Tampere University

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“WE WANT GLOBAL FREEDOM!”

Ethnographic Observations on Young Lives in Post-Revolution Tunisia

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ABSTRACT

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On December 17th, 2010, the self-immolation of a street vendor named Mohammed Bouazizi sparked nation-wide upheavals in Tunisia. Bouazizi became a symbol of the youth-led protests, also known as the Arab Spring, that later mobilised people from different socioeconomic backgrounds to demand for work, freedom and dignity. After the long-lasting dictatorship of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the people of Tunisia were ready to risk their lives to demand better living conditions. After Ben Ali's regime was dismantled on the 14th of January 2011, especially the youth, who were at the forefront of the demonstrations, had optimistic expectations about the future. However, after the revolution, the state has failed to address the pressing challenges related to the economic situation, general grievances and political predicament. Alongside these issues, the state has failed to engage the youth in politics.

Since the Arab Spring, academics have started to demand that attention should be paid to the youth's realities and living conditions. This study continues that path. At the ten-year anniversary of the events triggering the demonstrations, this thesis provides insights into post-revolution Tunisia in 2020 by examining the lives of a group of Tunisian urban youth. Using ethnographic data collection methods with an emphasis on participatory observation and informal interviews, this thesis scrutinises the social realities of these young informants. The aim of this study is to examine how the young people studied experience the social reality that Tunisia can offer to its young generation, and how the young people talk about their future options.

In the theoretical section, this study defines the category of *youth* and discusses the *youth bulge*, a concept that has controlled the narrative of rapidly developing countries with a large youth population. The *social exclusion* framework provides a context to the multidimensional challenges the youth are facing in Tunisia. Finally, the concept of *waithood* explores the impacts of economic marginalisation and failing social and political policies by focusing on the prolonged transition into adulthood.

The results of this study show that the youth still share a sense of alienation. Many of the youth's daily struggles are connected to economic challenges, which inhibits these young people from experiencing youth and taking steps that are considered part of adulthood. In 2020, the youth were still demanding improvements and opportunities to overcome the sense of global injustice they were experiencing. However, while waiting for improvements, they were also actively searching for ways to manage their lives with the assets they have and trying to live life to the fullest despite their struggles.

Keywords: Tunisia, youth, exclusion, waithood, ethnography, revolution

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tunisiassa joulukuun 17. päivänä vuonna 2010 nuori katukauppias Mohammed Bouazizi sai aluilleen maanlaajuisen levottomuuden sytytettyään itsensä tuleen protestina huonoista elinoloista. Bouazizista tuli symboli etenkin nuorten johtamalle protestille, joka tunnetaan myös nimellä Arabikevät ja johon osallistui myöhemmin ihmisiä erilaisista sosioekonomista taustoista. Ihmiset vaativat työtä, vapautta ja arvostusta. Ihmiset olivat valmiita riskeeraamaan henkensä parempien elinolojen puolesta osoittaessaan mieltään pitkään kestänyttä presidentti Zine El Abidine Ben Alin diktatuuria vastaan. Ben Alin hallinnon romahdettua 14. tammikuuta 2011, etenkin nuorilla, jotka olivat protestien eturintamassa, heräsi toivo paremmasta tulevaisuudesta. Tunisia on kuitenkin epäonnistunut vastaamaan vakaviin taloudellisiin ongelmiin, yleisiin epäkohtiin ja poliittiseen ahdinkoon vallankumouksen jälkeen. Edellä mainittujen ongelmien lisäksi valtio ei ole onnistunut osallistamaan nuoria politiikkaan.

Arabikevään jälkeen tutkijat ovat vaatineet huomiota nuorten elämään ja elinoloihin. Tämä tutkimus jatkaa samalla polulla. Kymmenen vuotta vallankumouksen alulle saaneen tapahtuman jälkeen, tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tarjoaa katsauksen urbaanien tunisialaisnuorten elämään vallankumouksen jälkeisessä yhteiskunnassa vuonna 2020. Nuorten sosiaalisen todellisuuden tarkastelua varten tutkielma hyödyntää etnografista aineistonkeruumenetelmää, johon kuuluu osallistuva havainnointi ja epämuodolliset haastattelut. Tutkielman tutkimuskysymyksinä ovat miten tutkitut nuoret kokevat sosiaalisen todellisuuden, jonka Tunisia voi tarjota nuorille sukupolville, sekä miten nuoret puhuvat tulevaisuuden mahdollisuuksista.

Tutkielman teoreettisessa osuudessa tarkastellaan nuoria kategoriana sekä youth bulge -konseptia, joka on määritellyt keskustelua nopeasti kehittyvissä maissa, joissa on laaja väestö nuoria. Social exclusion -viitekehys tarjoaa kontekstin nuorten kohtaamiin moniuloitteisiin ongelmiin Tunisiassa. Lopuksi, waithood-konsepti tarkastelee taloudellisen marginalisaation ja epäonnistuneiden sosiaalisten ja poliittisten päätösten vaikutusta pitkittyneeseen siirtymään kohti aikuisuutta.

Tämä tutkimus osoittaa, että nuorilla on yhteinen vieraantumisen tunne. Moni nuorten kohtaamista haasteista liittyy taloudellisiin ongelmiin, minkä seurauksena nuoret eivät koe kykenevänsä elämään nuoruutta ja siten siirtymään kohti aikuisuuteen miellettyjä etappeja. Vuonna 2020, nuoret odottivat edelleen parannuksia ja mahdollisuuksia, jotka vähentäisivät kokemusta globaalista epäoikeudenmukaisuudesta. Samalla he kuitenkin etsivät aktiivisesti mekanismeja, joiden avulla päästä yli kohtaamistaan haasteista niiden resurssien varassa, joita heillä on. Haasteista huolimatta nuoret pyrkivät myös nauttimaan elämästä.

Avainsanat: Tunisia, nuoret, syrjäytyminen, waithood-konsepti, etnografia, vallankumous

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1. Introduction

In 2017 I was on a holiday in Tunisia for two weeks. Tunisia is my other home country which I had not visited since childhood. During the holiday, I spent a lot of time with my relative Ali who is some years older than me. In the last days of the holiday, he introduced me to a few of his male friends, Ghazi, Nasri and Hasem who were all in their late twenties. They have lower socioeconomic backgrounds and only a couple of them were working or studying at the time. We met at a café in the main square in the city district of Le Kram. The café was only filled with men and we sat outside on the veranda. There you have an excellent view of the main road, which parts into a few small streets on both sides of the café.

While the young men smoked cigarettes and we enjoyed our warm drinks, the discussion moved from one topic to another. At some point, the discussion shifted to talk about youth opportunities in Tunisia. Despite being approximately the same age and sharing commonalities, as I was also a youth transitioning into adulthood, the way we envisioned the future and what it might entail were seemed different. They told me that life in Tunisia provides young adults with very few opportunities. As the conversation continued, they explained that they experience global injustice, not being able to even dream of having the same opportunities or experiences as young people elsewhere, "Just like you or people in the West*",* they added. While continuing to talk about this topic, Ghazi[1], who seemed highly intelligent yet the most frustrated, said that the only way to be heard in society and impact anything is by setting yourself on fire. He wanted to point out what Mohamed Bouazizi did[2], setting himself on fire after experiencing prolonged frustration and demanding living conditions. Although self-immolations have become a more common form of suicide as a means of protest of political and social demands after the revolution (Jedidi et al. 2017), I thought Ghazi was embellishing his emotions for the sake of conversation. However, as the other men stood behind his comment, I understood that there was a profound sense of despair, which I could not relate to nor fully understand.

After returning to Finland, I thought about this conversation often. At the end of 2019, I was browsing social media platforms when I noticed a few of these young men posting pictures of them cleaning

[1] All names in this research are pseudonyms. See Section 2.3 for more considerations about research confidentiality.
[2] More about these events in the following section.

the streets. Kais Saied, a candidate who received strong support from the young voters, had won the presidential elections in October 2019.[3] During his campaigns, Saied addressed "the will of people" to change local conditions and he encouraged the youth to put forward ideas to change the country. After the elections, cleaning campaigns initiated by the youth took over the country. (Foroudi 2019.) Following the Arab Spring, similar youth-led street cleaning projects arose. In Egypt where the youth cleaned up Tahrir Square and other neighbourhoods, Jessica Winegar (2011) explains that the physical cleanup was a symbolic act to "purify" the old governments, mismanagement, discrimination and corruption and a means to reclaim the public space that had been surveilled by security forces for a long time.

The social media posts about the youth cleaning up the streets seemed to portray a new wave of hope. On the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the Arab Spring, with the conversation from 2017 in mind, I was keen to learn more about the youth's thoughts regarding their lives now and in the future. With the encouraging words and helpful guidance I received from other students in my master's thesis seminar and the instructor Susanne Dahlgren, in February 2020 I arrived in the city of Tunis to carry out anthropological fieldwork on my own to seek answers to this topic.

1.1 Background and objectives

Many people are familiar with the incident of Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old street vendor who set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid, a small rural town in Tunisia's south. Bouazizi was a young man who struggled to make a living. Bouazizi's struggles reached their climax when he was humiliated by a woman officer who took his vendor's permit away and then he was not heard by the officials as he tried to file complaints. Following this, what he did was a radical statement for life under prolonged struggles and humiliation. (Ayeb 2011, 468-470; Babatunde 2015.) As a final cry for dignity and freedom, Bouazizi turned to violence against his own body (Jerad 2013). This event was what sparked the uprising in Tunisia on December 17th, 2010. In the eyes of Tunisians, by giving up his life for these ideals, Bouazizi became a martyr for dignity and freedom. (ibid. 239.) His act became a nationwide catalyst for people from diverse social classes and ages, who wanted to put an end to the long-lasting humiliation and suffering under the dictatorship of Ben Ali, which had closed all places for expression and used terror as a government strategy. (Ayeb 2011; Jerad 2013). In addition, the systematic corruption and the sudden rise in food prices had taken their toll on people (Ayeb 2011).

[3] I will talk about this more in Section 1.3

Especially the young Tunisians identified with Bouazizi, who was a young unemployed graduate seeking dignity, recognition and social and economic security (Ayeb 2011, 471). Young people started to show signs of dissatisfaction, mainly in the state's failure to respond to the needs of the youth (Honwana 2013, 6). At first, the upheavals mobilised people from tiny provincial towns and villages but soon made their way to the capital (Bayat 2017, 116-124). However, the uprising was not limited to only rural parts nor the youth. From the poor to the urban middle class, people with diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, ages and ideologies came to stand together by risking their lives under the immense brutality (Honwana 2013, 4). People chanted in the protest, ordering Ben Ali to leave with the French word *dégage* and the Arabic word *irhal* (Masri & Anderson 2018, 45; Farmanfarmaian 2017; Marzouki & Meddeb 2016). People in Tunisia demanded *shughl*, *hurriyya* and *karama wa-taniyya* (work, freedom, national dignity) (Dihstelhoff 2018, 3; Jerad 2013, 239). Ahmed Jdey (2012, 71) believes Bouazizi fueled the hopes of the Tunisian people, because his actions were motivated by a "philosophy of life": dignity, freedom, and human rights People called for civil liberties, work as well as socioeconomic and political changes, improvements to poor living conditions and the end of police abuse in the face of prevalent hopelessness and inequality (Dihstelhoff 2018; Mulderig 2013, 2). The focus soon shifted from civil liberties and socioeconomic reform to a social movement standing for a regime change (Honwana 2013, 4).

It has been said that one source of inspiration for the uprising was the just over thirty pages booklet from Stéphane Hessel (2010) titled *Indignez-vous!* (A Time for Outrage!). In the booklet, Hessel encourages the present youth to feel angry about the wrong making and to take back their rights and liberties. By the example of Palestinians, Hessel encourages non-violent resistance. (as cited in Glass 2011; Dahlgren 2012.) In addition, a few weeks before Bouazizi's self-immolation, a WikiLeaks document was spread, revealing the widespread corruption and nepotism of the ruling President Ben Ali (Harrelson-Stephens & Callaway 2014). The document contained an online rationale for the revolution, which was spread and consumed by millions of Tunisians (Bachrach 2011). Many of the topics Hessel and the Wikileaks document discuss were raised during the uprisings, but as Dahlgren (2012) reminds, the most important one was to regain a sense of dignity (*karama* in Arabic), a significant condition for the ability to be and to do (Ayeb 2011, 467), and a leading mantra for change (Farmanfarmaian 2017, 1044).

Nabiha Jerad (2013, 234-238) highlights that the revolution in Tunisia should firstly be known as a linguistic event that broke the barrier of fear and censorship when people were expressing their hate

of the regime openly. The revolution had a pacifistic nature as the youth, who was the main engine for driving the uprising, brought down a dictatorship without the use of weapons (ibid.). However, brutalities arose between the youth and the police. Young cyber activists spread brutality towards the unarmed protestors by tracking the protestors and hacking private social media accounts. The internet was an important tool for the mobilisation and communication of young people, but it also placed people at risk as the government officials were able to monitor the protestors. (Honwana 2013.) When these violent responses spread not only nationally but also internationally, it worked as a catalyst for the protest to expand from a localised group of youths resisting poor living conditions into a national uprising (International Crisis Group 2011, i). The revolution provided a sense of empowerment that drove the citizens' demands forward. Young people provided the backbone for the mass protests and had a fundamental role in ending the dictatorship of Ben Ali (Dihstelhoff 2018.) The state's efforts to repress the protestors failed, and in less than a month the protests dismantled a regime that had been in place for 23 years (Babatunde 2015, 110).

The events of Tunisia did not just initiate nationwide anger. It also inspired the youth in other Arab countries to revolt against autocratic repression by risking their own lives and safety. In the aftermath of the Tunisian uprising, revolutions overthrew dictatorial regimes also elsewhere. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak was overthrown, and in Libya the youth joined insurgents to defeat the forces of Muammar Gaddafi, who was later killed. (Honwana 2013; Mulderig 2013.) Several names have been given to the uprising in Tunisia. The narratives on reporting on the events contribute to the comprehension of the uprisings and the terms used to shape the knowledge production about the Arab world (Labidi 2019). Amongst the first names given to the uprising were Twitter Revolution and The Result of WikiLeaks, both of which credited Western technology as empowering tools for mobilisation and political activism (Beaumont 2011, as cited in Labidi 2019, 451). The Western media and states also adopted terms such as the Arab Spring and the Jasmine Revolution (Labidi 2019; Chaabani 2017). Tunisians were not fond of the name Jasmine Revolution, inspired by the fragrant national flower of Tunisia, a name that was given in France and soon adopted by the Western press (Noueihed & Warren 2012, 65; Labidi 2019; 459).

Imed Labidi (2019, 453-454) believes the terms used in the Western context obfuscate the goals of the revolution, downplay the severity of the challenges faced and downplay the courage ordinary people had when daring to resist well-armed national security services. However, a more common term used amongst Arabs has been the term *karama* as a reference to the fight for dignity (Dalgren 2012). Tunisians preferred to refer to the events as *Thawrat al-Karama* (the Dignity Revolution) or

Thawrat al-Shabab (the Shabab Revolution) (the Youth Revolution) (Jaouad 2011). Because of the unequal development policies focusing on the northern parts, tourist zones, coastal cities, and especially the regions that did not provide their citizens employment or opportunities before the revolution, Habib Ayeb (2011) prefers the term *alfa grass revolution.* The term Ayeb uses puts the focus on the direct cause of the revolution as the geographical, economic, social, and political marginalization of one part of the country, the poor South, in comparison to the wealthy North, as he explains. Nevertheless, the youth I met during the field trip, preferred to use the terms *uprising* and *revolution*, and sometimes the Arab Spring. Many contested the word *revolution* due to the post-revolution results. "How can you call it a revolution if nothing changed?", one informant once asked me. It is hard to choose a correct term that captures the complexity of the events and does not dismiss the events. For these reasons, I chose to use the terms revolution, uprising and the Arab Spring in this thesis.

Bouazizi's act was a catalyst that led to the liberation of the Tunisian people from fear and dictatorship (Ayeb 2011, 470). After the revolution, especially the youth had optimistic expectations. A more open political space emerged after Tunisia held their first free elections since independence (Babatunde 2015). However, since the revolution, the political sphere has been scattered, it has lacked leadership as well as organised rebuilding and the state has produced weak governments unable to address the pressing challenges of the revolution. In addition, the expectations for improved living conditions have not been met (Dihstelhoff 2018; Robbins 2016; Honwana 2013, 8-9). According to Asef Bayat (2013, 107) a consideration of youth experiences in the Muslim Middle East, "where moral and political authority imposes a high degree of social control over the young", might provide important information about youth. Certainly, the Arab Spring generated research focusing on the living conditions of youth, and now many authors are demanding attention to youth's realities[4]. Post-revolution studies have given important insights, for example, on the subjective experiences of youth living in marginality (see Honwana 2013; Mulderig 2013). However, to a great extent, studies considering Tunisia focus on political or economic changes, not on the youth's daily lives. For a complete understanding, both approaches are needed. In saying that, this research, which is based on anthropological fieldwork, will contribute to the latter by providing ethnographic observations of the lives of Tunisian urban youth in 2020. Because this research explores the lives of a small group of young adults living in the capital area, it should not be generalised to cover the entire youth population in Tunis or the whole nation. The research questions for this thesis are the following:

[4] See Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera (2010) *Being Young and Muslim* for an excellent collection of articles from different authors discussing topics related to Muslim youth.

1. How do the young people studied experience the social reality that Tunisia can offer to its young generation?
2. How do the young people talk about their future possibilities?

I approach these research questions through a broader socioeconomic and political context, with the guidance of existing academic knowledge, focusing especially on the post-revolution societies in the MENA[5] region. This thesis starts with framing the topic. In Chapter 1, I familiarise the reader with the main events in pre- and post-revolution Tunisia and the characteristics of youth studies. In Chapter 2, I discuss the practicalities of conducting ethnographic fieldwork. Methodologically this research is based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews, which play an important part in data collection. The theoretical background is multidisciplinary, as I have drawn knowledge from different fields of Social Sciences to Political and Economic studies. In Chapter 3, I define the category of youth and discuss the youth bulge in the Tunisian context. Then I move on to examine the life of young Tunisians with the help of the social exclusion framework. Finally, I explore the transition to adulthood and discuss the concept of waithood. Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to analysing the field data. In Chapter 4, the focus is on the struggles that challenge the youth's daily lives in 2020. Here, the social exclusion framework helps to understand the multidimensional disadvantages the youth are struggling with. This section sets the base for Chapter 5, where I explore how the youth talk about their futures. The final Chapter 6 is where I draw conclusions and discuss further questions that remain unanswered.

1.2 A brief introduction to Tunisia

Regarding ancestry, Tunisians are not homogeneous. Tunisia is a coastal country in North Africa, located by the Mediterranean Sea and situated in a strategically favourable location to the ancient conquerors with easy access to Sahara. Modern Tunisians are descendants of numerous civilisations, including Carthaginian, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Berberbs and French colonies, that invaded and assimilated into Tunisia throughout centuries until the independence of Tunisia in 1956. (Honwana 2013.) Notably, many Tunisians identify themselves as Arabs, but the term in the Tunisian context easily overlooks the complexity of the colourful past of Tunisia by disregarding ethnic and religious minorities (Gelvin 2012). Modern histories have produced a homogenous Arab identity, which does

[5] The Middle East and North Africa is commonly abbreviated as MENA.

not consider distinct ethnic groups, races, or religions. The joint Arab identity exists in the sense of shared experiences and history, but the term Arab alone does not provide any accurate explanations about identity due to the varying geographic characteristics. (Masri & Anderson 2018.) Although the predominant language is Arabic, Tunisian colloquial *Tounsi* stands apart from the other Arab dialects such as Levantine Arabic as Tounsi is influenced by French (Gabsi 2020, 2; Masri & Anderson 2018, 48).

When it comes to religion, most people in Tunisia are Sunni Muslims but there are small minorities of Christians and Jews among other religious minorities (Masri & Anderson 2018; Honwana 2012, 10; Quattrini 2018). There are four dominant Sunni schools of law that dominate the Sunni tradition, all of which have different scholastic interpretations. The Maliki school dominates the Maghrib region to which Tunisia belongs. (Charrad 2001.) Due to the colourful socio-culture and history shaping Tunisia's past, Zouhir Gabsi (2020, 1-2) believes that Tunisians often place themselves somewhere between Islamic heritage, their Northern African characteristics, and a nation overlooking to the European continent, in search of recognition as a modern Arab State. President Habib Bourguiba who achieved independence from France in 1956, shaped the Tunisian identity towards Western influences, especially French culture. Since the revolution in 2011, when Ben Ali's regime fell, Sami Zemni (2016, 132) believes that especially the post-revolution increased the political fragmentation and raised issues regarding who the Tunisian people are?

When it comes to the youth's cultural tradition, Gabsi however argues that:

> Tunisian youths currently in their 20s know almost nothing about Bourguiba's pre-colonial beginnings and ascension to power history, except for what they hear on the occasional TV debates or from their parents or grandparents. Transmitted mainly through oral history and various TV programmes and social media some Tunisian youth have a nostalgia for the past; they ache for the early cultural traditions and customs. (Gabsi 2020, 2)

During one conversation with a few young adults about Tunisian identity, I was reminded that:

> Tunisians are not even Arabs. Our bloodline comes from the ottomans. We are a mix of the Middle East, Europe, Spanish, the Ottomans and France. When Muslims invaded Tunisia,

> they wanted people to adopt the Islamic traditions and faith. Tunisia is a tiny country that people misunderstand. People from elsewhere think that we are undeveloped people who ride camels. Tunisia is a country that wants to keep up with the global world.

In the same instance, I was also told that: "The African countries think Tunisians are ashamed of their African roots. Indeed, some Tunisians do think like that. But Japanese people maintain their culture; why should we neglect ours? " The complex multi-ethnic past of Tunisia puzzles the youth when talking about their identity, and it also makes it difficult to choose correct terminology when discussing Tunisian youth. Due to the colourful political, linguistics, cultural, historical and religious influences, even the youth agreed that all different terms suit them equivalently. Therefore, I balance the terms Arab, African, and Middle Eastern.

1.3 Pre- and post-revolution transitions

President Bourguiba's one-party regime ruled Tunisia for more than 30 years after the country obtained independence from France in 1956. Bourguiba's regime initiated economic developments and reforms within public education. Women gained more rights when the Personal Status Code was adopted in 1956, legalizing divorce and promoting gender equality in inheritance rights. Later it authorised abortion and gave free access to contraception. Along with the reforms, Bourguiba aimed to break the feudal, tribal and religious dynamics that he thought were preventing the development of the country. Under his rule, the role of traditional Islam in the state was changed and religion became controlled in the public sphere. As a consequence, for example, the tradition of public religious education in Tunisia was ended. (Louden 2015; Masri & Anderson 2018; Fraihat 2016; Mahmoud & Súilleabháin 2020; Honwana 2013; Andrieu 2016.)

Bourguiba's regime was progressive, especially considering women. He established a nationwide women's organisation (the Union National de la Femme Tunisienne), although Tunisian feminist scholars argue that there was not an autonomous feminist movement until the 1980s. At that time, a left-wing women's feminist club (Club d'Études de la Condition des Femmes / Centre for the Study of the Condition of Women) was formed alongside the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD, formed in 1985 and legalised in 1989) that dedicated combatting all forms of discrimination against women. The progressive women's organisations already had a difficult relationship

with the regime, but under Ben Ali who ruled after Bourguiba, the state started to put more restrictions on their freedom of expression and association. (Honwana 2013, 170-172.)

Since its independence from France, Tunisia's modernization has been marked by public persecution of Islam and political state-led secular social changes (Labidi 2019). In 1987, Bourguiba's prime minister Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali seized the presidency from Bourguiba. Ben Ali continued with the economic developments and instituted reforms that improved Tunisia's economic growth. In addition, he continued the pro-Western foreign policy initiated by Bourghuiba, and also worked to strengthen the ties to the Arab Muslim world. (Honwana 2013; 16-17; Fraihat 2016, 58-62.) In 1989, a few years after Ben Ali's rise to the presidency wishes for a legitimate multi-party system in Tunisia seemed probable when thousands of imprisoned Islamist Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI) activists were released (Louden 2015). The members of MTI named themselves Ennahda (in Arabic *Al-Nahda*, also known as the Renaissance party). By dispelling the Islamic reference in the name, they tried to gain formal recognition from the state. (Mansouri & Armillei 2016, 157). However, as Mehdi Mabrouk 2012, 57) highlights, Ennahda's political opposition to the state infuriated the ruling government, which had no other option but to eliminate its Islamic opponents (as cited in Louden 2015, 7). Ben Ali silenced any political opposition and outlawed Ennahdha (Honwana 2013; 16-17). This gave a spark to the de-Islamization process which targeted books, newspapers, education and mass media. These measures violated fundamental human rights, for example, by prohibiting the wearing of traditional head coverings or the growing of beards. (Louden 2015, 7).

The government dissolved during the protests in 2010-2011, and Ben Ali went into exile in Saudi Arabia on the 14th of January 2011 (Fraihat 2016; Honwana 2013). In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, social stability and state authority broke down and the strict supervision over the religious sphere collapsed, opening an unregulated and public religious sphere (Donker & Netterstrøm 2017,12-13). Following the revolution, people had differing viewpoints when it came to power relations. During the political transition, one big debate, particularly amongst the secular and religious views, was the role and function of Islam in the new political system. Tunisia was accompanied by an interim government until the first free parliamentary elections on the 23rd of October 2011. Ennahda, a moderate Islamist party, won the parliamentary elections with 89 seats from 217 seats and formed a coalition government with two secular parties. (Grami 2014, 391-392; Masri & Anderson 2018; Zemni 2016; Honwana 2013.)

During the following two years, the government confronted challenges with the growing tensions between the Islamist and secular parties, and the attempts to answer people's demands (Masri & Anderson 2018; Zemni 2016; Abouaoun 2019). Ennahda gradually lost popularity as it was accused of trying to Islamise the country by trying to introduce laws and amendments which were considered a setback by the secularists. Ennahda promoted language that would describe Islam as the state religion, which then would have given room for Islamic Shari'a law and the criminalization of blasphemy for instance. (Masri & Anderson 2018, 59-60.) However, the propositions were rejected by protests and the political opposition including civil society actors, lawyers and politicians (ibid.). Ennahda also suggested reconsidering some of the clauses of the Personal Status Code that were perceived contradictory to Islam. Following Ennahda's political direction, the whole society debated the issue of women's rights. (Giulia 2014.) The Tunisian women activists following the debates defended women's rights to safeguard their fundamental rights and freedoms (Giulia 2014; Honwana 2013, 172-173).

By the end of 2013, the power was handed to an interim government that organised new elections where the secular parties won the Islamists. Later, the head of Nidaa Tounes and a former prime minister Mohamed Beji Caïd Essebsi was elected president in December 2014 in the first free presidential elections. However, the turnout for young voters was visibly low. (Masri & Anderson 2018; Zemni 2016.) Tunisia's democratic journey has been fraught with challenges since Ben Ali's downfall (Neo 2019). After the revolution in 2011 and before the death of Ben Ali and Essebsi in 2019, terrorist attacks, widespread protests regarding general grievances, economic problems, political turmoil, and clashes between secularists and Islamists have challenged Tunisia. (Mahmoud & Súilleabháin 2020; Melek 2019.)

Post-revolution Tunisia witnessed a quest for a visible religious culture. Amel Grami (2014, 392-393) discusses the new discourses, practices, styles, preaching and even public communal prayers that took place in Tunisia. There was a rise in religious nursery schools and Qur'anic associations and a significant increase in the sales of religious books. Via religious satellite channels, radical preachers coming from other Arab countries such as Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia called for a radical change both in the social and political sphere. (ibid.) Grami argues that these preachers, who presented themselves as "agents of change", encouraged people to follow a form of radical Islam that encourages female circumcision and veiling young girls. In addition, these preachers were urging Islamists to fight secularists and purify the country from "unbelievers", as Grami states. (ibid. 393.)

Dihstelhoff (2018) shows, from a survey of almost a thousand young Tunisians, that almost over a half [6] considered growing violence an important issue after the revolution and many perceive the revolution as responsible for increasing safety-related concerns. Since the revolution, jihadism has posed a threat to the country's survival (Neo 2019). Oussama Romdhani (2015, 62) believes that the issue with extremism lies in the pardoning of hundreds of prisoners, some of whom were extreme Islamists, that were released into the unstable political sphere. Ric Neo (2019) explains that the Arab Spring created a "vacuum" in which local and international jihadi groups could recruit new members, increase their area of political and geographical influence, and develop their extremist ideologies (ibid. 96). Perhaps the most shocking incidents were the attacks in 2015 at the Bardo National Museum on the 18th of March and a shooting at a tourist resort in Sousse on the 26th of June with several fatalities, that ISIS later claimed responsibility for (Neo 2019). The state's failed attempt to create sufficient jobs for the young population, including university graduates, has had its impact. Due to their sense of marginalisation and poverty, the youth in particular, have been vulnerable to the recruitment of jihadists. (Romdhani 2015.) Neo (2019, 96) however reminds that the issue of jihadi extremism is complex and it should be discussed in consideration of the sociohistorical, political and economic circumstances.

The versatile issues and urgent topics that needed to be addressed, such as the dispute over the narratives and interpretations of the revolution which then attributed to the dissent between people, were forgotten in the post-revolution environment (Boutieri 2021, 64-65; Marzouki & Meddeb 2016). The government's attempts to engage the youth in politics after the revolution have been limited (Masri & Andersen 2018, 54). After the revolution, the young population was mostly forgotten, although a few young Tunisians were asked to join the established governmental bodies (Honwana 2013). The ones who were asked to join were the middle-class cyber activists who had gained international visibility during the uprising. Some young Tunisians saw these acts as a genuine attempt to listen to the concerns of the youth. However, the participation of these young Tunisians mostly offered legitimacy to the institutions although the young activists were not directly linked to the revolutionary movement. (ibid., 103.) Alcinda Honwana's informant Aïcha, a 24-year-old woman from Nabeul, raised an important question considering the post-revolutionary transition:

[6] Survey collected in 2015-2017 amongst approximately a thousand Tunisians between ages of 16 and 30 years.

> Where is the youth in this transition process? What I see is the absence of the younger generation from the interim government … They put a new young Secretary of State for Youth as if young people can only deal with youth stuff, which I find quite patronising … Young people were in the forefront of this revolution but today they have been put aside. It is the older generation that is in the government and busy creating political parties. (Honwana 2013, 109)

Safwan Masri and Lisa Andersen (2018, 54-55) argue that the youth were lacking a common vision, which did not help when bringing the youth's demands forward. The young population agreed on what they rejected, but not on what they wanted, causing dispersions in priorities (ibid.). It has been argued that the post-revolution governments have failed to grasp the issues of high unemployment rate and regional economic inequalities (Boukhars 2017). The old elites have preserved their status, leaving the revolutionaries discouraged (Bayat 2017, 221), deepening the youths' frustrations and political alienation (Boukhars 2017, 266). In addition, the young have shown concerns about the political sphere after the revolution. Honwana's (2013, 112) young informant Zeinab, from Tunis, was fearful that people who are forming the new political parties view the situation as an opportunity for their personal gain.

In 2019, parliamentary and presidential elections took place following Essebsi's death. On the 13th of October 2019, Kais Saied, a retired constitutional law professor with no established political affiliation, won his opponent Nabil Karoui with 72.71% of the votes, with large support from young voters. Saied relied on his circle of student supporters to spread his campaign on social media. His campaign strategy included one-on-one contact and field visits to different regions, he was unaccompanied by his staff in his small meetings in cafés and refused to accept the public money to which he was entitled. In addition, he welcomed young people who had travelled hundreds of miles from impoverished areas to meet him at his palace. Saied was able to calm the anger of young people who felt misled by the post-revolutionary developments. (Mansouri 2022; Gabsi 2020,3; Jawad 2019; Aljazeera 2019.) Yet, during the fieldwork in early 2020, it was still unclear what concrete changes Saied would bring with him.

2. Ethnographic methods

In the following sections, I will describe the research methodology of this thesis. I will look closely at ethnography as a data collection method and discuss the practical challenges of both doing and writing ethnography. From its early days, ethnography has been both empirical research and a form of critical theoretical practice, the very backbone of anthropology (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007, 166). Ethnography is not only a research method but also a methodological approach in the broader context of qualitative research (Watt & Scott-Jones 2010,10; Sluka & Robben 2007) in which the studied phenomenon is understood as part of a larger sociocultural context (Huttunen & Homanen 2017; Cerwonka & Malkki 2007).

Ethnographic knowledge is constructed by the facts and data from the field, construed in a specific time and place (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007). It is about making observations and providing meanings and explanations to the details, especially those that initially might not make sense in the context (Ladner 2014). The anthropological truth has been said to lie in the participant-observer experience where the researcher acquires first-hand knowledge of the researched environment and people's social worlds (Gupta & Ferguson 1997, 15; Emerson et al. 2001). Anthropology, at its best, succeeds in distinguishing the objectified challenges of different concepts in their geographic, social and political circumstances on a micro and macro level, allowing it to penetrate through institutions and structures which might threaten the analysis by focusing on the actions and relationships of people who are affected (Amit 2000, 15-16). Ethnography has received criticism for unreliability and lack of generalisability (Hammersley 2019)[7]. With the criticism in mind, I will discuss reflexivity and the problematics of situatedness by providing examples from the field. This thesis does not intend to provide generalising truths but a rich and detailed ethnographic description of the life of urban young Tunisians by suggesting meanings to the research questions by critically presenting relevant details through a reflexive lens.

2.1 On becoming a "real" anthropologist

Participant observation during fieldwork is the primary method to collect data in the anthropological discipline (Watt & Scott-Jones 2010, 10; Sluka & Robben 2007). Fieldwork represents the main activity of an anthropologist, and is often perceived as a symbolic passage to professionalism (Sluka &

[7] Martyn Hammersley (2019) talks about the criticism ethnomethodologists have made against conventional forms of ethnography.

Robben 2007). In the familiar portrait of fieldwork, an ethnographer conducts a long-term study in a community, exploring deeply rooted practices within the community (Ladner 2014; Caputo 2000), preferably away from home (Gupta & Ferguson 1997). The duration of fieldwork for this study was three weeks. I arrived in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, in February 2020. I chose to conduct my fieldwork in Tunis, the largest city in the country with almost 700,000 citizens because I had visited the city previously and had some relatives there who could help me if I had any issues. In addition, Tunis was where I met the young men in 2017, who were the origin of my inspiration to conduct a study focusing on Tunisian youth.

Before the fieldwork, I was concerned about the language barrier. Based on my former experience travelling to Tunis, I knew that some young people could speak English in the capital region. However, I was aware that not being able to speak Arabic or French will have an impact on my study. The issues I was most concerned about were the possible limitations regarding whom I could speak to and share a mutual language as well as how to handle daily practicalities or any possible challenges in places where people did not speak English. In addition, I was aware that travelling alone as a female and somewhat wealthier than many locals could create an obstacle to entering certain domains for security reasons (dark alleys and remote locations).[8] During the fieldwork, everything went smoothly and I managed without concerns of the language used. Most young people I encountered knew how to speak English and their peers to whom I was introduced either spoke English or then the other young people in the group helped to translate. However, because not all informants were able to communicate with me in their native language, I believe perhaps the stories and explanations would have had a different tone in Arabic than in English.

The fieldwork was carried out in urban settings. One location of fieldwork was Le Kram, a suburb in Tunis located by the ocean, where I stayed at an acquaintance's apartment. Le Kram is considered a poorer suburb in Tunis, next to the wealthier areas like Carthage, where the presidential palace is situated, and Sidi Bou Said, a picturesque tourist destination. Le Kram is a mix of impressive seaside households next to ramshackle buildings (see pictures 1 and 2 below). It is known for the socioeconomic diversity in both streetscape and people. During the revolution, Le Kram was a culmination of juxtaposition: upper-class people travelled from the northern suburbs of Tunis to protest with the poor (Ayeb 2011, 476). Post-revolution, it has been said to be the focal place for protests amongst wealthier participants (ibid.).

[8] I will discuss more about some of the issues I had with safety in the analysis Chapters 4.

Picture 1: Suburban Le Kram.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

Picture 2: Housing near the beachfront of Le Kram.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

Other areas where I spent relatively many hours during the fieldwork were the nearby neighbourhoods of Le Kram as well as the city centre and its surroundings. Alone and with my informants, I visited both local cafés and tourist hotspots in Sidi Bou Said (see picture 3 below), a tourist attraction known for its picture-perfect white buildings with sky-blue doors, the coastal town of La Marsa, with its modern cafés, shopping centres and exclusive hotels by the sea, and Gammarth, a night-time hub. My main informant Amal had a major role in showing me the city centre and exploring Medina, a labyrinth-like historic quarter founded in 698 CE that used to be one of the greatest cities in the Arab world, where you can find *souks*[9], (see picture 4 below), residential quarters and monuments (Masri & Anderson 2018, xxix).

Picture 3: A café and a souvenir shop in Sidi Bou Said.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

[9] The souks in Tunis Medina (old town) are traditional shopping districts/marketplaces. The informants also used the term souk to talk about Medina in general.

Picture 4: A souk in Medina.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

The concept of the field grows constantly as new "places" are discovered (Sluka 2007, 2-3). The field is a place of anthropological imagination where social relationships and human context is found (Knowles 2000, 54-55; Sluka 2007, 2-3). In this research setting, the field consists of the youth's social world in a particular time and place. I got my entrance to the social world when I met Mariem at a newly built gym near Le Kram in the gym's dressing room. The gym locker where she stored her clothes was near mine, so it was natural to start a conversation with her. I recall being surprised when Mariem, who is a *muhajjaba*[10], was exercising at such a modern gym, where most of the customers were men and unveiled women. While she changed her workout gear, dark gym pants and a loose shirt, to a fresh pair of clothes, I introduced myself. She spoke good English and she seemed well educated judging by her good grammar and vocabulary. I told her I was in Tunisia to collect data for my master's thesis. She was surprised that I chose to conduct a study in Tunisia. She was keen to know whether I chose Tunisia myself or if I was assigned to do so. At the end of the conversation, I asked if she was free for a meeting some evening after her work. She hesitated before answering. Seemingly uncomfortable with the suggestion, she told me it is not safe for women to meet when it is dark.[11] She did not continue explaining why, instead, she asked if I was free at lunchtime. Later that day, I texted through a social media app, and we agreed to meet the next day for lunch with her work colleagues.

Before meeting Mariem, I had been walking around randomly on the streets and making observations of the surroundings. I had only succeeded in having a few brief conversations with a couple of young men. I learned quickly that the youth studied or worked during the days, and in the evenings, they went either home or gathered with their friends in local cafés. Le Kram was not the most fruitful place to spend time as it seems that most local youths headed to the wealthier and "safer" neighbouring suburbs like Sidi Bou Said and La Marsa during the evenings after finishing work or school. On the same day when I met Mariem, on my way home from the gym, I stopped at a café next to a gas station, hoping to find something to eat. To my surprise, the café was full of well dressed young adults. I had not seen so many young men and women in the same place, sitting side by side in groups, smoking cigarettes and laughing together. I was exhilarated because I had not seen so many potential informants before this day.

[10] Muhajjaba is a term used to describe a woman who wears a hijab/veil.
[11] I will discuss safety in more detail in Sections 4.3 and 4.4.

The air at the café was thick with smoke and modern music was playing loudly on TV, covering the noises of the various conversations around me. I walked to the counter to order some food, but the barista did not speak English. A girl at the counter leaned over, saying she could help to translate. During our short small-talk, I told her that I was in Tunisia for my research. I learned later that this was the sentence that quickly separated people to those who wanted to help and take part in the research and the ones who did not want to get involved or who did not feel comfortable speaking English. At first, this woman said she could help, but then immediately turned around and looked away. In addition to being extremely hungry and not getting food from the café, I also felt uncomfortable staying in the café because I felt like an outsider.

The next day, I returned to the café at lunchtime before meeting Mariem. On the way to the café, a man followed me on his bike. His appearance was messy, and he seemed to bike around without a clear purpose. Despite being on a relatively busy road, the man kept biking closer and repeatedly said something in Arabic. A common phrase used both in my family and that I have heard in Tunisia for commanding someone to stop is "Yezi âdd" (Enough now/please)[12]. The phrase seemed to have caught him by surprise. His face was full of confusion as he glanced at me one more time and then quickly biked away. I saw him a few times later during my fieldwork, but he did not even come close. I took my phone out to text a friend a few minutes later. I had the phone in my hands for less than a minute when an older woman stopped me. She was trying to explain something quite intensely. I did not understand what was on her mind until she gestured to hide my phone. I wondered if she had noticed the man who had harassed me previously. Finally, I arrived at the café from the previous day. Again, the café was full of young adults and I felt uncomfortable. I soon realised it was just the stressful situation that made me feel out of place. I was still practising how to do fieldwork. I ordered a coffee and went to sit at a table next to the window to observe people. I took my pink notebook out and started to make some notes. I hoped this would catch someone's attention and perhaps help to start a conversation. When a group of three young men sat next to me, I started a conversation with them by asking for a light for a cigarette. Because it was too loud to hear from a distance, the men pulled their chairs around my table and leaned over towards me.

Hamed and Mone did most of the talking, while Zanir stayed quiet. The young men were in their 20s, well dressed and judging by their appearance seemed wealthier than people I usually saw in and near

[12] This is a phrase I have learned in my family to tell someone to stop in *Tounsi*. My relative Bilel has helped me with both providing a meaning to the word and translating it to the Latin alphabet.

Le Kram. They were extremely polite and friendly. Hamed and Mone spoke good English, but Zanir did not talk much. I told almost immediately that I was conducting a study in Tunisia for my thesis. They were happy to help me and did not mind that I took notes in my notebook. I asked a few questions about their lives and their backgrounds. During the short conversation, Hamed and Mone told me that they live together and study at the university nearby. Their families live near Monastir, where life compared to Tunis is more "relaxed and free". Their families are highly educated. Hamed specified that his father has a doctor's degree, although he did not specify in what field. His father has also lived abroad. They wish to graduate and work abroad at least for a while, earn some money and experience and then return. Both told me they are angry about their lack of opportunities in the future since there are no jobs. They were upset that their families had had more options and opportunities in life in their adulthood. "Now the only option is to work long days with low wages". Unfortunately I had to end the conversation at its peak because I did not want to be late for meeting Mariem. The men promised to help me with anything, and we exchanged numbers: "We are here every day". I met them a few times later as well.

The notebook and the computer that I had carried with me to another café a few days earlier, both seemed useless. I learned that my idea that people would approach me just because I was alone and making observations, was naïve. As Mone and Hamed had said, "Maybe Tunisians are just shy and that is why they do not approach you?" To make new contacts, I had to be active in starting conversations. I met Amal, who became my main informant, in a local shop near Le Kram during my various walks around the neighbourhood. When I was having a stroll around the area, a tiny shop which did not seem to fit in the streetscape caught my attention across the street. It stood out from other ramshackle buildings and tiny kiosks and restaurants in the area. The shop was full of handmade products like wooden watches, hand-decorated leather jackets, organic cosmetics and lamps made of cardboard. The products at the shop were relatively expensive. Amal worked at the shop as a shop assistant. Amal came to assist me and asked with good English if I needed any help. Amal is a muhajjaba. She was wearing a nice pair of jeans, a loose shirt and sneakers. She had intense eye contact and a genuine smile as she spoke. I thought she would be much younger than me because of her round youthful face, but I later learned we were quite similar in age. Immediately she seemed like an easily approachable person. At first, she explained who had designed the various products, how they have been made and what materials have been used. After a while, I told her I was doing research in Tunis. She was intrigued and started asking questions about the research. The more I got to know her, I was impressed by how sincere and helpful she was. The more I spent time with her, the more impressed I got by her ability to laugh at any inconvenience and go beyond hospitality. After a brief talk at the

shop, she told me that she works at the shop most days and invited me to come around. Before I left, she also said she could show me other parts of Tunis. “It is a different vibe where I live”. Little did I know that she would guide me to important people, places and observations.

One contact usually facilitated access to the informant’s peers, creating a snowball effect of meeting new people. The tactic that worked, if such can exist, was to approach people with an open mind. In general, being curious about people, their culture and their lives was the way to gain informants. People were glad to share their stories and to be heard. During the fieldwork, I did not choose any contacts based on the social category of people, although my inability to speak Arabic limited my contacts to people who could communicate in English or who had peers who could speak English. In this study, the youth I talk about are urban young people living in the capital Tunis. They represent both sexes[13] between their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. The youth have different backgrounds and their socioeconomic statuses differ from lower-middle class to higher-middle class. All informants consider themselves Muslims, however, they have varying conceptions of what a Muslim is or should be. The youth whom I met were currently working or studying. For those working, occupations were diverse, from builders to information technology specialists, a few had jobs related to their education.

2.2 From fieldnotes to detailed ethnographic descriptions

For this study, I relied on participant observation that included informal interviews. Participant observation at its most basic form is when the researcher attends events, people’s daily lives and social structures in the context of the study (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 76-77). Informal interviewing as a part of participant observation often reminds a casual conversation between acquaintances. What separates informal interviews from a normal conversation in a non-research setting is that the researcher is interested in answering the research question(s) and knows that fieldnotes will be written. The goal is to participate in naturally unfolding events, observe them and search for insights from the participant’s point of view. (ibid.) Here is where the terms etic (outsider’s viewpoint/a researcher’s perspective) and emic (insider’s viewpoint/informant’s perspective) come under discussion to distinguish the researcher’s standpoint (Pike 2015, 37). By developing these two concepts, Kenneth Pike (1954, 1967) wanted to distinguish a researcher’s point of view in describing behaviour (as cited in Xia 2011, 76-77). Etic and emic lenses do not form a dichotomy, although they portray a topic from two

[13]Without the intention to perpetuate gender stereotypes, I use binary categorisation to men and females as that is how the youth spokeabout themselves and others.

perspectives. (Pike 2015). In this thesis, I have employed etic and emic as two complementary methodological perspectives.

For reliability, an ethnographer needs to explain what was done and how (LeCompte & Goetz 1982, 36). In this study, all my data is from the fieldnotes. Fieldnotes are selective descriptions of the social world which provide the base for future reviewing and studies. Fieldnotes are written memoirs of lived experiences close to the field's proximity. (Emerson et al. 2001, 352-353.) The practicalities of how to write fieldnotes are tied to personal preference. Charlotte Aull Davies (2002, 5) thinks ethnographers should pursue developing forms of research that acknowledge and utilise subjective experience as an intrinsic part of the research. My field diary is a mix of written records of discussions and things I heard and saw, amongst what I learned, sensed and thought. During the fieldwork, I preferred writing my notes at once. However, this was not always possible for example during walks in the souks or in group conversations. During these moments, I wrote notes on the next possible moment. Typically, I wrote the notes in chronological order of the events. I tried to capture the main events, meaningful conversations, essential details of the surroundings and people's backgrounds, and my own emotions and reflections on the encounters. Informal interviews often take place in a form of conversation during daily activities and in a situation with other vital details, which is why recording details might be difficult. However, what is being said and how it becomes a written record should hold as much verbatim conversation as possible. (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 81.)

Ethnographers' interpretations are usually based on former experiences and a result of some existing opinion or judgement (Davies 2002; Watt & Scott-Jones 2010, 108). Considering that, anthropological research based on ethnographic fieldwork provides, at its best, an expressive reality, which cannot be reached through merely native text nor with a reflection of the individual psyche (Davies 2002, 6). At its best, ethnography gives a vivid illustration of cultures in a specific time, place and social setting and fundamentally, ethnographic research gives just one situated perspective of the topic. In ethnographic research, the researcher's positionality is a significant element in knowledge creation because it impacts the data collection process (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007). The social role within the research site affects the information a researcher can obtain. Some ethnographers create no personal relationship as a non-participant observer, while some become close friends with the interlocutors. Both positions mutually provide and limit the knowledge researchers might access. (LeCompte & Goetz 1982.)

I had a beneficial background that facilitated the fieldwork and helped me be accepted in the youth's social circles**.** In many ways, I was a peer to the young Tunisians: a young adult with a familiar cultural background and a student on the verge of transitioning from studies to work. My Tunisian background promoted conversation and understanding of many cultural practices and provided common ground for building rapport. Hamed, who had the habit of asking my opinion about religion, food preferences and values, seemed to define whether I was a "Tunisian" according to my answers. Whenever I expressed similarities with what Tunisians in his opinion would answer, such as by saying that I love spicy food or that I am family-oriented, he became visibly excited and opened up more about his life. With Amal, we often laughed about her "un-Tunisian" preferences such as not liking spicy food, whereas I am very fond of it. As we ate together, she made sure her food was mild, while I had to convince people who heard that I am from Finland that I can manage spicy foods. The fluctuation between my Finnish and Tunisian background became an important element in creating a bond with the informants.

However, with some informants building any kind of bond was difficult. With Mariem, it seemed like my birth country Finland and the role of a researcher were the fundamental elements that defined how she perceived me. During any conversation about Tunisian people, unlike Hamed, she was actively othering me from Tunisians and she was careful how she answered my questions, as if I could cause her or "Tunisians" any harm. Avoiding any harm-doing is a vital consideration a researcher has to take responsibility for. I will discuss the responsibilities of an ethnographer in the following section. Personal interactions are always the primary canvas for ethnographic observations because ethnography is about living and existing in the world. (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007, 178; Amit 2000). Ethnographers cannot detach themselves from the social spaces**.** The personal details produce different situatedness, regulating what one can ask or do. Because an ethnographer works in the field with what they are given, the overall experience affects the fieldwork process. (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007, 177-179.) Self-reflection considering my positionality in the field was very much needed because it also raised ethical concerns, which I will discuss in the following section.

2.3 Ethnographic challenges and ethical considerations

Although I met helpful and kind people and things fell into their places, fieldwork was not always effortless nor easy. I will provide an example with Mariem and her work colleagues. When I met Mariem and her work colleagues Sami, Yesmin and Ahmed, they picked me up in a silver car in front

of the gym. In the car, Mariem explained that we were going to a lunch place where they go every day on their two-hour lunch break. She explained, "First we have lunch there at the pizza place and then we go for a coffee and *shisha*[14] later". Sami (in his mid-thirties) who was driving the car, was their manager. Sami seemed wealthy and owned a tiny but modern car and wore expensive accessories (Rayban sunglasses and a good quality watch). Sami was the most talkative, but Mariem had to help translate most of his comments as he did not speak English very well. Sami seemed to set the terms for the group. He dominated the conversation and he was in charge of when and where they went. During the few times I met this group, Yesmine, who has long shiny black hair and dresses well, said a few comments but mainly followed the conversation. Ahmed, who was always wearing a thick jacket and a dark red baseball cap, only nodded here or there and did not care much about the conversation around him. When I met them, Sami's goal always seemed to be to make me laugh. Sami joked often at Ahmed's expense. He also liked to twist everything I said about Ahmed and make romanticising comments about us two. For example, when I tried to ask if Sami is married, he responded by saying that he is married, and then added "But Ahmed is single". At the same instance, Mariem made a joke by saying that she is together with Ahmed, but then she added that it was just a joke. Ahmed just shook his head or laughed at the jokes. After the first time, I thought the group dynamics were a bit odd. All except Sami seemed quite quiet and reserved.

When I met them another time, Mariem seemed particularly annoyed with me. In addition, the atmosphere amongst the whole group was unpleasant. Nothing was going right at work, Sami explained. Still, Sami tried to keep the mood somewhat uplifted with jokes now and then. They kept switching the language back to *Tounsi* and left me out of the conversations. Not sure if Sami was joking or not, but he said with a smile on his face that Mariem and Ahmed are in love and he also said that Mariem does not like Ahmed talking to me. Mariem looked at Sami with annoyment, and quickly added "No I didn't say that". I sensed that it was somewhat a burden for them to meet an English-speaking stranger during their lunch break. This is probably why they were not so keen to speak English. However, I sensed I was caught in some sort of a love triangle, which had an impact on the sudden change in Mariem's behaviour. She had turned blunt with her answers and refused to translate Sami's comments. This made me understand the difficulties of fieldwork. Despite the intentions of a fieldworker, I cannot have an impact on how others perceive me. By this I want to show that the researcher's

[14] Tunisians use the term *shisha* for smoking flavoured tobacco from a *hookah* (a water pipe). These can be found in many cafés and some restaurants.

position did not guarantee smooth interaction, nor did it separate me from my characteristics (that I am a young woman, who could come in between the possible relationship of Mariem and Ahmed).

Jeffrey Sluka and Antonius Robben (2007, 6) suggest that a successful anthropologist needs many well-developed research skills as well as interpersonal skills such as kindness, patience and endurance. I believe having some of these previously mentioned interpersonal skills helped to balance in the difficult situations on the field. Allaine Cerwonka and Liisa Malkki (2007) talks about using all senses during ethnographic fieldwork. The ability to not just reflect on what was said or done, but also to sense mood changes helped me to recognise, for example, topics that needed to be changed. However, I would not claim that I was always on top of every situation, but I do doubt that by adopting only the formal methods, a set of anthropologist skills would have been incomplete (Sluka & Robben 2007, 6). An anthropologist should be particularly aware of the academic past of the discipline. In the early days of anthropology, anthropologists were relatively wealthy, often white male researchers, without reference to ethics or the issue of power. It was not until the late 1960s that the focus shifted to trying to understand the colonial setting in knowledge production in the interrelation between the native people and the colonisers themselves. This led to a call for reflexivity. (Aull Davies 2002.)

Although I mentioned in the earlier section that I was a peer to the informants, there was an undeniable power structure between us. I was also a student from a rich European country, observing impoverished Tunisia. As Michael Herzfeld (2010, 297-298) highlights, European people are not common subjects of anthropological research, but they are often the ones who do it. Herzfeld also points out that Western societies are rarely studied by non-Western countries. This hierarchy Herzfeld emphasise is linked to a surprising emotion I experienced during fieldwork. I had to learn how to accept not being able to relate to the informant's everyday struggles nor being able to help them in any way. These elements above resulted in guilt of privilege. However, as Tiina Konttinen and Elina Oinas point out (2015, 187-188), despite the painful and unavoidable disparities that might be embedded in the data collection process, acknowledging the desire to do more and dealing with the emotional burden of not being able to do so is an important part of the process.

Like in any other research, doing ethnography raises ethical concerns. The ethics page of the website of the American Anthropological Association has been of significant help when considering ethical

issues in the field.[15] At the core of research ethics is how to treat other people within the research relationship (Konttinen & Oinas 2015, 186). To maintain ethical sensitivity, an ethnographer needs to be aware of what questions can be asked during fieldwork. Ethnographic research should aim for transparency in the research process. A good ethnographer displays their observations critically and reflexively and takes responsibility for the research process, which requires translating languages, cultural aspects, and people's viewpoints. (ibid.) Each observer has some bias in terms of behaviour which impacts the standpoint of the report (Pike 2015, 46). Therefore, critical questions include who we represent in the story, where we fit into the study narrative, and how we place ourselves in relation to our participants' lives?

Fieldwork is about constant movement between previous understanding and new information, which forces us to rethink the whole process of data collection, sense-making and observations critically. Ethnography, like any other form of research, can cause harm to individuals or groups. After observational fieldwork ends, participants might experience feelings of loss, and what is written or left out might harm the people participating. (Murphy & Dingwall 2001.) A researcher's responsibility is to share the results accurately and fairly. To do so, the research must be well executed. When participant observation is the principal method, the researcher must be aware of how to enter a new setting and establish effective relationships in the field. Furthermore, a researcher must be aware of the circumstances and know how and when to take a step back. Finally, the researcher should depart the research environment in such a way that subsequent researchers will find an accepting community. (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 185.) An ethnographer has little control over what people will feel after fieldwork ends, but they can and should try their best to protect the participants from any harm (Murphy & Dingwall 2001).

Most informants encouraged me to ask any questions and to share their stories. Although I did not collect a fill-out consent form due to the spontaneous and informal nature of these meetings, I explained the ethnographic fieldwork research practices and the aim of the study and confirmed the permission to take notes. Many also wanted me to share their pictures. I have tried to respect the young Tunisians' wishes by providing comprehensive context and sharing their thoughts and comments as precisely as they were told without alterations. However, I chose not to use pictures of the young where they could be recognised to avoid any possible harm to the participants. I followed the

[15] To read more about ethical considerations, visit the American Anthropological Association web pages (Ethics and Methods): https://www.americananthro.org/ethics-and-methods

conventions of informant confidentiality and chose to use pseudonyms. I have also changed any personal details that could compromise their anonymity. But in the end, when it comes to research ethics, as Kathleen DeWalt and Billie DeWalt (2011, 196) remind us, the choice of any action ultimately has to be that of the researcher.

3. Theoretical explorations

During the fieldwork, I wanted to explore young adults' lives in post-revolution Tunisia. I was keen to learn about both their struggles and their aspirations in the present society. I quickly noticed during the many conversations I had with the young informants that despite the assets the young might have for a good life and the clear visions about their future, many were struggling to take advantage of the circumstances and to follow their dreams. The most important task for the theoretical discussion is to provide a context for the young Tunisians lives and a standpoint for the analysis. The theoretical premise provides an understanding to the challenges the youth confront in their daily lives and explores the obstacles that are also contributing to the existing frustration and stand in the way for experiencing youth.

The theoretical discussion is divided into three sections. First, I will describe what is meant by the category of youth and examine the much-discussed youth cohort in the Tunisian context. This first section sets the base for the second section, where I introduce the reader to the framework of social exclusion, which provides a multidimensional approach to exploring the disadvantages and structures impacting the youth. The framework helps to encapsulate the inequality and disadvantage elements of macro and micro phenomena (Silver 2007) and considers elements responsible for vulnerabilities facilitating youth exclusion (Gore et al. 1995, 32). In Section 3.3, I explore the concept of waithood. This part aims to illustrate how the consequences of the social, economic, and political struggle might lead to waithood - a suspended adulthood.

3.1 Youth and the youth bulge

Fundamentally, youth is not just about a person's age. The United Nations (2016) categorises *the youth* for statistical purposes as people between ages 15 to 25, while the African Union (2006) consider the delay in the transition to adulthood typical to African societies and defines, youth as those between 15 to 35 years of age. The definition changes under the numerous social, economic, political,

moral, and emotional circumstances (Oinas et al. 2017, 4). *Youth* is most importantly a socially constructed life stage full of transitions (Dhillon & Yousef 2007), a stage defined by social expectations and responsibilities (Honwana 2014, 29), a process of reconfiguring identities (Honwana 2012, 11) and a state of permanent uncertainty, where cultural prerequisites for adulthood are hard to attain (Sommers 2011). Youth is a transitional phase and a liminal stage of becoming - and the youth are a category of people who share the same social experiences (Honwana 2012, 13; Sommers 2011, 3).

Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera (2010) clarify that the youth share undeniably "(. . .) a certain important habitus and historical consciousness that is recognized by both the young themselves as well as by the political establishment and moral authorities" (ibid., 3). Bayat and Herrera do not suggest that any category carries identical experiences, but rather they suggest that just like being a woman, *youth* is a socially constructed category that includes certain time and culture-bound sociopsychological characteristics. In this sense, it is a life stage that describes the social conditions human development carries, where the individual stands between childhood (a stage of vulnerability and need of protection) and adulthood (the time of responsibility), neither dependent nor independent. (ibid., 6.) Following Pierre Bourdieu's idea of *habitus*, Bayat and Herrera believe that the stage of youthfulness consists of a set of tendencies, ways of being, and presenting oneself that are not consciously or rationally selected, but follow a structure related with the biological fact of being young. (ibid., 6-7.)

Uneven population and youth masses have challenged societies from Africa to the Middle East (Honwana 2012; Oinas et al. 2017). In the Arab region, by the 1980s, the population growth rate peaked, and the rapid growth of the population was left without the resources to support them (Murphy 2012, 8). Amongst the Arab population, the term relates to a demographic disproportion of youth. (Murphy 2012.) The theoretical premise of youth bulge builds on the understanding that societies with a large share of youth or a growing young population might suffer from rapidly decreasing economic opportunities, leading to frustration and working as possible catalysts for unrest (Schomaker 2013). Indeed, a large youth population contribute to unique political and economic challenges. The educational system in the Arab world has failed to equip young people for work in the global economy and provide them with employment opportunities. (Murphy 2012, 8).

A desirable demographic structure consists of a larger proportion of working people that supports a smaller number of people in dependency (Golding 2020, 2). The abundance of youth should be an opportunity for better economic and social outcomes due to the large working-age population. However, as Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef highlight (2007, 1-4), that has not been the outcome for

most young people in the Middle East born after the 1980s, and a large scale of young people have fallen out of the system as the education system and the labour market have failed them. The Arab region is now experiencing a dependent and underutilised population, who share a sense of alienation and exclusion (Murphy 2012, 9). Before the revolution, Tunisia had shown positive progress in economic growth and poverty reduction (Mansouri 2022), and the large youth cohort provided the potential for economic growth (Golding 2020). However, like many other countries, Tunisia could not benefit from the demographic potential and struggled with the socioeconomic and political marginalisation and the global recession of the years 2007 and 2008 (Golding 2020, 1).

The dichotomy of ages has a visible impact on young peoples' lives in different spheres, from labour market activities to participation in civic and political processes (Backeberg & Tholen 2018, 515). This creates challenges to the labour market's entrants seeking jobs (Silver 2007) and challenges to authorities to provide human resources (Mansouri 2022). The Tunisian revolution was a clear example of the results when a state fails to respond to youth's needs. Unable to benefit from the demographic structure, the potential of a large youth population turned into a demographic problem, attributing to widespread resistance. As the youth in Tunisia are still facing the same struggles as before the revolution, academics have been pushed to reconsider young people's lived experiences in the context of failing state management and political crises, as well as failed neoliberal policies and global socioeconomic crisis. (Honwana 2012; Dihstelhoff 2018.)

3.2 Excluded youth

Historically, MENA governments traditionally used a welfare state model to pacify their populations. In exchange for social benefits from their governments, people engaged in a trade of governmental repression. However, mismanagement, global recession, and demographic shifts all reduced the states' ability to offer social goods, as discussed in the previous section. Suddenly due to the large youth population, the state was not able to provide adequate social services. (Harrelson-Stephens & Callaway 2014, 421-422.) Before the revolution, the Arab youth struggled with the disadvantages of neoliberalism and the demographic youth bulge, which led to exclusion economically by being unable to secure (good) jobs, politically by the authoritarianism and repression, and socially by being stuck in a limbo of waithood due to the high cost of marriage. (Singerman 2013, 9-10). People protested against the regime, but the state's arrests silenced them (Harrelson-Stephens & Callaway 2014). In Tunisia, the economic struggles slowly created deeper unemployment, inequality, widespread poverty and juxtaposition against the extravagant lifestyle of some (ibid., 421-422). In addition, the high

unemployment rate amongst higher education graduates deepened the existing issues (Jeguirim 2021, 265-266). Youth with tertiary education are now more likely to be unemployed than those with only primary education or none (Ramos 2019).

There is a consensus that the uprising in Tunisia was triggered by a large population of youth who became aware that their generation lived in marginality and an undignified liminal stage of pre-adulthood (Mansouri 2022; Mulderig 2013; Honwana 2013). Frustration at the inability to access the opportunities promised in the social contract of adulthood, such as education, employment, marriage, and family formation, drove youth to the streets to demand a change in their country (Mulderig 2013; Oinas et al. 2017). Current studies (Robbins 2016; Roberts et al. 2017; Masri & Anderson 2018), and the fieldwork conducted for this thesis, support the observation that Tunisian youth are generally dissatisfied with the improvements in Tunisia and that there has been only slow improvement in the issues that were fundamental attributes for the revolution. In particular, high levels of unemployment and weak economic growth continue to challenge the country (Robbins 2016, 4). Although exclusion from economic progress has produced rising inequality and marginalisation patterns over recent decades, youth exclusion is not restricted to only economic difficulties in Tunisia (Oinas et al. 2017).

Exclusion is a multifaceted process that often contains elements of unequal power relationships in various dimensions and levels (e.g economic, political, social, and cultural and individual, household, group, community, country and global). These dimensions and levels create a cycle of exclusion marked by unequal access to resources, capabilities, and rights, which leads to health disparities. (Popay et al. 2008, 2.) *Social exclusion* is a concept of complex disadvantages and deprivation, where people lack access to economic, social, cultural or political arenas (Silver 2007, 15; United Nations 2016). It occurs when people suffer from a combination of linked problems and it can lead to a process of disintegration (Gore et al. 1995, 2; Silver 2007, 15; United Nations 2016). Although social exclusion is often linked to economic grievances such as poverty, socially excluded people might not suffer from poverty but other disadvantages (United Nations 2016).

The concept of social exclusion was popularised in the 1970s in France where it highlighted the occurring process of social disintegration, focusing on the rising long-term unemployment and young people's inability to enter the labour market. This resulted in rising tension, isolation and instability, which seemed to follow as a result of transformations in economic life. (Gore et al. 1995, 1-2.) There is no general agreement on the exact definition of the concept of social exclusion, and the elements that correlate with social exclusion vary across studies (Rodgers 1995). Originally, the concept of

social exclusion was used as a critical tool to understand and alleviate the issues of poverty and deprivation under economic restructures. Nowadays, politicians and policy analysts have adopted the concept due to its descriptive elements for describing and evaluating phenomena. (Gore et al.1995.) Youth around the world face similar issues, particularly in terms of unemployment. In Europe, however, the unskilled have more difficulties in the labour market than the well-educated, whereas in developing countries, even the well-educated are disproportionately unemployed due to a lack of opportunities for their expertise. (Silver 2007, 19; Honwana 2012.) According to Gerry Rodger (1995, 44) the social exclusion framework is a well-suited framework for understanding why and how individuals and groups do not access or benefit from the opportunities provided by the economy and the society. However, Silver (2007,18-19) recommends that the framework should be adjusted to the studied environment, considering the colonial past or evolutionary history, accompanied by the understanding of means of livelihood, social rights, linkages and development patterns, as Rodgers (1995, 45) add.

The social exclusion framework can also be used to examine disadvantages other than poverty. (Chung et al. 2019, 98) as it can help to focus on relations and processes that cause deprivation (Haan 2001, 26). As discussed previously, the most typical elements of exclusion are poverty and unemployment, which are associated with the lack of money or material possession. These elements of exclusion are critical for many reasons. Struggles in the labour market might lead to hardships in accessing resources and forming social identities. (Rodgers 1995, 45-46.) When the youth's employment is based on temporal, non-career jobs and unsatisfactory job vacancies, exclusion from labour markets contains an understanding of precariousness, as the access to safe and permanent jobs becomes restricted (Silver 2007; Rodgers 1995). In general, economic hardships fundamentally impact the means to satisfy a person's basic needs (Rodgers 1995, 45-46). Poor labour market access limits the youth's ability to engage in productive activities and secure their income, ultimately restricting their development and preventing them from achieving the quality of life they desire (Backeberg & Tholen 2018, 517-520). However, Diane Singerman (2013,10) highlights that there is still much to learn about young people's economic burdens and social constraints related to marriage costs. Young people's long-term social and political marginalization is accentuated by unemployment, which increases feelings of dependency, despair, and powerlessness (European Comission 2013). Yet, despite the existing assumption that social exclusion is highly related to economic struggles, Leonie Backeberg and Jochen Tholen (2018) have come to a different conclusion**.** Their study created a social exclusion index to explore the driving forces for youth exclusion in Arab Mediterranean countries.

Among economic, social and political factors, economic exclusion seemed to be the least significant while social and political exclusion had the strongest influence (ibid.).

Active involvement and participation, according to Backeberg and Tholen (2018, 517-520), is a requirement for becoming a fully integrated member of society, encompassing political and civic engagement, electoral participation, and confidence in the country's policymakers. These elements are also essential in avoiding exclusion processes, however, often the right to assembly and expression is weakened when it comes to the excluded (Rodgers 1995, 45-48). Ben Ali's rule in Tunisia imposed significant limits on personal freedoms regarding different areas of life (Harrelson-Stephens & Callaway 2014). Julius Dihstelhoff (2018) shows that the present Tunisian youth still lack confidence as political decision-makers. The young generation does not have access to public or political life, and the public sphere has become increasingly tense with attitudes towards social, private and political questions. Freedom of speech and credible elections have been crucial steps toward Tunisian democracy because these changes managed, at least to some extent, to address socioeconomic inequalities and the participation of youth (Mansouri 2022). Tunisian youth, meanwhile, continue to face structural issues stemming from post-colonial authoritarian regimes. Previous regimes repressed political liberties and exacerbated socioeconomic and geographical disparities, increasing social exclusion and causing political and economic difficulties that continue to shape Tunisia’s terrain and manifest in a deep sense of apathy. (Mansouri 2022, 13.) Social exclusion is a vicious cycle that produces severe and long-term damage to living conditions, emotional life and health, leading to other forms of deprivation (European Comission 2013, 4). Exclusion also influences the identity and self-image of young people, impacting their capacity to fulfil socially sanctioned roles (World Bank 2014, 79).

Many of the Tunisian youth’s dissatisfactions are related to multifaceted issues such as unemployment, denial of political participation, communal tensions in the public domain and issues with security (Dihstelhoff 2018, 14), but also the inability to access opportunities related to adulthood such as employment, causing a delay in marriage and family formation (Mulderig 2013). The social exclusion framework helps to understand what prevents certain groups from fully participating in the normatively prescribed activities they experience (Dhillon & Yousef 2007, 1-3), and it can be a helpful tool for analysing the large-scale mechanisms creating inequality (Rodgers 1995). With a multidimensional approach to the concept of social exclusion, Silver (2007) believes it is possible to explore different types of social disadvantage or group memberships that are linked to economic outcomes and general problems.

3.3 Youth in waiting

According to Honwana (2019), during the Arab spring, young people managed to set up a movement that changed their mindset, making them believe that their actions matter. Nevertheless, after the revolution, young people have struggled to discover means to go beyond street demonstrations, engage actively in politics and governance, and achieve systemic change. (ibid., 10). A major proportion of the Arab youth's expectations and hopes have not been met which has led to low social trust (Gerlach 2016, as cited in Backeberg & Tholen 2018, 531). Young people are struggling to find ways to sustainable livelihoods under the social and economic crisis (Honwana 2014). According to Dhillon and Yousef (2007) youth in the Middle East in the 21st century spends almost eight years in education, followed by several years of unemployment. While waiting for a job or family formation, young people become stuck in an unpredictable life in the transition towards adulthood, lacking a clear sense of the future (ibid). The social markers of adulthood, such as marrying, starting a family and becoming an active and contributing member of society, have become harder to reach, and young Tunisians, as the youth in many other African and Middle Eastern countries, are struggling with a smooth transition into adult life for a more extended period. (Honwana 2013, 10-13; Honwana 2012; Bayat & Herrera 2010.)

The economic marginalisation has given room for concern - without regular work, the youth stay dependent on their families, the state and other welfare programs or charities. The lack of economic independence results in difficulties with forming families and marrying. (Herrera 2010, 128-129.) The high unemployment rate and failed educational, economic, and social policies have substantially influenced young Tunisians' transition from youth to adulthood. (Mansouri 2022, 107), resulting in a stage of what Singerman (2007) and Alcinda Honwana (2012, 4) call *waithood*, a liminal space where the unachievable adulthood leads to a precarious existence. Singerman (2007) describes waithood as a protracted period of transition between childhood and adulthood in material and cultural circumstances. Singerman (2013) identifies four fundamental elements fueling waithood: the large proportion of young people, delayed marriage, youth unemployment and the high costs of marriage. These phenomena have local, global, political, economic, gendered, and social dimensions. (ibid., 10.) As the marital age continues to rise, also the overall youth frustration keeps reaching new levels (Singerman 2007). Maaike Voorhoeve (2014, 37) sees that in Tunisia, when the highly educated are reluctant to accept jobs that are below their educational level, they may remain a financial burden for their parents until over the age of 30. This delays marriage as they do not have the means to support a new family (ibid.).

According to Honwana (2014), who has studied young people in Africa, including Tunisia, waithood is caused by social, economic, and political systems which fail to provide opportunities for young people to live a decent and healthy life, get a good education, find employment, start a family, and actively contribute to society. As Honwana explains, waithood is a precarious condition, a neither-here-nor-there position, where the broken social contract between the state and its people, poor governance, corruption, and lack of opportunities prevent the youth from experiencing overall freedom (ibid., 29-30). When components such as starting a family and having an independent household, work and marriage have been considered fundamental components of adulthood, experiencing a delay in these steps (Silver 2007, 6) means not being able to become independent and gain social recognition as adults (Honwana 2014, 28).

Waithood for men in Africa and the Arab world typically entails the stress of finding stable employment, affording a home and managing the costs of starting a family. (Honwana 2014). For women, marriage and motherhood are delayed due to the men's inability to move beyond waithood (Singerman 2007; Honwana 2014). The marks of the transition period vary between different cultures (Russell et al. l., 2005). For example, the sense of autonomy might be more pivotal for Western youth than youth elsewhere (Brown & Larson 2012, 2). Families also influence whether childhood or youth is accelerated or prolonged by supporting young people's varying life stages (Kovacheva et al. 2017). Waithood also manifests differently among privileged and poor youth. The privileged might choose to avoid the responsibility of adulthood, while the poor more often experience it involuntarily. (Honwana 2012, 6.) Waithood is also not just an issue of developing countries but a global phenomenon. Honwana (2014) elaborates this through examples of youth elsewhere, stuck in the limbo between childhood and adulthood. In Japan, the youth have trouble forming families, and in Italy, the number of young men who are unmarried and leave home later is growing (ibid., 32). Honwana suggests that waithood in many countries is becoming a new form of adulthood, a prolonged situation of being stuck (Honwana 2012).

The details of what the concept of waithood entails have also been challenged amongst academics**.** Siyka Kovacheva et al. (2017) perceive waithood in Northwest Africa as a region-specific life-stage transition. The authors point out that it has never been unusual for men to wait until they are 30 years of age to marry, nor has it been unusual for women to marry when they are only a few years out of childhood. Honwana (2014) also adds that waithood does not affect everyone similarly. Transition to adulthood should be explored by understanding country-specific history as well as the social and

economic context and changes, as these elements impact it differently (Russell et al. 2005). Honwana (2012, 4-7) reminds that youth create dynamic forms of interaction through new involvement strategies. The youth stretch the idea of passive waithood, by using the power that they have and their imagination to create new forms of mechanisms to overcome various obstacles (Honwana 2014), but the transition to adulthood is no longer just a process of gaining autonomy and social recognition (Honwana 2021, 19). As Honwana (2012, 47) states:

> If what defines an adult is his or her ability to be independent and care for others, then many young Africans today are unable to become adults at all. Because so many youths are in this situation for extended periods, waithood is not the exception but is quickly becoming the norm, however uncomfortable it is.

4. What is bothering the Tunisian youth?

This analysis chapter focuses on the youth's realities and living conditions. The thematics discussed in this section have emerged from topics youth felt relevant sharing during the fieldwork. The youth compared their experiences with the time before the revolution as opposed to the time after the revolution. This chapter utilizes a similar contrastive narrative to demonstrate the observations. As the young informants regularly expressed, the revolution in Tunisia accomplished bringing down Ben Ali's regime, but since the revolution, the state has failed to bring significant improvements to their lives, essentially economy wise. First, I introduce the reader to the research setting in Tunis.

The actual analysis starts by discussing the youth's thoughts about post-revolution politics and decision making, which according to the young, has been fragmented and untrustworthy since the revolution. I continue by exploring the changes in the social order by focusing on the elements young found relevant. More particularly, the general sense of distrust and concerns related to safety, and I also touch upon the topic of social tensions amongst people. Midway through the analysis, I explore the controversies regarding religious norms and values. The concerns related to the economy remain in the background of each section, however, in the following sections the focus is mainly on the uncertainties related to the labour market as experienced by the youth. On the concluding section, I discuss the impact of the economic uncertainties concerning the high marriage costs. More in particular, how the combination of the youth's insufficient economic situations, according to the informants, prevents young Tunisians from experiencing satisfactory youth.

4.1 Welcome to Tunisia

It was a steaming hot day when I arrived at Carthage Airport in Tunis. Dragging my big bright pink suitcase and a smaller carry-on suitcase, I first headed to the toilets to change my clothes to something lighter. At the women's toilet, a friendly-looking middle-aged woman greeted me. She had all the cleaning equipment in the corner, so I suppose her job was to keep the toilet tidy. She offered to keep an eye on my luggage while I changed my clothes. The toilet floor was floating with water, and everything was sticky from either humidity or dirt. When I was about to leave, I thanked her, knowing that I had no coins in my pockets to give her. She seemed to expect a tip, but did not let it show, as she smiled at me genuinely as I left. From there I headed to the money exchange booths, looking for the best rate to get some cash in Tunisian dinar. The best rate was about one euro to 3,1 Tunisian dinars. I was surprised by how strong the euro was compared to the Tunisian dinar. On my way out, I stopped at a tiny kiosk that sold phone cards amongst everything else. I needed a local card for my extra phone to call people locally and to access the internet. Once I was ready, I chose a yellow taxi from the many waiting outside. I had the address to my relative's house near Le Kram on my phone written in both Arabic and Latin alphabet. I had agreed on first meeting my relatives, who would then take me to the apartment I was staying in. I showed the address from my phone to the taxi driver and we drove off. After a while, we arrived in a familiar place - the blue gate next to a Jasmine tree.

Once I had eaten and greeted my relatives, I suggested taking a taxi to the apartment. It was late and the thought of dragging my heavy luggage along the streets did not seem tempting. My older relatives Ibrahim and Donia, and the younger Ali (27) and Bilel (16) insisted on walking me to the apartment instead of taking a taxi. Taxi for such a short distance seemed like a waste of money for them. Also, walking alone was not an option because it is dangerous, as they emphasised. I did not want to insist on taking a taxi so I accepted their generous offer to walk me to the apartment. Ibrahim placed my bright pink American Tourister suitcase wheying 25 kilograms on his bike's back wheel rack while I pulled a tiny suitcase and my aunt dragged a trolley filled with blankets for the apartment that had no heating. During the walk, my suitcase got caught in broken street tiles and I had to watch out for ponds of dirty water. As we strolled in the dark on the empty side streets as a group, I tried to ask more about the risks they had mentioned previously. Bilel, who was the only one fluent in English, told me that it is not safe even for them. Once, someone tried to rob him in this neighbourhood during the daytime, but the situation was stopped when one of his friends from school happened to arrive in the location.

Arriving at Rite de La Goulette, the main street of Le Kram, was like entering a new world. The light poles illuminated soft orange light on the street, making everything look cosy and warm, unlike the side streets that were dark and quiet. Restaurants and kiosks were still open at around 9 pm, selling grilled chicken and fish as well as all sorts of sandwiches such as fricassee (a traditional Tunisian sandwich filled with tuna, boiled eggs, capers, olives, harissa and boiled potatoes), filling the air with appetising smells. The street was still rather busy, but only with men from different ages, no women. The majority seemed to come from low to poor income households. Some men were sitting on the sidewalk and some in a dark gas station, observing people walking by. As I walked with my relatives around me, I felt like I stood out. I was the only young woman and all my belongings seemed to create a contrast to the people around me.

When we arrived in front of the apartment's main gate, I was anxious. Behind the metal door was a dark apartment complex. The only level that looked finished from the outside was the ground floor, although it did not seem to be in the best condition. As we walked up the dusty unfinished staircase to the third floor, I had no idea what to expect. To my surprise, behind the heavy door was an apartment that was very well made from the inside. Although the walls were unpainted and unsealed wires were hanging from the roof and walls, the complex was more luxurious and modern than the average houses I had seen in Tunisia. The two-bedroom apartment had marble floors, a toilet decorated with handmade mosaic patterns and a 10-metre-wide extravagant balcony with a good view to the main street of Le Kram. Finally, it was just a short walk away from the seashore.

The balcony became my daily observing point. From its safety and peace, I could observe the busy street and people around the area while having my morning coffee and breakfast. Normally my day started with walking down the stairs and greeting a chicken whose temporary shelter was in the backyard of the apartment (see picture 5 below). On the first day in Tunis, I wanted to get to know the area where I was staying and start a few conversations with a couple of strangers. I also intended to visit the nearby gym with my relative Ali, who waited for me in front of the gate. On our way to the gym, we walked past fruit vendors, tiny food kiosks, a new Kia car shop and an international kindergarten

Picture 5: Chickens in the backyard of an apartment complex.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

Picture 6: A shepherd and his sheep in front of a Kia
car dealership.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

The gym was located in an area where everything seemed to be still under construction. The building where the gym was was also just built. From the outside it looked unfinished, and when we walked in I had to be careful not to get paint on me as men were still painting the hallway. At the gym, you could smell the fresh paint. The big windows made the place look extravagant. The gym had options to do air yoga and equipment pilates and it also had luxurious spa-like bathrooms and a small bar where you could buy fresh sandwiches and salads. With all these elements, the gym reached a level of elegance I have not experienced even in Finland. One time, I walked the same way to the gym and met a shepherd with his sheep in front of the Kia car shop (see picture 6 above).

After leaving the gym, I stopped at a local grocery store. As I was ready to pay, the electricity went. People started to guide each other loudly in the dark shop and cashiers voices were raising due to the impatient customers complaining about the situation. Later I went for a walk to learn more about the neighbourhood. Along the seashore, the contrast of crystal-clear water and the dirty beach was disturbing (see picture 7 below). There were not many people near the beach beside fishermen. When I encountered a group of men sitting by the shore, I suddenly felt discomfort. They did not approach me, but I sensed it was better to return to the main street with more people.

Picture 7: The beachfront of Le Kram.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

I headed to a café that was next to the main road and a terrasse that granted a perfect location for observing people walking past. I sat on the terrace, ordered a local mint tea with pine nuts, took my pink notebook out and started to make observations (see picture 8 below). Below is an excerpt from the field diary:

> I see men and women, although there are more men from all ages in the street than women. Everyone seem very concentrated in their daily activities. There are some older (poor) people selling tissues to cars and people walking past in front of the groceries– they are not begging. It is around 1pm. People are visiting the shops. bakeries and restaurants, stopping for a pastry or a lunch? The street is very noisy and active. Cars are driving past all the time, many of them are yellow taxi's. The traffic has its own rules. People cross the road where they want and cars are stopping and pulling over where they have room.

Picture 8: A view from the local cafeteria terrace in Le Kram
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

Just before I left, two young men in their twenties sat at a table next to me. Both had a messy appearance and their clothes seemed visibly dirty. The taller one with a red hoodie told me that he does not study or work and did not speak any English at all (I will call him Houssem here). The other man who told me that he is currently studying understood some words as I tried to ask some basic small talk questions (I will call him Karim). For a while, we tried to understand each other without results. Soon Karim and Houssem took their phones and we tried using Google Translate, but it did not help either. As I was leaving and about to pay for my coffee, Karim insisted on paying. I did not want them to pay, because I felt grateful that they had spared a moment talking to me. When I insisted on paying, Karim said I embarrassed him. As that was not my intention, I corrected my mistake by telling him that he could pay next time. He was fine with that.

4.2 ”The politicians cannot be trusted”

When Mohammed Bouazizi's self immolation took place in Sidi Bouzid in December 2010, the protests spread rapidly to other regions. On the 27th of December the protests reached Tunis where they first took place in the city centre. Amal, who lives near the city centre, recalled joining the protests as a teenager but only during the daytime. She explained that it was more unsafe to protest during the evenings because snipers targeted protestors. She also said that "My family told me to stay away from the windows". She explained that her family was scared that the bullets could also reach their home, as their house was near the area where the confrontations between the police and rioters took place. Amal's family's fear was justified because the clashes between the rioters and the police and security forces during the revolution led to many casualties (Noueihed & Warren 2012).

Amal recalled that when the president escaped people took over the streets. The protests were wild and the streets were overflowing with cars honking their horns. People were unaware of what had happened because Ben Ali had claimed that he went on vacation, Amal explained. When Ben Ali's regime finally collapsed, the society stopped working. People did not go to work and the streets became unsafe. The actual freedom of speech started some six months later. "Everyone wanted to say something after many years of oppression", Amal added. On January 14th, 2011, President Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia after gradually losing his authority and the support of the vast middle class (Honwana 2013). Soon, anarchy and disorder took over the neighbourhoods (Fraihat 2016, 59).

After the revolution, Tunisia has had to learn how to coexist with different viewpoints on governance because there is a lack of national consensus on the role of modern rulers (Fraihat 2016, 106). Following the fall of Ben Ali's regime, a transition from authoritarian post-independence regimes to a new democratic political system began. Questions about the next steps elicited differing responses from the general public and the ruling class. People who wanted to fully remove the old regime and those who advocated a compromise that meant retaining the previous regime's institutions were balancing throughout society. (Honwana 2013.) Indeed, Tunisia had been ruled by two autocratic leaders who were both viewed as reformist and dictatorial rulers. Both used collective punishment to suppress their opposition, from families to whole regions. (Fraihat 2016, 130-132.)

It has been acknowledged that people do not share a consensus on the past. After the revolution, the political sphere became polarised between liberals and the Salafi. The secularist liberals wanted to return to the "Bourguiba model", favouring Western-influenced lifestyle. They also wanted to replace the old authoritarian state with a multiparty democratic system. The secularists were challenged by the Salafi islamists, who could agree on building a multiparty democracy, but wanted to restore Islamic values, education and culture. (Masri &Anderson 2018; Fraihat 2016.) The significant fragmentation of authority, as well as the dispute over the role of religion in the state, worsened previously existing tensions, complicating the continuing transition (Bayat 2017). Amal believes that "The issue with Ben Ali's regime was that he was never chosen".

Amal, who introduced the city of Tunis to me, also introduced me to Omar and Ridha, who are both young men in their late twenties. We met at a hotel in Medina, where Ridha works. We sat in the beautifully decorated hotel lobby to talk. The hotel has collections of old Tunisian art, the hallways are decorated with mosaic patterns and the lobby is surrounded by arched walls (see picture 9 below). Both Omar and Ridha spoke good English and they were hospitable and smart. Within the first minutes, I recall thinking that Omar is highly intelligent. He could remember small details about different topics, was quick with his thoughts and a careful listener. Unlike Omar, who was easy to approach, Ridha seemed more reserved. Ridha was listening more than he talked. Similar to Omar, he also seemed intelligent. However, it was not until the second time I met him that it seemed that he could relax and share his thoughts.

Picture 9: Decorations at a hotel in Medina.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

We spokeabout life in general until soon the topic shifted to the revolution and life after it. Omar, Ridha and Amal were all well aware of the political transformations in Tunisia in the past ten years. Omar illustrated this by sharing some details from politics. He said that there have been approximately 200 parties in the past ten years. “A political life began after the revolution, but it has not solved the existing issues”. Omar continued that “There are too many parties and no clear majority who would push for their agendas and take the lead.” As he said, when there is no majority, “Blackmailing and bribing continue.”

The electoral lists have been filled with various political parties since the revolution (Bayat 2017). Although this appears as political pluralism on paper, the old power networks and elite have continued to operate, turning people’s hopes for change into despair and disengagement (Bayat 2017, 219-220; Honwana 2013, 94). Abstaining from politics in the aftermath of the revolution has been linked to the feeling of alienation, political mistrust and a declining economy (Dobbs 2021). According to the way the young Tunisian informants spokeabout post-revolution politics, it seemed like in the eyes of the young Tunisians the political sphere lacks transparency and reliability. It was interesting to observe

that when the informants spokeabout politics, it usually combined the elements of humour, ignorance and frustration. As Omar described, politicians are just comics, who cannot be trusted: “There is a channel where you can follow how the parliament works on live tv, but it is a joke”.

Omar, Ridha and Amal explained that politicians do not take any initiatives seriously nor do they discuss relevant topics. In addition, they only pursue their own political agendas. Many other informants told me the same things. They were sceptical and discouraged while following the state’s failing attempts to create sustainable solutions. One informant for instance said that “I do not believe in political activism because they (politics) ignore you”. The comments aligned with what Honwana’s young Tunisian informant Zarai, a 26-year-old woman from Sidi Bouzid, who commented on the political transition in the following way:

> I don’t believe in the politicians. Some of them are the same ones from the time of Ben Ali. Here in Sidi Bouzid we started the protests, but politicians stay in Tunis and don’t come here to talk to us to know what we want … Like before, it is all done and decided in Tunis. (Honwana 2013, 114)

In consideration of the social media post about cleaning the streets during the new political environment, I was keen to learn what thoughts the youth had on the presidential election of 2019 where Kais Saied was elected as president. Saied, competing against the well-known media mogul Nabil Karoui, appeared as a candidate of the youth. Despite his conservative views, such as openly favouring the criminalization of homosexuality[16], he seemed to gain popularity through a campaign that evolved around youth empowerment and the decentralisation of power.

Drawing on the informants’ comments, the outspoken Kais Saied grasped the youth’s attention with his inspiring words about citizen-led changes. However, this rising hope also seems to have faded as quickly as it started, leaving few inspired by the outcome of the elections. One of the issues related to Saied according to many informants was the disbelief that he could deliver any real positive changes. When I was in a café with Nasri and his friends, I asked about their thoughts on the elections. Nasri, whom I had already met during my visit to Tunisia in 2017, seemed very cynical when it came to politics. He did not vote in the elections and commented the following:

[16] See Amna Guellali (2019) in *Human Rights Watch*.

Nasri: “I don’t believe the system will change or that the president matters. He (Kais Saied) is just like the... (thinking)”

Me: “The profile picture?”

Nasri: “Yes!”

The first word I could come up with was perhaps not the most illustrative, but the men seemed to have a mutual understanding with me. Thinking back to it, the metaphor of a profile picture I used during the conversation worked very well. At the moment, the idea of a profile picture was to illustrate how people post pictures on social media. The profile picture tends to be the best shot, often refined. The key element here is that the person behind the photo is often not exactly alike with the photo in real life. As a young adult myself, I believed these young men, who are around my age, would somehow grasp the idea of this metaphor. In addition, I also knew that all of them have social media accounts. For many young people, Kais Saied was indeed still just a “good picture”. Something that looks good at first glance, but no one knows what the reality behind the photo is.

When I asked why Nasri did not vote, he sighed and said that “The whole political system is corrupted”, adding that “One president will not make a change to it”. Amal also explained her concerns about Kais Saied, but with a different approach. She explained that although Saied seems trustworthy, “No one knows much about him”. Sceptical, Amal continued explaining that Said has been shown in the media hugging and shaking hands of people who suffered during the revolution, showing his emotional side. But what would happen in the future and what are his true intentions? During the same conversation, Amal also highlighted that the former president Ben Ali did the same thing when he tried to present himself as a man of the people, despite the ongoing oppression and corruption. “The problem with Saied’s government is that there are still no concrete changes”, she added. Although only a few months had passed since Saied was elected president at the time I was collecting field data, the youth had underlying fears that nothing was going to change. As the title of this section illustrates, the youth repeatedly spokeabout politics which cannot be trusted.

4.3 "The problems in Tunisia are the people, not the law"

I felt safe in Le Kram despite all the warnings I received related to safety in the neighbourhood. As Sami once joked, "Kram is worse than the wild West". By the "wild West", he meant the city he was born in, which he believes to be unsafe. I was told that the safety of Le Kram had changed after the revolution. Leila, my distant relative in her thirties has lived all her life near Le Kram in a big house with her family. She was in her early twenties during the revolution and thinks that Le Kram became particularly unsafe due to the protests. In her opinion, the issue is with the location. The proximity to the president's palace attracted people from different socioeconomic backgrounds to protest together, causing increased unrest in the area. Post-revolution, the neighbourhood remained restless.[17]

I had a few uncomfortable situations in Le Kram. One afternoon, after I had finished lunch with Mariem, Sami, Ahmed and Yesmine, I walked home from the gym where they left me when coming back, as usual. I had my headphones on and enjoyed the sunshine. I usually walked the same road home, but this time I took another way. This was a tinier street next to the busy road I usually walked on. I was listening to music and therefore, did not pay much attention to the young man in a red jacket walking in front of me. He caught my attention when he turned around and stared at me for a while. He was wearing a dirty red hoodie, and his whole appearance was messy. Suddenly, he slowed his pace and looked like he wanted me to walk to him. He glanced at the phone I had in my hand and the headphones on my head. I put the phone away in my pocket. When I was beside him, he asked me what time it was by gesturing to his wrist. I pretended I had no idea what he was trying to ask because he kept looking at my pocket and there were no other people nearby. He insisted on his question and leaned a bit closer, but I pretended I could not understand what he wanted. I walked away from him with more speed, trying to make some distance.

I got more space between us, but soon, the young man was just at a few arms' distance. Just before he could reach me, I crossed to the other side of the road and ran into a tiny bike shop. I waited there for a while, thinking that he would be gone. When I came out a few minutes later, I saw that he was still on the other side of the street, making intense eye contact and waiting for me to exit the shop. Once I went out of the shop and started to walk, he did the same thing but on the other side of the road, following my every step. I did not feel comfortable so I went into a kiosk that was just next to

[17] The distance from the Presidential palace of Carthage to Le Kram is around 4 kilometres. Read more about the neighbourhood in Section 2.1.

the bike shop. After a while, the young man had given up and he was gone. This event took place in the same area in Le Kram where a man on his bike had followed me and where an older woman had warned me not to use my phone in public (see Section 2.1).

According to the informants, safety has become a bigger concern after the revolution. Whenever I told youth about uncomfortable safety-related situations such as the one above, I was told that those are great examples of post-revolution society's issues. Often the opinion was that people have too much freedom. Regarding the title, where I have used the words of one informant, I was regularly told that excess freedom after the revolution combined with economy-related uncertainties made people desperate, causing criminality to rise and relating to many other issues. Amal and I once got caught in an uncomfortable situation in Medina when we walked on the dark and tiny streets late in the evening. We had left the hotel, where we had spent a few hours talking to Omar and Ridha. As we walked along the labyrinthine dark streets, I spokeon the phone and texted with Hamed and Mone who tried to convince me to join them in a pub. It was a Friday evening and they wanted me to meet them before I left back home on Sunday. I was talking quite loudly to my iPhone because the reception was terrible. I was tempted to meet them once more in a new environment before returning to Finland. While on the phone, I noticed a group of two men and one pregnant woman walking past us. When they had walked past us, they looked at us for a bit longer than people usually do, but it did not raise any alarms at that time. When we kept walking with Amal, she suddenly started to turn her head around as someone was behind her as she speeded her walk. She said something quietly, but I could not hear it because I was still on the phone. When I hung up, she started running. The group had turned around and followed us, and they had almost reached us. We jumped into a tiny kiosk that was still open and Amal asked for help. The shopkeeper seemed stunned as if he did not believe that someone had followed us. When Amal asked him to go out and check if they had left, they had. Later, Amal's local acquaintances told her that this group were not from the area but from the south. Amal explained that people know everyone in the neighbourhood.

When we spokeabout this instance later, Amal told me that it is a common thing for people living in the south of Tunisia to go to big cities and rob people to make a living. At another instance, when I asked Amal about the unsafe reputation of Le Kram she said:

> Le Kram is less safe in the summertime when people go there for a vacation. People come to live by the beach. After they use all their savings, they have to rob to survive… it is usually people from the south of Tunisia.

Omar believes the biggest problems lie with people who live in the countryside: "Life is even harder for people from the south. This is a paradise compared to them." Another informant once explained how even terrorism is often related to people who are poor and desperate in life. An interesting observation was how the young often linked criminality or safety risks to "other", less fortunate people such as the uneducated, poor people, people from the countryside or the people from the south, as those were the terms they used of people who commit desperate acts such as pick-pocketing or even commit a suicide as a sign of protest.

Another example on particular way of speaking was provided by Hamed and Mone, to whom I had told about the nature of meeting strangers during fieldwork. They said I was lucky to meet them. Hamed pointed out that, "At least 80 % of the men would not be trustworthy". He took the word men as a self-evident fact, insinuating that only men could be a potential risk. I asked him to explain what he meant by his comment, to which he added that he believes most of these men have not seen the world nor are they educated. Therefore, they would be "closed minded if a stranger girl talks to them", Hamed explained. To show me that they do not belong in the 80 % and to justify their open-mindedness, they told me they have travelled and seen places and things. They want to be educated, just like their families, to get a better life. "It makes you more open-minded and smart. Without education people feel bad of themselves", Hamed added. For me it appeared as if Hamed's comment was to emphasise that there are good people (well educated and well behaving) and bad people (uneducated and criminals).

I found similarities between the answers of my Tunisian informants and Susanne Dahlgren's (2010, 269) observations about Adeni people, which she discusses in *Contesting Realities.* Dahlgren first explains that the idea that Adeni people have a particular and unique identity, different from that of the people of other parts in Yemen, is linked to a manifestation of Aden's vibrant and unique history. Although Adeni people share positive feelings about their common Yemeni descent, Dahlgren points

out how Adeni people use abusive terms[18] such as *badu* and *dashbas* to distinguish themselves from their fellow Yemenis. The Adeni people emphasise their uniqueness through the ways they categorise other Yemenis. What Dahlgren shows is a valuation process that has led to a categorisation of 'us' and 'others'. Similar categorisation appeared amongst the comments of the urban and educated young Tunians, who live in the vibrant capital.

Most safety-related concerns were about pickpocketing and robberies, especially in the evenings. The youth seemed to have learned to manage these daily risks by avoiding particular neighbourhoods, choosing the safest options for public transportation and knowing what to wear and who to be with. When it came to commuting options, travelling by train had the worst reputation amongst the young people I spoketo. I was told it is especially dangerous for lonely travellers and during the evenings. The few times I used the train alone were during the daytime when students and workers filled the trains and the only evening I used a train was with Hamed and Mone. That evening we were going to La Marsa. We were supposed to take a taxi as the previous times, but all taxis driving past us were occupied. They suggested taking the train, but with clear discomfort. For some reason, they did not want to buy a ticket so we walked straight to the platform. I did not understand why they would not want to buy a ticket because travelling without one made them visibly nervous. However, on the train, they told me to take an old ticket from the ground and pretend like it is mine. They kept the tickets in their hands and kept looking around for a ticket inspector. During the ride, they told me they prefer taking a taxi for safety reasons.

Hamed told me a story about when he used the train alone one evening. He said that a group of "tattooed youth" entered the train, carrying knives. His acquaintance who had entered the same train came to warn him and told him to change to another train. Nevertheless, I felt like travelling by train was more chaotic than unsafe. When I took a train to La Marsa alone on a weekday, at noon during school hours, a group of young boys between ages 10 to 12 were causing disturbance at the train station by jumping to the railway tracks before the train arrived (see picture 10 below). An older lady on the other side of the tracks yelled something to the young boys, I believe she was trying to make

[18]As Susanne Dahlgren (2010, 269) explains in *Contesting Realities,* the mockery term *badu* literally means *bedouin*, a category to which only a minority of countryside people belong to. The term is used for people from the surrounding countryside or anyone who behaves in an "uncivilised" way as contrasted to being a "civilised" town settler *hadhari. Dahbash* is an offensive term used for northern Yemenis who visit larger towns. At the core of the abusive discourse is the idea that the *dahbash* are people who have no understanding or manners.

them stop, but they did not listen. The boys jumped off the tracks and ran inside the train when it arrived. On the train, they immediately started to play around. Some of them were opening the train doors and hanging their bodies out from the train as it was moving, while the others were pushing them to make them lose their grip. When the train stopped, some of the boys ran out onto the platform. When trying to get back in, other boys in the group stopped the ones trying to come back in. One boy was left out. They continued kicking the doors and each other. In the middle of this, one of the boys bumped into me because I was standing at the door. He looked into my eyes with his innocent brown eyes, apologised genuinely and then continued playing with the others again. What surprised me was that the train was full of people, but no one said anything to them during the train ride.

Picture 10: Young boys playing on the train tracks.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

The youth who could afford it, relocated to their exclusive safe zones when it got dark. It seemed like only the less wealthy population and mainly men spent time on the streets during the evenings. Bayat (2017, 99-100) has also spoken about this phenomenon. Bayat explains that as the poor have increased their presence in public spaces, the rich have transferred into their exclusive zones in wealthier neighbourhoods with guarded bars or restaurants. Simultaneously, the "outsiders " (poor) lose access to these exclusive and privatised streets and neighbourhoods, Bayat continues explaining. Following this occurence, the fear of actual or imagined crime and violence has restricted the mobility of the wealthy and the ordinary people, particularly women, into the privatised areas. (ibid.)

I was advised not to travel alone during the dark. One evening I had to make my way from Medina to the apartment in Le Kram after spending hours with Amal in the city centre. I wanted to take a bus taxi home because it was much cheaper than the normal taxi, but the bus taxi stop was a few kilometres away. To get to the bus taxi stop, I had to walk along Avenue Habib Bourguiba to the other end, near the local train's final stop. Amal warned me about men who might disturb me and the dangers in the dark, mainly because people can see that I am not a local. She wanted to walk me there but I told her it is not necessary because I had done the same walk many times previously during the daytime and I did not want her to walk back home alone either. During the first two minutes of walking along Avenue Habib Bourguiba, some men started to catcall me, others said something in Arabic accompanied with a dirty look. Although I could not understand what they said, I felt uncomfortable. I put my headphones on and tried to walk as quickly as I could. A couple of hundred metres before arriving at the bus taxi station, I noticed two men were approaching me in the dark, although I had made sure no one was near me previously. They spread to both sides and came closer by the second. Just in time before they were right next to me, I spotted a woman talking with a man at a distance. I ran to them and asked where the bus taxi leaves from because I could not see one. I knew where the bus taxi usually stopped when entering the city centre, but I could not spot a bus taxi nor a pick-up location in the dark. I waited with them and the bus taxi arrived just a few minutes later.

Omar explained further why he believed issues with safety and criminality increased after the revolution. He believes the issue is that after the revolution, ordinary people were suddenly allowed to express their opinions freely, without the fear of violence or harassment. This slowly led to chaos, where people also "acted as they wanted", as Omar put it. The state that had long surveilled and controlled people seemed to have failed to manage many issues, but also, left people without guidance or surveillance. Although the young spokeabout safety problems as a critical issue since the revolution, the youth often emphasised that people still take care of each other in Tunisia.

4.4 Dealing with distrust

Amal, who was often keen to share her memories about the past in a humoristic way, had a serious look on her face as she explained how people were tortured if they had politically opposing opinions during Ben Ali's regime. Propaganda was spread daily in the media and Ben Ali's security forces punished parties and people who were against him. People could not trust others because there was no freedom to talk unrestrained. Even your family could inform you to the authorities for your words or actions, for example for practising religion or having opposing opinions compared to the regime, she said. Amal's relative was sentenced to jail after belonging to the political party Ennahda "because he was spreading propaganda". Amal told me these stories to explain why people do not trust each other nowadays and why trust is such a big issue:

> During Ben Ali, people were not allowed to work in peace because police monitored their actions. It caused a lot of hatred and distrust. If you got caught supporting a party that was against Ben Ali you got punished. Fathers and daughters were taken together to get raped. Sex and violence were Ben Ali's way to oppress and control people.

People learned to adapt to the restrictions and fear the police. During the 2011 uprising, the government hired young people to become police officers during the protests. A conclusion of what two groups of men told me about the police was that the aim was to get more people on the government's side and less youth involved in the protests. To attract more young people, they also raised the salary of police officers from approximately 200 dinars to 400 dinars per month to make them more loyal. They might even arrest you and put drugs in your pocket and say it was yours, even when it is not.

However, despite the deep-rooted hatred and distrust towards the police, many mentioned that life was safer when the police had more power. Nevertheless, the youth do not trust the police. I did not feel that the police could be trusted either. They were heavily armed and had a reputation for exceeding their limits. On a sunny afternoon, I visited the archaeological site of Carthage with Bilel. The area is not well sign-posted, and the ruins are scattered. When I walked to a grassed section, I noticed a sign on the ground. I walked to take a closer look at what it said. As I walked to the sign, I suddenly heard a palace guard yelling at me in Arabic while pointing his rifle straight at me from a distance. I

looked at Bilel who came closer and said that I need to get off the grass because I was getting too close to the presidents' palace. Indeed, the massive gate was just a few hundred metres away. However, it felt like an extreme reaction to such a small misunderstanding. I knew that the police have a reputation for using extreme power and violence towards disobeying citizens. Since the revolution, the security forces and police have continued using extreme responses and violence to tackle protests and personal confrontations (Meddeb 2021, Amnesty 2020).

Another interesting observation related to the police in Tunisia happened on the last week of my field trip. On Friday, 6th of March 2020, I organised a lunch meeting with Mariem, Sami, and Yesmin. As we arrived at their regular lunch place, a short drive away from the gym where they always picked me up, I noticed that everyone was staring at the TV in the background at the tiny restaurant. Two civilians on a motorbike had triggered a bomb near the embassy of the United States, leaving one police officer dead. People were watching the news in silence, and there was no discussion about it. Sami, Mariem and Yesmin seemed quieter than usual as we ate our lunch, although the atmosphere was more relaxed and cheerful than the previous couple of times. After we finished our pasta and pizzas, we walked across the street to a café where Sami always wanted to enjoy his after-lunch shisha.

This particular café was decorated with many colours, and it seemed very modern. While smoking shisha and sipping our tea, a policeman entered with a machine gun in his hands. He kept looking around as if something was wrong. I asked the others why they thought the police came to inspect the café. Mariem suddenly seemed very uncomfortable and looked almost scared. She answered quietly with a whisper that he probably came to have a coffee, and then changed the topic. When we left the café, the street was filled with at least seven police vans, and heavily armed police forces were guarding the road. As we walked around the corner to Sami's car, I was told that the suicide bombers supposedly lived in the area where we had our lunch. Later that day, I messaged Mariem through a social media app that we used for communication, and I mentioned that the casualties were much less than what we had been thinking (we had discussed this previously). She answered with, "Great. No comments about that" as if I was a reporter. It seemed like she was also nervous about commenting on the incident.

Later on that same day, I met Amal in the city centre at a clothing store. I had to walk from the bus taxi along Avenue Habib Bourguiba to meet her. The streets were crowded with people, and cars were honking their horns. I was confused about the overly positive spirit that seemed to have taken

over the whole city centre and its people. When I stopped to look around at the crowd next to an enormous clock tower, I could see an endless number of people and police officers on the sidewalks, and the roads were filled with cars, police vans and road stops. When I kept looking around for a while, a police officer approached to ask in English if I was all right, holding a big gun under his arm. Although he smiled at me, I wanted to get away from him. Perhaps I looked more suspicious or bewildered than others because quite a few police officers were clearly following me during the short walk. People were no longer shocked about the events that took place a few hours earlier. Instead, Amal explained that they were excited about the upcoming football game against Egypt and were there in the streets to celebrate the upcoming evening (see picture 11 below).

Picture 11: People around the clocktower at Avenue Habib Bourguiba on Friday 6th of March 2020.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

As we walked along Habib Bourguiba, I asked her how people in Tunisia feel about terrorism. Amal said that Tunisian people react to terrorism with humour. Then she started telling me a story about a "famous lady whose joints are twisted and she pretends that she cannot walk". A few years previously in 2018, there was a muhajjaba suicide bomber at Habib Bourguiba, and during that event even the "lady with weird limbs started running", she said with laughter. She continued explaining that when the suicide bomber's body parts were spread across and her underwear was shown, people started making fun of it in social media[19], spreading pictures of her funny underwear, and turning the incident into a topic of laughter. Amal continued, "People do not take terrorism that seriously. They gather to watch the drama rather than escape it". Again, she laughed, and continued explaining that people in Tunisia would go out to watch if someone was wearing a bomb west. I could not help but laugh at her funny expressions while she explained these stories with her dark humour.

Ken Roberts et al. (2017, 12) show that between 2015 and 2016 the Tunisian youth felt even less secure than prior to the revolution, due to the higher risk of becoming a victim of crime or terrorism. Later when we spokeabout terrorism with Amal, she said people in Tunisia do not want to give any room for fear. She said that the Tunisian humour is twisted. To process what has happened, people laugh. Then she again added a vivid illustration of how "Tunisian people do not have to play online shooting games when they have that in real life". In Section 4.5 I discus Amal's uncomfortable experiences on the relationship of veiling and security. After the suicide bombing in 2018, Amal said that, "People kept disturbing me with questions such as are you the next terrorist". She believes people approached her like that because she wears a veil. When she went near the police, they feared her. Amal believes that when people no longer had to fear Ben Ali, they started to fear each other.

On the same evening, I met Ridha and Omar again, accompanied by Amal. On our way to the hotel, we stopped to buy some sweets from a souk. We sat down to enjoy different Tunisian sweets such as *makroudh* (a fried sweet treat made with semolina flour and olive oil that is filled with date paste and then drenched in sugar syrup). Ridha had also bought some Lebanese pancakes from a hotel around the corner. This time we chose to sit in a private room next to the hotel lobby. While eating the sweets I asked about safety and terrorism amongst many other topics. We were sitting in a small room next to the hotel lobby with glass doors. Ridha got up and closed the curtains before we continued with the topic. Amal, Omar and Ridha answered by saying that there are not that many safety issues in

[19] See Aljazeera (2018) to read about the suicide bombing in 2018: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/29/nine-people-wounded-in-tunis-suicide-bomb-attack.

Tunisia as in the neighbouring countries such as Libya, although there have been some incidents since the revolution. Omar believes it is mostly the poor population who commit violent acts.

4.5 Debates over religion

Shortly after the first free elections since the revolution, Tunisians started to discuss several issues. Although many seemed to share a common narrative of Ben Ali's corruption and oppression, not everyone shared the same vision of a civic and democratic state. The role of religion in Tunisian society, as well as political and legal concerns such as the status of women and many other fundamental issues, became contentious. When it came to religion, Ben Ali's regime prohibited many forms of religious expression. (Grami 2014, 392-393.) In this context, Grami thinks it is not surprising that Tunisians were eager to explore their new public religious culture following the revolution. However, not everyone complied with the freedom of religion-related practices and the debates on religion become more polarised. “The state should avoid religion!” Ridha said firmly as he explained why religion should be separated from politics. He believes that religion increases disagreements and therefore creates more issues within society.

I was surprised by how strongly religion impacts the young Tunisian’s lives and how important a role it had in the conversations about daily struggles and life in general. Amal, who wears a veil, shared many concrete examples of how religious disagreements within the social sphere impact her life. As we sat by the desk at Amal’s workplace, she demonstrated how religion became a polarising topic after the revolution. “Some people became more traditional, and some went the other way. They started to drink and party”, she explained, adding “But now it is more balanced”. To provide me with an example, she told me about her relative who divorced after the revolution, started to go to the mosque and joined a traditional (extremist) Islamic community in social media that shared his extreme beliefs:

> He texted my family, telling us what we are doing wrong. He also joined different religious groups on social media, which shared extremist content. This kind of behaviour was not uncommon after the revolution. Many young men joined ISIS after the uprising, and some women left for Syria to marry the fighters

Many women started to wear a hijab post-revolution because it was forbidden under Ben Ali's regime**.** However, "It drags negative attention in public", Amal continued by saying that women who wear a veil struggle to find employment, despite the freedom of religion since Ben Ali. Amal also stated that. "Back in the days, people had to choose; either you study without a hijab or wear a hijab and stay home. The rule was the same with praying, and people ended up in jail for not obeying".

Amal's decision to wear a hijab resulted from praying in her late teenage years when her relative got severely sick. She told me that wearing a hijab was her decision after considering her relationship with God. The decision has not been easy and she still ponders it a lot. Although I got the impression that her family is quite conservative, especially her mother, her younger sister Dalel does not use a veil. Instead, she likes to dress up and pays a lot of attention to her makeup and hair. Amal thinks veiling is just one part of Islam's code of modesty that extends to all aspects of one's life. Approximately half of the young women I saw were veiled. It seemed to be a more common practice amongst older women.

When Amal was studying in the art school for her Bachelor's degree, her professor discriminated against women who were wearing a hijab:

> One time, the professor made fun of the prophet Muhammed and Muslim women in the class. He said that all Muslim women are ISIS's sex slaves and that a female should not veil themselves to live freely. He added that Muslims are oppressed because they do not have sex before marriage, which causes giving birth to stupid children and a stupid population.

According to Amal, no one wanted to interfere with the rude speech because he is a famous professor at the university, and it could impact the students' future. Another time the same professor had told Amal privately that" she does not know herself" because she wears a hijab. Nevertheless, these uncomfortable instances of wearing a hijab did not stop there. One customer at her workplace had told her sarcastically to cover her eyes at her workplace because "Is not the purpose of a hijab to cover the beauty, and you have beautiful eyes". Testimonies similar to Amal has been recorded after the revolution. The International Center for Transitional Justice (2016) discuss some of the testimonies, who experienced discrimination under the rule of both Bourguiba and Ben Ali. "Women who wore headscarves were not only expelled from colleges and schools, but also harassed by the police on

streets, summoned frequently to the police stations, and excluded from the private sector" (International Center for Transitional Justice 2016). [20]Although after Ben Ali's regime's collapse and the new freedom to wear a veil in public institutions, opinions have remained complex about the topic around it (Donker & Netterstrøm 2017).

A knowledge that has been absent in the academic study according to Susanne Dahlgren and Samuli Schielke (2013, 6-9) is the fluctuation on Muslim practises when Islam and morality comes together. As they explain, the morality of a Muslim alters according to the particular time and place, taking different forms depending on the context. However, when people cultivate and master these shifts of being inconsistent, they tend to do it in a way that does not jeopardize being a socially respected and considered a good person. (ibid.) The young informants morality seemed to be a conundrum. Hamed once asked me whether I am a Muslim. When I said no, he was visibly upset. After this, Hamed explained that the Quran supports science and explained that "Everything that has been said in Quran can be proved correct with science". Hamed is a proud Muslim and he also wanted me to know that. Hamed did not believe there are any contradictions in being a Muslim while drinking, partying, and having intimate relationships.[21]

When I and Amal once walked back from the City of Culture past the abandoned Hotel Du Lac, the inverted pyramid shaped hotel, I told Amal that I have found the youth's relationship to religion interesting. I told her about a conversation I had had with two young men (I was talking about Hamed and Mone), who reacted strongly when I told them that I am not a Muslim. Amal believes that in general, religion is a sensitive topic, although, she thought that the two men are hypocritical for getting mad about my answer because, "People these days pretend to be good Muslims, although their actions stand against the lessons of Islam". Amal had spoken about the same topic previously and she was frustrated and embarrassed how Tunisians do not follow Islamic practices but still talk loudly about being good Muslims:

> Tunisians drink the most alcohol in the Arab countries. People have no good manners or respect. They talk behind each other's back, they are unhygienic and unclean - while at the same time, they pray and emphasise their religion with God.

[20] Truth and Dignity Commission (TDC) in 2013 started to collect testimonies of women who experienced abuse under Bourguiba and Ben Ali, who repressed religious rights (ICTJ 2016).
[21] I discuss these topics more in Section 5.2.

According to Dahlgren and Schielke (2013, 4) after the worldwide Islamic revivals, Islam has become the idiom among several Muslims, embodying the idea of a good life. Furthermore, during Islamic revivals, higher standards for piety, honourable actions, and embodied morality have become more common. (ibid.) However, as Dahlgren and Schielke discuss, it has not resulted in people's moral clarity or perfection as contradictions and juxtapositions in people's lives and experiences are present. (ibid 2.) As they show:

> Being a good Muslim has become more important, more accessible, more individualistic and agency oriented, and more performative but also more difficult and troubling due to the tendency of Islamist activists to problematise people who do not follow high standards of piety, marking them as 'secularised', 'nominal', or 'sleeping' Muslims. (Dahlgren & Schielke 2013, 4)

In Tunisia, Islam is the country's official religion, and for many young Tunisians, Islam seems to create the basis for normative codes. Also the youth I met referred to themselves as Muslims. However, not all Tunisians or the youth I met identify themselves similarly, nor do they perform or think about the Islamic traditions and duties in the same way. Adeline Masquelier (2010) believes that whatever the youth's approach to Islam is, many Muslim youths have generated a youthful version of Islam in which they do not see conflicting Islamic practices. Yessine[22], whom I had met at an art event where Amal took me, is a beautiful young man in his late 20s who has big brown eyes and beautiful curly brown hair styled to perfection. He has a skinny figure, and his outfits were the two times I saw him well planned and stylish. At a café with Amal, he explained that he could never deny being a Muslim because people would attack him. Instead, he said that he believes in all Abrahamic religions. However, in the same instance, he said that he thinks he is a better Muslim than many in Tunisia, who claim to be good Muslims, but still hurt animals and judge people.

4.6 Uncertainties in the labour market

On a Sunday evening, Ali had organised a meeting with me, him and his friends. Ali is my distant relative, whom I had met once on my holiday to Tunisia in 2017. Ali has an education from a trade

[22] I will talk more about Yessine in the next Section 4.5.

school. He has a full-time job related to the field he has studied but the work is physically demanding and he works long hours. During fieldwork, I got the impression that he is still happy with his jobs, because unlike many, he has one. Ali's work seems to pay a decent amount of money. Ali has a nice new sports bike and he dresses well in good quality jeans and shirts. He has a membership to an expensive gym and in his free time, he spends time with his friends in coffee shops and eating out. Because Ali speaks barely any English, I did not learn much of his thoughts on future prospects. However, like his friends, he has an active social life and just like them, he struggles to find love.

It was already dark when Ali was waiting for me across the street from the apartment where I was staying. To my surprise, he was not alone. My relative Bilel, his younger teenage brother, and Hasem, whom I remembered very well from my last visit, were with him. Hasem looked just like I remembered him from my holiday to Tunisia in 2017. Once Hasem saw me, he greeted me with a big smile and shook my hand. Hasem is skinny, his face is narrow, he has darker features and his appearance seems a bit messy. Nevertheless, his outfit always seems well planned, although pretty worn. He is a careful listener, genuine and passionate about his opinions, and always has a lot to say. During the 200-metre walk to the train station, the conversation had started to bubble. As we walked side by side, he told me that he was not studying or working in 2017 when I was there last time. In 2020, he started studying visual arts at a vocational school. These studies would take approximately three years. As we stepped into the train, we stayed at the front doors because there were only single seats to sit on. While balancing along with the train's movement, Hasem told me that the current education would not provide him with the career he dreams of having. Hasem's dream is to become a professional driver or work with cars. When I asked why he had chosen such a specific education, he explained that it is more like his hobby and "it is ok" for now.

When we arrived at La Marsa, we walked to the shopping centre a few minutes walk away from the train stop, where we took the stairs up to find a café. Nasri (whom I had also met in 2017) and another young man, Arkan, whom I had not met previously, were waiting for us there. We were almost one hour late because I had misjudged how long it takes to get around the city. We sat for a while at the rooftop terrace and I explained to the men what my research is about, but Nasri and the other men said that they already knew. Ali had already explained it to them, but I wanted to make sure that it was fine for them if I made some notes during our conversations. In addition, I was not sure if Ali fully understood what my research was about because his English was not that good. As we moved inside to get away from the rain and the cold, we continued talking about employment and work in general in Tunisia. We sat around the table and the men took their smokes out, which they kept

smoking for the rest of that evening. I could not recall if Nasri worked or studied in 2017, and we did not talk about it during this meeting, but he did tell me that he has a Master's degree in Economics from a private university and that he now works in a private company that sells teaching services, work unrelated to his education. I got the impression that Nasri gets a decent salary, however, he later said that the job does not pay enough for his standards. When I asked the young men about employment in Tunisia, amongst many things, they mentioned that working for a private company is better, but the problem is uncertainty, because "Your boss can fire you any time", whereas public jobs are almost lifelong. Like in other Arab countries (see Dahlgren 2014), a state job is considered safer in Tunisia because it grants security in economically uncertain times, and it entails the possibility to receive better benefits.

The struggle is to get (good) jobs that pay well, are secure and where the youth are not mistreated. What happened to Amal gave a great example of the struggles of youth in the labour market. On a sunny afternoon, when I met her at a train station, she was sitting under an awning and seemed visibly frustrated. I asked her what had happened. She told me that her boss had ended her work contract and told her not to return to the shop anymore. Because he had ended the contract a week or two in advance, he said he would not pay the full salary they had agreed on. By doing this, he had an excuse not to pay the full salary. He told Amal that she had wasted his time by working there. When Amal kept requesting full payment, he told her to apply for a government substitute for the missing part. Amal later explained that there is a substitute people can apply for, but it has to be mentioned in the official work agreement to receive it. The situation with her boss continued later in the evening when Amal called him. I followed her out with Yessine, who had joined us later that day. On the phone with her boss, she was visibly angry, raising her voice, and her body was tense. After the call, Amal explained that her boss still refused to pay her the total salary, and he was laughing at her, telling her just to apply for the substitute. Amal was upset, although she said it would not cause any issues because she still lives at home. Finally, Amal stated that "He says he cannot afford to pay the missing part, although he can afford taking money from the cashier to take women on expensive dates".

In Amal's case, her boss took advantage of cheap labour and her willingness to work in a field close to the field of art which is related to her studies. Yessine, who was with us that evening, had also had similar unjust experiences in his field. When he was doing an internship for a famous fashion designer, he was not paid the total salary and he was treated poorly. He also told us that he once could not receive a job from a clothing shop because of his gender (the boss only wanted to hire females). Yessine explained that employers hire beautiful females because it is easier for them to sell clothes.

Amal agreed and added that females are sexualised in the labour market. In addition to the previously mentioned struggles, many spokeabout difficulties in finding a job. According to the youth, the only way to find a job is by knowing someone. As one infromant explained it*,"* It is easier to get employed if you know someone from the field or company."

According to Gry Heggli et al. (2013, 928), Tunisia's high level of unpredictability makes forecasting and planning harder. Heggli et al. argue, that rather than imagining a success story in terms of their own era, the youthful population may wish to relive the ideal life of their parents' generation. Because the informants often compared their life with their parents' generation, I once asked Nasri, Hasem and Ali whether they believed their parents' lives were easier. I was interested to hear what they had to say. They said that they think it might have been better for their parents because the Tunisian dinar has since lost its value. They also added that the general environment was safer in the past. As one young man said: "The economy was better before, and you could do more with your money. Before, freedom of speech was controlled, but the economy was better. Now it is not controlled, but the economy is weak."

Young people are forced to live their lives differently from the previous generations due to the new social, political, economic and cultural conditions they encounter (Honwana 2012, 31). Gry Heggli et al. (2013, 928) argue that in Tunisia, the family is the most significant source of maintenance when the state is not supportive. Heggli et al. believe this is why many young emphasise the respect for their parents' viewpoints and preferences. However, I thought the comparison to the "better" lives of the youth's parents was interesting because it has been said that the Arab Spring was partly about showing the rest of the world that youth were unwilling to live like their parent's generation (Dahlgren 2014, 146). During the conversations with the informants, I noticed that when they compared their lives to those of their parents', they actually compared their parents' youth and early adulthood (between the 1960s and the 1990s) to their youth and early adulthood. This comparison made more sense when Amal spokeabout her conservative mother, who is very different to her grandmother, who according to her, is more open-minded, "Because she lived her youth under the rule of Bourguiba". Bourguiba is known for leading Tunisia to independence and taking the independent nation's first steps towards European modernity, both socially and economically. He educated and employed the rising youth population and his era also marked essential developments in women's rights. (Gana 2010, 105; Mahmoud & Súilleabháin 2020.)

It has been said that Bourguiba managed to create a social contract where the people kept silent but the state provided services for people. However, this social contract was broken when Ben Ali took over the country in a coup against Bourguiba in 1987. With Ben Ali, the state moved from providing for its citizens to only providing for his inner circle. (Mahmoud & Súilleabháin 2020, 103.) Perhaps the golden memories of the past have been transmitted from the older generation to the youth, which is partially the reason why the youth still have high expectations. Finally, I would like to mention the insecurity of livelihood which might increase the struggles under unexpected events such as health-related issues and accidents (Rodgers 1995, 47-48). As Nasri stressed, "Without money, you do not have safety or opportunities". When I asked Nasri to elaborate on his comment, with a cigarette in one and a coffee in the other, he said that the Tunisian system is not the same as in Finland. "You need money because the system does not take care of you".

4.7 Concerns regarding marriage

For young Tunisian men, I discuss in this thesis, the most prominent concerns related to employment were the low-paying jobs, the lack of opportunities and the ability to marry**.** As one informant put it:

> In Tunisia, men have to afford not only the marriage but also buying the women from their fathers. At the moment, it is hard enough to afford your own living, talking about another person?

Hasem was eager to illustrate the complexities of living in Tunisia. He was frustrated. He wants to spend his own money and experience things first, but he says that, "In the system, it is not possible. You either have to save for a wedding and bridal money or live for yourself." Hasem was talking about *mahr* (dowry). According to Islamic Law, mahr is set to be given by the groom to the bride. It is a gift or a contribution that a woman freely owns and the mahr belongs to the woman in full. In Tunisia, The Tunisian Law of Personal Status 1956 defines that mahr can be anything that has monetary value, however, it shall not be anything valueless nor should it be excessive.[23] The amount of mahr

[23] The Tunisian Law of Personal Status 1956 defines the dower in the following way (as cited according to the English translation by George N. Sfeir 1957 in The Middle East Journal):
Article 12. Anything which is lawful and has a monetary value may be designated as dower. It shall not be anything that is valueless or its maximum limited. The dower is the property of the woman which she

exemplifies the interests of the man who wishes to marry, the bride and her future prospects, the couple's families financial concerns, and consideration of social norms and rules for bonding (Dahlgren 2005, 125-126). In Tunisia today, mahr is more like a symbolic payment. However, it is an integral component of a legal Tunisian marriage and without paying it, the groom cannot legitimately consummate the marriage. (Honwana 2012, 107.)

According to Honwana (2012, 107), the custom in Tunisia was that the bride's family expected higher compensation from the groom to show that the daughter was used to a life of affluence and that the future husband was required to maintain it. The groom's family then again needed to prove that they are financially secure and that their son was able to offer his bride a comfortable life. This was the tradition in Tunisia until Bourguiba showed a different example by paying his wife's family only a symbolic token of one Tunisian dinar as mahr. (ibid.) Hasem had told me that he does not like the idea of buying a girl from the father. When I asked more about this tradition that I was not that well aware of, he explained that it is a tradition that goes back centuries. Hasem's critical perspective has similarities with Dahlgren's notions from the critics of Aden considering the payment of mahr. According to the critics, setting a mahr leads to inspecting a woman's qualities such as desirability and characteristics. When the market value is set, the women are "sold" to the highest bidder. (Dahlgren 2005, 126.) A few male informants emphasised that "the system of paying the father" when wanting to marry is one of the main issues in Tunisia. "It makes it impossible to get married", I was told.

"When not having enough money to support yourself, how can you support another person", the men asked me? Traditionally the groom is also expected to buy gifts for the bride such as jewellery and perfume. In addition, the groom is expected to prepare the marital home with furniture and afford wedding expenses. (Voorhoeve 2014, 36.) Hamed and Mone elaborated on this when they said that men have to pay the wedding expenses and give gold and other material as gifts. Both Hamed and Mone agreed that, "The system is too expensive and it is impossible to afford all the expectations", which is why Mone, who was usually silent, said he does not want to marry a Tunisian girl. I heard similar comments from other men.

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may dispose of as she wishes.
Article 13. The husband shall not, in default of payment of the dower, force the woman to consummate the marriage. After consummation of the marriage, the dower shall constitute an unsecured debt which the wife may only claim payment thereof. Refusal to pay the dower shall not be cause for divorce.

When I asked Mone and Hamed, who pays for the wedding expenses, they said the main financial responsibility is on the man. In marriage, in addition to the cost of the wedding expenses, according to the Tunisian Law of Personal Status, the husband has an obligation to support his wife and the wife should contribute if she has the means (Voorhoeve 2014, 41). However, according to Maliki law, the woman does not have to touch her own money such as the dower for any expenses. The responsibility to maintain the family is therefore placed upon the men (ibid). In addition to the cost of the wedding expenses, according to the Tunisian Law of Personal Status, the husband has an obligation to maintain his wife. However, the wife should contribute if she has the means to do so when married. (Voorhoeve 2014, 41). Nevertheless, according to Maliki law, the woman does not have to spend her own money such as the dower for any expenses. The responsibility to support the family is therefore placed upon men (ibid).

When I was with Hamed and Mone, I asked them for more details on marriage expenses. I had met Hasem, Nasri, Ali, Bilel and Arkan on the previous day, and they had left me with many questions regarding marriage. Hamed and Mone elaborated on the expenses concerning marriage. At start, they emphasised that marriage is too expensive. Hamed said he does not want to use his money just to afford a wedding, which could easily cost 30,000 Tunisian dinar (over 9,000 euros) and last for seven days. It is not uncommon that the wedding lasts several days Mounira Charrad (2001) reminds, after attending a Tunisian wedding that lasted several days. Honwana (2012) elaborates that a Muslim marriage in Tunisia would traditionally start with a ceremony where mahr is paid. Then follows the bride's henna ceremonies, which may last up to three days. Traditionally it includes a series of ham-mam (traditional steam bath) treatments and henna (red dye from a plant) decorations of the body (especially hands and feet) for the bride and her friends which may last up to three days. (ibid., 107.) While the bride has a rest day, the henna ceremonies start on the groom's side. Nikah, the wedding ceremony, is the culmination of the celebrations. It is officiated over by the mufti (an official of religious law), who approves the marriage contract, the Aqd-Nikah. The celebrations are usually filled with food and drinks, and music. *(*ibid.*)*

Mariem gave some interesting insights into marriage from a woman's perspective when I asked her about mahr during one of our lunch meetings. I wanted to know if the man's income impacts the amount of mahr he pays. "Of course the income matters", she responded. She explained that the man pays his share of the wedding according to his income. When I asked how much men pay traditionally, after a short thought process, she said the ratio would be perhaps that men pay 70 % and women 30 %. Yesmin seemed to agree with Mariem by the way she was nodding, but she did not say anything.

However, Mariem then added that it does not matter who pays: “Also women can pay”. Mariem was not comfortable talking about the topic, or then she was not just that interested in answering my questions, but I continued with one more question. I tried to aim my question to Yesmin as well, who was following but did not take part. I wanted to learn what their families’ expectations are on men’s shares of the wedding expenses. Mariem said that the families do not care. Yesmin shook her head but did not give her opinion.

Hasem, who spokevery passionately about his concerns about marrying, and more particularly, finding someone to love, said “It would be easier if women did not have such high expectations”. Nasri agreed with Hasem, who blamed the women’s parents, mainly the mothers, for teaching young women to expect “too much” and to hold onto traditional values. It is not an unknown phenomenon that the mothers get involved in negotiation of marriage in the Arab context (see Dahlgren 2005; Jyrkiäinen 2018). During this same conversation, Ali, who was often quiet and content with just following the conversation, said with frustration that “Women want a lot of money or the money out of the man”. The other men in the group agreed and celebrated his comment. After Ali and his friends had blamed women for a while, they spesified that it is not just the women to blame, but the injustice in the entire system that has failed them, making them (men) unable to fulfil the expectations as a man and as a husband. The young men seemed to believe that love that leads to marriage is only possible if one has enough money. Although I had less conversations about marriage with young women, they did not mention similar concerns to men.

It is not an uncommon phenomenon to negotiate wedding expenses and the mahr, as Dahlgren shows with her example from Aden (Dahlgren 2005). In Aden, as a symbol of modernity and a result of negotiating around the customs and law, love marriages which involve little or no financial transaction have been recorded. These marriages are distinguished from the traditional setting where love follows marriage. (Dalgren 2005.) In a marriage that Voorhoeve witnessed in Tunisia, the mahr was 50 dinars borrowed from a friend and was then returned after the wedding. (Voorhoeve 2014, 36). However, many (male) informants implied that the women would not settle for less considering the payments related to marriage. Contrarily, the women I met were not that focused on financial stability or other advantages but more on finding love.

Another vital concern of the young was the timing of marriage. The men especially had desires to spend their own money on material things and experience life to the fullest, such as travelling, before marriage. But they seemed to balance between two realities: “You either have to save for a wedding

and bridal money or live for yourself" and "At the moment, it is hard enough to afford your own life, talking about another person?" As a solution to the financial burden of marriage, Hamed and Mone want to marry when they are older. As they put it, they want to first save some money rather than use everything to afford a wedding. Another solution is to marry a foreigner from abroad. Doing so, the men think they could be free from the high expectations regarding marriage.

5. Navigating in the marginality

While in the previous analysis chapter, the focus has been particularly on the issues regarding young Tunisians' lives in post-revolution society. This chapter puts more emphasis on the present be placing the focus on the ways youth manage their lives in the complex social reality they live in. I start by discussing youth's thoughts regarding the precariousness related to the labour market. After that, I illustrate how the young live their lives prior to marriage, which is commonly considered an important milestone of adulthood, but which has according to the young, moved forward to the future. I also discuss the complexities regarding religious norms and social values.

The revolution provided the young with some hope of a better future. In the final two sections, I discuss the young Tunisian's expectations in a time, where technology has provided a platform to explore young lives elsewhere. In the final analysis section, I discuss the youth's aspirations regarding their future, which for many, includes a vision of moving abroad.

5.1 "There are always jobs if you just look"

Ali, Firas and Hasem took me to the "locals café" as they called it at Sidi Bou Said to smoke shisha. While we were talking and smoking shisha on the terrace overlooking the city lights in the horizon, Hasem had a negative tone when talking about the scarcity of good jobs. Suddenly, Firas interrupted him and said that "There are always jobs if you just look". He seemed very rude at first but once I got to know him more, I learned it was just the way he spoke. I met Firas towards the end of my field trip. He is around 30 years of age, and a friend of Ali, Hasem and Nasri, whom I knew better. The first time I met Firas, he seemed extremely vigorous to present to me how his life is in control. He spokeabout his clear goals in life. Now, his goal was to become the best version of himself. For him, it meant getting back in the same physical shape he used to be. Because he wanted to prove how fit he was before, he showed me an old picture of his "fitter" figure.

Honwana (2012, 37) suggests that rather than thinking that young people are waiting for the older generation to do something, young people are actively managing their lives and livelihoods based on their resources. Firas seemed to have everything in order: a nice car, a girlfriend he loves, decent work at a technology-related company and ongoing studies to pursue one of his dreams of becoming a personal trainer. He uses the skills from his studies to earn extra money when he has time (although there are some restrictions on having two jobs, as he explained). Things he had not yet achieved were well organised on his smartphone as a list. As he explained, he was happy to share the list to help me achieve a goal that was important to him: "The goal of life is to achieve happiness and get joy out of the achievements. That cannot be compared to anything else."

Firas' approach to life is that with hard work, everything is achievable. Unlike many others I spoketo, he believes anyone can improve their lives if they just work hard for it. Firas is an incredibly proud man. At the first meetings, he refused to talk about his weaknesses or challenges in life, and he seemed almost overly optimistic when discussing any life struggles. But on a few occasions, I also saw his soft side. He was impressed and grateful for little things, for example, when I suggested paying for his drinks or food. He became more understanding and stopped saying judgemental comments. It seemed that with his harsh side he protected himself from the setbacks of life. Firas knew exactly what life has to offer. Although Firas was optimistic and had an exceptionally positive approach to life, just like others, he was aware of the realities and struggles.

The issue with a weak economy is that it also creates an obstacle to achieving personal goals (Dihstelhoff 2018). Honwana (2012, 39) has found that work is the main marker for adulthood due to its affiliation with gaining independence in different areas of life and its impact on fulfilling aspirations. However, not all jobs were perceived as a gateway to independence or achieving aspirations. Instead, many informants spokeabout good jobs where they can work in a pleasant environment related to their education or something that they like in general, have decent working hours, are secure and sustainable, and on top of these, pay very well. As Firas said, "Of course, it is disappointing to work as a cleaner or in a shitty job after graduating".

While waiting for Yessine, we stopped for ice cream with Amal at La Marsa. A man selling ice cream inside and a woman frying crepes outside appeared to me as if they were coming from Sub-Saharan Africa. Amal told me that people from other African (sub-Saharan) countries come to work in Tunisia. She explained that they earn better money in Tunisia than in their home countries. However, the issue is that because they work cheaper than Tunisians, the salaries for low paying jobs become even lower,

and there are fewer jobs for locals to choose from. For the same reason, Tunisians go elsewhere, for example to Europe, in the search of better-paying jobs. According to Amal, there have been issues with illegal migrants, which has made the public discussion more negative towards black people in general. She expressed her concerns about "seeing more black people in the streets working in low paying jobs. I fear they don't get paid enough". Securing any jobs is a struggle, even for the youth with good assets and who live in the urban cities with more employment options. However, as the employment opportunities are restricted, young Tunisians have less room to negotiate the terms. Education still does not guarantee more opportunities, however, it seems to have a positive impact on how the youth perceive their future opportunities as compared to the more disadvantaged population with no education.

The youth who did not work in the same field as their education, were mainly bothered by the low salary. As good jobs are becoming harder to get, the youth must settle for less. Those with good financial support from their families were less bothered by the downsides of low-paying jobs. "I don't mind working here. I am doing it for experience", stated Amal who had a low-paying job at the small shop and worked long hours but was not bothered by her situation. Her goal was to gain some experience and make new contacts in the art industry. When she got fired from her job without a warning, she had a plan in her pocket on the same day. She had heard that Amazon hires Tunisian people for cheap labour, so she believed she would have good chances of landing a job there. Although she lives with her family, she wanted to find a job to save some money for herself and her dreams. First on her list was to make it possible to meet her boyfriend who lives in a sub-Saharan country. In the future, she envisioned living with him perhaps in his home country or somewhere else.

5.2 Dating while waiting

The second time I met Hamed and Mone, they waited for me near my apartment, in front of a grocery store. Zanir, who was with them in the café when I met them for the first time, did not join them. The men told me that Zanir's girlfriend did not like the thought that he would meet a young woman. We took a taxi to a café in Sidi Bou Said, because I told them I would not mind aving something to eat. I was nervous in the backseat. Could I trust these strangers? However, my intuition told me I could trust them. When we arrived, they insisted on paying by saying "You are our guest". They had chosen

the same café as Leila, whom I had met a few days previously (see picture 12 below). When I told them that, they said it is popular amongst young people and the best place to go to

.

Picture 12: A café in Sidi Bou Said.
(Photograph by Amina Gort)

After ten minutes at the cafe, we were talking like old friends while passing along the shisha we had ordered. Hamed and Mone told me more about their lives. They are in Tunis for their studies on weekdays, but most weekends they visit their families.[24] When I asked about their lives in general, I got the impression they live like typical students. They study hard, and then they balance their free time with socialising, celebrations and parties amongst their peers. Hamed and Mone told me that they go out often. They drink beer, watch movies and come home late. Hamed told me about the times when he goes out in his home city. Sometimes when he comes home, his father catches him drunk. He was twisting his face to show me how drunk he has been. He laughed about these memories and continued: “He smells my breath and tells me to come back later if my mother is awake”. He added that his mom doesn’t like him doing *haram*[25]. When I asked if this really happened, he said yes.

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[24] I talk more about Hamed and Mone in in Section 2.1.
[25] *Haram, s*omething wrong or prohibited in the Quran.

Hamed clarified that his father is more open-minded because he has travelled and lived abroad. When I continued by asking if it is common to smoke *hashish*[26] in Tunisia, Hamed quickly looked around and said, "Speak quietly, or you get us in trouble". They explained it is common, but they do not like doing it. They added that it is hard to find in daylight, but not at night. During this conversation, Mone apologised that he had not answered my text messages last night because he had been drinking. Mone did not talk much the few other times I met him, so I suppose he just did not feel comfortable speaking English, although he spoke it quite well. At the café, I paid attention to how Hamed and Mone were always staring at attractive women walking by. During the first meeting at the café in Sidi Bou Said, Hamed pinched Mone, to point out that there was an attractive woman walking by. When I noticed what they were looking at, I commented about it with a smile on my face. Hamed's response was that, "We can not help it. We are men with adrenaline". Hamed and Mone were flirty men, who spokea lot about their active dating lives and women in general. They told me that they are seeing a few women at the same time. When I asked if the women knew that they were dating many women simultaneously, they said the women were aware of it. Later, however, they said that the women do not know that they are dating many women. They told me that they do not feel responsible for telling the women.

It is not uncommon for men in Northern African countries to live a single lifestyle (that might include hanging out in the neighbourhood's streets and to meet at a coffee shop or tearoom) and delay marriage, nor is it seen as a social failure (Kovacheva et al. 2017, 449). In 2017 I had a conversation with Nasri, Hasem and Ali, who said that are women who are meant "for fun" and others "for marrying". When I met the same group of men again during the fieldwork, I wanted to ask what they then meant by the "two types of women". Nasri and Hasem explained, with a grin on their face, that they date girls, go for coffees and have fun with them but without the intention to marry: "Women still insist on traditional values, but there are girls that want the same things as us, but they pretend like they do not because they have a reputation to keep". When I looked at them with disbelief, Hasem, who was yet again the first to answer, said that men are open with their intentions and the girls are on the same page. Hamed and Mone also told that: "There are the ones you want to marry and have a perfect life and children with and the ones who just want to have fun with." Although the men implied they had sexual relationships with women, almost all said they would only marry a virgin woman.

[26] A drug made of compressed cannabis.

Honwana's (2012, 99) Tunisian male informant Abdelihalil had very similar thoughts regarding pre-marital sex:

> It is a contradiction experienced by Tunisian young men. . . . True, there are girls to marry and girls to play with . . . but at the end of the day every woman is somebody's daughter and somebody's sister. . . . Also you want to share that experience with your girlfriend . . . and the girls also want to have that experience too. . . . It is becoming more difficult for young women to abstain from sex until they get married. . . . We want to enjoy our youth and our freedom.

In the West, intimate partners before marriage or independent housing before family formation, have become more common and marriage and starting a family can occur in any order, however, this rarely applies to MENA youth (Kovacheva et al. 2018, 442-443). Honwana (2012, 99) believes that the employment related hardship and the rising age of marriage has created a challenging environment for the young to manage the social and religious practices, particularly when it comes to questions considering intimate relationships. According to the male informants, young Tunisian women take part in intimate relationships as willingly as men. However, because they have a reputation to keep, "They do it in private", I was told. Similar observations have been done in the Eqyptian context by Senni Jyrkiäinen (2018, 227-230) who observe the online behaviour of young[27]. Jyrkiäinen discusses women, who create two sides of themselves on the social media platforms, which they keep apart. The outgoing- side is presented to friends and the good girl- side to the family. According to her female informants, Magda and Huda, young non-conservative women in Eqypt start presenting themselves online more conservatively when they want to marry, as a marital tactic so that the men would find them more appealing. Jyrkiäinen believes the online context does not differentiate from the public. (ibid. 231.)

According to Kovacheva et al. (2018, 450-451) it is less typical for women[28] in their 20s to go out with their friends in the streets or city squares in the same way that men do, rather, they prefer instead, to spend more time at home, online, and watching television. Kovacheva et al. suggest that there is no such thing as a youth life stage for young women, only years of waiting. Unlike Kovacheva et al.

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[27] Senni Jyrkiäinen (2018) in *Virtual and Urban Intimacies: Youth, Desires and Mediated Relationships in an Egyptian City* part III- "Online Navigation of Desires for Married Futures".
[28] Kovacheva et al. (2018) observes youth in Tunisia, Algeria ana Morocco.

argue, I observed women experiencing youth, but perhaps not in the same way as men. For example, Amal, who does enjoy spending time at home, also actively explores people and places and seeks new experiences. Dalila, Amal's sister, goes out to parties and dates men. She told me about her intentions to educate herself well and find a well-suited and handsome partner in the future. Amal often said she is so different from her sister, who is more social and outgoing than her. Unlike her sister who had an active dating life, Amal was in a relationship with a Christian man whom she had met in Tunisia, and who lives in a sub-Saharan country. However, the relationship had dark clouds over the future as travelling for a visit seemed expensive and challenging at the time. Also the places my informants took me illustrated another side of "Tunisian women". Women were everywhere. Nor were they hanging out on the streets in the same way as men do, they were still out and about: in the cafés, shopping centres and even nightclubs.

5.3 Contesting realities

Yessine arrived late when we were waiting for him with Amal at La Marsa. "Typical for Tunisians", Amal said. When Yessine arrived, he wanted to take us to a particular coffee shop in a tiny street, a short walk away from the train stop at La Marsa. The coffee shop had two floors, and it was crowded with young students studying at the wooden tables on an early Saturday evening. Because we could not find any free tables, we returned near to the shopping centre and went into a café we had walked past previously. That particular café had a different atmosphere than the one we had just left. This one was also filled with young people, but here they smoked cigarettes inside, and the youth were not there to study but to relax in their free time. R&B and hip-hop songs were playing in the background, customers were fashionable, and some women had revealing outfits. Young people sat together in mixed groups drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. We sat at a round table upstairs in the middle of the café while talking about diverse topics. Based on Yessine and Amal's relaxed habitus, there was no need to whisper about sensitive topics in this café (such as LGBT rights in Tunisia or police-related topics).

We spent hours together, first chatting at the café and then dining in La Marsa. We had to head home with Amal because it was getting late. On our way to get a taxi, we stopped on a sidewalk to talk more. It was around 10 pm, and the weather was turning cold. While we stood there, the discussion was still flowing. We spokepassionately and all of us shared intimate details of our lives. At some point, Yessine told us confidently that he is a homosexual. Amal did not seem surprised. She told him that she had thought about it but was too embarrassed to say anything. Yessine seemed relieved to

get his secret off his chest. It was not a surprise to me either because he had been giving hints about it when we were talking about LGBT people previously on that day. He had told us during the evening about clubs where men can kiss safely, and he had shared passionate opinions about the lack of acceptance of LGBT matters. Yessine was concerned about his future. He took his phone out of his pocket and showed a picture of his boyfriend, who lives in Europe and is a bit older than him. They had met online but never in person due to visa-related issues. Yessine said he would like to meet him and move abroad, where the world is more tolerant. We moved from the sidewalk towards a darker area under some trees, giving us privacy from the people walking past. Yessine continued talking about his deep anxiety considering his future. He fears that when he turns 30, his family will start pressuring him to start a family. "They do not know that I am gay", he told us. He was visibly anxious."I do not want to disappoint my family", he added. He felt it would be easier for him to tell his parents if he lived somewhere else. Yessine could only recall one Pride protest in Tunis. "Tunisia is in between two worlds. It follows the West while trying to keep the Islamic traditions" he added.

It was easy to understand Yessine's anxiety. In addition to anxieties related to telling his family, I knew that living openly as a gay person, even in the capital, could be challenging and even somewhat dangerous. The legal restraints impact how freely Yessine can live his life. Although some steps have been taken in Tunisia since 2011 to protect civil and political rights, such as freedom of expression, the LGBT community still suffers from many violations. The Tunisian Criminal Law criminalises sodomy and indecency by threats of imprisonment and fines (in articles 230 and 226). Even the newly chosen president, Kais Saied, openly favoured the criminalisation of homosexuality in his presidential campaign (see Guellali 2019). In addition, other informants, particularly men, did not seem tolerant towards gay couples, especially male couples. Their comments on the whole topic were often negatively laden, mixed with a sense of disgust. As Yessine explained with significant discomfort, a person cannot love or live freely in Tunisia if she or he does not follow the norms.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) argument in the outline of *Theory of Practice*, Fatemeh Sadeghi (2010, 275) reminds that young people are independent subjects to some extent, but they are also shaped by social practises and, in addition, they also shape others. Yessine thinks that the younger generation, who are soon taking the first steps of adulthood, are creating and growing into a more accessible world. They stretch the old norms more intensely despite the older people who try to push back. As Dahlgren (2014, 148) says, it is common for different generations to consider their social conventions "normal". It is not uncommon for adults to set limitations on Arab countries' youth. Together with the state, they act as an authority that guides public morality and keeps young people

under control. (Dahlgren 2014, 147-149). Cultural changes might problematise the relationship between different generations (see Bucholtz 2002). Youth, who struggle the most to fit society's norms, find alternative ways to live their lives freely. "I know one couple who are not together but they married out of social pressure. Now they have a baby together[29] but both do what they want", Yessine said with some optimism in his voice. Yessine spokeabout his friends who party and drink wine. There is a particular area (Gammarth) in Tunis where people go to parties. "In these areas, gay couples can kiss without judgment. In other places, they would be punished", he added.

In another instance, during a long conversation with Omar, Ridha and Amal, I asked whether open intimacy should be allowed in Tunisia. Before this, we had been pondering questions about LGBT people. Omar believes couples should be allowed to kiss openly and show affection in public. Ridha disagreed by saying that it would create chaos if people were allowed to act more freely. He explained that people already disagree with so many things. Allowing people to show affection freely would create friction among some. "Someone always gets mad", he said. It was interesting, yet surprising, that the same youth who had told me previously how they value freedom also believed that freedom has to have some limits. Ridha then reminded me that it is only a minority of the people who are gay, implying that because of that, they do not need the same rights. When I continued around the same topic and asked Ridha, Omar and Amal about what rules and laws should be obeyed, they agreed that people need to be allowed to do whatever they want to do. After this, Omar wondered whether "irrelevant problems are trying to be solved while there are more relevant things to take care of". He believes different issues should be solved in a pyramid model, from bottom to top, first fixing the primary issues (the economy, weak infrastructure, fragmented political field). However, he believes that Tunisia is currently undergoing changes because people are now brave enough to discuss different topics, although some changes have not yet been put into action.

5.4 Rising expectations

> One thing, however, is certain: The journey from the oppressive "old" to the liberatory "new" will not come about without relentless struggle and persistent popular engagement both in public and private, in ideas and in practice, individually and collectively. For revolution involves a fundamental rethinking of power, a radical reimagination of our social order, and

[29] With the help of artificial insemination.

> envisioning a society informed by the ideals of sharing, caring, egalitarian ethos, and inclusive democracy. Indeed, the long revolution may have to begin even when the short revolution ends. (Bayat 2017, 227)

According to Youssef Mahmoud and Andrea Súilleabháin (2020, 104) after the revolution people wanted the state to provide better livelihoods and opportunities, as well as better services and fight corruption. Whatever the original objectives and intentions were for the revolution, Mabrouk (2011, 633) argues that responding to people's expectations now is difficult, as their expectations have developed due to the issues of the previous government. Bahgat Korany and Mostafa El Sayeed (2017, 2) suggest that part of the youth's disappointment and a part of the Tunisian youth's current disappointment and frustration is due to the high and even unrealistic or exaggerated levels of expectations, which resulted from the rising hope after the long period of repression by the authoritarian leaders.

Dahlgren (2014) shows in her paper that Adeni youth consider the state responsible for the creation of and recruitment of new jobs. In Tunisia, the youth have the same expectations for the state, which they see as responsible for providing them with better opportunities. However, some informants also believe that the state stands in their way of opportunities. As Omar explained, Tunisia is rich, the youth have much knowledge, and there are many things to invest in. "Tunisians also have many start-up ideas but the law and paperwork required are complex", he added. Omar, Ridha and Amal all believe, that the state is making it hard to pursue their dreams and put their initiatives forward as the restrictions constrain life and business. As Omar added, "The ones who want to create a global online business suffer from the State's restrictions". The state does not seem to allow the youth to seek substantial changes. In the same discussion, Amal provided a practical example of the state restrictions:

> Some time ago, Tunisia negotiated about the access to PayPal services. The government set a rule which only allowed a certain amount to be spent on PayPal because they wanted the money to come to Tunisia. PayPal disagreed on the terms because they think everyone should have the freedom to spend as much as possible. So the problem is, you can get the services but not the equipment from Tunisia.

One of the most asked questions for young people, according to Honwana (2012, 29) is, "What would you like to be when you grow up?". Honwana argues that the responses reflect how young people think, their relationship to their social surroundings, their age, and their developmental stage (ibid). Honwana indicates that young people share similar concerns and aspirations, in both rich and developing countries, striving to receive a worthy life. Indeed, these were the aspirations of many informants. A worthy life, however, was often related to considerably higher income, which according to the informants, they are lacking. Bayat and Herrera (2010, 12-13) point out, being unable to earn a living can have a negative impact on young people's general well-being and desires, which typically include having enough money to buy consumer items, pursue their dreams, and be stress-free about their adult future. Just as Bayat and Herrera emphasise, the young informants seemed to have enough money to experience satisfactory youth. These expectations were understandable. However, some of the young Tunisians' expectations were unlikely to be achieved. One youth dreamed of becoming a professional driver (such as the ones in the movie *Tokyo Drift*), and another wanted to get extremely rich “just like people in America”. Alongside these dreams were usually the aspiration for wealth, materials and experiences, similar to what the young believe youth have elsewhere. However, these were just the dreams of some. For example, Yessine emphasised living somewhere, we he could have freedom to live as he is. This meant loving the person he wishes publicly and to pursue his professional goals, of which modelling is one, without the fear of social judgement.

I believe information and communication technologies have an important role in shaping the expectations harder to reach such as extreme wealth. The emergence of media and telecommunication services has provided people with a platform to take part in debates and conversations, use media as a tool for peer interaction or leisure, as well as grant them a safe channel for expressing differing viewpoints (Masquelier 2010, 228; Bayat & Herrera 2010, 10). The internet has provided youth with access to a global community in which they are more deeply engaged to other youth and global events (Gabsi 2020, 4; Bayat & Herrera 2010). For the young informants, internet seemed to have a significant role in their daily lives. The young knew what was going on in the world now. However, the online reality seemed to have created an illusion that life is much better elsewhere.

The internet was implemented in most Middle Eastern and North African countries to enhance economic development and competitiveness. However, as the revolution in 2011 showed, the internet makes it more difficult to restrict the flow of information within countries and across international borders. (Deiber et al. 2008, 207.) Erikson (1968) believes that the impact of modern developments might stress the youth, causing them to go through an identity crisis as they experience adulthood (as

cited in Bucholtz 2002, 529). When the youth are well informed about developments in the rest of the world, they are also becoming aware of the opportunities beyond their localities. This is raising their aspirations and creating new expectations. (Honwana 2012, 40.) As a result, modern media and telecommunication services might contribute to a new sense of exclusion when providing the youth with higher living standards and a desire to do more things in life (Dhillon & Yousef 2007). The youth whose expectations seemed highest, were lacking the foresight to achieve these in practise, according to our conversations.

5.5 Dreaming about the future

Omar does not believe Tunisia will develop into a society where infrastructure and social and economic rights are fulfilled in his lifetime. He considers that it is a long process that requires more time. The young generation is lacking patience, he said. “We waited for 25 years, and now three months is too much”, referring to Ben Ali’s regime and the presidential elections at the end of 2019. He continued that now that the new government has been elected, people have shown their disappointment on the radio. “Luckily it went through”, he added, “because the citizens will pay when the process is prolonged. Without settlements, the process would take even more time and money while waiting for the president to approve the government.”

Studies have shown that the youth encounter uncertainty when envisioning their future (Woodman 2011; Heggli et al. 2013; Honwana 2012). When Omar spokeabout waiting patiently or Firas, about everything being achievable, they seemed to represent a minority with such an optimistic outlook on life in general and the future. Most seemed to have lost the ability to imagine a better future with improvements and more opportunities. However, I sensed even amongst those with the most negative outlooks, that a slight hope was present. Hamed and Mone, who are both from wealthy and highly educated families, who travel yearly to the popular tourist resort Djerba (a Tunisian Mediterranean island in the Gulf of Gabès) and who enjoy the student life to the fullest, do not see a positive change nor are they hopeful about the future. However, both envisioned life in Tunisia as they get older. “We love our country so much. So, so much”, Hamed advocated firmly every time I met him. “The food, culture, people, weather, language…”, and his list kept going on. If only life in Tunisia would provide more opportunities and better prospects for the future.

Samuli Schielke (2015)[30] provides a great example of what life may be like for someone unable to achieve his or her goals. Schielke (2015, 150) shares the story of an Egyptian man Mukhtar Shehata, a frustrated and underpaid teacher, who gazes toward the other shore from Alexandria's waterfront, dreaming of the other side:

> When I sit on the seafront, it depends on my mood which way I look. When I'm in an optimistic mood I look away from the sea towards the high-rise buildings and think about the life of the people who live in them. When I'm depressed I look at the sea and think about the other side. And I imagine that on the other side there is someone who, miserable and depressed just like me, looks across the sea and dreams of the other side.

It has been showed that declining opportunities cause youth to migrate both inside and externally to obtain work and gain a sense of stability and security (Honwana 2014). As Shehata, many informants dreamed about moving away. One evening, when Amal and I booked a taxi through an online app from La Marsa back to my apartment, Amal said to the taxi driver that I am from Finland and that I was doing research in Tunisia. The taxi driver, who seemed to be in his mid-thirties, converted to English. He told us that when he was 18 years old, a 56-year-old European woman asked him to marry her. The taxi driver was amused when he told us this story, but he then laughed and added, and added that he had considered the offer to get a visa away from Tunisia. Although this was in a time even before the revolution, similar narratives were present by the young informants. Hamed believes he could have better work opportunities in Europe. A young male gym coach whom I only spoketo briefly, said his dreams are to move abroad to Europe or the United States, where he could gain more professional experience in his profession and receive better-paying jobs. Similarly, Mone prefers the idea of living abroad to gain more experience in his profession, although he sees himself coming back later because he loves the country. The same story applies to many informants who wanted to move abroad to seek better employment opportunities and more money.

From the informants' perspective, life in Tunisia is full of unjustice. Perhaps not that much if they compare to the "poor" or "people from the south", but globally, even more. Living abroad meant for

[30] Samuli Schielke (2015) In *Egypt in the future tense: Hope, frustration, and ambivalence before and after 2011.* Mukhtar Shehata's story in Chapter 7 "Longing for the world".

many, not just more opportunities in general, but the ability to dream about and access a better future. Dreaming about life somewhere else seemed to give these young Tunisians some hope in the prevalent society, where their options are currently limited. Nonetheless, that is not easy. Yessine elaborated on the visa-applying process. First, it is expensive and humiliating, as he described it. In addition, “Most of the time, the visa gets denied”. His earlier visa applications to Europe had been rejected but he was still hopeful, that being accepted to study at a university abroad, the visa would be denied. Yessine was persistent, but he also spoke about people who get frustrated in the process, so they apply for a visa to Canada because it is the most accessible country to get a visa, with money. “There are better human rights in Canada, and it offers better opportunities for life. Many of my friends have paid to get a visa to go there”, Yessine explained.

Schielke (2015, 169) believes that the gazing to the other side on the Alexandria waterfront raises the question about, “ Why the world is full of borders?” and, “What can be done about it?” Similarly to Schielke, I believe that this is what the young adults were searching answers fore. Bayat (2017, 219) says that hope is the most crucial element in post-revolution societies because the belief in a better outcome drive changes. Most of the young whom I consulted, was not willing to give up on their dreams. I understood why, when I asked Amal and Yessine, “What happens when the hope vanishes?”, and, “ How would it feel not to be able to chase your dreams or access them?” Yessine answered that, “It would feel like drowning”, and Amal quickly after Yessine added that, "You either have to accept it, and then you drown, or you have to fight".

6. Conclusion

Using ethnographic methods, this study has explored the life of young urban adults in Tunis in 2020. This study was intended to provide insights into how the young people experience the social reality that Tunisia can offer them and how they talk about their future options. As the theoretical discussion of this thesis shows, Tunisia has faced many challenges since the revolution, especially the weak economy and the fragmentation of the political field. The aim of this study was to bring forward the youth’s realities. In their narratives, the youth often shared their stories by comparing life before the revolution and the time after the revolution. I have adopted the same narrative approach by focusing on the time before and after the revolution, especially in the analysis chapters 4 and 5.

The new governments have been fragile and improvements weak. The young informants feel neglected in the political sphere. More importantly, the youth are lacking trust in the decision-makers in general. The young have lost faith that the state could provide them with a better future and more opportunities in life. According to the informants, people in Tunisia are still practising how to coexist after years of oppression as well as learning to live life with the new rules, norms and values. According to the young, a key issue has been to learn how to balance the new freedoms. As many young people emphasised, freedom was desired and warmly welcomed, but it also gave room to rising tensions as people who had been strictly surveilled for a long time were able to do and say as they wished after the revolution. The youth consider this a key element for increased criminality and safety-related concerns. Freedom itself is something that the youth value, but it has not resolved the biggest underlying issue: the weak economy, and more particularly the high unemployment rates.

In 2020, the young struggled to secure good jobs. The young informants who were working, had non-career and unsatisfactory jobs where temporality was a considerable issue. A good job, that many dream of, includes elements such as good salary, general security and is preferably related to their education or personal interests. However, the weak economy has placed the young to an even more vulnerable position, where they have little or no room to negotiate work terms. The concerns related to the economy were present throughout the data and the whole study because they impact the youth's lives in every aspect by either limiting or granting opportunities. Economic concerns impact the ability to live life to the fullest, and more precisely, experience youth.

Certainly, there is no such thing as a universal experience of youth. However, according to the young people I met, youth seems to represent a time for independent self-examination, where gaining experience and knowledge are essential steps. The young generation of Tunisia, who are well connected to global culture and trends through the internet, adopt ideas and influences of what youth should look like from various online platforms. Many of the informants seemed to believe that life would be easier elsewhere, especially when it comes to gaining wealth, finding a partner (particularly the men agreed on this), and living free from social constraints. This has sparked a sense of global injustice. While aspiring to experience youth in all its measures and balancing with the economy-related challenges (particularly the men), both the ability and the will to marry and form a family have been postponed. As the youth phrased it: "We want global freedom".

As this study shows, social reality impacts the ways the young population envision their future. A combining element for all informants was the dream to have a good life full of opportunities. However, the details of what a good life involves differs slightly for each person. Still, a good life was profoundly related to wealth which would make life easier. These observations are in line with the young men's comments about life in Tunisia in 2017[31]. In comparison to 2017, the devastating despair has transformed into disappointment mixed with some hope.

One male informant said that he would "Kill all the members of the government and hang them publicly" and that he would "set qualified people such as educated doctors, lawyers and engineers to lead the country" and that he would send all the old politicians to jail. Although this was just a figure of speech as he later explained, his idea was that by removing the current decision-makers and by replacing them with new people, the nation could improve. Many questions arising from my study have not been answered in this paper. At best, they have only been touched upon. The future studies are yet to ask what expectations do young Tunisians have for the state and what are the youth willing to do to meet these expectations?

The small group of urban youth I studied seem resilient despite the challenges that society puts in front of them. They are actively searching for ways to make life worth living with the assets they have and they seem to be persistent in holding onto their dreams, despite the setbacks. An unspoken question that still seems to linger amongst the youth ten years after the revolution is "What happens next?" The whole nation is yet again confronting drastic transformations as President Saied fired the prime minister Hichem Mechichi and suspended the parliament on the 25th of July 2021, a few months after I concluded my fieldwork in Tunis. After violent protests erupted in response to the government's poor approaches to the economy and its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, Saied granted himself executive power. (Deutsche Welle 2022a & b; Amara & Mcdowall 2021.) Even before the coronavirus pandemic, Tunisia's economic resilience had already been negatively affected by years of indecisive policymaking, rising protectionism, a slow growth rate, and rising debt. The epidemic of the coronavirus has accelerated the slowing of economic growth. By the end of the first quarter of 2021, unemployment rates had risen from pre-pandemic levels, affecting particularly women and young people aged 15 to 24. (The World Bank 2021.) Some Tunisians, especially the youth, have supported Saied's act to seize executive power based on his promise to fight corruption. However, Saied has been criticised for leading the country towards an authoritarian regime. (Ghilès 2021; The

[31] As discussed in Introduction.

Guardian 2021; Ebel 2021.) This has raised fears of returning to an authoritarian rule, however, only time will tell whether Saied will become the face of success or a leader, who threatens democracy.

Finally, I would like to thank the hospitable young adults who were willing to show me different sides of their own lives. To my surprise, the young people were often happy to share their thoughts and express their frustrations and hopes. This ethnographic study shows first and foremost that the young Tunisians have a lot to say about life in Tunisia. I believe this is an important finding itself. As a group that has been dismissed by the state, most seemed to enjoy taking part in a study where "someone is not just listening but trying to understand", as Omar's last words were to me as we said goodbyes.

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