement and attachment among these new actors of international migration who he calls nomads.

He was also one of the first to understand Belsunce's rapid transition as a place of international commerce, influenced by both the massive Moroccan migration of the 1990s and Algerian withdrawal following the civil war. Networks of commercial sites (wholesale and semi-wholesale stores, stands specializing in electronic products, cell phones, computers, household appliances, furniture, grocery stores, bakeries, convenience stores, etc.) have sprung up along the transnational routes used by Moroccans, from Algeciras to Barcelona, Turin, Lyon, Strasbourg and Brussels. In Marseille, some businesspeople of Algerian origin have joined the local peri-urban markets or accompany Moroccans to Alicante and then, from Oran, on to Algerian markets.

In the early 1990s, Tarrus developed the concept of circulatory territory based on the mobility paradigm and in reference to the work of the Chicago School, notably Robert E. Park's concept - probably based on a simple heuristic intuition - of "moral area." This refers to a fluid, unplanned conjunction of social times, places and mixtures of mobile populations, often nocturnal, that can influence normal daytime social relationships.

In Chicago in the early 20th century, a rich human, economic and cultural juxtaposition shaped the city: derogating from the "good" daytime public behavior (prostitution, gambling, alcohol consumption during prohibition, etc.) led to a cosmopolitan social mixing of Italian, Polish and Irish immigrants, Black Americans largely from the South, etc., thanks to urban and peri-urban mobility that, at night, intermingled peoples of different backgrounds. It would seem these nocturnal encounters influenced daily work, and that the daytime functioning of institutions benefited from this

effervescence despite its seemingly "immoral" and deviant nature. Spurred on by the same desire, company directors and their "boys" - one from his villa and the other from his slum - frequented the same places and shared the same bottle of contraband whiskey at night. This nocturnal behavior, made possible by mobility, was the guarantor of the functional daytime order; social distances picked up where they had left off the day before, and friendly mixing returned the following evening. These social ethics, depicted somewhat antagonistically in public double talk, were in fact complementary and an extension of one another.

The description of the Chicago of that time is obviously transposable, as is the concept of "moral area," provided the constituent elements are tailored to fit the historical context. Globalization, according to Tarrus, with its mobility and networks, has delimited territorial configurations into what could be called "moral areas." The continuance between underground and official activities, the entangling of affective and economic relationships and the mobilities at the origin of this mixing- sometimes heterogeneity- always cosmopolitanism were the same as that which he observed in the North African trading post in Marseille and in Moroccan transnational toings and froings <sup>3</sup>.

## From ethnic to cosmopolitan

Functioning outside of state regulations, the various social, affective and economic interactions amongst nomad traders, and between nomad traders and sedentary immigrant populations of the same origin, suggest an original territorial network that serves as a basis for the roads and networks of European migratory flows. Existing within but also beyond national regulations, a kind of Moroccan transnational society with specific regulations that unify, accompany, absorb and relocate migratory movement, thereby establishing new informal boundaries, has emerged.

La Mondialisation par le bas helps us in understanding the originality of Moroccan trans-European circulatory territory. In 1994, it had more than 120,000 ambulant door-to-door salesmen who travel through Andalusia, the Italian Piedmont, Lyon, Strasbourg and Brussels. With its innumerable creations (shops, cultural and religious associations), it connects several hundred thousand Moroccans dispersed along its roads by colonial mobilization <sup>4</sup>. In addition to underground nomadic traders <sup>5</sup>, between 1990 and 2000s

these roads - ramifications of a vast trans-European network - siphoned off sedentary Moroccan immigrants looking for family employment <sup>6</sup>, new migratory settlements and, often, original cosmopolitan collaborations between these new forms of migration (housing loans for logistics, identifying business opportunities, occasional help, etc.) and populations mobilized by the Glorious 30s and neighborhood youth.

This local territory with its multiple interactions (familial, interethnic, economic, affective, etc.) thus functions as much to facilitate mobility as a "blotting paper function," to absorb and sedentarize populations. In relation to the emergence of other transnational circulatory territories, the Moroccan roads are the Western European materialization of a world system of underground economies that have appeared on all continents, often as a result of religious boundaries <sup>7</sup>.

## A challenge for research and for the city

Paradigms of mobility and circulatory territory are themes that run through all of Alain Tarrus's work, but that are explored in particular detail in *La Mondialisation par le bas*. These two concepts help in showing, describing and analyzing original social facts relative to international migrations and constant cross-border movement. Many researchers have employed these concepts, which have helped to transform their relationship to the field and enrich the complexity of their analyses <sup>8</sup>. Tarrus's analyses starkly contrast with the doxa established in the 1980s. Today, the movement of migrant populations, which long fueled urban segregation, are creating transnational connections. This, in all likelihood, is a critical moment for the integration of these trends in urban policies.

Serious investigation of the activities of these migrant populations would make it possible to design public policies that better understand them, especially neighborhood populations, and to value them as important, constitutive elements of social change. The populations, approached by anthropologists using a thousand ruses, or, as Alain Tarrus says, by "understanding sociologists," take collective initiatives that unite them beyond rhetoric and political projects. These poor populations have invented an attractive, innovative development model, creating new centralities beyond city, regional and national limits, so much so that they could soon give birth to an kind of "power of the

excluded" across these countries that that so jealously guard their borders.

Of course, we are not talking about foreigners who do not belong to these networks and who wander aimlessly, depending on the territory's social rights. Yet, the sedentary life upheld as a universal model seems to offer no other solution than the charity of certain institutions. Even if populist speeches promise "our" poor miracles and wonders during election periods, such rhetoric is typically only followed by more misery. One crisis can hide another, as Georg Simmel said, and especially its resolution. The absorption capacity of different types and pockets of poverty by this international power is in line with this essentially economic Europe. It is up to these cosmopolitan migrants, moving step by step, to teach us how to live together, since our constitutive institutions no longer know how to.

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## Notes

1 Following Tarrius's investigations, a 1987 Caisse de Depot et Consignations survey estimates the annual turnover at nearly 3 billion francs.

2 Understanding societies based on the mobility of their peoples, theories developed by Georges Gurwitch (1950), Pierre Bourdieu (1963) and William Grossin (1974), allowed him to include this structuring theoretical dimension both in his work, in the tradition of French sociological research, and simultaneously in pragmatic empirical practice (the interactionist methodology that originated in the Chicago School).

3 Tarrius studied the movements of Afghans and various Balkan and Caucasian populations in works subsequent to *La Mondialisation par le bas*.

4 Tarrius Alain Missaoui Lamia, 1995, *Arabes de France dans l'économie mondiale souterraine*, L'Aube, 220 p.

5 Economy carrying all kind of goods that are either unavailable, too expensive or even prohibited in the country of origin, passing through several stopover countries.

6 Teens and children are often sent to other European countries with a family member to find work, for schooling or to be professionally trained for mobility.

7 A similar phenomenon of construction of a circulatory territory occurred starting in the 1980s, with Turkish migrants in Austria, Germany and Belgium, resulting in collaborations with Moroccans in Brussels and Strasbourg. Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia, however, - People's Republics from 1950s to the 1980s - did not allow the passing Turks to deploy a circulatory territory in spatial and social continuity comparable to that of Moroccans in the West, despite the marks the Ottoman presence left on these nations.

8 Researchers imitate the research subject: they move along with those who move in order to observe foreign populations' different ways of doing and being in mobility situations. See the works of Fatima Qacha, Oliviez Pliez, William Berthomière and other works carried out at the MIGRINTER Laboratory.

## Mobility



Broadly, the word mobility can be defined as the intention to move and the realization of this movement in geographical space, implying a social change.

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## Movement

Movement is the crossing of space by people, objects, capital, ideas and other information. It is either oriented, and therefore occurs between an origin and one or more destinations, or it is more akin to the idea of simply wandering, with no real origin or destination.

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## Mobilization

Mobilization is the action by which individuals are called upon to gather in the public space for a concerted effort, be it to express or defend a common cause or to participate in an event. In this respect, it is a social phenomenon appertaining to mobility. This article has been written by Sylvie Landriève, Dominic Villeneuve, Vincent Kaufmann and Christophe Gay.

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## Sedentariness

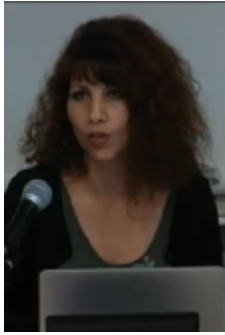
To be sedentary is to opt for stability and to put down roots, both social and spatial, whether by choice or not.

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## Residential mobility

Broadly speaking, residential mobility refers to a household's change of residence within a life basin.

[More](#)

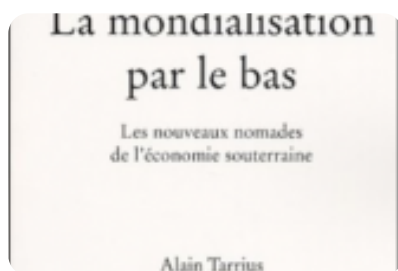


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<sup>1</sup> <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/mobility-450>

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/movement-460>

<sup>3</sup> <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/mobilization-3612>

<sup>4</sup> <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/sedentariness-459>

<sup>5</sup> <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/residential-mobility-3204>

<sup>6</sup> <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/directory/people/2018/02/05/lamia-missaoui-sociologue-12349>

<sup>7</sup> <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/directory/people/2018/02/05/lamia-missaoui-sociologue-12349>

<sup>8</sup> <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/directory/people/2018/02/05/lamia-missaoui-sociologue-12349>

<sup>9</sup> <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/publication/livres-clefs/2018/02/05/mondialisation-par-bas-12352>

<sup>10</sup> <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/publication/livres-clefs/2018/02/05/mondialisation-par-bas-12352>