



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

TUNISIAN WOMEN DURING THE REVOLUTION IN 2011-  
BETWEEN PARTICIPATION AND MARGINALIZATION

by

KATHARINA BRUNO HAENSLER

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
to the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies  
at the American University of Beirut.

Beirut, Lebanon

May 2013

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

TUNISIAN WOMEN DURING THE REVOLUTION IN 2011-  
BETWEEN PARTICIPATION AND MARGINALIZATION

by  
KATHARINA BRUNO HAENSLER

Approved by:

*Sawsan Abdulrahim*

Dr. Sawsan Abdulrahim, Associate Professor  
Department of Health Promotion and Community Health

Advisor

*Waleed Hazbun*

Dr. Waleed Hazbun, Associate Professor  
Department of Political Studies & Public Administration

Committee Member

*Livia C. Wick*

Dr. Livia Celine Wick, Assistant Professor  
Department of Social & Behavioral Sciences

Committee Member

*Rosemary Sayigh*

Dr. Rosemary Sayigh, Visiting Professor  
Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies

Committee Member

Date of thesis defense: May 16, 2013

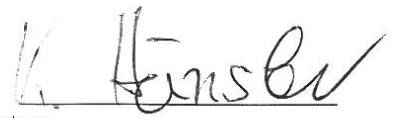
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

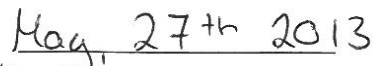
THESIS RELEASE FORM

I, Katharina Bruno Haensler

authorize the American University of Beirut to supply copies of my thesis to libraries or individuals upon request.

do not authorize the American University of Beirut to supply copies of my thesis to libraries or individuals for a period of two years starting with the date of the thesis/dissertation/project deposit.

  
Signature

  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It would not have been possible to write this thesis without the help and support of the kind people around me, to only some of whom it is possible to give particular mention here.

Above all, this thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of my principle supervisor Dr. Sawsan Abdulrahim. Her great efforts, her liberal supervision of this study and her ongoing encouragement and patience has been invaluable on both an academic and a personal level, for which I am extremely grateful.

I also would like to thank Dr. Rosemary Sayigh, who introduced me to oral history and taught me a lot about the Arab women's movement. She passed her great dedication to the cause on to me and has always been a great support.

Further I would like to mention my dear friends Sami Masri and Tarek Saleh for providing refreshing ideas that often allowed me to have another view on things. I am very grateful for all my friends in Tunisia who supported me by all means during my stay and made me feel very welcome.

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Katharina Bruno Haensler for Master of Arts  
Major: Middle Eastern Studies

Title: Tunisian Women during the Revolution in 2011- between Participation and Marginalization

Arab women played a crucial part in the uprisings of the Arab world in 2011/2012. Women actively participated in protests, marches, blogging, tweeting, organization of transportations and shelter; some got engaged in physical confrontations with the police forces and risked their lives during the days of the protests. However this moment of social equality was vanished away very fast after the demonstrations were settled or the regimes had fallen. Now, two years after the revolution, women in the Arab world- whether active or not, organized or not- are vowing not be marginalized by the new political systems. This study examines the perceptions of Tunisian women who experienced the revolution that is going on since December 2010. The research explores the following questions. First, what made women go on the streets to protest? And second, how do they see themselves currently represented in the political and social arena one year after a new Islamist government has been established. And finally, what do they see as obstacles in obtaining and maintaining rights and in developing women's empowerment under the post-revolutionary regime?

# CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	iv
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	6
A. Gender as a Political Construct	6
B. Clashes between East and West	7
C. Arab Feminist Movements in the Anti-Imperialist National Struggles	9
D. Islamic Feminism	12
E. The Women's Movement in Tunisia	13
F. The Women's Situation in the post-revolutionary Tunisia	17
1. Women's Legal Status	17
2. Economical Power	19

III. METHODOLOGY	21
A. Data Gathering Method	21
B. Fieldwork and Sample	22
C. Interview Schedule	25
D. Interpretation of Data	26
IV. TUNISIAN WOMEN DURING AND AFTER THE REVOLUTION IN 2011: BETWEEN PARTICIPATION AND MARGINALIZATION	29
A. Experiences during the Revolution – Women make History	29
1. The Roots of Tunisian Feminist Activism	30
2. The Awakening of a Generation – Women discover new Identities and Opportunities	38
3. The long-longed Freedom – Islamic Women	44
B. Being a Feminist – or not	48
1. Feminist and Militant Activism	50
2. “I am not a Feminist”	53
3. Islamic Feminism	56
C. The Issue of Women’s Rights and Women’s Situation in Tunisia two Years after the Revolution	59
1. From Religious Freedom to Religious Dictatorship?	60
2. Reinforcement of Patriarchy: Economic and Political Discrimination of Women	63
3. Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence	68



V. PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN’S ISSUES AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF 2011	72
VI. CONCLUSION	78
Appendix	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	80

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Women's struggles in Tunisia have always been embedded in a nationalist context and this dynamic is continued by the youngest generation of activists in present-day Tunisia. Young women are now eager to be a part of forming and shaping a new democratic Tunisia with an active civil society. But despite women's efforts to participate in the nationalist struggles in the 1950's, in student and worker uprising in the 1970's, 1980's and in 2008 which led ultimately to the revolution in 2011, women were marginalized and their role as mothers and wives dominated over their role as citizens. In Tunisia this process is in motion and in jeopardy at the same time. The nation is in process of redefining itself and its society. The question is when and how women's issues should be discussed and addressed in society and politics. Burning topics like economic stagnation and high rates of poverty seem to be more important for many citizens, even women. Although women in Tunisia have achieved legal rights that are outstanding in comparison to other Arab countries, and wide parts of the urban Tunisian society is fairly liberal, women are by no means fully empowered. Sherifa Zuhur thinks that "Arab states embody various patriarchal structures and Arab society clings to a patriarchal system in which women's position within and duties towards the family precede their rights as individuals" (Zuhur, 2003:2).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Arab patriarchy has been defined by Peter Krauss (1987) as "a hierarchy of authority that is controlled and dominated by males originating in the family" (Krauss, 1987: xii). Another view is that while patriarchy is "the universal form of traditional society" patriarchal values and social relations also exist under veneer of modernity (Shirabi, 1988: 3). While most Western feminists see patriarchy as male dominance over females (Johns 1993; Phillips, 1993; Eisenstein, 1994), I refer to Arab patriarchy according to Suad Joseph (1996). Joseph defines patriarchy on the basis of kinship, meaning that males and elders (including females) have a certain authority over females and younger family members (Joseph, 1996: 15).

Since the anti-colonial struggle, elite (upper and middle-class women) gained basic human rights as long as they did not challenge the existing patriarchal structures of state and society. Cultural identity was important to the relatively young states and relied heavily on Muslim culture, not least to distance the independent state from the Western values that the colonial powers tried to impose. Sherifa Zuhur says that because of the “Arab states’ reluctance to introduce policies that would irritate their religious establishments and the patriarchal and paternal nature of political leadership, very little has been introduced that would severely challenge or question the prevailing conception of gender roles...” (Zuhur, 2003:3). Rather, the patriarchal structure of the family as the smallest social unit has been taken for granted and policies have been built around it instead of breaking with this tradition. Women’s empowerment should not be analyzed as an end-goal, but rather it should be seen and treated as a process.

The unrest and uprisings throughout the Arab world which started in 2010 mark another milestone in the history of national revolts where women have played a crucial role. Looking back in history, which is characterized by marginalization and disappointment of women, leads me to the main research questions about Tunisian women: Why do Arab women continue to participate in national and social revolutions after so many disappointments in the past? What were Tunisian women fighting for? How do women perceive their social situation and standpoint now two years after the uprising? Do they feel heard and well represented in the new political agenda?

In the Tunisian intifada which took place from December 2010 to January 2011, women participated in street demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins and acted as spokeswomen through available media. In Tunisia, "women massively participated in the Jasmine uprising to make sure their demands would be taken into account, that they would get to be represented in post-revolutionary political institutions," says Souhayr Belhassen, president of the International Federation for Human Rights and herself a Tunisian in an interview. "Women strongly resent the fact that though they participated in the nationalist struggle

against colonialism, they were largely forgotten once independence was obtained." (Marquand, 2011)<sup>2</sup>.

Tunisian society is based on the family as the smallest unit of social life and state regulations concerning family organization manifest the importance of this unity. Although since the reform of 1993 women are not obliged to obey their husband anymore, the male remains the head of the family. With the new constitutional draft even this small concession is in jeopardy. Hafidha Chekir (1996) demands another conception of the family, which is based on democracy and equality. It is necessary for women to claim a civil right, based on egalitarian principles and legal instruments, aimed at combating all forms of discrimination against women. The feminist scholar suggests "to (establish equality between spouses in the family), there needs to be a clear distinction made between religion and politics, since as long as the patriarchal order continues to be connected in people's minds with religion, attempts to combat it are hampered by the fear of attacking people's faith and religious freedom" (Chekir, 1996: 46). In post-revolutionary Tunisia this goal seems to get further and further out of sight. The moderate Islamist party and extremist Islamist groups are trying to reinforce patriarchy and establish a purely male dominated culture. Attempts to intimidate women range from insulting non-veiled women on the streets and during protests, verbal attacks against female political candidates, and religious neighborhood watches in some popular Islamist- dominated areas of Tunis where men regulate and control the appearance of women on the streets. In December 2011 Salafist groups occupied the Manouba University in Tunis for over a month and threatened female professors and students under the threat of violence. They were calling for a gender separation in universities. The moderate Islamist Ennahda claims not to cooperate with extremist parties, but nevertheless it took over four weeks until police forces dissolved the occupation. This trend towards an Islamist domination of society is a threat to women, secular and religious alike.

---

<sup>2</sup> Interview done by R. Marquand (2011): "Arab women: This time, the revolution won't leave us behind", in: *The Christian Science Monitor, March (08)*. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/855841168?accountid=8555> (05.11.2012)

Feminist activists are worried about the subtle process that is happening in the Tunisian society where the government and Islamist extremists are putting the women's status in danger. Women were confident and knew about the importance of their support during the revolution in 2011. But after the Islamist party Ennahda came to power voices of concern became louder. The Tunisian feminist activist Amira Mhadhabi explains, that the major demand of different feminist organizations was to update the Personal Status Code (PSC) which secured several legal rights of women, but should be expanded further. "Tunisians began to worry about the acquisitions that women had secured in law since Independence when Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda (...) suggested holding a referendum about the PSC to reconsider the clauses that he believed were in contradiction with Islam - mainly the prohibition of polygamy and the right to adoption" (Mhadhabi, 2012). Just like Amira Mhadhabi and many other feminists, Khadija Arfaoui, a women's rights campaigner, warns of the two-sided face of the new Islamist political leaders and is convinced that "true and sustainable democracy cannot be built on a foundation of stark inequality between men and women" (Arfaoui, 2012). With that goal in mind it is sure that Tunisian women will not rest but will remain active, visible and loud against the desires of the ruling Islamist party to change the PSC and send women back to their homes.

The purpose of this research is to examine the situation and the role of Tunisian women during and after the revolution of the year 2011. This study explores how women's associations and feminist movements try to use the political transition period in their country to push forward women's rights onto the political agenda. Further the research focuses on Tunisian women's perceptions of their current situation in society and state and on their personal struggles.

This issue is important in two points. First, by addressing women's perceptions of their situation I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the Arab women's movements in the academic scholarship. My intention is to challenge the stereotype of Arab women which is often assumed by Western scholars. Western feminist scholars who write about third-world women often tend to describe them as victims of their states and societies (see Kahf, 2011). It can also be observed in Western academic scholarship that third-world women are represented as one homogenous group (Lazreg, 1994). This approach does not

reflect the diversity of third-world women and their different perceptions and socio-economic standards. I believe that the more issues of women's rights are discussed in academic literature the more powerful they become. It is necessary to raise awareness of the Arab feminist movements and to discuss their strategies, failures and achievements. Perspectives and visions surely vary among feminists depending on cultural, class, socio-economic conditions. It needs to be recognized that feminism can have different shapes and perspectives and therefore we need to break with Western hegemony in that field and look at Arab feminism differently.

Secondly, I believe that Tunisia offers an interesting historical background on women's issues and is therefore an important case study. With my study I intend to ensure that Tunisian women are given a voice to share their experiences and perceptions of the continuing revolution since 2010. The timing of this research is very important, since memories of the protests are still exceptionally fresh and clear and first perceptions of failure where women are concerned are being voiced.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **A. Gender as a Political Construct**

Women's rights in Tunisia have been since the establishment of the Personal Status Code which appeared in 1956 while the constitution was not passed until 1959. Hafidha Chekir, one of the founders of the ATFD argues: "Ironically, at the same time that the State acknowledged the rights of women in the family, it excluded women from the political arena, by depriving them of the right to vote for members of the constituent Assemblée Nationale, the body drawing up the new Constitution" (Chekir, 1996: 43). Thus, by organizing the family through the PSC even before organizing the state, did the government intend to establish the state on the basis of family? Or was this part of a social policy to confine women to the traditional tasks and reinforce patriarchal dominance? In any case it is sure, that the policy of the PSC banned women from the political arena and political as well as economic power remained in the hands of men.

According to feminist historian Joan Scott, male/female difference, because of its historical primacy, became very early in human evolution a metaphor to legitimize and underwrite other social hierarchies, like those of free man/slave, race, ethnicity, nation, class, etc (Scott 1988: 42). Scott defines gender in a way that removes it from the restricted scope of male/female relations, by setting it in a broad social and cultural framework. She writes her definition of gender as having two main parts and several subsets, interrelated but analytically distinct. "The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two propositions: gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes; and gender is a primary way of signifying relations of power" (Scott, 1988: 42). Rather than disconnecting domestic and public spheres, Scott's gender concept develops insights into their reciprocal nature: "Politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics" (Scott, 1988: 46) Joan Scott's theory of gender as the phenotype of all other hierarchies marks a starting point for thinking about gender as it

enters into West/East relations, and into the construction of Arab and Muslim women's sense of 'self'. And the idea that "politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics" offers guidance in the exploration of this topic.

## **B. Clashes between East and West**

Gender has always been a major focus of the Western view of Arab societies stretching back to the Middle Ages and to the era of European colonialism in the Arab world, when sexuality and gender were employed to construct stereotypes of Islam (Said, 1978).

Representations of Muslim women as being oppressed were and still are used to frame Islam in a negative light. Arab and Muslim women have been 'objectified' through a set of alienating images, whether through international and national organizing, academic studies, or popular media (see Badran 1995, Kahf 2011, Lazreg 1994).

Abdulahadi, Alsultany and Naber, editors of *Arab and Arab American Feminisms* (2011) comment on the pervasiveness of the 'fixed ideas' in academia as well as in popular discourse, that feminist academics have been among the worst offenders "creating limitations ...in mainstream feminist agendas that confine Arab feminist concerns to issues liberal feminists view as the purview of Arab feminists, such as 'the veil', 'the harem' or 'female circumcision', and rely on these issues as symbols of a backward and misogynist culture" (2011: xxxvi). The argument that Western feminist scholarships often project Muslim women as victims of their societies is discussed by several authors in the academic discourse (see Badran 1995, Kahf 2011, Lazreg 1994, Mohanty 1991).

Mohja Kahf notes, that the way Muslim women appear in academic scholarship or the print media in non-Muslim societies is mainly based on one stereotype: Muslim women are victims of oppression, by Muslim men, by the Islamic law and by state regulations. The only way for them to experience freedom is hence to escape these misogynic structures (Kahf, 2011: 112). The problematic lies in the way the whole Muslim world is demonized and Western standards and social structures are seen as the ultimate solution. It seems to be a hegemonic concept among the "Neo-Orientalists" to label Islam as "evil towards women" (Kahf, 2011: 112).



In her book on Algerian Women (1994) Marnia Lazreg discusses the way Islam is presented as “the main cause of gender inequality” and suggests that it needs to be studied how religion became significant under historical conditions. Lazreg is wondering if it “is (...) possible to do scholarly work on women in the Third World that goes beyond documenting existing stereotypes? How does one put an end to the fundamental dismissal of what Third World women say when they speak a non-stereotypical language?...” (Lazreg, 1994: 12).

Arab feminist scholarship has revealed stereotypical language and images of third-world women, and Muslim women in particular, are reproduced by Western feminists in academic scholarship on third-world women (Mohanty, 1991; Kahf, 2011). These stereotypes can only be overcome when feminists (from all kinds of backgrounds) abandon the idea that Western feminism is superior to others. One needs to understand women of different ethnic backgrounds than one’s own and recognize them as equally valuable and important.

Another supporter of this argument is Chandra Mohanty who states in her book *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* that, “Western feminist writings on women in the third world must be considered in the context of the global hegemony of the Western scholarships” (Mohanty, 1991: 55). She directs her criticism to the analytical principle which dominates the Western feminist discourse, namely the concept of “the category women as a homogenous group” which does not pay attention to class, social, ethnic, racial or religious differences and backgrounds. Women all over the world are therefore considered as a homogenous group (Mohanty, 1991: 55). Mohanty criticizes how “the construction of third world women as a homogenous, powerless group” portrays them as victims of particular socioeconomic systems. This indicates a clear distinction between representation of third world women by Western feminists and self-presentation by the latter. Subsequently she criticizes the assumption that “the problem with this analytical strategy ,..., is that it assumes men and women are already constituted as sexual- political subjects prior to their entry into the arena of social relations” (Mohanty, 1991: 59). Whereas Western women present themselves as modern, free in the control over their sexuality, educated and powerful (Mohanty, 1991: 56), which indicates a clear distinction

between representation of third world women by Western feminists and self-presentation by the later. Thus, if feminist studies do not recognize the differences of roles and statuses in different societies, feminist literature on third-world women will always suffer from weak analysis.

Saba Mahmood states that Western scholars tend to explore how third-world women movements try to resist and fight against patriarchal structures and oppressive state laws, because they assume that third-world and Muslim women must reject their societies and states in order to gain freedom and rights (Mahmood, 2004). This is why, the hegemony of Western scholarship on Muslim women needs to be overcome and voice needs to be given to Muslim women, who have various goals, ideas and ideals. As Mahmood states, “my suggestion is that we leave open the possibility that our political and analytical certainties might be transformed in the process of exploring non-liberal movements (...) and that the lives of women (...) have something to teach us beyond what we can learn from the circumscribed social-scientific exercise of understanding and translation“ (Mahmood, 2004: 39).

This leads me to the proposal that we need to reject universal, normative assumptions about the situation of all women.

Based on the literature presented here, my main argument is that we need to make distinctions in women’s needs according to their social, cultural and economic background and embed our analysis in historical conditions. Different realities produce different needs.

### **C. Arab Feminist Movements in the Anti-Imperialist National Struggles**

As outlined by many authors like Badran (1995), Hatem (1999), Weber (2001) and others, Arab women have always been loyal to national causes and contributed to the national liberation struggles from the European imperial powers since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Ellen Fleischmann outlines in her article “The other Awakening: The Emergence of Women’s Movement in the Middle East” (1999) the birth and development of different Middle Eastern women’s movements, which emerged in the region in the early 20th

century. Fleischmann describes the Arab feminist movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Middle Eastern states suffered from colonial powers and were stuck between old traditions and a new world order as the following: “At the heart of these contradictions (meaning the pluralistic approach to define feminism) is the question of consciousness and identity” and further “at its core, nationalism highlights the issue of identity” (Fleischmann, 1999: 91f). Women fought for their place in society, which they believed, could only be achieved if their countries were freed and independent. This approach proved to be wrong since later on “women’s rights were not conceived of as ‘part of the problematic of civil liberties and individual rights” (Fleischmann, 1999: 118). It also needs to be stated that the goals achieved during that period mostly affected urban middle and upper class women and left out the ones from rural poor, illiterate areas.

Nevertheless, I suggest that the participation in the nationalist struggles, including the domains of education, providing of health and welfare services, economics and even armed struggle, was an effective way to enter the public arena. Fleischmann mentions that many women perceived nationalism as an opportunity, an “honorable door” to participate in public life. They did not challenge the existing patriarchal structures, but they wanted the material benefits and social rights that accompany power that was associated with national liberation.

It is worth mentioning Margot Badran’s book *Feminism, Islam and Nation: Gender and the making of Modern Egypt* (1995) where she outlines the origin and development of Egyptian feminism from the late nineteenth century and explains strategies and approaches used by Egyptian middle and upper class women to gain influence in public life. Prominent figures of the Egyptian women’s movement like Huda Sha’rawi and Nabawiyah Musa, both educated, upper class women promoted girls education and their participation in civil society. They did not want to overthrow or revolutionize their society, but reform it. They demanded more opportunities for girls in the labor market and the reformation of the patriarchal system which dictated women to dedicate their lives to housework and family. Muslim women respected “the dictates of the harem culture” (Badran, 1995: 47) but anticipated an invisible feminism by organizing lectures, publishing a series of journals and books and teaching girls in public schools. Veiling became an issue

discussed among Muslim active women, but was often used as a way to access public places. National consciousness, however, soon overtook considerations of class and religion. Women concentrated on the liberation from the colonial power and on the establishment of the picture of “the new woman” (Badran, 1995: 48). Their strategies were pragmatic and piecemeal, to give society and especially men time to adapt and accept the new position of women in public.

But despite the support of part of the male elite, the reformers who believed that women’s exclusion from the public domain was both symptom and cause of Arab ‘backwardness’, women’s movements did not manage to establish themselves permanently in the political arena. As the case of Egypt shows clearly, once male leaders achieved a modicum of power they found ways to marginalize women and suppress feminism. To the extent that women expected that their sacrifices for the nation-state would be recognized and rewarded by, for example, enfranchisement, and reform of family status laws, they were disappointed. The implicit bargain between activist women and the male leadership was not kept (Badran, 1995: 63).

As Mirvat Hatem’s paper “Modernization, the State, and the Family in the Middle East Women’s Studies” (1999) shows very clearly, newly independent Arab (and other Middle Eastern) states worked out compromises whereby women were visible in the public domain, thus testifying to ‘modernity’ and ‘civilization’, while they were assigned collective tasks (such as social aid) that deepened the idea of gender ‘difference’. At the same time, autonomous women’s associations (such as the *Egyptian Feminist Union* or the *Union Nationale des Femmes en Tunisie*) were suppressed. “In other words, modernization offered women liberation from the traditional patriarchal family, but not gender equality!” (Hatem, 1999: 64)

After independence women who took part in national liberation struggles, or who became members of secular nationalist parties, were disappointed and frustrated by their marginalization within these movements, whether separated in women’s branches, or assigned tasks that replicated the domestic division of labor. Their attempts to introduce feminist aims and interests were not treated seriously. As a result, Jayawardena (1986) says: “The lack of autonomy of the women’s movements and the concentration of all

efforts on the achievements of national independence...explains the relative decline of women's movements after [independence]. With ... the establishment of nation states women's movements in most of the countries under study either faded away or degenerated into social welfare organizations concerned with women's education, handicrafts and home care...Once independence had been achieved, male politicians, who had consciously mobilized women in the struggle, pushed them back into their 'accustomed place' (Jayawardena, 1986: 259).

#### **D. Islamic feminism**

It is interesting why Western feminists automatically assume that the interest of Muslim feminists must be contrary to their religion. To evaluate this question, it is interesting to look at Margot Badran's definition of 'Islamic feminism': "Islamic feminism explicates the idea of gender equality as part and parcel of the Qur'anic notion of equality of all insan (human beings) and calls for the implementation of gender equality in the state, civil institutions, and everyday life. It rejects the notion of a public/private dichotomy (...) a holistic umma in which Qur'anic ideals are operative in all space" (Badran, 2006: 1). Badran discusses the problems Islamic feminists have to face. First, they fight against a misinterpretation of Islam that portrays an image of women who are obedient to their husbands in exchange for protection. Secondly, Islamic feminists fight against the misinterpretation of Islam that projects the religion as demeaning and oppressive to women. "Islamic feminism has taken on the two-fold task to expose and eradicate patriarchal ideas and practices glossed as Islamic — 'naturalized' and perpetuated in that guise — and to recuperate Islam's core idea of gender equality (indivisible from human equality). For this Islamic feminism has incurred enemies from within and without the Muslim community: 1) from within — men who fear the loss of patriarchal privilege and women who fear the loss of patriarchal protection, and 2) from without — those whose pleasure and politics are found in denigrating Islam as irredeemably anti-women." (Badran, 2006:1). The movement of Islamic feminism has emerged contemporaneously with the decline in support for the nationalist secular regimes because of their failure to

produce progress, economic well-being, social justice, and other national goals. It was these failures -- as well as corruption and Western attacks against Muslim countries -- that have encouraged the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism. Islamic feminism has emerged partly as the female branch of Islamic fundamentalism in the same manner as earlier Arab women's movements emerged as the female branch of secular Arab nationalism. However it would be a mistake to see it as only that. The association gave and gives legitimacy but it does not impose uniformity. We find many different tendencies within what is broadly termed 'Islamic feminism'. Indeed, many women who claim Islam and a public role reject the title 'Islamic feminist'. As Badran says in her excellent paper "Islamic Feminism Revisited", it is an 'unmarked discourse' in the sense that the label 'Islamic feminism' has not been chosen by its exponents but attributed to them by others ( Badran, 2006). As Amina Wadud, the American-Islamic feminist scholar, says: "By going back to primary sources and interpreting them afresh, women scholars are endeavoring to remove the fetters imposed by centuries of patriarchal interpretation and practice." (Fattah/ Carland, 2010). And Sheeba Aslam Fehmi, an Indian Islamic feminist writer says, "Islamic feminism serves Muslim women of all the classes and social location without any jeopardy to their family life, as their spouses have to engage with it instead of simply refusing it or brandishing it as too 'Western' to be adopted by a Muslim family."<sup>3</sup>

### **E. The Women's Movement in Tunisia**

Since the promulgation of the Personal Status Code (PSC) in 1956, Tunisia has stood out from the rest of the Arab world by the status it has accorded to women (Bessi, 1999). The introduction of the Personal Status Code in 1956 by former President Habib Bourguiba can be seen as an outstanding example of women's rights in the Arab world, that gave women suffrage, equal citizenship with men, abolished polygamy, and introduced several other marital and family laws.

---

<sup>3</sup> Quotation taken from an interview by Yoginder Sikand in 2011, published in: *Countercurrents.org*, retrieved from: <http://www.countercurrents.org/print.html> (10.11.2012)

Caitlin Mulrine marks the beginning of the Tunisian women's movements in the early writings of Tahar Haddad (Mulrine, 2011). In her essay "Women's Organizations in Tunisia: Transforming Feminist Discourse in a Transitioning State" Mulrine states, "the analysis of the current status of women in Tunisia is rooted in a contextualized view of the historical processes that shaped the current policies and culture. An examination of the historical processes that led to the legal advancement of Tunisian women necessarily begins with the recognition of the contribution to political and social thought made by Tahar Haddad" (Mulrine, 2011: 4). According to Mounira Charrad in her study of the postcolonial effect on women's rights, "Haddad called for changes in women's status and improvements in women's education as a way of making women better citizens, better wives, and better mothers. The point was not primarily to emancipate women for their own sake, but to make them better able to contribute to the stability of families and better able to educate future generations of Tunisians" (Charrad, 2001: 216). The reaction to Haddad's work *Our Women in the Shari 'a and Society* (1930) represents the social and political context of the time in which it was published when two Tunisian feminists, Manubiya al-Qurtani and Habiba al-Menhari unveiled during public events in the late 1920's. As Richard Curtiss argues, Haddad advocated formal education for women and maintained that over many years Islam had been distorted and misinterpreted to such an extent, that women no longer were "aware of their duties in life and the legitimate advantages they could expect" (Haddad, 1930: 12). The reformer laid his argumentation in the framework of misinterpretation of the Koran which was used to abuse women as "repudiation," whereby a husband could divorce his wife without grounds or explanation, sending her back to her family or leaving her for another wife (Curtiss, 1993). In his book the reformer declared: "Islam is innocent of the oft-made accusations that it is an obstacle in the way of progress. Rather it is the religion of progress par excellence, an endless source of progress. Our decadence is the consequence of the chimera with which we have filled our minds and the scandalous, paralyzing customs within which we have locked ourselves" (Haddad, 1930: 20). Building upon the positive atmosphere created by Tahar Haddad's writing, Tunisian women actively participated in the nationalist movement and the liberation from French colonialism and the emergence of women's associations and unions started in the

mid- 1930's, still under French colonial rule. The first women's association was the *Union Musulman des Femmes de Tunisie* that was founded by Mchira Ben Mrad. As suggested by Tahar Haddad the program was strongly influenced by the ideology of Islam, it was an important milestone in the history of Tunisian feminism, since it unified women of different social class backgrounds (Weber, 2001).

Although Haddad's work was strongly opposed by the sheikhs of Zeytouna University, it struck a responsive chord with many of the Western-educated leaders of the Neo-Destour Party, which would later on, under the leadership of Habib Bourguiba, lead Tunisia to independence in 1956. Shortly after independence Bourguiba established the Personal Status Code which secured civil and women's rights in particular<sup>4</sup>. Bourguiba was convinced by the views of Tahar Haddad, "the nation could not squander the half of its human resources that its female population represented" and encouraged women to participate actively in the nation's life (Perkins, 1997: 187). Charles Micaud argues, "In the Tunisia of today, he perhaps praised excessively, but his part in turning the Tunisian toward modernism was considerable" (Micaud, 1964: 46). Mohamed Charfi argues similar by saying "...despite Bourguiba's major role in its adoption, the Personal Status Code is based on theories of Tahar Haddad" (Charfi, 2005: 11). Tahar Haddad's ambitions to encourage women's participation in the civil society and in the work force, as well as his ideas to grant them more legal rights are still present in the Tunisia of today and secure Tunisia a leading role of women's emancipation in the Arab world.

As in other Arab countries, the Tunisian women's movement was closely linked to the nationalist movement and the liberation from French colonialism and the emergence of women's associations and unions started in the mid- 1930's, still under French colonial rule. In 1956, the *Union Nationale des Femmes en Tunisie* was founded as "the first women's non-governmental organization in independent Tunisia"<sup>5</sup> The union stood under great influence of Bourguiba's Neo-Destour Party which adhered the control of its program

---

<sup>4</sup> The Code of Personal Status abolished polygamy, established a minimum age for marriage, required the woman's consent to any marriage arranged by her family, gave women the right to file for divorce and increased women's share of inheritances (Perkins, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> National Union of Tunisian Women: History, online retrieved from: <http://www.unft.org.tn/en/presentation/historique.html> (21.11.2012)



by the leading regime. Thus, Bourghiba's actual motivation behind the liberation of women was not only the improvement of women's status in law and society, but much more intended to grace the country with women's rights that were established by law, but not rooted in the still patriarchal society.

Bourguiba's shifting discourse on the role of women during the struggle for independence and in the post-colonial period reflects the political interests inherent in the reformation of family law. Women were central to Bourguiba's agendas pre- and post-independence (Mulrine, 2011). After independence a political flow, often described as state feminism can be observed in Tunisia. President Bourguiba promoted women's rights during travels around the country and radio speeches, while the goal was to advance the country's image as modern and Western. As the French author Augustin Jomier claims, "State feminism implies that promoting women's social position was at the heart of the political project, whereas in fact the PSC was really only part of the "modernization" of the regime, and its interpretation as a feminist law came later. Beyond and above helping women, it was aimed at developing the country by "liberating" the feminine forces. Above all, Bourguiba sought to wake up a nation half-paralyzed" (Jomier, 2011).

Sarah Gilman claims Bourguiba's "paternal mission," is a "top-down approach to reform in which the state is responsible for instituting policy changes that impact civil society" (Gilman, 2007: 97). Such an approach did not take into consideration the social, cultural, and religious context of the newly independent state. Consequently, the application of the Personal Status Code established a disparity in which the law observed the value of women, while society itself had yet to challenge deeply embedded issues of gender inequality (Mulrine, 2011).

In the 1980's a group of feminists established a union under the name *Group des Femmes Démocrates* with the aim to have greater influence in politics and express women's needs on the political agenda<sup>6</sup>. In general it can be said, that Tunisian women's associations were successful in expressing their needs and demands; they were privileged concerning their legal rights in comparison to other Arab countries, but nevertheless they were limited in

---

<sup>6</sup> information taken from official website of the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates <http://femmesDémocrates.org/qui-sommes-nous/> (21.12.2012)

their influence due to strict control of the ruling regime. This trend continued under the power of Ben Ali, who granted women further legal rights, but openly used these achievements to keep up the already established image of a liberal, Western Tunisia. Therefore, Augustin Jomier argues, that “the paradoxes underlying the policies of the Tunisian government on (...) the advancement of women, as well as the evolution of the political and social context, have gradually made it difficult for this legacy to be managed by a regime that has chosen an authoritarian and repressive path.” (Jomier, 2011).

## **F. Women’s Situation in the post-revolutionary Tunisia**

### ***1) Women’s Legal Status***

Tunisia has ratified and signed the “Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (CEDAW) which was adopted by the United Nations’ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in 1979. However, the Personal Status Code and other Tunisia laws that are anchored in the country’s constitution do not include the principle of full equality between the sexes. Although Article 6 of the constitution states the equality of all citizens, it does not state the equality between men and women. In fact, the Tunisian government signed the CEDAW convention with several restrictions: “The Tunisian Government declares that it shall not take any organizational or legislative decision in conformity with the requirements of this Convention where such a decision would conflict with the provisions of chapter I of the Tunisian Constitution”<sup>7</sup> This restriction refers to laws that are implemented in the Personal Status Code concerning granting of family names to children and the acquisition of property through inheritance, as well as the right of married women to choose the family’s residence and domicile. Chapter I, Article I of the Constitution states that Islam is the official State religion. The ATFD condemns these limitations by arguing that “it is thus on the basis of this reservation, or

---

<sup>7</sup> Information taken from: United Nations Treaty Collection (<http://treaties.un.org>) for declarations and reservations made by State Parties (online: 28.04.2013)

more specifically on the basis of State religion, that customs, practices and legislative and regulatory provisions which discriminate against women are maintained”<sup>8</sup>.

It is for this reason that international observers view article 28 of the post-revolutionary draft constitution that is presented by the new interim government with great concern. Even though it stigmatizes any form of violence towards women, it invokes the principle of complementary between genders, thus justifying practices that are based on the idea of inferiority or superiority of one of the two sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women. Tunisia expressed its reservations with respect to the CEDAW in August 2011 (Cardoville, 2013). Just as the old regime, the interim authorities in Tunisia ratified the CEDAW, with reservation concerning Chapter I of the constitution. Article 28 of the draft has been presented and approved by Ennahda where the figure of the woman seems to be complementary to the man, therefore in a secondary position. Following the formal concerns of the United Nations and other international organizations, together with the protests by the Tunisian women, the article was modified. Although Ennahda assured Tunisian women to protect all women and their legal rights shortly after their election, this rhetoric is rather symbolic than regards to content. The journalist Sana Ghenima argues that, the great debates about the position of women in post-revolutionary Tunisia are unfortunately focused on customs of dressing and veiling. The President Moncef Marzouki of the Liberal Party CPR addressed the protection of women in his inaugural speech. Although he spoke for the protection of all women, regardless of whether they wear the neqab, which covers the whole body, or the hijab, which leaves the face free, or are unveiled. The rhetoric is condemned by feminists, however: Not only did he categorize women according to their clothes, which is unique in an official political discourse. He also refers to unveiled women with the term "safirat" which translates literally into "whose face is unveiled". "Safirat" is an expression used in practice mainly for "ill mannered" or "non-religious" women (Ghenima, 2011).

---

<sup>8</sup> Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (2010): “Women’s Rights in Tunisia. Alternative Report”, p.5

## 2) *Economical Power*

In the past, women had the right to employment to the same extent than men. Women were not limited in the choice of profession since no restrictions were made in the law. However, the chances for employment go along with the educational background. According to UNESCO statistics the literacy rate among youth is 96% for females and 98% for males.<sup>9</sup> Thus, a report of the ATFD states, that numbers are much lower in rural areas, where the disparity between girls and boys is constantly widening. The illiteracy rate among females (all ages, not limited to youth) stands at 20.1% in urban areas and 42.8% in rural areas (compared to male illiteracy rates: 8.3% and 20.1%). The ATFD explains this discrepancy between urban and certain isolated regions of the country by two main factors. One factor concerns the security of girls in rural areas who have to travel long distances to reach schools. The second factor underlies a cultural aspect that many families prefer to provide education to their sons and encourage girls to support their families either by working on farms or in the household.<sup>10</sup> The latter point is a great obstacle for many girls and women to achieve a professional career according to their wills and is a serious discrimination of girls which is enforced by patriarchal culture and practices. In accordance with the Article 28 in the new constitutional draft women are complementary to men and the man remains the sole head of the household. This could imply serious economical discrimination against women, since patriarchy is reinforced and embraced by law. If girls are depended on their father's approval to seek higher education or employment, numbers of illiteracy and unemployment especially in rural areas are likely to increase further.

Women are also discriminated with regard to inheritance laws that are characterized by pre-eminence of male relatives. Male relatives are privileged by law to inherit the double amount in contrast to female relatives of the same degree of relationship. Several feminist organizations and the workers' union UGTT argue that given the current structures of

---

<sup>9</sup> Information taken from: UNIFEC: MENA Gender Equality Profile Status of Girls and Women in the Middle East and North Africa: <http://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Tunisia-Gender-Eqaulity-Profile-2011.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (2010): "Women's Rights in Tunisia. Alternative Report", p.17

Tunisian families and the new economic role played by women and their contribution to the development, women must have the same inheritance rights.

The discriminatory inheritance laws put men in a superior economic position and make women financially and economically depended on their male siblings.

# CHAPTER III

## METHODOLOGY

### A. Data Gathering Method

The research methodology used for this research project is oral history. As Michael Frisch argues in his influential book *A Shared Authority*, “oral history is a powerful tool for discovering, exploring and evaluating the nature of the process of historical memory – how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context and how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them” (Frisch, 1990: 188).

It is worth asking what connects gender politics with oral history. Both are recent arrivals in the worlds of politics and social science. Both are in some sense social movements: feminism is a combination of political and intellectual activism aimed at changing ideas and practices around male/female relations; oral history also calls itself a ‘movement’, and aims to change knowledge about the world as well as perspectives towards history (Sayigh, 2012, unpublished).

A critical text on oral history that came out of the Cultural Studies Centre at the University of Birmingham in 1982 *Making Histories* asserts that “we must become historians of the present too”; history writing is “in and for the present”. Thus, history is not just about the ‘past’, and thus safely removed from the problems of the present, but it should be directed to learning how to use historical research for present purposes, to create better futures. Understood in this way, oral history is potentially implicated in all movements for social justice.

Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes explain in their work *Oral History and Public Memories*, that oral history is often understood as a source of data that is able to uncover the unknown” or to “give voice to the unheard” (Hamilton/ Shopes, 2008: viii). And further the authors state, that “oral history emerged as a widespread practice in relation to

the democratizing of history in the 1960's, fueled by decolonization and the feminist and civil rights movements" (Hamilton/ Shopes, 2008: ix).

Since this study does not have the purpose of a policy proposal but rather focuses on the perceptions and experiences of women and on raising awareness about their situation, I believe that oral history is a valuable method. This approach not only allows me to uncover women's perceptions of their current situation after the revolution in 2011, but also gives Tunisian women a voice. Making the women heard is a big part of the intention of this research, since their efforts, their experiences and memories are not written down in more classical method approaches. There are barely documents which account for women's efforts. By documenting their struggles and participation in the Tunisian Revolution, this study ensures that women's experiences won't be forgotten. That argument is supported by Gluck and Patai who state that oral history has found great popularity among feminists, who see it is a way to understand and bring forth the history of women in a culture that has traditionally relied on masculine interpretation (Gluck/ Patai, 1991). "Refusing to be rendered historically voiceless any longer, women are creating a new history – using our own voices and experiences" (Gluck, 1984: 222).

Oral history focuses on events or situations in the past and how they were experienced by the narrators. Therefore oral history has the potential to uncover feelings and perceptions of time witnesses that other methodologies do not cover. It can explain ideologies and cultural or social aspects that we present at the time. The American oral historian Ronald Grele says: "The process of oral history interviewing, because it involves the structuring of memory and because meaningfulness influences the construction processes of memory, is actually a process in the construction of a usable past. In this manner, when used in this way, oral history can live up to the promise of 'Everyman his own historian'". (Grelle, 1979: 236)

## **B. Fieldwork and Sample**

Fieldwork for this project took place during spring 2013 in a locale where I had previously worked and lived what gave me the benefit of prior knowledge and connections

in the country. I conducted interviews with seventeen women in total. Interviews took place in Tunisia's capital Tunis, as well as in the border region Kasserine at the Algerian border, the touristic city Nabeul and the mining region of Gafsa in the interior of the country.

My previous stay in Tunisia in 2010 when the country was still ruled by former President Ben Ali made it possible for me to see, feel and understand the change that the country has undergone in the last two years since the regime had fallen. A detailed background research and conversations with Tunisian friends prior to my fieldwork did not only help me to get a better feeling for the current situation in the country, but it also provided a good starting point for the fieldwork and the recruitment of speakers. While preparing the trip to Tunisia I contacted several NGOs and women's associations in order to inform them about this project and to establish contacts to recruit potential participants for the study. This approach proved to be unsuccessful since none of the targeted NGOs replied to my messages. Once arrived in Tunis I chose a more direct approach and contacted the associations directly by phone or by visiting their offices where I was received with great interest and support for my research. Establishing contacts with several associations provided me with contacts in the field and resulted in finding first speakers. Interviewees always referred me further to other potential speakers. I found all speakers through contacts that I have had in Tunisia already or through speakers who introduced me to other women. Through a local journalist who has been covering social aspects of the revolution since 2011 referred me to the women's office of Ennahada, to the *Islamist Women's Association* and to the women's office of the worker union UGTT.

In addition to conducting interviews, I attended feminist and women's association's meetings and conferences concerning human and women's rights and feminist or social activism, which allowed me to gain a better insight into the scene and the functioning of the women's associations. The attendance of meetings and conferences were especially vital because I managed to meet and interview prominent figures working in social activism in Tunisia. These formal interviews with Tunisian feminists and activists provided me with a more balanced, two-sided perspective on grass-root and institutional interaction. By attending women's organizations meetings I also gained a deeper insight of



the agenda and functioning of these organizations. The meetings provided me with information about the political standing of the associations and clarified to what extent they are affiliated with political parties or whether they are of a purely non-governmental nature. Beside the interviews I conducted with long-term feminist activists and members of associations, it was important for me to include the grass-root level and talk to women who are not organized in associations and to women who even oppose their ideologies.

University students, journalists, elderly women and working class women of poorer areas gave me more detailed and personal narratives than those women who are active in organizations. By both tracing and documenting the women's efforts in official associations and institutions and conducting fieldwork in the grass-root level I gained an understanding of the current situation of women's rights and their social standing. Oral history proved to be a highly feasible method because it focuses on personal experiences and perceptions and can provide aspects of women's lives that would stay undiscovered by other research methods. Although a sample of seventeen women does not provide a basis for generalization, it can uncover struggles, obstacles and feelings or perceptions that are important in relation to the Tunisian society. The grass-root level is especially important to consider and to include in the sample, since these women, their motives and their very personal perceptions and experiences have not been covered in books about Arab women and politics.

The sample includes members of *L'Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates* (ATFD), *l'Association des Femmes Islamiques Tunisiennes*, the labor union *UGTT* and women affiliated with the ruling Islamist *Ennahda* party. The sample also includes speakers that are not affiliated with any organization, but lived the revolution and shared their personal experiences. I also interviewed social activists working for various NGOs, bloggers and an elderly lady who lived under the French colonizers. The age range of participants varies between 20 and 83 years old. Interviews were made with women in different regions and different socio-economic as well as educational backgrounds. Islamist and secular women were taken into account and the selection of speakers provided a wide range of different perspectives, struggles and experiences.

### **C. Interview Schedule**

The interview schedule included open-ended questions about the personal experiences, memories and motives of the women's involvement in the protests, as well as their personal struggles and goals. The following questions were addressed: 1. Tunisia has a long history of women's activism, especially since the struggle for independence. In what ways have you been interested or active in the women's movement (Harakat al Nassawiya) in Tunisia? 2. Describe the revolution to me from your own perspective. 3. Tunisia is known to be the most advanced country in the Arab world when it comes to women's rights. What did you personally fight for in the protests? 4. Some women are content with an Islamic government while others are afraid that it will brush away at the rights women achieved in Tunisia. Tell me where you stand on this issue and why. 5. There are voices in the media proclaiming the situation of women has been improved since the revolution; others fear the marginalization of women and a decline of women's rights. What is your take on that?

The questions were well understood by the speakers and proved to reveal an interesting and detailed set of data. In order not to interrupt the narrator's flow I tape-recorded all interviews and transcribed them later on. Most of the interviews were held in French and were transcribed and translated into English concurrently. My proficiency in English and French allowed me to translate the transcripts by myself and although neither of these languages is my mother tongue I tried to translate the interviews as accurate as possible in order to capture the real meaning of the interviewee's narration. For three interviews that were held in Arabic I was accompanied by a translator who translated simultaneously into French.

I was positively surprised by the openness and interest that all speakers showed in the research. All women that I approached were willing to tell their stories and saw this study as a way of being heard and sharing their experiences. It was often stated during interviews that Tunisians are happy and excited to share their personal narratives about the revolution to keep its spirit alive. Speakers also talked freely and openly about their political and religious views. Under the former regime this research would have been nearly impossible since the fear of repressions for criticizing the government was very high, whereas now

speakers of all social backgrounds saw this study as an opportunity to narrate what has long been due to say. The positive feedback from the participants not only astonished me, but it became an even bigger motivation for me to expand the sample that was originally constituted of ten women and got expanded to seventeen.

Since this study is based on a qualitative research methodology, analyzing the data was challenging in one major point. When I started the research I thought of speakers as members of certain social categories. I soon realized that the reality is more diverse and complex and that social categories cannot be assumed. Originally I intended to interview Islamist women as well as secular ones, feminists and anti-feminists, supporters of the new Islamist government and its opponents. These categories were not a result of ignorance or misconception from my side, but they were a mere instrument of choosing speakers from different social backgrounds. This approach was not successful though since opinions and perceptions varied strongly among women and did not conform to pre-set categories. Instead I decided to recruit different speakers according to their age, educational background and profession. This approach provided me with a bigger and more diverse sample and allowed me to analyze the variety of women's perceptions in Tunisia.

#### **D. Interpretation of Data**

The analysis of the data was more challenging than I had anticipated due its large amount. In a first step I read the data several times to get familiar with it. During this process I identified three major topics of analysis. The interview schedule provided a helpful guideline, since the questions addressed three major topics: (1) the experiences of women during the event of the revolution (2) the points of view on feminism and the self-representation of the speakers (3) the perceptions of the situation of women two years after the downfall of the Ben Ali regime. I proceeded within these topics to analyze the data. In the second step I read the answers of all speakers to one question and compared them to each other. By listening to the women's voices I tried to relate what was said to factors such as generation, educational level, social standing and political affiliation. In the first topic that I analyzed I made a distinction between women who had long been active in

feminist activism and between those who became active shortly after the revolution for the first time. The analysis of the second topic about feminism was more challenging. I looked at each speaker's answer separately while not making any categorization yet.

When I started this research I had a clear idea of the kind of women that I wanted to interview: secular feminists, Islamist feminists, and traditional religious women who reject the idea of feminism. This idea turned out to be naïve and unrealistic. I fell into the trap of a Western feminist scholar who writes about Arab women. Like many other academic scholars on third-world feminism, I made the mistake of putting Tunisian women in categories. I assumed that well-educated women would consider themselves feminists and less-educated ones would not confirm that expression. In fact, this categorization has been criticized by Marnia Lazreg (1994): "Academic feminism reproduces the social categorizations and prejudices that are prevalent in larger society" (Lazreg, 1994: 8). Lazreg points to the necessity to develop "a form of consciousness among (Western) feminists that transcends their sense of specialness and embraces what is human at the heart of womanhood across cultures and races" (Lazreg, 1994: 8).

I came to understand that intersectionality plays an important role in the self-definition of Tunisian women and their standpoint on feminism. Gender intersects with social class. That argument is supported by Mohja Kahf who states that gender justice and women's rights are a matter of class and economic privileges, and should not be judged based on religious or cultural backgrounds alone (Kahf, 2011). Stephanie A. Shields (2008) emphasizes the importance to pay attention to different identities and intersections of identities when doing feminist research. In her understanding identities are social categories in which an individual claims membership (Shields, 2008). One category can be "gender", thus individuals are not only defined through their sex. Identities intersect with each other. Social class, religious affiliation, political opinion are identities that define a person and intersect with each other. During this research I originally considered religious affiliation – being secular or religious – to be the most defining identity. When comparing Tunisian women's self-representation and their opinions on feminism, religiousness played an important role, but did not serve as the only categorization. Even women of the same social and financial backgrounds had very diverse opinions on feminism.

Analyzing the third topic was less challenging, since all speakers addressed the same or similar obstacles and fears that they are having. In contrast to the second topic where I had to deal with great diversity among speakers, the third section was a synopsis of the narratives.

## CHAPTER IV

### TUNISIAN WOMEN DURING AND AFTER THE REVOLUTION IN 2011: BETWEEN PARTICIPATION AND MARGINALIZATION

#### **A. Experiences during the Revolution – Women make History**

The experiences of women during the revolution vary among the speakers. But the narratives of all women capture a historical moment and the interviews document a part of recent Tunisian history. For long-term feminist activists the revolution in 2011 was the outcome of decades of protests and uprisings. For many young women it was an awakening and an event that they had never foreseen. In this first chapter the interviewees narrate a piece of Tunisian history and tell their personal experiences.

The media often describes the Tunisian revolution as a tsunami that swept over the country and paved its way further to other Arab states. The Tunisian revolution came unexpectedly to many observers, to the West and probably even to many Tunisians. As Hussein Yaakoub states, “the revolutions have taken the revolutionaries by surprise” (Yaakoub, 2011: 35). Concerning the widespread idea of Western scholars about the incompatibility of Islam and democracy it might be argued that the revolts came unexpectedly and shook the region like an earthquake. The outcome in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia so far, namely the overthrow of the regimes, in such a short period of time was unexpected. But was the revolution itself surprising?

The Tunisian Professor Mehdi Mabrouk argues “to limit the causes of the revolution to the period between December 2010 and March 2011 uproots it from the historical context” (Mabrouk, 2011: 132). The Intifadas were a result of decades of injustice and oppression enforced by authoritarian regimes that are characterized by corruption, disregard of basic

human rights and a lack of economic reforms to prevent poverty and high rates of unemployment.

Tunisia has witnessed and experienced a number of revolts and protests since the late 1980's, which were met with bloody state repression, high numbers of imprisonment and revolts remained local and never spread throughout the whole country (Perkins, 2005). The surprising part of the 2011 revolution therefore is the outcome, namely the success to overthrow the regime, than the actual revolt itself. What is less known is the fact that women contributed to the uprisings in Tunisia, not only in 2011, but long before. Women demonstrated side by side with men in all regions of the country, and experienced the revolution in many different ways.

### ***1) The Roots of Tunisian Feminist Activism***

The revolution was an intifada of the people of all different kinds of social and socio-economic backgrounds, men and women, young and old, for a free and democratic country. The revolution was an uprising of all Tunisian people. But what made women participate?

The first speakers have long been involved in feminist and militant activism. Their narratives do not only reflect the roots of feminism in Tunisia, but also put the revolution of 2011 in its historical context. Fadhila<sup>11</sup>, an elderly woman of 83 years old fought against the French colonizers and remembers her activism during the nationalist struggles. I was introduced to Fadhila by her grand-daughter whom I got referred to through friends. I met Fadhila in her house in Tunis where I was received warmly. The interview was recorded in Arabic and translated simultaneously into French by her grand-daughter. Later I transcribed it into English.

*First of all it was important for me that my country is independent and therefore the Tunisian women could become independent. I wanted that the educational level of women*

---

<sup>11</sup> The names of all speakers have been changed in order to protect to anonymity of the women, which is a common practice in oral history studies.

rose, because this was the only way to achieve independence, it was impossible without the mass of educated women. When I was a young girl, like seventeen or eighteen years old, I was obliged to wear the hijab. My father even wanted me to wear the neqab. I refused all of this. I was so young, but even at this age, I knew that I didn't want it, I felt oppressed, so I refused to wear the veil, I even didn't wear "decent" cloths as a girl was supposed to. It was a revolution at this time, because the social etiquette did not allow a woman to dress as she liked. My father was a merchant, we had a good financial standing. I would say we were middle class. We had a car and nice clothes etc. We had doctors in the family and we were intellectuals. I grew up in Sfax which is an industrial region, it can be said that is the economic capital of Tunisia. You know, before the independence the Tunisian people were widely uneducated and very poor. Bourguiba, that's the father of our Tunisia provided homes and education for everyone! Thanks to Bourguiba we have so many universities, schools and a good standing internationally. The French they only profited from our potential without giving anything back. Bourguiba gave us a lot. I forced my daughters to get a proper education. One of my girls went to the United States and the other one went to study in Belgium. Higher education is the most important thing a woman can have! And no one can take that from her. All of this was possible because of the reforms and the spirit Bourguiba brought us. The era of Bourguiba was not perfect, but it was much better than the French colonialization and everything that came after him. I was a militant at the time of the struggle for independence. I always participated in the demonstrations and protests. Several times I was chased by French soldiers. Once I was running away from them with a friend, so we threw bread at them to keep them away. I was pregnant during that time and I was close to being arrested several times, but I always managed to escape. I was in a circle of militant women; we all fought together against the French. These women were all very strong and had no fears. She became very famous as well and she got killed by the French during protests. Usually women and men protested together, but we created this circle of militant women and we were inseparable.

Under Bourguiba Tunisia was free and everything was in order. But especially important, he brought the freedom and rights of women. Bourguiba understood that the country can only be successful when women are educated and have equal rights.



*Under Ben Ali we were still free; everyone could do whatever pleases them. But he stole from our country. He ruined it with his greed. He didn't deprive us from our rights, we were still free. But he separated the nation. Under Bourguiba there was a middle class, Ben Ali created a very rich upper class and left the rest of the population to sink into extreme poverty. But we lived normally, now with the new government we are facing a strong inflation and life became very expensive here. I am sad for Tunisia when I look at the new government. I am happy the revolution happened, but I expected a different outcome. I was sure that everything would become better, people would find jobs, poverty would shrink and this family of robbers would be finally gone. But unfortunately it came different. The outcome is in contrast to what I expected.*

Fadhila was a militant and believed that the liberation of her country was the only solution to liberate women. In her eyes nationalism and women's rights go hand in hand. She also mentions that she refused to obey the dictates of society that forced women to wear the veil. Fadhila, despite disregarding the will of father, developed a national consciousness and therefore decided to fight for the liberation of her country.

The next speaker, Emna, a strong woman, a leader, a fighter, is in her early 60's has a long history of feminist and militant activism. Her narrative outlines the continuation of the women's struggle in Tunisia. During student revolts in the 1960's in Tunisia against a growing economic crisis, women took part in protests and carried on the feminist and militant activism that had already taken place in the early 1950's. Militants like Fadhila built the base for feminist activism and later generations of women continued that struggle. That is why I see strong parallels between the two ladies. Emna works for the Tunisian worker union UGTT and is head of the women's office in Sfax. The role of the local worker unionists made a big part of the success of the revolution. Different than in previous uprisings, the Tunisian population stood up against their regime together. Students, lawyer associations, labor union activists of the local branches and the women's association *Femmes Démocrates* organized themselves in a short time.

Through a Tunisian journalist whom I got introduced to I received the contact of Emna and I met her in Gafsa in a coffee shop. The interview was recorded in French. With sparkling

eyes and carefully chosen words Emna tells me her experiences and views about the revolution of 2011:

*I lived it day by day and hour by hour because I was very active and I was one of the militants of this revolution. I see this revolution as a result of the efforts of the Tunisian people. It was the result of years and years of protests and a unification of the Tunisian people. The revolution was the fruit of militant activism of several generations. Student protests happened in the 1960's, in the 1970's and the syndicate uprisings in 2008 and of course all the fighting and protests in all kinds of different milieus in times of crisis made the revolution only a matter of time. It was a way of saying 'no' to dictatorship, 'no' to exploitation and 'yes' to democracy, liberty and 'yes' to the Tunisian people. I always knew that one day we will be able to live our moment of dignity, our moment of liberty and our moment of prosperousness. This revolution in such a small country made Tunisians great people who never gave up their hope. It was a merit for us, we became a magical country. In every period of our history we were a very specific nation. Tunisia was the first country that abolished slavery, the first country that had a written constitution and the first Arab county that introduced women's rights. This didn't happen by accident it resulted from a long history of reflection and progressive thoughts. The woman was always very present in the Tunisian history. We have to remember that Tunisia was founded by a woman who came from what is Syria today. She was very intelligent and she founded Carthage, which later became Tunisia. And then a long history of strong and educated women followed. We had the first female pilot, the first female doctor and the first female minister in the whole Arab world. If we are a progressive country and a progressive modern society this is thanks to the presence of Tunisian women. In 2008 I was one of the leading figures in the worker protests in Gafsa which marked the beginning of the revolution in 2011. The UGTT played a crucial role in the uprisings, especially the local branches. In many towns and villages the local UGTT offices organized protests and people followed their call and went on the streets. I participated in all demonstrations and protests in Gafsa and Tunis to accelerate the revolution and force Ben Ali to leave. Ben Ali was a dictator and I was imprisoned during the protests in 2008 just for speaking out our*

*rights, the rights of the Tunisian people. The right to live and work in dignity, the right to express our opinion and the right to live in a free country. When we look at the revolution in 2011, it was the young people, and mostly young women and progressive women who carried on the progressive, social, democratic and revolutionary spirit of these days. In January 2011 the Tunisian people, men and women together, stood up against a dictator and showed the Arab- Muslim world the perspective for change. They also showed the Occidentalists that another world is possible and that it was a revolution of the citizens and for a better Tunisia. And I hope that we continue with this logic and these thoughts to create a democratic system and to stop violence and ignorance, because this is not our culture and not our history.*

Emna underlines the role of the UGTT, especially the efforts of the local branches. In fact, Olivier Piot, reporting for *Le Monde Diplomatique*, recorded an interview with a local UGTT activist in Tozeur on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 saying that a national wide strike of school teachers in the following three weeks was planned by the national UGTT leadership. The activist added furthermore "I know it is a long time to wait, and I'm not sure if it won't be too late. I've told the union leaders, but they are closely tied to the authorities. For my part, I feel that from now on we risk seeing poor districts across the cities of the centre and the south going up in flames" (Piot, 2011). Therefore the revolts were a matter of time in a country where the average unemployment rate lies over 13%, and over 30% among young people (15 to 24 years). The unemployment rate in the poor off- shore regions, where tourism is rare is even significantly higher (facts taken from the CIA World Fact Book, 2012).

Emna also emphasized the role of women, not only during the protests, but also their outstanding efforts in the last two decades where women continued protesting while many men were arrested and imprisoned. Her words are more than just the narration of the history of Tunisian women's empowerment. They can be read as a tribute to Tunisian women. Women made Tunisia and they are a big part of the country's history. It was a woman who founded the country, formerly named Carthage. It was women who fought for the liberation of Tunisia and women who never got tired of continuing to struggle. In

Tunisia feminist activism is part of the nation's tradition. Women played a big historical role in forming the Tunisian identity. This is very specific about the small Mediterranean Arab country. Both narratives of Fadhila and Emna show that they are proud of being a Tunisian woman. This is why the revolution was more than just a relief for them; it was the award of years and years of activism.

The tradition of feminist activism is carried on by various women's associations, of which the *Femmes Démocrates* is the biggest and most powerful one. During the protest in late 2010 and early 2011 the women's association *Femmes Démocrates* coordinated their actions and their support of the protesters with the UGTT and soon they reached masses of people together. The two organizations had close links to each other since 1982 when cooperation between them was created. Since then the *Femmes Démocrates* work closely with the *Syndicate Commission of Working Women* which is a branch of the UGTT. The involvement of the *Femmes Démocrates* was of a patriotic and nationalist nature and did not link to women's rights only. The association's goals are much broader. The ATFD is one of the few independent unions in Tunisia that always criticized the regime and fought for women's as well as human rights. In the most recent statute of the *Femmes Démocrates* "Women and Republic: a fight for equality and democracy" (2008) the association states its secular character and describes its agenda. Beside the struggle for equality between the genders, the AFDT fights for democracy, human rights, worker rights, improvement and access to education for every citizen, freedom of speech and better health care. The ADFT also aims to improve the situation of rural and marginalized women and provides assistance and shelter for women who became victims of domestic violence.<sup>12</sup> The motivation to protest against the regime in 2008 and in 2011 of the members of the national board of the ADFT can be described as a nationalist attempt. They argue that women cannot be free and independent in an authoritarian country where there is no potential for development. Souha, a member of the *Femmes Démocrates* is in her late 20's and works as a lawyer. She told me her experiences of the revolution. Being born in the early 80's Souha had only experienced living in a dictatorship and witnessed a period of

---

<sup>12</sup> For further information see: Association des Femmes Démocrates Tunisiennes (2008): *Femmes et République: un combat pour l'égalité et la démocratie*

unrest, economic stagnation and state corruption. Souha is a feminist activist and her efforts and struggles were often frustrating and limited by the control of the regime. The interview took place in the office of the association in the heart of Tunis and was recorded in French:

*One has to know that before the immolation of a young fruit seller in Sidi Bouzid, there were worker uprisings in the mining region of Gafsa in 2008. An enormous amount of people got arrested and imprisoned and many people died during these protests. At this time I started to realize that something is happening in Tunisia. There were many dead and injured, it was not just a strike, it was an uprising. We were engaged in these events and organized manifestations and lawyers went to Gafsa to support the protesters who got imprisoned. The Femmes Démocrates positioned themselves in Gafsa as well, because one has to know, that many men got imprisoned and the women continued the protests and it was women who continued fighting against the system and the regime at this time. It became a manifestation of women and children, because their brothers, husbands, fathers or sons were arrested in masses. Our association was helping the women with the manifestations and supported them with their daily needs. But at this time Ben Ali positioned checkpoints on the highway to Gafsa and women or members of the Femmes Démocrates were not allowed to pass. They made sure that not a single member of us was able to pass. Only two lawyers were able to reach Gafsa to provide legal assistance in the tribunals of the imprisoned protesters. Meanwhile we organized manifestations in the capital Tunis on Avenue Habib Bourguiba. But at this time it was hard to mobilize people, we were in small numbers. For me the revolution really started in 2008. And what happened in 2011 was only a continuation of what had started in 2008. In Gafsa many people died and got arrested, but there was no change for another two years! And then we heard of the immolation of the fruit seller in December 2010. Personally I didn't expect that this would cause a revolution. One year before there was another young man who burned himself at Monastir and nothing happened. I thought that this was just another sad happening, but nothing we hadn't seen before. I was sure that people would just turn a blind eye on it and continued living their lives. But one day later we heard of uprisings in*

*Sidi Bouzid, in Gafsa and in Kasserine and also in Tunis, mostly in the poorer areas. We were surprised and we felt that we should take these protests seriously. We started to gather a number of activists in secret meetings to discuss what was going on all over the country. We made documentations of what was happening and formulated strategies to enforce the uprising. All of this happened secretly because we were closely observed by Ben Ali's police. The leaders of the Femmes Démocrates were present at many manifestations all over the country. And we opened our doors to young people and mobilized them to go out on the streets. We reached a great number and many young people, boys and girls followed our call and they joined us in the protests. We got so much support from young people who made banners and flyers and who helped us in every possible way. The older members of the association were overwhelmed by the amount of young people who became active. They had to warn them to be careful, because the militants of our association have a lot of experience with the regime and they know the risks involved to protests against the regime. It was dangerous because we knew how the regime deals with opponents and protesters. We had witnessed death and imprisonment before and no one knew the outcome of the uprisings at the stage. By the time of mid January the movement became enormously big. There was not more violence by the police than in previous demonstrations, but the police separated the masses. Some of our members were able to go back home after the demonstration and some were not able to leave the city center, so they were hiding in building entrances or small niches. And people who live or work on Avenue Habib Bourguiba opened their doors for protesters who were followed by the police. We experienced a great solidarity between Tunisian people. Personally, I would have never thought that Ben Ali would leave. It seemed impossible for me! And then he left. It was unbelievable. It felt like a complete liberation. And after Ben Ali and his family had fled the country many things changed. Under his reign we could not have done such an interview for example. I mean we could have, but only secretly and under a great risk for you and for me. Under Ben Ali there were always two or three police officers standing in front of our building to observe who is coming in or going out. It was a way of telling us, 'we know who you are and we are observing you'. It was a way of intimidation. And this doesn't exist anymore. The Femmes Démocrates always played a*

*crucial role in Tunisia. There are many associations in Tunisia, but only six or seven of them were truly independent from the government which made them hard to control. We are one of them. The majority of other associations were satellite organizations of the regime. Our militants never stopped denouncing what happened in the country and therefore they were always running the risk of being arrested.*

Active members of the *Femmes Démocrates* are militants and contributed to the success of the revolution with great commitment and devotion despite the violence and aggression exercised by Ben Ali's police forces. Souha is proud of being a member and she is proud of the success of the revolution. So far we have heard three militant and feminist activists who direct their efforts not only to defend women's rights but also to contribute to the development of their country. It is interesting to see how feminism with a nationalist approach is carried on from generation to generation. Women in Tunisia until today play a big role in forming and developing society and this is not only limited as their function as mothers who educate children. It is a much more active approach and this is very particular for the country's history. With the historical upheaval that Tunisia experienced in 2011, even new forms of activism are possible. While big associations like *the Femmes Démocrates* or the UGTT always denounced the criminal activities of the old regime, many young Tunisians did not have any encounters with politics. Since the revolution of 2011, however, a new generation of active women is growing.

## ***2) The Awakening of a Generation – Women discover new Identities and Opportunities***

Despite disappointment and worries about the future of Tunisia, the revolution brought new opportunities for many Tunisians to get involved in social activism, civic society and politics. The current uncertain situation and the Islamist government do not only cause frustration among many young Tunisians, but it also motivates them to get engaged and serve their country. Under the former dictator it was not only extremely dangerous to get fully engaged in social activism, it also seemed to be useless and a waste of time, since

change was out of sight. The revolution and the new democratic character of the state provide a chance and motivation for many young Tunisians to be active for their society and their country, since they have learnt that change is possible. Tunisia is now in a transitional period where many decisions concerning the future of the country are made. A new constitution is in progress and civil society is redefining itself. For many women this is a chance to contribute to the building of their country.

Lilia, 39 years old, was born and raised in France where she studied law after graduating from high school. For over thirty years Lilia felt closer to the Western mentality and considered French as her first nationality, although both of her parents are Tunisian. Seeing Islamists and their ideology as a threat to Tunisia, the revolution provided a chance to discover her Tunisian identity and to work for her country. Growing up in France after her parents had emigrated from Tunisia in the 1970's, Lilia now lives in Tunis with her family where I met her in her house in a well-situated area of the capital. I received Lilia's contact from a social activist whom I have met during preparations for this study. The interview was recorded in French:

*My parents are Tunisian but they immigrated to France in the 1970's, so I was born in France and I received all my education in France. During my studies of law I came to Tunisia for a semester. At that time, Tunisia was technically my home country, but I had nothing to do with this place. I didn't know the country or the culture and I hadn't spent any time in Tunisia despite summer vacations. When I spent a semester in Tunis a professor told me in an oral exam that he will ask me a question in Arabic. And at this time, I didn't even speak proper Arabic, my mother tongue. I couldn't answer his question and there I realized that I completely lost or maybe never had a Tunisian identity. After that I decided to stay in Tunisia and I got a job at the French embassy. But I felt like living in a bubble. I worked with French people and I was active in a French association. My circle of friends were either French or Tunisians who grew up in France like me. I could say that I had no idea what was going on around me in the country. We never talked about politics and I was not critical of the current situation or the regime. When the uprising started in December 2010 I was in France and I followed the events on TV. We*



*had heard about the young man who burned himself in Sidi Bouzid, where my mother is from. But we didn't take it seriously; we never thought that something might happen. I went back to Tunisia in January 2011 and this is when I realized that something was cooking. The nation was moving towards something big that we would have never expected. I literally felt it under my skin. People died during the demonstrations and Ben Ali apologized on TV and this is when I realized that there was no other solution than the down fall of the regime. I told myself that this guy absolutely needs to leave. I told myself that something had to be done and that Ben Ali had to leave. And this was the moment when the Tunisian in me was born. I lived in Tunis for almost ten years at the time, but at this moment I discovered my Tunisian identity. The day of January 14<sup>th</sup> 2011 was an extraordinary day for me. All kinds of people, all social classes from all over the country came together and protested. Demonstrations and protests were going on since a while in the interior of the country which is a mainly working class area. I told myself that the revolution will not succeed without the bourgeoisie. After he had fled the country I found myself in the middle of Tunisian society. I became Tunisian. I started to get interested in politics and I began to follow the international media and their reports on what was happening in Tunisia. I realized that our country slowly fell apart and that it was not enough if Ben Ali left the country but the old cadres were still present. It was a pushing and pulling for power right after the revolution. And then I became scared, I really became scared. A few weeks later the wave of revolution, the spirit if you want it, swept over to Libya and Egypt and then further to the Middle East. Tunisia fell into chaos and complete anarchy. Then Egypt fell and then Libya fell. I was scared of what would happen to Tunisia. I often gathered with my friends and for the first time we were discussing politics and we all agreed that something had to be done. In summer 2011 I joined a think tank and we decided to start a campaign and run for elections for the constitutional assembly. We are all people that were never interested in politics but after the revolution all of us agreed to take action. We discovered our patriotic spirit. At that time the Islamist party didn't pose any risk. We knew that big names of the Islamic opposition came back to Tunisia after years of exile and we knew that politics cannot be done without them anymore. But we didn't imagine that they would be in power after the elections. The problem is that those*

*people don't know Tunisia at all. They spent the last thirty years of their lives abroad! It was a big surprise that they gained power. Until this day I always participate in demonstrations and I want to continue to fight for my country. I feel an obligation to do something for my country. And to be honest, I am not doing this for myself because I am almost 40 years old. But I have a child and I want that he grows up in prosperous, free and democratic Tunisia. I am responsible for the heritage of my country. Within the election period I met with many parties and I have to say that I never found myself and I could never identify myself with one of them. That's why I decided to run as a candidate as a free member for the next elections.*

Lilia discovered her Tunisian identity and feels responsible for the future of her country. Lilia emphasizes that the new circumstances in Tunisia worry her to an extent that she feels obliged to be active for her country. She also mentions that she fights for the future of her son. Lilia started to feel Tunisian due to the historical circumstances and discovered a new identity. I argue that identity is closely linked to historical circumstances. When looking at the individual level of identity, it is possible and very likely that the self-definition of an individual's identity might change with social circumstances. This does not conflict with old existing identities, but can provide new motivations and objectives. For Lilia her Tunisian identity is something to be proud of. The context of being Tunisian and being proud of that identity is reflected in all narratives so far. Another example is Ines a university student, a 'normal' girl of 24 years old as she describes herself. She grew up in secular, middle-class family in Tunis and never had any encounters with politics or social activism. I interviewed Ines during a conference about Tunisian Youth Development in a hotel in Tunis. Ines was one of the few speakers that I interviewed in English. The revolution has changed her life:

*I can say that I became more involved in the political sphere after the revolution. That is a major change in my life. I was a normal young female in Tunisia. After the revolution I started working as a journalist, what I had never expected before, because under Ben Ali journalism wasn't a very promising career. So, after the revolution everything changed for*

*me personally. As a journalist I can pressure politicians and I feel in power of what I am doing. But you know after the revolution you expect everything to change, you expect massive improvement of every aspect of political and social life. But if we think historically every country is facing a depression after a revolution. This is a fact that people simply can't deal with. The expectations they had were too high and unrealistic. I think that now is the time that every single Tunisian should work towards the goals that we had right after Ben Ali left. And I mean the males and females should work on that side by side. Change is not just going to happen, we need to work for it. I think that the biggest achievement we got is the freedom of speech. And I feel that we have a lot of opportunities in the country that we didn't have before. NGOs are increasing in numbers, human rights activism is booming and I am very proud to see many successful NGOs operating in different fields. Young people have the opportunity to take part in building up the country and this is something that the revolution brought us. Young Tunisians who live abroad want to come back and be part of this new spirit. It is exciting what is going on in our country right now and I am proud of being part of it. I think that the revolution opened a lot of opportunities for young people, what we didn't have before under the regime.*

Ines is aware of the economic problems her country is facing and she knows that this transitional period is important for the determination of Tunisia. Nevertheless she is positive about the future of the country due to an active civil society. She became a journalist and uses the power of the profession to criticize politics and social development. As predicted above we can see that the tradition of strong active women in Tunisia is continuing and maybe even increasing. A new generation of activists is forming itself and carries on the heritage of their “foremothers”.

Especially for young university students who had never had any contact with political debates and social affairs the revolution came unexpectedly. Seeing the protests as a way to identify with their Tunisian identity and to improve their country many young women were eager to participate in the protests, but were held back by their families. Asma, a confident Tunisian woman, 26 years old is one of them. She became a victim of violence by a policeman during one of the protests and was not allowed to leave the house after that

incident. Her father locked her up in a room and she remembers the frustration she felt that she could not be part of the protests. Asma moved out of her parents' house and lives in the neighborhood of Al-Marsa in Tunis where I visited her for the interview. Asma told me her story in English:

*I was not involved in demonstrations or civil activism right from the beginning when the fruit seller burned himself. But when a famous Tunisian activist was put in jail for criticizing the government, we became more conscience. We hadn't heard of things like that before under Ben Ali, it was unacceptable. This is when the revolution started for me. I went to protests and got interested in social activism. I went to Avenue Habib Bourguiba at eleven in the morning at one day of the protests with four other girls. We were waiting and a guy came up to us and told us to go home and that nothing would happen today. I asked him why he wanted us to leave, and he didn't respond but three guys came, they were police officers but in civilian clothes. I didn't know that at this point. So one of them asked me why I am talking to the guy like that, he said: 'Who do you think you are talking to a police officer? You are a girl, you do not talk to men like this!' I was just to respond to him, but from one second to another, I felt a heavy beat on my chest. I flew at least two meters to the ground. Even the sound of the beat was so loud. I was so surprised, but got myself together fast. I got up and I felt raging anger in me, at first I didn't feel the pain. I used to do kickboxing. So I got up and kicked him in the waist. The other guys standing around us were holding him back then, because he wanted to kick me again. And imagine, he was a police officer! They are like animals. But on January 14th, my dad locked the door of my room and wouldn't let me out, because he was afraid that I will go to protest again. He was scared that the police would beat me, because the two days before they killed people during protests on the streets. I was so mad. I wanted to go with all the other people. Either you are living or you are not living. But living with a fear is not a life.*

### 3) *The long-longed Freedom – Religious Women*

Living or not living. Asma expresses what many of her fellow countrymen must have felt during the revolution. Tunisia is a country that has never experienced democracy since the republic became independent in the 1950's. Authoritarian leaders and corrupt regimes led the country and successfully expelled or repressed every kind of opposition and criticism. "Living a life in fear" was of special concern to one particular group of the population. When I interviewed Aliya, 49 years old and founder of the *Islamist Women's Association*, she told me about the relief and freedom she felt when the regime broke down. When I received Aliya's contact through a journalist I called her and asked for an interview. She was immediately interested and invited me to the office of her association. The interview was recorded in French:

*It was a great hope I've always had. Since the first event that happened in Sidi Bouzid I knew that this was the moment! Before the revolution I felt like a walking cadaver. I didn't even feel alive. There was nothing I could do or nothing I felt was worth doing in this country. After the revolution I started this NGO because I finally saw a sense and a deep urge to do something for my country. The revolution was magical it was a moment of magic. A few days after Ben Ali had fled the country everyone smiled on the streets and strangers greeted each other. It was a miracle! We were free and we felt the freedom! We lived this magic and for the first time since a very long time I felt that I could breathe, I could feel the oxygen in the air when I breathed. One month after this animal had fled the country I inscribed myself to a university and now, at the age of 49 years I'm pursuing a degree in law studies! I could not attend university as a young girl because I was not allowed to veil and teachers at school discriminated against me and other girls because we wanted to practice our religion. The regime did a lot to make our lives hell! We have a member in our association who was imprisoned and tortured with electrical shocks and in many other ways simply because she refused to uncover her head. By that time she was married and she had five children. The regime forced her to get divorced and her children were taken away from her. When she had her trial the judge was female and she was crying because she was ordered by higher authorities to charge her with several years of*

*prison. The courthouse is on Avenue Habib Bourguiba where the big demonstrations took place. This lady has never set foot on that street since she was charged guilty because it brought up traumatic memories. But on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January, she took her daughter and she was among the first ones to protest against Ben Ali who cannot even be called a man, he is more of an animal. When I heard how brave she was I started crying, I couldn't help it and tears were running down my face. We are finally free! No one could criticize him or his politics and freedom was only granted to people who shared exactly his convictions and his politics. Under Ben Ali we never discussed politics, not even with our neighbors or close friends, because we could never know whether someone would report us.*

Aliya is not a single case and many Islamic women experienced “Living a life in fear” under Ben Ali. With Tunisia being a secular state, especially religious leaders and practicing Muslims were persecuted and imprisoned in masses and many fled the country. It was truly and literally a matter of “living or not living”. During the late 1980’s a serious economic crisis evolved in the small Mediterranean country and many citizens of poorer and rural regions turned to the *Movement of Islamic Tendency (MIT)* which later became the Ennahda party in 2011. Ben Ali and his regime felt the threat that the movement posed to him and his regime since the MIT was gaining support in the population. The regime then banned the movement in 1991, persecuted its followers and many members fled to exile in order to escape from long-term prison time. Religious symbols were removed from public offices and institutions like universities, schools, municipalities etc. and veiling in public spaces was forbidden. This posed a struggle to religious women who suffered under the repression of their religion. Not being able to veil or wear a hijab to school or in universities hindered many religious women to continue education in schools up from a certain age or seek a university degree. By forbidding the veil for Islamic women many of them got deprived of their entry into social life. They were put in front of a decision and had to choose between education, employment, social life on the one side and their belief, values and morals on the other side. The revolution brought new freedom and dignity especially to religious women. The downfall of the regime was more than the liberation of the country to them. It was the gain of a personal freedom which brought them the right to

veil, wear the hijab and to practice their religion freely. With the right to veil many Islamic women finally continued studying or were able to seek employment for the first time. Many Islamic women refused to show themselves in public or their fathers' or husbands' did not allow them to do so because they could not cover their head.

It is a feeling that Noura, 32 years old, member of Ennahda experienced throughout her entire childhood. Noura felt paralyzed by the power exercised by the regime which repressed her family for being religious. The downfall of the regime did not only mark the end of a life in fear, it also marked the beginning of a new life. She decided to join the Islamist Ennahda movement and works in the women's office. Her father and her uncle were members of the forbidden *Movement of Islamic Tendencies* and she experienced harsh discrimination against her family. For her the gain of power of the Ennahda party is a satisfaction and the award for years of suffering. Reaching Noura was a harder task because she is very busy. I showed up at the Ennahda headquarters twice before I was able to get hold of her. Once I met her and asked for an interview, she agreed immediately and the interview took place right away in her office. Noura has studied English literature and the interview was recorded in English:

*The Tunisian revolution was a dream coming true. It was the liberation for the Tunisian people, an act of community and solidarity, something that our country was waiting for since thirty years. People in the whole country revolted together, people became friends, even people from very different backgrounds. It felt like Tunisian people walked hand in hand with each other to fight a corrupt and criminal regime. I felt so overwhelmed and happy when I heard that the old regime had left the country. We went outside to the streets and celebrated with our neighbors. I knew that big change would happen and the Tunisian people were the force behind it. I did not go to Avenue Habib Bourguiba because it was very dangerous, people even got killed during the protests. But I celebrated with my friends and family the days after. My uncle and my cousins came back from Great Brittan two days after Ben Ali had fled. They lived in exile for almost twenty years and on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January our family was finally reunited. My uncle was part of the *Movement de Tendance Islamique* and was persecuted by Ben Ali and his regime, so he fled to exile in*

*order to avoid going to prison. This is not a single case, many Tunisians shared his destiny. Ben Ali is a dictator and our country was suffering from his reign. Everyone who criticized him or his government got arrested. Even peaceful citizens, like my uncle, who did nothing but practice their religion got arrested or chased out of the country. There was political freedom only for those who conformed to his politics and religious freedom only for those who were not Muslim. The rest of us suffered three decades of suppression, we were held like sheep. Like my uncle my father was a supporter of the MIT as well, but he decided to stay in Tunisia because my mother didn't want to leave her family. I remember many times when the police just broke into our house unannounced and took everything with them that they liked. My father, may God rest his soul, got arrested several times, but he was always held in prison for a few days, maximum a few weeks and then he got released. It was horrible for me to see my father and my entire family suffering although they hadn't done anything wrong. We were treated like criminals. I always looked up to my father, may God bless his soul, because he believed in God and he never gave up hope. I blame the old regime for my father's death. They made him sick and this caused his death. The revolution finally brought justice, democracy, freedom and liberty. And I am proud that the Tunisian people stood up together and that I had the chance to experience that. I am happy and proud that my children will live in a free, democratic and just Tunisia. I am happy and proud that my children don't have to live the life that I had as a child.*

The revolution and the fall of the regime was a relief to most of the Tunisian population. It was a common notion that all speakers of the sample of all social classes, educational or regional backgrounds, secular or religious experienced the fall of Ben Ali as a sign of freedom and the end of repression, corruption and dictatorship. Religious women are satisfied with the Islamist government after decades of repression. It brought personal freedom as in the cases of Noura and Aliya and provided new opportunities as in the cases of Ines and Lilia.

From the narratives presented in this section I conclude that living under a dictatorial regime had negative impacts on women (and men) that go beyond social class or religious affiliation. Emna, a secular woman, as well as Noura a religious woman talked about



imprisonment and discrimination. The revolution was an uprising of all Tunisian people and had nothing to do with women's rights. As described above, women in the past, during the anti-colonial struggles, fought for their country and played a big role in the success to become an independent state. It is worth asking, is Arab feminism is always linked to nationalist attempts? Do some Tunisian women claim to be feminists, and what do they mean when they say this?

## **B. Being a Feminist – or not**

I had to realize that the self-definition of Tunisian women varies strongly. Social or educational backgrounds do not serve alone as categories to define Tunisian women accordingly to their self-representation. I talked to women of all social and educational classes and I was surprised about the outcome. Although many argued in favor of gender equality and women's rights they did not consider themselves a "feminist". Has the term "feminist" a negative connotation? Does it only apply to militant feminists? Or is it a Western concept that does not fit the self-representation of an Arab woman?

When I asked Fadhila whether she considers herself a feminist she answered the following:

*I raised my daughters to become independent and strong. And between me and my husband there was always an equal relationship. In a way there is no need to call myself a feminist, because this expression should not even exist. It is only natural that women have equal rights, this goes without saying. In Tunisia we reached this, thanks to Bourguiba a long time ago, and I am proud of that! There is no way that any woman in this country can accept that we will be deprived of our rights. I cannot support this government and anyone who is affiliated with it. Our rights will remain! You will see, I am telling you. Tunisian women will protest and fight. Even if they kill us, we will fight for our rights! We always went to protest, we won't stop now. I could not go on the streets anymore, because I have problems with my knees, but in my mind I am always with the women. My daughter went to demonstrate and was beaten by the police brutally. And the next day she went again. We will never give up, our rights will remain, you will see. My daughter is a journalist and she was against the Ben Ali regime. They did not allow her to work for over ten years because*

*she wrote articles that were critical of the regime. After the revolution she was called to teach journalism at a university and she works for a Tunisian radio station. She always fought for real democracy and equality for all citizens. When we women fight for our rights, everything is allowed, we will use all of our weapons.*

Although Fadhila does not consider herself a feminist she is a militant and argues in favor of women's rights. She believes in the strength of women and encourages younger generations to protest and fight for legal rights. Militant feminists, members of the women's association *Femmes Démocrates*, ordinary students and working women joined the protests. Many young Tunisian women discovered new opportunities to get engaged in social activism or politics. Tunisian women know that now is a time where change can happen. But the uprising was not about women's rights and Tunisian women fought for the liberty and freedom of their country. Fadhila's story provides an example of similarity between women's efforts today and women's activism during the fighting for independence where men and women fought against the French colonizers and for the freedom of their country. Women fight for their country, then and now. Fadhila, remembered her activism during the 1950's and she considers herself a militant. She explicitly states that she does not consider herself a feminist. It is surprising that Fadhila, a militant and a strong woman, rejects the term "feminist". All of the speakers so far were involved in the revolution and its aftermath. They are strong women and fight for their country. I believe that the question is not whether the speakers would consider themselves feminists. Instead we need to ask what does being a feminist mean to Tunisian women? And what is feminism for them? Therefore, I do not want to define the term 'feminist' according to its Western understanding or to any other definition. I want to find out how Tunisian women define feminism and how they perceive this term. This approach allows me to focus on the particularities of Tunisian women.

### **1) Feminist and Militant Activism**

Women become activists for several reasons: a liberal and progressive education, living in a feminist or politicized environment or as a result of personal experiences. In the case of Souad the desire for being equal to men started in her early childhood although she did not link it to a direct feminist consciousness. Having experienced social discrimination after her divorce Souad became interested in the women's movement and joined the ATFD. I met Souad in the offices of the ATFD where the interview took place. It was recorded in French:

*In the beginning I was not too interested in women's rights. But when I was young I lived in a very conservative village, 35km Southern of Sousse. Since my childhood I revolted against the segregation between boys and girls. To revolt against that conservative mentality, I was riding a bike for example, and this was perceived as bad and wrong. I went to the market, although a girl was not supposed to do that. It was inappropriate at this time in the villages. I disregarded the social rules a bit but without having a feminist consciousness. But then I got married at a very young age and a few years later I filed for divorce. After my divorce I had to realize that society rejects divorced women. A divorced woman does not have a good social standing, she is considered a prostitute, she is easily available for every man... This attitude bothered me a lot. And at this point I joined the women's movement to see what they are working on. I met other divorced women and also militant women from the left wing. They told me that even in their party there was no equality between the genders. Women were there to prepare coffee etc. The members of the movement were very different and everyone had diverse and particular reason to join the women's movement. This is how I became a feminist.*

Emna, whom we heard of earlier, is a member of the UGTT and calls herself a militant and feminist. She was exposed to a politicized and militant environment at university and she became interested in the militant students' movement to fight economic exploitation of workers, corruption and the authoritarian regime. She is aware of the vulnerability but also

the strength of marginalized women, especially in rural and extreme patriarchal areas and fights against women's exploitation and abuse:

*When I was young I was very interested in the student's movement which was a movement of students and the syndicate movement in the 1980. I was interested in syndicalism because in my eyes the UGTT was the strongest and most present association in the country and it was the association which was very close to the people. Me and my student fellows we were not only interested in syndicalism, but also in militant activism which fought for human rights. I joined the Tunisian League for Human Rights and then I started working with the "Office for Tunisian working women" and I started to defend women's rights and especially women who were economically exploited. Under Ben Ali I was member of several boards for human, workers' and also women's rights.*

*Even if there are attempts to push women back and to limit their rights, Tunisian people are very present on the streets to defend women's rights. And it is not only women, but also many men who fight for that. We experienced attempts to touch the 28 article of the constitution which states the equality between men and women, but the manifestations and all the work that is being done in the country to educate women about their rights create a lot of pressure on the government, because we will not accept that article 28 will be vanished. We need to fight for the rights of women, the rights of educated women, the rights of working women and especially the rights of marginalized women. The constitution that is in progress now is important for us, because it will not only establish the new political order, but it is an inspiration, it is a dream and an ambition, it is the fruit of the struggles of Tunisian women. Women made this country and women need to have legal power and rights in the new second Tunisian Republic.*

*I am a militant woman and I fought for this country a lot. I fight for human rights, but my special attention is given to women's rights. I am very close to ordinary people and I know and support their struggles. There a lot of marginalized women in poorer areas of the country and it is these women who faced the hardest times, it is them who fight the most. And I believe that it will be these women who will make the change because they need it the most. Change will not come from women who live in comfort. I was in a small village*

*in the region of Gafsa where I organized an event for the World's Women Day. The women in this village know that this is a special and important day. Women went out on the streets one century ago on this day to protest against the exploitation of women in the factories where they had to work after World War II. And last week we celebrated this day with marginalized women in the South of Tunisia who face the same problems and exploitation like American women a century ago. And the reactions of these Tunisian women was great because for the first time they realized that they are appreciated, that they have a place in society and that they are the actors of the new Tunisia. They are modern women, progressive and extremely courageous. They live in an extreme patriarchal society but they came together to discuss women's rights and to discuss the equality between men and women. This is a great and wonderful achievement, because women in our poorer regions never experienced any appreciation although they are the ones who make a big part of our economy. These women work in agriculture, in factories or other jobs and they take care of their families while a big percentage of the men are unemployed. I was very happy and proud of these women and I believe in them. And what I am saying is for these courageous women who will keep on fighting. And I hope that women all over the world and especially in the Arab- Muslim world will stand up together and fight for prosperity, democracy, equality, liberty and humanity and against any kind of discrimination. I know that a better world is possible.*

Whether it was for the reason of personal discrimination or the influence of a revolutionary environment both speakers knew of the importance to fight for women's rights.

Both women consider themselves 'feminists'. For them feminism is part of the culture and does not reject the Tunisian cultural heritage. Emna believes in the strength of Tunisian women and wants to boost and advance it. Instead of rejecting the Tunisian culture, she embeds her struggle in its historical context. Feminism for Emna and Souha means to reform and not to reject their society. Women need to understand their value and power they are already having and make use of it in order to avoid and fight gender discrimination. Emna also explains that marginalized and discriminated women will fight actively for their rights. Change will happen because of them, it will not come from

privileged and advantaged women. Marginalization and discrimination are motivators and reasons for women to fight for their rights.

## 2) ***“I am not a Feminist”***

Lina is an architect and works in a mainly male-dominated profession. She got married young, at age 21 and is mother of two children. I was introduced to Lina at a dinner with friends and when she heard about my study she became very interested. I asked her for an interview and met her in her office where the interview took place. Lina’s speech was recorded in French. I asked her what she understands under the term ‘feminism’:

*I never ever thought of being different from men and I never experienced any discrimination because of my gender. In the home where I grew up there was no differentiation between me and my brothers. I was allowed to do everything they did. I believe that Tunisia offers a lot of opportunities for women. If you have a goal you need to work hard for it and you will succeed. If you want to do something, you just have to do it. I am an architect and this business is very male dominated. I still succeeded because I wanted to. There will always be feminists who want more and more, but let’s face it, Tunisian women have a pretty good position. We are very advanced especially compared to other Arab countries and we can measure ourselves with Western Europe. I am not a feminist, because I never saw the need for it. I think that we should be happy with what we have and profit from our rights.*

Lina comes from a liberal family that is financially well-situated. She never experienced any discrimination and doesn’t see the need for being a feminist. For Lina feminism is connected to militant activism. In Tunisia militant activism of women is strong as the stories of Emna, Fadhila and Souad have shown. In the case of Lina, Emna’s theory is confirmed. Women who need change due to discrimination that they experienced will fight for their rights, whereas economically and socially privileged women live in comfort and do not see the urge to fight for women’s rights.

A similar view is shared by Rajeb, the owner and manager of a family-run hotel from Kasserine. I got introduced to Rajeb by a friend who has a travel agency and knows the lady since several years. Rajeb could be called a matriarch. She manages a hotel and her children work with her. During the interview I felt a strong presence of the woman in the room. The interview took place in Kasserine and was recorded in French:

*Our economy is very weak and this has a strong impact on women. The burden of managing the daily life and provide food for the family lies on their backs. Sure, men bring the money, but in many rural regions in Tunisia and even here in Kasserine the women work and make half of the income for their families. Not being able to buy food or clothes for their children has a more severe impact on them than on their husbands. I think that women suffer even more from the economic situation. And they are more prone to become victims of economic exploitation. But I wouldn't say that I am a feminist. I don't see why I should be treated differently than men just because I am a woman. I think that Tunisian people should be united now and men and women should fight together for the future of our country. In Tunisia women are strong and have many legal rights compared to other Arab countries. I don't understand why they don't make use of them and drop the issue of women's rights. I believe that now is the time to put all our energy in improving our economic situation and not to fight for women's or other personal rights.*

Although Rajeb is arguing that she is not a feminist, she raises an important issue on economic exploitation of women. Rajeb introduced me to Umm Said who had worked for Rajeb in the past. Umm Said is a lady from Kasserine who holds two jobs to be able to feed her family. Umm Said is worried about the future of her children and carries a heavy burden as a single bread winner after her husband had a work-related accident. She kindly invited me to her home. Her daughter was present during the interview and helped me out with translation when I was unable to understand some words in Arabic:

*I have two jobs to feed my family and I work twelve hours every day. I work on a small farm with other women and we sell fruits and vegetables on the market. I also work as a*

*cleaning lady in an elementary school. My day starts at five in the morning and when I come home from work I take care of the house and my family. My husband broke his leg on a construction site where he used work two years ago. We cannot pay for a surgery and he cannot work anymore since then. I had to take the second job in order to make enough money for the family. My sons and my daughter are helping me a lot. My daughter and my younger son are living with us and the oldest one got married last year. I hope that the new government will keep their promises and help us out. They told us that they would improve our streets, our water supplies and provide medical care even for people who cannot afford expensive hospitals or doctors. You know, I really hope that they will help us. The old government forgot about us. They took care of people in the capital and of the touristic regions, we were forgotten citizens, like we didn't belong to the country. With God's help our situation will change now. I worry a lot about the future of my children.*

When I asked her about the situation of women in her village she answered the following:

*Women in our village stick together. We help each other out and meet often in one of our homes. Many of our husbands are unemployed or sick from years and years of hard work. And women often have better chances to find jobs in agriculture or factories. It is us who make a big part of our income here. And it helps a lot that we are close to each other and that we support each other. Everyone knows his or her place around here. I don't mind doing the housework and taking care of the kids. But since my husband's accident I have to work a lot and I am tired. I am so tired. I really hope that things will change with our new government, inshallah.*

Umm Said struggles to provide food and shelter for her family life. Before the interview she told me that she can neither read nor write and is limited to find employment on low-salary jobs. That makes her extremely vulnerable to be exploited economically.

Although Lina and Rajeb argue in favor of women's rights they do not consider themselves feminists. Both women enjoy a privileged social and economic standing, they are well-educated and successful in their professions and they grew up in a fairly



progressive and modern environment. Umm Said on the other hand has to struggle to feed her family. She mentions that women in her village stick together. This gives them a certain autonomy and power.

### **3) Islamic Feminism**

Religious Muslim women interpret feminism in their own ways. Their understanding of feminism is closely linked to the Quoranic text. Noura, member of the Ennahda party argues as the following:

*I believe in women and their strength. And I am proud and happy to say that women made a big part of our revolution. But there are women who are disgracing the rest of us. They blame us of being unmodern and by saying that we want to push back Tunisian women, just because we are veiled and believe in religion and tradition. This is wrong and attempts simply to attack the government because we are having other points of view. I believe that now is the time to pull at one string to reunite our nation and to push it forward all together. Having an Islamist government does not mean being anti-modern, it means being valuable, being in solidarity with all citizens and Tunisia and living our tradition. We do not limit the rights of anyone, and surely not the rights of women. In contrast, we are working for a better future for everyone, for more justice, liberty and prosperity. I believe that our religion should reunite us and not drive us apart. Islam is a very kind religion and can guide us in many ways. Now two years after the revolution we need to build up a new Tunisia, we are starting from zero and Islam can help us. We find many answers in Islam especially when it comes to how to deal with each other and how to treat our neighbors. I don't understand why so many men and women reject our tradition and values. Coming back to your question, I am a woman and I am proud to be a woman. I stand for the empowerment of women and the end of economic exploitation of women as it had happened under Ben Ali. But I also stand for our traditions and values that Islam provides us. Why do you think Ben Ali suppressed and persecuted Muslim leaders? Because he knew that they were doing the right thing and that he would have lost his*

*power if they have had more influence. He knew that valuing our roots and traditions and living a peaceful life in harmony with God was right and what he did out of greed for money and power was wrong.*

Noura is well-educated and chooses her words carefully. Although she speaks in favor of women's rights, her points of view are closely linked to Islam. For Noura Islam is more than a religion, it is a guidance in personal life and a guidance to establish the new Tunisia. Khedija, a supporter of Ennhada and a religious woman herself argues in a similar way. As she tells me her point of view she advocates for women's rights and emphasizes that she considers herself modern. I met Khedija through the *Islamist Women's Association* and the interview took place in the offices of the association. Khedija spoke to me in French:

*I wish there was more tolerance among Tunisian people. There are two extremes right now, the left party on the one side and the Salafists on the other side. I wish that the Tunisian people could unite themselves and find a basis somewhere in the middle. I wish that we manage to combine modernity and tradition because I believe that they do not exclude each other. I wish that we keep our modern and liberal spirit in Tunisia, but that we also respect and accept our traditions and values. If a woman is veiled or if she carries her hair open doesn't matter. We are all sitting in the same boat and we need to make sure that we fight for our country all together. And even though I know that some people will never understand why a woman wants to cover her hair and also the other way round, I demand that we at least respect each other and live together for a new democratic Tunisia. We cannot judge each other according to the way we dress, this is simply ignorant and I hope that these days will be over now. And if Tunisian women understand that and unite themselves, the men will follow. In Tunisia the strongest members of our society are women. But unfortunately there are many militant women who are totally against any kind of veiling and they blame us for veiling. They think that we intend to push women backwards, although this is not true. I am veiled but I consider myself very modern. Unfortunately our government now is facing many problems, unnecessary problems. There is a contra-revolution going on, led by the opposition. The opposition and its followers*

*don't let the government work and do their job. The opposition is acting irresponsible and our government is facing a lot of hatred and dishonesty. There was a big discussion about the Sharia. Why do people protest if our government is trying to establish a new and fair legal system? Under Ben Ali the juridical system was corrupt. Sharia could finally provide justice to all citizens. This is simply not the moment to revolt and demonstrate and people should understand that. The government should be able to work on our new constitution and on our economic situation, but the opposition is creating unnecessary problems. Right now Tunisians need to stick together and solve our problems hand in hand with each other because as I said it is not the time to revolt against the government now. We should be fighting all together for a new, democratic, strong and modern Tunisia. Right now we just have to be patriotic.*

In Noura's eyes religion can offer a personal guidance in many aspects of the private life and in the establishment of a new Tunisian Islamic state. For both, Noura and Khedija, feminism means to have legal rights that are justified by the Islamic law Sharia. It also means to be respected as a practicing Muslim woman. Islamic traditions and values do not confront with being modern. Both of the speakers are working and that means that they reject traditional gender roles where the woman stays at home and takes care of the household. Khedija is the co-founder of a Islamist women's organization and Noura works for the Ennahda Party. Feminism for them, as for secular women that we have heard earlier, is being a part of forming the Tunisian society. This is something that secular feminists and Islamic feminists have in common. Thus, their approaches are different ones. That is the reason why there is a debate between secular and Islamic feminists is currently taking place in Tunisia. The ATFD argues that Islam is often used to justify male dominance over females, in private and in public. Women who live in extreme patriarchal, often rural and socio-economically less privileged areas suffer from the suppression exercised by men in the name of God. That problematic is addressed in a publication of the ATFD on the situation of women in the country (2008). According to members of the ATFD the Islamist domination in the Constitutional Assembly is especially threatening to women. Recent attempts to introduce the Sharia as the judicial law and to allow polygamy,

both Islamic ideologies, caused loud and massive protests among secular people. Islamic women like Noura nevertheless argue in favor of it and in favor of Islam as a national and governmental guideline. The speaker also argues in favor of women's rights as long as they are compatible with the ideology of Islam. The veil is their entry point into society and they use it to fight for women's rights. Without rejecting progress and development in Tunisia, these women stick to their religious values and can reach a broad supporter base within the religious community. This could be a chance for many women who feel discriminated and oppressed since it is possible that religious women can identify with Islamic feminists. Without rejecting their traditions they can get involved in the women's movement and fight for women's empowerment.

### **C. The Issue of Women's Rights and Women's Situation in Tunisia two Years after the Revolution**

Tunisia has now a new government, one that has been elected democratically even though many women are not pleased with the results. For the obvious reason that in spite of Ennahda's promises of respecting women's rights and the CPS, the strong religious impact the government has established in the country is a source of serious concern among the secular population. Only 49 women have been appointed in the constitutional assembly out of 217 members.<sup>13</sup> Islamic women are satisfied with the Islamic government after decades of repression. But the raise of the Islamists and their dominance in the political sphere of Tunisia now is threatening secular citizens and especially women. Tunisian women fear their rights could be in jeopardy if Islamist parties follow their announced course. The issue of women's rights came up shortly after the regime had fallen and the Islamist party Ennahda positioned itself on the political arena. Attempts to establish an Islamic state that follows the justice of the Sharia and the threats of limiting women's legal rights made feminist activists worry.

---

<sup>13</sup> Information taken from: Leaders, retrieved from: <http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/49-femmes-elues-constituante-24-des-217-si%C3%A8ges?id=6785> (20.04.2013)

### ***1) From Religious Freedom to Religious Dictatorship?***

Nabila is the co-founder of the Islamic women's association and explains their goals and point of views concerning women's rights in the new constitution. Just like Khedija, I met Nabila through the Islamist women's association and her interview was recorded in their offices. The interview was recorded in French:

*We founded our association after the revolution in April 2011. We have several perspectives and projects that we are working on. Our main purpose is to help women who became victims of violence, abuse and discrimination under the old regime. Our associations works on many projects and we want to improve the conditions of women in general and raise their standing in society. We are also approaching international organization and we formulated our principles and desires for a new Tunisia. We want to encourage women and secure their rights in the new constitution. We are using the International Convention of Human Rights as our guidance, although some points had to be modified according to our Islamic belief. International conventions are only guidelines and there is room to adopt certain things and to modify others, because every region and every country has its own traditions and cultures. Some points of that convention do not reflect our identity, that's why we changed them or left them out when we wrote down the statute of our association. We also want to keep the Personal Status Code in our new constitution, but a few changes have to be made. We are not fighting for equality between men and women but we are fighting for women's rights. There is one article that forbids women to wear the veil and that needs to be changed because we are enjoying religious freedom now. Now women can wear the hijab or the veil if they want to. Before the revolution women wearing the veil were harassed by the police and offended by many people. Now we can just be who they want to be. Now girls and women have the right to go to school wearing the veil. And this makes sense to me, because other women always had the right to wear whatever they want. Under Ben Ali we lived in a big prison and this has changed now.*

The gain of religious freedom is a gain of a basic human right. For Nabila the veil is more than just a religious practice, it is the symbol for a new, democratic Tunisia where everyone can practice their religion freely. Nevertheless secular women are worried about women who fight for an Islamic constitution that does not respect the International Convention of Human Rights fully.

We have heard from Nabila that they are relieved and satisfied to be able to cover their head after years of repression. For Nabila this was a personal and free decision that should and needs to be respected. Thus, veiling is more than just a choice of dressing. For the ATFD it is not only a religious symbol, it is a symbol of gender inequality (ATFD, 2008: 55). Having an Islamist government and the rise of Salafist groups in Tunisia makes the veil not only a personal choice, but it can become an obstacle to women who are forced by their families or social environments to cover their heads and bodies. When women are forced to cover, the veil can be seen as a symbol that stigmatizes the body of women (ATFD, 2008: 55). It serves to control the sexuality of women and creates segregation between genders. When the decision to wear the veil is not free and personal, it is a suppression of women and a control over their bodies and it manifests patriarchal structures. The AFDT made a clear statement concerning veiling: “Our association stands and fights for secularism, autonomy of women, human rights and the equality of all citizens. We oppose veiling. But opposing that practice does not mean to suppress it, neither to legitimize the repression. Opposing the veil does not mean to reject women how wear it, but it means to reject the veil as a horizon for women.” (AFDT, 2008: 54). The distinction between Islamic women like Nabila who choose to veil and women who are forced to do so is important. The story of Sana, 25 years old, exemplifies the threats of an Islamic environment to young women like herself. Religion has never been an issue in her family, until recently. I met Sana through friends and met her in a café in Tunis. Sana speaks fluent English:

*I am a normal citizen. I didn't have a problem with Ben Ali at all. But the economic development of the interior regions of Tunisia was stuck and people there live under the existence minimum. And of course, there was a lot of corruption going on. Ben Ali is just a*

*person, we had a problem with the whole system. Women protested against the regime, it had nothing to do with women's rights. There was no need to protest for our rights, because we had a socially and legally good standing. We got tired of the system and the corruption. Not even of Ben Ali himself, but the regime and the family of his wife. But the revolution was not about women's rights. Even men are jealous of our rights. But after the Islamist government came into power, the situation has changed. Tunisia was not like that until Ennahda came. I even see that on my own mother. She suddenly told me that I should practice Islam and become a decent woman, whatever decent means for her. This was never an issue in our family. I told her, that she could practice her religion if she wanted to, but I won't. It's nothing I believe in. I see many girls who suddenly veil now and follow this new fashion trend like it already exists in Kuwait and other parts of the Gulf, I think this is hypocrite. They still dress in a way to attract men and wear make-up, just veiled. And this is a symbol of the whole Ennahda system. My sister still lives my parents and she suddenly started to veil, just like my mother, although I know that she does not believe in this practice. It is more something that comes with social pressure.*

Sana describes the dangers that social and family pressure can mean to girls and women and how they conform and respond to it.

Hajer, a 36 year old social and human rights activist expresses these worries as the following. I met Hajer at a conference organized by the British Council in Tunis where I asked her for an interview. Hajer spoke to me in French:

*The revolution had nothing to do with women's rights. But the women's movement got very active after the elections when Ennahda got the majority of the votes. At this point the discussion about Tunisian women became politicized. I think that women will not lose their legal rights. But what is happening now is worrying me. I see very young girls at the age of twelve or thirteen wearing the hijab and this is sick in my eyes. What man would ever look at a girl of this age? If you asked me, the Islamists are hypocrites. There are certain new aspects of social life that concern the daily life of women. Under Ben Ali there was no space for extremists and radical Islamists. But now there is a change in society that*

*threatens the liberty of girls, especially in rural and poorer areas. They might be obliged to wear the veil or to get married at a young age. Young women and girls need to be protected, but this has nothing to do with legal rights. This is a question of extreme patriarchal structures that are supported and enhanced by the Islamist government.*

Hajer is concerned about the social aspects that the Islamist government promotes. Patriarchal structures exist especially in rural areas in the interior of the country, which is also characterized by high rates of unemployment and poverty. According to Pillay “the unequal power relations are manifested in social practice and in beliefs and values that promote male superiority and female inferiority.” (Pillay, 1999: 40) The Islamist government attempts to limit women’s rights not on a legal basis, but through change in social behavior between men and women.

## ***2) Reinforcement of Patriarchy: Economic and Political Discrimination of Women***

The story I have been told by the journalist Hint confirms the worries of the promotion of patriarchy and also depicts envy that men feel for women. Just like Hajer, I met Hint at a conference at the World Women’s Day and asked her for an interview. Hint told me her story in English:

*I had this opportunity to work as a journalist and translator during the election period and I interviewed lots of men, most of them from Tunis. I found that most of them voted for Ennahda, because women have a lot of rights and men have a complex about that. They see that women find jobs easily, because they are more situated in schools and universities. Women have higher grades and better diplomas in general than men in Tunisia. Men are simply jealous. I interviewed one guy for example, and he said that the night before the election he was with two girls and they consumed alcohol. He wanted to vote for another party in the beginning, but while he was waiting in the cue, he changed his mind. So I asked him why and he said that he wants to become a good Muslim in order to go to*



*paradise after death. He said that his current lifestyle won't allow that. But if Ennahda came into power they would forbid such behavior and alcohol consumption. That's why he voted for Ennahda. It was one of the most stupid things I have ever heard! I really couldn't believe it. I interviewed another guy and he said: "If you oblige women to stay at home, take care of the house and the raise the children, our unemployment problem would be solved. There would be enough jobs for all Tunisian men. And this would solve our economic crisis and we would not suffer from poverty."*

From the statements of the two men I conclude that women and their economic power as well as their strong standing in society are a threat to some men in Tunisia, particular poor men. Mernissi (1991) even speaks of the "feminization" of the male in post-colonial states as the traditional role of the economic provider is no longer the exclusive concern of the man in the family and as the modernizing state draws women into the public arena through both law and public provision such as education. In Tunisia, women's empowerment and legal rights both got boosted and secured by former president Bourguiba and many well-educated women entered the labor market. Thus, there is "an implicit setting up of a binary opposition between the state and patriarchal forces in society", as argued by Mehdid (Mehdid, 1993: 9). Whereas the politics of Bourguiba and later Ben Ali empowered women and their economic contribution, the Islamist government now tends to reverse this trend. Kandiyoti (1991) points to the symbiosis between the state and patriarchy: "Whereas the traditional exercise of patriarchal authority tended to rest with particular men – fathers, husbands and other male kin – the communalization of politics, particular when backed by state-sponsored religious fundamentalism, shifts the right of control to all men" (Kandiyoti, 1991: 14).

Hence, Ennahda is trying to infiltrate the social dimension and push women back to the homes. With this approach they find a broad support base among young men, especially young unemployed men in poorer regions.

Barbara, a blogger and journalist explains the problem concerning women's rights in the country now. I found Barbara's blog during an online research and contacted her by e-mail.

She immediately replied and showed interest in my study. I met her in a café in Tunis where the interview took place. It was recorded in French:

*The question about women's rights is often raised. But during the revolution, there were no issues raised about women's rights. The revolution was against the regime, it had nothing to do with women whatsoever. That means, during that revolution there were no women or men, there were Tunisians. Until January 14, 2011 we never talked about women or men, we talked about the unity of Tunisians. And there is a simple reason for that. See, Tunisian women are strong, in society and in the constitution. It was only after the revolution, especially since the election of Ennahda, that we started to discuss the issue of women's rights. Ennahda is an Islamist party and many members of them are extremists. And their first and biggest problem is the issue of women's rights and especially the self-presentation of women. And the problem is that we are scared that women's rights become more and more marginalized now that they are in the process of writing a new constitution. You can see that already in popular Ennahda areas where women are obliged to wear the veil, because their men oblige them to do so. I have the impression that Ennahada wants to dominate the life of women in every aspect. Women never had problems with Ben Ali. For example, if a man wants to divorce his wife, he will think about that twice. The law is with the women, she has legal rights and protection. Women can travel without the permission of their father or husband, which is not the case in many other Arab countries. After the revolution the new government wants to change that. The woman should complement the man now and the family is a man's issue. Woman in the rural areas, where Ennahda is strong, will suffer. Even if she is protected by the law, it will be difficult for her to escape from the domination of her husband and from the social pressure raised by the extremists. If her husband is an Ennahada supporter she will have to obey their rules and social standards. So, I guess that the changes concerning women's rights will happen in the practice of daily life and in the way society acts upon it. The law won't change, but step by step the practice of how to treat a woman will change. The problem is that the Islamists are infiltrating many aspects of social life step by step. They are present in universities, schools, kids and sports clubs etc. And that change can already*

*be observed. When Ennahda got elected they proclaimed to maintain women's rights, they said they won't touch the Personal Status Code and so on. After a while, issues like introducing polygamy and the Sharia law came up. They broke their word within less than a few months. And at the same time, they accept the raise of Salafist groups. But Tunisians went on the streets immediately to demonstrate against the introduction of polygamy and Sharia. For example, there is a lady called Souad Abderrahim, she is a famous Ennahda spokeswoman. In an interview on a radio show she said, that all single mothers are prostitutes and that there is no place for such women in Tunisia. This kind of things are worrying us, because it reveals how the party members think and how extreme they are. One thing is for sure. The Islamists are strong, especially in rural and poor areas. They give bread, clothes and other goods to the people and gain votes like that. People in the interior of the country are hungry, they don't care about the government, they vote for whoever gives them money. In addition to that, I'm afraid of how Ennahda is infiltrating many aspects of social and educational life.*

Barbara is critical about the intentions of the Islamist leaders and warns that the Islamists will try to control and subordinate women and their public and private life. While conditions in times of conflict and transition give women certain new opportunities for activism, the same conditions create formidable obstacles when it comes to male/ female power relations, since women's participation in conflicts challenge the existing stereotypes. When women decide to actively fight for a cause traditional gender roles become obsolete. The presence of women as icons is celebrated, but often their active contribution to the cause is shaded out by history and by subsequent political developments. This statement is very applicable when it comes to women's participation in the recent Tunisian revolution.

Souad, a national board member of the Femmes Démocrates, explains the efforts and struggles her association went through and is still going through during the elections for the Constitutional Assembly:

*Ben Ali left the country on January 14, 2011 and on January 29, 2011 women went out to protest and already at this time, members of the Islamist party came and insulted us. They shouted “Go home you prostitutes” “Go back to the kitchen! What are you doing on the street?” and they threw stones at us! And this is when the trouble started. Ben Ali kept the Islamists small and suppressed and the moment he left, they came out of their holes. Violence on the streets started and when we demonstrated they threw stones at us and insulted us. Right after the revolution we, the Femmes Démocrates, installed centers in the different regions of Tunisia. And many of our members were running as candidates for the National Assembly. Every time when one of our members wanted to present her candidacy she got insulted by Islamists. They were telling people in the mosque not to vote for her, by mentioning her name and claiming she was a prostitute, claiming she was not a real Muslim and in favor of homosexual marriage. Ennahda created facebook pages just to insult our candidates by posting manipulated pictures of them and calling them sluts and prostitutes. But after the elections it became even worse, it is a disaster. We were crying a lot about how they treated us. We know what Ennahda stands for, they want to bring us down. I worked with the Islamist movement in 1980 and I know all their literature and their thoughts and I can tell you, it is terrible. Their statements before the elections concerning the status of women are nothing but lies! Now they are following a strategy to infiltrate every social dimension, like schools, universities, sports clubs. I compare that to the spreading of AIDS. They are openly attacking everyone and everything that does not conform their way of thinking. I feel that our country is falling apart. Women started to wear the Neqab, children are scared of their fathers. There are missionaries from Al-Qaida who promote the jihad in schools and universities. They distribute DVDs to encourage students to go on jihad in Syria. In areas where Ennahda got the majority of votes, they started to replace school directors with their own people. It is a corrupted system. They are about to destroy all aspects of our republic. You know that Ghannouchi’s ideal is state is Sudan. Now they started to assassinate our intellectuals, like Chokri Belaid. But I don’t think that women in this country will accept this kind of politics! After fifty years of liberty and women’s rights, there are more women with a diploma than men in Tunisia.*

As Cynthia Enloe says “women’s desires and stories are among the first to be excluded when nationalisms is rendered fragile by external threat or internal fragmentation” (Enloe, 1989: 60). “In nationalist contexts, stories of gender conflict are highlighted if they enrich a certain imaginary and censored if they are seen to break rank” (Enloe, 1989: 56). Although the ruling Ennahda party had made clear promises to keep and enlarge women’s rights in the new constitution women’s needs were pushed aside very fast. The government went even further to insult female candidates of the women’s association and destroyed their reputation. Souad feels being marginalized by a government that rejects the need of improving and securing women’s rights. Despite the hardship her association is going through, Souad is nevertheless confident, that the Ennahda party will not succeed in limiting women’s legal rights. As Alvarez (1990) argues in the context of South America “feminists should neither dismiss the State as the ultimate mechanism of male social control nor embrace it as the ultimate vehicle for gender-based social change. Rather, under different political regimes and at distinct historical conjunctures, the State is potentially a mechanism either for social change or social control in women’s lives” (Alvarez 1990: 273). Looking at the post-revolutionary Tunisia the latter applies under the Islamist government. The control of women’s private and public life is a concern to many women in the country right now.

### ***3) Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence***

Women report an enormous increase in harassment and violence practiced by men and even police officers. A sad case where a Tunisian woman was raped by policemen in front of her husband in the capital Tunis was reported in early 2013. It was covered by international media and provoked a debate about the security of women after the revolution. Asma, a university student explains the fears of many Tunisian girls and women. Asma is a strong, young woman whom I met during a visit at the Faculty of Nabeul. When she heard about this study, she agreed to tell me her points of view. The

interview took place in the cafeteria of the university in Nabeul. Asma told me her story in French:

*Women are scared now of the men with the beards, the Salafists that you see on the streets. There were incidents that were discussed even in international media. A woman got raped recently by two police men. Who should protect us if not the police? You have no idea how often I get harassed on the street since then. Yesterday I was walking on the street in the city centre and two guys came and asked me if I had forty Dinar. Before the policemen raped the girl they asked her how much she had and she said she had forty Dinar. So, these two guys asked me the same. Men think that's funny or that they have the right to harass and assault women, because even the police does it. I often carry a rock, and I am ready to throw it at them if they offend me. They are animals. It was not like that before the revolution, because Ben Ali is a military man and Tunisia was a police state. The police was very present on the streets, they were everywhere. Once I got harassed by a young guy on the street and I picked up a rock. He wanted to touch me in the middle of the street and a police car drove by. They saw me standing there and screaming and they didn't do anything, they didn't even stop. I knew I was on my own. I started shouting at the guy and I told him, that even if it is the last thing I do, I would kill him. I have nothing to lose. The biggest issue for me is that our streets are not safe anymore. The police is not present, they are not here! And if they are there physically, you can't trust them. Now when I go on the streets wearing a skirt or a dress, many men think that I'm trying to deliver a message to them, like an invitation. My curly hair is also perceived as a certain image, but just because of the way I dress, doesn't mean that I'm available for any man. Women will protest and fight. Don't worry about that. The problem is the lack of security on the streets after Ben Ali left.*

Souad, mother of a teenage daughter herself, shares the same opinion:

*Under Ben Ali the security was good, the police was very present. Now we fell into a hole of security and we don't feel safe on our streets anymore. I don't leave the house alone at night and I don't allow my 16-year old daughter to walk anywhere alone. I take her to*

*school and I pick her up. And you cannot count on the police anymore. There was a famous case where a girl got raped by two policemen. The police does not protect us anymore. You have to know that the police force is consisted of very low-class people. Even the directors of police stations are uneducated and the majority comes from very low-class milieus.*

It is a common world-wide phenomenon that women suffer from gender-based violence and abuse after a conflict. In the case of Tunisia, the violence and harassment practiced by men on the streets are not related to war crimes as in many African countries that underwent long periods of armed conflict, but the motivation for harassment and violence is the same. Anu Pillay (2001) explains the source that underlies the use of violence against women in post-conflict and political- transitional countries: “The patriarchal structure of society enables men to use and abuse their power (...) and our binary construction of sexuality does not allow flexibility. Gender stereotyping ensures that women remain outside of policy and decision making” (Pillay, 2001: 39). It is important to define gender-based violence not only as physical abuse, but to include economic and political violence. Beside the violence perpetrated against the individual, violence is exercised against women in general. The concerns of the speakers that we have heard so far suggest that women in Tunisia now suffer from all three kinds of abuse. Asma emphasizes the increase of harassment and aggression by men on the streets. Souad is concerned about the political violence coming from the ranks of Islamists. As she told us, female members of the *Femmes Démocrates* who campaigned for the Constitutional Assembly got harassed and insulted immensely by supporters and members of the Islamist party. They got systematically excluded from the chance to participate in the building of the new Tunisia. The statements of the two men interviewed by Hint suggest that economic exclusion of women is desired by some men in order to improve their own job opportunities.

Barbara is a journalist and blogger who has observed the Islamist movement since a long period of time concludes the following:

*Women in Tunisia are an important economic factor. But in society we don't know yet what will happen to women. There are professions in which men simply don't want to work, like agriculture for example. Agriculture in Tunisia is done by women, not men. And it goes without saying that we need the agricultural business. I think that Ennahda will exclude women from political offices, but for the economy it will be very difficult for them to exclude women and I don't know how they will try to do so. And I also think that the Islamists won't touch the legal rights of women. They tried to do so, but Tunisians went out in masses to protest against new legislatives concerning women's legal rights. We have a very active society and the revolution is not over yet. It is rather a question of religious practice and therefore a question of the social standing of women in general.*

Barbara points to the social change that can happen in Tunisia and determines this change as the most striking problem the country is facing. Tunisian women are strong and confident and protest for their rights frequently on the streets, secular and religious women.



## CHAPTER V

### PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN'S ISSUES AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF 2011

The data shows that there is a debate going on between religious and secular women in Tunisia about perspectives of a new Tunisia with special regards to women's rights. Haleh Afshar states in his essay "Women and Wars: Some Trajectories Towards a Feminist Peace" (2003): "For too long, wars, revolutions, and militarist governments have been seen as male affairs with men fighting for masculine causes, ranging from defending specific classes or ideologies to protecting the interests of groups or nations." And Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias argue in their book *Woman, Nation, State* (1989) that the role of women in conflicts, wars and revolutions is linked to several attributes. According to the authors women are biological reproducers for the collectivity by giving birth; women are reproducers of boundaries and collective ideologies and teach certain ideologies to their children; and women are participants in national, economic, political and military struggles. Only the last point refers to women as independent individuals who make their own choices about where and how to participate. In the cases of Souad and Emna the latter applies, since both women decided to join the women's movement and fight actively for women's rights. Both women joined organizations that played crucial roles in previous uprisings, violent confrontations with the state and police forces and led ultimately to the revolution in 2011. But also religious women like the founders of the *Islamist Women's Association* Khedija and Nabila, became active after the revolution. They fight for women's empowerment, only with the addition of a religious connotation. Noura, Nabila, Aliya and Khedija are in favor of pushing women's rights in Tunisia forward, without sacrificing traditional and religious values.

Marnia Lazreg argues in her book "The Eloquence of Silence" (1994) that third world feminists are often put under pressure to choose between their feminism and their culture.

Further she writes, “thus third world female intellectuals find themselves either defending their culture against feminist misinterpretations or reveling in the description of practices deemed disreputable” (Lazreg, 1994: 11). Thus the discussion among secular and religious feminist activists turns around the question about how far religion should play a role in the new Tunisian society and politics. In other words, should religion be separated from the state or embraced in it?

For a valuable analysis of this highly sensible debate, we first have to overcome the Western hegemony of scholarship on Muslim or third-world women. Second, we must recognize that Muslim women are not a homogenous, powerless group, but that their feminist approaches and goals vary according to their socio-economic and historical background. Third, that we cannot assume universal standards of women’s needs. Islamic feminism is way for Muslim women to combine their beliefs and values with women’s rights.

Nevertheless we need to bear in mind that Islamic feminism only targets one group of women, namely religious Muslim women. Their goals and values cannot be applied to all women, even in a Muslim country, and do not reflect the reality of all women. They do not take under consideration that not all Islamic women choose freely to be religious, but are forced by their families and communities.

And this is problematic. The Islamist domination in the new Tunisian government clearly exemplifies that argument. Introducing the Sharia and polygamy as legal components of the new constitution are a threat to secular women, like Souad argues in her story. Both concepts derive from Islam and both concepts are discriminatory to women. Like Khedija many women are in favor of it despite its discriminatory character. Islamic feminism might provide certain guidelines for Islamic women in private, but is not a concept that can be applied in modern societies or to defend women’s rights effectively.

Witnessing the increase of violence against women in the post-revolutionary Tunisia, I raise the question what underlies violence of women in post-conflict regions? Anu Pillay argues that four elements emerge as the most powerful forces of gender-based violence and

discrimination. The first one is the inequality of power relations that are manifested in social practice and in beliefs and values that promote male superiority and female inferiority. Pillay states that “gender is stereotyped into rigid, binary roles of males as protectors and females as nurturer with the objectification of the female as property” (Pillay, 2001: 40). In Tunisia women are scared by extremist Islamists and Salafist groups that are now very present on the streets. Under Ben Ali power relations were more balanced and women were protected by law and by the police. It goes without saying that violence against women existed before the revolution, but it was not tolerated by that state and far less frequent than now. Experiences as told by Sana and Asma show that the security of women on the streets are not granted anymore and attacks from young men and even police officers are not being punished. Sana thinks that the Islamist government promotes the inequality between the genders and establishes the male as the head of the family. Ennhada attempts to change family laws in favor of male dominance, such as the introduction of polygamy. Polygamy is a concept where a man is legally allowed to have more than one wife given he can provide for them. This concept of life promotes the male figure as the economic and the private head of the family who possesses his wives in exchange for financial stability. This concept goes along with the second source of discrimination against women, as argued by Pillay (2001), namely the construction of masculinity. Men feel physically superior to women what allows them to harass and attack women on the streets. Along with that physical strength comes a feeling of masculinity. Tunisian men are jealous of the economic power of women in the country and seem to demonstrate their strength and power in physical violence against women. That brings me to the third source of gender-based violence, the factor of economic power. Braam and Webster (2000) explain the vicious circle of economic power. The construction of masculinity, which puts pressure on men to provide for their families financially, means that men perceive high levels of male unemployment as emasculating, and this results in violence against women (Braam/ Webster, 2000). The fourth of Pillay’s categories is the acceptance of violence against women. The case of the young woman who got raped by police officers is a good example. And also Asma told us that the police turned a blind eye on the situation when she got sexually harassed on the streets in the middle of the day in a

crowded area. When authorities who are supposed to protect citizens from crime exercise violence themselves or remain inactive when they witness such, it gives a free pass to many men to act the same. If violence is accepted and not acted upon by the state and the police, it is likely to increase since no sanctions have to be feared. We have to see violence against women as a system in itself and consider it in its entity. Pillay suggest “it permeates every facet of society and is expressed socially, economically, politically, culturally and professionally” (Pillay, 2001: 42). According to the stories of the cited speakers, women in Tunisia now suffer from sexual harassment and physical violence on the streets, political exclusion and social and economic discrimination that goes along with the promotion of patriarchy by the Islamists. But as the authors of the book *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation* state, “conflict, war and shifting social orders provide women with opportunities to break out of stereotypes and stifling societal patterns. Social patterns are profoundly upset at such moments, presenting new possibilities. If women seize these opportunities, transformation is possible.” (Meintjes/ Pillay/ Turshen, 2001: 44).

Hafidha Chekir, one of the founders of the Femmes Démocrates reminds in her article “Women, the law and the family in Tunisia” (1996) that “as in other Arab- Muslim countries, the status of women in Tunisia bears the weight of Arab- Muslim culture, and is based on the superiority of male elders – the ‘patriarchal’ order” (Chekir, 1996: 43). However, the legal status of women in the family differs from most other Arab- Muslim legislatures thanks to the rights secured in the PSC. The state regulates a great deal of family order which gives the women certain rights, although tradition and patriarchy are maintained at the same time. Despite the reforms in favor of women in 1993 which eliminated the woman’s duty to obey her husband, he retains the headship and guardian of the family. But women still have to obey age-old patriarchal traditions and fulfill the conjugal duties required by habits and customs. This new law protects women only to a certain extent, since they are still expected to devote her own life to the happiness of the husband and the children instead of pursuing an own career (Chekir, 1996). We have to see that these practices do not apply to all Tunisian women, since the reforms in 1993. Women

in upper class society and women who follow a professional career, like Lina and Rajeb but also Noura, Nabila and Khedija, are not as prone to be reduced to the role of the mother and wife, as women in poorer and less-educated areas are. As we have seen in the interview of Souad, who grew up in a conservative village, women like herself do not profit from the legal rights given to women, but instead suffer from social and traditional practices. This is what Souad was and still is revolting against. Whereas women like Lina and Rajeb grew up in a more liberal family and surrounding never had to face these problems. They can rely on their legal rights and do not see any need for further expansion of women's rights.

The university student Ines argues in her narrative that going against long- established traditions and values is a harder task and usually requires several generations. Patriarchal tradition is unlikely to diffuse within a short period and fighting it can demand the use of a more radical approach. But, if women's rights are not defended now, women risk to be marginalized. Feminist activists like Emna and Souha know of the importance to keep on the struggle and to educate working-class women like Umm Said. Tunisia is in a transition period right now where the constitution of the country is discussed. Women have to fight for feminist issues and women's rights in order not be marginalized by the state as it had happened in many Arab countries after the anti-colonial struggles. If women - of all social classes – do not fight for their rights now, they are risking becoming second- class-citizens.

As we have learnt from the UGTT activist Emna and the ATFD member Souad, women who suffered or still suffer from gender based inequality are more likely to get engaged in feminist activism if they manage to emancipate from their social environment. Social inequalities produce unrest and uprisings. This is true for economic and political inequalities, but as well for gender based discrimination. Women all over the country have participated in widespread demonstrations since late 2010 against the former regime of President Ben Ali and its corrupt politics and failure of economic reforms. And although the revolution of 2011 had nothing to do with women's rights, women played a crucial role. This fact proves that the Arab women's movement is not only focused on gender

equality, but sets its goals in a wider nationalist context. Arab feminist activism is not limited to push for gender equality, but women want to play a role in forming their societies and improving the situation of their nations. The *Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates* for example states in their statute, that their struggles aim to fight for women's empowerment, but also for human rights, freedom of speech and political as well as legal equality for all citizens.

Despite disappointments in the past after the nationalist struggles in the 1950's, women know that Tunisia is in a transitional period right now, where change can and will happen. This is why women went out to the streets in masses. Tunisian women want to play an active role in the new Tunisia society. For many of them, the revolution is not over yet, it is still going on. Demonstrations on the streets continue on a weekly basis where the people demand reforms concerning the improvement of the economic stagnation, or protests against the Islamist government and their attempts to turn Tunisia into an Islamic state. In the beginning of the recent uprising women participated in protests to get rid of a corrupt authoritarian president, but now their focus has shifted. Now women are vowing not be marginalized and not to lose any legal rights that they have already gained. This shows that the Tunisian women's movement is very typical for the Arab women's empowerment. Their understanding of empowerment is wider than of Western feminists. Feminist activists in Tunisia are patriots and women in Tunisia play a role in forming and shaping society.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

As the data has shown Tunisian women have been participating in national struggles and protests since the anti-colonial struggles. This tradition is carried on from generation to generation. Tunisian women had achieved outstanding legal rights after independence, especially in family policies, compared to the rest of the Arab world.

The speakers tell with great attention to detail and how they experienced the revolution in 2011 and most of them agree, that the revolution is not over yet; it is still going on two years after the downfall of the regime. As the stories of the Fadhila, Emna and Souha show, women's empowerment has a long history in Tunisia and women have always played a big role in forming the Tunisian society. The revolution was perceived as something positive by all speakers, although shortly after the downfall of the Ben Ali regime voices of concern among the secular population, and especially secular feminist activists, became louder. Since the Islamist party Ennahda gained the majority of the votes for the new government that forms the constitutional assembly, women's issues became important. According to speakers like Barabra, Sana, Asma or Souad, the Islamists and their conservative and traditional views are a threat to many secular, but also to religious women. The party promotes patriarchy and is heading towards the establishment of an Islamic state. This implies risks for women of all social classes. The social aspects are the biggest concern for the feminist movement, since they are afraid more and more women will be forced to wear the hijab or even the neqab. Sexual harassment on the streets against non-covered women is increasing as reported by the speakers in this study and women fear to be pushed back to their homes in housewives roles. The danger of losing the secular state and the liberal society as well as the government's attempts to introduce misogynic laws like polygamy, that has long been banned in Tunisia are a threat to women, secular as well as religious. Opponents of the party are being insulted in public, especially women,

and first arrests of critical journalists have been taken place. The Islamists are infiltrating universities, social clubs and associations to promote their values and force them upon women of weaker social standing. As Souad said in her narrative, people fear that the current political tension might provoke a civil war as it has happened before in the neighboring country Algeria. The fear of an Islamist dictatorship is high and alarming for the vast majority of the secular population.

Nevertheless, women like Khedija, Noura or Nabila, all consider themselves Islamic feminists, may not be judged on the basis of their belief. These women support the Islamist government and favor the idea of Tunisia being an Islamic state. But they also emphasize that modernity and progress is important for them.

What I have learnt from the interviews is that, the goals and perspectives for the future of the country are not even too far from each other among Islamic and secular feminists. This is very distinct for the Tunisian women's movement. Both sides should rather make an effort to approach "the other" and discuss their views together. If both recognize each other's points the Tunisian women's movements could become even more powerful. Religious as well as secular women need to fight hand in hand for women's rights and against the exploitation of less-privileged women in the country and against the threats of extremist Islamist groups.

I am pleased that I had the chance to meet the speakers that are presented in this study. To conclude this study I have to say that it is hard to predict the political future of the country since facts on the ground are moving and changing fast. This is not least due to the very active civil society and their willingness to keep on fighting for their country. The great polarization in the society between secular and religious citizens remains a big challenge. But it sure, that women are a driving force to push their own rights forward and to fight for a free and democratic Tunisia even despite the intimidation exercised by the Ennahda and other Islamist extremist groups.

Since the revolution is not over yet it is interesting to observe the further development of women's empowerment in Tunisia. It would be interesting to meet the speakers of this study in the future to reassess their experiences and evaluate the failures and achievements that have been made since now.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abu- Lughod, Lila (1998): *Remaking Women: feminism and modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton: PUP

Abu-Lughod, Lila (2009): “Dialects of Women’s Empowerment: The International Circuitry of the ‘Arab Human Development Report 2005’”, in: *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 41

Abdulhadi R., Alsultany E., Naber N. (2011): *Arab and Arab American Feminism: Gender, Violence and Belonging*, New York: Syracuse University Press

Afshar, Haleh (2003): “Women and Wars: Some Trajectories Towards a Feminist Peace” in: *Development in Practice*, Vol. 13, (2/3), pp. 178-188

Al-Ali, Nadjé (2000): *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: the Egyptian Women’s Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Al-Ali, Nadjé/ Pratt, Nicola (2009): *What kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Alvarez, S. (1990): *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women’s Movements in Transition Politics*. Princeton, New York: Princeton University Press

Antonius, Soraya (1983): “Fighting on Two Fronts: Conversations with Palestinian Women” in: Davies, Miranda (ed.): *Third World, Second Sex: Women’s Struggles and National Liberation*. London: Zed Books.

Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (2008): *Femmes et République: un combat pour l’égalité et la démocratie*, Tunis: La Charguia

Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (2010): “Women’s Rights in Tunisia. Alternative Report”. Tunis, Tunisia

Badran, Margot (1994): “Gender Activism: Feminists and Islamists in Egypt” in: Moghadam, ed., *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Badran, Margot (1995): *Feminism, Islam and Nation: gender and the making of modern Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

- Badran, Margot (2006): "Islamic Feminism Revisited", in: *Al-Ahram Weekly* 9-15 February
- Bessis, Sophie (1999): "Le Feminisme Institutionnel en Tunisie", in: *CLIO. Histoire, femmes et société*, Vol. 9: Femmes du Maghreb
- Braam, T. / Webster, N. (2000): "Mainstreaming Violence against Women: Tshwaranang's Organizational Strategy into the new Century", Johannesburg: Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre to End Violence Against Women
- Chamari, Alya Chérif (1991): *La femme et la loi en Tunisie*. Alger : Éd.s. Bouchène
- Charfi, Mohamed (2005): *Islam and Liberty. The Historical Misunderstanding*, London/ New York: Zed Books
- Charrad, Mounira (2001): *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Chekir, Hafidha (1996): "Women, the law, and the family in Tunisia", in: *Gender & Development*, Vol. 4 (2), pp. 43-46
- Curtiss, Richard (1993): "Special Report: Women's Rights an Affair of State for Tunisia", in: *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs Vol. 3*
- Enloe, Cynthia (1989): *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkley: University of California Press
- Fleischmann, Ellen (1999): "The other Awakening: The Emergence of Women's Movement in the Middle East, 1900- 1940", in: *A Social History of Women*
- Fontana, Andrea/ Frey, James (2003): "The Interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text", in: Denzin, Norman (ed.): *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications
- Frisch, Michael (1990): *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Albany: State University of New York Press
- Gauch, Suzanne (2007): *Liberating Shahrazad: feminism, postcolonialism, and Islam*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Gilman, Sarah E. (2007): "Feminist Organizing in Tunisia: Negotiating Transnational Linkages and the State.", in: Moghadam, Valentine (ed.): *From Patriarchy to*

*Empowerment: Women's Participation, Rights, and Movements in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia*. New York: Syracuse University Press, p. 97-119.

Gluck, Sherna Berger (1984): "What's so special about women: Women's oral history" in: Dunaway, D/ Baum W.K. (eds.): *Oral history: An interdisciplinary anthology*. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History

Gluck, Sherna Berger/ Patai, Daphne (eds.) (1991): *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. New York: Routledge

Golley, Nawar Al-Hassan (2004): "Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women?", in: *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 521-536

Grele, Ronald (1979): *Envelops of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, New York: Praeger

Haddad, Tahar (1930): *imra'atunà fi'shshart' a wa'l-mujtama'* (in a translated version (1978): *Notre femme, la législation islamique, et al société*, Tunis: Maison tunisienne de l'édition

Hamilton, Paula/ Shopes, Linda (eds.) (2008): *Oral Histories and Public Memories*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hatem, Mirvat (1999): "Modernization, the State and the Family in the Middle East Women Studies" in Margaret Meriwether and Judith Tucker eds., *The Social History of Gender and Women in the Modern Middle East*. Boulder CO: Westview Press

Jad, Islah (2011): "Islamist women of Hamas: between feminism and nationalism", in: *Inter-Asia cultural studies*, Vol. 12 (2), pp.176

Jayawardena, Kumari (1986): "Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World", London/ New York: Zed Books

Jomier, Augustin (2011): "Secularism and State Feminism: Tunisia's Smoke and Mirrors", Institute Francaise, online publications

Joseph, Suad (1996): "Patriarchy and development in the Arab world", in: *Gender & Development*, Vol. 4 (2), pp. 14-19

Kahf, Mohja (2011): "The Pity Committee and the Careful Reader: How Not to Buy Stereotypes about Muslim Women", in: Abdulhadi, Alsultany, Naber (2011): *Arab and Arab American Feminism: Gender, Violence and Belonging*, New York: Syracuse University Press

- Kandiyoti, D. ed. (1991): *Women, Islam and State*. Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press
- Kucera, Irene (2004): *Frauenrechte in Tunesien*. Wien: Diplomarbeit Universität Wien
- Lazreg, Marnia (1994): *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. New York: Routledge.
- Mabrouk, Mehdi (2011): "The Youth Revolution: A First Reading of the Social and Cultural Conditions Surrounding the Tunisian Revolution", in: *Heinrich Böll Institut Perspectives, Vol. 2, Special Edition*, pp. 132-144.
- Mahmood, Saba (2004): *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press
- Marzouki, Ilhem (1993): *Le mouvement des femmes en Tunisie*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose
- Mehdid, M. (1993): "Feminist Debate on Women and the state in the Middle East" Paper presented at the Conference of Socialist Feminists, London, July
- Meintjes, Sheila/ Turshen, Meredith/ Pillay, Anu (2002): "The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation", London/New York: Zed Books
- Mernissi, F. (1991): *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Micaud, Charles (1964): *Tunisia. The Politics of Modernization*. New York/ London: Frederick A. Praeger Publications
- Moghadam, Valentine M. (2003): "Engendering Citizenship, Feminizing Civil Society" in: *Women & Politics*, Vol. 25 (1-2), pp. 63-87
- Mohanty, Chandra T. (1991): "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", in: Chandra T. Mohanty, Ann Russo, Loudres Torres eds. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Morgan, Robin (2011): "Women of the Arab Spring", in: *Global Report* Vol. 21 (2)
- Mulrine, Caitlin (2011): "Women's Organizations in Tunisia: Transforming Feminist Discourse in a Transitioning State", in: *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. Paper 1136.

- Outram, Dorinda (1995): *The Enlightenment. New Approaches to European History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Pateman, Carole (1988): "The Fraternal Social Contract" in: John Keane ed.: *Civil Society and the State*. London: Verso
- Perkins, K.J. (2003): *A History of Modern Tunisia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 212
- Perkins, Kenneth J. (1997): *Historical Dictionary of Tunisia*, (second edition) Lanham/ London: The Scarecrow Press
- Peteet, Julie (1991): *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Peteet, Julie (2000b): "Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian Intifada: A Cultural Politics of Violence", in: Mai Ghousseub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, eds. *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*. London: Saqi Books.
- Rai, Shirin (1996): "Women and the State in the Third World", in: Haleh Afshar ed. *Women and Politics in the Third World* London/ New York: Routledge.
- Said, Edward (1978): *Orientalism*. Berlin: Ullstein
- Sayigh, Rosemary (1994): *Too many enemies*. London: Zed Books
- Sayigh, Rosemary (2002): "Gender, Sexuality and Class in National Narratives: Palestinian Camp Women Tell their Lives", in: *Frontiers*, Vol. XIX (2)
- Schick, Irvin Cemel (1990): "Representing Middle Eastern Women: Feminism and Colonial Discourse", in: *Feminist Studies* Vol. 16 (2)
- Scott, Joan W. (1986): "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis". In: *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91 (5), pp. 1053-1075.
- Shields, Stephanie A. (2008): "Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective", in: *Sex Roles* Vol. 59 (5-6) pp. 301-311
- Tucker, Judith (1986): "Women and the State in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Egypt: Insurrectionary Women", in: *Middle East Report*, no. 138

Weber, Anne Françoise (2001): *Staatsfeminismus und autonome Frauenbewegungen in Tunesien*. Hamburg: Deutsches Orient- Institut (ed.) Vol. 62

Weber, Charlotte (2001): “Unveiling Scheherazade: Feminist Orientalism in the International Alliance of Women 1911- 1950”, in: *Feminist Studies* Vol 27 (1), pp.125-157

Yuval-Davis, Nira and Anthias, Floya (ed.) (1989): *Woman, Nation, State*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

Zuhur, Sherifa (2003): “Women and empowerment in the Arab world”, in: *Arab Studies Quarterly*, pp.1-22

### **Online Publications**

Arfaoui, Khadija (2012): “The Arab Spring and the Political Empowerment of Women” in: *Equality Now*, retrieved from: <http://khedija.blog.fr/2012/05/02/the-arab-spring-and-the-political-empowerment-of-women-13611957/> (21.11.2012)

Cardoville, Veronica (2013): “The new draft of the Tunisian constitution under examination by the Observatory for Human Rights”, retrieved from: <http://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/node/9273> (24.04.2013)

Carland, S. / Abdel-Fattah, R. (2010): “Muslim feminists deserve to be heard”, in: *National Times*, online version, on January 28, 2010, retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/muslim-feminists-deserve-to-be-heard-20100127-mywf.html> (07.12.2012)

Ghenima, Sana (2011): “Mobilisation générale pour les droits de la femme”, online under: <http://www.medinapart.com/2012/03/09/mobilisation-generale-pour-les-droits-de-la-femme/> (15.04.2013)

Marquand, R. (2011): “Arab women: This time, the revolution won't leave us behind”, in: *The Christian Science Monitor, March (08)*. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/855841168?accountid=8555> (05.11.2012)

Mhadhbi, Amira (2012): “State feminism in Tunisia: Reading between the lines” in: *Open Democracy*, Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1140132302?accountid=8555> (23.11.2012)

Pal, A. (2011): “The Arab Revolution”, in: *The Progressive*, 75, 8-9. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/863359651?accountid=8555> (05.11.2012)

Piot, Olivier (2011): “De l’indignation à la revolution”, in: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Vol. 2 (2011), p.10/11 Online: <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2011/02/PIOT/20114> (15.05.2012)

Sikand, Yoginder (2011): “Sheeba Aslam Fehmi On Islamic Feminism”, in: *Countercurrents.org*, online: <http://www.countercurrents.org/print.html> (07.12.2012)

