

**Post-revolutionary Tunisia:  
The Islamist Construction of  
'Woman' on Facebook**

**Manel Zouabi**

**PhD**

**University of York**

**Women's Studies**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the construction of Tunisian woman on post-revolutionary Islamist Facebook pages. Much research on the digital politics of ‘the Arab Spring’ has been conducted. It has significantly emphasised the liberatory function of social media, especially in regard to the mobilisation of people into street rebellion. Yet, there has been scant research into the more subtle discursive power of online communication in shifting normative cultural understandings. In this project, and after discussing the political history of Islamism in Tunisia and then outlining the way Facebook became a crucial location for political persuasion, utilised by groups of Islamists, I assess a significant number of Islamist Facebook pages. I ask: ‘How do Islamists construe women, what strategies are used to enable Islamist ideas on women to become culturally acceptable? In order to address these questions I carefully selected representative posts dealing with the particular aspects of women’s dress code, moral conduct, and feminist activists, which I identified in my critical study of the political history of Islamism. I deploy critical discourse analysis to offer a small-scale, detailed analysis of the re-inscription of women into the Islamist discourse. My analysis unveils that the post-revolutionary Islamist discourse about women still draws widely on the pre-revolutionary Islamist agenda. Woman is still essentialised in, and conceptualised through, the mega religious, cultural, and political discourse of resistance. She is, consequently, strictly polarized into the veiled versus the unveiled, the pious versus the fallen, and the Arab Muslim versus the Westernised francophone. I assert that this deconstructive exposure not only contributes to underdeveloped scholarship on North African and post ‘Arab Spring’ studies in relation to women, politicised religious discourses, and social media, but also offers tools with which to challenge Islamist ideas.

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My thesis is dedicated to you.

## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is based on original research, and I am the sole author. All sources are acknowledged as references. This thesis has not been previously published or presented for an award at the University of York, or any other, university, although a draft of chapter IV was published in February 2017 as 'Post-Revolutionary Tunisia: The Conceptualisation of Women in the Islamist Discourse on Facebook' in *Africa Studies Bulletin* 78 of the University of Leeds.

## Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is a critical study of the Islamist discourse about woman in early transitional Tunisia (2011-2012), as constructed through Facebook. In this opening chapter, I first discuss the research context of the thesis through the assessment of the question of woman, the rise of Islamism, and social media in the post-‘Arab Spring’ scholarship. Second, I critically reflect on my motivations for conducting this research, and the way my experiences as a Tunisian woman, Facebook user and researcher on women’s studies informed my conceptualisation of my topic. Third, I set out my key questions and ideas. In doing this, I, most importantly, shed light on the complications of the notion of ‘Islamism’, and attempt to negotiate them. I conclude the chapter by outlining the structure of the thesis.

### Research Context

#### *Women and Islamism: eclipsing the question of women in post-revolutionary Tunisia*

I commenced my doctoral research at the Centre for Women’s Studies in January 2013. Yet, the ideas of the thesis were initially conceived in mid-2011. A wide host of researchers (see for example: Saikal and Acharya, 2013; Solomon and Palmieri, 2011; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015) argue that the year 2011 signalled the most significant socio-political transformation in the contemporary history of Tunisia. Michael Willis notes that the North African country became no longer associated internationally only with fancy ‘holiday brochures’ (Willis 2014, p.1).<sup>1</sup> Instead, Tunisia started occupying international media headlines. This wide and sudden interest stemmed from the breaking of a popular revolt and the consequent overthrow of the 23 year-old dictatorship of the Ben Ali regime. It was not only international media, however, that the Tunisian Revolution had attracted. A growing number of researchers (see for example: Alianak, 2014; Esposito et al, 2016; Henry and Hyang, 2013; Howard and Husain, 2013) also turned their attention to revolutionary and transitional Tunisia. These researchers raised critical questions addressing the role of Tunisia in launching the ‘Arab Spring’,<sup>2</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup>A researcher on North African Studies.

<sup>2</sup>The ‘Arab Spring’ is a series of uprisings and manifestations that started in Tunisia on 17 December 2011, and led the overthrow of dictatorial regimes in different Arab countries including Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya. Yet, it also led to civil wars, especially in Syria and Libya. The expression ‘Arab Spring’ is now controversial, and many people, including some public intellectuals in Tunisia such as Olfa Youssef and Saloua Sharfi oppose the use of the expression. These debates on the use of ‘Arab Spring’ are not among the focuses of my thesis, and are beyond my work.

correlation between social media and resistance, the rise of Islamism, democratisation, and most importantly, the compatibility of Islamist movements with political plurality.

What comes as a surprise, however, is the relative lack of interest in researching on and interrogating perspectives of research on post-revolutionary Tunisian women.<sup>3</sup> Having said that, I should first highlight the publication of pertinent work on women after the Tunisian Revolution in particular, and ‘the Arab Spring’ in general.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, this interest in the question of woman has largely been eclipsed by the international scholarly focus on political Islam in relation to the process of democratisation. I argue that discussions about women have not yet reflected clearly the ‘value’ of the question of woman in the critical understanding of the transitional Tunisian paradigm. In a 2016 survey conducted by *Sigma Conseil*<sup>5</sup> on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Tunisian independence from France, participants ranked women’s issues, particularly emancipation,<sup>6</sup> among the top features of contemporary Tunisia (*Sigma Conseil* 2016, p.1). The result of the survey, broadcast and discussed on the popular Tunisian TV channel *Elhiwar Ettounsi* (The Tunisian Dialogue), would probably seem surprising given the post-revolutionary Tunisian rising concerns about other critical questions, notably the shaking national security and sharp economic decline. Yet, the very same survey result, if analysed in conjunction with a myriad of other significant statements, brings into the centrality of the question of woman in the internalised Tunisian collective awareness.

Beji Caid Essebsi, the current Tunisian Head of state (December 2014 - ), argued, in different occasions, for the significant way women have shaped post-revolutionary Tunisia. President Essebsi seems to be referring to the women who voted for him in the 2014 Presidential elections. These women, election polls estimated, brought about not only the 2014 victory of ‘secular’ Bourguibist politics led by Essebsi,<sup>7</sup> but also the electoral retreat of their powerful political opponent, En-nahda Islamist Party, into second place. In addition to *Sigma Conseil* and President Essebsi, Naila Sellini, an influential Tunisian woman public scholar, made a very connotative statement about the issue of woman. When asked by the Sky News host Turki Dakhil about the factors of the distinctiveness of the Tunisian transitional paradigm in

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<sup>3</sup>In my thesis, I use ‘woman’ in the singular for conceptual analysis, and ‘women’ plural in other situations.

<sup>4</sup>See for example: Khalil, 2013; Sadiki, 2014; Shalaby and Moghadam, 2016.

<sup>5</sup>Sigma Conseil is a very well-known group of offices founded and based in Tunis (the Capital of Tunisia) and ‘implemented in the North of Africa [...] for the study of marketing, medias, ad opinions. The metier of Sigma resides in the collection, treatment, interpretation, and analysis of quantitative and qualitative database.’ (*Sigma Conseil* 2014, p.1).

<sup>6</sup>The term ‘emancipation’ was first employed in the Bourguibist discourse with reference to a set of feminist legal reforms. It then became widely adopted in popular discourses about post-independence Tunisia.

<sup>7</sup>I discuss ‘secular’ Bourguibism in the next chapter.

the Arab World,<sup>8</sup> Sellini's answer was a firm one-word phrase: 'woman!'.<sup>9</sup> The statements of Tunisians interviewed by *Sigma Conseil*, Essebsi, and Sellini draw attention to a 'mystery' surrounding the post-revolutionary Tunisian woman. This mystery, as I earlier suggested, has not yet been thoroughly spelled out by contemporary research on the 'Arab Spring' and its aftermath.

*Social media and the study of the post-revolutionary Tunisian woman: beyond revolution.*

I did not refer, through my emphasis on the need for a 'spelling out' process in the above section, only to the amount of research conducted about the question of post-revolutionary Tunisian woman. I also targeted the available *sources* for conducting this research. Social media is one source that has increasingly been explored for the study of Arab Revolutions. A wide array of researchers (see for example: Peter B. Steel, 2012; Stein Schjolberg, 2014; Gilbert Silvius, 2016) have asserted that Facebook is one of the 'fastest growing' sites in history. The most recent statistics have, as well, reflected this fast growth of Facebook. For instance, the Zopheria digital marketing website suggests that, in April 2017, there were 'over 1, 86 billion monthly active Facebook users; which is a 17 percent increase year over year'. This growing worldwide popularity could hardly go unnoticed; as more and more people were joining Facebook every day, scholarly questions were raised about the utility of this site.

In his critical review of the study of Facebook in social research, Robert E. Wilson et al. (2012, p. 207) poses a set of key questions:

- (a) Who is using Facebook and what are users doing while on Facebook?,
- (b) why do people use Facebook?
- (c) How are people presenting themselves on Facebook?
- (d) How is Facebook affecting the relationships among groups and individuals?
- (e) Why are people disclosing personal information on Facebook despite potential risks?

These questions, I suggest, seem to revolve around the issue of representation, especially in relation to the self. In fact, there has been ongoing speculation within media studies about representation and how it is mediated on digital platforms through every day online communication (Page et al. 2014; Thumim, 2012; Wankel, 2010). My thesis, likewise, sheds light on the question of representation on Facebook. Yet, unlike Wilson et al.'s observations, I am not concerned with representation in relation to communication and everyday 'Facebooking' practices. My analytical emphasis, instead, is focused on ways in which

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<sup>8</sup>The Tunisian post-'Arab Spring' transition is regarded as the most successful and democratic paradigm in the Arab World (Sadiki, 2014).

<sup>9</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of1f6ZQxk4M>.

politicised representations of Tunisian women are formed, naturalised, and assimilated into common sense knowledge on Islamist Facebook pages.

Tunisia is a fairly small country in terms of population, with around 9 million in 2012. Yet, it ranks as the 47<sup>th</sup> biggest country user of Facebook in the world, and 79% of Tunisian internet users have Facebook accounts according to the 2012 Wamada statistics. Facebook became incredibly important with the December 2010 uprisings and its aftermath, and the number of users increased by a third during the 2011 Revolution (Wamada, 2012). Both bloggers and everyday users relied on this site to obtain and spread information about the uprisings.<sup>10</sup>

Alexis C. Madrigal (2011), commenting on the increasing usefulness and popularity of Facebook in Tunisia, comments:

For activists as well as everyday people, Facebook became an indispensable resource for tracking the minute-by-minute development of the situation [the Revolution]. By January 8, Facebook says that it had several hundred thousand more users than it had ever had before in Tunisia, a country with a few more people than Michigan. Scaled up to the size to the U.S., the burst of activity was like adding 10 million users in a week. And the average time spent on the site more than doubled what it had been before. p.1

Clearly, the noticeable ‘flourishing’ of Facebook in Tunisia was significantly related to political factors. This may justify how social media studies, among other fields, focused on the role of this digital platform in the ‘Arab Spring’.

Many researchers have acknowledged the centrality of social media in the ‘Arab Spring’ socio-political landscape. For instance, Nouri Gana (2013), specialising in the language and cultures of the Arab World, questioned the role of Facebook in the Tunisian Revolution. Loubna Skalli (2013), focusing on the question of woman, examined the strategies of North African women users of social media against gendered discourses including that of sexual harassment. The works of Gana and Skalli reflect the overwhelming research orientation, especially in the first few post-revolutionary years, of employing social media for the study of ‘Arab Spring’ Revolutions. Little has been done, however, to broaden research into the deployment of social media beyond revolutionary apparatuses and subtle gender debates, and my approach to Facebook attempts a new perspective.

I argue, for reasons I shall explain in the next chapter, that social media, particularly Facebook, articulate a highly useful field for the collection of data in regard to the Tunisian case. The utility of this site can be, I suggest, expanded into the study of woman from

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<sup>10</sup> For more on the circumstances, please see chapter II, section 3.

different angles (other than that of revolution and activist campaigning) such as politicised representations. This interest I developed in the scholarly deployment of Facebook, combined with my personal and academic focus on women's studies, is among my central motivations for the launching of this research project in mid-2011.

### **Motivations: It is the Revolution! Down with dictatorship...and with feminism**

The 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 was not only a day that 'took the world by surprise' (Willis 2014, p. 1). A large part of Tunisians were also taken by surprise. Two likely scenarios were expected for the end of the popular uprisings breaking out throughout the country since December 2010. Reform was one option since certain Tunisians hoped that President Ben Ali, a long-established authoritarian figure, would take steps forward into the de-restriction of freedoms and the improvement of economic and political conditions, in response to the uprisings. Others speculated that Ben Ali would end popular discontent through the criminalization of those who were seen as his corrupt cronies, particularly his in-law family. Neither of the two scenarios came true. What happened instead was, in effect, the flight of Ben Ali outside the country and his consequent overthrow. This end of the Ben Ali rule, as a result of popular uprisings, could not be easily processed. The youth who revolted against Ben Ali were, themselves, largely brought up at the start or during Ben Ali's 23 year-old rule between 1987 and 2011 (Abegunrin 2013, p.136). The only figure these youth were accustomed to as a President of Tunisia was Ben Ali. Signboards portraying Ben Ali used to surround people everywhere before 14 January 2011; in public streets, public service buildings, and even in gyms! These signboards contained persuasive texts such as 'Ben Ali: Safety and Security' and 'Ben Ali: Change Maker'. The figure of Ben Ali was an Orwellian 'Big Brother', watching closely over Tunisians, till its fall.

The overthrow of Ben Ali did not only crystallise a starting point for the potential break with dictatorship. This overthrow also brought possibilities of looking, through new lenses, at socio-political discourses perpetuated over the last 23 years. Rigid dictatorship proved to be shakeable; and hence were the discourses associated with dictatorship. It was within this phase of 'euphoric deconstructionism' that the Ben Ali discourse on woman, a subtle continuation of the discourse of Habib Bourguiba, who is considered a symbol of anti-colonial resistance, the founding father of 'modern' Tunisia, and the 'emancipator' of women, came publicly under attack.<sup>11</sup> Attack did not seem to be pointed against the pre-revolutionary state monopoly of public discourse on women's rights. Attack rather targeted the social

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<sup>11</sup>I discuss Bourguibist reform in detail in the next chapter.

structure that state reform produced in regard to women. The social structure I refer to is the myriad of ideas and practical articulations aiming at, and succeeding in, better integrating women in the public sphere and securing more gender equality. This structure, cherished by the overthrown Ben Ali regime, was now claimed as ‘unauthentic’ in relation to the Tunisian Arab Muslim identity.

Such a post-revolutionary association between the Ben Ali discourse on woman and between the breaching of Tunisian Arab Islamic ideals did not come as a surprise after the Revolution. In fact, this association could also be mapped in pre-revolutionary Tunisia, particularly in the Islamist discourse.<sup>12</sup> Yet, what had distinguished the post-revolutionary phase was the promotion of the theory of the semiotic inseparability between overthrown dictatorship and women’s rights. Feminist reform was re-articulated, especially by Islamist Facebook users, as a signifier of political oppression. As Tunisians were successful in ending state dictatorship, they needed, according to Islamists, to erase one of the most significant signs of dictatorship: the so-called women’s Bourguibist rights. These Facebook users seemed to call, as Saloua Charfi, a Tunisian public intellectual, suggested in a 2011 on TV, for the ‘*jeter le bébé avec l’eau du bain*’ (throwing the baby out with the bathwater).

The Tunisian Revolution was, as a wide host of researchers (see for example: Khalil, 2013; Ghana 2013) argue, a politically leaderless and decentralised revolution. Islamists and other socio-political movements in general, did not participate directly and/or explicitly in the Revolution. It was rather everyday civilians that took to the streets, and raised the following slogan: ‘Freedom, Dignity, Social justice’. Yet, the revolutionary landscape had noticeably shifted by the overthrow of Ben Ali on the 14<sup>th</sup> January. Facebook, once a means for the promotion of revolution and resistance, transformed into a platform for politicised debates on national identity and women’s dress code and rights. It was on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, as quickly as just one day after the overthrow of Ben Ali, that unfamiliar types of publications started circulating on Facebook. That day was the start of a curfew. I logged into Facebook in the morning. The site was a vital means for interaction, and of communication of news, especially with the unpopularity of and declining trust in home traditional media.<sup>13</sup> There were a couple of publications that kept figuring on the news feed. The first was a video about the unethical dimensions of alcohol consumption. The second was a picture with a descriptive text, and revolves around the importance of making women wear *hijab*. I was initially fascinated by the language employed in both posts. Standard and very formal Arabic, akin to

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<sup>12</sup>As I further explain in the following chapter.

<sup>13</sup>I explain why Tunisian home media became unpopular in the following chapter, section 3.

that of international media preachers on Islam, was used. This noticeably differed from the casual, usually colloquial, style of interaction on Tunisian Facebook pages. Apart from language, I was taken aback by the topics of the publications. I do not underestimate the importance of ethico-social and cultural discussions. Yet, alcohol consumption and the veiling of women were, by no means, issues I would have expected to discuss in the first morning of Revolution against political dictatorship, economic marginalisation and social injustice. Was the Revolution taking a new shape? I then wondered.

I was not totally wrong. After this sudden Facebook shift, little was discussed anymore ‘about employment, freedom and dignity in public [...]. Tunisia’s sole problematic became the question of identity. Discussions [...] revolved around terrorism, *niqab*, alcohol consumption, prostitution, spinsterhood, same-sex schools, Caliphate and related topics’ (Zouabi 2014, p.1). Some Tunisian women took to the streets in Tunis less than two weeks after the Revolution. Their march was fuelled by the alarming misogynist discourses rapidly promoted, especially on Facebook. Debates around the misogyny of the Islamist discourse on the one hand, and the ‘dictatorial’ semiotic character of women’s rights on the other hand, intensified. It became very challenging, at some point during the early transitional era, to publicly support gender equality on Facebook. This situation appeared to me as no different, at least symbolically, from that of the spirit of the Reign of Terror I studied about and was haunted by as a high-school girl.<sup>14</sup> The supporter of women’s rights would be subject, by certain individuals and groups, to vehement defamation, including sharp accusations of enmity to the Revolution and solidarity with dictatorship.

It was within what I perceived as post-revolutionary polarized Facebook platforms and intensifying debates on women’s rights that the ideas of my thesis were initially conceptualised. My stand as a Tunisian, a woman, a Tunisian woman, an observer, a participant, and a researcher on women’s studies played, in effect, a central role in informing my thesis. I speculated, in mid-2011, that it was probably time to leave behind my ‘beloved’ Victorian women in whom I was academically interested for over three years. I decided that it was rather the appropriate moment to critically approach Tunisian woman after the Revolution, and explore how the rise of Islamist discourses on Facebook into prominence impacted her. Both my theoretical framework and analytical perspective are rooted in, and

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<sup>14</sup>The Encyclopaedia Britannica (2015) defines the Reign of Terror as: ‘[...] the period of the French Revolution from September 5, 1793 to July 27, 1794 (9 Thermidor, year II). With civil war spreading from the Vendée and hostile armies surrounding France on all sides, the Revolutionary government decided to make “Terror” the order of the day (September 5 decree) and to take harsh measures against those suspected of being enemies of the Revolution’.

informed by, my commitment to gender equality and women's rights. A move toward a more gender-egalitarian Tunisia would have been, I suggest, a more truthful crystallisation of the original quest of the 2011 Revolution for social justice.

### **Key questions and ideas**

My personal and academic interest in women's issues, as well as my reflections on the Tunisian Revolution and its aftermath impact on women in relation to Islamist Facebook discourses, informed the research questions of my thesis. I ask:

- What particular issues do Islamists focus on in regard to woman?
- What other discourses does the Islamist discourse interplay with in construing woman?
- How does the Islamist discourse interplay with other discourses in construing woman?
- How do Islamist Facebook pages construe woman?
- What discursive strategies do Islamist Facebook pages deploy for the construing of woman?
- What discursive representations of woman are embedded in Islamist Facebook pages?
- How are Islamist discursive representations of woman assimilated to Tunisian common sense knowledge?

During a conference that took place in my final PhD year, I attempted to explain how my thesis explored the Islamist Facebook discourse about woman in post-revolutionary Tunisia. One of my interlocutors, a woman-researcher who showed interest in the potential cross-cultural dimensions of my topic, was thoughtful for a moment. Then, she addressed me in apparent excitement: 'It was interesting to look at how women participated in the 'Arab Spring' online, but we [audience? academics? Western?] kind of forgot to look at how these women were portrayed.' This is what I precisely aim to do in my thesis. I shed light on a central question, 'how is woman construed by Islamist Facebook users in post-revolutionary Tunisia?', and its related set of questions.

I set out, accordingly, a new theoretical framework helpful for public conceptualisation of, and academic research about, post 'Arab Spring' woman in Tunisia. I argue that my questions provide new lenses for the study of Tunisian women beyond revolution, self-representation, and traditional mediums of communication.<sup>15</sup> I rather question *how* the increasingly influential discourse of Islamism, as promoted through the popular medium of Facebook, constructed specific discursive representations of woman in transitional Tunisia. I address

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<sup>15</sup>Conventional media (example: TV and press), interviews, and official political statements.

politicised ideas about woman in Islamist Facebook posts. I interrogate the themes, discursive strategies, devices and interplayed discourses in which politicised ideas are embedded, and through which are articulated. I examine the produced representations, and their assimilation into socio-political and cultural common sense knowledge. Yet, these very same questions raise an initial concern, especially if addressed during these particular international circumstances,<sup>16</sup> and in a Western academia milieu. The concern I refer to centres on how I understand, and employ the concept of Islamism in my thesis.

Main stream media has exhausted the term ‘Islamism’, especially after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the 9/11 US events, the 2011 ‘Arab Spring’, the emergence of ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), and the 2015 Charlie Hebdo tragedy in Paris. Islamism has since epitomised different dimensions; the most prominent of which are perhaps extremism, ideology, terrorism, and radicalisation (Croft, 2006; Strindberg, 2011). The post-revolutionary rise of Tunisian Islamist movements, together with my trip to Britain for a doctoral research on Islamism and woman, have been vital in critically highlighting the embedded complexities of the use of Islam-derived terminologies in public, in main stream media, and often in academic milieu.

A certain lovely lady, in the very first week of my arrival in Britain, and after discovering I was a Muslim, addressed me kindly: ‘I had some Muslim neighbours in Sheffield [...] they were nice.’ I, dutifully, thanked her for the apparent compliment. Nevertheless, and at the back of my mind, I reasoned differently. The statement of the lady, though well-appreciated, sounded, literally, no different from telling me: ‘I met people from the planet Earth [...] they were nice.’ I could not understand how my ties with the Sheffield Muslim neighbours may be any stronger than that. Therefore, I could not feel, truly, flattered. Yet, this holistic labelling on religious basis was extremely thought provoking. I was initially interested in the negotiation of its multi-layered cultural imageries. Therefore, I could not care less for the interplay of signifiers within.

More recent intriguing instances had been the headlines of international newspapers. One headline, for example, employed the term ‘British Muslim’. I then required a relatively long time, approximately a few seconds, to process this expression, and familiarise myself with it. The blurring of complex intersections of geography, age, class, education, mental health, and sexual identity, among many other potential individual specifiers, into the one umbrella of

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<sup>16</sup>I worked on my thesis during very critical international circumstances related to Islam, and Islamism including the civil war in Syria, the rise of terrorism against armed forces and Westerners in Tunisia, and terrorist attacks in Paris and Belgium. I discuss this in detail in the concluding chapter.

religious identity, has been strikingly noteworthy. A quick imaginary flash occurred to me then. It was about reading news headlines like ‘The British Christian Adele releases a new album’ or ‘The British agonistic passenger was convicted of drug smuggling’. I was too perplexed then to pursue reading what became of that ‘British Muslim’. Yet, and as to me, I became aware of the way Islam-derived terminologies are sensitive, and discursively interplayed in international mainstream media.

Another central instance has been the discussion of my research project. Not only have discussions about my topic raised my awareness about the above problematic of terminology, but it has also drawn my attention to the impact of this problematic use on Muslim and non-Muslim conceptualisations of ‘Islamism’. Islamism, especially in its adjective form ‘Islamist’, generated multiple, often unpleasant, signifiers in regard to my research. The term would be approached, by my interlocutors, as the synonym of ‘fundamentalism’, ‘terrorism’, ‘misogyny’, or, at best, as simply ‘Islam’. I therefore needed to argue, every time, that my work does not approach ‘Islamist’ and ‘Muslim’ as synonymous. For all the instances discussed above,<sup>17</sup> I feel compelled to spell out my understanding and employment of ‘Islamism’ as early as the introductory chapter.

The term ‘Muslim’ (Moslem, مسلم) appears in Qur’an. The term ‘Islamist’ (Islami, إسلامي), however, does not appear at all in this Islamic key text. Farid Adel (2010), an Islamic scholar, defines ‘Muslim’ as:

[...] someone who surrenders himself to the will of God; therefore, anyone with these basic and fundamental beliefs will be considered a Muslim. [...] “Muslim” is not exclusively reserved for the so-called Muslims as we assume to know. A Jew or a Christian or any person can be called a Muslim, depending on one’s belief in the existence of the one true God. p. 3

The literal meaning of ‘Muslim’ is a person who submits to the will of God.<sup>18</sup> Adel (2010) notes that the term Muslim in Qur’an is not exclusively used for the prophet Muhammad and/or his followers. The term is also employed for pre-Muslim messengers, prophets, and groups of individuals who ‘surrendered [...] to will of *Allah*’ (Adel 2010, p. 3). Adam, Noah, Abraham,<sup>19</sup> and others are inscribed in Qur’an as Muslims for abiding by the will of *Allah*.

Shifting into ‘Islamism’, a host of scholars suggest that this concept first originated in the work of the French philosopher Voltaire in the eighteenth century. For instance, Richard

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<sup>17</sup>I expand on the connotations of the notion of Islam in the concluding chapter.

<sup>18</sup>Merriam Webster dictionary.

<sup>19</sup>Messengers in Quran.

Martin and Abbas Barzegar (2010) argue that Voltaire's deployment of 'Islamism' in regard to Islam and the prophet Muhammad was 'anything but gentle' (p.68).<sup>20</sup> Hichem Djait, a notable Tunisian historian, also accentuates the role of the works of Enlightenment, notably Voltaire's, in the early perpetuation of an association between 'Islamism' and meanings of fanaticism, enthusiasm, and superstition (1985, p. 21-4).<sup>21</sup> 'Islamism' re-appeared again during the twentieth century. The rebirth of the term was initially fuelled by the appearance of right-winged religio-political movements, notably the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, and the sub-continent Indian Islamic Society in 1941. William Sharif (2009) suggests that scholarly interest in these movements was limited at that time due to the circumstances of WWII and then the Cold War. Islamists became highly visible, however, after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The foundation of a ruling Islamist system in Iran had attracted immense attention to the phenomenon of political Islam (Sharif 2009, p.14). Then, and after 09/11, 'Islamism' has often transformed into an alternative of 'Islamic fundamentalism' (Sharif, 2009, p.14). To sum up, the concept of 'Islamism' has acquired different signifiers since the eighteenth century, all of which are, almost, unfavourable.

I focus on the concept of 'Islamism' as broadly covering socio-cultural and/or political individuals and movements active since the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to Islam, the Islamist perspective emerged in already Islamic societies such as Egypt. Early influential Islamist theorists approached these societies as not Muslim at all, or at least as not being Muslim *enough*. For example, Sayyed Qutb, second only to Hasan Al Banna (the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood) in Islamist influence, argues: 'People are not Muslims as they pretend to be. They conduct *aj-jahiliya* [pagan] life [...] this is not Islam, and those are not Muslims' (1973, p.158). Qutb also contends that Imams '[...] chant in the minarets<sup>23</sup> in the East and the West with no meaning and reality' (1976, p.1057). Apparently, Qutb questions, even urges for the re-conceptualisation of, the Muslimness of these societies. The paradigm of resistance displayed by Qutb and these movements may hence evoke what Afif Bouni (2014), a Tunisian intellectual, depicts as the Islamisation of Muslims. By this, Bouni seems to point

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<sup>20</sup>Researchers on political Islam.

<sup>21</sup>The approach of the French Enlightenment in general and Voltaire in particular to religion, and the Muslim one in this specific case, represents a complex topic of debate. My interest, however, centres on the broad scholarly agreement on the negative instrumentalisation of the term 'Islamism' by the French Enlightenment.

<sup>22</sup>I examine the emergence, and development of Islamism in more details, with a particular emphasis on the Tunisian paradigm, in chapter III. The discussion I conduct now in the Introduction is rather an overview aiming at clarifying the confusion between 'Muslim' and 'Islamist'.

<sup>23</sup>A place in a mosque used to call for prayer.

to the idea of the transformation of those who are perceived by Qutb and his followers as *basic* Muslims into Islamised versions of themselves.<sup>24</sup>

The original framework of Qutb, and Islamism in general, may broadly evoke making *basic* Muslims more Muslim, or real Muslims.<sup>25</sup> Means of Islamisation can be crystallised in a myriad of mechanisms. Whereas Islam represents an end in itself and a part of the state of being and living of Muslims, it rather functions as a means,<sup>26</sup> within Islamism. Islamists instrumentalize Islam for the achievement of a specific socio-political project. This project, typically, essentializes a distinctive Islamised discourse of Islam (Yavuz and Esposito 2003, p.271). On the Alhiwar.net (dialogue.net) Islamist online forum, Nouredine Zouari (2011), a contributor who identifies as an Islamist, offers what I suggest that it is a brief and basic, yet, comprehensive analysis of the Muslim-Islamist difference:

Muslim:

Is a person who believes in the pillars of Islam, a belief that enters them into Islam [makes them Muslims]

And the Islamist:

Irrespective of the [negative propaganda of media] about the term, an Islamist is anyone who has the following four qualities

1. Muslim
2. knows the features of the Islamist project (\*)
3. Believes in the need to achieve the Islamist project
4. Attempts to achieve the Islamist project.

\*An overview about the Islamic project:

the features of the Islamic project centres on the following three points:

1. The rule of Islam: the need for Islamic Sharia as the main or only one, according to what the Islamic thought schools believe in.
2. The unity of the nation: Here we must be aware that the governorship of Islam if achieved in the area without the other, or the state without the other, as some of our liberal brothers want, it is not enough to achieve the Islamic project.
3. The sovereignty of the nation on earth: or as some like to call it: "professorship" on earth.

Nouredine describes the Muslim as an individual who expresses belief in the conventional pillars of Islam, namely the *Shahada* (the declaration that God is one and unique and Muhammad is his prophet), prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca. Such a belief

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<sup>24</sup>Basic Muslim is an expression that I employ to better grasp Qutb's thought, and I refer, through this expression, to Muslims who do not adopt an Islamist framework, and hence they can be considered, by Qutb, as either basic raw material to be developed into Islamists or, in other cases, punished by death penalty for their lack of what Qutb perceives as true Muslimness.

<sup>25</sup>Those who pronounced only the *Shahada*.

<sup>26</sup>Not to say that it is also an end.

enables the individual to become a literal follower of Islam. An Islamist is also a Muslim. Yet, Zouari argues that the Islamist aims to achieve a specific socio-political project. The agenda of this project, according to Zouari, centers on three focal points: the full enactment of Sharia laws, the unity of the Muslim *Ummah* (nation, in reference to the Caliphate system) and the ultimate advancement of the Islamist nation.<sup>27</sup>

Contemporary scholarly definitions of Islamism tend to focus on political parties active especially in the Arab World. Yet, these definitions can loosely share common conceptualisations of Islamism with the above definition of the online activist. Barton (2004) perceives Islamism as diverse rather than unitary. He argues that Islamism covers a 'spectrum of convictions' ranging from the empowerment of the role of Islam in everyday life to the full establishment of an Islamist state (Barton 2004, p. 28). Haideh Moghissi, a scholar on cultural Islam and gender, also argues that Islamism evokes a 'broad project of the mobilisation of

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<sup>27</sup>المسلم:

هو الإنسان الذي يؤمن بأركان الإسلام يدخله في حلة الإسلام، يعني باب الاعتقاد، و أما الإسلامي

يعني عن كل الإلهامات الغيبية لإلعالعالم والمخابرات العربية و العربية، هو كل من يحمل الصفات الأربع التالية:

1-مبلم

2-يعرف مالحم المشروع الإسلامي)\* (

3-أمن بضرورة تحقيق المشروع الإسلامي

4-يسعى بكل ما أوتي من جهد و نههم إلى توثيق المشروع الإسلامي

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نوطية حول المشروع الإسلامي)\* (

المشروع الإسلامي مالمحه ممكن نتمحور حول النقاط الثالث التالية

1-حالكمة الإسلام: أي ضرورة أن تكون الشريعة الإسلامية هي المصدر الأساسي أو الوحيد، حسب ما يؤمن به التيارات و المدارس "الإسلامية" للحكم،

2-وحدة الأمة: هنا يجب أن نعي أن حالكمة الإسلام لو تحقت في رقعة دون أخرى، أو والية دون أخرى كما يجلو الخوازا التيريزين تسميته، هو غير كاف الإسلكمال مالحم المشروع الإسلامي،

3-سيادة الأمة في الأرض: أو كما يجلو للبعض تسميتهها " أسنانية الأمة في الأرض

Islam' (1999, p.159). This Islamist project, Moghissi suggests, can be put into action through diverse rather than a unitary set of frameworks (Moghissi, 1999). Certain Islamist movements would construct an Islamist society within a partly secular state (Moghissi 1999, p.161). This framework evokes the Islamisation of social structures and practices within a modern form of state including that of republicanism. A second group would promote *progressive* readings of Islam in 'everyday life practices' (Moghissi 1999, p.161). Other Islamist groups may go as far as to merge Islamism with the political state as in Iran (Moghissi 1999, p.161). Moghissi concludes that Islamism, though popularly associated with politics, may also denote a conservative or a progressive societal movement including that of gender equality. Moghissi's analysis, though significantly helpful, is also problematic. The mobilisation of Islam within progressive societal or feminist projects does not, I suggest, articulate an Islamist phenomenon. The central emphasis in this example rather lies in the production of a version of Islam compatible with feminism: rendering religion feminist. Within an Islamist framework, however, emphasis is on the production of a version of feminism compatible with Islamism: making feminism Islamist.

The above discussion of the differences between the concepts of 'Muslim' and 'Islamist' leads me to initially dismiss the employment of the 'Muslim' for the identification of the Facebook administrators and commentators that I analyze their publications. Tunisian Facebook users with similar or even completely contradictory background ideologies may identify, even very loosely, as Muslims,<sup>28</sup> and this is why Muslimness may not be a helpful criterion for identification. In addition, the material I discuss does not revolve around basic Muslim practices such as prayer and pilgrimage. Posts rather tackle more contested discourses about woman. Furthermore, I note that Islamist Facebook activists and official political bodies call themselves 'Islamists'. For example, En-nahda Party in Tunisia, and Justice and development in Morocco officially identify as 'Islamists' and not Muslims both in Arabic (الإسلامي) and French (*les Islamistes*). Prominent Islamist activists such as Soumaya Ghannoushi the daughter of the En-nahda Party leader and a Facebook activist, Rachid Al Khiari who is a journalist and Facebook activist, and Tawfik Ghodbane who is a campaigner and a Facebook activist, also openly identify as Islamists. The term 'Islamism' represents what Spivak (1987) describes as 'strategic essentialism' (cited in Piela 2012, p.5). Anna Piela (2012), a researcher on Islam and woman, argues that it is vital to take into consideration the way individuals voluntarily 'prioritise' certain elements of their identity. This helps, Piela

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<sup>28</sup> Exceptions may, of course, exist. Yet, I hardly mapped them in my data. Users, Islamists and anti-Islamists are either silent (not necessarily intentionally) about their religious affiliation, or claim to be Muslim.

(2012) suggests, the establishment of a ‘collective identity [...] and political ties’ of groups (p.5). For all the above reasons, I argue that the Facebook users whose publications I examine may not regard ‘Islamist’ as a negative form of identification, in the way it is often employed in certain Western platforms. Instead, Islamism crystallises a particular societal, largely politicised, discourse adopted by the administrators and users. In the following chapters, which I outline in the section below, I further examine the conceptualisation and discourse of Islamism in regard to woman as constructed on Facebook.

### **Overview of the chapters**

In the next chapter, Chapter Two: The Islamist Discourse about Woman: Discursive Interplay, Key Questions, and Post-revolutionary Activism on Facebook, I offer a critical overview of the Islamist Discourse about woman in pre-revolutionary (1969-2011) and early transitional Tunisia (2011-2012). I divide the chapter into two main parts. In the first part, I examine the elaboration of the Islamist discourse about woman in pre-revolutionary Tunisia. I argue that this discourse has been shaped by, shapes, and interplays with a myriad of central discourses about woman, notably French assimilation, traditionalism, progressivism, and Islamic reform. I frame the critical analysis of the interplay of Islamism with these discourses within a Foucauldian archaeological understanding of social processes and discursive relations of power. I map, through Foucauldian archaeology, woman, and decode the way she is essentialized in the Islamist discourse.<sup>29</sup> Then, I address the specific issues Islamists tackle in regard to woman. I discuss Islamist emphasis on particular topics, their rhetoric on these topics, and the development of their stance throughout pre-revolutionary Tunisia.

In the second part, I shift into post-revolutionary Tunisia by initially discussing the factors of the rise of Facebook into a politicised popular platform, utilised especially by Islamists. I argue that specific socio-political and media shifts have created, and perpetuated popular Facebook activism. These shifts are: democratisation, national politicisation, popular distrust of conventional home-based media, and international emphasis on the idea of a ‘Facebook Revolution’. I examine these factors, and assess their role in the popularisation of Facebook. Second, I offer a critical overview of post-revolutionary Facebook in general and Islamist pages in particular. I examine the shift of Facebook into discursive publications forming particular representations of woman.

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<sup>29</sup>This critical contextualisation of the interplay of Islamism with other discourses, and the investment of woman within, would be further deployed in chapter IV, V, and VI for the spelling out of the myriad of discursive strategies embedded in the Facebook material I analyse.

In the third chapter, Framing my Methodological Conceptualisation of the Islamist Discourse about Woman, I critically reflect on and assess my methodological framework. I divide this chapter into three main parts. In the first section, I identify my methodology: critical discourse analysis (CDA). I discuss both my motives for selecting critical discourse analysis, and how I employed it in my thesis. I also point to the limits of this methodology through the critical examination of the problematic notion of ‘ideology’ used by key critical discourse analysis theorists. I draw on Foucauldian archaeology for the negotiation of the limitations of the notion of ‘ideology’. I then reflect on how I shifted from the employment of ‘ideology’ into the adoption of Foucauldian ‘discourse’. I argue that ‘discourse’ better articulates the development of my conceptualisation of my topic throughout my doctoral research. In the second part of the chapter, I reflect on the processing of my research data. I initially offer an overview of the outline and devices of Facebook pages. Then, I illustrate my selection criteria. In the third part, I attend to translation and ethical issues. I critically reflect on the ethical questions I encountered, and how I negotiated them.

In the fourth chapter, The Islamist constructions of Woman through the Veil, I examine Islamist representations of woman through veiling. I divide the chapter into two parts. In the first part, I attempt to critically define the veil, and trace its history and rhetoric in the Muslim World. I also discuss the different modes of veiling in Tunisia. Then, I examine the rise of debates about veiled and unveiled women in post-revolutionary Islamist Facebook platforms. In the second part of the chapter, I shed light on three Facebook posts. The first is a picture of a group of women and men in colonial Tunisia accompanied by a text. The second is a picture of four unidentified women with different dress codes, and the picture is accompanied by the question ‘Who do you choose as a life partner?’. The third post is a text announcing the appointment of a woman public intellectual as the Head of a Tunisian religious radio station, and was accompanied by the picture of the woman who is appointed.

I draw on critical discourse analysis in order to identify the ideas, and discursive strategies through which these ideas are embedded, and assimilated into common sense knowledge. Within a critical discourse analysis methodological framework, I deploy Sandra L. Bartky’s and Farah Azari’s theorisation of the sexualised body for the critical dissemination of the material.<sup>30</sup> Through all these steps, I map these representations of veiled and unveiled woman. I demonstrate how these representations are polarised, and politicised.

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<sup>30</sup>Bartky and Azari are two feminist scholars who I introduce and discuss their theories in more detail in chapter IV, section 3.

In the fifth chapter, *The Islamist Discourse on the Conduct of Woman*, I attend to the Islamist conceptualisation of the conduct of woman. I attempt to answer questions about how Islamist posts approach the issue of morality, and assimilate their approach into the common sense knowledge. For this purpose, I select two of the most publicised videos on Facebook in transitional Tunisia. The first video is about the perspective of the Islamist MP Souad Abderrahim on the question of the single mother. I define the concept of ‘single motherhood’ in Tunisia, and discuss statistics, factors and stereotypes of ‘single mothers’ in conjunction with, and in support of, my examination of how the MP construes the single mother. I analyse the MP’s language, ideas, and discursive strategies. As critical discourse analysis is also about assessment and challenge, I deploy a comparative paradigm highlighting the statistics and conceptualisations of single mothers in other North African and Arab countries. This comparison aims at questioning the relevance of the arguments about, and produced representations of, the single mother in the statements of the MP. The second video is disseminated by an Islamist man activist and campaigner. He discusses the relationship between woman’s dress code and rape. I first discuss the concept of rape in relation to the terminology used for sexual violence in Muslim societies. I then attempt to identify the discursive interplay the activist sets between morality, dress code, law and rape. I decode his embedded rhetoric about the unveiled woman as a legitimate subject for rape, and how he assimilates this rhetoric into common sense knowledge.

In the sixth chapter, *The Islamist Construction of Women Feminist Activists*, I discuss the Islamist Facebook construction of feminist women, particularly members of the Tunisian Association of the Democrat Women (ATFD). I first attempt to further explain the post-revolutionary dictatorship-feminism semiotic association I pointed to in the second section of this introductory chapter. I also offer an overview about how notions of ‘feminism’, ‘secular feminism’, and ‘women’s rights in Islam are understood and employed within the Tunisian context. I then deploy two Facebook posts to analyse the conceptualisation of ‘secular feminists’ in the Islamist discourse. The first post is a picture taken from a TV show of a prominent feminist activist, accompanied by a descriptive text. I analyse the different strategies and themes construing this feminist activist. I attempt to decode the semiotic association and therefore representations the post produces and assimilates to common sense knowledge. The second post is a comparative article between secular and Islamist approaches to women’s rights. I critically examine the metaphoric language and the methods of persuasion employed in the post. I unveil how secular feminists are construed through their

juxtaposition to Islamist women on the one hand; and through the interplay of discourses of traditionalism and assimilation on the other hand.

In the seventh chapter, *Concluding Critical Reflections*, I discuss the research experiences, arguments, and future plan of contributions I have drawn together throughout my thesis. I look, in the first section, into the different challenges that I have encountered. I attempt to relate them to, and reflect on them within, personal and international circumstances that went hand in hand with my work. I illuminate how all this had been challenging in terms of forming knowledge, and how I came to acknowledge and then seek my way out of these complications. In a second stage, I shed light on the different apparatuses of knowledge I identified about the Islamist constructions of woman, and I reflect on how I de-naturalised them. In doing this, I illustrate the rhetoric, discursive methods, and conceptualisations I attempted to decode about women's dress code, their moral conduct, and feminist activism. Third, I negotiate the areas of knowledge my thesis covered, the areas of knowledge I have expanded, and how my work can contribute to further rigorous research, especially in regard to the scholarship of feminism, Islamism, and North African Studies.

## **Chapter Two: The Islamist Discourse about Woman: Discursive Interplay, Key Questions, and Post-revolutionary Activism on Facebook.**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I discussed the development of the scholarship on Islamism. I first pointed to the surge of scholarly interest in Islamist movements after the 1979 Iranian Revolution (see for example: Ayubi, 2006; Burgat, 1988, 2003; Esposito, 2010; Roy, 1992, 2004). I then shed light on the way the 2011 ‘Arab Spring’ represented a turning point not only in terms of the growth of scholarly interest in Islamism, but also in terms of the novelty of questions and approaches for the study of this topic. The ‘Arab Spring’ produced, for instance, a pluralistic political landscape, especially in Tunisia, marked by the rise of Islamist groups into power. Scholarly research has, accordingly, exhibited a shift from the pre-2011 epistemological investigation of the ‘true nature’, ‘true motives’, and ‘true intentions’ of the ideology of Islamism into the post-2011 exploration of the democratic potential of Islamist groups (Netterstrøm 2015, p. 112). Questions no longer evolved around what *is* Islamism and what do Islamist groups *intend* to do? Questions have rather become centered on what do Islamist *do* and how do Islamist groups evolve into democratic political parties? This shift in the study of Islamism is quite pertinent as it provides new research questions and approaches compatible with the contemporary evolution of Islamist thought into what seems to be a more democratic structure. Yet, this shift seemed to partly neglect, among other things, the revision of the pre-‘Arab Spring’ questions on and approaches to the study of Islamism and woman, especially with the rise of new and investable sources of data including social media. This was perhaps, as I suggested in the introductory chapter, due to how the question of the democratic potential of Islamism eclipsed other questions, notably that of woman.

In this chapter, I attempt to offer a critical overview of the Islamist discourse about woman. I ask: how is woman interplayed in the Islamist discourse, what key issues figure in the Islamist discourse about woman, and how has the Islamist discourse been brought into and articulated in the post-revolutionary Facebook platform? In framing my questions, I strongly take into consideration the methodological usefulness of the shift from an epistemological scope of analysis about Islamists, and I push forward for a more focused framework about the interplay of the issue of woman within the Islamist discourse before and after the 2011 Revolution. Interplay, as understood and employed in this work, is about the way discourses interact

through, for example, subordination, prioritisation, or muting of particular discourses in regard to others, and through this interplay, they hence form and produce knowledge about subjects.

### **The interplay of the question of woman in the Islamist discourse: an archaeological study.**

The first question, ‘How are women interplayed in the Islamist discourse?’ evokes apparatuses of discursive interplay. I argue that the Islamist discourse about woman interplays with, shapes, and is shaped by a myriad of other Tunisian discourses, some of them active since the first half of the twentieth century. I here point to the discourses of colonial assimilation, traditional anti-colonialism, reform, and progressive Bourguibism.<sup>31</sup> Yet, I suggest that linear historicisation (for instance: a solely informative account) may not help critically tackling these apparatuses of discursive interplay. I therefore decided on the Foucauldian archaeology (1978) as a contextualising theory for the examination of the interplay of woman in the Islamist discourse in this section.

Archaeology, as depicted by Michel Foucault (1978), comprises of the questioning of the ‘[...] two levels of [...] tactical productivity (what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge they [discourses] ensure) and [...] strategical integration (what conjunction and what force relationship make their utilization necessary)’ (p.92). Following Foucault’s depiction, I understand and employ archaeology as a theoretical framework uninterested in the linear flow of history and, instead, it digs into the tactical strategies linking discourses to each other, the unequal distribution of power between these discourses, and the apparatuses of knowledge they hence produce about the subject of the discourse. My understanding of power in this section and also in the whole thesis draws on Foucault’s conceptualisation of power as ‘a complex strategical situation in a particular society’ (Foucault 1978, p.92). In this quote, Foucault pictures power as the interplay that is exercised between discourses through, for example, the subordination, prioritisation, or muting of particular discourses in regard to others (Foucault 1978, p.97). I find this Foucauldian conceptualisation of power incredibly helpful<sup>32</sup> for the mapping of the discursive construction of woman in the Islamist discourse,

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<sup>31</sup>Discourses of reform of women’s rights started as early as mid-nineteenth century (1857). However, agendas did not essentialise women at that time, unlike the 1930s.

<sup>32</sup>The limits and exhaustive deployment of the Archaeological framework, of which I am aware, are beyond the scope of this chapter.

the way she is positioned in relation to mega and sub-Islamist discourses, and hence the form of tactical knowledge produced about her.

I choose to focus on specific archaeological strategies in this research. Yet, and before discussing these strategies, I initially define my framework, following Foucault (1978, p.10), as the process of:

[...] question[ing] those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar [...] those readymade syntheses, [...] those links whose validity is recognized from the outset [...] to determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between these different series; what vertical system they are capable of forming; what interplay of correlation and dominance exists between them; what may be the effect of shifts, different temporalities, and various rehandlings.

This definition articulates the archaeological process of ‘digging’ into conventional discourses, grouping these discourses into units, and examining their engendered relations. I then need to map the discursive paradigm of discourse-power-knowledge the produce about woman.

For the conduct of this archaeological research, Foucault (1978) suggests a set of strategies, of which I select two relevant ones for the support of my argument. The first strategy is the focus on specific ‘instances of discursive production’, namely ‘the statement [narrative] in the exact specificity of its occurrence; [and...] its conditions of existence’ (Foucault 1978, p.28). In my analysis, I opt for five key instances: the culmination of assimilationist, traditionalist and reformist discourses in the 1930s, the promulgation of the Code of Personal Status in 1956, and the emergence of the Islamist movement in the 1970s. The second archaeological strategy is the grouping of discourses into separate but interplayed units. This grouping permits to ‘draw up specific description of statements, of their formation, and of the regularities proper to discourse’ (Foucault 1978, p.20). Statements, as I shall explain in detail in the following chapter, are the myriad of claims constituting the subject of the Islamist discourse: woman.

The Tunisian woman is essentialised in the assimilationist,<sup>33</sup> anti-colonial, Bourguibist, and Islamist discourses. Post-colonial scholarship has sought to decode the French colonial strategic deployment of the colonised woman. Ali Mazrui,<sup>34</sup> for example, frames the question of woman within the theory of assimilation. Mazrui describes this theory as ‘the cultural

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<sup>33</sup>Drawing on different works such as Foucault, 1978; Anna Piela, 2012, I understand and employ the notion of essentialisation as the prioritisation of specific subjects in the interplay of discourses for strategic reasons.

<sup>34</sup>Ali Mazrui is an academic professor and political writer on African and Islamic studies and North-South relations.

[French colonial] war on indigenous traditions' (Mazrui 2012, p.17). According to Mazrui, colonial France aimed to usurp the collective memory of the natives and, alternatively, 'convert' them to African French subordinates. Woman, in this situation, would be instrumental for the process of assimilation. Hence, colonial France worked 'enthusiastically', as Mazrui argues (2012), on transforming colonised women into Christian, French-speaking, unveiled,<sup>35</sup> and Francophone-educated subjects. Mazrui's work, though thought-provoking, ignores the problematic nature of tradition, and more specifically, the way successive processes of colonisation had shaped what he describes and defends as genuine tradition and nativity.

Examining the work of a host of post-colonial researchers (Fanon, 1965; Forsdick and Murphy, 2014; Robinson, 2004), I note an overwhelming consensus on the 'assimilationist' nature of French colonialism (though the way these researchers identify the theory and practise of assimilation varies).<sup>36</sup> The essentialisation of woman within tends to be a repeatedly plausible conclusion. Fanon (1965) even went as far as to argue that the French colonial rhetoric could be summarised as: 'If we want to destroy the structure of [the] society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the woman; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves' (Fanon 1965, p. 37). Converting the Tunisian woman into the French colonial model represented, within the French political agenda, a heralded statement of assimilationist power (Fanon, 1965). Discourses that claim 'cultural authenticity', including anti-colonialism and later Islamism, may deploy assimilation, as an antagonist discourse, for the empowerment of their stances.

Growing up as a post-colonial Tunisian, images of the *sefseri*-wearer 'graceful' woman have been among the most haunting symbols of the French colonial era.<sup>37</sup> Since the 1956 independence, the focus of Tunisian literature, media, and (high-) school curriculums had

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<sup>35</sup>For more on the symbolism of the veil, please refer to the following section and chapter IV.

<sup>36</sup>Charles Forsdick (Professor of French specialised in modern languages and cultures at the University of Liverpool) and David Murphy (Professor of French specialised in modern languages and cultures at the University of Liverpool) (2014) describe 'assimilation' as the process of the promotion of the culture of the coloniser among the colonized through the medium of language and education. As to aims, assimilation had perhaps targeted what John Jaurès (a French socialist leader (1859-1914) known for his antimilitarist agenda and influence by humanist philosophy) defined as '*l'intelligence et le cœur*' [mind and heart]. The colonised would no longer be the oppressed, he (Jaurès) seemed to suggest. Instead, they would rather transform into the educated French-speaking admirers of the 'greatness' of France (cited in Forsdick and Murphy 2014, p.92). While Forsdick and Murphy provide an 'objective' analytical definition of assimilation founded on linguistic investigation, Fanon and Mazrui engage more critically.

<sup>37</sup>Traditional white garment worn by Tunisian women.

largely centred on anti-colonial resistance.<sup>38</sup> For instance, *Halima*, a prominent Tunisian novel, depicts the struggle<sup>39</sup> of the *sefseri-wearer* woman protagonist, whose name is Halima, against French colonialism. The Ramadan drama, an annual Tunisian ‘ritual’,<sup>40</sup> and cinema works had ‘idolised’ the role of the virtuous<sup>41</sup> woman in the independence movement. These images are associated, to a significant extent, with the conceptualisation of anti-colonial resistance in Tunisia.

This same *sefseri-wearer* woman image had been instrumentalised in the traditionalist anti-colonial agenda of the neo-Destour (1924-1956).<sup>42</sup> The Neo-Destour Party was founded on March 1934 by Bourguiba,<sup>43</sup> who held the position of the Secretary General. Resistance was widely political then despite resorting to armed guerrillas at times, and required wide popular support for the anti-colonial cause (Ltifi, 2013). In contrast to pre- Neo-Destour elitist educated middle-class resisters, a large part of these new grassroots were rural migrants. The late 1930s witnessed, in effect, a high expansion of rural migration toward the capital Tunis (Ltifi 2013, p.1). The question of woman was utilised at that time in fuelling the discontent of rural migrants about colonial France. For example, Bourguiba opposed the French unveiling of Tunisian women while he would, paradoxically; discourage the *sefseri* in the post-independence era. Bourguiba’s perspective at that particular instance of resistance seemed to essentialise the veil within the ‘enticing’ macro-discourses of the Arab-Muslim identity and anti-colonialism. According to him, the *sefseri* should be ‘preserved in the face of the assimilationist whims of the [French] colonial power’ (Camau and Geisser 2004, p.95). Bourguiba argued, accordingly, that this dress code serves as a marker of the ‘threatened’ religious and cultural belonging of the colonised.

The pragmatic Neo-Destour discourse on woman had also been articulated in their position to the calls for social reform in behalf of woman. The party, literally, abandoned the reformist

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<sup>38</sup>This focus has slowly decreased since the disposition of Habib Bourguiba in 1987, and especially after the 2011 revolution.

<sup>39</sup>Halima smuggled arms to men fighters.

Tunisian drama production is very limited, and usually restricted to the Ramadan month. It has been customary among Tunisian individuals and families to follow only national media (particularly drama) during the Ramadan month. This tradition is still persistent, though slightly affected by the open access to other Arab (especially Egyptian) media since the early-mid 1990’s. Such Arab platforms had not been accessible before that, as

<sup>40</sup>Tunisians could have access only to Tunisian, French and Italian media.

<sup>41</sup>A woman who resists the allure of Westernization, helps with hiding arms, and preserves the honour of the family.

<sup>42</sup>In the next sections, however; I examine how the same image has shifted (since the 1970s) into the centre of the Islamist rhetoric.

<sup>43</sup>I mentioned Bourguiba in the introductory chapter. He is the first president of the Tunisian Republic, and is known for his significant feminist reform which I discuss in details later in this section.

Tahar Haddad<sup>44</sup> during the national polemic on his social treatise *Our Woman in the Shariaa and Society (Imra'atuna fe Shariaa wal Mujtama'a)* (1930). Bourguiba's justification of this distanced position to feminist reform was that women's rights should be accomplished by independent Tunisians, and not French colonisers. By arguing as such, Bourguiba seemed to subordinate the feminist cause to the national one (Boarui 2002, p.1), and the discourse of woman to the discourses of identity, Islam and anti-colonialism. After the 1956 independence, however, Bourguiba 'traded' the discourse of traditionalist anti-colonialism for a Bourguibist progressive approach to woman's rights.

The Bourguibist discourse about woman dates back to the 1950s. Even before drafting a new Constitution and abolishing the pre-independence Beylical monarchy,<sup>45</sup> Bourguiba addressed the question of woman from a reformist perspective. Different socio-political factors helped him implementing his reformist rhetoric through legislative measures. Bourguiba granted himself vast, almost dictatorial, powers. In addition, Tunisia represented a favourable ground for reform. It contained an influential middle-class urban base, weakened to non-existent tribal structure and power, already pre-colonial centralised state, and a relatively homogenous legal system (Charrad 2001, p.89). By shifting from the pre-independence discourse of resistance to post-independence nation building, Bourguiba adjusted his rhetoric on woman in order to serve this shift, 'Beyond and above helping women, [the Bourguibist discourse] aimed at developing the country by "liberating" feminine forces. Above all, Bourguiba aimed to wake up a "nation half-paralysed" ' (Jommier 2011, p.1). Bourguiba essentialised the idea of woman's contribution to national socio-economic progress. He argued that the 'liberation' of woman was instrumental for the overcoming of what he described as the devastating colonial legacy.

It is worth noting, however; that the Bourguibist discourse on woman eschewed breaking from Islam. Instead, Bourguibism was framed within Islamic teachings. Bourguiba seemed aware of the appeal of the religious discourse since his anti-colonial activism, and hence sought legitimacy for his post-colonial rhetoric on women under the umbrella of religion (Webbs 2013, p.18). Bourguiba, for instance, deployed the *ulama* (scholars) of the Ez-zeitouna mosque for sanctioning the 1956 Code of Personal Status. Discussing the legitimisation of this code through Islamic exegesis, Kenneth J. Perkins, a historian on Tunisian politics, argues:

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<sup>44</sup>Haddad is a Tunisian social reformer that I refer to in detail in chapter VI, section 1.

<sup>45</sup>Beylical: in reference to the Beys (monarchs) of pre-independence Tunisia.

[CPS] [is] the most innovative legal reform in the Muslim World since Turkey's abolishment in the 1920s, [it] clearly revealed the trajectory Bourguiba envisioned. He took pains, however, to portray himself not as sweeping aside Islam, as Atatürk had, but rather as using critical thinking skills [*ijtihad*] to reinterpret it- a process highly regarded by mid-nineteenth and twentieth century Muslim reforms. 2011, p.61

The Bourguibist discourse on woman seeks the 'authenticity' of '*la personnalité Tunisienne*' (Tunisian personality) within the Islamic rhetoric.<sup>46</sup> Bourguibism draws not only on French inspirations but also on Islamic reformism, particularly Haddad's *Our Woman in the Shariaa and Society*.<sup>47</sup> This is perhaps why it is hardly possible to consider the Bourguibist reform fully secular, and hence is the reason why the notion of 'secularism' in relation to Bourguibism should be approached with caution.

The Code of Personal Status may have striking limitations including the preservation of the patriarchal family structure and superior male heritage rights. It may have also served, as certain scholars including Monica Marks (2013) and Nadia Marzouki (2010) argue, as a promotional image of Tunisia in the West. Yet, a host of researchers (for example: Abidi, 2003; Cavatorta and Durac, 2015; Murphy, 1999) describe this code as a set of woman's most progressive rights in the North African and Arab region. The Code, I suggest, produced a drastic impact on the reduction of women's economic, and to a lesser extent, socio-political subordination to patriarchy. It boosted, considerably but not fully, woman's visibility in public and private domains.

The way discourses of assimilation, anti-colonialism, and reform have shifted meaning and interplayed with each other in pre- and post-colonial Tunisia is strikingly noteworthy. For instance, the Bourguibist discourse on woman, revolving around the idea of resistance, shifted meaning from traditionalism in the colonial era to progressivism and nation building after independence. Francophonism, likewise, was no longer portrayed as an antagonist discourse after independence. Instead, Bourguibism embraced Francophonism, together with Islamic reform, as a source of inspiration for 'feminist' reform. The Islamist discourse, in turn, and since its emergence in the 1970s, has shifted the connotations of and interplayed with Bourguibist progressivism. Islamists attempted, at different instances of their history, to re-shape Bourguibist reform as antagonistically assimilationist in theory and practise. Rached

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<sup>46</sup>*La personnalité Tunisienne* is a discourse that emerged in the 1850s, but had elaborated in the 1960s-70s with Bourguiba. It mainly accentuates the specificity of the Tunisian circumstances and history in regard to the East and West.

<sup>47</sup>I earlier referenced the book in this section.

Ghannoushi, the leader of the Islamist En-nahda Party, argued, both in late 1970s and 2011s,<sup>48</sup> that the Bourguibist reform denotes a colonial oppressive ‘raid’ against the Arab-Muslim identity of Tunisia and the piety of the women of the country. The Islamist discourse, and through antagonising Bourguibist progressivism as the statement of Rached Ghannoushi suggests, assimilated its agenda into the traditionalist anti-colonial discourse of resistance (Cesari 2014, p.188).<sup>49</sup>

### **Critical overview of the emergence of Islamism in Tunisia**

Islamism is employed as an umbrella term in social and political disciplines.<sup>50</sup> It covers a broad array of Islamist paradigms ranging from violent social groups to democratised political parties. These movements share, as Kasper Ly Netterstrøm (2015) argues, the firm credence that Islam should play a central role in all life aspects, including politics, economy, education and judiciary. Monica Marks (2015) identifies at least three prevalent paradigms of Islamism in Tunisia, the first of which is Salafiyya Almiyye (rational salafism). Marks argues that this form of Islamism best describes the pre-politicised agenda of En-nahda Party<sup>51</sup> in the late 1960s. En-nahda, still call themselves the Islamist Group (Al Jama’aa al Islamiya) then, articulated what Rory McCarthy describes as ‘a group focused on religious ethics, Quranic Study and proselytizing’ (McCarthy 2015, p.1). Rational salafism, accordingly, aims at espousing Islamic teachings.<sup>52</sup> The second paradigm of Islamism that Marks (2015) points to is Salafi Jihadism (Salafiyye jihadiyya). Jihadism is a radical form of Islamism in which Salafi Jihadists deploy physical violence for the formation of what they believe to be an Islamised state. The third paradigm is political Islam in which certain Islamist groups, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and En-nahda in Tunisia, transformed into political parties, and engaged in democratic electoral processes.

I clarify, however, that though I employ the concept of ‘Islamism’ in broad terms in my thesis, the analysis and accompanying examples of this section in particular widely draw on

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<sup>48</sup>I discuss this Islamist perspective on Bourguibist reform in the next section.

<sup>49</sup>According to Rached Ghannoushi (2011, p.1), Bourguiba deployed Islam as a ‘clay’ (*salsal*) material. Ghannoushi argued that Bourguiba fashioned Islam as to fit with his Francophone ‘fantasies’ (Ghannoushi 2011, p.1). Webbs argues that Ghannoushi’s argument embeds, ironically, a self-contradictory rhetoric (Webbs 2011, p.20). By arguing that Bourguiba utilises Islam as legitimising ‘clay’, Rached Ghannoushi acknowledges, paradoxically, that Bourguiba *does not eradicate* Islam from the Tunisian socio-political landscape at once (Webbs 2011, p. 20). Instead, Islam still persists as part of the Tunisian identity. Yet, Ghannoushi and Bourguiba, Webbs suggests, instrumentalise Islam in their mega narratives of Islamism and progressivism.

<sup>50</sup>Further to my discussion of the concept of Islamism in the introductory chapter, I approach Islamism in this section with a more centred focus on Tunisia as a case study.

<sup>51</sup>The largest and most influential Islamist Party in Tunisia.

<sup>52</sup>I further discuss Salafiyya Almiyye in detail in the next section.

the paradigm of the Tunisian Islamist political Party En-nahda (Renaissance). The focus on this particular paradigm arises from multiple factors. First, the emergence and evolution of En-nahda is well-documented both popularly and scholarly in comparison to the relative lack of documentation for other Islamist movements in Tunisia. This, as I spelled out in the introduction, has roots in the scholarly and non-scholarly growing interest in political Islam. In addition, En-nahda has been the most consistent Islamist body in Tunisia since its emergence. A wide host of researchers (see for example: Cesari, 2014; Alexander, 2010; Ozzano and Cavatorta, 2014) argue that the Islamist Party En-nahda has been the largest and most popular form of Islamist opposition against the Ben-Ali regime. The rich documentation on En-nahda, combined with the important socio-political ‘weight’ of this Party, provides the foundation for the analytical strategy I follow in this particular section.

A third and more important factor I note is the *representativeness* of En-nahda of the different paradigms of Islamism I discussed above. Certain works (see for example: Marks, 2015; Marzouki, 2013), together with occasional statements of En-nahda figures, theorise for the post-revolutionary split between this party and its ideological roots on the one hand, and the split between the party and the other present Islamist movements in Tunisia, notably salafism and Jihadist salafism on the other hand. These researchers, together with En-nahda figures, argue, instead, for the considerable evolution of the movement into a more politicised, moderate, and democratised structure similar to modern, even Western, political parties. This argument has, at different instances, been partly plausible. For example, En-nahda engaged in the post-revolutionary democratic transition and engaged in democratic elections. Yet, I suggest, following Amel Grami (2011) who is a Tunisian feminist scholar of gender and Islamic civilisation and Raja Ben Slama who is a prominent Tunisian intellectual and public figure (2011), that En-nahda articulates a multitude of in-within factions. These factions, still active within the Party, are representative of moderate, salafi, and Jihadist salafi Islamist discourses. As Grami (2011, p.1) explains,

In the West, they often talk about En-nahda as *homogeneous*, but what we witnessed this year [2011] was *fragmentation* inside the party. Even inside En-nahda we find a radical grouping. This includes, for example, Sadok Chourou, a member of the Constituent Assembly, and Habib Ellouze. The latter is a member of the Constituent Assembly, and at the same time a fundamentalist. He appeared in some En-nahda gatherings, meetings and videos calling for ‘purification’ of the media, and purification of intellectuals, and inviting preachers from Egypt and the Gulf to promote Female Genital Mutilation and the veil. Sadok Chourou also called for the application of *hudud* punishments (corporal punishments like flogging and stoning derived from Muslim laws), and for dealing with

demonstrators by cutting off their hands and their legs according to Islamic law.[...] A woman member of the Constituent Assembly from the En-nahda party called for segregation of beaches and of public transportation [by gender].

A group of En-nahda key members, most notably Sadok Chourou and Habib El Louz, represent what is perceived as the faction of *Sukur* (Hawks). This faction espouses a radical, and often jihadi Salafist, discourse. El Louz, for instance, is a vocal advocate of jihadism in the Syrian conflict. Ghannouchi, on the other hand, an apparently non-*sukur* faction member, advocates a moderate discourse, especially in regard to woman. He, for instance, claimed that he does not object to ‘women go[ing] to the beach in a bikini’ (BBC 2012, p. 1). Abdelfattah Mourou, a third key Islamist figure, engages in Salafiya Almiyye in parallel with political activism.

The emergence of En-nahda Party dates back to the late 1960s. It commenced as a discreet societal movement under the name of the Islamist Group (*Jama'aa*). It initially acted in the mosques and high schools of the capital (Allani 2009, p.257). Co-founders, Abdelfatteh Mourou and Rached Ghannouchi, postulated missionary (*da'awa*) calls for a Tunisian Arab-Islamic ‘renaissance’ (Jaiet, 2000). Mourou was at that time a young *baldi* (urban bourgeois) lawyer who claimed to be disappointed by the recession of the national religious influence of the Ez-zeitouna mosque after the independence.<sup>53</sup> Ghannouchi, however; was a rural Arabophone-educated teacher of philosophy who had just returned back from a five year-trip to the Middle East. Ghannouchi’s trip was instrumental in introducing different Islamist discourses from the Levant, Egypt, and Pakistan, to the movement. In addition, the trip fuelled Ghannouchi’s sense of cultural ‘alienation’ vis à vis what he perceived as the Bourguibist ‘Westernised’ Tunisia (Burgat 2003, p.30-5).<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the movement

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<sup>53</sup>Ez-zeitouna is the oldest mosque in Grand Tunis, and is one of the most reputed in the Muslim World. Among its alumni is Ibn Khaldoun. It provided education, and played an important role in the anti-colonial resistance. After independence, Bourguiba modernised its teaching, and turned its scholars into civil servants. He also nationalised its properties (*Waqf*). Though Ez-zeitouna still keeps a high-profile presence and offers courses, Islamists argue that it had been marginalised by Bourguiba.

<sup>54</sup>Rached Ghannouchi claimed that he left Tunisia in 1964 in order to study agriculture in Egypt in Arabic language. Tunisian universities, in fact, have taught only in French. Paradoxically, he turned to the study of philosophy in Syria. His Egypt-Syria journey took place in a very critical time. It had been the peak of the Bourguiba-Abdel Nasser conflict over the Pan-Arabist project and the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. The Bourguibist approach did not, for instance, agree with that of Jamel Abdel Nasser (President of Egypt 1960s) on the two issues. Therefore, the Egyptian extremely popular *Sawt Al Arab* radio, had been instrumentalized to disgrace him fiercely all over the Arab World. A set of accusations, identical to the ones I will later map so often in Facebook Islamist discourses had been ready to bombard Bourguiba with. The radio deployed anti-imperialist, anti-Western and conspiracy theory rhetoric in order to describe The Tunisian president’s position. He was diabolized

identified, at this stage, as a socio-cultural Muslim renaissance. Its central objective was, Joffe (2012) argues, raising awareness about the Arab-Muslim identity, and preserving the Zeitouna Mosque against marginalisation (p.55).

The Islamist Group pursued their discreet missionary activism through the usual mosque meetings, and the infiltration into the state-regulated Association for the Safeguarding of the Holy Qur'an.<sup>55</sup> However, the political atmosphere had eased in their favour during the 1970s. The conservative faction of the Bourguiba regime gained ground.<sup>56</sup> Cesari suggests that the Bourguiba regime opted for this conservative stance and also allowed Islamists to flourish freely, in order to be '[...] counterparts [of] the secular forces [left and pan-Arabism...] that were stronger [than Islamists]' (Cesari 2014, p.127) at that time. In fact, the conflict between Bourguiba and the secular opposition had reached a peak. The regime that had previously been praised as effective, feminist, and modern was falling apart. Tunisia suffered catastrophic political and socio-economic crisis that '[had] ripped through the entire nation' (Perkins 2013, p.67). The devastating failure of the economic experience of communism, combined with the failing mental health of Bourguiba, social change, and insistent demands for political pluralism, produced an extremely fragile atmosphere. Sensing the threat of the growing opposition, the state instrumentalised Islamists, especially in universities and popular platforms, to counterbalance leftists.

To the distress of the Bourguibist regime, Tunisian Islamists revealed pronounced enthralment with the success of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the accession of Iranian Islamists to power. Tunisian Islamists had even shifted from missionary rhetoric to open criticism of what they described as the Tunisian elitist urban infatuation with the West. The

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as a Francophile, and enemy of Arab liberation. Ahmad Said (the most famous presenter at that time) reflected on his anti-Bourguiba propaganda (2003,p.1) stating:

'He [Bourguiba] was Western-minded [...] He had strong ties with the International Jewish organization. He attempted to lead the Arab World into thinking of the Palestinian case in terms of partition. [...]

Generally, he had been patriotic only to Tunisia. But as to North Africa and the Arabs, his perceptions impeded their liberation.

Tunisian embassy in Cairo had been vandalized, and anti-Tunisian demonstrations spread across the Arab World. Tunisian-Middle Eastern relationships had been suspended, and Tunisia abandoned Arab summits for few years. This Bourguiba anti-Islamic image, though very debatable, had been largely in Rached Ghannouchi's memoirs.

<sup>55</sup> جمعية المحاضرة على القرآن الكريم.

<sup>56</sup>For example, bills for more feminist reform such as gender equal heritage rights were rejected. Anti-CPS practises were no longer vigorously fought against (Jommier 2011, p.1).

Group's discourse became, apparently, politicised, and they changed their name into the Movement of the Islamist Tendency (Allani 2009, p.260). The fears of the Bourguiba regime climaxed with the Islamist call for a referendum on the Code of Personal Status in 1984. Rached Ghannouchi became a vocal critic of the Code, and urged the restoration of the image of the 'authentic' Muslim woman by abandoning 'Westernised' legislation (Ghannouchi, 2000). Islamist Partisans, in accordance with their leader, attacked what they perceived as symbols of 'moral laxity and cultural decadence' including non-veiled women in streets and restaurants that open in Ramadan (Ayubi 1991, p.116-7).

After the 1987 fall of Bourguiba, however, Islamists recanted their earlier hostile position to the Code of Personal Status. They even described the code as a legitimate form of Islamic *ijtihad* (interpretation). This sudden shift was considered by different scholars and political opponents (see for example: Mohamad Talbi, 2011; Burgat, 2003; Saida Garrach, 2011) as a strategic concession since President Zine Alabedine Ben Ali, the successor of Bourguiba, required the Islamist acceptance of the code as a condition for the legalisation of their participation in the political life and even access to power. Surprisingly quickly, Islamists abandoned their positive attitude to feminist reform in the early nineties (Allani 2007, p.265). Ever since, the Islamist discourse on the question of woman has constantly been changing and ambivalent.

### **Key issues about woman in the Islamist discourse.**

As I touched on in the previous section, Islamists have focused on what they describe as degenerating family values due to Bourguibist legislation (Allani 2009, p.257). They have argued that the Code of Personal Status (CPS) aims to dismantle the traditional structure and unity of the family and, necessarily, de-valorise the heart of the family: woman (Dweyer 1991, p.43). The CPS abolition of polygamy was, for example, among the most fiercely opposed Bourguibist reforms during the late 1970s. *Al Maarifa (The Knowledge)* magazine, which was the only media channel of communication for Islamists, published an article in defence of polygamy in 1976. Abou Ahmed, an Islamist activist and the author of this article, urged women's support of this practice as 'a means of safeguarding their families' (Dhouib 2015, p. 525). Abou Ahmad argued that polygamy prevents the husband from committing of 'Western' extra-marital affairs, acts of adultery, by permitting him to 'have' a second or a third or a fourth wife, or all of four wives together, under the specific circumstances of the sterility and/ or sexual passivity of the first wife (Dhouib 2015, p.p525-7). Abou Ahmad supports his above argument by this *hadith*: 'If I would ever ask someone to kneel down to

someone else, I would have ordered the wife to kneel down to her husband' (qtd. in. Dhoub, 2015, p.526).<sup>57</sup> According to Abou Ahmad, polygamy hence safeguards woman against three dangers: divorce, the destruction of her family, and the non-Islamic act of displeasing the husband.

In addition to Abou Ahmad, the wife of Ghannoushi<sup>58</sup> attacked the Code of Personal Status in a televised French-language interview in the early 1980s. She maintained: '[Tunisian] women abused this [Code of Personal Status] liberty' (2011, p. 1). Simultaneously, Mrs Ghannoushi defended polygamy. She suggested that its abolition led to the prevalence of the practise of adultery and debauchery among men. She concludes that Bourguibist legislative reform had worsened women's situation (2011, p.1). The code promoted, Islamists hence argued, Western dysfunctional models of gender relations within the family. In turn, Islamists located women's happiness and rights in *their* reading of tradition, and the Islamic texts.

Moral conduct has been among the central topics in the Islamist agenda about woman. Nevertheless, the dress code also represented an extensively and persistently debated topic. Rached Ghannoushi argued that Bourguiba's forceful unveiling of women afflicted him with anger (Ghannoushi, 2011). By forceful unveiling, Ghannoushi refers to a televised scene of the early post-independence era (circa 1960s). The video showed Bourguiba convincing a *sefseri*-wearing woman among the popular crowd, during a public visit, to unveil. However, and contrary to what the statement of Ghannoushi suggests, Bourguiba did not enact a law against veiling at that time (Burke 2001, p.134).<sup>59</sup> Ghannoushi claimed that this *sefseri*-wearer woman scene fuelled Islamist resistance. Islamists felt compelled, Ghannoushi suggested, to 'fight' for this dress code as the emblem of the Tunisian Arab Muslim identity (2011). Fierce debates on the veil intensified especially during the 1980s, and then after the 2011 Revolution on Facebook.

In addition to the conduct and dress code of woman, feminist political activism had developed into another critical polemic especially in the post-revolutionary phase. Woman's political participation was, in effect, unthinkable of for the Islamist Tendency of the 1970s (Esposito, 1998). This participation contradicted the Islamist rhetoric about the role of woman. Nevertheless, Islamists started considering the idea of the acceptance of gender mixed

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<sup>57</sup> لو كنت أمرا أحدا أن يسجد ألد ألمرت المرأة أن تسجد لزوجها

<sup>58</sup>No information is provided about her name except being Mrs. Ghannoushi.

<sup>59</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HEwv8u7Nm8>.

committees after more than a decade; in 1981. This openness was fuelled by the Islamist growing political ambition. They planned at that time for the transformation from a solely societal movement into a political one as well. Woman's inclusion, even if almost invisible, could secure more public appeal (Dhouib 2015, p.528). Yet, the regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali (1956-2011) did not allow Islamists to legalise their Party. Instead of transforming into a legal party, Islamists turned into prosecuted resistance against dictatorship (Alexander 2010, p.51). It was under this umbrella of resistance that the Islamist first interaction with the question of feminist political activism took place.

Islamists allied with the feminist *L'Association Tunisiennes des Femmes Démocrates* (The Tunisian Association of Democrat Women, ATFD).<sup>60</sup> The alliance also included liberal and leftist political parties with whom Islamists assimilated, irrespective of their complex ideological differences. They all claimed resistance against the one-Party rule of Ben Ali (Ozzano and Cavatorta 2014, p.72). Moreover, and surprisingly, Islamists no longer objected to liberal gender equality. They signed, together with secular feminists, a pact championing the late Bourguiba Code of Personal Status on October 2005. The pact also called for further reform regarding women (Ozzano and Cavatorta 2014, p.72). Afterwards, Sana Ben Achour, the president of the Tunisian Association of the Democrat Women, expressed scepticism toward the favourable attitudes of Islamists to women's rights. It was perplexing, according to Ben Achour, that Islamists, on the one hand, signed a feminist gender equality pact. On the other hand, however, their leader Rached Ghannoushi chaired an international association for the defence of polygamy (Dhouib 2015, p.527). Nevertheless, the resistance of dictatorship alliance between leftists, feminists and Islamists persisted at that time. Notable Democrat women lawyers including Bochra Blhaj Hmida pleaded Islamists during the 1990s-2000s waves of political trials (Belhaj Hmida 2011, p.1).

After the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011 Revolution, however, the Islamist discourse of anti-assimilationist resistance seemed to be mobilised against a new discursive antagonist: 'secular' feminist activists, notably members of the Tunisian Association of Democrat Women. Certain Islamist Facebook pages, which I shall examine, launched strategic Facebook campaigns against these women in particular, which even led in many instances, to assassination threats. Bochra Belhaj Hmida, one of the Democrat Women has, for example, been provided security protection by the state due to threats of assassination, especially on Facebook. This new

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<sup>60</sup>I identify and examine this association in detail in Chapter VI, section 1.

discursive shift highlights, among other things, the rising role of Facebook in the promotion of the Islamist discourse about woman.

### **Why Facebook?**

Specific post- revolutionary socio-political and media shifts have created and perpetuated the concept of popular Facebook activism. These shifts, I suggest, are democratisation, national politicisation, popular distrust of traditional home-based media, and Western and Arab emphasis on the concept of a 'Facebook Revolution'. First, the overthrow of the authoritarian ruling regime, and the aftermath rising freedom of speech may account for the surge of this type of online practices, among other forms of activism too, including civil associations, and Student and Trade Unions. Tunisia was a political dictatorship<sup>61</sup> till the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011. Internationally, the Ben Ali regime recorded almost the largest politically-motivated censorship of social networks between late 1990s- and 2011 (Howard and Hussain 2013, p.19).

The roots of Tunisian digital activism can be traced back to the late 1990s. There emerged at that time basic websites such as *Tekriz*, *Tunezine* and *Nawat*. Their administrators were largely based outside Tunisia, and were not necessarily politically active. These administrators were rather interested in what Tarek Kahlaoui, a Tunisian academic and politician, describes as 'social problems [and] human rights agenda' (2013, p.150). The late 1990s-early 2000s had, in effect, been a critical phase marked by rising unemployment, agitation in Iraq, and new crisis regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These factors, Kahlaoui (2013) suggests, accounted for the regime's early censorship of these websites; a censorship which had prevailed till mid-2000. Since 2007, however, the digital landscape shifted from non-Tunisia based websites to Tunisia-based blogs. Tunisia-based bloggers, notably Lina Ben Mhenni and Fatma Riahi, started being active at that time.<sup>62</sup> These blogs did not explicitly engage in politics. Most of their complaints were rather against the increasing state censorship of the blogosphere. By 2010, the regime's censorship reached a peak perhaps due to sensing the danger of potential blogosphere collaborations and transformation into active grassroots, and hence Facebook transformed,<sup>63</sup> as Kahlaoui (2013, p. 152) explains, into an outlet for censored bloggers. After the overthrow of dictatorship, this digital platform

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<sup>61</sup>I use the term loosely for the lack of plurality, and the freedom of speech.

<sup>62</sup>Their blogs, twitter accounts, and Facebook pages would later be instrumentalised in sharing the news of the 2010 uprisings.

<sup>63</sup>Restricted state control of the parameters of Facebook.

has become a popular politicised site, utilised especially by Islamists. Different shifts may account for this Facebook transformation.

The first significant post-revolutionary shift, especially in regard to Islamists, was the *democratisation* of social networking. Islamist Facebook pages were launched at once, and some of them were sponsored. Rached Ghannouchi's official page was, for example, publicised at the right hand side of the feed news of Facebook users. This aimed at boosting the online visibility of previously-banned Islamists in Tunisian public platforms.

Nevertheless, this hypothesis of the shift from dictatorship to democratisation, raises, I suggest, significant concerns about its deterministic nature. Newly democratised societies may not necessarily experience a surge of social media activism. They may not also undergo massive politicisation as in Tunisia. This is why I am inclined to point to a second important political shift: national politicisation.

I suggest that post-revolutionary Tunisia orchestrated a popularisation process of politics. The overthrow of the Ben Ali dictatorship, though overwhelming, posed serious questions about the future of Tunisia after a 'leaderless revolution'.<sup>64</sup> Tunisians were, suddenly, 'left in their own' (Ennaji 2014, p.118). They were forced to raise collective serious concerns, which they discussed on social media, particularly on Facebook. In the eve of the Tunisian Revolution, Yousri Marzouki et al.<sup>65</sup> (2012) conducted a cyber psychological study on the role of Facebook. Their research aim was to produce a 'proxy of a collective state of mind' conceptualisation of the site (Marzouki et.al 2012, p.1). Marzouki et.al analysed a text corpus of 6630 taken of 330 Tunisians. Interestingly, the findings suggested 'three main clusters' of Facebook use: 1: political function, 2: informational function, and 3: media platform function (Marzouki et.al 2012, p.3). These findings suggest a shift toward the popularisation of political debates.

As Tunisians experienced, simultaneously, democratisation and popularisation of politics, both shifts were initially isolated from broadcast home-based media. Public and private sectors ignored the uprisings. Their positions were pro-regime, indifferent, or, at best, ambivalent. Perhaps expectedly, home media was regarded unfavourably after the overthrow of Ben Ali. Moha Ennaji, a researcher and political analyst specialised in North Africa, discusses the Tunisian Broadcast media-Revolution crisis, arguing that:

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<sup>64</sup>'Leaderless Revolutions' are characterised by the absence of a political figure, party, or organizing capacity (Marzouki 2012, p.1).

<sup>65</sup>A Tunisian researcher on social media.

[...] The State media obscured events and defended local “democracy” [Ben Ali regime], [...] the Private media held ambivalent views. Neither of the private stations, of TV air licenses, could address the issue [uprisings] in any possible way. [...] Young people [therefore] turned to the internet and international media to find out what was happening in their country.

The local broadcast media became a subject of dark humour. Mocking the journalists and the public media became a national pastime on the social networks.2014, p.118

The Tunisian media did not support the Revolution, and promoted the narrative of the regime about the uprisings. It, thereby, attracted an aftermath public discontent. Its credibility and professionalism became fiercely attacked. In addition, it was discredited at the expense of international media and social networks.

Popular attitudes have gradually changed. Home broadcast media commenced reflecting the democratisation and popularisation of politics. Yet, it has widely interacted with Facebook. High-rating shows, notably the Eighth day (*Al-Yawm Ath-Thamen*) and Talk of the People (*Klem En-ness*), provided permanent sections for the transmission of the live interactions of Facebook users. In addition, debates on Facebook had frequently served as the starting point and/or content of political and entertainment shows and articles. This interest in Facebook seems to have widely been motivated by the international emphasis on the concept of the ‘Facebook Revolution’.

Though still a matter of contention, the Western over-emphasis on the idea of a ‘Facebook revolution’ can hardly be overlooked as it helps,<sup>66</sup> I suggest, understanding the Tunisian popular shift of attitudes toward Facebook. Kahlaoui (2013) draws attention to the impact of the Western coverage of the ‘Arab Spring’, irrespective of its objectivity, on the production of this shift. Western TV and newspapers, Kahlaoui argued, popularised the *idea* of the Tunisian Revolution as a ‘Facebook Revolution’ (Kahlaoui 2013 p.147). As for the Arab World, the Egyptian media played a significant role as well. For example, Wael Ghoneim (2011), a now iconic blogger of the ‘Arab Spring’, famously claimed: ‘If you want to liberate a society, just give them the internet’. Ghoneim may have, perhaps, exaggerated the role of online networking. I would also be inclined, however, to point to the importance of the impact of Ghoneim, together with other Egyptian bloggers and media figures including Alaa Abdel Fattah and Amal Sharaf, in attracting popular attention to Facebook, and transforming it into a popular and politicised platform marked, especially in Tunisia, by the rise of Islamist pages.

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<sup>66</sup>I discuss the debate about this issue in the next section.

## Islamists on Facebook

Facebook shifted into a site of a ‘partisan nature’ (Zayani, 2015) after the ‘Arab Spring’. Multiple pre-revolutionary and newly launched personal profiles and public pages engaged in the promotion of particular discourses, notably the discourse of Islamism. Public Islamist figures initiated pages. For example, Rached Ghannouchi started a Facebook public page less than a week after the overthrow of Ben Ali. Ghannouchi first opted for the ‘sponsored’ parameter of promotion. According to the Facebook Business page, promotion represents ‘a way to create ads that will show in News Feed, on the right side of Facebook’. Ghannouchi needed to pay a daily fee to secure the advertisement of his page on the right hand side of the news feed of users. Thanks to the promotion parameter, Ghannouchi was able to target specific audience based on their geographical location, interests, age, and gender. Ghannouchi’s page succeeded in attracting a large number of users, counting an initial overage of 100 000 members. Yet, not all members are fans of Ghannouchi or Islamists.

Members can join a certain page which they do not agree with its publications in order to debate the published material through comments. Others can join as part of a habitual practice of joining all Tunisia-related pages. Another category of users may be interested in a certain page for professional purposes. A journalist or a blogger can, for example, become a member of a page in order to be updated about, transmit, and probably debate, the published material. Pages of public Islamist figures tend to employ a single, or a group of, extra administrators, popularly known as ‘admins’. Michael Cross (2013) describes extra-administrators as managing assistants. They can be assigned different roles, and different levels of access. Cross also explains that the roles of extra-administrators may include analysis, advertisement, moderation, and management. Extra administrators are mainly required to analyse and summarise the insights of members, appeal to new users, and moderate the posts and the comments that are on the page.

In addition to Islamist public figures, Facebook users who have an Islamist background also launched pro-Islamist profiles and pages. For example, Houssein Eddine Trabelsi, an online activist, launched a public page named *I am an Islamist! Yes, I am an Islamist!*<sup>67</sup> in January 2011. The page did not list at first a clear affiliation to a particular Islamist school or party. Yet, it explicitly advertised a conventional Islamist socio-political rhetoric, especially in regard to woman. The page supported an Islamist discourse on the issues of the veil, the

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<sup>67</sup> أنا خوانجي أي زعم أنا خوانجي

segregation of sexes, and women's leadership.<sup>68</sup> Like the pages of public Islamist figures, partisan pages can also have co-administrators, with different levels of access and roles. In addition to Islamist public figures and partisans, certain pre-revolutionary pages, probably motivated by the post-revolutionary popularisation of Facebook, engaged in ideological politicised debates. The most notable examples of these pages are *Tunisia\_تونس\_Tunisie* and *Koora Tunisie*. As to *Tunisia\_تونس\_Tunisie*, it was launched on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2010. The page identifies as a 'community organization', therefore; it does not acknowledge a politicised nature. Before the emergence of the Tunisian Revolution, *Tunisia\_تونس\_Tunisie* published about national and international topics in multiple areas of interest including football. After the revolution, however; it shifted into the advertisement of an Islamist discourse in regard to woman in particular and the political landscape in general. The position of the page to the questions of the veil, and the conduct and leadership of women are explicitly in favor of an overtly Islamist societal paradigm, and I shall further investigate them in chapters focusing on these specific issues.

## Conclusions

Scholarly approaches to the question of Islamism have significantly developed after the break of the 2011 Arab Spring. Focus became centred, to a large extent, on the democratic potential of Islamist groups. Debates on Islamism and women, however, have not been fully in line with this development. Debates rather tackled the issue of woman from the two particular angles of revolution and democratisation. Women's participation in the Arab Spring and the potential Islamist openness about women's rights have, in effect, represented the most prevalent questions. In this chapter, I conducted an archaeological analysis of the Tunisian Islamist discourse about woman. I have attempted to examine the interplay of woman in this discourse. I outlined the way woman is essentialised in the Islamist discourse of Arabism, Islam, traditionalism, and then anti-colonialism and resistance. I have also attempted to spell out the key issues that the Tunisian Islamist discourse about woman addresses. Therefore, I discussed the evolution of the Islamist agenda since the early 1970s, and provided detailed examples. I identified these issues as moral conduct, dress code and feminist activism.

My analysis then shifted into the study of the developments which followed the 2011 Revolution. I argued that the rise of Facebook as a popular politicised platform articulated an extremely significant shift in relation to the Islamist discourse about woman. I first identified

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<sup>68</sup>I discuss the rhetoric of this page in Chapter IV, section 2 and 3.

a myriad of post-revolutionary socio-political and media factors responsible for the rise of Facebook. I hypothesised democratisation, popularisation of politics, lack of trust in home-based media, and the international idea of the ‘Facebook revolution’. These factors helped producing a democratised space, inhabited by newly politicised masses of Tunisians disappointed by their home media, and ‘allured’ by the idea of a ‘Facebook Revolution’. I then concluded that the above factors had been enormously instrumental in the transformation of Facebook into an Islamist political platform. I outlined, at a second stage, the types of Islamist pages. I discussed the roles of page administrators and members, and the exemplary shared material.

I argued in the chapter for the essentialisation of woman in Islamist discourse. I shed light on the way she had acquired different central signifiers throughout the historical evolution of the Islamist movement in Tunisia. I uncovered how woman connoted multiple discursive images, notably that of Tunisian tradition, identity, progress, and resistance against dictatorship. I also commenced framing the way woman’s issues have been again interplayed in post-revolutionary Tunisia. This time, however; these issues had been interplayed on the newly popularised and politicised platform of Facebook. In the next chapter, I discuss my methodological framework for the study of Islamist posts and comments on this new Facebook platform.

## **Chapter Three: Framing my Methodological Conceptualisation of the Islamist Discourse about Woman**

### **Introduction**

This chapter critically assesses my methodological framework as I discuss the value, challenges and limitations of my research practice. My aim, through this discussion, is to offer a critical and reflective overview of *how* I elaborated my analytical approach for my thesis. First, I identify my methodological choice: critical discourse analysis (CDA), and explain my motives for making this choice. I then illustrate how I employed this CDA, and argue for its value in my work, yet, I also negotiate the challenges and limitations that it exposed. Within this context of negotiation, I discuss my strategic shift from the employment of the critical discourse analysis definition of ideology to the selection of the Foucauldian notion of discourse. I argue for the employment of the Foucauldian understanding of *discourse*, and not the CDA theorisation on ideology, in framing my methodology. Third, I shed light on the processing of my data. I commence by outlining the format and parameters of Facebook pages, and I then shift into the illustration of the selection criteria I opted for in regard to Facebook pages and comments. I devote the last section of the chapter to a critical reflection on the translation and ethical issues I encountered, and how I negotiated these issues.

### **CDA: definition, motives, employment, challenges and limits**

My focus centred on the representations of woman; as constructed through an Islamist perspective on Facebook. I attempted to critically analyse how the Islamist discourse disseminates ideas about, and embeds particular representations of, about woman in Facebook posts. These representations, I speculated, would not be ‘straightforwardly explicit’ (Van Dijk 2006, p. 23) or subtly ideological most of the time. I, therefore, needed to think of, and approach, Islamist discourse about woman as a myriad of *coded* texts. My aim, accordingly, culminated in decoding the underlying implications of language, and to a lesser extent visual signs, in relation to their particular social contexts and structures. I perceived language and social elements as intertwining in the production of discursive representations. Decoding was not, however, the sole aim of my thesis. I also planned to critically assess ‘the social

structures, mechanisms and forces' (Fairclough 2012e, p.1) responsible for unequal power relations in the Islamist discourse about woman.<sup>69</sup>

Having decided on my methodological aims, I moved forward into the selection of a compatible methodological framework. I sought a method, or a set of methods, that is/are aware of the dialectical paradigm of interplay between language and discourse in general on the one hand, and between society on the other hand. This relationship between discourse and society should be, I speculated, more complex than the reduction of one to the other.

Discourse is not a linguistic or visual articulation of the societal and society is, as well, not a communicative, abstract or material reproduction of discourse. Discourse and society are rather active within what Norman Fairclough, a key theoriser of critical discourse analysis, describes as 'a dialectical relationship' (1995c, p.23). I perceived that both discourse and society represent discursive fields for the dissemination of power relations. The method I needed to select would provide me with the tools for decoding these embedded articulations of language. Therefore I opted for a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework.

I divide my analysis into two levels: linguistic and contextual. At the first level, I disseminate linguistic devices constituent of discursive practices. In doing this, I loosely draw on pragmatic and functional linguistics (see Halliday, 1994) in order to spell out how specific instances are presented, discussed, and produced on Facebook. I, in effect, agree with Halliday (1994) who posits language as:

represent[ative] [of] aspects of the world (the physical world, the social world, the mental world); enact[ing] social relations between participants in social events and the attitudes, desires and values of participants; and coherently and cohesively connect[ing] parts of texts together, and connect[ing] texts with their situational contexts. p. 42

Halliday's work is instrumental in the identification of the multiple intertwined representational functions of language. Following Halliday, I explore the ideational (representational), interpersonal (action), and the textual processing of discourse in my Facebook data.

At the contextual level, I critically frame representations of woman within their specific cultural, sociological, political and historical contexts. I analyse the way the discursive production of knowledge about woman 'dialects' with contextual apparatuses. As Jorgenson and Phillips (2002) explain:

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<sup>69</sup>For a better understanding of how I employ the concept of power in this thesis, please refer back to Chapter II.

For critical discourse analysts, discourse is a form of social practice which both constitutes the social world and is constituted by other social practices. As social practice, discourse is in dialectical relationship with other social dimensions. It does not just contribute to the shaping and reshaping of social structures but also reflects them. [...] In critical discourse analysis, language-as-discourse is both a form of action (cf. Austin 1962). Through which people can change the world and a form of action which is socially and historically situated and in a dialectical relationship with other aspects of the social. p. 38

Jorgenson and Phillips point to the way discourse acts both as a constituent of, and constituted by, social structures. Accordingly, I signal the need to understand discourse within a paradigm of power, knowledge, and truth. By this, I allude to the circular paradigm of the production of knowledge about social subjects and structures.<sup>70</sup>

I selected critical discourse analysis (CDA) for the exploration of Islamist interactional and contextual discourse on Facebook about woman. This choice first stemmed from my approach to Facebook as a ‘speech community with its own discourse norms, but also embedded within and symbolised by the latter, its own ‘ideological norms’ ’ (Fairclough 1989a, p.19). I tackled Facebook, through critical discourse analysis, as an interactional field; ideas are discursively embedded in, and constructed by, posts and comments. In addition, CDA, and unlike other discourse analysis methods, does not only observe these discursive practises, but it also works on decoding embedded rhetoric which is presented as ‘common sense’ knowledge (Fairclough 1989a, p. 19). I negotiated and uncovered the discursive common sense assumptions constructive of particular representations of woman, and hence attempted to spell out unequal power relations.

Deciding to research on politicised religious discourses widely associated with pre-conceptualisations of misogyny, through critical discourse analysis, may seem a problematic strategy, especially in terms of power relations. I am aware that I may be, for instance, subject to speculations of subjectivity and strategic interpretation since my research agenda may perhaps seem not to agree, at different instances, with the agenda of administrators and commentators who I analyse their words. Yet, these concerns about *how* I exercise power as a researcher were not related only to my use of CDA as a methodology. These concerns, in effect, marked my broader methodological and conceptual negotiation and understanding of my thesis as a whole. This is why I chose to critically reflect on them at the concluding chapter of this research, as a significant part of the critical synthesis of my whole experience as a doctoral researcher. Regarding the CDA framework in particular, I, however, discuss its

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<sup>70</sup>Please refer back to the first section.

limitations in this chapter through the reflection on my shift from the problematic CDA notion of ‘ideology’ to Foucauldian conceptualisation of ‘discourse’.

### **From Ideology to Discourse: shifting my methodological perspective**

The initial title, as well as the initial framework of the thesis, included the term ‘ideology’. My critical aim at that time was to decode Islamist Facebook *ideologies* on woman. At an advanced stage of my research, I decided to abandon the term ‘ideology’. Instead, I opted for the Foucauldian notion of ‘discourse’. As I touched on in my introductory chapter, the ongoing post-2011 socio-political transformations in Tunisia, particularly in regard to woman, represent one (amongst other things) of the central influences on my position as a researcher, and on the production process of this research. Therefore, the role of this change in the shift of my methodological perspective requires to be, steadily, pointed to. The post-revolutionary rise of Islamist politics had, in fact, been alarming. Islamism has, theoretically, as well as practically, opposed, or at best ignored, woman’s (secular) rights before the Revolution.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the overthrow of a ‘feminist’ dictatorship and the spread of Islamist rhetoric in Tunisian (social) media, including Facebook, signalled the commencement of critical feminist crisis and challenges. As a Tunisian woman interested in woman and gender issues, I felt compelled to take part in this emerging feminist-Islamist debate. Feminist activism, both in academia and online, became my means of expressing my discontent with, and resistance against, Islamist *ideologies* on women.<sup>72</sup>

I approached Islamist Facebook posts and comments, in my first draft, as an ideologically-loaded arena for the promotion of particular representations about Tunisian woman. I drew on critical discourse analysis methods (which I still employ in my final draft) to examine these ideologies. I was at first inclined to employ Fairclough’s conceptualisation of ideology as ‘[...] the representation of the world from the perspective of a particular interest, so that the relationship between proposition and fact is not transparent, but mediated by representational activity. So ideology cannot be reduced to knowledge without being distorted’ (Fairclough, 1995c, p.47). Accordingly, ideology functions as discursive structural ‘systems of ideas’ (Van Dijk 1997a, p.53). By ‘structural’, I point to what Terry Eagleton, a literary theorist and critic, described, within the Marxist theoretical tradition, as the distribution of ‘agents’ (bearers of ideology), and the consequent securing of the ‘domination’ of one (dominating) group within a struggle (2007, p. 9). Eagleton’s analysis of Marxist ideology highlighted, to my interest,

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<sup>71</sup>Please do refer to chapter II, section 2 for more details.

<sup>72</sup>I discuss my position as a researcher in detail in the concluding chapter.

the structural binary distinction between the unity of those who exercise ideology (agents), and the unity of those upon who ideology is exercised (subordinates). I argued, following Mark Stoddart (2007),<sup>73</sup> that later Marxist theorists such as the Frankfurt school, Antonio Gramsci and Spivak expanded the class (material) struggle into the social and cultural (Stoddart, 2007). They, interestingly, *revolutionised* the theoretical conceptualisation of ideology. Gramsci, for instance, developed the ‘subaltern’ concept (Stoddart, 2007) within his Hegemony (ideology-related) theory. He was among the first to point to an investable subordinated consciousness in class struggle (Stoddart, 2007). Nevertheless, apparatuses of distorted forms of knowledge, false consciousness, dominating/dominated patterns, and structural strategies persisted in the studies of ideology.

The above Fairclough approach to ideology suited my understanding of my data at a particular time. Fairclough provided a complex insight into Marxist, and also post-Marxist, theorisation about the concept of ideology. On the one hand, and in accordance with the Marxist theoretical tradition, Fairclough shed light on the structural ‘manipulative’ paradigm of ideology. He discussed the strategic representation of the perspectives of dominating groups as ‘facts’, ‘common sense’, and ‘knowledge’ (Fairclough, 1989a). On the other hand, and as to notions of resistance, Fairclough rather splits away from Marxism. Agreeing with Laclau and Mouffe (2001) and Foucault (1978), he posited that discursive fields as not *only* arenas for the promotion of ideology. They can, he suggested, serve, as well, as sites for resistance. Hence, and as Jorgenson and Philips (2002) argue, CDA does not only examine and decode ideology. It also illuminates instances of resistance within these ideologies and not outside them. I had been planning, and working on this debate of ideology during very specific circumstances. This research had developed, metaphorically but interestingly, in parallel with post-revolutionary Tunisia, and with worldwide critical transformations, as I further explain in my concluding chapter. I could hardly then demarcate, completely, my framework as a doctoral researcher, from my involvement in and reflections on the changing Tunisian and international socio-political landscape, and also from my evolving research perspective and expertise. This may account significantly for my shift from the use of the concept of ‘ideology’ into the adoption of a methodological framework situated within the Foucauldian notion of ‘discourse’.

The concept of ‘discourse’ came in vogue in the 1960s. Ever since, it has become widely employed, especially in cultural studies and sociology disciplines. Sara Mills, a professor of

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<sup>73</sup>A researcher on social thought.

linguistics, argues (referring to the early 1990s) that, though transforming into a ‘common currency’ term, discourse had hardly been defined (1997, p.1). Scholars rather used the term at first, Mills suggested, to ‘signal a certain theoretical sophistication in ways which are vague and sometimes obfuscatory’ (Mills, 1997, p. 1). Clearly, there was a pronounced discrepancy between the wide employment of ‘discourse’, and the scant efforts to define its implications. In contrast, Jean K. Chalaby (1998), a professor of journalism studies, did not then focus on the lack of definitions of discourse. Instead, she criticised the ‘prison-house’ of the term within linguistic understanding (Chalaby 1998). Chalaby contended that the Derridean (1960s) approach to discourse as merely language has widely impacted the different later approaches to the term (Chalaby 1998, p.57). She pointed to the taken for granted association of discourse with language, or at best, with text which is a linguistic unit as well.

Verbal and written language has generally been the most associated signifier with discourse. In fact, I initially approached discourse as written, as well as visual and auditory units of communication. These units, I suggested, can be turned into texts which I analysed as discursive mediums for the construction of Islamist representations of woman. ‘Speakers’ who are clearly publishers of posts (Facebook administrators), have the upper hand. ‘Hearers’ (Facebook users), however; are passive recipients. At best, they can be enhancers of produced discourses. I had rarely questioned my taken for granted definition of, and approach to discourse, at that time. The fluidity and sophistication of the term had perhaps echoed my bewilderment with the complications of my doctoral journey.

Mills suggested that discourse-language association may have stemmed from the ‘core meaning’ of the term in French (*discours*) and English (p. p 2-3). She depicted the dictionary definitions of discourse as to do with ‘conversation and ‘holding forth’ on the subject’ [English], or giving a speech [French]’ (1998, p.2).<sup>74</sup> Yet, I argue that discourse, even within its basic dictionary meaning, still mediates a more complex communicative interplay than a ‘conversation’. Power balance is not likely to be equal between the speaker and the hearer. Activity is, as well, not shared equally. Emile Benveniste offers a rather more elaborated *basic* meaning of discourse, ‘Discourse must be understood in the widest sense: every utterance assuming a speaker and a hearer, and in the speaker, the intention of influencing the other in some way’ (1974, p.92). Benveniste, (perhaps because of) being an early semiotics theorist, attributes, unquestionably, discourse to language.

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<sup>74</sup>Collin Concise English dictionary and Longman dictionary of the English language.

David Crystal was probably among the first linguists to expand the notion of ‘discourse’ into the written:

Discourse [...] is used in its broadest sense, applying to speech as well as writing. Some give the term text a similarly broad application, and talk about text linguistics where others talk about discourse analysis. The emphasis is different, but the intent is the same: to move away from the analysis of individual words and sentences to the realities of monologue and dialogue in any mode of transmission. Crystal 2006, p. 10

Crystal discusses the forms and aims of discourse. He suggests that the term is used to denote verbal (monologue/dialogue) and written material (text). At this stage, he embraces the linguistic stance, slightly elaborated, but still faithful to the Derridean theorisation. Guy Cook (1989, p. 6-7), a pedagogy scholar, identifies discourse through the contrast of abstract to communicative language. Abstract linguistic structure, he argues, is useful for literacy (learning a specific language) purposes. Communication is, however, beyond the systematic abstract production of correct sentences and punctuation. Emphasis rather lies on *coherence* (Cook, 1989, p. 6-7). Therefore, discourse, according to Cook, can be identified as the coherent use of language for communication purposes.

Benveniste, Crystal, and Cook’s definitions of discourse, though tactically different, are all rooted in language. Benveniste describes discourse as verbal language. The intuition of the speaker to influence the hearer is key characteristic of discourse. Crystal includes the written bodies of language as well. He, vitally, highlights the discourse’s analytical function of reality. Cook, more interested in pedagogy, assigns discourse a *unique* communicative character based on coherence. Clearly, this host of definitions illuminate important discursive concepts. They revolve around influence (which can be considered a form of exercising power) and structured communication (between the speaker and the hearer). These definitions, very useful in offering an insight into discourse, pave the way for a more complex and critical reading of the concept within a socio-political framework.

Chalaby argued that Foucauldian archaeology (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 1978) introduced a more elaborated interest in, and definitions of, discourse since the 1970s (1998, p.58). Mills (1997) also pointed to the role of Foucault’s work in the development of discourse studies. MacDonnell (1986), though recognising the influence of Foucault in the increasing attention to discourse, highlights the contribution of other important theorists to the field of discourse including Mikhail Bakhtin, Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst, Louis Althusser, and Valentin Voloshinov (cited in Mills 1997, p. 10). I noted that discourse was widely associated

with Foucault in the material I explored, and hence the examination of Foucauldian archaeology was a plausible methodological step to take foreword.

Foucault disperses few key ‘hints’ about his conceptualisation of discourse throughout the early stages of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1978). He gradually explores, and then forms, the meaning of discourse while sharing the process of his theoretical experimentation with the reader/ researcher. I choose a selective method for the employment of Foucauldian archaeology. I focus on critical features relevant to my feminist framework: 1) the position of the researcher, 2) the position of the object, and 3) the functioning of statements constituent of discourse. First, and in relation to the position of the researcher, Foucault argues that situating one’s self above studied statements is perhaps not an accurate methodological stance.

Detaching one’s self from the ‘complicit’ web of ideological ideas is, as well, a problematic position to opt for (Foucault, 1978).

I argue that these Foucauldian methodological recommendations to the researcher are explicitly critical of the notion of ideology. ‘Ideology’ has been a greatly elaborated concept during the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the theorisation of embedded (and what I perceive as rigid) notions, including that of ‘false consciousness’ and the firm critical position of the researcher, seem to persist. Mills suggests that,

[...] ideology [...] is based on the notion that the position from which the theorist speaks is one of scientific critique [...] Ideology is [...] characterised as false consciousness or an imagined representation of the real conditions of existence; the position from which this falseness is apprehended is that of critique and stands outside ideology. 1997, p. 32

Mills’ discussion of the position of the researcher (who employs ideology) in regard to the notion of truth is no different from Fairclough’s (1989a).<sup>75</sup> The researcher is entitled to critically unveil what they perceive as ‘false consciousness’ (distorted truth in Fairclough’s work) crystallised in the form of a system of ideas (ideology). The aim of the researcher is to highlight the way and sometimes the impact of the promotion of ideological ideas, vital in the subordination of manipulated (or in the process of being manipulated) groups. This approach has not been applied only to Marxist material (class) case studies, but it has also served for the study gender, race, and ethnicity (Stoddart 2013, p. 208).

I am aware of, and committed to challenging subordinating ideas about woman. I, therefore, agree with the notion of ideology, which tackles the spread of oppressive rhetoric, and the

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<sup>75</sup>Please refer back to the previous section.

way it is assimilated into collective awareness. Yet, and in contrast to the notion of ideology, I am, following Mills, aware that:

‘[...] there are limits on what can be classified as ‘knowable’. The notion within ideology of false consciousness assumes that there is a consciousness which is not false (the position of the critique); [for Foucault, however;] all knowledge is determined by a combination of social, institutional and discursive pressures, and theoretical knowledge is no exception. Some of this knowledge will challenge dominant discourses and some will be complicit with them. Mills 1997, p. 33

Being a researcher, I have a political position. My arguments are vocal political statements. What demarcates discourse from ideology is, I suggest, a more complex articulation of one’s political position.

I acknowledge, within a discourse methodological framework, the prevalence of systems of ideas I challenge (patriarchy), and others I am complicit with (statements about/on feminist rights). By ‘complicit’, I refer to my theoretical alignment with, and awareness of the limitations of, statements constructive of my ‘knowable’ field of ideas. ‘Complicity’ is not, in this context, denotational of negativity. It rather persists, practically, in my awareness of my positioned researcher-self within, and not above, a web of empowering and challengeable relational statements of ‘power’, ‘truth’, and ‘knowledge’ (Foucault, 1978, p. 23). I noted, for example, in the previous section that I conceptualised feminism, for long, according to the Bourguibist paradigm of feminist reform. Thus, I had been, expectedly, complicit with the Bourguibist discourse during the elaboration of my feminist approach to Islamist posts and comments. My awareness of my complicity had, very interestingly, provided me with pertinent experiences and synthesis, which I am thrilled to share.

First, this acknowledgement of my complicity (among other complicities) led me, finally, to question the feminist dimensions of the Bourguibist discourse which I took for granted for years. The questioning process highlighted, to my surprise, certain instances of Bourguibist complicity with patriarchal rhetoric, as well as feminist rhetoric, which I had not been aware of. Bourguibist-Islamist nexus proved, to me, to be no longer fully structural. It is rather, I finally speculated, largely ‘relational’ (Stoddart 2013, p. 205). The nexus articulates a selective interplay of discourses, constructive of ‘knowledge’, at specific discursive discontinuities (Foucault, 1978). Therefore, acknowledging and questioning my partly complicit stance and limits of the knowable provided me with more elaborated and empowering conceptualisations of the meanings and performances of feminism (within the field of ideas). These new meanings are non-dismissive, but aware of, my relational and

interplayed forms of feminist knowledge. In fact, it is not only my research stance that requires to be elaborated with more critical complexity. Discourse objects and mechanisms should, as well, be disseminated under a critical microscope (Foucault, 1978).

Foucault (1978) attempted to define discourse through what it may not stand for. He presented a hypothesis on the centrality of objects in signalling discourses. By this, he suggested that the latter can be identified based on the objects they ‘ [...] define the[ir] dispersion [...], [...] grasp all the interstices that separate them, [...] measure the distances that reign between them- in other words, [...] formulate their law of division’ (Foucault, 1978, p. 33). For example, discourses of madness can be defined as the myriad of statements interested in the object of madness (Foucault, 1978, p. 33). However, Foucault soon dismissed this hypothesis as implausible. He rather argues that object(s) (within a discourse), though related, do take different forms variably in statements. The madness of the medical records of the seventeenth century is ‘not identical’, for instance, with the madness of (contemporary) police legal sentences (Foucault 1978, p.33). Therefore, ongoing transforming objects (which are themselves products of transformative social processes) may not serve as definers of statements.

Foucault highlights the problematic of the multiplicity of objects within discourse. Moreover, (and referring back to the example of madness), madness has not formed the statements. Instead, statements are what crystallised multiple forms of madness. It is, understandably, the object that is ‘constituted by all that was said in all statements that named it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its developments, indicated its various correlations, judged it, and possibly gave it speech by articulating, in its name, discourses that were to be taken as its own’ (Foucault 1978, p. 32). Statements, Foucault suggests, play the central role in forming objects and constituting discourses.

I find Foucault’s conceptualisation of the object(s) of discourse(s) helpful in the study of the construction of woman in Islamist Facebook posts and comments. As I have partly demonstrated (Chapter II, section 2), I cannot treat woman as a unitary object. She does not form, but is formed, through the successive socio-political processes of Islamist statements. I perceive woman as not consistent (in Islamist discourses). She is rather fluid and transformative as to accommodate variant Islamist discursive instances.<sup>76</sup> Woman had, for example, served, at the early stages of the emergence of Islamism (1960s), as the emblem of a

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<sup>76</sup>I went through this in more details in chapter II.

‘pure’ societal project. She had epitomised piety, honour,<sup>77</sup> ethical resistance and preservation. All these ‘values’, in which she is intersectioned, had been located in the macro-discourse of the Arab Muslim identity. Some Islamists such as the movement of En-nahda which I studied in the previous chapter, switched from a fully social to a (socio-) political scheme in the late 1980s. Woman needed at that time to accommodate with the new socio-political evolution of this movement. She no longer articulated only abstract virtuous conceptualisations of society. Instead, she was led to crystallise the compromise between the traditional ‘Arab-Muslim’ and the ‘modern’ Bourguibist woman. Yet, she was required to switch, a second time, into the emblem of political resistance after the banning of the En-nahda Party (and Islamist activism in general) in the early 1990s. She then became no different from the oppressed leftist, progressive and/or liberal woman under the Authoritarian Ben Ali regime.<sup>78</sup>

In addition, Islamist woman was also required to embody the Nasserite (Pan-Arabist), Youssefi,<sup>79</sup> and leftist values at different times. Paradoxically, the latter discourses shared little or nothing at all (in common) with the Islamist theoretical rhetoric. Pan-Arabist (Nasserite) woman, for example, was not representative of the Islamist ideal; nonetheless; she was, also, ‘the antagonist’ of the Bourguibist woman in the 1960s (during the Bourguiba-Pan-Arabism conflict). Expectedly, Tunisian Islamists borrowed her then (for a while) as a role model. Youssefi woman, another example, was an anti-colonial emblem. She was distant from and critical of Islamist thought (especially the politicised). Yet, and surprisingly, Islamists borrowed her as a role model as well, perhaps because of her conflicting image with Bourguibism.

At another instance (November 2014), Soumaya Ghannoushi, an Islamist leading woman, posted a Facebook photo. It included a joyful group of Islamist MPs, the grand-daughter of the overthrown Bey (king) of Tunisia, and herself. She commented on the photo: ‘[I am] In the company of lady Saloua, the grand-daughter of the last Bey [king] [who ruled] before the overthrow of the Husseini [dynasty] rule.’<sup>80</sup> Beys tend, for many Tunisians, not to be

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<sup>77</sup>It is not possible to guess whether it is physical, symbolic, or physical and symbolic piety and honour.

<sup>78</sup>For more on the shift of the Islamist discourse about woman before the Revolution, please see chapter II, section 3.

<sup>79</sup>Youssefi: partisans of Salah Ben Youssef, political opponent of Bourguiba who left to Egypt in mid-1950s and adopted Nasserite Pan-Arabism.

<sup>80</sup>Arabic original text : رفقة السيدة سلوى باي حفيدة اخـر بابات نونس زبل الطاححة بالحكم الحسـيبي سنة ٧٥٩١ Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Soumaya.Ghannoushi/photos/pb.117668441643841.-2207520000.1456089596./723239954420017/?type=3&theater>.

regarded favourably because of their association with the abuse of power, treason, and French colonialism (Boroweick 1998, p.16). Bourguiba abolished the monarchical system immediately after the 1956 independence and a republican system was, instead, established. Soumaya's Facebook post is very suggestive, especially in regard to the terms she employs including 'lady' (*sayeda*) and 'overthrow' (*Itaha*), which articulate vocal subjectivity. In addition to the language, the act of taking the photo, with that particular pride and enthusiasm, is also suggestive in terms of identification with the disposed Husseini princess. Paradoxically, the symbolic meaning of the photo conflicts with the Islamist anti-colonial rhetoric. Yet, and like Pan-Arabism and Youssefite associations, it shares, among other things, the antagonist dimension in regard to Bourguibism. Certain users' comments on the photo contended the systematic deployment of typically 'anti-Bourguibist' woman symbols regardless of their lack of any form of connection with the Islamist thought.<sup>81</sup>

The above examples about the transformative dimensions of woman in the Islamist rhetoric can be better analysed in a framework of discourse. Unlike ideology, discourse allows a multiplicity of meanings to form (about/around) objects. Emphasis lies on the relational, rather than structural (ideology) apparatuses of the construction of these objects. In discourse, I map the construction of woman in Islamist discourse through decoding her relation to/ intersection with mega discourses including Arabism, Islam, tradition and sexuality. The study of correlated webs of statements allows for the production of a more complex image of the construction of woman in Facebook Islamist discourse.

The Tunisian post-revolutionary scene has, I suggest, articulated complex 'array of [political] actors' (Fominaya 2014, p. 159). Interestingly, access to, and involvement in mega debates, has no longer been restricted to socio-political elites. The apparatuses for the promotion and challenge of (oppressive/ oppressed) ideas have expanded into a more complex web of relational negotiations. Therefore, sites of patriarchy may no longer persist as the power domain of the *agents* of distribution.<sup>82</sup> Resistance, likewise, may culminate within, and not outside, the arenas of discursive oppressiveness. I hence argue that discourse (statements on woman) functions, paradoxically yet effectively, as a site of both the production of (oppressive) ideas, and the critique of these ideas. Whereas ideology is a site for the production of power, discourse is a site for the production of both power and resistance.

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<sup>81</sup>In an interview with *Al Sarih* newspaper, the grand-daughter of the Tunisian Bey praised Bourguibist reform despite the role of Bourguiba in ending the rule of her dynasty.

<sup>82</sup>Please see Terry Eagleton in this same section for more about the agency of ideology.

I agree with Foucault (1978) who posits that discourse is both a site of power production and contestation. In fact, living through, and being involved in, the post-revolutionary feminist-Islamist debate made it, as Ghana (2013) notes, a complicated process, at first, to transform my retrospective memories into an ‘object of knowledge’ (p. 53). I was, initially, absorbed by the complications, concerns, and challenges of my stance. My absorption clouded my conceptualisation of the Facebook socio-political landscape. It fixated me on the image of an ideological structural scene. Tunisian Facebook users, particularly women, were at that time, I speculated, ‘lulled into compliance by the false claims of [patriarchal Facebook material]’ (Stoddart 2013, p.204). This speculation is largely true. I ignore, by no means, the prevalence of ideologically loaded material. Yet, I underestimated, perhaps under my pressure, the parallel prevalence, within the same site, of empowering instances of resistance. Through the analysis of the Islamist Facebook discourse on woman, I provide a ‘within’ Facebook critical negotiation of their construction of woman.

To sum up, Discourse is the myriad of statements that form knowledge about woman. My analysis would opt for a relational paradigm which stresses the interplay of different discourses, challenging and complicit, in the Islamist Facebook construction of woman. In fact, the apparatuses of the interplay of discourse constructive of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ are what Foucault concludes as manifestations of power (Foucault, 1978). By this, I argue that power does not represent, in my thesis, the conventional patterns of domination versus subordinate (un-)consciousness. Power rather detects the way multiple discourses do intersect in order to form common sense ‘truth’ and knowledge about woman. Discursive strategies are what I further elaborate through the employment of a qualitative reading of data drawing on Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis methods. Through the employment of a qualitative reading of data, which I shall now discuss, I further decode these discursive strategies.

### **Facebook data: an overview of the site and of my selection process of data**

In order to understand the site of my data collection, it is necessary to be aware of how Facebook functions. I have already explained the power of this digital site in post-revolutionary Tunisia (Chapter II, section 3). In this section, I focus on the technical aspects of Facebook, and I discuss the confidentiality parameters of pages, administrators, commentators, and the mechanisms of interaction on pages. I finally reflect on how I have selected my data. As to pages, Facebook Official Centre for Help first indicates that they are identical to personal profiles, and are notable for three central aspects: confidentiality,

audience, and communication. Pages are public by default, and everyone can see them through web search engines. Every Facebook user can press their like button on the right hand side, and automatically become a fan. There is also a dislike button (below the like button) to unfollow. A notification button (in the same row as the like and dislike buttons), if pressed, helps users receiving page updates in their newsfeed, either regularly (first), or by default.<sup>83</sup> They can, then, interact with the post without the need to visit the page. If disturbed by the content (for example, misogynist or homophobic content), users can signal or block pages. In fact, there is a special Facebook service for the examination of complaints against signaled pages (for their described disturbing content). On the other hand, administrators of pages can also block fan(s). Though becoming no longer able to interact in the page or receive updates in the newsfeed, blocked users would still be able to check the content of pages that blocked them, unless the administrator also blocked them from seeing particular posts. The design of pages is identical to personal profiles. There is the cover photo on the top of the page, the profile middle-top photo at the left hand side, a journal form of publication, and a timeline at the right hand side. Facebook users can access the timeline and click on a specific year and also month in order to check publications at that particular year. I can, for example, access a page without even being a fan, click on certain dates (for example: January 2011), and then be able to trace the posts and comments that were shared.

A creator of a page is automatically an administrator, and they are the only ones allowed to publish, modify, and administrate information on the page. They can declare or hide their identities, especially in pages dealing with peculiar issues. They can, instead of official names, use nicknames, or versions of popular terms such as the abbreviation 'admin'. In addition, they can seek help by appointing co-administrators who can be volunteer or paid by the page owner for their administration services. For example, Sonia Ben Toumia, an Islamist woman politician, claimed in a TV interview conducted in 2012 that she employs and pays an administrator who is in charge of her Facebook page. Each administrator can have a separate account, so there is no need for a shared password to access the page parameters.

Interestingly, administrators have access to statistics, and even demographics, which show the composition of the overall fan landscape. Administrators can, for example, easily access information about the overall number of likes and/or comments for specific posts, as well as the age and gender range of fans.

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<sup>83</sup>The notification button is relatively new as it appeared after 2011.

Page interaction is articulated through the activities of administrators and fans. Administrators may post publications and comments. Fans may see, click, like, share, and/or insert a written comment, in regard to the posts. In certain pages, and depending on the confidentiality parameters, fans can even post publications. There is no word count restriction on the responses of the fans. Their comments can be short or long, and of textual, emoticons, visual, or auditory content.<sup>84</sup> All Facebook users may perform all the above interactive practices, even in pages in which they are not registered fans, as long as they are not blocked by the administrator(s). The regular format is the post on top, and the responses of the fans below it. Yet, an alternative format, post on the left hand side and comments at its right side, is also common. Contrary to photos, there are no censorship regulations on the used language, as far as Facebook parameters are concerned. It is, however, up to administrators to verify the content of posts before publishing them. Administrators can, for example, ban offensive or strong language through a warning status, and fans who do not comply can be subject to blocking. It is worth noting, however, that Facebook parameters and formats are subject to change, so my above overview varied but not significantly over my research period between 2013 and 2016.

Since the 2011 Revolution, there has developed a wide interest in socio-political debates on Facebook. Among the most notable sites for debate on this digital platform were Islamist pages which had, as I noted in my critical overview of the thesis (see Chapter III, section 3), become significantly visible on Facebook. Some of these pages had even figured in conventional media, notably TV channels and newspapers. In addition, certain administrators of Islamist pages had also featured in popular political and entertainment shows, and been interviewed in relation to their Facebook activism. Amen Allah Al Mansouri who is, for instance, an Islamist administrator, was notable for, and interviewed about, the role of his page *Kasbah III*<sup>85</sup> in contributing to the fueling of a series of popular uprisings leading to major post-revolutionary changes such as the establishment of the Constitutional Assembly.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>The addition of visual and auditory content of comments is one of the new developments of Facebook that did not exist in 2011 and 2012.

<sup>85</sup>*Kasbah* is the name of a Tunisian quarter where the Palace of the Government is located. The surroundings of this palace functioned as the sit-in of post-revolutionary uprisings.

<sup>86</sup>According to the definition of Wikipedia, ‘The Constituent Assembly of Tunisia, or National Constituent Assembly (NCA) was the body in charge of devising a new Tunisian constitution for the era after the fall of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD)–regime. Convoked after the election on 23 October 2011, the convention consists of 217 lawmakers representing Tunisians living both in the country and abroad. A plurality of members comes from the [...] Islamist En-nahda Movement. The Assembly held its first meeting on 22 November 2011, and was dissolved and replaced by the Assembly of the Representatives of the People on 26 October 2014’.

Rached Khiari, another famous Islamist administrator of a Facebook page called *Assada Site (Mawqi'u As-sada)*, has also featured in popular TV shows on politics such as *Talk of the People (Klammu An-nas)*. The strong visibility of Islamist pages both on Facebook and other media outlets, combined with my familiarity Facebook, had been very helpful for the identification of potential Islamist Facebook pages for my research data.

Selecting my data was a much smoother process than might be imagined from the outside. I was already, as I noted above, familiar with, and immersed in, the Islamist digital landscape before commencing my doctoral research in 2013. This early familiarity with my 'potential data' stemmed from different factors: my interest in politics, especially my personal and scholarly engagement with the politics of gender, and my use of Facebook as a platform for both the observation of and participation in the ongoing post-revolutionary debates about women.<sup>87</sup> In the previous chapter, I discussed in detail significant features of this Islamist Facebook platform including types of pages, popular pages, the roles of administrators, and the types of commentators. Here, I reflect on how I revisited the familiar Facebook Islamist pages, this time through a more developed and critical academic research perspective, in search of my prospective data.

In my critical overview, I had already attempted to explore the most prevalent themes in the Islamist discourse about woman, and identified them as women's dress code, moral conduct, and feminist activism. Accordingly, I sought posts and comments which discuss these specific themes. The data I considered at this early stage was, of course, considerably larger than my final choices, and surpassed fifty posts and two hundred comments. Because of the numbers, I moved to a second stage of grouping, or rather sub-grouping, of material. In this task, I noted that posts and comments tended to share specific common discursive features: general layout, language and, at a primary reading, mega discourses. For instance, the posts about women's dress code almost always followed a particular layout of a mixture of visual and written material, usually a picture above the descriptive text. As to language, there is an overall emphasis on specific lexicon such as morality, religious piety, and social stability. Mega discourses are, as well, usually marked by the interplay of the semiotics of Islam and resistance. I deduced, accordingly, that a large part of my thematically-identified data is, in effect, representative of an overall conceptual mode of representation, though through variant practical modes of representation. To continue with my example of dress code, important conceptual ideas, such as the relation between the political and women's dress code, can be

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<sup>87</sup>For more on these factors, please refer to the introductory chapter.

mediated differently through different sorts of visual material. For instance, in one post, the administrator(s) publishes a picture of Bourguiba greeting a group of Western-clothed young women. In another post, the administrator uses the ‘iconic’ picture of Bourguiba convincing a *sefseri*-wearer woman to dispose of the *sefseri*. These posts, clearly, hint at the discursive relation between Bourguibist gender politics and women’s dress code. Yet, this relation is mediated through different visual articulations in the two posts.

I came to identify representative posts and comments thanks to my close examination of the available data. Yet, I was also very interested, prior to commencing my PhD and collecting my data, in particular posts dealing with well-publicized discursive instances. For reasons I shall further unveil in chapter VI, I could hardly imagine conducting research on the Islamist representations of woman without shedding light on these distinctive and highly-publicized discourses. I here point to the Islamist discourses including that of single motherhood and the right to rape unveiled women. These discourses had generated tense national and international debates in Islamist rhetoric about women. What is perhaps more important is that these discourses have been very significant not only for the tense debates they generated, but also because of the *distinctiveness* of *who* produces them, *when* and *how* they are produced and naturalized, and *ways* in which they can be both influential on the popular post-revolutionary conceptualization of the Tunisian woman and also challengeable through normative egalitarian rhetoric.

By this stage of my data selection, I had collected a number of important posts and comments based on the thematic criterion of women’s dress code, moral conduct, and feminist activism. I had also further split these posts into two groups. The first group of posts comprises representative data of the overall mode of posts and comments on Islamist pages, while the second group comprises well-publicized discursive instances.

The above process of data collection was, by no means, isolated from my process of methodological conceptualization. This is why, as I finally decided on critical discourse analysis (CDA), I needed to ‘rethink’ how my data is shaped by, and in turn, shapes my approach to methodology. I had, in effect, become gradually fascinated by how conceptualizations of women are discursively embedded on Facebook, thereby shifting my focus from the digital site as a main center of interest (in terms of the communication of representations) to a starting point of analysis and a structure of production (where

representations are formed).<sup>88</sup> Such a shift, combined with the final shift into the employment of CDA, required the re-conceptualization of my data. I decided to use a small-scale data set that could enable specific methodological possibilities. These ‘possibilities’, as I argue throughout the next chapters, allow for a detailed, in-depth analysis of the formation of meaning rather than focusing on the different practical strategies of the formation of meaning. Following this methodological path, I chose posts that were most shared, commented on, and conceptually connotative.

During the different stages of the collection of my data, I noted, interestingly, that Islamist posts in reference to, and dealing with, women’s issues tended to occur with surprising regularity. More interestingly and probably more connotatively, men’s participation was much greater and more vocal, compared to women, in the discussion of women’s issues. In a Facebook post about women’s dress code, men made three quarters of the overall total number of participants. In a second post also about the veil, 267 were men, while there were only 87 women participants.<sup>89</sup> I also noticed that men’s enthusiasm for the discussion of women’s dress code, as assessed through their participation rate, was significantly higher than their enthusiasm for debates on the other issues. In fact, Islamist men participants often tend to shift into the discussion of women’s dress code even within posts which do not deal with this issue.

Before deciding on my final data samples, I took into consideration the higher number of men commentators compared to women, and also the higher interest in women’s dress code compared to other issues. In doing this, I attempted to replicate the Facebook scene on my analysis by first preserving the same gender statistics of commentators, in which men outnumber women, but within small scale samples. Second, I aimed to reflect the centrality of the issue of woman’s dress code by increasing the number of data samples and further expanding my analysis on this particular issue compared to the other two issues of moral conduct and women feminist activists. In addition to the replication of the Facebook scene on my analysis, this strategy helps, I suggest, in critically reflecting on how Islamist Facebook pages approach the question of woman, and what men’s more vocal opinions and their keen interest in women’s clothes can perhaps tell us about the Islamist rhetoric.

Through both representative posts and comments and widely publicized posts, I hoped to offer a small scale in-depth critical investigation of the Islamist construction of woman on

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<sup>88</sup>For reasons I further went through in previous sections.

<sup>89</sup>I analyze these two posts in chapter VI, section 3.

Facebook, the discursive methods forming these constructions, the way these constructions are naturalised into common sense knowledge, and how they can be challenged. Having discussed the selection process of my data, I examine in the following section how I conducted the translation of this data and approached ethically.

### **On being the Researcher/translator**

In this thesis, I referenced the dictionary of *Lisan Al-Arab* (1290), literally *The Tongue of Arabs*, which comprises of twenty volumes, for the translation and expanded definition of key concepts in standard Arabic. This dictionary has been considered the most extensive and referenced encyclopaedia of Arabic language (Versteegh 2001, p. 63) till date. What distinguishes *Lisan Al-Arab* from other key sources on Arabic which I could have used is, perhaps most importantly, the critically reflective stance of the author Ibn Manzur. He employed, in this work, an investigatory methodology, attentive referencing and discussion of the different possible meanings words can generate, and constant employment of the method of exemplification.

Having emphasised the value of *Lisan Al-Arab*, I do not ignore the criticism that this source has been subject to. Hekmat Fawaz, an Arab linguist, points, for example, to the lack of concise and precise analysis at many points as the author, because of his critical perspective and poetic style, tends to over-expand on the assessment of sources at times (Fawaz 2014, p.60). I am also aware of the constant changes standard Arabic could have been subject to since the time of the writing and then publishing of this dictionary. Yet, and being myself keen on exemplary analysis and interested in critical rather than overwhelmingly literal subtle apparatuses of translation, I find *Lisan Al-Arab* compatible with my understanding of the functioning and aims of translation.

In addition to standard Arabic key concepts, I also needed to translate Facebook posts and comments, and other research and/or media sources from vernacular Tunisian, other French or Tunisian inspired vernacular variations, and standard French, into English. I speculated that the most problematic language/dialect among them would probably be vernacular Tunisian dialect (variations) due to the lack of research on it. In their discussion of the Tunisian dialect, Didieu et al. (2013, p. 103) contemplate the lack of sources on Arabic dialects in general and Tunisian dialect in particular, and the impact of this lack on the critical understanding of Tunisian interactions. I note that this lack of sources has also been problematic for works which examine data of spoken/written vernacular Tunisian dialect for reasons I shall explain.

Didieu et al. (2013) focus, at a second stage, on the complications of the Tunisian dialect in particular, first attempting to define this dialect as:

[...] mainly spoken and not written. Tunisian dialect is subset of Arabic dialects. It is characterized by morphology, syntax, phonology, and lexicon which have similarities and differences compared to the standard Arabic, and even to other Arabic dialects. Tunisian dialect is strongly influenced by the Berber and also by other languages such as Turkish, Italian, and French. It has several large regional varieties, but the variety of Tunis (used in the capital of Tunisia) is the most understood by all Tunisians. p. 103

In Tunisia, Tunisian dialect is used only for oral communication; Tunisians have no standard written form of their dialect. It is true that Tunisian dialect shares similarities with Standard Arabic, yet, it is, on the other hand, very different from it. For instance, non-educated Tunisians or Tunisians who did/do not study standard Arabic at school are not likely to understand spoken and written standard Arabic. While Most people I met in England expected me to understand and speak Standard Arabic *just by the virtue of being Tunisian*, I actually, and paradoxically, communicated with the Arabs I knew there either by English or some standardised Arabic, simply because my Tunisian dialect did not seem, to these Arab friends, Arabic or at least understandable Arabic in any way. I sometimes found it unfair that my vernacular Tunisian would not be considered an additional dialect separate from my standard Arabic to be added to the list (which is quite short!) of the languages I speak.

Facebook has been among the first opportunities ever for Tunisians to attempt transcribing their dialect using Arabic, French, or both keyboard letters for strategic<sup>90</sup> or personal choices. This is one reason why working on Facebook posts was quite an exciting challenge for me. I finally could see ‘our’ dialect acquiring a physical shape instead of only oral one, and I could consider materialising its translation. Yet, the task of translation raised conceptual concerns, revolving around epistemological, ontological and deontological questions.

Temple and Young, both sociological researchers, argue that research which comprises of the need for translation may probably provoke these questions: ‘Does it matter if the translation act is identified or not? Does it matter if the identity of the researcher and translator are the same? When is a translator not a translator – that is, how far into the analysis do you involve a translator?’ (Temple and Young 2004, p. 168). These questions about the identity of the translator including whether they are also the researcher at the same time, and how they conduct their translation act raise, among other things, certain peculiar concerns such as my

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<sup>90</sup>In my analysis in the next chapters, I provide examples and discussion of the strategic use of Arabic and/or French keyboard letters.

epistemological stance as a researcher, how I exercise power in language and through language translation, and how I transmit and/or interpret the words of participants<sup>91</sup> who I may probably conceptualize as the other.

Only being a *neutral* researcher, free from all forms of subjectivity toward the research issue and participants, may spare the researcher from the above concerns and make them ‘eligible’ for the conduct of the act of translation, as long as they master the different languages they translate and can overcome some technical problems (Temple and Young, 2004). Yet, the concept of ‘neutrality’ is very problematic in terms of practical fulfillment, and is debunked by the overwhelmingly subjective history of research. A researcher may hardly be, as I earlier argued in the discussion of my methodological dilemma regarding the frameworks of ideology and discourse, neutral irrespective of their strong ontological, epistemological and deontological convictions. I rather speculated, and then argued, that our position as researchers is complicit with, and complicit against, particular discourses. This way, and when deciding to conduct the act of translation by myself, I may end up, as Temple and Young suggest ‘situated in many, sometimes competing, positions to my translation’ (Temple and Young 2004, p. 169).

The problematic ontological, epistemological, and deontological position of being both a researcher and translator at the same time is often discussed, broadly speaking, in relation to works dealing with race, ethnicity, and similar and/or related topics. The researcher is perceived, in this case, as an outsider. Yet, they are also a translator, often interpreter, especially in qualitative research, of the words of the researched insider Other. This outsider-insider critical relationship between the researcher and their participants in works about ethnicity, race, and related issues provokes major ontological, epistemological, and deontological concerns, questioning, for example, on power relations within language, and apparatuses of representation and oppression (Temple and Young 2004, p.168). Yet, does being an insider in relation to my research ‘participants’ and working on issues that are hardly related in scope and meaning to cross-cultural questions of ethnicity and race and so on, make my position any better and less problematic in terms of ontological, epistemological and deontological considerations?

I am a Tunisian woman conducting a research about a Tunisian data set in a Tunisian milieu. Yet, I also have *different and many* other forms of ontological facets of *being*, including,

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<sup>91</sup>I do not have participants in the conventional sense of this term. Yet, I sometimes employ this term, in particular instances of the thesis, for the designation of my research subjects.

among other things, being a woman, a researcher on women's issues, and belonging to a particular age range, social class (though not necessarily in the Western sense of class), and geographical location, which my participants and I may not share.<sup>92</sup> To say that my 'participants' and I are both *insiders* in relation to my research, just because of our common Tunisian identity, is partly relevant. Yet, such an ontological perspective is, on the other hand, also partly irrelevant. It undermines the discursive and social interplay of power relations within and outside the boundaries of the act of translation itself. It also ignores the complexity of my insider-outsider positionality in regard to my research, for reasons which I found it would be more relevant to expand in my concluding chapter. What I attempt to assess now, however, is my epistemological position.

Epistemology is broadly defined as the theory of knowledge in which the very nature of knowledge that I, as a researcher, claim to have, the extent of the rationality of my 'belief' in it, and how I can justify for the accumulation of this knowledge, are being investigated (Crumley, 2009). Following Crumley's definition of epistemology,<sup>93</sup> I identify my understanding and employment of this concept in my thesis as:

[...] the study of the nature of knowledge and justification, and this includes looking at sources and conditions of knowledge and justification. In identifying, for example, the conditions of knowledge, theorists say that in order to have knowledge, you must meet certain conditions of, or the standard for, knowledge. Similarly, in identifying the conditions of justified belief, epistemologists claim that some beliefs are better than others; some beliefs measure up to the standard for justification.

In identifying the sources of knowledge, epistemologists are also trying to say why particular "source" satisfies the conditions of knowledge or justified belief. For example, perception is a source for many of our beliefs. We have beliefs as a result of what we see or hear. In looking at perception as a source of justified beliefs, epistemologists explain why "perceptual beliefs" satisfy the conditions for justification. Crumley 2009, p. 16.

Crumley points to the importance of the study of the nature of knowledge individuals may claim to have. This study examines how this knowledge has been accumulated, and how the process of accumulation can be both documented and justified. This is because, according to Crumley, the apparatuses of knowledge we acquire need to meet with certain epistemological conditions and standards.

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<sup>92</sup>I have discussed my other positions elsewhere in the thesis (see chapter I and VII).

<sup>93</sup>A scholar of philosophy.

In conducting the act of translation, I required, most importantly, to assess the extent to which my 'knowledge' is consistent with the required epistemological conditions and standards.

First, I am closely familiar with the different languages and dialects in the posts and comments I analyze, notably the different variations of the Tunisian dialect, standard French, the Tunisian use of French, and standard Arabic. Regarding the Tunisian dialect in particular, it can be problematic when instrumentalized for, or is the topic of, research, especially for non-Tunisian researchers, due to the striking lack of resources on. Yet, the Tunisian dialect is distinctive, though few exceptions may be common, for its homogeneous character. There is a wide scholarly agreement (see for example: Castells, 2015; Lobban and Fernea, 1998; Powell and Sadiki, 2010) about Tunisia being among the most, if not practically the most, culturally and linguistically homogenous country in the Arab world. This homogeneity, which I also (following these researchers) argue for, had been very helpful in my translation of posts and comments which are in, or contain segments of, Tunisian dialect.

As to the material in standard Arabic, I frequently faced practical translation issues, and I am keen to share my critical reflections on these complications in order to better understand my conceptual framework on translation. A wide array of translation researchers, including Hussein Abdul-Raof (2001), Azadeh Shafaei (2010) and Ronak Hussni and Daniel L. Newman (2015), point to the complications Arabic can generate, for translators, as a source language. This stems, among other factors, from the tensely polyvalent nature of Arabic (2001, p.9). Shafaei (2010, p. 169) critically defines polyvalence as:

Signs [that] can be connected with several signified objects at one and the same time. The notion of polyvalence represents the result of the acquiring by a sign of a new meaning yet retaining its original meaning. Such accumulating of meaning can result either from extended use of a sign over time or from transposing the sign to a new context where it begins to develop some additional meanings. R. Barthes considered such process as cyclical and characteristic of the particularly important signs (symbols) in which the development of new meanings increases the relevance of the symbol (Barthes, 1973).

Clearly, polyvalence is a complex and multi-leveled mechanism for the communication of meaning within and outside language. As Shafei argues, polyvalence offers the chance, over time and as a result of continuous socio-cultural and historical developments, for both the preservation and generation of new signifiers. Polyvalence, as Shafaei further suggests, allows for a multiplicity of meanings and also readings to be formed, and this perhaps one of the most celebrated features of Arabic language, especially in relation to Qur'an (Shafei 2010, p. 165). Yet, this same polyvalence can represent a tricky practical detail for translators.

Abdul-Raof (2010) suggests that translation as a practice, regardless of involving polyvalent data such as Arabic, almost always requires a certain degree of negotiation of meaning. He argues that meaning, in the source language, is often associated with distinctive aspects, most notably cultural norms (Abdul-Raof 2001, p.9). These aspects do not permit the production of ‘equivalent’ translations. What the translator can accomplish, Abdul-Raof (2001) speculates, is a mediation, or, at best, a paraphrasing of meaning. I found Abdul-Raof’s idea of ‘meaning mediation’ helpful for the development of certain strategies I employed to negotiate practical issues of translation throughout the thesis. I sensed the need not to be ‘intimidated’ by polyvalence of my data, but rather to ‘celebrate’ this polyvalence in a positive way. I dealt, for instance, with terms, and often concepts, derived from Islamic texts (for example: the Quran) and also culture-specific expressions (for example, the Tunisian use of adjectives in relation to women’s dress code). These terms and/or concepts did not seem to have a fixed, or at least a clear potential equivalent, in the English language. In addition, they articulated, in many instances, different potential signifiers.

I point, for example, to the well-known example of the term ‘*hijab*’ which is, I suggest, a polyvalent term. It can mediate different meanings in the verses of Qur’an and also in Islamist Facebook posts and comments. These meanings revolve around women’s dress code, but can also connote other signifiers beyond the dress code.<sup>94</sup> Attempting to better communicate the denotative, and also connotative, translation of this term, I chose to engage with the critical linguistic work of the Tunisian ‘feminist’ scholar and public intellectual Iqbal Gharbi.<sup>95</sup> She examines the communicative meaning of the term ‘*hijab*’ from different discursive angles, including that of gender and culture. This contributes to my analytical aims of the decoding and denaturalization of discourse. I found that the ‘dialogue’ I established between the scholar’s and the Islamist commentators’ understanding of the term ‘*hijab*’ helped in uncovering the embedded discursivity of the translation of the term in the different verses of Qur’an and in Islamist posts and comments.

Shifting from epistemological questions into deontological ones, I rather suggest that my deontological concerns in relation to the issue of translation were, by no means, separate from the deontological concerns I have had in relation to my methodological and conceptual understanding of my site of data (Facebook) and the whole thesis in general, and which I shall partly tackle in the following section.

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<sup>94</sup>As I shall further illuminate in chapter IV, section 1 and 2.

<sup>95</sup>Please see chapter IV for more on this example.

## Ethical Considerations

Although Facebook is an open digital site as I have detailed, my ethical concerns were high. Professionally too, my concerns were important as academic research requires critical awareness about, and close attention to, ethical integrity. A wide host of professional research and ethics associations emphasize the centrality of ethical considerations in the research practise. The British Sociological Association (2004, p.1), for instance, argues that:

[Researchers] have a responsibility both to safeguard the proper interests of those involved in or affected by their work, and to report their findings accurately and truthfully. They need to consider the effects of their involvements and the consequences of their work or its misuse for those they study and other interested parties. Sociologists should note that there are national laws and administrative regulations (for example Data Protection Acts, the Human Rights Act, copyright and libel laws) which may affect the conduct of their research, data dissemination and storage, publication, rights of research subjects, of sponsors and employers etc..

As a researcher, I had been aware, throughout the different stages of the development of my project, about the centrality of ethical integrity in the production of a ‘valid and trustworthy’ piece of work (Hesse-Biber 2016, p.17). I negotiated the question of research objectivity, and reflected on my standpoint as a researcher in regard to my topic and methodological choices.<sup>96</sup> In parallel, I repeatedly addressed other ethical questions including: Does the nature of my research require the consent of administrators and commentators, do I respect their will and privacy, do I assure that no harm can be caused to them and to me because of my research, and am I fully in line with the ethical guidelines of academic research?

I gradually discerned that the discussion of the above questions was a more complex and demanding process than what I had initially speculated. This complexity stemmed from the lack of clear ethical guidelines about online research data, especially social media. Hamid Nemati<sup>97</sup> argues that professional ethics committees and IRBs<sup>98</sup> have not yet developed sufficient knowledge about the nature of online data (Nemati 2007, p. 336). A more recent investigation conducted by Maggi Savin-Baden in 2015 demonstrates that the ethics of online research, though increasingly elaborated, are still ‘troublesome [...] and unclear’ (Savin-

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<sup>96</sup>Please refer back to the second section of this chapter where I discuss the complications of my methodological choice.

<sup>97</sup>An associate professor specialised in data warehousing and mining, and information security and privacy.

<sup>98</sup>An institutional review board (IRB), also known as an independent ethics committee (IEC), ethical review board (ERB), or research ethics board (REB), is a type of committee used in research in the United States that has been formally designated to approve, monitor, and review biomedical and behavioural research involving humans. They often conduct some form of risk-benefit analysis in an attempt to determine whether or not research should be done.<sup>[1]</sup> The purpose of the IRB is to assure that appropriate steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans participating as subjects in a research study.

Baden 2015, p. 15). A central factor for the perplexity surrounding online research is the blurred boundaries between the public and the private (Buchanan 2004). Privacy parameters are instrumental for the assessment of ethical approaches to online material.

Different reputed sources on research ethics, notably the Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR), point to the importance of the examining privacy policies in online sites. AOIR encourages researchers to ask: ‘Is there a policy that establishes specific expectations –e.g., a statement notifying users that the site is public [...]?’ (AOIR 2014, p.12). The answer, regarding my data, would most likely be a ‘yes!’. The Facebook Statement of Rights and Responsibilities clearly specifies that ‘When you [Facebook user] publish content or information using the Public setting, it means that you are allowing everyone, including people off of Facebook, to access and use that information, and to associate it with you (i.e., your name and profile picture)’. Facebook posts, particularly that of the public pages I analyse, are designated as fully accessible by the public, even by off-Facebook individuals. If a page administrator chooses not to share a post publicly, they may use privacy parameters to block public viewing. This is why I suggest that both administrators and members are technically aware that their interaction, as long as the public parameters are activated, is fully public. Public interaction can be viewed, commented on, shared or used by all Facebook users unless blocked.

The ethical access to and use of certain Facebook material, as I illustrated, may be ethically justifiable as ‘[t]he greater the acknowledged publicity of the venue, the less obligation there may be to protect individual privacy, confidentiality, right to informed consent [...]’ (AOIR 2014, p.12). In addition, and in accordance with the UK copyright law, all published material, including Facebook public pages, can be reproduced for the purpose of *criticism and review*, as long as it is accompanied by sufficient acknowledgement. Apparently, the open and publicly accessible nature of my data may build a strong case for the ethical and legal righteousness of its use. Yet, can this public nature of my data also be an answer for my deontological concerns?

Deontology is an ethical framework for academic research based on the philosophies of Immanuel Kant. This framework questions the moral, rather than legal, pragmatic, virtuous, or consequential, nature of acts (Salmons 2015, p.59). Research ethics would, therefore, be assessed in terms of what is morally right, and what is wrong. The Facebook data I use is public. Yet, I am morally bound, as a researcher, to ensure the non-violation of the will of

administrators and commentators. I may not observe individuals or groups, even in public settings, without having them ‘as fully informed as possible’ (Social Research Association 2013, p.14). This deontological enquiry drew my attention to one critical concern which I have not fully paid attention to at first: ‘do I really have participants in my research or do I rather have a myriad of published texts?’.

A significant part of my data (chapter V, post 1 and post 2. chapter VI, post 1) represents public political statements. The first sample is an audio-recorded intervention of an Islamist woman MP in a radio political debate. The woman MP acted as the official spokesperson of a political party. The second post is a video shared by an Islamist activist. The video is for purposes of electoral campaigning. As to the third post, it is an article published by an Islamist activist and political analyst. This activist is a Tunisian public figure. She acts as the spokesperson of the largest Islamist party in Tunisia in many public occasions. These three ‘administrators’ are public political figures. They have public Facebook pages, and not private profiles. Facebook users and non-users need only to enter the page in order to access the publications of these administrators. Users are also explicitly encouraged to widely share the publications of these administrators. In addition, these Facebook publications had been widely publicized by Tunisian, as well as international media in the case of the MP. My sole reason for the collection of these statements from Facebook, and not from any other non-online public medium of communication such as accessible newspapers or TV programmes, is that these posts were first published and popularised on Facebook pages.<sup>99</sup>

Even if I approach the above material as published politicised texts, the rest of my data may not be fully considered as such. The posts and comments produced by non-public figures, though displayed publicly, can be more problematic than the above examples. Facebook users who post comments, and in contrast to public politicians, do not necessarily expect their opinions to be nationally and internationally discussed or researched on. Nevertheless, I would argue that the participation in politicised debates in transitory Tunisian Facebook pages, either through posts or comments, evoked a shift toward more publicity. I found the bases of my argument on Nemati’s recommendation that researchers may benefit from ‘their familiarity with, and adherence to, the etiquette and social norms of virtual environments that they are studying’ (Nemati 2007, p. 336). I was strongly involved, as an observer, participant, and critic, in politicised debates on Facebook pages. This is why I, perhaps, feel justified to suggest that the transitional phase was marked by the extravagant shift from political

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<sup>99</sup>Please refer back to the section of ‘why Facebook?’ in chapter II.

dictatorship to wide popular politicization, especially on Facebook. The Facebook lobbying mattered in the shaping of the political landscape (Ghannoushi, 2011). So, Facebook pages were not small localized societies, but rather large public platforms where Tunisians attempted to make their opinions publicly voiced. Posts and comments articulated published political opinions in that particular phase of transition. The safety of those who expressed their opinions, as well as my safety as a researcher on their opinions, is technically, better guaranteed now than it could have been in pre-revolutionary Tunisia thanks to the significant plurality and freedom of speech the 2011 Revolution brought into. Yet, threats remain relatively high under a consistently evolving transitory state, and in the presence of ideologically rigid conceptualisations of the question of Islam and woman.

The posts and comments I selected have been finalised as data samples at least four years after their publication on Facebook. Before being finalised, samples went through a complex process of selection. I first intended to discuss hundreds of both Islamist and ‘secular’ samples. Yet, and throughout years, many changes occurred, to administrators, commentators, and to my research framework. Certain commentators stopped being active. Other commentators had fictitious profiles, or have simply stopped socializing on Facebook. In addition, Facebook pages which were very active during transitional Tunisia have not necessarily preserved the same name, level of activity, popularity, and influence afterwards. Different posts I selected also proved not to be original material, but rather copied one. For instance, some administrators used pictures taken from Tunisian archives. As to my research, the number of posts I selected slowly, but significantly, decreased in accordance with my methodological shift into a more focused approach. These different shifts I went through were paralleled with variable ethical negotiations, choices and reflections.

I have attempted to formulate a clear and valid ethical framework through the consultation of different theories of ethics, and guidelines of recognised ethics committees and independent research. Yet, I finally speculated that ethical debates, particularly in regard to online research, may hardly offer definite answers. As Salmons depicts these frameworks:

[...] do not provide clear answers to ethical dilemmas that emerge, where we must decide what is right or wrong, but they offer a means for thinking about them and assessing an appropriate and defensible course of action. 2015, p.13

Suggested ethical frameworks rather help, among other factors, in the formulation of the researcher’s approach to the question of ethics in their work in general, and research practice in particular. The researcher’s conceptualisation of how to deal with ethical complications is,

however, construed through the researcher's own understanding of these complications, engagement with and conclusions about the approaches different ethics frameworks may offer to them, and finally the researcher's choices.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter was an assessment of my methodological framework. I attempted to shed light on and discuss the significant methodological questions, challenges, achievements, and also concerns I had encountered in relation to my research practise. A first central issue I pointed to was my process of search for a convenient methodological Framework. I outlined my perspectives, requirements, and aims; and then argued for how critical discourse analysis (CDA), a methodology I opted for, seemed compatible with them. In arguing for the computability of CDA, I explained the way it is, first of all, useful for a focused in-depth analysis of research data, comprising of detailed examination of both language and context within a dialectical rather than relational paradigm. In a second stage, I explained how the from-within challenging methodology of critical discourse analysis represented one of the most significant features that motivated my choice. I am, for instance, interested not only in an in-depth critical analysis of my data, but also in means of challenging this data at the very first level of meaning and within the boundaries of the text.

I also shed light on the limitations that critical discourse analysis seemed to expose in my research. I decided, and after a process of critical negotiation, on discarding the critical discourse analysis concept of 'ideology', and opting, instead, for the Foucauldian concept of 'discourse'. The critical discourse analysis conceptualisation of ideology did not, in effect, fit with my understanding of my position as a researcher on the one hand, and the position of administrators and commentators as research subjects on the other hand. I rather sought to acknowledge my complicity with and against discourses I examine, and also approach power relations as relational rather than hierarchical. In doing this, I moved from a rather traditional Marxist decoding of power as an articulation of the duality of oppressor/oppressed to a more complex reading which situates power in the way discourses, even that of the oppressed, inter-relate, and (re-)produce every day forms of oppression.

Having clarified how I methodologically conceptualize my data, I shifted into more technical details revolving around the outline, parameters, and interaction on Islamist Facebook pages, and also my selection process and criteria. I highlighted how I attempted to combine between representative and publicly controversial posts, while maintaining the thematic criterion of

dress code, moral conduct, and women feminist activists. I then, in the last section, reflected on the translation and then ethical complications of my thesis. Being both a researcher and a translator of more than one language and one dialect at once and into English was not an easy task. I needed to negotiate epistemological, ontological, and deontological questions. These questions made me not only aware of the responsibilities imparted on me, but also attentive to how I employ my knowledge, position, and ethical perspective when engaging with my data. Discussing my ethical considerations was not a big shift from my speculations on being the *researcher/translator*, as both questions significantly dealt with epistemological, ontological and deontological speculations. The discussion of ethics, however, offered more room for the expansion on and discovery of the multiple possibilities academic ethical frameworks explored in relation to researcher's choice. By choice, I point to how the researcher, and after going through the critically reflexive process of the negotiation of the research practice, becomes able to construe a personalised framework benefiting from, but not finding definite answers in, the available literature on research ethics.

## Chapter Four: The Islamist Construction of Woman through the Veil<sup>100</sup>

### Introduction: Critical survey of the veil(s)

This chapter is a critical study of Islamist construction of woman in regard to the veil. A wide array of researchers have attempted to define the veil. Some focus on specific cultural articulations of this dress code. For instance, in *The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture* (Shirazi 2001), the Iranian feminist scholar Faegheh Shirazi describes the veil as a head cover ‘[...] consist[ing] of black *chador* and a black *maghmach* [a tight-fitting head cover]’ (Shirazi 2001, p.108). Shirazi points out that all other variations of the veil are considered, according to the Iranian Hezbollah,<sup>101</sup> as simply ‘imports from the West’ (Shirazi 2001, p.108). Shirazi’s work, though a rich and insightful semantic study of the veil, does not explain the physical and cultural differences between the Iranian, Saudi, and Moroccan veils she thoroughly investigates. Other researchers, including the prominent Egyptian anthropologist Fadwa El Guindi (1999), draw on historical and ethnographic theories. In providing a critical overview on the veil, El-Guindi traces the appearance of this dress code back to the Assyrian civilisation. The scholar suggests that free upper-class Assyrian women donned the veil in order to be distinguished from women slaves and prostitutes (El Guindi, 1999).

Sahar Amer (2014),<sup>102</sup> apparently unhappy with different descriptive definitions of the veil akin to that of Shirazi and El Guindi, argues that there is actually no one ‘veil’, but rather ‘veils’:

Using the singular word veil instead of the plural (veils) fosters the false sense of a uniform dress code, of one unique way of thinking about and donning the veil. The truth [...] is that Muslim veiling practises range widely, as do other types of dress and fashion customs. The English word ‘veil’ therefore best thought of as an umbrella term that refers to all kinds of women’s veiling practices. Amer 2014, p.12

Amer draws attention to the way women across the world may cover their hair differently, and argues against the holistic perception of the veil as ‘singular’ (2014, p.12). I suggest that

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<sup>100</sup>I employ the term ‘veil’ and ‘*hijab*’ alternately in this chapter to refer to the headscarf worn by Muslim women.

<sup>101</sup>An Iranian movement formed during the 1979 Iranian Revolution for the consolidation of the political-religious power of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

<sup>102</sup>Sahar Amer is a researcher on comparative cross-cultural relations between Arab and Muslim societies and Western cultures.

there are claims to agree with and claims to argue against in regard to Amer's understanding of the veil. On the one hand, I note that the English term 'veil' is broad and unspecified since it refers, indiscriminately, to a wide range of different head covering techniques including, for example, the Iranian *chador*, Afghani *burqaa*, Saudi Arabian *niqab* and Turkish *hijab*. On the other hand, however, I agree with Bronwyn Winter who contends that veiling practices,<sup>103</sup> with very few exceptions, have increasingly become a 'globalized hybrid [...] combination of Western feminine clothing such as fashionable and loose tops' (Winter 2010, p.4). This hybrid veil Winter refers to can now be spotted across the world including Tunisia.

In Tunisia, I identify three physical forms of contemporary 'veils'. The first is 'the globalized hybrid' form<sup>104</sup> which consists of black or colored headscarves, and is donned in conjunction with Western loose tops, trousers, long skirts, and dresses. This form of veiling is more common among students and middle-class housewives and/or employed women. The second form of veiling consists of a black headscarf covering both head and neck, and a long black *jilbab* (loose dress). This veil can be mapped among rural and working class women, and in Friday prayers. A well-known piece of Muslim folklore in *Kitab Al-Aghani* (The Book of Songs) suggests that the popularity of the black veil is not owed to the unattractiveness of the color, but to the marketing techniques of a Kufa<sup>105</sup> salesman in the Umayyad Age (Abu Al Faraj Al Asfahani 1216, p.43-5). The salesman sold all coloured veils, but no black ones. He complained to his poet friend Al Darami who, in turn, said these verses:

قل للمليحة في الخمار الأسود \*\* ماذا صنعت بزاهد متعبد  
 قد كان شمر للصالة ثيابه \*\* حتى وقنت له ياب المسجد  
 ردي عليه صالحه وصيامه \*\* ال نقتلبيه بحق دين محمد

English:

Tell the *Malihah* (the beauty) in the black veil  
 What did you do with an ascetic worshipper  
 He was rolling up his sleeves for prayer  
 When you stood for him in the door of the mosque  
 Return him back his prayers and fasting

<sup>103</sup>Researcher on cultural studies and particularly the intersection of gender, sexuality, and religion.

<sup>104</sup>In relation to the work of Bronwyn Winter.

<sup>105</sup>A city in Iraq.

Do not kill him for the sake of the religion of Muhammad.

Ever since, these verses have become very popular in the Arab Muslim world. They seemed to encourage women to fantasise about the veil as a seductive dress code for the attraction of the most ‘unreachable’ kind of men; the believer who renounces sensual pleasures. The third form of veiling is the black *niqab* which covers the whole body. Women may leave eyes uncovered or lay a transparent curtain on.

Muslim societies encourage and may even force women to don a version of the veil as is the case in the Islamic Republic of Iran where women are forced by law to wear the *chaddor*. M. Metwally Shaarawy (2005, p.1), reputed to be the most popular Arab Muslim preacher in the twentieth century, argues that *hijab* protects young and beautiful women from the male gaze and also eradicates *fitna*,<sup>106</sup> dysfunctional family relations, and ‘female rivalry’:

In the *hijab*, there is both honouring and insurance for women [...] let’s imagine, for example, a man who marries a good veiled woman. Then, her [the wife’s] beauty fades and her freshness vanishes through time. Burdens of pregnancy, work, etc...make her become unattractive [...] What if her husband leaves the house and sets eyes on an unveiled loose girl who is in the eve of youth? What will be his attitude? Of course, the husband will compare between her [the unveiled girl] beauty and that of his wife at home; a comparison unfavourable to the veiled good wife [...] *Fitna* will occur then. Families will be destroyed. This is [the unveiled woman] the real source of promiscuity and destruction of families.

Islamic Sharia addresses the woman: ‘I forbade you from being unveiled and loose when you are young and beautiful in order to protect you from other unveiled seducing young girls when you are old and when your beauty is gone.

Shaarawy points to the centrality of sexuality in his discourse on the veil. This dress code can be, the preacher argues, a means for the control of the sexual desire of men and the avoidance of the occurrence of *fitna*. According to the *Lisan Al Arab* (The Tongue of the Arabs) dictionary, the verb *fatana*, from which the name *fitna* is derived, means testing during, and endurance under, hardships. For instance, the assassination of the third Caliph Othman (656 AD) and the subsequent disorder and polarisation of the Muslim *Umma* (nation) are known as the Great *Fitna* (name). What comes as a surprise, however, is that a physically attractive woman is also described as *fatina* (adjective) and *fitna* (name).<sup>107</sup> This leads me to note the striking semantic fusion between the attractive female (*fatina*) and socio-political disorder

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<sup>106</sup>I discuss the concept of *fitna* in the following paragraph.

<sup>107</sup>I can identify no precise data about the time and context these different forms of the verb started being employed semantically as such. It is unclear whether it had been before, by, or after the emergence of Islam.

(*fitna*) in the pro-*hijab* rhetoric. This kind of semantic fusion may suggest, among other things, the association between the body of the woman and social disorder.

The notion of *fitna* is referenced by Fatima Mernissi (1983), a leading feminist figure in the Muslim World, who argues against the internationalised coding of the body of the woman as *fitna* (destructive) in the Muslim culture:

Muslim society is characterized by a contradiction between what can be called 'an explicit theory' and an 'implicit theory' of female sexuality, and therefore a double theory of sexual dynamics. The explicit theory is the prevailing contemporary belief that men are aggressive in their interaction with women, and women are passive. The implicit theory, driven far further into the Muslim unconscious, is epitomized in Imam Ghazali's classical work. He sees civilization as struggling to contain women's destructive, all absorbing power. Women must be controlled to prevent men from being distracted from their social and religious duties. Society can survive only by creating institutions that foster male dominance through sexual segregation and polygamy for believers. Mernissi 1983, p.32

According to Mernissi, Muslim societies instrumentalise the assumption of the vulnerability of women to the sexual aggressiveness of men in order to support gender segregation. The assumption demonstrates, the feminist scholar suggests, the *explicit* 'taken for granted' cultural construction of women as fragile sexual beings. This Muslim emphasis on the fragility of women, however, strikes Mernissi as *implicitly* misleading, especially after she ventures into the classical work of Al Ghazali.<sup>108</sup> Drawing on Al Ghazali, Mernissi attempts to uncover that it is, in effect, men and not women who fear the other. She points to the way men perceive the sexuality of women as uncontrollable and destructive (*fitna*) to the social order, and hence, persuaded by fear, they deploy segregation against women in order to protect themselves from destruction.

Mernissi's theory of explicit versus implicit women's sexuality, though thought provoking, has striking limitations. I hoped that Mernissi would first question the popular semantic fusion of the concept of *fitna* instead of approaching this fusion as a linguistic assumption and building her theory on. In addition, I hardly see how the implicit theory of women's greater active sexuality can be helpful for explaining, changing, or arguing against the oppression of women, unless Mernissi does not draw on but rather argues against Al Ghazali. This is not the case, as her analysis appears to be a reinforcement of the rhetoric of Al Ghazali. The woman, according to my understanding of Mernissi, is finally conceptualised no differently from patriarchal or Orientalist discourses. While Orientalism argues that the veil consolidates the

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<sup>108</sup>A prominent scholar in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. His work represents an important reference for Islam-related research.

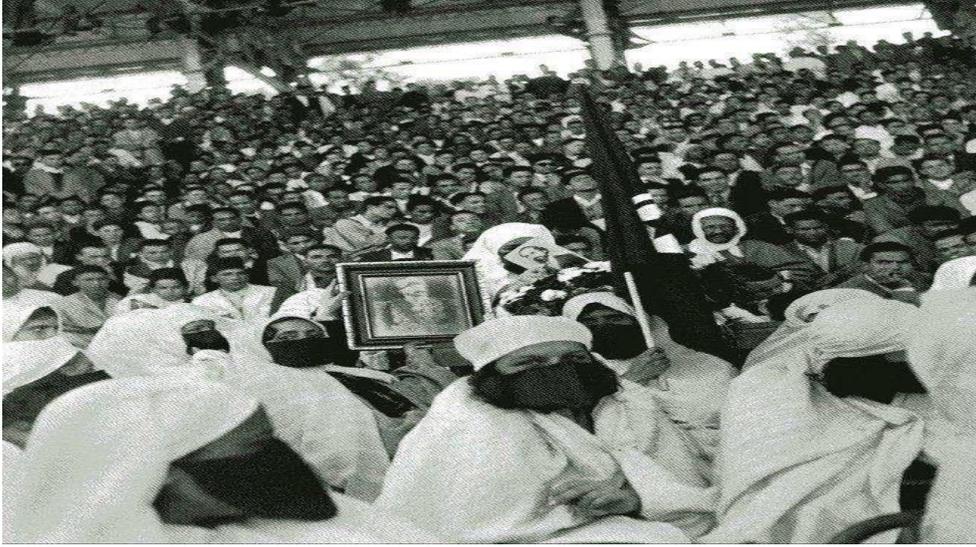
domination of man through the oppression of the sexuality of woman, Mernissi similarly argues that the veil protects the domination of man through the control of the greater sexuality of woman. Woman, I suggest, is conceptualised in both discourses as an objectified body, irrespective of having passive or active sexuality. Man, on the other hand, is conceptualised in these discourses as incapable of controlling his sexual drive which leads to the sexualisation and oppression of the woman as a means of protection against the *fitna* of her body.

Contrary to the above debates around the multiplicity and oppressiveness of the veil in the Muslim World, women's veils in Tunisia had symbolised rebellion, resistance and freedom for more than thirty years before the 2011 Revolution. The question had been, as Rached Ghannouchi stated, 'not about forcing the veil on women, but [it is] about not forcing it off their heads' (Ghannouchi, 2011). The Bourguibist pre-revolutionary regime banned the donning of *hijab* in 1981. Teenage girls of my generation, including myself, could not think of a more rebellious act than donning a *veil* as a means of challenge against parental authority, the Bourguiba figure that 'monopolises' the Tunisian feminist voices and history, and the society that criminalises veils in agreement with the decrees of dictatorial Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes. The Ben Ali 'secular' regime, which continued the Bourguiba ban on veils, was overthrown by the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011 Revolution. Yet, the veil did not lose its political symbolism. Instead, the veil, now a more multi-polyvalent signifier, surfaced openly on Tunisia, and particularly on Islamist Facebook pages.

In this chapter, I attempt to spell out the Islamist representation of woman in regard to this particular dress code. I ask: how do Islamist Facebook posts approach the question of the veil, how do they construe veiled and unveiled woman, what discursive methods do they employ to embed their discourse, what arguments do they disseminate, and how do they naturalise these arguments into Tunisian common sense knowledge? I divide the chapter into three sections. First, I offer a critical descriptive overview of the three posts I selected for analysis. Second, I identify and discuss the different Islamist discourses representative of woman in relation to the veil. In doing this, I delve into the ideas, discursive strategies, and apparatuses of naturalisation that construe woman with and without *hijab*. I conclude the chapter by a critical discussion of and reflection on the arguments I have drawn together throughout the chapter.

## Overview of the posts.

The first post I examine is titled ‘Among the Rare Photos of the Tunisian Woman in the age of Colonization and Beys’. It was published on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2011 on the Tunisia \_ تونس \_ Tunisiepage.



Tunisia \_ تونس \_ Tunisie

من الصور الزائدة للمرأة التونسية في عهد السععمار و البابات

وكيف كانت المرأة التونسية مشاركة في الحياة العامة و السياسية و مساهمة في الحركة التحريرة للبالد من السععمار جزبا لجزب مع الرجال و لكن ني اللن زفسه كانت محافظة و كانت مزوبة ايضا

ثم بعد السيقال الى الزعيم بورقيبة و نزع الزواب و السفساري من على وجه المرأة التونسية باسم الحداثة والتطور و التخلص من الظالميات و الرجعية اما اليوم نالزقاب اصبح غريب على المجتمع التونسي و اصبح يرعب الصغار و الكبار في حين ان جدتك و جدتي و جدة كل التونسية كن مزوبات و محافظات على هذا المنوال

...

حاجنين يا اما جودنا كانو رجعيين و ظالمين و متخلنين يا اما نحن نكفنا ني اصلنا و اصبحنا نسعير من ماضينا باسم الحداثة والتطور و التغير الخ

English translation:

Among the rare photos of the Tunisian woman during the age of colonization and Beys.

Look at how women participated in the public and political life and contributed to the independence of the country side by side to men, but they had been in the same time conservative and donning *niqabs*.

Then after independence, there came Bourguiba who stripped off women's *niqabs* and *sefseries* in the name of modernity [...] *niqab* became scary for children and adults, while 'our grandmothers' had been conservative and *niqab*-wearers.

It is either that our ancestors were backward people of darkness, or that we abandoned our origins and we became ashamed of our past in the name of modernity, progress, enlightenment, etc...

This post is composed of visual and written material: a black and white photo with a written text underneath. The photo shows an adult gender-mixed group. Women stand in the front. Men, who largely outnumber women in the photo, stand in the back. The photographer seemed to have focused their camera on a small group of women at the expense of a much larger group of men since this group of women occupies at least half of the photo. All women wear the Tunisian traditional *sefseri*, with most of them covering their faces, except the eyes, forehead, and a part of the neck, by the traditional black *hayek*. All men also wear traditional Tunisian clothes. Some of these men wear the urban middle-class *djebba*, a loose robe. Others wear the rural *djebba*, a loose robe too but with a darker color, less expensive texture, and less sophisticated decoration than the urban *djebba*. These women's and men's dress codes are celebrated, among other pieces of 'traditional' dress, every 16<sup>th</sup> of March in the Tunisian National Day of the Traditional Dress. Yet, these clothes are now very rarely worn in everyday life.

This photo was probably taken circa 1942 since this year marked the height of the popularity of Moncef Bey<sup>109</sup> and Habib Bourguiba, who women hold their pictures in what seems to be pride and admiration. The audience seems to be quiet, serious, and attentive. This indicates that the occasion of the gathering might be a political public speech, possibly about independence from French colonization. Though the speaker is suppressed from the photo, they are likely to be, I suggest, Bourguiba. Women, clearly, hold pictures of Bourguiba very dearly. In addition, Bourguiba was very well-known for giving popular speeches during French colonialism.

The written part of the post largely contradicts with the visual one. Women in the picture do not don black *niqabs* as the description suggests. They rather don the Tunisian traditional

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<sup>109</sup>A Bey (monarch) who ruled Tunisia (1942-3), and was disposed by French authorities for his anti-colonial activism.

*sefseri*. In addition, Bourguiba did not appear after independence as the post indicates. Bourguiba is rather an acclaimed anti-colonial activist, and even symbol of resistance. He, for instance, spent 24 years in colonial French imprisonment. He was also the politician who headed the negotiations of internal and national independence of Tunisia in 1955-6 (Moore, 1965). Moreover, the relationship between Bourguiba and women does not seem to be negative as the post evokes. The women, contrary to the claims the text makes, hold the picture of Bourguiba in what is apparent patriotism, pride, and admiration. Apart from the contradictions between the photo and the descriptive text, the focus solely on women is noteworthy. The text does not include information about the date, occasion, and topic of the photo, and does not refer at all to the dress code of men.

The second post is titled ‘Your Life Partner?’, and posted on *I am an Islamist! Yes, I am an Islamist!* page on 21 November 2011.

## شريكة حياتك ؟



The post is a picture of four unidentified and numbered young women lined next to each other. The first woman from the left, numbered 1, faces the camera in a catwalk like posture. Though her facial features and gestures are not clear, she seems slightly smiling. She has dark brown long hair flowing over the sides of her neck and shoulders. She wears casual everyday clothes composed of a pair of jeans, a slightly loose colored sleeveless round-necked t-shirt and a mid-sleeved short jacket on top. The second woman, numbered 2, clearly poses for the camera. She puts her two hands on her waist, with her apparently long hair pulled back behind her back. She wears an ankle-length white and red full-sleeved loose dress similar to Middle Eastern traditional costumes, especially that of the Levant. Woman number 3 dons the black ‘global’ and ‘hybrid’ *hijab* I discussed earlier, with a small white strip in the forehead matching her full-sleeved white shirt. Her head is positioned to the left. Her gaze is lowered,

therefore not facing the camera or any potential audience as the previous two women did. Her lowered eyes, combined with her calm facial expression, suggest a state of timidity and sedation. Woman number 4 dons a full black *niqab* which covers her whole face except the eyes. She leans on a tree in a modeling-like posture. Contrary to the other photos, she is contextualized with a background scene, which evokes a garden. The garden, being green, denotes good fortune, fertility and stability in the Tunisian cultural coding of colors. No individualized information for each of the women accompanies these pictures. Women are depersonalized into numbers. The most noticeable difference I discern between these women is the dress code. Thus, the administrator is asking for responders to select a life-partner according to the dress code criteria, and I assess the deeper implications of this in the construction of woman when I analyze the responses later in the following section.

The third post is titled ‘The appointment of Iqbal Gharbi as the Head of the Islamic Radio Ez-zitouna for the Holy Qur’an’, and is published on the *Tunisia- تونس Tunisie* page on 7 September 2011 by an administrator who signs their publications on this page with the nickname ‘admin 4’:

Tunisia \_ تونس \_ Tunisie 7  
septembre 2011 .



سُمِّية السُّيدة إقبال الغُربي في خُطة مُنصُرف مُمثِل الدُولَة بمُجلس إِدارة إذاعة الزُّيتونة لِوُزيران الكُريم إقبال الغُربي هي عالِمة زُفَس تُونسِيَّة حاصِلَة على دَرَجَة الدِكتوراه ني الأِنثروبولوجيا مِن جامِعة رِيُونِه دِيكارْت في السُوربون في فرنسا. مَكَنها النِظام البائِد عن طُريق رِئيس جامِعة الزُّيتونة السابِق ومُدير مَعهد الأُصول السابِق مِن شِهادة التَّاهُل في العُلوم الإِسلامِيَّة كما أُسزِد لها أزالَم النِظام البائِد مسؤُوليات إِدارة ني جامِعة الزُّيتونة و تُداسنَعَمَلت في تَنْبِيذ سِياسَة تَجَنيف المِزاج خاصَة وهي المَعروفَة بِدَعوئها الصُريحَة لِلتحرر الجِنسِي، و اعتبارها لِلحجاب نَعْبِير عن الكُبت الجِنسِي و ان الحُدود الذُّرأِيَّة الإِنسانِيَّة. و طَلِبة الجامِعة التُونسِيَّة يُعرفون انْتِماءها

ونشاطها مع اليسار المتطرف - الوجد - وهي مقربة من وزير الشؤون الدينية الحالي .  
المعروف على السيدة إقبال الغربي ان لها " تأملات جديدة حول الحجاب " اترك  
لكم زراة بنات انكارها و مذهبها للحجاب و لكم التعليق

...\_http://www.mettransparent.com/.../ikbal\_algharbi\_new\_thoughts

كذلك زرايتها للشريعة التي تقول ان تطبيقها اليوم حرام و لكم التعليق  
...http://www.mettransparent.com/.../ikbal\_algharbi\_application\_o

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Admin 4

English translation:

The appointment of Iqbal Gharbi as the Head of the Islamic Radio Ez-zeitouna for the Holy Qur'an

Mrs. Iqbal Gharbi is a Tunisian psychologist who holds a doctoral degree in anthropology from the René Descartes University in France. The overthrown regime granted her, through the intervention of the previous Head of the University of Ez-zeitouna and the previous Head of the College of *Usul*, a degree in Islamic Studies. In addition, the *azlem* [cronies] of the overthrown regime offered her administrative positions in the University of Ez-zeitouna, and she was used for the conduct of the policy of drying up waters [blockading Islam],<sup>110</sup> especially that she is well known for her explicit call for sexual liberation, consideration of hijab [veil] as an expression of sexual oppression, and the Quran *hudud* [penalties] as inhumane. Students of Tunisian universities know about her adherence to the extreme left, and her activism for the radical leftist *Al Watad* [Party], and she is close to the current Head of Religious Affairs.

What is known about MrsIqbal Gharbi is that she has 'new mediations around *hijab*'

I leave you the opportunity to comment after reading her ideas and her understanding of the '*hijab*':

...\_http://www.mettransparent.com/.../ikbal\_algharbi\_new\_thoughts

Here is also her reading of the Sharia, which she says that its application nowadays is *Haram* [religiously wrong]

...http://www.mettransparent.com/.../ikbal\_algharbi\_application\_o

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Admin 4

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<sup>110</sup>Drying up sources or waters is a post-revolutionary terminology employed by Islamists to describe the pre-revolutionary censorship of mosques, and the oppression of Islamist groups and activism in order to put an end to the Islamist thought in Tunisia.

The above text seems as a declarative piece of news announcing the appointment of Iqbal Gharbi as the New Head of the Ez-zeitouna Radio. The administrator, who nicknames themselves ‘admin 4’, offers an overview about the curriculum vitae of this new Head of Ez-zeitouna Radio by shedding light on specific aspects of her academic career, ties with the pre-revolutionary regime, political activism, and research perspectives on the issues of the veil and Islamic Sharia.<sup>111</sup>

Gharbi is a Tunisian woman public intellectual. She is, among other things, doctor in psychology, professor at the University of Ez-zeitouna for Islamic Studies, director of the Chair of Religious Anthropology at the University of Ez-zeitouna, , and president of the Tunisian League for the Defense of Academic Freedoms (*La Ligue Tunisienne de Défense des Liberté Académique*). Apparently, Gharbi’s interests combine between psychology, anthropology, Islamic studies, and activism for the defense of academic freedoms. Gharbi is also widely noted for her interest in women’s issues, and her call for what she describes as ‘progressive and egalitarian Islam’,<sup>112</sup> especially in relation to women (Gharbi 2011, p.1). Gharbi, for instance, writes about the position and rights of woman in Islam within a progressive (*progressiste*) egalitarian framework.<sup>113</sup> One of her articles, dealing with the question of woman and the veil in Islam, is referenced in the above post.<sup>114</sup> Page members are invited, by the administrator, to read this article in order to ‘grasp Gharbi’s ideas about and conceptualisation of the veil’ and make comments, most probably on the page just below the post.

Before providing links to the articles, and specifically in the middle section revolving around the career of Gharbi, I note that the declarative style, formerly marking the title, rather shifts into discursive negative representation in relation to the subject of the post, namely Iqbal Gharbi. Admin 4, on the one hand, passivates Gharbi in regard to the pre-revolutionary regime through both a lexic of use and passive syntax ‘She [Gharbi] was used for the conduct of the policy of drying up waters [blockading Islam] [...]’. Through this discursive passivation, Admin 4 explicitly points to what they believe to be the subordination of Gharbi to the authoritarian pre-revolutionary regime. They also assume her instrumentalisation, by the same regime, for the purposes of the censorship and oppression of Islamists. Gharbi,

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<sup>111</sup>I further discuss these aspects of Gharbi’s career later in this section and also in the analysis of comments. *Islam progressiste et égalitaire*.

<sup>113</sup>Progressivism (*progressisme*) is a theoretical socio-political framework which I discussed in detail in chapter II in relation to the Bourguibist reform.

<sup>114</sup>I discuss the referenced article of Gharbi about the veil in detail in the next section.

according to this passive conceptualisation, is rather portrayed as the puppet (*marionette*) of the Ben Ali dictatorship.<sup>115</sup>

On the other hand, however, admin 4 makes Gharbi active in what concerns (what Islamists perceive as) her unorthodox perspective on sexuality, the veil, and Islamic Sharia, her political affiliation in and activism for (what Islamists perceive as) the ‘radical’ left, and her close ties with (what Islamists perceive as) controversial figures,

[...] she is well known for her explicit call for sexual liberation, consideration of *hijab* [veil] as an expression of sexual oppression, and the Quran *hudud* [penalties] as inhumane. Students of Tunisian universities know about her adherence to the extreme left, and her activism for the radical leftist *Al Watad* [Party], and she is close to the current Head of Religious Affairs.<sup>2011</sup>

This activation, which can, in effect, be strategic, is further highlighted through vibrant lexic including expressions such as ‘explicit call, oppression, inhumane, radical, activism’.

Whereas Gharbi is portrayed as a puppet in the hands of the pre-revolutionary authoritarian regime, she is also pictured as vocal, confident and strong-willed in expressing and fighting for her unorthodox views, especially in what concerns the veil. In the following section, I attempt to decode what this interplay between passivation and activation can tell, how Islamist commentators construe Gharbi religiously and sexually in relation to her perspective about the veil, and also as a non-veiled Head of a religious institution. In addition, and in conjunction with Gharbi’s construction, I also tackle the religious and sexual constructions of woman in the two other posts in relation to the veil.

### **Religious and sexual constructions of woman through the veil.**

Religious debates about women’s rights in the Muslim world significantly seek the identification of, and distinction between, the *halal* (allowed), *haram* (forbidden), *fardh* (must), and *Sunna* (recommended). For example, discussions about the veil tend to focus on whether the wearing of this dress code is a religious must, religious recommendation, or just an optional practice dependent on personal choice. Certain Islamist participants argue that the veil is a religious *fardh* (must) on Muslim women. Moslem, a male participant in post 1, writes:

Niqab is *fardh* [must] and *mustahab* [recommended]. *Inchallah* [by the will of God], it will be *setr* [covering / protection] to most of the Tunisian women very soon. Piety and timidity are the best criteria for a woman.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>The metaphor of the puppet of dictatorship is widely in use in post-revolutionary Tunisia, particularly in media platforms, in relation to many feminist figures.

Those who do not agree can go to France or the USA.

Omm Amenelah, a woman-commentator (post 3), writes:

There should be no discussion of the holy creed of *Allah*.<sup>117</sup>

Moslem suggests that *hijab* is both a holy creed and a recommended Islamic practice. He points out that women are expected, through religious obligation and personal preference, to wear the veil. Moslem apparently leaves no room for doubt about the importance of this dress code. Yet, and though Moslem espouses a religious discourse about the veil, I note that he does not provide solid religious arguments like, for example, Qur'an verses or prophetic statements (*hadiths*) supporting the mandatory character of the veil. Instead, he deploys alternative discursive methods including the association of those who agree and those who disagree with his perspective with particular signifiers. Moslem codes the agreeing, who can be a veiled woman or a supporter of the mandatory character of the veil, as an overwhelming majority 'most of the Tunisian women', and as pious and timid.<sup>118</sup> The disagreeing, however, are coded by Moslem as a handful of people influenced by the life ethics of France or the United States and not Tunisia.

The choice of these two particular countries, France and US, to associate with opponents is, I suggest, likely to be strategic. France, being a former colonial power present in Tunisia between 1879 and 1956, denotes, among other things, religious and cultural oppression of Tunisians. The United States, on the other hand, is widely associated with the break of the Iraqi war, the support of the Israeli side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Because of these particular connotations of both France and the US, Moslem is very like to be targeting the Tunisian suppressed collective traumas of French colonialism and contemporary American role in the Iraqi and Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The association of the other, namely the unveiled, with such suppressed traumas may represent a discursive method for their conceptualization as the Islamophobic and Westernized Other (Dabbous 2006, p.65). This way, those who disagree with the Islamist discourse about the veil are rather constructed,

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مذابيا هاكا الكمشة الي ما يتسماوش وما يسواوش صودري "الديمقراطيات" يوربوننا كيفاش النقلاب دخيل، وونها زناكندو ملوح الي هو ما الدخالء<sup>116</sup>  
عليها وجالية نرنسية بالحق والزم نرجع مزين جات  
والنقاب بين واجب ومسحب، ويانن هلا بلش يسير أغلب نساء تونس زربا جدا زادا، مخبرش مالعة والحشمة،

<sup>117</sup>Lei ni9ach me3e fardh allah.

<sup>118</sup>I will discuss the association between the veil and timidity and wifely duties in the following section.

according to the rhetoric of Moslem, as not only the different, but also the threatening assimilationist Other.<sup>119</sup>

Zohra, a woman participant in post 1, writes:

Despite you, Tunisia is Muslim with *hijab* and *niqab*. Whoever defends Bourguiba, may they be sentenced to hell with him!

Zohra, like Moslem, deploys a religious discourse, arguing that *hijab* and *niqab* are compulsory visible signs of the Muslimness of Tunisia. She, in parallel, assigns the opponents of her rhetoric a place in ‘hell’ with Bourguiba. In alluding to Bourguiba, Zohra interplays the mega discourses of Islam and Bourguibism as antagonists, essentializing the veil as the center of their antagonism. She clearly embeds the assumption that Bourguiba was hostile to Islamic creeds, including the veil. Bourguiba, together with the supporters of his discourse are polarised, by Zohra, against good *veiled* Muslim Tunisian women.

Mohamed, a male-participant in post 3, writes:

‘Allah be merciful on us! She [Gharbi] is in the same bag with Olfa Youssef and Yousef Seddik...and many others!! They do not know anything about our great religion!’<sup>120</sup>

Olfa yousef is a Tunisian public intellectual woman who researches on Arab linguistics, especially in relation to the questions of Islam, woman and gender. Youssef is, perhaps, popularly most known for what is considered her ‘controversial’ reading of the issue of homosexuality in Quran, arguing that consented homosexual relations, contrary to the overwhelming majority of interpretative claims, are not forbidden in or by this Islamic supreme text. In addition, among Youssef’s most noted works, this time about woman and Islam, is *The Confusion of a Muslima (Hayratu Muslima)* which she describes as:<sup>121</sup>

[...] an attempt, [...] through specific examples, to [explain] the difference between the various interpretative possibilities Quran can carry, and the restriction of these potential possibilities by interpreters who impart sacredness to their human relative readings.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>119</sup>Assimilation is a French colonial strategy for the cultural assimilation of its colonies into the French values.

<sup>120</sup>Yarabitoltefbinamen hal3bed, fi nefsschkeretolfa youssef w youssef sedi9... w barcha chiyoyhorou!!

Mfeminechaymeddine l7ennif

<sup>121</sup>A Muslim woman.

حيرة مهبلمة"، وهو كتاب حاولت فيه أن أبين من خلال أمثلة مخصوصة الفرق بين الإمكانات النسبية المتعددة التي يحملها القرآن من جهة، وحصرو تلك الإمكانات من قبل المنسرين الذين يضمنون على زراءاتهم نداسة ني حين أنهما زراءات بشر كفة نسبية<sup>122</sup>

Youssef seems to question the validity of the different interpretative efforts, brought in by Islamic scholars/individuals, of the perspective of Islam on ‘peculiar’ issues including, for example, sexuality. In doing this, Youssef tends to disagree with the sacred character certain people bestow on their readings, thus claiming a chance for multiplicity and openness.

As to Youssef Seddik, who is mentioned together with Olfa Youssef in the above comment, he is a well-known Tunisian philosopher and anthropologist, notable for his work on ancient Greece and the anthropology of Islam. Seddik became more of a famous public figure, especially in popular circles, after the 2011 Revolution thanks to the decreasing censorship on intellectual discourses, broadly speaking. Among Seddik’s notable works are *We have Never Read the Qur’an (Nous n’avons Jamais Lu le Coran)* 2004; *Have We read the Qur’an?(Hal kara’ana al Qur’an?)* 2005; *The Other and the Others in Qur’an (Al-Akhar wal Akharun fe Al-Qur’an)* 2015. Seddik’s works have been influential, thought provoking, and controversial in many ways that are beyond the scope of this section. Yet, what is worth noting, however, is that Seddik calls for the use of a multi-disciplinary approach for the reading of Qur’an comprising of, among other things, a philosophical framework. Through this research agenda, he challenges the sacred character certain ancient interpretations of Qur’an acquired, and pushes forward for multiplicity of and openness on the various, not necessarily contradicting, readings of Qur’an.

Despite their interest in and research on disciplines that are relatively different (varying between psychology, linguistics, and philosophy), Olfa Youssef and Youssef Seddik seem to have things in common, with each other and with Iqbal Gharbi. They are, for instance, all critical of the rigidity some Islamic scholars and also Muslims may articulate in regard to their interpretative attempts of Qur’an. This common perspective Youssef, Seddik, and Gharbi share is what makes the Islamist participant groups them together as a consistent negative ‘out-group’ through the use of the pejorative expression ‘in the same bag’. In the Tunisian dialect, ‘in the same bag’ tends to be employed negatively for the association of a group of individuals with connotations of uselessness and unreliability. The expression may possibly remind of and relate to the Tunisian expression ‘the bag and the sea’ which embeds an implicit common sense (in the Tunisian dialect) call for the disposition of these intellectuals (probably in the same way Chokri Belaid and Brahmi were disposed of).<sup>123</sup>

Hakim, a male-commentator (post 1), writes about Gharbi:

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<sup>123</sup>Two Tunisians politicians who were assassinated in 2013.

Hubal! Hubal!<sup>124</sup>

*Hubal* is a pre-Islamic deity statue that the Quraich clan, the family and tribe of the Islamic prophet, worshipped. When the doctrine of Islam appeared, it forbade the worship of physical deities. By mentioning the name of this deity, Hakim associates Gharbi with practices that Islam fought against. This can be a discursive way of portraying Gharbi as not only religiously incompetent as a Head of Ez-zeitouna Radio, but also as a woman with a hostile anti-Islamic agenda about the veil.

Sta, a male participant in post 1, writes:

Why are you so annoyed of the word *niqab*? Woman, cover yourself up with a *niqab*, a *sefseri*, a duvet... Whatever! Just cover yourself! I think that the words *niqab* and *hijab* do not exist anywhere in Qur'an and *Sunna*, do they? I am not sure... whatever...but covering up is a *fardh* on women anyway...<sup>125</sup>

Sta openly acknowledges having poor information about the Quran and *Sunna* and no information at all about passages dealing with the donning of the veil. What I find more surprising, however, is that Sta is not concerned about or expresses interest in learning about the religious facets of the issue of the veil. Nevertheless, he, still, firmly asserts the mandatory character of this dress code, at the first place, through successive imperative sentences and assertive lexicalization, 'just cover up, *niqab*, *hijab*, *sefseri*, duvet, covering up'. Like Moslem and Zohra's comments, the outline of Sta's comment ends by an assumptive declaration about the veil as *fardh* 'anyway'.

Rahma, a woman participant on post 2, comments about the two unveiled women:

May number 1 and 2 repent back to *Allah*!<sup>126</sup>

Mohamed, a male-commentator in post 3, writes:

Is a woman with a bare head [unveiled] going to tell us about religion and Quran?! Who are they fooling? The state is still against *hijab*, she is too. They are against Islam![...] Enough of this, Tunisians, and repent back to *Allah*[God]!<sup>127</sup>

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هيل هبل<sup>124</sup>

<sup>125</sup>Sta Stablechbikom kelmet niquab 3amletelkom el 7asasia!! yalelle 8atti rou7ek siwa b niquab walla sefseri walla 7atta battania el mofid 8atti rou7ek. Aslan kelmet niquab w kelmet 7ijab matdhokrouch la fi el kiteb w la fi sonna ama elma3na houa elli tefradh 3la ensa welli hoa 8ATTI RO7EK.

<sup>126</sup>1 w 2 rabi yehdihom.

<sup>127</sup>Brabi ensena rasha 3aryen wtji ta7kilna 3addine wel quraan?3la chkoun yetmanykou? eddawla bidha eltawa contre el7ijeb,c a d contre el isalem, wejboura theb 3al7adatha wett7in,yezzi ya twensa warj3ou lrabbi.

Ahmed, a male-commentator in post 2, writes:

If she [the woman] believes in *Allah*, it is obvious what she will wear. May they [women] repent back to *Allah*.<sup>128</sup>

Hosni, another male participant, writes about the first post:

If Tunisians had followed their religion, things would have been much better. But as they live in an anti-Islamic environment, it is expected that that they follow wrong principals... May they repent back to *Allah*... Many things will change then, and they will realize that Islam is our religion.<sup>129</sup>

Rahma, Ahmed and Hosni frame their comments within the religious discourse of repentance (*tawba*). This concept of *tawba* embeds, among other things, an assumption of the ‘sinfulness’ the addressed is guilty of on the one hand, and the moral superiority the addressee enjoys on the other hand. Unveiled women in the first post, combined with Tunisians living under the rule of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, are constructed as the sinful Other by default. They represent, as Hosni seems to suggest, the by-product of an ‘anti-Islamic environment’. Hosni perceives that these individuals live by ‘wrong principles’, detached of their Muslimness, ‘[...] they will realize that Islam is our religion.’

Rahma, Ahmed, and Hosni, being the good Muslims, urge non-adherents to the Islamist discourse about the veil to repent back to Allah through optative expressions like, for example, ‘May they repent back to *Allah*!’. No different from the previous participants, Rahma, Ahmed, and Hosni’s comments implicate multilayered apparatuses of discursive antagonism. These participants, at a first stage, antagonize the mega discourse of Islam to the Bourguibist discourse, which Hosni describes as an ‘anti-Islamic environment’. They, at a second stage, construct a religious polarization between adherents and non-adherents to the Islamist discourse on the veil.

Rahma, Ahmed and Hosni’s comments do not only construct a religious polarization based on the dress code. They also draw attention to the peculiar post-revolutionary discourse of repentance, which requires the donning of the veil, for unveiled woman, as a sign of her re-conversion to good Islamic ethics. There have even been Facebook campaigns urging prominent Tunisian Feminist activists to ‘repent to Islam’ through the donning of the veil. For

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كَيْفَ نَبْدَا نَعْرِفَ رَبِّي طَبِيعِي جَدَا بَلِّشْ نَعْرِفْ شَرُونَا بِلْزِمِهَا نَلْبَسْ وَ هَادِيكَا إِلَي نَخْتَارُهَا<sup>128</sup>

و ربي يهدي

<sup>129</sup>Kanjat la3bad tabe3 fi din ray denia bkir\*\* ema c'est normale bach tkoun el mentalité haka puisque trabaw 3la mabade ghalta.....rabi yehdinch barcha 7ajet tetbadel ema a3rfou elli dina el eslam mech 7aja okra.....!!!!

example, *The National Campaign of Making Raja Ben Slama Don the Hijab* targeted Raja Ben Slama, who is a Tunisian outspoken secular feminist. The main photo of the page was photo-shopped as to show the feminist wearing a *hijab*.

While all the above comments conceptualize the veil as a religious *fardh*, I argue that this is rather a form of naturalization of the veil into a *fardh*, which can be strongly contested from a religious perspective. Participants appear to overlook the difference between the concept of the Islamic *fardh* on the one hand, and *ijtihad* on the other hand. *Al Fardh* (the must) is a set of well-defined holy creeds which consist of the five pillars of Islam<sup>130</sup> and *aqeedah*.<sup>131</sup> Muslims are required to firmly abide by these creeds whenever possible. *Ijtihad*, however, is a form of critical thinking for the explanation of particular ambiguous and fluid passages in the Qur'an. The verses on woman's dress code (7: *Al Aarf*, 17: *Al Israa*, 19: *Miriam*, 38: *Sad*, 41: *Fusilat*, 42: *Shura*, 83: *Al Mutafefeen*, and 33: *Al Ahzab*) are among the most famous examples of the semantic fluidity and ambiguity of Qur'an. Gharbi's article,<sup>132</sup> which is referenced in the third post, provides a different religious perspective on the veil to that provided by the above participants:

The term *hijab* occurred eight times in the holy Quran in the following *Suras* [chapters]: 7 *Al Aarf*, 17 *Al Israa*, 19 *Miriam*, 38 *Sad*, 41 *Fusilat*, 42 *Shura*, 83 *Al Mutafefeen*, and 33 *Al Ahzab*. None of them used the term *hijab* to denote the dress code that covers women's heads.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>130</sup>Shahada, prayer, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage to Mecca for those who can afford it.

<sup>131</sup>Belief in Allah, angels, divine books, prophets, day of judgement, and Allah's good and bad predestination.

<sup>132</sup>I provide the original text in a footnote, and translate the specific argument on the interpretation of Qur'an into English.

Original full text:

تأملات جديدة حول الحجاب  
إقبال الغرابي

الحوار المتمدن-العدد 12:06 - 19 / 4 / 2007 - 1890 :

ملف 8 اذار / مارس يوم المرأة العالمي- 2007 حجاب المرأة بين التقاليد الاجتماعية والبيئية والموروث الديني المحور

إن الخطابات الدينية المتطرفة في العالم الإسلامي قد ظهرت في سياقات سياسية واقتصادية جد مختلفة. وعلى الرغم مما يربطها من تشابهات واضحة، نحن الخطأ اعتبار هذه الظاهرة حركة وحيدة ومتجانسة. بالذات المحليات وأصدائها في الوسائط الإعلامية، والنخلة الاجتماعية، والالتزامات الاقتصادية، والمراجع الدينية، تسهم كلها في تكيف حركات إسلامية متعددة الشكل مختلفة الاتجاهات. إن أنه رغم هذه التباينات، فإن الأصوليين الإسلاميين يجمع كل منهم على مسألتين مرتبطتين وثيقة الارتباط وهما البحث عن الهوية، ووضع عريّة المرأة. أجمع زعم عن تحديد وتطوير سياسة ونظام اقتصادي يتلوهما صراحة إسمية نوعية ومنهجية، لم يشخص الأصوليون المسلمون إلا مجال واحد يحمل في نظرم جوهر الهوية الإسلامية: أال وهو قضية المرأة. فالمطالبة بإعادة النساء الحجاب الإسلامي هو المحور الأساسي لكل سياستهم تجاه المرأة بل ولكل التي يتبنونها لصالح لها ال بوصاية الرجل عليها الى البند، إيديولوجيتهم. إن أن قراءة تحليلية سريعة لخطاباتهم تكشف لنا أن الحجاب هو الشعار

المكتمل لتوليدية المنظومة الذنروبولوجية، والتشريعية، والثقافية والسياسية للاحركات الأصولية. وعلى

ضوء هذه القراءة يتبين لنا أن المناداة باتخاذ هذا اللباس ليست سوى الجزء الضئيل الظاهر من جبل الجليد، وأن ما يخفي وراء ذلك هو أبعد بكثير وأعمق أثرا. بالحجاب الإسلامي يطرح النظر عن الشكل والمنعرجات الاجتماعية الوأانية التي يظفر فيها، يتجاوز مغازة الى حد بعيد ظاهره

المتمثل في زي يتنرض أنه بصون جسد المرأة من عيون الرجال ورغباتهم العنصرية. نورا الحجاب يخفي لتوليدهم الرجعي للشيعة، وتتسرع بالخصوص قواعد المساواة الجوهرية الثالث التي تميز هذا التأويل، أال وهي: عدم المساواة بين الرجل والمرأة، وعدم المساواة بين المسلم وغير المسلم، وعدم المساواة بين الرجل الحر والعبد. وبذلك، فإن الحجاب يصبح رسالة دينية تفضي التسبب والتأويل، ويتكشف عن مفاهيم رجعية

The only two verses which contained recommendations about women's dress or shyness are 30 and 31 from the *Nur Sura* (number 24), and verse 59 in the *Ahzab Sura* (number 33) in which *Allah* asks the wives of the prophet to 'bring down

نتواری بحکم" البیة التي یلجؤون الیها في الأحادیث والتصریحات الرسومية والتي تنسب بالمجاملة والمالطة المشاعر، ومن تلك المفاهیم: بنفوس المسلم علی الكافروا غیال المفكرین الحرار بلسم الردة و حضم حقوق المرأة و الظلم بلسم الثریعة و حضم البداع والنن والشعر و البحت العلمی بلسم فقه العصور الوسطی، ویزد التسامح، واعتماد تعدد الزوجات، والطلاق التعسفی، والرجم. فلخطاب الذي یؤله حجاب السالمین هو إذن خطاب رافض، یرفض الذات، ویرفض استقلالها وحریتها، ویرفض المساواة بین الرجل والمرأة، والمخالفات بین الجنسین، كما یرفض البیة الفضاء العمومی، وال یؤیل بعقود الإنسان وبالویوم الدیمقراطية . ویرغی للثونین الذین یدانعون عن الحجاب السالمی ویرغونه رمزا محایدا باعتمادهم أسلوب الشك النسبوی واضفائهم صبغة القدسیة علی البحث عن النسبویة التي تغرق الویوم الكونیة و الحقوق الطبیعیة وعلی إجالل الحق فی التغلف ال الحق نی الختالف، هوالء المثونین یرغی لهم أن یأخذوا

بالاعتبار الحقیقی البالیة - :

إن لفظ الحجاب قد ورد ثمانی مرات فی القرآن الکریم فی السور البالیة 7 : الأعراف، و 17 الإسراء، و 19 احريم، و 38 ص، و 41 الفضلت، و 42 الشوری، و 83 المطفین، و 33 الأحزاب. ولم یأت فی أي سورة من هذه السور للدلالة علی اللباس الذي یغطي به المرأة رأسها. واللبان الیوحیدان اللتان تضمینتا توصیات بخصوص اللباس أو بشأن الحیاء هما الیة 30 والیة 31 من سورة النور) عددها 24 (و كذلك فی الیة 59 من السورة عدد) 33 الأحزاب (وبها یوصی فلا ینساء الرسول بلن ینزلن علیهن من جالبینهن لکی یرفن. فالمرء ال یغلق إذن لیباس إضائی، وإلما بطریفة جدیدة نی لیباس الثیاب المعهودة، مع الیمیز نی مستوى الحركات. وبالاضافة إلى ذلك فإن هذه الیة ینتقل نعال بالزیناء، فلها ال تعلق بكل النساء، بل هی شریح بوضوح الی أزواج الذین ومن أمهات المؤمنین، الالیة یتوجب علی المؤمن احترامهن، وال یمكن له أن ینزوج من بعد زملهن أو طالقهن، بما أن القرآن الکریم قد منحهن صفة الأمهات لكل المؤمنین. وقد بین بعض المفسرین أن الختالف فی المعاملة نیما یخص عدم إكابة الزوج نازیة، الوارد فی نفس الیة التي ورد نیهما ذکر الحجاب، ومضاغفة العذاب أو مضاعفة الجزاء لمن دون غیرهن، یؤكد أن المرء ال یغلق بقاعدة عامه، بل بقاعدة خصوصیة متصلة برباق معین، وإنها تنطبق علی نساء الذین دون غیرهن. وإن ما ذهب الیه بعض المفسرین اعباطا، من اعتبار أن لمده الیة صبغة عامه، ای أنها غیر مرتبطة بزمان ما وأنها شاملة وصالحة لكل الوضاع، هو مخالف للقیضیات المأثورة والصحیحة لدى المفسرین والداعیة الی الأخذ بأسباب الزول. وهذا الخداع هو الذي یعمده بالأساس، أصحاب الموازیف الرجعیة من المحدثین السالمین ومن الوساط المحنطة الذین غلبوا النصریة المتعصبة علی فقه الراي والتاویل والزراعة التاریخیة والنسبویة للرض العقدس.

وقد ذهب العلماء المبرلمون الی أن الحجاب السالمی واجب علی المرأة الحرة دون سواها. ویرى إهداء المذاهب السنیة الأربعة، المذهب المالکی، والمذهب الحنفی، والمذهب الشافعی، والمذهب الحنبلی، أن الأمة، باعتبارها خارجة عن محیط الزوجات، وغیر داخله فی النسب، ال یجب علیها الحجاب، وأن عورتها - أي ما یجب ستره من جسدها - مماثلة لعورة الرجل، وذلك لیسیر سریر البضائع الیومیة وحماية المصلح النجاریة. وقد كان الخلیفة عمر بن الخطاب یؤزع العواقب الشدیدة بالآلة التي تنبرقع ألها تدخل الضطراب علی نظام التهییز و علی المراتبیة الوائمة بین المرأة الحرة و بین المرأة الیمة.

-وفي كل العصور، كان الحجاب موضع رفض وتغیید فی العالم السالمی بالذات، بدءا بجندیة رسول هلا صلی هلا علیه وسلم، و سبولة البیت النبوی سلفینة بنت الحسنین التي كانت یرفض الحجاب بإصرار. وقد كانت عائشة بنت طلحة، جدیدة أبی بکر الصدیق، وهو من أكبر صحابة الرسول وأول الخلفاء الراشدين، تقول إذا كان هلا ف ودها الحسن، فل داعی لستره وراء حجاب.

ومنذ ذلك العهد، ما نئیت الحركات الیومیة والنسبویة یرفض الحجاب وینزاع نی شرعیته - . نی بعض البلدان السالمیة، یرض الحجاب كذلك علی النساء غیر المبرلمات. وهو ما یکتف عما یخفی وراهه من رهانات حیویة تتمثل فی تغیب المرأة دورا و جسدا و صوتا و فی تلك الرتبة من التوثیة، وإلکار الختالف و التعدد بین الجنسین بل وإلکار لاختلاف ذاته، هذا الختالف الذي یثیر الجدل و یزعزع البیون العومی و یعادي احتكار الحقیقة . والیوم، نمم الواضح الجلی أن الحجاب السالمی یظمر لنا كعالمة سیاسیة وكأداة للیمیز الذینی. وهو یبلیر جملة من القیضیات المبرمضة علی المرأة المبرلمة: وهي السقطة والتخطی عن كونها نكرا حرا نی جسد أصیحت تتكیم نیه. وذلك باعتبار أنه عندما یرتوصل الیات المراتبیة والمعالیة المعجمة الی أوضاع الحیاة الیومیة و الیومیة لمحااصرة وتجدیب الجسد، والرغبة، والرحس الجمالی، وبعجارة وجزرة، ما یجبل علیة الإنسان من استعداد نظری للمدح بالیة، نكف الیاحرافات الیومیة نغمو مكنة. لماذا؟ لن نعطیل هذه الززعات نثبت الفرد و یعمده فی حالة طفالیة الجنادیة و فی مراحل جنسیة ما قبل اودیة و نجله ینخرط فی الأطوار النمیة و السادیة المازوشیة لإلثارة الجنسیة. وهي أطوار تتلاءم مع وضعیات التنن و التماهی و مع علقات الطاعة و البنیة و الخضوع المازوشی التي ینسجها النابع مع الزرعیم و مع القند. هذا القند الذي ینصیب فی مؤزع مثال الننا و یلب دور الب الروحی الیجتماعی و یلی رغبة عنیة یبع فی أعماق الإنسان و تلزمه من المهد الی اللحد و هی الرغبة فی نیل حب و حمایة أب و دود و قوی . ال بد لنا أن نیر أن مضمعنا العربیة السالمیة تصنع، من خلال لعبة التومع و المحظورات من كل النوع و أسالیب السیغالل و السیطرة المختلفة، الیفت بأزاعه. فلما أنها ال تكف عن إنتاج الكدر الإنسانی و رعایته، وال سیمما هذا البوس الجنسی الذي شاهد نبلنایته من خلال عودة المكبوت الفعالی نی شكف نقات عوانیة أو هوس دینی. هذا الهوس الذینی الذي یمجد اللم والخنوع و یحور الة و مباح الحیاة و یعظم النضحیة و غیر یزة الموت.

و علیة من الضروری أن نؤكد أن مقومات المشروع الثونیناری نیقود الی غیر یزة الموت و تعادی طبیعة الحیاة نهی نغمد أساسا علی إدانة الحب و علی نرض الخلق التومیة علی اضطهاد الوائمة و المطفین و أن السیاسة الحقیقیة نیبدأ عند الزواة الكثر أولیة للضمیر الخلاقی التي تقوم للکذب و الظلم و یجزلنا ال نسحم أن یخفق هذا المشروع. وفي إطار هذا النضال ضد هذه الززعات الثونیناریة، وهذا الصراع من أجل الحریات و الكرامة الإنسانیة، فإننا نعتقد بأن الخط الناصل بین طرفی النزاع ال یمر بالضرورة بین الشرق والغرب وال بین الشمال والجنوب، بل بین العنلین فی كل مكان والوصول بین فی كل البلدان، بین الززعات السلطویة و بین الدیمقراطية، بین من یغنون أنهم یملكون الحقیقة المطلقة، و بین الذین یفرون علی الشك. ومن هذا المنظر، فإن الحجاب لن یؤیم بمقاییس الحدائة أو الخصوصیة الوائمة، بل سیکم علیه بالمعیار التیمی السالمی الوحید الجدییر بالاعتبار: ال وهو إنسانیة الإنسان

over themselves [a part] of their outer garments to be recognized [by the public as the honorable wives of the prophet].<sup>134</sup> So, the issue is not about adding extra garments, but about a new way of wearing the old clothes [...] In addition, this verse is really about women, but not concerned with all women. It points explicitly to the wives of the prophet who are [nicknamed] the Mothers of Believers. Muslims should respect them, and never marry them after becoming widows or divorcees, because Quran assigned them as mothers to all believers [...] The rule is not general and it applies only to a specific context, and to the wives of the prophet.

What some scholars argued, arbitrarily, about the generality of this verse, i.e. not being associated with a specific setting, goes against the valid and true requirements [conditions] of *fiqh*, and which necessitates the thorough examination of the context and reasons of the falling<sup>135</sup> of every Quran verse. Gharbi 2007, p.1

In her attempt to analyse all verses of Qur'an containing the term *hijab*, Gharbi argues that *hijab* is employed for the denotation of different acts rather than one consistent unique act of hiding and covering. She points, for example, to how *Allah* can make a *hijab* between the prophet and his adversaries. In this case, *hijab* may denote a material barrier or any other form of protection of the prophet against his opponents. Like this verse, none of the other verses containing the term *hijab*, Gharbi explains, is really about the dress code of women.

In addition to her demonstration of the lack of association between the notion of *hijab* and the body of the woman in Qur'an, Gharbi points out that Qur'an discusses clothing *only* in reference to the wives of the Islamic prophet, and not any other women, and *without* the use of the word *hijab*. Gharbi contemplates that the wives of the prophet, the only addressed women in Qur'an in regard to dress code, are required to change and not to extend the way they dress, so that this change can permit them to be easily identified as the honorable wives of Muhammad, and thus be respected by the public. Gharbi's critical analysis of the question of *hijab* represents a form of *ijtihad*. The scholar searches for meaning, deploys contextualisation for a better understanding of her argument, and forms one way of knowledge. Her rhetoric may have limitations, and is subject to debate. Yet, *ijtihad*, contrary to what the Islamist participants' assertive tone suggests, does, by no means, legitimize the construction of Gharbi and/or opponent voices in general as the anti-Islamic and assimilationist Other.

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<sup>134</sup> 'O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.' (Al Ahzab, 59). Trans. Muhsin Khan.

<sup>135</sup>The Muslim faith indicates that Qur'an came from the sky through the angel Gabriel to the prophet.

The Islamist discourse on the veil was not only religious. Islamist Facebook participants also deploy sexual rhetoric. For example, Zouheir, a male-responder in post 3, writes:

Her [Iqbal Gharbi] style is that of a cabaret belly dancer or of a model of sex shop window. These people should leave our nation.<sup>136</sup>

Soufeine, a male-commentator in post 1, writes:

Women in the picture [with niqab] are pious good ones, but you are a nation of whores who does not appreciate honor and piety!<sup>137</sup>

Sherif, a male-commentator in post 3, writes about Gharbi:

Whore!<sup>138</sup>

Abir, a woman-participant in post 2, writes:

Allah is the mighty! Choice always falls on the veiled woman, so that unveiled ones understand that *hijab* is piety and that she is outside the circle of man's consent! May Allah offer me and all the pious women good pious husbands!<sup>139</sup>

Hmada, a male-participant in post 3, writes:

She [Iqbal] fits better in a brothel.<sup>140</sup>

Seif, a male-participant in post 3, writes:

Iqbal has better knowledge about sexual issues [...]<sup>141</sup>

These commentators employ a sexually-loaded vocabulary, 'honor, piety, whore, brothel, sexual, belly dancer, cabaret, sex shop'. This use of language seems to portray non-veiled women as sexualized bodies, and may be rooted in the patriarchal practice of slut shaming in which women are subject to 'normalizing sexualizing gaze upon the female body' (Renold and Ringrose 2013, p. 334). 'Slut shaming' tends to be rather tackled in Western feminist

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<sup>136</sup>SON ALLURE NE SERT QU,A UNE BELLE DANSEUSE DE CABARET OU UN MANQUIN DANS LES VITRES DE SEXSHOP LES SALLES DOIVENT SE RETIRE DE NOTRE NATION

<sup>137</sup>هذي الشرقيات الغنيات باشعب سروال طايح

<sup>138</sup>عاهرة

<sup>139</sup>سبحان هلا يبغي داينما الاخنيار على المحجبات و المزيبات ليزداد المبرجة بؤننا أن الحجاب هو العفة و البقاء و أنها غالبا خارج دائرة الاخنيار  
الاهم ارزوني و بنات المبرمبن أزواجا صالحين و ا رزق شهاب المبرمبن زوجات صالحات امين!!!

<sup>140</sup>كن نمشي لكارتي احسن زله

<sup>141</sup>عالمة في " الفرائش " و كان

academia and about Western data, and is rarely applied on or referenced in relation to Muslim societies in research. Yet, I suggest that the above comments are loaded with apparatuses of slut shaming. These discursive apparatuses do not only target what commentators perceive as the unorthodox sexual behavior of Gharbi (manifested in not wearing a veil), but they are also a reminder of the cultural internalization of Gharbi, who is a woman and as a woman, as the inferior Other who is reduced into a sexual body, and is hence unfit for the position of leadership.

Shifting into a more culturally-focused reading of the above comments, I suggest that the sexual ‘fantasies’ of commentators about ‘unveiled’ sexuality recalls imageries of the *harem* institution, especially in the Ottoman empire. Cabaret, whorehouse and sex shops seem to be the substitutes of this institution for Islamists, and thus the modern alternative of *harem*. As far as these comments apparently tell, woman, and particularly the unveiled, should be restricted to man’s sexual pleasure, and she hardly suits as wife, religious scholar, or leader.

Before shifting into another facet of this sexual construction of woman through the veil, I note that Islamist comments are often characterized by very strong language comprising, most notably, of swearing. Paradoxically, this type of language is strictly prohibited in the Tunisian common sense understanding of religiosity as practicing and devoted Muslims are expected not to employ swearing at all. The most recurring term in the Islamist comments in all posts is, in effect, ‘whore’. A seemingly non-Islamist responder, for example, reveals her puzzlement about the strong language Islamist commentators employ to address the question of woman on Facebook. She reminds an Islamist man-commentator with whom she conducts a sub-debate on one post that ‘offending a woman is punishable by 100 lashes in Quran!’ This very strong language was perhaps one of the factors that made Islamist Facebook users ‘win grounds’ during the first few months following the 2011 Revolution. Non-Islamist Facebook users started to avoid confrontations with them; in which they would end up shaming them as unbelievers, whores, gays,<sup>142</sup> dictatorship champions, conspirators, and traitors.

In addition to ‘slut shaming’, certain Islamist commentators employ the rhetoric of *Setr*. I was initially intrigued by the Islamist post-revolutionary semantic re-articulation of the cognitive meaning and social understanding of the concept of *setr*, particularly in regard to women. This semantic re-articulation I note, and to my surprise, became increasingly elaborated,

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<sup>142</sup>In a negative sense.

promoted and naturalized into collective common sense knowledge on Islamist Facebook pages, and even wider Tunisian settings. For example, certain participants write:

Hamza (post 1): ‘To all girls of the country: [...]. Do seek *setr* with *niqab* or whatever, whores, so that men may reconsider their [bad] opinions in you [...]!’<sup>143</sup>

Ben Hassen Khaled (post 3): ‘I am really disappointed of the Tunisian women who do not want to wear *niqab*. Don’t you want *setr*? What if you leave your house [without *niqab*] and get raped? I swear by God, there are human wolves in the outside that nothing can shut down their eyes and curb their desires except the *niqab*.’<sup>144</sup>

Hedihi (post 1): ‘When a woman *tustur* [protects, derived from the name *setr*] her body by a black *niqab*, you say what an ugly black color! But when she wears a mini-black dress, you say *quelle classe*!’<sup>145</sup>

It is noteworthy that Hedihi’s comment implicates discursive interplay of Arabic and French. Whereas Hedihi deploys Arabic for the support of the *niqab*, he uses French, specifically, for the criticism of anti-*niqab* participants. Since Arabic is the language of Qur’an, and is associated with Islam in the Tunisian collective common sense, it can be useful as a discursive means for the acquisition of more religious authority and credibility for the commentator. French language, however, is conventionally coded, sometimes in a hyperbolic way, as a signifier of the assimilationist discourse.<sup>146</sup> Certain Islamist Facebook commentators associate, through the strategic use of French language, the unveiled with Western secular agency. However, and contrary to strategic and ideological interpretations of the use of French, this language can serve, for many Tunisian Facebook users, as *simply* and *only* an alternative typing option for the substitution of the Tunisian dialect. French language is, in effect, much more convenient for the users of Latin computer keyboards than standard Arabic can be, especially that the use of Arabic keyboard was quite rare till the 2011 Revolution.

In these comments, the use of the notion of *setr* implicates protection through covering. Oddly, and to the best of my knowledge, Tunisians do not –conventionally- employ *setr* in

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<sup>143</sup>Lebnet elkol : krahet ri7etkom braby oster ro7ek be sefseri wala ni9ab hakeka newali ne7eb ri7etkom yamlahe; weeli mouch 3ajebha klemi temchyt enayek.

<sup>144</sup>Wallahi ana behet fe barcha twensa ama 5ir esotrawe eni9ab walla tabarajwe e3tisab wallah fama dhi2eb ‘des lous’ humains maisakrelhom 3inhom wechah wethomken ni9ab.

<sup>145</sup>Kitoster rou7ha t9oulo noir afaa ka7la w kitalbes wa7da robe mini noir t9oulo waw kel classe ....waaaaaaaaa 3ajabah!!!!

<sup>146</sup>I discussed the way France signifies the assimilationist other in the anti-colonial discourse the second chapter.

relation to the body of the woman. This term is rather associated with the scandalous and the defective. There is hardly available exemplary research data about the Tunisian colloquial use of the term *setr* to build on.<sup>147</sup> Yet, and as the term is essentially derived from standard Arabic, I collected samples of the uses of *setr* in the *Bukhari and Muslim Book*, the most reliable source in *hadiths* and *sunna*, which may be useful for the comparison and clarification of meaning:

*Hadith 1:*

The messenger of *Allah* said: '[...] whoever *stara* [past verb from *setr*] the fault of a Muslim, *Allah yasturu* [present/future tense derived from *setr*] his fault on the Day of Resurrection". (Al-Bukhari and Muslim Book 1, *Hadith* 233).

*Hadith 2:*

Messenger of *Allah* said, "Every one of my followers will be forgiven except those who expose (openly) their wrongdoings. An example of this is that of a man who commits a sin at night which *Allah satara*[past verb from *setr*], and in the morning, he would say [to people]: "I committed such and such sin last night', while *Allah* had kept it a *setr* [secret]. (Al Bukhari and Muslim Book 1, *Hadith* 241).

In all *hadiths*,<sup>148</sup> the denotations of the *setr* are that of concealment and covering. However, what distinguishes between the basic act of covering (*taghtia* in Arabic) and the act of *setr* is that *setr* requires, at the first place, the occurrence of a deficiency, defect, fault, or sin in need of covering. *Setr* in the Tunisian dialect has, I suggest, an equivalent meaning and identical use to the one in the above *hadiths*. For instance, it is accurate for Tunisians to say that one's hair or food is *mughatta* (adjective from *taghtia*, covered). It is not accurate, however, to say that one's hair or food is *mastur* (adjective from *setr*). Simultaneously, it is accurate to say that a scandal is *mastura* (adjective), concealed or rectified so that shame is avoided. Yet, it is inaccurate to say that a scandal is *mughattat* (covered). This is why I am inclined to suggest that Islamist participants deploy a semantic manipulation embedded in the discursive construction of the body of the woman as the scandalous. Participants imply that the body of the woman does not require only covering, but rather *setr* as well. This semantic manipulation appears to naturalize the shamefulness of the body of the Tunisian woman, and transform into Tunisian common sense linguistic, cognitive, and social knowledge.

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<sup>147</sup>For more on the lack of sources about Tunisian dialect, please see chapter III, section 4.

<sup>148</sup>I quoted only three *hadiths* about *setr* as examples. I selected them because they were the first listed *hadiths* including the term in the book.



This was the image of the Muslim Tunisian woman before being raped [by Bourguiba].<sup>152</sup>

Shedding light on *Umm Amine's* comment in particular, I note that her Facebook profile name is connotative in terms of gender dynamics. Umm Amine identifies herself through her kinship to what appears to be her son as the prefix 'umm' means in English 'mother of'. I note that it is a frequent practice among Islamist women Facebook users to present themselves as essentially mothers, daughters, or wives. The identity of the Islamist woman apparently requires, for many Islamist women Facebook users, to be articulated in connection to that of man.

Umm Amine employs the metaphor of rape in order to depict the interplay between Islamist and Bourguibist ideals of Tunisian womanhood. She pictures the Tunisian woman as a/having a chaste Muslim body dishonored through the rape offense that Bourguiba commits against it/her. This metaphorical use of rape, I speculate, espouses the idea of cultural 'defloration' of the Tunisian woman through the implementation of 'secular' Bourguibist reforms on women's rights. It is through the body of the woman, Umm Amine seems to argue, that shame penetrates, and it is also through the body, and by the donning of the veil, that shame can be held off.

The lexic of comments, marked by the metaphorical threat of rape, articulates, among other things, an explicit discursive signal of intimidation against unveiled women. Because the body of the woman is widely *internalized* as vulnerable and thus easier to physically penetrate in comparison to that of a man, the woman is culturally conceptualized as the most potential target of rape (Bartky, 1990). Following Sandra L. Bartky (1990), who is specialized in philosophy and gender studies, I define internalization as an image '[...] incorporated in the structure of the self,[...] the modes of perception and self-perception which allow a self to distinguish itself both from other selves and from other things which are not selves. [...] a generalized male witness comes to structure women's consciousness of herself as bodily be' (p.77). Bartky argues that internalization is not about the way the woman perceives herself through her perspective, but it is rather about how both the self and the other, particularly the man, conceptualize the woman. In *Femininity and domination: studies in the phenomenology of oppression (1990)*, Bartky provides an incredibly useful psychoanalytical and ethnographic investigation of the way different women in public spaces such as streets and train stations seem to be forced to internalize their bodies from a patriarchal angle of view. Bartky sheds

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<sup>152</sup>Hedhi souret et tounssia 9bel ma ye8tasbou 7ouriyetha !!!

light on how these women are culturally bound to behave in a certain ‘proper’ way, forcing their bodies to be ‘disciplined’ as to appear ‘small, narrow, harmless, [...] take up little space [...] avoid the bold and unfettered staring of the “loose” woman’ in public spaces (Bartky 1990, p.68). Though drawing on a Western research data, I find Bartky’s analysis helpful for a better grasp of meaning within the comments I analyze. The scholar’s findings, I argue, can be smoothly articulated in the first Islamist comment:

Moslem (post 1): Piety and timidity are the best criteria for a woman!’

The ‘proper’ Tunisian woman, like the Western woman Bartky depicts, is constructed by Islamist Facebook participants as timid, ashamed, and harmless in the public space. She has to adhere to a particular coded physical appearance in order not be perceived as a ‘whore’, or as a potential target of the threat of rape. It is woman’s responsibility, participants seem to strongly argue, to secure her body against the sexual desire of man through the practice of veiling.

Khaled, another participant, employs the familiar yet complicated metaphor of ‘human wolves’ in relation to the discourse of rape. The complicated aspect of this metaphor, I suggest, resides in the difficulty of locating its imageries in the Tunisian cultural folklore. Wolves are, in effect, not widespread animals in Tunisia. To the best of my knowledge, they do not constitute a part of the internalized Tunisian cultural myriad of tales, myths, proverbs and metaphors as, for example, wild pigs do. Apparently, participants may have borrowed this metaphor from foreign folklores of which the Western, and more precisely *The Red Riding Hood*, sounds the most potential source. Tunisians are very well acquainted with the tale of the ‘[...] naïve, helpless, pretty little [Red Riding hood] girl who must be punished for her transgression which is spelled out more clearly as disobedience and indulgence in sensual pleasures’ (Zipes 1993, p.33). Islamist participants probably drew on, or were inspired by, this childhood fairytale because of its discussion of the themes of women’s disobedience, venture in non-female territories, and consequent punishment. I am more inclined, however, to argue that Khaled employs this common metaphor, most importantly, as a discursive method for reduction of the culpability of man in rape. Khaled uses the passive verb form to describe the rape act ‘What if you get raped’, and replaces ‘man’ by ‘human wolves’; which significantly suppresses the agency of man (Van Leeuwen, 2008). Through the discursive suppression of

the activity of man, the unveiled woman is constructed as culpable, and as the one who brought rape upon herself.<sup>153</sup>

The above commentators argue that a woman who ventures in the public domain of men outside the house with her source of honor and shame unconcealed is not only likely to be harassed or even raped, but she has, in effect, simply ‘asked for it’ (Azari 1983, p.106). This rhetoric strikes me as contradictory to the popular internalization of the man as more rational than woman, particularly in the Tunisian culture. Unlike her, he is not, for example, considered instinctive, hyper-emotional and obsessed with ‘womanly’ gossip practices. He is also portrayed as the traditional bread winner and protector of the honor of ‘female’ dependents. Yet, and surprisingly, it is woman who is required to be more rational when it comes to the control of the sexual drive (Azari 1983, p.95). While the woman is required not be aroused by the unveiled or even semi-naked sight of the male body, she ought, according to Islamist participants, to veil in order not to arouse him.

In the two posts, there are participants who tend to reinforce the above rhetoric:

Nourredine (post 1): Have you ever seen fruits without peels? Have you ever seen a pearl without a seashell? Fruits get rotten without peels, and pearls lost without a seashell.

Med (post 2): Exhibited goods are subject to dust, insects and bacteria, I accept only preserved goods.

The above commentators deploy metaphorical imageries to depict what they perceive as the exhibited sexual sign of the unveiled hair. The veiled woman, according to them, is similar to a fruit with its peels on, a pearl inside its seashell, and a non-exhibited good. A woman without *hijab* is, however, shamed and polarized as a peeled fruit, an unshelled pearl, and an exhibited good subject to insects, bacteria, and dust. Participants suggest that like goods, the unveiled woman becomes a legitimate target, and culpable, of forced sexual advances of man.

In addition to culpability, commentators draw metaphorical imageries of commodification and consumption since goods, fruits and seashells are all commodities to be exhibited, sold, bought and consumed. The nature of this consumption is, suggestively, sexual. The loss of seashell, outside cover, and peels may embed, as Shirazi argues in her feminist study of the commodification of women under the Islamist Iranian *Hizbullah* (Party of *Allah*), semiotics of

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<sup>153</sup>I discuss the discourse of rape in more detail in chapter V, section 2 in regard to the gendering of the conduct of woman.

defloration (Shirazi 2001, p.76). The active agency of society, particularly that of man, is noticeably suppressed in these comments. Like a buyer is expected to be tempted by goods, man is also expected, by commentators, to be tempted and aroused by female bodies he sets eyes on. Participants implicitly argue that man does not need to be ‘discriminate’ in his advances to women’s bodies. This way, women are construed as mere embodiments of ‘sexual calls’ (Shirazi 2001, p.117). Their bodies catalyze, as I earlier highlighted in this chapter, a destructive *fitna*. Women are required to cover themselves in order to be safe from ‘dust, insects, and bacteria’ which are, ironically, men. The veil articulates a defense against man’s indiscriminate sexual drive.

Other commentators seem to construe woman as ‘the angel in the house’. Fayçel (post 1), for example, writes:

In my opinion, women are good only for kitchen, clothes washing, child bringing, and bed.<sup>154</sup>

Nour, a woman-commentator in post 1, writes about the women in the picture:

How lovely they are! Just like angels. But now, you can sometimes see a woman who is like an *obitha*(woman-devil)!<sup>155</sup>

Responses seem to restrict woman to domesticity. In fact, the second post in particular and the overall comments to it are discursively-loaded with semantics of exhibition, commodification, and depersonalization of woman. This type of dress code-based ‘selection’ publications was common in early post-revolutionary Islamist Facebook pages. Administrators would post comparative pictures of female-children, unidentified adult or even famous women such as veiled Islamist politicians versus unveiled seculars or singers, and ask men participants to write down the number of their favorite woman. Though this is perceived as a ‘fan-activity’ by some responders, it helps, I argue, internalizing the rhetoric of the depersonalization of women.

Farah Azari provides an intriguing analysis of the strategy of the depersonalization of woman in patriarchal societies. At a first stage, Azari explores Mirnissi’s work on the rhetoric of *fitna* and her elaboration of the explicit versus implicit theory on the sexuality of woman. Though I discussed briefly this theory in the introduction of this chapter and was critical of it, I note

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<sup>154</sup> في رأيي, الزنهاء ما يصلحو كان الكوجينة, غميريل الحوايج, نربوية المرغار و النرش

<sup>155</sup>comme des anges mahlahom emma tawa sa3at etra wahda etkoul 3obbitha esmmelah!!!

that Azari, interestingly, could reach thought provoking findings by drawing on the same theory of Mernissi.

Both feminist scholars, Mernissi and Azari, examine a myriad of important *hadiths* depicting the conceptualization of the prophet and Ali (the cousin of the prophet) on woman's sexuality in *Beyond the veil: Male Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Mernissi 1985) and *Women of Iran: the Conflict with Fundamentalist Islam* (Azari, 1985). In one *hadith*, for example, the prophet saves his chastity against the *fitna* of attraction to an unknown woman, who he seemingly met by coincidence and immediately liked, by seeking fulfillment in his wife Zainab. In a second *hadith*, Ali speaks to his followers about the centrality of sexuality in relation to women, and recommends that they have an active sex life with their wives so that they (Ali's companions) would not feel threatened by *fitna* of other women and become unfaithful. Both *hadiths*, interpreted from a positively traditionalist perspective, seem to praise the institution of marriage as an effective means for regulating sexuality and avoiding unfaithfulness.

Both Mernissi and Azari draw similar conclusions about how the Islamic tradition above embeds a vibrant fear from woman's active sexuality, and an intention to control this sexuality through the regulatory practice of marriage. Azari, however; further elaborates her argument as to signal the role of above *hadiths* in the promotion of the 'women are all the same syndrome' and consequent 'depersonalization of sex' (Azari, 1985) in Muslim societies:

This example [Ali's *saying*] in many ways epitomizes [...] fear of sexual forces acting on a Muslim man and leading him astray from the social order and observance of religious rules compels that man not to abstinence and self-control but to a mere reflection of his sexual interest. To put it crudely, [...] a man is conditioned to think that 'all women are the same'.

[An] aspect to the 'women are all the same syndrome' is that this could only be so if they were perceived of as having only one dimension to their character- the sexual dimension. When woman's individuality is not recognized by a male population whose attitude towards them is a utilitarian one, then a possible outcome is that women are regarded as sex objects. Azari 1985, p.103-4

Muslim societies, according to Azari, had generally been patriarchal even before the emergence of Islam. The scholar, for instance, offers the example of the pre-Islamic Persian Empire as a male-centered civilization (Azari 2014, p.104). Yet, she argues that the emergence of the Islamic tradition has enhanced the already-existing portrayal of woman as a sexual being first and foremost: man is expected to be tempted and sexually aroused by all female bodies he sets eyes on because they are all a destructive *fitna*. He does not need to be

‘discriminate’ in his approach to them since they all embody ‘sexual calls’ and means of libidinous satisfaction (Azari 1985, p.117). Female individuality ceases then to be an important issue. Thus, women become commodified and stereotyped.

It can be noted that North African societies internalize different female commodifying and stereotyping patterns. For example, women can work the same as men and achieve financial independence, yet; they are always conceptualized as domestic (Hessini 1994, p.48), and subordinate to the male figure of the husband or father or brother. For instance, both Tunisian custom and law requires the head of the family to be a male, while women are denied this status. As for gendered sexual stereotypes, they are also widespread. Mernissi offers the example of the Moroccan folk tale of the ‘libidinous’ female demon Aisha Khandisha who ‘has pendulous breasts and lips and her favorite pastime is to assault men in the streets and in dark places, to induce them to have sexual intercourse with her, and ultimately to penetrate their bodies and stay with them forever’ (Mernissi 1985, p. 1985). Mernissi also points to the existence of various popular Moroccan proverbs and poems emphasizing the destructiveness of the sexuality women, and they are all internalized in the popular Moroccan cultural conceptualization of women (Mernissi 1985, p34).

Apparently, Azari decided to be less compromising and rather ‘sharper’ than Mernissi in her criticism of the role of the Islamic rhetoric, especially in relation to the prophet Muhammad and his cousin Ali, in depersonalizing woman’s bodies. I partly agree with Azari, considering how the *interpretation* of certain *hadiths* may probably tend to emphasize the sexual character of women. Yet, I am, on the other hand, inclined to suggest that Mernissi’s and Azari’s different experiences of Moroccan-adapted and Iranian-adapted paradigms of Islam into their native cultures may have influenced their stances toward the question of Islam and the body of the woman.

## **Conclusions**

The initial question of this chapter was about women’s dress code in broader terms. Yet, I noted that the overwhelming majority of posts dealing with the issue of dress code focus on the veil. Therefore, I shifted my analysis into this particular dress code which I thought, till that stage, that it has been explored thoroughly enough in earlier scholarly research. The Tunisian transition and consequent rise of Islamist groups especially on Facebook seemed, however, to expand the discursive scope of the veil as a polyvalent signifier. A critical survey of the different definitions of the veil uncovers that there are rather ‘veils’, and also a ‘veil’.

Veiling practices differ across countries and cultures all over the world. Yet, there is one form of hybrid hijab, a combination of Traditional Muslim and modern Western pieces of clothes, prevalent nowadays. After the 09/11 US events, this hybrid veil became the visible sign of the Muslim identity. I employed critical discourse analysis and a myriad of feminist studies to uncover how veiling practices are argued for in Islamist post-revolutionary Facebook posts.

In my analysis of the posts, I uncovered the prevalent set of constructions of women in regard to the veil, most notably the religious, sexual, and political ones. While I postponed the political discourse for a further elaborated analysis in my work on feminist activism in chapter VI, I tackled both the religious and sexual discourses. The discursive strategies administrators and users deployed were not strikingly innovative. They rather confirmed to the pre-revolutionary conceptualizations and the veil. For example, the Qur'an was mobilized through a pro-veil interpretation of the specific verses on this dress code. What is innovative, however, is the discursive methods inspired by, and formed through, interaction in the digital space of Facebook. I here refer to the instrumentalisation of the profile photo, profile name, typing language and style for the articulation of a particular ideological position. My analysis uncovered that the veil, instead of the liberation of debates on it, transformed into a tensor discursive signifier.

I have then argued that the discourse of culpability discourses can be rooted, among other things, in the Islamist rhetoric of the depersonalization of women as all being 'same' and '*fitna*'. I partly drew on Farah Azari's provocative theorization on 'women are all the same syndrome' in order to decode the motives and implications of this depersonalization process, and demonstrated how the body of the woman is exhibited, unidentified, restricted to the domestic, and commodified into veiled versus unveiled mere number. Both the existence and the absence of the veil served as markers of the sexualized 'proper' and 'improper' female body.

Tunisia serves as 'the best example of an egalitarian Islamic law for women' (Pauly, 2011). It has a praise-worthy feminist tradition embodied in the Code of Personal Status, individual freedoms and women's effective contribution to the work force, family dynamics and politics (parity law). However, Facebook posts and responders I examined are representative of many Tunisian Islamists who have been 'forced' to subdue to the new 'dictatorial' Bourguibist gender division of domains in which women could finally leave the house to join the public space. Yet, the Islamist men have remained unwilling to accept woman as a non-sexualized

equal socio-economic partner. Her body is still perceived as a sex object exhibited in the public, and thus requires regulation through segregating veils, or warning and punishment through sexual assault. Post-revolutionary Islamist revival have represented an opportunity to for suppressed rhetoric of patriarchy (by authoritarian feminist Bourguibism) to be visible again (Afary, 2009).

I am inclined to end this chapter with an extract of post-revolutionary Tunisian realistic feminist fiction which offers a clear image of how Tunisian woman has lurched between Bourguibist optimistic ‘liberation’ and the re-emerging post-revolutionary oppressive sexualization. This extract is taken from the 2015 Arab Booker winning novel *Al Talyeni* (The Italian), written by the Tunisian leftist public figure Chokri Mabkhout. Najla, a middle-class educated divorcee woman character, contemplates:

The women of [my] generation and [I] are the victims of an unmerciful society which requires [us] to be in the public and private space without real new division of roles.

Bourguiba handed us a new chain that we thought it was liberation, but we got trapped in. We cannot go backward now. Yet, if we would like to advance, we will not be able to. While the house is a small prison, the street is a big prison. The first is ruled by a demanding jailer with endless orders, [...] and the second is filled with the mean [men] with their harassment of women, sexual lusty language and gazes which strip us naked.

You do not feel the ugly violence of the eyes and tongue. It is a destructive violence for us as women. p.68<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup>Original text:

لقد أعطانا بورقيبة زيديا جديدا ظننا ان عنقا قورطنا. لم يعد بلمكاننا أن نعود إلى الوراء و إذا ما أردنا أن نتقدم نعدر علينا ذلك أما البيت فسجن صغير و أما الشارع فسجن كبير. أحدهما يعمره سجان بأيدي ال نزهدي طلباته طفل صغير دللته أمه و لم يسطع في الغالب النظام منها و الآخر يعمره السفلة ينحشهم بلزساء و عزف لعنهم الجنسية الناضحة كبتا و نظراتهم التي تعري المرأة تعرية.

## Chapter Five: the Islamist Discourse on the Conduct of Woman

### Introduction

This chapter is a critical study of the Islamist construction of woman in relation to her moral conduct. Research evidence (see for example: Gharbi, 2011; Lorber and Moore, 2007; Waisman, 2010) suggests that socio-political obsession with the morality of woman, and especially her sexuality, tends to aggravate under certain circumstances, most importantly in conflict and post-conflict situations, and within theology-inspired discourses. Early transitional Tunisia crystallised a favorable ground for the aggravation of moralistic discourse on woman as the country had then been both a post-conflict setting, and a 'fertile soil' for the re-flourishing of religiously politicised movements, namely Islamism. The Islamist focus on the morality of woman does not, in fact, come as a surprise at this stage of the research. I have rather discussed this focus in detail in my critical overview in the second chapter, but in reference to the *pre-revolutionary* Islamist agenda in Tunisia. In this chapter, however, I attempt to assess the Islamist discourse on the moral conduct of woman, but, this time, in reference to *post-revolutionary* Tunisia, and on the digital site of Facebook.

In order to conduct this assessment, I selected two Facebook posts; one dealing with the issue of single mothers and the other with sexual assault against unveiled woman. These posts, and in addition to being representative of the overall transitory Facebook debates on woman's moral conduct, are also, and on the other hand, distinctive for the wide public attention they attracted when first published, transforming their content into what Ghana described as a source of national 'conflagration' (2013, p.240).<sup>157</sup> They were, in effect, more shared in pages opponent to the Islamist rhetoric. Factors accounting for the wide public interest in these posts in particular compared to many other similar and representative Islamist posts about the morality of woman may be, among other things, the timing of publishing, the identity of the speaker, and the employed language; all of which I shall critically discuss their importance in my core analysis.

It is not only, however, the peculiar representativeness-distinctiveness of these two posts that is a common trait between both of them. The posts also share common thematic and rhetorical aspects. While the speaker in the first video-post examines the moral limitations and

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<sup>157</sup>I referenced Nouri Ghana earlier in the thesis. He is a scholar of Arab languages and cultures.

consequences of single motherhood, Ghodbhane, the speaker in the second video-post, sheds light on the moral limitations and consequences of not abiding by gendered dress codes. Both posts are, apparently, constructive of particular portrayals of women in relation to their moral conduct. In order to decode these portrayals, I ask: how do Islamists construe a single mother and an unveiled woman, what discursive methods do Islamists employ, how does this construction of the single mother and the unveiled woman mediate the overall representation of the conduct of women in the Islamist rhetoric, and how is this construction assimilated into common sense knowledge? In order to tackle these questions and explore the Islamist representation of woman in relation to their moral conduct, I divide this chapter into two sections. First, I examine both posts, working on identifying ideas, discursive methods, and forms of naturalisation of the Islamist discourse. Second, I discuss my findings, and critically reflect on them.

### The single mother

The first post I analyse is an audio-recorded video published by ‘anti-Islamist’ Facebook pages on November the 9<sup>th</sup> 2011. The video is a debate about women’s rights in post-revolutionary Tunisia broadcasted on the Arab-speaking radio of Monte Carlo Doualiya (MCD).<sup>158</sup> Souad Abderrahim, an Islamist woman MP and participant in the debate, expresses her Islamist stance toward the issue of single mothers:

Original text:

ولما أنا نسأغرب كيف نطرحوا مثل هذه المواضيع في مجتمعاتنا المسلمة... الحجة الـ يمكن أن تكون في المطلق... الحجة مع احترام العادات مع احترام التقليد مع احترام العرف الجاري مع احترام العقائد... كيفاش تلي امرأة عازبة نعمل لها قانون بجمها؟ كيفاش في بلاد عربي مسلم تلي نعملوا قانون بجمي النساء العازبات... يجب اصل الحهم أخالقنا الـ نعطيهم حرية التواجد... نخلو أخالقنا سامية... نمشي نعمل عالقة غير شرعية و من بعد نجي نطلب حلول؟ نشتم قدام نبي العالم العربي كيف نسمح جنائزلة من جنائزنا نتكلم هكا... المرأة التونسية ديامنا نغزولها و نحافظوا عليها حسب رأيك، مشكلة مخدرات نعملوا قانون بجمي مسهل كي المخدرات؟... المراه اللي نعمل عايلة خارج اطار الزواج الزم نتزوج... لمادا الـ نسمح بهذا للرجل و نسمح به للمرأة؟

English translation:

I am surprised how we can discuss such issues in our Muslim Tunisian society. Freedom can't be absolute. Freedom ought to respect customs, conventions and faith. How can I ever accept a law that protects single mothers?! We should correct these women ethically; we should not afford them the legitimacy of existing. let's put our ethics high! How can a woman conduct an extra-marital affair, end up having a baby, and then asking me to find her a solution?! This is abominable; I really feel ashamed

<sup>158</sup> مونت كارلو

in front of the rest of the Arab World when I hear that Tunisian women discuss these issues...I am deeply ashamed [...] The Tunisian woman is a pearl that should be protected. For example, can I sanction a law to protect drug consumers?! How can you then wait from me to accept a law for single mothers?!

Forming a family outside marriage is completely wrong. The woman ought to marry as soon as possible [when she has sex outside marriage]. Why are you OK that the Tunisian law punishes men, but not women for extra-marital sex?! 2011

Abderrahim is the sole Islamist woman MP who does not don a veil. En-nahda Islamist Party championed Abderrahim's unveiled hair as the symbol of their post-revolutionary tolerance of and openness to different manifestations of womanhood other than that of the conventional veiled Islamist woman (Olimat 2013, p.173). International media had also celebrated Abderrahim's unveiled hair. Reports seemed more interested in her semiotic connotations as a non-veiled Islamist woman than in her political qualities. For example, the British BBC described Abderrahim as '[...] a candidate who does not wear the veil, [who] *has been* offered as a symbol of their [Islamist] tolerance' (Lewis 2011, p.1 my emphasis). All this Islamist 'celebration' of Abderrahim's unveiled hair, combined with the wide international optimism about her 'potential' feminist qualities, brought into 'great expectations' about how she would possibly contribute to and reflect the liberalization of Islamist perspectives on woman and gender.

Abderrahim's statement about single mothers, as transcribed above, is a part of a conversation with the show host, and two feminist political activists Bochra Belhaj Hmida and Nedra Chaabane.<sup>159</sup> They are discussing, in this particular segment, the post-revolutionary concerns about the legal rights of women. Chaabane, pointing explicitly to the Islamist 2011 electoral victory, voices her fears about many interrelated feminist legislative questions including gender inequality, the Islamist double discourse about women's rights, the need for the separation between ethical and legal discourses about women, and the incompatibility of the 1956 Code of Personal Status with the evolution of the Tunisian society, unequal heritage rights, unequal parental authority (of children), the lack of legal protection for single mothers, the problems facing Tunisian migrant women married to non-Muslim men, and the status of the children of these migrant women. When requested by the host to express her opinion

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<sup>159</sup>Belhaj Hmida had then failed the elections as MP Representative of Grand Tunis with the Modernist Pole Party. Chaabane, however, won as the MP Representative of Tunisians in France with the same Party: the Modernist Pole.

about all of Chaabane's concerns, Abderrahim chooses to focus *only* on the ethical dimension of the *specific* issue of single mothers, and her response is quoted above.

The use of the expression of 'single mothers' (أمهات عزيلات) is relatively new in Tunisia. Ayed Ablel<sup>160</sup> (2010) argues that this expression is borrowed from the French<sup>161</sup> social lexicon in particular (*les mères célibataires*), and the Western lexicon in general. Because of 'cultural openness and societal developments since the 1990s', this expression has been adopted in non-Western countries as well (Ablel 2010, p. 1). Ablel describes a single mother as simply a woman who gives birth to a child out of an extramarital sexual affair (Ablel, 2010). Al Kabir Al-Dadissi<sup>162</sup> (2014) further expands the definition as to include women who have children out of extra-marital rape, sexual exploitation, or artificial insemination (if the woman is not married).<sup>163</sup> I note, however, that these mothers, after the birth of their child outside marriage, are still unmarried to the biological father, or legally engaged to a different partner other than the father of their child. Therefore, they are also regarded as solitary because of the absence of a marital union for the legitimization of their identity as wives-mothers. I signal that these women represent the most *morally* problematic subject Chaabane points to. Their problematic character, compared to migrant Tunisian women and mothers who do not enjoy equal heritage rights and parental authority, arises, essentially, from their problematic sexual identity in the Tunisian context.

The body of the single Tunisian mother, together with her sexual reproduction, are coded as disgraceful (Douki et al. 2007, p. 183). She, at first, transgresses the societal ideal of pre-marital virginity (Douki et al. 2007 p. 183). At a second stage (and in addition to the disgrace of extra-marital sexual defloration), the single mother, neither she nor her child legally belonging to a male figure, transgresses the societal ideal of 'legitimate' motherhood within the institutions of marriage and wifehood. Lamia Zayzafoun (2005), a Tunisian sociologist, argues:

[The Tunisian] woman remains subordinate to man and exists only inside the family unit. Tunisian law recognizes only the family unit: the personal Status code of 1956 is silent on the status of single mothers and the judicial system criminalizes same sex relations... Thus, the Tunisian woman does not exist as a

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<sup>160</sup>A Moroccan sociologist.

<sup>161</sup>Ablel discusses single mothers in North Africa, particularly Morocco.

<sup>162</sup>إنجاب امرأة لوليد خارج إطار مؤسسة الزواج سواء كان الزوج اب زنيحة ممارسة جنسية بالتراضي، أو بالغ نصاب والسنغال الجنسي تحت التهديد أو بدون أو تفتح اصطلاحاً أي ترغب من وراء المرأة الحصول على ولد من صلبها بعدما تعذر عليها الزواج.

<sup>163</sup>Al-Dadissi is more interested in the linguistic meaning.

single mother, or a lesbian; she has rights only as [married or widowed] mother and wife. p. 107

The conduct of unmarried mothers deviates from the normative conceptualization of women as either single virgins or married/widowed mothers. Unmarried mothers violate the normative ethics to which the Tunisian society appears to adhere. Therefore, they represent a very likely target of vehement social condemnation. Accordingly, I suggest that Abderrahim's strategy of touching only on the ethical and not at all on the legislative side of the particular issue of the single mother embarks on an ethical, rather populist, statement.

Abderrahim employs a dichotomized lexicalization strategy in regard to herself on the one side, and the present feminist activists and unmarried mothers on the other side.

Lexicalization, according to Van Dijk (2006), is an '[...] expression and persuasion [...] in which speakers] may make use of words and slogans [...] that emphasize the positive implications of in-group opinions and values and the negative ones of those of the Others' (Van Dijk 2006, p.26-7). Following Van Dijk, I identify lexicalisation as a discursive method speakers may instrumentalize , through the use of vibrant language, to highlight (what they see as) their positive in-group traits while, simultaneously, accentuating (what they claim to be) the negative traits of the out-group they are in conflict with. I depict Abderrahim's use of lexicalisation in the below table:

<b>The way Abderrahim lexicalises herself.</b>	<b>The way Abderrahim lexicalises single unmarried mothers.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-she is surprised.</li> <li>-She is respectful of customs, conventions, and <i>aqeedah</i> (faith).</li> <li>-She is Muslim.</li> <li>-She is the speaker in behalf of the society ('our society').</li> <li>-She is surprised.</li> <li>-She is Arab and Muslim.</li> <li>-She has high ethics, but no law knowledge.</li> <li>-She is ashamed of belonging to the same country of the speakers).</li> <li>-She is ashamed (for the same above reason).</li> <li>-She feels deep shame (for the same above reason).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-They should not enjoy absolute freedom.</li> <li>-They are not respectful of customs, conventions and <i>aqeedah</i>.</li> <li>-They do not deserve protection.</li> <li>-They sinned.</li> <li>-They require ethical straightening.</li> <li>-They should not have the legitimacy of existence.</li> <li>-They should not have protective laws for them.</li> <li>-Victims of rape among them should marry.</li> <li>-They should not expect solutions from the legislator (herself).</li> <li>-They are a shame for the Arab Muslim society.</li> <li>-They should have been protected pearls.</li> <li>-They cannot do whatever they want.</li> <li>-They are like drug consumers: criminals</li> <li>-They should not be allowed more rights than men.</li> <li>-They are societal exceptions, and an oddity.</li> </ul>

According to the above lexicalisation, Abderrahim constructs herself as the virtuous. She, on the other hand, constructs unmarried mothers as the vicious. She conceptualises them as sinners and undeserving of protection and existence.

Abderrahim further reinforces the negative construction of single mothers through the discursive method of negative comparison (Van Dijk 2006). This method is mostly associated with political agendas, where politicians can negatively compare their countries to more authoritarian or patriarchal regimes (Van Dijk, 2006). For example, a politician may praise how a certain country could reduce the risk of terrorist attacks through tighter restrictions on civil freedoms. Accordingly, the restriction of civil freedoms, initially a negative concept, transforms, through negative comparison, into a positive concept effective for the maintenance of security. Civil freedoms, however, an initially positive concept, transforms into a negative potential source for the increase of the risk of terrorist threats. The negative comparison seems to polarise complex but not forcibly opposite concepts, thereby de-

complicating their meaning and polarising public opinion about them. Abderrahim expresses her ‘shame’ about the Tunisian discussion of the legislative status of single mothers within the Arab Muslim context, ‘I really feel ashamed in front of the rest of the Arab World when I hear that Tunisian women discuss these issues [...] I am deeply ashamed’. She compares Tunisia unfavourably to the more legislatively conservative arena of the Arab Muslim World, especially in regard to women’s rights (Stromquist 2014, p. 132). Abderrahim codes openness about the socio-legislative problems of single mothers as negative. She, on the other hand, codes forms of tabooing and firm legislative criminalisation of individuals on relative ethical standards as positive.

I argue that the above negative comparison articulates a myriad of knowledge apparatuses construing of the subject of the single mother. Abderrahim construes single mothers as not only an individual shame, but as a *national* shame. These mothers, as far as Abderrahim warns against, damage the international reputation of the country. On the other hand, the MP codes an oppressive, even exterminating reaction to single mothers ‘[...] we should not afford them the legitimacy of existing’, probably practised elsewhere, as the positive norm. This discursive strategy perpetuates the image of the subject as the grotesquely shameful, and normalizes criminalization as the appropriate response.

Abderrahim positions herself favourably in regard to the other, namely single mothers, through the negative lexicalization and comparison I analysed above. She is the ashamed of the single mother, and single mothers are the shaming subject. Abderrahim’s consequent superior ethical agency allows her to reproduce her own discourse, which is essentially Islamist, as the truth and common sense. What I argue for, however, is that the truth Abderrahim constructs about single mothers is rather an opaque distorted form of knowledge (Fairclough 1995c, p. 32).

I draw on Bochra Belhaj Hmida’s response to Abderrahim and a myriad of sociological studies about single mothers in the Arab Muslim world in order to challenge Abderrahim’s opaque discourse. Belhaj Hmida addresses Abderrahim:

These loose [big] slogans [of Abderrahim] do not relate to reality. [...] single mothers] are not only in Tunisia, but also [...] in the Arab countries and the Gulf. [...] There are children born outside the wedlock in all the Arab Muslim countries [...] and in certain countries that are known for their religiosity.

Belhaj Hmida argues that the phenomenon of single motherhood, contrary to what Abderrahim perpetuates, exists in other Arab Muslim societies as well. Interestingly, and

through the inspection of different sociological studies and declared statistics about single mothers,<sup>164</sup> I discovered that Tunisia has overage to low figures of single mothers, compared to the statistics of some fellow Muslim Arab countries. Tunisian annual number of extramarital births ranged from 1036 to 1300 in the 2000s (Ben Mahmoud 2007, p. 1). Morocco, though preserving a marginally more religious family law<sup>165</sup> (see for example Charrad, 2012; Kelly and Breslin, 2010), recorded an approximate number of 45.424 extramarital births in 2009 (Sharkaoui, 2009, p. 1).<sup>166</sup> In Casablanca alone, in 2000s, two out every five births are outside the wedlock in the 2000s (Sharkaoui 2009, p. 1). Algeria, a fellow Arab Muslim country with a more conservative approach to family law (see for example Charrad, 2012; Kelly and Breslin, 2010), recorded around 4000 declared extramarital births in 2007 (Abdel Jawwed 2008, p. 1). Clearly, the issue of single motherhood is not restricted to Tunisian society, as Abderrahim promotes. Single mothers rather figure in the societal landscape of the different Arab Muslim countries.

In addition, certain people in Arab Muslim societies such as the Moroccan one have started to demand for the protection of single mothers. Aicha Ech-Chenna, a prominent Moroccan feminist activist, notes the significant, though unsatisfactory, improvement of the Moroccan stance toward single mothers. In 2014, she argued that the society has developed from the complete rejection of single motherhood, including the terminology itself, to the acknowledgement and open discussion of their situation.<sup>167</sup> In addition, civil associations interested in the issue of single mothers have been active in the Arab Muslim World since the early 1980s (Nabil 2007, p. 1). For example, the Moroccan association of the Solidarity of Women (الانضمام النسائي) appeared in the year 1985, and is now highly vocal (Nabil 2007, p. 1). To sum up, single mothers are, by no means, treated in equal terms with married mothers in Tunisia or in any other Muslim country. They are rather subject to patriarchal discrimination, and often criminalisation. Yet, Abderrahim's denial of their individual identity and existence, as well as their being a public discussable topic in some parts of the Arab Muslim societies, represents a discursive manipulation of knowledge about the issue.

The negative comparison method Abderrahim employs figures steadily in Islamist discourses about the conduct of women, including that of Islamist politicians, activists, and partisans. The Islamist leader Rached Ghannouchi and Islamist media figure Rached Khiari, for

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<sup>164</sup>Declared statistics are expectedly much lower than real one because of secrecy issues.

<sup>165</sup>The statement regards only the legislative level.

<sup>166</sup>It is extremely difficult to reach statistics of other countries than Morocco and Algeria.

<sup>167</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcKECC1b0Jk>.

example, describe the figures of single women under non-Islamist Tunisian governments as ‘disgraceful’ in comparison to the Arab Muslim World.<sup>168</sup> Ghannoushi and Khiari’s statements are, at the first place, tensely pejorative and gendered since they use notion of *unussa*, which is a pejorative colloquial term for (what is perceived) as ‘old-aged’ unmarried women. Ghannoushi and Khiari do not seem to only conceptualise unmarried women as ‘instances of social failure [...] for not having “found” a husband’ (Kovecses2006, p. 344), but they also banalise the complex rhetoric of celibacy and marriage. In addition to this gendered management of meaning (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 273), the information Ghannoushi and Khiari provide and reproduce as truth is simply and technically false. The highest Arab statistics of ‘spinsterhood’ are not marked in Tunisia (Jabbour and Yamout, 2012), contrary to what both claim. Yet, a large part of the recipients of the Islamist discourse choose not to check reliable studies and statistics about ‘spinsterhood’ in the Arab Muslim world. These recipients are likely to assimilate the information to their common sense knowledge. Therefore, Islamists naturalise unmarried women and single mothers as the antagonist fallen Other, perpetuating societal forms of gendered knowledge about them.

Abderrahim further empowers her discursive shaming of single mothers through the employment of ‘the consensus’ method (Van Dijk, 2006). I here refer to the way the discourse of power is reproduced as already inherent in the collective knowledge. Abderrahim uses the inclusive pronoun ‘our’ to signal consensus:

‘I am surprised how we can discuss such issues in *our* Muslim Tunisian society’.

‘Let’s make *our* ethics go high!’

Through the employment of the pronoun ‘our’, Abderrahim roots her discourse in the common sense societal knowledge. In addition, she illustrates the cognitive solidarity and consensus of the Tunisian and Arab society with her discursive conceptualisation of single mothers. Moreover, she articulates her speech as the verbal performance of the consensus. By accumulating these three discursive prerogatives, Abderrahim’s discourse acquires what she conceptualises as unchallengeable ethical and religious legitimacy.

The legitimacy of the Islamist ethical criminalisation of single mothers, and in addition to being perpetuated through consensus, is also articulated through the investment of the mega discourses of Arabism, Islam and Westernisation,

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6dydvmb-sw>.<sup>168</sup>

[Abderrahim addresses the debate participants]: ‘Do not impose programs on our Tunisian Arab Muslim society!’

Abderrahim constructs single mothers as embedded signifiers of secularism. In fact, Abderrahim’s localisation of single mothers within the East-West ethical dichotomies is more transparent in her interview (after the above Monte Carlo interview) with the Algerian Newspaper *Al Watan* about the new constitution:

It [the constitution] will be Arab and Muslim. Its engine will be a modern Islam. Previously, political projects were imported from France, such as total freedom for women and support for single mothers. In our society, we cannot defend unmarried mothers or the child that carries his mother’s name. This is not in conformity with our Tunisian identity. Abderrahim 2014, p. 1

In the previous chapter, I examined in detail the discursive interplay of the discourses of Arabism, Islam and Westernisation, in regard to the Islamist conceptualisation of women. I uncovered the way these discourses legitimise the Islamist rhetoric through the maintenance of hard-line polarisation between the Islamist ideal woman as the traditional anti-colonial symbol and the Other as the loose assimilationist francophone. Abderrahim’s instrumentalisation of these discourses embarks likewise, I suggest, on a hard-line polarisation of the conduct of single mothers who are portrayed as no longer ‘enshrined pearl[s]’ (Abderrahim, 2011) but rather fallen women in need of ethical correction and then complete exclusion. Single mothers, not conforming to the Islamist ideal of sexual chastity, have not right, according to Abderrahim, to exist. The MP commences at first by urging for the ethical correction of these mothers, and later shifts into denying them the right of existence. I argue, however, that Abderrahim’s discursive practice of the coercive gendering of the single mother’s conduct catalyses an Islamist myth about single motherhood.<sup>169</sup>

Bearing a child out of wedlock is not an ideally deliberate choice for Tunisian women. Research evidence suggests that single mothers are aware of, and keen on, conforming to the societal normative gendering of women’s identities. This finding is supported by different factors. First, according to the studies conducted by the sociologists Samia Ben Mahmoud (2007) and Hichem Harbeoui (2015), the highest statistics of single mothers are recorded in conservative rural rather than urban parts of Tunisia. Rural single mothers make up 89% of the total of Tunisian single mothers (Harbeoui, 2015). In addition, 45% of these mothers are illiterate, while only 3% entered higher education. Moreover, women under 20 (15 to 10 years-old) represent the highest age category: 23% of the total of single mothers. Women

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<sup>169</sup>Imposing gendered measures in regard to sexuality.

between 20 and 24 years old are the second highest age category. The overwhelming majority, 90%, have never been married. Furthermore, 82% of the single mothers are unemployed. As for the employed 18%, they are divided between working class agriculture, cleaning and textile.

Two direct factors may account for the extra-marital pregnancy of these overwhelmingly rural, uneducated and working-class single mothers. First, they lack sexual education. Ben Mahmoud (2007) notes that many of them realize they are pregnant late, usually after the first four months. The second factor is the single mother's 'hope' that the coming of the baby may 'force' the father into marriage. A study led by the Democrat Women (2010) revealed that the most common profile of the father is the employer, the colleague, or an acquaintance who deploys the woman financially and sexually in exchange of false promises of marriage. The above figures and classification of single mothers and their partners suggest that being a single mother, and in addition to not being a fully deliberate choice, is not a determinant political position. A single mother belongs and does not belong, simultaneously, to different normative societal modalities. What Abderrahim attempts is to eradicate the possibility of the multi-layered apparatuses of belonging for the single mother through discursive coerciveness. Single mothers, contrary to what Abderrahim perpetuates, does not seem a deliberate active part of the pious Muslim 'we' versus the fallen secular 'they' polarisation. By activeness, I refer to the strategic mobilisation of single mothers for ideological political ends. I rather note that Abderrahim subjects single mothers. Subjection is the way the 'individuality [of the subject] is rendered coherent, totalised, made into the discursive and conceptual possession' (Butler 1997, p. 85) of the Islamist discourse. Abderrahim totalises single mothers as a political signifier of the assimilationist secular anti-Islamist Other.

### **The body of the woman...and rape**

The second Facebook post I analyse was initially published as a self-recorded video by the Islamist Facebook activist Taoufik Ghodbhane on November 20, 2011. A particular sequence of Ghodbhane's video, which is about unveiled woman and rape, was afterwards largely shared on anti-Islamist pages. I provide the original and translated transcripts of both the full video and the particular rape sequence:<sup>170</sup>

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Peace be upon you.

For those who are drawing about women's rights,

There increased the number of those drawing about woman's rights, woman's freedom, and all that stuff...

Let's remind them that in the *jahelleya* [pre-Islam] new born women used to be buried alive. Allah the holy forbade that 'When the [infant] buried alive was questioned, for what crime she was buried alive?'

Then, Allah honoured her through different phases of her life when he made her half of the society, when he made her the mother, made her the sister, made her the wife, made her the maternal aunt, made her the paternal aunt.

Do they think that they are being innovative [anti-Islamists] when they call for the freedom of women?...and...and fake slogans...just like their fake democracy since

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اللي يسنوا ني القوانين هادم هوما أصلهم عندهم عقدة من رابط الزوجية المقدس، و جبلي و بالذليل الواضح، جبلي واحدة من مدعيات الديمقراطية مع عرسه و منهنية ني دارها . بل فيهم واحدة تتشوق على الحجاب و هي لتوا ما عرسيت . كيفاش تكلم اني على حواج و باش نين قوانين هادي ني المستقبل و اني مععرفش نعمل حياة زوجية ، ما نعرفش قداصة الحياة الزوجية . نين اني و غبرك في مجلة الأحوال الشخصية و اني ما نعرفش قداصة الحياة زوجية اللي تتجاوز مجرد عقد يربطهم على خاطر العقد راي موش ورقة للضمان القانوني و اكاهوا ليه الجراءات القانونية المرابط.

رابط الزواج مقدس و أكثر من عقد زواج اني ما جرسبهاش الحاجة هاديكا.

بل و نالخطوا أكثر مفتي الهم هورية الجديد أحمد نجيب الشابي يقول أنا ما نجيش الحجاب . بإعلا معلومة صغيرة و كان ما نعرفهش راو الحجاب ال لبسه الرجل بل لبسه المرأة و اني وقت اللي باش نتكلم ، أوال في حديث سابق قلت أني مسلم و ال حاجة لي بجن بلمني ديني نفاك راو الحجاب نرض في السلم و من أكثر آية في القرآن قد فكر و من أكثر آية نفاك القرآن كله...

حاجة نزيه ، لكنت نجم نقول المرأة حرة اللي نحب لبس نلبس و أما موش أنا ما نجيش . زهار آخر . هلا ال بقدر كان باش توصل للرئاسة باش نقول باش ننسوا الحجاب كيف سلنكم الصالح بن علي القذافي مناعكم . نين غبرك كيف نسمع حاجة هكة و الرجل ديبلوماسي خرجنا بشوب المزامل من حرة و يتشوق بقوق المرأة و الديمقراطية و نضالو و لهن نخط ثالث تواط نخرج أمام نضالو....

تحرق في روحك سياسييا و تتدخل في قضية الحجاب ، على الأقل كيف نعرف روحك باقالبك ني الدين موش ليه قول و هلا هاديكة حرة المرأة ما تتدخلش نيهما لبس اللي نحب . و نقول القول هذا يرجع لرجال الدين ال كانت موش رجل دين....

حطك نمشي تكون روحك سياسييا أوال و انت نلوي نترشح للرئاسة موش خير ما اللي ندرش قضية الحجاب؟ و زيد نحرش و تدخل روحك في حريات غبرك .

خويا أعطونا حقوق المرأة التونسية ، نجيب حقوق المرأة التونسية ، نجيب زوج عوا قداصة أمي و أختي و زوجتي ، نحبها نرجع

لما نريد هي زاد كانت حبت نورينا مفلنهما و ال نين روحها نين روحها . حرة كاملة موش حرة على طريقتكم . على خاطر حرة على طريقتكم تولى حرة نغري المرأة التونسية ، احنا نحبها حرة كاملة كيهما هديكا عندها الحق باش نغري مع أنه نيه اعتداء على حق الرجل على خاطر نغريوا اللي الرجل عنوا غرايز زادة . هو ربي عطاك لبسة باش نلبسها باش نين روحك ، ما نكونش مغيرة لغرايز الرجل .

'إذا باش نناديوا بحرية النغري فرد حرة نعطيوها ! احنا الرجال حقوقنا نجزر ال غنصاب على خاطر هلا غالب ماو عنذك هكا اركب فلة في القانون و هو ني حالة سكر يخفوا عليه الحكم . زادا احنا من هكة الذي اركب جريمة اغتصاب نول هلا غالب بسبب اثاره شوائه عن طريق عرض

مفاننها نعطيوه حكم مخفف .

هكا إي ما نسلوش نعطيو حرة المرأة حرة المرأة حرة و نسلو الرجال... نلبسوا بيهك باش ناخذوا حقوقنا ني بالذنا؟؟'

1956 [Bourguiba reform] till now...in Tunisia and what Tunisian woman accomplished of achievement , and we need to empower and develop the Tunisian woman according the *chalaikia* (ironic negative term for secular)....

When you defend the Tunisian woman, when you defend something, defend all, do not exclude. If you deliberately exclude something, a specific category, and then you say you defend the woman, no you have to defend all of the Tunisian woman! Defend the hard working woman in the South who plants and does the harvest! Or is it because she has nothing to display, no seductive body that you can defend? Why don't you give that woman her rights? Defend cleaning assistants that she may be around 50 and still working hard! Or is she not a Tunisian woman because her body is not seductive?

When you are going to defend, when you say you want the Tunisian woman to be liberated, liberate her by giving her full rights. Then I will believe that you want to liberate her. Why is the unveiled treated kindly, while the veiled is guided to police stations? This is a truth that I think everybody knows. She [the veiled] is even called a whore. They do [singular verb form], do [plural verb form] whatever they want to her, or is she not a woman? Poor woman! What do they see in her? Only a moving sexual bulk? Truly, and it needs to be said, they want women free in order to exploit their bodies. Their utmost ambitions, they best they can think of, the sexual exploitation of her body. When you defend Tunisian women, defend the woman as a whole. Defend the 50-year old woman who is a cleaning assistant! Defend that who cannot write and read! Those are worth defending them.

There is a new trend. After they exploited her body in advertisement, and...and...crazy parties and all that stuff, we see them now are coming to exploit her [electoral] voice. There are coming elections. They [anti-Islamists] want to exploit her, the voice of the Tunisian woman. [...] Why? [Anti-Islamists are telling her] Be aware of voting for Islamists! [Anti-Islamists are telling her] If Islamists win [the elections], men will be allowed to marry four women!' This is a [my] message to all Tunisian women: if all your relationship with your husband is just law, then he does not deserve you. He, and not you, that does not deserve you. The marriage tie is sacred as *Allah* said, 'they are a cloth for you and you are a cloth for them [ Ghodbhane recites the Quran verse wrongly]. You are like clothes to men. *Allah* made you like clothes to men. We know that clothes protect from warm and cold weather, and protect your *awra* [Islamist term refers to what is to be covered of a woman's body] See what Allah the holy has likened you to! They want to take of your clothes under the slogan of woman's freedom.

Give woman freedom in everything. Don't curtail even the freedom of choice! You want to exploit even her electoral voice!

Shame on you! When we hear what the famous French [moments to remember his name, but he can't at the end] defends, defends, what does he say? Veiled women of France are purer than the rest of the women of France. In Tunisia, however, the veiled is treated as an outcast or a whore. Is this your pretended freedom of woman? Is this woman's freedom?

Those who enact bills are hostile to the sacredness of marriage ties. Show me, with clear evidence, one of those pretenders of democracy, who is married and happy in her life. They speak about the veil when they have not married till now! How can they judge things and enact laws in the future when they can't form a family? You, and others, enact the Code of Personal Status, when you do not know the sacredness of the marriageable life that goes beyond contracts. Contract is just for the sake of formal law procedures. The ties of marriage are more sacred than a contract. You do not know because you have not tried that [marriage]

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Look at what the new Mufti<sup>171</sup> of the state Ahmed Nejib Chebbi says! He says he does not like the *hijab*!. I want to tell you one little information: *hijab* is worn by woman and not man. Some time previously, he affirmed that he is a Muslim, and that he does not need anyone to teach him his religion. I tell you [Ahmed Najib Chebbi]: *hijab* is *fardh* (Islamic must). That who denies a verse of Quran (a must) becomes a disbeliever. A second thing [to Ahmed Nejib chebbi] You could have said women are free to wear whatever they want, not that you do not like the veil. Another day if, God forbids, you become President, you may ask us to forget about *hijab* like your ancestor Ben Ali [who is] your best example. I get surprised when I hear this from a diplomat who appeared to us in the gown of a militant and lectured about resistance. I put three exclamation points in front of your resistance story.

Why do you [Ahmed Nejib Chebbi] burn yourself politically by interfering in the *hijab* issue? If you know that your luggage in religion is not that big, say that that is woman's freedom in which you do not interfere. Say that men of religion have the last say because you are not one of them. You better go train yourself politically and stop being nosy about the *hijab* issue. Stop interfering in other people's freedoms. Give us the rights of the Tunisian woman, we want the rights of the Tunisian woman, we want to bring back the sacredness of my mother, sister and wife. A she [woman] wishes. If she wants, she can display her charms or cover herself: whole freedom, not that freedom at your pace. A freedom in your way would rather be the freedom of nakedness. We want it to be a whole freedom in which as this [woman] has the right to go naked, and the other [go veiled] though nakedness includes a violation of man's right because as we know, man also has instincts. Allah gave you clothing that you wear and cover yourself not be seductive to men.

If you will call for the freedom of nakedness, then you ought to grant us, men, our rights allowing for rape; and Allah will be our forgiver all.

I believe that there is a special law in favor of individuals who commit crimes in state of drunkenness, is it not? Same should apply to cases of rape: men who rape women should be released or at least granted a reduced penalty, since women are also culpable of igniting the poor guys' desires by displaying their bodily charms to the public.

Do not ask for women's freedom, women's freedom, women's freedom ..., and forget about men! Should we-men- wear wigs [women's] to get our rights in our country? 2011.

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Ironic.<sup>171</sup>

The specific sequence about unveiled women and rape was published on anti-Islamist Facebook pages on May the 28, 2011. For example, the anti-Islamist page *Pour Que cette TomateAie plus de Fan que Rached Ghannouchi* (For this tomato to have more fans than Rached Ghannouchi) published the sequence under the title ‘I demand my right to rape!!’

إذا باش نناديوا بحرية العري نغرد مرة نعطيوزا إحنا الرجال حؤوقنا نجهز إل غنصاب على خاثر هلا غالب ماو عندكم  
هالكا ارتكب فلة في القانون و هو في حالة سكر يخفوا عليه الحكم. زادا احنا من حكة اللي  
ارتكب جريمة اغنصاب نقول هلا غالب بربب اشارة شهوانه عن طريق عرض مفاظها نعطيوه حكم مخفف. هكا  
إيه ما ننساوش نعطيو حرية المرأة حرية المرأة و ننسو الرجال... نلبسوا بيريك باش ناخدوا  
حؤوقنا في بالدنا؟؟؟

English translation:

If you will call for the freedom of nakedness, then you ought to grant us, men, our rights allowing for rape; and Allah will be our forgiver all.

I believe that there is a special law in favor of those who commit crimes in state of drunkenness, is it not? Same should apply to cases of rape: men who rape women should be released or at least granted a reduced penalty, since women are also culpable of igniting the poor guys’ desires by displaying their bodily charms to the public.

Do not ask for women’s freedom, women’s freedom, women’s freedom . . . , and forget about men! Should we-men- wear wigs [women’s] to get our rights in our country? 2011

Ghodbhane openly identifies as Islamist. He administrates two Facebook pages: Taoufik Ghodbhane (تؤيق الغضبان) and No Freedom without the Departure of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (ال حرية إل برحل التجمع الدستوري الديمقراطي). He founded these pages after the 14th January 2011 Revolution as Islamist platforms, and instrumentalized them for Islamist campaigning during the 2011 elections. The above post is part of this Facebook campaigning in behalf of the Islamist En-nahda Party.<sup>172</sup> Ghodbhane targets anti-Islamists that, according

<sup>172</sup>Ghodbhane produced this video to clear out accusations of misogyny against Islamist parties, particularly En-nahda, during the electoral campaign. I accordingly suggest that this video may be framed within the ‘feminist-Islamist’ post-revolutionary electoral conflict, in regard to women’s rights.

Ghodbhane further specifies the focus of the feminist-anti-Islamist conflict:

‘If you [anti-Islamists] are going to defend [women], you say you want the Tunisian woman to be liberated [...] then why the non-veil wearer (*motabarija*) is treated kindly, while the veiled is liberated to the police station? [...] When you defend the Tunisian woman, defend her as a whole.’

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Ghodbhane's emphasis on the centrality of the dress code issue in the video of rape is further revealed through his allusion to Ahmed Néjib Chebbi:

Look at what the new Mufti of the state Ahmed Nejib Chebbi says! He says he does not like the *hijab*! [...] Some time previously, he affirmed that he is a Muslim, and that he does not need anyone to teach him his religion. I tell you [Ahmed Najib Chebbi]: *hijab* is *fardh* (Islamic must). That who denies a verse of Quran (a must) becomes a disbeliever.

Ahmed Néjib Chebbi (together with Maya Jeribi) is the leader of the Democratic Progressive Party PDP<sup>172</sup>. Since its foundation in 1983, PDP was among the most outspoken opposition parties against the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes (Joffée, 2014, p. 141). After the overthrow of Ben Ali in the 2011 Revolution, PDP became among the main political rivals of the Islamist Party En-nahda for the October 2011 elections. This rivalry stemmed, I argue, from the PDP-Islamists different, even contradictory, approaches to woman's dress code and sexuality. Ghodbhane, for instance, proclaims Ahmed Nejib Chebbi a disbeliever because of his disagreeing (with Islamists) rhetoric about the veil. Chebbi, therefore, is made to join the half-*kafer* (disbeliever) in the polarised veil debate I explored in the previous chapter with more details.

Surprisingly, and may be ironically as well, Chebbi was one of the initiators of the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2005 Movement for Rights and Freedoms (M'rad, 2015, p. 18). I pointed to this movement earlier in the second chapter as inclusive of Islamists as well. It defended, among many other things, women's rights of veiling, in discordance then with a veil-hostile Ben Ali regime (Al Jazeera, 2014, p.1). In addition, and when enquired about his stance of *hijab* few days prior to Ghodbhane's video (16th May 2011), Chebbi stated<sup>172</sup>:

The veil is a private issue. That a woman, or an individual in general, wears what they want remains a private issue, a private freedom. The problem, however, culminates in forcing individuals to wear what they do not want. [...] A number of women approach *hijab* from *aqeedah* (religion) perspective. They believe it is an Islamic must (*fardh*). This is an unquestionable right [veiled women should enjoy]. Why?: Because from the philosophical democratic liberating perspective, the state is a coercive power and exclusive user of force. Society grants the state this power for the purpose of guaranteeing three central things: the right to life, the right to economic autonomy, and the right to individual and private freedoms. [...] Consequently, the *hijab* question should not be for [state] debate.

The [*hijab*-banning pre-revolutionary] 108 law was not resisted *only* by Islamists. An important number of progressive and liberal politicians including myself resisted anti-*hijab* legislation for long years in the age of dictatorship. [...] Thereby, this [post-revolutionary debate [Islamists-anti-Islamists] is artificial [fabricated] from the part of some political opponents who lack the consistency of argument, and who, to some extent, lack intellectual impartiality. [...] The individual [I] should not be judged based on their personal taste [May be Chebbi means that he does not prefer *hijab*], but rather on their commitment.

I *always* said that the veil debate in society [...] is a private freedom that the state has no right to interfere in. [veil] can be discussed *in the civil society* as to whether it is a religious must or not, or preferable or not...[...] All this come into the frame of freedom. What I reject myself is the interference of the state in banning or forcing this type of dress code [...] or anything that relates to personal freedoms. [...] I finish with a verse of holy Quran: 'the foam it passes away as scum upon the banks, while that which is for the good of mankind remains in the earth'

Ahmed Néjib Chebbi provides an account of his pre-revolutionary resistance against the Bourguiba and Ben Ali *hijab* ban. Resistance was articulated through outspoken political action evident, for example, in his initiation of the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2005 Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Pouillard, 2013; Filiiu, 2014; Erdle, 2010; Najar, 2014). His position to the veil,

to him, call for women's 'nakedness'. The Facebook page in which he published the post has 15 000 fans, which is a low number of users. I am inclined, because of this small number of fans, to suggest that the high publicity of and consequent national polemic about this video did not arise from the popularity of the page or the high profile of the video owner, but rather from the very explicit and shocking discourse of rape it contains.

I opt for 'rape' as the English translation of '*ightisab*' (اغْتِصَاب). The latter is a standard Arabic term. Lisan Al Arab defines rape (*ightisab*, verb) as 'to grab a thing unfairly [...] forcibly [...]' (Lisan Al Arab 1989, p.35). As to the sexual meaning, Lisan Al Arab describes '*ightisab*' as '[...] A man [no mention of a woman] have [ing] a forced intercourse with a woman' (Lisan Al Arab 1989, p.35). Therefore, rape, as in the language used by Ghodbhane, i.e. standard Arabic, contemplates a forced sexual intercourse committed by a man against a woman. No further details, for example about the age or relationship of aggressor and aggressed, are offered. The term *ightisab* (rape), contrary to Ghodbhane's choice of terminology, tends to be avoided in Tunisian colloquial verbal interactions. Minced and less explicit colloquial expressions are rather opted for as alternatives of '*ightisab*'. The cultural and political tabooing of the topic of sexual violence may perhaps account for the obscured meaning of rape, as well as the mincing of the explicit verb (*ightisab*) into more implicit colloquial expressions in the Tunisian dialect.

Arab definitions of sexual assault, notably rape, and till the late twentieth century, had been very scant. Nagmabadi and Suad (2003) argue that only since the mid- 1990s that the Arab World, including Tunisia, started elaborating definitions of sexual assault acts including that of rape and harassment. In fact, the pre-revolutionary Tunisian regime, a very firm dictatorship, refused to acknowledge the existence of sexual violence against women. The regime feared, the International Federation for Human Rights (*La Fédération Internationale des Droits de L'Homme FIDH*) suggests, that such an acknowledgement would damage the Tunisian reputation of the advocacy of women's rights (2014, p.1). The first attempts for the open discussion of sexual violence against Tunisian women commenced in 1993. The Democrat Women took the pioneering step of producing a book on the issue at that time. The Ben Ali regime confiscated and banned the book from being published till 2007 (FIDH 2014,

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Chebbi argues in the above quote, did not arise from a personal 'taste' (preference). It rather crystallises his philosophical interpretation of the relationship between the state, the civil society, and individual freedoms and rights. It mirrors his political stance to dress code as an individual freedom, and not a state-regulated, i.e. forced or banned, domain.

p.1). Because of the factors discussed above, the use of the term ‘*ightisab*’, especially in a popular setting such as Facebook, is strikingly noteworthy. Ghodbhane’s shift from an implicit to an explicit vocabulary of sexual violence implicates, I suggest, a vocal mobilization of the semiotics of rape in the Islamist discourse.

It is not only the use of an explicit vocabulary of rape that encloses a form of tactical discursivity. The video also articulates a semiotic interplay. This interplay manifests in the ‘opaque’ (Fairclough 1995b, p.52) use of the term ‘unveiled’.<sup>173</sup> Knowledge is consequently assimilated, in its distorted form, into truth and common sense knowledge (Fairclough 1995b, p. 52). Ghodbhane fuses, during the representational activity of speech, the denotational meaning of *unveiled*, i.e. ‘[the] basic one [meaning], [...what] corresponds with [the] linguistic sense’ (Ruiz, 2005, p. 170) with the culturally unfavourable signifier: *naked*. In order to endorse this fusion, Ghodbhane first forms a semantic juxtaposition between the veiled (*muhajaba*) versus the unveiled (*mutabarija*), ‘why is the *mutabarija* treated kindly; and the veiled is guided to the police station?’ *Mutabirija* is a standard Arabic term descriptive of women who do not wear a veil, and typically put make up. One party of the juxtaposition, the unveiled, evolves throughout the video into different connotational signifiers. Ghodbhane gradually portrays the unveiled woman as ‘the touristic woman’, ‘the one who shows her physical charms’, ‘the pretender of democracy’ and ‘the non-sacred’; all in continued polarization with the veiled. Ghodbhane, however, and after the seventh minute of the video, completely ousts the term ‘unveiled’ by the term ‘naked’, ‘Like this one [woman] has the right to go naked, [anti-Islamists should] defend the right of the other one [woman with a veil]’. Therefore the signified ‘unveiled’ finally acquires, by Ghodbhane, a new signifier: ‘naked’. Ghodbhane seems to naturalise naked for unveiled ‘to the extent that it [naked] achieves dominance, and hence the capacity to win acceptance for it as ‘the lexicon’, the neutral code’ (Fairclough 1995b, p. 36). Clearly, a woman without *hijab*, according to this Islamist rhetoric, is now construed as the naked. Her nakedness justifies *her* rape.

Ghodbhane further articulates woman’s culpability for her rape through the discursive interplay of agency. Ghodbhane constructs rape (*ightisab*) as an act committed on (and not against) a woman by a man. The man, who Ghodbhane avoids describing as a rapist, is in a drunken-like state, ‘[...] I reckon that there is a special law in favour of those who commit crimes in a state of drunkenness, is it not? The same should apply to cases of rape: men who

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<sup>173</sup>I defined ‘opaque’ in Chapter Three, section 2, following Fairclough (1995b, p. 36), as the way forms of knowledge about a term in this example are being distorted, through the representational activity of the speaker.

rape women should be released or at least granted a reduced penalty [...]. Rape, an unconscious act according to Ghodbhane, is caused by the woman's '[...] display of her physical charms in public'. First, I highlight that woman is clearly an 'active agent' (Fairclough 1989, p. 58) in the rape activity. Theo Van Leeuwen, a key theoriser on critical discourse analysis, argues that activation 'occurs when social actors [agents] are represented as the active, dynamic forces of the activity' (Van Leeuwen 2008, p. 12). Ghodbhane assigns woman this active role through grammatical structures including active verbs, causal clauses, and pre-modification. Woman is the one who displays her physical charms. She is the one who fuels the desire of man, and causes *her* rape ' [...] *Allah* [God] gave you [addressing women] cloth so that you can cover [*tustur*<sup>174</sup>] yourself and do not incite man's instincts [...] women are also culpable of igniting the poor guys' desires by displaying their bodily charms to the public'. Her activation, I argue, is further emphasized as a form of participation in the activity. I here refer to Ghodbhane's construing of the woman as '[...] the dynamic force in an activity, in particular as an agent in relational and material processes, especially in terms of her actions and behaviours [...]' (Sollo 2013, p. 1) in the rape action.

Woman is constructed as participatory, active, and culpable. Her role in the rape act, Ghodbhane suggests, catalyses material and relational dimensions articulated through the body, dress code, and man's provoked sexual desire. Interestingly, woman has been fully passive in the pre-rape sequence of the video. Ghodbhane presented her as the exploited, manipulated and marginalized, in regard to the westernised agenda of anti-Islamists. He employed only passive grammatical structures such as 'They [anti-Islamists] want to take off your [woman] clothes]', 'Give woman her freedom [...]!', and '[...] The veiled is guided to police stations [...]'. Only when Ghodbhane switches to the discourse of rape, and only in regard to man rapists, that woman becomes an active social actor.

Man, on the other hand, is 'suppressed' (Zollo 2013, p. 15). He is not mentioned at all or, at best, made passive in the rape discourse. Van Leeuwen defines the passive actor as 'the goal in a material process, phenomenon in a mental process or carrier in an effective attributive process' (2008, p.66). Man is the carrier of the action of rape. Yet, his role is portrayed as the background of the action rather than the activating force. Ghodbhane pictures the rape as a natural, rather automatic action, in response to woman's physical exposure. Ghodbhane employs the discursive quote *Allah ghaleb*, which is a colloquial Tunisian expression denotative of involuntary and uncontrolled actions. The expression aims to reduce and even

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<sup>174</sup>Please do refer back to the setr discourse in the previous chapter.

eradicate the responsibility burden of the doer. According to Van Leeuwen, passive social practice does not necessarily require to be matched with passive grammatical forms (example: passive verb forms) (Van Leeuwen 2008, p. 66). Instead, passivation can be accomplished through subjection and/or beneficialisation (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 66). Man is subjected as a social actor *seduced* by the physical charms of the woman, ‘women are also culpable of igniting the poor guys’. In addition, man is made, by Ghodbhane, eligible for reduced judiciary penalty, ‘men who rape women should be released or at least granted a reduced penalty’. Ghodbhane stresses the utterance ‘grant’ (‘us, men, our rights allowing for rape [...]’) in the video. He presents men as having the right to judicial protection after the commitment of rape crimes on and not against women.

Ghodbhane further perpetuates the gendered distribution of agency through the discursive technique of explicit intertextuality between rape, drunkenness, and court pardoning; which Fairclough defines as:

[...] individual other texts are explicitly present in the text under analysis they are “manifestly” marked or cued by features on the surface of the text, such as quotation marks. Note, however, that a text may “incorporate” an individual other text without the latter being explicitly cued—one can respond to another text in the way one words one’s own text, for example. 1995b, p. 72

Ghodbhane points to what he describes as a law text in regard to crime commitment under the state of drunkenness, ‘[...] I believe that there is a special law in favour of those who commit crimes in state of drunkenness, is it not? Same should apply to cases of rape: men who rape women should be released or at least granted a reduced penalty [...]’. The demarcation of the intertextual part is articulated through the explicit allusion to the law, apparently the Tunisian, as the source of the quote. Demarcation is also signalled through the employment of a rhetorical question, and the switching from colloquial Tunisian to standard Arabic.

In comparing the original text to the incorporated one, (Fairclough 1995b, p. 275) a misuse can be identified. Ghodbhane is not faithful to the content of the original text of law. Being caught in a state of drunkenness does, by no means, grant the accused court pardoning or reduced rule in justice, contrary to what Ghodbhane claims. Only individuals who are *fully* deprived of free will, due to ‘extreme indulgence in drugs, alcohol, being poisoned, and/or suffering psychological disorder’, may be exempt, according to the fifty first article of the Tunisian penal code.

This rape discourse is framed within a struggle for political power. This struggle is between Islamists and anti-Islamists,<sup>175</sup> over the conduct of women. Ghodbhane's resort to intertextuality helps him accomplishing what Fairclough describes as an [...] 'intertextual process [...] for the] restructuring [of] orders of discourse as processes of [...] struggle in the sphere of discourse' (Fairclough 1995b, p.180). Ghodbhane incorporates discourses of drunkenness and judicial pardoning in support of the rhetoric of the rape of women adamant to the Islamist ideals of female conduct. This intertextuality, and in addition to maintaining the gendered distribution of social agency in rape acts (as analysed earlier), articulates a vital form of power, namely discursive coercion. Ghodbhane mobilises Law selectively, and paradoxically,<sup>176</sup> for the disciplining of culpable bodies through the rape punishment. An undisciplined woman's body, Ghodbhane seems to argue, is a legal pretext for *her* rape.

I allude to Richard Felson's social interactionist theory on rape (1993) for a better grasp of Ghodbhane's Islamist rhetoric. Felson's approach, an implicit critique of feminist theorisation on rape, dismisses the gender-based explanations of sexual violence against women (Felson 1993). Felson argues that the main motive for rape culminates in sex, '[...] domination and harm are incidental outcomes; his [the rapist] interest is in influencing the victim to have sexual activity' (Felson 1993, p. 107). Subjugating practises of predators against women, during the rape process, are purely incidental, and domination, harm, and aggression serve as involuntary means for accomplishing the sexual end of intercourse (Felson 1993, p. 108). When targets of rape are do not resist sexual violence, i.e., cooperative with their rapists, Felson suggests, men would be less likely to resort to force (Felson 1993, p. 108). Clearly, Ghodbhane emphasises the pure sexual aim of rape '[not wearing a veil] includes a violation of man's right. Man, also, has instincts' (Ghodbhane 2011). Woman is not subject to man's patriarchal thrives of dominance in rape acts. Instead, she serves as a displayed sexual object provocative of man's sex drive. Felson further elaborates his rape theory as to stress the particularity of young and attractive women, in regard to man's sexual motives (Felson 1993,

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<sup>175</sup>Nejib Chebbi.

<sup>176</sup>I referred to the above intertextuality as paradoxical because of its pronounced contradiction with two Islamist methodological principles, inherent in their theoretical framework, and action plans. First, Tunisian Islamists firmly renounce the legitimacy of the civil judiciary. For example, when drafting the 2014 Tunisian Constitution, Islamists vigorously fought for the implementation of the Sharia (Islamic teaching) instead of civil law. In addition, Islamists do oppose alcohol-free consumption (and even existence). The employment of alcohol-related example, rather favourably, is strikingly controversial. Therefore, Ghodbhane's intertextuality is paradoxical.

p. 108).<sup>177</sup> He notes that the targets of rape are very likely to be young women. Young age for women attributes a range of sexual signifiers revolving on desirability, provocation, attractiveness, and also vulnerability (Beere, 1990; Denmark et al., 2016; Odem and Warner, 1998). Ghodbhane does not refer to specific age categories. Yet, he shows *preference* for particular rape targets through accentuating ‘physical charms’ and ‘nakedness [not wearing a veil]’.

I found Richard Felson’s theory, though harrowing, incredibly helpful in the understanding of Ghodbhane’s conceptualisation of the raped woman. Felson’s work contributed to my figuration of the way woman could be anchored in the Islamist discourse as a sexual social actor and *end* in herself. Yet, I argue that Felson’s theory on rape and Ghodbhane’s construction of woman in the discourse of rape expose striking limitations. Both perpetuate a sexist rape myth centred on woman’s dress code and culpability. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994, p.134) define a rape myth as ‘attitudes and beliefs that are generally false, but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women’. Rape myths hypothesise woman’s culpability and man’s passiveness in rape. Yet, these myths fail to address different concerns about gendered sexual assault and specific anti-thesis cases, such as the rape of a veiled woman for example.

Simon Hawkins, an anthropologist, has researched Tunisian gender dynamics, in relation to dress code and sexual desire, including a close-up analysis he conducted between 2006 and 2008 about groups of ‘young’ and ‘mature adult’ Tunisian salesmen, waiters and silversmiths in urban settings. Hawkins questioned the social articulation of man’s sexual desire in regard to woman’s veils through daily observation. He noted that the veil is rather a ‘polysemous sign’ (Hawkins 2009, p.2). Men reacted to the veil, individually and homocially, in different ways ‘depending on the form of the *hijab*, the age and social identity of the wearer, her behaviour, the context in which it is worn, and the social identity of the viewer’ (Hawkins 2009, p. 2). For example, some of the observed men coded veiled women as modest. Other men were, in contrast, attentive to veiled women because of their sexual curiosity toward their hidden bodies (Hawkins, 2009). Irrespective of the different sexual reactions of men to the veil and cultural conceptualisations of this dress code, Hawkins argues that veils hardly play a role in reducing a woman’s sexual attractiveness (Hawkins 2009, p.9). The interplay between man’s sexual behaviour and *hijab* is rather more complex than the concealment and exposure

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<sup>177</sup>Felson supports his theory of the pure sexual purposes of rape and the attractiveness of younger targets through different studies conducted on romantic dates, and in colleges and even prisons (Kanin 1965, 1967, 1985; Lockwood 1980).

binaries Ghodbhane perpetuates in the video. On the other hand, however, Hawkins noted that the observed men were sexually repelled by women in control of their sexuality (Hawkins 2009, p. 7). Men did not express sexual interest in these women. Women's 'control over sexuality', as Hawkins interprets it, is not essentially manifested in the dress code. Control rather refers to a range of women's behavioural aspects including for example eye contact, verbal explicitness and awareness about sexuality, and face gestures.

Hawkins analysed 'flirtatious' encounters between the observed men and women who men described as 'timid' and 'assertive'. Men seemed 'captivated', and more sexually interested, in 'blushing', 'half-smiling', and shy-talking' girls; even those with a modest dress code (Hawkins, 2009 p. 10). Simultaneously, Hawkins noted the way men felt 'uncomfortable' with assertive women who, for example, gaze at men instead of being gazed at (Hawkins 2009, p. 10). They hence lost interest in making sexual advances to them, 'While the sexuality of the body was coded as desirable, the presumed assertiveness of the woman was not. Control over sexuality was very important in male desire (Hawkins 2009, p. 8). Dress code therefore, examined from a man's observed perspective, has little to do with men's sexual interaction with women. There have been other dimensions, including but not restricted to, woman's control over sexuality that shaped this interaction.

## **Conclusions**

A critical analysis of two Islamist posts about single mothers the right to rape unveiled women uncovers the coercive gendered conceptualization of the moral conduct of woman in the Islamist discourse. I commenced by decoding a statement made by an Islamist woman MP promoted as moderate on single mothers. The woman MP refuses, contrary to the request of the host and the two feminist guests, to touch on the problematic legislative situation of the single mother, the Tunisian woman married to a non-Muslim, and the rights of the children of both women. Instead, Abderrahim *only* espouses the moral wrongness of having a child out of wedlock. The focus of Abderrahim on this particular issue is discursively strategic. Single motherhood is, in effect, the most ethically problematic topic for debate among the above ones of the single mother, the Tunisian woman married to a non-Muslim, and the rights of the children of both women. Single mothers are a very likely target of social condemnation. feminist research on single motherhood, and on the Tunisian case in particular, suggests that the 'sexual identity' of the single mother accounts for her condemned social status.

I spelled out the non-conformity of the single mother with the ideal of pre-marital virginity and the presence of a legal male figure in the sexual reproduction. This construction of the single mother as the appalling, the shameful, and the condemned by the Islamist MP is articulated through the employment of lexicalization, negative comparison, and the interplay of the mega discourses of Islam, Arabism, and tradition. I employed critical discourse analysis and a myriad of feminist research about single motherhood in the Arab World to decode these discursive strategies. I demonstrated the way Abderrahim presents as the ethical superior, and therefore constructs unequal power relations. She reproduces her discourse as truth and common sense knowledge. My findings suggest, however, that her discourse is rather an opaque ideology. The arguments the MP offers deploy invalid statistics, wrong information, and banalisation of the complex multi-layered question of single motherhood.

The coercive rhetoric the MP perpetuates is also shared by the publisher of the second post, the Islamist Facebook activist Taoufik Ghodbhane. The latter employs different discursive strategies to argue that a woman without *hijab* is culpable of *her own* rape. I identified Ghodbhane's strategies as deeply rooted in gendered rhetoric, especially that of rape myths. I used Felson's controversial theorization on rape (1993) for a better grasp of the Islamist discourse about this topic. I demonstrated the way Ghodbhane associates the sexual aggression of women with relational and material processes culminating, for example, in attractiveness, provocative dress code, or resistance of the male gaze. Van Leuween's discursive patterns of activation versus passivation were incredibly helpful in my analysis of the role of women in rape according to Ghodbhane's narrative. The woman is an active agent culpable of the harm she initiates. Man, however, is suppressed as a passive target of the material exhibition of the female body. Both Islamist posts call upon the gendered moral rhetoric embedded in the Tunisian tradition. They deploy the problematic social stigmatisation of woman's body and sexual identity to support the Islamist discourse about women.

## **Chapter Six: The Conceptualisation of Women Feminist Activists in the Islamist Discourse.**

### **Introduction: the understanding of ‘feminism’, and the relation between feminism and Islamism in Tunisia**

This chapter is a study of the Islamist discourse about women feminist activists in post-revolutionary Tunisia. I examine the discursive constructions that the two Facebook posts I selected articulate about these women. This particular research topic has, in effect, been tackled by a wide array of scholarship including that of Islamism and gender since the late 1970s.<sup>178</sup> The overwhelming majority of research findings, combined with the popular collective conceptualisation of the relationship between feminism and Islamism, perpetuate the negative oppositional paradigm of discursive interaction between the two discourses. The Islamist discourse is positioned, often as vehemently active, against feminist movements, especially ‘secular’ and ‘Western-inspired’ ones, and vice versa. Accordingly, and before the move into the discussion of the questions, aims, and structure of this article, I first offer a critical insight on how this particular study I provide about the Islamist Facebook discourse on women feminist activists in transitory Tunisia is an original contribution to earlier studies. I illuminate, through this insight, the way the concept of feminism on the one hand, and the pre-revolutionary feminist-Islamist discursive paradigm on the other hand, deviate from the prevalent perspectives I noted above in academia, and thus the importance of the re-assessment of their post-revolutionary evolution on Facebook.

The exploration of issues on or related to feminism in Tunisia represents a complex area of investigation. It is hardly possible to argue for the existence or complete lack of a feminist movement. There have been efforts to address women and gender, especially since the 1930s,<sup>179</sup> yet, these efforts may not possibly form a consistent feminist movement similar to that in the West. Amel Grami, a notable Tunisian feminist figure that I referenced her work earlier in the research, further discusses the inconsistency of feminist thought in Tunisia:

There is no feminist movement, in the strict conceptual academic sense, which can be studied in depth, as is the case for feminist movements in the West which have undergone revisions dealt with in the first then second then third waves, and studied the prospects of post-feminism. But there are currents [...] and they do not represent a harmonious and monolithic bloc. All what there is a feminist ideology adopted by a group of women individually, or sometimes, some associations operate according to

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<sup>178</sup>1979: the Iranian Revolution and the consequent establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

<sup>179</sup>I discuss these feminist efforts later in this introductory section.

its foundations. Accordingly, it is not possible to talk about an identity of a movement or concrete efforts, so far the feminist thought is moving between the ebb and flow, and it witnesses, I think, a process of revival after the Arab revolutions as a result of decline and violence meted on women, pushing them to further search for the mechanisms of resistance, including mechanisms produced by the globalised feminist philosophy.<sup>180</sup> Grami 2011, p. 1

Grami suggests that certain Tunisian women and associations adopt a loosely feminist framework which serves, among other goals, as a tactical reaction to the injustices and violence meted out to women in Tunisian society. Grami also suggests that the 2011 Revolution inflicted more discrimination and violence on women, particularly in the early transitory phase. This probably explains why ‘feminist’ individual and collective discourses started revising their efficiency, and have become among the focal areas of debate, and also revision, in both liberal and Islamist agendas.

Early and vaguely Tunisian ‘feminist’ waves date back to the first half of the nineteenth century. There had emerged a relatively reformist thought then, manifested in the legislative reforms of the abolition of slavery (1842), the drafting of a civil constitution (1857) committed to equality, and the advocacy of women’s education (Ibn Abi Al-Diyaf, 2005). A second and more vibrant “feminist” wave appeared during the late 1920s. This wave was led by Tahar Hadad, who is a highly acclaimed ‘feminist’ figure in Tunisia. Hadad’s work essentialises the question of woman in the macro-discourse of social reform, and is credited as the stone corner of the Code of Personal Status (CPS). Haddad is an Islamic scholar, trade union activist, notary and social reformist. He originated from a rural Southern working-class environment. He would describe his small village Al- Hamma as a place where ‘elder women’ would wish ‘good luck’ to ‘younger girls’.<sup>181</sup> Elderly women lamented, Haddad reveals, that apart from the hope in arbitrary luck, Tunisian women had no means at all for a good life (Haddad 2004, p.75).

Haddad tackles the problematic nature of tradition in regard to woman. He argues that impediments of liberation from French colonial oppression, socio-economic progress and better life conditions culminate in the ‘unauthentic’ notion of ‘tradition’ (Haddad, 2004). Haddad denounces tradition as ‘*jahiliya* [pagan] psyches, ethics and habits [...] created

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لبيست هناك حركة نسوية بالبهوم العلمي الذي يُمكّن من التعمق في دراستها، مذلما هو الشأن بالنسبة إلى الحركات النسوية في المغرب<sup>180</sup> التي خضعت لمراجعات تناولت الموجة الأولى فلبنانية فالثانية، ودرست أفاق ما بعد النسوية. وإنما هناك في العالم العربي تيارات، وهي ال تمثّل كقناة منسجمة ومبالغة، كل ما هناك هو نكسر نسوي تبناه جماعة من النساء بطريفة نردية، أو أحياها تُشَدّل بعض الجمعيات ونق أسسه. وبناء على ذلك ال يُمكّن الحديث عن هوية حركة أو جهود ملموسة، غاية ما في الأمر أن النكسر النسوي متحرك بين مد وجزر، وبشهد، ني اعتقادي، عملية إحياء بعد الثورات العربية زنجرة النراجع والغرف المراط على النساء، بما يندفعن إلى مزيد البحث عن الآليات المقارمة، ومنها اللوات التي ننتجها للظفة النسوية المعولمة.

<sup>181</sup> ‘Good luck’, in specific circumstances, may mean ‘a good husband’.

through years and eras. It has transformed into undoubtable *Aqeedah* [firm belief]. It is either that [...the] senate rules according to them, or the sword and spear [violence/ war/ dominance] would rule' (Haddad 2004, p.11). Unlike assimilationist and anti-colonial discourses,<sup>182</sup> Haddad does not engage, at least explicitly, in the negotiation of tradition and assimilation. Instead, he *juxtaposes* the Tunisian tradition to what he identifies as 'innocent' and 'egalitarian' Islamic law. The battle of 'emancipation', henceforth, resides between 'rigid tradition' and 'revolutionary Islam'. A traditional society comprising debased women and dominating men would be, Haddad argues, both oppressive and oppressed (Haddad, 2004). Haddad accentuates the dehumanising impact of patriarchy through several accounts of viciously beaten, illiterate, exploited, and disheartened women victims of patriarchy he had encountered as a notary. Haddad suggests that the empowerment of women does not necessarily imply the renunciation of Islam. Empowerment is rather a means of stopping the 'physical and psychological' pain of half of the society (Haddad, 2004).

Haddad elaborates the mechanism of the 'purposefulness of the text' (Haddad,<sup>183</sup> 2014) in support of his reformist, apparently "feminist", rhetoric. The Tunisian reformer here points to the gradual spatiotemporal progressivism of Qur'an and legislation. Haddad argues that the emergence of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century in the Arab peninsula had, practically, *revolutionised* the situation of women in that *specific time* and *place*. Accordingly, the revolutionary factor of progress should be maintained. Details, however; are flexible for the accommodation of the changing spatiotemporal circumstances (Haddad 2004, p.9-11). Haddad exemplifies his analysis through Quran-based case studies such as court testimony. For instance, women in the pre-Islamic Arab Peninsula were not allowed to attend or provide court testimony. It was Islam that provided women this new right of testimony, though equating one man's testimony to two women's. Haddad argues that providing the *new* right to court testimony at that particular time represents the theoretical foundation of women's empowerment. The detail of the number of women in comparison to men is, however, spatiotemporally-conditioned. According to Haddad, women in the early days of Islam were less visible than men in the public domain comprising of labour and economy. Therefore, they had less expertise than men about the cases they would testify in (Haddad 2004, p.17). As woman's involvement in public life increases, rights persist. Practical details, in contrast, change in order to accommodate the positively evolving situation of the woman. Haddad accentuates the ambivalence of Quran as an explicit call for the conduct of an evolving and progressive

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<sup>182</sup>Please see chapter II, section 2.

<sup>183</sup>Mohamed Haddad is a contemporary Tunisian researcher.

reading of the text, a process I referred to as *ijtihad* in my discussion of the veil in the fourth chapter. Haddad's discourse legitimises gender equality under the umbrella of Islam and within the macro-project of Islamic social reform.

Haddad's discourse about woman significantly shapes the Tunisian conceptualisation of what "feminism" denotes. Lilia Laabidi, a Tunisian feminist scholar and activist, signals that Haddad 'became the symbol for those who questioned the patriarchal political discourse and took it upon themselves to construct a new discourse' (Laabidi 2007, p.14). This challenging 'feminist' symbolism may probably explain why a group of radical Islamists decapitated the statue of Haddad after the 2011 Revolution. In a 2015 episode of the Tunisian show *Talk of the People* (klem En-nes), Lotfi Laamari, a Tunisian political critic, described the attack on the statue as an intellectual decapitation. 'If Haddad were alive', Laamari suggested, 'they [radical Islamists] would have decapitated him for his ideas' (Laamari, 2015). Obviously, Haddad has been regarded unfavourably by certain Tunisian Islamists. Yet, he provided the legitimising religious foundations for later Bourguibist reform on the situation and rights of women through a Tunisian *Islamic* framework.<sup>184</sup>

'Feminism', according to Haddad's and Bourguiba's discourses, can be partly defined, and in relation to Islam in particular, as a selectively pro-women's interpretation of Islamic sources, instrumentalised for the accommodation of the macro socio-economic discourse of progressivism.<sup>185</sup> Haddad's 1930s treaty and Bourguiba's 1956 legislation about women still articulate the most vibrant signifiers associated with the concept of "feminism" in the Tunisian society. The day of the launch of the Bourguibist Code of Personal Status, the 13<sup>th</sup> of August, is annually commemorated as the National Day of the Tunisian Woman.

The prominence of state feminism, championed by the President Bourguiba and later by Ben Ali, eclipsed women's efforts for the initiation of state-independent movements. Women feminist activists were expected to be active under the supervision of the state. Therefore, they needed to join state-dependent establishments, notably the Tunisian National Union for Women. It was not until the late 1970s that a wave of independent feminist activism, associated with the political left, emerged. It was led by prominent feminist figures, notably Elham Marzouki who is known for her critical documentation of the Tunisian feminist thought in her work *The Tunisian Feminist Movement in the Twentieth Century*.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup>Please see chapter II, Section 2 for more details on the Bourguibist reform on woman.

<sup>185</sup>For more on the discourse of progressivism, please see chapter II, Section 2.

<sup>186</sup>الحركة النسائية التونسية في القرن العشرين

Independent feminists established cultural clubs and associations for the discussion of, and activism on, women's issues. The most vocal feminist action culminated, however, in the creation of the Tunisian Association for the Democrat Women (ATFD), popularly known as the Democrat Women. This association, as provided in its website description:

[...] was founded by the autonomous movements of women who, since the 1970s have had, through different structures, diverse forms of expression:

**1978** The Club of the Study of the Condition of Women "Tahar Haddad".

**1982** The Commission for the Study of the Condition of Working Women of UGTT<sup>187</sup>.

**1983** Review of "Nissa"(Women).

**1984** Commission of Women LTDH.

**1988** Birth of ATFD.<sup>188</sup>

ATFD was the first Tunisian association for women to officially identify as 'feminist'. Their feminist identity is founded, according to their website, on a myriad of principles comprising autonomy, plurality, solidarity, and secularism. The last principle, secularism, represents a negatively controversial concept in the Muslim World, and is widely associated, especially in popular milieu, with the complete elimination of religion from the lives of individuals and the state. The ATFD official website, however, identifies the understanding of women members of the concept of secularism as the elimination of all forms of discrimination based on religious and patriarchal prejudice.

Discussing their aims, ATFD point to the enhancement of the rights of women, and the work on further progress toward:

'[...] the abolition of all forms of violence and discrimination against women in areas and spaces.

The contribution to the development of laws in the path of full and effective equality between the sexes.

Change and confrontation of patriarchy, and the urging for women's free decision.

Working on the effective contribution of women to public and political life, and the enhancement of their full rights as citizens.

ATFD, though happy with the 1956 Code of Personal Status, criticise Bourguibist 'feminist' reform as insufficient, and in need of further efforts. They contemplate that the Code perpetuates patriarchy in different articles including the article dealing with the conditions of

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<sup>187</sup>General Union for Tunisian Workers.

<sup>190</sup> L'ATFD a été fondée par le mouvement autonome des femmes qui, depuis les années 1970 a eu, à travers différentes structures, des formes d'expression diverses :

**1978** Club d'études de la condition des femmes « Tahar Haddad » .

**1982** Commission d'études de la condition des femmes travailleuses de L'UGTT.

**1983** Revue « Nissa »

**1984** Commission femmes de la LTDH.

**1988** Naissance.

the conjugal relationship as well as the more restrictive marriage regulations on women and not on men.<sup>189</sup>

The fledgling Democrat Women transformed into a visible rival to the Ben Ali dictatorship during the early 2000s. The association's criticism of rigid Tunisian patriarchy, combined with their produced reports on violence and discrimination against women, conflicted with the strategies of the regime which vigorously sought to establish an international pro-women reputation. This is the reason why, for example, the 1999 Democrat Women book about sexual violence against Tunisian women was censored by the Ben Ali government.

Patriarchal practices did not, according to what the Ben Ali regime promoted, exist anymore in post-independent Tunisia. Women rather enjoyed full and equal rights to men, the regime claimed.

This Ben Ali's prosecution of Democrat Women may partly account for the solidarity that developed between the feminist association on the one hand, and the Islamist stream on the other hand, during the 2000s. Democrat Women and Islamists joined each other in an alliance that also included liberal and leftist political activists.<sup>190</sup>

Clearly, the feminist-Islamist paradigm in pre-revolutionary Tunisia was not, at least partly, the typical conventional oppositional model I discussed at the beginning of the chapter. The questions of feminism and Islamism were rather fluid, and dependent on the mechanism of collective resistance against political dictatorship. After the fall of this dictatorship and the consequent early transitional phase (2011-), it is time now to investigate how this discursive paradigm had developed, and more specifically, to ask: how do Islamists conceptualise women feminist activists, what discursive methods do they use for this conceptualisation, and how do they naturalise it into common sense knowledge? I divide the chapter into two further sections, the first focusing on the critical analysis of the posts and comments I selected, and the second examining the arguments I draw together.

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<sup>189</sup>Tunisian women, unlike men, are required to engage martially only to men of Muslim religion.

<sup>190</sup>I discussed in detail, the pre-revolutionary feminist-Islamist Union in Chapter II, section 2, and I briefly sum it up as the way they both claimed resisting the one-Party rule of Ben Ali (Ozzano and Cavatorta 2014, p.72). Moreover, and surprisingly, Islamists no longer objected secular full gender equality, for which Democrat Women called within the alliance. Instead, Islamists signed, together with feminists, a pact championing the late Bourguiba Code of Personal Status on October 2005. The document also called for further reform in behalf of women (Ozzano and Cavatorta 2014, p.72). Afterwards, Sana Ben Achour, theATFD president, expressed scepticism toward the favourable attitudes of Islamists. It seemed confusing, according to her, that Islamists signed, on the one hand, a feminist gender equality pact. On the other hand, however; their leader Ghannoushi chaired an international association for the defence of men's right to polygamy (Dhouib 2015 p.527). Nevertheless, the allied resistance of dictatorship between feminists and Islamists persisted, and notable ATFD women lawyers including Bochra Belhaj Hmida, defended them during the 1990s-2000s waves of political trials (BBC Arabic 2011, p.1).



ممثلي الجمعيات السالامية في زناة تونس 7 هنتلو يثرى بالحاج حمّده و بوريوها فنرها بكل أدب وتربية:))))))

Hhhhhhhhh. The sheikh warmed my heart when he put limits to her [Bochra], and addressed her: “In 2007, you defended gay rights and campaigned for the same sex marriage. Do you want my son to come to me one day with his intentions to propose for a man? and tell me: ‘Dad, I would like to marry a guy like me, accompany me to propose for the guy!’ Then, I go to the father of the [potential fiancé] man and address him: ‘I ask for the hand of your honorable son.’”Hhhhhhhhh

Bochra Belhaj Hmida became confused, and she did not know what to answer with, and got into a hysterical state. Even the presenter who sided with her [Bochra] all the time against the sheikhs and offered her more time and always interrupted the sheikhs, she [the presenter] cut suddenly the broadcasting. Instead, the administration of the TV broadcasted a recorded program about wild animals. This indicates that the national TV is not neutral and not impartial. When they [TV] knew that they were defeated in front of the sheikhs whose arguments were strong and whose influence is great on the public, they [TV] just cut it at once...What a scandal!

The woman in the photo is Bochra Belhaj Hmida. I spotted her name, mentioned unfavourably, in different comments about the dress code and the conduct of women in earlier chapters. This post, however, sheds light specifically on her. This Islamist recurrent implication of Bochra in particular, in trivial and focused ways, is noteworthy. It raises questions about the discursive connotation of this activist, and *why* and *how* she is repeatedly invested in the construction of the Islamist discourse about woman. Bochra is, in effect, best known as a *Femme Démocrate*<sup>192</sup> despite also having multiple other occupations including being a prominent lawyer, Human Rights activist and politician. She was the co-founder of the Tunisian Association of the Democrat women ATFD (*L'Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates*) in 1989, which she presided over between 1994 and 1998. ATFD is, as I earlier noted, very distinctive in Tunisia for its open identification as ‘feminist’. This leads me to suggest that Bochra’s vocal ‘feminism’ is perhaps among the invested signifiers in the Islamist discourse.

Bochra did not post the visual part of the post on her Facebook profile, neither as a primary nor as a secondary source. The photo rather figures as a primary source only in Islamist Facebook pages. This indicates that Islamist Facebook administrator(s) are, most likely, the one(s) who chose and captured this particular visual instance of the feminist activist. Sad looking, Bochra is angled at the far left, with her distressed eyes not facing the camera. Her facial expressions, which I define following Fairclough as the action mode (Fairclough 1995b, 68), sound passive and negative. Her eyes aim nowhere, and they are lowered down. It is the camera that is pointed at her. She is also anything but happy and/or relaxed. Instead, her expressions are coded as bewildered, disappointed and defeated. In addition, only her

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Popular expression to identify members of ATFD.<sup>192</sup>

relatively wrinkled face and a small part of her upper body, enough to show her earring, necklace and clothing, are revealed. As to the wrinkles, and compared to Bochra's usual public appearances, they seem to be hyper-highlighted in the photo.

I point out to the connotative interplay of colors in the picture. Bochra wears a long-sleeved *violet* T-shirt. She has a sleeveless flowery blouse composed of a *violet* background and *red* roses on top of the T-shirt. She is framed within a *dark red* background. The color violet acquired ideologised political connotations in pre-revolutionary Tunisia. It was rumored to be the favourite color of the disposed president Ben Ali. It figured in different pre-revolutionary festivities (example: violet balloons) and decorations (example: bridges). *Lapresse* newspaper described the rule of Ben Ali as the Violet Years (Lachepelle, 2012). After January 2011, Islamists and certain leftists employed the expressions 'violet partisan' and 'violet media' as strong intimidation weapons against their opponents. As to dark red, it articulates multiple political significations, the most prominent of which is perhaps the Tunisian flag. Yet, dark red was internalised, especially in the early transitional phase, as the colour of the dissolved ruling Party of The Democratic Constitutional Rally (France 2, 2011). The logo of the Party was in dark red. The visual association of Bochra with the violet and dark red colours at the transitional phase codes her, I thus argue, as a rotten political subject.

The post further perpetuates the negative political construction of Bochra through the logo on top of her. The Bochra-logo positioning recalls, to a large extent, the Arab-language metaphor of 'the badge of shame on the forehead'.<sup>193</sup> There are connotations of political 'branding', borrowed from imageries of the Middle Ages (Dodge and Rennison 2015, p.58), as a form of shaming and punishment. The expression of the 'non-patriotic' on top of Bochra, though referring to the TV, brands her as well as a traitor. The aim of branding is often to 'warn members of the [Facebook] community of the specific potential danger of the individual posed' (Dodge and Rennison 2015, p.58). Given the Islamist inherent employment of the religious rhetoric, this visual production of Bochra may also be loosely based on the Muslim eschatological metaphor of the *Al-Messiah ad-Dajjal* (الدجال المسحوق).<sup>194</sup> According to the Muslim eschatology, *Al-Messiah ad-Dajjal* is an evil character branded with the term *Kafer* (disbeliever) between their eyes. Yet, people will not be able to see the branding. *The Messiah Ad-Dajjal* succeeds in misleading them by pretending to be a saviour (Glassée 1991, p. 109). Curiously, Bochra, as well, presents as a human rights defender and advocate of women's

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<sup>193</sup>Arabic. العار على الجبين.

<sup>194</sup>Comparable to anti-Christ in Christianity.

rights, yet, the Islamist ‘non-patriotic’ branding on top of her may evoke that she, in reality, misleads Tunisians, particularly women, into false ‘feminism’ and ‘patriotism’. I suggest that the post further reinforces the visual metaphor of the *Al-Messiah ad-Dajjal* (الدجال المسيح) through the semiotic interplay of the terms of ‘patriotic’ (وطنية) and ‘unpatriotic’ (الوطنية). Whereas this evil character in the Muslim eschatology presents as *Messiah* (Christ, the saviour), their real name is rather *Messiakh* (the deformed deceiver). The interplay of meaning lies in the omitting of the ‘k’ letter. As to Bochra, the interplay may lay in dropping the pre-suffix ‘un’ (patriotic).

The Islamist visual production of Bochra articulates embedded discursive methods which I identified as the passivation of the action mode of the subject, the semiotic signification of colours, and the religious and cultural metaphors of shame and deception. The Islamist publisher of the post constructs the feminist activist as the defeated, dependent on corrupted dictatorship, and deceiving Other. This visual construction, embedding an intersection of feminist political activism with mega discourses of authoritarianism, and political and ethical decay, seems to be directly in line with the written content of the post.

The title ‘Representatives of the Islamist associations on TV7 humiliated Bochra Belhaj Hmida, and showed her the real worth she has, in all politeness :))))))’ seems to summarize the text. The representatives of the Islamist associations are the social actors. The post constructs them, through the collective vague and unspecified plural, as an in-group (Van Dijk, 2006). Bochra, however, is located in the out-group. The post maintains this polarization, in which the in-group represents the ‘good’ and the out-group the ‘bad’, through the discursive use of oxymoron. Oxymoron is a ‘figure of speech that combines two opposites’ (Gorrel 1994, p. 203). The title consists of two contradictory modes of action: humiliation and politeness. Islamist representatives are the in-group humiliating agents. Yet, they catalyze, paradoxically, a polite humiliation. Bochra, the out-group passive subject, is the humiliated in a polite way. This discursive oxymoron, and in addition to the polarizing effect between the representatives and Bochra, embeds legitimizing elements in regard to the action the Islamist representatives take against Bochra (the humiliation of the subject).

The body of the text is a detailed discursive description of the polite humiliation of the feminist activist. In line with the visual part of the post, the verbal part embeds discursive political codes as well,

‘The sheikh addressed Bochra Belhaj Hmida: ‘I remember well when you said ‘*J’ai confiance en Ben Ali* [I have confidence in Ben Ali the overthrown President]’”.

The ‘sheikh’ points to Bochra’s participation in a televised debate on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2011: the eve of the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime. The debate was broadcasted on the state-controlled TV 7 channel. At that time, Bochra discussed the breaking uprisings and the Ben Ali public response to them. In the following morning of this televised debate, the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011, the overthrow of Ben Ali was announced. In the aftermath flourishing of post-revolutionary Islamist Facebook pages, a video sequence taken from the participation of Bochra in the above debate spread virally on Facebook. The sequence focused on the feminist activist saying:

I consider this speech [the speech of Ben Ali before his overthrow] a historical moment [...]

Today, I have confidence in Ben Ali: I am telling you. I say this in front of the world.<sup>195</sup>

This sequence, reaching a large number of Facebook users and secondary users, contributed to the public political coding of Bochra as corrupt. Feminist political activism especially that of ATFD, was coded by Islamists as a signifier of empathy with authoritarianism.

It is noteworthy, however, that the above short sequence articulates a highly employed Islamist discursive method in the transitional phase. I here point to the way Islamists deploy selective speech segments, detached of their discursive context, for distortive representational purposes (Van Dijk 2006) of political opponents. Distorted representation, in the case of the above sequence ‘the sheikh’ refers to, is articulated through manipulative montage. The non-Islamist montage-free original sequence of Bochra reads as:

I consider this speech [the weak apologetic speech of Ben Ali before his overthrow] a historical moment **because it [concession] happened thanks to the will of the Tunisian people. It is behind those people that the government and all those in charge should stand.**

Ok, I feel that Ben Ali is sincere about this speech. Let’s say that I have confidence in Ben Ali, **but excuse me! What about the 23 years [the rule of Ben Ali 1987-2011] of injustice? What about the impediment of the chances of democracy for all this time? The state is making concessions now only after Tunisians sacrificed themselves [were shot in uprisings]!?**

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<sup>195</sup>Original transcription :

نعينروا الخطاب un moment historique.

ج’اي انا اليوم j’ai confiance en Ben Ali, je vous dis. Je le dis devant tous le monde.

The selective montage Islamists employed afterwards modifies, distortedly, the statements constructive of the political discourse of Bochra. Accordingly, the Islamist construction of the feminist activist ideas is promoted in a distortive opaque form as truth (Fairclough 1995b, p. 56) to the public audience of Facebook. The ‘sheikh’ (mentioned in the Islamist post) instrumentalises the Islamist Facebook defamation of Bochra to construct her as a negative political subject.

In addition to political coding, the post articulates ethico-social coding as well. The discursive move from the political to the ethico-social is signalled through the move from one form of ‘polite humiliation’ to another.

[...] he[the sheikh] warmed my heart when he put limits to her [Bochra], and addressed her: “In 2007, you defended gay rights and campaigned for the same sex marriage. Do you want my son to come to me one day with his intentions to propose for a man? and tell me: ‘Dad, I would like to marry a guy like me, accompany me to propose for the guy!’ Then, I go to the father of the [potential fiancé] man and address him: “I ask for the hand of your honorable son.”  
Hhhhhhhhh

The sheikh, unclear whether he is the same first speaker or a different new social actor, employs argumentative parody. By parody, I refer to a form of critical humour composed of an original model (the parodied) and its imitation (the parodying) (Dentith, 2002). The discursive aim of the above parody is ‘to (dis-)qualify political developments, social groups or even individuals as threatening the identity or continued existence of [society]’ (Musolff 2012, p. 303). The representation of the feminist activist as pro-LGBT rights, especially in the early transitory phase, articulates an action mode of defamation. LGBT activism evokes the theme of the destabilisation of gender norms. It connotes a socially-unconventional example of betrothal etiquettes, and is therefore ill-received in Tunisia. This ill reception can be rooted in socio-religious stigmatisation on the one hand, and legal criminalisation on the other hand.<sup>196</sup> The post does not clarify whether this ‘accusation’ represents a deliberate statement

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This form of sexuality deconstructs, according to certain popular Tunisian rhetoric, the conventional (gendered) apparatuses of family composition, and of femininity and masculinity. Homosexual men, in particular, are thought to be ‘be feminised [...] in their mannerism and attitudes’ (Moran, 2002, p. 111). In addition, homosexuality is associated with a myriad of negative sexual, medical and religious myths. A large part of <sup>196</sup>Tunisians relate same sex activity to paedophilia, i.e., (forced) sex with minors. They also associate the practice with sexually transmitted diseases, unnatural form of behaviour and Godly anger. The throne of *Allah* is thought to shake in anger every time homosexual acts are committed on earth. Given the lack of Islamic texts proving it, some Islamic scholars, notably AmelGrami (2015), debunk the myth of the shaking of the Godly throne. As to legislation, the Article 230 issued in 1913, criminalises same sex intercourse. Samir Dilou, an Islamist politician and the minister of Human rights during the 2011 Islamist government, described homosexuality as a ‘perversion’. Dilou argued that homosexuals should be treated medically (Zoubir and White, 2016, p. 240). For example, Ahmed Ben Amor, the vice President of the Tunisian association SHAMS for the

made by the 'sheikh' or an answer to something Bochra said. Like the visual part of the post, the verbal one passivates Bochra as well. The feminist activist is the centre of the post. Yet, she does not speak; she is under the patriarchal microscope of gender politics and ethics. She is constructed through the discourse of the male sheikhs.

The second Facebook post I move to is a standard Arab-language article titled 'Between True Feminism and Fake Feminism'. It is posted by the Islamist Facebook user and activist Soumaya Ghannoushi on her official page holding her full name on November the third 2011,

بين النسوية الحقيقية و النسوية المزيفة

21:26 novembre2011, 3

لكم كان متوقعا بدأت مكينة الكذب والدجل تشغل مجددا وبسرعة البرق، نؤبل إن يجف حبر نتائج الانتخابات شرع جيش المهزومين والخائبين في تجميع قلوبهم المشتتة. إنطلق المسلسل بتحريك الإضرابات ثم باع نصاب بعض المجموعات التي تدعي زيفا و بهتانا الدفاع عن حقوق ومكاسب المرأة التونسية.. الحقيقية المرة التي يناهها هؤلاء الخائبون البائسون عمدا هو أنهم سيرون نبي الأيام الزادمة مجلسا تأسيسيا يضم 49 امرأة من بينهن 42 امرأة نهضوية ما بين محامية وأسنانة جامعية وطبيبة ومهندسة. سنكون هاته القيادات الممتخبة شعبيا في طلعة النضال التونسي الحقيقي لتجدير حقوق المرأة التونسية ومكاسبها الفعوية، ال المزيفة، و سيعملن بتفان وجد لتعظيم هذه المكسيبات على سائر نساء تونس في المدن والأرياف التونسية، بين الطبقات الوسطى والنظيرة و بين المثقفات و الأميات. ستحصل المرأة التونسية بحول هلا على مزيد من الحريات والحقوق في التعليم والشغل والرعاية الصحية، مثلما سنكون مشاركنها في الحياة السياسية والعامرة أوسع من أي وقت مضى. سيؤري التونسيون المرأة في كامل مواقع المسؤولية دون استثناء، و هذا هو أفضل رد على نساء "النادي الباريسي" اللواتي يحصرن حقوق المرأة ني ارنداء الجنى جيب، وتدخين سيجارة، واحساء علية كحول في ملهى ليلي

## Between True Feminism and Fake Feminism

As was expected, the machine of lies and quackery started working again with the speed of light. Before the ink of the election results dries, the army of the defeated and futile started gathering their dispersed cronies. The [TV] series started with the mobilization of the strikes and then by the sit-ins of some groups that falsely claim the defense of women's rights and achievements. The bitter truth that those futile and miserable intentionally ignore is that they will see in the coming days a Constitutional Assembly composed of 49 women 42 out of which are Nahdaoui (Islamist) between lawyers, university teachers, doctors and engineers. These nationally elected leaders will be at the forefront of true feminist militancy in order to implant women's true rights and gains, and not fake ones. They will work hard with dedication in order to spread them [rights and gains] on all Tunisian women in cities and forgotten countryside, between middle and working classes, and between the educated and the illiterate. Women will get, God willing, more

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protection of gay rights, notes that 'Tunisia is an extremely homophobic society and there are some here who want to terrorize us [advocates of/homosexuals] and make our lives hard' (Ben Amor, 2015).

freedoms and rights in education, work and healthcare. Her participation in the political and public life will be greater than any previous time. Tunisians will see women in all cites of responsibility without exception; and this is the best answer to the women of ‘the Parisian Club’ who restrict women’s rights to wearing a mini-jip, smoking a cigarette and drinking a bottle of alcohol in a nightclub.

Soumaya Ghannoushi, the author and publisher of the post, is best known in Tunisia for her blood and marital ties with Islamist men figures. She is the daughter of En-nahda Party leader Rached Ghannoushi and the wife of the Islamist previous Minister of Affairs Rafik Abdessalem. Nevertheless, she is also a researcher on the history of ideas and a freelance writer on different newspapers including *The Guardian* and *Al Jazeera English*. In addition to traditional media, Soumaya is active on social networks. Soumaya’s official website [soumayaghannoushi.com](http://soumayaghannoushi.com) and her pre-revolutionary freelance work, are all in the English language. This may have stemmed from her upbringing and study in Britain.<sup>197</sup> Paradoxically, Soumaya’s Facebook page, founded in the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution, publishes only in standard Arabic. Soumaya does not accompany her Arabic-written Facebook articles with English translations. Yet, she regularly provides an Arabic translation for her English newspaper articles. This language focus on Standard Arabic may connote a strategised method of targeting the Arab-speaking reader, particularly the Tunisian, on Facebook.

Soumaya points explicitly to the socio-political context of the post, ‘[...] Before the ink of the election results dries, the army of the defeated and futile started gathering their dispersed cronies [...]’. The above text is situated within the post 2011 electoral context. These constitutional elections were the first to be held after the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime. They crystallised the practical potential of transition from the one-party authoritarian rule to political plurality. En-nahda emerged in the first place with 40% of the total votes. The results had not apparently been a happy surprise to ‘secular’ feminist activists. The Islamist discourse on women, which Ons Hattab<sup>198</sup> criticized in a 2016 show as ‘deeply obscure and worrying’, may account for feminist discontent with the electoral outcome.<sup>199</sup> The pre-electoral Islamist Facebook posts and responses about women’s dress code were coercive and polarizing (see chapter IV), and they still are. In addition, the President of En-nahda Party advocated, since the emergence of the movement, patriarchal rhetoric on marriage. He referred to unmarried

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<sup>197</sup>Her father (and the Islamist leadership in general) had, unlike leftist opposition during the Ben Ali era, preferred seeking political refuge in Western Europe. So, Soumaya was born and brought up in London till the 14<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution.

<sup>198</sup>Ons Hattab is a Tunisian feminist politician and unionist.

<sup>199</sup><http://elhiwarettounsi.com/replay/talkshow-liman-yajroo-fakat-liman-yajroo-fakat,5126.html>.

women with the pejorative term *awaness*. He also argued that women's education and work, combined with the abolition of polygamy, inflicted unemployment on men and 'spinsterhood' on women (Ghannoushi, 2011).<sup>200</sup> Moreover, the Islamist MP Abderrahim vehemently attacked single mothers just after the elections.<sup>201</sup> For all these discursive statements of patriarchy, feminist concerns about the victory of En-nahda were immediately vocal. These concerns were, in turn, reacted against by Islamist Facebook users including Soumaya through her above article.

The title, 'Between True Feminism and Fake Feminism', suggests that the post is a comparative text. Soumaya's response to feminist concerns would, therefore, imply comparative methodology. Comparison culminates in the way the Islamist discourse on the one hand, and that of Democrat Women on the other hand, construct feminism. Ghannoushi sheds light on what she describes as 'fake feminism' first. She employs an overtly figurative language in order to construct these social actors, who she describes as 'fake feminists',

**The army of the defeated and futile** started gathering their **dispersed cronies**  
**The machine of lies and quackery** started working again with the **speed of light**  
**The [TV] series** started with the mobilization of the strikes and then by the sit-ins of some groups that falsely claim the defense of women's rights and achievements.

The text represents a metaphorically-grounded argument. It articulates a 'grotesque application' (Musolff 2012, p.303) of metaphor. The term 'grotesque', according to the Oxford dictionary, implicates repulsive, and often comic, ugliness, distortion, incongruity, and/or inappropriateness. Edwards and Graulund<sup>202</sup> (2013) point to the ongoing twentieth century interdisciplinary disagreement about the functions of the grotesque, and its positive versus negative instrumentalisation in linguistics, arts and psychoanalysis (see for example: Freud's *The uncanny*, 1919; *Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World* 1965). What I see as relevant for the dissemination of Soumaya's post, however, is the scholarly broad agreement on the inextricability between the grotesque and the social imagination. Harpham (2007), for example, explains that the grotesque is not grotesque in itself. It is rather 'our conventions, our prejudices, our commonplaces, our banalities, our mediocrities' that define what a grotesque object is. The conceptualisation of the grotesque targets what is perceived as

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<sup>200</sup>I pointed in earlier chapters to the Islamist rhetoric on marriage (especially polygamy), woman's participation in the political life, single motherhood, rape and the polarisation of dress code (chapter II, IV, and V).

<sup>201</sup>Please see chapter V, section 2.

<sup>202</sup>Scholars on Literature and English language.

irregular and threatening to the social order (Harpham, 2007). Ghannoushi deploys the grotesque metaphors of the ‘machine of lies’, ‘sorcery’, and the ‘obscure defeated army’ for the description of feminist activists. They are explicit and well-articulated, rather than embedded, metaphors in terms of polarisation and disfigurement of the Other. Soumaya reinforces the explicitness of her metaphors through a dense comparative lexic of material feminist negativity (machine, lies, sorcery, defeated, futile, dispersed, falsely, miserable, fake, Parisian Club) versus Islamist positivity (constitutional, nationally-elected, leaders, true feminist militancy, true rights and gains, work hard, dedication, more freedoms and rights, greater, responsibility, best). Clearly, Soumaya constructs feminist activists as what is grotesquely fake and deformed. Islamist women, on the other hand, catalyse the true notion of feminism.

Scholarship on critical discourse studies, particularly political and media discourse, commenced shedding more light on the device of metaphor since the 1970s (Mussolff, 2012; Steuter and Willis, 2009). This interest, Andreas Mussolff (2012 p.303) argues,<sup>203</sup> arises from the utility of metaphor in communicating political ideas (of the author) and assimilating them to public collective awareness (reader). Metaphor is generally seen, since antiquity, as an attractive, memorable and powerful linguistic device. Steuter and Willis (2009) point to the way Aristotelian rhetoric examined the visual appeal of metaphor, as articulated through the vibrant visual scenery effect it produces. This attractiveness, nevertheless, is rather the ‘dangerous’ (Mussolff 2012, p.305) type. I focus, for example, on Soumaya’s first metaphor of war. It is rather a universal kind of metaphor (Kovecses 2008, p.103). War is, in effect, extensively used in political discourses, the best well known contemporary of which is probably George Bush’s war on terror (Hodges, 2011; Holland, 2012). First, Soumaya addresses ‘the symbolic theme’ (Mussolff 2012, p.305) of the defeat of enemies of Islam through the construction of feminists as a ‘defeated, futile [and...] miserable army’. She appeals to the collective Muslim imageries of the defeat of evil as conceptualized through Qur’an, *Hadith* and modern media. The lexic is also borrowed from these sources. Soumaya is among the Islamist public figures that instrumentalise symbolic military themes of the early Muslim era. I point, for instance, to the Islamist En-nahda Party members Sadok Chourou and Habib Louz who employed imageries of the defeat of ‘*koffar*’ (disbelievers) during the very

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<sup>203</sup>A scholar on linguistics who researches on the area of critical discourse analysis.

early days of Islam (notably Treaty of Hudaibiyyah 628 and the Battle of Badr in 642), in order to describe the Islamist conflict with Tunisian secular forces.<sup>204</sup>

In addition to the assimilation of feminist women to the army of enemies of Islam, Soumaya de-complicates, through metaphor, her disagreement with them. Mussolff (2012) argues that metaphors ‘collapse complicated issues into more simplified information that can be understood by the public’ (p. 306). Soumaya is not required anymore, thanks to metaphors, to provide an arguments and supporting facts in behalf of her claim about the ‘evilness’ of feminist activists. She, in effect, does not explain laboriously *how* and *why* their feminism is *not compatible* with her understanding of the notion. Instead, her metaphors are what is capturing about and construing of feminist activists. It is at the end that she explicitly ‘agentivises’ her enemies of war, the women of the ‘Parisian Club’. Her agentivisation of these women is, again, not based on laborious argumentation. Soumaya rather deploys an overt value judgment. Housseem, a male-commentator on Soumaya’s post writes:

When I read your article, I did not understand the difference between the principles of what you call true feminism and fake feminism.

Could you please further elaborate, provide arguments and dispose of that insult stuff?<sup>205</sup>

Housseem highlights what he perceives as the lack of complex argumentation. Following Housseem, I also suggest that the article is overtly composed of de-complicated metaphorical imageries and value judgment. The value judgment Soumaya deploys targets very particular details related to the private conduct of woman. This illuminates, among other things, the problematic Islamist conceptualisation of women’s individual freedoms. Soumaya argues that ‘true feminists’ can become doctors, engineers, and teachers. Yet, she neglects telling the reader about how these domains can become socially de-gendered through, for example, the elimination of male harassment against women at work places. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, Soumaya fully ignores addressing the feminist demand for individual freedoms including individuality, dress code, and sexual conduct and reproduction.

Soumaya polarizes feminist activists at the start. She constructs them as the evil side and herself as the righteous one. She gradually, however, deprives them of all aspects of feminism. In parallel, she simplifies their activism into socially-diabolized apparatuses of agency. Soumaya restricts secular feminist women’s agency to what she perceives as

<sup>204</sup>For more examples about this metaphor please see Chapter I, section 3 and chapter II, section 2.

لکي زيريت "المجال" مناعك ما نهمنش شزو الفرق ني المبادئ بين لي نس نجه نسويرة حذويرة و نسويرة  
مزويرة.<sup>205</sup>

من صموشي نزيد نذوق الفتر ني الدجاليل و نو وري الحجج مناعك و نخرج شويرة

مَالِ السَّيِّدَانِ؟

inappropriate dress code, dictatorial elitism, and un-Islamic consumption of cigarettes and alcohol. These feminists, therefore, are transformed into a repulsive social threat. Steuter and Willis instigate that the construction of the enemy as a threat to the audience fuels ‘calls for extermination’ (Steuter and Willis 2000, p.38). Tunisians who are directly in line with Soumaya’s discourse would be required to eliminate the corrupt paradigm of feminism responsible for the de-stabilization of social order. It is here worth referring to the case of Chokri Belaid, who was a Tunisian politician and among the prominent pre- and post-revolutionary figures of the political opposition. He was increasingly demonized on Islamist Facebook pages. Islamists portrayed him, just like Soumaya does, as a threat on Islamic ethics because of his leftist discourse and vocal criticism of Islamist (not even Islam/ Islamic) politics. Effectively, Belaid was assassinated on February 2013. Different figures, including Belaid’s widow Basma Khalfaoui, blamed the online *takfeer* campaign (accusation of enmity to Islam) for Chokri Belaid’s assassination. Certain feminist activists, including Bochra Belhaj Hmida, Lina Ben Mhenni and Iqbal Gharbi, still have state-provided security because of radical Islamist threats of assassination.

Publishing on social media is not an identical process to publishing on traditional media (Floyd et al., 2015). Publishing on Facebook can, for example, be in a less formal language, shorter texts, and more interactive methodology than publishing on traditional media (Floyd et al., 2015). Yet, the articles Soumaya shares on Facebook are *strikingly* different from English-language material on her official website and in international newspapers. The difference between Soumaya’s Facebook and traditional media writings extends beyond the structure and formality apparatuses I noted. Paradoxically to all the above findings, Soumaya refers to non-Islamist women activists as ‘sisters’ in *The Guardian* (2014, p. 1). She also describes the pre-revolutionary Tunisian civil society, of which Islamists were not a part,<sup>206</sup> as a ‘vibrant civil society’ (Ghannouchi 2014, p. 1). In addition, she employs a lexic of solidarity for the description of the post-electoral Tunisian scene ‘consensus-building, national unity, compromise and consensuses’. For instance, she describes the post-revolutionary relation between Islamists and the Forum for Freedoms Party which consists of multiple liberal feminist figures including Bochra Belhaj Hmida, as a ‘commitment to consensus-building [that] has shielded Tunisia from the intense ideological polarisation’ (Ghannouchi 2014, p.1). The lexic of compromise Soumaya employs in her non-Facebook articles, as shown through the example of *the Guardian*, is the complete opposite of the polarization paradigm she

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<sup>206</sup>Please see my analysis of the exclusion of Islamists from pre-revolutionary Tunisia.

perpetuates on Facebook. This brief, interestingly suggestive, comparison highlights, among other things, the *distinctiveness* of Facebook as an Islamist political platform.

The above posts also shed light on what Islamists conceptualise as the Francophone content of the Tunisian secular feminist discourse. Posts deploy different discursive methods in order to perpetuate the construction of these feminists as the Francophone Other. For instance, the first post on Bochra Belhaj Hmida employs French language only for the reporting of what is promoted as her verbal intervention, ‘The sheikh addressed Bochra Belhaj Hmida: ‘I do remember well when you said *J’ai confiance en Ben Ali* [I have confidence in Ben Ali]’. In the second post, Ghannoushi uses ‘the Parisian Club’ as a semiotic signifier of feminists, ‘women of ‘the Parisian club’ who restrict women’s rights to wearing a mini-jip, smoking a cigarette, and drinking a bottle of alcohol in a nightclub’.

The term *francophonie* was initially coined by the French geographer Onésime Reclus in 1880.<sup>207</sup> Reclus employed this terminology in reference to French-speaking geographical parts of the world (Singh 2008, p.14). After the twentieth century independence of many French colonies including Tunisia, however, la francophonie acquired new interdisciplinary signifiers. Christiane Albert (1999, p.5) suggests that the notion was disseminated, rather reflexively, in a variety of discourses. For example, the International Organization of la francophonie, defines the francophone realm as:

[...] one of the biggest linguistic zones in the world. Its members share more than just a common language [French]. They also share the humanist values promoted by the French language. The French language and its humanist values represent the two cornerstones on which the International Organisation of La Francophonie is based.

Accordingly, French language and the humanist values transmitted through French language to French-speaking nations, notably former French colonies, represent the foundations of collective, yet multi-cultural, forms of ties. Kamal Salhi (2010, p.17), a post-colonial critic, explains that these human values are, *theoretically*, derived from the philosophy of Enlightenment and the Universal declaration of the Rights of Man. Francophone member nations are required to share common linguistic and Republican beliefs in the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity (Salhi 2010, p.17).

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<sup>207</sup>I employ the French form of the term following the different English sources I consulted. The different spelling for linguistic-cultural and political francophonie is worth noting. The linguistic-cultural is with a lowercase letter: francophonie. The political, however; is with a capital letter: Francophonie. I use them variably according to the context.

La francophonie articulates different connotations in Tunisian discourses about woman. On the one hand, la francophonie has both colonial roots and signifiers.<sup>208</sup> During the colonial era (1881-1956), it signified illegitimate assimilationist power. The anti-colonial nationalist movement, led by Bourguiba, constructed la francophonie as a politico-cultural threat. This construction was instrumental at that time for the mobilisation of the public against French occupation. Public rejection of la francophonie was, accordingly, championed as a means for the protection of the Tunisian Muslim Arab identity against colonial assimilation. On the other hand, however, la francophonie acquired a paradoxically different signifier after independence (Dhiouf, 2010). The same leading anti-colonial figure Bourguiba transformed into a champion of French language and Enlightenment values in Tunisia.<sup>209</sup> He (1968) romanticised, emphatically, about the vital role of his French education, notably in law and political philosophy, in the formation of his anti-colonial resistance goals. He even founded, with other post-independence African heads of states, the International Association of la francophonie. Therefore, Bourguiba re-signified post-independence francophonie as the language and theoretical values of ‘emancipation’ (Dhiouf 2010, p. 260).

Bourguiba’s post-independence approach to the francophone discourse had possibly articulated a complex political orientation in terms of international relations. My focus, however, centres on the cultural articulations of this demarche. Bourguibist Tunisia highly cherished literary, social, legal, philosophical, and revolutionary francophone discourses (Mazrui 2014, p.19). Beyond theory, the francophonie largely shapes the multiple apparatuses of cultural expression, including for instance the artistic, dialectical, and legal. This infatuation, a host of researchers (Dhaoudi, 2013) instigate, has gradually decreased. Recession of la francophonie may have stemmed, among other things, from re-shaped global geopolitical paradigms, Arabisation of public curriculums, international rise of English language, and the ‘loss of [...] influence of French in the worlds of science and technology and business’ (Harrabi 2011, p.166). Noticeably, however; la francophonie is still associated with a myriad of normative socio-political signifiers. I point, for example, to urbanisation, intellectualism, and foreign agendas especially in regard to women’s rights. I discussed, in

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<sup>208</sup>I discussed in details these roots and significations on my critical contextualisation of the thesis and post-colonial roots.

<sup>209</sup>Bourguiba argued, in what Salhi describes as a ‘lyrical’ political speech (Salha 2010, p.14) that anti-colonial resistance targeted assimilationist, and not linguistic, dimensions of French coloniser.

effect, the way Islamist discourses on women mobilise the discourse of assimilation, particularly in relation to the issues of dress code and morality.<sup>210</sup>

### **They are the pervert, elitist, and anti-Muslim Other!**

Islamist comments, in line with the above posts, focus on la francophonie in particular for the construction of feminist activists. Mounir, a male-participant, writes in response to the second post:

The Tunisian people are free, and they proved their freedom in the day of elections when they voted for those who respect their identity and ethics [Islamists], and refused the sons of France, a handful of LGBT (*chawadhun*, شوا) and whores.<sup>211</sup>

Mounir employs the in-group versus out-group discursive technique. He represents the in-group as the righteous majority through ‘internal evaluation’ (Labov 2010, p.84). I here refer to the representation of Islamist voters as ‘free’ in the ‘atemporal’ simple present tense (Fairclough, 1995b; Mills, 1999). Fairclough argues that the employment of simple present denotes the timelessness and greatness of social actors (Fairclough 1992). In addition, Mounir articulates a positive in-group ‘external evaluation’ (Labov 2010, p.84) through positive lexicalisation ‘free, freedom, voted, respect, identity, ethics’. In contrast to in-group ‘free’ Islamists, feminist activists are disqualified through quantitative, political, sexual and social signifiers. A ‘handful’, which Mounir employs, is a noun denotative of smallness and scarcity. Framing this signifier within the wider socio-political context of post-2011 Tunisian elections, it is worth noting that Islamists nicknamed their opponents, notably secular feminists, as the ‘Zero.Group’. An Islamist Facebook page, *Tounsi w Rasi Ali* (A Proud Tunisian) defines the *zero. Group* as:

<sup>212</sup>[...] Those whose electoral results ranged between zero seat and an orphan seat, i.e. zero. percentage [...] Those who, when united as ‘artists’ and theatre actors<sup>213</sup> and associations of civil society and women feminist activists, [...] won only five seats as manifestation of humiliation and disdain against them by Tunisians, akin to an ass-kick that people bestow on perverts and outcasts in every society.

<sup>210</sup>Please see the two previous chapters.

الشعب التونسي حر وقد أثبت حريته يوم الانتخابات نصّوت لمن يحترم هويته ويحترم أخلاق هذا الشعب، لذلك اجنّز صاع اليك ما يسمى بحزب الحداثة والتقدمية وأمانهم شر إبانة أمام أمهم نرنسا المجرمة وتركهم للأجراء.... شكرا للشعب التونسي الذي لم يخطئ حين صوت للزهضة والمؤتمر وقصر أحزاب العرصر والخسة والنذالة والوقاحة وتركها لحوي كالكالب... شكرا للزهضة ولن ننتخب غير هـا ميوئبال شمامة في هؤلاء اللوغاد مخزئين وعاهرات

هؤلاء الذين تراوحت نتائجهم في الانتخابات بين صفر ومقعد ومقعد بينهم أي بما تربته صفر ناصل<sup>212</sup>Arabic text : هؤلاء الذين حيزما جيمعوا أنفسهم جن نرائين ومسرحين وجمعيات مجتمع مدني ونساء ناشطات، ثم خططوا ثم نجمعوا في جبهة" القطب [...] الحداثي" ثم خططوا لم يجاوزا خمس مقاعد، كموقف اجنّز وازدراء من طرف التريسيين لهم، فبما يشبه الركلة التي يوجد بها الزاس على مؤخرات المنحرفين الميوئين بكل مجتمع

<sup>213</sup>The Arabic word is used in masculine form.

Pejorative quantitative terms including ‘handful’ and ‘Zero. Group’ were also employed by public Islamist figures. Rafik Abdessalem (2011), an Islamist politician and Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2011, described the secular opposition as the Zero.Group.

The expression of the ‘Sons of France’ is also a connotative metaphor of out-group negativity, limited influence, and isolation. Mounir constructs France as the mother figure of feminist activists. In his analogy of sexuality in Islam, Abdelwahab Bouhdiba (2012) provides a pertinent illustration of the metaphor of the ‘mother/child cult’ in Arab Muslim societies. Bouhdiba (2012) argues that the mother/child cult comprises three main processes of societal formation: extension, authenticity, and stability. The mother, namely France, forms psycho-sociological union with ‘her’ child, namely feminist activists. Therefore, Tunisian feminists represent an extension of the being of their Mother France. The mother also signifies authenticity. This is why feminist activists, according to the commentator, seek their subjectivity (state being) in their authentic roots, Mother France. In addition, semiotic reproduction embeds stability and continuity. The French production of feminist activists in Tunisia is, in effect, an articulation of the stability and continuity of the existence of France as well. France, a political signifier, therefore articulates both the intrusive and the elitist. Feminist activists, following the footsteps of their metaphorical mother, are, from an Islamist perspective, material and societal articulations of the continuity, stability, and authenticity of *la francophonie*. They are constructed as carriers of a francophone secular conceptualisation of women’s rights against Arab Islamic ideals.

Mounir further elaborates the social threat of feminist activists, ‘the sons of France, a handful of LGBT (*chawadhun*, شواذ) and whores’. He constructs them through their association with what is perceived as the ‘grotesque’ francophone sexual identity/abnormality. This grotesque portrayal is articulated through Mounir’s use of the term *chawadhun* (شواذ) as a synonym for the English LGBT. *Chawadhun* is a strikingly discriminatory Arabic term. According to the definition of *Lisan Al-Arab*, the ethically *Chadhun* (singular of *chawadhun*) is the pervert. As to behaviour, the *chadhun* is the faulty. Raja ben Slama explains that *chawadhun* is a morally-pejorative linguistic alternative for the neutral term *mathaleyun* (Ben Slama, 2015).<sup>214</sup> *Chawadhun* had, as Ben Slama highlights, been widely employed in the Islamic jargon of the Middle Ages as a denotation of social abnormality, perversion, and sinfulness. The term still has negative denotations in contemporary Tunisia. Yet, it is now strongly associated with Westernisation, sexually transmitted diseases, and/or psychological illness.

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<sup>214</sup>A Tunisian feminist scholar and activist who I referred to in earlier chapters.

Bahri Jelassi (2011), a public Islamist figure, went as far as to argue that homosexuality can lead to the extinction of the human race.

Other participants share Mounir's discursive construing of feminist activists as the francophone other. For example, Lotfi, a male-commentator, writes in response to the second post:

The worst type of sick people are those who ignore their illness. The gang of modernist activist women and many like them from the 'Set me free' campaign has not yet realized their limited popular value and that they represent only themselves.<sup>215</sup> They are just a vocal phenomenon, acting in their very own isolated society. They prove that 'If Allah wanted evil for a community, He would grant them the skill of arguing but not working.' We are all for the renaissance of Tunisia, but against the conspiracy on Tunisia by this modernist gang that wants to control us through the power of criminal France.<sup>216</sup>

Lotfi sets a negative comparison between feminist activists and patients who are unaware of their illness. This comparison, I suggest, evokes the metaphor of disillusion. Feminists are construed as a 'gang of modernists' acting in their own isolated delusional world away of reality. They are deprived of their physical and mental capacity of social integration. The comparison may embed, as well, the pressing urgency of disposing of them as a form of disciplinary extermination. Lotfi instrumentalises multiple normative pronouns including 'this type, those, the gang' in order to maintain the discursive apparatuses of exclusion.

Like Mounir, Soumaya, and the two other participants, Lotfi constructs feminists as unrepresentative of Tunisian women. They are, Lotfi emphasises, a recycled paradigm of cultural colonisation. Fatima El-Issawi (2012,p.18), a researcher on Arab Media, points to Islamist assimilation with traditional working-class Tunisians contrary to secular (who are constructed as, I would argue,) Francophone elites. Abou Yaareb Marzouki, a leading Islamist figure of En-nahda Party, labels non-Islamist Tunisian political forces as 'delegates of indirect colonisation' (Marzouki 2016, p.1). Islamist posts and comments therefore construct feminist activists as the embodiment of the Francophone isolated, delusional, and minority un-Tunisian other in Arab Muslim Tunisia.

Abobakr, another Islamist participant, comments on Soumaya's article:

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'Set me free' is a national activist campaign that took place on Spring 2011 as a response against what a group of activists and regular citizens perceived as a violation of individual liberties by some extremist groups including the freedom of dress code, the freedom of thought and the political neutrality of mosques.<sup>215</sup>

الجهل أعدى أعداء الزمان ، ومصيبة تونس أن نهبها حذالة جاهلة ال تفر على الزؤد نتمسرع إلى السرب والثرتم ، الكيد أن سمية الغزوشي لن تخسر<sup>216</sup> شئوا وإنما أكدت للجموع الطليعة السوقية البائسة لخصومها وخصوصا من العاصرات الداعرات اللواتي ال يجدن غير الفحش ناكيدا لسلكهن اليومى ...

Yes for En-nahda! No for dependence [to France/the West] and atheism and unveiled women! Tunisia is Arab-Muslim. Honor is for Arabs and Muslims. No place for the regressive francophone among us!<sup>217</sup>

Abobakr employs a variety of slogans, including the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ ones. Nicola Woods (2014, p. 50) draws attention to the performativity of slogans in political speeches. Slogans can be deployed, for instance, for protest, legitimisation or intimidation, and are an effective discursive method thanks to the surge of emotions they transmit to the audience (Woods, 2014). I suggest that the above Islamist slogans, as much as Soumaya’s grotesque metaphors, constitute instrumental discursive tools. These patterns of speech are easily understood, learnt and repeated by partisans. This stems from the way the metaphor and the slogan encompass discourse into a short de-complicated segments of speech. These segments are sonorant and appealing to emotion.

Abobakr associates unveiled women, clearly referring to feminist activists, with the lexicon of atheism and colonialism; both of which I have encountered in the two previous chapters on the veil and the conduct of woman. Feminist activists, the commentator argues, do not conform to what he perceives as the religious norm of dress code. They do not believe in religious doctrines in general, and in Islam in particular. In discussing the Islamist rhetoric on the veil in the fourth chapter, I highlighted the way Islamist accusations of atheism, and particularly enmity to Islam, on Facebook fueled violence against leftist and liberal figures. These online accusations significantly contributed to the two political assassinations of the leftist leader Chokri Belaid on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013 and the leftist activist Mohamed Brahmi on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2013. The use of ‘abstract indiscriminate’ religious and cultural notions, notably atheism and Francophonism in this case, represents an *ideological* discursive method (Ellis 2013, p. 13). The above Islamist post publishers and commentators substitute, negatively, feminist activists for a myriad of abstract indiscriminate aspects including atheism, elitism, and non-heterosexuality. This substituting articulates a shift into a wider religious and civilisational scope of conflict. The opponent, therefore, is dehumanized into an abstract evil entity. Their exclusion, often extermination, becomes consequently a naturalised popular demand (Ellis 2013, p.13). This discursive strategy, as constructed by earlier posts and comments, intensifies in this particular comment of Abobakr who vehemently demands the extermination of feminist activists on basis of their attributed francophone mode of action.

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نعم للرهضة ال و ألف ال للنعوية و اللجاد و التراج . تونس عربية إسلامية . العزة للعرب و المبرلمين و ال مكانة للترنكفونيزين الرج عيين النبعين<sup>217</sup>

## Conclusions

The examination of two exemplary Facebook posts uncovered the evolution of the Islamist discourse about women into a more polarised and polarising stance. The overthrow of dictatorship and the consequent change of the political landscape allowed for a change in the discursive paradigm of interaction between feminists and Islamists that I illustrated in the introduction. The solidarity of different, even ideologically contradicting, discourses against the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali became no longer tangible, and thus was the temporary compromise). The posts, quite representative of the overall content of Facebook material during the transitional phase, centred on the specific association of the Democrat Women (ATFD). This focus suggests the Islamist targeting of the openly feminist and the openly secular. ATFD are, in effect, very vocal about their secular feminist convictions. I noted a recurrent association of feminism with the threatening Other. The latter is articulated discursively through a myriad of methods including for example the interplay of colours, metaphors, and slogans.

The feminist woman, constructed as the other, catalyses the political, ethical, and cultural threat facing the Islamist identity of post-revolutionary Tunisia. Democrat Women are associated with the dictatorship of Ben Ali. They are portrayed in both posts and also comments as a distorted representation of the Tunisian woman, imposed by authoritarianism. Islamists construct vocal feminists as urban and elitist mediums of control perpetuated by Ben Ali. Francophonism is one significant discursive method for the emphasis of political corruption and elitist urbanism. Feminists are construed as Francophone abject bodies within the 'authentic' Muslim and Arab composition of the Tunisian identity. They are conveyers of francophone irregular ethical, sexual, and cultural values. Accordingly, the posts end up polarising feminist to the religious, heterosexual, and independent (from France) ideals of the transitional phase. These discursive constructions of feminists are disempowering, especially in the peculiar phase of transition. They aim at disposing the feminist demands of their potential realisation in a non-Western and non-secular landscape such as the Tunisian one.

## Chapter Seven: Concluding Critical Reflections

I set out in my thesis to question the way Islamist Facebook pages construe woman in early transitional Tunisia. In the introductory chapter, I outlined the array of personal, academic, and political motivations that inspired my interest in this particular research topic. Being a Tunisian woman, a feminist researcher, a Facebook user, and an observer and critic of and a participant in the materialising transitional scene, especially in regard to woman, significantly informed my initial conceptualisation of my work. I was, like many Tunisians in the early morning of one wintery day, taken aback by the news of the flight of the authoritarian President Ben Ali. This news signaled the start of a thrilling political change. It brought concrete hope for the establishment of a democratic and egalitarian state. Yet, this same news also raised a challenging question: ‘What will become of women?’. I had concerns, as much as hopes, about the transitional status of the Tunisian woman.<sup>218</sup> I channeled both my hopes and concerns as a Tunisian woman partly through my use of Facebook. This digital site, thanks to its striking post-revolutionary popularity,<sup>219</sup> became my new and vital platform for the discussion and defense of women’s rights, where I keenly observed and participated in debates about women.

The phenomenon that could not go unnoticed in these debates was, however, the immediate and powerful penetration of an Islamist discourse, especially in relation to woman, into Facebook.<sup>220</sup> This phenomenon had transformed, in effect, into a central topic for popular

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<sup>218</sup>I thoroughly discussed the factors of my concern in my introductory and fifth chapters. These factors briefly revolve, among other things, around the Tunisian common sense negative political significations of feminism, the inconsistency of independent feminist activism, and the powerful re-rise of movements with so called ‘anti-feminist’ agendas.

<sup>219</sup>For more on the popularity of Facebook in Tunisia, please see chapter II, Section 2.

At that early stage of the Tunisian transition, I could not figure clearly the essence of the Islamist discourse about woman. My lack of familiarity with Islamism mostly stemmed from private circumstances including my age category and my family upbringing. I grew up in the late eighties and in the nineties. This chronological phase catalyzed the culmination of the firm dictatorship of Ben Ali. The regime was then notorious for the spying on the daily practices of individuals, including their verbal communication. Therefore, the popular discussion of politics, especially about banned Islamist activism, was not recommended. The public atmosphere of the lack of the freedom of expression was perfectly compatible with the values of my family who were not particularly dictators. Yet, they sounded rather apolitical. They did not use to venture, with positive or negative views, into the particular topic of politics.

<sup>220</sup>This ‘mysterious’ silence around Islamism in and outside home had been intriguing. As a growing child and then as a young adult woman, I was sometimes curious about Islamists. I raised questions to myself like, for example, who are Islamists, what is their agenda about woman in particular? Are they really anti-feminist or does the dictatorial Ben Ali regime attempt to distort their image through their association with a misogynist agenda? My questions, however, did not remain unanswered for very long. The Revolution enabled Islamists to finally become visible again in the public scene. As I noted earlier, the Islamist re-emergence was strongly

debate in early transitional Tunisia. Speculations had focused on the way this Facebook discourse construed and impacted the popular perception and situation of woman in this critical moment of Tunisian contemporary history. Yet, I was disappointed by the way the centrality of this topic inside the country was not significantly tackled, compared to other topics such as Islamism and democratisation, in media coverage, and even scholarly research, about the Tunisian transitional phase. It was at that time that I commenced sensing the need for a serious and thorough assessment of the way the re-emerging active force of Islamism construed women in the popular space of Facebook. I hoped that this assessment would contribute to a better critical understanding of the new representations woman was subject to after the Revolution. This would consequently help, I speculated, in the decoding of the still fuzzy and cryptic changes brought by the Revolution in regard to women.

The critical discussion of the Islamist construction of woman on Facebook has been both a challenging and an exciting process because of two key factors. First, it is true that social media articulated an increasingly rich field of research data throughout the last decade. Yet, the deployment of Facebook for the study of interdisciplinary feminist questions, especially in relation to the Muslim-Arab World, is still under-explored. Second, the Tunisian Revolution was a considerably *new* socio-political phenomenon during the first years of the planning for and the conduct of my thesis. In spite of the increasing scholarly interest in this Revolution and its aftermath during the last four years, the focus has rapidly shifted from Tunisia into other ‘Arab Spring’ settings, most notably that of Tahrir Square in Egypt. The shift, however, has not been only in regard to the setting: research questions also became centralised on the topic of democratisation. This centralisation was largely at the expense of other critical concerns including women’s situation and rights. Therefore, the combination of a relatively innovative source of data (Facebook) and a recent socio-political phenomenon (the Tunisian post-revolutionary transition) crystallised into what I earlier described as a challenging and an exciting process of critical analysis. This thesis is among the first works to study the post-‘Arab Spring’ Islamist discourse about woman on the digital platform of Facebook.<sup>221</sup>

My commitment to the principle of gender equality in particular and social justice in general formed the broad methodological foundations of my thesis. As I perceive research as an effective path for uncovering, challenging, and changing gender inequalities, I sought a framework compatible with these goals. I opted for critical discourse analysis (CDA),

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marked by the promotion of an influential Facebook discourse in relation to women. This discourse claimed offering an alternative and ‘authentic’ understanding of women’s rights.

<sup>221</sup> For more on other works about post-‘Arab Spring’ and Women, please see Chapter I, section 1.

especially, but not only, for its distinctive effectiveness in the decoding of socio-political and politicised material, and its accommodation with different feminist theories for the study of women's issues. CDA, combined with a myriad of feminist critical works, crystallised both a complex and flexible methodological framework. It offered me the opportunity of tackling the different levels of meaning of the data I analysed. CDA also allowed me to challenge the meaning produced from-within the data. My thesis, I argue, succeeded to a significant extent, through the use of CDA, in the production of an in-depth analytical-critical paradigm of research. Yet, I also encountered certain challenging complications, which I am keen to, at a first stage, critically reflect on in this concluding chapter. I then shift into a discussion of the different forms of knowledge I have developed in this work. In doing this, I shed light on the arguments I have drawn together about the Islamist construction of woman on Facebook, and I spell out how I attempted to denaturalise these constructions. I negotiate, as a final step, the importance of my work, and how it can expand into and contribute to further international and multidisciplinary research, especially about women.

**A Muslim woman researching Islamists and women in a Western milieu and in a critical *époque*: the turbulent journey**

Without being aware of, and able to critically reflect on, the challenges of forming knowledge, we are unable to make solid claims about the ideas, meaning, and arguments our research has gradually drawn together. A suitable place for the discussion of challenges would, ideally, be in the methodology chapter, where methodological complications are being negotiated. Yet, I could not see that happening. My challenges kept, in effect, dramatically evolving and shifting back forth, in many ways and in different forms, over the whole period of four years of research so that I came to perceive these challenges as rather culminating conclusions within and beyond the boundaries of my methodology and even of my thesis as a whole. My challenges were *really* about what and how have become of my research and of me, the individual/ researcher, over a hyper-critical four years-phase of personal experiences, and of national and international changes.

I conducted my PhD in the midst of my first ever shift from the Tunisian 'I' to the international 'they', and from the scholar who is interested in women's issues to the committed academic feminist. As to Tunisia, my research, also about Tunisia, took place during a crucial turning point in which I could see '[...] a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long, long years to come, I [also] see the evil of this time and of the previous time of

which this is the natural birth' (Dickens 2000, p.486). I saw an exciting Tunisian transition, promising democratic achievements, and new rights; but I also witnessed tense ideological conflicts, terror, and new forms of oppression. All Tunisian 'triumphs and defeats' were occurring in parallel.

At the international level, however, many other things, with a great impact on my researcher-self and research, happened. My thesis coincided, among other events, with the 2015 tragic attacks in Paris, the war in Syria, the military overthrow of the government of the Egyptian Brotherhood, the rise of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), the civil war in Libya, the 2016 US historic elections, and finally, all those debates going on about democracy, terror, Islam and Muslims. My four years of research were, obviously, so eventful that they could not but influence my thesis. In the face of this evolving self and world, I, the individual (and) researcher, have been, repeatedly and differently, challenged.

My colleague, who is a Muslim woman herself, tended to ask me, usually after conferences I presented in and drafts I submitted, whether I spoke positively about, and even defended, Islamic values in relation to woman, in the face of the accusations of a 'hostile West'. I always felt like it was my compulsory duty, according to my colleague, to be sound and defensive. I needed, every time, to explain to and remind her that I researched on *Islamism and not Islam*. The boundaries between the two concepts, though, seemed to be always blurred for my colleague. Researching women in a Muslim country is associated, almost always, with the question of Islam's treatment of women, even if this is not an explicit question of the research. My neighbor, a white educated middle-class liberal man, shared the concerns of my Muslim woman friend. He, likewise, tended to remind me every time we met, about the importance of building confidence and making compromise between my work and the Islamist rhetoric. My colleague and neighbor were not my only interlocutors to show reserved, rather cautious, attitudes toward my 'research intentions' in relation to Islamism and woman. Certain Islamist relatives and acquaintances in Tunisia could not also help expressing their suspicion about a thesis on *ISLAMISM* being conducted in the *WEST*.

These concerns and suspicions that I encountered had, especially at the beginnings of my research, confined me to the corner. I asked myself: 'why am I not free to decide on my theoretical and analytical perspectives and to draw together my arguments and conclusions the way I conceptualise them? Why am I often pushed, advised, or gently recommended by interlocutors, mostly but paradoxically whites or Islamists, to be considerate, compromising,

apologetic, and neutral in outlining my ideas and discussing my analysis (in relation to the Tunisian Islamist discourse about woman), even when I think I can argue for the strength and relevance of these ideas and analysis? What makes me susceptible to prejudice in the eyes of these individuals, which contributes in turn, at least implicitly, to my development of a sense of self-oppression and self-censorship over my work?'. After a considerably long phase of inner discomfort, I finally decided to look critically into the reasons behind, the limitations of, and the ways through, my problematic stand.

Being a Muslim woman researcher is one central factor, I found out, for being a likely target of caution. I, in effect, identify with Winter's (2006) contemplation of how problematic it is for a Muslim woman-scholar to research on Islam-related issues from a feminist perspective and especially, I would add, in a Western milieu.<sup>222</sup> This woman-researcher may probably be, Winter argues, 'criticized as Western and imperialist' (2006, p.97). Technically, the Islamic perspective on woman's rights has often been conceptualized, especially in and by the West, as misogynist and oppressive; the reason which has widely 'stifled and disempowered' (Sanchez 2014, p. 1) Muslim women seeking gender equality in Muslim countries. Feminism in Muslim societies rather became, at many instances, connotative of both a hostile and a demonising rhetoric on how Islam treats women.

After the retreat of Western colonial powers from Muslim countries in what came to be known as the post-WWII independence waves, the unfavorable understanding of the concept of feminism intensified in Muslim countries, partly for strategic reasons. For instance, certain socio-political groups including Islamists in Tunisia, who appeared as late as more than a decade after the Tunisian independence, construed feminism as the remaining landmark of imperialist Francophone oppression. Rejecting feminism was, accordingly, portrayed by Islamists as the 'glorious' rejection of embedded forms of colonialism. This probably explains why women's issues, notably their bodies and rights, are essentialised in Islamist mega narratives of antagonism between the values of the West versus Islam. In my thesis for example, I spelled out how Islamists essentialised woman in their discursive opposition with the West. I highlighted how Islamist rhetoric, vocally patriarchal at times, was championed as a means for the preservation of 'authentic' Islamic family values against degenerating and loose Western perspectives about woman and family.

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<sup>222</sup>To avoid confusion, and to the best of my knowledge, Winter is not a Muslim scholar, but she discusses the mentioned problematic from an observational perspective.

Yet, there are also multiple instances when Western powers, like Islamists, mobilised the issue of woman in their intervention in some Islamic zones, perhaps most famously, the post 9/11 US intervention in Afghanistan (Sanches, 2014). Certain works (see for example: Hussein, 2008; Sanches, 2014 ) discuss how prominent Western men and, interestingly, women like Oprah Winfrey, Cherie Blair and Nora Bush construed the US intervention in Afghanistan as a means for the liberation of the Afghani woman and the promotion of egalitarian gender values, which were, apparently, Western values. In doing this, Hussein (2008) and Sanches (2014) argue that all these prominent Western women and men, did not liberate Afghani women. Instead, they broadened the gap between Afghani feminist women activists and their societies since these women came to be seen, by many of their own fellow-country women and men, as Western allies complicit in the international ‘conspiracy’ against Islam.

The question that a Muslim woman researcher committed, like myself, to gender equality needed to pose in the midst of this West-Islam antagonism, and before taking a clear stance, was: ‘to be or not to be [?]’ (Shakespeare 2000, III: 1, p. 3). Should I claim my academic freedom, and research the way I see as compatible with my understanding of my topic without being oppressed by this worldwide dichotomy of the West and Islam? Or should I, rather, not be as ‘blind’ to and as detached from the world as to ignore the presence of some problematic propaganda about Islam in the West, which is productive of either and only demonising or apologetic views about the question of Islam and woman? One of my two sisters, who I always perceived as a worldly lively woman entirely uninterested in all questions of politics and religion and so on and who, unlike me, accumulated solely a Francophone and scientific education and hardly ever learnt a single thing about England except, probably, how Princess Diana or Queen Elizabeth II looked like, came to address me one day saying:

Imagine what would have happened if the man who killed the woman politician in Britain were Muslim?!

My sister was referring to the murder of Jo Cox though she could not, obviously, memorize her name. This rhetorical question my sister posed struck me as a real shock in the midst of the writing of my thesis in England. My sister, the woman I always perceived as belonging to an abstract timeline and space and who I heartily envied, at many instances, for seeming to have no concerns or questions to address to the big world beyond the boundaries of the busy everyday life, finally fell to earth, and even started speculating about the critical situation of her Muslimness. This was, to me, an alarm bell about the sensitivity and also trickiness of

being Muslim, woman, and researching on Islam-related issues. After all, the problematic Western propaganda targeting Islam turned out to be, by all means, real; I can't go on pretending that I do not see it, and that it does not exist.

Between my strive for a soundly free-oriented critical academic journey toward knowledge on the one hand, and a world getting full of prejudice against one of the aspects of both my identity and my thesis (Islam, Islamism and Islam, and Islam in relation to woman) on the other hand, my thoughts and hopes lurched.

It is true that Hamlet once contemplated: 'to be, or not to be, that is the question' (Shakespeare 2000, III: 1, p. 3). Yet, Hamlet also, and after all, decided: 'I must be cruel, only to be kind' (Shakespeare 2000, IV: 3, p.8). I decided not to be 'blind' anymore to certain Western generalization and stereotyping of Islam; yet, I also decided to claim my right to a form of knowledge free from 'oppressive' pre-conceptualizations. This choice meant making use of, instead of being oppressed by, dichotomies and stereotypes targeting one of the aspects of my upbringing and identity and research, namely Islamic values. I commenced perceiving my work as rather a valuable academic opportunity for the tracking and negotiation of the boundaries and also interplay of the different representations of Muslimness.<sup>223</sup> I here allude to the way the Muslim-self and rhetoric are represented and interplayed in Western Discourse (especially the discourse of Orientalism and partly that of the War on Terror) and the post-revolutionary Islamist discourse, in regard to the question of woman. By now, and at the end of my research, I can hardly claim that I succeeded in fully eradicating the pressure I feel inside and also when researching because of who I am, where I am, and what I research on. Yet, I argue that this tracking and negotiation were helpful in the identification of the different generated apparatuses of knowledge about Islam(-ism) and woman, ways of assessing and challenging them, and hence ways of attempting to challenge my own oppression. One way of challenge that I employed was identifying, assessing, and denaturalising knowledge.

### **How I identified and denaturalised Islamists conceptualisations of woman on Facebook**

In order to spell out the Islamist constructions of woman on Facebook, I conducted an in-depth analysis of a small scale representative group of posts and interactions to them. These posts and comments dealt with woman's dress code, moral conduct, and feminist activism. When I commenced collecting my data regarding the first issue, I had in mind to research on

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<sup>223</sup>Representation as defined by Fairclough (please see chapter II, section 2.)

woman's dress code, broadly speaking. Yet, it was the myriad of posts and responses to posts that kept pushing me forward to the more specific dress code of the veil (*hijab*). This keen interest in the issue of the veil, most noticeably by Islamist *men* and not women participants, was not spotted only in the posts and comments that focused on woman's dress code. Islamist administrators and commentators also approached the issue of the veil within their interactions about woman's moral conduct and feminist activism. I found out that discussions about topics other than the veil systematically shifted to become centered on the veil. This essentialisation of the veil comes as no surprise and does, by no means, split away from the early pre-revolutionary Islamist discourse of the 1970s outward. Yet, what struck me as original were both the new discursive methods digital media could provide for Islamists and the shift of the semiotic connotation of the woman with and without a veil.

Facebook allowed Islamist users to form and argue for their identities and rhetoric (as Islamists) in intriguing ways including, for example, the naming of the profile and the transcription of comments. Though Facebook regulations require the use of real names, certain Islamist users ignored this condition. I noted that some Islamist women's understanding of their (digital) identity was rather reduced to their association with their dress code, male kinship (example: Mother of, Sister of, Daughter of), and/or religious practices. As for Islamist men, they frequently tended to choose compound names after early Muslim warriors or names associated with religious practices. When Islamist men used real profile names, they were likely to opt for the Middle Eastern-pronounced and English-spelled (Latin keyboard) instead of Maghrebi-pronounced and French-spelled forms of their names. The Islamist choice of all the above forms of digital identification was, as I shall argue, strategic and complicit with their linguistic interplay of French and Arabic languages as well as intertextuality between comments and religious texts. One of the administrators of *Ennahda Dégage* (En-nahda Go Away!), a Tunisian Facebook page critical of the Islamist discourse, shed light on this distinctive phenomena of digital self-representation:

Facebook names with an Islamist character: 'Proud of my Veil', 'Happy with my Veil', 'Keen on my *Niqab*', 'Devotee of the *Sunna*', 'Lion of Monotheism', 'My Beard is Nice', 'Devout in my Prayer', 'Charitable in Secret', 'Doer of (Islamic) Ablution Before Sleep', 'I Don't Bind Except in my Prayer', 'Strong with my Faith'. 2011

The digital process of identity formation, particularly in relation to the naming of the Facebook profile, seemed to serve as one discursive method for the expression and further consolidation of the Islamist rhetoric. In addition to the naming of private profiles, Islamists

applied a digital linguistic interplay. Arabic and French languages and keyboard transcriptions were used interchangeably, and most importantly strategically, in their constructions of women with and without a veil. While Arabic was employed for the description of the woman who wears a veil, French was employed for the woman who is without a veil. Arabic, a language widely associated with Islamic texts and culture, provided the veiled woman with more religious credibility and ‘authenticity’. A woman without a veil, described through French language and Latin keyboard, was radically detached from the Tunisian ‘Islamic’ culture, and assimilated with Francophonism.

My findings suggest that the post-revolutionary Islamist construction of woman was not only marked by the new discursive possibilities Islamists made use of when setting their platforms on digital media in general and Facebook in particular. I also analysed and decoded the way woman had acquired new post-revolutionary signifiers, theoretically similar but technically different from pre-revolutionary signifiers. Before the 2011 Revolution, and as I demonstrated in my critical overview in chapter II, the Islamist woman represented a flexible, often essentialised signifier, in the mega discourses of Islam, Arabism, tradition, and resistance. During the early Bourguibist era (1970s-1980s),<sup>224</sup> the Islamist woman connoted politico-religious revival. Her veiling was constructed, especially by the Islamist Group,<sup>225</sup> as a reaction against and a challenge to what Islamists called Bourguiba’s alienating Francophonism, notably his feminist reforms culminating in the 1956 Code of Personal Status (CPS). At a second stage, and during the short phase of compromise between Ben Ali and Islamists, the Islamist woman was transformed into the signifier of compromise between Islamism and the ‘modern’ regime. The Islamist woman was accommodated into the discourse of feminist reform within and dependent on the Islamic wider framework of Tunisia, thus justifying the sudden Islamist acceptance of the one rejected and vehemently criticised Code of Personal Status (CPS). At a third and final stage before the 2011 Revolution, the image of the Islamist woman was transformed, for a third time, into the signifier of resistance against dictatorship. She, like her fellow feminist rebelling women, was essentialised in the national and international narratives of resistance. Clearly, the Islamist woman’s semiotic flexibility permitted her to be construed as the signifier of new Islamic

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<sup>224</sup>For more details about the Bourguibist era, women, and Islamism, please see chapter II, section 2.

<sup>225</sup>The name taken first by the En-nahda Islamist Party.

*Fath*,<sup>226</sup> harmony between Islam and modernity, and then resistance against the authoritarian Ben Ali regime.

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<sup>226</sup>*Lisan Al-Arab* provides a literal translation at first, indicating that *Fath* means, simply, the act of opening. The definition expands into the discussion of the different uses of the concept *Fath* in the Qur'an. Like Arabic words usually are, this word also has flexible meaning and multilayered levels of complexity; among which I choose to focus on the socio-religious dimensions. *Fath* is a standard Arabic concept that can be literally translated as 'opening' and/or 'liberating' a nation and a land, and is associated with the idea of political and geographical conversion to the religion of Islam. The concept of *Fath* has been used to describe the expansion of the Islamic rule and ethics from the Arab Peninsula into parts of the world including Southern Asia, Eastern Europe, and North Africa. Ever since, *Fath* became connotative of the conversion of non-Arab Muslim territories to Islam as a religious and socio-political paradigm of life. The discourse of *Fath* comprises of different discursive signifiers including radical (complete) change, holiness, conversion and triumph. *Fath*, in effect, theorises for radical change comprising of culture, politics, and society, and it assimilates these changes to *Truth* and triumph of Islamic values. Islamic *Fath*, according to this definition, seems to represent a means for the deconstruction of an already established socio-political structure and the reconstruction of a new one based on Islamic ideals.

Tunisia was among the North African countries to be 'opened' by the Islamic Fath around 670, and was converted into the Islamic religion and Arab language. Yet, the notion of 'Fath', together with its most vibrant imageries, significantly re-flourished by the return of the Islamist leader Rached Ghannouchi after 23 years of what he claimed as forced exile in London. I analyse the Facebook video that depicts the 'glorious' return of this Islamist personality in order to investigate the Islamist propagandist rhetoric. A video which was posted under the title 'the Return of the Free Man' showed Ghannouchi welcomed by a large crowd of supporters in the Tunisian airport, who sang for him *Tala'a al Badru 'Alayna* (The White Moon Rose over us):

Arabic text:

من نزيات الوداع	طلع البدر علينا
مادعا هلال داع	وجيب الشكر علينا
جئت بالهدى المطاع	أوها المبعوث نبينا
مرحباً بها خير داع	جئت شرفتم المدينة

English translation:

O the white moon rose over us  
From the valley of wada'  
And we owe it to show gratefulness  
Where the call is to Allah O you who were raised amongst us  
Coming with a word to be obeyed  
You have brought to this city nobleness  
Welcome! best caller to God's way

Tala' Albadru 'Alayna' is a folkloric Islamic 'Nasheed' (form of singing) said to date back to when partisans of the Islamic Prophet Mohammad sang it in his honour upon his arrival, victorious, at the city of Yathrib (nowadays Medina in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). The song seems to glorify the person of Muhammad as a leader, celebrate the end of the alienation and oppression of Islam in its birthplace, and finally to commemorate the beginning of the Islamic caliphate. Entering the Medina after a long period of forced exile, the newly celebrated prophet was welcomed by the above song, perceived as a Supreme Leader, and his new philosophy, namely Islam, had finally been embraced as a constitution by the people of the Medina.

Islamist Facebook comments seemed to conceptualise Ghannouchi as the post-revolutionary returning prophet with a particular emphasis on the notions of renewal, change, and holiness. Ghannouchi was portrayed as a new leading prophet who fights against the infidels in Tunisia the same way the Islamic prophet Muhammad fought against the Quraich clan who opposed him. Ghannouchi was referred to, for instance, as 'the light of Allah' (نور) (كلمة هلا) (and 'the word of Allah') (الشيخ الفاضل) (the honourable Sheikh) هلا.

In the post-revolutionary Islamist discourse on Facebook, woman, my analysis suggests, was still construed as a politicised signifier. By politicised signifier, I point to the way woman was essentialised in the discursively politicised rhetoric of Islamists. Theoretically, the woman was still portrayed as a penetrable body, through which discursive ideas, firstly and essentially, infiltrate. This high potential of infiltration Islamists associate with the body of the woman seemed to uncover both (what Islamists perceive as) the vulnerability of this body, and also its critical discursive value in terms of being both an effective and a dangerous way for the promotion of discourses. For instance, the body of the woman, in its veiled form, represented, according to comments, an efficient way for the maintenance and promotion of the Islamist ideals in general and not only those relating to women's issues. The body of the woman, in its unveiled form, represented, however, a dangerous instrument that can be utilized by different, and even opponent, discourses. Certain Islamist commentators made an explicit allusion to the female body as vulnerable to penetration, and illustrated different options for unwelcome penetration including, most significantly, sexual rape (chap. III and Chap. IV), metaphorical attack by flies (the woman is a piece of sweet in this case, chapter IV, Section 3), becoming rotten (the woman is portrayed as a fruit, chapter IV, section 3), unsanctioned sexuality (reproduction through extramarital sex chapter V, section 2), and being part of the 'Parisian club of loose smoking and alcohol-consuming women' (chapter VI, section 3).

Metaphorical language, partly manifested in the above possibilities of penetration, had been widely employed in Islamist posts and comments, and this led me to shed light on why and how metaphor represents a persistent and powerful discursive method. I found out, after a close in-depth analysis of particular metaphorical images, that metaphor has, since antiquity, drawn scholarly attention because of its very peculiar political devices. Metaphor, a wide array of researchers argue,<sup>227</sup> is effective for the communication of political ideas into the wider popular bases, and the assimilation of these ideas into common sense knowledge. Islamists seem to employ metaphors in order to reduce complex political debates into simple and memorable segments of visual imageries. For example, many Islamists, including Soumaya Ghannoushi the publisher of one of the two posts I analysed about feminist activism (chapter VI, section 3), instrumentalise the metaphor of the military conflict between the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his opponents in order to describe the relationship between

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<sup>227</sup>See the discussion of the device of metaphor in chapter VI, section 2.

Islamists on the one hand, and between unveiled women, single mothers and feminist activists on the other hand.

The employment of vibrant imageries of the conflict between Muslims led by the prophet Muhammad and their non-Muslim ‘enemies’ in the early Islamic era was one of the recurrent, most critical, and also most dangerous metaphors, for reasons I decoded. Islamists portrayed woman without a veil, a single mother, and a feminist woman activist as signifiers of the transgressing discourses and practices of ‘the enemies’ of Islam. These women, according to Islamists, represented ‘the army of losers’ (see chapter VI, section 2) who violate the Islamic ethics and promote for ethical degeneration. Veiled women, wives, and Islamist activist women were portrayed, contrary to the above transgressing women, as good and devoted Muslims who are signifiers of stability, family values, and social solidarity.

I found out that this Islamist construction of woman through metaphorical imageries and in relation to their dress code, sexual reproduction, and approach to women’s rights was both polarising and banalising of women’s problems. My analysis uncovered, for example, that the issue of single motherhood transcended, and often had too little to do with the question of ethics and morality. Tunisian single mothers, I unveiled, were overwhelmingly brought up in widely conservative and moralistic environments (for instance: the countryside). They also tended to be tolerably religious or, at least, to adopt no strategic non-conformist perspectives about sexuality and reproduction. I found that these mothers, overwhelmingly impoverished and poorly educated, were rather frequently subject to sexual exploitation through a tactic of sex in return of promises of marriage, or by being sexually abused by the stronger male employer or relative. Because of these factors, I strongly argue that the Islamist polarisation of these mothers as politicised signifiers of moral transgression was strategic, misleading and oppressive. While these women were instrumentalised in the Islamist propaganda against the left, little attention, however, was provided to the discussion and challenge of their sexual and social exploitation and marginalisation within the patriarchal order.

In drawing together the above arguments, I noticed that the language used by the publishers of the posts (administrators) and commentators was overwhelmingly assertive and polarising. There seemed, for instance, to be no room for the discussion, or even consideration, of a different non-assertive perspective about the veil, the moral conduct of women, and feminist activism. Islamist pages, as far as my analysis revealed, hosted tense polarised debates. Commentators would express their perspectives, assert them, and attack different

perspectives, often offensively through strong language. This kind of Islamist Facebook rhetoric could hardly be spotted in the official civil society and political discourse, especially internationally after the 2011 Revolution. For example, I compared the difference between the Facebook and international rhetoric employed by Soumaya Ghannoushi, an Islamist woman who publishes on Facebook and also contributes to international newspapers including the British *Guardian* (see chapter VI, Section 2). Ghannoushi's discourse, it turned out, was highly metaphorical and polarising on Facebook, while analytic and sympathetic in *The Guardian*. She, for example, described secular feminist activists on Facebook as the loose women of 'the Parisian Club'. In *The Guardian*, however, Ghannoushi referred to the same women as 'Tunisian sisters' (!). Clearly, the Islamist construction of women was not only banalising and polarising, but it was also indicative of a double discourse strategy in which entirely different discourses were transmitted to Facebook users on the one hand, and the wider Tunisian and international public on the other hand.

These arguments that I have drawn together made me aware of the way my thesis can be situated not only within a Tunisian but also within an international context, and contribute to multiple fields of scholarships including, most importantly, social media, gender and woman, political Islam, and international relations.

### **My contribution to wider and multi-disciplinary further research**

My thesis has contributed, beyond what I planned at first, to the scholarship of social media. My research approach to Facebook has, in effect, developed throughout the thesis. This digital site was initially my main focus. I had been fascinated by how forms of communication on Facebook contribute to the production and assimilation of mediated representations of women in Islamist posts and comments. Yet, I gradually shifted my approach, as I discussed in the introductory and methodology chapters. My focus became, rather, centered on how ideas are formed. Facebook, in turn, was reduced, in my understanding, into a site of production. What strikes me as both surprising and exciting at the concluding reflections of this thesis is, however, the significance of my shifts in usage and understanding of Facebook. I can now see the importance of Facebook as a specific site for the construction of meaning, and in this way I now see my work as contributing to current developments in the studies of digital cultures. I here point to the way that this site, even though approached as a basic text, unveiled significant apparatuses of knowledge about the distinctiveness of digital self-representation, mediated representations of objects of discourse, and the formation process of meaning. As I

noted above, Islamist commentators made use of the digital space to mediate their identities. This was articulated in how commentators chose their names, profile pictures, written language, and style of typing. For instance, my analysis uncovered the way some Islamist women mediated their identities through their kinship to male figures such as a father, husband, or brother (see mother of Amine ‘Umm Amine’ in Chapter IV, section 2). Such a strategic self-identification is quite connotative in terms of how the Islamist woman conceptualises herself online. I also discussed the way objects of discourse, namely women, were represented through the interplay of Arabic and Latin keyboards. This interplay, afforded thanks to the technologies of the digital space, embedded a semiotic mediation of women. For instance, Islamists represented feminist activists as semiotic signifiers of Francophonism through the use of French keyboard when describing them.

Another fascinating finding was, doubtlessly, the discursive possibilities and choices the Facebook platform could offer, and that are different from other traditional platforms including newspapers and television. For instance, I identified the way Ghannouchi, the publisher of the second post (chapter VI, section 2) publishes strikingly different material on Facebook on the one hand, and international newspapers such as *The Guardian* on the other hand, on the same topic: Tunisian Islamists and women. Facebook allowed the publisher to target a particular audience (for example: age category, geographical location) and produce a distinctive discourse, adapted to Facebook and not to other media platforms.

These findings, I suggest, seem to be situated within the ongoing discussion in media studies about the question of mediated representation (see for example: Dobson and Shields, 2016; Thumim, 2012). My thesis can contribute to the way research in this field attempts to decode the relation between the self and self-representation on digital platforms. I do not claim that I have specifically and/or considerably negotiated this issue, yet; I am hopeful that these digital discursive possibilities and differences I mapped would be further explored, especially in relation to the question of woman, in media (and also trans-disciplinary media) studies.

However, I consider my main contribution to be in the field of women, gender, and political Islam, especially within the realm of international academic debates. The post-‘Arab Spring’ re-emergence of Islamist movements, particularly in Tunisia, had been greatly celebrated in the world. Tunisian Islamists, together with a very wide and influential array of international figures, scholars, and media platforms, hypothesized and even argued for the democratic agenda of Tunisian Islamism, including the democratisation of their perspective on women.

Inside Tunisia, Rached Ghannouchi (2011b), perhaps the most well-known Tunisian Islamist public figure, stated, in many post-revolutionary occasions, that the Islamist movement (and particularly his party En-nahda) had undergone a thorough process of self-revision during what he described as their pre-revolutionary years of estrangement and prosecution by the Ben Ali regime. The self-revision the Islamist leader referred to comprised their conceptualization of women as well, promising a split away from their vocal patriarchal rhetoric of the 1970s and 80s. This promise was, in turn, greatly championed in international outlets. Among the most influential international figures known then for their support of Islamist groups was the US politician Hillary Clinton, who happened to be the US Foreign Secretary at the time of the Tunisian Revolution and during the early phase of transition (2009-13). Clinton described the post-revolutionary rise of Islamists as a *democratic achievement*, and vigorously promoted for the Tunisian Islamist potential of ‘[...] embracing the freedom of religion and full rights for women’ (Clinton, 2011).<sup>228</sup>

Contrary to this noticeable worldwide optimism about the democratic agenda of Tunisian Islamist movements, a wide array of prominent Tunisian scholars and/or public figures rather displayed concern. Among the so many examples, I point, for instance, to Allani<sup>229</sup> (2014) who suggested that the Islamist post-revolutionary discourse, despite consistent claims of democratic evolution, still articulates concerning, if not oppressive, rhetoric in relation to the conceptualisation of the state, pluralism, and most importantly, woman. Mohamed Talbi (2011), an acknowledged Tunisian historian and Islamologist and a public figure, expressed serious concerns about the credibility of the Islamist post-revolutionary claim of democratisation. Belhaj Hmida and Lina Ben Mhenni (2011), both famous Tunisian feminists and human rights activist women, criticized the way the post-revolutionary Islamist agenda articulated a double discourse about Tunisian woman. Clearly, there was a striking discrepancy between the overwhelming international optimism on the one hand, and national concerns on the other hand, in regard to post-revolutionary Islamist discourse. Having said that, I note that I, by no means, deny the presence of national public, media, and scholarly interest in, and even advocacy of, of the idea of an Islamist ‘democratic evolution’. Yet, I suggest that this support, especially within national media and academic premises, was significantly limited in comparison to its vigorous international counterpart.

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<sup>228</sup><https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/11/08/175985.html>.

<sup>229</sup>A Tunisian researcher on the history of Islamist movements that I referenced in Chapter II.

I was, in effect, aware of the above discrepancy between the national and international response to the question of Islamism and women even before commencing my doctoral research, and this discrepancy did not really articulate any of my questions and/or areas of interest throughout the thesis. Yet, and as arguments for as well as against the post-revolutionary shift of the Islamist conceptualisation of women started figuring occasionally in my process of data analysis, I realised that I have, unintentionally, engaged in debating this discrepancy. My thesis, it turned out, did not only attempt to spell out the central question of the Islamist post-revolutionary constructions of women on Facebook, but it also came to negotiate one persistent national and international speculation: ‘Have Islamists *really* shifted their discursive attitudes in post-revolutionary Tunisia?’. I implicitly approached this ‘unplanned’ question through my discussion of the different ideas, discursive methods, and naturalisation mechanisms Islamists, or rather who came to be renamed as *Arab Spring Islamists* (in the sense of flourishing and change), articulated on their Facebook interaction. This discovery I made after finalising my thesis, about the discrepancy I unintentionally questioned throughout my thesis, has, excitingly, unveiled the new areas and apparatuses of knowledge my work could expand into, and complement. It, on the other hand, raised my awareness about the new areas of knowledge my challenges as a researcher expanded into as well. My work was no longer significant only within the boundaries of Tunisia, Facebook, Tunisian woman, or even the broader values of gender equality as a whole. My work, together with its conceptual and empirical challenges, shifted into, and I hope it will contribute to, a wider multi-disciplinary and international research context.

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