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# The Maghreb Maquiladora: Gender, Labor, and Socio-Economic Power in a Tunisian Export Processing Zone

Claire Therese Oueslati-Porter

University of South Florida, [clairelati@hotmail.com](mailto:clairelati@hotmail.com)

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The Maghreb Maquiladora: Gender, Labor, and Socio-Economic Power in a  
Tunisian Export Processing Zone

by

Claire Oueslati-Porter

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Anthropology  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Kevin Yelvington, Ph.D.  
Chair: Stephen Thornton, Ph.D.  
Mark Amen, Ph.D.  
Maria Crummett, Ph.D.  
Susan Greenbaum, Ph.D.  
Rebecca Zarger, Ph.D.

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## **Dedication**

I thank my parents, Suzanne and Terry, for instilling in me a belief in social justice, and a curiosity about the world. To my grandmothers, Margaret and Eunice, who told me their stories about living in New Guinea and Algeria. I would like to thank my husband, Maher, for supporting me in this endeavor. I thank my husband's family, Khadouja, Khadari, Burhan, Nouredine, Talel, Awatef, and Kalthoum, for their thousands of kindnesses. I thank my sister in law, Kalthoum, for being there, for enjoying the time (and being patient) with Faris and me in Bizerte. Also to Heather, who helped me consider from multiple perspectives the lives of Tunisian women.

I dedicate this dissertation to Faris, who, at two and a half, made the field experience what it was. To our long evening walks/stroller rides through Bizerte.

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## Abstract

This study is about Tunisian women's work and lives in the present era of economic neoliberalism. The focus is women in the city of Bizerte, Tunisia, both those who work in Bizerte's export processing zone (EPZ), as well as those who work outside it. This study is a qualitative examination of formal and informal employment, set inside and outside of women's traditional political and economic domain, the home. Through ethnography of women's work and lives, this study's purpose is to contribute evidence against conflating women's "empowerment" with incorporation into global production. However, this study also lends itself to considerations of the possibilities for exertions of power, powers that women in Bizerte now seek that opened through the forces of globalization.

## Introduction

The pregnant woman rubs her belly and begs the *cheffa*, Madame Hayatt, to let her sit down. Madame Hayatt calls over the manager, Bechir, who is smoking with the other men in the doorway. Bechir approaches the women's work area with his cigarette in his mouth. "Gucem wants a break again," says Madame Hayatt. Bechir rolls his eyes and tries to walk past Guceem, but she steps into his path. She looks him in the eyes, holds her protruding abdomen, and says, "but I have pain." Bechir replies, "You ask for time to rest every day. Maybe you would prefer to be at home? I can get another girl in here to take your place in an hour. Are you ready to go?" Guceem stares down at the floor. Still rubbing her belly, she steps to the side, and Bechir walks past her. Madame Hayatt walks toward another work table, and says to herself "God, help me."

Gucem returns to her table and picks up her push pins. She shouts across the table to her workmate, Faizeh, "It is so hot, like we are in Hell!" Faizeh has push pins gripped between her lips. She makes eye contact with Guceem for a second, and then she slides the fabric pattern back across the table to Guceem to fold. Guceem continues, "Bechir has a list of other girls who will take our jobs... (She sucks her teeth). Madame Hayatt, she is just as bad. They use us, all they do is use us."

This statement could have come from a historical study of colonial Tunisia, in certain ways. It could have been said by a Tunisian peasant woman



about her husband or in-laws, who would have expected her to work from dawn to dusk doing menial, grueling farm tasks. This statement could have been made by an urban *Tunisoise* woman pressured by her husband or in-laws to weave fabrics on a home loom to be sold by kinsmen in the *souk*, threatening violence or repudiation divorce if she did not labor quickly enough. This statement also could have been said by a woman in the post-1956, independent Tunisia, where women's circumstances had not changed as much as was promised under Habib Bourguiba's Personal Status Codes (PSC's).

This study is about Tunisian women's work and lives in the present era of economic neoliberalism. I focus on women in the city of Bizerte, Tunisia, both those who work in Bizerte's export processing zone (EPZ), as well as those who work outside it. I examine formal and informal employment, set inside and outside the home. I aim to contribute to the body of anthropology of gender in factories. Through ethnography of women's work and lives, I hope to add evidence to against conflating women's "empowerment" with incorporation into global production. However, I also consider the possibilities for exertions of power that women in Bizerte now seek that have opened through the forces of globalization. I root this analysis in the context of women's contemporary labor and cultural practice related to the pre-colonial and colonial Tunisian past.

Rural and urban Tunisian women's textile work is a culturally normative form of gendered labor, a common socio-historic cultural feature along all shores of the Mediterranean (e.g., Barber 1994; Collins 1993). While the fabric itself has changed little, the context, the EPZ, is different from the traditional milieu of

women's work. The argument that women's work is essentially the same, that there is some sort of cultural continuity, obfuscates the importance of the economic system in which labor takes place (Beneria 1987; Yelvington 1995).

Things have changed in Tunisia, especially the gendered circumstances of labor. The percentage of women in paid labor rose from six percent in 1966 to twenty-five percent in 2003 (Moghadam 2005). The proletarianization of women is under way, and its impacts on culture are complicated (Wilson 2004). In traditional textile work, Tunisian women have been and are exploited by their families; this is a normative feature of the patriarchal Arab kinship structure (Abu-Lughod 1993; Abu-Zahra 1986; Barber 1994; Hijab 1996; Holmes-Eber 2003; Moghadam 2005). In this stratified gender system, women do the knitting, weaving, loom-work and embroidery in the domestic space which is so heavily gendered in the Maghreb. However, women have little control over wealth in terms of the means of production or the terms of sale, arguably making them a proletariat in the kinship system (Hijab 1996; Hochschild 1968; Lazreg 1994; Tekaki 2006). While there is inherent exploitation in this patriarchal system, women also have opportunities to wield power, especially through motherhood and kinship (Abu-Lughod 1993; Abu-Zahra 1997; Holmes-Eber 2003). The dynamics of women and power through traditional textiles is evidenced in Tunisian director Moufida Tlatli's (2000) film, *The Season of Men*, which details the conflicts between women in a Tunisian family over labor and autonomy. Importantly, the film is a condemnation of women's subordination.

In the traditional system of women's work, Tunisian women were protected by male kin. Feminist critique provides a framework for understanding this protection as a kind of protection racket, but nonetheless this protection does keep women safe from certain forms of exploitation, at least at the hands of non-kin. Thus, the historical traditional system of Tunisian women's work meant that most women's exploitation by Beylical or French colonials would have been buffered by male relatives, as were any interactions outside the kin group. Thus, exploitation in respect of the traditional patriarchal kinship system was mediated by a set of socio-religious, moral obligations to kinswomen.<sup>1</sup>

These moral codes and obligations influence the capitalism of the Tunisian EPZ. They are also encountered by women and men in many ways. Women's moral reputations are thrown into question in the EPZ's. Similar precariousness of female morality has been documented in much extant EPZ research. In the Mexican *maquiladoras*, factory girls are often sexually exploited by North American managers; simultaneously, *factory girls*, and all women are at increased risk of sexual assault by men in their own communities, who perceive women as morally loose (Beneria 1992; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Haley 2001; Tiano 1994; Wood 2010). Similarly, in his research in a Trinidad factory, Yelvington (1995) found that women were concerned about their sexual reputations, some choosing to wear respectable long skirts as a sign of their strict sexual morality condemning other workers who chose to wear tight-fitting pants to work.

At the same time that Tunisian women's sexual reputations are thrown into question by working in EPZ's, unprecedented forms of power are available to

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<sup>1</sup> All names have been fictionalized in order to protect confidentiality.

them outside the traditional kinship-based labor system, albeit access is thwarted. It is at this point of conflict, at the nexus of two patriarchies- the Tunisian Arab traditionalism that has experienced resurgence under structural adjustment and global capitalist logic and endeavor- that Tunisian factory women labor.

Conflict surrounds hegemonic moral ideology of Tunisian women's labor. What is hegemonic in Tunisia is submission to male kin; women in the EPZ seek opportunities to subvert this normative form of dominance in a venue where kinship rules often run counter to the disciplines of production. However, women's attempts to subvert male dominance occur in a socio-historic context of a re-emergent moral economy of peasant patronage fomented by structural adjustment and privatization in Ben Ali's Tunisia (Bourdieu 1972; King 2003). Maltreatment of women workers in Tunisia's EPZ's would not be anomalous, except that it is committed by non-kin, and ultimately at the behest of foreign (Western and male) owners. While my goal is not to detail human rights abuses in the EPZ, the subject is important to this research in that maltreatment in the EPZ is the result of women's pursuit of power outside the traditional milieu of kin-based women's work, a zone of production designed to optimize exploitation by selectively playing on Tunisian culture's sexism and denying the moral obligations that would impede women's labor efficiency. Because the women workers in the Tunisian EPZ labor under a patriarchy, they are often blamed for their own abuse, while at the same time their paychecks are taken by family members, to be used for marital and familial expenses. In this study, I seek to elaborate the point of conflict for Tunisian EPZ workers, between re-emerging

patriarchal traditionalism and equally (albeit different) patriarchal global capitalism. This conflict extrapolates the meanings of capitalism on culture (Beneria 1992; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Freeman 2000; King 2003, Ong 1987; Wilson 2004; Yelvington 1995).

Gucem's statement comes from 2008. She is a 36-year-old Tunisian factory worker, the child of farm workers who were made redundant in the 1990's as the Ben Ali government privatized farm collectives which Bourguiba's administration had orchestrated in post-colonial Tunisia (King 2003; Perkins 2004). Gucem, her husband, and two children live in a three-room apartment on the outskirts of Bizerte. Gucem was pregnant, hot, exhausted from being on her feet for six hours (with at least six more hours until quitting time). Perhaps her rage about the manager Bechir and the *cheffa* (female manager) was mostly release, but her outburst prompted me to pose a question considered by other researchers of global production: how much have things changed since Tunisia was a colony (Black 2001; Kopinak 1996; Yelvington 1995)?

Since Tunisia's independence in 1956 and Habib Bourguiba's imposition of the personal status codes (PSC's) upon the newly-independent Tunisian people in 1958, women's rights increased in certain ways, but not in the substantive ways that Tunisian feminists had worked for during the struggle for independence from France. Ben Ali's neo-liberal restructuring of the Tunisian economy which started in the late 1980's and ended with the Jasmine Revolution, (January 14, 2011) did alter the PSC's at the behest of the women's ministry, to further emancipate Tunisian women (Charrad 2003; Moghadam 2005). The so-called

Jasmine Revolution was a popular mass protest which took place throughout Tunisia, and focused on the corruption of the Ben Ali government and the deteriorating economic situation of the lower classes. As a result of the massive peaceful protests, Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia, where he remains. Despite the amendments to the PSC's, there was a de facto deterioration of the masses of Tunisian women's lives because of the devaluation of the Tunisian dinar and the hikes in price of staples (Moghadam 2005). Meanwhile neoliberal economic restructuring meant that employment of men who could support a family waned, and women were "sold" as cheap and (supposedly) docile workers to multinational corporations (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Moghadam 2005).

Women in pre-colonial and colonial Tunisia would have been working in their kin groups as herders and agriculturalists. In the Berber and Arab patriarchal systems, they would have been relegated to much of the drudge jobs like collecting manure, weeding and threshing, and childcare as well as household work like cleaning and cooking; in addition, they would have been producing textiles for their men folk to sell in markets. They were under the protection but also under the threat of their male kin. These male kin would be subject to women's demands, in certain contexts of kinship. For example, sisters would be expected to be supported financially not just by their fathers but by their brothers; wives expect that men will support them financially and sexually (Lazreg 1995). Even the dominant have obligations to those beneath them in hierarchy.

While he described himself as the father of progressive modernization, the reformer of his "backward" people, Habib Bourguiba's 1956 Personal Status

Codes (PSC's) were not his creation, but were built on Tunisian feminist ideology and advocacy, and out of his shrewd understanding of how to best undermine tribal patriarchs. Tunisian feminist activism, while limited to a small intellectual elite in the capital of Tunis, is evidenced starting in the 1890's with women's rights advocate Shayk Muhammad Snoussi, and in the early 1900's of Abdelaziz Thaalbi, Cesar Ben Attar, and Haydi Sabai, Tahar Haddad and the Young Tunisians, the Dusturians, and Neo-Dusturian political movements (Perkins 2004: 77). Yet Bourguiba, a Neo-Dusturian hero of revolutionary Tunisia, gave little credit to this feminist legacy for the creation of the PSC's. In his characteristic arrogance, Bourguiba declared himself the primogenitor of the gender reforms of the PSC's, and for the whole creation of modern Tunisia (Gana 2010).

The PSC's have been the subject of much research and political discourse in and about Tunisia because they changed the legal status of Tunisian women in the civil, socio-economic, and public sphere. However, the PSC's are also criticized for stopping at the threshold of the Tunisian home, in essence protecting the source of the most insidious forms of Tunisian sexism. Indeed, Bourguiba stipulated in the PSC's that women should obey their husbands. This command would be removed by Ben Ali in 1992, albeit in an attempt at "global impression management," not feminism (Rushing 2001).

Bourguiba's PSC's are championed as proof that an Arab Muslim country can be part of the modernist trajectory with regard to the woman question. Indeed, the Tunisian PSC's are often cited as among the most progressive codes adopted by any of the post-colonial nations (e.g., Labidi 2005). The codes

forbade minor girls from being placed in arranged marriages, and forbade polygyny. However the codes did not cross the threshold of the nexus of male supremacy, the home. As has been seen in other cases, such as the status codes enacted by Castro's regime in Cuba, laws which seek to change or enforce gender equity are often ornamental for a government, an attempt to show that reform and justice have already been achieved, and to obfuscate meaningful criticism about endemic sexism (Luciak 2005). Such is the case with the Tunisian PSC's, which are incessantly evoked by government officials when questions about women's rights are posed. The terse answer is usually that the *woman problem* was already solved. However, as Gana (2010) posits, the problem of gender lies with melancholy, masculinity-bound Tunisian men. The PSC's were used by both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali administrations to silence criticisms, occidental and oriental, of persistent sexism in society. For example, reports of domestic abuse and honor killings have increased in Tunisia in the last two decades, an indication of the continuance of patriarchal oppression. The higher reports may also suggest that women are less likely to accept abuse from male kin (Labidi 1995; Moghadam 2005).

Other than illegalization of polygyny and divorce by repudiation, Bourguiba's PSC's gave little focus to the dismantling of the inner workings of patriarchy in Tunisia. Bourguiba himself argued that women should be emancipated so that they could be better mothers, motherhood being the central role of women in the traditional patriarchal system that was essential to the very peasant moral economy that Bourguiba wanted to modernize (Charrad 2003;



Gana 2010; King 2003). In speeches, Bourguiba warned women not to take their new freedoms as a sign that they should shirk the duties of motherhood. But under what circumstances did a questioning of gender first arise in Tunisia, which would seem an unlikely place (according to what is believed to be known about gender roles in the Mediterranean) for feminism.

In the 1920's, the renegade Zeituna Mosque scholar and trades union organizer Tahar Haddad re-interpreted Qu'ranic passages, building on a larger movement toward liberal interpretation of Islamic text. The woman question in Islamic society had been fomented by Shayk Muhammad Snoussi, who in 1897 published "The Flower's Blooming, or a Study of Woman in Islam," which promoted women's rights as extant within Islam, principally the Qu'ranic emphasis on education and intellectualism as an equal obligation for men and women. Fifteen years later, Abdelaziz Thaalbi, Cesar Ben Attar, and Haydi Sabai published "The Koran's Liberal Spirit," arguing that Islam was a tolerant, intellectual religion, and promoted the education of girls, as well as the removal of the Tunisian version of the *hijab*, the *sifsaree*. In 1930, Haddad continued advocacy of liberal interpretation of the Qu'ran and Sunnah found in nineteenth century scholars like Kheirredine Pasha, Ibn Abi Dhiaf, Muhammad Snoussi, and Salem Bouhageb, and published the book that got him ousted from the Zeituna Mosque, "Our Women in Sharia and Society." In Haddad's interpretation of the Qu'ran and women's role in Islamic society, he advocated that Muslim women had not been able to reach their full potential. His work against polygyny influenced Habib Bourguiba, although Bourguiba can be understood to have used

anti-polygyny for his own political aims (Charrad 2003; Gana 2010). Haddad argued that if God said there could not be justice and equality between co-wives, then God was *against* the indigenous polygyny of the Arabian Peninsula during the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammed.

Haddad was cast out of the Zeitouna Mosque by the elder imams, but he remained a popular hero to the Tunisian people because of his feminist interpretations, as well as his revolutionary activism against Beylical and French colonial dominance (Perkins 2004). Despite Haddad's and other Islamic feminist scholars' wish to re-interpret the Qu'ran against patriarchal bias, Bourguiba did not credit Haddad or feminists, but rather he took on the patriarchal approach, that he was the seminal creator of post-colonial modern Tunisia. Bourguiba's motivations for condemning the veil for women were not the result of feminist conviction so much as a belief that modernity could only be achieved if the Tunisian people gave up traditional dress (Perkins 2004:138).

Revisions to the PSC's were enacted in the early 1990's by Ben Ali's administration, mostly dealing with divorce, alimony, and minor married girls' rights. The National Union of Tunisian Women's web page details the amendments to the original PSC's. It is important that the revisions include the rejection of the submission of wives to their husbands, inserting instead that the two spouses "must treat each other with kindness and consideration, and assist each other in the management of the household and the affairs of their children." Further, a mother must consent to the marriage of a daughter who is a minor, but also that married girls who are still legal minors have the right to manage their

own private life and affairs, and that men who shirk their alimony payments be prosecuted, and that family court judges receive training in sociological and psychological aspects of gender equality. Legal changes to the PSC's, however, do not enforce these changes; indeed, legal codes on gender can be manipulated by the state, especially by a "bully praetorian state" like Ben Ali's Tunisia, to avoid contending with the realities of sexism (Clement 2010).

For example, the PSC's outlawed discriminatory hiring practices, supposedly clearing the way for women in paid labor. However, equalized hiring practices have not actually made for an equalized work environment in Tunisia (Moghadam 2005). This is partly to do with the continued sexism of mostly male owners of the means of production and the expectation in Tunisian society that women's primary job is reproductive labor in the home, which Moghadam conceptualizes as a cultural contract in MENA countries (2005). This cultural contract is a moral system (not specific to one religion) where women are dependent on men and secluded in the private sphere of the home; the moral justification for this system is maintained through women's chronic underemployment and low wages.

Through the 1990's and the first decade of the new millennium (arguably up until the Jasmine Revolution of January 14, 2011), Tunisia underwent economic restructuring, and more women work in the waged economy than in previous eras. However, as in previous eras, women continued to make lower wages than did men. The traditionalist system of Tunisian gender stratification in cases where women were in waged labor illustrates their marginality and

exploitation (Moghadam 2005). For example, Stephen J. King's (2003) account of agricultural labor in Tebourba, Tunisia, portrays the landless women farm workers as paid less than men under the assumption that the women had male kin to provide for them. While the post-colonial Bourguiba administration attempted to socialize farms by making them collectives, Ben Ali's administration, starting in 1986, re-privatized farms, placing most land back into the hands of the old elite landowning families (Clement 2010; King 2003). King (2003) found that women were hired more often than men as menial laborers on privatized farms because they were paid less for the same jobs, based on the same traditionalist moral justification.

In the case of export processing zone (EPZ) labor force participation, proponents of globalization argue that working in these "free zones" is a boon to women's status (Ustubici 2009). Over the past three decades, proponents of neo-liberal globalization have advocated women's increased participation in paid labor as a logical step towards liberation, but anthropologists of EPZ's posit questions about the layered impacts of women's proletarianization.

Anthropologists insist that EPZ work and gender role change are fraught with many meanings, and that the assumption that formal labor participation will propel women's empowerment is problematic (Beneria 1992; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Freeman 2000; King 2003, Ong 1987; Wilson 2004; Yelvington 1995). By focusing on the experiences, perspectives, and actions of the people themselves, the anthropological perspective can provide a complicated answer to the question:

how do women, their families, and their society change when they labor in the global capitalist system?

The extant literature on women and development suggests a strong link between women's empowerment, family, and societal development. Instead of asking if women and society *better off* based on proletarianization, the anthropological point of entry illuminates the ways in which change in women's labor force participation sparks changes in gender, family, and community.

In the late 1980's, Zine Ben Ali took Tunisia from Habib Bourguiba in a bloodless *coup d'etat*. Ben Ali facilitated Tunisia's reorientation toward neoliberalism; Bourguiba had shifted towards structural adjustment in the early 1980's, under the coercive auspices of international lending institutions (King 2003). Neoliberal economic policy replaced the relatively protectionist and socialized governmental policies of Bourguiba's government. Ben Ali's administration signed more trade agreements with the United States and the European Union, and opened EPZ's along Tunisia's Mediterranean coast, the largest at Zarzis and Bizerte. The macroeconomic changes taking place in Tunisia affected the micro economic lives of women and their families; rural-urban migration of landless farm workers escalated in the late 1980's as socialized farms were privatized and the kinswomen of displaced farmers found in their new urban environment work in the EPZ's. These workers can be considered both fortunate and unfortunate. While Tunisia has been independent since 1956, in 2008, it is still possible to see in Tunisia's multinational production zones and society, ghosts of the colonial past.

Men work in the Bizerte EPZ as dock loaders and inventory-takers. During the Beylical and French colonial periods, most Tunisian women and men were the peons and peasantry, field workers on Ottoman, and then French, plantations (King 2003; Perkins 2006). The Ottoman period, where Beys ruled the Tunisian populace and “protected” them from being subsumed into a European realm of power, lasted from the sixteenth century through the administrative takeover of the French in 1881. Tunisian men from more powerful kinship groups were given overseer roles on these colonial plantations. They acted as an arm of colonial power. In the Z-Textiles factory, the chief manager, Bechir, is a Tunisian man from an elite, well-connected family. He holds a degree in business from University of Tunis. His sister also holds a university degree, and she is the secretary and receptionist. Their status is marked by their family’s background as “Les Bourgeoisie,” as working class Tunisians term them, marking them as different from the mostly peasantry-cum-proletariat of Tunisia. The manager’s authoritative position within the factory is not unrelated to his class and gender position in Tunisian society. While Bechir has direct authority over all women and men in the factory, including the women’s manager, Madame Hayatt. Madame Hayatt worked on the line as a pattern and fabric cutter before she was offered the ladies’ manager position. Like a mother in law who exerts discipline on her daughters in law, she replicates a hierarchy of women that oppressed her.

Bechir’s authority over Madame Hayatt and the women workers is exercised in ways that reflect abusive hetero-social relationships in the Tunisian

kinship system. As authoritarian figures, Tunisian mothers-in-law may abuse their daughters-in-law outright, but more endemic to these relationships is the symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977). As in Tunisian society, these two interrelated forms of patriarchal power reproduce themselves on the factory floor. However, EPZ workers sometimes challenge these forms of domination in ways that they rarely can in the kinship system.

The owners of the factory are French and German, and they fill contracts with various European companies. In 2008 when I observed on the factory floor, the contracts were for uniforms for automobile, hospital, and medical supply companies in the European Union (EU). The two owners are business partners and come from the Bourgeoisie class of managers from Western Europe. The factory-floor workers are Tunisian and they receive wages that are lower than those available outside the EPZ for similar work; however, as unemployment has grown to nearly forty percent in Tunisia, even EPZ jobs are sought after (King 2003). For women, who are only 25% labor force participation, these jobs offer an opportunity and are in high demand (Moghadam 2005).

The occupational structure of the EPZ's mirrors the traditionalist, class and gender-based division of labor. In the factory, the female workers make such low wages that they must participate in "informal" labor, earning money on the side by sewing, baking, performing beautician services, and may even engage in prostitution. Informal economic participation, where women earn money for themselves and their households, has been part of Tunisian history (Tekaki 2006). Husbands "allow" women to earn their own money as a way to release themselves

from some of the moral burden to pay for and maintain their wives. While this gives some freedom to women, to keep and control their earnings from work on the side, it effectively subsidizes husbands and in-laws of their obligation to provide for women (Yelvington 1995). Further, much of these earnings are necessary for women considering the high rate of unemployment, currency devaluation, and the removal of subsidies on staples (Moghadam 2005).

Two colonial forces are at play in the gender relations in the EPZ's of Tunisia. During the Beylical period, Tunisians were under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, who installed beys to manage the resources of the Maghreb (Lazreg 1994; Perkins 2006). The Beys imposed the sexism of the Ottomans on Tunisian women, who were already subjugated in indigenous Berber and Arab patriarchies. Evidence of the sexual objectification of women under Beylical rule can be seen in the establishment of legal prostitution districts in most Tunisian cities, often within walking distance from religious centers. Many of these brothel districts have endured until today, and have been the subject of human rights investigations (Semerdjian 2008).

During Beylical rule, most Tunisians were agriculturalists with little say in government (King 2003; Perkins 2006). Farm women did much of the cultivating, weeding, and harvesting, but had little control over the wealth that their labor amassed, because men in the family would usually turn over produce to colonial patrons, or market it themselves. At the same time, Tunisian urban culture was also dominated by Beys and by the Tunisoise, urban families who controlled commerce and arts in the port cities (Hajeij 1997; Perkins 2006).



While the Tunisoise women were confined to the home, they labored as artisans and textile weavers. Their production was regulated by a woman's father, husband, and mother-in-law. While there are definite resonances between the dynamics of labor in the EPZ's and with Tunisia's past, there are also new phenomena in the production process taking place in this node of global production. Thus, male and female workers operate within the framework of Tunisian gender roles and class hierarchy, but they also transgress these boundaries.

What are the effects on Tunisian women's lives of working in EPZ's, and/or laboring in a globalizing, neoliberalizing economy? What are the conditions under which they labor, and how are they significant in the kinds of choices women make about their lives? The anthropological knowledge of EPZ's in Central America, the Caribbean, and Asia, collected over the last thirty years, has led to several intertwined conclusions. Women workers seek to overcome patriarchal limitations through their labor in EPZ's; sometimes they assert agency in ways that may empower them. However, they often find that their choices are limited, and that they must negotiate their freedom against the disciplines of production. My study lends support to the preponderance of skeptical conclusions about EPZ's in regards to their ability to promote economic development, gender equity, and political stability. Like other anthropologists of factory production and EPZ's, I examine Tunisian culture, especially gender and class. I describe the forms of patriarchal control found in the factory, and the symbolic violence

exerted by the managers (Bourdieu 1977). I also describe women workers' attempts to wield power on and off the factory floor, their confrontations and acquiescence to power.

While the Tunisian patriarchal kinship system is used and thwarted in Z-Textiles, the relationships between managers and the women workers occur in the anomalous setting of an EPZ, *le zone franche*, as it is called in Tunisia. The Bizerte EPZ, like other EPZ's around the globe, is designed for maximization of labor exploitation. The morally-coded Tunisian kin-based production system, with its emphasis on women kin making honorable choices to submit to male kin via their labor, compels women and men laborers to act against management, in certain ways. However, the same moral system is also played on and strategically denied workers as a means of discipline.

EPZ factory women are temporarily outside kin-based patriarchal rigors during their work days. They are away from the eyes of fathers, brothers, fiancés, and husbands and in-laws (if married). However, other rigors are hegemonic in the EPZ. The women workers may have increased financial liberty, if they are allowed to keep control of their earnings, and the earnings' uses are not pre-determined by her family. The freedoms of the factory can allow for expressions of sexual freedom. The camaraderie of women workers can allow women to establish political and economic networks outside their neighborhood and extended family that Holmes-Eber (2003) identifies as the only realm of influence for most Tunisian women. At the same time, women workers are subjected to yet another form of patriarchy, one which, unlike their kin, has no moral obligation to

them. This form of patriarchy exerts a constant threat: any moment the owners, European men, could walk through the one-way mirrored glass doors down onto the factory floor to terminate the workers. In the EPZ, there is no inherent empathic, moral obligation that a father, husband, or mother-in-law might have; women must labor to make this moral obligation exist in the hearts of the managers and owners. However, some of the joy a family member would have at a kinswoman's pregnancy, and empathy with her for her aches and fatigue, is exhibited in relationships between male and female laborers.

Is this work helping women subvert patriarchal dominance, or has a new form of patriarchy, perhaps reminiscent of the French Colonial period, reasserted itself? In this study, I describe the possibility of both. Of central theoretical concern is an understanding of how the globalization of capitalism compels cultural change. Capitalist change can destabilize, or edify, cultural norms that were doxa, and can confound habitus (Bourdieu 1972). In the term doxa, Bourdieu describes that which a culture takes for granted as true; as truth, doxa exerts control over people. For example, it has been argued that in Arab society, a gender hierarchy where men dominate social institutions, is doxa (Mernissi 1996). Assuming that male dominance is doxa, however, does not make this reality static in the face of women's incorporation into global factory work. Is male dominance thrown into question when women are proletarianized? If doxa is shaken, then habitus must also change. Habitus, according to Bourdieu (1972), is how people live, according to doxa, and it is how subordinate groups learn to participate in, and perpetuate, their own oppression. When women factory

workers like Goucem use pregnancy in order to slow down their work (albeit temporarily), they are not so much challenging male dominance as challenging male authority over their production process in light of feminine reproduction, at its most moral. However, the moral supremacy of the pregnant woman breaks down on the EPZ factory floor. The new freedoms of the factory may facilitate women's camaraderie and financial independence; at the same time, the disciplines of the factory can reinforce women's role in Tunisian society as that of obedient daughters and wives who submit and sacrifice in home *and* factory.

Tunisia is held up as the exemplary country on the continent of Africa, of proof that capitalism and neoliberalist economics will lead to progress and development (e.g., Hitchens 2006). Like other post-colonial peoples, Tunisia has sprinted toward capitalist modernity. Tunisia is often the subject of praise from international lending institutions, as well as political organizations. Because of its rapidly industrializing economy, its rising GDP, and the bloodlessness of its dictators' coups and revolutions against the dictators, Tunisia is held up as a success story on an otherwise economically destitute and politically perilous African continent.

Anthropological research provides a point of entry into the lives of those most affected by neo-liberalism, absent from macro-level research. The Ben Ali regime that enacted structural adjustment with loans from the World Bank, the United States Government, and other multinational organizations proclaim that Tunisia is on the road to success. Yet the complaint of the pregnant factory worker, and others like her who are now swept into the wave of capitalist

discipline, provide a counter point to the ideological promotion of development-through-capitalism.

While there are historical continuities between the factory lives of women and the colonial and patriarchal history of Tunisian women's labor history, what is happening in the EPZ's of today's Tunisia is different, especially in terms of gendered power dynamics. Since the mid-1980's women have been fast-incorporated into global capitalism, part of the broader trend whereby capitalist firms locate in parts of the developing world where their labor and overhead costs will be low, and where they typically hire women from impoverished agricultural areas to be factory workers (Moghadam 2005; Ong 1991; Warren and Bourque 1991; Zavella 1991). The task of much of these ethnographies is to understand how local situations have changed due to the effects of changes in industrial production globally and to specifically examine the exploitation of women in this process (Yelvington 1995, Bookman 1998; Cavendish 1982; Freeman 1993; Grenier 1988; Kondo 1990; Lamphere 1987; Ong 1987, 1991; Pollert 1981; Wajcman 1983; Westwood 1984; Zavella 1988).

This new trend of globalized production, where patriarchal exploitation is not mediated by socio-religious ethics and familial obligation, has imposed a new form of patriarchal exploitation on Tunisian women. It is not just the industrial-sized fabric saws which impose more danger to women than if they were sewing on a small home machine. The form of patriarchy in multinational production is such that, should a woman worker be ill, she is not permitted to sit down. Sitting down in Z-textiles would be impossible since work is athletic. The typical labor

of women workers in Z-Textiles consists of carrying the enormous bolts from the loading dock to the tables (when men are unavailable or unwilling to help), stretching across the tables to cut out and pin the patterns, even climbing up on the tables and crouching over the patterns to pin them to the fabric, and pulling the fabric from the spools up and down the tables.

Women also must deal with the disciplines of capitalist production in that child care becomes a problem. Children cannot be close by as is the case of home-based labor. Moreover, if she is late because of a childcare problem, she will be fired, and replaced by the next woman on the applicants' waiting list. However, she may appeal to morality when explaining her problem to Bechir. When a woman performs labor where her male kin manage her work, she may have to contend with many abuses, but she will not worry about being fired, and the PSC's outlawed repudiation divorce which could have been used as a threat against wives. She may still be abused by a father, husband, and/or mother-in-law, but the moral imperative of those relationships curtails the consequences. In the factory, traditional moral codes are muted.

The factory in this study is Z-Textiles, located in the Bizerte EPZ which starts at the Port of Bizerte and runs west along the Eastern edge of the city, ending at a creek at the foot of mountains which extend to the west of the city. In Z-Textiles the workers prep the textiles by pinning on the patterns and cutting them out. The fabrics will be sewn together at another factory in the same EPZ. The finished clothing will be uniforms for Volkswagen auto mechanics in Germany, Dutch hospital gowns, and a variety of athletic uniforms. All these

products are bound for Europe by ship, out of Bizerte's much-coveted deep water port.

About ninety percent of the factory workers are women, while ten percent are men who work in the loading dock area lifting fabric bolts off the truck when new shipments arrive, driving the small trucks which carry bolts onto the storage racks, doing inventories, and mechanical work. The EPZs in Tunisia are part of the international trade agreements made between the Maghreb and Europe; they also reflect the Tunisian government's complicity, following Ben Ali's coup, with neoliberalist approaches to solving Tunisia's predicament of underdevelopment.

This study is the result of participant-observation fieldwork undertaken from May 2008 through March 2009. I explicate the social relations of the factory workers, as well as of Bizerte women working outside the EPZ's. Using research from several academic disciplines, I place my subjects within Tunisian history by identifying an historic context characterized by the hegemonic colonial forces that shaped the division of labor (Yelvington 1995). I follow the development of the post-colonial state, the cultural construction of gender and class, and economic systems of dependency.

In the factory a division of labor exists along gender and class lines. The owners are European men who visit the premises only a few times per year. These visits are preceded by a phone call, usually. The European owners hired a Tunisian manager from the Bourgeoisie, sometimes called *Beldiya* class, Bechir, to manage production; Bechir hired his sister, Fayza, to be the receptionist and secretary. The *Beldiya* class are historically the urban bourgeoisie, merchants and

religious shaykhs, who aligned themselves with the Beys and then with the French colonials (Hajeij 2003). The Beldiya maintained their power as a class by aligning themselves with the Neo Destourians, the revolutionary anti-colonial party, following Independence (Perkins 2006).

Most Tunisians are part of the agriculturalist, peasant class and have hard feelings toward the Beldiya. Many of the political group the Young Tunisians, those who were critical of French colonials and who sought to overthrow them, were also self-interested as a class in maintaining their economic advantages over the Tunisian peasantry (Perkins 2006). The Beldiya controlled commerce in the markets, as well as agricultural, textile, and crafts trade. The political leaders have come from the Bourgeoisie- Bourguiba claimed to be from a poor background but his family were actually wealthy shop owners. In Tunisia, the majority are descendants of the agricultural peasantry, and they often accuse the Beldiya of being pretentious, snobbish, and cliquish. Bechir's sister was often the target of class and gender-based derision from the factory workers. Her clothing, like most women's from the Bourgeoisie class, was more revealing than the factory workers'. The women workers would joke that Fayza's clothing became more revealing on days when she knew that the European owners were visiting.

Bechir appointed a woman worker, Madame Hayatt, who had been a fabric cutter on the line herself, to be a manger. She oversaw only the women workers. She fits the Tunisian concept of the *boss lady*, a middle-aged married woman (with daughters-in-law) to manage the other women workers. Bechir himself manages the men directly, and also manages the women at his discretion.



Hayatt does not manage the male workers, reflecting the taboo against women bossing men in any part of society.

The fabric cutters are unmarried and married women, the oldest worker being 38 years old. All the loaders, drivers, and inventory specialists are men. The gender-segregated work positions are a reflection of the acceptable gender roles in Tunisian society. Developing states' investiture in globalized capitalist production is built on the non-contingency of available cheap labor. The project of EPZ production banks on the subjugation of women. Further, the ordering of the production process is "determining and determined" by class and gender (Yelvington 1995: 3). But the site of production is also a place where class and gender are contested. However, when factory women rebel or challenge their subjugation, power also acts through them. Gender, class and production are part of the power relations of the factory.

In this study, I unite the research on labor and gender in the Maghreb. These two areas of research have been relatively separate, with the research on labor and production being "gender blind," and thus centered on men and gender research focused on women and the family, with little attention to women's participation in formal paid labor, except as these are viewed as incursions on their traditional roles (Moghadam 2005). We cannot understand the relationships of power in regards to class and gender without understanding the "material productive arrangements" of the setting (Yelvington 1995:4). This process described in this study can best be described as a dialectical one where social identities constitute and determine the production process (Ibid).

Ethnicity, class and gender are constructed through society and culture, but the mechanisms through which the production and reproduction of these identities occurs is important to identify. In my study, I identify how gender and class disparities unfold in the multinational factory. This is intended to add to the body of research on multinational factories which counters the neoliberal claim that women will be liberated through capitalist discipline, harkening back to modernization theory. I argue that women need more than a paycheck of their own to have true emancipation.

My aim is to lift the veil of neoliberalism in order to promote social change. I argue that the production process in the export processing zone is a primary place for the contestation of gender but also for its reification (Yelvington 1995). Resistance and agency is structured by cultural forces which maintain women's unequal access to the means of production. In an attempt to make an equitable marriage of Marxism with feminism, I use Marxist theory and feminist theory to make sense of production in Z-Textiles, as well as in workplaces outside the EPZ in Bizerte, and through women's housework. Engels argued that waged labor would eventually liberate women from male domination, but this has yet to happen in capitalist economies. In line with Engels' contention, Lamphere (1993) finds that working women in the USA can negotiate more equality with their male partners. However, women have yet to have social equality with men. In my study, many of the laborers accepted the inequity of their situation out of desperation. Few expressed their plight as one of class exploitation, but many identified sexism as the root cause. I do not romance resistance in this study. I

found many of the women workers' strategies for resistance to be ingenious, but, as Hossfeld (1995) argues, many of these strategies play on the logic of the owners of production (and their managers). If these subversive strategies worked, they would have already. How can this change?

To promote anthropological practice where Marxist theory and feminist theory play an equal part, I follow Magloire and Yelvington's (2005) aim to unite history, culture, structure, and agency. My first aim is to connect the ethnographic context with the social forces or structures that make for the causal mechanisms that influence subjects' relative power. My second goal is to define the activities which happen in the factory and in the world of labor outside the factory, with attention to structure and agency and how society can be changed. The subjects are not the passive purveyors of social constraints. History is here used to understand the wider processes of gender and class in production, and the way it is culturally and structurally organized (Yelvington 1995).

In this study, I look at what Yelvington calls the "culture of domination" (1995:6) in the EPZ, as well in Tunisian society, and the ways in which culture is used to exercise power and to resist it. This power is wielded and resisted in ways which are complicated, masked, and usually part of a subtext in social interactions. This makes the domination of workers harder to resist than would be overt forms of exploitation; at the same time, workers' complicated ways of challenging domination make it harder for the powerful to counter the resistance. Also important is that humans are rarely completely aware of how simultaneous occurrences of domination and resistance are unfolding. For this reason, studies

which rely only on subjects' own views of domination could end up in complicity with the powerful.

I went to Bizerte's EPZ looking for a factory whose manager or owner would allow me to do participant observations. I visited several factories in *le zone*. I met with a *cheffa* of one of the call centers, and several of the women workers. Call center workers were easy to approach since my apartment was across the street from the part of the EPZ where the call center was and I could see through the center's windows from the roof of my apartment. When I spoke with women who worked in the call center, I learned that the French owners placed male managers of Algerian origin in the center. Perhaps they assumed that this supposed ethnic consanguinity would make production run smoothly. Perhaps they made the assumption that an Arab man could manage Arab women better, a decidedly colonialist perspective on management. The company employed Tunisian women whose pronunciation of French was closest to native French speakers', the idea being that the French person receiving a call would be more likely to make a purchase if they believed the person on the other end of the line to be French. This same assumption is made by U.S. companies who have outsourced their call centers to India and the Caribbean. While I had initially hoped to participant observe in the call center, my connection stopped communicating with me and my sister in law after I asked her if I could come in to the center. I suspect she was worried for her job security, being pregnant with her third baby and living in a tiny flat with her family in impoverished East Bizerte. I did not press her further.

When I told my sister-in-law Kalthoum (who lived with me and translated for me during my entire stay in Bizerte) that I would not pursue research in the call center, she said that it was for the best, since the girls who worked there acted snobbish and pretentious, and she would not enjoy translating interviews with them. I heard this opinion about call center employees repeated from many Tunisians. This resonates with Freeman's (2000) research in a Caribbean call center, where women workers re-shaped their class identity through work in air conditioned, office-like factories.

The search for a factory that would allow my presence lasted several nerve-wracking days. These days of pounding the pavement of the EPZ with Kalthoum, showing my government-stamped permission papers multiple times to Ben Ali's gun-clad guards, asking to speak to bosses who were mostly absent (in Europe) and managers who were usually Tunisian men, led me to talk with several managers who politely said no to my request. Among these many no's were medical production factories specializing in plastic catheters, and several textile factories. Kalthoum and I wound up at the door of Z-Textiles, near noon with the fear that I might have to face the fact that I would not get to do factory research. Z-Textiles was at the end of a cul-de-sac at the most western end of the EPZ. The manager, Bechir Ben Moussa, surprisingly was open to my presence on the factory floor, but not to my working on the line with the other women. We arranged a brief on-site meeting, where he permitted me to start the research the next morning. I had a feeling of relief that I had been allowed into a factory, and anxiety that he would think better of my presence and rescind.

My first meeting with Bechir was held in his air conditioned office which opened to the factory floor. Bechir asked few questions beyond what degree I was working on, and he directed most of his questions to Kalthoum. Through Kalthoum, I said that Tunisia had not been paid attention to enough in labor studies in the Maghreb, and that it was better for me to do research in Tunisia because my husband is Tunisian, especially since my two year old son was with me. I explained that my son was in day care in Bizerte so I could be in the factory every morning. I hoped that Bechir would be less likely to turn me down because of my family connection to Tunisia. I did expect that I would be scrutinized as to my own politics before I would be allowed to conduct research. However, Bechir asked me nothing about my politics. His lack of suspicion or even curiosity about my reasons for wanting to research Z-Textiles was disconcerting.

While I cannot know for sure why he was unconcerned about my politics, I suspect this has something to do with my kin connection to Tunisia, and my gender. He might have felt an obligation to treat me with hospitality. He seemed in a hurry to get the interview over with. His brusqueness was typical of our interactions throughout the year of my research. His lack of interaction with me also could be a way to prevent gossip. I noticed immediately that if any man came near me on the factory floor, there were spectators.

Bechir refused to let me work. He said he could not allow this because the fabric cutters machines, which look similar to jig saws, were too dangerous. The machinery did malfunction frequently- electrical shocks sometimes shot out from the overhead grid of power bars. The wiring loosened from the incessant pulls

from the workers as they manipulated their machines, cords winding around other cords as the women followed the curves of the patterns they cut.

Perhaps Bechir thought he was showing respect for me by refusing to let me work, and if so, perhaps this was based on assumptions about my social class (as someone working on a degree), and that of my husband's, who Kalthoum told Bechir was an engineer in the USA. Or, perhaps he feared a confrontation with my husband, who he would assume would not take to the idea that his wife was under his management.

Like Yelvington (1995), I did not fully disclose my own politics to Bechir or the European owners. I did disclose them in interviews and participant observations outside the EPZ, where I was often asked if I supported then President George W. Bush- I was more than eager to say no, since I felt shame about the Bush administration's brutality in Iraq. In the factory, I was fortunate that no one seemed to care much about my politics or even my presence- they were always so busy! Also fortunate for me, the European owners who occasionally strode through the doors and across the factory floors past the workers, waving and smiling like celebrities to their fans, also did not seem to care about the European-looking researcher standing at the corner of a cutting table, staring and taking notes. Perhaps they considered what I was doing too trivial to be of any potential trouble to them.

This study is applied in that it is politically engaged, and is intended as labor activism. Perhaps I should have gone out of my way to inform Bechir of my perspective on EPZ's, because my political agenda might conceivably have

some impact on the factory owners and Bechir. However, as Yelvington (1995) posits, the problem with full political disclosure is that it precludes research that implicates the powerful. If disclosing politics to a factory owner keeps the researcher from getting access to the field, then the requirement for full disclosure supports the powerful, in this case a global capitalist class and a local bourgeoisie who does their bidding.

Once I gained access to Z-textiles, I tried to make myself worthy of the confidence of the workers. At first, some workers thought that I worked for “the French (their label for all the European owners).” They suspected that I was observing their work with the intention to “downsize” less efficient workers. This was 2008, and news of a worldwide economic depression was already circulating in Tunisia. I tried to laugh this off and repeated that I was working on my Doctorate on Tunisian women and that my husband is Tunisian. That I had married a Tunisian tended to give me a social in; at least in some ways I shared experience with the married women with children. However, that I am an Anglo US citizen was something that set me apart from the workers, and I puzzled over ways to ameliorate the differences between us. When I would say goodbye to the workers at lunchtime, I would say, “time for me to pick up Faris from day care.” This made the workers see me more as a woman with the same time constraints and issues the married mothers faced. However, I was keenly aware that most of the mothers in the factory would not be able to afford the twenty dinars a month for the middle class daycare on Bourguiba Avenue. The women workers had to entrust their young children to relatives for the long hours of their shifts.



I spent the first two weeks sitting and standing near the tables where the women worked. While they did not really have many breaks, I did introduce myself to all the women so that they could become used to me. I told them what I was doing, usually a quick sentence in French here and there. I told them, with tutelage from Kalthoum (who did not accompany me on the factory floor) that I was interested in women workers in Tunisia because this subject had been understudied.

In translating workers' words from colloquial Tunisian Arabic to American English, I tried to be true to their meaning. My attempts at phonetic spellings posed some problems when I would write down things I heard in the factory that I could not understand. I brought these phonetic attempts to Kalthoum to help me translate- sometimes they were obscene double entendre. During the fieldwork, I tried to immerse myself in the factory and extra-factory lives of the workers. I went to weddings, circumcision parties, to teas to celebrate children's passing of the baccalaureate exams, and to other celebrations, and also to the beach. During interviews, some of the women disclosed personal information to me, and I respected their wishes when they asked that information remain off the record. I also chose to omit certain topics that I felt would violate sexual privacy. A sign that I gained the trust of some women was when they asked that some personal details be put into the study. I was told, "Don't forget me. Put my story in to your Doctorate!" While this suggests that I gained some trust, that women wanted to be written about may also be a sign of status, of me being part of a woman's strategy for building social capital.

The dissertation is arranged as follows. In Chapter 1, I outline my theoretical approach to the ethnography. I locate the ethnography historically, and discuss the phenomenon of globalization and neoliberal economic policy in contemporary Tunisia and the world. In contextualizing the ethnography, the project here is to trace Tunisia's political-economic, and socio-cultural reorientation toward free trade ideology. I place contemporary Tunisia in a broader political-economic context where globalization forces exacerbate older patterns of exploitation. However, I also describe the tremendous changes to Tunisian women's role as laborers and cultural agents; this is to say that the globalization of capitalism offers opportunities for women but also increases their vulnerability. Here I compare and contrast assembly line work settings and cultural responses to EPZ labor. Then I consider the maquiladoras of Tunisia and Bizerte, as well as labor activism in maquiladoras across the globe, toward to discussion of an emerging global female proletariat. In Chapter 2, I analyze the role of anthropology of the Mediterranean in the discipline of anthropology. Here I explain the ways in which the MENA is represented in anthropology as well as the meaning of the MENA to the ethnographic project and trajectory of the discipline of anthropology.

Also in Chapter 2, I delve into the anthropology of globalized production. In considering the preponderance of research on women in EPZ's, I prepare to identify the many similar patterns in my own study. In Chapter 3, I describe the methodologies that have been used in factory research and MENA research and those that I used in gathering data on women in the Bizerte production zones as

well as laborers in Tunisian society, in many invisible and unpaid labor forms and now increasingly in paid, albeit underpaid, labor. The main body of the ethnography is in Chapters 4 and 5, where I seek to disaggregate the role of gender and class and the roles they play at work in the factory, and in the city of Bizerte. The study concludes in the postscript, Chapter 6, with a discussion of how gender and class in the contemporary Tunisian labor force has made for volatile social relationships, and helped to cut a new pattern for the Jasmine Revolution, where women were prominent. But the Revolution was also fraught with conflated ideologies of gender and class, starting with the fatal interaction between a male fruit seller and a female government worker. The relationship between class and gender occurs in specific ways, and in the post-script I attempt to look back at my 2008 research in light of the 2011 revolution.

Cultural categories of gender and class are created by humans, but also contested by them. A dialectical way of understanding the social construction of power and identity allows for both an acknowledgement of individual and collective agency as well as the societal and cultural ideologies which reify power (Yelvington 1995). The world-wide research on women's labor in and outside of EPZ's suggests that female workers respond to their unique conditions of labor in many ways and that their sources of resistance are cultural. Tunisia is a part of the MENA where women are underrepresented in formal employment, but where their numbers are fast increasing (Moghadam 2005). In this node in the global economy, women are rapidly becoming incorporated into global capitalism, as workers and as consumers. In this climate of economic change, cultural

ideologies which support gender and class stratification, often perceived as doxa, may be wrested from this status. This process is not necessarily progress, but it certainly presents a possibility for exploited classes and women to participate in a deconstruction of hegemonic economic and gender forces. In this study, I attempt to reveal this process.

## **Chapter 1: Tunisia's History into the Present: Economy, Ethnicity, and Gender**

In this chapter, I describe contemporary Tunisia's participation in global economic systems through a recounting of its history. Since prehistory, Tunisia has been the object of strategic conflicts over resources; it has been and continues to be the site of economic, political, ethnic and class conflict. I situate Tunisia in a very old global political economic framework, for it has been a (willing and unwilling) participant in cross-Mediterranean, cross-Saharan, and possibly cross-Atlantic economic relationships since the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Decker 1999; Sertima 1976). I discuss Tunisia's ethnic and gender dynamics, which reflect its history as a strategic location for settlers and invaders. Gender stratification marks Tunisia's past and present. I discuss gender and class in terms of Tunisia's historic neoliberal reorientation of the last four decades, and especially to what globalization means for gender stratification in contemporary Tunisia.

Tunisia sits at a prime location on the Mediterranean; any group that has ever wanted to dominate places that border the Mediterranean has sought to control Tunisia (Herodotus 420). It is made more valuable because of its rich, arable land. The Romans called it *the granary* and over-exploited the land. Tunisia before antiquity was much less desert and far more verdant than it was by the Middle Ages (Davis 2007).

Its earliest known inhabitants are the semi-nomadic pastoralist and agriculturalist Berbers, whose presence in North Africa is traced from before 5000 BCE. While there are several groups who can be considered indigenous to the Maghreb, it is the Berbers who have been most populous and whose Afro-Asiatic language has been most widespread in the early history of the Maghreb (Briggs 1960). The Berbers are not a homogeneous group. Their pre-historic origins are the result of a “merger” by at least three different groups, the Neolithic farmers who migrated west from the Nile river valley, and the Capsian and Ibero-Maurusian peoples. African cave paintings dating 12,000 years, are seen across the Maghreb, suggesting that the Berbers were a Neolithic culture (Camps 1996; Cavalli-Sforza et. al 1994; Desanges 1990). Their history is one marked by a variety of strategies for survival and dignity in the face of many invasions (Balout 1989; Brett & Fentress 1996; Laroui 1977).

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Phoenicians invaded Tunisia from Lebanon and settled the coast. Since the Berbers were pastoralists and agriculturalists, they did not usually live in the Phoenician-occupied areas, and there was little known conflict between the two groups (Brett & Fentress 1996). With their nautical expertise, the Phoenicians developed Carthage into a powerful political and economic node in the Mediterranean trade network, and beyond. The circumstances of most Berbers in Punic Tunisia were off the map of relevance, since most lived in rural areas of little import to the Phoenicians. But those who lived in urban areas like Carthage were the poorest laborers (Brett & Fentress 1996).

The Romans, who coveted the power and location of Carthage, conquered it in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and made Carthage Rome's third most important city. Most Berbers were peasants to Roman lords. However, some Berbers grew powerful and worked as kings with the Romans. Some rebelled against them (Brett & Frentress 1996). Under the Romans, most Tunisians were along with the European subjects, converted to Christianity, albeit the Berber Jews maintained their religion (Chouraqui 1968).

When the Roman Empire began to unravel in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the invaders who had sacked Rome arrived. Tunisia was sacked and held by the Vandals, and then in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, by the Byzantines. Neither held Tunisia for long. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Tunisia was conquered by Muslim Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula. The Arab project was to expand an Islamic empire. They founded Kairouan in 670, and it became a holy city. Kairouan was also established as the center of North African governance of the Islamic empire, and was a hub of travelling politicians and dignitaries (Mones 1992).

In 800 Kairouan was invaded by Berber rebel groups who were fighting a resistance against the Arabs. The Berbers' military incursions were many, but in 702, after their most revered leader and warrior, the woman Damiya Al-Kahina, was killed by Arab forces, most Berbers submitted to religious and linguistic assimilation, excepting some Berber Jews (Mones 1992).

Since the Arab project in Tunisia was to make permanent settlements, so that Tunisia (and the rest of the Maghreb) would become part of the Arab empire, they sent large numbers of settlers from the Arabian Peninsula to settle. These

settlers were agriculturalists who established Tunisia (once again) as an important wheat producer, this time for the Arab empire. The settlers also often married the newly converted Berbers. It is unclear whether these marriages were consensual or coerced. Many Berbers continued to challenge forced or coerced assimilation, even after conversion to Islam. For example, a Muslim Berber group called the Kharijites reinterpreted much Islamic text as one based on equality and formed sects which posed challenges to Arab political authorities (Mones 1992). The Kharijite Berbers are still prominent in Jerba, an impoverished Island off the southern coast of Tunisia, where they live alongside Berber Jews (Balout 1989; Talbi 1971).

While Tunisia was certainly not a homogeneous place following Arab settlement, shared religion did help elite rulers impose a sense of shared ethnicity and cohesion; a succession of Muslim Arab dynasties ruled Tunisia. Tunisia's history differs from Algeria and Morocco in that most Berbers intermarried with the Arabs, and most assimilated linguistically. Few people in contemporary Tunisia report themselves to be Berber, and very few speak the Berber language. This fact has been the premise of the theory that Tunisia's ethnic homogeneity is part of the reason for its contemporary political homogeneity (Charrad 2003).

From the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D., successive Arab dynasties ruled Tunisia. At this point the Berber followers of the Fatimids prospered and gained some political influence; they also continued to intermarry heavily with them (Brett & Frentress 1996). There were competing factions within the Arab dynasties, with rivalries between Shi'ite and Sunni groups who were sponsored by different Arab



factions in several satellites of the Arab empire. Each group vied for the resources that came with the favor of powerful administrators. There was often a tense peace, punctuated by violence between these groups. For example, in 1050 the Zirids offended the Cairo-based Fatmids who subsequently ravaged Tunisia in brutal invasions (Abun-Nasr 1971). Once again, it is clear that Tunisia's early history is not isolated or homogeneous. Its incorporation into larger political economies has been ongoing.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the threat of European dominance manifested when the Normans of Sicily invaded and held the coastal areas. This ceased when the Almohads from Morocco conquered Tunisia, with a vested interest in keeping Tunisia Arab and Muslim (Abun-Nasr 1971). "Outside" rule by the Almohads lasted for less than 100 years at which point the Tunisian Berber-Arab assimilated group, the Hafsids took control of Tunisia. Between 1230 and 1574, the Hafsids made Tunisia a major player in the larger political economy of the Mediterranean. That the Hafsids were seemed to be accepted as insiders by the Tunisian population helped form a nationalistic (albeit mythic) sense of homogeneous identity (Abun-Nasr 1971).

In the mid-1500's, Spain seized much of Tunisia's coast, and under threat of becoming part of the Holy Roman Catholic Empire. The Turkish Ottomans whose empire was then burgeoning entered to defend the Islamic empire in Tunisia (and to gain a chance to exploit Tunisia's resources). They succeeded in expelling the Spanish. The Turkish beys (kings) then established governorships in Tunisia, and the Ottoman Hussein Dynasty lasted in Tunisia from the late 16<sup>th</sup>

century until 1957, albeit their power was reduced by the French (Cooley 1965). While the Beys were also Muslim, they established themselves as rulers over the (Arab and Berber) Tunisians.

Tunisia's status as a debtor nation began not with the taking of high-interest International Monetary Fund loans in the 1980's, but a century earlier. The Ottoman beys borrowed heavily from the French. Much of this money was supposed to go toward developing Tunisia's infrastructure, but it was misused. The Beys imported fineries and décor from France on lines of credit, to embellish their own lifestyles (Julien 1970). When they could not pay back their debts, their French creditors increased their interest rates. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Beys had lost much of their political influence because they owed money to the Europeans. In 1869, the Beys declared Tunisia bankrupt, and France, Great Britain, and Italy assumed their debt (Perkins 2004).

France was also encroaching upon Tunisia militarily. It had made neighboring Algeria a "protectorate" in 1830. Tunisian nationalist groups invaded Algeria along the western border in attempts to help liberate it from the French. This activity and the Beys' massive debts to the French aided the French aim to make Tunisia a protectorate. This happened officially with the signing of the treaties of Bardo (1881) and Mersa (1883) (Anderson 1986; Perkins 2004). The French did not acquire Tunisia without facing Italy's opposition. Italy argued that Tunisia should be theirs since they had a higher population of Italians living in Tunisia than did the French. Indeed, the Italians and Maltese both had major

population sectors in Tunis and Bizerte (Perkins 2004). This is to emphasize Tunisia's history as a much-coveted node in larger political-economic systems.

Once France acquired Tunisia as a protectorate, it seized lands that had been farmed by fellahs (the Berber-Arab assimilated agriculturalists) and placed this land under the ownership of French farmers, who then used the fellahs' labor in a system similar to share-cropping (Lahmar 1996). A tiny group of the wealthier fellahs, called notables, were able to oversee the fellahs who had become sharecroppers (Lahmar 1996).

Nationalist resistance against the colonials began in the late 1800's, with wide support among the peasants, working class, intellectuals, and Islamicists. France's colonization of Tunisia was viewed as a move for the Roman Catholics to dominate a part of the Muslim world. Tunisian intellectuals also applied some Marxist critique to France's colonialism, and fomented union opposition to French economic exploitation. The Destour (constitutional) party was organized in 1920 as an opposition to French colonialism; its goal was to oust the French. However, the party was soon co-opted by the Tunisian Bourgeoisie and land owners, sometimes called notables, who were more interested in working with the French to increase their own wealth (Anderson 1986; Lahmar 1996; Perkins 2004).

The Destours compromised with the French, and were seen by nationalists as collaborators with the colonials, and under the control of the Tunisian Bourgeoisie, who wanted to continue economic relations with the French (Perkins 2004). Socialist organizations posed an intellectual critique on French

colonialism and on the Beys' willingness to support the bourgeoisie's maintenance of wealth at the expense of most Tunisians. These organizations were banned by the French, with the support of the Beys.

In 1934, the Neo Destour party emerged; the French colonials declared it the only legal outlet for political-economic critique. The future first president of independent Tunisia, Hamid Bourguiba, was an activist in this party. Bourguiba drew in new members outside of the urban intellectual cohort. He built up the party by reaching out to labor unions, who had been supported by the (illegalized) communist General Confederation of Tunisian Workers. The Neo-Destours gained the support of these unions as well as skilled laborers, the few elite women's groups, and the university students who had been the base of the Destours. Marxist Muhammad Ali also became active in the Neo Destours, but his efficacy as a dock workers' union organizer and his inspirational speeches got him exiled by the Beys, who, wishing to maintain their posh lifestyles in Tunisia, usually did the bidding of the French (Berque 1962).

Renegade feminist Islamic scholar and union organizer Tahar Haddad also joined the Neo Destours. He helped organize boycotts against imported products, and supported unions and women's liberation (Anderson 1986; Berque 1962; Charrad 2003; Perkins 2004). Haddad became a folk hero in Tunisia, and his feminism was influential on Tunisian Islamic intellectuals (Anderson 1986; Perkins 2004). Following his ouster from the Zeituna Mosque University for advocating a non-patriarchal interpretation of Islamic scripture, Haddad organized boycotts of French goods and published pamphlets which challenged the

legitimacy of the French administration (Abun-Nasr 1987). The Neo Destours gained broad support through their critique of the role of the Tunisian Bourgeoisie and land holders in economic complicity with the French (Perkins 2004).

Feminist organizations participated in anti-colonial activism in Tunisia, but their appeal was limited. Feminism under French colonial rule reflected the frustrations of a small elite set of urban intellectuals, but was not a wide-spread movement in Tunisia (Abu-Zahra 1986; Charrad 2003). The limited feminist activism of Tunisia attended to economic exploitation (at the hands of the French and the Tunisian elites who collaborated with them) and “indigenous” patriarchal cultural domination. Some of this thought was part of an economic critique, and some feminist activism grounded itself in radical reinterpretation of Islam. The Union of Tunisian Women identified the relationship to the means of production as the crux of women’s oppression, and argued that lack of equality would hinder Tunisia’s ability to develop.

The Muslim Women’s Union of Tunisia found edification in the revered revolutionary Islamicist Tahar Haddad (Gilman 2004; Perkins 2004). Many of these organizations linked colonial oppression with patriarchal oppression, and promoted revolution against the colonial forces in the society and in the home, on Islamic principle (Gilman 2004; Perkins 2004).

The Group of Destourian Women was the women’s branch of the neo-Destourian party in which Bourguiba was a prominent revolutionary; unsurprisingly, Bourguiba’s administration favored the feminists from the Group of Destourian Women in the new independent government and consolidated them

into one state-controlled organization (Gilman 2004; Perkins 2004). The Neo-Destourians built on the politics of the Destourians who had challenged French colonialism earlier in the Destourian party.

The Neo-Destourian movement was effective at driving out the French colonial regime, but like other anti-colonial regimes, was riddled with unexamined sexism. As with many other anti-colonial movements, the restoration of challenged indigenous men's masculinity tended to predominate (Gilman 2004; Jayawardena 1986; Perkins 2004).

The nationalist anti-colonial movement organized many street protests in the 1930's. One particularly violent clash happened in 1938, when colonial forces fired on unarmed protesters in an event organized by the Neo Destours, the anti-colonial party, killing more than one hundred. Bourguiba and other organizers were taken to prison, accused of inciting a civil war. This fueled Tunisians' anti-colonial sentiments. It was likely that the revolutionary war would have happened at that historical moment, had it not been for the Second World War, in which the Tunisian Sahara became a war theater for the Axis and Allies (Perkins 2004).

Anti-colonial activism decreased after France fell to Germany (1940). Bourguiba had been transferred to a prison in France. In 1942 the Germans in France released Bourguiba from the Marseille prison and sent him to Rome, where he was honored by the fascists. Mussolini tried to force him to sign a document of complicity with the Axis powers, but Bourguiba refused. Bourguiba sent messages to Tunisia, and informed the Neo Destours to warn the Tunisian

public that the Fascists only wanted to satisfy their own appetite for colonies (Perkins 2004).

After the war was won by the Allies, anti-colonialist fervor rallied, and swept Tunisia. Bourguiba negotiated with the French colonials, but the French settlers did not wish to concede any property. Speaking of Algeria, Then Premier Pierre Mendes-France asserted, “Algeria has been French for some time...” This same logic was applied to Tunisia. Boycotts of French-made goods, and attacks on French businesses and schools ensued, and were met with French troops’ brutal repression. The Neo-Destours then organized more campaigns of protest and resistance. Bourguiba simultaneously made several trips through the Arab countries and European countries, making the case for Tunisian independence. By the 1950’s, France attempted to placate Tunisia without letting go of the colony, granting it some autonomy, instituted the “Internal Autonomy Agreement.” After more protests led by unions and intense negotiations, Tunisia achieved independence in 1956, but it was based on the French holding on to Bizerte.

Following negotiations for independence, Bourguiba allowed the French to maintain naval installations at Bizerte until 1963. This was part of the agreement for independence for the rest of the country, and Bourguiba agreed because he wanted newly independent Tunisia to be able to rely on France for trade. However, France used Bizerte as its base to wage brutal battles against Algeria’s revolutionaries in the independence movement. Many Tunisian organizations continued to challenge the French occupation of Bizerte. Union-

organized protesters clashed with French troops in Bizerte in 1961. The French shot and killed several protesters.

Only at this point did Bourguiba insist that the French forces be expelled from Bizerte. The French did not leave until 1963, after ongoing violence in Bizerte (Perkins 2004). Bizerte was important to the French, as it had been to the many groups who had held Tunisia since 10,000 BCE. Tunisians' nationalist-driven fight for control of Bizerte was a fight for control of this node in the political-economy (Anderson 1986; Perkins 2004).

Following independence in 1956, Tunisia's ruling party created a government that was modeled on the French parliamentary system. In 1956, Habib Bourguiba became Prime Minister. The constituent assembly of Habib Bourguiba voted to depose the last Bey, Sidi Lamine, in 1957. The president of Tunisia is the head of state, and the prime minister is directly below the president in the chain of command, and is the head of government. Tunisia's government is based upon a constitution, which (at least in theory) balances power between the federal government and the governorates, which are localized regional governments. However, since the governorates are appointed by the federal government, the people of the governorates have no say in who their governor will be. They can only vote on less influential officials, the mayors and municipal councils. This design reflects the French centralization of power, but also the ruling party's desire to control power over provincial Tunisians who they considered politically unsophisticated, and retrogressively patriarchal (Charrad 2003; Perkins 2004).



The government structure also consists of a bicameral legislature with judicial, executive, and legislative branches. The lower house of the bicameral parliament is the Chamber of Deputies, and is elected by popular vote. 25 percent of the seats are reserved for opposition parties; there are six legal opposition parties. 27 percent of the seats must be filled by women of any party. Since a fraction of the Chamber of Deputies is from opposition parties, they can rarely block the passing of a bill by the majority. They do often bring up controversial issues, and have notoriously lively debates (Anderson 1986).

The chamber of advisors, the upper house of the bicameral parliament, may be representatives of governorates, as well as figures of national import and representatives from professional organizations. Nearly half of the 112 members are appointed by the Head of State, while the others are elected by their peers. The high percentage of appointees continues to make Tunisia's government one where elites can maintain representatives who are likely to enact policies which will benefit their class interests (Perkins 2004).

Before describing further Bourguiba's strategies for an independent Tunisia, it is important to consider some aspects of Bourguiba's biography which influenced his leadership, and have had serious consequences for gender dynamics in contemporary Tunisia. In this section I describe Bourguiba's education, marital life, and political style, which continue to impact the political economy of Tunisian gender. Despite Nouri Gana's (2010) lugubrious use of psychoanalytic analysis to describe gender in contemporary Tunisia, his argument, that Bourguiba failed to confront sexual inequities in his personal life,

and that his authoritarianism was a reflection of Tunisian society's continued submission to autocratic patriarchs, is cogent. Gana (2010) states that Tunisian men and women are suffering from an "enduring neopatriarchal hangover" (Gana 2010: 105). Despite (and perhaps because of) women's superficial legal emancipation via the PSC's, women remain in struggle against and complicit with patriarchal control while men are "stuck," conflicted and melancholy, somewhere between western modernity and patriarchal authoritarianism (Gana 2010).

Bourguiba did not follow the trend of many nationalist post-colonial leaders who acknowledged women's role in anti-colonial struggle and then promptly marginalized them after independence (Jayawardena 1986). Instead, he made women's liberation the "capstone" of his nationalist project, for his own political benefit (Gilman 2004: 97). He consolidated several pre-independence women's organizations into one, La Union Nationale des Femmes Tunisienne (UNFT) with little acknowledgement of the activism by feminist organizations which informed Bourguiba's ideologies (Gilman 2004). Bourguiba took credit for making Tunisian women the prototype of the liberated Arab woman. Indeed there has been a tendency to see Bourguiba as a renegade thinker whose top-down gender policies were for Tunisian women's own good, and enacted against patriarchal, tribal Tunisian men (e.g., Fluehr-Lobban 1994; Gilman 2004).

Bourguiba exploited nationalist sentiments about gender. For example, during the anti-colonial movement, he fought against the French colonials' attempts to get Tunisian women to stop veiling with the *sifsaree* (the Tunisian-style hijab). The French colonials were encouraging Tunisian women to be

liberated by removing the sifsaree. Bourguiba and other nationalists encouraged Tunisian women to veil to assert their ethnicity and resist colonialism. However, once he came to be president, in the 1960's, he created a campaign against the veil, calling *sifsarees*, "old rags" and argued that the modern Muslim woman should throw them in the garbage. There was not any accompanying campaign to root out the actual subjugation of women by men. Bouguiba did not reconsider the PSC's admonishment that women obey their husbands, anymore than the French colonials had considered their own exploitation of Tunisian women when they argued that they should remove the veil. The veil is literally and figuratively superficial. Gana (2010) observes that Bourguiba's anti-veil campaign was "an attempt to veil male privilege precisely by means of unveiling women's faces...." (109) The relevance of this for the study of gender and power is that, in colonial and post-colonial Tunisia, women were coerced into patriarchal-colonial and then patriarchal post-colonial submission, not encouraged to assert their own political aims concerning liberation.

Bourguiba promoted French culture as the panacea of modernity. He wore French business suits, never traditional Tunisian attire, each day of his presidency. His adoration with the French no doubt started early in his life. His secondary education was all attained in France; at the Sorbonne, he received his degrees in law and political science. Living in Paris, he not only romanticized French culture but romanced a French woman, Mathilde Lorrain, whom he would go on to marry and bring back to independent Tunis as the First Lady. Speaking of himself, Bourguiba declared, "This Arab is Frenchified to the tips of his fingers, a

living example of assimilation” (quoted in Hopwood 1992:142). Yet he was less ready to admit his acceptance of “the Arab man” as a domineering patriarch. Before marrying Matilde, he insisted that she convert to Islam, and he changed her name to an Arabic one, Moufida (Perkins 2004). This hardly seems in keeping with the desire for a perceived French liberty, equality, and fraternity. Rather, Bourguiba’s actions toward Matilde/Moufida evoke the observation (and lived experience) of Frantz Fanon (1952, 1961) concerning the desire of colonized men to possess white women as a manifestation of psychological colonialism, as well as revenge against it.

His arrogant authoritarianism toward all Tunisians, according to Hopwood (1992), was to the detriment of the new republic. In one of his many books and letters, Bourguiba wrote, “*J’espere que vous connaissez mieux l’histoire de notre pays en ecoutant celui qui l’a faite,*” translated: “I hope you will better understand your country’s history by listening to the man who made it” (Bourguiba 1977 :75).<sup>2</sup>

Despite his promotion of Western democratic principles, Bourguiba placed himself in the very old patriarchal role of the authoritarian father of the new Tunisia (Gana 2010). In line with this he also declared himself the father of Tunisian women’s liberation, and “consolidated and appropriated” feminist organizations that had been active pre-independence (Gilman 2004: 97). Careful analysis reveals the ways in which the Tunisian codes of personal status (PSC’s) maintain women’s subjugation to men (Charrad 2003; Gana 2010; Gilman 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> My translation.

One of Bourguiba's first actions as president, five months after independence in 1956, was to draft and legalize personal status codes (PSC's), *majalla* in Arabic. These laws dealt with marriage, custody, and inheritance. Polygyny, while it was rarely practiced in Tunisia, was outlawed, and any man attempting to marry a second wife could be fined or jailed. Of importance here to the illegalization of polygyny since it was rarely practiced except by wealthy land owners, the very groups who were against Bourguiba (Lahmar 1997). Bourguiba challenged the dominant interpretation of the Qu'ran. The verse that had been used to justify polygyny, Surah 4, verse 3: "...if you feel you cannot do justice between them (wives) then marry only one..." also states later in the same Surah: "You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives." This was now interpreted by Bourguiba to forbid it, with the support of the few Islamic authorities who would support him. Bourguiba pressed the dominant council of Islamic scholars to endorse the interpretation, but they instead issued a statement that the PSC's were counter to Islamic Sharia, and Bourguiba banished them (Perkins 2003). However, he did get several Islamic scholars to agree, and rewarded them by endorsing the Quranic Preservation Society in the 1970's. As was usually the case, garnering the support of Islamists as a way to counter growing Leftist political opposition in the 1970's, to his abandonment of socialism in the industrial sector (Perkins 2003).

The PSC's also forbade divorce by repudiation, whereby a husband had unilateral ability to divorce a wife by repeating, "I divorce you" three times in the presence of two witnesses. The Codes gave equal access to divorce to the

husband and wife. Most importantly, it made the pursuit of divorce possible only in the courts. This placed what had been a family matter (decided by male kin) under the control of the state (Charrad 2003).

The PSC's established a minimum of age for marriage for girls of 16 and 18 for boys. This was important in changing the overt practice of arranging marriages between families when the bride was still a child, often including a real wedding ceremony between a child bride and groom. The practice continued covertly, but the importance of the law was that it established the state's authority over family authority to regulate the forms of material exchange that were part of marriage (Charrad 2003). For example, Bourguiba altered bridewealth, which was traditionally a large sum of money as well as other forms of wealth such as land. Bourguiba declared that the groom could only give the bride one dinar.

The PSC's also overrode dominant interpretations of Islamic Sharia in other important ways. While the Sharia gives total financial responsibility to husbands to care for their wives, which then justified wives' submission to their husbands, Bourguiba stipulated in the codes that women who had money would have to contribute to expenses. Bourguiba was clear that this was intended to make women and men more equal. However, Bourguiba also placed in the PSC's the stipulation that "women should obey their husbands." (The obedience clause would be taken out in Ben Ali's amendment in 1993, albeit not because of Ben Ali's feminist convictions.) Thus, Bourguiba was able to establish the modern state of Tunisia, not instead of but as well as religion, in legitimizing women's subjugation (Charrad 2003).

The PSC's further reinforced women's subjugation financially. It made into law the Islamic Sharia law where women may only inherit half of what their male counterparts inherit. While it gave women custody of their children in the case of a divorce, it also left up to judges to decide if it was the man's or woman's fault for the divorce. In courts dominated by male judges, women could easily be ruled at fault and then forced to pay large sums to husbands. So while the PSC's were enforcing equality between the genders by making either one liable to have to pay damages for a divorce, the sexism of the judges lead to more discrimination.

While the PSC's did enforce some positive changes on Tunisian women, Bourguiba's motivations are suspect. Ostensibly, the PSC's dealt with women's rights, and were meant to liberate "backward" rural women from their kin groups. However, Charrad's (2003) analysis suggests that the PSC's banned arranged marriages for other reasons. Arranged marriages were a central means through which tribal groups consolidate land holdings; one of the first things kin groups did after expelling the French settlers was to re-possess "their" ancestral lands (Lahmar 1997). This re-established social stratification between powerful large land owning tribes and smaller land-owning ones, who often had to work as share croppers on the larger owners' farms (King 2003). The PSC's socialist vision was easier to impose by banning arranged marriages that maintained the land ownership inequalities.

Bourguiba's initial focus was to develop Tunisia's agriculture; his strategy of breaking up family lands into collectives for agricultural production was helped

by banning arranged marriages (Charrad 2003; Lahmar 1996). Charrad (2003) states, “The CPS [PSC’s] replaced the vision of the family as an extended kinship group built on strong ties crisscrossing a community of male relatives with the vision of a conjugal unit in which ties between spouses and between parents and children are prominent” (13).

During the anti-colonial period leading up to independence, while renegades like Tahar Heddad wanted the cause of Tunisian women to be taken up, his proposals got him ostracized by powerful clergy at the Zeituna Mosque. He became more of a hero for his anti-colonial activism than for his feminism. Since there was no widespread women’s movement in Tunisia either leading up to independence or thereafter, the Socialist Destours were not supporting women’s rights so much as they were imposing a modernization scheme on women and (more importantly) on their male kin (Charrad 2003).

In this section, I describe the economic policies of the last five decades since Tunisia’s independence, these decades are characterized by changes reflecting the rise (and fall) of economic philosophies globally. In short, there are five political economic phases of independent Tunisia’s history that I will now discuss: From 1961-69, Bourguiba enacted socialist economic policy, very much in keeping with the ideological rise (and fall) of socialism, and then to a market economy mitigated with by protectionism (1970-85). After an economic crisis in 1986, Tunisia turned to an IMF plan of structural adjustment which included more “free trade.” Economic restructuring was promoted even more by Ben Ali, who came to power in 1987. In 1995, Tunisia signed an Association Agreement with



the EU, with the promise of opening EPZ's for EU companies, which happened right on schedule. January, 14, 2011 marked the beginning of the end of Ben Ali's regime. However, it has not marked the end of neoliberal economics. I will now describe the pertinent details of each era, with attention to economic restructuring's impacts on class and gender.

After independence in 1957, from 1956-60, Bourguiba cleaved to France, enacting liberal policy to try to maintain France as a trade partner; France still held Bizerte during this time. In 1960, Bourguiba's government began a program of modernization based on a vision of socialist modernity on the Tunisian people, deemed necessary since the French (and the Beys) had left the population largely uneducated, unskilled, and (according to the Tunisian urban elite) culturally *en retard*, backward. Bourguiba's party, the Neo Destours, was re-named the Socialist Destourian Party<sup>3</sup>. This social program, termed *Tunisification* by Bourguiba, required educating a new generation so that they could fill governmental and professional positions in the modern republic. Bourguiba proclaimed that he would make Tunisia *un pays pilot*, a model among post-colonial states in education and in medical care. Along with medicine, much of the Republic's budget was spent on education (Perkins 2004).

The Socialist Destours' agenda of the 1960's included the creation and support of labor for skilled laborers as well as professional, universal free education, and the redistribution of land away from large powerful landowning

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<sup>3</sup> It was again re-named the Constitutional Democratic Rally (CDR) in the 1970's following Bourguiba's abandonment of socialist policy in the 1970's. The CDR has remained dominant into the present, even after the Jasmine Revolution of January, 2011.

extended families, into farm collectives, and the emancipation of women (King 2003; Perkins 2004). The expanded reach of the central government's administrative authority into rural Tunisia meant that traditional systems of hierarchy and authority (which the French settlers had manipulated to their advantage) deteriorated. For example, Duvignaud (1977) conducted research in the 1960's on a rural village, Shebikha, and documented the ways in which the newly independent Tunisian government put them under a system of paternalistic control not so different from what they had experienced under the Beys or the French Colonials.

Bourguiba initially focused on agrarian reform, envisioning an agricultural collectivism which would include exportation of agricultural goods to gain funds for internal development. However, his belief that rural agriculturalist groups would have to learn to be modern through top-down administration led to harsh implementation (Duvignaud 1963; King 2003). Bourguiba nationalized the farmlands that had been held by French settlers and repossessed by kin groups who claimed that they were their ancestral lands. He succeeded in dissolving some of the power of large land-holders (bourgeoisie), but they funded opposition to his regime (Anderson 1986; Lahmar 1996; Perkins 2004).

Despite the ostensible commitment to women's rights, agricultural women continued to be heavily exploited in the socialist 1960's. In a series of meticulous ethnographic studies conducted between 1968 and 1987, S. Ferchiou scrutinized modernization schemes in agricultural areas. Ferchiou finds that the patriarchal farm families exploited the unsalaried labor of farm women. While men relied on

this grueling labor, they also perceived women's work as a part of the larger cadre of unsalaried women's work. For example, in agricultural Sidi Bouzid, and in agricultural areas throughout the country, women on farm collectives did all the weeding, washing of vegetables, and many other tedious tasks. Their labor was not considered important, yet was vital to production (Ferchiou 1968, 1972, 1973, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1987).

Ferchiou identifies the exploitation of women as class exploitation, held in place by gender ideology which renders women's work as trivial, to the benefit of male kin. But now the state also was benefitting from farm women's labor. Ferchiou argues that Bourguiba's modernization scheme, with its heavy-handed state implementation, relied on the free labor of women to boost production. The neglect in considering the position of women in modernization schemes, other than as menial workers, corresponds with the development research literature, where often modernization projects neglect to include women's labor and rights (Bodley 2001; Seeley et. al. 2000).

In the following section of the chapter, I describe industrialism in Tunisia. Among other things, I describe women's place in industrializing Tunisia. Moghadam defines an unwritten patriarchal gender contract at work in MENA countries, which is, "the implicit and often explicit agreement that men are the breadwinners and are responsible for financially maintaining wives, children, and elderly parents, and that women are wives, homemakers, mothers, and caregivers" (Moghadam 1998). While this is not divergent from the unwritten contract of gender in agricultural Tunisia, there is evidence that male-dominated

industrialization exacerbated women's subjugation, until the 1980's, when the opening of the economy changed gendered patterns of labor.

Bourguiba's initial socialist modernization project, which focused on agricultural collectives as a base for development, was largely abandoned by the late 1960's. He continued a socialist-driven industrialization project which was abandoned a decade later. Socialist agriculture could have succeeded, had it not been for three phenomena: 1) the political opposition by the large land holders, 2) three consecutive years of drought, and 4) the World Bank's lack of support for mechanization (Kaboub 2007). The agriculturalist land-holders continued to foment opposition against the loss of control of any of their land, in political organizations and especially in the form of conservative Islamist groups who argued that socialism was against Islam (Lahmar 1997). At the same time, the World Bank rejected Bourguiba's request for funding to mechanize these farm collectives. Without the loans to create these mechanized farms, agricultural production plummeted (King 2003).

Perhaps as a way to co-opt Islamism, Bourguiba argued that Islam supported his modernization scheme (much as he manipulated Islam in the creation of the PSC's). Thus, Bourguiba declared in speeches that all Tunisians must wage *jihad* against underdevelopment (Perkins 2004). To show his own belief that Islam was on his side, during the Ramadan fast, Bourguiba told factory workers that they were fighting *jihad* so they need not abstain from food and water. In his televised speech, Bourguiba drank water during daylight hours to show his commitment to the *jihad* (Lawrence 1988). Many Tunisians rioted, and

conservative Islamists added this to their arsenal of anti-Bourguiba propaganda. The conflict between perceived Islamic values and modernity continued to be a challenge to state authority under Bourguiba.

Bourguiba remained committed to “Tunisian Socialism” but turned from agricultural collectivism to industrialization in the early 1970’s; he supported workers’ unions with funding and political representation. Unions were for working class and professionals in Tunisia, and they are all united in one umbrella organization, the Union Generale des Trades Tunisiennes (UGTT) which was first begun by Marxist Muhammad Ali Hammi in 1925. However, the UGTT itself represents class stratification as it has never represented the unskilled workers and temporary laborers who represent an underclass in Tunisian society (Perkins 2004). It also could not represent Tunisian women working in small, secret factories earning illegally low wages upon which the factory owners did not have to pay taxes (Moghadam 2005). Bourguiba’s support of a monolithic state feminism remained constant, except for a brief period in the late 1970’s when he relaxed his control of civic activities (Giman in Moghadam 2007: 98). In this window of time, an independent feminist organization emerged, the Club D’Etudes de la Condition Des Femmes, popularly called the Club Tahar Haddad, harkening back to the unfulfilled claims of equality between women and men. These women came together with an agenda to confront the nascent sexism of the political Left, and leftist men’s refusal to work to end women’s oppression (Gilman 2004: 98).

Due to heavy government support and subsidies in industrial manufacturing and mining, in the early 1970's, Tunisia's gross domestic product (GDP), the total amount of goods produced and services rendered, soared 380 percent. Women's employment grew significantly throughout the decade; 12 percent of Tunisia's formal labor was female (ILO/INSTRAW 1985). But the economy collapsed at the end of the decade, due in large part to currency devaluation implementation recommended by the IMF, but also because of the oil crisis- Tunisia is a mixed-oil economy, and in fact does not have enough oil to supply its own industrial demand. Further, it appears that Bourguiba's administration purposefully over-counted the number of women factory workers in the 1970's, to portray an impression of gender equality to the international community (Moghadam 2005). In reality, industrial jobs were male-dominated reflecting the male-dominance of Tunisian industrial unions (CREDIF 2002; Ben Romdhane 2005). Not until the end of the 1980's, with the economic *infidha* (a term that translates to opening of markets to trade) of Tunisia's economy and the ensuing EPZ's did women begin to dominate factory labor, albeit without any macho union representation. However, in the initial years of trade liberalization, women's unemployment rate increased, from 11 percent in 1984 to 20.9 percent in 1989. It declined slightly in the early 1990's, to 17 percent in 1994. It continued a slight decline to 16.3 in 1999 (Republique Tunissienne 1999; CREDIF 2002). Since then, it has continued in slight, steady decline. Moreover, in the 1990's there was a growing number of unemployed women who were previously employed. In a study conducted in 1997 through the Tunisian

government, it was revealed that nearly half of unemployed women were previously salaried employees (Republique Tunisienne 1999). This is just counting formal labor, which represents but a fraction of Tunisian women's labor story. Moghadam points out that Tunisia has an extremely high rate of women who work in factories that are in rural and informal or "irregular" settings, especially sewing and loom work in rooms of homes that are converted into factories- virtual microscopic sweat shops (Moghadam 2005). Further, there is also high underemployment for women, who may work seasonally (CREDIF 2005).

For the elite minority of women (those with college degrees and living in urban areas), the 1970's was a time of increased opportunities for employment in government-run positions in education, healthcare, and welfare administration; dovetailing with these opportunities was legislation to protect women, including paid maternity leave (ILO 1985; Brocas, Cailloux, and Oget 1990; Moghadam 1998; CREDIF 2002). These opportunities and protections were (and continue to be) protections for middle class women, who represent a fraction of the Tunisian population, and most of whom do *not* participate in the formal economy. Moreover, women who were able to start their own businesses (excluding home-based micro-businesses) were most often middle class, and college educated. This is corroborated by government research conducted in 2002: there are a total of 5,000 women business owners in Tunisia. Of these, 54 percent had higher education degrees, as compared to 40 percent of men (CREDIF 2002). This is

evidence that businesses are held disproportionately by women of the elite classes.

Another complication for women laborers was that much of their labor was probably not quantified by official statistical measures, since Tunisia has a booming informal (and illegal) sector. This highly feminine sector includes production done in the domestic sphere but also includes illegal small factories (basically neighborhood sweat shops), especially those described as “light manufacturing,” primarily textiles. These untaxed wages are paid out illegally; already in highly exploitative conditions, these women laborers are affected by the currency devaluations which began in the 1980’s (Moghadam 2005).

Bourguiba’s administration adopted neoliberal trajectory toward economic growth at the end of the 1970’s (Perkins 2003). Neoliberalism, based on laissez-faire economic philosophy, entails that capitalism must be unfettered by regulations. It promotes the idea that this is an ethical endeavor: free markets make for more just polities. Export-oriented trade forms the crux of this economic strategy. Bourguiba’s administration also gained money from loans from international lenders. The administration also sought foreign direct investment, but the FDI rates in the MENA are lower than other parts of the world at just 1 percent, and with a steady drop between 1976 and 1998 (UNDP 2002; World Bank 2000).

In the global economic downturn of the early 1980’s, Tunisia plummeted into a debt crisis. All the MENA countries were beset by economic problems, occurring in the context of a world-wide free fall in the prices of primary



commodities, including oil (Moghadam 2005). By 1986, after fluctuating in the early 1980's, the price of oil plummeted from \$28 per barrel to \$7 per barrel. That same year, Bourguiba turned to the IMF for a loan, and the agreement was based on an IMF-dictated program of structural adjustment.

The antidote to these economic crises, namely structural adjustment, caused more economic hardships for the proletariat. Tunisia made its way onto the list of largest World Bank borrowers, and was forced to adopt IMF-led austerity measures to work off its debt. Many mixed-oil economies of the MENA (including Tunisia) experienced negative growth, and became severely in debt, at 70 percent of GDP (UNDPI 1989). Tunisia went through a series of "IMF riots," known as bread riots or revolts in Tunisia (Niblock and Murphy 1993; Harik and Sullivan 1992; Lahmar 1997; Walton and Seddon 1994).

The Tunisian proletariat did not passively absorb the reductions in public services, devaluation of currency, disempowerment of labor unions, and price increases on staples. These 1978 street protests were reported in industrial centers, rural and urban and for a week, thousands of people thronged the streets in front of government buildings. While the unions were part of these street protests, masses of people who did not have the privilege of union representation, the jobless and those employed in menial jobs, formed the bulk of the street protests (Seddon 1986). The far-left Tunisian National Opposition Movement (MONT) termed the protesters, *les insurges de la faim*, hungry protesters. The Tunisian democratic socialist party and the communist party (legal) supported the protesters, and criticized the government for sending in the military.

Approximately fifty protesters were killed, and hundreds detained and tortured (Seddon 1986).

Despite little evidence that militant Islamic groups, or leftists, had organized the massive protests, Bourguiba's government detained, interrogated, tortured and even killed people in these groups in the months following these protests (Seddon 1986). General Ben Ali (who would go on to be president in 1987) was in charge of the brutal government crack-down. The then illegal Islamic Tendency Movement, which would later morph into *Ennahda* (the most popular political party of the post-Jasmine Revolution era), was treated as an especially real threat. Bourguiba's government's treatment of the protesters and of people in opposition groups increased peoples' disappointment with Bourguiba which would culminate in the mid-1980's. These 1978 protests were only a small preview to the revolts of the 1980's. Popular resistance against structural adjustment is evidenced in what are termed the Tunisian bread revolts (Lahmar 1996).

January one through six, 1984, is known as the period of the bread revolts (Lahmar 1997; Seddon 1986). They had been preceded by union-organized protests which reflect the proletariat's frustrations at Bourguiba and the Constitutional Democratic Rally (CDR) concerning the dropping of socialist promotion of unions, and the ensuing hardships which the working classes who suffered unduly from unemployment, were to endure (Lahmar 1997). Through the 1970's, Tunisia's wealth was becoming less equally distributed and the unemployed proletariat was growing more frustrated by the elite entrepreneurs

who made money at their expense (Ferchiou 1987; Lahmar 1997; Perkins 2003). Bread became the symbol of class conflict in modern Tunisia.

Bread prices had been fixed by the Bourguiba administration almost immediately following independence from France (Reich 1990). Maintaining the low price of bread and other essential commodities was achieved by the expenditure of an average of twenty percent of the Tunisian GDP on food subsidies (Alaniz 1994). While this was true of some other staples like sugar, semolina, and oil, bread has religious, political-economic, and caloric significance in Tunisia, as it does in the rest of the MENA (Bousselmi 1987).

Muslims cite the verse of the Qu'ran that states that bread is a gift from God, and that it must be treated as sacred. Thus, in Tunisia bread is never thrown in the garbage, not even the crumbs. In practical terms, bread is how Tunisians get their energy. No meal is eaten without bread, either baguette or traditional Tunisian bread (similar to pita); an average of 57 percent of calories in the Tunisian daily intake is from bread (Johnson and Ferguson 1986).

Given the symbolic *and* caloric significance of bread, in 1984, when Bourguiba's administration doubled the price of bread, in keeping with the stipulations of the IMF's structural adjustment program, a popular revolt ensued. This revolt was wide-spread, taking place on the streets in cities and in rural agricultural areas (Lahmar 1997).

There were precursors to the revolt. While the Bourguiba administration began "preparing" the public for the coming doubling of the price of bread three months before the price increase went into effect, by making speeches about the

importance of austerity measures. The agricultural unions and students' groups in the south of Tunisia and in industrial centers like Gabes in the west also staged events, threatening Bourguiba's administration that it was ready for a fight should the price of bread increase. The UGTT began protests to attempt to avert the price hike (Lahmar 1997).

The bread revolts were organized by the unions and students' organizations, but it was the masses of people without union representation or the privilege of post-secondary education who made the revolts so effective. They staged the largest protests in Tunisia's history (excluding the Jasmine Revolution of January 2011). Along with the universities, which were taken over and shut down by students' groups, all the major industrial sectors closed. The sudden cessation of industrial production was as alarming to the Bourguiba administration as were the street protests.

Women workers and students' organizations played a large role in these protests, and women's unions were adept at getting young men to break curfews imposed by the government. One example is that of the women workers in a textile factory in the village of El-Henncha, where the women workers' union was crucial to strong representation during the protests. Mouldi Lahmar (1997) describes the El-Hencha protests:

...leaving the factory they headed towards the center of the village, chanting slogans against the rise in food prices. They then continued to march in the main street, passing in front of small shops where old merchants and fellahs gathered to play cards or to gossip. The crowd continued its march and passed in front of the only café in the village, where young day laborers (agricultural sector), pupils, and some officials had the habit of meeting daily. The girls, with their ululation, encouraged them to

join the demonstration. Thus the crowd grew in size and the rhythm of events speeded up. The demonstrators then headed towards the high school where they were joined by students, then by other villagers, by children, and by some construction workers who were married with children. Then violence broke out. A car belonging to the high school administration was burned, the seats of the town council and the national guard were attacked, and the police station was sacked... (Lahmar 1997: 328).

The prominence of women protesters in the bread revolts is linked with their proletarianization and the strength of unions, and not to feminist organizations. By the 1980's much of the developing world's working-age female population was in waged labor (40 percent), but in Tunisia, as in the rest of the MENA, working women's numbers were still very low, at 14 percent. As Lahmar (1997) also describes, in villages where few women were in waged labor, such as Bir Ali, they were largely absent from the protests. Moreover, women have been extremely underemployed in clerical, sales, administrative and managerial positions (Moghadam 2005). As in most of the world, Tunisian women with secondary degrees have a higher rate of unemployment than do Tunisian women with no secondary education (UN 2000).

On January 3, Bourguiba declared a state of emergency and a curfew, which was largely broken. His police force, despite their brutal attacks on the protesters (89 were killed and hundreds detained and tortured), were overwhelmed by the more than two million street protesters. Bourguiba then sent the army in. The protests only increased over the next two days, and there was speculation and hope that Bourguiba would be overthrown.

On January 6, Bourguiba announced an end to the price hikes. He gave a speech where he blamed his advisors. He said that they had told him that the people were wasting bread, and he was trying to prevent them from this sin (Lahmar 1997:336). The bread revolts cannot be explained by bread's religious significance so much as it is by the strength of agricultural unions, industrial and students' unions, and the growing frustrations of the unemployed (not represented by unions) proletariat (Lahmar 1997; Seddon, 1986).

Bourguiba looked out of touch during the protests, and the public frustration with him continued to grow (Hopwood 1992; Perkins 2004; Salem 1984). His decision to take International Monetary Fund loans symbolized the unraveling of the socialist protectionism that had been a cornerstone of Tunisian independence (Moore, 1970; Perkins, 1986; Salem, 1984). Seddon concluded:

Even if the riots of 1984 and rebellion of 1985 do not oblige an immediate re-assessment of the entire economic strategy on the part of government, they may stimulate more serious consideration of alternatives among those whose interests are not best served by the 'open door' policies that have predominated hitherto. Parties and trades unions may reconsider their own political strategies and recognize the potential for a broad-based popular movement to include the 'unorganized' and unemployed as well as the 'organized' workers and disaffected members of the middle class and the bourgeoisie. (Seddon 1986:19)

Seddon's prescription for action concerning the growing gap between the group benefiting from economic liberalization and those harmed by it did not happen. In fact, the situation would grow worse under Ben Ali, from the standpoint of the masses of laborers, as well as many proletariat with union representation. As for women, the class inequalities to come were complicated by what Moghadam describes as the patriarchal gender contract.

Between 1978 and 1984, there was a “polarization” of women’s employment which reflected growing social stratification inequalities (CREDIF 2002:41). Working class women (while still underemployed in the formal sector) were employed primarily in textile factories; in rural areas, their already intensive work in agriculture increased as men out-migrated to urban areas to find work (especially in construction in the fast-growing cities).

Middle class women, with university degrees (while still underemployed in the formal sector) were more likely to work in the government public sector jobs, and unlikely to work in private businesses or sales. This reflects the predisposition of women to seek government-regulated jobs, where they were less likely to suffer from discrimination or sexual harassment in the private sector that is very much dominated by a “good old boy” mentality. That is, private businesses in Tunisia are homosocial, dominated by men and their male relatives and friends (Moghadam 2005).

While there has been no wide-spread feminism in Tunisia, as I described earlier, there have been some elite feminist groups. They have been concentrated only in the capital city of Tunis, and have mostly existed under state control. There is little research about feminist organizations in Tunisia over the last three decades. Gilman (2007) describes the resurgence of feminism in 1980’s Tunisia. While it was not as dynamic as that in some other parts of the world like Latin America, non-State aligned Tunisian feminist organizations posed a challenge to the male elite’s contention that women were already liberated, especially by exerting pressure for reform of the PSC’s (Gilman in Moghadam 2007).

Under Bourguiba and also even moreso under Ben Ali, feminist organizations were tightly controlled, so that even transnational organizations promoting women's issues were, according to Gilman, "governmental non-governmental organizations" (Gilman 2004: 99). However, those women's groups which operate without state control receive most of their funding from European (especially German) women's organizations. In 1989 the Club Tahar Haddad was recognized by the state, and re-named the Association des Femmes Tunisiennes Democratres (AFTD). This official recognition took place two years after Ben Ali's coup, in a climate of superficial social liberalization. It remains the only autonomous research organization (Gilman 2004). The non-state aligned Femmes Democratres (ATFD) took stances critical of the government, whereas those who are State-aligned promote officially sanctioned ideology. Femmes Democratres (ATFD) tried to engage with the state to exert pressure on the administration for reforms; however, state engagement puts them at risk of being co-opted and controlled (Gilman 2004: 99). These feminists (and all other political activists working independently from government control), have also been subject to harassment and intimidation. Thus, part of the reason why they are underrepresented in the international research on feminism is that they frequently had their passports seized when they tried to leave the country to attend conferences (Gilman 2004).

It was not only was the public that was disenchanted with Bourguiba by the mid-1980's. Despite the rigid and homogeneous character of the political scene under Bourguiba (and Ben Ali), many members of his government were fed



up with his autocratic tendencies. Many broke in secret into unofficial parties (Hopwood 1992). Popular opposition to Bourguiba was growing as the pressures of the IMF's structural adjustment program stresses the masses of Tunisians; unemployment rates rose (LABORSTA 2003).

In an attempt to diffuse popular discontent, and under pressure from his advisors, in 1981, Bourguiba gave legal authorization for opposition political organizing, and multiparty elections were held. However, only certain hand-picked parties were legalized, including the Democratic Socialist and Communist parties; these parties received so few votes that they posed no threat (Perkins 2004). Bourguiba was the subject of general frustration.

The end of Bourguiba's presidency marks the beginning of many contemporary situational trends of contemporary Tunisia. It is upon examination of Ben Ali's political-economic trajectory in relationship to the globalizing economy that one may gain an understanding of Tunisia as economists have classified it, a "watchmaker country" (Richards and Waterbury 1990). Such a country is small, with relatively low population (today's Tunisia is just over ten million in citizens), and limited natural resources (Tunisia has a fraction of the amount of oil as some neighboring countries). As such Tunisia has oriented itself to the global economy by investing in human capital, and exporting laborers abroad to send back remittances, as well as exporting skill-intensive manufactures. As of the 1990's, manufactured goods equaled 42 percent of Tunisia's exports (Richards and Waterbury 1990). In this section of the chapter, I trace the liberalization of Tunisia's economy under president Ben Ali.

In 1987, a member of Bourguiba's government, General Zine El Abidine Ben Ali staged a bloodless coup, which he called a constitutional coup, necessary to preserve the constitution as Bourguiba had grown (supposedly) senile. Ben Ali, like Bourguiba, was a revolutionary fighter against French colonial rule. He showed great aptitude in military matters, and, like Bourguiba, he studied in France (albeit at a military college, not the Sorbonne). For most of his years in government, he headed the Tunisian Military Security Department. He also headed the interior security and administered the brutal suppression of Islamic groups in Tunisia (Perkins 2004). When Ben Ali took over from Bourguiba in 1986, he enacted sweeping neoliberal reforms.

Ben Ali's policies were in keeping with the capitalist re-orientation that Bourguiba's administration had begun since it abandoned socialism in the late 1970's. Ben Ali amplified the neoliberal structural reforms to the economy which Bourguiba's administration had begun under the auspices of the IMF in the beginning of the 1980's. After assuming the presidency in 1987, he removed much state regulation of industry, and re-privatized farms, distributing land up the social classes (Boughzala and Sallaouti 2003; Chebbi, et al. 2010; King 2003).

Feminism, especially activism by non-state aligned groups like the ATFD (the Femmes Democratés), continued to pose a challenge to the State and the male elite in the 1990's. One of the Femmes Democratés' major undertakings of the 1990's was the Centre d'Ecoute et d'Orientation des Femmes Victimes de Violence, a battered women's center in Tunis. They also coalesced with other feminist organizations across the MENA, and formed another organization called

the AISHA Network, which confronted patriarchal violence and control by the state and within the family. In the mid-1990's, the state-controlled press published a series of articles about the organization, condemning the women as unmarried women, prostitutes, and lesbians. This turned much of the public against the organizations, organizations most Tunisians had never heard of before reading this propaganda (Gilman 2004). It is not surprising that sexuality and sexual reputation were used to destroy any credibility that ATFD and the AISHA Network might have garnered, since destroying a woman's sexual reputation is the worst form of symbolic violence in the MENA. The autonomous feminist movement weakened after these events.

Ben Ali expanded neo-liberal reforms and signed more free trade agreements with European trade organizations. Between the beginning of Ben Ali's presidency and 1992, the IMF conducted a program of structural adjustment with Tunisia. During that time period, the economic growth rate averaged 4.2 percent; Its GDP growth rate in the early 1980's was barely above 1 percent. Unemployment frustrations grew, and this rage would increase with Ben Ali's increased opening of Tunisia's economy to the world market.

In March 1994, the Ben Ali Ministry of Finance enacted Law Number 94-41, which allowed the free importation and exportation of goods, with little restrictions. In 1995, the Tunisian government and the European Union negotiated a major economic agreement on what is popularly called free trade. Free trade policies center on the dismantling of barriers to markets between states or regions. For example, Tunisia phased out tariffs on European goods as of

1995, as well as with the United States. As of 2004, the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service adjunct of the U.S. Department of State reported that Tunisia had been compliant with the goals of structural adjustment. While the Ben Ali administration maintained a fraction of import restrictions deemed strategic, ninety-seven percent of imports into Tunisia do not need prior authorization to enter Tunisia, and are not subject to tariff. According to the logic of neo-liberal globalization, this is awesome progress.<sup>4</sup>

The Ben Ali administration reduced its role in regulating the economy so successfully, that by 1994 forty-six of 189 publicly-held business enterprises were privatized through sale of shares or assets. Ben Ali's administration focused on the Tunisian Stock Market, the Bourse, as the principle vehicle for the privatization program. A privately-held stock clearing house company was also established. Further, competitive industries like airlines that were state owned were turned over to private ownership, their shares sold on the stock market (Perkins 2004).

The definitive re-orientation towards global capitalism is evidenced in the financial and banking industries. The Central Bank of Tunis gradually shifted from a regulatory role, an arm of the government, to a supervisory role. Interest rates were officially deregulated and commercial banks allowed to move into a long-term credit market. The Tunisian Dinar was made convertible for account transactions, and currency trading was also privatized (Perkins 2004).

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<sup>4</sup> The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service adjunct of the U.S. Department of State observed that Tunisia, "represents outstanding progress since 1986 when only 23.6 percent of imports could be freely imported."

Also in the 1990's, Ben Ali narrowed existing trade imbalances, increasing imports, and offering investment incentives. The Investment Incentives Code of 1994 allowed Ben Ali's government more ways to promote the economic growth that fit with the hegemony of globalization. The code offers two incentives, first is applied to all investment projects, except for mining, energy and finance. The second investment incentive made possible through the code is vaguely described as reserved for projects in specified fields or projects of a special nature. These projects include export processing zones, termed economic parks by the Tunisian government.<sup>5</sup>

The Investment Incentives Code is not the only incentive created by the Ben Ali administration; non-residents also get tax-free transfer of capital invested in the investment project and the profits thereof. If the non-resident investors decide to sell their shares in a Tunisian enterprise, they can repatriate their money to their home countries. Once a foreign investor has invested in a Tunisian enterprise, it is the Tunisians who stand to lose if the investors leave the country. The Tunisian High Commission for Investments is authorized to grant further incentives to investment projects deemed to be of special significance and importance. These are often lucrative ventures which usually present the largest

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<sup>5</sup> According to the 1994 code, all investment projects other than those exceptions described above, are given the following ten incentives under the 1994 code: 1) A deduction from taxable income, of up to 35 percent of net income profits, for income or profits reinvested in share capital or invested in capital increase; 2) A suspension of VAT and sales tax on locally produced equipment; 3) A reduction of 10 percent from customs duties and the suspension of the VAT and sales taxes on imported equipment for which there is no Tunisian manufactured substitute; 4) An option to apply an installment method of depreciation for production plants and equipment, excluding off equipment, having a life expectancy of more than seven years. The second kind of investment incentive is available to investment projects in the field of exporting (whether in whole or in part), regional development projects, or projects engaged in agriculture, environmental protection, research and development, and small new enterprises. The investment incentives are substantial and vary depending on the field in which the enterprise engages and the industry concerned. A brief overview of some of the incentives available follows: 5) A full deduction of income or profits from taxable income or corporate taxable income for a period of ten years, and a reduction of up to 50 percent at the eleventh year; 6) A full tax allowance in respect of profits reinvested in the company; 7) A full tax allowance in respect of profits reinvested in the company; 8) Financial support for amounts paid for social security levies; 9) Investment bonuses equal to 8 percent of the cost of the investment made; 10) The option to elect a flat-tax rate of 20 percent of gross earnings.

benefit to elites and members of the Ben Ali administration. The benefits often include exemptions from income tax, or corporate tax, for a period of up to five years, state-funded contributions to the cost of infrastructure development, an investment bonus of up to five percent of the total investment in the project or the suspension of tariffs. In terms of gender and access to these neoliberal employment opportunities, it is clear that middle class Tunisian men have an unequal access to importing and exporting.

Consequently, there has been a rise in women's employment in previously male-dominated civil servant positions, so that women came to occupy approximately 10 percent of these positions (Moghadam 2005). In the late 1980's, there was some diversification in Tunisian women's employment, especially in the growing service sector (with its low wages) and in manufacturing other than textiles, principally pharmaceuticals and food processing (CREDIF 2002). By the mid-1990's, women were making some gains in the formal labor sector. For example, between 1994 and 1997, women got 38 percent of new employment (CREDIF 2002). Moghadam (2005) attributes these gains to foreign investment, increase government investment in information and communication technologies (ICT) and the political rights given to women via the PSC's.

While this number is still small, it is a higher rate than most other countries of the MENA. Moreover, Tunisian women are more likely to obtain employment in sales positions, as well as professional jobs in finance, insurance, and real estate in the private sector. This would lend support against Ghazy Mujahid's (1985) thesis that it is Arab culture that makes women disinclined to

work with male strangers in public for if this was the case, Tunisian women's would be as low as they are for women in many other MENA countries (Moghadam 2005).

Unemployment throughout the 1990's into the 2000's grew (to 14 percent), brought on by the very policies that were to liberalize Tunisia's economy, a combination of slow economic growth after the post-oil boom, the decline in real wages, shrinking employment in the government sector, and privatization especially for Tunisia, who Moghadam (2005) calls the pioneer of liquidating publicly held businesses and selling them to private owners.

On the other hand, it is important to point out that Tunisia has developed in certain respects. As of the 2000, it was categorized as a lower-middle income developing country, with 2,500 GDP. Further, according to the World Bank, it is only moderately indebted, with only 53 percent of Tunisian GDP going to pay off the debt (Central Bank of Tunisia 2003). That many other countries of the developing world are worse off than Tunisia is hardly reassuring. It is also important to note, though that poverty levels in Tunisia decreased from 22 percent in 1975 to less than 4 percent in 2001 (Kaboub 2007). Not all groups suffer unemployment equally: Tunisian women with secondary educations were more likely to find employment in the government sector and in the era of privatization and government shrinkage, this puts them disproportionately in jeopardy of unemployment (ERF 1996: 89-91). Given the rise in attainment of post-secondary degrees in Tunisia (by 2006, two thirds of new job seekers held university diplomas), there has been a deepening sense of crisis concerning

unemployment. In the 2000's, 50 percent of job-seekers in Tunisia had been looking for a job for more than six months (UNCTAD 2003).

Daughters of the middle class, likely to have post-secondary degrees, have been treated differently by Tunisian government research agencies, a sign of the patriarchal contract ideology that Moghadam describes in MENA countries (1998). CREDIF terms women college graduates' unemployment "voluntary unemployment" and even "unemployment-as-luxury." It is doubtful that they feel there is anything luxurious about the vulnerability they experience without a paycheck (UNDP 2002).

More common for women in Tunisia has been their participation in the informal labor sector, that is marked by adverse working conditions and wages below the national standard minimum wage (World Bank 1995). The minimum wage is 270 Tunisian dinars per month for 48-hour work weeks, or translated to .75 euro per hour (ANSAMED 2007). The informal labor sector is difficult to study, but what little exists about this in the MENA corresponds to my own research on women in informal labor. Fleur-Lobban (1989) in her research in several countries including Tunisia found women working in household-based mini businesses like baking, sewing, and illegal sexual services as well as loan pools and street markets. In her research in Egypt, Early (1998) found that women in Cairo worked as market vendors, midwives, henna-appliers, and *hammam* (public bath) attendants. Specifically in Tunisia, 35 percent of women work in the informal sector, according to survey research conducted in 1989 and 1991. Berry-Chickaoui (1998) found that most Tunisian women working in the



informal sector produced traditional goods and specialty foods (such as pastries for Eid). However, they also participated as a response to poverty and “modern aspirations” (218). They were also *hammam* attendants, seamstresses, street food vendors, hair dressers and worked as artisans of leather and metals. What they all had in common was their long hours of work for low pay (Lobban 1989).

A reflection of labor’s growing coerced complicity with Ben Ali’s government was that the largest union, the union backed by Bourguiba’s administration, the National Labor Federation (UGTT) supported privatization. While there were protests over the fallout of this move toward privatization, it would still be more than a decade before the Jasmine Revolution; perhaps that it took a decade for most Tunisians to experience the impacts of the firings, monetary deflation, and unemployment.

Tourism plays the same role in the services sector. The Ministry of Tourism reported that as of 2000, it drew an average of five million tourists annually. This mimics the sources of revenue of other semi-periphery countries like Mexico, and Brazil. These Tourists are approximately 89 percent Europeans, but it is unclear how many of these Tourists are actually Tunisians who live and work in the EU and return for their vacations. It is clear that women working on the tourist industry are paid the least. Data collected by the ANSAMED research center shows that women are hired to work in the lowest-paying jobs, mostly as chamber maids and laundresses in the resorts, while Tunisian men are hired in management positions, as waiters, bell hops, and attendants (ANSAMED 2007). Thus, women benefit less from tourism than do men. Also, women sex workers

at touristic locations are also chronically underpaid, and subject to violence (Henslin 2007; Poirier 1995). While it was not the focus of my study, prostitution was clearly visible around Bizerte's tourist hotels, where Tunisian women in scanty clothing would sit in Tourist bars and cafes, and receive European men at their café tables, and sometimes disappear into the hotels with them. Henslin (2007) describes sex workers in far worse circumstances around the Port of Zarzis, whose major clientele are port traders and soldiers.

The 1995 restructuring of the Ben Ali government also reflected neo-liberal aims. The Ministry of National Economy was split into the Ministries of Industry and Commerce. The Ministry of Industry was made responsible for improving the international competitiveness of Tunisian industry, and also retained control of the few remaining state-owned industries. The Ministry of Commerce manages the areas greatly affected by structural adjustment, consumer subsidies, and price controls. Thus, the Ben Ali government was restructured in order to maximize the neoliberal capitalist impetus.

Tunisia's largest Free Trade agreement came about through its association with the EU in 1996, which phased out tariffs on European imports by the year of my field research, 2008. According to this agreement, Tunisia became a preferred trade partner with the EU countries, with emphasis on trade in textiles and agricultural products from Tunisia (i.e., textiles and olive oil).

As Tunisia has more than one Free Trade Agreement, there have been issues to sort. For example, the older impetus towards socialist protectionism meant that products from Europe, like olive oil, would be taxed, so as to keep

Tunisian olive oil marketable. There had also been a political alliance and trade agreement between the Middle East and North African countries, reflecting pan-Arab alliance. However, a conflict over imported cotton established the United States' supremacy over Middle Eastern cotton exporters.

While MENA countries could import cotton with no tariff, a 17 percent duty was placed on cotton coming from the United States. After years of complaint and intervention from the U.S. and the EU, the Ben Ali administration reversed the policy of duty-free agricultural trade between MENA countries. All cotton reaches the Tunisian market duty-free, which means that the highly mechanized and subsidized American cotton industry would beat out MENA cotton industry. Throughout the 1990's, Ben Ali's administration enacted policy that would be more amenable to foreign investment, and this was done through privatization, and tariff removal. Promoting Tunisia's workforce and environmental conditions for foreign investment also became part of Tunisian governmental policy, especially investment incentives (Perkins 2003).

By 2009, Tunisia's GDP was 25.813 billion Tunisian dinars, which equals approximately \$19.13 billion US. Its per capita GDP, according to IMF estimates, equals approximately \$ 8,254 US. What GDP cannot provide is a sense of the growing inequality of access to production of goods and services. However, the poverty rate in Tunisia and throughout the MENA has actually increased. Consider the critical period of economic liberalization that was the 1980's: in 1985, the poverty rate was 30.6 percent of total population of the MENA, and by 1990, it was 33.1 percent (World Bank 1993; ESCWA 1999).

As Holmes-Eber (2003) and King (2003) show, the economic growth of Tunisia benefits the bourgeoisie and the upper class; its positive effects have not been equally felt. Holmes-Eber's description of women from rural families (*fellahs*) who live in impoverished areas of Tunis gives insight into the inequality of access to the benefits of economic growth. Stephen J. King (2003) investigates the impacts of liberalizing economic reforms through a case study of the Tunisian village of Tebourba in order to challenge the ideology that capitalist development will facilitate democracy. He explores structural adjustment in the late 1980's and early 1990's, where state-run socialist farm collectives designed by the Bourguiba administration were privatized. Large land owners took most of the farm lands, leaving small farmers with little land for growing. The landless farm workers were left in desperation, as they not only were not allocated any land in the privatization schemes, they were also rendered largely redundant. Privatization also meant that large landowners took out loans for farm machinery that did the peasants' jobs. The landless peasants, those who did not move to cities in search of work, must rely on charity. Nearly destitute, they must beg the wealthy land owners who displaced them for basic foodstuffs at religious holidays like Eid (King 2003).

Along with this shift toward privatization came a shift in the peasants' unions, which Bourguiba backed. The unions became increasingly willing to do the bidding of the large farmers, so the small farmers and landless workers were even less democratized by economic liberalization (King 2003). The plight of the "below zeros," whose middle-peasant relatives resent having to hire them when

they don't need extra laborers, is not described through the GDP. In King's (2003) research, he describes the widening class divisions between agricultural groups: the poor peasants, termed "below zeros," the middle peasants, and the rich farmers. King describes the return of ancestral lands to large land owning families, the same families who had posed intense opposition to Bourguiba's socialist farm collectives in the 1960's, which had redistributed much of their land. King's research set in the 1990's agricultural sector reveals some social changes for women laborers, as compared to Ferchiou's studies of the 1970's and 1980's. The women agricultural laborers of Ferchiou's research were usually unwaged- their labor was considered part of women's chores, despite the fact that they did more than half of all the farm labor. Female "below zeros" in King's study were paid, albeit a dinar less per hour than were men (despite the stipulation for equal wages in the PSC's).

By paying women less, large farm owners obviously gain more profit, but the practice also leads to misogynistic resentment of women by their male counterparts. This means more threat of violence against women, as it foments competition which drives down wages. As land was re-distributed up the social strata under Ben Ali's administration, the landless laborers of Tebourba became more impoverished. Many continued to migrate to urban areas to seek employment, thus feeding Tunisia's rapid urbanization.

The large land holders revived traditional Islamic charity towards the laborers, which edified an older stratification system where wealthy elites, are able to exact more control over the large proletariat of farm laborers, who must

rely on them for food hand-outs. Further, the large land holders supported local politicians, *umdas*, providing the funds for building mosques and clinics. The *umdas* would encourage the laborers (below zeros) and other peasants to comply with the wealthy land owners by promising charity in the form of food and medicine (King 2003). At the macro level, the economic restructuring of Tunisia's agricultural sector has had consequences for its ability to promote long-term goals of economic self-sufficiency.

Between 1986 and 2006, Tunisia's currency exchange rate was 50 percent higher (World Bank 2010). This has had consequences for exportation. In a broad study of export agricultural industry in Tunisia from 2000-2010, economists concluded that, "...the continuous depreciation of Tunisia's exchange rate led in the long run to a decline in the external net agricultural position of Tunisia, potentially jeopardizing the objectives of self-sufficiency, food security and higher production of agricultural products..." (Chebbi and Sellaouti 2011:5). In the short run, Chebbi and Sellaouti note that (as corroborated by King) agricultural owners have benefitted financially.

The industrial sector has benefitted in the short and long run, note Chebbi and Sellaouti (2011), and they suggest that this is because more funds have been allocated by the government to enhance industrial production. However, women laborers also fill many of the textile factory positions, and their wages are lower than men's (ANSAMED 2007).

Currency devaluations since 1986 have meant that the masses of proletariat struggle more to purchase basic staples. The World Bank reported

that, as of 2006, Tunisians spent an average of half their incomes on food. In the 1990's, they spent approximately 40 percent of their incomes on food. Tunisian producers (large agricultural producers, factory owners) have benefitted because as Tunisian currency devalued, it gave them a competitive edge in export sales of the products. That is, Tunisian olive oil was sold to the EU for less than Italian olive oil (Chebbi and Olareagga 2011).

While pursuing neoliberal reforms and trade-based economic expansion, Bourguiba also cracked down not just on Islamic political organizations but all other opposition political parties (a trend which Ben Ali increased), thus leading Stephen J. King (2003) to describe Ben Ali's Tunisia as one liberalizing *against* democracy. Ben Ali only allowed the marginal leftist political opposition to be legal, since they had no chance of gaining a majority of seats in elections. Since the Islamists did pose a real possibility of gaining political majorities if they were allowed legitimacy, Ben Ali waged a campaign of torture and intimidation against anyone suspected of links to Islamist groups. This included detaining and torturing even of men with long beards. Human rights groups have identified many cases of brutality and torture against the Ben Ali administration (Nazemroaya 2011).

Suppression of Islamic groups fit with Ben Ali's trajectory of neo-liberalism, for several reasons. Al Nahda's leaders were especially critical of the PSC's, which had given women too much freedom. Once Ben Ali became president, he added amendments to the PSC's, imposing more liberation on women in the family. Ben Ali's 1993 amendments to the PSC's aimed at the

heart of patriarchy, relationships of power between wives and husbands.

Amendment 93-74 gave women the right to pass on their last name and national origin to their children (in the case of divorce or foreign marriage), but only with the father's approval, which in reality makes the amendment moot since few fathers would give approval (Charrad 2003).

The amendment also states that women have a say in decisions concerning their children, and that the mother must give consent before a minor daughter can be married. Again, these amendments are unlikely to be used in a practical way. In the case of divorce (a growing phenomenon in Tunisia), Ben Ali's amendments furthered Bourguiba's plan to limit patriarchal kinship in that maternal grandparents would now receive child support payments equal to paternal grandparents'. Also, it asserted that men could be jailed for not paying child support and alimony.

The 1993 amendments to the code also made statements about family violence. The same amendment stated that husbands must treat their wives with "kindness," a genuine need in Tunisian marriages, according to many of my married informants. I will discuss in later chapters the problem, identified by Tunisian wives of their husbands, "giving them a hard time." This often included emotional violence, but women in my study never directly discussed physical battering with me; they did speak of other women who had suffered from domestic violence. The Femmes Democratrices' center for women victims of battery would suggest that this is a real problem. These amendments actually do little except to make a favorable impression on other countries, trade partners, and



international investors (Labidi 2010). That is, family law courts have few records of husbands standing trial for lack of kindness toward their wives, or for not paying child support to an ex-wife or her parents (Charrad 2003; Labidi 2010).

It is likely that the amendments were less an imposition of actual equality than they were about Ben Ali's administration promoting international impressions which attract FDI, especially multinational corporations and the states that represent. At the same time that Ben Ali added these amendments, the 1990's, he was waging a brutal persecution of Tunisians engaged in political activism against his regime, and especially against Islamist Al Nahda and the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party. The following is a joke I heard frequently during my field research in 2008. It was told to me directly, but more often, it was passed around on social networking internet sites. It is told with several variations, but always with the same punch line:

European human rights workers travel to Tunisia, their mission to investigate claims that Ben Ali is brutally suppressing the Tunisian people. The workers first interview some Tunisians on the street. A textile vendor tells them that Ben Ali has been great for the country, and that he does not mind that he must compete with larger vendors who now import polyester from China, because his women workers love to sew longer hours for less pay. Then, the human rights workers talk to some garbage collectors who say that they love Ben Ali and would like to pay even more bribes to keep their licenses. Then, the human rights workers talk to some slum-dwellers who are sorting through the garbage at the dump. When asked about Ben Ali, one of the men says, "Please tell Ben Ali how happy I am with him, and tell him to send a big black guy to beat me up, too."

Women activists were also subject to rape and torture when detained in Ben Ali's prisons (Chrisafis 2010). Many mothers of young children were given long sentences under conditions which Amnesty International has identified as a violation of women's rights. The amendments to the PSC's were a way for Ben

Ali to display Tunisia as a country where women's rights and democracy prevailed, promoting a climate favorable to foreign investors, but the real suppression of women was actually widespread (Labidi 2010).

Since it is unlikely that Ben Ali amended the PSC's out of a personal conviction to feminism, it is necessary to understand his elaboration of women's rights as it relates to the strategy of economic liberalization and political repression. Equal access to employment for women has been the primary attractant for multinational factories throughout the developing world (e.g., Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983). There are several interconnected reasons for this. Women are most often underemployed in the developing world, and they fill the least-skilled assembly jobs in EPZ's. Islamist Al Nahda leaders in Tunisia have used the reality of Tunisian women's exploitation to pose the argument that women needed to be "protected" from economic exploitation, secluded in the home in what they see as a much needed return to an Islamic past where men provide for, and rule over, women. Islamists may also wish to rid men of the humiliation of having to compete with women for scarce jobs- a Marxist analysis of Islamists' vision of traditional gender roles suggests that women would be better off secluded so that they would not "take" men's jobs and drive down wages (Charrad 2003). With only men competing for jobs, they could demand higher wages, exactly what Ben Ali's neo liberal agenda, and multinational corporations, would not want.

No doubt to the chagrin of conservative Islamists, Tunisian women's educational attainment not only increased in the last four decades, but actually

surpassed Tunisian men's at the post-secondary level (Ben Romdhane 2005). This reality, while it is a sign of progress toward women's rights, is actually more a result of the Tunisian government's complicity with the needs of their foreign investors and the service sector. Between 1993 and 1994, women represented 43 percent of college students. By 2002-2003, they represented 53 percent of college students. Yet, their unemployment rates were increasing and their real wages decreasing. This is because the ICT and service sector hires women, especially those with college degrees, disproportionately.

For example, approximately 63 percent of call center employees are college-educated women, but they earn the minimum wage, 272.480 dinars per month for 48-hour work weeks (ANSAMED 2007). Even acquiring this kind of job is unlikely, as unemployment rates for women increased throughout the 1990's. 1990's Tunisia, according to Moghadam (2005) is characterized by the "feminization of unemployment" in the MENA, and this worked to the advantage of Tunisian elites and the foreign investors with whom they work, for the high female unemployment rate helps them keep wages low, and keeps women desperate to get and keep a job, even under adverse conditions.

In 1999, Ben Ali was again re-elected with approximately 89 percent of the vote. He faced a token challenge from the two legal Leftist opposition candidates (the more popular Tunisian Communist Workers' Party is illegal). He swiftly pressed to make his position of power permanent. His appointees in the Lower House passed a constitutional amendment, approved in 2002 in a referendum by a similar margin, permitting the president to run for more than two

terms, and in 2004 Ben Ali was reelected with 95 percent of the vote; he again faced only token opposition from the legal opposition.

The “landslide” victories of Ben Ali and the government party have been marked by voter intimidation and vote-rigging (Bell 2009; Perkins 2004). Despite this, Tunisia has been the subject of great praise especially by western policy-makers, for its supposed move toward democracy. Christopher Alexander, in his 2010 book titled *Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Middle East*, writes, “Once again, Tunisia would be a model. It would yield insights into how political and economic liberalization could create robust growth and stable democracies in a region dominated by stagnation and authoritarianism” (3). Given the preponderance of evidence to counter such a claim, it is likely that Alexander and his ilk write with a political agenda (Harvey 2005).

The Tunisian economy is now a service-based one; 50 percent of GDP comes from the service economy. Only 5 percent of that is from tourism. Most of the services are telecommunications, including in large part the call centers in Tunisia’s EPZ’s. The economic place of the agricultural, textile, mining and fishing industries has weakened (IMF Country Report 2010). Of note about service economies is that they tend to be made of mostly low-waged positions, like those in Tunisia’s EPZ’s, where amostly female workforce does customer service and sales calls.

The neoliberal agenda can be seen in the trade agreements between Tunisia and the EU. In 1998, Tunisia opened bilateral trade through the EU Association Agreement. Subsequently, exports to the EU from Tunisia went from

68 percent in 1986 to 126 percent in 2008. This rise allowed for funding in Tunisia's infrastructure, especially factory upgrades and mechanization, as well as transport and communication. Following the European Neighborhood Policy of 2005, FDI inflows have risen above four percent.

According to International Monetary Fund data, by 2008, between approximately 75 percent and 90 percent of Tunisia's receipts come from financial transactions with the EU, in the form of tourism, remittances, and FDI flows. 76 percent of Tunisian exports went to the EU (representing 46 percent of Tunisia's GDP), 90 percent of remittances sent back to Tunisia were from the EU (5 percent of its GDP), 83 percent of tourists to Tunisia came from the EU (7 percent of its GDP), and 73 percent of its FDI inflows come from the EU (6 percent of its GDP). While the establishment of these economic interactions had been promoted by the IMF as Tunisia's way to develop and expand its economy, in 2008, it warned that Tunisia's high dependency on the EU for exports makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in EU economy, which by 2008 was in recession (IMF Country Report 10/109). In 2008-9, when the EU went into recession, GDP growth slowed from 4.6 percent to 1.3 percent; textiles, mechanical, and electrical sectors were most negatively affected.

More recently in 2008, Tunisia signed an Association Agreement with the European Union which eliminated customs tariffs and other trade barriers on manufactured goods, and provides for the establishment of an European Union-Tunisia free trade area

in goods.<sup>6</sup> The Association Agreement of the European Union (AAEU) has three main features. The AAEU liberalized trade by abolishing trade restrictions; by 2008 there was free trade for industrial goods. The AAEU also liberalized trade of agricultural products and services, but these have not been as “free” as have industrial goods. The AAEU also effectively stabilized Tunisia’s regulatory framework with that of the European Union’s; that is, it set up similar norms of trade, and communication. Third, the AAEU, through its mise a niveau program, aided the sectors of the Tunisian economy that were struggling with liberalization (IMF 2010).

US trade agreements with the Maghreb allow for the importing and exporting of agricultural commodities. Tunisia and the United States have also signed a series of Trade and Investment Framework Agreements (TIFA’s) in

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<sup>6</sup> The terms of the agreement are as follows: “CONSIDERING the importance of the existing traditional links between the Community, its Member States and Tunisia and the common values that the Contracting Parties share; CONSIDERING the considerable progress made by Tunisia and its people towards achieving their objectives of full integration of the Tunisian economy in the world economy and participation in the community of democratic nations; TAKING ACCOUNT of the Community's willingness to provide Tunisia with decisive support in its endeavours to bring about economic reform, structural adjustment and social development; CONSIDERING the commitment of both the Community and Tunisia to free trade, in compliance with their rights and obligations arising out of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT); CONVINCED that this Agreement will create a climate conducive to the development of their economic relations, in particular in the fields of trade and investment, the key sectors for economic restructuring and technological modernisation

2. The aims of this Agreement are to: - provide an appropriate framework for political dialogue between the Parties, allowing the development of close relations in all areas they consider relevant to such dialogue, - establish the conditions for the gradual liberalisation of trade in goods, services and capital, - promote trade and the expansion of harmonious economic and social relations between the Parties, notably through dialogue and cooperation, so as to foster the development and prosperity of Tunisia and its people, - encourage integration of the Maghreb countries by promoting trade and cooperation between Tunisia and other countries of the region dismantled by 2013 (EC 2006).

2003, 2005, and 2008. Tunisia has not enacted all the structural adjustments that the US is encouraging, and thus, while TIFA's can be precursors to Free Trade Agreements (FTA's), Tunisia has yet to have full blown Free Trade with the US. Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick promoted the benefits of a trade agreement with Morocco as follows: "Morocco will become part of an expanding network of United States Free Trade relationships. This agreement cuts tariffs and opens markets for American workers, farmers, investors, and consumers" (USTR 2006).

The small elite class of those who work in importing benefit while those who work at the lowest positions in agricultural labor often get poorer (King 2003). Tunisian producers, like others in the developing world, are unable to keep their own prices competitive (e.g., Beneria and Roldan 1987; Bodley 2001; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Ong 1987; Rothstein and Blim 1992; Tuissant 1999). Further, to pay down interest on loans, these countries use an "export-led" approach to economic growth, which requires that countries export more than they import to produce a positive balance of payments (Bodley 2001, p. 210).

Tunisia's Export Processing Zones (EPZ's), known as *maquiladoras* when described in Latin America, and dubbed *Les Zones Franches* in Tunisia, are manifestations of neoliberalism. As part of FTA's, Tunisia and other developing states have opened factory zones to multinational corporations. Multinational corporations are able to take advantage of the poor populations in these developing states, who will work for small wages, and who will demand little of their employers.

While stipulations vary from free trade agreement to free trade agreement, in general EPZ's are designed to attract production from wealthier countries' multinational corporations by offering tax-free incentives, and covering much of the factory overhead, such as road construction, building maintenance, and electricity and sewer services. Elites in these developing world governments also implicitly and explicitly sell the workers, promising a docile local labor force, and by guaranteeing that trades unions will not be permitted (Fernandez-Kelly 1984).

Throughout the 1990's the government-supported Tunisian research institute CREDIF has posited that globalization has benefitted women. Women have been able to gain employment in the expanding export processing factories and in the expanding service sector (which includes ICT and tourism) and, for middle class women, in administrative services (CREDIF 2002). Yet, as Moghadam (2005) points out, there has been a rise in women working in informal "precarious" employment since the 1990's, in neighborhood sweatshops, and off the books in family-run businesses. The presence of some NGO's who do micro-lending to women, has helped a few, but most women lack the financial resources to start their own businesses, whereas the male kin often have more resources. Also, private businesses in Tunisia are reluctant to hire women, who they consider "expensive employees" due to laws which require that they pay for maternity leave and other benefits. And more generally, Tunisia has its own good old boy business mentality that favors male employees as bread winners (Moghadam 2005).



Further, CREDIF (2002) asserts that the opening of the economy had caused some Tunisian firms to fold because they cannot compete with the foreign goods, and this hurts everyone's job opportunities. In the 1990's up until the Jasmine Revolution of 2011, Tunisian women's employment accounted for approximately 24 percent of the labor force; an expanded definition of formal labor, developed by CREDIF (2002), brings the percentage to 38 percent. However, this expansion is political, and includes some speculation on women's informal labor participation (Moghadam 2005). Married women's participation in the formal labor force is lower, and barely increased between 1994 and 1997 from 16.7 percent to 18 percent. Most working women are single, divorced, or widowed, at 53 percent of the female workforce (CREDIF 2002). The bias against married women working in the formal sector is partly cultural, in that anecdotal reports are that married women are pressured by husbands and in-laws to stay home, especially after marriage (Holmes-Eber 2003). However, it may not be culture so much as the lack of affordable, decent childcare in Tunisia, which unlike some other MENA countries did not require child care facilities to be built into the workplace. My own experience with placing my toddler in a Bizerte day care while I conducted research can be lent to the problem: the cost of the day care was twenty dinars per week. For women whose salaries are low, at the minimum of sixty-five dinars per week, this price is a disincentive.

The Jasmine Revolution of early 2011 marked the end of Ben Ali's rule. It was a triumph for the proletariat, who, through largely peaceful, yet relentless protest, sent Ben Ali running to exile in Saudi Arabia. The street protests and

rebellion of the Jasmine Revolution was characterized by mass protests of mostly young, unemployed Tunisians. These youths were the first generation to grow up after the abandonment of socialism, enduring the conditions of structural adjustment. As children of neo liberalism, they witnessed their parents' struggles, and then many found themselves with degrees but chronically unemployed or in low-wage employment. At the same time, they were children of political repression. They grew up in a climate of fear that any expression of political critique could land them and their families in political persecution. While the efforts of collective activism of the Jasmine Revolution are laudable, the ouster of Ben Ali has not marked the end of neo-liberalist policy and philosophy; indeed, many of those in the "new" administration were part of Ben Ali's regime.

Members of Ben Ali's administration installed themselves as the temporary administration after Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia. On January 15, 2011, Fouad Mebazza was voted in (by Ben Ali administration members) as the new President. Mohamed Ghannouchi, a member of Ben Ali's administration, had claimed the right to be president, but his move was denied when protesters responded vehemently against Ghannouchi. Ghannouchi placed five opposition members in the cabinet, but they resigned, apparently perceiving themselves as tokens in an administration that was a replica Ben Ali's. Fouad Mebazza was then installed as president, and has been perceived by most Tunisians as less problematic. However, Mebazza held offices in both Bourguiba's and Ben Ali's administrations. The policies reflect the neoliberalism of Ben Ali. The resulting

political situation in Tunisia is marked by a continued frustration, and genuine fears that the new administration is old wine in *old* wineskins.

The tremendously popular Islamist *Ennahda* was legalized in March of 2011, due to popular pressure. Several *Ennahda* leaders who were in exile have returned to Tunisia, and among them, Racheed Ghannouchi (an Islamist philosopher exiled by Ben Ali in the 1990's) stands to run in the next presidential election. *Ennahda* quickly emerged as the most popular political party in post-Ben Ali Tunisia (Lynch 2010). However, *Ennahda* has issued statements where it assured the public that it would not try to reverse the PSC's, and Ghannouchi has emphasized his vision of Islam as similar to the secular vision espoused promoted by Ataturk in Turkey. The Islamism of *Ennahda* appeals to Tunisian nationalism, rather than religious extremism (Goulding 2011).

Structural adjustment's consequences are not limited to price spikes and unprotected markets. The neo-liberal trajectory requires that developing countries enter into trade agreements with more powerful, often former colonial, countries.

7

“[Concerning the European Union's 1995 Free Trade Agreement with Tunisia] Its economic dimension also includes ways of favouring capital mobility and technological advancement and of upgrading industry in the countries that sign... Its political dimension emphasizes stability, peace and security, human

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<sup>7</sup> North African countries have entered into free trade agreements with European Union countries, as well as the United States. In 1995, Tunisia became the first Maghreb country to enter into an “association agreement” with the EU (<http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/countries/tunisia>). The association agreement, as outlined in the European Commission's Official Journal Joint Declarations, outlines the extent of the trade relationship between the European Union and Tunisia: agricultural and fishery products, and imports without customs are free to be imported from Tunisia into the EU, and vice-versa (Joint Declarations, L 097 30/03/1998 P. 0002 – 0183).

rights, and democratic values. Overall, it serves as a commitment mechanism, arguably making the liberalization mechanism irreversible” (Boughzala 1997).

The balance of forces in all these countries has enabled certain sections of the bourgeoisie to maintain their predominance in the political as well as the economic sphere. They thus could ensure that the government pursued "liberal" export-oriented economic policies in Tunisia and Sudan and Morocco to their very considerable advantage, but at the expense of the majority of workers and peasants. The struggle between the various sections of capital, and that between capital as a whole and organized labour, have marginalized a significant proportion of the population, and perpetuated economic policies favouring big capital. These policies have created their own social and political contradictions, and deepened the crisis of the national economy” (Seddon 1986).

Structural adjustment has also often led to an attenuation of workers' rights, wages and working conditions, and this situation is often related to the “opening up” of sectors to foreign firms. Local production sectors are often then forced to try to compete against goods produced with less overhead and are unable to keep their prices competitive (e.g., Beneria and Roldan 1987; Bodley 2001; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Ong 1987; Rothstein and Blim 1992; Tuissant 1999). Further, to pay off loan debts, countries must use an economic approach called “export-led” economic growth, which requires that countries export more than they import to produce a positive balance of payments (Bodley 2001 210). Export-led economic growth, is not feasible, though, since economies

of small scale cannot compete with products and goods coming from economies of scale (Harvey 2005).

The MENA has been no exception, indeed, Seddon (1987) characterizes North Africa in the 1980's as a place of bloody economic protests (1987). Protests over structural adjustment outcomes have been broad in scope in the Maghreb, beginning in 1978 (the period termed a post-oil boom) and were frequent through the 1980's and 1990's (Karshenas 1994).

Economic relationships, like political ones, between Western super powers and the MENA have been going on for several decades; trade agreements are not altogether new to the MENA. The United States already has in place "Trade and Investment Framework Agreements (TIFAs)," with, unsurprisingly, its allies, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Tunisia. The key provisions of these free trade agreements, when considered in a critical manner, are important in perhaps an over-obvious way. <sup>8</sup>

The office of the United States trade representative has laid out the benefits that the U.S. will get from FTA's in the MENA, principally derived from the elimination of 95 percent of tariffs. Tariffs set up to protect products made within the country are removed so that US products compete and win against indigenous-made products. The access that US markets will gain through this and

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<sup>8</sup> The following is an excerpt from the webpage of the office of the United States Trade Representative of reasons for the benefits of FTA's: *1) New Advantages for U.S. Corporations and Manufacturers:* More than 95% of bilateral trade in consumer and industrial products becomes tariff-free immediately, with all remaining tariffs eliminated within nine years. Key U.S. export sectors, such as information technology products, construction equipment, machinery, chemicals, and many more will benefit. This is the most advantageous market access package for US corporations negotiated with a developing country in a US bilateral free trade agreement...*2) Access to Services:* The agreement offers new access for US banks, insurance companies, telecommunications companies, audiovisual services, computer and related services, express delivery companies, distribution services and construction and engineering services.*3) This is a Trade Agreement for the Digital Age:* State-of-the-art protections and, non-discriminatory treatment are provided for digital products such as US software, music, texts, and videos. Protections for US patents, trademarks, copyrights, and trade secrets follow the high standards of US bilateral free trade agreements. The agreement also provides strong protections for U.S. investors, so that their new investments will become profitable in a secure, predictable legal framework in Morocco.

other free trade agreements with the MENA goes beyond industry and agriculture, and directly into the realm of finance, so that US investment banks will be allowed access to Moroccan financial activities. Realms of economy, from engineering to high-tech services, will also be made “accessible,” making the US able to tackle many areas of Moroccan commerce.<sup>9</sup> Finally of importance in the office of the United States Trade Representative’s list is the reassurance to US businesses and investors that they will be provided with a “stable” and “predictable” business climate in Morocco.

Ben Ali’s neoliberal agenda and the running of his country received accolades from the global financial community (investment banks) and western governments throughout the last two decades. In its executive summary, in regards to Tunisia, the U.S. Department of State declares, “Tunisia offers good potential for American business. It has sound macroeconomic policies and has successfully completed an International Monetary Fund and World Bank sponsored restructuring program“ (US Dept of State 1987-1994).

Ultimately, neoliberalizing Tunisia of the last three decades has functioned to consolidate wealth and power among the urban and rural elite, while most Tunisians’ ability to participate in democratic politics diminished. This includes the cooptation of farmers’ unions by wealthier landowners.

Tunisia’s supposed progress toward free trade globalization was expedited under Ben Ali’s regime. With Tunisia’s graduation in the 1990’s from USAID

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<sup>9</sup> The office of the US Trade Representative represents industrialists and investors as potential *victims* of discriminatory treatment in their economic ventures in Morocco. However, it is usually sociological minorities who are discriminated against, and not economic superpowers and their contingent multinational corporations.

and Peace Corps programs, Tunisia and the USA entered into The U.S.-North African Economic Partnership (USNAEP) in the period of 2001 to 2003.

During this period, the US gave \$ 4 million dollars to Tunisia to be used to promote US economic *integration* into Tunisia's economy. This meant the promotion of free trade, through which many US commodities entered Tunisian markets at prices so much lower that Tunisian products could not compete. From 2002 to 2005, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) set up an office in the US embassy in Tunis. The MEPI incorporated the goals of the USNAEP while adding regionally-specific projects in education reform, development, and what the MEPI calls, "women's empowerment" (US Department of State 2005).

The MEPI promotes, "projects that enhance women's marketable skills and expand women's participation in the region's economy" (MEPI 2003). By connecting women's empowerment with women's participation in the labor force, the MEPI promotes the idea that women's labor force participation *is* empowerment. Women of the working classes are most likely to be unemployed, especially those who are among the many who have migrated from rural agricultural zones to seek work in the cities (King 2003). While their male kin could find work in construction, they often are left in informal labor that has extremely low and unpredictable pay, or in employment at the lowest wages. For example, the poorer classes of women are often hired in tourist hotels only as chamber maids and laundresses (ANSAMED 2007).

Desperate for employment, and willing to take the lowest wages offered, these women labor in EPZ's. To argue that they are empowered when they labor

out of desperation is the least ethical sort of disingenuousness. Unionization is illegal in the EPZ's, one of the attractants for the investors and the national interests they represent.

Between the 1990's and 2010, Tunisian elites marketed their country as an ideal partner in trade, industrial production, and tourism. In conferences with the European Union and the United States, Tunisia emphasized its six commercial seaports, albeit they barely needed to remind the Europeans of the advantages of the Bizerte port, and seven international airports. Ben Ali's administration increased their trade possibilities and allotted several million dinars to the creation of a new deep-water port at Enfidha, 100 miles south of the capital; the populist spirit of the Tunisian society has gone through a transmutation toward the ethos of neo-liberal globalization. Tunisia was evidenced by the IMF, the World Bank, the United Nations, and many wealthy countries as proof that globalized capitalism works, as long as a country follows the rules set by the international lending institutions. Tunisia's GDP and overall standard of living increased dramatically between the 1980's and the first decade of the twenty-first century. 31.5 percent of Tunisia's GDP is earned through industrial production of petroleum, mining, footwear, electrical and mechanical manufactures, and textiles.

However, most of this production is textiles, which require much low-skilled labor, and is done by a mostly-female workforce. Textiles may bring in large revenues, but the primary recipients are Tunisian elites who manage or own the textile mills (Seddon 1984). Most of the textiles made in Tunisia are



produced under large contracts from foreign firms, most of it in Export Processing Zones, the largest of which is in Bizerte. As of 2005, 90 % of textile production in Tunisia is exported (US Department of State 2005).

Islamism as a political movement was a threat to both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali governments for a variety of reasons, the most important of which surrounds economics and gender. The Islamism party of Tunisia is a case-book example of a reactionary social movement. It is a reaction against perceived corruption from French influence. A truly Islamicist regime would purify economic relations, and that would mean that loans with interest would be forbidden (Islamic law forbids usury); Islamic financial law, if it were followed, is a threat to the economic foundations of capitalism. Forbidden in the Qu'ran is any interest on a debt. It is not surprising that Ben Ali's neo-liberalist administration dealt harshly with anyone suspected of being a fundamentalist, so much so that secret police often ran investigations on any man with a beard. Ironically, the justification for outlawing the Islamic party in Tunisia was often that the Islamicists would hurt social progress, especially women's rights. Women were not in need of being protected from capitalist exploitation in the lowest-paid jobs, where Ben Ali's administration has promoted the proletarianized peasant women as cheap labor in and out of the export processing zones (King 2003).

Tunisia's reorientation towards neo-liberalism over the last three decades has resulted in many economic changes and ensuing cultural impacts. Ara Wilson (2004) argues that "...economic systems- even corporate capitalism- are

composed of social and cultural processes and are lived in daily life” (38). With the advent of structural adjustment in the late 1970’s, following in the wake of the implosion of Bourguiba’s socialist projects in agriculture and then industry, the Bourguiba administration sought to promote economic growth according to the logic of neo-liberalism. While he began to make the recommended changes of structural adjustment according to the IMF’s recommendations, it was Ben Ali who changed Tunisian economic policy and opened it to foreign investment and free trade. Culture, and gender have changed in important ways with this economic liberalization.

Since the implementation *infidha*, open door economic policy, development three decades ago, Bizerte again sits at the fore of international political-economic relationships. The Ben Ali administration promoted Bizerte as a European tourist destination, and as a production destination for European investors. A brief perusal of European travel advertisements for Bizerte elucidates its charms: beautiful beaches... cheap luxury resorts... a Muslim country where European women can safely wear thongs (Tunisian resort workers’ responses to European nakedness are absent from the advertisements). Bizerte’s incorporation into the global economy through tourism is similar to that of Cancun, Mexico. And there are similarities between the experiences of Cancun women and Bizerte women, as described by Kray (2007). Kray finds that Maya women in Cancun face certain social pressures from their kin groups as they work in waged labor, including increased risk of getting a bad reputation and shaming their husbands. Moreover, since the onset of free trade agreements, which began

with Ben Ali's enactment of Tunisia's 1994 Investment Code, Bizerte has become a strategic part of the global economy in a new way, as a harbor to an EPZ.

Under Ben Ali, Tunisia enacted the 1994 Investment Code. The code allows foreign investment and 100% ownership of many industries and businesses in Tunisia, with exceptions in mining and agriculture, where foreign companies may not own but can set up long-term leases (Tunisian Ministry of International Cooperation and Foreign Investment 1994). With 100 percent tax exoneration on products manufactured for export only, and no tariffs on raw materials or machinery (Finance Act Provisions 1999). Tunisia's major trade agreement of 1995 has had a twelve-year phase-in period, so that, by the time I conducted research in 2008, the 1994 trade agreement had been completely operational for a year.

More than 130 companies applied to be part of Tunisia's EPZ's. Most of the companies' investors are members of the EU, but also are from the USA, Japan, Indonesia, and Egypt. Most of these companies seek factories for the manufacture of textiles, electronics, and pharmaceuticals.<sup>10</sup> The EPZ's are especially attractive because export-only production receives a 100 percent tax waiver (Tunisian Ministry of International Cooperation and Foreign Investment 1994). There are many other incentives, as well.

Export processing zones (EPZ's) have contributed to the intense cultural changes seen throughout the developing world. They have also been touted by

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<sup>10</sup> When I first came to Bizerte's EPZ, I asked permission to the owner of a medical equipment producing disposable catheters to do participant observation there, but I was turned down because he said that they had no free space in their sealed sanitary rooms for an observer.

international lending institutions, multinational organizations, and neoliberal political entities as antidotes for the maladies of the developing world (Harvey 2005). This premise has been under investigation by anthropologists since the 1970's, and the findings suggest that EPZ's are not really medicinal, although they certainly provide some workers with certain advantages.

EPZ's are made attractive to multinational corporations through incentives. In the EPZ's, the local government's regulations and taxes are lifted, so that companies can get their goods manufactured for a fraction of the price of production outside the zone. Unions are usually banned from the zones, as is the case in Tunisia, which makes workers less able to use their collective power to change anything in the zone to their benefit.

According to Jacobson and Lindberg (2005) Ben Ali's regime is an *offshore production regime*, a government whose primary aim is EPZ production because government officials and a small elite class who support them make tremendous profit from these economic parks. As an offshore production regime, Ben Ali began preparations for the EPZ's in the late 1980's, soon after his coup. In 1992, Ben Ali approved a law which made large parts of Bizerte and Zarzis bounded geographic areas, in preparation for converting them into EPZ's (Bellon 1998). This move also was attractive to potential foreign investors.

The two largest EPZs of Tunisia are in Bizerte to the North and Zarzis in the South. EPZ's in Tunisia are officially termed *parc economique* (economic park) by the government but I will call them by the term *le zone franche* which is what the citizens of Tunisia call them. The Bizerte zone is actually divided in two

sections which almost overlap, the site of Bizerte (28 hectares) and the 21 hectare site of Menzel Bourguiba (which is inside the shipping complex at the port). Together they span 51 hectares, just over 60 acres, approximately one square mile. Most of the 220 companies with factories in Bizerte's economic park produce textiles, pharmaceutical equipment, and information and communication technologies (ICT), as in the case of the call center whose upper floors I could see from the roof top of my Bizerte apartment. 25 percent of all Tunisian exports leave from the Bizerte EPZ via the port of Bizerte.

The Zarzis EPZ is in the south of Tunisia, close to the Island of Jerba, on the port, near the border with Libya. It adjoins the Zarzis port and is 31 hectares, just over half a square mile. The Zarzis zone also has factories for textiles and electronics, as well as for food production (especially olive oil and citrus exports). Twenty million dollars of foreign investment went into the Zarzis zone, and this has also been used to deepen the Zarzis harbor (Jacobsen and Lindberg 2005). The Zarzis harbor is also the major port for importing oil from Libya. Bizerte's oil refineries do not produce enough for the country's needs.

Employment opportunities in the EPZ's are frequently argued to be a way for women to become empowered. What empowerment actually means is often defined in statistical measures, like the gender-related development index (GDI) and the gender empowerment measure (GEM) used by the United Nations and NGO's to classify women's situation (Bardhan and Klasen 1997). The GDI is an index of many aspects of human development which includes a comparison of women and men within nations. The GEM is an instrument designed to measure

women's agency and success in the paid labor force and in politics for any given nation, as compared to men's. While both provide necessary information, they often fail to capture class differences, and ethnicity. Women's employment rates increase when EPZ's are present, but it is an oversimplification to equate their increased employment with higher development or empowerment.

Statistical measures of women's educational achievement, labor force participation, and fertility rates provide a general picture of women's health, but the circumstances and meanings of the statistics need ethnographic support. In comparison with other countries of the MENA, Tunisia ranks high on several measures of women's empowerment, including educational attainment, labor force participation, and fertility rates. However, these quantitative data do not show the differences in women's empowerment by social class. With universal free primary schools which are gender-integrated, approximately 90 percent of women have gone through sixth grade. However, rural women and girls are far more likely to have not gone to school and to be illiterate.

Since Independence, Tunisian women's labor force participation has increased steadily. As of 2010, Tunisian women represented 25 percent of the labor force (ANSAMED 2007). While this number might seem low when compared to other developing countries of say, Latin America, Tunisian women's labor force participation is in keeping with the rates of other MENA countries. Even at their highest level of employment, this number is low, similar to the low labor force participation of women in other MENA countries. Also, women who

are employed have tended to work in the lowest-waged occupations, and are disproportionately represented in the EPZ's in textile work and call centers.

Tunisian women face several predicaments that challenge their ability to gain a dignified lifestyle. Part of the economic restructuring plan to keep Tunisia competitive in the world market was to keep the minimum wage in Tunisia lower than in other countries of the MENA, at .75 Euros per hour. Thus, Turkey, Morocco, and Algeria have a *higher* minimum wage than Tunisia! (ANSAMED 2007) Unemployment is also rampant, especially in the generation of recent college graduates. Tunisian women with college degrees are more likely than male college graduates to stay unemployed or to work in the call centers in the EPZ's, as phone representatives. These college graduate women speak impeccable French, and are hired usually in customer service with French companies. These *binat fi call center*, "call center girls" as they are colloquially (and with double entendre) termed in Bizerte, have a higher status than other women workers in the EPZ, and a more suspect one in sexual ways. The *binat fi call center* employ their symbolic capital (partly based on their college educations, their perfect French diction, and because they sit down in air conditioned offices) to exert authority over other EPZ workers as well as womenfolk who work outside *le zone franche*. While the conditions under which they labor are quite different from the working conditions of women working in textiles and manufacturing, their salaries are the same. The average EPZ woman worker received the national minimum wage, 272.480 Tunisian Dinars (DT) per month for full time work (48 hours per week). The complications of gender and

labor, as I describe in detail in chapter 4 and 5, are important to the understanding of how neoliberalism and culture interact.

Tunisia's current political-economic, gendered, and ethnic situation is still about contestations for its resources, its laborers, and its strategic location. The present chapter in Tunisian history can be understood to have begun with the economic and political crises of the 1980's, a time when the neoliberalization of its economy was implemented to fix it. Instead, the structural adjustment plan did what it did in other developing countries. It resulted in more indebtedness to international lending institutions, as well as more reliance on imports, with a consequent reduction in production. Foreign direct investment was promised to increase the GDP, but it actually has remained at the same level of growth as it was prior to the 1980's (Kaboub 2007).

One constant of Tunisian history and present is the underemployment (an underpayment) of women in the labor force, a fact which belie the grueling unpaid labor they continue to do (UNDP 2002; Moghadam 2005). Prior to the Jasmine Revolution, women's unemployment rate neared 30% in Tunisia (CAWTAR 2001; Moghadam 2002).

Tunisia's resources and laborers have made certain groups powerful beyond the reaches of the geographic boundaries of Mediterranean and Sahara. The powerful have become so at the expense of masses of exploited classes and genders. In light of Tunisian history and present, I consider Marx's (1852) statement, "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce," critically. There is something of globalization that seems like a repeat of colonialism, albeit



this new colonialism is on technological steroids. The farcical aspect of globalization could be the feigned naivety of its proponents.

However, if globalization is about the rapid spread of capitalism and all its trappings, it is also (albeit this is an unintended consequence) a presentation of possibilities for women to exert power. As globalized capitalism's undertow pulls women into paid labor at the bottom of the hierarchy of wages and status, they may find that can make demands that were never before possible (Moghadam 2005).

Women have been subjugated throughout Tunisian history, and across ethnicity and class. Prior to industrialization in the 1970's, women performed menial agricultural labor, and their participation in agriculture has been, until recently, unpaid, because it was conceptualized by patriarchal kin groups as part of *woman's work* (Duvignaud 1970; Frechiou 1978). Only recently, starting with Bourguiba's modernization projects in Tunisia did many agricultural women gain wages for their farm labor (Ferchiou 1978, 1980, 1981, 1983). Even then, their wages remain lower than men's (King 2003).

Non-peasant women, a minority of elites, have had less opportunity for waged labor, and their work has been primarily secluded "behind closed doors," and behind the doors of illegal neighborhood sweatshops (Hejaiej 1996; Moghadam 2005). These women labor in the domestic sphere, and then turned their work over to husbands or more distant male kin who sell their products in the market; thus women did not have control over the money they earned.

Only since the 1960's have women become proletarians, working in industrial production; only since the 1990's have women entered the new service sector, where their status may be higher than their wages (Freeman 2000). As of 1999, 66 percent of Tunisian working women were salaried, meaning in formal economy. Far fewer were in a more common traditional form of labor as *aides familiales*, working as helpers in a family business or farm, and perhaps working to earn their family's keep in a share cropping arrangement, or just working to earn room and board. Moghadam (2005) argues that there has been progress in women's status since the 1980's, and employment and education reflect this progress, in certain ways.

The proletarian Tunisian woman working formally and informally in the wide open economy of 2008 is the focus of this research. The conditions under which factory women labor, their struggles as laborers in a global economic system are a key part of the present moment of Tunisia's history; so are the struggles of women laborers outside the EPZ in Bizerte. They remain subjugated by this new patriarchal, colonialist force, termed globalization. However, they may also have opportunities for rebuttal against their exploitation the likes of which have never before been seen.

## Chapter Two: The Mediterranean of Anthropology

Anthropological inquiries about the Mediterranean have been necessarily complicated, and I here describe the assumptions and the critiques so as to situate my own research. In so doing, I follow the approach of Magloire and Yelvington (2005) concerning Haiti, by inverting the usual theoretical point of entry of “What has been the anthropology of Haiti?” Instead, they ask “What is the Haiti of anthropology?” They argue that it behoves anthropologists to consider what treatments a temporal place and geographic location are subjected to, via anthropology, and consider the relations of power which informed these research aims. Thus, I am compelled to consider what the Mediterranean of anthropology has been, and also what my role in its representation should be. Anthropological accounts of the Mediterranean as a realm held together by a cultural “honor and shame” complex have recently been the subject of a project of critical re-examination. Ethnographers of places within the Mediterranean must carefully consider the formerly hegemonic anthropological consensus about the monolithic culture of the Mediterranean. In considering the Mediterranean as an “assemblage of representations and practices in the conceptual system of anthropology,” it is clear that certain questions have confined the anthropological project of making the Mediterranean (Magloire and Yelvington 2005:127). The established line of inquiry about the Mediterranean, as for Haiti, “...continues to guide and limit anthropological investigations” (Magloire and Yelvington 2005).

Appadurai (1986) further argues that regions of the world have been guided by “theoretical metonyms” that delimit thought about the culture therein (358). To give a few examples of Appadurai’s contention, these metonyms have led to the focus on caste and purity and pollution in India, a focus in Africa on segmentary lineage, and reciprocity in Polynesia (Appadurai 1986). In the Mediterranean, the metonym has been honor and shame, a complex of ideals that permeates all aspects of social interaction. While my aim here is not to deny or promote honor and shame as guiding ideologies of the Mediterranean, I am guided to query how this theoretical focus has detracted from other pressing societal aspects, especially those surrounding class.

Through a description of the critiques of these controlling representations of the Mediterranean, I seek to avoid limiting assumptions about the women and men of my study. That is, while I do not attempt to deny the emphasis on honor and shame in Tunisian society, I focus on aspects of gender which do not fit neatly within its definitional brackets.

Let me begin with a definition. By “gender” I mean the roles assigned to each sex that are assumed to be normative by a society, but which often edify a hierarchy which privileges one gender over another (Wood and Eagly 2002). I also acknowledge that the roles are not always assigned according to biological sex (e.g., Nanda 1990). Even the verity of two separate biological sexes has been subject to theoretical trouble (e.g., Butler 1990).

Gender is subject to transmutations as part of the process of economic change, from peasant to proletarian in a global production setting. Much of neo-

liberalism necessitates flexibility in the workforce, and women's flexibility is based on their ability to work under the disciplines of the assembly line (or fabric pattern cutting line, in the case of my study). That neo-liberalism is premised on the ideal unregulated market means that workers are secondary to the markets' prerogative. This is a change from the stability of work routines found in agricultural societies.

Gender studies in neo-liberalism reveal that gender roles and inequalities can be both exacerbated and contested as peoples' relationship to the means of production and the kinds of labor which they are required to do changes. Masculinities premised on control of women and expressions of power over other men may be exacerbated if the group is alienated from the system, as is the case in Bourgois' (1989) study of Puerto Ricans in East Harlem. While their grandfathers would have been Wolf's (1956) cane workers, the masculine identities of Puerto Rican men in El Barrio in the 1980's require more extreme expressions of masculinity; their jobs as factory workers had disappeared. Women may experience heightened cultural disjuncture when they enter the global economy, as Kray (2007) finds in her study of Maya women in Cancun.

Gender informs cosmologies and shapes hierarchies, and it often delimits the division of labor. Gender is a social construction, and its "roles" may or may not correspond with sex (e.g., Nanda 1990). Understood as a socially constructed reality rather than a biologically "hard wired" one, the study of gender elucidates the circumstances under which the roles are constructed and reified. Gender

ideologies are permeated with anxieties and taboos, an explication of which requires analysis of power relations in culture and society.

Gender is generally understood to be the delineation of behaviors, mannerisms, and labor and occupations assigned to each sex; these “roles” are normative according to a given society, but they often edify a hierarchy which privileges one gender over another (Wood and Eagly 2002). Mills (2003) describes gender as, “systems of dominant meanings and symbolism, as structured social relations, roles, and practices, and as lived experiences of personal identity” (42). The roles are not always assigned according to biological sex, but can form alternate avenues to power and subjugation, as, for example, in the case of the “third gender” *hijra* of India (e.g., Nanda 1990). What cases of gender subversive actions suggest is that the verity of notions of essential difference based on biological sex is troublesome (e.g., Butler 1990). More importantly, the performance of gender’s roles is not innocuous- power is created, transferred, and reified through gender.

In the Mediterranean, and especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) of the Mediterranean, gender has been troublesome. The ethos of a masculinity linked to brutal domination against weaker men and especially toward women, has been a prominent aspect of the anthropology of the Mediterranean. Portrayals of women have been of submissiveness and seclusion in attempts to enact the shame of the female body and garner honor for male kin. The anthropologist of the present MENA has some responsibility for sorting through the messy anthropological past, and even messier present, to evaluate the remnants and to assess the impacts of what has been known about the MENA on what is written about it at present. Anxieties about knowledge and power concerning the anthropology of the MENA aspect of the Mediterranean have also led to reactionary theoretical developments and research aims concerning it. Deconstruction projects of the theoretical treatments of the MENA, especially those centered on patrilineal kinship bound by a pan-Mediterranean honor and shame complex are important to acknowledge (Albera et al., 2001; Blok 2001; Braudel 1972; Davis 1975; Gilmore 1987; Herzfeld 1987; Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992; Pitt-Rivers 1965).

The Mediterranean has been described as possessing a fragmented unity (Braudel 1972; Davis 1977; Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992; Blok 2001; Albera et al., 2001). Recently, this has been problematized by Hauschild et. al (2007), who argues that the Mediterranean region exhibits more cultural enclaves (places of difference) *but also* more cohesion than any other region in the world. This suggests that no easy assumptions be made about groups in the Mediterranean.

Assuming that it exists as more than just a geographic location, the Mediterranean has been the subject of a dialectics surrounding its cultural meanings. Looking at these elucidates the ongoing theoretical conflict between cultural relativism and notions of cultures in conflict (Hauschild et al., 2007: 311). As Bromberger (2006) puts it, the concept of the Mediterranean ignites “lively controversies” between anthropologists (93). The controversy over the Mediterranean is partly in the ways in which Anglo Saxon anthropologists have made an “other” out of it, which reflects the domination of North Western Europe over Southern Europe (Cabral 1989; Herzfeld 1980). The major areas of study of the MENA have been patronage, and kinship, both of which feed into the complex of honor and shame (Gilmore 1987). I will first give a brief discussion of patronage and kinship, and then link these to the honor and shame complex. I will describe especially what the inattention to class stratification has left out of the anthropological understanding of the Mediterranean and MENA.



Pitt-Rivers (1986 1997) and Tillion (1966) argue that the peoples of the Mediterranean and the MENA share a similarity of lifestyle and social values, but they fail to consider wealth inequalities. For example, Li Causi (1975) argues that patronage (often termed clientelism) in the Mediterranean and the MENA underpins a class system. In this system the patron holds political-economic and moral power that the clients (usually labourers) must access through systems of reciprocity. There has been a tendency by anthropologists to explain patronage and clientelism as a system of reciprocity without fully explicating how the elite maintain their access to political-economic and moral power: why don't the clients have direct access to power? For example, John Davis (1977) describes the "postures of deference" in which clients engage to gain access to the patrons' resources (132). The patrons oblige because they must maintain honor which is done through generosity toward clients. The emphasis on the mutually beneficial system of reciprocity has been at the expense of considering its asymmetry.

Campbell's (1964) study of the transhumant Sarakatsani in Greece also reinforces the anthropological trend to explain functionality in reciprocity rather than conflict over resources. The Sarakatsani had to defer to clients to survive: to shop owners for lines of credit, to local village patrons for grazing rights. The patrons were under obligation to be generous to the Sarakatsani, this edified by spiritual kinship ties created through marriage sponsorship and godparentage. Patronage compels patrons to be generous, to give gifts spontaneously to the clients, in order to maintain their own moral superiority. This is how patronage has become understood as part of the honor and shame complex that provides the over-arching, blinding, "theoretical metonym" of the anthropology of the Mediterranean and the MENA (Appadurai 1986: 357)

Marxist critique of patronage (and other aspects of the honor and shame complex) emerged in the 1970's. Rejecting the over-emphasis placed on reciprocity in relations between patrons and clients by anthropologists, Li Causi (1975) argues that the land owners mask their power and their ways of exploiting their clients through acts of reciprocity. He charges that anthropologists of the Mediterranean had failed to see the system as part of a larger one of political domination. Gilsennan (1977) and Littlewood (1980) argued that patron-client ideology was a class system. Even if they became friends, spiritual kin, and political supporters, the relationships were predicated on a veiled conflict over resources. That anthropologists had failed to understand Mediterranean ideology as a class system had enabled them to encounter Mediterranean groups as different from the class-bound relationships of their own society (Herzfeld 1987). This problematic also is evidenced in the anthropology of Mediterranean kinship.

Studies of Mediterranean kinship structure describe a family that it extended, patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal, endogamous, and sometimes polygynous. In analyzing the implications of these imagined similarities, Bromberger (2006) states, "This is the Mediterranean (has it been said enough?) of ostentatious hospitality, of honor and shame connected to blood and name, of an endogamic vision of the world, of the republic of cousins, a pattern anchored especially on the southern shore... of marrying with one's kin... of sexual segregation and... virile brutality" of men (97) .

Men vie for dominance in patrilineal kinship structure, which is central to political organization, political economy, and control of labor and production (to which women are key). That is, a man's kin group of other men must have honor in the system of tribal, stratified, patronage and clientelism (Gilmore 1987; Peristiany 1965). The Mediterranean of anthropology reveals patterns of tribal violence between tribes over land, resources, and political power. In this system, women embody a kin group's honor. It is women, under intense pressure to exhibit shame, who are a major source of tension in a male-dominated world. This has been the much corroborated finding of many anthropologists of the Mediterranean.

The problem is not a question of the veracity of these claims of pan-Mediterranean culture so much as what the monolithic focus omits: class stratification. Much focus on gender and honor and shame left little consideration of wealth inequalities, and on how social class maintains elite groups' ability to exhibit honor. That is, only the elite are able to properly seclude "their" women. Peasant women and proletariat women must be engaged in economic production; while some of this could happen in the domestic sphere, much of it requires that these women be in public, male-dominated spaces. According to the logic of honor and shame, women's public presence puts "their" menfolk's honor in question.

According to the classic works of the anthropology of the Mediterranean, gender segregation and seclusion of women is necessitated to bring honor to men in the kin group (Peristiany 1965; Herzfeld 1990). The seclusion of women from most social participation minimizes the prospects of shame being imparted onto the kin group. There is chronic tension surrounding women's roles in the patriline. A case in point is evidenced in the anthropology of endogamy.

Endogamy is, according to functionalist analyses, an attempt to limit women's ability to hurt the patriline's honor. In the Maghreb women are aligned with the devil, while men's kinship groups work with angels (Charrad 2001: 61). Charrad's Marxist analysis of endogamy reveals elite men of the states' ways of manipulating popular sentiment on gender toward their political goals. Women are only actually part of the kin group if they marry endogamously. Parallel cousin marriage, while considered ideal, is at its highest at only around thirty percent among Bedouins (Abu Lughod 1987). This means that most women in the Maghreb as well as the rest of the Mediterranean marry exogamously. Even though such marriages are often arranged, they are a threat to the patriline's cohesion because a girl must prove her virginity at marriage or risk sullyng her family's reputation, as in the case of *verguenza* (e.g., Pitt-Rivers 1961).

Women are threats to patrilineal systems in the Mediterranean and they are controlled through a variety of overlapping beliefs (Davis 1975). For example, they are aligned with the devil because of menstruation, and pregnancy is physical evidence that they have sex. She can also incite sexual arousal of men without intention, so she must be closely monitored, secluded, and protected by male kin (Charrad 2001; Peristiany 1965). Dwyer (1978) asserts that researchers must acknowledge that they come to the MENA after Western colonialism, do more to deal with this fact in terms of what is known about gender, a reflexivity about the western researcher's image and (in Dwyer's case) Moroccans' self-image. Many anthropologists have, in contemporary research, made it a prime objective to overcome distance between researcher and researched (or at least to reflect on the distance), with varied theoretical implications (e.g., Abu Lughod 1987; Altorki 1988; Crapanzano 1980; Dwyer 1978; Hoodfar 1998; Rabinow 1980; Shami 1988;). Anthropologists are compelled to produce cultural analyses cognizant of the relationships that have bounded the occident and orient, and even to participate in transforming them. The production of knowledge about the MENA by anthropologists has been taken up with gender, and the reasons are bounded by power relations (Abu Lughod 1986, 1993; Dwyer 1978). Many anthropologists, including Michael Meeker (1979), Steven Caton (1984), and perhaps most famously E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1949), interpret Arab society as political struggles among men, and women as the pawns in their attempts to forge political alliances and incur honor. Honor and shame become concepts that limit the theory produced about the MENA, and the reification of their theoretical metonym has

led to the critique of anthropology's MENA (Appadurai 1986). In her account of the importance of Edward Said's (1979) concept of *orientalism* for analysis of the anthropology of the MENA, Lila Abu-Lughod (1989) argues that there is no "pure" truth about the MENA, or any other region, because the very process of producing knowledge about a place asserts an underlying political, cultural, economic relationship between the two (271). Abu-Lughod writes, "anthropological writing shapes a Middle East of its own, fashioned out of conventions, standards of relevance, imaginative and political concerns, and zones of prestige," and these that must be central in understanding gender in the anthropology of the MENA (1989: 278). She makes examples out of Geertz and Bourdieu among others as producing anthropology of Morocco and Algeria, without sufficient analysis of their role as members of colonial countries, studying former colonies. These issues are dealt with more satisfactorily, according to Abu-Lughod, in Pierre Bourdieu's (1979) studies of Kabayle society in Algeria, where he attends to the ways in which domination, as it is gendered and classed, is perpetuated.

Abu Lughod also reflects on the legacy of Clifford Geertz in Sefrou, Morocco. He conducted research in a time of considerable western presence in Morocco. Edwards (2005) and Slymovics (2009) describes the Morocco of the 1960s and 70s as a haven for counter cultural types, draft dodgers, Peace Corps workers, drug users, and anthropologists. Clifford Geertz (1973), used a symbolic interactionist approach, that individuals “read” one another and make meaning, especially religious meaning. Meaning in Sefrou was made into orderly hierarchy via religious morality. Geertz’s inattention to how religious adherence not only kept there from being *fitna* (strife) but also enforced hierarchy in Sefrou is an anthropological problem. Abu-Lughod identifies three zones of theory in the “Arab World”: segmentation, the harem, and Islam (1989: 280). Abu-Lughod states, that anthropologists “...should have been interested in political organization in the era of colonial rule is hardly surprising” (29). Again, the critical connection between geo-politics and the kinds of anthropological images that have been generated about Arabs is central, and Abu-Lughod considers the similar patriarchal domination of both the West and the MENA to be enmeshed in these processes. The importance of what Abu-Lughod insists upon is that the personal and interpersonal, as opposed to only the group-oriented and political has too often been left out by classic anthropological studies. Much nuance around gendered power relations has been ignored, or flattened into orientalist stereotypes (30). Orientalist stereotypes of gender run parallel to those of the rest of the Mediterranean, albeit they might be amplified in comparison with those from the northern side of the sea. However, the list of traits could easily be used



for any Mediterranean group: MENA men are competitive with other men, and often use violence to gain dominance. Their virility is based on having sexual encounters with many women. The worst compromise to their masculinity is to be cuckolded, so women are under constant watch for fear that any public interaction with men could lead to gossip that would pull down the husband's honor. MENA women cannot have honor, but they can garner the honor of their male kin by exhibiting shame in public, and optimally, being mostly secluded. Male violence is a normative form of control over kinswomen. Obviously these stereotypes are as problematic for the MENA as for the rest of the Mediterranean. The point is not to deny that such dominance and violence exist. Rather, as Abu-Lughod argues, anthropologists must "broaden our vision" of the MENA so that it includes Arab women's and men's domestic, interpersonal and agonistic experiences (30). In such a way, a more holistic definition of the personal and political emerges.

This is not to refute the importance of honor and shame, but rather to state that the complex becomes a problem when it precludes research on other foci in MENA societies. Honor and shame need to be put in its place, as part of multiple relationships of power. Otherwise there is a circular logic where any and all social interactions happen because of honor and shame. That honor is a deeply held concept throughout the Mediterranean has been shown in many ethnographic portraits. Abu-Lughod points out, among the Awlad Ali Bedouin society, shame is less applicable than is modesty as a way to deconstruct the metonym of the honor and shame complex. But her goal seems to be to corroborate with Hauschild et al. (2007) that there needs to be study of the diverse enclaves within the Mediterranean. She does not provide a way to understand how the Bedouins' values of personal autonomy and egalitarianism play out for less honourable men, and all women, and all non-Bedouins. That is she fails to identify the conflict over honor as a conflict over power and resources. Abu Lughod fails to describe how differential access to modesty keeps certain groups from gaining control over resources.

Moreover, Abu Lughod describes power relationships in a way that is reminiscent of the anthropology of the Mediterranean that has been criticized since the 1970's (e.g., Davis 1975). By emphasizing the reciprocal responsibilities of the honorable male patriarchs toward groups with less honor, women, weaker men, and the peasants who always seem to exist at the edge of her analysis, and by giving primacy to the ways in which the weaker manipulate their relationships with the powerful patriarchs, she emulates much of the patron-client research. Her attempt to break orientalist stereotypes of Arab gender relationships reinforces a trope of the imagined Mediterranean.

While Abu-Lughod uses the concepts of Said's (1977) *Orientalism* to analyze the making of gendered knowledge in the MENA, she reacts against the anthropology of the MENA not so much by refuting the factuality of women's separate sphere, but by contesting that this parallel sphere subjugates women. Here, she demands that we must understand symbol of honor and hierarchy according to post-modern theory. Especially pertinent is Foucault's contention that power produces resistance, and in turn, resistance produces its own power. She presents an analysis of the culture of women who exert their own power, especially visible in the concept of *hasham*, for the Awlad Ali Bedouins. By *choosing* to serve their male superiors and *choosing* to be deferential and feel shame at the bodies which curtail their purity and self-mastery in comparison with men, women can exert honor. This is innovative of Bedouin women, and Abu-Lughod seems to get caught up in how innovative it is, instead of analyzing what it does. It is an exertion of power for Bedouin women to exert honor by feeling, and performing, shame. They also garner this honor by upholding their own subjugation, a point that Abu-Lughod seems intent on refuting. Bedouin ideology, she posits, identifies women's bodies as more impure and thus their morality weaker than men's, but she does not discuss how these ideologies delimit women's access to the means of production and other important resource-based decisions, in a resource-scarce environment. She seems to take as fact that women's bodily function of menstruation naturally lends itself to ideologies of male superiority but she does not offer any reasoning about why male bodily function might be considered neutral in the garnering of honor. She also gives

description of women's pregnant bodies belying their sexual desires, and thus detracting from self-mastery. But the Bedouin are aware that men would have gotten them pregnant yet she fails to describe why the pregnant woman's husband's honor is not depleted from his impregnation. Moreover, since, as she describes in some detail, married women are often held down and forced to have intercourse with their husbands, it seems that accepting the idea that pregnant women have given in to desire, instead of being victims of marital rape, is problematic. Abu Lughod's descriptions are thick, her language evocative and engaging. However, anthropology is also about explanatory critique, which is lacking in Abu Lughod's portrayals.

Abu Lughod's political mission is limited to allowing Arab women to be understood as more than just objects of patriarchal dominance and pawns in men's politics; ironically, her portrayal may add to women's subjugation as forcefully as Evans-Pritchard's (1949). Her use of Said's Orientalism is also problematic concerning the male gender. Abu Lughod's argues that western men's attention to the political struggles of MENA men is hardly surprising because this is the reality for their western patriarchal societies. To this effect, Abu-Lughod states, "...it strikes me that a felicitous correspondence between the views of Arab tribesmen and those of European men has led each to reinforce particular interests of the other and to slight other aspects of experience and concern" (30).

It is counter to the goals of applied anthropology which emphasize the need for a theory of human equality to stereotype either the orient or the occident, which is the crux of the problem of Said's project. He claims that the stereotypes the west has put onto the MENA are a reflection of western culture; he does not acknowledge that he is stereotyping the west. Holmes-Eber (2003) provides nuanced descriptions of Tunisian women's ways of forging power through avenues which, in concurrence with Abu Lughod's (1986; 1993) contention, run parallel to men's. Holmes-Eber is more vehement than Abu Lughod in her assertion that Tunisian women's and men's spheres are separate but equal. Her thesis is reactionary in that she seeks to counter the assertion that women of the "Islamic World" are unequal or imprisoned in patriarchal kinship systems. Holmes-Eber seems to concur with Abu Lughod's argument, that Muslim women really do not need saving. Yet, Holmes-Eber does not seem to take seriously her interviewees' laments that they are forbidden by their husbands from having social lives outside of their own kin groups. Holmes-Eber asserts that women's homes are public, political-economic venues, where male household members fear to tread for much else than eating the meals women cook and serve to them (often eating after the men have finished) and sleeping. Conveniently for the menfolk, they make up for their marginalization in the domestic sphere by having access to the whole of the outside world, where they engage in political-economic networking. Holmes-Eber does not explore how this control of public space by men may have something to do with women's struggle to gain equal (or any) employment in Tunisia (e.g., Moghadam 2005). She does this by denying that

women are deprived by positing that their homes are their public spaces. While Holmes-Eber reveals the innovative ways in which Tunisian women forge networks of exchange via the home, like Abu Lughod, her arguments are complicit with patriarchy. She gives only cursory attention to how these public spaces of the home are classed, albeit she does state that women are impacted differently by neoliberal economics. Ultimately, the failure of Abu Lughod and Holmes-Eber is their failure to consider how culture practice upholds social stratification. This line of query only grows more urgent in the last four decades of neoliberal restructuring of impoverished economies.

In a review of 1960's-70's anthropology of the MENA, Eric Cohen (1977) discussed the advent of major global political-economic changes; during these decades, much of the anthropology of the MENA was taken up with the concept of change in these societies. Cohen observes, "Middle Eastern communities and ethnic groups of all kinds are in the throes of a multifarious and all-encompassing process of incorporation into broader societal frameworks" (324). That change has been the major impetus for anthropology of the MENA in the period Cohen analyzes is hardly a coincidence. The range of analysis of kinds of change is formidable. For example, D.L. Johnson (1969, 1975) dealt with changes in the nature of MENA nomads, and E. Marx (1973) studied changes in nomad ecology. Bates (1971), Barth (1973), and Swidler (1973) all did research on changing peasant-nomad relationships. Black-Michaud (1975) looked at changes in patterns of family feuds, while Fernea (1972) examined types of villages in times of developmental change, and Rosenfeld (1972) analyzed changes in village politics. Finally, Harik (1972) studied the ways in which ethnic identity changed under shifting political conditions.



Cohen (1977) identifies a shift in the focus of research as bound up with a new understanding of the MENA as part of a world characterized by rapid change (now termed globalization), as opposed to a timeless, traditional place: “as part of the process of change, Middle Eastern societies were opened up to external forces and influences, so that their internal processes cannot be understood satisfactorily without taking into account their interface with broader societal frameworks” (316). Whether it was ever fitting to treat MENA societies as delimited units in space and time, outside of interaction with global politics and economy, is questionable, considering that the relations between the MENA and the rest of the world go back at least as far as the time of Homer (Said 1986: 11).

Social change, as it is captured in the anthropological studies of the MENA of the 1960's and 1970's, is conceptualized as incorporation in the global economy. These studies attempt to show how nomads, villagers, townsfolk, and even urban dwellers are incorporated into broader political, social, and economic schema. In so doing, the studies reveal the continued preoccupation with, and assumption of traditional and temporal social life in the MENA (Cohen 1977). For example, Fernea (1985) describes the phenomenon of urban influence to explain the changes from the so-called traditional way of life to modernity in her research in Iraq; her focus is bound up in accounting for villages that changed and those that did not. Again this assumed a timelessness of tradition in the MENA.

The assumption of politically disconnected, socially isolated, and traditional MENA places is unexamined in many of the studies under Cohen's analysis. He sees the social forces of the 1960'-70's leading to, "previously isolated communities emerge into the modern world through progressive enmeshment into regional, national, and sometimes even transnational frameworks" (322). This assumes that such nomadic groups, villagers, townsfolk and even urbanites were not "enmeshed" in relationships of power before.

Barth (1969) for example, describes the relations as an "ecological trilogy" between nomads, peasants, and urbanites in the MENA. Interestingly, Barth argues that the relationship between this trilogy was symbiotic, reflecting the patron and client research of the Mediterranean. Further, Barth argues that these relationships have remained unchanged, therefore reflecting the orientalist perspective. Indeed, few anthropologists prior to the 1960's dealt with the enmeshment of small MENA communities into wider political-economic frameworks, which is exactly the point of relevance (Abu-Lughod 1989; Cohen 1977).

The zone of theorizing MENA women, according to Abu Lughod, is centrally imprisoned in the mythic harem. Abu-Lughod argues that the obsession with the harem reflects the prurient interests of Western men (who Said claims are jealous of MENA men's supposed ability to have their own personal surplus of women). However, rejection of the importance of the harem, which is actually the seclusion of women, is a reactionary theoretical move. Indeed, Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi describes the importance of the harem, having grown

up in one herself. The meaning of harem, according to Mernissi, is to keep women out of public space; the veil functions to keep women in the harem on those rare occasions when they must enter the public sphere. By removing the focus from elite MENA men's ways of limiting women's power in society to a diatribe against lecherous western men, Abu Lughod does a disservice to the women she studies. Mernissi brings the theoretical focus back to the conflict over resources, power, and influence, reflected in a patriarchy that secludes women in an effort to hoard power for an elite group of patriarchs (Mernissi 1991). Gender questions often seem synchronized with Religious debates in the MENA.

Islam is often suggested to be at the root of patrilineal kinship and gendered roles of men and women. In response to the many accounts of the MENA of anthropology where Islam is conflated with backward cultural practice, Tucker (1993) states, "...facile assumptions about the monolithic role "Islam" or Arab culture plays in the seclusion, disempowerment, and oppression of women no longer pass as the accepted academic discourse on the topic" (vi). However, Tucker does not refute that women are secluded and subject to close regulation from male kin in the MENA; She critiques the assumption that Islam is the root cause of these injustices. Similar debates have occurred concerning the other predominant religions of the Mediterranean, bifurcated Catholicism and Judaism. Recently, public media-sponsored focus on women's rights and Islam has distracted popular attention away from the inherent sexism of Catholicism (Eastern Orthodox and Roman) and Judaism.

Algerian sociologist Marnia Lazreg (2002) indicts Western feminist social science for its frequent assumption that non-Western women are oppressed without acknowledging the ways in which this has been used for political justification for colonial endeavors. As evidence, she points to French feminists' claims that Algerian women needed French colonization so that they could be freed from Algerian patriarchy. Lazreg states, "Accounting for these women's forms of life and 'liberating' them (from themselves, their men, their cultures, their former colonizers) to be more or less like 'us' has always been the dream of feminists in their symbolic conquest of the world of Otherness" (123). While Lazreg's indictment of feminism is reductionist in its own right, the critique is still valuable and apropos to certain kinds of liberal feminist thought like that which claimed that women were global sisters without examination of class and ethnicity (e.g., Bolles and Yelvington 2010). However, reactionary anthropology which denies that women are subjugated may add to justifications for the functionality of patriarchy.

In Rhoda Ann Khanaaneh's (2002) ethnography, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, the political meanings of women's sexual, household, and market activities are considered. The minutiae of gendered activities reveal confrontations with and appropriations of Israeli colonialist and Western globalization ideology. Kanaaneh argues that reproduction of culture is inseparable from the related activities of physical reproduction. By citing Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp (1995) on the first page of her book, she situates herself within a feminist body of globalization and

reproduction theory. Thus, “the nation” as a Palestinian project is engaged in a breach birth because the Palestinian community frequently accepts Israeli constructs of the “modern” and the “primitive.” A dialectic of resistance and appropriation to Israeli colonialism is woven into the everyday activities of Palestinian Israelis.

Consumption is also along the lines of power that the Palestinian community engages in. Cindy Crawford exercise videos, Hollywood diet drinks and other products are tied to identity and power: by consuming hegemonic nations’ products, Palestinians can “partake in the powers of the first world”(94). Through (sometimes ironic) appropriation, then, Palestinians and other subjugated peoples may seek to breach a divide of political economic power. This is an important theoretical premise that may be applied to the study of global capitalism and cultural imperialism.

The structural power and limitations of “ruling institutions” in Palestinian lives is central to Kanaaneh’s theoretical analysis. While Kanaaneh devotes much of her analysis to the actions of individual Palestinians, she avoids the trap of situating her theory in a concentration on “individual agency.” She insists that, “It is important not to overlook the role of ruling institutions” in the process of, “construction, dissemination, and possible contestation of modernity” (92).

Kanaaneh illustrates how the realms of reproduction, from sexual activity, to reproductive technology, to the household economy, to birth and child rearing, are relevant material processes set in political-economic contexts. Further, she shows how the Palestinian communities’ ways of reproducing themselves are

bound up with the region's political economy. Palestinians often accept uncritically the colonial ideology of modernist capitalist values and aesthetics, even as they are politically in opposition Israel.

Kanaaneh reveals this theoretical premise through Palestinians' everyday activities. Kanaaneh accompanies the women of her community as they shop, drop by each other's homes, and receive services at beauty salons. In these settings she points out details that indicate the appropriation of Western modernism. At a beauty parlor, she is reassured that the makeup sealer is modern and American-made. On drop-in visits to women's homes, she describes a common sink catch device, as well as European curtains hung over sometimes imaginary windows. Such thick description illustrates the permeation of colonial modernity in everyday life.

Kanaaneh used participant observation as well as interviews to gather her data. Of importance is her own identity as a Palestinian and as a woman. As a married Palestinian from the Galilee, she gains access to intimate information about her community. However, due to gender relations, she must hire a male researcher to interview men in regards to sexuality. As a married woman, she is also subject to sanctions, positive and negative. She is often chided for not having children, especially for not having a son. Kanaaneh identifies the female body as the locus of Israeli-Palestinian colonial conflict. Further, she depicts Palestinian Israelis' modernist consumption as a form of subjugation as well as resistance. Through Kanaaneh's identification of problematic resistance strategies (e.g,

buying into modernist ideologies of fertility and consumption), she elucidates broader realities of globalization phenomena.

Hooma Hodfar (1997) found that, for the working class Egyptian women who were the participants in her ethnography, working outside the home changed kin relationships, and even altered perceptions about who is considered kin. For example, Hodfar describes how women working outside the home altered their marriage prospects: their mothers negotiated less with traditional families and more with liberal ones for suitors, since more liberal attitudes exist amongst men from middle class Egyptian families. This was a strain on working class girls. They often did not wish to “marry up,” fearing that the husband’s family would treat her as a servant. Instead many girls used their new economic power to wait for a suitor of their same class so that they would be, “treated like a queen” in the home.

Further, Hodfar and other researchers found that most of the residents of poor Cairo neighborhoods were peasants who had migrated into the city (Early 1992). These were the descendants of people who were displaced as a result of development schemes. In this new urban environment, many peasants lived for the first time in close proximity to non-relatives. Hodfar’s participants re-structured kinship, creating “fictive kin” bonds, and making marriage arrangements between fictive cousins (Stack 1974).

Shirin Shukri (1996) details the ways in which MENA women’s social and political power in economic development schemes are limited. According to the social customs that govern the family, women are expected to obey the men in

their families, as well as their mothers-in-law. Further, social freedoms are limited by conventions that dictate that women not interact in public to the same degree that men do. Women in MENA countries also do not typically hold as much land as do men, even though they may do much of the agricultural labor. Further, women's obligations to do all housework may further drain any time when they might be involved in political activities. The distinction made between productive versus reproductive work renders women's household work as extremely low status.

Tunisia tends to be used as a contrast against the rest of the MENA. To assay anthropology of Tunisia is to come up against a contradiction: Tunisia may still be portrayed as the Mediterranean, and as part of the Arab world, but it is also portrayed in the media as a place where modernization, industrialization, and women's liberation has worked (e.g., Geyer 1987). A good example of this paradoxical portrayal of Tunisia is captured in the documentary film, *Changing Tunisia* (Mackie 1974). The film features colorful scenes of folkloric Tunisian life contrasting images of president Habib Bourguiba, who the filmmakers portray as the renegade leader who got his country away from its backwardness (the very folkloric images the filmmakers present). Bourguiba liberated women for the good of the country, without any ulterior motive. This film exemplifies the double talk of women's emancipation, the unresolved tensions that exist in Tunisian society, between endorsing Bourguiba's mythical "single-handed" progress-making in Tunisia and a romanticized image of Tunisian tradition.



The romance of and confidence in state-controlled change is absent from Duvignaud's (1965) research on the village of Shebikha. Duvignaud describes the lives of Shebikhans as they weather the changes made in agriculture under Bourguiba's state socialism. While Bourguiba viewed rural Tunisians as backward, Duvignaud takes the perspective of the peasants, and describes their internal class struggles and how elites try to manipulate the new agricultural collectives.

While Abu Zahra's (1988) focus is religious ritual in the village of Sidi Aneur, she like Duvignaud is most interested in the ethnic and class divisions between inhabitants who consider themselves the original population and the newer inhabitants who fight to participate in the rain rituals. These rituals impart status to the female performers because they are believed to bring on the rain, vital in a chronically dry environment. Abu Zahra's point is to argue for a research focus on class and ethnicity.

The anthropology of Tunisia has concerned gender and class, and this has also been the case in the research of the last two decades. This research is exhibited in the work of Paula Holmes-Eber and Stephen J. King. Both look at the consequences of economic restructuring, especially in terms of class and unequal access to resources.

Paula Holmes-Eber (2003) seeks to understand how Tunisian women respond to the social changes that were spurred by rapid industrialization in Tunis, the capital city of Tunisia, in the 1980's and 1990's. Holmes-Eber presents a portrait of Tunisian women who deal with the consequences of rapid industrial

modernization based largely on their social class position. Women are the sturdy backbone of Tunisia, adept at forging their own parallel system of social and political power. There exists, nevertheless, a problematic absence of critical thought as to why women must create a system parallel to men's and based in the home during hours when men are out in paid employment. However, she gives little analysis of how women's networks are an aspect of agency in the face of structural adjustment. Her choice to conduct her ethnography in what is arguably the most liberal and feministic Arab Muslim country allows her to engage with several larger theoretical and empirical issues. Through her ethnographic findings, Holmes-Eber is able to rebut modernization theorists' confidence that traditional customs would disappear as capitalist values set in. While Tunisian policies since the time of independence from France make the state a veritable gender outlier in comparison to the other countries of the Muslim world, this half century of ideological progress has not lessened, according to Holmes-Eber, the primary role of women as honor-bound mothers, wardens of tradition, and market consumers. Women maintain and promote these primary traditional roles through elaborate kin and friendship networks.

Tunisian women's networks of family and friends embody a crucial element for dealing with an urban life filled with economically tenuous development. Holmes-Eber finds that women create bustling social, economic, and political worlds through their incessant visits to one another's homes. The home, Holmes-Eber argues, is not a private place in Tunisian society. Rather, it is a public realm of women. Further, by accompanying one another during daily

excursions outside the home on trips to the markets, as well as on social outings to Tunis beaches, they display their honor and social power. Women relatives and friends pay visits an average of four times per week to each of the women's homes in their social network. The average woman's social network consists of fifteen women. Thus, women spend much of their free time visiting or being visited. Even women who have heeded the call of modernization into paid employment spend their diminished free time visiting. Indeed, they may use extra income earned through work to further edify their networks in the form of gifts. In such a way, a woman can increase her marriage prospects by offering a better dowry, and also increase the social class of women in her network. Thus, paid employment for women does not serve as an alternative to their role as keepers of social kin networks. Rather, Tunisian women have used modernization to fit their traditional cultural needs.

Holmes-Eber describes the bulk of theory on women of the MENA which describes them as secluded in their homes, a normative facet of the Muslim world. Holmes-Eber asserts that women create a public space in their homes; they travel as many as thirty times per week for two hour long visits in one another's homes. In these visits, women conduct business, discuss market prices for needed commodities, create and maintain reciprocal gift-giving ties, and pass along political happenings that government-controlled media does not report on the television. For applied projects that deal with development projects in the Muslim world, this research is invaluable: women's social networks could be valued for the forms of Bourdieuan capital that they create and sustain.

Unfortunately, Holmes-Eber does not incorporate Bourdieu's theory of forms of capital into her analysis. Nevertheless, micro-lending and other development projects that target women could make use not only of women's networks, but of women's networking skills in promotion of economic development projects.

Holmes-Eber's discussion of the extant research literature is primarily a critique of the extant development literature that focuses on Muslim countries. Holmes-Eber argues that there is a hole in these studies, in that they tend to only examine ideological change and its meanings in light of Tunisia's legislative strides towards enforcement of women's equality. Similarly, other studies have provided statistical information as to the percentages of women in various employment sectors, but these studies are methodologically unable to show the ways in which social life and ideology may change. "Top-down" studies that assume governments effect change while households passively absorb them, argues Holmes-Eber, ignore the ways in which people effect social change. Holmes-Eber, via daily participant observations, was able to document that women who participated in the mostly low-wage manufacturing sector continued to use their free time making elaborate gifts and sweets for their friends.

There are few studies, Holmes-Eber shows, which focus on women's specific activities as strategies to negotiate economic change in Tunisia. Unfortunately, many studies focus within individual domestic spheres, and so pay insufficient attention to women's social networks via consanguinial and affinal kin, as well as friends. Eber praises the small body of development research that examines the creative strategies that women use to deal with development.

Women's work as keepers and promoters of relationships, through gifts, child care, et cetera, are discussed, but only through the research of Di Leonardo (1987) and Papnek (1979)- not through Carol Stack's concept of fictive kin, which was a glaring omission to her analysis. Nor does Holmes-Eber, despite her copious descriptions of making and exchange of gifts, consider Marcel Mauss (1925), or Annette Weiner (1992), who deals specifically with the gendered aspects of reciprocal gift giving. There are many obvious ways that *Daughters of Tunis* would benefit from such theoretical analysis. For example, Holmes-Eber notes that women only exchange gifts with women who can afford to give them roughly equal exchanges back. Termination of friendships and family feuds often centered on unequal exchanges. Holmes-Eber becomes caught between two arguing women friends: one gave a \$100 bottle of perfume to the other for her wedding; she only gave a \$25 gift in return.

For the university-educated women of Holmes-Eber's study, rituals of visiting and reciprocal gift-giving, or extended kin ties did not fall by the wayside. Rather, the wealth these women earned and the ties with non-family that they forged in higher education settings increased their participation in traditional practices. Thus, the educated and middle class women of the study can be seen as reinforcing the traditional gendered Arabic practice of networking. Further, women with higher education and careers did not critique the cultural imperatives of marriage and motherhood. Instead, higher education might allow women more social freedom to meet men. For example, one woman with a masters degree met her husband on a bus at the university. This required that she

have freedom of movement in the male-dominated public space, and that she herself felt that a strange man on a bus would not be able to do symbolic violence to her reputation (Bourdieu 1977). That is, her status as a university student allowed her own symbolic capital to increase.

Other researchers of Tunisia devote more time to describing how the Personal Status Codes (PSCs) signed into law by Habib Bouguiba in 1957, changed gender roles, especially the roles of wives and husbands. In her research, Lilia Labidi (2003) describes the myriad ways in which social change, rather than timelessness, has marked Tunisian society since independence from France. These social changes in gender roles correspond to Tunisian women's greater economic freedom. With the enactment of the Personal Status Codes (PSC's) under Hamid Bourguiba, polygyny was illegalized, refutation (where men could divorce women by a declaration) illegitimated, women were required to be at least nineteen before marriage, universal coeducational schooling was guaranteed, and women are required to receive the same salary as men for comparable work. Not discussing the perfunctory nature of much of this legislation, or discussing Charrad's (2003) argument that the PSC's were a ruse for Bourguiba's urban ruling party to undermine rural tribal political authority, Labidi argues that these changes led to changes towards egalitarianism between married couples (Charrad 2003: 201-202).

Labidi (2003) uses the example of wedding changes to illustrate her point, but her argument is weak. She focuses on a few wedding ceremonies in order to argue that Tunisian couples are more equal. The defloration ceremony,

whereby the night of the wedding consummation was made into a spectacle for the whole family because the groom's family would display the bloody sheet, was forsaken. Labidi describes Tunisia as if it were classless and urban by only describing the urban middle class. She attributes changes to the PSC's that may have more to do with the privileges that the elite urban Tunisians have gleaned from integration into the global economy.

Two other outcomes related to gender resulted solely from the PSC's, according to Labidi. Beyond the transition to a private wedding night, it became honorable for wives to earn a wage (something that would have caused dishonor before the PSC's). Again, this has become honorable for a small group of middle class, urban Tunisians, but she generalizes to the whole country. Perhaps this is due to Labidi's affiliation with the Ben Ali government, in the Women's ministry for several decades.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps she seeks to help present the image of modernized Tunisia that is promoted by the elite in hopes of acquiring more foreign direct investment and favorable trade relationships.

The research of Holmes-Eber refutes Labidi's claim, in that the ideal Tunisian wife still was secluded at home, according to Holmes-Eber. This was in research taking place in the 1980's. My research, outside the capital city in 2008 lends more evidence to refute Labidi's claim: Bizerte women worked because they had to. Several women said that it was the bad economy that forced them to work. As one participant said darkly, "The time of the woman in the

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<sup>11</sup> Labidi was member of Ben Ali's government, and, after his expulsion from office, Labidi was chosen to be the head of women's ministry in the transitional government.

home is over.” An economic necessity for women earning an income is not the same as it becoming respectable, however.

The third piece of progress, according to Labidi, is that husbands and wives spend time together as a couple in the domestic sphere, whereas an earlier ideology would have meant that husbands’ masculinity was threatened by his spending time alone with his wife (117). Labidi, a doctor of psychology, uses psychoanalytic concepts of gender to argue that women and men are no longer adversaries. No longer, she contends, is a woman’s wedding night her futile fight against sexual consummation. In modern Tunisia, Labidi argues, the wedding night is based on a mutual desire, and women are able to blossom psychologically under this new (yet still in keeping with patriarchy) ethos of marriage. Women now devote themselves to, “transformations that answer the ambitions of an intellectual and moral life to which reformers, feminists and thinkers of the Arab world contributed” (118).

Lest Labidi’s analysis of gender change in Tunisia seem a romanticized endorsement of modernity (not to mention of the dictator who is her boss), she describes the market changes, changes towards capitalism, that propelled the ideological changes that middle class Tunisians went through. Thus, she reveals that the only group that mattered to her arguments were the middle class, even though she did field research among impoverished women. The *Mahr*, bridewealth, traditionally involved large sums of money and property be given to the bride’s family. The problem with the *Mahr*, according to Labidi, was that it was linked with the woman’s virginity, and commodified the process of



defloration. However, Labidi argues that Bourguiba's change to the Mahr, making it the exchange of just one Tunisian dinar, extricated women from the role of a commodity.

Further, according to Labidi, the growth of the Tunisian hotel industry, which targeted young middle class couples for honeymoons, moved the wedding night out of the groom's family home and into a hotel room. When Tunis Air began special honeymoon flights from the Carthage airport to such touristic destinations as the isle of Djerba, it privatized the issue of the intact hymen. It became an embarrassment for middle class and affluent Tunisian families to display the bloodied sheet, a sign that they had not been able to afford to send their son or daughter on a proper honeymoon. What Homes-Eber argues, that different classes are affected differently by neoliberal economic change, is certainly borne out in Labidi's arguments; the problem is that Labidi conflates the progress of elite women to the whole of Tunisia. The Tunisian masses of urban and rural poor are certainly not taking an airplane to Jerba for their honeymoon. A shrewder analysis is given by Charrad (2001) who argues that Bourguiba's changes to bridewealth would have helped to undermine tribal patrilineal by devaluing a major form of patriarchal exchange in weddings, which were a political tool of alliance building through bonds of exchange. The problem is, according to Labidi, that Tunisians have not remained true to Bourguiba's vision. Now, the mahr has been replaced by the pressure on grooms to provide a neolocal residence for the couple, and for the bride's family to equip it, a source of much sociological critique in contemporary Tunis (e.g., Bergaoui 1990; El-Bour 1990;

Ben Bassine and Hanachi 1999). Labidi concludes that it is Tunisians' continued backwardness that has caused them to corrupt Bourguiba's marriage reforms.

The gendered division of labor changes as economic systems change- this is evidenced in the last century of Tunisia's history. As French colonial subjects, peasant women of the imagined "orient," labored in fields, producing wheat and other products consumed and sold by the Ottomans, and then the French colonials (Ferchiou 1998; Perkins 2003). Women's labor was considered the most menial, and involved threshing, picking, weeding, and carrying and hauling. These women gave birth to daughters of revolutionary, anti-colonial Tunis. Daughters of the revolutionary period labored for gender justice (as did some radical revolutionary sons of Tunis), but were largely subjugated by an ideology of patriarchal nationalism into gendered labor as wives and mothers, a role Hamid Bourguiba admonished them to never forget was their primary role (Jayawardena 1986). This labor was mostly unpaid and ruled by patriarchal, patrilateral, and patrilocal kinsmen. This generation birthed the contemporary daughters of Tunisia, who exercise agency in the face of patriarchal control of their labor, but must play on, and ultimately reify, patriarchy to gain petit favors (Holmes-Eber 2003). The daughters of contemporary Tunisia also labor under neo-liberalist dictators. They are approximately one third of the paid labor force, and nearly one hundred percent of the unpaid household labor. The "second shift" for Tunisian working women is doxa (Bourdieu 1972; Hochschild 1987). The Tunisian woman in paid labor gets paid the least for that labor, and then returns home to do all domestic chores. To compensate for low wages and higher prices

for staples (brought on by structural adjustment), women often work a third shift in the informal market, if they have the wealth, as beauticians, seamstresses, or bakers of baklava who sell from their homes to other women, for special occasions (Lobban and Fernea 1998; Moghadam 2005). If they are the poorest, as domestics, street peddlers and even prostitutes. There is something new in terms of gender, happening with the advent of EPZ's, where women are a disproportionately high percentage of line workers.

Tunisian society presents women with choices toward individual or collective agency. However, the choices are limited by patriarchy, a reality that is obfuscated with the seeming freedoms of agency. Women and men may feel they are making free choices but in fact the socialized norms determine many of the free choices, and thus form a habitus, an existence where certain perceptions and actions maintain power (Bourdieu 1984). Thus when women workers exercise agency, they may participate in their own oppression (Freeman 1993; Hossfeld 1990; Ong 1987; Tiano 1994; Yelvington 1995). Women may be cognizant that they are edifying their own subjugation. Just because they know this is happening is not their empowerment. I saw this pattern in my study, in Tunisian social life and in the factory. For example, in interviews with Tunisian women, many married women laughingly told me that they "let" their husbands feel superior, because men need to feel like "real" men. Many women explained that if men did not feel superior, then they would give their wives "a hard time" at home. However, most married women factory workers, home-makers, and women business owners said that they themselves were responsible for the lacking of

gender equality in Tunis. Gendered ideology maintains the powerful, while the “weak” use weapons that may give them some power but also buttress their empowerment.

As women in the lowest strata of periphery countries have begun to labor in EPZ’s, the doxa of gender stratification is thrown into question.

Simultaneously, gender norms are manipulated by management in order to exert control over workers; workers also play on gender roles in order to manipulate management (even though playing into gender stereotypes ultimately exerts the very power they seek to subvert). My aim in this study is to explicate gender in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) factory, Z-textiles, in Bizerte, Tunisia, and in Tunisian society more broadly.

As neo-liberalism gained global hegemony over the last three decades, the anthropological study of gender and labor has elucidated changes in stratification, as well as new potential for resistance. In this section of the chapter, I examine four areas of anthropological inquiry that are of particular concern to understanding my study: 1) the concepts of gender and labor in the neo-liberal “free trade” era (e.g., Elson 1995; Marchand and Runyan 2000; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Rothstein and Blim 1992), 2) research that attends to gender and power in specific settings of EPZ labor (e.g., Finn 1988; Gill 1994; Ong 1987; Yelvington 1995), 3) the anthropological work that attends directly to the phenomenon of globalization, including transnationalism and domestic service (e.g., Anderson 2000; Gamburd 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Parrenas 2001) and 4) gender in the informal labor sector in the wake of structural adjustment

policies (e.g., Beneria and Roldan 1987; Clark 1994; Gill 2000; Rahman 1999; Seligman 2001).

The anthropology of gender in the factory elucidates the production, contestation, and execution of power. (Beneria 1987; Collins 2003; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Freeman 2000; Gill 2000; Marchand et al., 2000; Ong 1987; Tiano 1994; Salzinger 2003; Yelvington 1995). Further, Patricia Fernandez-Kelly argues that we need to pay attention to how women workers' gendered identities change. Capitalist production often manipulates extant gender stratification in a cultural setting, because doing so suits the goals of capitalist production, to maximize production and minimize costs. Incorporating women into capitalist production can destabilize gender doxa. As a place for anthropological research on gender, the EPZ is a place of both maintenance and contestation of cultural norms of gender.

There have been two major points of view on the impacts of labor on the global assembly line, in regards to gender. The first, globalism, is rooted in modernization theory. As discussed in chapter one, the globalist assertion is that globalization of capitalism, and all that goes with this economic system, will solve poverty and underdevelopment. Globalists argue that underdeveloped nations will become wealthy once incorporated into unregulated market capitalism. When women participate in the market economy, their status rises. Once on the capitalist trajectory, women and men become more equal, and culture "evolves" toward modernity (Bodley 2007; Edelman and Haugerud 2005; Marshall 1984).

There are pitfalls in this trajectory of modernization. For example, Kray (2007) describes the Mexican government's facilitation of Maya women in Cancun into tourism-related work. The government's support of Maya women workers in Cancun's Tourist industry is justified as promotion of modernization, and the empowerment of women (Kray 2007). Similarly in Tunisia, women in Bizerte and Zarzis, it was argued, would be helping themselves and their families by working in the EPZ's (World Bank 2005). While working in the cash economy does bring Maya women some new forms of power, it also makes them more subject to gossip and male violence. The concept of social capital is here exploited by officials, and employed to reinforce the neoliberal "feminization of development" literature. There is, "a tacit understanding that women are the most productive social capitalists and an unspoken assumption that 'women are naturally predisposed to their families or communities' and take their responsibilities seriously" (Molyneux 2003:178).

Another case in point of the problems of gender in development is documented by Ong (1987) in a Malay factory, where peasant women transform into a global proletariat, and their sexual reputations compromised. As social capitalists in a market economy, Alex Inkeles (1974) argued, that women would benefit by undergoing psychological modernization, and men would come to see women as their equals (i.e., Lerner 1958; Shorter 1975). Several flawed assumptions are here made. This argument assumes non-western cultures are assumed to be backward (Di Leonardo 1991; Said 1977). This is not to negate research which suggests that in Western countries, when women gain waged

incomes which rival their male partners, they tend to be able to increase demands for equality in terms of domestic work and child care (Hossfeld 1990; Lamphere, et al., 1993).

Women are the preferred workers in factory production and in post-industrial service economies because they have increased the profit margins of multinational corporations. They have entered into the production equation subjugated (via culture) which is the very reason why they increase the profit margins of multinational corporations. So while women laborers certainly seek and sometimes find some empowerment, that this was not the motive of the corporation is important. Even as I explore new opportunities for resistance among women workers in Z-textiles. While proletarianized women in Bizerte wage new opportunities to challenge Tunisian patriarchy, they also find themselves constrained by new a multinational capitalist discipline. As Ong (1987) discusses, the Malay peasant women who have become factory workers get new freedoms around sexuality and mobility, but also face new forms of dehumanization (Ong 1987). Other criticisms of modernization theory based, development through market participation include its bald ethnocentrism and that western women are yet to be equal with men. The United States and Western Europe remain patriarchal on a spectrum of gender empowerment measures (Edelman and Haugerud 2005).

The push for equality through incorporation into the global capitalist system is popularly accepted and promoted by political entities and non-governmental organizations, as well as some social scientists. Susan Marshall

(1984) points out that the *modernization equals women's liberation* perspective is also often supported by scholars of women and the family, who have attributed women's progress to level of participation in market economies. A famous example is evidenced in the Grameen bank project in Bangladesh, and the many other micro-loan projects which it continues to inspire (Rahman 1999; Schuler and Hashemi 1994). Giving poor women small loans to start businesses is a way to empower women; more importantly, it is a way to empower women that fits within the hegemony of neo-liberal ideology. The micro loan projects are also predicated on the idea of class stratification, as not all women will receive the loans, only those deemed by men who run the lending institutions, as Rahman (1999) describes. The new stratifications which emerge in impoverished countries like Bangladesh, as some women move up in community while many do not, is rarely questioned.

While there are avenues to power that are pursued by women when they proletarianize, the fact is that multinational corporations open factories in EPZ's because they can pay lower wages for more working hours with less overhead; any empowerment that employing these women imparts is secondary to the profit motive of the corporation. The fact of the exploitation of women workers on "the global assembly line" must take a central place in applied anthropological assessment, even while simultaneous forms of resistance and empowerment are also examined.

The second of the two major points of theoretical entry in understanding the impacts of industrialization on gender is rooted in Marxist theory (e.g.,



Bourgeois 1995; Haraway 1984). However unhappy the union of Marxist and feminist theory, understanding gender in the EPZ necessitates critique of the role of capitalist schema on gender (Hartmann 1976). Albeit there are differences in women's role in patriarchal societies in their families and that exploitation and that which they face as proletariat (e.g., Safa 1974, 1981), application of Marxist theoretical perspective to women's experiences as the proletariat allows examination of the circumstances of their labor. That is women are oppressed via patriarchal gender doxa and proletarianized women's experiences as a class are exploited via their gender. Women's labor in EPZ's is characterized by patterns of acquiescence and resistance based largely on the cultural forces placed upon them as a gender, and on their position as the proletariat at the site of off-shore production. The women workers of the EPZ's position emerges in an interaction between the cultural forces of gender and the economic forces of globalized production.

Dependency theory posits that women's traditional forms of labor are devalued as they are incorporated into global capitalism, usually at the lowest-paying, least skilled, and lowest-status positions.<sup>12</sup> It is not just the women who are drawn into capitalist production whose status deteriorates, but women's who remain in the traditional, informal economy, whose status goes down and whose resources diminish as men are drawn more into capitalist production. That is, men's economic power may increase when they engage in market production,

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<sup>12</sup>Development schemes have been much criticized by anthropologists as promoting patriarchal biases. These biases have led to development agencies' focus on men in communities, funding them rather than women, limiting female access to capital, technology, and expertise (e.g., Bodley 2007; Marshall 1984:501).

while women's decreases (Bodley 2007; Collins 2003; Edelman and Haugerud 2005; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Marshall 1984; Ong 1987; Yelvington 1995). A rebuttal against the modernization-as-development theory, women and men may become more stratified in the process of incorporation into the global market. There are other important outcomes that result from women's emergence as a class of laborers in EPZ's.

The political economy of gender and global capitalism is imbued with violence, both physical and symbolic (Bourdieu 1977). For example, Patricia Fernandez-Kelly (1983) found that women in communities around free trade zone factories expressed fears that their husbands would beat them, and that this was linked to shifts in husbands' and wives' contributions to household economy, as well as men's disdain for women's growing social participation outside the home. Maya women in the Cancun area are subject to violence from husbands and in-laws when they work in tourism (Kray 2006). Kevin Yelvington (1996) describes violence among young Trinidad factory workers in the form of a game where flirtation involves hitting knuckles. Further, factory managers sexually harassed women as a labor control strategy while women participated in this "flirting" in order to hold their jobs (156-163). Similarly, Hossfeld (1990) describes women workers in Silicon Valley who feared violence from husbands when their paychecks were larger, leading some to even give part of the check to a child so that the father would not feel threatened by his wife. Aihwa Ong (1987) describes how new social freedoms for young women factory workers in Malaysia also

elicit violence from their fathers. Also, the Kampong (village) village often rejects and ridicules what they deem overly sexual factory girls (124).

Violence against women factory workers has been common in the anthropological literature. An example that has drawn international attention is along Mexico's Northern industrial corridor (Kopinak 2001). In cities like Juarez, Tiano (1994) argues that Mexican patriarchy is challenged by women's new freedom outside the family. The sexual assault and homicide of approximately 370 maquiladora workers (this not including more than 450 who remain missing), are argued to be the consequences of gender roles thrown into question, retribution against women's assertion of new freedoms (however attenuated). While Mexican women are often relegated to the domestic sphere, *muchachas*, "maquiladora girls," experience new freedoms. *Muchachas*, challenge the ideal of domesticity and are often condemned as promiscuous (Beneria 1987, 1989; Tiano 1994). In cities like Juarez, when maquila girls' shifts end, they often participate in a social life that is inaccessible to working class women. What is suggested by the case of the Juarez rape-murders is that there is a backlash against women for experiencing freedoms like nightlife, and even sex before marriage- realms of life that Mexican men have dominated (e.g., Salzinger 2003; Tiano 1994). This is pertinent to my study in Tunisia because factory girls are the frequent topic of questions about the proper role of women, and because factory girls often partake of new freedoms in ways which are similar to the Mexican *muchachas*'.

While there has been endemic risk of sexual violence against unchaperoned Mexican women in Mexican society where men dominate public and recreational space, violence towards women has increased since the 1980's, and there is popular acknowledgement that this has something to do with women's participation in formal labor (Beneria 1987; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Salzinger 2003). Reports of sexual abuse of women workers also continue to emerge from the popular press, such as a human rights investigation into the sexual abuse, including rape and torture, of women workers brought in from Sri Lanka as laborers in an EPZ in Jordan (Hazaimeh 2011). As in the case of other sites where women transition from being peasants, or impoverished homemakers, to waged laborers in EPZ's, these women's sexual reputation becomes controversial. When women's gender role is thrown out of the role of doxa, so is men's (e.g., Tiano 1994).<sup>13</sup>

Women who proletarianize also engage in leisure and pleasure activities that are not available to Mexican women traditionally, a phenomenon documented by anthropologists of the factory (Beneria 1987; Collins 2003; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Freeman 2000; Gill 2000; Hosfeld 1990 ; Marchand et al., 2000; Ong 1987; Tiano 1994; Salzinger 2003; Yelvington 1995). For example, many girls who participated in Salzinger's research reported that they take maquila jobs not for economic survival, but for independence, and thus challenge cultural norms of the feminine as the self-abnegating Marianisma versus the masculine Machismo.

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<sup>13</sup> In the case of Mexico's Maquiladora workers, the North American managers have participated in the sexual exploitation of the workers they supervise. An overt example is evidenced in the Miss Maquila pageants. More subtle forms of sexual exploitation in the Maquiladoras are evidenced by North American managers who pursue sexual relationships with the Mexican women workers (Salzinger 2003).

Maquila jobs also give some unmarried women economic power to purchase feminine modernity in the form of cosmetics, provocative clothing, and admission to night clubs. Thus the Maquiladoras provide a way for working class girls to engage in capitalist modernity. But factory girls who spend their meager paychecks on commodities which they have fetishized because they represent modernity are not freed by their labor. While they obtain a sense of power, they also make themselves into sexual objects themselves, compliant to the demands of sexist society.

Further, when sex outside of marriage is made into a possibility in a patriarchal context, women engaging in sexual relations may be a way for the women to exert freedom over their sexuality; however, in a patriarchal society, they may suffer consequences as their reputation becomes tarnished. That is, women's freedom may enable men to exploit young women before marriage- In fact, this is arguably an extension of patriarchal control over women, rather than a rejection of it (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Salzinger 2003).

Another commonality in the research on EPZ's is that women workers are cognizant that their sexual reputations are "on the line" because they are factory girls; they act in ways which (e.g., Ong 1987; Tiano 1994; Yelvington 1995). The patterns which emerge are of gendered manipulations, and strategic use of sexist and racist stereotypes. Formal collective labor activism is less common for several important reasons, some of which have to do with the structural legalities legal of EPZ's- that is to say that the multinational corporations will simply pick up and leave the country if women form unions. Usually the problem of women

organizing is “solved” by the governments who use a variety of forms of coercion and force to ensure the docility of its women workers.

Manipulation of sexist and racist stereotypes is described in a variety of ways in EPZ’s. Hossfeld illustrates ways in which workers’ resistance by using managements’ logic against them on the shop floor of may achieve short-term goals like getting a break ultimately hinder their collective status as workers. She describes various ways in which women workers use the managers’ sexist and racist “logic against them,” with some limited positive outcomes. Ong (1987) describes the strategic use of spirit possession among the Malay factory workers. The possessions amounted to pacing of production but also in a subversion of capitalist discipline.

The question of violence against women in the EPZ’s of the Maghreb has remained unexplored. There is little research on the working conditions of women in multinational production zones in the Maghreb, and less in regards to sexual violence in production. As I discussed at the opening of this section, there are historic, literary, and anthropological accounts which implicate Arabic culture and Islamic family law as determiners of suppression and violence against women in the MENA (e.g., Charrad 2001). As I have also discussed, some of the claims about Arab culture and Islam are misguided and propagandistic, while others offer astute critique of Arab patriarchy and Islamic Law’s subjugation of women. However, analyses of MENA women’s employment experiences as EPZ laborers in this broader context of (albeit secularized) Islamic Arab society has not been explored in ethnographic research. Considering the commonalities which run

through the shop floors of EPZ's throughout the developing world is necessary in evaluating the meanings of women's experiences in Tunisia.

Central to the processes of global production, as Karen Hossfeld (1990) describes, are the familiar themes of the industrial past, where gender, ethnicity, and class are manipulated to the benefit of the owners of the means of production. In the case of Tunisian women workers in the EPZ's, there are many questions that I seek in this study to understand. As with most other women who work in EPZ factories, this is often Tunisian women's first experience in factory production. That is, they are primarily proletarian novices in a patriarchal society. Labor activism among women workers in EPZ's must be considered in terms of women's position in the political economy of gender, in a milieu of feminized labor (Acker 2004). The dominant conception in social scientific study of women laborers in EPZ's is shaped by what seems to be the situation of women in the broader culture (Elson and Pearson 1981; Mies 1986). The reasoning is that they are subordinated not only in their traditional feminine roles within the culture, but as laborers in the New International Division of Labor (Elson and Pearson 1981; Mies 1986; Tiano 1994). The maquilas-as-mobilizers thesis posits that the maquila industry started an ideological shift where Mexican women are more accepted in the workforce. "The maquila program has been a force for change in the border region and has transformed the contours of the labor market by absorbing a population sector previously at the margins of the formal labor force" (101). As Vicki Ruiz (1988) shows, the maquila industry in Mexico promoted itself, via publications and media, as an acceptably feminine way for women to

contribute to home and family (13). Leslie Sklair (1993) states that the, “litany of docile, undemanding, nimble-fingered women workers” is a way to facilitate an ideology that meshes with patriarchal notions of women in the home, outside the home (171-72).

This description of third world women has been criticized for purveying a monolithic, stereotyped victim role for these laborers (Mohanty 1991; Sani-Sinha 2006). Yet not all accounts rely on stereotypes. Rather, their passivity as laborers has been explained as their being overburdened by responsibilities as mothers and wives as well as workers- they have no time for formal labor activism (Tiano 1994). It has also been found that women’s sexualization at work often perpetuates their oppression within their patriarchal culture. However, in the context of Northern Mexico, Tiano (1994) and Fernandez-Kelly (1983) point out that gender ideologies of womanhood have been revised as women were hired by maquilas. Before maquilas, women existed outside the formal economy, but now have made a “new working contingent” (Fernandez-Kelly 1983). The ideological landscape of Northern Mexico, argues Tiano (1994) was changed, and the catalyst was the maquila industry. Women’s employment in the formal economy of Mexico increased since the advent of the maquilas; indeed, it was not the maquila industry that hired the most of new women workers but internal companies and the state (101).

Accounts which reveal women workers’ resistance, as described by Collins (2003) and Marchand (2002) show that women’s resistance is complicated. There is a need to understand the ways in which women EPZ



workers seek empowerment. To this effect, Ustubici (2009) states, “global capitalism constrains conventional forms of workers’ mobilisation while *paradoxically enabling* other forms of resistance” (2). Strategies of resistance, and where they fit in the scheme of power relationships, needs analysis.

In her review of anthropology of women laborers in world factories, Mary Beth Mills (2003) points out that few ethnographic studies have focused on “gendered processes of labor organizing and politicization” (51). But Rosa (1994) criticizes the tendency to reduce labor activism only to union activity, and then to contend that women do not organize. The reality is that the EPZ is something of a theater, and the tactics mostly guerilla. This despite the tendency for women’s formal participation in capitalism to be ignored around the world, and throughout most of the twentieth century (Boserup 1970, Blumberg 1976, Mies 1986, Tiano 1987).

There are many kinds of labor activism among female EPZ workers, and certain forms are intimate. Some EPZ laborers’ resistance is manifested through women workers’ bodies. Foucault (1976) contends that resistance an aspect of power and that there is not a clear delineation between the dominator and the dominated; Ngai’s (2005) concept of “multisided resistance” reflects Foucault’s contention (193). Similarly, Ustubici (2009) views the Turkish laborers in her study as employing bodily resistance as a reaction against managements’ domination of women workers’ bodies. While Foucault’s analysis helps in understanding how resistance can be bodily, it has also tended to preclude the possibility of organized resistance (Dreyfus 1983; Ustubici 2009). Other cases of

women's resistance are treated more theoretically satisfyingly to Marxist analyses, evidenced in pacing of production through physical ailments and even through spirit possession (Ngai 2005; Ong 1987).

Such tactics disrupt the flow of production, but have been largely overlooked (outside of anthropological study), possibly because of the over-focus on formal labor activism (Rosa 2005). More typically, bodily resistance has been viewed (by male managers and factory owners) as evidence of women's emotional instability and as evidence that such work is psychologically stressful (Hossfeld 1990).

Informal activism, takes on "multiple forms" (Mendez 2005: 63).

Women's informal labor activism is often subversive, and exploits the ideologies which are employed to subjugate women (Hossfeld 1990; Yelvington 1995; Ong 1987; Drori 1997; Freeman 2000). Women may, as I discuss above, wear provocative clothing to work to manipulate the Chebs into helping them more. Or, they may wear hijab to heighten their moral standing against stereotypes of loose morality that are painted in broad strokes against all factory women.

Moreover, women may engage in pacing of production, through means including feigned (or real) "female problems" like menstruation and pregnancy, to spirit possession (Hossfeld 1990; Ngai 2005; Ong 1987). Women play on cultural constructions of sexism in order to get out of hazardous or strenuous tasks. For example, Hossfeld describes women begging managers to not have to handle hazardous solvents because it would ruin manicures. Yelvington describes women who flirt in order to receive help carrying heavy boxes. The extant

literature describes women factory workers who engage in creative and daring attempts to impede managers' attempts to control them (e.g., Ong 1987; Yelvington 1995; Tiano 1994; Hossfeld 1990). According to Aihwa Ong (1991), workers' struggles may be based less on class consciousness and more on cultural consciousness, and the workers often identify themselves through kin and gender. Industrial modes of domination must be understood beyond only the sense of production on the factory floor; this control is less despotic than hegemonic. Subtle control of social spaces is important. Workers' struggles against domination by factory are cultural struggles over meaning, values and goals. Women are understood as secondary or junior workers and their lower wages reflect this; this system reflects the secondary status of girls and women in the home. Ong argues for the "Evidence that transnational capitalism has produced, along with microchips, discourse that naturalizes the subordination of women in industrial enterprises" (296). There has been a social reorganization of accumulation, and capitalist ventures are uneven in the developing world.

However, women's informal activism also reinforces their subordination. When women play on stereotypes of the feminine in order to pace production or evade a dangerous task, they reify corporate justifications for paying women lower wages and keeping them at the bottom of the worker hierarchy. When women are compelled to flirt (or more) with male managers to keep their jobs or to get help with physically difficult tasks, they reify patriarchal sexism which relegates women to the role of sexual object.

In rejecting of Foucaultian theoretical framework, I argue that women EPZ laborers are not exercising power which equalizes them with EPZ managers or owners, or heads of state. These forms of resistance actions have not enabled women to excise the domination of management, but they represent the conflict between workers and owners. This is not to demean women's actions but to give weight to the understanding of the structural constraints placed on laborers through state policy and multinational corporations, both of whom manipulate local patriarchies to exercise control over female workers. Having stated this, I do not mean to preclude the limited cases where women have gained some power through their labor. I now describe the dynamics of such empowerment.

Before comparing export processing zones across regions, it is first necessary to understand what an EPZ is, in terms of the forces under which this brave new factory emerged as the most common way that production is done. Further, it is important to establish the features that make it distinct from the factories which exist as part of a state's national system of production. Throughout the world, EPZ's are known by several other names, and these names may elucidate the meanings of globalized production. They are known as Free Trade Zones, Free Zones, or some close variation. In Tunisia they are known as economic zones and colloquially as Les Zones Franches. EPZ's are also sometimes called Multinational Production Zones, and off-shore production zones. What they are called helps in understanding what they represent in terms of a globalizing economy's challenge to notions of the autonomous nation-state.

There are an estimated 3,500 EPZ's around the world employing 66 million people in 130 countries (ILO 2008). EPZ's have many similarities. These zones were established as a result of free trade agreements between countries. Over the last three decades, trade agreements were signed usually between wealthier, former colonizer or imperial countries and poorer, often colonized ones. These trade agreements reduced or eliminated tariffs on imports, and lifted restrictions on corporations from moving their factories to poorer countries. EPZ's were set up in many developing countries (few are in core nations) to facilitate corporations' ability to take advantage of cheap labor and lax environmental standards. The preponderance of similarities between EPZ's is explained by the purpose and origin of this form of production. Since the 1960's many corporations moved production to developing countries, especially unskilled labor positions, but maintaining control over management and technology in the base, usually in the core- this is known as the theory of the New International Division of Labor (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983; Kim 1992). In the EPZ's, it is typical for there to be disparities in gender. Production in all regions is guided by similar beliefs about development and modernization, and all are underpinned by the principles of capitalism.

The ideology of neo-liberal "free trade" was strengthened by the consequences of loans made between international lending institutions and the newly independent post-colonial nations. Backed by the wealthiest countries, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) lent money to the developing ones. These loans came with stipulations which focused on the

dynamics of the economic infrastructure, and trade relations. When countries were unable to pay back the loans according to the schedule, their interest rates increased, as per the contractual loan agreement. This predicament has become so common that it is normative for developing countries to be paying back only the interest on those loans (Bodley 2007). A program of structural adjustment is advised by the international lending institutions, who stipulate that the country must cut national spending in order to be able to borrow more money. Ideologies of newly independent colonial nations were often critical of the role capitalism had played in their exploitation, but whatever socialist policies were promoted by newly independent nations were short lived.

Fuelled by the imminent demise of many communist regimes, as well as the growing crisis of poverty in the developing countries, neoliberalism swept much of the developing world. This sweep happened in a variety of ways, some overtly violent but much in forms of symbolic violence of economic coercion. Simultaneously, powerful countries' leaders led a purge of left movements, exemplified in the figures of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, who participated in both violent and coercive removal of left-leaning leaders across the world (Bourgeois 1990). Powerful nations' promotion of neo-liberalism and undermining Socialist leaders continued through the last three decades into the present (Harvey 2005). Structural adjustment requires that states cut back on public services, like education and healthcare, and subsidies for housing. Usually, the state acts at the mandate of international financial institutions like the World

Bank or the International Monetary Fund, but elites often stand to benefit from structural adjustment.

The cutbacks on the national budgets of indebted countries have been fraught with problems that impact the lower classes. Women who have not become workers in free trade zone factories contend with the economic effects of structural adjustment in their home and community economies, because, “structural adjustment plans mobilize women’s unpaid domestic labor as domestic nurturers and economizers to subsidize the costs for international capitalism and to guarantee the debts secured by poor states” (Mills 2003: 47). Women who must subsidize the effects of neoliberalism often participate in the informal economy, where their work is poorly paid and exploited (Fernandez-Kelley 1983; Marchand and Runyan 2000; Rothstein and Blim 1992; Tuck 1996).

There are ideologies of gender which justify multinational corporations’ use of women to maximize production while reducing labor costs. As the community caretakers who will make ends meet in the face of structural adjustment, women are held responsible for “cleaning up” and holding together families. Since flexibility is key to the expansion of capitalism: flexible means of production, flexible laborers, and flexibility in specialization all characterize free trade zones. Further, the self of the worker is also transmuted. Carla Freeman (2000) describes how Barbadian women workers in an EPZ call center refashion their identities, just as they refashion their appearance. The importance of the study of these transformations of self through labor in EPZ’s is crucial. “The task for anthropology,” Freeman argues, “is to connect the ways in which new modes

of consumption together with new modes of production give rise to new meanings of local culture and newly flexible identities” (34).

Women tend to be hired in the lowest-paying, lowest-status positions in EPZ's (as is the case in capitalist factory production in general). It is young unmarried women who form the backbone of this labor force, for several reasons. The logic is that young women are “nimble-fingered,” and thus well-suited to textile and assembly work. Young women are assumed to be naive and therefore docile, which would mean, for management, that such women are easy to manage. Young women are also sexualized; to manage young, unmarried women is an opportunity for managers and owners to have access to women who they hope would be too naïve or desperate to refuse their sexual advances.<sup>14</sup>

But there are more subtle forms of sexual exploitation, where managers flirt with women and women flirt back for several strategic purposes. Flirting with women workers can be a way for managers to maintain high production, and keep women from complaining about conditions, as Hossfeld (1990) documents. However, this would only work in circumstances where women were encouraged or flattered by being flirted with. In much research, women do not feel flattered. Rather, many feel compelled to flirt back to stay in the good graces of management, since women also have the constant knowledge that they could be replaced in hours by the droves of other women who want jobs in EPZ's. Managers use the knowledge that, when women are competing for the attentions of managers, they are in antagonistic roles with one another. This divide-and-rule strategy makes collective organizing less likely. This strategy was evident in Z-

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textiles. Several binat, unmarried young women in Z-Textiles, described Bechir, their manager, adoringly. Beshir played on the girls' hopes by reminding them in indirect ways that he was looking for a wife. While Tunisian custom is that men and women look for long periods of time before selecting a partner this custom allowed Beschir to be looking for the whole year of my research with proposing to anyone. This strategy keeps the binat in a position of willingness to please him in hopes they might be chosen.

As Hossfeld (1990) and Yelvington (1995) describe, women can counter-manipulate male co-workers and supervisors; however, flirtation requires women to succumb to and even promote their own exploitation. The factory zones of the EPZ reproduce it by giving male hires slightly higher-status, and higher-paying positions (e.g., Ong 1987; Tiano 1994; Yelvington 1995). This diminishes the status of the jobs women perform, and helps justify their lower wages. For example, Yelvington (1995) found that managers would punish male workers who engaged in too much slacking off or horseplay by assigning them to work with the women, sitting down. Forcing the man to work sitting still and assembling without being able to move freely around the factory floor humiliated them. Since masculinity is often defined as freedom of movement and autonomy, to make men sit and be self-contained in one area vexes his sense of masculinity. Male workers in Yelvington's research who had been so punished would be teased by both male *and* female co-workers. A similar pattern occurred in Z-textiles, where women would taunt men when they failed to carry bolts of fabric to the tables fast enough for the women. Women would offer men push-pins, and

(with varying levels of innuendo) ask the men if they were “up to” lifting pins. Women accepted that masculinity should be superior, that jobs like loading, lifting, and driving lorries were superior to the “light” work of the women. While women did challenge male superiority in Z-textiles in ways they would not have access to outside the factory, they devalued their own labor to do so.

In certain cases, women who are wives and mothers are manipulated by management based on this status. Since most women workers are usually young and unmarried (and usually without children), married mothers working on the line are subject to pressures in society and in the EPZ. Yelvington (1995) notes that, in his research on a Trinidad factory, middle-aged wives and mothers were not disciplined as much in the factory as were the younger girls, because the society was already exerting control of them, via their obligations and labors as wives and mothers. Also, Drori describes the ways in which the older factory workers in Japan were treated with condescending respect by male management (Drori 2000). Middle-aged women in Yelvington’s research also exerted their respectability through expressions of religiosity and dignified ways of dress and talk. For example, while younger women engaged in a discourse called Bacchannal, where they would ridicule men sexually, older women rarely would. Thus, middle-aged women could exert forms of moral power to differentiate herself from younger, more vulnerable and more micro-managed women. At the same time, their agency in getting to do this also led to their curtailment of power, for being respectable meant limiting behavior and dress (Yelvington, 1995).

Tunisia does not have as long of a history of accommodation to EPZ's as do countries like Mexico. However it does have a history of industrial zones, factories owned by Tunisian elites (called "les bourgeoisie" by working class Tunisians) where goods are manufactured by Tunisians and then sold to Tunisians, such as shoes and blue jeans. Also, Tunisia has factories owned by Europeans where Tunisians produce goods that are sold in Tunisia, such as Nestle's many yogurt and ice cream factories throughout Tunisia, albeit Nestle has been under attack by Tunisian unions for their unethical labor practices (Lydersen 2010). This is important because even though these factories are not in EPZ's, they did often hire Tunisian women, meaning that Tunisian women already have begun the process of proletarianization, starting in the 1970's.<sup>15</sup> While little research has been conducted on gender in these factories, anecdotal evidence suggests that many women worked on the line under similar circumstances as do women in the Le Zone, to amass dowry or to help support their husbands' paycheck.

In Tunisia, where similar gender ideologies as those in Mexico dominate (albeit Tunisian women's equal rights are made clear in the Personal Status Codes in a way that they are not in Mexico), similar dynamics emerge for women workers. Regarding the dynamics of women workers in Mexican maquiladoras, Susan Tiano (1994) argues that in Mexico, "where conventional ideologies of female domesticity have molded the public consciousness, ideas of maquila work as merely temporary help to dispel resistance to an industry whose predilection

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<sup>15</sup> Nestle in Tunisia recently closed an ice cream factory in the middle of the night, without telling the factory workers; unions protested but there was little to be done because the Ben Ali government's contract with Nestle contained clause allowing Nestle to abandon operations at their volition (Lydersen 2010).

for women workers is common knowledge” (100). That is, the temporal nature of their work may play to the benefit of patriarchy as well as to the benefit of the factory owners. However, two theses on women workers in multinational capitalist production must be considered before going forward with the possible linkages between global factory work and other regions.

The most common thesis on women workers in global factories is the exploitation thesis, and according to it, because of their dire economic straits, women are exploited by multinationals as well as by their own cultures’ patriarchies. First of all, that women’s employment in free trade production zones is temporally bound makes for several ways that women are exploited. The backbone of the workforce is young unmarried or recently married women, and managers hire women in the expectation that they will leave or be fired once they get married, or after they have children. Since there are more young women in need of employment than factory jobs, managers hire and fire women in a short time span (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Tiano 1994). Women workers know that they must be compliant or be replaced (Marchand 2002; Touissant 1999).

In such a work setting, where faces come and go quickly, women are unlikely to gain worker solidarity in order to organize a union, albeit, it has happened (e.g., Fernandez-Kelly 1983). This ideology in women’s own societies, that their work is a temporary thing done out of economic need and not as a career, reinforces patriarchal family structure where women are viewed as wives and mothers whose proper place is working outside of waged employment, inside the home. In such a way, the patriarchy is not threatened and thus, there is little

community critique of maquiladora industries. Part of the problem is that women's ideological subjugation to patriarchy is reinforced by their employment, which they expect to only provide a temporary need.

However, there are important possibilities for women workers, as well as exploitation. According to the integration thesis, women who work in waged labor via free trade zone factories gain new opportunities and new powers through their participation in the formal economy. Further, some analysts have argued that free trade zone factories want stable, long-term workforces (Lucker and Alvarez 1985; Stoddard 1987). They argue that these factories have invested in training their employees to do complex assembly work and it is costly for them to lose them (English et al., 1989). Lucker and Alvarez (1985) argue that employers now want to avoid worker turnover. This claim though remains contested by much ethnographic data.

Either way, as Tiano (1994) points out, the assumed temporality of global factory employment stands out. In the exploitation thesis, employers hire and fire to subjugate women; in the integrationist thesis, employers must try to keep women workers who leave their jobs after only a short period. Interestingly, the integrationist thesis implies that traditional gender norms hinder women's chances at become proletarians by pulling them away from the assumed benefits of waged global factory labor.

In her research in neighborhoods in Juarez, Mexico, Patricia Fernandez-Kelly (1983) notes the immensity of social change since the advent of maquiladoras in the area. Women in the barrio had gone from unemployed

housewives (albeit engaged in the informal economy) to a proletarianized workforce, part of a global process of capitalist expansion (180). The meanings of gender in a society are not simply reified when a multinational factory sets up for business. While the factory can be a place where cultural notions of gender are reinforced, anthropologists have also found that more complicated gendered processes may be at work.

Through ethnographic interviews, Jane Collins (2003) describes the ways in which workers in textile factories across borders perceive of their interrelations with one another. She argues that “Studying [the commodity chain] requires us to track the social relations of apparel production as these are restructured by local and global forces and enacted by employers and workers within their disparate and shared frameworks of meaning and power” (6). The proletarianization of women can provide unintended outcomes, including gender contestation and transformation. The question that I seek to answer by doing this research is, how are Tunisian women reifying, and/or, contesting, and/or transforming gender through work on the global assembly line? Tunisia has quite a unique socio-political history, compared to much of the rest of the MENA region. It has been hailed as the most progressive of the MENA states, especially in terms of women’s rights. In 1956, when Tunisia gained independence from France and Hamid Bourguiba took power, he created and implemented Personal Status Codes that replaced the Qu’ranic Sharia law concerning marriage and the family (Tessler et al., 1978).

Ben Ali cut social welfare programs and privatized Tunisian farm and factory collectives. As discussed in section one of this paper, large landowners and the urban bourgeoisie acquired most of these collectives (King 2003). More recently, Ben Ali signed free trade agreements with the European Union and the United States. These have led to a flooding of foreign goods on Tunisian markets, inflation, and free trade production zones. The question is, how have these free trade policies affected women and relations of class and gender? A look at research from other regions of the world helps to give a sense of what dynamics may be emerging in Tunisia.

Susan Marshall (1984) argues that attributing women's lower participation in economic development in the MENA to religious cultural factors or to the phenomenon of foreign capitalist penetration is inadequate. In her research on several MENA countries, including Tunisia, she argues that the role of elites in the State have far more to do with women's participation, and that this is supported through evidence of the diversity of women's participation between countries. That is, Marshall points to the significance of the state's role in supporting or disenfranchising women in development schemes (1984: 499-550). While Marshall's point is well argued, it is the interaction between state elites in Tunisia with the international lending institutions and multinationals which together sets the range of experience of Tunisian EPZ laborers.

Researchers who have studied global production zones in Mexico have found that women's increased participation in the formal economy often leads to gender tensions in the household, including male violence against women (e.g.,

Beneria 1992; Tiano 1994). While there is a serious paucity of gender and political economic research on Tunisia, in her ethnography of Tunis, Paula Holmes-Eber (2003) suggests that increased female participation in the paid labor force contributes to an increase in women's ability to make their own marriage matches. Since women rarely choose a male cousin for themselves, as is the endogamous custom, women's increased economic independence may have transformed traditional Arabic marriage arrangements, but the phenomenon would be limited to a small group of women. The notion that women are empowered by work on the global assembly line remains dubious. Other research from Tunisia describes the erosion of extended kin households. More isolated nuclear families, it is suggested, have led to more domestic violence (Holmes-Eber 1997). In the case of Tunisia's neighbor, Algeria, Marnia Lazreg (1994) argues that the phenomenon of nuclear families in Algeria results in wives' increased vulnerability to domestic violence, whereas traditional extended family living meant that a wife had more protection from her husband and his family- but she provides no ethnographic evidence to back this claim. Considering the costs and benefits to women, their families and communities as global factory workers is central. Here I seek to describe the relations of power between women and men in the society, and between women workers and global manufacturers, in order to assess how women's lives change.

Tunisia is a predominantly Sunni Muslim country, but assuming that this fact explains women's situation is lame, since the rest of the MENA is also predominantly Muslim, but women's rights vary tremendously (Charrad 2001).



How does Islam impact the EPZ labor experience, and how does it impact power relations. In her research on a Malaysian factory, Aiwa Ong (1987) offers a fascinating analysis of Islam on factory work. In Z-Textiles, the major ways in which Islam impacted work evidenced in *hijab*, or lack thereof. While Sarah Tobin (forthcoming) offers analysis of how Islamic banks objectify women tellers by selling an image of the bank through women workers who are pious ladies or modern Muslim women, Islam could not be used in the same ways, as a selling point in Z-Textiles. Commodification of women workers based on their Islamicness judged by their dress and use of cosmetics matters in industrial production, but for different reasons. For example, a *binat*'s choice to wear a mini skirt and lipstick to work, versus another's choice to wear full hijab are assertions of identity and power. Both choices can be understood as attempts to mitigate patriarchal subjugation as it relates to the state. That is to say that the workers who wears mini skirts is asserting her right to do so against Tunisian society that will demean her for doing so. But the girl in hijab is rebelling against the other problem of masculinity in Tunisia, the secularized modern man who objectifies women. Her use of hijab then becomes a way to avoid being what he wants women to be, accessible if only visibly. The importance of dress in Tunisia, however, gets at the broader subject of women workers' responses to the exploitation of their labor.

Before elaborating on the anthropological accounts of EPZ workers and their resistance to exploitation in EPZ's, it is first necessary to consider the facts of production agreements between host countries and multinationals; these often

preclude certain labor rights. EPZ contracts usually stipulate that workers are barred from forming unions or engaging in any other collective activities (Carty 2006; ILO 2008). If workers dare to organize, the corporation can pick up and move to another country, one with a “fresh” group of supposedly compliant workers (Bolles and Yelvington 2010; Soni-Sinha 2006). In extreme cases, they could also be tortured and killed for activism (Bourgeois 1990; Toussaint 1999).

This robber baron quality of the multinational corporations of the EPZ system is made possible, even in host countries where unions are supported, because EPZ’s are not legally part of the host country. Therein, the contractual agreements set between the country of the multinational and the government of the host country are the only laws. That is, EPZ’s are legally distinct from the host country, so national labor regulations do not apply (Carty 2006; ILO 2008).

Compounding the legalistic realities of EPZ’s, women have had complicated relationships to labor unions. Rare are historical cases where they have been accepted as equals into trades unions (Bernard 1990; King 2003; Perkins 2004; Ustubici 2009). In consideration of women’s limited affiliation to unions, and the fact that unions usually cannot legally exist in EPZ’s, labor activism must be defined and explicated in more complicated ways (e.g., Mendez 2005). Ngai (2005) argues, “New theorising on resistance, not simply of the worker-subject, is urgently required, and it should go beyond conventional dichotomies of individual and collective actions, personal and social resistance, and non-political and political, confronting behaviour” (194). While there has been research on the daily forms of resistance of EPZ workers (e.g., Ong 1997),

Ustubici (2009) argues in her review that not enough focus has been given to women as resisters. Activism in forms of everyday resistance (that is not collective in a traditional sense) represents the bulk of EPZ women laborers' attempts to gain control of the conditions under which they labor; few have had the benefit of the Turkish workers of Ustubici's (2009) study. These Turkish EPZ laborers went on strike at their factory, Novamed (Ustubici 2009). Turkey is a Muslim country that is often compared to Tunisia for its secularism and attention to women's rights. Indeed in the case of the women's strike, it was the support of the women workers by Turkish feminist groups as well as the support of their union that made the strike a success (Ustubici 2009). While these Turkish laborers left the bargaining table after 15 months with several improvements to their work conditions, other successful examples are few. Another exception to the lack of formal labor struggle among women workers in EPZ's is found in S.K. Kim's (1997) ethnography of South Korean women who acted successfully to unionize by employing an ideology of class struggle. While Kim found that the factory women she researched were successful at unionization, unions are often a reflection of the patriarchal society within which they exist. For example, Fernandes (1997) found that in a Calcutta jute factory, men workers aligned with management against a unisex union to maintain their own wage advantage over women workers. Portraying women's strategies of resistance and action as laborers requires ethnographic investigation beyond formal labor activism.

In limited cases, research reveals that some women in EPZ's find more empowerment than their cohort in the non-EPZ factories of their countries, and

that conditions are better in the EPZ than outside of it (Kabeer and Mahmood 2004). Further, there is evidence that I corroborate in my study, that women find some freedom in the EPZ's from family constraints (Grossman 1979; Kabeer and Mahmood 2004). However, the anthropology of the EPZ suggests that when EPZ workers find more empowerment through EPZ work, it is often at the expense of women in the community who do not work in the EPZ's (Ong 1987; Tiano 1994). For example, in Ong's research on village women who became EPZ laborers, she describes the heightened power they get over women who stay farm laborers. Some ethnographies of labor in free trade zone factories also consider troubling the woman-as-victim or exploitation thesis by providing descriptions of powers gained by women factory workers. While the factory itself is dominated by the patriarchal powers that be, women may gain the power to become consumers, bargainers for their own marriage prospects, and they may gain access to public spaces while remaining respectable mothers and daughters.

But the powers gained by women via factory work may represent the ultimate in lack of class consciousness; women may fetishize their jobs and their roles as workers, purchasing middle class clothes with the money they earn so that they can perform the role of a middle class office worker, even if they are actually paid a pittance as Carla Freeman (2000) found in Barbados. Freeman saw the relationships between production and consumption among high tech women laborers in Barbados as part of a complicity of working class women with middle class values. Class identity relies on gendered practices and ideologies; however, gender identity draws on configurations of class, and both of these processes are

related to production and consumption (53). Off-shore services, where working class women are expected to come to an office in stylish business clothes, challenge the ideologies of identity and class consciousness. Rather than challenging the exploitation inherent in their low wages, Freeman found that women workers were more interested in gaining status. To this effect, Mills (2003) states, “Gendered encounters with capitalist labor relations do not necessarily direct workers’ struggles for greater autonomy toward the workplace “(50). That some women find more power as consumers, or as potential marital matches is therefore not an endorsement of international capitalist production, but it highlights the many impacts that EPZ labor can have on women’s lives, considering the economic situations of their communities.

Tiano (1994), in line with modernization theory, argues that free trade production zones are having a positive impact on women because they are breaking down patriarchal notions that proscribe women’s labor force production, but if the maquilas make women’s work acceptable by making it temporal and feminizing the work by demeaning it to little more than “women’s work” outside the home, as several other researchers (e.g., Fernandez-Kelly 1983, Sklair 1993, and Ruiz 1988) contend, then it could also be seen as edifying patriarchal dominance. Ultimately, the question of how to define these workers needs further research.

The anthropology of the Mediterranean is an assemblage of representations of Mediterranean peoples as effusive, bound by honor and controlled by shame, deferential to patrons, and deeply patriarchal (Said 1977).

Culture areas and realms were once fashionable ideologies. Perhaps no place and no people more than that of the Mediterranean was to have a cohesive ecology and character (e.g., Braudel 1966). Perhaps this is not the problem. Perhaps assumptions about all Mediterranean groups having certain traits, like effusiveness or machismo, or the complex of honor and shame, are not what hurts the understanding so much as the absence of an accompanying focus on class conflict. Anthropology has some responsibility to understand honor and shame as a way to maintain resources; ideologies do not stand by themselves, but serve those who control means of production.

The anthropology of global production has also amassed an image of factory women who resist exploitation through mostly intimate and covert means. The body of anthropology of global factories also reminds that gender remains a primary facet of stratification, even if popular culture has declared this a “post-feminist” era. The portrait that emerges is one where women laborers are mostly down-trodden, oppressed and frustrated. As I will show in the following chapters, my own research corroborates this conception. Yet, women laborers also gain opportunities and act in ways that they would not have been able to do in the informal economy or in unpaid household labor. That is, the importance of learning about the experiences of women workers in EPZ’s is that their lives in factory production in the zones may lead to forms of collective action, the likes of which have been seen in several EPZ’s (Ustubici 2009). There may be some promise for liberation that is not based on stereotypical sisterhood of all women but in the knowledge of class exploitation (Bolles and Yelvington 2010).



### Chapter 3

At the beginning of the era of *maquiladora* production, Patricia Fernandez-Kelly (1983) described what anthropological research in global production zones could do. She stated, “It is at the point of convergence between a broad analysis and personal experience that anthropology can yield its most fruitful results” (Fernandez-Kelly: 188). The research methods which guide my study are those employed by anthropologists who, for the last four decades, conducted research in factories and export processing zones (EPZ’s) attending to the laborers’ agency and the structural forces under which they work.

I am also guided by those anthropologists who sought to analyze gender and class in the Mediterranean, and within that area of inquiry, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The legacy of anthropology of the Mediterranean and MENA is one where a set of foci have dominated analysis, and these have overshadowed issues of class (Mitchell 2002). Here I examine what has been known about the Mediterranean and the MENA, and I also consider methodologies which inform a re-evaluation of the MENA.

My study is also informed by the research methods of anthropologist-parents who were accompanied by their children in the field. A new mother at the time of the research, I did not anticipate the ways that having my then toddler, Faris, with me would affect my research. Faris affected the ways I collected data,



and my understanding of the data. He was the primary hindrance to my field work, but he was equally an unexpected key in gaining field experiences. It was not until I completed field research that I began to consider what Faris had helped me get from my field experience.

My research methods are informed by the reflexive accounts of research in the MENA, especially the research conducted by women over the last four decades. Of concern to me is that my field research was deeply influenced by my status as the wife of a Tunisian man, living with my in-laws and chaperoned by them. I examine my identity as an anthropologist who, although not what Abu-Lughod describes as a “halfie” anthropologist, has family connections to the place under study (Abu-Lughod 1991). That is to say that I describe women participating in social and religious rituals that I take part in myself. The fact that this information was the first thing that participants would learn about me shaped my findings.

In this chapter, I do four things: 1) I explore the ways in which factory work is researched 2) I consider the ways in which the MENA has been methodologically approached in light of class and gender, 3) I consider the role of researcher as parent in the field and 4) I consider my role as a slightly insider anthropologist. I describe and justify the methods I employed, and why this research needed to be done through open-ended interviews and participant observation.

Valentine Moghadam (2005) argues that qualitative case-studies of countries can, “elucidate the contradictory nature of the neoliberal policy turn and

the complex and differentiated ways that it has affected states, employment patterns, and social policies, especially as far as women's rights are concerned”

(3). Included in what qualitative data can bring to light is how to gain entry into the strange, intimidating, forbidding EPZ. Because I went to Bizerte with no arrangement that I would be allowed into a factory to do research, I sought to know how other anthropologists managed to be allowed to go to these limited access zones. Fences and security gates with guards (sometimes toting automatic weapons) are the gate-keepers of EPZ's; equally daunting are the administrative and political barriers which surround the EPZ. The anthropologist must become an Olympic hoop jumper to navigate such bureaucracies. Once they have satisfied administrators, they must allay the suspicions of paranoid factory owners to get permission to be in their factory.

Once there, the anthropologist must try to gain rapport with workers who are fearful that to befriend the researcher may jeopardize their job; more mundane reality is that the drudgery of factory work allows workers barely enough time for a bathroom break, much less time to befriend a researcher. Mohiuddin and Khatun (1998) in their research on EPZ garment workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh find their way in to the factory by first riding busses with the workers to and from the EPZ. They found that workers socialized on the busses, and were receptive to the researchers in this relaxed space.

Researchers of EPZ's also usually participant observe and conduct interviews and surveys in communities surrounding the EPZ, in order to understand holistically the community's situation- including changes in culture

and economy. While gaining entry into the factory requires layers of permission access, doing research in the surrounding community may be easier once the rapport is established in the factory. From Yelvington's (1995) descriptions of "liming" with factory workers at social times, and partying at weddings, to Fernandez-Kelley's descriptions of women's small shops and home interviews, it seems that most researchers of the factory have an easier time gaining access to the community. This may be partly a function of being a presence in the factory. For example, Yelvington was an employee (albeit he was not paid) and as such, he in many ways became a friend to the workers.

In Yelvington's (1995) ethnography of a Trinidad factory, he works on the line as a participant observer, so as to document the machinations of the powerful and the powerless, as they "produce power." He argues that social scientists must go beyond capturing emic perspectives. Pike's (1954) argument in his development of an emic/etic concept was to steer anthropology away from debates about objectivity (whether it could be achieved) towards an understanding of perspectives of knowledge of those under study and those doing the studying. The emic is important because it validates the systems of knowledge of the studied. However, emic perspectives also cannot be held as truth anymore than can the scientific etic. In the factory and society, emic perspectives are reflective of the socio-historic and economic inequalities (Yelvington 1995). Therefore, "lending voice" to participants would not be a way to counter racism, classism, or sexism. Researchers must approach field research *with* political and ideological views (an etic perspective) to interpret their findings.

Mohiuddin and Khatun (1998) argue for an active dialectical relationship between researcher and researched that privileges the participants. Indeed, they give weight to the voices of the participants, and reveal the astute criticisms they had of their position in the global economy. For example, a participant says that there should be a “pain label” on each garment, so that Western consumers could know how much pain the woman who sewed it endured (12). However, they also find that their interpretations of the workers’ activities were necessary. They describe finding out that most all of the participants lied about their age and marital status to the researchers, and they were perplexed as to why the participants, who were friendly and outgoing to them, would lie. What they found is that the information they gave them was the same as the information that they gave the bosses in order to get hired. Since the bosses preferred “tender” unmarried young women, the women lied to get hired and this lie they continued with the researchers.

Fernandez-Kelly (1983) argues that, “the lesson to be apprehended from related isolable lives should go beyond the limits of personalism. All human lives are an end product of a set of specific historical processes” (172). While it is important to examine the circumstances through which capital accumulates through multinational manufacturing endeavors, Fernandez-Kelly insists that it is equally important to understand the situation of potential workers, particularly women and their positions within the household, as they come to be factory workers. We cannot only study the capitalist demand for labor, but also the laborers, who have been increasingly feminized in the developing world. Thus,

Fernandez-Kelly conducts interviews with women in the cities in which EPZ's exist, in women's homes where they are certainly engaged in reproductive, unpaid household labor but also may be engaged in a third shift, performing income-generating activities which have become more necessary as structural adjustment programs have led to devaluation of currency and cut-backs in social security services. She also found that it was not unusual for women white collar workers to leave these prestigious positions to work in maquilas because the pay and benefits were better (1983:54).

At the heart of her research is this assertion: while it is important to examine the circumstances through which capital accumulates through multinational manufacturing endeavours, it is equally important to understand the situation of potential workers, particularly women in the household, as they come to be factory laborers. We cannot only study the capitalist demand for labor, but the supply of laborers, who have been increasingly feminized in the developing world. In order to move beyond the generic explanations of "cheap labor" or "reserve industrial army," we must research the women and their positions within domestic units. This means developing research methods which take into consideration the constraints of women workers' lives.

Fernandez-Kelly conducts ethnographies in the proletarian communities and homes of Ciudad Juarez, where many maquila workers live. It is to be expected that she would conduct domestic research considering her emphasis on the labor positions of women in the home that lead to their maquila work outside the home. She emphasizes the connection between local labor markets, the

informal economy, international migration, and the maquila industry. By visiting women and doing both surveys and in-depth interviews, she describes maquila workers' complex informal support networks. The informal support networks include patronizing one another's side businesses, creating a web of financial support. Of many examples, she describes women who buy each others' cosmetics out of an obligation to keep their friends in business. By observing at women's informal economic events, Fernandez-Kelly is able to comprehend how vital this kind of economic networking is in helping women make ends meet. But her analysis goes further, because she also indicates the ways in which these economic activities benefit the upper classes, because they lessen the social services and benefits through neoliberal structural adjustment schemes. Women then cannot be viewed as just empowering themselves, but as also supporting a system that exploits them.

Further, Fernandez-Kelly presents cases of factory women who she has interviewed and participant observed within the household. She finds that family structure modifies in the face of women's many ways of participating in the labor force, it is through her research in women's homes that she is able to describe the changes in family structure. She creates portraits of women's lives, that are shaped by intertwining productive and reproductive labor strategies, in the formal and informal sectors.

She makes friends with her participants, to the point that they disclose financial realities of the domestic sphere like the importance of knowing who in the household purchased the refrigerator, television, or furniture. This matters as

women may buy these items instead of relying on their husbands to do so, as this suggests a shift in gender and power. She also stays in women's tiny corner stores and describes in detail the items they sell most, and the elaborate systems of credit they establish with their patrons/neighbors. She goes to Avon Cosmetics meetings, where neighborhood women generate cash and gain social capital. She is able to show that all the women in the neighborhood are indebted to one another and that reciprocity is foundational to their social and economic lives.

Because of the depth of her relationships with participants, Fernandez-Kelly is told of the many ways in which they generate income outside the formal economy. Many maquila workers also offer beautician services in their homes, sell Avon, work in canneries across the border in the US for certain seasons, and offer day care services. Women also disclose details of their relationships with men, and, these relations are often violent, or strained emotionally. She describes the immense investment women make in their children's school activities, hoping to their children will progress towards a life of more opportunities than the mothers themselves have (168). Ideologies of class are also a prominent aspect of findings based on a variety of research methods in EPZ and community.

Through her ethnographic methodologies, Fernandez-Kelly challenges modernization theorists' contention that informal economic strategies are archaic or traditional means that induction into capitalism will obliterate. To the contrary, Fernandez-Kelly supports Portes' (1982) argument that capitalist expansion *relies on* and *prosperes from* workers' informal endeavors, since the income generated from these activities can justify industries' minimal support of workers. But

informal transactions between the women in the proletarian neighborhoods of Juarez do more than generate extra cash. They also reinforce the feminine role in society, because such activities are not threatening to fathers or husbands, finds Fernandez-Kelly. But there is an even more important function to women's involvement in the informal economy.

Leslie Salzinger (2003) employs the theoretical perspective built upon World Systems Theory (Wallerstein 1973), the New International Division of Labor Theory, to lend understanding to the women in Mexico's Maquiladoras. What she finds is that Maquiladora work is still, after two decades, built on the exploitation of a largely female workforce. Salzinger participant-observed in four Maquiladoras in the 1990's, working different jobs. She also "studied up," as a way to record the attitudes of male managers and workers that helped reify women's subjugation in the plants. She argues that women's docility is produced in the factory production process (16). By being there in the factory with the workers, she was able to capture male managers' ways of objectifying women workers, and women workers' use of their own objectification to gain some power. Further, Salzinger is able, via interviews, to understand why maquila women often refuse promotions, and how this is related to their gender where they fear their promotion will intimidate their husbands. She contributes to an understanding of how *habitus* is produced and maintained in the *maquiladora* by her participant observations and in-depth interviews. It is necessary to conduct research outside the factory because women may feel more comfortable describing their working conditions when not under the supervision of managers



or co-workers. Most factory researchers do participant observation in the both the factory as well as interviews and participation in events outside the factory.

Susan Tiano (1994) argues that multiple research methods must be used in order to reveal the complicated impacts of maquilas on culture. She chose to do research in Mexicali, Mexico, which is in the northern industrial corridor. By doing so, she delves into the heart of maquila production, and is able to analyze the work lives of Mexicali women who labor outside the maquilas- she emphasizes the impacts that the EPZ's have on the whole of the culture and economy. She employs a complex research design involving qualitative and quantitative methods. She participant observes and conducts interviews, and she conducts surveys of a variety of women workers in Mexicali. Tiano's field work was conducted in phases. She first made contact with public and private officials, she then tested the instruments, then trained and oversaw the interviewers, and then returned to the site six years later to assess changes to the industry. Tiano also identified and measured what she termed, "typologies of women's consciousness," where she identified four patterns of women workers' ideological frameworks concerning labor. Women workers tended to fall into one category- they either acquiesced, accommodated, were alienated, or resisted the maquila system.

She conducted research in multiple spaces, including in the maquilas and in women's homes and communities. Surveys with women workers provided most of her data, which is to say that patterns of women's activities and experiences helped her develop her claims. Her sample was of women in the

electronics and apparel industries. By comparing workers in these two sectors, Tiano compares the common features that shape workers' job experiences.

Tiano's methods also included a comparison group of women in various formal service jobs- seventy women were surveyed who worked in service jobs open to women in Mexicali. By including many kinds of labourers, she was able to draw the theoretical conclusion that women's exploitation continued even as they gained waged employment. She interviewed secretaries, accountants, clerks, proprietors of small stores, travel agents, switchboard operators, cashiers, beauticians, medical assistants, childcare workers, restaurant hostesses, food servers, cooks, maids, and domestic servants- all jobs that were most probable for finding women workers. By comparing women's work inside and out of the maquilas, she could evaluate their participation in the maquila industry and against those characteristic of formal labor force participation generally (8). She found that many forces that play on women's socioeconomic milieu are present across the labor force, but not all. Through this methodology, she could, "illuminate the ways in which maquila employment imparts a unique cast to women's working experiences" (8).

Tiano's questionnaire inquired about their demographic status, household composition, labor histories, working conditions, friendships, affiliations, attitudes toward their jobs and working conditions, and aspirations for the future. Further, the questionnaire posed questions to women about what they saw as an appropriate female role in contemporary Mexico, as well as problems facing women, and the types of workplace programs that would most benefit Mexican

workers. She mixed the opinion items so that some were structured, and closed-ended, and some were unstructured, and open-ended.

Tiano also conducted interviews with managers, personnel directors, and other industry representatives, as well as with government employees involved in maquilas. To managers, she posed questions about hiring practices, methods of organizing production, attitudes towards labor turnover, and other questions about labor practices. Through exhaustive methods on many groups in the Mexicali community, Tiano creates a holistic understanding of the impacts of the EPZ's. She lends support to the contention that EPZ labor affects entire communities.

Fernandez-Kelly also was able to describe non-factory workers in the Juarez community. She was able to capture attitudes towards *maquila muchachas* by conducting in-depth participant observations. Community attitudes toward EPZ workers are revealed through methodologies which go beyond survey to in-depth interview, and, no doubt what Geertz described as “deep hanging out” with participants. Community members often view EPZ women workers as “putting on airs,” acting as if they had risen in social class. Carla Freeman, in her research on Barbadian women in a call center, details a verbal altercation between an EPZ worker and a man while they waited at a bus stop on their way to work. The vignette illustrates her thesis that women in the call center were attempting to change their classed and gendered status, and the wider community's reaction against these attempts. Freeman's methods allowed her to capture these altercations. Had she not been participant observing, waiting for the bus to the call center herself, she would not have been able to offer this nuanced account of

class and gender in an EPZ. It is through careful, long-term ethnographic participant observation that she captures these discourses (171).

Similarly, Aiwa Ong (1987) is able to describe village members' attitudes toward the factory girls by living in the Kampong. She is able to capture the laments of parents and elders who remember when Kampong girls did not have to objectify themselves. For example, pedicures were unheard of by villagers before girls began working in the factory; men would still ask for a girl's hand in marriage, even if her feet were cracked. This level of detail is really only possible through participant observation over long periods of time. As factory girls rather than peasants, Ong finds, kampong girls exert new consumerist freedoms, along with sexual ones. However, Ong finds that they are subject to the disciplines self-objectification that go hand-in-hand with participation in capitalist production.

In this study, I used research methods that helped me to understand how gender and class in Bizerte are changing due to neoliberal structural adjustment and women's proletarianization in the Bizerte EPZ. To answer questions of economic and gender changes would require participant observation in a variety of places in Bizerte. It required that I live in the community, to be there and go visiting and shopping, relaxing on park benches while I watched my son play, and go to the beach, and (since I was barred from working on the line) be there to observe in an EPZ factory. By using participant observation in a variety of settings of employment, by being involved in rituals, as well as leisure, I aimed to understand cultural transformation. By conducting open-ended interviews with women whose relationships to the economy were diverse, including those whose

only work was in the home, and who did not participate in income-generating activities at all, those who worked at home and did income-generating activities, those who worked in the formal economy outside the EPZ and those who worked in the EPZ, I hoped to understand the linkages between growing proletarianization, structural adjustment-driven currency devaluation, and the growing phenomenon of poverty. What emerged from participant observation and open-ended interviews is a sense of the increased burden of proletarian women to care for their families, and gaping class disparities. One of the things that surprised me in the interviews was that almost every woman cried. After the initial weeks of interviews, my sister in law Kalthoum told me she was glad she had not majored in anthropology because one had to listen to so many sad stories!

In conducting research that is focused on power and production, there are several ethical concerns involved in gaining access, and in portrayal of the participants. I used the most commonly-used methods of anthropologists because of my own adherence to the belief that naturalistic observation enabled me to get to understand women's perspectives on how their lives were affected by economic restructuring. Given the considerable prohibitions factory owners put in place against outside scrutiny of "the global assembly line," the methods that researchers have used that worked, as well as the challenges they faced, are of practical, and ethical, importance. (The challenges faced by Western social scientists doing research in the MENA are also significant, and I will discuss this in the next section). No doubt, some of the barriers placed on access to the global

assembly line have affected the theoretical outcomes of this research, in ways that need to be carefully considered.

As I discussed earlier in this section, getting in to an EPZ is difficult for an anthropologist. Anthropologists have had to do several things to gain entry, and not always without controversy. Kevin Yelvington describes his way of getting in to the Trinidad factory. While he tells the boss that he votes Democratic, he does not disclose much else in terms of his politics, certainly not his Marxist orientation. Obviously, he did so in the belief that he would not have been allowed in to the factory if he had disclosed his politics. While I agree that some basic facts are an obligation of the anthropologist to give to those who would be observed, it is too much to expect that the researcher should have to stand trial and swear to speak every truth in order to be viewed as “ethical.” This has been a problem in that the powerful and their institutions have been understudies precisely because they can refuse to allow in anyone who might be critical of their dominance. Thus, while there is research on workers, less has been gleaned about the powerful who control the system and reap the benefits (Nordstrom 2007; Vincent 2002).

Aihwa Ong (1987) faced different challenges. While she was the same gender as the factory workers, her ethnicity as a Chinese Malay studying ethnicities who are in a position of lower status in Malay society, carries with it an elitism that could be seen as an intimidating and coercive facet of her identity. She attempts to ameliorate her position of power in several important ways. First of all, she lives with a Kampong family, who call her, “Not Yet Javanese” and

patiently assimilate her into village life (xv). While she does not discuss her research assistant, Rageswari Balakrishna, it seems that her ethnic status might have helped Aihwa to fit in.

Ethnicity is complicated further in the research by Ara Wilson (2004) on women as consumers, labourers, and entrepreneurs in Thailand. She is a North American and has wealth that most of her subjects have little access. She seems to leave much of her actions in the field unexamined. For example, she does some research in strip clubs, and offers to take one of the strippers out for the night. The stripper is anxious and refuses. Wilson is perplexed and most of her analysis deals with sexuality, and homophobia. She pays little attention to the fact that she was in fact participating in the exploitation of a sex worker, as a Western white person, which is exactly what male sex tourists from Western countries do.

Critics of research on global factory work have raised concerns about the sometimes caricatured representations of the “typical” woman factory worker. Linda Lim (1990) argues that many representations of women workers’ experiences have lacked empirical support, and led to a common view of women workers as victims. She insists that arguments about one “context” of factory production should not be generalized to others. While Lim’s critiques ultimately obfuscate workers as an exploited class, some of her criticisms have been informative in the making of anthropology of factories in the latter 1990’s and the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Lim argues that researchers have not used control groups in their methodologies, or have used inappropriate ones. Lim argues that Third World

women factory workers' jobs should be compared with other jobs women do in the Third World, rather than compared with the working conditions of Western, industrialized nations. In arguing that working conditions are "all relative," Lim justifies the broadening inequalities between the industrializing periphery and wealthy countries. While Lim argues for more objective research methodologies, she implies that research conducted with a political agenda is invalid, unless it matches her own politics. An extremely problematic perspective, Lim argues that since the seventies, things have "smoothed out" in global factories, in terms of wages and working conditions, and that this has not been considered by many anthropologists (113). What she seems to be suggesting is that the early problems in the factories have given way to a female labor force that has benefitted from factory jobs. However, nothing seems smooth about the new international division of labor, what with its high worker turnover rate and tendency to pick up from any country where workers organize and move somewhere with a fresh group to exploit. Fundamentally, I reject the notion that the early years of EPZ's were fraught with nothing more than growing pains. The conflicts inherent in this venue are growing more complicated as patterns of resistance emerge (Ustubici 2010).

Much subsequent research would seem to refute Lim's claim; more fundamentally, Lim's politics seem to acquiesce to the inevitability of neo liberalism, as if it were a natural evolution, an ideology that Manfred Steger (1994) debunks. Because Lim tacitly accepts global capitalism as an irreversible force of nature, she fails to critique it as a political economic phenomenon.



Rather, she indicts feminist social scientists who do present political-economic critiques. For example, on the extant research on global factories, she states, “weaknesses result primarily from biases introduced by ideology, ethnocentrism, and vested political interests” (1990:119). This is an ironically blind disapprobation, considering Lim’s own politics.

Nevertheless, Lim’s work is important in that she identifies methodological shortcomings in factory research as they contribute to a totalizing picture. Lim argues in her 1990 article that many conclusions about women factory workers were drawn from research in the 1970’s, and things have changed on the global assembly line since then. Lim does call for research that has a, “normal, multivariate approach to causality,” which would help to discern the effects of factory work on women’s lives from other phenomena. Phenomena like state policy, social norms, and the traditional gender division of labor. Several methods must be used, argues Lim, and several sites of research must be considered in order to ensure that what is being captured unfolds from the factory labor experience.

While there was a tendency among sociologists of EPZ’s in the 1990’s to underplay the role of exploitation, and a focus on structure of labor and production minus the emphasis on a creation of a docile, sexualized woman worker, more recently, there has been a move back to the centrality of exploitation (e.g., Bolles and Yelvington 2010; Ramirez 1997). Kopinak’s (1996) research has helped bring ideological frameworks which emphasize that, in the

era of the New International Division of Labor, as in Wallerstein's (1973) world systems, exploitation of women is the key.

The initial ethnographic quandary is where to go. Once a place to go is identified and justified as, somewhere-in-the-MENA, the question becomes, "Where am I?" Choice of field setting and gaining entry, while difficult, shrink next to the behemoth problem, the MENA's whereabouts. There is the real and literal quandary that the MENA is actually neither real nor literal; then there is the politics of disabusing a very much made up location from those who formulated its fake realness, all while cognizant that positionality of the researcher is an active relationship, and that "every view is a view from somewhere" (Abu-Lughod 1991).

In this section, I analyze the extant research methodologies of anthropology of the MENA, in order to situate my own methods within a cultural context of an EPZ and also a cultural milieu that has been variably defined as and/or reduced to "Mediterranean," "Arab," and "Muslim." As the subject of various ethnographic and ideological treatments, I will describe the anthropology of the MENA here.

Generally, gender, class, and identity of the researcher and the participants shape participant observation strategies, delimit the questions asked in interviews, and mould other methods of data collection (Angrosino 2002). As I discussed in Chapter Two, the MENA, as a place with uncertainly certain cultural aspects is a locus of polemics of gender's meaning. Here I explore how researchers of the MENA navigate, evaluate, and sometimes reify, social norms about gender in

their ethnographies. (That anthropologists of the MENA are compelled to play along with gendered hierarchies elucidates gender in and of itself.) Also the research methods may reify inequalities by making the researcher an unwitting tool in the machinery of gender hierarchy. I relate these to research on class stratification in the MENA. Finally, I discuss how the gender and national identity of the researcher of the MENA is important to an understanding of how research aims and findings unfold.

As I discuss in Chapter Two, the anthropology of the Mediterranean and the MENA has been treated to certain theoretical metonyms (Appadurai 1986). There was an historic focus on Arab men and patrilineal tribes (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1949), and then on exotic religiosity (e.g., Geertz 1973). Contemporary anthropology of the MENA exhibits a reactionary politics of gender. While I emulate the reflexive research methods of certain women anthropologists of the MENA, I take issue with the recent theoretical justifications for gender stratification (Abu-Lughod 1991).

A century ago, there was little research conducted on the MENA at all. This paucity of ethnographic research did not end until the second world war, when Evans-Pritchard conducted his study of the Sanusi of Cyrenicia (1949). Evans-Pritchard's focus was primarily men's tribal conflicts. While only a trickle of research was done by anthropologists during this time, *orientalist* studies programs produced prolific accounts of the MENA; scientific pursuit was largely absent (Varisco 2005). The neglect of the MENA reflects early twentieth century anthropology's focus on "primitives" in places like New Guinea. At this, Abu-

Lughod quips that peoples of the MENA are too clothed to fit the ideal anthropological subjects (1986). This is illustrative of anthropology's early focus on capturing humans in their supposedly uncivilized forms. Since most people of the MENA are smack in the middle of civilization, they were relegated to the status of peasants (Varisco 2005). This is not to state that peasants were completely unstudied; they were granted focus throughout the Mediterranean and fit into the theoretical metonym of honor and shame complexes, and patron-client relations. When anthropologists of the earlier part of the last century did conduct research, there were problems, both methodological and ideological. For example, Louise Sweet (1953) relies more on *orientalist* and Arabist accounts to describe Islamic ritual and kinship than the data derived from her own participant observations in a town in Syria. Not only is this frustrating, but seems to be an invalidation of Sweet's own two years of participant observation.

Beyond this absence of much MENA research before World War 2, anthropologists face the challenges of conducting participant observation in largely gender-segregated settings... this is hardly a new challenge for anthropologists who had been studying Oceania's gender-segregated milieu. As in other settings, in the MENA, depending on the researchers' gender, s/he has access to different sets of information found in these "parallel worlds," and the data that is amassed can lead to varied conclusions (Holmes-Eber 2006; Warnock-Fernea 1965).

This reality gets at the anthropological critique of objective scientific knowledge, and calls into question the divide between the anthropological self

and the researched other (Abu-Lughod 1991; Bourdieu 1977; Joseph 1988). Anthropology of the MENA conducted by men portrayed a world dominated by men; perhaps this is partly the perception because the researchers had little access to the realms of women (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1949; Crapanzano 1977, 1980; Eickelman 1985; Geertz 1973, 1975, 1988; Gellner 1969; Rabinow 1977). In the 1970's Morocco was a central venue for experimental ethnographies. Geertz described Morocco as a kind of wild west, which fit a general Western perspective of Morocco in the 1970's as a place where hippies sought Sufist enlightenment, and where deviants could engage in debauchery and even pederasty, as in texts by and about Paul Bowles (1949). Gellner (1969) has been subject to criticisms over his use of a segmentary framework to interpret High Atlas culture as tribal and male-dominated, with little attention at all to questions of women (Munson 1993). When this group of Morocco researchers did write about women, their tenor was often complicit with the disparaging tone of male participants. Crapanzano's key informer (and the title of his book) Tuhami, rants against women. While Crapanzano does challenge Tuhami's ways of thinking, he does not question his misogyny. Generally, Geertz's cohort of male anthropologists seemed uncritical of the sexism of their participants, who found ways of blaming women for a broad spectrum of their troubles.

Some of Geertz's cohort seemed complicit with men's exploitation of women, as in Crapanzano's descriptions of "whores," who he visited through participant observations with Tuhami and other men (1980). By going with the emic perspectives of men in his study, Crapanzano participated in a gendered

system of inequalities. Since my purpose in this study is to contribute to labor activism and gender justice, I argue that it is unacceptable to rest in emic understandings that perpetuate domination.

This is not to say that Geertz did not enquire about gender. He did ask pointed questions to men about gender, and focused on production of meaning attached to gender. However, his ethnographic descriptions are usually of men in the foreground of activities with women in the background, performing chores, joking and making the *ululu*, (what men are likely to see of women in the MENA). I am not critiquing Geertz because he practiced his “deep hanging out” among men; he would have faced sanction and ridicule, and maybe been expelled from the community had he gone to the women’s spaces and tried to hang out deeply there. My critique is philosophical; Geertz describes how his subjects make meaning as if the meaning existed outside forces of power, especially the control of the means of production, rather than being a manifestation of power. That is, he describes the women of the house, who he hears joking, laughing, and making the *ululu*, as co-creators of meaning, which they are. But, he wrongly describes them as equals in the creation of a hierarchy which subjugates them (Yelvington 1996). Foucault’s analysis of the making and exchange of power leaves no one and everyone equally responsible, a denial that some groups maintain privilege at others’ expense. So when Geertz challenges a senior man in a village about why he does not think girls should get schooling, the man replies, because a girl is just a girl, Geertz accepts this perception as part of the ways in

which Moroccans make symbolic meaning. I argue here that anthropology must move beyond the task of understanding the emic.

My study is not about Islam, but is concerned with it because it is the cosmological underpinning of my participants' society. Varisco (2005) laments the little bit of ethnographic attention paid to Islamic practices in many anthropological accounts, except when the focus was on the exotic rituals, including Sufism in Morocco (Crapanzano 1977, 1980; Eickelman 1985; Geertz 1973, 1975, 1988; Gellner 1969; Rabinow 1977). There is actually very little research on Islam in early twentieth century anthropology, and as Varisco (2003) describes, this is because in the former half of the twentieth century, anthropologists relied on the research of *orientalists* and Arabists. In the latter half of the twentieth century, accounts which focus on "exotic" forms of Islam like Sufism, as opposed to everyday practices of Islam, predominate. Thus, Anne-Marie Brisbarre (1992) expresses the need for research on Islamic rituals like the sheep sacrifice of Eid Al-Kabir as it is practiced by Muslims in cities, and how it is impacted by the forces of globalization. Most research, Brisbarre notes, is conducted in rural Islamic areas even today when it is argued that Algeria is in Paris (Silverstein 2004).

Research on women in Islam has emerged in recent decades. A few important exceptions, came out earlier, including Elizabeth Warnock-Fernea's (1965; 1989) research on Iraqi women and Nadine Abu Zahra's (1982) focus on gender and ethnicity in Tunisian villages. By no coincidence, the rise in accounts which contend with women and Islam in anthropology corresponds with the

emergence of women anthropologists of the MENA. Warnock-Fernea, in her ethnography as the wife of an anthropologist of a village in Southern Iraq, offers rich detail on women's culture. Warnock-Fernea's methodologies were the result of her own situation as the wife (enduring the oppressive patriarchal culture of the 1950's USA) of a husband who insisted that she fit the customs and norms of women of the village. This Warnock-Fernea did, acting as a participant observer, and she counters the dominant portrayal of MENA women put forth by many male anthropologists. Nadia Abu Zahra (1982) also conducted participant observation research in the village of Sidi Ameur, her focus on women's participation in religious rituals. Her accounts make clear that, although women are limited in their freedom of movement, they achieve power through rituals. The power they exert is stratified by ethnicity. She describes the strategies that the original inhabitants employ to keep the newer peasants out of their rituals. Hence, Abu Zahra's research elucidates ethnicity as an assertion of class. Abu Zahra is able to describe women's lives quite differently than did male anthropologists, and particularly in understanding women's roles in Islam. Warnock-Fernea, through participant observations with women, is able to counter perceptions of Arab women as the victims of absolute subjugation. Instead she describes women who, although not equal to their male counterparts, who work behind the scenes to manipulate rituals and marriage arrangements. As Altorki (1988) argues, one important task of anthropology of Arab women is to aid in debunking stereotypes of their abject subjugation, and instead create nuanced understandings of the ways in which women navigate patriarchal control.



In the last few decades, there has been a flurry of research centered on gender in the MENA, mostly conducted by women. These researchers have sought to construct an understanding of gender dynamics from the perspective of women, in the void where the focus on patriarchal doings left room for them only in the background, and at the margins for women. The “eloquent silence” of MENA women belies a world of its own, one poorly understood as oppressed by Islam, and/or stereotyped by orientalists and Arabists (Altorki 1988; Lazreg 1994; Mernissi 1991). Women researchers have employed many strategies for gathering research with participants, and here I explore these.

Women researchers in the MENA field face diverse challenges based on gender, but also (perhaps ironically), they gain some privileges as females in a patriarchal context. A theme I discuss here is that in the MENA while men are barred from women’s world, and are adamant to stay away from women’s areas, women are often allowed at the margins of men’s spaces. Thus, Warnock-Fernea (1965), Abu-Lughod (1987), Webber (1993), Altorki (1988), Abu-Zahra (1988), and Hoodfar (1997) are privy to the world of men because women must serve men food and refreshments with the other women, staying silent, but with ears wide open. They use these opportunities, where they are largely silent and at the margins, exhibiting Hasham (Abu-Lughod 1987) to learn about men’s decisions in political, economic, and kinship issues. Similarly, Holmes-Eber finds that women may be marginal figures in men’s discussions, but men distance themselves from women’s. Thus, women researchers of the MENA, while subjugated in the field, can play on patriarchy to gain knowledge and insight.

But are there ethical considerations in playing along with patriarchy in ways that reify women's subjugation? Do we as researchers have some obligation to challenge rather than conform? Warnock-Fernea (1965) came into her husband's research with him, in a village in Southern Iraq. She had to contend with her husband's quite patriarchal insistence that she obey him so he could gather his research. He insisted she conform to local women's norms.

Women face other constraints in the field, and these involve the strictures of the feminine role. That is, Abu-Lughod gets privileges and faces constraints based on her gender and ethnic identity. She gets into the field as an Arab American, with her father as the one who negotiates her status as a guest and daughter. That is, she was able to manipulate patriarchy to enter the field. However, she also was treated as women are treated, as servants to men of the family. She also became a daughter of the house and this meant that she could not simply go out to visit other Bedouin families, and she had to be chaperoned.

Hooma Hoodfar (1997) in her research with working class Egyptians, ran into several problems which she managed adeptly in the field. The focus of her research was marriage and social class, and how women make their marital choices. However, she entered the field as a single, "foreign" woman who was Muslim, and without a chaperone she moved into a working class neighbourhood in Cairo. Yet she was able to build rapport with her female participants. She found that most of her informants were like herself young and unmarried. They felt comfortable telling her about their marital aims, and often assumed that she would feel the same. They described their family problems, but ran into

challenges as an unmarried Muslim woman. However, she was able to overcome these issues once she became a part of their neighborhood. Then, she was able to get at class dimensions of marriage aspirations among the women and men of the neighborhood. She found that, counter to the stereotype, working class Egyptian women hoped not to marry up in class, out of fear that they would be treated like servants by their in-laws. Hoodfar presents a rare story about marriage as a mechanism through which social class stratification is edified. Such attention to class in the MENA has been rare.

As Holmes-Eber (2003) and Stephen J. King (2003) explain, the global economy and its neo-liberal underpinnings affect social classes differently, with elites and those who work for elites gaining in wealth and power, and the poor (called “the squeezed” in Tunisia) getting poorer. The anthropologist of the MENA often has to form fictive kinship relationships with participants. This allows for trust and a sense of belonging, but it also poses challenges because of the barriers between class groups. Holmes-Eber builds rapport with women of most social classes, from women in the working class neighborhoods to elites in villas who worked in the Ben Ali administration. Perhaps her own social position aided her broad reach of participants: she came into the field with a Western husband and moved into an apartment in a Tunisian neighborhood. She made friends with many women, but maintained a degree of formality that is not possible for researchers who have a familial or affinal bond with participants. That is, Holmes-Eber did not have to be concerned that her honor would be

questioned. Being an insider gives some increased access but it also can limit interactions across class lines.

Several researchers faced barriers based on social class in their MENA ethnographies. Suad Joseph, as a middle class Lebanese Christian, conducts research on her own group, and finds major impediments to conducting research in neighbourhoods poorer or richer than the one in which she lives. Altorki (1988), in her research on her own, middle class Saudi women, does not attempt cross-class analysis but she offers an alternative to the stereotypes of Saudi women as docile and oppressed, and also provides a nuanced analysis of classism and elitism in Saudi Arabia.

Lila Abu-Lughod's (1986) research intents are to understand the role of spoken-word poetry in the moral-social cosmologies of the Bedouins of Egypt. In viewing the Bedouin poetry as an expression of emotions and vulnerabilities that are unacceptable in the value system of Bedouin spoken discourse, she interprets the poems to situate this everyday poetry into the social hierarchy. Her methodological approach is important because it was initially non-directive. She was guided not by a set agenda, but by what the Awlad 'Ali found to be most important. Importantly, this methodological approach was not her ideal choice, and it caused her anxiety in the beginning months of the research. It is important that her research methodology had much to do with her identity in this community, and she discovers the limitations and special advantages of her position as protected daughter. She states, "My position of powerlessness in the

community prevented me from coercing people into discussions in which they had no interest” (23).

While Abu-Lughod’s father is Middle Eastern, her upbringing took place in the U.S., setting her apart in experiences from her Bedouin hosts and research participants. As she describes, though, her father insists on coming with her to Egypt and making the initial contact with the Bedouins that she will live with. While she is perplexed and embarrassed at first by her father’s role in setting her up to do the research, she learns her first research lesson in the process. Her Arabic father knew that his initial presence and explanation for his daughter’s strange desire to want to research their lives would ensure her reputation as a “good,” Arabic girl, with a strong patriarch for a father. Through her father’s actions, she was taken into a prominent Bedouin household as a protected daughter.

Her daughter status, despite her maturity, also reflected the other challenge that she dealt with: she was an unmarried adult woman with no children. Thus, she found that she was somewhat limited from the intimate conversations of married women, who considered her a sexually ignorant virgin, a status that she could not refute without alienating herself from her hosts. Realizing that her identity was central to the kinds of information she got from the family with whom she lived, she had to come to terms with the idea of *asymmetry*. That is, while her host family disclosed very personal details of their lives to her, she was initially uncomfortable because she could not disclose details of her

“Americanness” that would alienate her hosts. She had to be a persona of whom she thought would be acceptable to her hosts.

It is her identity, one with little freedom or power (that of an unmarried girl), that lead to her choice to participant observe and listen to what people, especially the women, wanted to talk about rather than try to force them to discuss what she thought was most important. It is only through this non-directional initial approach that she comes to realize that the recited poems that people break into in daily life might have some important meaning.

That is, as a dependent daughter of a Bedouin household, she could not move freely about the community, socializing and interviewing whomever she chose, something she thought anthropologists were supposed to be able to do. She reconciles this as she realizes that she has advantages that other male anthropologists who studied MENA societies did not: she had access to the intimate lives of women. Further, as a woman, she had more access to men in her family than male researchers ever had to women in theirs.

Like Abu-Lughod, Rhoda Ann Khanaaneh (2002) had one parent from the Middle East, but was raised in the U.S. with a value system different from that of her Palestinian-Israeli research participants. In her ethnography of Palestinian women living in Israel, Khanaaneh uses qualitative methodologies and situates them in historic contextualization and current thick description to ground her assertions. While Khanaaneh was married, she had no children, and this affected her status in certain ways, as it did Abu-Lughod’s, Altorki’s, and Abu-Zahra’s. Through interviews and participant observations, Kanaaneh shows that colonized

peoples may not always use what would seem to be the most advantageous forms of resistance.

Holmes-Eber uses an interactionist approach to make her network analysis come alive. She chose to use women between the ages of twenty to forty five, because they would be the first generation of women to grow up since Tunisia's independence from French imperialism. Her analysis would be much richer if she had also interviewed the older generation of women who might give valuable insight into how social and economic life had, or had not, changed.

Holmes-Eber's network analysis would have more nuances if she had been more sensitive to power embedded in social class relations of women. For example, she chooses to live in a very affluent neighborhood in Tunis, which automatically affected her social networks. Many of her first and closest key informers were the wives of the powerful and the bourgeoisie and *Tunisoise*, or original Tunis families. Further, she chose to interview maids in the homes of the women they worked for rather than bringing gifts to the maid's homes and visiting in a way that would show equality required of reciprocity. There were painful descriptions of affluent wives offering their maids to Holmes-Eber, putting into question whether the maids really consented to the interviews. Further, she paid these women a pittance for their valuable time: five *dinars* (approximately seven dollars) for in-depth interviews. Although she did pay visits to the poorest women in her study, her descriptions are pithy compared to her extended and sensuously described dinners and evenings in the homes of affluent friends. The independent variables employed by Holmes-Eber are family

class position as delineated as *baldi* (country migrants to the city), *Tunisoise* (old Tunis families), suburban residents, and *Medina* residents. Consanguinal family background related to the dependent variable of whom one socialized with (in the neighborhood) and to whom one would marry.

Another important independent variable was education level and dependent variable if one married a paternal cousin (high school or less) or one chose one's mate via the greater social freedom of university life. Thus, women who went to university were likely to choose strangers and even date before they became engaged because they had the social freedom and familial support to do so. Since women from middle class and affluent backgrounds, rarely *baldis* or their descendants who form the working poor of Tunis, got to attend university, these constitute clear sets of variables. These variables help to illustrate the goals of the research because they provide concrete evidence of how social class networks maintain class structure.

While Holmes-Eber began with a convenience sample, she did not rely only on her connections. Showing great courage, she conducted surveys and interviews with women on Tunis beaches. Holmes-Eber reveals her understanding of the Tunisian beach culture by this methodology. As she explains, groups of women and their children take lunches to the beach and make a day of it. This time at the beach is a special place where women socialize away from home. Holmes-Eber walked up to groups of women, introduced herself in Tunisian Arabic, and waited for the inevitable hilarious laughter and the invitation to sit down. All women were eager to be interviewed.



Holmes-Eber's analysis of her own analyses is impressive. Further, she got key informants to sort the class positions of women in the study. She provided the two informants with note cards that listed the family, residence and employment of each participant. Both informants organized the cards in a similar way and observed that Holmes-Eber over-sampled for women from the upper middle class to the middle working class. To Holmes-Eber's credit, she admits that the wealthy elites and the abjectly poor were not represented. One factor related to this is that the public beaches of Tunis concentrate women from the middle: elite women drive to their private beach houses further from the capital and poor women cannot afford bus fare even to the public city beaches. A threat to validity that could emerge relates to patriarchal violence. Holmes-Eber might have considered that she would not have access to an invisible population of women who might be isolated from social networks if their husbands forbade their social networking. Indeed, she does mention two women whose husbands forced them into seclusion and insisted that they limit social networks.

Ara Wilson (2004) conducted multisite ethnographic research in Bangkok, Thailand in order to capture how the society's "intimate economies"- family life, gender roles, ethnic identities- changed as a result of unprecedented economic change through global market capitalism. She lived in Bangkok for two years, at the edge of a China town. By doing so, she developed a socio-historic portrait of Sino-Thai business families in the area that formed the background for understanding international market economies in Bangkok. Wilson also worked part-time in a cable company office and participant observed in this multi-national

business. As a participant in several women's non-governmental organizations, Wilson forged ties with Thai feminists.

She began her initial research by making a "map of consumption areas" of Bangkok (25). This initial survey helped her formulate research questions, and to choose certain markets as well as a marketing office and go-go bars. She then gathered background information, observed the setting and conducted informal interviews. She took notes on the infrastructure of the venue, observing behavior and material objects and primary and secondary texts. Her reason for staying mainly with informal interviews is that formal interviews in Thai society implied a hierarchical social meaning that she found aversive to her purpose and politics (28). That is, to conduct an interview with someone was to assert a position over the interviewee. Similar issues in interviewing Tunisian subjects may be relevant; informal interviews may help level some of the discomfort that Tunisian factory workers may feel.

Faris' third tackle sent me over backwards from where I sat, cross-legged on my apartment floor. This time, my pen and notepad flew through the air. As I struggled to right myself with my line-backer giggling in triumph, I thought: "This is not how I imagined my interviews would go." When I was pregnant and defending my qualifying exams, one of my committee members, Maria Crummett, said, "I don't know how you are going to do this," indicating my swollen belly. Dr. Crummett explained how it had been difficult to study maquiladoras in Central America with her young son in tow. I resented her comment, thinking that to even suggest that a mother be restrained from field

research was playing into a sexist system... had a been a man defending with a pregnant wife, would I have been asked how I could accomplish my research? While in the field with a toddler, I realized that Dr. Crummet was a pragmatist, and I was thinking as a feminist utopianist! At the time when Dr. Crummet asked me the question at my defense of proposal, I proceeded to describe to Dr. Crummet how I had in-laws in Tunisia who could babysit while I was in the EPZ, and that my son could be present while I conducted interviews. I also looked back at that and realized I know little about childhood development, specifically the jealousy of a toddler toward his mother's attention.

I reasoned that the interviews would be the easy part (the factory research I imagined seemed much tougher); women could come to my Bizerte apartment, or I to theirs, and this would fit the reciprocal visiting that Holmes-Eber (2003) describes as a prime facet of women's social and political spheres. And Faris? He would be playing quietly while I conducted open-ended interviews with my translator and sister-in-law, Kalthoum. I had it all planned. I packed coloring books and crayons in the diaper bag just for these imagined interviews where Faris would color, perhaps interrupting for the occasional kiss or to sit quietly in my lap. No problem...

I look back on my ignorance and arrogance! The plans I conveyed at my defense of proposal were those of a first time parent with little time spent around small children. My trajectory of research was also based on assumptions. I assumed that my sister in law Kalthoum could help me and baby sit. Kalthoum had been assigned to me through many Skype conversations between my husband

in Miami and my in-laws in Ezzahra. My husband and in-laws could not entertain the idea of me staying in Bizerte “alone.” I had anticipated this assumption, based on my previous visits to Tunis, where it seemed someone from my husband’s family accompanied me nearly everywhere but the bathroom. Also, I had studied the accounts of several women anthropologists of the MENA who had needed chaperoning. Abu-Lughod father took her to the Bedouins to become a chaperoned “daughter of the house.” There were limitations, but I know that being connected to a Tunisian family would be important, based on Sabra Webber’s (1991) account of being affiliated with a kin group in Kilibia, in order to be accepted as “respectable.” I acquiesced to the (to my mind) rather sexist assumption that I needed to be accompanied. It all seemed perfect in my defense- I mean, I needed a translator, anyway, and Kalthoum was an English major at University of Tunis. Also she could help me with Faris...

The first bad assumption I made was actually quite sexist, and that was that Kalthoum would want to take care of Faris. Granted, my husband had told me that she would. I also soon learned how little Tunisian men consulted female family members on childcare matters. I tried to be careful about not reifying sexist stereotypes about Arabs, but I was dismayed to find that the perception that men have nothing to do with the day-to-day rigors of childcare in Tunisia was absolutely true, that men consider child care to be women’s domain and therefore relinquish responsibility. In fact, once an American friend was visiting me, and we saw a young girl sitting in a café with her father. We were so surprised that my friend asked the father if she could take a photo of the two of them.

Kalthoum did not wish to take care of Faris, not even for half an hour while I tried to type field notes. I do not mean that she was not warm and loving toward him, and she certainly fussed over him. I learned that Tunisians perceive the woman with a child as interruptible. The mother in Tunisia is not someone whose career work is much respected in comparison to the needs of a son, especially. So Kalthoum would not try to intercept Faris from coming into the kitchen to jump on me just because I was typing. This caused me frustration that I did not handle well. While I never confronted Kalthoum about my feelings of being disrespected, I did feel loneliness and rage that I was not helped. However, I had also made a rather sexist assumption that she would help me with Faris- I was taking advantage of the labor of a *binat* myself.

The second bad assumption I made was not considering the regression that Faris would undergo when he got to Tunisia. I did not know that a toddler would feel jealous that my attention was not on him. Even worse, I did not anticipate how much he disliked most of his everyday life in Tunisia. He was sad and angry to be away from home. He declared in his toddler's lexicon, that he wanted to "go back Miami!" He missed his daycare, where his beloved teacher, Maria, would take care of him while I worked.

I did not know that I would feel stress and guilt about Faris' happiness! I could not imagine that I would have to leave him, screaming and clinging to me, at a Bizerte daycare, since Kalthoum made it clear that she did not wish to mind him while I was in the factory. I barely could survive looking over my shoulder

at the daycare center from the street, because he would be at the window, weeping after me.

I became fully aware of how naive I had been as I sprawled across my tile floor, desperate to maintain control of an interview already lost in the screaming giggles of my son, “Mammaaa! Play with meeeee!” Kalthoum and the participant being interviewed would eventually ignore me, and start gossiping or discussing the prices in the Souk. Kalthoum wasn’t even bothering to translate to me anymore! I thought a lot about Dr. Crummett’s caveats, and at many times, I felt that I had made big mistake in trying to do this study.

Since I had been sure that there would be easy ways to deal with all the “little” issues of motherhood in the field, I had not bothered to do a review of anthropological studies conducted by mothers, to find out what other mother-anthropologists had done to deal with these issues. I had not run across many accounts by anthropologists about being parents in the field. I had read Iman Bibars’ (2001) research on Egyptian single mothers; regrettably, I judged her as elitist for bringing her nanny into the field with her. She had her husband and a full time nanny with her. Once in the field myself, with no husband present, and certainly no nanny, my scorn for Bibars turned to envy. Unprepared for the challenges of motherhood while conducting research, I know that I must know the experiences of other mothers in the field.

There is a body of research about anthropology conducted by mothers (and fathers), and the problems and privileges of having to take care of oneself and a child in the field, and even on how to include children’s presence into the

research. I discuss them here. I try to consider critically Poveda's criticism of the terse considerations of children in the field. Poveda states, "...there are many other collateral roles that researchers' children can play in the research process. Glimpses of these roles are made visible in various ethnographic texts, but they do not seem to have been analysed reflexively in methodological terms..." (5).

Psychologists have long included their children in their studies and have even featured their children in the study of childhood development (e.g., Piaget). Anthropologists have rarely exploited their children's inability to give informed consent to this degree. However, they have described the role of their children in the field setting in several ways. Sometimes, their children exist at the margins of the point of study, a naturally occurring integration between the researcher's family life and their work in the field. Sometimes anthropologists and other social scientists have used their children as a means through which to gain rapport with participants, more ethically problematic. And sometimes, anthropologists have made their children partners in the field research experience. I will explore the dynamics and ethics of anthropology with and of children here.

Anthropologists often have families, and since the rigors of ethnographic study require the anthropologist to be there and stay there for months, they often must have their families with them in the field. Several examples of mother anthropologists in the field are Lourdes De Leon (2005), Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1993) and Annette Weiner (1988) and more recently Alma Gottlieb (2004). Scheper-Hughes describes her daughter's presence at the margins of field

experience, and she makes clear through her boundaries that she is a parent to her child, and protects her child's privacy.

Some anthropologist parents have used their children's inevitable presence in the research experience as part of the process. Annette Weiner (1988) incorporates her daughter's experiences into her analysis of the Trobrianders of Papua, New Guinea. She allows her daughter's perceptions of life with her mother in the field shape her analysis. For example, she begins each chapter of her book with a quote from her daughter's diary, making her daughter's most personal writings part of the ethnography. Also, in footnotes, Weiner describes how her daughter becomes enculturated into the Trobrianders' everyday lives (Weiner 1988:70, Footnote 6). Similarly, De Leon (2005), a linguistic anthropologist of the Maya, considered her young daughter, Isa, her research partner. She describes Isa as an active part of the field experience, not at the margins but as shaping the data and analysis (16).

Gottlieb (2004) conducts research with infants of the Beng people in West Africa, and had her own young son with her in the field. Naturally, in the course of her field research, her son befriends Beng children; in this sense, he becomes part of her research just as the babies do. Her son also becomes enculturated into Beng customs, a fact which she discusses. However, her son was a natural part of her life, and not a means through which to gain rapport with her participants. Similarly, in his research on linguistics among Gitano children, David Poveda (2009) describes how his one year old daughter helped him develop rapport with Gitano children in a park. While he does not intend to use his daughter, the



children were drawn to her. In fact they were more interested in her than in him. Soon he and his baby were regulars to the park where he was able to conduct much research while the children pushed his daughter's stroller and interacted with her (5).

Some researchers have used their children as primary participants, and this raises issues. Sociologists Patricia and Peter Adler (1996) studied their own adolescent children's peer worlds, and term this opportunistic strategy for gathering data "parent-as-researcher," and argue this is similar to researchers who are also participants' teachers or counselors (36). Social scientists have found using their own children for research a way to circumvent third party gate keepers and bureaucratic procedures that are the norm in childhood studies (Poveda 2009). This is the case with linguistic anthropologists Greenwood and Hoyle (1998) study their own children's discursive practices and place them in their own cultural context. There are ethical criticisms of these methods.

Corsaro (2005) describes the ethical quandaries as those of two differing roles. Where does the parent decide that the parental role is to protect the privacy of her/his child (57)? Further, a parent cannot attempt to engage in participant observation with her/his child or anyone else's, for the parent is more powerful by virtue of age. Corsaro states, "Parents... cannot ethically cross the boundary between child and adult to become 'one of the kids' because they are in an inherently supervisory position" (57). As Adler and Adler (1996) put it, there is something exploitative about using one's own children for research aims. Thus, the consensus among most anthropologists is not to make one's children the focus

of research. Yet, not wanting to use Faris, he was there with me, and influenced all aspects of my study. He was my beloved problem, he was my general feeling of sorrow while conducting factory research, because I had just left him in the daycare center that he hated, and seeing his weeping face through the bars or the daycare's windows as I walked away toward the factory, my refusal to catch rides with Tunisians who did not have seatbelts in the backs of their cars for me to strap Faris' car seat into, my reason for not having all my field notes typed the same day I wrote them in my notebook, the scattered and derailed interviews with participants, and many other ways. But he also helped me in the field. Like Povado with his daughter in the stroller, the normal activities Moms do with their kids led me to Tunisian women. Faris had a profound influence on my research.

*...Before leaving the factory after twelve noon, I do "the rounds," saying Bisslema to the women workers as I pass. Those who have a second to look up from their work smile, and say, "You are off to get your son? Kiss him for me!"*

*...Late afternoon in the children's park in Bizerte, Faris runs through the playground chasing, or being chased by other children. Inevitably, he runs to the benches where rows of mothers sit. Kalthoum and I run after him, and a conversation begins.*

The purpose of this study is, “to illustrate how the gendered division of labor in and out of the house elucidates the impact of socioeconomic change” among Tunisian women of the city of Bizerte (Bolles and Yelvington 2010 xii). Despite the unanticipated challenges of having my toddler with me, I still went about conducting research according to the methods that I had intended to use. My research findings were largely shaped by my situation in the field, as mother of a toddler, and as daughter-in-law of a Tunisian family. Here, I describe how I conducted my field research based on the research methods of anthropologists of EPZ’s and local factories, as well as of the MENA in light of my situation.

I emulated the anthropologists of factories in my research in Tunisia. As for the factory, I conducted research on the factory floor where I hoped to be allowed to work, like Yelvington (1995), on the line. Like Beneria and Roldan (1987), Fernandez-Kelly (1983), Freeman (1993), Tiano (1994), and many others, I also wanted to learn about how Bizerte women’s lives were changing in the wider community by learning about their household and family reconfigurations, and informal labor force participation. Like Ong (1987), I strove to understand morality in an Islamic context in the factory as responses to capitalist discipline on neophyte factory women.

I also based my research methodologies on the anthropologists of the MENA in my study. Of particular influence on my research strategies are Holmes-Eber’s (2003) research methodologies. She conducted interviews according to the culturally sanctioned rituals of women’s visits, and “on beaches and benches,” two public areas where women are likely to be. I also consider the

meanings of women's and men's separate realms when conducting research. This might call for diverse data collection strategies. The anthropologist discerns the meanings of women's and men's "segregation"/"parallel spheres". While some anthropologists, like Sabra Webber (1991), accept without analysis the segregation of the sexes in Kilibya, Tunisia, another group of anthropologists like Abu-Zahra (1982) consider women's segregation and seclusion in Sidi Ameer as a form of subjugation. In what I have discussed in chapter two as a reactionary theoretics of gender in the MENA, researchers have attempted to reinterpret women's place in MENA society. Holmes-Eber (2003) describes the segregation of women in the home as a form of power and agency. Abu Lughod seeks to validate the emic cosmology of gender for the Awlad Ali.

I am also informed by the methodologies of Webber (1991) who, in her study of folklorics in Kilibya, assigned herself to be an honorary unmarried daughter to a prominent family of the town, so that one of her "brothers" could chaperone her while she conducted interviews with men. Granted, her relationship with Kilibya had started years earlier when she worked there in the Peace Corps, so she was already an esteemed honorary member of the town. For me, the circumstances under which I researched both complicated and facilitated by my affinal relations to a Tunisian family.

Being who I was in the field made the limits of my research choices palpable, but on the other hand I was privy to life as a wife and mother in a Tunisian family. I did not need to ask permission to see if I could do certain things, but I was chaperoned by my in-laws whenever I informed them of what I

planned to do. This meant I was a burden to them, because, not wanting to disallow me to go places, they were obligated to find a relative (usually a hapless unmarried woman) to accompany me. The largest imposition to them was that they decided, after many discussions and debates, to send my husband's unmarried sister Kalthoum to be with me for the duration of my research in Bizerte. Since Kalthoum was the only daughter left at home, I was taking away my mother-in-law's primary source of household labor, and her emotional support. Leaving my mother-in-law Khadouja alone, to cook and clean for her husband and two sons, affected my sense of obligation, not to mention guilt, during the field research.

While I benefitted immensely from Kalthoum's presence as a translator, but also as a confidante, and ally, I knew I was also under her watch. Kalthoum called her family in Ezzahra to relate to them what I had cooked (the report was usually grim). She also reported when I brought home pizza or rotisserie or some other delectable Bizerte street foods instead of cooking. I received multiple lectures from female relatives via phone about how unhealthy it was to get food "out," and about the importance of cooking at home.

I also felt pressure about cleaning, something else I would have done a minimal amount of in the field. I was a source of amusement, because I could not figure out how to mop the floors properly with a strange purple cleaner called Mir, and I had no idea how to wash clothes by hand on the roof of our apartment without wasting water. These things I resented; I was sure that a man doing this field research would have the privilege of womenfolk doing everything for him. I

often seethed with rage while in the field. In this regard, I felt that I was getting a taste of the pressure that in-laws put on their daughters-in-law. I tried to use these constraints to my advantage however I could, which is what Tunisian women do!

In this section, I describe some of the quandaries of conducting research as a feminist and Westerner who is strongly connected, via affinal ties, to the MENA. Sharing my everyday life with my Tunisian immigrant husband in the USA, and living with Tunisian in-laws while in the field in Tunisia, I feel an affinity with the "halfie." Further, my commitment to feminism as a basis for this applied anthropological study prompts consideration of the quandary of speaking for versus speaking from (Abu Lughod 1991). Abu Lughod describes "halfie anthropology" as a necessary vacillation between talking of and from a group, and that writing against the concept of culture is important, because writing of a group as culturally *other* reinforces inequalities (Abu Lughod 1991). She states, "...the process of creating a self through opposition to an other always entails the violence of repressing or ignoring other forms of difference" (468). Appadurai (1988) argues that otherness is a fantasy of the anthropologist. I am cognizant of my anxiety about the participants in my study, of wanting to understand and, being that this is an applied project, clarify the symbolic violence of neoliberal structural adjustment.

At the same time, I seek to describe women's oppression without my discussion being used as propaganda against Muslims or Arabs, but as about inequalities in access to resources. This is also tricky, being a feminist anthropologist, because of the positionality of the anthropologist in relation to the

“native” woman. Michaela DiLeonardo (1998) describes the fantasies about indigenous women created by western anthropologists and feminists. While native women are valorized as uber women, the dark side of the indigenous woman is her own essentialist, timeless cultural beliefs. In light of this, I felt compelled to scrutinize my own privilege in terms of class, ethnicity, and nationality. At the same time I explore how I see myself as at least part “halfie,” as the chaperoned wife of a Tunisian man, as a mother who participates in Islamic rituals with her family. Before I discuss my research methods, I shall describe my origins.

I was a child of the US 1970’s, the daughter of politically Left, middle class parents who watched public television news religiously with me. (This was the extent of my household’s religiosity.) By elementary school, I knew that there was a country called Iran and that something called an Islamic Revolution took place there. I remember understanding how reliant we were on oil and gas that came from this place called “The Middle East” as I sat in the back seat of my family’s dining room-sized Chevrolet station wagon, in the gasoline line during something called an embargo done by scary men in OPEC, from “The Middle East.” I remember the adults around me blaming “Arabs” for the skyrocketing gas prices, and for far worse things that I watched in television programs and films (Shaheen 2001) .

As a middle class child of intellectual privilege, I lived with my parents in France while my father was on sabbatical from his professorial position, so my mother, a painter, could build her repertory of French landscapes. I overheard the

adults discuss problems with kidnappings by North Africans; our French friends warned my parents to “watch out” for me. This was ironic because our neighborhood in Nice was heavily Algerian. I was allowed to play in the street with my Algerian friends but was forbidden from entering their apartments.

Yet I grew up being taught culture, to appreciate artistic representations of the MENA. Beyond television Arabs, I learned about the MENA from the Louvre’s oriental wing. On the French streets, I was pulled, gently but firmly, away from North African men, the very men represented in the paintings in the Louvre on Divans, smoking Hookah. While I do not believe that I can ever “unlearn,” I do believe in being conscientious of the repertory of stereotypes of Arabs as *others* which I carried with me into the field.

When in the USA, I hear people critique the MENA based on the repertory of stereotypes that I know that “we” are enculturated to believe true, I often defend the MENA as if I were part of it. Perhaps this is not a bad thing, to have broken down the barriers that Abu Lughod discusses in light of Clifford and Marcus’ (1985) critique. Yet though I often feel a part of Tunisian culture, I am often made aware when in Tunisia that my identity is different. That is, I have privileges based on my class and nationality.

I am accepted as a family member, and remember with happiness when I waited with the other women until the men had finished eating to eat with the women and then clean up with them. I was happy to have been accepted as a member of the Tunisian female cohort. But this because I know I will leave the field and go back to a life where I assert ideals of equality in my relationship to



male kin. How will I, I wondered, tell this ethnographic story without reifying the stereotypes of MENA women? Will I find some way to analyze the reasons why women cook the food, set the table, and then feed the men so that women will be actually empowered by this choice? I found the idea of emulating the reactionary rethinking of MENA gender roles objectionable. I never found anything empowering about the separate spheres of women and men, and did not see anything political (in a positive sense) about women's sources of power in the home. My female relatives and participants said that letting men eat first was just a custom, or that if they did not let men eat first, they would give women "a hard time." Understanding that ethnography is a form of collecting, that should aim toward holism but cannot be whole, I am left having to represent women doing what I was able to see and hear about them doing: cooking for, waiting on, and then getting to clean up after the men, and then eat what the men left. How to tell this ethnographically without stereotyping or justifying? One answer is to connect the sexism of the MENA to the sexism of Western countries, to point out the research from the west about the "second shift," that women do an inordinate share of housework inside and outside the MENA (Hochschild 1989). That is, part of my ethnographic project is to describe the MENA and the West as neither bounded nor discrete when it comes to gender (Abu Lughod 1991).

I remembered with great empathy Leila Abu Lughod's description of feeling infantilized when her father drives her to the Bedouins and makes arrangements for her to be a "guest and daughter" with a family. When my husband and in-laws were making plans for me in the months leading up to my

time in Bizerte, I felt this same biting sense of childish frustration. When my husband and my in-laws debated (via Skype) who would chaperone me when I got to Tunisia, that they assumed I could not stay alone with my son. Like Abu Lughod, once in the field I was chaperoned by my sister-in-law constantly, and visited by other family members whenever they could make it from their hometown Ezzahra to Bizerte. Like Abu Lughod, I had to assess what kinds of research I could not do as kin to a Tunisian family, and with the constraint of having a toddler in the field. I focused on the intimacy of the accounts of women's lives, focusing on the quality of details versus the quantity that some researchers not affiliated with a family could get.

As a woman conducting research with other women, I did not need to emphasize what I had in common with the women who participated in this study, including the big issues of being a wife and mother. While I reject the reductionist view that there is a universal "woman's experience," or that, as we used to say in 1990's in women's studies departments, "Sisterhood is Global," I also was aided in certain ways by aspects of my identity which I had less control over, like my Tunisian women subjects. I had not planned to gain advantage in the research setting by marrying a Tunisian man or having his son with me in the field. But I am married to a Tunisian man, and I did carry our two year old son (kicking and screaming). It was not necessary to consciously emphasize the points; my sister-in-law accompanied me into the field and was my near constant companion, and spent much time explaining to curious Bizertis who I was.

Out on the streets, on our many daily walks to markets and for leisure, women would approach my sister in law, and ask her who I was, and Kalthoum would proudly reply that I was her American sister-in-law (La Damme Americaine). They would often then address Faris with hugs and kisses, and talk to me in French or English. With Faris in a stroller, and locked arms with my sister-in-law, strolling in the evenings, I became widely known around Bizerte as the “La Dame Americaine,” and not one of the ubiquitous European tourist women. Non-Tunisian tourists are ubiquitous in Bizerte, but I was immediately identified as a non-tourist, because I did not live in Le Corniche (the affluent seaside resort area), and was accompanied nearly everywhere with a Tunisian sister-in-law and Tunisian-looking toddler. Kalthoum was often approached by women and sometimes men who wanted to prove their theory right: was she the wife of one of your brothers? Kalthoum would answer with pride that yes she was. Guessing the nationality of foreigners is a favorite pastime of Tunisians. There was much surprise when they would guess German, French, Czech, and be surprise and interest that I was all the way from the USA, which implied that my husband was a successful immigrant.

I came into the field in the Spring of 2008, as the world capitalist economy took a nosedive, and the Bush administration’s war against Iraq was winding down, but its war with Afghanistan was intensifying. Once the fishermen of the Old Port of Bizerte learned to recognize me when we took our evening walks, he would call out to Kalthoum that I should tell George Bush to fix the economy. I would usually laugh and smile. Going into the field at that historical moment, I

was sure that I would be seen in a less positive light than Holmes-Eber or Fleur-Lobban, who reported of the solicitous friendliness of Tunisians in general. I thought that I would find that, considering that my country's military had decimated Iraq on the premise of weapons of mass destruction that did not exist, I might experience hostility. But I never did, and this probably had to do with my identity as a woman, and as a woman married to a Tunisian man, carrying around his baby.

Major challenges in the field arose around childcare. Being invited to do an interview with a woman in her home with Faris in tow was something I grew to dread. In Tunisia nothing is child-proofed, so that while I would be trying to conduct the interview, I would constantly have to watch the ever-restless Faris, who would pick up and inspect every glass vase and candy dish, push every button on the remote control. Even more harrowing was that Faris had no regard for Tunisian etiquette which meant that a visitor would not go walk into other rooms of the woman's home, not even the kitchen. In violation of this custom, I would have to chase Faris through every room, even bedrooms. One most embarrassing incident occurred when, while the woman was discussing her own wedding as part of an open-ended question, Faris wrestled himself down off my lap and sped down a dark hallway and through a door. I ran after him, and into the room, where the woman's husband lay on a bed in his underwear!

I was awarded a research grant from the American Institute for Maghrib Studies (AIMS) for 2008. This grant allowed me to stay in the field without having to find a job. When I set out to do this research, Larry Michelak, then director of the Tunisian satellite of AIMS, called the *Centre d'Etudes Maghrebines a Tunis* (CEMAT) helped me attain a letter from the Ben Ali government, decorated with signatures from the ministry of industry, as well as a variety of official stamps, to conduct research outside the capital city, which is rarely allowed. When I moved to Bizerte, there were no guarantees that I would gain permission from a factory in the EPZ to conduct the research. I had to prepare two possible research trajectories, one for the possibility of research in an EPZ, and one where I would conduct research with women outside the EPZ, in the city of Bizerte. I had one factory connection when I got to Bizerte, a woman who was my other sister-in-law's best friend in University. Karima is a supervisor in the EPZ call center, who worked her way up from being one of the phone girls. My first hope was to meet with Karima and see if she could arrange for me to participant observe in her call center, a French-owned water filter company that relies on sales calls to sell its filters. Having met with Karima in 2007 in Bizerte, I had the feeling that she was nervous about me being in Bizerte doing research in the EPZ. She was hospitable, but not enthusiastic.

My sister-in-law Awatef had arranged for Karima to help me find an apartment in Bizerte, which turned out to be portentous. Karima referred me to apartments away from the center of Bizerte, along the corniche where European tourists and affluent Tunisians had summer homes. She suggested apartment after

apartment three or more kilometers away from the neighborhoods of Bizerte, and I told my husband and sister-in-law no. This was embarrassing to my in-laws, who feared that Karima would be offended, but I made the right decision to insist on being on the West side of Bizerte, in a neighborhood occupied by full time residents of Bizerte, and two blocks from the EPZ (from my roof I could look in the call center windows). By being in an apartment above a Bizerte family, we became known as neighborhood residents. Beya, the owner of our building, lived with her husband, daughter and two sons on the center floor, and rented out the ground floor and the top loft (where we lived). She owned and ran the two shops at the front of the building, one rented out by a man who sold sundries, bread, cigarettes, milk, and an array of junk foods.

The other shop Beya ran herself and sometimes put her eight year old son in charge of, a vegetable and fruit shop. Since the stairs to our apartment were the same as the stairs to get to her house, and went through her terrace, we were in constant contact and conversation with Beya, her eight year old son Rami, and sixteen year old daughter Noura. Through being in her building, I learned much about the busy house wife. I could hear her bustle up and down the stairs and open her produce shop. I could also hear her come home at lunch to cook a hot meal for her family and then while everyone took a siesta, pound garlic into *tabil* (a spice mixture) in her mortar and pestle to sell to “working wives” on their way home from work out of her shop. She shared our terrace, where she washed her family’s clothes and hung them to dry with ours.

Beya would sometimes incorporate us into her economic strategies, asking to borrow some of my next month's rent so that she could pre-pay the farmer who provided her with fruits and vegetables for her shop, and get first dibs on the freshest merchandise. Beya also allowed me to gain understanding of Holmes-Eber's assertion that economic restructuring could also affect different classes of women differently. That is, while Beya was a hard-worker, she was also from an affluent family. She was able to take advantage of poorer women. For example, when we rented the apartment, Beya said that with the apartment there would be a woman who would come and clean once a week. Though that was not a selling point for me, Kalthoum said it was a normal occurrence and that we could just send the lady away if it made me uncomfortable. Intriguingly, the domestic did not show up when Beya said she would, and when Kalthoum told Beya, she did an unconvincing job of looking shocked. Several weeks went by and the woman never showed up. Kalthoum became suspicious and perturbed, since Beya told us that a certain portion of our rent went directly to the domestic. Kalthoum then confronted Beya with me in tow, saying that she would not pay Beya the twenty dinars part of the rent that was supposed to go to the domestic. Beya's attitude toward us after that confrontation was coolly polite.

Once we moved to Bizerte, Karima barely returned our phone calls, and we decided not to rely on her for much information. One of the first things we did in Bizerte was to stand outside the EPZ gate outside the call center at quitting time, and ask call center women if they would mind doing an interview.

Ultimately, I could not get the call center managers (all men) to allow me to

participant observe, so I went further west on Habib Bourguiba road, to the western-most entrance with my permit in hand, and Kalthoum and I pounded the pavement for several mornings asking to be let in to conduct research. Most managers were very polite, but said no.

I was fortunate to find a manager in the EPZ who agreed to let me observe, after several others said no. Participant observations in Z-Textiles<sup>16</sup> factory began as early as I could get Faris to let go of me at his dreaded daycare, usually 8:30 am, until as late as 1:00pm, when I would pick Faris up and spend time with him, do chores and errands, and try to type my field notes. I planned to participant observe by working on the line in the factory, but this I was not allowed to do.

The manager of Z-Textiles, Bechir, said no without skipping a beat, when I proposed to work for free as a fabric cutter with “his girls and ladies.” His reason was because I might hurt myself. I suspect that my safety was not why he said no, as I was the same age or younger than the lady (married) women on the line, and I am not particularly delicate-looking. Perhaps Bechir would not let me work on the line because of the awkwardness of breaching social status. He would be relegating me, a US doctoral candidate/wife of a Tunisian man (who Bechir would assume had wealth by virtue of the fact that he had emigrated to the USA) to the subjugated position of a worker. I used his discomfort at having to say no to me (Tunisians hate to seem inhospitable to foreigners) as a sort of door-in-the-face technique: since he had said “no” to me working there, he could surely let me *just* stand around and observe the factory. This worked.

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<sup>16</sup> All names of people and places in Bizerte have been fictionalized to protect anonymity.



I also participant observed outside the EPZ, in the city of Bizerte. I went visiting, which is a socially normative activity where women turn their homes into public forums during the day when men are out of the house (Holmes-Eber 2003). With the help of a translator, who was also my sister-in-law who lived with me during the entirety of my research, I conducted interviews and surveys. Some of the interviews became akin to life histories or *testimonios*, in-depth accounts of women's individual circumstances that they felt compelled to give (Angrosino 2002). Surveys would sometimes become narratives of entire lives. When this happened, I tried to convey to women that their lives were the point of my research, and that Kalthoum and I were glad to be there listening. I got used to bringing tissues to these interviews, as most women cried during them.

I conducted some research in key venues around Bizerte. Influenced by Holmes-Eber, I conducted research "on beaches and benches." I also conducted research in the Souks, and weddings. The souks I thought an important venue to study women because they were the primary economists of the home who had to make ends meet. I developed some survey questionnaires designed to see how women as primary household consumers made choices as to what to buy and how what they buy might reflect the currency devaluation, and flooding of the markets with imports, key facets of structural adjustment. Weddings reflect both the ideals and constraints of Tunisian women, and I was keen to observe them. Kalthoum encouraged me to crash weddings all summer (apparently this is a common practice). In summer in Bizerte, the banquet halls down town and along the old port are thronged with wedding entourages, mizwid (bagpipe) music

screams out the open windows, and no one seemed to mind my appearance. While I thought that people would say something about this stranger and her son crashing their wedding, I was, interestingly, ignored. Perhaps for the same reasons that wedding crashers can get away with their incursions in the USA, that everyone assumes that the stranger must be related to someone on the other side of the two families? However, I could not conduct interviews at weddings because the music was deafeningly loud, Faris was disturbed by the amped up *mizwid*, and because Kalthoum would not crash the wedding with me unless she had had time to dress up.

I considered conducting research in the *hammam* (public bath), based on Mernissi's (2001) assertion that this was one of the few social venues where women would not have to be serving someone, and could relax and focus on themselves. Having gone to the *hammam* many times with my female in-laws, I knew that this was a place where women would have leisure time and many would be able to talk. However, I found the *hammam* too problematic a venue to do research. I knew I was bothering women who were there to relax, albeit I did the same thing when I approached women on benches and at the beach. The *hammam* seemed more of an intimate space, though. I knew they would feel obligated to do the interview if asked, and I felt that they would feel that their privacy was being compromised, since I would be conducting interviews with them when they were naked. Asking women personal questions when they were vulnerable (nudity and vulnerability conflated in the culture) I would feared that they would feel caught off guard. Perhaps I was more uncomfortable than my

participants would have been since I felt unnerved myself in the *hammam*. I had fought to keep a nightgown on in visits. My female relatives were perplexed by my shyness about nudity, as I suspect that this prudishness did not mesh with their beliefs about the “wild” west. I explained that in my own society, my female relatives would rarely EVER be naked around one another. Not surprisingly, the *hammam* was not my first choice for research.

I went into the field with the aim of helping to broaden the theoretical focus of the MENA beyond the honor and shame complex, and to attend to class and gender change under neoliberal structural adjustment. Certain ethical considerations emerged in the field as I actualized what I had put in writing for University of South Florida’s Institutional Research Board (IRB). The IRB required that I make explicit how I would get informed consent with participants who might not be literate, or whose livelihoods might be in jeopardy through their interactions with me. That is, the IRB wanted to be sure that I would protect the participants. I tried to ensure that the women factory workers would be protected by getting verbal consent if they did not wish to sign an informed consent document- it turned out that none of them wished to sign any documents. Non-factory workers felt the same about signing documents, so I had to gain verbal consent. I would explain that names and identities would be changed for confidentiality. Once in the field, I also added that I was NOT a journalist, and that this was not an investigative report. However, I did not detail to participants, including the manager of Z-Textiles, Bechir, my political beliefs about maquiladoras. My own understanding about EPZ’s is that they are a symptom of

global capitalism. While they may afford women new opportunities for power and collective action, their purpose has never been to empower women, but to take advantage of their relationship to the economy. However, when factory workers would say they felt exploited, I would certainly agree. When married women factory workers said they felt resentful that they would have to go home from work and clean the house and cook for the men, I certainly agreed that that was unfair. When unmarried women factory workers complained that their wages were taken by their mothers, I certainly shared their feeling of frustration. Having said this, I did not disclose that my politics made me critical of capitalist exploitation and sexism (Hartmann 1979). I did not explain all this partly because I thought it would seem like I was trying to impose feminism or Marxism on the participants, to whom I should be listening not giving a lecture. Also, I worried that if I expressed my feminism some participants might assume that I was attempting to impose a western view of gender on them, especially those women who were more religiously conservative.

My disclosure was less full with the manager, Bechir. I was not completely honest with him. This was easy to be since he was disinterested in my motivations. I explained to Bechir that I wanted to observe the processes of production. That I was able to take advantage of his assumptions about me, probably based on my gender, is not to justify my taking advantage. As I have already discussed, to have given a full account of my politics would have possibly precluded me from doing this research. If I had told him that, based on the extant research on maquiladoras and on the economic system under which they have

emerged, I believed that laborers were being exploited, I imagined that he would have told me that I could not conduct research. Perhaps I was wrong and I did a disservice by denying Bechir the opportunity to engage with me honestly. This choice reflects my own assumptions about management in maquilas, and while I may have compromised ethical transparency, I also got the opportunity to observe in EPZ factory production.

Ethical issues also emerge in my treatment of male factory workers. I snubbed male workers from my first day of field work, which was necessary for me to gain the trust of female workers. I did not gain even verbal consent to observe the chebs, since any communication between them and me would be the subject of gossip, and I did not want to provide any ammunition about my supposedly loose western morals. This was based on my experience in a Tunisian family where gossip could be generated over the slightest interaction between a woman and man. My action also came from my husband's vehemence: people would assume I had loose morals because of what western women tourists did when in Tunisia. I decided to be above any possible reproach. So, beyond saying the perfunctory "Assalam Alaykum," I made no eye contact nor even walked near the men of the factory. Since they found many reasons to go into the women's work area, I still had many opportunities to observe them.

Outside the factory around the city of Bizerte, I also got verbal informed consent. Most participants were uncomfortable with signing any form because Ben Ali's spies were omnipresent, listening in for any dissent. Kalthoum wisely said before we began the research that women would not want to be recorded. I

wanted to try though. Kalthoum sighed, acquiesced to my naiveté. After a week of seeing the discomfort on interviewees' faces when we asked if they could be recorded (since they hated to have to say no), the machine was retired to a high kitchen shelf in our apartment, and forgotten.

The ethics of the research also became hairy when it came to offering factory workers remuneration for doing interviews. I did not ask any factory employees for interviews until the last month of research, knowing that this could prove to be too much for Bechir or other authorities to tolerate. I made sure to obtain women's phone numbers outside the gates of the EPZ. Many agreed to give their numbers but did not answer them. For those that did, I thought it important to give them some payment, because their time was so precious, and the interviews that I had conducted with women had run over an hour. Kalthoum expressed chagrin at the mere idea of giving five dinar to women. She said that Tunisian women would be insulted, but I argued with her about this. She consented with a roll of her eyes, but said she would not had them the money. I agreed. This time, I turned out to be right, much to Kalthoum's surprise. While most factory women did not wish to do interviews, those that did expressed appreciation for the money. There is the risk that the money for the interviews led to a power imbalance in the ability to give free consent. But my intention was not to exploit women but to validate what I knew was their very scarce free time.

My research for this study is naturalistic, and some of my experiences are extremely familial and personal. The methods and my position in the field also promote the unraveling of the subject-object dichotomy. While sweeping

statements about women in the MENA are in many ways obstacles, I did act on my own perceptions (as well as the anthropology that would back up these perceptions) that women's reputation is based on sexual modesty (i.e., Abu-Lughod 1986; Abu-Zahra 1982; Holmes-Eber 2003). Also, as I assert in Chapter Two, the emphasis on women's modesty is rooted in women's subordinate role to men's. I reject the reactionary reinterpretation of modesty which obscures women's unequal access to the means of production, prestige, and wealth (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1986). However, I found it prudent to adapt my behaviour so as to establish myself as someone who would not compromise a woman's modesty, in hopes that women would be comfortable with me. As in my own society, respectable women keep their distance from women with bad reputations. In the field, my first problem was that my husband would not be with me in the apartment I rented in Bizerte. The solution was that I be escorted everywhere by, and live with, my husband's sister. This had a profound effect on my research. I also had to establish myself as *unlike* the European women tourists who frequent Bizerte, who I resemble. When out strolling in Bizerte, people would often try to guess my nationality, and usually the guessing would start with Germany or France. So, while I was told by my sister in law that I did not *have* to wear a *jebba* (traditional Tunisian dress) over my swimsuit, I did. Further, while I could have made eye contact with men in the Souk, I averted mine to focus somewhere over their shoulders, like respectable Tunisian women do. These were the easy ways to adapt my behavior to make myself a safe westerner for Tunisian women.

I did much to comply to honorability and, like Tunisian women, I cared for my reputation. I could not establish myself like Holmes-Eber (2003) who came to Tunisia a Westerner with a Western husband. She had certain freedoms that I did not, and seemed to be “excused” from knowing certain codes of conduct. Tunisians are very tolerant of Westerners’ behavior, because they consider their questionable moralities the result of not knowing any better. So when Holmes-Eber describes riding on the back of her husband’s motor scooter, she is unaware that Tunisian women are morally compelled to ride “side-saddle” with ankles crossed. She would be forgiven for riding with her legs on either side of the bike, but I would not. On the other hand, I was privy to certain kinds of discussions because of my affinal relationship to Tunisia.

Abu-Lughod (1986) was on my mind every day I was in the field, as was Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh (2002) whose family connections in a Palestinian village, and her status as a married woman, were essential to the information she got on women’s reproductive strategies. Like Khananeeh, I was privy to many conversations about women’s sex lives because I was married to a Tunisian man. However, only some of this information went into this study because there was a blurry line between my research and my inclusion into a cohort of Tunisian wives. What comes along with a deconstruction of the dichotomy between subject and object in anthropology is an obligation by the anthropologist to give serious consideration as to what is personal (Clifford 1986).

There were instances when I found compliance to women’s honorable behaviour objectionable. For example, women are careful about the male gaze in



public spaces. Men tend to dominate public space, especially through the many men-only cafes. There are so many of these cafes that Tunisians have an expression: “Between two cafe’s, there’s a cafe,” to describe the typical street. Women cannot honorably walk past a cafe on the sidewalk that runs in front of it. So they step down off the sidewalk, onto streets already too congested with cars, in order to maintain their reputation. I had seen women walk right in front of the cafes, and they were immediately condemned by other women as “bad women” or prostitutes. Of course I wanted to be considered a respectable woman. Since I had Faris with me, maintaining honor meant wheeling his stroller down into the traffic to go around the cafe. This never ceased to incense me. I went from saying “no!” to Kalthoum when she would steer Faris’ stroller down, to trying to reason with her, that this was “fucking insane!” to negotiating, that we could cross the street to the other sidewalk. This was an exercise in frustration since there was usually a cafe on the other side too. In those daily situations, I was far from an unbiased researcher. I felt quite disempowered, myself, yet I could never muster the courage walk in front of the cafe!

While I tried to adhere to the modesty rules of Tunisian women, I was on occasion a trouble for my in-laws. Once, my American friend came to visit, and the two of us went out at night together, despite my in-laws’ troubled expressions. I put them in an awkward position because they would find it inhospitable to say no to a visitor’s request, yet that meant allowing their daughter-in-law out at night. In more frequent situations, I vexed my women in-laws because of my inability to stand staying inside for days at a time. I came across as spoiled when

I would have to exit the home. For example, on the holiday of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, I was enlisted to make the cake for my in-laws. Since I knew it would only take me two hours to make it, I accepted the invitation of my brother-in-law to drive to Tunis early in the day, with my husband (who was visiting from the USA) and some other male relatives. (This rankled my husband as well, since he was sure I should have refused the invitation because it did not come from him.) I felt I had reached my boredom threshold at home with the women, so I "selfishly" accepted.

On my return to the house, bantering with my brothers in law in a far too masculine way, I received glares from female relatives, but I had fewer incentives to care than would a Tunisian daughter in law. Here is the nexus of my privilege: I could leave. I planned to leave. I knew that I was only on a visit, that I would enter and exit their lives as I pleased, as citizen of the USA. Their moral exertions, so powerful on a Tunisian daughter in law, were just a grazing sting on me. I made the Prophet's cake on time, and my in-laws ate it.

## Chapter Four

The impacts of globalization have consequences which reach the most intimate realms of people's lives. For women of Bizerte who labor in factories in the Export Processing Zone, their identities as wives, mothers, and sexual beings are thrown into question. In this chapter, I discuss the results of my observations in Z-textiles factory, as well interviews with women workers. I describe the ways in which women pose challenges to the existing patterns of gender subordination at work, and also how they acquiesce to ideologies of gender which reify patriarchal subordination and justify their position as the lowest-paid unskilled laborers. While the consanguineous patriarchal ideologies of Tunisian femininity and multinational capitalism together impose discipline on Tunisian factory women, women attempt to assert control over their lives through the wages they earn, and by opportunities outside the "woman's sphere" of the home or kin-based business.

The Export Processing Zone (EPZ), termed *Le Zone*, by Bizerte's residents, runs parallel to Bizerte, Northeast to Southwest, where the mountains rise. Standing at any point in the city, one can head South, and eventually hit the EPZ road (were it not gated and guarded by a police officer with an automatic weapon) which borders *Le Zone*. The EPZ road was specially constructed by Ben Ali to accommodate the EPZ's. *Le Zone Franche* begins with a ten foot high fence (razor wire at the top), across the road from the port of Bizerte, which was deepened and widened by the French colonials. The French colonial administration used Bizerte as an economic and strategic harbor, and its

importance is evidenced in France's machinations to hold on to Bizerte even after they were ousted from Tunisia.<sup>17</sup> The two post-colonial administrations (Bourguiba's and Ben Ali's) also used Bizerte strategically for cross-Mediterranean trade.

Mercedes-Benz big rigs (it is astounding that these trucks can fit on most Tunisian roads) from Le Zone roll up to the port's loading area, where port officials in uniform (white cotton short-sleeved oxfords and blue polyester trousers) stand with clipboards. Usually a cigarette hangs from the official's lips because the favorite past-time between loading and unloading is to lean against the *site portuaire* wall and smoke.

The officials look over the cargo, sometimes opening containers or ripping a corner of plastic off a roll of fabric, then sign off on the clipboard invoice and hand it to the truck driver. The truck driver opens the back of the truck and then has a cigarette with the port official while the laborers (men in blue cover-all's) load the truck. The port official and the driver usually exchange ritual swear words, complaints like, "I am behind schedule today because the boss gave me too many pick-ups." The complaint is followed by the favorite phallus-centric vulgarity, "Deen zip zipee," translated: "It's like my dick."

After the cigarettes are smoked and the trucks are loaded, the drivers zoom towards *Le Zone*. From the EPZ road, the truck drivers turn into one of several gated entrances to Le Zone, hand the clipboard over to a government police official with an automatic weapon on his belt, where he either exchanges some jokes with the driver if they are friends and signs the clipboard, or asks the driver

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<sup>17</sup> A description of Bizerte's historic importance can be found in Chapter 1

to open the truck so that he can climb in among the cargo to do an inspection. Rarely did I see such an inspection; daily, I saw convivial ritual insults between the two men. The driver then usually zooms up to the loading dock, where he hands the clipboard to the factory manager, Bechir, in the case of Z-textiles. Bechir oversees the factory men as they put out their cigarettes and unload the materials into the factory holding area.

From port to mountains, it is approximately ten kilometers long and its width is of a city block. One main road runs through the zone, and it looks markedly different from the condition of roads outside of Le Zone. The road that runs through Le Zone is free from potholes, garbage, and low shoulders; indeed, the road through Le Zone has a full-time staff of landscapers. Each morning I greeted the men in blue uniforms and wide-brimmed straw hats with “Spah il-hayre,” and they would look nervously at me, saying nothing, a most disconcerting ritual, since in Tunisia, “Spah il-hayre” is mandatory.<sup>18</sup>

The excellent condition of the road that runs the length of Le Zone facilitates the ease of the trucks that haul in raw materials and go back to the port with sewn and assembled goods. However, it also sends a positive impression to the European owners who visit, announced and unannounced. The neighborhoods of factories are diverse in production. Next to Z-Textiles, for example, is a

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<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this is because agricultural peasants are often ignored by other strata in Tunisian society. Or, perhaps they were afraid that talking to a European-looking woman in Le Zone would get them in trouble, or even fired. Or, as was suggested to me by another researcher whose focus is Morocco, perhaps they were Berber speakers, and could not reply in Arabic. Perhaps their silence toward my greeting was a sign of the stratified dynamics of contemporary Tunisia: one Tunisia is near the coastal cities where there has been development and a growth in the middle class, and another that is rural, underdeveloped, and forced to migrate to the edges of cities to find work (Holmes-Eber 2003; King 2003). They seemed to me puzzled and unnerved by my persistent attempts at greetings, as if they were so used to being ignored by elites, and especially by the Europeans who rolled in and out of the EPZ that I was just too weird.

medical equipment factory, where women workers arrive each morning and slip into sterile smocks, plastic hair caps, and plastic booties in the sterile anteroom, before entering the sterilized and air conditioned lab. While I was conducting research, the Tunisian manager and I had a meeting, and he explained that their biggest client was a French company which had contracted with his factory to produce catheters. While these women's salaries were the same as the women's at Z-textiles, their air and dress set them apart. They snubbed the women at Z-textiles, even though their factories were right across the street they did not say a "good morning" to my research participants, who also snubbed the medical workers. While I do not know for sure who started the snubbing, I suspect it was the medical workers, who wished to assert their place higher in the class hierarchy. Similarly, the women who work in the call centers that are further Northeast along the EPZ road (I could see their building from the roof of my apartment) also self-segregate from factory women. The textile workers also snub them, but again I would suspect that the call center workers started it. Like the call center workers in Carla Freeman's (2000) study in the Barbados, women in the settings where there was air conditioning and labor involved technology that could alter their class identity. The women in Z-Textiles were not able to do this, working in the heat of summer and cold of winter, doing physical labor, and using no high tech machinery.

Women workers in air conditioned, high tech factories wear skirts, heels, and their hair in elaborate styles (if they do not wear *hijab*), and fancy silk *hijabs* (if they do), enjoy a different status than the factory women who wear whatever

will help cool them off without compromising cultural norms of modesty. In the dusty, hot factories, women wear whatever they do not mind getting dirty. As for *hijab*, those who wear it wear the oldest scarves they have, and those women who do not use *hijab* wear their hair in ways that will keep the dust off: pulled back, bound into a bun, covered with a handkerchief. The Z-textiles girls have strong opinions about call center girls and medical girls. The girls in Z-textiles talk about these girls with envy *and* distaste. They are envious that the women get the luxury of air conditioning and the luxury of sitting down at work. They are also envious that these other workers get to show off their looks and fashion sense, a mark of an accomplished woman, every day at work. Part of the work of being a Tunisian woman is to display femininity; for women who stand all day in the heat, in old, dust-covered clothes, carrying heavy loads and operating machines, pulling off the feminine role is a challenge.

Labor in Z-textiles, as in other work settings, is organized to enforce hierarchies and power structures. In Z-textiles, the factory floor is an expression of the cultural power of men in Tunisian society, of the Bourgeoisie<sup>19</sup> elite Tunisians over the proletariat Tunisians, and of European businessmen in contemporary neoliberalizing Tunisia. This power manifests in women's and men's differential wages, of freedom of movement, and breaks. Labor is also overlain with the domination of the European men, the absent owners of Z-textiles who hired a Tunisian Bourgeoisie to be present.

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<sup>19</sup> Tunisians call the small elite group who work in the Ben Ali government and who run most industry Le Bourgeoisie. Le Bourgeoisie are also called a variety of vulgar terms, most of which translate to mean those who prostitute themselves to the government, and those who act better than Tunisian proletarians.

These owners are called by the Tunisian women and men employees, *les Francaises*, even though they are actually from Germany and Holland. That they are referred to as *the French* is indicative of a statement about the colonial legacy of French domination, and its neo-liberal renaissance.<sup>20</sup> The French, generalized to all Westerners, are in Tunisia to dominate once again, most Tunisian proletarians say. In men's cafes, and in women's visits, discussion about a new form of outsider domination is common.

Entering Le Zone on foot via the Southwestern most entrance, I can see Z-Textiles at the right side of the bend in the road. The specially constructed road is made of black asphalt, and is spotless and broad (to accommodate those Mercedes big rigs) as a highway in the USA. The EPZ road bends and straightens out past Z-Textiles, to go North-East to the New Port of Bizerte. I am told by Bechir the manager to enter the factory through the office door at the front, not via the loading dock at the back where the workers enter. I must check in with Bechir's sister, Sylvie, the secretary in the office, where the air conditioner whirrs and it is deliciously cold, when I enter each morning. I leave my backpack and straw hat in Bechir's office (as he instructed me to do), to the side of the front entry where his sister types at the reception desk. She always smiles at me says good morning. Sylvie always smiles. From inside Bechir's office, there is two-way glass, from floor to ceiling, where he can watch the women but they cannot see through from their side. The blissfully refrigerated office has a door (also two way mirrored) which connects the two sides of the factory. The factory is just a

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<sup>20</sup> Colonial lexicon is employed in Tunisia whenever a situation of bold inequality is perceived. Acting like *Les Francaises* or being like the Ottoman *Beys* is employed to critique power abuse. But being like a Bey is sometimes a compliment to a man's masculinity.



step down two wooden stairs, into the heat or cold wind, noise, and fumes of the factory floor.

The largest part of the factory is the fabric cutting and pattern pinning floor, which starts right outside the two-way mirrored glass wall of Bechir's office. There are four rows of cutting/pinning tables. The rows extend in length approximately twenty-five feet and are approximately six feet wide. They are green, and remind me of elongated ping pong tables. There are breaks in the tables so that two women work in each section. There are four women facing four women (their partners in work), two per section of a table in each row. A total of about thirty-two women work cutting and pinning. However, as in many EPZ factories, workers are interchangeable in this intensely flexible environment (e.g., Fernandez-Kelly 1983). What with firings and hirings (Bechir told me he had a list of applicants at the ready), and the practice of a varied quitting time (depending on the orders set by the owners), this number was approximate only.

There are also some related jobs that happen at the peripheries of the cutting tables. Almost directly outside of the door which connects the office to the floor, there is an industrial sewing machine with German writing on it. One woman sews certain hems on specialty orders that are done at this factory because the manager does not wish to try to transport the giant machine to the sister factory where the pinned fabrics from this factory are sewn together. It is at the Northeast entrance of Le Zone. At the right, adjacent to the bathrooms, is a conveyor belt, where fabric is fed by two women through the one end, and two women at the far end, closest to the shelves, process the pieces that come through.

To the left of the fabric tables is a desk and some files where Madame Hayatt and the senior men process orders, and can keep their eyes on the women workers. To the right of the fabric tables is a bathroom which has a stall for women and one for men, and a sink in-between. At the end of the section of these vast tables is the loading dock on the left and then floor-to-ceiling shelves where fabric is kept at the back. The shelves are dark and the center rows are unlighted. This area is far away from the two-way glass of Bechir's office, and dark, meaning that much of what happens there is outside the constant watch of management. This is the domain of the chebs.

The term cheb refers to young and unmarried men and it can also be used on men who are engaged. A cheb in Tunisian culture is a young man who has not yet taken on the responsibility of a wife and family; he is green, naive, and usually trying to gain sexual experience. Most laborers in Z-Textiles are chebs, while a few are middle aged, married, and carry respect and authority due to their age and kin status. The youngest and least experienced chebs have the least status, Hamedi and Schedli. They are in their early twenties, and do most of the heavy lifting and unloading.

The factory does not have any working ventilation system, which means that, as one worker explains to me, "In summer, it is hot as Hell so we are in Hell. In winter, we freeze, and wish we were back in Hell." There is a large ventilation unit built into the wall above and to the left of the two-way reflective floor-to-ceiling windows of Bechir's office, but I never saw its giant blades move. The building is metal, with a ceiling that connects to an electrical grid. There are

small white fans clamped on to the metal electrical grid which hangs from the ceiling over the cutting tables, and they are plugged into the power bars that are used for the fabric-cutting jigsaws. But these fans are never turned on. I never asked why they were not turned on, but perhaps it is because of the widely-held belief among Tunisians that a fan blowing directly onto the body will cause lung problems. (My in-laws were convinced that I would do myself in with the fan that I had blowing on me throughout the summer.) Or, perhaps the fans do not work because of the buildup of dust on the blades. Perhaps the fans would blow more textile particles and dust into the women's mouths and nostrils, which is already a problem. Many women walk to the ends of the tables where garbage bins sit, lean on the bins and expectorate mucus, which seems to be laden with fabric particles and dust.

Women's place in Z-textiles is the fabric cutting and pinning tables, and the peripheries of the tables, the sewing machine, the conveyor belt, and for Madame Hayatt, the small desks to the left. Their place is central; the fabric cutters' tables take up most of the factory floor. They are directly in front of Bechir's mirrored class windows. The two-way glass of Bechir's office, which meant the workers saw the mirror side and he could watch them, led the women to know that they *could* be being watched. This is an example of what Foucault discusses in the panopticon, where prisoners or groups in other kinds of institutions, like factory workers, are disciplined by the subtle force of knowing they are constantly surveyed by the powerful (Foucault 1975).

Layered onto this kind of management through discipline of surveillance is the MENA cultural anxiety of women's honor that is tied to men's gaze. That is, there is a politics of vision that is gendered in Tunisia and in the MENA generally, where women must protect their reputations by averting men's attempts to objectify their bodies. Hence, modest clothing prevents men from looking at and possessing women. The two-way glass prevents the women workers from knowing if they are being watched, and, if they are if it is in a sexual way. Bechir spends much time in his office. The European owners go there for meetings. They could be sexualizing the women workers. They could be, but the women cannot know. The workers have several ways of confronting this disciplinary strategy.

The other women of the factory are at the sides of the cutting tables. Madame Hayatt, the *Cheffa*<sup>21</sup> of the women, had a table and chair to the left of the cutting floor which faces the women. More often than not, Hayatt was pacing the cutting floor, checking to see if women were keeping up, ready to chew out any team that fell too far behind.<sup>22</sup> Bechir could also watch Madame Hayatt at her desk. Khadija, who everyone called Mima (Grandma), was in every part of the factory, including men's areas, because she had to clean. I could not understand her heavy rural Arabic accent, and she spoke no French, but other factory women told me that she is 65 years old, and that when she gets home from work, she must cook for her husband and two unmarried sons. The only other woman at Z-textiles is Bechir's sister, Sylvie, the secretary and receptionist, who sits at the

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<sup>21</sup> *Cheffa* is a French-derived word used by Tunisians to describe a woman boss.

<sup>22</sup> Since the quotas were set very high, most cutters were chronically slightly behind.

reception desk in the office. Rarely did she venture through the door onto the factory floor, where eyes full of judgment would meet her.

While most of my field notes focus on the approximate 36 fabric pinning and cutting women workers, the other women laborers who work at the periphery are the lone seamstress, Ghusan, and the abovementioned Khadija, and Sylvie the receptionist/secretary. The seamstress Ghusan was a curvy M'raa (married woman) when I came into the field, and was bulging with a pregnancy when I exited. She did not talk with any other workers except Madame Hayatt, when Hayatt handed her another box full of materials to hem, and she handed Hayatt a completed box. This was probably a sign of her own assertion of status. She was an expert seamstress, not just a fabric-pinner and cutter like the other women. She also got to sit down, a privilege she only shared with Sylvie.

The other workers were the *binat* (unmarried women) at the conveyor belt at the right side of the fabric cutting tables, next to the bathroom, who number between four and six. These women were the youngest in the factory, in their late teens, and all in Western dress. Their dress style was the most provocative. One of the conveyor-belt girls, Wisal, even wore above-the-knee skirts, scandalous in Tunisia. These women also wore make-up that was provocative. While wearing kohl eye make-up is normative for Tunisian women, wearing bright blush and lipstick is associated with loose morals, and even prostitution. When I asked Bechir about them, he said that he was watching them closely (indeed, the conveyor belt was close, and in full view of his two-way glass windows). These *binat* were “in training,” but he was not yet sure about how intelligent they were.

He explained to me in English, pointing his finger to his forehead, “It depends on the girl’s mind.”

Apparently, they needed to be watched for a very long time; while I was there, only one of these workers was moved to the fabric cutting table, when Bechir fired another woman. However, two quit on their own. Their job at the conveyor belt requires that they feed and receive pieces of fabric pinned with patterns which are processed through the machine, and then placed in boxes at the other end. This job seemed exceedingly easy and monotonous, but it was not the training position Bechir made it out to be, since other new hires who were often more modestly dressed were never placed on this job, but were put immediately on fabric cutting positions. This heightened my perception that Bechir could use his place behind the two-way glass to watch women for sexual reasons, as well as survey them as a disciplinary strategy.

Bechir’s sister, Sylvie, rarely left her office chair at the reception desk. Her major work was on her computer, sending and receiving production quota faxes to the European owners in Germany and Holland. She also answered the telephone in impeccable French. She appeared younger than Bechir, in her early twenties. Her hair was long and in elaborate styles. She also wore clothes that turn heads in Tunisia. Her outfits reminded me of the clothing women in South Beach, Miami, wear to night clubs: low neck lines (albeit no cleavage showing), and tight, low-cut pants. Indeed, my sister-in-law, who accompanied me to the factory on my first visit, commented when we left, “I don’t know how Bechir can let his sister wear such clothes!”

Sylvie was always smiling, her dark red lip gloss off-setting her white teeth. Very rarely did she enter the factory through the mirrored door, smiling intrepidly against the storm of unsmiling women workers' faces. This only happened when a fax came in that needed to go to Madame Hayatt. Usually it was Hayatt who would go into the office to get faxes, but when there were urgent orders, Sylvie would have to go to her.

The approximate 36 women cutters and pinners, as I described above, work in teams. Approximately half of the teams are *m'raa*, married women who are mostly in their late twenties and thirties. The other half are *binat*, unmarried and mostly in the teens and twenties. The teams are always comprised of either two *binat* or two *m'raa*. While I never asked Bechir why, I suspect it was an unquestioned assumption that mirrors Tunisian culture, where higher-status *m'raa* would not wish to consort with the childish *binat*, even if their ages were the same.

The cutting tables are six feet in width, approximately twenty-five feet in length. Women teams of two face each other across the tables. Here is the typical process of the fabric cutters and pinners' work: If there is none already in place, the women must get the *chebs* to get a bolt of fabric out of the fabric shelves and onto the wheeled holders at the right end of each table. The *chebs*, especially Chedli and Hamedi, who are the youngest and least-skilled, are supposed to carry over the fabric spools. However, the Chebs rarely bring the spools to the women without there being some sort of exchange based on sex or morality, which I shall discuss later in this chapter.

Women have good reason to insist that the Chebs do their job and retrieve the bolts of fabric. Beyond the possible negative physical outcomes, like falling or back injuries, many women fight to be heard by the Chebs based on the principle of the matter. The men are in charge of the fabrics, and that means they should carry them out to the women. That is, women expect fairness in the workplace- it is stipulated, after all, in the Personal Status Codes! They know they are not paid as well as the men, and part of the justification given by Bechir is that women are paid less because they are not able physically to do the heavy lifting that men can do.<sup>23</sup> Trivialization of women's work justifies its devaluation. Women workers in Z-textiles are on their feet for an average of twelve hours, since shifts can be extended or called short depending on the orders that come through to Bechir.

Women also climb onto the tables in order to plug, unplug, untangle, and re-plug chords that loosen, which occasionally makes for a fireworks display of sparks and pops. Women also climb up onto the tables to pin patterns at the center of the tables, or if they cannot reach the patterns. Thus, work is assessed as "light" or "heavy" based on the gender which performs the work, not on the strength the work actually requires.

Once they get the spool of fabric in place, the two women each stand on their respective side of the table and grasp a corner of the fabric. They then walk the length of their table, staying parallel to one another. Once they have pulled the fabric all the way to the end of the table, they each place a metal weight on their corner of the fabric. These weights are under the tables. They then walk

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<sup>23</sup> Women would often say to chebs when they were asking for help carrying the spools, "Earn your pay!"



back up the table, stopping about every three feet, reach under the table and pull up another weight. I picked up one of these weights once, and they have the heaviness of a cast iron pot, perhaps ten pounds. They continue to weigh the fabric all the way back up to the holder end of the table. They also retrieve a box of push pins from under each side of their table, and place about ten between their lips.

The leader (usually the woman who has been at the job the longest) then gives the go-ahead to her teammate to retrieve a box from Madame Hayatt and Saddam's (the one lone man who was middle aged and married, termed a *rajul*) office area. There, Hayatt will give her a box filled with rolled brown pattern papers. She must count the total patterns she's been given and then check off the serial numbers for each, and then she must sign off on Hayatt's clipboard that she has received the patterns. Once back at the table the woman gives the box to the team leader, who takes out one roll and then puts the box under the table. The leader then reads the instructions, as to how many to cut. She then unrolls the pattern and begins carefully laying down the patterns, each woman working from her side. They pull one pin from between their pursed lips and begin to pin down the patterns. Once each woman has reached in toward the center of the pattern as far as she can reach (the tables being approximately six feet, but also around five feet off the ground), one of the two climbs up onto the table, pins still in mouth, and, on hands and knees, pins the inner part of the pattern. All women climb up several times a day, be they wearing *hijab*, or a mini skirt, or even when they are pregnant. This is a position that a woman would rarely be seen in around men.

Once the pinning is done, they receive a visit from Madame Hayatt, who makes rounds to correct or reprimand any mistakes. Hayatt runs her hands across the patterns, checking to make sure there are no wrinkles. She makes sure the girls have placed the pins close together, as she often spits out comments about women's laziness if they do not pin close together, saying things like, "Lazy woman ought to be at home watching a soap opera!" This is but one way in which stereotypes about lazy housewives are reinforced by working women. But it also reinforces the reality of the women's class situation: they are not middle class or elite wives and daughters whose labor would only have to be in the home. Hayatt's remarks put these women in their place, encouraging them to remember that they better work hard since they have no choice. At the same time, there is a kind of pride encouraged by the stereotype of the elite, lazy woman. Women working in the formal economy outside the home in Tunisia may be accused of many things, but they will never be called lazy. Z-textiles women can differentiate themselves from the housewives (who they sometimes envy) because they do two full time jobs, not *just* one.

The women must pull down the fabric saws (which look like jig saws) from where they are up on the grid, which also sometimes requires climbing onto the tables to reach. They share one saw, each cutting along the edges of the pattern, while the other keeps her hands on the fabric to try to keep it from rippling or wrinkling.

Once they are done cutting the patterns, they remove all the weights and put them back under the table. They pick out all the edge remnants of fabric, and

fold them and place them in cardboard boxes which sit next to the garbage bins. They then fold up the pieces with the patterns still pinned in place. They fold each piece and pin a paper onto the top, and the leader writes the part in French. If she struggles with writing, she gets help with this from another girl. This goes into a pre-labeled box, which one of the team members retrieves from Madame Hayatt. Then, the team leader pulls another roll of pattern out of the box, and they start again.

The pressure of the job comes from the speed at which they are expected to finish each round, and because they must rely on the *chebs*, Hamedi and Schedli, to bring them spools of fabric when their rolls deplete. Because women are under a time pressure to finish one pattern and go to the next, and because they are loath to walk into the male-dominated fabric shelves to retrieve a roll, nor is it easy physically for them to carry the spools of fabric (which are approximately five feet long and three or more feet wide) they are often put into stressful situations at work, situations where they must convince the *chebs* to help them. The following scene reveals the sense of stress and frustration as well as the exchanges of power, which the fabric cutters and the *chebs* engage:

The stress on the factory floor today, the reason why there is extra urgency in Shatha and Marwa's calls for *chebs* to bring them the next fabric spool, is because Volkswagen placed a rush on an order of five hundred mechanics' uniforms. The uniforms must be on the ship tomorrow morning at seven, ready to make the voyage to Europe. Madame Hayatt has been belting out orders to the women, saying, hurry up, *yullah!* as she paces each workspace with her clipboard.

At each station, she examines the numbers of cut, pinned, and folded uniforms, and scolds the women who are behind.

The patterns have to be cut, pinned together, and folded, ready to be sewn together by seven pm (it is now five pm and the women have been working since seven am). The cut and pinned patterns will be loaded into the truck and driven down to another z-textiles factory in Le Zone where another group of women will sew the pinned patterns together into the wee hours of the morning. Then, the finished uniforms can be loaded back into the trucks before dawn and driven down to the Port, and loaded by men into a cargo container, and then shipped across the Mediterranean.

Even though it is dank-cold November, Shatha is red-faced and Marwa's hair is damp at the temples. It has been thirty minutes since they started asking Hamedi and Schedli for the spool. Their spool has only one layer of material left on it, and they fear that they will get behind waiting for the next spool. Shatha calls to Hamedi, who is standing with Schedli, talking. "We really need that fabric," she says, scowling. "We will be out of fabric in one more pinning."

Shatha and Marwa tried asking sweetly a few times but were ignored. Then, twenty-five minutes ago, Shatha called flirtatiously, "Ya Hamedi."<sup>24</sup> The flirtatious tone did indeed get Hamedi's attention. Barely dragging his flip flops, he walked over to the girls and told Shatha he would get to them next. Shatha and Marwa smiled at him and said, "Aye-shuk, Ya Hamedi." Thank you, in an ingratiating tone.

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<sup>24</sup> "Ya" in Arabic is a part of speech termed the evocative particle. While there is no direct translation, for the "ya," it is a term of endearment, and gives emphasis. Used in Arabic, it often gets the attention of the person better than calling them by their name alone.

However, ten minutes later, Hamedi still had not brought the fabric. By the time that Shatha and Marwa pulled the last stretch of fabric down the length of the table, lay the irons along the edges to keep it flat, Shatha yelled out over her shoulder, “Where is Hamedi?”

Over the past thirty minutes, over the drone of the fabric saws, the two *binat* have gone through the repertory of techniques for getting the *chebs* to bring them the bolt. They know from experience that one or another strategy may work, but that they can never count on any to work. Marwa and Shatha have done everything perfectly, started asking early and sweetly, asking before they have actually run out of fabric, because they know that it could take much emotional labor on their parts to get the chebs to carry over the gigantic spools of fabric. But a direct command by a woman to a man in Tunisia is unacceptable. Indeed factory woman tell the Chebs that they need another bolt, but they *do not tell the Chebs to get them the bolts*. Women may say, “We really need that fabric,” but not, “Bring us that fabric.”

Nonetheless, Marwa and Shatha are showing their frustration towards the end of the thirty minutes since they began asking for the bolt. They are throwing the iron weights off the fabric and folding up their last pinned and cut patterns and throwing them into the cardboard boxes with much eye rolling and talk that is generalized rage: Marwa says to Shatha, “we have to do everything here!” Shatha responds by tisking. Then finally, Hamedi emerges from the fabric shelves, an orange bolt slung over his shoulder. He walks towards Shatha and Marwa, who scowl.

As Hamedi gets closer to the girls, he lifts the bolt down from his shoulder to the side of his pelvis, and holds it with both hands, so that it juts out. He tips the bolt upwards, so that it makes a giant orange phallus, and says, “Marwa, where do you want me to put this?”

Marwa and Shatha cover their mouths with their hands, blush, and giggle. Shatha, puts her head on Marwa’s shoulder and seems like she may faint. Hayatt approaches from her desk, looking suspicious, and the girls quickly remove the empty spool from the holder and Hamedi fits the new bolt into place silently, and retreats back to the shelves. Hamedi heads straight to where Wassim and Taib are sitting with clipboards. He tells them the story, and they nearly fall to the floor in laughter.

In this incident, Hamedi manages to deflect his responsibility for making the girls’ work far more stressful by delaying the carrying of the fabric bolt, by using sexual innuendo. The double entendre of the remark, “Where do you want me to put this?” to two unmarried young women, who ideally do not even know (or are interested in) where a penis goes, threw Shatha and Marwa off. The girls ended up losing face because they did not react with scowls and grimaces, or a religious admonishment. Perhaps the loss of reputation began earlier, though, when the girls flirted to try to get Hamedi to bring the bolt. Hamedi got these two chaste girls (Shatha wears *hijab* and Marwa is always dressed according to Islamic guidelines) to engage in flirtation. It is a sport for chebs to throw into question chaste girls’ reputations by seeing if they can push them into flirtation when under pressure. Shatha and Marwa do not have any illicit relationships with

men, and they are gossipers, not the gossiped about. Yet Hamedi was able to get them to flirt, and then able to get them to laugh at a sexual innuendo. This opens the door to more attempts by the Chebs to try the girls, whose fragile reputations have been damaged.

Chebs frequently turned fabric bolts into phallic symbols upon delivery to women's tables, and women had a variety of ways of responding to these antics, which reflect the several ways women could seek power. Had Hamedi said the same scandalously lewd remark to a team of binat who flirt and have sexual relationships with men, or to a team of married women, he might have faced challenges to his own masculinity in the process of his attempts to compromise their sexual honor.

Chebs are skilled in the art of sexual innuendo, and the fabric bolts function as their main prop in this endeavor (e.g., Yelvington 1996). This kind of interaction is indirect, which protects men and makes women vulnerable. If a woman reacts, as did Shatha and Marwa, with shock, the Cheb can blame her for her "dirty" imagination. After all, he only asked where he should put the fabric! The ideal virgin is so impossibly innocent that it would not cross her mind that this statement could be sexual; few women can adhere to this role. Yet by showing shock, Marwa and Shatha revealed that they knew something about sex, and thus failed. Hamedi reported their reactions to the other men in the factory, which quickly circulates through gossip (verbal and through everyone's instant messages on their phones) to the community. This kind of gossip can seriously jeopardize a woman's reputation.

Usually, modest binat can ignore glaringly phallic innuendo (albeit this leads Chebs to find ever more shocking ways to break through the virginal facade), but other binat, usually ones less invested in having virginal reputations, played into the sexual connotations to exert other kinds of power. Before I move to examples of these women, I will describe how modest binat manage to ignore glaringly explicit innuendo from the Chebs. The following is an example typical of ways for chaste girls to ignore sexual innuendo.

Binat Safa and Warda, Safa with *hijab*, both in loose modest clothing, both started asking every passing Cheb for a new bolt at 10:00 am. Safa and Warda are both quiet and smiley, and considered attractive. Safa asks Taib as he walks by with a bolt for two m'raa, Inas and Hiyam, without eye contact, and without any familiarity, "Please, we will need a new bolt soon." Taib does not say anything back to her; he just continues walking toward Inas and Hiyam's table. Warda calls out dead pan to Hamedi for a bolt, and he says that he is too busy. However, Hamedi (who saw that Hayatt was busy doing inventory on a shipment, drops off a bolt he was carrying to Leila and Huma, and then goes and leans at the conveyor belt to talk to Zainab (who wears dangling earrings and tank tops) and Wisal (who wears short skirts).

Now it is 10:50 and Safa and Warda are still waiting. Their faces are both stolid. They have run out of fabric, and even though they started asking over an hour ago, they have yet to receive a bolt. Warda says that they should go into the shelves and reach one themselves. Safa says she does not want to do the Chebs' job for them. "Do they get paid more than us to flirt with sluts," Safa retorts.



Then Taib emerges from the shelves with a bolt and carries it to them. As he places the bolt onto the wheel at the end of their table, Warda takes one end to help fit it. Taib says to her, “I love it when you help put it in.” Warda says nothing. She and Safa remain stolid, despite Taib’s leering grin.

The girls immediately take their places, grip a corner of the bolt, and pull it down the length of the table. Taib rolls his eyes and walks away. He has no story to tell the other Chebs.

Girls who wish to exert power by asserting their perfectly virginal selves have no choice but to totally ignore such innuendo. If they show anger, or shock, it means they knew enough about sex to know the mechanics. If they know the mechanics, they lose their purity. Such *binat* must suffer the frustrations of getting ignored by Chebs who are supposed to deliver them their primary work material, the fabric, because they will not compromise their purity.

Chebs frequently picked and chose whose fabric would be delivered, and whose would be delayed. Chebs sometimes ignored *binat* who would not engage with them in flirtation, or they brought fabric promptly so they could try out a new line of sexual innuendo. Mostly, they ignored them for strategic reasons. Ignoring good girls fits a broader cultural pattern where men ignore beautiful chaste women to attempt to get the girls interested in them. Tunisian chebs use the expression, “I like my meat well-cooked.” It means something similar to the English expression, “Treat them mean, keep them keen,” that a girl who gets ignored by a guy will start to be interested in him. The Chebs’ neglect of their

work duties increases the more they are ignored by the girls, which can be viewed as symbolic violence since this can cost them their job (Bourdieu 1977). While women who choose this high moral ground maintain their reputations, they are more likely to fall behind at work because they were ignored by Chebs who wield this power. They then are more likely to be sanctioned by Hayatt, and they may even be fired by Bechir.

Many women instead try to walk the line between flirting and getting a bad reputation. By engaging with the innuendo of the Chebs, they could manipulate the men into helping them; at the same time, their own integrity could be compromised. The following incident illustrates the ways in which more assertive and sexually active Binat contend with Chebs' sexual innuendo at work.

Adila and Duha, two binat whose cutting table is first on the other side of Bechir's office, asked both Hamedi and Schedli as they passed to bring them a new bolt of fabric. It was 9:30 am the first time they asked. Adila and Duha are young, and were hired only three months before I began research. Bechir described the two of them as having good minds for the work, but that they would get into trouble if they were not watched. Adila and Duha both wore clothes that would be barely tolerated on the streets of Bizerte, and I wondered how a taxi driver would even stop for them (many taxi drivers will not stop for women who seem scantily dressed). That is, they wore tank tops, which revealed their whole shoulders. Additionally, Adila often wore blush and lipstick.

At 10:00 the girls were getting anxious, Adila called out to Schedli that their current bolt was nearly bare. She then smiled at him and said, "Ya Schedli, I

*need* your bolt.” Schedli retorted, “You *need* to be patient to get a big bolt.”

Adila replied, “Perhaps I would be patient if I knew you *could* carry it.” She said it dead pan, and Schedli started to laugh. A few moments later, Schedli emerged from the shelves with a bolt over his shoulder. Smiling, he walks over to Duha and Adila’s table, where he drops it down to his waist. Adila avoids eye contact with Schedli, ignores him completely, and Duha says, “I didn’t expect it to come so fast!” Schedli walks away toward the shelves blushing and smiling. He recounts the story to the Chebs, who laugh.

Women often played on men’s anxiety about their sexual potency. This was especially common among m’raa, married women, who used this tactic on the unmarried Chebs when they were made to wait for a bolt.

Lamis, with hand on hip, says in a deep and loud voice to Schedli and Wassim, who are walking by her table with clip boards, “Can you boys manage to carry a bolt to Iman and me? Are you up to it?” This in and of itself could be meant in a non-sexual way, but Lamis’ delivery was dripping with a sexual implication. When Wassim brought the bolt, Lamis said to Iman, “Oh look how big Wassim’s bolt is!” Iman replied, “Aren’t you married yet, Wassim?” The women cackled together, as Wassim retreated, blushing, to the shelves.

Judging from Wassim’s smile and his flushed face, this tactic is also a way to reward men, to keep them coming back for more (and in the process get the bolts delivered on time), by playing into and complementing them on their

supposed virility. This strategy reinforces Tunisian notions of gender, where men and women's only way of communicating with one another is sexual. This interaction also lends to the justification for the segregation of women from men. While women can certainly manipulate men, ultimately this is an exchange where women are compelled to interact sexually with men to get them to do their job. That is, when women refuse to engage sexually, men often ignored their requests. Thus women are coerced into symbolic sexual exchanges.

Some female workers also employed other forms of sexual display in order to attain an advantage at work. This often involved women objectifying themselves, as in a common practice done by women who are sexually active before marriage. Many of these instances involved provocative bodily postures on the factory floor.

Wafa and Mahera have hidden a bottle of Coca Cola under their table, which is against the rules. To sneak a drink, they bend over with their behinds toward Bechir's office window and take sips, giggling conspiratorially. They are in a sexually provocative posture with their posteriors in the full view of whoever is in the office, Bechir, and sometimes the European owners.

This act represents rebellion and complicity with patriarchal and capitalist domination. Since drinks and food are not allowed on the factory floor, women try to find creative ways to get liquids, which they need during the long hours spent on their feet, and in constant motion. Especially in the hottest months of the year, to work for six hours with no liquids may lead to serious dehydration. The

policy of no drinks was set by Bechir himself. Knowing that women will inevitably violate this no-drinks policy gives him an opportunity to discipline, threaten, and replace women workers when he wants. At the same time, Bechir and the Chebs (who are more than happy to view women's posteriors) can objectify women in this position; in doing so they can reify an opinion of the women as promiscuous.

Another example of provocative body postures was employed by women in a more general way, and not to mask an illicit behavior, like drinking soda on the job. Women had to climb up on the cutting tables frequently in order to pin patterns at the center of large pieces of fabric, and also to cut intricate parts of patterns on large pieces. These tables were high, approximately five feet high. When women had to climb up, they would usually do so seriously, one leg up at a time, and then crouch over the pattern to work. When women with honorable reputations did so, they were serious and kept their eyes lowered. However, binat who expressed themselves in more sexual ways would posture themselves on hands and knees, so that their buttocks were in full view of any men. The unusualness of this would throw men off. Bechir, who just happened to be on the factory floor when Duha struck this pose, ran into a table. Chebs would forget what they were supposed to be doing. Saddam, when he saw a binat in this position, her behind facing his desk, walked out onto the loading dock and smoked. The Duha's laughter while she was in this position, was an indication that sexual displays like this, were also indirect forms of asserting power. In a society where women would never be seen by men on their hands and knees,

being in that position at work (as part of completing a work task) it was powerful to disarm men.

Relationships between men and women of Z-Textiles have several dynamics. Contextualizing sexual relationships outside marriage, it is necessary to understand the constraints placed on these in Tunisia. According to Tunisian law, sex outside marriage is illegal. While this is extremely rare, men and women have been jailed for sex outside marriage. Still rare but more often, young men who sleep with a romantic interest are forced via family law to marry the girl. He may refuse, and spend time in jail rather than drag his family name through the mud (the expression is the same in Arabic as it is in English) by marrying a less than virginal girl. Again, this is rare, but fits into the cultural stories that are told and re-told.

In Tunisia, romantic relationships before or outside marriage must be clandestine, and the factory can be a place where young adults can approach one another without kin around to chaperone or regulate flirtation. The *chebs* and the non-virginal *binat* engaged in serial relationships; much of the set-up for clandestine sexual activity could happen on the factory floor. However, men who are “Don Juans,” as Tunisians jokingly call sexually promiscuous Chebs, gain status as virile and masculine, but *binat* who lose their virginity lose status, and romantic exchanges are fraught with problems for *binat*. Hamedi was the factory’s ultimate Don Juan; he had serial relationships with more than ten of the *binat* (that I knew of). Chedli was less popular, but had dated at least two girls that I know of. Wassim and Taib had had relationships with five each, that I

knew of. Part of the game the *chebs* played involved getting girls to think that they were in love with them, and that they were serious about them. That is, the *chebs* would attempt to manipulate girls' feelings so that they would engage in sex. When, over time, girls discovered that a *cheb* was not going to ask her father for her hand in marriage, she would often break off the sexual relationship. But her reputation was permanently damaged while his increased. The tension between them at work could escalate into conflicts.

The two *binat*, Abir and Malika, told the *chebs* that they needed another spool of fabric to be carried to their table over an hour ago. They are being ignored, probably because Abir recently broke off a relationship with Hamedi, who everyone calls "the Don Juan of the Factory." Hamedi then gossiped about Abir's activities with him. The two *binat* discuss getting the bolt themselves from the shelving.

To get to the right spool is an athletic task: other bolts must be wrestled out of the way without injury. While part of the *chebs*' job is to order the spools so that they can be reached depending on the order in which they will be used, sometimes the bolts are on a high shelf so that the retriever must climb up the shelves. Not only is retrieving bolts time-consuming, it can cause injury.<sup>25</sup>

*M'raa* who were pregnant had to play on their pregnancies to get the *chebs* to bring them bolts. Since married women could use their status as mothers to engender *chebs*' sense of moral obligation, *m'raa* often exploited real or

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<sup>25</sup>On occasion, I confronted Hamedi and Schedli myself, telling them that their help was needed. At first, my words propelled the *chebs* to go help the women, but eventually this wore off and I was ignored (with eye-rolling) like the other women workers.

possible pregnancies. Since pregnant women are revered in Tunisia, because they are believed to be closest to moral purity, this strategy often worked. However, as I shall discuss later in this chapter, this same moral obligation could not be exploited between women and management.

Daliyah, an m'raa in her early thirties, calls out to Taib as he passes, "Ya Taib!" He approaches her, watching her rub her abdomen. She is slender, without any physical sign of being pregnant. She says, "Could you carry a bolt of fabric for me? In my condition, I am afraid to do it myself." Her teammate Aziza continued running the saw as if she could not hear the conversation. Taib nodded, and said, "Aye, am-ti," an colloquial expression meaning, "Yes, Auntie." He strode seriously off into the shelves and returned promptly with the bolt. Aziza stayed away so that she would not be expected to carry the bolt.

Daliyah did not *say* she was pregnant, but implied it. In this way, women cannot be liars and men cannot say for certain if a woman is or is not pregnant. This opens more opportunities for a possibility of pregnancy, which is an opportunity for women to get Chebs to do their jobs in a timely manner. Also important is that in this possibility of pregnancy, female and male workers could forge an imagined kinship implying a moral relationship between male kinsmen and women that was largely lacking in Z-Textiles.

In instances where a woman's abdomen is noticeably swollen with a pregnancy, *chebs'* sense of moral obligation heightens, and this gives women an important if temporary leverage. While much of the exchange between men and



women of the factory was full of sexual innuendo, the kinds of exchanges associated with immoral interactions outside of kinship, a pregnancy changed the tenor of *chebs*' interactions toward *m'raa*. Women who had carried a pregnancy while at work, who took time off for birth, and then came back to the factory also carried a higher status with the *chebs*. Even when they were almost the same age as the *chebs*, *chebs* would call them mother or aunt. Motherhood could be asserted by women as a way to achieve purity and power (e.g., Abu Zahra 1970).

Earning wages can be a source of liberation for women workers. For *binat*, this is often the first time in their lives that they do not have to ask a father or brother for money, which means being interrogated about how it will be spent, and an increasing feeling of owing male kin. The problem with this is that girls described feeling trapped by indebtedness to male kin who support them. An *m'raa*, *Dunia*, described how she felt obliged to say yes to an arranged marriage to a cousin she did not like. When she told her father and brothers that she did not accept the arrangement, they admonished her for being “selfish.”

“My father would not talk to me for days, and my brothers would berate me and smack me constantly for taking their money and then acting spoiled when they found the ‘perfect’ guy for me... After several months of being treated in this way, I could not take the guilt anymore, and I accepted the arrangement. I wish I had had my job at Z-Textiles then, so they could not have bullied me. Now I am stuck married to this jerk.”

For *Dunia*, she imagined that having been able to support herself would have enabled her to choose her husband for herself. This is exactly what *Inas* did.

She was able to amass her own dowry from her wages before receiving proposals. Then, she was able to turn down several relatives without recourse from her family. Dunia speaks glowingly of her husband. “We met at a café, and we exchanged numbers. We called and texted each other constantly on our phones. We fell in love over the phone (laughing). What could his parents do? My dowry was ready for them!”

Women’s dowry, like men’s bride wealth, requires large sums and expensive commodities in Tunisia. While officially the groom gives one dinar to the bride during the engagement, unofficially, the price of marriage includes houses and cars, livestock, jewelry, appliances and other expensive items. Many *binat* in the factory are able save their wages as an investment in a dowry. This also gives some women the freedom to refuse men they do not like. However, the results are not always so happy.

Since many of the factory workers are living in poverty, in a large family and in a cramped apartment, daughters may be pressured into getting married earlier than they would otherwise do because they have the money for a dowry. This was the case of Ibtihaj. When Ibtihaj came to my apartment to be interviewed, she came with her mother and her youngest sibling, a three year old little boy. Ibtihaj’s mother explained how she had had six daughters and then *finally* got a son. Her mother had saved all her wages and she already had enough to get married to a relative in his forties. Ibtihaj was very quiet during her interview, while her mother explained that they could not afford to keep all their daughters at home, but that Ibtihaj was willing to get married to help her family,

who would receive the dowry. Ibtihaj was expressionless as her mother spoke. Kalthoum ended up talking with the mother for most of the interview.

Women could also use their wages to bolster their social status. *Binat* could get a match with a man from a wealthier family if she had a sizable dowry. In this way, women could ascend the class ladder. There were benefits and drawbacks for women in this situation. While some women benefitted from this ascendance, there were women who were pushed to marry a man from a wealthier family because of the bride wealth that would come with the exchange, and because the family needed the resources. In this way a daughter could be pressured to make a sacrifice for her whole family by making an affinal connection with a family that would be able to provide access to a variety of resources. There is a political economy of marrying up, since in Tunisia, people rely on nepotism and other connections to obtain jobs. A girl from an unconnected family can, through her marriage, build a bridge for her extended family toward connections that can open up job possibilities for her relatives. Several *binat* in the factory were heading toward such unions.

Zuhur, from a family with rural roots living in a three room apartment with her parents, two sisters, and one brother, was heading toward such a union. She was the typically beautiful Tunisian girl, with large black eyes, sloping nose and full lips. She explained how her engagement had begun. One evening when she was strolling the corniche with her mother and sisters, an *m'raa* in a fancy silk *hijab* got out of a white BMW and approached her mother. She asked her mother if she was engaged yet. When the mother said no, the lady gave her a kiss on both

cheeks and exchanged phone numbers with her mother. She said she had a handsome son with a good job who was looking for a wife. This is not a typical beginning to an engagement in Tunisia; I was told by several Tunisians that this sounds like something that would happen in the Middle East, not Tunisia. My informants told me it must be because of Zuhur's beauty, that her groom was in the car and saw her on the corniche and asked his mother to ask about her. It is perhaps because of the obvious social class disparities that such a beginning was acceptable to Zuhur's mother. Zuhur and her mother and sisters had seen the m'raa get out of a BMW. Such a car is a sign of affluence in Tunisia (as it is in the USA).

When the negotiations between the two families began in the months leading up to the *khoutouba* (engagement), the groom's family asserted that they did not want a long engagement, a polite way to query if the bride's family had the dowry ready. Zuhur had saved most of her wages. She had worked in Z-Textiles from 18 to 22, so there was enough for a decent dowry. Plans moved forward quickly as the families celebrated the *Khoutouba*. Zuhur's parents went into debt to all their kin to rent a banquet hall and a band. It is customary for the bride's family to pay for the engagement party and the husband's to pay for the wedding.

All this was relatively easy, as wedding negotiations go. The difficult part for Zuhur was accepting an unattractive, divorced man to be her husband. She was not forced to accept the proposal, but she was certainly compelled. Like many girls in a similar situation, to say no to the proposal was to deny her whole

family opportunities for connections and possibilities for advancement. Since nepotism is normative in Tunisia (and especially under Ben Ali's regime), people without "connections" are often desperate. For example, Zuhur's marriage opened the door for her brother to be offered a job through his new kinship with the groom and his brothers. Zuhur might be able to find matches for her sisters among her husband's relatives. There would be gifts, possibly even a car for her parents. Zuhur's sacrifice seemed small to her family compared to what she could provide for them.

Beyond Zuhur's lack of attraction for her groom, there are other downsides. Now her family would be under pressure to keep up with the quality of gifts in the elaborate exchanges which mark a variety of Tunisian social occasions. Since Zuhur had been given Givenchy perfume as a gift from her mother in law (real perfume, not eau de toilette), this obliged Zuhur's relatives to reciprocate at future weddings with Givenchy or better. To give lower quality perfume or any eau de toilette would be to lose face. This would mean her family would have to save and borrow more from their kin to afford such gifts. The more indebted they become to kin, the more they will be beholden to them when they make requests.

There is also the fear that the bride will be abused in such situations. As Hoodfar (1997) found among her working class Egyptian participants, their families sometimes avoided marrying up the social ladder because of the fear that their daughter would be treated as a servant by the first wife and mother in law, and/or as a sexual plaything by her husband. This is perhaps a more common

concern in Egypt because polygyny is legal. Indeed, there is a trope in Egyptian culture: the young and beautiful, but poor, girl becomes a second or third wife to a middle aged man who is looking for sexual gratification. His first wife would force the poor girl to do all the housework and she and the mother in law might abuse the new bride. In Tunisia, perhaps this fear is allayed since monogamy is the only legal option. Within marriages, there is evidence that women who work in waged labor can make more demands toward equality with their husbands.

While I suspected that m'raa would assert more power in their marriages because of having their own wages, I found little evidence of this. Based on the research of Lamphere (1993), I thought it might be the case that as women earned wages, they could expect at least some help around the house and that they could make more decisions for their families. But many m'raa described their husbands' jealousy about their wives' work. Several m'raa who quit while I was in the factory said that they could no longer withstand their husbands' suspicions about their working around strange men. The idea that other men would have the ability to look at their wives' bodies, or talk to them, was a major point of conflict. One woman said that her husband would ask her when she came home from work if she had let any men stare at her while she worked. "How would I know if they were staring? Do I have time to look?" she had said to him, exasperated.

Other women said that their husbands could not stand their wives working in the EPZ, when the word on the street was that the women in the EPZ were promiscuous. Particularly vicious and damaging rumors circulated through

Bizerte's cafes that some women workers in the EPZ were having sex with the European owners. This scenario is reviled, a reminder of the French colonials' sexual predation of Maghreb women (Alloula 1987). I never heard or saw anything about factory workers having relations with the owners. Although it is certainly possible, it seems more like the kind of misogynistic slander that working women must endure.

While some women found that they could assert themselves through factory work, many others found that the stress of working in the EPZ was debilitating. Nervous breakdowns were common, and many women who quit because they felt that they could not take the pressure were also ashamed because they had failed to handle the pressure. In interviews with several women who quit, tears were shed because they felt like failures. Shihan, an m'raa with two sons and a husband who worked in construction, felt that she let the whole family down when she quit. She said the pace of work, and having to rely on the chebs to bring fabric, made her enraged. "Every day in the factory there was humiliation," she said. Shihan said she was demoralized and had to see a psychiatrist to get antidepressants. This is no small thing in Tunisia where there is a social stigma on mental illness. Once she started to take them, "I was not willing to put up with the... not the work itself but what I lost of myself. But I know that it was selfish to quit." When I asked what she meant by herself, she said she felt, "I was losing my dignity. That's how they get the women to work harder. They break them down."

Shihan's observations seemed harsh, yet also the kind of harshness of someone who has had to think critically about what her work meant. What her case presents is evidence that women's experiences as EPZ laborers vary. The women who stay on at work may be those who have the family support or personal fortitude to do so. There may be other lessons learned about how women may gain more sense of power by maintaining a factory job or quitting it.

Men laborers roam the factory but have certain jurisdictions that are their territory. The main areas are the fabric shelves located at the far end of the factory floor, where inventory must be taken and spools of fabric lifted up or down from the shelves. The fabric shelves are furthest from Bechir's two-way glass windows. The loading dock is also where men always are, and women hardly ever venture. The loading dock has barn-like doors that are almost always kept wide open, and it is where the young Hamedi and Schedli stand or squat, waiting for the big rigs to arrive from the port, which infuriates Madame Hayatt. Her rage, though, is muted. She mostly scowled at them, and occasionally made a sarcastic remark, but the hierarchy of the factory like that of Tunisian society prevented her from being able to directly boss men.

While the men have their territories, they find many reasons to be in areas where women work. Chebs must enter women's territory when they must deliver the fabric bolts. Chebs also cross the women's area to get to the one bathroom (which has one stall for women and one for men and a sink in the middle).

Saddam, the rajul, must often skirt the edge of the cutting tables on his way to the



office with data on a clip board, but he hardly ever even acknowledges the women workers.

Bechir frequently walks every part of the factory, with central command being his office, with the power to watch workers who cannot see him. Bechir moves through the women's areas for several reasons, because he wants to be sure the workers know he is present, perhaps, or when Hayatt tells him that a worker is misbehaving or underperforming. He walks the periphery of the women's area as he frequents the loading dock for cigarettes and camaraderie with Saddam, the chebs, and any visiting delivery men.

The European factory owners have access to the whole of the factory, but they are mostly absent. Most often, they announce via phone (speaking in French to Sylvie) that they will arrive at a certain time during a given week. When they do visit, they enter the factory, smile and wave at the female laborers as if to their fans, speed walk through the factory, making a perfunctory lap, and head back into Bechir's office. They could be doing any number of things in the office, including looking at the workers through the two-way glass.

Chebs must deliver the spools of fabric to the women's tables, which means that several women may call out requests for a new spool at a time, and they usually start to call for another spool when there is still some left, in anticipation that Hamedi and Schedli may not honor their request quickly. Hamedi and Schedli are supposed to assess the spools at the tables to gauge who will need a spool the earliest. However, they may not do this. They sometimes ignore women who ask in an unpleasant or "bossy" way, and also binat who have

snubbed them or who they disrespect. They may bring bolts in a more timely manner to the women who ask for them nicely, or binat who flirt with them in a variety of ways. If Saddam or Bechir caught them playing favorites, he would reprimand them, so much of this is subtle or covert.

The two Chebs who were slightly older, Wassim (engaged) and Taib (unengaged), sometimes unloaded trucks and carry fabrics, but spend more time with clip boards, sitting on folding chairs in the fabric shelves taking inventory, or driving the loader. Wassim is popular with the binat, and several of them find reasons to approach him. Saddam, a *rajul*, middle aged, married, a father, acts as a quasi- manager, by virtue of age and experience at the job, but does not do heavy lifting. He has a chair at Madame Hayatt's station and fills out much of the paperwork. Saddam, like all the men except the Europeans, smokes and socializes on the loading dock. Officially, Bechir manages all the men directly and there is no internal distinction. However, Saddam is given the respect that middle-aged men receive in Tunisia. As the longest-working employee, and the eldest, acts like a father to the Chebs, and even to Bechir, who is in his early thirties.

Because there are upwards of four shipments of new fabric spools each day, there is frequently a mountainous pile of fabrics lying close to the managers' processing area, blocking the way to the tables. These five-foot spools of fabric, between three and six feet thick, are processed by the senior man, Saddam, who must enter a confirmation count into a log, then carried by the Chebs to the fabric shelves, which are already bowed under the weight of spools. Sometimes, the

fabric never makes it to a shelf, but is placed directly onto the roller at the end of a cutting table. This is especially common when there is a rush order. Often the workers must climb up over the mountain of unprocessed fabric to get between areas. Madame Hayatt curses and scowls at these unruly piles, but it is the men's jurisdiction, and she does nothing more than suck her teeth and scowl that her underlings must struggle over the unstable spools of fabric.

Male laborers at Z-textiles do not spend more than three hours at a time on their feet; they drive the fabric loaders, and often lean, sit, or squat to do inventory. While women laborers' work is a continuous flow, where they are constantly behind on tasks, men's is patterned in spurts of activity followed by pauses (waiting for trucks to arrive) spent smoking on the loading dock, or in the halls of fabric shelves. Inequalities in leisure time in the factory reflect gender in Tunisian society, but also reflect capitalist discipline in export processing zones. The disciplines of capitalism means that the women are the major source of the extraction of surplus value, the focus of exploitative practice. Men's labor in the factory, while certainly exploitative, is all in support of the primary laborers. That the strictest rules of work procedures, of near constant states of motion without breaks are imposed on the women laborers reflects this and is bolstered by the extant patriarchal system where a woman's work is never done. Further, this moral system of women's labor encourages women to gain status by being self-abnegating, virtuously exhausted mothers and wives.

Bechir's work and the European owners' work is rarely physical. It is the psychological threat that Bechir, who cannot be seen through the glass, will have

reason to confront or fire a worker that he plays on. It is his invisible presence that exerts chronic discipline on the workers. This is punctuated by his emergence through the mirrored door onto the floor, always in the latest sportswear from Italy (Dolce and Gabbana sun glasses on head) walking his effete gait that seemed to be the outcome of the tightness of his designer jeans. The threat that he might see them engage in an activity which is against the rules is more warped because the rules are so unreasonable that most all the workers feel compelled to violate them. Since most workers hide drinks on the floor because they cannot make it through the shifts without liquids, they all feel more anxious to stay on task since Bechir could catch any of them stealing a sip.

In Tunisian society, agricultural workers and proletarianized men often work in spurts of grueling work activity, punctuated by breaks. In the home, as I shall discuss in the second section of this chapter, women are responsible for all labor, which reflects several aspects of Tunisian culture. Many women disclosed in conversations, “he (the husband/father) sits like a Bey (Ottoman king) while I do everything!”

Men’s pay being slightly more than women’s places men and women in a familiar relationship of moral obligations found in Tunisian kinship culture. Men get paid more because their work is more grueling, and because it requires heavy lifting. I often heard Tunisians call women’s work “light” which seemed astounding to me. It appeared to me as if Tunisian women were always working, at home and at “work.”

The cheffa, Madame Hayatt, is a familiar if feared character of female authority and status in Tunisia. She is over forty, and married with children. She performs the role of the mother-in-law to the women laborers. Indeed, it was not the Europeans who mandated that there be a manager for women. Rather, Bechir explained to me that “Madame Hayatt was my invention.” Hayatt had started as a fabric cutter and Bechir had chosen to promote her, he explained, “...to make the ladies more comfortable at work.” That is, the mother-in-law is the boss of junior women in kinship units; it would be her, and not her son who would oversee daughters in law. The mother-in-law is supposed to be bossy and dictatorial, and Hayatt fits this role. There was also a system in colonial Tunisia where village girls in their teens would be tutored in domestic duties, textile weaving, how to be a proper servant to Beys or French colonials, and to a husband, by a senior lady of the community. This role is romanticized in Tunisian historical soap operas, which conflate the tough yet feminine middle aged lady who socializes younger women into their gendered, classed, and colonized selves. While Bechir gives himself credit for creating Madame Hayatt as the Boss Lady of Z-textiles, she was around long before him.

However, the notion that culture transposes itself neatly across labor relationships begs criticism. I do not make an argument here that Tunisian culture is unaltered by its position in the global economy. Tunisian culture, a problematically monolithic category, is not *prêt à porter*. That is, Madame Hayatt is also very different from the traditional boss lady/mother-in-law. She is a working woman who herself works under the discipline of a globalized

capitalism. As the primary wage earner in her own house, Madame Hayatt is able to assert some influence in her marriage at the same time she is under the pressure of absentee European bosses and a very present (if invisible) Bechir. Hayatt's husband stays home with the children, and does most of the housework. She discusses this at work, with measured pride, and participates in the ridicule of others who demean her and her husband's relationship. While Hayatt exerts control over the women laborers, she has no authority over male workers. This scene illustrates the conflicts between Hayatt and the *chebs*:

Hamedi and Schedli squat against the dock smoking and fanning themselves with scraps of vinyl folded into accordion fans by the two *binat* with whom they have been flirting. Madame Hayatt strides by, clip board tucked under her arm and an envelope full of patterns that just arrived by air courier in her hand. Hayatt slows at the sight of the idle *chebs*. Referring to their fans, she asks them if they are in a wedding. This is a dig at their masculinity, as it is the bride and her entourage of female relatives and friends who fan themselves with white lacey fans during wedding rituals. Schedli fans himself more avidly, with his pinky up, and says in a high-pitched feminine voice, "Yes, where is my groom."

Hamedi laughs and smiles femininely, crosses his eyes, and does a *uluulu* (the vocalization Arab women make at celebrations). Hyatt scowls at the performance, and asks when the next shipment is scheduled to come in. Schedli flips his palm at her and says, "Insh' Allah, Cheffa, it will come any minute." Hayatt strides away from them and says over her shoulder, "Yes, InSh'Allah, I

heard that half an hour ago.” Hamedi and Schedli roll their eyes, and laugh. Hamedi says to Schedli, “She’s crazy.” Scandar takes a drag off his cigarette and says, “No wonder her husband stays home all day.” The two chebs then roll their eyes and curse, “Deen zip zipee,” and stand up and go into the factory and do inventory.

Hayatt walks to the front of the factory floor and begins to yell at Duha and Adila. Hayatt is flushed and she is sweating through her *hijab*; the blue polyester sticks to her temples. While Hayatt reprimands the girls, the whole floor is watching and listening, but never stops working. In her fist, Hyatt grasps a set of pattern dimensions on an order sheet. “Did you read the dimensions,” she asks. “Do you know how to read? Do you know how much fabric you’ve wasted with your mistake? Perhaps Bechir would like to know he hired illiterates, when so many smart girls wait to replace you?” The girls do not even attempt to answer Madame Hyatt. They stare at the floor, and Duha wipes a tear before it has a chance to run down her cheek. She tells them the mistake will come out of their paycheck, then throws down the plans telling them to start over, and stalks away still yelling that she does not understand, and that, “you girls must have a monkey smoking a water pipe in your brains!”

Duha and Adila immediately start over again. Eyes cast downward and flushed, they walk together to the bolt shelves to lift and carry the bolt. They do not call out to the chebs to help them. They lift the bolt by the metal ends, carrying it, and struggle to place it on the wheel. Then they take two corners and pull the fabric down the line, walking back and forth six times, carefully laying

down each layer. They place the patterns over the fabric, pull down their electric cutters from the grid, and begin cutting.

While the women have gone back to work, some chebs who were looking on from the inventory area are laughing. At the left-hand table, Jamilla, a married, divorced, and now engaged mother, watched Hayatt's attack on Duha and Adila from her work area. Jamilla has a reputation for speaking the truth when others stay quiet. Women on surrounding tables watch Jamilla as they work, sneaking glances toward her as they run the machines, as if waiting to see if she will make a scene. Hayatt strides towards Jamilla and her work partner Mariam. Hayatt snaps at Jamilla and Mariam to hurry up or she will dock their pay, too. Jamilla snarls, "How can we hurry up any more in this Hell? The chebs fan themselves like they are at a wedding and we, we get told to go faster?" Hayatt tells Jamilla to, "Mind your own business," and not to worry so much about other people's work. Jamilla retorts that she should save some of her anger for the men rather than dumping it all on the women. Then she yells, "We will all be crazy from this heat!" Schedli, who has been watching the scene, giggles and shakes his head at Hamedi. Hyatt scowls at him. He looks down still giggling. Hamedi ululus at Hayatt. Schedli cracks up.

Jamilla stood alone in her choice that afternoon to vocalize the gender disparities of the factory to her supervisor. While her work partner Mariam told her as they resumed work that she was right to say something, and Duha and Adila smiled and blew kisses to Jamilla once Hyatt had walked into the office, later that afternoon gossip about Jamilla was buzzing. While most women



complained in interviews that it was unfair for women to make less money and work harder than the men, most women ruled against Jamilla, calling her unwise to risk her job to confront Madame Hayatt, who was just doing her job, anyway.

After the incident, two virginal binat, Husna and Daniyah, joked that they were sorry for Jamilla's fiancé, and then the story of Jamilla's two previous divorces were gossiped. Some girls talked about Jamilla's toughness, and that she had married and divorced the same man twice, and that now she was engaged to a new man, "God Help Him!" they laughed. Yet Jamilla's rage was also focused on a woman, Hayatt, and never at Bechir, the ultimate authority. While women gossiped about each other, they never complained that Bechir did not concern himself with making sure that work was shared equally between women and men, much less that workers should be paid according to their labor without demeaning women's jobs. Women often accept a social system that makes women responsible for most of the work; it is hegemonic. However, they also spend time criticizing men's laziness, which suggests that doxa does not capture what is happening here. But hegemony does in that there is not a total absence of critique. Rather, women complain about their unfair exploitation in a way that enforces their role as virtuous martyrs (good workers), and they make quips about the laziness of the chebs. Theirs is not a complete acquiescence to domination.

Hayatt's treatment of Hamedi and Schedli while they were fanning themselves on the loading dock indicates that, despite her seniority, gender ideology that women must never directly confront men compelled her to make only snide comments about their laziness. That she was enraged at their idleness

suggests that she acknowledged that it was unfair for the *chebs* to get free time when the women do not, yet, she took out her anger on the *binat*. She did exact some violence on the *chebs*, though, by challenging their masculinity. Hayatt attempted to put them in their place and reinforced sexism. She could not confront the men directly because she is literally not the boss of them in the factory hierarchy and never could be the boss of them in Tunisian culture. It is taboo for women to openly boss men; Hayatt then employed the acceptable tactic of passive aggressive remarks to the men. Passive aggression is a common strategy among oppressed groups, who cannot openly assert power. A normative function of power from a Foucaultian perspective is that the powerless seek power by aiding in the oppression of other subjugated people, one's own group. In this part of Foucault's thesis, I agree.

However, Foucault's ultimate conclusion is that in this way the powerless gain power, a circuitousness which ultimately fastens the opaque veil more tightly over the powerful, rather than lifting it. Rather than gaining power by engaging in power plays over other oppressed group members, women invert power and thus reify their own subjugation.

It is more important to understand how power is challenged and how such attempts are undermined. Attempts to challenge power disparities, as raised by Jamilla, who confronted Hayatt in order to consider the implications of her turning her frustrations onto women were not successful because of the ideological beliefs about gender, and the actual factory hierarchy. Foucault's assertions do not play out in this scene. Jamilla did not gain any power by

confronting Hayatt. Rather, both women entrenched themselves into the class system. Bechir was not confronted, much less the European owners. In Jamilla's bid for power, the factory owners edify their power and they did not even have to be present to do so, because management and workers did it for them.

In the factory hierarchy, women are never supervisors over men, but men are supervisors over women. The men are all directly supervised by Beshir. In the gendered hierarchy of the workplace, like other social realms in Tunisia, women are not to be the bosses of men. However, Hayatt's snipe on their masculinity did prompt the men to get back to work, but not without Hyatt being the subject of gendered insults that imply that she is unfeminine, and that she has emasculated her husband.

Perhaps to remove the sting of gossipers, Hayatt is open, talks about her husband who stays home with their children. When describing her husband, Hyatt has even implied that he is becoming feminine. At lunch time, the women all sit on the floor in a large circle, taking advantage of any piles of fabric to cushion against the cement floor. Hayatt sometimes makes fun of her husband. Lifting her pinky fingers and making a feminine hand roll, she described her husband: "He even cooks well," at which point the other women collapse into peals of laughter. However, when Hayatt comes to my apartment to do an interview, her attitude and thoughtfulness about her role are markedly different.

Hayatt came to my apartment to do an interview in the early afternoon, and it is nearly eight PM when she leaves. Sitting on one of our Tunisian benches, by the window which faces the back patio and overlooks a collapsed

French barn that has been there since before independence, she talks about her life, and the meaning of it, in terms of her career and her children, and her husband.

She talks of her happiness when Bechir chose to promote her, as opposed to letting go of most other women, normal around their fortieth birthdays. She says that she has always had a forceful personality, and that her mother encouraged her to be more than, “just a housewife.” “My mother’s generation of women was confined to the home,” Hayatt said. “But we women of this generation, if we are tough we can be successful.” I ask her why so few women are in the workforce and why those who are, are likely to work in menial positions. Hayatt gazed out the window for a moment, before answering. “It is women themselves. They do not have the confidence to be tough at work.” She paused then, and started to tear up. “We are so overburdened. We have too many things to do to be successful. I even feel overburdened even though I am lucky to have a stay-at-home husband.”

It is important to consider the incidents where Bechir, the high manager, confronted women workers. When Bechir would confront women who were resting for even a few moments or asking to go to the bathroom, no woman came forward to confront him, although by the incensed facial expressions of surrounding women, it seemed obvious that they were thinking that they would like to confront him. For example, women who dared to ask for breaks, even when pregnant, were subject to an aggressive retort from Bechir, the kind that would not happen if they were in a domestic situation and she were a family

member doing women's work on a farm, or weaving in a home. This is not to romanticize some imagined agrarian functionalism, or women's realm "behind closed doors" but to assert that the brutalities of agrarian labor or domestic textiles were mitigated by male family members' moral obligations toward women. Intense moral obligation male kin feel towards women is when they are pregnant. In Tunisia, many Tunisians told me, a pregnant woman is "almost God." Many Tunisians cite a verse from the Qu'ran which states that heaven is under the mother's feet. Women in the domestic sphere, or working for and with male kin could pace production if they were pregnant, or thought they might be pregnant.

Factory production in the EPZ is markedly different from the work environment of traditional Tunisia. There is not a private or segregated world of women's work, one's character and creativity must be muted, and the intimacy of women kin who would work together is attenuated, and managers and owners are not bound by moral obligations. M'raa attempted to pace production by trying to engender moral obligation that a mother in law or husband might feel in a Tunisian family. These were exerted on both Hayatt and Bechir, but this were mostly ineffective. I observed m'raa trying a variety of strategies to get Hayatt or Bechir to ease their workload because of a visible pregnancy or a suggested possibility of a pregnancy. Of the two examples from my notes, the first involved an m'raa who was not visibly pregnant, and the second who was in her second trimester.

Women and men are managed differently at Z-textiles, evidenced in the management role of the boss lady, Hayatt, and the informal father figure Saddam, and in Bechir's role toward both genders. Women are subject to micro management, and constant criticism, not just from Hayatt, or Bechir, but from one another. Hayatt is constantly walking the floor of the factory, checking her clipboard against what she sees each team doing. She often asks critical questions that exert pressure on the women to speed up. For example, If she walks by and sees that the same spool of fabric still at a team's table, she will stop and ask why they haven't yet finished. If the women try to answer why, she tisks them and says she does not want to hear their excuses. If they say nothing, she snaps at them to, "answer my question." Their only choice is to go faster. The women must also ask permission of Hayatt to go to the bathroom, and she usually has something to say about that too, like, "Can't you control yourself?" The women are also reminded by Hayatt and Bechir that they are replaceable. Even their facial expressions must be controlled, as they may be threatened if they scowl or roll their eyes.

Bechir emerges from his office to confront women workers' behavior, but usually only after Madame Hayatt has reported to him a behavioral or poor work performance issue. However, there are instances where he emerges having caught women doing something against the rules that he must have seen through his glass wall. This only has to happen occasionally to give the message that women are being constantly watched. Since men are out of the field of vision of Bechir's office windows, they are outside of this form of psychological control.

While I observed many instances of him confronting women workers, I have few instances in my field notes of his emerging to criticize men's work. This can also be explained by the fact that men workers are not in easy view, not directly on the other side of the glass, but also because men are viewed as in need of personal autonomy and integrity to be properly masculine. Bechir manages the men through conviviality. That is, he takes cigarette breaks with the men, and spends time joking and engaging in a sort of ritualized cursing that men engage in, where they complain about their lives by comparing some unfavorable circumstance to their penises, saying, "deen zip-zipee," in repetition. By validating shared masculinity in these "humor orgies" and curse sessions, the workers could edify male supremacy, while Bechir could manipulate the male workers' sentiments toward Bechir as just one of them. At the same time, he also could emphasize his role as also a worker for the Europeans, so really just a worker himself.

A common women's saying in Tunisia is that, *men are always looking for women*. This was in one sense a fittingly stereotypical description of Mediterranean men. More than production of textiles goes on in Z-textiles, and the activities of the *chebs* were often focused on *binat*. The *chebs* often pace the factory from one end to the other, doing a task like delivering a fabric spool but making detours past the tables of women whose attentions they seek, or who with whom they are in relationships, or both (in line with the participant's view of men). These motives were not all sexual or romantic. The work is inhumanly tedious, repetitive, and finding a reason to prowl around means getting to escape

from the monotony. A chance to interact with women is a great diversion. While I found it impossible to build rapport with the *chebs*, I did observe them at work. They have a range of strategies for getting girls' attention, ranging from innocuous to more forward form of flirtation, which may have aggressive undertones.

For a woman to be alone from her female relatives, and to be away from the watchful, albeit threatening eyes of male relatives, is to be in jeopardy. The jeopardy is not just that she might forget herself and her chastity, that she might reinterpret her vulnerability as agency. She might decide to go to a cheb's apartment on one of those days when she is released from work early by Bechir because orders were low. She might be taken advantage of by men who are not relatives and do not have her best interest at heart, but even worse, she might take advantage of an unmonitored hour to pursue her own pleasure.

In the factory, women have few moments alone or unsupervised. From the moment they arrive in the morning to when they finish at night, they are supervised. The married women usually are dropped off by husbands, on the back of a moped, or, if they are lucky, from a car. These married women did not pursue sexual freedoms, other than sanctioned sexual ridicule toward the chebs.

Binat walk together to the factory from their neighborhoods, since most live in the newly-built cramped apartment blocks on the West side of Bizerte. Those coming from the proletarian neighborhoods in East Bizerte share taxis, six to a back seat. No women ever arrived at the EPZ gate alone. The binat enter the gates in groups, arms linked, jauntily singing Egyptian pop songs, and calling out



greetings to the guard at the gate. That is, they seemed to be looking forward to being there, and as if work was a break from their outside lives.

Women avoided going anywhere in the factory without other women. The bathroom, which was in the far left corner, was one exception in that women would not be allowed to go with other girls on a bathroom break because that would mean two workers missing work instead on one. Chebs would often make way for the bathroom when they saw a woman heading in that direction and try to intercept her before she reached the door. The following passage from my field notes is happened between two workers in their mid-twenties.

Leila had been making eyes at Wassim for some time. She asked Hayatt for a break and sauntered across the factory floor, going out of her way to pass by the loading dock, where Wassim was smoking. He made eye contact with her, and handed his cigarette to Chedli. He walked across the factory floor toward the bathroom, and crossed her path. As he got next to her, he told her she was a rose blossoming in his heart. She smiled and she entered the women's bathroom. Wassim did not enter the men's bathroom, but walked to the shelves, grinning.

These kinds of flirtations are common between binat and the chebs, and most do not lead to romantic or sexual relationships. What they do is keep allow girls to keep chebs interested, hopeful that she might pursue a romantic relationship with him.

While Leila and Wassim were direct in their flirtations, many of the chebs' syrupy love poems are less direct. And the indirectness of such poems is what makes them important. As I discuss in the next chapter, in the street, the

poems are said out into the air, to no one in particular, but toward groups of *binat* as they pass. The same strategy is used by *chebs* in the factory. Because the poems could be directed at any woman around, or, indeed, could just be the *cheb's* recitation, the woman cannot confront the *cheb* directly. If she did, he could accuse her of being conceited to even think it was about her, or accuse her of being sexually assertive enough to even imagine herself having a romantic encounter with the *cheb*.

There are some similarities to the research of Yelvington (1995) here. However, the marked cultural contrast is that while in the Caribbean, Yelvington describes women as having little choice but to play into the sexualization of themselves in the Trinidadian context, in Tunisia, women's only respectable choice is to ignore love poetry. Thus, in the factory, women's reputations are nearly always compromised because they must play into their own objectification to get the *chebs* to bring them the bolts.

There are limited cases of *chebs* making overtly sexual remarks to women, because Tunisian women have no choice but to curse and physically attack any man who would dare to challenge her reputation. Never once did I see a man sexually harass (according to my US definition) a Tunisian woman, on the street or in the factory. I did hear of stories of women physically assaulting men who dared to say anything sexual to them, and of women calling over police to arrest men who have said anything inappropriate on the street. On the street, though, there are neighbors, relatives, and close family watching. A girl who seems receptive to a man's advances is sending a message to her entire community. The

peering eyes of women on balconies, friends, and kin will quickly turn this into gossip. Since a proper *binat* is repelled by sex and a married woman would be termed a *zania* (a cheater) if she interacted with men other than her husband, the only acceptable street performance would be to show brutal scorn to sexual innuendo. The factory is different in that a girl's relatives are not able to watch over her. A woman's husband and in-laws are not there to make sure she does not cuckold her husband. This is not to claim that the factory floor is a totally anomic place, for there is certainly gossip. However, this labor is performed at arm's length from many of the strictures of neighborhood life.

A typical poem delivered by a *cheb* in the factory would be some variation of, "you are like the rose I wish to gaze upon for eternity." Women's reactions to this verbal flirtation ranged from stoic ignoring, to smiling laughter, to sharp retorts like, "Your poetry is as tired as I feel." There are more covert forms of aggression in some of these interactions. Not all poetry stays syrupy. When a woman ignores a line of poetry, the *cheb* may try to insult the woman: "You are as sweet as honey. Did you know that honey is the shit of the bee?" This line, often said indirectly toward a group of girls, was common on the streets of Bizerte, and in Z-textiles. It met muted reactions, since if a girl gets offended it could mean that she assumed it was meant for her, or that she was conceited enough to believe that she was that beautiful. But flirting may also be more acceptable for women in the factory because they could get a benefit from it: help from the *chebs*.

Women are blamed for mistreatment by men when it comes to sexual infractions. This is the context of the broader society, where in Arabic culture, women are likely to be punished for men's actions (e.g., Charrad 2003; Mernissi 1991). If a woman is raped, the first question asked is what she was doing *there* in the first place... albeit this is the first question asked in US culture, as well (e.g., Rozee and Koss 2001). In marital relationships, women are expected to accept their husbands' sexual advances no matter their own wishes in a given situation. Women are expected to stay away from and certainly not to talk to men who are not family members and if there is unacceptable sexual conduct, she will most likely be condemned as a seductress (Labidi 2005). Even cousins of the opposite gender are included in these social rules, perhaps because cross-cousin marriage is acceptable. Thus, women in the factory and in other paid labor jobs in Tunisia are in jeopardy of having their reputations compromised by the fact that they must interact with and talk to non-family men. Women workers in Z-textiles acted in several ways in response to these social constraints. The same expectations for women to limit their activities or be smeared is obviously deeply patriarchal. That working women must adhere to even more patriarchy in the factory speaks to new social constraints being imposed on women, rather than factory work improving their situation.

Flirting in a Western sense would be scandalous, so women find ways to interact with men and used their work needs as a means to initiate encounters with men. "Ya Hamedi!" was a part of my everyday field notes. While women have no chance to annoy men on the street in public or private, work gave women a

way to harass men by calling on them to do heavy lifting, and this could be justified by the discipline of capitalism- a gem time for women to get to “boss” men in a playful way. At home, women cannot call on their husbands or brothers in such an authoritative way. Thus this vignette from my field notes is relevant to a challenge to patriarchy:

Farah and Badia, two recently married women in their twenties, ran out of orange material, and Farah scans the factory floor for Hamedi, who could help them carry the huge bolt of fabric. She spots him standing near the piles of fabric and calls out, “Ya Hamedi! We need the fabric bolt.” Hamedi pulls down the huge orange spool of fabric and carries it over his shoulder. As part of usual routine, he holds the bolt by his pelvis, tilted up towards the girls phallically, and asks Badia, “where do you want me to put this?” Farah flushed a deep red and giggles; Badia holds Hamedi’s gaze and giggles, “It is even bigger than I thought!” At which point the three burst into fits of giggles.

Hamedi puts the bolt on and walks back to the fabric shelves, immediately recounting the story to Schedli and another truck driver, who look over toward Farah and Badia and laugh. The playful assertion of bossing a man, though, is not actually a subversion of power. Since they must rely on Hamedi to bring the bolt, ultimately they must pander to his masculine sense of superiority.

The extent of Tunisian women’s liberation has been overblown for political and economic reasons (e.g., Charrad 2001; Gana 2010). Is sexual activity outside the strictures of patriarchal marriage transgression, or acquiescence? It is likely both; women who choose to remain chaste until

marriage and those who chose to rebel, and engage in sexual activity outside of the patriarchally-sanctioned marriage could both be transgressing or acquiescing. The larger point is to look at how sexual activity can be used as a source of power by *binat* women. That many participants in this study espoused conservative views toward female sexuality is one way to understand the extent of women's subjugation in the patriarchal family. Both *binat* and *m'raa* agreed that girls should remain virgins until their wedding night. However, virginity requires an intact hymen. The many other forms of sexual expression, those that would not rupture the hymen, were the subject of controversy. The few times I broached this subject, women would say that many women do "other things" with men before marriage, but never implicate themselves. Davis and Davis (1989), in their ethnography of adolescent sexuality in a Moroccan town, described a covert world of sophisticated sexual conduct, where adolescents' accounts suggest that sex before marriage is common, but where it is taboo for adolescent girls to admit that they themselves engage in it. While similar research has not been conducted in Tunisia, I found a similar pattern. Holmes-Eber (2003) discusses sex before marriage with some of her participants. They assert that sex before marriage is unacceptable, but that it occurs frequently.

For *binat* in the factory, the question of sex before marriage is important in that it may lend strength to an argument that factory girls are more free to liberate their bodies from patriarchal constraints. Or, it may lend strength to an argument that factory girls are less likely to consider their bodies as special, sacred, and, when chaste, to impart powerful purity (e.g., Abu Zahra 1978). That is, a popular

Arab narrative portrays the virgin *binat* as liberated from male desire, manipulation, and exploitation. The virgin free from male domination is at risk of being dominated through her acquiescence to sexual desire for men, who are women's oppressors. This is not to negate the possibility for sexual expression for *binat*, but to argue against a false dichotomy.

Paula Holmes-Eber (2003) also reports the accepted norm that *binat* in Tunisia should be virgins. Her field research was conducted two decades earlier than mine, in the 1980's. Holmes-Eber was uncritical of the social values of Tunisians concerning virginity, which seemed to reflect her politics of paying a homage to the emics of Tunisian gender culture. She criticizes one of the participants who had confided to Holmes-Eber that she was having sexual intercourse with her boyfriend. Holmes-Eber's reinforcement of patriarchal strictures represents a problematic praxis in anthropology. Women may exercise agency by having sex outside marriage, and this warrants serious inquiry, not an emic-derived judgment. For this study, I interviewed both women and men, albeit outside the factory and far fewer men than women for reasons I shall further elaborate in Chapter Five. The accounts of *binat* sexuality were quite different depending on the gender of the interviewee. If there is one most important element to sex before marriage in Bizerte, it is secrecy. That being said, since few private spaces are available to unmarried Tunisians for sexual expression, it was fairly simple finding out where young lovers would go. Bizerte is a beach town.

As a subjugated group, some women workers, usually the *binat*, challenge gender roles; they do so knowing that they will be judged by other women, and by

men. As *binat*, they tended to be younger and not yet responsible for whole families. *Binat* may have the advantage in that they have not yet engaged in the ultimate act of subjugation, marriage. Further, they often saw their jobs in the factories as just a temporary position; they had hope of finding a better work situation.

*Binat* challenged gender roles by engaging in overt flirtation with men, and even more controversially, by challenging the hegemony of male authority rather than acquiescing. This gender bending was limited to factory girls and factory *chebs*; *binat* did not challenge managers nor did they challenge the European owners. This happens with other employees at the same level class-wise, but not to managers. *Binat* would challenge men of their own age cohort, in terms of flirtation that was overt and quite unlike socially acceptable heterosexual flirtation among the unmarried.

A *binat*'s reputation is questioned from the time that she begins to work in the *le zone*, and there are several ways she can confront the questioning of her virtue. To work in an EPZ is for women, especially unmarried women, to have one's reputation on the line, even more than in Tunisian society in general. That the women have no chaperones (family members who would look out for her reputation) while they work long hours can bring freedom in certain ways; however; such freedom can also mean that no one in her community can be sure what she is really doing for those long hours around *chebs* who do not have her best interests at heart, and, even more alarming, among European men. In Tunisian society, Tunisian women who speak to foreign men, tourists,



businessmen, are condemned as immoral. A distinctly patriarchal nationalism causes Tunisian men to condemn Tunisian women who interact in any way with tourists as “bad women.” That factory girls are in contact with foreign men (albeit not very often), and unsupervised by male relatives, is a violation of patriarchal sense of integrity. Women in the *le zone* are literally outside the control of male family members, who often hear gossip about the sleazy activities of EPZ women.

There are several ways to deal with the perils of reputation that come with working in the EPZ. Some women, as I have discussed, acquiesce to patriarchal norms and wear hijab. Many began wearing the hijab after beginning to work in the EPZ, sometimes at the urging of brothers or husbands, sometimes not. Some choose to wear clothing that reflects a western sense of liberation, like short skirts or shirts which reveal the arms. However, these women still adhered to Tunisian values in that they did not show any cleavage of breasts, something one never sees in Tunisia (except among European tourists). Also, even girls like Wisal, who wore short skirts, did not wear the miniskirts that can be seen on dozens of European television channels.<sup>26</sup> While women who chose to emphasize their freedom through more sexualized forms of dress counter the dominant ideology which prioritizes female virginity in *binat* and chastity for *m'raa*, they also sexualize themselves. The irony is that the hyper-sexualized European women they see on satellite are viewed as free. The conflation of self-sexualization and freedom has been the subject of much critique in the west, yet it remains

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<sup>26</sup> Most Tunisians have satellite dishes, clearly visible on roof tops, where European channels are much-watched.

hegemonic. In Tunisia, women who adopt western clothing and who embrace an ideal of feminine freedom present a critique to Tunisian patriarchy. However, they reify a western patriarchal sexism which relegates women to the status of sex object.

Wearing conservative, proper Islamic clothing in the factory is one way that women could counter the reputation threat that comes with working in the factory. I noticed the severity of public censure against women showing much skin when my cousin in law, Asma, came to stay with me in Bizerte. At night, Kalthoum, Asma and I went out (as usual). Asma dressed in a sleeveless fitted top and designer jeans. While many of the crowds of people were unfazed, some women in hijab gave disparaging looks, and some men on the street reacted aggressively. I was surprised by the disgust several men expressed toward her. Sarcastic comments were thrown her way, like, “couldn’t you afford sleeves?” and “Oh, for God’s Sake, give me a break!” were hurled in her direction. Asma held her head high and ignored the comments. This kind of bravery made me consider the iron grit of women like Wisal, and what they must go through when they are out in short skirts.

The *hijab*, a headscarf worn by some Muslim women, became more popular in the last two decades among Tunisian women, in the same way that it has made a comeback in other Muslim countries (Holmes-Eber 2003). The reasons for this headscarf revivalism are complicated enough to have inspired studies (e.g., Mahmood 2001). In this study, the *hijab* is important for what it symbolizes for women factory workers. Approximately one third of the factory

women said that their families or husbands mandated that they wear *hijab* so as to be in line with Islamic teachings.<sup>27</sup> Of these twelve women in *hijab*, six started to wear *hijab* only after they started working at Z-Textiles. The reasons varied. Some women said that being away from their families, they felt more protected by the *hijab* from the close proximity of men who were not kin. Other women said that they started to feel more religious after they started to work in the factory. For example, engaged *binat* Feirouz once had the terrifying experience (which I was there to witness) of the plug of her fabric saw exploding in the socket above her head. Sparks came raining down on her head, onto her *hijab*, but it did not ignite. Feirouz interpreted this miracle as evidence that God was protecting her from harm because she was wearing *hijab*. “God was merciful to me,” she said.

Women could exercise agency in many ways through their factory labor. While arranged marriage without the consent of the bride was illegalized in Tunisia under the PSC’s, a legal prohibition does little to stop the coerced marriage of *binat* to men they do not want to marry. A bride can be easily coerced or pressured into accepting a marriage proposal when her family encourages her to do so. Since young men and women have so few chances to meet one another, many accept marriages to cousins or other members of extended family, because they are pressured to do so. *Binat* in the factory discussed their family’s plans to match them with relatives. Shireen, a *binat* who had been working for eight years and was reaching the end of her twenties, said, “they wanted me to marry my cousin, but I said no and they punish me daily with

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<sup>27</sup> There are several interpretations of the Qu’ran in terms of what female modest dress entails.

their comments about how I could be married by now if I had accepted the arrangement. Really, they make me crazy with their constant torturing me. I would rather be working here than to marry that cousin.”

That Shireen would prefer to work in the factory than be married, and be willing to put up with her family torturing her for her decision, is illustrative of the pressure that women feel to marry traditionally. Paula Holmes-Eber (2003) accepts the prevalence of traditional arranged marriage as foundational to the Tunisian kinship system. Functionalist approaches leave much to be desired in that they shut down analyses of power conflicts in kinship systems. Several binat discussed their family’s reactions to their refusal to marry a cousin as shocked and offended. Binat described being slapped, shunned, and verbally abused for their decisions. The illegality of arranged marriage is far removed from the family in Arab culture. A woman has to be prepared to fight social convention to reject arrangement; in reality, families often start to match cousins when they are toddlers, and mothers may seek to establish verbal agreements with sister-in-laws to promise the two toddlers to one another. When girls or boys reject these arrangements, they have to deal with nonplussed relatives and the humiliation of their mothers. Mothers are usually in charge of marriage arrangements, and when they go sour, their husbands and the rest of the family often blame her. This can escalate into abuse and family in-fighting. Women and men with an opportunity to approach women that they would not have otherwise; women with the opportunity to approach men they would not other have a chance to.

Girl siblings are believed to need more privacy and protection, and are thus usually all put into a small bedroom with several mattresses, and then told to lock the door until morning. This does leave women more protected and it gives them more privacy, but at the same time, this is a way for men to control space. Further, this means that boys will grow up with more freedom of movement than girls. While brothers of the house often come and go as they please without a word to their female relatives, girls are watched, monitored, threatened, and abused in the name of protecting them. For example, in Suad Joseph's (1978) research in working class neighborhoods in Beirut, Lebanon, she describes brothers controlling, threatening, and brutalizing their sisters. Joseph points out that this relationship lays the groundwork for marital power relations.

Fathers also exert control over their daughters in a way that promotes patriarchal dominance. Fathers encourage sons to go out in public spaces, to play soccer in the street, to go to the beach, to meet male friends in cafes.<sup>28</sup> Tunisian fathers often tacitly encourage their sons to womanize. As has been much discussed in the anthropology of the Mediterranean, young men gain status through sexual conquests with women. Daughters are under the control of fathers, who must protect their daughters from the womanizing strategies of *chebs*. Thus several women subjects described working at the factory as a chance for freedom and opportunity. Here is a piece from an interview done with Beja, a *binat* who was not yet engaged. I had posed a question about her social life outside the factory:

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<sup>28</sup> Cafes in Tunisia are homosocial spaces. From the teen years, it is normative for men to stay out in cafes, where they drink tea and coffee, and smoke the water pipe. The usual café activities include watching news from the café television, discussing politics, playing cards, and gossiping.

“My father never lets me go anywhere. I was so fed up at home because even in the hottest part of the summer, he always tells me he will kill me if he finds me at the beach. He rides on his motorcycle all through the streets, and if he finds me with my friends, he makes me get on his bike and takes me home and then he beats me and my mother for not watching me. I couldn’t stand life- it was so boring before I got my job here!”

That the line workers never know when they will be sent home each day, as this is determined by the work orders faxed in by the European owners, the workers sometimes have the luck of being released from work relatively early and getting time to spend without the direct regulation of any family members. This time is important for *binat* to socialize in public, perhaps strolling through the souks arm in arm gossiping and making eyes at *chebs* who attract their attention, or taking a taxi to one of the few women-allowed cafes near the corniche. The renegade nature of unregulated romantic relationships was more serious than just flirting for many girls, though. For *binat* this time can also be for sexual relationships.

For *m’raa*, getting off from the job early may give the luxury to get to the housework at an earlier time, and give them more much relished leisure time. Since many *m’raa* described coming home each evening to a husband sitting on the sofa, waiting for her to cook, getting home early meant time under less pressure. Lamis told me, “My best day is when I get home before my husband and I can cook and watch the television stations I like.” Time spent not working or serving is precious to *m’raa*.

Perhaps women workers did receive help from husbands, but they would not disclose this because they would fear that their husbands would be labeled “lady-men,” a derogatory term for men which I discuss in chapter 5. Or perhaps the husbands did not help because of strongly held beliefs about women’s work in the home. Several *m’raa* said that they looked forward to doing all the housework after their job ended, because they felt like good wives and mothers. This suggests that women view their primary role as housewives and their waged employment as an obstacle to their fulfilling work in the home.

Labor activism at Z-Textiles cannot be assessed by measuring women’s formal labor organizing. If researchers only seek to quantify union-type activities among women workers in global factories, they would have to concur with the stereotype of an unorganized, docile female labor force. However, when social scientists observe the factory floor with an eye for other kinds of resistance to exploitation, as I have tried to do, then the conclusion is that women laborers engage in nuanced forms of resistance. What such resistance does warrants serious attention.

Women of Z-Textiles who chose to play into men’s sexual advances stood to gain, and lose, in certain ways. The same is true for women who chose to maintain their honor by rejecting sexual innuendo, when they were able. Moreover, there is not a doxa of acceptance of women’s place as workers who deserve less pay. The perception is more that they are long-suffering women who feel they have little power to change the patriarchal and capitalist exploitation, so they must play into it, a common finding in research on gender and factory labor

(e.g., Hossfeld 1993). That the women of Z-Textiles employ strategies of resistance, even though they are not engaging in formal labor organizing, is hopeful. It means that there is resistance. This resistance will probably not change their labor conditions for the better. The resistance in Z-Textiles takes place in the context of Tunisian patriarchy, and this is important because it means that women laborers' resistance strategies are shaped by notions of gender in society which give women lesser access to resources and power, and where women must gain favor from men to get access to resources.

Understanding emic perspectives does not push analysis of gender and class power relations far enough. As I discuss in Chapter Two on theory about gender in the MENA, recently, it has become popular to generate a reactionary theory of gender where emic patriarchal notions are validated, and even promoted to create a Foucaultian argument that women's compliance to patriarchy is in itself a way to wield power (Foucault 1980). While women surely seek power through adherence to patriarchal norms, in the process they reinforce their own subjugation. This strategy also pits women against each other, because women must distinguish themselves from other women who do not adhere to the strictures of femininity as they do. This is a limited and ultimately degrading power for women to wield.

Male workers, while exploited themselves, reify patriarchal supremacy through their work. They become agents of labor domination. Though their sexual antics, they aid management in promoting justifications for women's low wages and intensive discipline. Yet men at Z-Textiles act from vulnerability in



important ways. Since 1956, Tunisia's dash toward modernity has eroded masculine dominance. Tunisian men vacillate between the comforting patriarchal authoritarianism of traditionalism and the unsettling romance of western modernity, and women seek power in the midst of masculine decline (Gana 2010). When *chefs* coerce *binat* to play into, or resist, their sexual antics at work, they reify traditional feminine dependence on men. The hegemony of this feminine dependence on masculinity is being increasingly challenged. As Tunisians often say, pointer finger on forehead, and smiling knowingly, "The *binat* are always ahead of the *chefs*."

Gender and labor in the Z-textiles factory in Bizerte's EPZ matches some contours of the patterns of gender and labor described in the extant research; the theoretical paradigms which have been employed also offer useful insight into the relations of labor in Tunisia's EPZ's. There are also differences in Z-textiles which relate to Tunisia as a country with some contemporary dynamics that belie historic forces specific to Tunisia and these are especially important to consider anthropologically. Analyzing Tunisia's EPZ labor relations means analyzing the anthropological literature on gender and labor patterns in the MENA as well as that of the EPZ's which exist primarily outside the MENA, in tandem. Further, since Tunisia stands in sharp contrast to the MENA in several regards, Tunisia's historic, ethnic, and political economic situation must also be considered as part of the larger MENA.

There are implications for women's proletarianization in the country where Personal Status Codes (PSC's) ostensibly liberated women but actually

allowed the ruling party to undermine tribal power (by curtailing patriliney) so as to consolidate the State under the control of an urban elite (Charrad 2001 202). That Tunisia is more homogeneous than Algeria or Morocco (with less than one percent Berber speakers), is important because ethnicity could not be manipulated by elites and political movements, at least not to the same extent as exhibited in Tunisia's neighbors... but gender policy could be manipulated (Charrad 2001: 201-2). The Tunisian milieu of gender and labor illustrates the ongoing conflicts between State ideologies of de jure equality conflated with open market capitalism, contrasted with de facto sexism and class exploitation.

There are many similarities between my study and the extant research. This is because, while culture and national history are different, the aims of multinational production are the same. In my study, as in the extant body of research, many women would be unemployed in the formal labor force if it were not for EPZ jobs. They get a paycheck, but they also contend with the economic changes of which accompany neo-liberal free trade policy. Tunisia has in common with Mexico, Malaysia, Philippines, Trinidad, Kenya, and other host countries for EPZ's the effects of structural adjustment. This most often entails cuts in public service spending and devaluation of currency (Bodley 2001; Bolles and Yelvington 2010). They must respond to the pressures of international lending institutions to "fix" their economies by lifting protectionist trade barriers and remove any artificial price fixing on commodities (Tuck 1996). Devaluation of currency is an expected consequence. Frequently, I listened as middle aged Tunisian women recited little informal poems opining the devaluation of the

Tunisian dinar. While these poems have endless variations, the basic format went like this:

What happened, Oh Dinar?

You were our gold!<sup>29</sup>

As the family budgeters and marketers, Tunisian women are like their cohort in many other developing nations in that they must be astute economists. When they do weekly shopping, they are continually reminded of how they can afford less because prices on staples have increased and because of the devaluation of the dinar. Holmes-Eber (2003) describes women's discourse when visiting each other, checking on the going rate of staples and textiles so that when they bargain, they will know they are getting a fair price. However, she does not provide description of the increased pressure women face under structural adjustment of the 1980's Tunisia. She does describe the riots which shut down the country when Bourguiba removed the price regulations on bread, the largest source of daily caloric intake. While she describes women's support of the bread rebellions, she fails to incorporate much economic analysis (Prince 1990; Seddon 1986). Her unexamined functionalist theoretical orientation here allows her to celebrate women's part in holding families together, but not much more. Shukri (1996) and Charrad (2001) offer analyses where women's position in the MENA, as subjugated wives and as a pool of reserve menial laborers serves the needs of State elites and multinational corporations.

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<sup>29</sup> See Webber's (1991) discussion of *hikaya* in Kilibya, Tunisia.

Temporally, EPZ jobs in Tunisia as in other EPZ's are considered temporary to labor, management and owners. Owners and managers maintain lists of applications so that workers can be replaced within an hour of a worker being fired or quitting. They justify this as part of the economic survival of the company, so that there will be no lapses in production. At the same time, management often reminds workers that they are replaceable, to cut down on worker complaints, organizing, or behavior that would challenge the management.

Globalizing capitalism also exerts tremendous influence on local cultures (Hermassi 1997; Lazreg 2002; Marchand 2002; Scholte 2000; Toussaint 1999;). Cultures shift in several ways when EPZ's become part of a local economy. Women working in EPZ's or other forms of formal labor are likely gaining a wage and are likely to be the first or second generation of women to do so. They may be able to use their wages in a variety of ways, albeit some must turn over their earnings to parents or husbands. They may be expected to give their wages to their families to pay for household expenses. They also may be able to use their money in order to engage in modernity by being consumers (Ong 1987; Freeman 2000; Tiano 1994; Fernandez-Kelley 1983).

More opportunities to get money does not equate to a better quality of life, a reality which anthropologists have been able to capture through data collection methods which have given a holistic sense of what economic development can mean. Thus, while waged labor may increase women's access to some things, it can also promote gender, ethnic, and class inequalities and may even create new class schisms (Beneria & Roldan 1987; Held et. al. 1999; Kray 2006; Scholte

2000; Wilson 2004). Men who gain jobs in EPZ's and other forms of market capitalism often use the money to further their own status aspirations in patriarchal societies. That is, they are likely to gain power while women are left more vulnerable in traditional forms of labor (Bodley 2007).

As is the case of the EPZ's around the world, Tunisia's EPZ's in general and in Z-textiles in particular, women laborers are hired for most of the lowest-skilled line jobs, as is the case in most EPZ's where the work involves textiles and assembly. They are paid the national minimum wage, 272.480 Tunisian dinars per month, for 48 hour work week (CREDIF 2002). The rationales for hiring women match the pattern of justifications used in other regions of the world. Women are hired because they are already experienced seamstresses with nimble fingers, and that women are docile and will not engage in unruly behavior.

In Tunisia, as in other EPZ's, most of the women hired are young and unmarried, while a fraction are middle-aged and married with children. The rationale for hiring mostly young women in Tunisia's EPZ's fits the patterns of rationales in other EPZ's. Young women are inexperienced workers who are desperate for the wages, so they are likely to be docile. There is also a benefit to management, both male and female. Male managers can play on girls' hopes that the managers are romantically interested in order to keep them from complaining about the work conditions. Female managers can exert a role of a strict female relative, and younger women may feel pressure to obey.

The women on the line are subjected to intense discipline in that they are under constant supervision from supervisors and managers. They also know that

their work is watched because their manager Bechir has one-way glass between his office and the shop floor.

The few male workers in Z-Textiles are supervised, but their areas, the loading dock and the stock shelves are not visible from the one-way glass of Beschir's office, and this parallels the extant research on the more lax treatment of the male workers in EPZ's. Further, Bechir manages the men in less micro-managing forms. Female workers are, as in the other research settings, expected to stay in one place, while men are given jobs where they have opportunities to move through their own areas through the women's areas. This is similar in Z-textiles, in that women stand in semi-fixed spots while they work, pinning and cutting. However, their job necessitates certain repetitive movements, such as the periodic walking to the end of the cutting tables, where a bolt of fabric is on an attached horizontal spool. Two women on either side of the table must grasp a corner and pull together down the table, so that the fabric will be laid out flat and ready to have patterns pinned to it. Also, women must frequently climb up onto the tables to get to the center of a pattern to pin it. This still fits with a pattern in the extant research of women being not sedentary, but stationary. By comparison, men are given the freedom to move through the factory and have more liberty in personal choices as to where to move, which reflects the extant literature's general trend. This reflects gender ideology, that women are viewed as naturally inclined to stay still and be docile, while men are believed to become restless and in need of some mobility. As in the extant literature, this also affords men the opportunity to enter women's areas of the factory and to act on a set of cultural

norms where men are given license to try to get romantic and sexual attentions of women.

Tunisia's EPZ's exist in an Arab Muslim country and there is little extant anthropological literature on EPZ's in Arab Muslim contexts, but much economic and development literature which identifies EPZ's as a key form of progressive development in conservative and traditional societies. This literature tends to be from economic Ong's (1987) research has certain resonances, because of Islam as part of the labor and production of power. While Tunisian women did not attempt to pace production through spirit possession, they did use Islamic discourse and ritual to do so.

Agnatic kinship also marks Tunisia's special dynamics of EPZ labor. That is, kinship and labor in traditional Tunisia meant that girls would be managed by senior women in the agnatic kin group, and that a man would be unlikely to oversee the labor of unmarried non-kin. Thus, Bechir's hiring of a special "boss lady," Madame Hayatt, to manage the women, fits a pattern which reflects the gender segregation and importance of kin in Tunisia. Madame Hayatt could also be in close contact with the women, whereas for a man to do this could elicit gossip and compromise a woman's reputation. However, while women were at a distance from men in the factory, they also engaged in many flirting techniques.

As in some of the extant research from Latin America and the Caribbean, Tunisian women flirt and engage in romantic relationships with men in the factory in order to, and in hopes of, bettering their situations as workers, even though to do so may reify their own subjugation. Women flirt because they feel that to

repel the attentions of a male worker might reflect negatively on them. They also flirt strategically to get help with a difficult task, which corresponds with the work of Hossfeld (1990) in Silicon Valley and Yelvington (1995) in a Trinidad factory. However, the constraints on flirting, and the actual content of the flirting is unique in Tunisia. While in the Latin American and Caribbean context, male-female interactions are charged, in Tunisia, they are negatively charged, or there is trouble. How does flirting fit into the MENA, where a large body of research discusses culture characterized by strict codes of patriarchal gender stratification. Here the research literature on sexuality, gender and honor and shame of the MENA is relevant. Flirting in an Arab Muslim context is quite different from its context in the Caribbean and many other places, because the stakes are high for women especially. Women's reputations can be shattered, like glass, Tunisians say. For a woman to accept a sexual innuendo from a man in the street, without screaming in his face or punching him is a reflection of her honor. And since a girls' brothers are usually close by, they will defend their offended honor at any infraction. Since women carry the honor of their entire kin group with them every time they are outside the domestic sphere, they enter public arenas as Leila Ahmad (1992) explains, ready for a fight. Women must also be ready for this fight in the factory, but they also engage in new freedoms of sexual interaction in this strange place, the EPZ, that is not actually regulated by agnates.

Morality in the factory is also exerted by women, in ways which diverge from the extant body of literature. As Ong points out, factory girls in Malaysia's reputations are on the line, and this is true in Tunisia. However, that some women



choose to embrace their power as sexually free while some wear hijab, suggests several ways of asserting morality on the factory floor. Yelvington (1995) points out that older women workers in the Trinidad factory where he conducted research were regulated by the social forces put on women as wives and mothers, also evidenced in my study.

Some women, young and unmarried or married and middle aged, did assert Islamic morality and this and this gave them the ability to stop work for prayer. Also, it gave them power over men, or at least an attempt at it, to play on men's moral obligations to help women. However, some older women did not wear hijab, or modest clothes, and what their experience as seasoned workers had informed their moral sense was that the factory itself was *haram*, forbidden by God. That is, they posed moral critiques on the disciplines of the labor process. This gave them some power to consider the larger meaning of their labors.

## Chapter Five

Waged labor in the export processing zone (EPZ) can be a way for women to exert autonomy, but this form of labor can also exert control over women. Tunisian society's ideological dichotomy of gender has at one side a modernist romance for and about the "liberation" bestowed upon women via the Personal Status Codes, and at the other deep anxieties about the proper role of women and men in society (Charrad 2003; Gana 2010). There is an enraged nostalgia for an imagined past when women knew their place, a time when households were supposedly peaceful and women did not, "marry in summer, divorce in winter," as several participants sang laughingly.

Bourdieu's (1977) concept of doxa precludes critiques that fall outside of that which is allowable to even think. According to Bourdieu, in a society social hierarchies are taken thought of as natural. Rebellion would be impossible. Yet Tunisian women, peasants, and other subjugated groups were and are critical of their unequal access to wealth and status, albeit expression of their frustration may be muzzled. More useful for understanding responses to power is Gramsci's (1973) concept of hegemony. According to Gramsci, certain ideologies have supremacy, and they are not *supposed* to be criticized. However, Gramsci contends that the oppressed pose many critiques subversively, in ways that the powerful have difficulty in regulating. This subversion can be exacted through humor, arts, and covert activities. Tunisian filmmaker Moufida Tlatli provides two views into Tunisian women's actions against patriarchal supremacy. One film is set around the end of French colonial rule, *The Silences of the Palace*

(1994). The other is situated in the Tunisian post-colonial period into the present, *The Season of Men* (2001). *The Silences of the Palace* takes place in the years leading up to the Tunisian revolt against French colonialism (and the Beys who administer French domination). It follows the lives of the women who live and work in the Bey's palace: servants, cooks, and concubines. Throughout the film, there are scenes of palace life where the decadent Beys are served deferentially. However, most of the action takes place in the servants' areas of the palace, the basement where the kitchen is, and the servant's quarters. In these scenes, women lament their sorrows, and complain against the injustices done to them. The women are forgiving of the concubines, who they know have little choice but to try to please the Beys. While they feel they must never anger the Beys' families, they certainly do critique the power they wield. The main character, Alia, is the illegitimate daughter of one of the Beys (she does not know which one)- her mother is their favorite concubine, servant, and sometime belly dancer for the Beys' social events.

Alia grows up faced with many silences; she cannot get answers to questions about who her mother's kin were (her mother does not know), or who her father is. More important are the silences around the maintenance of power in the palace. She is traumatized when she witnesses her mother's submission to being raped by one of the Beys. When the Beys demand that Alia become their new concubine, her mother protects her by tricking the Beys into having sex with other concubines who exhaust them. Luckily, Alia is a talented singer, so she entertains at the Beys' social events (that is, she has a skill with a higher status

than as a sexual entertainer). Her mother gets pregnant again, and feeling that she cannot go through the pain having another illegitimate child, she kills herself in an attempt to abort. Alia, now a teenager, gets caught up in revolutionary fervor, and falls in love with one of the young neo-Destourian men. In an overt violation of hegemony, Alia sings a revolutionary song at one of the Beys' events, in front of the French colonials. This is the eve of Tunisian independence.

Alia leaves the palace, and fights in the revolution. However, she finds that the new generation of Tunisian men still do not afford her equality. After Tunisia becomes independent, she works in nightclubs as a singer, a status barely above that of a prostitute. Alia's revolutionary lover refuses to marry her because she has no family name, and he pressures her to abort her pregnancies. Tlatli's film, a polemic on gender, nationalism, and power, ends with a scene of the betrayed yet defiant Alia, who declares that she will keep her pregnancy, and choose the name of her child herself (a right reserved for the father).

In Tlatli's recent film, *The Season of Men*, the view is of a group of kinswomen on the Isle of Jerba who, for eleven months of the year exist without their husbands who migrate to Tunis for work. The men come back for one month in summer to spend time with their families, and collect the textiles and carpets sewn by their wives during the year which they will sell in the souks of Tunis. The film examines how patriarchal power is enforced among the women, even in the absence of the men. This power is not accepted as doxa; many of the young wives fight against their authoritarian mothers in law. More typically, they rebel through subversive means. The mothers in law are ruthless enforcers of

patriarchy, as using their daughters in law as servants is seen as their reward for having gone through being a young wife themselves. While Tlatli promotes an understanding of the women as prisoners on the island, they are prisoners of an ideology which women enforce on one another, she also exhibits acts of rebellion against patriarchal dominance. That is, while patriarchal hegemony is a brutal presence, women still critique it. Most poignantly, Aicha, one of the young mothers, nurtures her autistic son Aziz, when her husband and mother in law neglect him. Aziz represents the vulnerability of masculinity, and as such his father effectively abandons him. Aziz finds his only comfort in weaving, which is the work of women, a further destabilization of his father's masculinity.

In both films, doxa, accepting the ideas and agenda of the powerful absolutely, is absent. Rather, power is played on, manipulated, subverted, and sometimes flatly challenged, in ways which correspond to Gramsci's explanation of hegemony. Similarly, in the stories in this chapter, of women in Bizerte, women employ strategies for dealing with patriarchal dominance, and, while they may acquiesce to male dominance, they do so out of necessity, rather than because they believe it is inherently right.

In this chapter, I examine to results of research on women's work and lives outside the EPZ, in the city of Bizerte. Here I describe several phenomena pertaining to women. I look not only at Tunisian woman's formal and informal economic participation, but her reproductive labor as a wife and mother. Further, I examine how the forces of globalization compel women to be savvy household economists in the wake of currency devaluation and price spikes. I also discuss

how this affects working class and middle class women differently. I also explore how women's personal lives are impacted by the political economy of Tunisia, especially how their sexual identities and practices reflect their place in the neo liberal economy.

Women's roles in the family, at rituals, in the city, and in the bedroom, are in flux. It is important to explain, but not explain away, women's heavier burden in the factory by tracing it to the heavier burden of work performed by women in the home, and her likelihood to do a second and even third shift after she returns from the factory. I also examine the unpaid and paid labor of women in Bizerte. I conducted participant observations, interviews, and surveys with over 100 married and unmarried women, from their late teens to mid-forties. I did so in a variety of settings so that I could ask questions about and see their economic and cultural activities, but also because, "Tunisian women are always in a hurry," as I was told by many of my married participants. I observed and participated in their home-based businesses, as well as businesses outside the home. I did participant observations in the souks and French-owned supermarkets to understand women as household economists. I also conducted interviews in Bizerte's playground by the sea where mothers sat on benches or leaned against the fences socializing. I listened for women's own conceptualizations of their roles as *binat* (unmarried women) and *m'raa* (wives) in a changing socio-economic milieu. Finally, I sought to understand how women's sexual choices reflected and challenged their changing orientation to the economy, especially in the wake of structural economic changes. This is important because women's sense of identity is linked

with sexuality; sex before marriage is a taboo yet I heard that it happened frequently. I seek here to understand how binat conceptualize their sexuality, and how this reflects their changing sense of identity.

I interviewed twenty homemakers who did no form of paid labor. These women were hard to find since many Tunisian women who are home makers participate in the informal economy; they sew, bake, babysit, henna, wax, and even sell imported goods out of their homes. Kalthoum and I had to ask around and visit to find these twenty who did not earn money in any of these ways. These women were affluent and from elite backgrounds. I conducted interviews with thirty housewives who engaged in informal labor in the home; most did a combination of sewing, baking, babysitting, waxing, henna, hairdressing, and selling imported goods through their homes. There were many women in this category, and every woman I interviewed would give me the names of family and friends who also wanted to do an interview with me. I conducted interviews with women who are employed in the formal economy, but not in the EPZ, as well as EPZ workers. Twenty worked in Businesses, and ten worked in government-run services. I also conducted interviews with twenty women who owned a business outside the home, most of these very small.

As I discuss in Chapter Three, my own identity influenced my research methods and conclusions. Being the wife of a Tunisian man with a toddler son in tow presented opportunities and challenges in conducting this research. Certain benefits of being the wife of a Tunisian with his son (who looks uncannily like his Tunisian father) worked to my advantage; however, social restraints that applied

to Tunisian wives also applied to me. That my sister-in-law lived with my son and me while I conducted the research, and introduced me to participants as “my American sister-in-law” provided a *framework* for me as socially, affinally connected person the factory observations and interviews that I conducted. Being a wife and not a *binat* allowed me to be seen as on the same status plane as the women I needed to reach for research. To be a *binat* trying to do research with married women would have meant that the women would have viewed me as inexperienced and unacceptable to disclosed sexual details of their lives. Instead, married women were jovial in their discussions with me about married life as working women.

At the same time, I was subject to the judgments put on Tunisian wives. When I did not follow the cleaning guidelines, I was *binat al-rumiyah*, the daughter of the West, who did not even know how to properly wash the floor. When I balked at cooking heavy stews every day through the summer, in 100 degree weather in our oven of an apartment, I was again not being a proper woman, and endured the humiliation of some of my female in-laws singing a mocking song about me.

My status as a resident in our West Bizerte neighborhood also afforded me a kind of “in” with the local community, which made interactions with Tunisian men innocuous. That is, with my Tunisian sister-in-law and my son, I became not an object of possible sexual conquest (as are most European women), but a protected mother. In the neighborhood, this was important because men would treat me as they would Tunisian women, a complex etiquette of avoiding eye



contact, yet acting a combination of chivalry and standoffishness. As I came to think of Bizerte as a home, I was able to find women outside the factory who were often happy to participate in interviews.

The central features of the city of Bizerte are the old and new ports, the EPZ which borders it on the East, the Martyr's Cemetery on the West, and the Mediterranean-front road and promenade at the North, the location of an amusement park and children's playground, mixed cafes, and Tourist hotels, and the beach. The Corniche area is frequented by residents of Bizerte, but only very wealthy bourgeoisie, as they are called by most Tunisians, live in the apartments and homes there. The Corniche is important in that Tunisians from the city neighborhoods work there in the hotels, and go there for recreational and social purposes.

The EPZ, since its inception in the 1980's, creates a new border along the East of the city, and there is a bridge which extends over the New Port, and connects Bizerte to East Bizerte, a proletarian community of neighborhoods which is comprised of migrants from rural areas. Residents from middle class sections of Bizerte look down on East Bizerte; several workers in Z-textiles live in Z-textiles and share a cab to work each morning. From East Bizerte, there is an excellent view of the oil refinery.

The martyr's cemetery to the northwest is a sloped field of yellow stones, memorialized by a plaque. It is an unnecessary reminder of Bizerte's part in colonial conflict, and of its history of being sought after for its key position. The city neighborhoods of Bizerte proper begin at the water's edge at the Old and

New Ports and extend along the main road, Avenue Habib Bourguiba, which ends before the mountains begin in the West. There are proletarian and middle class neighborhoods throughout, but most of the middle class apartment buildings and homes are clustered around Avenue Bourguiba. Working class areas are further from Avenue Bourguiba. As in French cities, the lower classes are at the peripheries. The working class areas are also the newest buildings, small apartments with balconies covered with clothes drying, and women engaged in various domestic chores. This reflects the newness of the working classes to the city, mostly from agricultural areas, mostly displaced agricultural workers (e.g., King 2003). More established homes are older because they were “original” to the city.

Social class is reflected in the architecture and structure of homes and apartments. As in the city of Tunis, Bizerte’s architecture reflects its colonial legacy and Arab culture. The wealthier Bizerte homes are a mixture of Arab and French influences. The original Arab houses near the Souk, with central secluded courtyards, have been converted into small apartments where all residents share the courtyard. The reputation of residents is of struggling families, but also more dubious. Many Bizertis reference these beautiful old Arab buildings with prostitutes.

The newer residents from agricultural backgrounds live in new, sometimes unfinished, cement apartment buildings. These are often three rooms and are shared by more than ten family members. These apartments are noticeable near

the entrances to the EPZ. They tend to be out of sight of the corniche, where only aesthetically pleasing and expensive apartment buildings exist.

The home is the domain of women in the MENA. There are several perspectives in the extant research on what “women’s sphere” means. What comes across in much of the literature is women’s sense of the home being both a place of safety and imprisonment for women (e.g., Brosseau and Ayari 2005; Hajeij 1996). Holmes-Eber (2003) rejects that women are imprisoned in the home in Tunisia, even though some of her own participants feel trapped in their homes. For example, she gives the case of a participant who opines her former unmarried life, before her husband forbid her from spending time with friends. While Holmes-Eber’s argument that women turn their homes into lively hubs of women visitors is compelling, in what I describe in Chapter Two as a reactionary theoretical stance which minimizes the reasons why women become ostensibly imprisoned, a reality that Tunisian women and other MENA women have emphasized. That is, the domination of public spaces by men. In my research, I visited women who were middle class homemakers as well as women who had home businesses, and frequently they expressed frustration with being “trapped” at home, and having to ask for permission from husbands to go out of the home.

Middle class participants without home businesses told me that I should write about how frustrated they were with their husbands. Several said dolefully that they did not leave their homes for sometimes three days in a row. If they had so successfully turned their homes into public meeting spaces, why was there so much frustration and resentment? Many also said that they had to ask permission from husbands to take their children to the playground or the beach. Initially I had on my list of interview questions how often husbands took care of the kids so she could go out. But I stopped asking it, because I got laughed at. “Our men would never take care of the kids so we could go out!” When I asked why, they looked at me perplexedly. “Why would a man like his wife to be out in public without her kids?” I felt that I understood the implication since I myself experienced what children afford women in public. The first time I visited Tunisia, my son was a baby. When I went out in public with him, men were courteously standoffish. When I went out unaccompanied by my son, I was stared at, approached, albeit courteously, by men on a variety of pretenses. While Tunisian men do not aggress women in public, as they do in many places in the world including in many MENA countries, they certainly engage in indirect “flirting,” and attempt to make eye contact with women. But when women have their children with them, men will avoid any interaction other than in market transactions. While a woman without children or a male chaperone is subject to leering glances and syrupy love poems, or remarks dripping with indirect sexual innuendo, “Our children protect us,” I was told and had experienced myself. *Binat* also expressed feeling trapped in their parents’ homes. Thus *binat* in the

factory, as I discussed in Chapter 4, expressed that they felt freed by their jobs. While *chebs* roamed and ruled Bizerte's streets, sitting on doorsteps and street corners, playing soccer, and cruising on mopeds, *binat* who cared about their reputations would never be caught idle on the street. They would have no opportunity to be idle, since *binat* are helping with housework at home, and taking care of younger siblings. If they are middle class, they are expected to be at university, and then come straight home to study, as well as help their mothers. The few *binat* who violate these rules are condemned. These girls are rare to see in Tunisia. They are the few who walk past men's cafes, rather than stepping down into the traffic. They often dye their hair red or even more scandalously, blonde. And they smoke on the street. Women who smoke at all are considered morally questionable but women who smoke while standing on the street are considered promiscuous. Men make jokes about the cigarette, making it into a phallus, and passing women will sneer or tisk at the woman. Kalthoum said bluntly that such women are "bad women," and refused to approach them for interviews.

Married women's respectable opportunities for escape from the home are quite limited. Shopping provides a respectable outlet, as do excursions to relatives' homes (visiting) and excursions for children to the playground and beach. I participated in the rituals of getting out of the home, like Tunisian women. The grind of cleaning and cooking (which I failed to do properly) seemed maddening, and Faris seemed to suffer from cabin fever. I thought my sense of stir craziness was because I was a spoiled westerner, until I learned from participants that wives and mothers were fed up with the home, as well. For women without a job outside the home, the ability to be out, and broach public space for reasons other than grocery shopping, is an assertion of power. In Tunisia there are several public venues where it is acceptable to be a woman. It is neutral for women to shop in corner stores, the market stalls in the souk, and the new French-owned *Geant* and *Monoprix* supermarkets (albeit they were looted and burned down in the Jasmine Revolution). It is not neutral, but can be acceptable, for women to be at the beach when part of a group of women, with her children, or accompanied by a male relative. Evening strolls on the *corniche*, the avenue adjacent to the sea, is also not neutral but acceptable, as long as *en groupe*, and preferably with children.

To be out on the town as a woman is an athletic endeavor, in that it involves a lot of strolling since there are few respectable places for women to sit in public. Almost all cafes in Bizerte are men-only spaces. To understand the café culture of Tunisia is to understand the Tunisian expression: "Been il Cawah

wil Cawah wa il Cawah,” which translates to, “Between two cafes, there’s a café.” These are almost exclusively men’s territory.

In Bizerte, there is an average of approximately three cafes on one downtown street. But there are only around five in the entire city that women can patronize.<sup>30</sup> There are restaurants where women can respectably go, but they are for the middle class and the unmarried. They tend to specialize in Tunisian snacks like cakes, pizzas, briks (fried savory pastries), and smoothies, expensive for the majority of working class Bizerte women. These restaurants tend to be not only frequented by middle class women but women of questionable reputations who sit on the top floor of the café, smoking in open view of men.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, men’s cafes require only small purchases, such as a cup of tea or coffee.

Even in cafes that are “mixed” gender, women know that their presence is secondary to men’s. Men outnumber women, and they may stare at women customers who are unaccompanied by a man or a child. I realized the difference in how women with children are treated; when Faris accompanied us, men rarely looked at us, but on the rare occasion when we did not have Faris, Kalthoum and I were subject to invasive eye contact by men. Most women never enter cafes alone for fear that they would be assumed promiscuous or even prostitutes.<sup>32</sup> Bathrooms in these cafes are often forbidding places for women. They are small and dirty rooms down dark corridors at the back of businesses. Many women

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<sup>30</sup> I do not include in this number cafes in tourist hotels or in exclusive areas of the cornice, since most Tunisian women would have little access to these.

<sup>31</sup> Women who smoke in view of men are subject to pornographic gossip. Men make jokes which imply that if she smokes cigarettes she must perform oral sex. Women who see a woman smoking on the street will tisk her and tell her she should be ashamed, or at least scowl at her.

<sup>32</sup> Prostitutes in Tunisia often sit at mixed cafés at a table alone and smile at men. They also loiter on the street near men’s cafes.

only go in an emergency and then with another woman. They prefer to “hold it” until they got home. This lack of acceptable bathrooms also makes women more tied to the home than men.

Since markets require purchases, as do the few cafes open to women, women who are on a tight budget stroll, and seek out benches along the corniche, or at the seaside playground, or in squares downtown. These are the social outings that women dress up for. As I stated above, few mothers get the chance to get out every day. As one homemaker who I interviewed on a park bench said, “Be sure you write in your paper how bored we women get at home.” What women who have the money can do daily to get out of the house (if they have the privilege of not having to work outside the home) is go shopping for household-related items. The bustling social scene of women shoppers bargaining with men vendors in the souk for items that are more and more often imported can help elucidate women’s place in the changing culture of Tunisia.

Dusk settles on the outer rings of the souk. This part of the souk is not actually in the souk, but stretches out from the winding Media, so it gets the full benefit of the Tunisian sun until its last rays disappear in the West. This spill-over souk is hemmed in by the Old Port of Bizerte to its North, and by the modern, French and French-looking shops to the south. The souk sprawls down the street that leads to one of the Mosques which is nestled just a stone’s throw from the Old Port of Bizerte. When we take our evening walk, my sister-in-law, my son, and I, inevitably stroll down this street, attracted by the colorful bustle of milling, mostly female customers and all-male salesmen with whom they bargain.



The street is packed with vendors' wares but honking cars still wind through the street market. Adolescent boys on mopeds also speed through the blankets and tables of goods. The vendors along this street usually have their goods laid out on blankets on the street or sometimes on fold-out tables. Many sell used shoes, clothing and textiles for home use, bath towels and upholstery fabric. The most colorful part of the market is where the jebba salesmen hawk these traditional Tunisian dresses.

Jebbas are traditional dresses which range in style and formality as well as quality based on intended use. Since jebbas were traditionally for every occasion of women's lives, waking and sleeping, Jebbas encompass a wide range of styles and qualities. All jebbas share a basic pattern: a loose-fitting gown which reaches the ankles and has slits at both ankles. The sleeves vary from sleeveless to full wrist coverage. The fabric varies by intended use. House jebbas are for leisure and housework, and tend to be made of cotton for summer and wool in winter. The ankle slits are usually higher, the summer and house jebbas are most likely to be sleeveless. Modesty ideals mean that outside the house, women would be compelled to cover more skin. In the home this would be less so.

Jebbas are also worn at the beach, where many women feel it is unacceptable to wear western-style bathing suits without more coverage. Paula Holmes-Eber found this to be the case in the 1980's, and I found the same trend three decades later. There are limitless designs and colors for jebbas, from silks, taffetas, brocades to tie-dyes. Many have embroidery and appliqués at the collar and sleeves. Silk and rayon embroidered and appliquéd jebbas are used for some

nights of wedding celebrations, circumcision parties, visits to a new mother after birth, and some Eid Al-Khabir celebrations. However, women are wearing jebbas on fewer outings. Many women opt for western pants and shirts, widely available through importation, as well as some local factories for blue jeans. The use of jebbas has declined as Islamic abayas imported from the Middle East as well as western fashions from Europe actually encroach on traditional Tunisian Jebbas. While Holmes-Eber found women in the 1980's in the capital city visiting and doing errands in jebbas, I found few women doing so in 2008. Most wore jeans and below-the-waist shirts. Since women still do wear jebbas to swim, it seems that it is not notions of modesty, but globalization that is most important here.

The street is usually crowded with women and children, who pick through the goods and haggle over prices. The salesmen call out prices, and often have their employees, their sons and nephews, they call out, "Look, Look, Madame, at the quality of the stitching!" While the adult men call out the going price. Traditionally it has been Tunisian women who sewed these jebbas at home, mostly urban *beldi* women and peasant women who migrated with their families to the cities. Women would not have control over their own production, but would be managed by a mother in law or male family members. Male relatives, husbands usually, take the finished jebbas to the souk to sell. Thus, labor stratification in terms of gender is part of a traditional market system in Tunisia. On these evening strolls through the souks, I often stop to look at the jebbas, and by the end of my time during research I wore them frequently.

On this night, I pull my son's stroller out of the street, out of the path of cars and boys on mopeds, and the salesman turns to me and says in French, "look at the fine quality of these jebbas, Madame! These are made in China. See how good the quality is?" He wrinkles his nose and continues, "They are not Tunisian quality, Madame." He proudly holds a blue jebba with white embroidery to me and shows me the stitch work. I draw myself away from him, and avert my gaze, a haptic that means I am not interested. He does not try to follow me down the street like some vendors do. There is a small crowd of women for him to turn to. His son is calling out, "Jebbas of high Chinese quality!" A woman with two children shakes her head and tisks when the salesman presents his jebbas to her. She points to some gaps in stitching and says, "It is Tunisian quality." He lowers his price, but the woman stalks away, pulling her children by the hands.

As the daughter-in-law to a Tunisian family, I saw the disparities in household labor between my husband's mother and father. This disparity did not have much impact on me, though, probably since women in the United States in my mother's generation also do more housework than their husbands. However, I was struck by the maintenance of the gender disparity for women in paid employment, women of my generation and younger, in Tunisia. Tunisian working women would typically go home after ten hour shifts to find their men folk sitting on the sofa, waiting for dinner. After she cooked, she would mop the floors (a daily activity in Tunis) and prepare the children for bed. In interviews with factory women, as well as women working in paid labor and home makers had two major reactions to the reality that their kinsmen were not sharing in

reproductive labor. One statement that arose again and again was, “Our guys in Tunis are lazy.” The other response was that to try to get men to help in the chores just caused the husband to anger. “It is easier for the woman to just do everything herself. Guys give us a hard time when we demand help.”

But women’s critique of men’s tendency to be “lazy” suggests that many women do not accept their subjugation as doxa (Bourdieu 1972). But a rejection of sexism intellectually did not translate into action, perhaps because their wages, if they had a job, are almost always lower than their male kin’s. Women would employ “weapons of the weak,” playing on patriarchy by manipulating the idea that an honorable daughter, sister, wife, and mother is self-abnegating (Scott 1985). In disputes with husbands, many women use their martyrdom as defense: “After how I serve you, you treat me like this?” While this appeal to men may indeed inspire guilt, it was not effective in getting men to change their “lazy” ways in the home. Interestingly, it could make men more appreciative of women’s work, and some women said that positive results might include gifts or money. This does not equalize their relationship, though.

While men’s “right” to be waited on in the home and to be “lazy” is not doxa, women’s responsibility for child care seems unquestioned and assumed to be part of the natural order. Here, the conflation of cultural and religious beliefs with state policy makes women bear an unequal burden in childcare. While all *binat* who participated in this study wanted to be married and have children, mothers’ actual treatment of their children sometimes reflected resentment at having to be solely responsible. For example, several women reported beating

their children. One such woman, a 32-year-old grocery clerk named Soraya, an employee in the new French-owned Geant store, expressed regret at her treatment of her children: “sometimes I beat them because I am angry because no one helps me with the housework when I come home from work. I know I must feed them, clean them, clean up after them, but my husband should help with the housework. My husband comes home and only sees what I did not clean. But he will not help me clean. Truly, it is insufferable to be married to a man who knows well women’s work!” In this case, Soraya not only is expected to do the second shift, but her husband acts as her supervisor, giving her a “hard time” for what she has not cleaned.

Yet women also tacitly support men’s masculine laziness, fearing several problems if the men do stay home to help. Women reported three major consequences of their husbands staying in to help instead of going to socialize at the cafes: resentment toward their wives that would lead men to take out their aggressions on them, men’s reputations depleting among the community of men as their masculinity was thrown into question, and women’s fear that their only source of status, home and children, would be stripped from them.

The few women in interviews who said that they had asked that their husbands to stay home from the cafes reported that they ultimately regretted the request. “All he did was make me and the kids miserable. He called me over and over to bring him tea, coffee, snacks. He wouldn’t let the kids watch the TV shows they wanted. He yelled at us,” said a 28-year-old mother of two and factory line worker. This was a common response, that women did want help

from men, but were thwarted by their husbands. Thus, many women would encourage men to go out to the cafes.

Women also reported that they were fearful of gossip if their husbands stayed at home to help them. First of all, they feared that other men, friends and enemies of their husbands would gossip about her husband while he was absent from the café. The wife expressed fear that her husband would lose face, meaning losing masculinity, for not engaging in homosocial bonding. Many married women said that their husbands would become the butt of jokes and be called “lady women,” jokes with homophobic innuendo. Women also feared that this would spiral into gossip that the wife was sexually unsatisfied, since the assumption is that a lady man might be nice but he would be useless in bed. This could lead to dangerous gossip about the unsatisfied wife becoming a *zania*, a woman who commits adultery with other women’s husbands.

This sort of gossip happened to Noura, a thirty-six year old mother who lived on the adjacent street from my apartment. She lost her friendships with several women on her block (including my land lady) when gossip circulated about her husband’s choice to stay in with her and the kids for her daughter’s sixth birthday party. That is, he had stayed in the women’s space of the party rather than disappearing to a café. Noura’s mother in law was sure that Noura had put a magic spell on her son to control him. Within a week, her mother-in-law had come to her house, lit candles, and chanted some verses from the Qu’ran to rid her daughter in law’s house of the spell.

Magic is women's realm in Tunisia. It is taboo to practice or use magic; technically, no Muslim should believe that magic is real, since the Qu'ran declares the witch and the soothsayer to be charlatans and liars in the *ayat al-Kursi*, the *surat al-Ikhlās*, *Al-Falaq*, and *An-Nas*. Magic may be a way for women to impose power over one another. While most Tunisian women may not practice magic, they know a woman who does. To practice it, or pay a specialist to remove a spell, is a way for women to gain a sense of control over social circumstances that are out of their control. Seeking the future through reading leaves in the bottom of a tea glass or throwing cous cous into the wind are do-it-yourself rituals that women can do in kitchens and roof tops (Lazreg 1994). Ferchiou (1972) asserts that the Tunisian cult of Marabouts is partly the result of women's lives being over-determined: lack of choice over their marriages, educations, and careers, makes possession and exorcism cathartic. The Marabout cults (a kind of Sufism) promote rituals where participants go into dissociative trances, and lose awareness of their surroundings (Dwyer 1978; Maher 1984). Maher suggests that achieving "decontrol" helps women develop distance from painful social realities, like abusive family situations. Women may be encouraged to learn to dissociate in Marabout rituals because it helps their mental health to achieve states of reverie in their everyday lives. During breast feeding, Maher (1992) finds that women who can "decontrol" release more hind milk, and suggests that this is a functional explanation for social encouragement for women to engage in Maraboutism (30).

While Maraboutism and all Sufism is linked to Islam and gains women some respect, magic is a complicated reality for Tunisian women. According to Islamic texts, magic does have real consequences. Those with malevolent intentions get help from Satan to harm others, and this is a highly gendered endeavor. Scripture specifically condemns women who cast spells to cause a husband and wife's marriage to end. But magic is not all considered Satanic. Magic is divided into light and dark. Thus, several of the participants in this study who were having magic done by a specialist would read verses from the Qu'ran, especially passages from ayat al-Kursi and surat al-Ikhlās, Al-Falaq, and A-Nas that are believed to lift black magic spells.

Magic mostly occurred, according to participants' stories, between kinswomen. Fear that kin would practice contagious magic by collecting a woman's nail clippings or hair led women to flush these down the toilet, or, even better to throw them into the sea. Women are thought to use magic to control their husbands, something that women are not supposed to do to men. Women also cast magic spells to sabotage other women in order to gain a marriage engagement. Especially prevalent are stories that a *binat*'s mother may try to sabotage other eligible girls so that her daughter could get the eligible bachelor.

For example, Sausan, an unemployed *binat* with a college degree, told me that her aunt was jealous of her degree because her own daughter (her cousin) had not gone to college. A woman with a college degree is considered a better match than one with only a high school diploma, or less. Sausan and her mother grew convinced that her aunt had put magic in her food when, after having lunch at her



aunt's house, Genan broke out into a rash of hives that lasted for one year. No medicine could cure the rash. "I was so ugly from that rash! No man would want to look at me," Sausan explained. It was only by drinking water from a sacred spring in Mecca (brought to her by a relative who had gone on Hajj) that the rash finally cleared up. Usually, it is a religious practice that can erase a spell. However, for Sausan, the man she was interested in marrying had already proposed to her cousin. Interestingly, there is rarely a confrontation with the alleged witch, since most women argued that it was better to keep peace between kin. However, the gossip circuit would light up over these situations. Women accused of doing magic often had permanent damage done to their reputations.

Shortly after Noura's husband stayed for his daughter's birthday party, Beya (my land lady) told Kalthoum and I that she saw her husband (a notorious womanizer who rode his moped to the beach as soon as the sun came up) talking to Noura in Beya's vegetable store. Beya furiously gossiped that Noura was a *zania* (a woman looking for other women's husbands), since Noura's own was a lady man.

Noura's reaction to the whole situation toward her neighbors was of condescending contempt; Noura had the advantage of some money of her own, and she did not have to run any businesses, unlike Beya who ran several. "They are ignorant and backward!" Noura stated. "To think a man has to be separate from his wife and kids is the old attitude of the uneducated Tunisians," she sneered. Then, Noura brought up the fact that Beya was from a region of Northern Tunisia called Jendouba. At this, Kalthoum said to Noura and me,

“That explains it. The people from Jendouba are zeros!” Noura rolled her eyes and agreed. I asked what she meant, and Noura said, “You must understand, Claire. They are ignorant, mean people.”

In this case, Noura could fall back on class superiority to cope with the loss of her friendships, and the malicious gossip of her former friends. Noura was fortunate, because she was one of the few women I knew of who was not reliant on a network of other women. She had no business that would lose customers because they suspected there was magic in her products. She did not rent out any floor of her house to people who would gossip that they heard strange noises from her floor in the night. She did not have to go to the *hammam* (bath house), since she had one in her home. She could reject Beya and the other women in the neighborhood. For most Tunisian women, such affluence was not an available way out.

A wife’s affinal kin, who usually live within walking distance, often gossip that a wife is trying to dominate her husband, their consanguineal kinsman. Mothers in law were an especially cogent source of gossip. One woman interviewee, Genan, a stay-at-home mother who sold pastries to her neighborhood from her home, and whose husband was a mechanic, told the story of her reputation being ruined. Genan’s mother in law told all the family that she was practicing magic to keep her husband from going out to the cafes. There is general skepticism that a husband could be happy at home with his wife and kids. Genan’s reputation was permanently damaged by the gossip about magic. For example, when her sisters-in-law visited, they often inspected the kitchen pantry.

She believed they were looking for signs of magic. Genan's mother-in-law would perform rituals in her house and to her son, to try to extricate him from the spell. Her husband grew suspicious, since his mother (who he would not counter) told him about her suspicions. The remedy for this magic is for the husband to distance himself from his wife. Ironically, this is just what the society promotes as the proper relationship between husbands and wives. The husband went back out to the cafes and left his wife and kids at home.

The counter-rituals against magic are usually religious, as the belief is that Islam can destroy magic, which is weak by comparison. When Genan's husband showed no sign of improvement (in that he did not start to frequent the cafes), Genan's reputation sank lower, as then her affines gossiped that her magic must have been extremely strong. Women have real financial concerns about such gossip. Her friends, while they did not necessarily believe that she practiced, gossiped to the general community of women about the possibility that she practiced. Many of her regular customers stopped buying her baklawa, which was her main source of independent earnings. Once a reputation for magic is established, it is extremely difficult to reverse the effects.

More common supernatural belief in Tunisia than magic is the evil eye. There is much evidence that the evil eye concept is found across the Mediterranean and the MENA (Davis 1977; Galt 1982; Marino 2002). Belief in malevolent eyes is perhaps especially strong in Muslim society because the Prophet Muhammad declared through the *Hadith* that the evil eye was real and true. That is, a person could unwittingly attract evil by looking with envy or

jealousy on another. Babies and children are especially vulnerable, as are brides. The most troubling part of the evil eye is that the person does not need to think anything malevolent, or have animosity toward another to bring on the evil eye. Indeed they could simply give a complement. This leads to a milieu of endemic fear and intrigue concerning the evil eye.

Finally, women guarded their major source of status, childcare and homemaking. When men tried to help, their wives and female kin often ridiculed them, and imply that they are becoming *lady-men*. *Lady-men* and the intrigue surrounding them, indicate the narrowness of acceptable masculinity in Tunisia. To be a *lady-man* is to be absent from community cafes during the evenings, to be comfortable spending time with wife and children at home, to help in domestic labor, and to be anything less than domineering with the family. While Lillia Labidi (1987) argues that men's roles are becoming more fluid in Tunisian homes, and that some are pioneering new roles as involved fathers and husbands, the fathers and husbands of the women participants in this study were decidedly derisive toward men who were less than properly patriarchal. Wives may try to ensure that their husbands and brothers feel incompetent in the household, to protect their reputations as well as their authority as mothers. Women are the specialists of the home, and usually they hold the keys to every door and closet. Tunisian novelist captures the gender dualism of men and women this way: "The heart of the house beats in my grandmother's corset just as the street pounds in my old man's hand" (Beji 1993: 119). The mothers' authority rests in maintenance of the household, her ability to make a comfortable home for her

family, and her preparation of delicious meals. For these tasks, she is cherished, especially by her children. She also submits to her husband out of a sense of propriety and a belief that patriarchy is the natural order of human society. At the same time, wives often cracked jokes about men being children, and that they had to consider their husbands as one of their kids: emotional, flighty, and needy. This kind of banter was engaged in by wives out of earshot of men folk.

Patriarchal authority in the family in Tunisia is an important manifestation of gender inequality; to minimize it or protect it as a researcher is to be complicit with it. Justifying patriarchal power as “cultural” renders culture as sacrosanct, which should not be the project of applied anthropologists and other social scientists who wish their research to lend in social justice. The importance of the culture concept in anthropology is in our ability to see the ways in which the concept belies a mystique of the cultural “other,” non-Western and usually non-White subjects whose culture is often believed to be stuck in time (Fabian 1983).

The rigidity of gender roles in Tunisia means that men who do any kind of housework may hide this fact, or may poke fun at themselves because they will be ridiculed as *lady-men*. Thus while men may actually perform housework there is a conspiracy of silence surrounding this help. Men who “help” are the subjects of gossip about their sexuality. Further, the masculine identity is performed largely in public spaces like cafes, in the evenings after work and on weekends. Men who stay home with their wives to help are compromising their time to do masculine work. Like ethnic work, where an ethnic group must be active promoters of their ethnic identity, men in Tunis are in a constant struggle to assert

their masculinity. This has been suggested to be especially true in Tunis, because of the gains made by women following the PSC's. Nouri Gana (2010) and Mounira Charrad (2003) argue that men are threatened with losing their patriarchal supremacy, and that this has marked the post-colonial era, from 1958 at the passing of the Personal Status Codes (PSC's).

Gana (2010) argues that this destabilization of patriarchy did not receive a sincere effort by Bourguiba toward gender equality. The ruse of modernity at the time of Tunisian post-colonial nationalism is the origin of the "melancholy masculinity" of Tunisian men. Tunisian men's bind between the stability of patriarchal authoritarianism and egalitarianism is explored by Tunisian filmmakers. For example, in Moufida Tlatli's (2001) *The Season of Men*, the husbands are stunted by traditional masculine patriarchy, and enforce their dominance (through their mothers) on their wives. *Man of Ashes*, by Nouri Bouzid (1986), features two young men in the city of Sfax, who are psychologically devastated by the sexual abuse they suffered as boys at the hands of their employer. Although it is taboo to discuss the abuse openly, through gossip, the community ridicules the two young men's emasculation, while their abuser remains a respected member of the community. Ferid Boughedir's (1990) *Halfaouine: Boy of the Terraces*, while it is uncritically Freudian, is also an exploration of anxiety-ridden Tunisian masculinity. In this film, masculine dominance is reified, and men's sexism toward the vulnerable (lower class women) is accepted. However, the figure of the main patriarch of the film is also portrayed as a pathetic womanizer, who is threatened by even a few moments of

time spent around a group of women. Indeed, the men of the film are one-dimensional and contemptible. The father tries to gain sexual relationships with female customers, he reads French pornography magazines, and his sexual advances are rejected by the promiscuous sister of his wife. That is, this film promotes a saying that is common among Tunisians: “Our women are always ahead of the guys.”

The tensions between women and men are evidenced in Tunisian women’s novels from the 1950’s to the present. Underlying these novels is the fear among men that women’s growing equality of women in waged labor and their broach of public space, is diluting their dominance. For example, in Jalila Hafsia’s *Cendre a L’aube*, the young female protagonist seeks liberation by transgressing the private, feminine space into the public male one. Souad Guellouz’s *Les Jardins du Nord* describes women’s world as a place of severe seclusion. However, her narrative is nostalgic for a supposedly simple past where women and men’s roles were clearly delineated. Perhaps her social class position afforded her plenty of leisure activities (and servants) which softened the feelings of restriction. Similarly, Hele Beji, in *L’oie du Jour*, writes from an elite point of view. Beji considers the modernization of Tunis as something that has destroyed its traditional charms (Brosseau and Ayari in Falah and Nagel 2005). Emna Bel Haj Yahia, in *Chronique Frontaliere*, presents a feminist critique of Tunisian and French culture. In it, two young female protagonists become disillusioned with modernity, but have no nostalgia for an imagined traditional past. Tunisian women’s novels of the last six decades share a focus on women’s place in

Tunisian society (Brosseau and Ayari in Falah and Nagel 2005). They also often choose to write in French, which may allow them the freedom to express freely their feelings in a way which is religiously taboo in Islam (Segarra 1997). That is, Islamic values include the belief that when women express themselves openly in public, they create *fitna*, the threat to moral social structure (Ibid). Segarra (1997) argues that writing in French, which has no religious values for Muslims, allows women to veil themselves so that they may express social problems without feeling exposed to criticism (Ibid). To this effect Tunisian novelist Fawzia Zouari (1996) argues that if she were forbidden to write in French, she would be condemned to silence.

Men who shirk their masculine responsibilities are seen as hilariously out of place in the home and are at threat of being admonished as lady men. Lady men in Tunisia are not necessarily considered homosexual, but they are believed to be lacking in masculinity, and therefore a prime threat to masculine supremacy. By performing women's work, these men upset the assumed-natural superiority of men over women. When a man is feminine, his wife becomes more masculine, and transgression of these segregated spheres of social life is believed to corrupt society (Souaiaia 2009). Lady men have stooped beneath their rightful place, entering the feminine sphere; men *and* women make incessant jokes about such men.

Jokes about lady men range from innocuous to violent. The jokes about Tunisian lady men are shards of the deeper anxiety in Tunisia surrounding gender. Nouri Gana (2010) describes contemporary Tunisian men as



“Bourguiba’s Sons,” men who are melancholy because of an un-reconciled conflict between the modernity imposed by Bourguiba juxtaposed with the traditional patriarchy which rules the Tunisian family through the absolute authority of the patriarch. The melancholia of manhood, as described by Gana is a reflection of Bourguiba himself, who advocated women’s equality through the Personal Status Codes while also imposing himself as the inceptor of modern, independent Tunisia.

While Bourguiba’s passing of the PSC’s gave women rights that no other MENA country except Turkey had given, the PSC’s did not liberate women, nor did they make women equal to men (Charrad 2003). Bourguiba made clear that women must never forget that their primary role in society was to be wives and mothers. Bourguiba’s own romance of French modernity was coupled with his un-reconciled sexism. The destabilizing impacts of women’s mitigated liberation loom in Tunisia, and lady men remind Tunisian men and women that the patriarchal family has been thrown off. Thus, the *cheffa*, Madame Hayatt, chooses to make fun of her lady man husband as a way to remove the sting from the inevitable gossip about his compromised masculinity and her ruptured femininity. That Tunisian men who “help” in the home and with childcare, or even spend time at home with the family instead of being out in the public sphere asserting their masculinity are the subject of ridicule by other men and women, indicates the deep cultural unease around gender changes.

I experienced this gender anxiety and ridicule when I first arrived in Bizerte. We visited a family friend from Bizerte, a college classmate of my sister-

in-law named Khadija. Khadija works full time as a manager of a printing company; her husband Muhammad is her cousin, the ideal traditional marriage. They had two girls. When I met Muhammad, I noticed a lack of rigidity in his greetings and he kissed us on the cheek in a way that usually the woman of the house does. He also lacked the mustache typical of middle-aged men. When we visited Khadija at her home, she was seven months pregnant with a hoped-for son. My sister-in-law was with me on the visit to help translate. Khadija's husband was helping set the table for lunch, moving in and out of the kitchen softly chiding his two daughters to stay out of his way while he set the table. Muhammad sat with us, rather than eating in a separate room. Throughout the meal, we all talked and he played with the girls. I felt totally at ease around Muhammad and had a very good time. I thought that Khadija got a good man.

At the end of the evening, as we walked home across Bizerte pushing my son in his stroller, my sister-in-law locked arms with me and smirked conspiratorially, "What did you think of Khadija's husband?" I said in all sincerity that he seemed like a really nice guy, which made my sister-in-law giggle. "Yes," she laughed. "He is soooo nice."

Perhaps this tacit encouragement to boys to be masculine by being not very nice to their wives has larger consequences. Tunisian women tend to make jokes, that once they are married they become "captives." While said with laughter, such jokes may be more serious, especially considering the problem of violence committed by male kin toward female kin. The organization of *Collectif Maghreb Egalite* (CME), in a 1999 report, described high levels of violence from

husbands against wives, as well as violence toward *binat* from fathers and brothers- including keeping girls imprisoned in their homes, a fact reflected in my own participants' words. Violence against women also was reported by the CME in the form of threats and psychological intimidation.

Femininity and masculinity in Tunisian culture reflect the values of several cultural systems. While Arabic and Islamic value systems are predominant, they are also uniquely modified by Tunisia's historical interactions with other cultures. In order to understand the complicated gender value complex found in Tunisia, it is important to look at the major cultural influences on femininity and masculinity.

Beyond weddings and circumcisions which happen only occasionally, shopping is women's major social outing. Weekly visits to Souks, and daily visits to local shops, butchers, greengrocers, and bakeries are social events where women meet with family and friends, stroll, gossip, and watch one another. Eyeing each others' purchases, asking about the quality of a purchase are also part of the shopping event. The traditional straw market baskets have been replaced by opaque plastic bags, allowing women to see into women's purchases and make assessments about their status.

Two women stand in the extremely long line at the Geant, me standing in line behind them. Two women in front of me discuss potato chips. One woman in navy blue *hijab* speaks to another woman with cropped curly black hair. The lady in *hijab* is telling her seven-year-old son to run to the aisle with the chips and get two more bags. The cropped hair lady asks if they are more delicious than the

other brand. Are they made in Tunis? Good quality? She repeats three times. The lady reassures her three times. They are made in Tunisia, *but* they are still good quality.

This discussion, variations of which I listened in on and sometimes participated in while I waited in the line with my son, suggests many things. To show through words that one is concerned with high quality is to show that if the quality of the commodity was mediocre, one could and would pay more money for higher-priced chips. Part of being a good modern mother is to consume good quality foods; Tunisian and international television commercials and pelt women with information about good quality products.

In the traditional souk markets, the butchers' market area of the souk was a place where more affluent women would display their wealth by ordering more cuts of meat, but also by making conversations with the butchers which included inquiries about the well-being of their families and by references to when they had last been to the market. In interviews with women consumers, I asked how much they had purchased, and how many people it was for. Women who had made large purchases were jovial in showing us, while women who had purchased small slices of mostly bone were reluctant to talk to us. Many women who purchased small bony pieces of meat said that it was just to add flavor to a sauce. When we probed and asked how many people would this meat feed, women would often say that this was only for flavor, or that they did not really eat much meat. Many women with small amounts of meat literally rushed away from us. Others said they were in a hurry and could not talk to us.

Women amass cultural capital by purchasing European products that are luxury items, unnecessary, and even unhealthy. Kraft Foods for example, is now marketing in Tunisia. A small block of Philadelphia cream cheese is approximately five dinar, whereas locally produced Tunisian cream cheese is approximately two dinar. Five dinar for anything other than meat is exorbitant in Tunisia. Tunisians watch Arabic stations which are centered in the wealthy gulf states, and there commercials show gulf women in elegant clothing and decadently modern kitchens spreading “Philadelphia” on European-looking breads, and serving it to her lady visitors on a silver platter. Products like Philadelphia Cream Cheese show up in Arabic music videos; they are background items in the fabulously wealthy singers’ kitchens. To serve “Philadelphia” is not just to show one’s wealth, but to achieve a global status, and possess a piece of this powerful Western product. As Rhoda Ann Khanaaneh (2002) describes in her research on Palestinians, to buy Western products is to be engaged in Western modernity. So while the locally produced cream cheeses in Tunisia tasted much better, they did not impart the status of Philadelphia.

In her ethnography of Tunisian women in the 1980’s, Paula Holmes-Eber (2003) describes a few of the effects of the dismantling of trade barriers between Tunisia and the European Union: Tunisian shops began to display European items that were much coveted, but unaffordable, to most people. Desire for items like washing machines, vacuum cleaners, designer Italian fashions, and German luxury cars became rampant. Since the 1980’s, women have tried to acquire household appliances that had use value. For example, a dishwasher does cut

down on the labor of a working mother. However, having household appliances can also be a sign of prestige, especially if it is a German brand like Heier, and not a Chinese brand. The larger issue is that products like appliances and cars are a way for Tunisians to engage with modernity.

Marriage practices provide insight into the political economic transformations brought about through Tunisia's increased incorporation into global capitalism. Desire for goods produced outside Tunisia is an historic predicament. In 1927, soon-to-be ousted Zeituna Mosque University professor and Desturian activist Tahar Haddad published a criticism of Tunisians' purchase of imported, European-made goods instead of Tunisian-made products (Perkins 2003). Haddad and the Desturians' anti-colonial movement was successful in compelling the French colonial regime to abdicate their colonial administration. The Desturians and the other Tunisian nationalist revolutionaries, however, did not kick out the French altogether. Tunisians' commodity fetishism for European products has been more difficult to conquer.

The souk is packed at 10:00 am on a Saturday, and sticky in July in these winding alleys with no ventilation. My sister-in-law and I are looking over the maquillage (the French word Tunisians use for make-up) section of the souk. We run into some binat from the factory. We are looking over the racks of pressed powder compacts, which run in color from light-tawny to molasses-colored. A brand with French and Arabic writing on the box catches my eye. My sister-in-law and Sarah see my look of intrigue and both tisk, "That is *Tunisian*

Maquillage. *Low quality.*” They admonish me to consider only the French make-up, especially since I have the money for the “best quality.”

“European” products are often believed to be high quality. This is evidenced in the linguistics of the discussions, where an item that is considered high quality is described to be so in French: *meilleure qualite*. In marketing in the souks, as well as in Bizerte’s two Western-style supermarkets, the French-owned chain *Geant*, women expressed that some European products were superior. The hegemony of the idea of foreign-made products’ superiority over Tunisian products is one that reveals power in globalized economic relationships. However, there is a counter-discourse here. Tunisians also assert the superiority of many agricultural products. Wheat grown in Tunisia is considered stronger and healthier, and Tunisians balk at the idea of purchasing semolina flour or pasta imported from Europe. There was an attempt made by a French *couscous* company to sell the product in Tunisia, but Tunisians scoffed at the very idea that the French could think their *couscous* could be superior. Similarly, Tunisians celebrate the high quality of their tuna, which is packed in olive oil and exported to many countries as a gourmet product. Their spicy *harissa* paste as well is their delicacy (which sells in US gourmet shops for upwards of ten dollars), as are capers which they know Italians favor over the Italian capers. The products which have symbolic value and are linked to national identity tend to be considered higher quality, whereas products that are relatively new to the Tunisian diet are those that are believed to be better when imported.

Tunisian *Saida* brand chocolate spread resembles the Italian chocolate spread Nutella. Only recently have chocolate spreads become popular in Tunisia. Access to these products, and the mere fact that these European-made luxury products are available in Tunisian grocery stores, is a testament to the hegemony of “free trade” agendas. There are several Tunisian renditions of Nutella, some made with pulverized sesame seeds instead of hazelnuts so as to resemble the traditional Tunisian sweet *halwa chamia* (which is healthier), and some designed to be exactly like the high-quality Nutella. The most mass-marketed of these chocolate spreads is *Saida*. Tunisians describe *Saida* as being low-quality. I heard that it was made from carnauba wax, with very little chocolate at all. *Saida* is cheaper to buy, almost one dinar cheaper than the expensive, coveted Nutella. Thus, to purchase *Saida* is to associate oneself and one’s family with the struggling working class.

Bizerte has few playgrounds open to the public, so the amusement park’s privately owned *jardin des enfants* a playground adjacent to the sea, is a popular excursion for Tunisian mothers of young children. It costs half a dinar admission into the playground, so it is frequented by middle class mothers, who would be able to afford this luxury. It is at the back of the amusement park, and adjoins an outdoor café, both of which overlook the beach. For the practical reason that I was a mother of a bored and frustrated toddler, I spent many late afternoons at the playground. I also anticipated, based on Holmes-Eber’s (2003) research, that where there were benches, there would be women with whom to conduct interviews. This was indeed the case. A row of cement benches lined the sides of



the chain-link fence of the playground, and in late afternoon and early evening, they were packed with mothers socializing with one another.

When I first arrived at the playground with Faris, I felt like I had won the lottery. Before me sat approximately thirty women between 18 and 46. Most all of the women in the playground were married with children; the only other adults would be the mother's adult daughters, who would accompany their mothers (since they continue to live at home until marriage). Adult unmarried daughters are common in Tunisia since many women do not get married until they near thirty. The playground interviews revealed much about the experiences of prime domestic economists, who were burdened with the impacts of structural adjustment. However, as Holmes-Eber (2003) describes, the affluent classes of Tunisia are those who may benefit from trade liberalization. These women were enjoying leisure time out, whereas "the squeezed," the working classes, would not have the money or the time to engage in such activities.

At the playground, I used my own existence as a curiosity, blended with my sister-in-law's frank and easy way of starting conversations, and my son's presence to gain women's confidence that I was not a secret agent or someone whose questions could in any way be a problem for the women. As a curiosity, many times I was approached by mothers before I could approach them. To Kalthoum and to me, they enquired the usual things: why I was in Bizerte? what country I was from? where was my Tunisian husband?

All the women on the playground accepted doing interviews with us, and that was something I felt deserved inquiry. Perhaps it was the fact that they had

time. They were not employed. They were not rushing between a market and home. This was a time of leisure. This was also a time of leisure open to the middle class, who tend to feel confident about their lives, since culture tends to reflect their value systems (Flank 2007; Gramsci 2000).

After considering the reactions of participants to the topic of my dissertation, I concluded that because my focus was women's everyday concerns, like household budgeting, housework, informal economic participation, that these were considered by women to be trivial, inconsequential. When Kalthoum and I would explain that we were interested in women's lives, how they shopped, what kinds of labor in which they engaged, they would often seem bemused. When I assured women that these interviews were confidential, they would often giggle. One mother told me, "Please don't use my real name to find out what wedding gifts I give," cracking up the mother next to her.

However, once the interviews began, women would often become quite engaged, and what were designed to be individual interviews would become group discussions where other mothers would respond to what the official interviewee would say. For example, when I would ask about the largest single household expenditure, if the participant said groceries. Another mother might say, "No. A household expenditure is not meat, my Dear. She does not mean food." I would often be asked to clarify questions. I would respond by saying, "How do you define household expenditures, and what might you consider groceries, if not a household expenditure?" Often, the debates among women helped to clarify where women felt most of their financial responsibilities lay.

Kalthoum's role as translator also expanded during these interviews. She would often engage with women about market prices. She also would use these opportunities to find out which markets had highest quality goods for the lowest prices. Further, she enquired about which women were most famous in their home businesses, from baklava-makers to beauticians who did wedding services like body waxing and henna.

The playground interviews revealed some information about how affluent women deal with the impacts of neo liberalism and structural adjustment. While these mothers tended to be married to professional men, and government officials, they rarely worked outside the home. Some women wanted to be sure to tell me that there are working women who are married to affluent men, but they have no time to take their children to the playground, for when they return home they must still deal with the housework.

When I asked about domestic servants, women replied that a domestic servant could not be relied upon to make the food and that women would want to be there to supervise a domestic. The majority of women in their class position would not work after they had children, because they would be pressured to stay home. Many women themselves considered a woman who could stay home but chose to work to be selfish. "A struggling lady- she is good for working because she helps support her family, but a wealthy woman, she is neglecting her children and husband by choosing to be away from home." Further, the women argued that a woman asserting her independence in this way would lead to marital

problems. “The husband will feel neglected, and it will hurt his pride that the wife wants to be like him, at an office.”

Despite many of the interviewee’s description of themselves as “comfortable,” financially, they also complained that they found it humiliating to have to go to their husbands to ask for money. “It is not good to have to explain to your husband why you need money- and they are always stingy.” Many women had home-based businesses, selling to other women in neighboring homes. Most of these businesses involved pastries and dress-making. Here, many women said that having a domestic was helpful because she could help them produce more to sell. This would exemplify the differing impacts of structural adjustment on classes of women. The domestic servant in effect becomes the home laborer for the mother of the house, allowing her to boost production and thus sales. Kalthoum would be around too, ready with questionnaires that were usually conducted perfunctorily, before the real gossip and discussions about the high prices of commodities, and about how the dinar was diminishing.

Women work in a variety of businesses in Bizerte, under a variety of circumstances. Most work in a family’s business, some work as receptionists and secretaries, shop floor attendants. Others work in government agencies, of which I had little access, because most governmental offices are in the capital city. I did however, do one interview with a postal worker and tried to do one with a soldier (who admonished me to never enter the military barracks of Bizerte again).

Most often, women work in a kin-owned business, albeit they rarely own the business. When a man owns a shop or some business like a dry cleaner's, his wife (and quite possibly his mother) will work there. Many small food shops, typical places where Tunisians purchase snacks while they are out during a lunch break or need a break from errands, are owned by a man. Even though he owns the shop, female family members, especially wives and/or mothers, actually do most of the work.

When asking to do interviews with women in such businesses, most of the time women would say that they needed to ask their husband's permission, and that he would not be in the shop "until later." When we would asking the husband permission, he would often say that we could ask him the questions directly. He was reticent to let womenfolk do interviews. Women in this position would tell us to come back when he was gone, so that she could do the interview. However, if the mother in law was present, this would be impossible, since she would tell on her daughter-in-law to the husband. In this way, wives become workers for their husbands. In Tunisia, men are rarely thought of as successful unless they are married; their success is often attributable to the labor of his wife in his business.

What women who could do the interviews told us was that they did most of the work, while their husbands were off socializing in cafes and/or looking for other women with which to have sexual encounters. Women expressed bitterness about their husbands' sexual exploits, but little critique of husbands' exploitation of women's labor. This illustrates the doxa of "women's work" as being not just

household labor but whatever the husband delineated as such. However, women also said that they were happy that their husbands did not often stay in the businesses, as then they would boss them around. Even though they ended up doing almost all of the labor, at least with their husbands gone they could be in control of their own pace of labor, which many women equated with freedom. Another possible freedom was that many women were able to keep some of the money from sales for themselves, or even conduct other business on the side.

This was also the case with Beya, who lived in the house whose top floor I rented. Her husband Hamid was a notorious womanizer. He would leave for the beachside mixed cafes on his moped after breakfast to let Beya, her teen daughter and Rami her ten year old son do all the housework and attend the vegetable store. He would return to eat lunch and nap, and then back out he would go. Since Beya's husband was gone for so many hours, she could also do other kinds of business without her husband knowing about the profits, with the help of her son and daughter. She would not allow her teen daughter to attend the vegetable market, as her husband forbade his daughter from going out anywhere except to accompany her mother at the markets. Beya did let her ten year old son do so. While Rami ran the vegetable store, Beya could babysit neighbors' children with the help of her daughter. She could prepare *harissa* (a spicy condiment) and other spice preparations to sell late in the afternoon from the counter of the vegetable market. Beya explained that she sold most of the spice preparations to working wives who wished to prepare dinner quickly (but as if it were homemade) for their husbands and families.

I frequently saw the call center workers purchasing these preparations from Beya's vegetable market. As Beya's economic activities illustrate, this kind of family-run business affords women possibilities for economic independence, albeit it requires never-ending labor. They also fit into a larger scheme of economics happening in Bizerte. Beya could use her earnings to achieve many goals. She could use some earnings to invest in more products to sell from her store. Moreover, she could increase her status with kin by contributing more expensive gifts for weddings and circumcisions. By giving more expensive gifts, she would increase what her own daughter would get when she got married. Her sons would benefit because their brides' families would feel obligated to give more expensive dowries. Items in dowries, bridewealth and *zahez* (gifts given to the bride from her in-laws) usually include perfumes, toiletries, lingerie, and Tunisian slippers. It is the quality of the items which can increase the giver's status. For example, French perfume has the highest status, while eau de toilette and US or other perfumes are less desirable. The gifts of weddings are fodder for gossip. When people gossip, they often run down an inventory of every detail of the price of each item given by which relative. Women who do not have an independent source of income are stressed to find ways to save face at such events. This corresponds to Bourdieu's findings among the Algerian Kabili, who amassed or lost symbolic capital through gift-giving (1977). Moreover, it is normative for a bride's family to borrow money from other kin to create a bank of money for the dowry and the festivities (Holmes-Eber 2003). Those relatives

who can be counted on to contribute large sums are afforded higher status and they are owed more favors in return.

When visiting shops in Bizerte, it is common to see young, attractive, yet modestly dressed (sometimes with headscarves) women behind the store counters. Most are hired as young unmarried girls, and many leave the labor force once they get married and have children. While male shop owners were more than willing to be interviewed themselves, they said little more about hiring young women than that, “the people like to see a nice girl when they come into a shop.” While there is certainly sexism in this, it reflects an ideology where young modest women are perceived as an indication of the propriety of the business proprietor.

This also reflects the neo liberal changes in Tunisia- like much of the world, women’s employment rates increase, but most of them occupy “pink collar” positions in the service sector which is low-wage. This is reflected in the EPZ as well as outside of it. Several young and attractive women have secured employment with airlines. These women are almost always unmarried and perceived as attractive. While their salary is not much more than other pink collar professions in Bizerte, their presentation of self is decidedly bourgeois.

Since unemployment is high and higher for women in Tunisia, for a woman to even get a job at a tourist hotel cleaning rooms is challenging. In interviews with chamber maids at tourist hotels, participants described the competitiveness of the job market. An unmarried chamber maid said she waited three years after she applied to get a job. She works an average ten-hour day and makes approximately fifty dinars per week, the average rate for chamber maids.



Somehow the hotel manager heard about the interview with us and said he would fire any other employee who met with us. Perhaps because the Bizerte bourgeoisie (elite) make a large profit from tourism, they were threatened that their employees might say something negative about the hotels. She did in fact describe grueling work and exploitation. She said that men got hired in jobs which paid more, and women were barred from being bell hops, bar attendants, or waiters. She also described the degrading treatment she received from male European guests, who sometimes propositioned her sexually, or left the rooms filthy for her to clean. The Tunisian men workers also treated her disrespectfully, disparaging her on the assumption that she had sexual relations with hotel guests.

Many women got jobs not because of their qualifications, but either because they were considered attractive by male managers/owners or because they have a family connection with the owners. Further, women who are hired based on their looks are in a vulnerable position not only because they may be coerced into sexual relationships with bosses, but even more so because of gossip, which could destroy her reputation.

This leaves the poorest of Bizerte with the disadvantage of higher unemployment, since they have few connections for employment and have few family members with businesses.

I will begin this section by describing women who own businesses, where they live in the store. These women are usually living in poverty with their children. Their husbands have either abandoned them, or are present but chronically unemployed. These women rented a living space that was the lowest

floor of an apartment building. The space was usually two rooms, and a bathroom. Most women would turn the front room into a shop where they would sell canned sodas, candies and other snacks. Here, they work inside the home, but the home the same as the business. Women participants with this sort of business tended to be originally from rural agricultural regions. They and their husband's families were the lowest agricultural classes, the squeezed, in Tunisian. They worked the land, without any ownership rights. Re-privatization under Ben Ali displaced many of these workers. The following case of Safia illustrates some typical patterns of hardship for poor women in Bizerte.

We sit on the bench while Safia, a middle-aged woman, sits on her bare floor of the room behind her small store. She insists that we sit on the bench in the room which must function as kitchen, living room, and bedroom. While we interview her, she keeps her eye on the front room, for any customers. It is cold outside but in her room it is humid and close, probably from the simmering pot on the stove. Safia starts by apologizing for her apartment. She tries to keep it clean, but she has three adult sons and her husband there, and she has no daughter to help her clean or cook. When we ask her if she is a Bizerte native, she says no, and describes her life story:

“I was born and raised in Jendouba. My parents, my seven sisters and brother including me, we lived in a one-room shack near the Fields of the Ben Hamra family. My parents and my brothers and sisters and I we all worked in the Ben Hamra fields. When I was 17, they married me off to a relative's son, Jaffar.

Jaffar could not find a job and he always wanted to go to the city, so after a month of marriage, he left to go to Bizerte. He found some construction work.

I was miserable with his mother-in-law. She had me like her slave, doing all the work for her and for her other children who made me take care of all their children and cook for everyone. She [Jaffar's mother] beat me and once she slapped me in the face, and I knew I had to leave. So when Jaffar finally came home for a visit, I begged for him to let me go with him to Bizerte. He said no. His mother said no.

Then I slept with him and tried to be sure to be pregnant. It worked and he finally conceded that I could come with him. We lived in a one-room apartment, and he had work building some hotels, and we were happy. But after the first baby, I got pregnant right away again, and Jaffar lost his construction job. He could not find another job and he started drinking and blaming me for our problems. I ended up with three sons, but they did not finish school, and they are all three and their father out of work. Now they come to me to ask for money for cigarettes, and for God only knows what else. Anyway, I have to fight to keep enough money for the rent, between my husband and my sons. Only God Knows. If it were not for my store, I would be one of the beggar women on the street.”

Safia's palpable sorrow was only lifted when she spoke of her store. She explained that she borrowed the money from a neighbor for the supplies. She managed to pay back the neighbor for the initial supplies, and now she stays afloat, paying rent and for food, from what she makes from the store. Safia's case helps to drive the point that Tunisian women take pride in their work, and value

the idea of independence. They are often the backbone of their families. At great personal expense, they attempt to keep their family's financial integrity. This is evident in many of the stories told to me by Bizerte women.

Rania, a middle-aged woman I interviewed as part of the research on women workers in informal and formal economics, owned a small beauty salon. Interviewing her in her salon. She described her work history in a blue jean factory as we sat in her salon. To own a salon in Tunisia is a sign of accomplishment for a woman, since most women offer salon services in their homes. To own a salon shop means that there has been so much business that the woman could move her operation out of her house.

Rania's salon is a "cut-out," a room in which a back wall is placed making a shallow area on the ground floor of an otherwise residential building. Rania's salon consisted of sofa, where Kalthoum (my translator and sister-in-law), our Algerian neighbor who gave us a ride, and I, sat. Adjacent to the sofa, approximately five feet away, are two mirrored salon chairs, and at the back there is a curtained-off area for waxing. Rania sat in one of the salon chairs to tell us her stories. As a teenager, she begged her father to let her get a job in the Bizerte jeans factory, but her father refused, saying that factory women were either promiscuous, or they acted pretentious. She won her father over to the idea by pointing out other young women in the neighborhood who had saved all their money for their dowries, and could therefore get married earlier. Since she was not beautiful, something she told us matter-of-factly, and that neither of the other two women in the room protested, Rania reasoned with her father that amassing a

dowry would expedite an engagement, which might otherwise take years.<sup>33</sup> She laughed a lot during this story, especially at how relieved her father looked when she convinced him that he could stop supporting her at a younger age, since she would become her in-laws' responsibility.

But Rania's secret plan was to use her paychecks to open her salon. After a year in the factory, her parents began to accept engagement propositions, but Rania always found a reason to reject the engagement. She purchased salon equipment, which she hid with her mother's complicity, in her friends' houses. She advertised by word of mouth to friends and neighbors. The Tunisian-owned jeans factories would close for several weeks in summer, the season of vacations and weddings in Tunisia, and on her first day of vacation, she opened her shop. Her father did not even find out until she turned a profit. At that point, there was little he could do except yell at her, but she contributed to household expenses, and as she described, always stayed, "a good girl." Being a still good girl means being the kind of woman who does not even consort with men. She was twenty-one; she said from then on, she took her time finding the right husband, and did not marry until she was thirty-two. Her husband owns the adjacent barber shop.

It is cloyingly humid in Monia the *haneneh*'s house on this September mid-morning. I am trapped on her Italian leather sofa, my hands and feet covered in a lattice-work of henna, "gulf style," my arms and legs in frozen position. The *haneneh*'s daughter Samr, put my hands in an imploring position, outstretched and I am not allowed to move for at least two more hours. Perhaps it is so sticky

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<sup>33</sup> Rania referred to herself as "not beautiful," and indicated her dark skin tone as her main detractor. Whiteness as a beauty ideal is common in Tunisia, yet unattainable for most Tunisians.

because Monia's house is just a few streets away from the Old Port of Bizerte, and because the Medina has high walls which block the breezes from the Mediterranean. Three hours ago I arrived, wanting to see Monia's house and business at the height of the Bridal and tourist season. Monia is a famous *haneneh*, from a long line of women who have prepared brides in traditional beauty rituals, as well as sexual matters, in the days of their weddings.

As always, I wanted to be early to Monia's house, a neuroses I bring from my own culture that means that in Tunisia I am twenty minutes before anyone else. So earlier that morning, I wound my way through the streets of Bizerte's Medina. I walked into the Medina from the Old Port side, the only side I can find my way back to after leaving. Men, and some women, were making their way to jobs, housewives were taking out the garbage, depositing plastic grocery bags of household waste on the sidewalks.

Trash collectors would soon follow, men from the countryside, displaced farm laborers, I am told, who wear straw sombrero-like hats and thick mustaches and who do not return my Arabic "good morning." They jump up and down from their pickup trucks, collecting whatever has not been torn apart by hungry cats, and drive it out to the landfill that is West of Bizerte.

Children in blue uniforms head to school; a group of boys is lingering, kicking a soccer ball around the narrow street, while groups of girls stride by, many with arms locked. After school, the street will be crowded with boys playing soccer, while girls will be inside helping their mothers with cooking and other chores.

When the *haneneh* opens her door, she is still wearing her bathrobe. I apologize for being early in French and say I will be back later, but she insists that I stay. She ushers me into her living room where there are two oversized Italian leather sofas. I know that they are Italian because on our first visit, my sister-in-law and I sat on them at Monia's insistence; she told us, beaming, that her son who works in Italy shipped them across the Mediterranean by boat for her. The rest of the room is traditional Tunisian furniture, wall-to-wall Tunisian sofas, which are bench-like day beds covered in patterned material.

As she did on my first visit, Monia points to the leather sofa and tells me to sit in Arabic. This may be because Western-style imported goods carry a higher status, or because she assumed that as a Westerner I will be more comfortable on a European sofa. Since I have lived in a Tunisian neighborhood and with me in-laws for several months, they have forgotten to see me as Western. That I am just as comfortable on Tunisian furniture, or for that matter sitting on a carpet on the floor, suddenly I am reminded again that I am seen as *binat al-Rumiya*, a daughter of the West, by most Tunisians.

The *haneneh* leaves me in the living room and disappears through a door. She comes back momentarily, wearing an aquamarine Jebba. She says to wait a moment and she walks across the living room and disappears through a sliding door, where I hear voices, perhaps her daughter, and water running and the clatter of dishes being washed. While I am waiting I look out the window, where there is a small courtyard; a rooster scratches through the dirt. It already seems that the air is thick and sticky in the room. The Haneneh's daughter, Samr, comes out

from the kitchen and greets me in her Queen's British English. "Perhaps you would like tea, my dear." Samr acquired this BBC-perfect English in a private school. She wears a Purple jebba, and she beams at me and kisses me on both cheeks. She is wearing her diamond engagement ring on her plump finger; Samr recently got engaged to a man she met in university. She and her fiancé represent the modern union, in that theirs was not arranged by the families, and moreover, they are not patrilineal cousins, as is the preferred traditional union. Rather, Samr and her fiancé were arranged via the new match-maker, the co-educational University. As modern as such a venue for a romance as a university might seem to Westerners, though, the story of Samr and her fiancé Muhammad is not what it seems.

When we last visited Monia, we had tea and, since her daughter was out doing errands, she spoke gravely of her future son-in-law. Monia lamented the strictness of Samr's fiancé. Muhammad is an Islamic Studies Major, who actually wears Islamic dress in a society where young men nearly always prefer Calvin Klein to the men's jebba; even more arresting is Muhammad's untrimmed beard. In Tunisia, beards are associated with Islamic militancy, and most Tunisians fear that a man with a beard will be picked up and possibly tortured by the secret police.

For their engagement agreement, Muhammad insists that Samr wear full hijab, which is also rare, but on the increase in Tunisia. Muhammad insists that her sleeves cover the backs of her hands, and that most of her forehead and jaw be covered in a scarf. There has been a resurgence of hijab in Tunisia, as I have



discussed throughout this study. Monia is worried and rubs her hands against her forearms rhythmically, says in Arabic at our first visit that, even though she and her husband approved of the fiancé, they did so because his family has a good reputation for piety and hard work. Monia did not realize the full extent of her future son-in-law's religiosity. She says, "I do not mind that he is such a good Muslim, of course it isn't that." Rather, Monia is worried that Muhammad will restrict Samr. "Did we send her to University to be closed away?" Muhammad's family is native to Bizerte, and lives just a neighborhood away, but Monia fears that after the marriage, Samr will not even be able to visit.

Perhaps such an engagement could be broken off, except that Samr herself is beaming with happiness. She never complains about wearing hijab, and, when other women tease her for dressing "Like a Saudi" she rolls her eyes and shrugs. In discussion with Samr, she tells me that she and Muhammad had a History class together. She saw him as handsome and, "not a *carliff* at all." A *carliff* can be described in a multitude of unflattering ways in Tunisian culture. He is a young male who is interested in getting girls to talk to him, but with a vulgar interest in having sex with the girl. Some women described the *carliff* as physically disgusting, dirty and unkempt while others described him as dressed in tacky Italian clothing, rank with cologne and hair gel. Women identify *carliffs* as unemployed, because they are lazy they take money from their parents to buy cigarettes. These young men socialize around beaches and cafes to run their game on any passing women. I had had many run-ins with *carliffs*, who see my western looks as a sign of easy access. Walking along the corniche in the evenings,

*carliffs* in groups would call out greetings to me in several European languages, trying to get my attention. Most women speak of the *carliff* as the diametric opposite of what they look for in a man.

Samr giggled as she told me how Muhammad had first approached her, as serious as a Shaykh. He asked her if she was interested in going to a study group for women on the Qu'ran. She giggled and said she only said yes to make a good impression on him. At the Islamic studies class, she met Muhammad's sister, Asma, who became her friend. Asma then reported to Muhammad that Samr was a good girl, and from their home city of Bizerte. Muhammad asked for Samr's hand in marriage the summer after they graduated. It is a provocative point that many women in Tunisia are choosing to be part of an Islamic resurgence, at the behest of male partners. Perhaps it is a sign of women's disenchantment with "modern" Tunisian men that they would see Islamic piety as a better option than the womanizing and violent "Bourguiba's Sons" (Gana 2010).

Samr brings me tea in a mug, also a new and modern way to drink tea coming from Europe; in the mid-afternoon, the tea would have still been served in tiny classes with mint and, finances allowing, pine nuts floating on top. After handing me a tray with the mug of tea and some cookies, she asks me how I am and if I am ready for Henna. Samr is the only expert in Bizerte who knows how to do gulf henna, that is the lattice-work style done in the Arabian Peninsula. Tunisian henna is part of the wedding ceremony for the bride and all female kin on both sides of the family; it is also for all female relatives, and for the boy himself, for circumcision rituals. Traditional Tunisian henna is characterized by a

total coverage of the hand that tapers at the wrist. It is still considered beautiful, but not exclusive. To get gulf henna for one's wedding, or as part of circumcision festivities, is a mark of status, in the same way that brides want to get their hair done in salons which feature Lebanese hair styles for weddings. Lebanese style is not a particular kind of coif. It seems to be just considered voluminous and elegant, like the Lebanese pop star, Nancy Oghram's in her music videos. That Kalthoum pushed for us to both get Gulf henna toward the end of the field research, even though we were not part of a wedding was a way for her to assert her own status.

After my hands and feet were covered with the latticed henna, I had to sit still for four hours in Samar's living room. By noon, the living room was full of women from bridal parties, and one French woman who wanted to get henna while on her vacation. She sat smoking (without having asked permission from Samar), while the Tunisian women all completely ignored her. Through the open door to one of the bedrooms, I could see a naked woman getting waxed for her wedding. In the bathroom, Samr's mother was doing a facial called "peeling" in Tunisia. Most of the discussion in the room was on dresses and hair styles.

A ten-year old girl who was part of a wedding party was sent out with another teenaged girl to buy Tunisian sandwiches for the ladies of the room. They returned and the ten year old was instructed to feed me the sandwich since I could not move my hands. No one warned me that the sandwich was spread with *harissa*, so the girl had to wipe away my tears and blow my nose for me.

The beach is an important setting for the study of gender and change. While I did not conduct surveys like Holmes-Eber on the beach, approaching parties of women and children with a tape recorder, I did see much of what she reported. That is, that women go to the beach on outings, and prefer old jebbas over western bathing suits. However, I also observed forms of sexual expression (or transgression?) while taking strolls along the corniche.

When I first noticed, my cousin in law, a twenty year old girl named Asma, had come to stay with Kalthoum , Faris, and me. We had sodas in a mixed café along the Old Port, and then we headed with Faris in stroller over to the corniche, which was thronged with teenagers on this Friday night. As we walked along the Corniche, we came to places where there was no wall but where the dunes begin just to the other side of the Corniche. It was dark out along the beach, and we saw mixed groups of teens emerging off the dark dunes, laughing and flirting. Asma gave a shocked expression, and said something to Kalthoum and they both shook their heads. Later, I asked Kalthoum what she thought about what we had seen. “Girls in Bizerte have so much, too much freedom,” she said disparagingly.

The chance to gather with other women makes couscous making a form of labor that is social. Women sing folk songs and while they press the semolina down through the sieve, they make jokes about sex, especially the clitoris (*nuna* in Tunisian Arabic). In a region of the world where clitoridectomy and other genital removal operations are prevalent, Tunisians are proud that they do not perform this operation on girls and women. Tunisian women discuss Egyptians

with tasks as committing *haram* for performing genital surgeries on girls. Part of the project of modernity for Tunisians is to point to how different they are from the rest of their perceived part of the world, the MENA, and especially the other Muslim countries. The couscous, once dry, is stored in bins and used several times per week over the following year. Couscous is also part of women's traditional spirituality, and is linked with supernatural rituals. For example, Marnia Lazreg (1994) describes women using couscous for fortune-telling rituals.

Since the 1980's, couscous has begun to be mass-produced by Tunisian companies, and this is related to Ben Ali's neoliberalist agenda which includes promotion of mass production towards international trade, and the corresponding emergence of women's increased participation in the workforce since the 1980's. Ironically, most workers in the couscous factories are men. Women who work outside the home, and then come home to perform the "double shift" at home, may not have the time to make their own couscous. This also means that women's social and sexual lives change. Women do not have yearly rituals when they converge with other female relatives to create couscous, sing songs, and talk sex. They have less time to participate in extended family gossip circuits, rife with gender politics and complicated machinations around spousal relations, and marriage proposals.

During women's meeting times, like the couscous rituals, women have a chance to discuss marital problems like abuse or sexual dissatisfaction. These are placed in a female relative's ear strategically, with the expectation that the relative will pass on the information to men in the extended family who will then

intervene by confronting the husband about the abuse or the sexual problem. Despite Tahar Haddad's assertions that according to the Qu'ran women and men are equals and so should be in marriage, it is still unacceptable for wives to confront their husbands directly as this is seen as a challenge to his power, releasing information about abuse to a female relative so that a woman's brothers will defend her, is an important function of women's gatherings.

Further, since Tunisians emphasize good sex in marriage as part of happy marriage, and since the PSC's state that women can divorce their husbands if they do not satisfy them sexually (a law that actually follows the Islamic Sha'ria), a woman who strategically complains that she is dissatisfied in bed during a couscous making ritual can hope that another woman will pass this information along to another male relative who will confront her husband (Lazreg 1994). The happy married woman will be a better mother and a better cook. An unsatisfied woman's mothering skills and culinary skills will languish. Thus, health for Tunisians is an idea intertwined with sex and food. Tunisians emphasize that food's flavor and healthiness comes from the hand of the women who made it. The symbolism of the right hand of a woman in imparting wellness is a feature that permeates Tunisian life, and finds powerful imagery in the Hand of Fatima, a metal rendition of which hands from rearview mirrors, and dangles over doorways to impart good luck. Thus, when a woman who is a favorite in the extended family offers food, the relatives clamor for a bite. Women who are believed to have bad eyes are believed to impart the bad eye through their hand into food.

Exaggerated care is taken and women are in a constant fight to uphold their reputations. Women will walk out into traffic to avoid the sidewalk beside a café. The fear of being hit by a car is less pronounced than the fear of being a bad woman who walks in front of men in a café. The only women who I ever saw break this cultural norm and walk along a sidewalk in front of a café were women who were prostitutes. These women would walk on the sidewalk in front of the café, and smile in at the male clientele. Prostitutes were alone, and their aloneness was part of what marked their lack of respectability as women. Men might make eye contact and smile in return, rise from his seat and throw down his money on the table with a brief *bisselemma* to his friends and then follow the woman, staying some twenty feet behind, down the street towards her flat. Most prostitutes in Bizerte lived alone in tiny one-room flats in dilapidated French colonial apartment buildings. Prostitutes in Tunisia come from several backgrounds. Many are divorced women who have been rejected by their family of origin. They may receive alimony, but this payment is so low that they must supplement their incomes.

One way to do this is to develop a clientele of “lovers” who bring gifts of perfume, clothing, and cash. Most of what is known of these women is told about them, as their illegal and stigmatized identities makes them reticent to speak to anyone, much less a foreigner. Other prostitutes are young women seeking to pay their way through college. They are often from rural villages and their college scholarships, offered by the government, are not enough to cover their expenses. These girls must also have lovers who pay for a flat, clothing, and food.

Prostitution in Tunisia is very much hidden in plain sight. While laws against prostitution are tight, it is still common.

In interviews with factory *chebs*, and unmarried men, they said that they could always borrow a someone's apartment for sex. Men who could afford to do so could rent a studio apartment for possible sexual privacy; his friends would then ask to borrow time there. Most of the *chebs* seemed eager to assert that pre-marital sex was a normal part of what they could expect from girls who were able to have time when they were not monitored by brothers or fathers. Racheed, a *cheb* in his early twenties said, "Any time I want, I can borrow a friend's apartment for time alone with a girl." Racheed grins and continues, "It is easy for us to spend time together in secret, if she has time away from home without a chaperone."

While Racheed was coy about what happened during these meetings, other *chebs* and some *binat* discussed in more detail what actually happened during these encounters. Marwa, a *binat* in her late twenties and engaged to a male relative, stated, "some girls, the bad ones who don't really mean to be bad, but maybe stupid, they forget themselves and they think they can trust the boy with their hearts, and go to be alone with a boy and they take off their clothes and do things and the girl may preserve her virginity for the sake of the family, for her future wedding, but she does other things." Ilkcaracan's (2005) research on Moroccan girls and sex outside of marriage reveals that many girls engage in sex without intercourse before marriage, mainly oral and anal intercourse.



Several *binat* spoke laughingly about the girls who forget themselves in the heat of the moment. When asked if girls went to the men's apartments with the intention of having sex, the girls made a distinction. "if the girl is good morally but infatuated with a boy, and he coaxes her to be alone in the flat, she may go just thinking that she will hug and kiss him," said Hannan, a twenty-three year old factory worker. "But once she is there and he says so many sweet things to her, and convinces her that he loves her, she may do more." I asked her if she knew many girls who this had happened to. She laughed and told me, "This is the normal situation in Tunisia. She just has to stay a virgin for her family's honor, but part of it is we wait so long to get married, like almost 30 years old! It is hard even for good girls to wait that long, and even worse if she is in love."

Other *binat* were more condemning of the girls who forget themselves; their sexual irresponsibility was seen as hindering all young women's chances at being trusted by male relatives to have more freedom. Shetha states, "They act like bad women and some become not virgins because they don't care about how their actions affect the rest of women in Tunis. Men will talk and it gets back to brothers and fathers and they have more justification to limit our freedom. That is why we don't like these bad girls who go alone with boys before marriage." Freedom from constant patriarchal supervision is often seen as a dangerous for women, but also as a time when other women expect each other to maintain their chastity so that they do not harm the collective reputation of women.

Blaming women for engaging in extramarital sex while failing to place any blame on men's behavior is a symptom of patriarchal power. But that

Tunisian women see their hard won freedoms as being harmed by other women's sexual freedom is symptomatic of neo-patriarchy, as discussed by Nouri Gana (2010). According to Gana, Tunisian men are stranded in neopatriarchy, yet this new patriarchy is a fragile shell, and many men struggle to break out of it, and also retreat back into it.

In their hours spent with friends in the cafes, men hear gossip about the sexual activity of *binat*, and this becomes a justification for them to tighten control of "their" women. Girls spoke of their brothers spending much of their time on the street to patrol it, making sure that their sisters were out of sight, but also trying to get attention from *binat* themselves. Factory *binat* have much to consider and many social pressures to contend with when they have a chance at some free time. The tendency of the culture to blame girls lends to factory girls' increased oppression: their increased opportunities for freedom come with tremendous threat.

Paula Holmes-Eber (2003) argues for Tunisian women's complicity with patriarchal control of sexuality; in her ethnography of Tunisian women in the 1980's, she argues that women who have sex outside of marriage are doing so at their own peril. She thus takes accepts an emic patriarchal perspective to make the point that women who stay chaste until marriage edify their own good reputations, their family's, and their collective good reputation of women. While Holmes-Eber brings to light the emic perspective, her complicity with patriarchal control belies the deeper issue of what patriarchal power does to limit women's actions and movements. As an applied anthropologist, I do not think that my

agreement with women who blame other women for their lack of trust in the eyes of me is helping Tunisian women's status. It is a means of political resistance to male relatives' control to engaging in pre-marital sex; this is a challenge to fathers and brothers who seek to control daughters' and sisters' ability to experience sexual pleasure.

However, to assert that *binat* who have sex before marriage are renegades fighting for feminist sexual liberation would be missing out on how premarital sex can also edify patriarchy. To understand Holmes-Eber's point in condemning women who make to choice to have premarital sex, the *binat* who forget themselves or decide to have sex before marriage can also be interpreted as subjugating themselves sexually in such a way that their one most potent sense of power, virginity, which is only powerful when kept from men, is given to men. Men can then use this illicit sex as a source of misogynistic propaganda. As the gossip about illicit sex circulates through groups of *chebs*, over *shicha* and strolling through the street, men have more reason to look down on women as bitches. This is not to say that if women would clean up their behavior, men would respect them more. It is to say that stories of women's sexual behavior outside of marriage promotes men's already-threatened sense of masculine superiority. Women who could make really free choices concerning their bodies literally embody the destruction of patriarchal control.

The consideration of Tunisian women's labor, marital strategies, and sexual choices springs forth from a more fundamental question about liberation,

and the anthropologist's role in it. Throughout this study, I have asserted that the anthropologist's purpose goes beyond evocative insights into the emic. The emic and its understandings are inherently political, so the anthropologist must be committed to explicating power. For example, women who shun a neighbor whose husband is effeminate are conduits for symbolic violence; they ultimately aid in their own subordination (Bourdieu 1977).

Tunisia is the model of a post-colonial state which adopted principles of modernity. Modernity purportedly holds the keys to human liberation. However, modernity and its sibling, capitalism, were/are primary vehicles of colonialism, where non-Western others, those who existed "there and then," were defined so as to be dominated by those who existed "here and now" (Fabian 1983: 14).

Tunisian women are caught in the middle of the contradiction of nationalist struggle for modernity. Modernity is predicated on equality of the genders; Tunisian nationalism is an attempt by men to regain the patriarchal authority which they feel they lost under colonial rule. Bourguiba played on both modernity and patriarchal nationalism, to the detriment of Tunisian society (Gana 2010). It is under these strains and contradictions that Tunisian women labor.

Bizerte women assert themselves at work, in their families, with men, and in the city, in new ways. However, they are frustrated in their efforts toward autonomy by an economic system which promises more jobs for women but frequently exacerbates exploitation. Women have gained power through formal employment. They gain more autonomy from their fathers and husbands, and they wield more economic power in the home. Many have opportunities for

sexual agency, albeit the risks to their reputations are immense. In light of Bourdieu's (1977) symbolic violence, it could be that women gain little from engaging in sex outside marriage. That is, they may find themselves dominated by men through such activities since men have more symbolic capital. Women have lost certain moral expressions of power. While they could rely on their own purity to gain status in traditional culture, their attempts at sexual liberation have destabilized the notion of the virginal *binat* and the chaste *m'raa*.

## Chapter 6: Self-immolation, Gender, and Class

When I aspire to lofty goals  
I mount high hopes and discard trepidation  
Neither avoiding rugged roads  
Nor evading the roaring flames.

“The Will To Live” Abu al-Quasim al-Shabbi<sup>34</sup>

On December 17, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi went to work, selling produce out of a wheelbarrow in the impoverished regional city of Sidi Bouzid. His mother and two sisters (who he was supporting) said he had been suffering from one of his frequent headaches, and that he had been sleeping before he left for work, which was rare for him since he also suffered from insomnia. At a spot on the street near the downtown municipal buildings of Sidi Bouzid, Bouazizi was approached by municipal inspector, Fedia Hamedi. Run-ins with police and municipal inspectors were quotidian experiences for hawkers like Bouazizi. Fedia told him he needed a permit to sell produce, and that he had to show a permit or pay a fine of ten Tunisian dinars. He refused and she confiscated his wheelbarrow and scale.

Since no permit is needed in Sidi Bouzid to vend produce, there is a broad assumption that Hamedi was actually bribing Bouazizi; indeed, Tunisians often complain that government workers bribe unconnected Tunisian citizens for a wide array of contrived offenses. Hamedi’s version of the events is that she told Bouazizi that he had to move to another location to sell his goods because it was illegal to vend near municipal buildings (Day 2011). When he refused to move, she confiscated his wheelbarrow and scales. He yelled at her, asking how he was

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<sup>34</sup> Translated by Mahmoud Abbas Masoud.

supposed to support his family. Some witnesses report that Bouazizi yelled insults at Hamedi. She yelled back, although what she said back is the subject of debate. Some witnesses said that she cursed Bouazizi's dead father, and spat on Bouazizi. While most of the other people who witnessed the events said that Hamedi confiscated his scale and his wheelbarrow full of vegetables and threw them in the garbage, Hamedi herself said that she took his bananas and some peppers as a punishment, and donated them to a charity. There is no corroboration to support this statement (Toumi 2011).

In the unlikely case that Hamedi did donate the bananas to a charity, then she intended to cut Bouazizi deeply- bananas are an expensive import in Tunisia. Most Tunisians can afford Bananas only rarely. Bouazizi may have grabbed Hamedi's hand in an attempt to take back the vegetables and scale, and he very well may have insulted her with gender-specific derogatory words, and, from some accounts, grabbed her breast (Jacobsen 2011). Hamedi says that he hurt her finger when he tried to take back his scales (Day 2011). Some witnesses reported that it was at this point that Hamedi slapped Bouazizi (Toumi 2011). Hamedi says she did not slap Bouazizi or spit on him, as some reports suggested; in interviews with western journalists she says that an Arab woman would never slap a man. This is simply not true. That a slap imparts humiliation is exactly why Tunisian women smack men in a variety of status-bound situations.

Who Tunisian women choose to slap hinges on class hierarchy. While it is true that it would be taboo for a woman to slap a man with power over her, for example, for a wife to slap her husband or a daughter to slap her father, women

slap men who are beneath them, or who they wish to put beneath them. Mothers slap their sons across the face as a normative part of discipline. Women slap men in public places for many reasons. If a man's sexual innuendo is too pointed, he is likely expecting to get slapped- he may relish telling the story of getting smacked with his friends.

Further, if a man is beneath a woman in social class and age, there is no sanction against her slapping him. Hamedi, in a decently-paid, high-status government job, and more than ten years older than Bouazizi, would be in exactly the kind of social position to be able to smack a street hawker like Bouazizi. This is not to say that it would be acceptable to the male street hawker to get slapped; the point is to degrade him. This is the crux of the gender problem: a woman is able to violate a man's dignity through her superior class position, and through her connection with the Ben Ali government. "Bouazizi's body was public property after his pain was shared: it was made the home of the public pain, and these are the sorts of stories that envelop that pain and are shared, their veracity as unimportant as the truth is unknown" (Jacobsen 2011).

Hamedi said that Bouazizi was "hysterical" when she left to take the produce she had confiscated to the uncorroborated charity (Day 2011). Witnesses, primarily other vendors who were nearby, also reported that he was distraught. Neither the slap, nor the sexual assault which preceded it, may have never actually taken place. The assault to Bouazizi's masculinity was already there. In the hours after Bouazizi stood in front of the municipal buildings (where no one would address his grievance), he doused himself with gasoline, and set



himself alight. News of the slap travelled fast (not the sexual assault), via word of mouth, text messages, and social networking sites. Hamedi's (real or imagined) slap on Bouazizi felt like a slap in the face of a collective Tunisian masculinity that was already rankled, melancholy, and vulnerable (Gana 2010). Real or imagined, it was palpable to the masses of unemployed and underemployed, those being excreted out of the class system.

This was a slap and spit in the face of the poor, unconnected, rural-to-urban migrants of Tunisia, whose patriarchal heads of household have to struggle to gain even the lowest employment, and whose wives and daughters are highly likely to be underemployed, and working in the informal economy (Holmes-Eber 2003; Moghadam 2005). To understand Bouazizi's life story requires understanding the decimation of his parents' agricultural way of life. The Bouazizis have in common with most Tunisian families a recent history of rural-to-urban migration. His mother, Mannoubia Bouazizi, is a rural woman who had no education, and whose labor on farms was necessary to her kin's survival, but was unpaid or underpaid. Bouazizi's parents were like millions of other Tunisians whose farm labor became redundant in the 1990's as the Ben Ali administration (following Bourguiba's lead) re-privatized farm collectives (King 2003). The Bouazizis lost their small plot of land, where they grew olives and almonds. They moved to a small apartment on the fringes of the city of Sidi Bouzid. Once there, they had to compete for menial jobs with other recent migrants. Bouazizi's father had to leave the family to find construction work in Libya, where he died of a heart attack.

The economic burden on those displaced farmers was tremendous; many arrived in cities just as structural adjustment-driven currency devaluation and reductions in social services hit the Tunisian public (King 2003). Bouazizi and his family were part an impoverished underclass, rural laborers who were compelled to move to cities to find work (Holmes-Eber 2003). Bouazizi's emotional state had in common with most Tunisians' an envy for and rage against the Ben Ali regime and symbols of its decadent corruption. In the days after Ben Ali fled his people, seeking protection in the arms of the most repressive and misogynistic country in the Muslim world, Tunisians broke into his palaces. In news stories and films made on peoples' phones and uploaded on Facebook, Tunisian families toured the palace rooms now covered in broken glass and pieces of smashed furniture. A man standing with his young son said he wanted to see how Ben Ali was living when he himself could barely afford to feed his family.

In interviews following Bouazizi's ascent to martyrdom, his sisters said that he worked so that they could stay in school, and attend university. He did not want them to be rushed into an arranged marriage, or exploited in low-wage work (Fisher 2011). Those in this underclass work in the menial positions like construction. Under Ben Ali's rule, such positions received no pension or health insurance. As Holmes-Eber (2003) points out, these families reaped no benefits from neoliberal economics. These newcomers to the cities also have no network of family or friends who can get them much-coveted government jobs via connections. Ben Ali's government was characterized by nepotism, and this

practice of giving jobs only to family and friends left the rural underclass even more marginalized.

Bouazizi was a devoted son and brother, the kind all struggling Tunisian families depend upon. Bouazizi did not go to university; in fact he dropped out of secondary school so that he could work selling produce. Initial press about Bouazizi suggested that he was a university student, an easy thing to believe since university graduates who remain unemployed are a national problem. Marc Fisher's story in the Washington Post (March 27) was one of many reports that Bouazizi was an unemployed college graduate. Jacobsen (2011) argues that, "the stories fit and resonate with the pain of many Tunisians" (26). But that is a middle class pain, and Bouazizi's is the struggle of the quickly lumpenizing proletariat. The lumpen proletariat, according to Marx, are those who are at the most marginal positions of a classed society (Thoburn 2002). They survive in informal labor. As the refuse of all classes, Marx saw them as a hindrance to achieving a classless society (Marx 1849). For Marx, it is precisely the lumpen proletarians' marginality that impedes their class consciousness.

However, Bouazizi and his family do not fit Marx's definition of the lumpen proletariat in that they were not reveling in their ability to exist outside the class system. Bouazizi's family lost their jobs as farm laborers. Once in the city, Bouazizi's father tried to support his family through construction jobs. Mohamed Bouazizi was not a rag-and-bone merchant, albeit Fedia Hamedi's confiscation of his produce and cart pushed him closer to such a category. He and

his family were being excreted from the class system, which Draper (1972) argues is the relevant point (2308).

Bakunin's (1973) arguments are borne out in the Jasmine Revolution, in that he argued that it would be the marginalized lumpen proletariat who would be the revolutionaries. During the protests, the streets of Tunis, the smaller regional cities, and even towns were thronged with the unemployed and underemployed, college-educated unemployed, men and women. Jacobsen, in interviews with Tunisians in April of 2011, argues that Tunisians made a hagiography of Bouazizi, but that they do not wish to consider his life because that would be to examine his vulnerability. Young men in cafes chide Jacobsen for asking about Bouazizi's role in the revolution, and showed him the scars on their bodies from being beaten by police in protests. Those who protested see themselves as the real heroes, while Bouazizi's act is a reminder of a compromise of masculinity. Bouazizi's mother said that her son was emasculated by Fedia and the system she represented (Jacobsen 2011). Bouazizi's family has in common with most Tunisian families a mother without means to support herself. After her construction worker husband died young of a heart attack, Manoubia was compelled to marry her husband's brother, the traditional thing for a young and destitute widow to do. Manoubia represents the long-suffering traditional mother who hopes her children will be successful.

She also exemplifies the mother whose own status has been built through her son's. There is an admixture of envy and disdain for Manoubia and her family. Reports from shop keepers are that that Manoubia expects special

treatment, and declares herself the mother of the martyr (Day 2011). One female relative stated that Manoubia had become arrogant, and resent the money the Bouazizis have made from Mohamed's martyrdom. Ben Ali, in an attempt to quell the unrest which followed Bouazizi's immolation, gave the Bouazizi's twenty thousand dinars. Rumors are that an Emirati bought Mohamed's wheelbarrow for thousands. Cash donations were showered on the family.

Self-immolation is common among Muslim women in the Middle East and Central Asia, and is often explained as a reaction to their lack of control over their lives (Campbell and Guiao 2004: 283). Bouazizi's suicide displayed his emasculation under a government and economic system that left many men feeling in similar ways. Vulnerable, broken masculinity was avenged in the revolution. A different kind of argument would suggest that the foundational perception of masculinity as impervious is the problem (Gana 2010). Bouazizi's sacrifice was his own self-destruction, rather than the self-aggrandizement of successfully masculine men. "Protest suicide attempts to draw the attention of others to something that, in the suicide's perception, constitutes a wrong of moral, political, or economic dimension, a wrong that affects the lives of many" (Androlio 2006:102). But self-immolation is the result of lack of agency to enact change without destroying oneself, a feminine predicament. What of the woman who emasculated him?

Fedia Hamedi has been much vilified as not just a part of the corrupt governmental system but as a woman who, having gained power over men, abused it. In this sense, she evoked the envious rage of Tunisians toward Ben

Ali's wife, Leila Tribelsi, whose family was likened to the Mafia for their nepotism, involvement in drug smuggling, extortion rackets, and decadence. While "Baba Ben Ali" was a part Papa Doc part Suharto figure, according to Al Jazeera reporter Larbi Sadiki, Madame Leila was likened to Imelda Marcos, but with far more sway over her husband (Sadiki 09/27/2011). That is, Madame Leila fits the Tunisian trope of the female goat, who eats everything and creates *fitna*, social discord. Social media sites supporting the overthrow of Ben Ali were filled with photo shopped images of Ben Ali in traditional Tunisian women's attire (hijab) and Leila in her characteristic women's "power" suits. Fedia Hamedi, while a peon public sector employee, exemplified the corruption of the Ben Ali government. Following Bouazizi's immolation, witnesses told authorities of Hamedi's role in humiliating him, and Ben Ali had Fedia jailed; protesters, including Bouazizi's family were outside the courthouse when she was arrested and jailed, where she stayed for two months.

While Manoubia Bouazizi at first agreed with trying Fedia in court for abusing her son, she later dropped the charges in the name of reconciling the infighting between families in Sidi Bouzid. There were splits in allegiance between Hamedi's family and pro-government groups (families that had been patronized by Ben Ali) and those who wished her to receive harsh penalties and also pushed for Ben Ali's ouster. In the midst of post-revolutionary squabbling over resources, and in the throes of revived intertribal violence, the sense of collectivism that was so magnificently evidenced in the protests was obfuscated.

The revolution was the result of many frustrations, especially with political-economic policy which benefitted elites and left the vast, urbanized proletariat in desperate circumstances. Abdelbaki Hermassi (in Hopkins and Ibrahim 1997) states: “Maghreb states have readjusted their economic politics in response to national and international pressures. But they believed they could do this without turning the local political configuration upside down. Economic liberalization (infitha) could be accompanied by the maintenance of political hegemony: what Clifford Geertz terms authoritarian liberalism (60).” Hermassi (1997) here identifies the crisis of the Jasmine Revolution, where the European Union, the United States, and the Tunisian Bourgeoisie are attempting to secure a government which resembles the Ben Ali regime, in both its authoritarianism and its acquiescence to neoliberalism, while the proletariat of Tunisia is organizing and protesting for a more substantial governmental change.

This study can help fray the hegemony of neoliberalism, especially its contention that gender inequities sort themselves out when women gain employment in EPZs. Gender conflicts of many kinds were important in the period leading up to Ben Ali’s ouster. That women played an integral part in the protests against Ben Ali and his government is unsurprising, but the media’s coverage of women of the Arab Spring begs for scrutiny for what it says about widespread assumptions about Arab/Muslim women.

The Jasmine Revolution was partly a movement by and about proletarian men restoring masculinity, but it was also a movement where women protesters attempted to assert themselves as equals in making social change. In the Arab

Spring, photographs of women protesters of various ages, and wearing the broad range of clothing styles that typifies Tunisia, reinforce what should be obvious: Maghreb women are politically engaged. Their political participation is often thwarted by their absence from public forums and by their unequal burden of chores (Moghadam 2005). Here I challenge Holmes-Eber's contention that women turn their homes into bustling political forums; rather, women are forced to use their homes because the public spaces largely exclude their presence. All is not functional in this gender disparity.

A variety of MENA news outlets, websites, blog spots, and social media websites have described the Tunisian women protesters. On Islamist sites, photos of women protesters with head scarves are featured, and they are described as the Muslim heroines fighting against the immorality of a corrupt dictator. More mainstream MENA news outlets have presented women's presence as proof that this is a grass roots, widespread movement. Further, that most of the Tunisian women are not wearing hijab is evidence that this is more about economic realities than moral fervor.

Then, there are websites, run by Arab men, where women protesters are turned into revolutionary sex objects. One of the most flagrant examples of the objectification of women protesters is on the webpage of BeirutSpring, a Lebanese political site which presents a collage of attractive Tunisian women protesters' photos with copy reading, "We had our day, now it's the Tunisians' turn to put a pretty face on their just cause... (PS: Mabrouk Tunisia)."



This objectification, which circulated at lightning speed across social media sites, jibes with the absence of serious consideration of the sacrifices women activists and protesters have made. In the mainstream media, little has been made of the fact that it was a Tunisian woman human rights activist, Lina Ben Mehenni, who arranged protests via her Twitter account, even as Ben Ali's secret police chased her from secret location to location.

There has been limited press about other Tunisian human rights champions, like Sihem Ben Sidrine or Radhia Nasraoui.<sup>35</sup> We heard and saw little about the violence done against women protesters, as in the case of the teen aged girl who was shot in the head by Ben Ali's security forces on January 12 in protests in Nebeul. While there is a film (from a witnesses' cell phone) of the girl being wrapped in a white sheet right in the midst of the protests, blood from the head wound soaking through the shroud as male protesters around her say prayers, few news outlets do more than mention the event. Most do not mention her name. Perhaps the Nobel committee's choice of Yemeni human rights activist and liberal Islamist Tawakkol Karman, who organized Yemen's ongoing anti-government protests will bring focus back to the realities of Arab women's agency, instead of victimization.

Few media outlets have reported incidences of women protesters who were sexually assaulted by Ben Ali's thugs during protests. Most accounts are by women survivors on social media sites, who bravely break a social taboo by recounting every detail of their assaults, often in front of a room of activists. It

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<sup>35</sup> Nasraoui was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize, and photos of her bruised face after she was beaten by Ben Ali's secret police were shared across social media sites.

might seem ironic that the Arabs in protests have captured better than professional journalists, what it meant to be female during the Jasmine Revolution.

Yet Middle Eastern and North African women's participation in social movements is nothing new. A look at the anti-colonial movements in Algeria and Egypt, and in the social movements in Iran, to name a few, should inform the Western and Eastern presses, yet the coverage was often as if such women were a curiosity. This kind of naiveté would seem to make the beating and gang rapes of Yemeni women protesters seem new, when in fact the same sorts of atrocities were committed by French colonial soldiers on Algerian women (Ausaresses 2010; Lazreg 2007). It is important for there to be organizations which can support women's attempts to gain real power in politics and in the labor force.

With Tunisia's ouster of Ben Ali, and elections underway, the time is ripe for promoting Tunisian workers' rights. This study can be of use in developing the agenda of organizations that seek to help Tunisian women laborers in export processing zones (EPZs), as well as in other venues of employment. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as governmental agencies, labor unions, and feminist organizations all can support women's agentive struggles at work. Obviously, it would help if the government would be democratic; there is widespread fear among Tunisians that the elections of October would be rigged, and that members of Ben Ali's party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (CDR) would steal the elections. This fear was not borne out; the CDR squarely lost to Ennahda, the Islamist party, and Moncef Marzouki's leftist (albeit religious) party.

There was also fear leading up to the election that if the CDR loses, they would, with the support of more powerful countries, divide and rule Tunisia by fomenting a civil war like that which was provoked by the Algerian government starting in the 1990's. The CDR was thought to be behind the tribal fighting in Gafsa. Early in June 2011, local CDR representatives spread the word that they would give jobs in a local phosphate mine to members of one local tribe, but not the other. Shortly thereafter a man was knifed to death and mass tribal clashes ensued (Al Jazeera English 06/06/2011).

Even if democracy is achieved, it must be more than its lowest common denominator, the right to vote (Steger 2009). Evidence from other countries suggests that even if democracy is achieved, EPZ workers may be restricted from the right to organize. This is the case in many nodes of the global economy, where democracy is pared down under the auspices of free trade. For example, in a study sponsored by the International Labor Organization (ILO), Sri Lanka's government constitution guarantees the right of workers to organize, but in the EPZs, union activity is met with brutality (Sivananthiran 2008).

Governmental regulations and guarantees must be held to accountability by NGOs, unions, and human rights groups. Assuming that Tunisia does not erupt into a two-decade long, terroristic civil war like Algeria, NGOs can play an important role in ameliorating a lack of governmental support for EPZ workers. Unions outside the EPZ can stand in support of EPZ workers' attempts to organize. Moreover, they can help to encourage EPZ workers. Thus, the ILO

lends support in the Sri Lanka case by promoting “decent work,” through a series of recommendations (Sivananthiran 2008).

Support from NGO’s which specialize in labor relations, worker advocacy, and union support could help women to exercise social agency. There are many pitfalls for women EPZ workers, and organizations that could support women in their attempts to avoid them are necessary. For example, if women are coerced into playing on pregnancies to get breaks, they reinforce justifications for lowered wages. Moreover, if they are coerced into sexual relationships, they promote the stereotype of the dishonorable factory girl, which can lead to more social control of women by family and in the law. This is a real danger in Tunisia, where conservative religious parties can manipulate the public’s beliefs about working women’s promiscuity in order to limit women’s agency. With outside organizations’ support for their labor concerns, women could address aspects of exploitation in ways which did not reinforce gendered stereotypes against them (Hossfeld1990; Tiano 1994; Ustubici 2009).

Organizations like Singapore-based Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) conducted independent research on the problem of sexual harassment in Singapore’s EPZs. What they found was that the problem of sexual harassment was endemic, and that most women were afraid to complain when they were harassed, for fear of reprisals. AWARE then published a series of recommendations which were made more powerful by their naming of the corporations who refused to meet with their representatives to set up anti-harassment policies (AWARE 2008).

NGO's could help support women's informal labor strategies by providing options away from covert activities that manipulate management's stereotypes and push women further into stereotyped, marginal positions. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) hosts workshops that encourage EPZ workers to coalition. They provide a space for workers to air grievances and understand that they are a group with common interests (Perman et. al. 2004). This would be helpful in the Tunisian context, where such organizations would have been banned under Ben Ali but could now be sanctioned by the new government.

Considering the efficacy of Turkish women's unions in supporting the striking EPZ workers in Ustubici's (2010) study suggests that labor unions independent of government control could help workers from the outside of the free trade zones. They could also be instrumental in promoting a societal respect for EPZ women workers. That is, unions like the women's union in Turkey helped women EPZ laborers organize their strike, gain benefits through collective bargaining, and gain respect in the larger society.

This is a time when Tunisian women stand to gain, or lose, many societal rights. While the Jasmine Revolution can surely be used as evidence that neoliberalism does not lead to affluence and stability in developing nations, it can also be used as evidence that the liberal gender policies, like those declared in Ben Ali's increase in women's rights on paper, are a failure. Conservative political groups and religious fundamentalists will battle with social-justice and

feminist organizations in Tunisia. It seems likely that the struggle for economic and gender justice is a long way off.

In this study, I employed Marxist theory in ways which are sensitive to the cultural situations of Tunisian women. I found that women in Tunisian EPZ's experienced similar forms of discipline over their labor, and that they also attempted to exert power in similar ways. However, the Tunisia of EPZ capitalist production is unique in that the expressions of gendered power in certain ways are marked by Islamic values and cultural constraints.

The two-way mirrored windows which divide the offices of Z-Textiles from the factory floor reflect specific cultural exertions of power, in that women workers are chronically violated by a potential male gaze of Bechir or the owners. Much of Tunisian culture rests on feminine dignity which is edified by women's ability to prevent sexual objectification by the eyes of men. Hence, women value modest dress to prevent male besting. During the protests of the Jasmine Revolution, a news story emerged that Ben Ali's police threw tear gas canisters into the public baths on a women's day. This was a way to humiliate women by getting them to run into the public male-dominated street naked. While the intent was to dishonor the women and demoralize "their" men, the strategy backfired, and the protests increased as this was seen as evidence of the immorality of Ben Ali.

That women laborers in Z-Textiles must constantly make choices on the assumption that they may be being sexually objectified by men who may be on the other side of the glass maintains a milieu of domination and hostility toward

women workers. This also impacts their sense of dignity and quest for respect with the male laborers. In the wider context of Bizerte, where their reputations may precede them through traditional gossip and high-tech gossip of the latest factory intrigue, some women choose to embrace sexual freedom, while many others assert morality to preempt such symbolic violence.

Women's lives in Bizerte, Tunisia, like those in Mexico's industrial corridor, and in factories in many other regions of the developing world where EPZ's exist, are changing in terms of their relationship to the means of production and in relationship to men. In this study, I found that women's reputations are made more fragile through factory work, and this corresponds with the findings from other regions. For some EPZ laborers, seeking sexual freedom via economic power outweighs the question of chastity; this was the case for some young women in Z-Textiles. The challenge is to support women's labor strategies and their promotion of social change, when women choose widely divergent strategies. Now that Ennahda swept the Tunisian elections, many Tunisian women are asserting religious piety through the wearing of the veil. While exertions of sexual freedom can be an expression of women's greater liberation, it is important for many Tunisian women to assert their chastity and morality as a means to achieve power. This is to say that while political piety will not ultimately equalize Tunisian women with men, in a practical sense, many Tunisian women will choose to assert religiosity as a prudent strategy toward power and authority.

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## Appendices

**Table 1**

**Leading Exports of Tunisia, 1989-1990  
product % of total country**

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Crude Petroleum	16.40
Men's outerwear not knit	13.57
Fertilizers, manufactured	8.56
Women's outerwear non-knit	6.70
Inorganic elements, oxides etc.	4.81
Outer-wear, knit non-elastic	3.68
Lime, cement, building products	2.17

Source: UNCTAD, Handbook of International Trade and Development Statistics 1992, Table 4.3 (NY: UN, 1993).

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**Table 2**

**Mean Years of Schooling, 25+, early 1990s,  
country males to females**

Algeria	4.0	0.8
Egypt	3.9	1.9
Iran	4.6	3.1
Iraq	5.7	3.9
Jordan	6.0	4.0
Kuwait	6.0	4.7
Lebanon	5.3	3.5
Libya	5.5	1.3
Morocco	4.1	1.5
Tunisia	3.0	1.2

Source: UNESCO, Education for all: Status and Trends 1994. Paris, UNESCO, 1994.

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**Table 3  
Manufacturing  
Wages, Selected  
MENA, Latin  
American, and  
East Asian  
Countries, 1963-  
1995 (U.S. \$)**

1975-

1985-95

85

**1963-70**

Iran	568	6986	4805
Jordan	532	3531	3561
Tunisia	940	2808	5126
Brazil	-	2407	6193
Mexico	-	3865	5286
Venezuela	2366	8615	5788
Korea	342	2558	9313
Malaysia	688	2082	3425
Philippines	627	1081	1816

Note: Wages refer to total compensation of labor in US\$ terms at market exchange rate, divided by total number of employees in the manufacturing sector.

Source: Extracted from Karshenas, 2001, Table 3, p. 67, using data from UNIDO.

**Table 4**

	<b>HDI Rank</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>Estimated Earned Income (PPP US\$), 2000 Country</b>			
Tunisia	97	3,347	9,320
Islamic Republic of Iran	98	2,524	9,088
Jordan	99	1,749	6,014

Source : UNDP, Human Development Report 2002, Table 22.

**Table 5**

<b>Un- employ ment Selecte d MENA Countr</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Male %</b>	<b>Female %</b>	<b>Total %</b>
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ies, 1990s Country				
Algeria	1992	24.2	20.3	23.8
	1997*	26.9	24.0	26.4
	2001			27.3
Bahrain **	1991	5.5	13.4	6.8
Egypt	1995	7.0	22.1	10.4
Iran (urban)	1991	8.9	21.5	14.5
	1996	8.3	12.5	10.2
Jordan	1991	14.4	34.1	17.1
	1994	12.9	28.3	15.0
	1997	11.7	28.5	14.4
	2000 (Nov.)	12.6	19.8	13.7
Lebanon	1996	8.6	7.2	7.0 (22% for new entrants )
Morocco (urban)	1992	13.0	25.3	16.0
	1998	17.4	22.9	18.7
Oman	1993	4.7	8.7	5.1
Syria	1981	3.2	2.0	3.0
	1991	5.2	14.0	6.8
	1995	5.1	11.6	6.5
Tunisia	1993	14.7	21.9	16.1
Yemen	1991	14.0	6.0	12.3
	1994	10.1	5.4	9.1

Sources: World Bank (1995b), p. 5; ERF (1996), p. 103; ERF (1998), p. 128; ESCWA (2000), p. 37; ILO (1999); Moghadam (1998); Yemen Ministry of Planning & Development (1998); Jordan Department of Statistics, Employment and Unemployment Survey (various issues); IRI (1993), Table 8, p. 64; IRI (1997), Table 3-1, p. 70.

\* 1997 data on Algeria from Republique Algerienne (2000) and from World Bank Genderstats

\*\*24.8% female unemployment in 1991 compared to 12.3% for men. (Human Development Report, State of Bahrain (UNDP, 1998), p. 92.