

The Identity of Moroccan Migrants and the Question of Cultural Difference in the German Context

A Sociological Study by Majda Bouazza¹

هوية المهاجرين المغربية وسؤال الاختلاف الثقافي في
السياق الألماني

دراسة سوسيولوجية لماجدة بوعزة

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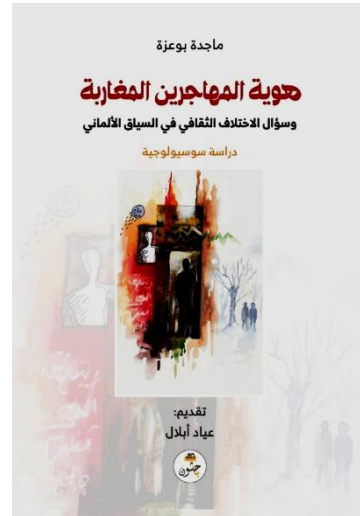
¹ This review is originally written in Arabic and translated into English by the editorial team of the Ijtihad Journal.

INTRODUCTION¹

The concept of “identity” has become one of the most prominent topics and pressing issues attracting the attention of researchers in the social and human sciences, particularly within contemporary sociological and cultural debates. This urgency is closely linked to the increasing waves of migration and the geopolitical transformations taking place in Europe, as well as the profound questions these migrations raise concerning religion, belonging, integration, and cultural difference. Such complex issues require rigorous academic inquiry and field-based studies to understand these phenomena within their real-life contexts.

In this framework, identity can no longer be understood as a fixed or stable concept, but rather as a dynamic process that is continuously reshaped through interaction with the Other, within spaces marked simultaneously by conflict and recognition. Identity has thus become a subject open to constant negotiation and reconfiguration across transnational contexts, whether temporal (intergenerational differences) or spatial (geographical displacement).

Within this perspective, Majda Bouazza’s book, *The Identity of Moroccan Migrants and the Question of Cultural Difference in the German Context: A*



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Sociological Study, offers an open sociological approach to the Moroccan migration experience in Germany. In fact, this experience has received far less scholarly attention compared to Moroccan migration in other European contexts such as France, Belgium, or Italy, whether in Arabic or foreign-language studies.

The importance of this book lies in its ability to fill a double knowledge gap. On the one hand, it focuses on the German case, which is often overlooked in Maghrebi and Arab academic literature. On the other hand, it examines Moroccan migrant identity at the intersection of gender, public policies, and media discourse, thereby providing a complex and multidimensional analytical framework. Overall, the book seeks to deconstruct the Moroccan migrant experience in Germany by focusing on how identity is constructed and negotiated between the self, the community, and the host society.

The book begins with a historical overview of Moroccan migration to Germany since the 1950s, when guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*) were recruited to work in industry and services. It then analyzes the transformations of this migration, particularly with the emergence of family migration and the growing presence of second and third generations. The author emphasizes that the transition from temporary migration to permanent settlement brought about profound changes in migrants' self-awareness and modes of belonging.

The book also devotes detailed attention to the situation of Moroccan women, highlighting the dual challenges they face. On the one hand, German society imposes different expectations regarding work and social participation; on the other hand, women are still expected to preserve traditional roles within the family and their community of origin. This duality makes the female experience a crucial entry point for understanding the complexity of Moroccan migrant identity, which cannot be adequately grasped through abstract or purely theoretical studies detached from lived realities.

In addition, the book examines the impact of German public policies, including residence and citizenship laws, as well as political and media discourses on Islam and migration. The author concludes that these policies directly or indirectly shape Moroccan migrants' self-perception and reinforce representations held by the host society.

Bouazza's study highlights five key elements that constitute the core of the research and its fieldwork-based depth, combining theory, analysis, and conclusions:

1. Migration as a phenomenon oscillating between dream and reality within Moroccan society.
2. Identity and cultural difference as negotiable and constantly evolving components within the German context.
3. Religion and values as formative factors in shaping a dynamic concept of identity, working together in the reconfiguration of Moroccan migrant identity.
4. The experience of Moroccan migrant women as a central element of migration, situated between the culture of origin—maintained through language, religion, and customs—and the culture of the German host society, which imposes new patterns of living, work, and social relations.
5. The role of language in strengthening or threatening Moroccan identity. Arabic and Amazigh function as strong ties to the homeland, preserving collective memory and cultural belonging, while German is essential for integration in work, education, and social life. For children, language may become a site of identity conflict, as weak proficiency in Arabic or Amazigh can lead to feelings of cultural disconnection.

The study thus presents language as a dual factor:

- A reinforcing factor of identity when linguistic balance is achieved.
- A threatening factor when linguistic adaptation turns into complete cultural assimilation.

The theoretical framework of the book conceptualizes identity as a relational structure continuously reshaped through interaction with the Other. This aligns with contemporary approaches in cultural sociology, such as those of Stuart Hall and Zygmunt Bauman. Identity is not a fixed essence but an open process intersecting religion, language, gender, and public policies. In this sense, the author rejects essentialist views that regard identity as homogeneous or immutable. However, this framework would benefit from stronger comparative analysis with other European contexts.

The author adopts a qualitative methodology based on interviews and lived experiences of Moroccan migrants, allowing access to detailed aspects of daily life and social relations. This approach facilitates an understanding of how migrants construct meaning within multicultural realities.

The book stands out for addressing a relatively new topic in migration studies by focusing on the German context, which has long been marginalized in academic research compared to other European settings. It also highlights the importance of the gender dimension, placing migrant women at the center of identity construction—an aspect rarely emphasized in previous studies. Moreover, the research combines historical analysis with contemporary transformations of identity, offering a comprehensive view of Moroccan migration in Germany. The findings also provide valuable insights for public policies on integration and multiculturalism.

Despite its clear contribution, the book presents some limitations:

- a. Methodological limitations: reliance on qualitative methods without sufficient quantitative data to strengthen empirical findings.
- b. Comparative limitations: absence of comparison with other migrant communities in Germany, such as Turkish or Tunisian migrants.
- c. Internal diversity: insufficient attention to generational differences and regional origins within the Moroccan community.
- d. Socioeconomic dimensions: limited analysis of economic and social factors, despite their central role in identity formation.

In conclusion, *The Identity of Moroccan Migrants and the Question of Cultural Difference in the German Context* by Majda Bouazza represents a significant contribution to migration and identity studies. It enriches scholarly debate on Moroccan migration in Germany, a context that has received limited academic attention. Despite certain methodological and theoretical gaps, the book remains a key reference that opens new research horizons on migrant identities and integration policies. It sheds light on the tensions between belonging and difference, recognition and adaptation, making migrant identity a vital lens for understanding the challenges of cultural pluralism in contemporary Europe, particularly in Germany.