

Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights

# **SOCIOLOGY OF THE “MARGIN” AMID THE CORONA VIRUS**

Fear, Precariousness and Expectations

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# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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I hope that this study, which adds to the various analytical and research projects conducted by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, is just the first contribution as part of a larger project for the post- pandemic period to raise issues related to development, democracy, social justice from theoretical and practical perspectives in the short to medium term.

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# INTRODUCTION

Humanity has never faced its tragic reality as it is the case these days. This time, the enemy is not a world war with its frightful casualties, economic and financial crises with their dreadful legacies, nor it is a natural disaster with limited effects that spreads slowly such as hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes. Humanity is facing a global epidemic that took by surprise all governments and nations worldwide.

Throughout history, humanity has faced many epidemics and paid a high human price. The Black Death, also known as the Pestilence and the Plague, peaking in Europe from 1347 to 1348 was the most deadly pandemic recorded in human history. The toll reached one third of the population of Europe (25 million out of 75 million people in Europe). The Spanish flu in 1918 resulted in an estimated death toll of around 50 million to 100 million that is 5% of the total world population. In 2002-2003, humanity went through SARS and Ebola in Central and West Africa which affected one third of the population and took the lives of 11 thousand people. Then humanity was challenged by **acquired immunodeficiency syndrome**(AIDS). At present, there are nearly 40 million people affected worldwide, 25 million of them from African countries while 95% of the affected people come from poor countries. Last but not least, humanity has also faced environmental disasters due to unreasonable use of nuclear energy such as the Chernobyl disaster in April 1986. All these disasters are

painful memories whose real and psychological impacts are still alive or still untold.

These crises highlighted humanity's lethargy and outraged politicians, doctors and ecologists while researchers, thinkers and scholars studied, analyzed these crises and drew several lessons. During these crises, the social and economic value systems as claimed by Edgar Morin<sup>1</sup> were challenged, scrutinized and criticized. Once the crisis or the epidemic was over, the world regained its equilibrium, stability and the unrestrained pace of its industries, technologies and markets. The calls and pleas of thinkers, environmentalists and critics to revisit the social and economic policies went unheard. As soon as humanity overcame the fallout of the crises, the world has been bent on accelerating the pace of technological and industrial developments and investing more and more money on military manufacturing. The world has also witnessed a hectic urbanization with the rise of global mega cities<sup>2</sup> marked by hectic economic activities and dense population groupings. All these developments have been accompanied by rugged individualism, unfair competition, and the social costs of government austerity

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<sup>1</sup> A French philosopher and sociologist who has been internationally recognized for his work on complexity and "complex thought, and for his scholarly contributions to such diverse fields as media studies, politics, sociology, visual anthropology, ecology, education, and systems biology. He holds degrees in history, economics, and law. Though less well known in the anglophone world due to the limited availability of English translations of his over 60 books, Morin is renowned in the French-speaking world, Europe, and Latin America.(Wikipedia).

<sup>2</sup> The notion of global cities was first suggested by Saskia Sassen, the global cities that are included in the globalization process concentrate all the central tasks of the management of huge firms and services for companies.

policies as a global recipe imposed worldwide by international financial institutions.

The last shock, which called into question the fundamentals of modern capitalism, was the crisis of 2008 following the Arab Spring uprisings which inspired a comprehensive global movement “Degagism/ political clearance” spreading from Spain to Wall Street .This movement united 99% of the world population against a tiny minority of 1% who rule, rob and exploit.

Despite these successive crises, wars and famines during the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, humanity seems to have been under the influence of an arrogant dogmatic doctrine based on the theoretical premises of Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History”<sup>3</sup> and Mary Shelley’s “Last Man.”<sup>4</sup> The pillars of this doctrine are Adam Smith’s “Invisible Hand”<sup>5</sup> and the free and unfettered market able to correct itself by itself with no room for obsolete group and social ties since history is made by strong and smart people. In this world dominated by free market economics and the survival of the fittest, inequality is considered an inescapable fact and outcome and unintelligent, lazy and

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<sup>3</sup> The end of history is a political and philosophical concept that supposes that a particular political, economic, or social system may develop that would constitute the end-point of humanity’s sociocultural evolution and the final form of human government. (Wikipedia).

<sup>4</sup> The Last Man is an apocalyptic, dystopian science fiction novel by Mary Shelley, which was first published in 1826. The book describes a future Earth at the time of the late 21st Century, ravaged by an unknown pandemic which quickly sweeps across the world. (Wikipedia).

<sup>5</sup> The invisible hand describes the unintended social benefits of an individual’s self-interested actions, a concept that was first introduced by Adam Smith in The Theory of Moral Sentiments, written in 1759, invoking it in reference to income distribution. (Wikipedia).

dependent people are to blame for their poverty and precariousness.<sup>6</sup>

The first 100 days of the Corona virus epidemic has revealed the fragility of the world system and banned any movement within the social world for fear of infection, pain and death. The crisis also pushed politicians to make unprecedented decisions such as closing entire cities and isolating countries and asking armies to support the efforts of governments. During this crisis, the word war has been used many times in the speeches of government officials.

All these transformations have been accompanied by preliminary attempts conducted by philosophers, psychologists and sociologists to understand, analyze, and foresee the impacts of the crisis. However, all nations have turned to their doctors, hospitals, laboratories and clinical research to counter the epidemic through a treatment or vaccine. Social and human sciences have an increasing appeal among many categories of people who are keen understanding the emerging phenomena as we are witnessing a complete reversal of our ways of living and our social relations, even the very meaning of life .

The sociological interpretation and analysis of the reality, as expressed by Pierre Bourdieu<sup>7</sup> ,

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<sup>6</sup> In a public speech, the French president praised those who launch their business and those who are nothing. <http://www.lesinrocks.com/2017/07/news/les-gens-qui-se-sont-rine-lexpression-qui-choque-demmanuel-macron>

Lenoir, R. (1989). *Les exclus, un Français sur dix*. Seuil 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu was a French sociologist, anthropologist, philosopher and public intellectual. Bourdieu's major contributions to the sociology of education, the theory of sociology, and sociology of aesthetics have



cannot be simply a neutral or an indifferent analysis because of academic objectivity. Rather, it is at the heart of deep transformations which penetrate the whole social body. The theoretical act cannot be conducted away from the daily life of people. Theories are not elaborated in a “no-man’s land” social sphere and the theories cannot be drafted and cannot ever earn their explanatory power in social vacuums. The theories are woven in a special context that lift to the world the new problems.

The task of the sociologist is, according to Bourdieu, is the scientific study of social relations, actions and manifestations through which society is formed and evolves. Sociology is the field of knowledge which focuses on understanding the manners by which the social body moves and changes and the relations between individuals and society; labour and social movements, social categories, classes, families, networks and friends, organizations and schools and enterprises. All these issues are addressed from different perspectives: cultural, social, technological, political and economic. Critical and innovative Marxism, as claimed by Pierre Bourdieu, is interested in all the mechanisms or tools of capital appropriation (economic, cultural and symbolic) and the means of production and reproduction of hegemony and dominance within every social formation.

All members of society do not enjoy the same level of comfort and the same level of power and recognition. That is the cogito of dominance that is at the heart of Bourdieu’s research .

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achieved wide influence in several related academic fields, popular culture, and the arts. (Wikipedia)

As we follow the development of the effects of this epidemic through media outlets, at health and political level, we have noticed two types of comments and analyses. The first type, tackles the crisis as a whole, as a collective human crisis that calls the capitalist globalization project into question. The second type sheds light on hidden, dark and forgotten areas and looks into the challenging and dead angles that cannot be caught by holistic topographies. Each type promises a new era of serious and deep post corona reforms.

The starting point of this study is our understanding that we have ushered in a new and crucial era and it is incumbent upon us to launch a profound critical campaign of the liberal and capitalist era that rules the world. This campaign should be inspired by local monographs, specific studies and micro- analyses so that our arguments are irrefutable, informative and amenable to real and tangible changes.

## **The main issue**

The importance of this sociological study stems from all the questions and issues raised due to the Corona virus crisis. During this sociological moment we are going through, we have noticed that there has been an overlap between media, scientific, political and security discourses.

The objective of this study is to shed light on a “blind spot” obscured by “ general” approaches to the crisis and global conceptions of the solutions. This “blind spot” is the society of the “margin” during the pandemic. It is the society of fragility and precariousness in a country, Tunisia, which is going through a period of political transition. How does this “ society” see the crisis

and its fallout? Does this society possess the means of precaution and safety against financial and moral crises? What are the future expectations of Tunisian at a time they are still waiting for a tangible change in their daily life ten years after the revolution?

What comes from this pivotal query are two hypotheses.

The first hypothesis is related to the way Tunisians are coping with the epidemic given the disparity in their living standards, income and the status in society. The way Tunisians have coped with the measures and instructions of the executive branch has differed from one social category to another. These categories cannot afford the same the means of protection against the virus. In addition, the categories do not have the same representations of the possible danger and the cost of the general lockdown. This creates necessarily a misunderstanding between two societies at least: “the integrated society” on the one hand and the parallel and “non-integrated” one.

The second hypothesis states that every political, technical or security measure cannot be separated from the complex sociological dimension of the health issue. Accordingly, the crisis becomes a factor that accelerates the debates about some concepts that have come to forefront as debatable issues such as social solidarity, distributive justice and the role of the state

## **Theoretical and conceptual framework**

For researchers, Tunisia has always been an interesting theme and field of research. First, thanks to its

successful revolution in overthrowing an authoritarian regime. Second, the steady progress of its democratic peaceful transition through the ratification of the new constitution in 2014 and holding successive regular fair and transparent elections. These elections certainly have put into place the concept of peaceful transfer of power and guaranteed the unity and integrity of the State and its continuity in a region where many countries are in turmoil because of civil wars and foreign interventions. Still, the country has not solved all its domestic challenges and threats. The fault lines between some secular and some Islamic groups have not been settled once for all. Moreover, the terrorist threat is still serious and may strike anytime anywhere.

Geopolitically, the whole Maghreb region is still in turmoil that threatens its stability. The European Union still wants a partnership with Tunisia that will first serve the interests of its members not those of Tunisians. Briefly, there are not enough guarantees for Tunisians to rest assured as to the future of their nascent democracy.

The previous period was marked by public arguments and controversies around concepts and expressions related to the « revolution,» « the democratic transition,» « modernity,» « identity,» « the religious state,» and « citizenship.»

The issue that has not secured enough and proper attention is the efficiency of protest and social movements of the « society of margins» which has developed over the five previous years its means and tools for mobilization , struggle and pressure. This

society has gradually become an open space ready to impose the priority of debating economic and social rights relying on a sharp consciousness of the meaning of social citizenship deriving these values from the new constitution and the values of social justice and equality considered guarantors of true and effective democracy. Despite the continued stigmatization of these movements and their accusation of interrupting economic growth, these loud dissenting voices have remained a witness of the suffering felt only by the victims.

With reference and in the same line with previous research, our aim is to highlight this forgotten underclass and micro- societies during the epidemic full of contradictions worth studying. This choice springs from a theoretical position related to the sociological approach to social life.

This interest in “the invisible members of society” is in itself recognition of their existence because social invisibility as discussed by Axel Honneth <sup>8</sup> is the practical representation of the position of superiority towards others, deemed inferior, and the refusal to recognize their existence. This social invisibility is an intentional act whose main purpose is to perpetuate the hegemony of dominant groups within Society. Judith Butler talked of “the faceless ” or those intentionally ignored by the hegemonic authority while they are trying to acquire “ a face.” In reality, the “ faceless” are

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<sup>8</sup> Axel Honneth is a German philosopher who is professor of philosophy at both the University of Frankfurt and Columbia University. He was also director of the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt am Main, Germany between 2001 and 2018. (Wikipedia)

looking for a material existence in the public sphere putting pressure for an ethical awakening followed by an alternative political program for social advancement.<sup>9</sup>

When we raise the issue from a perspective based on sociological epistemology, we are faced with two approaches to sociological research.<sup>10</sup> The first is the holistic perspective that deals with the global constructions and major determinants of individual behavior. The second is interested in partial and the micro- behavior. This two approaches can be reflected in the Tunisian field of research: Interpretation models that lend interest to social entities giving priority to micro-sociological models versus the micro-analytical model.

Since any unification of approaches only benefits dominant groups who have the power and authority to hide and conceal what they think should be hidden and concealed as analyzed by Bourdieu. Therefore, there is an intentional hiding of the point of view of the victims of hegemony and dominance.

From this reality stems the interest of this study in the excluded, the marginalized the “concealed” who are opposing and resisting dominance and struggling for recognition not only because they have been victims and deserve piety but also because they are considered citizens entitled to all their rights without any form of discrimination. One of these rights is to have a voice in

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<sup>9</sup> Butler, J. (2005). *Vie precaire*. Amesterdam. “The faceless are not only marginalized but also erased from public space.”

<sup>10</sup> For more details, Kassoumi, M.(2015). *The society of revolution*.(Arabic ed.) University of Manouba

the public sphere which should not be utterly reserved for hegemonic classes that is a “bourgeois space” according to Nancy Frazer.<sup>11</sup>

In the context of this theoretical perspective, the conceptual framework of the crisis takes shape in order to frame the expected investigation of the topic of the study. Writings about social exclusion in the French field of research have appeared after the publication of the book by René Lenoir<sup>12</sup> in which the author extensively used the concept of the excluded to include all people who suffer from social problems and do not enjoy any social protection or insurance. For many researchers, the use of this concept may encompass not only the meager financial resources, poverty and the limited income but also it includes all the obstacles that prevent an individual, a group or a category from integrating their societies. In this vein, Burckhard<sup>13</sup> describes social exclusion as “the non-participation in social and fundamental activities”. It has four dimensions:

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<sup>11</sup> Nancy Frazer is an American critical theorist, feminist, and the Henry A. and Louise Loeb Professor of Political and Social Science and professor of philosophy at The New School in New York City. Wikipedia

<sup>12</sup> René Lenoir was born in 1927 in Algiers. He was director of the ENA, secretary of state under Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, then a leading political adviser in the 1990s. He was also the author of the highly noted *Les Exclus*, in 1974, a book which will have given birth to the study of exclusion in our modern societies.

<sup>13</sup> Mentioned by Dib, A. and Abdelhalim, M.M. (2015). Social assertiveness and its dangers on society. (in French) *Idhafet Journal* (Arab Sociological Journal) Vol.31-32, Summer- Fall,

- Non consumption: (The ability of purchase goods, needs and services and to own a decent house)
- Not having savings, pension and any source of revenue in times of crises.
- The inability to participate in economic and social activities available through a permanent job, a secure income, education and access to public services.
- Non political participation and exclusion from decision making at the local and national level. Therefore, the lack of integration in the local and national communities.

All these forms of exclusion combined clearly deepens the degree of chronic fragility and leads to different manifestations of social fracture within the system that governs every society. This fallout of exclusion clearly raises the need and urgency to return to the values of solidarity, social justice and the equality of opportunities not only during times of crises but as a social, political and strategic option.

In this study, fragility is not that state that is linked exclusively to individual psychological life but fragility is related to social deprivation and the non-recognition, and real and imaginary exclusion. The major paradox of invisibility is that it targets a social sub-humanity whose existence is at the same time significant and unbearable.

Francois Dubet <sup>14</sup> distinguishes between “ inequality in itself and inequality that is felt in the form

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<sup>14</sup> François Dubet, born on May 23, 1946 in Périgueux, is a French sociologist, former director of studies at the École des Hautes Etudes



of the lack of justice. The different forms of inequality are not only objective and measurable quantitative data but also they are moral and normative events. These events should be taken into consideration in their diversity and multiplicity because the daily life of people is not identical which makes its visualizations non-identical and distinct. This complex social reality leads us to confess that any classification of people remains temporary because the borders between social categories are not final and static but subject to constant reviews.

The notion of “ the Marginal Man” by Robert Park<sup>15</sup> allows us to go further than the fragmented categories long preferred by social sciences such as the poor, minorities, the delinquent, and the excluded, etc. which are different names that cover in a mixed way social and economic phenomena.

As every society ends up producing its marginalized, alienated and estranged at all times and

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en Sciences Sociales (EHESS). He was a professor at Bordeaux-II University until his retirement in 2013. He is the author of studies devoted to juvenile marginality, at school and at institutions. He directed the preparation of the report "The college of the year 2000" given to the minister responsible for school education in 1999 (Wikipedia)

Dubet, F. (2014). *Inégalités et justice sociale*, Paris, La Découverte, coll. « Recherches », Paugam, S. (2001). *Les formes contemporaines de la pauvreté et de l'exclusion en Europe*. *Études rurales*, 3-4 (159-160), 73 -95.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Ezra Park was an American urban sociologist who is considered to be one of the most influential figures in early U.S. sociology. Park was a pioneer in the field of sociology, changing it from a passive philosophical discipline to an active discipline rooted in the study of human behavior. Wikipedia

everywhere, there are individuals who are forced to live at the margin, hidden from “public opinion, ” the prevailing “popular culture” and social traditions, who were set aside and were removed from the social circle and from the functional unity of the social entirety because their presence is looked upon as a threat for the social unity. Marginalization, in some extreme cases, may take a tragic dimension and this marginalized human being finds himself/ herself “ confined” in an absolute otherness, that of the “useless human being.” Any “normal” society that justifies and accepts this uselessness, needs to be protected again his/her harm and threat.

Even though the phenomenon has always existed, the way of exclusion or marginalization has not been the same because the values adopted by societies differ from one to another and from one culture to another. At the heart of the social body, there are constant revisions of the ever changing intuitions and values of society according to local and global geopolitical variations.<sup>16</sup>

The aim of this study is, through sociological analysis, to break into the spaces of precariousness and to acquire the mechanisms to deconstruct their discourse and identify their representations in order to influence this reality and to induce possible changes.

We seek, through laying bare this hierarchical classification and social fractures within an unjust society that transforms the “visible” into “invisible”, to

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<sup>16</sup> Bel Hadjambrouk,S..(2014). The marginal other. (In Arabic) *Al Hiwar al Moutamadden*. 15(3).

bring out the need to recognize the “marginalized” others and to de-stigmatize them. This is the key word that guides this study: To combat the daily stigmatization and its tragic effects on the reality of entire communities and to reinvent popular democracy without any form of discrimination against the people at the bottom of social hierarchy.

## **Methodology**

The methodology of this study rests upon the qualitative approach which aims at understanding the social reality relying on the representations of the people themselves and the restitution of their discourse and behavior in their specific environments. This ethnographic choice owes a lot to the works of the Chicago School of Sociology which investigated the reality and culture of slums in this American city using many research tools and techniques to gather observations, data, testimonies and life stories.

Interpretative ethnography is a deliberate methodological choice. This means to approach social life as a text carrying a meaning and open to interpretation.

We owe a lot to Clifford Geertz<sup>17</sup> who believes that the ethnographer, by collecting and organizing data

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<sup>17</sup> Clifford James Geertz was an American anthropologist who is remembered mostly for his strong support for and influence on the practice of symbolic anthropology, and who was considered "for three decades...the single most influential cultural anthropologist in the United States." (Wikipedia)

related to the culture under scrutiny, ends up in an operation of “dense description.” The culture of human groups is contemplated as textures of interconnected significances and meanings woven by the actors. Consequently, the researcher should not limit his investigation and discussion to an experimental study looking for a law that governs it. Rather, the researcher is supposed to conduct an interpretative action. This makes his study appropriate to the specificity of the investigated human phenomenon and the specificity of academic research related to this phenomenon.

Critical ethnography is a precise type of sociological research. The scholar is expected to take part in the liberating marginalized groups in society. These researchers, who embrace political convictions, are not expected to give them up and be utterly neutral. They join the resistance and protest movements against inequality, dominance, the denial of the rights of the weakest categories in society with little representation. The declared objectives of the critical ethnographer is to help these marginalized people have access to more power, to have a voice and a say, to challenge the current situation and to join public debates. Research should contribute to the questioning of forces and factors of hegemony which endeavor to perpetuate all forms of injustice, inequality, dominance and corruption.

The study has been conducted during a particular moment and within an exceptional context. This fact makes us adopt a qualitative survey that consists of a corpus-based. We collected data through meeting people

or semi-structured interviews of individuals or groups of people. The participants represent a sample of actors living in precarious and marginalized situations. The aim is to get information and opinions related to their life experience and their social environment.

Because of the lockdown, it was impossible to conduct face -to face- interviews. In order to complete this study in due time, we have resorted to gathering testimonies through the phone and social media. These testimonies have been collected to meet the urgency of conducting research as we are going through the Corona virus pandemic and its fallout. A further refined and enlarged field research will be conducted after the end of the lockdown.

What motivates me not to insist on face- to- face usual interviews, apart from the lockdown, is a sociological tradition that consists, according to Goffman<sup>18</sup>, of considering the main idea of the research as paramount and essential for choosing the research tools.

The interviews have focused on the experiences of the respondents in the context of the pandemic. This means the impact of this context marked by a general

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<sup>18</sup> Erving Goffman was a Canadian-born sociologist, social psychologist, and writer, considered by some "the most influential American sociologist of the twentieth century". [Wikipedia](#). In his book *Frame Analysis* (published by Munuit) in 1991 talks of "methodological opportunism": observe, look , take notes of anecdotes, classify. A method that purely qualitative and inductive without sample and without a systematic inquiry, even without a very limited field and space for the inquiry.

crisis on their daily life, be it economic, social, emotional or psychological. Beyond that, through the interviews, we have sought to question the representations of the respondents of the future of society, the State, always through their own experiences and the social environment they belong to.

These techniques are not new, in conducting filed work, psychologists, like that conducted by political scientists and opinion poll experts, more often resort to these techniques considered a solution or an alternative to direct interviews. These techniques are used in sociological research in the context of its adaptation to new tools by making good use of audio and visual means( the picture, audio recording, recorded tapes, etc.).

Still, conscious of the limits of this method which deprives the researcher of meeting the respondents face-to-face, interacting with them, their emotions and their body language and gathering observations from within their living space and their experience. In order to overcome this shortcoming and to diversify data that can be interpreted and analyzed , we have contacted some participants more than once to check some points deemed relevant and to be more accurate. In addition to that, we have tried to enrich our observations and the analytical data and to add more elements to the methodology of the study, we have explored the virtual space where many actors and participants post their opinions and arguments. The collected data through the virtual space, surely, will clarify and enrich other data collected through oral interviews.

In addition to that, our first hand experience with protest movements, the findings of past testimonies, the discussions conducted within the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights (TFESR) and the advocacy campaigns have allowed us to situate this study in a wider context and understanding the impact of the Corona global epidemic on the sociology of the “margin” within a larger historical and social context. Media materials and social media networks provided us with additional data, statements and informative positions related to the theme of the study.

We have also benefited from literature, report, studies and statistics related to the topic of the study to enrich the findings and discussion. Here also, micro-analysis may rely on data and observations collected from more general literature that have dealt with the social issue and the issues of democracy and development.

The choice of the research sample is not linked to any specific geographic space. The main objective is to have a sample that is representative of the diverse forms of precariousness.

The sample is definitely scattered: It includes those living in rural areas and lack drinkable water or the ability to have access to water. Others are victims of fragile employment like precarious workers ( those doing daily manual tasks like cleaning and gardening etc...), female workers in the farming, textile, cleaning and gardening sectors and the unemployed. Part of the

sample are people with special needs, the inhabitants of poor neighborhoods<sup>19</sup> in and around the capital and immigrants from sub-Saharan immigrants.

The findings and conclusions drawn from this study remain partial and temporary and in need of future field studies conducted by multidisciplinary researchers either to conduct comparative studies or to highlight other aspects of the sociology of the “margin”.

The linking thread in this choice is to direct ethnographic research towards the geography of the “margin,” especially interior regions marginalized and penalized by an unfair development system for many decades and poor neighborhoods which geographically were decisive in the outbreak of the revolution. Geographically, these regions still represent a favorable area for dissenting voices and the protest and resistance actions .

What we will present in the following sections are the results and analysis of the testimonies of 20 interviewees ( 8 female and 12 male). I have to admit that the sample is too small to enable us investigate the different aspects of the topic. However, it is a starting point for future extended research.

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<sup>19</sup> In this translation, I will be using poor neighborhoods, rather than populat neighborhood to avoid any ambiguity.





**SOCIAL “MARGINS”  
IN THE MIDST OF THE  
STORM**

Immediately after the revolution, Tunisian sociological studies have embarked on investigating the “margins” in order to accurately understand the role played by this category in mobilizing society against the ousted political regime. In other words, it is an inquiry into active popular actors who transformed the uprising of December 17, 2010 into a civil peaceful revolution that ended by ousting the former president and overthrowing the political system.

After the revolution, the sociology of elections, legal and illegal immigration, violent extremism, youth artistic expressions such as Rap music have dealt with this “margin” as if all people admitted that understanding and dissecting this forgotten invisible social group would be a crucial condition to set plans for social and political reforms

In term of geography and research domain, the concept of the “margin” has territorial and geographic connotations. It refers to interior, Central and North-Western governorates, and people living in the South of Tunisia. We know and we are aware that all development indices reveal the huge gap which separates these governorates from the remaining regions of Tunisia, especially the coast and the north deemed “useful.” The concept of the “margin” takes us to densely populated large poor neighborhoods in the suburbs of big cities, especially the capital Tunis. These areas are inhabited mainly by migrants from interior regions who migrated searching for work, to escape rural areas that lack many public services, and to overcome

feeling of despair nurtured by miserable living conditions in remote areas. The other connotation of the concept of the “margin” is the precarious situation led by poor social categories including the unemployed, temporary workers, retired, limited income people, immigrants and people with special needs.

Many sociological studies, media reports and academic papers that have dealt with the issue of illegal immigration, violence or political and religious extremism have posited a cause and effect relationship between marginalization and the emergence of these new phenomena. These simplifications have, intentionally or unintentionally, contributed to the ambiguity between the reality of the complex “margin” and all the political problems and issues. These attitudes have often accused the “margin” of being geographically the incarnation of all the diseases of the “original” society.

More than that, the negative stigma towards the “margin” as the “other” by some opinion-makers deepens the gap between the space of the “margin,” the rest of the social body and the social fracture and strengthens the feeling of oppression and injustice.

The “margin” in its multi-dimensional manifestations suffers from economic, social, symbolic and political inequality. It tries to produce narratives and representations about itself, society, the State and the world. These narratives and representations tell us about their never ending endeavor to adapt to the world as it is. After October 2011, the “margin” has become more

enthusiastic about the possibility of change and powerful enough to impose itself and its voice through its own special, proper and unusual means inside the material and virtual public sphere. To do so, the “margin” relied on new forms of protest and expression of anger such as Rap music, street art and the Ultras soccer groups.

Because the “margin” has appropriated its own voice, words<sup>20</sup>, description of its daily life, it has become an independent actor expressing itself outside the “official” prevalent discourse which is the discourse of the State and mass media. In other words, the discourse of the dominant, cold, unjust, biased and “blind” that is unable to identify poor categories in society. The “margins” are unable to find in this discourse a reflection of themselves, their identity, their suffering and their role. Even when the discourse takes into consideration the “margins,” the reality is that is too late to be useful. We remember that the speech “I have understood you” by former President Ben Ali, a few days before being overthrown, did not ease the anger and resentment of the “margins.”

Building on that and relying on data collected from the respondents, the analysis of posts on social media networks and several relevant media materials collected during the lockdown, we underline here the significance of the suffering, fear and even indifference of the “margins.” In other words, the reactions of the “margins” during the global epidemic as expressed and

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<sup>20</sup> Lapeyronnie, D. and Courtois, L. (2008). *Urban Ghetto: Segregation, violence, poverty in France these days*. (in French) .R.Laffont, p.58.

formulated by these very people. They reveal, within this context marked by the corona pandemic, the internalization of a sharp and complex fragility but also hope nurtured by some small victories whether temporary or lasting.

## **I.1.The Untimely Epidemic: Indifference, Fear, and Severe anxiety**

Psycho- sociological studies have revealed a change in the behavior patterns of individuals and groups during catastrophes and epidemics. The “rationalism” which is supposed to govern behavior and actions during ordinary daily life, even if it were fragile, is not longer relevant.

Sociologists have recorded that the pace of daily life, its monotony and routine have become, to a large extent chaotic. The daily life of individuals and society including known and tried patterns of interaction, relations, expectations and readymade solutions are no longer recognizable. This epidemic represents a shocking and sharp break with the routine.<sup>21</sup>

Amir is 34 year - old, has special needs and lives alone, after the divorce of his parents, in a poor neighborhood in the city of Kairouan (located in the Center of Tunisia). Since the outbreak of the disease

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<sup>21</sup> Maffesoli, M.« part of the inexorable swings of human history, the tragic feeling of life tends to prevail. The dramatic feeling is decidedly optimistic . The tragic is aporic. It means it has no solution. Life as it is.”  
<http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/michel-maffesoli-la-crise-du-coronavirus-ou-le-grand-retour-du-tragique-20200323>.

followed by the lockdown, he feels anxious. Amir states “since people start talking about the first and second infected cases, like my neighbors, I was afraid. I have abided by the stay home instructions issued by the authorities. For five days, I have not left the house although I am not used to this loneliness. Before the health crisis, I used a wheel chair to go out shopping to get essential goods or to go to the youth center to take part in the activities of the theatre club. I watch soccer games in the café since I am keen on this game and the Tunisian national team. I attend adult education classes which were stopped. I am really afraid, if not scared to death. I do not communicate with the outside world and none visits me because of the lockdown except for my cousin who provides me with some food.”

The isolation of Amir from the outside world and his life between his wheel chair and his bed has transformed his life into a frightening prison. There is a difference between someone living in a villa and someone living in a small house which is similar to a prison cell.”

Will I be able to go out again? Will I be able to meet my friends in the street and the youth center? Will I be able to watch the Tunisian national soccer team (The Eagles o Carthage) again? Will be able to listen to the fans sing a the lyrics which I have written myself for the glory of the team? Such questions adds to the distress Amir who feels exhausted and unable to fall asleep.

Amir, who receives a meager government grant allocated to poor families and an additional 50 TD temporary grant to face these hard times, confirms that this amount is not enough to make two ends meet. He is living in a rented house ( his friend helped him to find this house) and he has to pay 200 dinars a month. Now, the landlord may evict him in case he cannot pay rent for the month of Ramadan. During these hard times, financial want is made harder and unbearable by social distancing imposed by the authorities. For Amir, the outside world (outside the house) is the world of life and the world of hope despite the limited financial resources. The feeling of loneliness and social isolation for those at the bottom of the social pyramid have become unbearable and a source of anxiety. For high income people, the lockdown, although challenging, is still bearable because they have the means to live through this isolation.

Jamal is 42 years old, he comes from the Governorate of Mednine (in the South-East of Tunisia) and works in the real estate court in the city of Zarzis ( in the South West of Tunisia). Lately, Jamal has gone through tough times. Few days before the lockdown, he met in the corridors of the court citizens coming from foreign countries and he shook hands and hug them. From that moment, he has been frustrated about the possibility of being infected “ I have isolated myself in my room and I have avoided any contact with my father because he is an old man and he is sick. I am terrified of the idea of being sick. I am a poor worker. I was scared to death when I learnt that the there was “an epidemic

outbreak” on the island of Djerba, especially that the health infrastructure in the governorate of Medline is not good enough to face multiple the exigencies of the epidemic and the increasing number of infected people.”

These are the statements of Jamal who stresses the high degree of anxiety he has been suffering since the outbreak of the virus and its dissemination. His story and tragic situation are telling. They are shared by many excluded and marginalized Tunisian citizens challenged by the dissemination of the infection. This has deepened their feeling of alienation in their home country. For Jamal, every meaning in this life has become questionable and doubtful.

Before the corona pandemic, Jamal was an active member in the Coordinating Committee of Precarious Workers (those doing different daily manual tasks like cleaning and gardening etc...) in Mednine. For ten years, he has been living under the pressure of this precarious form of employment . He expresses deep sadness any time one of his coworkers passed away. The last case was his friend from the governorate of Kebili (the second largest of the 24 governorates of Tunisia, situated in the south-west.) the late Jimani El Rhimi and from the governorate of Siliana(North West of Tunisia) the late Neji Ayari. He expressed his sadness through these words in the last meeting of the protest movement “ Yes, death is a great calamity, but we go to death smiling if we die for a cause, proud to fight for the liberation of our land and liberation of our people “ “ other dead people went to heaven.” He adds “ They have decided that we



should die for the regime and the system to stay, we will die suddenly and awfully as street stray dogs do.”

Jamal is terrified as he sees himself threatened by death since he is employed in an insecure job and he belongs to a vulnerable social category victim of inequality on the one hand and threatened by this invisible virus, on the other hand.

The popular saying “dead alive” finds its true meaning in the situation of Jamal as he finds himself besieged by social misery and the lockdown. For some poor social categories the danger of the epidemic and the lockdown have just made their life more tragic and harsher.

Resentment, fear and anxiety are common denominators among all people, poor and rich alike, worldwide. However, these feelings remain a personal experience as the words “fear” “anxiety” “tension” “despair” are only general labels that are not applicable to the same living experience of every individual and every social category. These labels become stickers we attach to dissimilar cases. It is the task of sociology to show the differences and to unveil the untold or invisible suffering of the people. The respondents have not only expressed their fear, they have also expressed their acceptance or submission to reality. Hussein, a citizen with special needs, earns his living by selling tea to passersby in the city of Gafsa (South \*West of Tunisia). He lives in a -“Essourrou” neighborhood with his family. Hussein downplays the danger of this epidemic

when he states that “ I do not pay a lot of attention to this issue. Everyone talks ,in one way or another, about the corona virus. I do not have time to think and contemplate this health problem. I have to go out to earn a living. I have to go out to earn few dinars. Corona does not kill people because death is our destiny. We rely and depend on God and nobody else.”

What is striking about Hussein is the overlap between the religious feeling or fatalism and the urgent and pragmatic need to keep working to earn a living. These feelings have not made Hussein nervous because of the spread of the epidemic. Another facet of indifference adopted by the youth in this context is the case of Sihem. She lives in the suburbs of the capital Tunis in a highly populated neighborhood ‘Ettadhamon’. She is a student in the Department of Philosophy at the Teachers’ Training College. Sihem does not hide her anger towards the indifference of the youth in her neighborhood. Sihem states that “ I am shocked when I see the youth in my neighborhood outside their houses gathered in the streets without any respect for preventive measures and social distancing. This is an irresponsible behavior that reflects the absence of awareness.”

In the poor neighborhood where Sihem lives there are two opposing cultures. The distance between the representation and perception of Sihem ( a girl and a university student) in tune with the policies and measures adopted by the government and the representations and perceptions of the youth in her neighborhood who are careless and indifferent to the

health crisis and its fallout. This difference in the perception of the crisis reveals the complex nature of individual behavior within poor neighborhoods where we can find two or more identities that able to coexist and to collide. The difference between what Sihem called understanding government regulations and measures and the behavior of the youth in her neighborhood confirms that daily life inside these neighborhood is not subject to the perception and the same rules.

In the same context, Hamida, who is unemployment despite her university degree, comes from the city of Jedliane in the governorate of Kasserine (Central- West of Tunisia). She contends that “There is no respect of the general lockdown among the youth as cafes are secretly open and the youth still play soccer games in the open fields and in the streets. For fear of getting infected myself or my mother, I called the police to order the youth to stay home . I have the impression that these youth wish to get infected and they seek to spread the infection to other people out of revenge.”

For Hamida, asking for the help of the police during this crisis is an act of acceptance of the role of the republican police to practice social control on those who do not abide by rules and regulations. It is a new position in the discourse of Hamida who had previously complained of the behavior of the police and had criticized their brutal interventions when dealing with social protest actions in which Hamida took part.

The tension between the youth in the disadvantaged interior regions and the police is not structural. Rather, this tension may change depending on circumstances. In the case of Corona virus and its possible dramatic fallout, some youth from excluded and marginalized areas may come to accept the concept of the “just laws” of the State which should be enforced and respected. They also seem to accept the legitimacy of the violence of the State to impose its power and authority.. This new attitude breaks with the stereotype of the sociology of the “margin” which categorically rejects the power of the State and may even defend “the stateless society.”

However, we have to be careful of the essentialist interpretations of the indifference of the youth as a proof of a definitive lack of civism among the youth or to the irrational that commands the behavior of the excluded and marginalized. In this indifference, there is something like an identity disorder that affects “proud social categories “unable to reproduce representations of themselves and of their social environment.

These social groups who do not express themselves but other people talk about them. We are in front of young people who are literary dispossessed,<sup>22</sup> whose social existence is face to face with boredom. The youth are

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<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre.(2002). *The Singles' Ball. Crisis of peasant society in Béarn* . ( in French) Seuil. Cf. The notion of « jaded man » by Simmel, Goerge (1986) in his book *The Sociology and the expereicne of modern world..* Méridiens Klincksieck as cited by Mohsen Bouazizi (2009). *Sociology of the indifference.* In *Social expressions and social space*, pp.154-160 .(in Arabic). Maison Arabe du Livre.

not in a confrontational relation with the official discourse. They are not in dissonance with decision makers. The youth simply ignore them as they are ignored by decision maker. This is a history that goes far back and puts into play the relation of the patriarchic State and its elites and society and its marginalized.

We are in front of another social representation of the epidemic within the society of the “margin.” Fear and anxiety coexist with indifference and submission to fate and destiny. This overlap is in itself a manifestation of the elements that constitute the sociology of the “margin.” Religiosity, nihilism, the lack of civic awareness of risks and adventurism coexist with poverty, the feeling of isolation and fear. Sociologists become certain of the benefits of putting the macro- social reality as the focus of their research to overcome the prevailing preconceived ideas and hasty generalizations.

A different behavior adopted by the people in the rural areas was mentioned by Moncef who is from “ Douar El-Houwadia” . In his testimony Moncef states “We are around 40 families who live in the rural area close to Tabarka (is a coastal town located in North-Western part of Tunisia ).We feel that the epidemic is far from our wonderful rural area. We are used to ensuring our needs out of our farm products and we are able to continue leading a peaceful and calm life. The challenge is more in large cities and in the capital because of population density and over crowdedness.”

The serenity expressed by Moncef is possible in a self sufficient farming village whose people are able to preserve their traditions against the evils of urbanism.. This representation of the epidemic challenges our initial hypothesis related to the representation of the “margin” during epidemics and raise the issue of people staying in their rural areas and their ability to acquire the necessities of life from their lands. Many studies and statistics worldwide indicate that large and overcrowded cities are more vulnerable in front of the ravages of epidemics than rural areas where the population is scattered which reduces the possibility of infection. This is true in the case of Italy where “Lombardia,” a region which is economically well developed and open to China and the world through trade, is considered to be the starting point of the outbreak of epidemic and where the death tolls is very high.

From a general sociological perceptive, the fear expressed by the population of far away rural areas, neighborhoods and disadvantaged regions is legitimate. However, what comes out of the different positions towards the current crisis, the precaution measures and the probability to overcome the crisis is that sadness is not lived as an individual neurosis nor as solitary suffering. It is inseparable from the sociability of the individual. The relation between fear , tension and anxiety are sometimes determined in relation to emotions and shared feelings and not in the closed corners of the deep and isolated individual soul. Panic is internalized, ignored or domesticated depending on

people and places. This depends on how everyone struggles with “the principle of reality” imposed by the outside world, as outlined by Freud.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the necessity of adaptation of individuals to the state of collective anxiety is asymmetrical.

## **I.2. Sub-Saharan African Immigrants: The End of Racism?**

For many years, Tunisia had been a country of transition for Sub-Saharan African immigrants. These days, it has become a country of residence and settlement. In addition to the students who enjoy a legal status, a large number of illegal immigrants from different African countries also live in Tunisia. Unfortunately, these immigrants have integrated the world of precarious employment in the sectors of cafes, restaurants, security, construction, seasonal farming, and housekeeping, etc. Their life has not been easy before the crisis, first because of their economic conditions and their illegal status according to current laws and second because they have been subject to racial and discriminatory practices, even physical violence.

Like other fragile categories, the Corona virus crisis shook the fragile social equilibrium according to

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<sup>23</sup> Freud, S. *Malaise dans la civilisation*. The Freudian L’*homo sexualis* is always in relation with the other, but the narcissistic or the practical human being; for example, has different relations with outside reality. This human being does not react in the same way to three sources of human malaise : hostile nature, the finitude of bodies and the institutional deficiencies of the family, society or the State.

which the immigrants have lived and according to which they have organized their daily family life and even their spiritual life by finding private spaces and transforming them into churches to pray. They have joined the economic cycle bereft of rights which made them sometimes, especially women, in situations of “human trafficking”<sup>24</sup>

Ayoub is an asylum seeker from Sudan. He has been living in Tunisia for less than one year after he had crossed the Tunisian border from Libya where his life was no longer safe and secure. He used to work in the construction sector all week earning no more than 25 TD a day without any health insurance. He stopped working and he is living with a group of asylum seekers from Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea in a small hotel downtown the capital sharing the same common space and the bathroom area. Describing his living conditions, Ayoub says “ after losing my job with the outbreak of the Corona virus, I feel that I am afraid of the disease and the infection and the prolonged unemployment period. I am also worried about my family because I cannot transfer any sum of money to help them during these tough times.”

Ayoub adds that he has tried many times to get a job that matches his skills as someone who has a

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<sup>24</sup> Araïssia, H. (ed.) Rapports du FTDES: Enquête de dignité, notes sur les questions de migration (Arabic edition) <http://ftdes.net/rapports/femmesubsahariennes>. Pdf.

Araïssia, H. Violence against subsaharan migrants women in Tunisia. <http://ftdes.net/Violence-against-subsaharan-migrants-women-in-Tunisia/>



professional degree in car mechanics but in vain. The labor laws in Tunisia do not allow him to do so. In addition, many Tunisian mechanics, for unknown reasons, have denied him a position. “All my plans and all the steps taken to apply for an immigration visa to Canada or any European country have been in vain. Alas, my dreams have not come true.”

The situation of Ayoub who is haunted by fear and worried about his poor family and his despair regarding the future is but a sample of a tough situation shared by many refugees and immigrants living in Tunisia. Today, due to the Corona crisis, their situation is getting worse and worse.

Bellamassi is an immigrant from Cote d’Ivoire and an activist in the associations of Sub-Saharan African immigrants confirms this tough situation when he says “For most immigrants, the current crisis is economic, health and humanitarian. We have not recorded a case of infection among immigrants but to be jobless is, for all of us, unbearable. Most of us work without any legal contract that protects our rights. In these circumstances, we have a real problem to guarantee staying in our houses since we are not able to pay the rent at the end of every month and this lockdown may continue for some time.”

To explain the specificity of the suffering of female immigrants these days, Bellamassi adds “a large number of female immigrants are now working in restaurants, cafes, and houses as housekeepers. Lately,

many landlords, no longer need house maids because many Tunisian families are home confined, fired their African housekeepers. In addition to the fact that Tunisian families, out of precaution, try to avoid any contact with the outside world for fear that housekeepers bring the virus home.”

This testimony raises a human, legal and structural issue related to a large number of housekeepers who were subject or victims to manipulation and exploitation from networks specialized in bringing women from several African countries to work as housekeepers. This world used to be closed and hidden. We were hardly able to integrate this hidden world and disclose its secrets. Today, this world has become open and urges the entire society to answer many relevant questions about the conditions of this female housekeepers.

In the same context, Bellamassi adds “ We will face in the near future a health problem especially pregnant women and immigrants who suffer from chronic diseases who constantly need medicines at a time they do not have enough savings to provide for their needs in the coming period.”

This important revealing testimony indicates the fragility of the tough situations of immigrants who are live in Tunisia. With few racist attacks and behavior towards them, the precarious employment and illegal situation , the threat of the Corona epidemic will worsen the situation of immigrants.”

All international human rights organizations, civil society associations and public opinion stress the importance of assisting immigrants and refugees and the necessity to protect them in these exceptional situations..<sup>25</sup>

The recent positive government measures for the benefit of immigrants enacted after coordination and constructive consultation between the civil society and the Ministry of Civil Society and Human Rights have put into place a solidarity program to help this fragile social category on legal and humanitarian bases.

The most important lesson from an anthropological and sociological perspective is the acute awareness of Tunisians towards the rejection of any form of racism. Tunisia has recently passed a law that bans any form of racial discrimination.<sup>26</sup> This surely will reduce forms of discrimination against Sub Sahara Africans and will increase the number solidarity initiatives towards them during the pandemic.

### **I.3. Isolated and forgotten rural areas fight Corona virus**

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. The declaration of the General Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore” The covid-19 pandemic could devastate the refugee, migrant and displaced populations within the country without an urgent international action.” <http://www.unicef.fr/article/covid-19-les-populations-de-refugies-de-migrants-et-de-personnes-deplacees-auraient-etre-0>

<sup>26</sup> JORTLaw 50-2018, October 23, 2018 criminalizes racism liable to prison sentences.

The problem of rural areas is one of the most investigated and researched issues by studies related to the revolution either from the perspective of the structural crisis of the farming sector since independence or from the perspective of the developmental and human situation that emerged due to the public policies and the economic options in relation to the rural areas or the interior regions.<sup>27</sup> From the perspective of the political economy, the Tunisian State has chosen to “suggest” for the people of interior regions the solution of migration to compensate for its inability to achieve durable development and jobs in these regions. This choice has manifested itself clearly on the eve of the revolution when the State realized the size of the gap that separates remote and isolated areas from rich and prosperous ones through regional development indices published in 2012. This inertia that has befallen interior regions has not only become an obstacle to development but also it has become a threat to the basis of essential life for Tunisians living in the rural areas. The repeated protest movements demanding the right to drinkable water since July 2012 are hard evidence of these shortcomings. At that time, the government’s response was sometimes indifference and impotence and some other times arrests and trials of may protesters in many rural areas.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Tizaoui, H. (2014). Social Hypersensitivity of a local, fragile and unstructured economy in Collective (Eds) *Tunisian revolution: The local in the mirror of human sciences*.(Arabic edition). Doha: Centre Arabe de Recherche et Etudes des Politiques (CAREP).

<sup>28</sup> See FTDES, Report about victims of thirst (In Arabic).  
<https://ftdes.net/rapports/soif.pdf>

Amal is a lawyer from the region of “El Dhibet” and an activist in the “Right to Water Movement” states “ we have been protesting for the right to water for many years. Today because of the unpaid debts of the water associations, the latter does not supply the inhabitants of the region with water. Today, we do not have the most important basis of life that is water. How can we talk of hygiene products and sterilization?”

The Tunisian Observatory of Water keeps alerting authorities and public opinion of to the incessant water disruption in the supply of drinkable water in many regions. One month after the discovery of the first case of infection, many complaints about water disruption and polluted water reached the observatory through social media in 22 governorates.

The observatory administered and operated by the Association Nomad 08 has been working for many years on the issue of the right to water and drinkable water pollution in many regions. The head of this association Mr. Ala Marzouki confirms “ many regions for many years have been suffering suffer from a shortage in the supply of drinkable especially during summer time . Some villages may remain for several days without drinkable water supply. The pipeline network of the Tunisian water company (SONEDE) is getting old and the State has not allocated enough financial resources to maintain this network.”

There is a strategic problem related to drinkable water in Tunisia. However, the causes of this problem are

beyond the scope of this study. We would rather focus on the burning issues of these days. For Alaa, “despite the official statements to assure us , we still record disruption in the supply of water in some regions, especially those regions that have access to water through water associations. We have issued a statement to call the Tunisian Electricity Company (STEG) to supply these associations with electricity and to delay the payment of their debts. In anticipation of any unexpected event, the Observatory and the Association Nomad 08 issued a statement on March 12, 2020 entitled “ The Victims of Thirst, the Victims of Corona,” referring to Article 44 of the constitution. The statement was sent to the President of the Republic, the Head of Government, the Ministry of Agriculture and The Tunisian Company for The Exploitation and Distribution of Water (SONEDE) and the Tunisian Electricity Company (STEG).

People in these thirsty regions consider access to drinkable water a top priority. Compared to access to water, they consider other priorities claimed by other regions such as roads or school as luxuries. These regions warn us again that any policy that does not take into consideration the different priorities of the different regions will necessarily fail. Each region has its own specificities that should be taken into consideration by government when designing development plans. Governments cannot impose a common way of living on many groups of people who do not have the same

resources and needs according to the Maslow's Hierarchy of need.<sup>29</sup>

It is evident to say that the motive of these claims and protests related to the right to water is the very instinct of survival and dignity. This motive is highly important for the inhabitants of rural isolated areas, poor regions who have been asked not to travel and move as part of the in the national strategy to combat Corona with its health, administrative and security aspects. It is difficult for the State to impose its legitimate control and to institutionalize it. There is no normative recognition of authority of the State in light of social, economic and political relations based on dominance, injustice and contempt.<sup>30</sup>

The effect of this structural marginalization of the interior regions which goes beyond the dilemma of drinkable water highlights, once again in light of this crisis, other challenges. Lotfi , from the city of Bouhajla in the governorate of Kairouan (city located in north-central Tunisia), has a university degree but he is unemployed. He states "I have been forced to quit my seasonal job in olive harvest recently because security forces have prevented us from travelling to the governorate of Mahdia (town and fishing port located on

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<sup>29</sup> Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" in Psychological Review. Maslow subsequently extended the idea to include his observations of humans' innate curiosity. Wikipedia

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Jaballah, S. Protests against water shortage, in Tunisia.(in French) FTDES. <https://ftdes.net/policy-paper-les-droits-economiques-et-sociaux-en-tunisie-1/>

Al-Sāḥil (Sahel), the coastal plain region in eastern Tunisia) because of the Corona confinement. I have been unemployed for many years that is why I had no alternative but to work in the olive harvest on a temporary basis. Because I quitted this seasonal job, I have no other source to earn money to guarantee my very basic needs to survive without further burdening my family.”

These solutions found by the youth to overcome unemployment such as accepting precarious temporary and seasonal jobs for low wages should not be considered permanent solutions for their daily suffering. Moreover, due to the Corona crisis, these very precarious solutions are no longer available which affects the life of the youth especially in these regions where the opportunities for permanent and well paying jobs are very rare.

The governorate of Kairouan belongs to the second group of governorates as suggested by the geographer Adnene Haider in the classification of Tunisian governorates from the north to the south.<sup>31</sup> This classification among the different regions and governorates is expressed by Lofti “ what I have noticed when I used to travel to the Governorate of Mahia ,where I used to work, is that the regional authorities take

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<sup>31</sup> Haydar, A. (2006). Regional dynamics in Tunisia: From regionalization to metropolisation. (in French)..*Revue Tunisienne de gographie*,37.

The first group is made of the governorates of Tunis, Manouba, Ariana, Coastal cities. The second group (middle of Tunisia) includes the governorates of Beja, Zaghouan,Siliana, Kairouan, Sid Bouzid,. The third group (west of Tunisia) includes the governorates of Jendouba, Kef, Kasserine, Gafsa, Tozeur,Kébili and Tataouine.



seriously the implementation of the lockdown compared to Kairouan. Once again, we realize that we are forgotten and that we do not belong to Tunisia. In Mahdia all aspects of daily life are well planned and well organized, in my city Bouhajla, it is chaos.”

Lotfi has expressed a painful feeling of being discriminated against and neglected by central and regional authorities. This feeling is shared by most inhabitants of the interior regions. During times of crises this feeling of neglect becomes sharper.

Hedi, who belongs to a poor family, stresses the severity of his socio-territorial fracture. After taking part in a series of protests, his activism paid off. He was hired by the National Union for Social Solidarity in his region Feriana (a town and commune in the Kasserine Governorate). Hedi states that “ In Feriana, his hometown, the priority of the people is to ensure their food and to have access to private and government aid programs. Many left the rural areas to nearby towns and cities to get government aid as announced by the authorities or to buy semolina and fodder for animals. They are not paying any attention to the lockdown measures and social distancing.”

Abdelhalim, “the oldest among the unemployed”, is 40 years old. He is an activist in the National Coordination Committee for Social Movements has posted many times, through his face book page, a call to the Governor of Sidi Bouzid to pay more attention to

rural areas and the villages rather than focusing all efforts on urban and well-off regions in the governorate.”

The management and administration of the crisis at the central and regional levels have been planned and designed on the assumption that the newly established local authorities that emerged after the local elections of May 2018 do not have the necessary logistic , financial and political capabilities to confront the ever-increasing needs of the regions. Neither the newly elected municipality councils, the governors nor the different local officials have succeeded ,according to these testimonies, in comforting and appeasing the inhabitants in their regions. More than that, these regional and local authorities have not been able, sometimes, to reach a consensus on the implementation of lockdown measures because of narrow partisan differences and interests. In this case, all the expectations of the population have been focused on the central authorities, the Head of the Government and the President of the Republic.

This means that the organization of political authorities within the State is not only a legal and an organizational issue but it is also a political and developmental issue. The oppressive and authoritarian regime was able, to some extent, to maintain the loyalty of the “margins” through the role and presence of ruling party, and “ waiting and expecting strategy of governing.” This approach or strategy , expressed by Hamza El Meddeb, means that regional and local officials intentionally keep postponing problems as much as possible without any willingness to look for

suitable solutions and remedies . There are still attempts by some political parties or associations to control the dissolved Democratic Constitutional Rally networks of loyalty in the community of the “margin” and to benefit from that politically. Several political parties and associations are still trying to have a strong presence in these peripheral areas. None has the power to dominate the “margins” materially speaking nor the power to dominate the voice of the “margins” as it was the case during the period of authoritarian rule and the hegemony of the ruling party.

This has been confirmed by Hassib during the sit-in of “ Jendouba wants authentic development” in 2019 and when he reports the complaints of the rural areas in the governorate of Jendouba because of the shortages in essential goods and the exasperation of the people there after 10 days of the lockdown measures. Hassib reminds us of the advantages of participative democracy and open governance in easing the anger and resentment of the people. However, this approach was not a strategic option of the State during the last few years as long as there was no political will to seriously tackle the issues of local and regional development.

Undoubtedly, it is worth mentioning that local problems and claims as a trigger of the revolution reflects the sharpness of the social fracture as expressed by Omar Bel Hedi in his analysis of the geography of the expansion of protests. These protests against the unequal distribution of wealth are still compelling looking for ways of expression that are political, peaceful and civil.

The latest figures for the year 2015 show that the poverty rate in the coastal areas ranges between 6.3 % and 12.9% while the same rate reaches 17% in the South West and 30.3 % in the Midwest. The number of Tunisian living in dire poverty, unable to afford their essential needs, in terms of food not to mention other needs such as housing and clothes, is around 320 thousands. The two governorates of Kairouan and Kasserine are at the bottom of the pyramid with 10% of the poor. In Kairouan , 85 thousands Tunisians live below the threshold of dire poverty and 199 thousands below the poverty line.

Once again and because of the epidemic, Tunisia faces the depth of the social suffering of the “margin” and the rupture that still separates part of the economic and political elite from the reality which makes the scientific sociological study relevant to indentify for common denominators between the political issue and the social issue.

#### **I.4. Involuntary unemployment, fragile employment: When the epidemic adds to the suffering**

Before the revolution, , government authorities did not allow researchers to have access to the accurate figures related to the precarious categories. Since the Revolution, the official discourse has changed and access to information has become open to all people. In addition to 700 thousand unemployed, we count 285

thousand needy families, 622 thousand limited income families , around 70 thousand in low paying jobs and 40% of 950 thousand retired receive a pension lower than the guaranteed minimum wage.

To all these figures, we may add thousands of female workers in the farming sector who represent 70 % of the total number of farming working force. The people who make the largest base of the social pyramid and suffer from want and very limited financial resources collide with a major event that has disrupted their daily life, shook their fragile equilibrium economically, socially and psychologically and has unveiled their hardships. It is unfair to transform citizens who share with us the nation's territory and enjoy, according to the constitution, the same rights into figures or crowds of people who took to the streets despite the lockdown instructions. All these explicit, public and visual events are significant and pose on the Tunisian democracy real challenges that can no longer be neglected or discarded.

Sana, from the Ben Aoun a village in the governorate of Sidi Bouzid (in the centre of Tunisia) , works in the farming sector. Before the epidemic, she used to earn 11 TD a day. Her net wage is 14 dinars from which 3 dinars are deducted for transport from her village to the farm. Sana has lost her job lately since group transport and working in the fields have been banned for fear of infection. However, to stop working is a tough decision. Sana says that “ We have no other alternative. At the beginning, only a small group were allowed continued working before we were all obliged to stop

working in the fields. That was a great financial loss for myself and my family. My husband used to work intermittently as a carter. Recently, he has become unable to work because of his sickness. We applied to get the grant allocated to poor families but in vain because he is not eligible for that grant since he has not reached the age of 60.

Zaara comes from the same region and she works in the farming fields. Because of the corona epidemic, she and her coworkers were forced to stop working and stay home. Despite its precocity and low wages, women continue working in the fields since most of them, after the epidemic, have become the only breadwinners in their families.

Like Asma and Zaara who went experienced tough living conditions because of losing their jobs, thousands of women live in the same dire conditions.

It is worth mentioning that this fragile category of women working in the farming field is more likely to pay a high social price today than other workers in other sectors. They are victims of working in very appalling conditions in return for low wages devoid of any social insurance despite the fact that they are continuously subject to road accidents known as “ the pickups of death”. In an article published previously, the researcher Faten Mbarek<sup>32</sup> dealt with the suffering of rural

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<sup>32</sup> Mbarek, F.(2020). Rural women, unstructured labor.(in Arabic). <https://assafirabi.com/ar/29156/2020/02/16>.

See also . Rural women in Tunisia , Archeology of life. (in Arabic). <https://www.mominoun.com/auteur/1306>.

women. She wrote “rural women in Tunisia are maltreated more than any other category in the Tunisia society. They either work essentially in family farms without being paid or as seasonal workers for low wages and for most of them, without any form of social insurance nor any legal professional status or contracts since the farming sector itself is not well structured. Statistics show that only 33.3 % of rural women have social insurance. This rate is insignificant compared to the number of rural women working in the farming sector which is considered one of the pillars of the Tunisian economy. This sector makes 9% of the GDP and offers 16% of job opportunities. This sectors depends essentially on female labor force with around 500 thousand women which represents around 43% of active women in the rural areas of which 32.5% are wage earners in the unstructured farming sector and large properties.

The feminization of poverty in the rural environment and the risks related to unstructured work for rural women is already a fact known by all people and does not need more proofs. This feminization comes under the spotlight and attention of authorities and mass media with every deadly accident whose victims are rural workers. Sadly, after some time, the lot and suffering of these workers are consigned to oblivion.

The precarious and marginalized life led by rural women emerges to the forefront of social life with every road accident whose victims are female workers in the rural areas “ they travel long distances up to 20 km to reach the fields and farms by pickups or tractors on

bumpy roads without any respect for road security. According to Faten Mbarek, statistics show that 10.3% of workers in the rural areas are victims of job accidents, 21.4% are likely to be at risk during their work, 62.2% work under very unfavorable conditions and 18% work under very tough conditions.

Today as we go through the Corona pandemic, social categories are not equal in terms of capabilities and rights in front of the crisis. To ignore the challenges of our reality does not mean the absence of this reality. By reality, we mean precisely the reality of fragility and precariousness of the conditions of rural women, who unwillingly and for lack of other alternatives accept precarious work, risk jobs accidents and lack any legal means to individually or collectively to claims their rights. The decision to ban all economic activities in rural areas at the time for the Corona epidemic has aggravated the situation of rural female workers already appalling in an unstructured economy sector.

This unstructured or parallel is estimated by objective economic studies to represent around 40% of the Tunisian economy. Radhia, a divorced woman with three kids from Kebili ( the second largest of the 24 governorates of Tunisia, situated in the south-west.), states in her testimony “ I was forced to join the parallel economy after I had lost my job as a cashier in a supermarket. My pension is so meager that I cannot afford the basic needs of my three kids . Together with a group of women from Kebili, I used to travel to Algeria once a month to bring goods and commodities and sell them in the weekly market in Kebili. Today, since the



closing of the borders and restricting travel between the two countries, I lost an income that used to be more or less stable.”

Radhia acknowledges that her current income still enables her to meet the basic needs of her family thanks to a monthly amount of money she earns by renting a small house. Radhia adds that “several other women lost all sources of income. I am not sure they cannot endure this situation any longer.”

The economy and the local community, formal or informal, structured or underground have been hit hard by the crisis. More than any time before, the development of these rural and marginalized regions has become urgent and inescapable. The recurrent social protest movements since 2011 can only confirm this sociological reality. As underlined by Mohamed Ali ben Zina,<sup>33</sup> we should not resort once again to simplistic solutions to deal with the hardships of these poor border regions such as stigmatizing smuggling by highlighting its illegal and harmful aspects or by relying on an utterly security approach, that proved inefficient in the past. Effective lasting solutions should be based on scientific field studies to understand the social and economic conditions that are the source of these parallel activities. The decision to stop the cross border activity or smuggling these days, according to Radhia, will surely weaken the capabilities of the local community to confront the economic and social fallout of the crisis through personal

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<sup>33</sup> Ben Zina, M.A, Guerdi, R, & El-Fargi, A. (2019). When parallel commerce and gender make one.(in Arabic). Mots passant, Narchaz-Dissonances.

solutions and initiatives. The cross border trade offers the unemployed or their mothers an outlet to earn a living through innovative and risky personal initiatives. In doing so, this trade has always acted as a shock absorber postponing the explosion of social conditions that have not been taken seriously by successive governments. These governments could have absorbed the discontent of the people through valuing the farming sector in the region which is the number one producer of dates and through developing processing industries to create job opportunities and sources of income to the unemployed and excluded in the region. The failure to do so is due to the influence of some business men who own large plots of land in the oases and do not want to invest in highly needed processing industries in the region. Their main concern is to export dates to foreign markets. In addition, it is worth mentioning that State has not clear and well defined strategy to make good use of the natural resources such as oil and minerals to create job opportunities.

From a wider perspective, Hamza El Meddeb argues that the marginalization of the economy of the border regions should be understood as part of the historical process of “ asymmetrical evolution of Tunisia.”<sup>34</sup>This means that that unequal development of

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<sup>34</sup> Hibou, B. (2015).. *The State of injustice in the Maghreb. Morocco and Tunisia* . Karthala.

Béatrice Hibou mentioned the idea of “ The asymmetrical evolution of the State in Tunisia: The territories of injustice.”

See also Meddeb, H. (2018).The youth and smuggling in Tunisia (in Arabic). In Mohamed Ali Bena,Meriem Abdelbaki, & Olfa Lamoum (eds).*Sociology of margins in Tunisia*. Alert International, Dar Mohamed Ali.

the different regions is closely related to the unequal deployment of the State over its territorial space, or more accurately the withdrawal of the State from interior regions for the benefit of coastal regions . This has resulted in the “empowerment” of many economic sectors which have evolved independently without close government regulations and outside or parallel to the formal economic system. Apart from the border regions, the parallel economy has expanded to many economic sectors and many social categories. Confronted by the epidemic, the people involved in the parallel economy have been ordered to stay home. Practically, this decision cannot be strictly implemented not only by those who earn a living in this parallel economy but also for those who depend on this economy to purchase different commodities for their daily consumption.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight the problems encountered by the textile and clothing sector. For many years and especially since the end of the 1980s, this sector has suffered from an accumulation of problems that have led to the quasi-collapse of this sector with a high employability, especially for female labor force. Today nearly 160 thousand women earn their living from this sector that is based mainly on totally exporting companies regulated by the law of 1972. “Women working in the textile sector suffer from many systematic and “legalized” injustices by decision makers, in Tunisia and outside, at different levels within this industry with the complicity of the State which through an arsenal of laws and legislation , paved the way for the an optimal exploitation of female labor force in this sector. This happens through the legalization of

these forms of precarious work by the local adaptation of the principles of unfettered market economy within an unjust development mode implemented since the mid eighties.”<sup>35</sup>

Women working in this sector are victims of two forms of exclusion: The first form has to do with their overexploitation during their professional career. The second has to do with social exclusion and marginalization in cases of arbitrary dismissals before the retirement age.

“The current development mode stemming from the structural reforms of the economy made necessary by globalization has provided an appropriate framework for precarious work since the State has provided all the suitable legal legislation to benefit capitalists at the expense of the labor force. This labor force has been gradually submitted to the mechanisms of the unfettered market economy for which labor force is just a commodity subject to supply and demand. This market economy is heedless of the fundamental labor rights stipulated by all international charters and covenants related to economic and social rights, let alone human rights.

The legislation regulating work contracts or the labor code has stipulated since 1996 new forms of work relations within a framework known as the flexibility of employment which sanctified the fragility and

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<sup>35</sup> Hassine, M. Female workers in the textile sector, from the precariousness of labor to social exclusion. A study conducted for FTDES. <https://ftdes.net/ar/rapport/textiles2.ar.pdf>.

precariousness of work like A fixed-term employment contract (or CDD) and outsourcing contracts and worker's tenure (appointment to a permanent position) etc. Since 1996, 75% of labor force in the textile sector in Tunisia has been forced to accept these unjust new forms of work relations that perpetuate precariousness and insecurity.<sup>36</sup>

“The Investment Code has provided all the incentives and rewards to attract private investment. Unfortunately, this was essentially at the expense of the economic and social rights of female workers in the textile sector, especially since survival of this industry after the cancellation of the Multi Fiber Agreements, has become dependent on its competitive ability which was built mainly on low wages for female workers. All the legislation enacted by the State for the benefit of private investors offer favorable background to violate the rights of female workers regardless of their work situation whether under fixed-term employment contracts (or CDD) or employment contracts without a fixed-term. We may add to these legislation, the flexibility adopted by different departments responsible of the enforcement of laws in this sector and the indulgence towards the recorded violations of the rights of female workers using as excuse their endeavor to preserve these work positions. The sector has been going through tough times with the abrupt closure of factories either for bankruptcy or relocation in new regions inside and outside Tunisia

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<sup>36</sup> Hassine, M. Female workers in the textile sector, from the precariousness of labor to social exclusion. A study conducted for FTDES. <https://ftdes.net/ar/rapport/textiles2.ar.pdf>.

without the possibility for workers to sue the company. Unless workers can prove irrefutably that bankruptcy was deliberate and fraudulent, workers cannot refer to the Employment Code in Tunisian courts, collect sums of money plundered by investors such as allowances and compensations for those fired workers and unpaid contribution to the social security, taxes and other forms of debt.”<sup>37</sup>

The precariousness of work in this sector is tangible at five different levels:

-The deterioration of the working conditions, especially in the subcontracting factories.

-The working space, sometimes, does not meet of the minimum health prerequisites required in this type of industry.

-Working in this particular industry is tiring and tough because of the long working hours per day and the extra hours often imposed on female workers to meet export deadlines of finished goods.

-The health consequences of working in this industry such as occupational diseases especially muscular disorders, arthritis and allergy in addition to frequent accidents in the workplace in the absence of the professional safety rules in most factories.

-The frequent breaches due to the flexible and fragile work relations which include the work contract, pay

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<sup>37</sup> Hassine, M. Female workers in the textile sector, from the precariousness of labor to social exclusion. A study conducted for FTDES. <https://ftdes.net/ar/rapport/textiles2.ar.pdf>.

certificate, allowances , extra hours, salaries and social insurance, etc.

After the adoption of the structural reform plan , the State has opted for impartial policies that offer private capital all the incentives and rewards through generous tax exemptions. At the same time, the State has worked hard to create the appropriate conditions for private investment at the expense of cheap labor force. The Economic and social rights of workers have been sacrificed for the benefit of investment and exports. This was achieved through legalizing the forms of fragile and precarious employment and the flexibility and indulgence in enforcing laws stipulated in different legislation. Certainly, this highlights the weakness of the State in front of private investment, especially foreign investment, and its inability to guarantee and defend the rights of female workers through disavowing State responsibilities stipulated in international agreements and covenants ratified by Tunisia. These agreements and covenants stipulate the protection of women female workers against all forms of exploitation and discrimination. The fact that the State does not respect these agreements surely weakens its authority and its ability to put an end to fraudulent practices against female workers with the complicity of the State itself.<sup>38</sup>

“Despite the huge revenues in foreign currencies yielded from this sector fifth of the Gross Domestic Industrial Product), we can notice the insensitivity of economic and social policies to the plight of female worker. The State

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<sup>38</sup> Hassine, M. Female workers in the textile sector, from the precariousness of labor to social exclusion. A study conducted for FTDES. <https://ftdes.net/ar/rapport/textiles2.ar.pdf>.

economic and social policies have systematically impoverished female workers in the textile industry through their marginalization for long periods of time , not taking into consideration the erosion in their purchasing power because of inflation, exorbitant prices, especially after the revolution. This situation has resulted in a blatant violation of their fundamental rights to healthy food, decent housing and access to health. Their meager earnings do not allow them to have the necessary calories to keep fit and to be able to work all day. They can only afford unhealthy and fast food that are not quantitatively and qualitatively healthy in terms of calories.

The limited and biased role of the State can be seen during social negotiations with trade unions once in three years before the revolution and once a year after the revolution. Very often, these negotiations, intended to raise wages and improve working conditions, have not taken into consideration the erosion of the purchasing power of workers in the textile industry due to very high inflation and inhuman neoliberal policies. Through these policies, the State adds to the suffering of this fragile and precarious social category. Added to that, many these legislation and laws in force find reasons for discrimination, even among women themselves, regarding social insurance and the right to early retirement for working women who are arbitrarily sacked before the legal retirement age. Early retirement is regulated by conditions that do not take into consideration women's choices and their psychological, health and physical rights guaranteed by all legislation ratified by Tunisia. Indeed, Female workers should reach



the age of 50 and should have three kids in custody to enjoy the right to early retirement. What about unmarried workers or those who get married and do not have kids and those who have one or two kids? All these women work in the same conditions and are subject to the same violations. Some female workers who have been sacked for different reasons are denied social insurance and access to health services, at a time when most of them suffer from chronic professional diseases.<sup>39</sup>

In her testimony, Ribh confirms the maltreatment of female workers in the textile industry. She states that “ Women working in the textile sector, who are subject to exploitation and blatant violations of their economic and social rights during their careers, are also subject to exclusion and social marginalization normally after the age of forty. This exclusion and marginalization may take different forms according to their legal status since most bosses in this sector do not prefer to employ women aged over 40. They justify this decision by the diseases they may suffer from which negatively affects their productivity. Forced to involuntary unemployment, most of them lose access to free health services and they are unable to afford basic necessities for themselves and their families. Current legislation does not enable them to benefit from early retirement given the strict conditions (age 50 years old and three kids in custody or 66% disability rate).

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<sup>39</sup> Hassine, M. Female workers in the textile sector, from the precariousness of labor to social exclusion. A study conducted for FTDES. <https://ftdes.net/ar/rapport/textiles2.ar.pdf>.

Faced with these cases, employers resort to two “ legal” procedures permitted by labor “ flexibility”.

- The first situation: Employers do not renew fixed-term employment contracts when the female worker is a victim of an occupational disease which negatively affects her productivity or when she reaches the age of 40. Although these workers have acquired valuable experience, they are sacked. In this case, they lose all their rights, even the right to complain or protest due to the flexible system of unemployment. Moreover, this legislation does not allow these women to sue for compensation for severe exploitation for many long years, sometimes more than twenty years heedless of their effort. This situation should be considered a form of discrimination justified by the principles of unfettered free market economics and sanctioned by the States. The situation gets tougher for those who work under the principle of subcontracting. They are also subject to all forms of discrimination in terms of salary, allowances and social insurance violating the Labor Code and all legislation in force.

- The second situation: This situation comprises permanent full time job contracts: Employers resort to abrupt closure of the company to evade their financial commitments towards their female workers in case they sack them arbitrarily. Legislation in force stipulates that these workers have the right to get compensation of arbitrary expulsion which leaves workers with no solution but to go to the courts. Even if they succeed to get a court decision, which is not usually the case, these decisions, most of the time, are not implemented. Therefore, whether these workers have permanent full

time job or not, they all join the community of the excluded and marginalized.<sup>40</sup>

The low salaries in the textile sector, the occupation diseases and arbitrary expulsion deepen the feeling of exploitation and maltreatment among these workers. Leila, who has been working in this sector for three decades, states that “when I hear that someone earns a 1500 or 2000 Tunisian Dinars (TD) salary, I burst out crying and I am overwhelmed by a feeling of sadness and injustice. I feel that I am not considered a citizen in a country that prides itself on guaranteeing women rights. After thirty years of work, I earn 400 TD a month, a sum of money that does not enable us to meet my basic needs in terms of food, shelter and clothing, even if we eat onions for all meals.”<sup>41</sup>

This feeling of injustice is felt by all female workers in the textile sector or “Girls of the Factory” as they are nicknamed everywhere. Ribh is 42 years old from Kasserine. She was sacked arbitrarily after the fraudulent closure of the factory by the Italian owner of the factory. She states “As soon as the epidemic broke out in Italy, we started to panic. Some factories continued working till March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020. All workers were scared given that we were 100 to 150 workers in the same factory, one next to the other. Given the space of the factory, social distancing was just impossible.”

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<sup>40</sup> Hassine, M. Female workers in the textile sector, from the precariousness of labor to social exclusion. (in French). A study conducted for FTDES. <https://ftdes.net/ar/rapport/textiles2.ar.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> The hidden face of Tunisian women: discrimination and exploitation till enslavement. . <https://middles-east-online.com/>

Ribh, who has kept contact with her coworkers, confirms that several of them are really worried regarding their future and the future of their families and kids. “ I left my boy with my neighbor. What will be his fate if I get infected.” This is what is reported by Ribh on behalf of one of her coworkers from another region. Ribh, who has lost her job, her salary and compensation for being arbitrarily sacked, is living on debt. She states “I owe the grocery store 200 TD . I have no other solution or alternative and I do not know how I am going to go through this very tough period. God is my only resort.”

The case of Ribh is a living image of the daily experience of a whole social category. She states “ After many year of hard work, I have been arbitrarily sacked from work and I am not able, like other 60 workers, to get their rightful compensation decided by the court. Today economic and social fragility forces her to stay home and prevents her even from legitimate her right to take to the streets and protest.”

In an short documentary<sup>42</sup> produced by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights in partnership with the Canadian association “ Badail/ Alternatives”, we come across many similar testimonies related to the conditions of workers in the textile sector and the challenges they encounter such as occupational diseases, the feeling of being exploited socially by some foreign investors, the lack of a legal “ safety net” to protect their rights and the absence of trade union representation.

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<sup>42</sup> The forgotten female workers of the sewing machine.<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQU7lm5zQe>.

Besma summarizes the severity of this suffering “ my salary was what keeps me living , it is how I can meet the needs of my son and daughter. Today, without a salary, I lost everything.”

Since the outbreak of the crisis, the Forum has been minutely following the ramifications on workers in the textile sector. The Forum has highlighted the negative effects of the epidemic through a statement issued on March 19, 2020.<sup>43</sup>

Other social categories live the same structural fragility. These categories have been working in the front lines before and during the lockdown while other economic sectors were forced to close. These are the workers in the cleaning and security. These categories whose working conditions best illustrate the notion of precariousness as it is defined by Labor Code rules and legislation: “Considered precarious are temporary, seasonal , fragile and / or expected to disappear.<sup>44</sup> These jobs pay low wages and promotion are more unlikely and fixed term employment which most often end in frequent dismissal.”

These dangers of structural fragility for a large percentage of the labor force have become more apparent during this turning point. Hayet Trabelsi is the Secretary General of the Crafts and Services Federation in the Tunisian General Trade Union (UGTT) states that

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<sup>43</sup> Statement of FTDES related to health and rights of workers in industries with high labor density. <https://ftdes.net/ar/communiqué-ftdes-et-asf/>.

<sup>44</sup> UGTT, Department of studies and documentation (2009).Precarious labor and its fallout on workers.

“ Women in the cleaning sector are mostly hired in the private sector which is regulated by the unfair subcontracting rules. The direct employer is not required to provide cleaning and sterilization materials. Some of them feel that they are not welcome when they enter some administrations to clean. Some of the staff in these administrations think they represent a health hazard or risk lest they spread the infection. This feeling of mistrust is unbearable as confirmed by Hayet “ these workers have two shifts. They work two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. Between these two shifts, some of the workers stay in the streets collecting plastic bottles to sell them to earn extra money at the end of the day.”

Women working in the farming sector, textile and cleaning exhibit in their daily life the reality of fragility and precariousness they endure. The experiences of these three categories force us to understand and analyze the fallout of economic and social exclusion of women at a time women in Tunisia are expected to be active and influential in the democratic transition to guarantee comprehensive rights and liberties to all Tunisian without any form of discrimination on the basis on gender.

People working as security guards in the different intuitions are another category of those who go through marginality and precariousness. Their jobs are regulated through tripartite form of subcontracting: An employer to provide services, an institution that signs a contract to benefit from these services and an employee . Another category mentioned by Hayet “There is high demand on

this category of workers since all institutions and establishments, even the ones closed because of the lockdown, need all day security guards. These workers feel threatened by the infection since their employers do not provide any security against the virus and threatened by the repeated attacks and violence against them. ” Hayet reviews in more details the conditions of this category “Today, these people have little education and their financial situation is meager. They are employed by contractors who act as intermediaries between the workers and the companies. These days, many of them have contacted me to express their fear from infection in light of the lack of means of security and the lack of health coverage. Given the high demand for these workers in different economic sectors, they are getting more and more numerous.

Hayet, the trade unionist, highlights the importance of the right to be affiliated to a trade union and social insurance in any future vision of the relationship between capital and labor, between employer and employee.

Ahmed 30 years old had worked as night security guard in a restaurant downtown Tunis for four years. He has no written contract with his employer. Obligated to quit his job mid- February 2020, Ahmed lost his salary. Since then, he has been going through tough times. He states “ I cannot remain unemployed. I have no alternative but to go out and defy the lockdown even though I am not sure I can find a job. The country is on a lockdown and the economy is nearly paralyzed.”

Reflecting a state of confusion and disappointment, if not depression, this position summarizes the difficulty to conceive the future for a large number of sectors victims of precarious employment and the society of the “margin”. It should be considered as a psychological and social tough experience where elements of confusion, inability and expectation overlap. It should be considered, also, as a form of estrangement and emptiness filled with negative emotions. It is important to take into consideration these satiations with their unique and specific feature to be able to apprehend the general situation in Tunisia. Pragmatic sociology of social actors teaches us that the latter are induced to adapt to the conditions around them, to tinker compromises, and to elaborate “justifications.” These steps allow researchers to invent categorizations for every situation. It is about finding the deep meaning and connotation of the life experiences of thousands of people whom distracted commentators refuse to see or consider as “absurd” or nonsense.

Asif Bayet, an Iranian sociologist and expert in Orient Islamic societies considers that “ordinary people” change their reality by imposing their will on public and public spaces by “nibbling” bits and bits of the power of the State any time they have the opportunity to do so. This is their only way to survive. This daily action is just a confrontation between the State and these social actors “of life as it is” is difficult to halt or to disrupt. This ongoing fight is what makes the “lockdown” unhealthy for those leading a fragile and precarious life are afraid of tangible hunger that is tangible more than the invisible virus itself. Therefore, there is no match



between the representations of the slogan “ stay home” and the principle of “ get up to earn a living” as expressed by many of them.

## **I.6.Monopoly, speculation and corruption: When the poor pay the highest price**

Everybody, including the official authorities, admits that the annual rate of inflation has risen during the last few years to reach 7%. This high rate negatively has affected the purchasing power of poor classes, even that of the middles classes. The Corona crisis, despite the efforts of the government to guarantee the free flow of essential goods and to combat high prices, it has not been to stop the fever of speculation and monopoly of all goods. During this period of crisis, speculators have acted as if we are living a “stateless” condition where people try to get rich by all means whether legal or illegal.

While people in the cities and the middles classes complain of the high prices of the hydro-alcoholic gel , gloves and protective masks, within poor and rural classes , the main concern has been semolina, a vital commodity for family food. Hedi belongs to a poor family and he works in the National Union for People with Special Needs after a long and bitter fight for his right for employment “ There is a real problem to buy semolina as we have to pay double the normal price if this vital commodity is available. For us, Semolina represents a vital commodity because in the rural areas

we highly depend on it to prepare bread and other dishes according to our culinary traditions such as “Kesra” or bread. We do not consumer readymade pasta as people in the cities do. Therefore, the shortage in the supply of semolina and its high price are catastrophic for us.”

This dilemma is reiterated by Zaara who is from the village of Ben Oun (a town and commune in the Sidi Bou Zid Governorate,). Not only has the price of semolina doubled but also it is very hard to find it. Ribh adds that in city of Ksar Helal (a town and commune in the Monastir Governorate) not all consumers can buy imported olive oil ( cheaper than pure Tunisian olive oil) since this commodity is sold to a restricted group of consumers. The same idea is confirmed by Ahmed from Ouerdia ( Southern Suburbs of the Capital Tunis) states that “ grocery stores keep imported olive oil and other commodities for their friends and relatives.”

This shortage in fundamental food commodities, especially in the interior regions and poor neighborhoods, the exorbitant prices of certain commodities reveal the phenomenon of the “ irrational consumption.” However, not all social categories have the financial resources either to consume or to store commodities for fear of an unknown future. This could be an interesting topic for sociologists. For poor social categories, the scarcity of some products means that they and their families live on the brink of famine. In this vein, Ribh states that “ I am certain that half the destitute and poor population may die out of famine before they die out of corona.”

According to Amel, the incident of intercepting a lorry full of semolina bags by ordinary people in the village of Ala in the governorate of Kairouan clearly proves that poor people would like to ensure their survival by all means. The death of the head of a family suffering from diabetes while waiting for a bag of semolina in the village of Rouhia (northern town and commune in the Siliana Governorate located 130 km south-west of the capital Tunis) is very telling of the suffering of these categories and an expression of the social distancing in the sense of the enormous gap between poor and wealthy classes.

The collective memory of the poor and even the ancestral discourse still champion the images of the “Tekia” or the day center for the elderly, the endless queues of poor people (waiting for the distribution of bread), those who deserted the rural areas to the city because of drought or those left the peripheral slums hoping for a better living space.

The current scenes that come from the rural areas and the outskirts of the cites bring back to our memories what historians had recorded about the fragility of poor categories when confronted with plagues, drought and famine. These distresses, thought to belong to the past, threaten again the same poor and marginalized regions. “People in the south and in the middle regions of Tunisia have been suffering from the chronic shortage of rain “zemma,” the spread of contagious diseases among cattle and locust invasions which devastated cattle and crops. Famine had also swept the rural areas for example that

of 1887 (The White year) , 1936-1937 ( the year of Rice) and the famine of 1944-1947, etc.”<sup>45</sup>

There is a long memory linked to food and “Kobza” or bread. When this expression is used these days as it had be used in the past in the discourse of poor people “ I have to work hard to earn my daily bread and that of my kids.”

“ I running after bread,” in the sense of I am working hard to ensure bread for my family. In these instances, the underground identity of social actors of “ margins” as a “khobziste” floats to the surface. It is the identity of someone who main concern in this life is to get bread to survive indifferent to all other aspects of life. It is worth mentioning in this context that he exorbitant rise in the price of bread in 1984 was the trigger of the popular riots.

By analogy, the price of bread ( semolina and flour) on the one hand and its availability are symptomatic of fragile balance unveiled by the sociology of the “margin.” They are not purely economic indicators; rather , they are also anthropological and psychological. Social traditions are reproduced by marinating some kind of social balance, even if it is fragile, as claimed by to what Norbert Elias.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Timoumi, H. (2001). Social history of Tunisia. (in French). Dar Mohamed Ali.pp.132-133.

<sup>46</sup> Norbert Elias was a German sociologist who later became a British citizen. He is especially famous for his theory of civilizing/decivilizing processes. (Wikipedia)

The dilemma of macro-economic visions is the fact that they are obsessed only by important financial balances of the state at a time when the feeling of resentment among the poor and the marginalized arouses the communities of the marginalized and brings back to their memories dark events lived by the old and transmitted to their children.

This fear of the food shortages in addition to meager financial resources have always led to a feeling of social class injustice among the poor. As for the rich and wealthy social classes, they have always had sufficient supply of wheat, olive oil, beans and other necessary commodities in the “Beyt el mouna “ or the pantry. The “Jarra” or the jar , the “ Zir” the big jar, “Khabia’ or the amphor are containers used by the rich to conserve food all year long. Storing food for the poor was a luxury. They live on a day to day basis.

Lotfi, who is unemployed and lives in the village of Bouhejla (a town and commune in the Kairouan Governorate), claims that “ we, in the rural areas and specifically in the rural areas in the Governorate of Kairouan, are deprived of the basic necessities of life. Those who own five cars and five houses, those who travel abroad, go to restaurants and hotels evidently cannot feel or imagine our suffering.”

What we conclude initially is that the complaints and suffering of poor citizens because of the exorbitant prices, inflation, the meager financial resources and the scarcity of basic food products have aggravated the fragility of “ underground foundations “of society.

On the other hand, this problem will acquire political dimensions when this increase in prices and the scarcity of food products are coupled with favoritism and patronage, particularly among decision makers. The corruption of the “elites” is perceived by the marginalized people as imminently political. Let’s not forget that one of the slogan of the revolution was to combat corruption. The disclosure of secret warehouses full of food products, the importation of expired products, the complicity of local, regional and national authorities with speculators and monopolists or defying lockdown measures by influential local official make society distrustful of the seriousness of the elite and the political class to combat corruption and to dismantle the corruption system and multiple networks.

A report by the National Commission of Inquiry into Corruption and Embezzlement has concluded that “ This corruption system got stronger and consolidated its power to the extent that corrupt people control the State and society. They have infiltrated many political, administrative and legal institutions, associations, political parties mainly the Democratic Constitutional Rally and mass media. This corruption system has been able to manipulate and shape collective behaviors and mentalities.”

This reminder seems useful these days because it helps us put the finger on a political and social problem with countless damages. The acts of speculation we are witnessing these days, at a time of pandemic are just the top of the iceberg. Corruption has stretched deep roots within the State. It is high time we made forceful

measures. The outcome of the last presidential elections in 2019 can be considered a referendum against corruption . We have heard clear statements and signals coming from the president or the head of the government stressing the political will to firmly combat corruption. The people can only wait and see.

## **1.7.Popular neighborhoods: A complex reality and a different daily life**

The images of crowds of people gathered in several public spaces in poor neighborhood by mass media are usually accompanied by two sorts of commentaries.

The first commentary expresses confusion, shock and sympathy towards the images of the gathering of people in markets, in front of post offices and local and regional administrations to get government aid grants. The second type of commentary has a paternalistic tone and reflects a feeling of superiority that describes these people as mob, chaotic, irresponsible and unconscious. They are subject to their anger because their behavior is risky and may lead to the dissemination of infection.

These evaluations of the behavior of people in poor neighborhoods are neither scientific nor useful to clearly understand individual and collective attitudes inside poor neighborhoods either in normal times or during the time of the Corona. The way these neighborhoods, especially the youth population, have

reacted to the lockdown measures such as social distancing suggested by the government relying on the recommendations of doctors and pandemic experts is dependent on specific factors worth dissected.

It is worth mentioning that we do not claim that we have an exhaustive list of the literature related to the sociology of poor neighborhoods in terms of scientific articles, press investigations or studies.<sup>47</sup> Suffice here to mention three main studies. The first is written by the researcher Fouad Ghorbali who investigated the suffering of the inhabitants of poor neighborhoods in the Agareb ( a coastal town and commune in eastern Tunisia in the Sfax Governorate) neighborhood in the city of Sfax ( a city in Tunisia, located 270 km southeast of Tunis) . The second is a press report published in the site “Nawet” that outlined some samples from within neighborhood “Hey Hlal” ( a poor neighborhood in the Suburbs of Tunis with a high population density) not far away from the capital. The third is a field study conducted by the researcher Lilia Blaize in which she studied the “Ragpickers” in the neighborhood Ettadhamen”<sup>48</sup>(Ettadhamen-Mnihla, also known as At-Tadaman, is a

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<sup>47</sup> Fethia Saidi has worked on a corpus of academic studies between 1970-2000. She identified 15 research fields . Most of them have tackled five disciplines: Labor sociology (42 studies), Sociology of social movements and social change (46), sociology and development (51), cultural and anthropological sociology (71). *Insanyat Journal*, 2001.

<sup>48</sup> “Sociology of suffering through the daily life o f the youth in poor neighborhoods.” *Omran Journal*, 2016.

\*Marginal territory; immersion in the poor suburbs of Tunis (Djebel Jloud, Ahy Hlele, Sidi Hassine). *Nawat.org*.

\*The recycling facility of Rag pickers in Ettadhamen (pilot study related to the principle of social economy and solidarity. Lilia Balise, <https://www.international-alert.org>.



town and commune, part of the agglomeration of Tunis. Highly-dense areas).

These three references are just a sample of how three overlapping and three complimentary scientific fields explore and study poor neighborhoods in Tunisia. By three fields, we mean academic research, media investigation and militant civil society surveys. To investigate objectively and independently poor neighborhoods has become possible only after the revolution with freedom of expression and press without any form of censorship

There is a consensus among these studies that the marginalization of poor neighborhoods in Tunisia is multidimensional. It is related to special planning: Non-existent or insufficient public service infrastructure. It is also socio-economic in view of the income of inhabitants and the overcrowded housing situation. It is finally symbolic linked to the stigmatization of the youth and the inhabitants of these neighborhoods.

Ahmed who lives in Ouardia, in the southern suburbs of the capital, confirms “ here, not far away in another neighborhood , the houses are too small. I live with my family made of six people in a three- room house. I have to thank God because our neighbor, a widow with three kids, lives through a much tougher situation.”

Sihem, from Ettadhamen, states that “ It is very difficult for people to abide by the lockdown restrictions. Their way of life and the urgency to go shopping makes

it very difficult for them to stay home and respect social distancing. If we are admit that people are not aware, we have also to admit that people are going through tough situations. For instance, on Sundays, as usual, go shopping careless of lockdown, mask wearing and social distancing.”

In another poor neighborhood from the governorate of Manouba ( a city in north-eastern Tunisia, and is part the metropolitan area of Tunis, also called "Grand Tunis". It is located at the west of Tunis city center ) Seif, from “Douar Hicher” ( a city located in the western suburbs of Tunis . It is located a few kilometers from the center of the capital. It shelters populations of generally low social level.) confirms “ people are losing their patience. They are exasperated by the lockdown and the limited financial resources. The cannot endure this situation forever despite the efforts exerted by the youth in this neighborhood and the initiatives of the social society to comfort them.”

The first level is socio-economic in view of these testimonies that describe the suffering of poor neighborhoods during the Corona crisis. This level is linked to the multidimensional poverty index, the housing conditions and the demographic characteristics of these neighborhoods.

“ It is difficult for a mother to imprison her kids at home,” says Ahmed who lives in Ouerdia. “They will surely rebel against that decision and she cannot prevent them from going out especially that schools are shut down and entertainment facilities inside the house are

practically nonexistent. They have to go out for God's sake. Poor housing conditions are the norm in these neighborhoods."

A second level can be called the anthropology of daily life in poor neighborhoods disregarded by the directives of the government. In the neighborhood, cafés, friends and groups of youth people outside their houses are daily behaviors and practices that weave social and emotional relations within the neighborhood, with friends and with the space itself. It is very difficult to do without the space outside in the daily life of the people in poor neighborhoods which contradicts the lockdown measures.

Between the house and the street, there is social continuum that cannot be broken. There is some kind of emotional and psycho-sociological configuration that wraps up collective and inter-individual relations. In these neighborhood, the inner space is nothing but the neighborhood itself and the outer space is what is located outside the neighborhood. The sociability of this interior forges an identity for the residents of these neighborhood: The mosque and the café for the elderly, adults and the pious, among friends in their daily meetings (qa'ada), and during religious feasts and national holidays. This Bourdieuan habitus, which configures the identity and the dynamics that produces and reproduces life in these neighborhoods, is discernable particularly in the behavior of the youth, especially male youth. Group solidarity among them is more significant and evolves outside the traditional framework of the family. This explains the bewilderment

of Sihem and her indignation towards the attitude of the youth in Ettadhamoun who have been uncaring of the lockdown, continue their normal life by gathering outside their houses in small and large groups of friends.

Within these collective behaviors, soccer fan groups and Rap music groups are formed and nurtured. Later on, they create a collective conscience (WE) that turns into a new collective identity superposing any other form of belonging. This identity compensates the lack of self-esteem and concealed narcissistic injuries. These youth are united by a common feeling: They rule and decide within the neighborhood instead of official authorities. They feel as if they were part of a heated competition with authorities for the exercise of power within this space. When you read a gigantic mural “Kabbarioun” (refers to the resident of the neighborhood) in Kabbarria indicating that they are in charge, united and proud to be.

This tension we are witnessing between those inside the city (intra-muros) and those outside the city, the inhabitants of marginalized neighborhoods and unstructured building (extra-muros) can be understood from economic and social perspectives. However, political anthropology can shed light on the blurred relationship between the people and the State, the impossible reliability and trustworthiness of the official discourse among the youth in poor neighborhoods. For this reason, we have to say during this unprecedented turning point, the will to impose rules and authority of exceptional times within these neighborhoods runs up against different kinds of obstacles. The random,

unstructured and illegal housing policies have developed simultaneously with structured and planned housing policies aiming at building new suburbs and neighborhoods outside the capital to accommodate the large numbers of migrants in better and healthier conditions after dismantling slums. These two paces of urbanization have in fact enabled civil servants, clerk and workers to own individual houses in the 1970s and 1980s. It enabled migrants to gain a foothold in the capital. For the latter, apart from the new life styles, they should elicit a recognition of their presence within the city. This recognition has been denied to migrants on the pretext of illegal construction without a valid construction permit.

According to Morshid Chebbi, , the fuzzy identify of suburban neighborhoods can be accounted for by the differential distribution of urban housing within the capital. Poor and marginalized neighborhoods ( even after some attempts to rehabilitate and improve them) remain a space where traditional community relations, sometimes even “ tribal” determine housing and inhabitants. As for the new wealthy suburbs (Manar, Menzah) are inhabited by people who are considered the outcome of social mobility (social ladder, individual success and meritocracy. They are essentially managers, university teachers and private sector senior and junior , etc. These inhabitant do not show any group relations; rather, their relations are dominated by rugged individualism. The distribution of people in different living spaces induces different relations with the State.

The people in Algeria have coined the expression Hittistes (Unemployed youth who spend most of their time in the street, leaning against a wall. Initially; it was used sarcastically then it became a stigma. )The youth in poor neighborhood have carved a collective identity for themselves related to their occupation of the outer space (the streets) in their neighborhood. They are there idle but they insist that they control that space who belongs to them. This paradox, underlined by Adel Haj Rhouma is found in the daily idleness of the unemployed which has become a source to build a collective identity that have enabled them to transform the stigma of exclusion and fragility into some kind of social construction that reveals the way social relations have been formed inside this miniature community.

“Stay home “ or the call for social distancing definitely is incongruous with the daily life of poor neighborhood. This directive to stay home is perceived as a way to confiscate the identity carved by the marginalized for themselves through which they act or represent their live unaware of society’s rules and regulations . The physical confrontations with the police, seen from this point of view, are just ways to defend as much as possible this special identity.

On the other hand, the means of transport ( the metro) are auspicious to a free movement and easy and quick access to the city. However, by entering the city, the youth are face to face with two ways of daily life summarized by Ghorbali the idea of people living in misery and at the same time fixed on the cultural horizons of middles classes. The pride of belonging to the neighborhood has

finally accommodated itself to the dream of “integration.”

Despite the fact that the former ruling party permeated these neighborhoods, the youth played an decisive role in the revolution 17 December 14 January. After the revolution, the same neighborhoods represent a battle ground for power among political parties. In the past, the State completely gave up its authority in these neighborhoods and these days there are attempts to extend again its grip. In one way or another, a new factor, worthy of consideration, has emerged after the Revolution. Poor neighborhoods are no longer as stigmatized as they used to be in the past when they were considered as “ outcasts” and blamed for the ailments of cities ( violence, delinquency , drugs, terrorism, etc.).The solution today is not to close and isolate these neighborhoods and the deny or ignore their existence to protect the neighborhoods the islands of opulence and quietude. Rather, the solution is to contemplate that coexisting with these peripheral social categories has become urgent as we all share the land and the same destiny.

The political offer that consists in inviting the people of poor neighborhoods to join the institutionalized fight against Corona epidemic is not irrational or absurd in itself. Joining this fight is a common necessary while refusing this offer and irredentism are ultimately counterproductive. However, this offer should take into consideration the nature of the daily and social life within these neighborhoods. The complex specificities of the neighborhood are revealed by sociological studies

deemed interesting and relevant to rational political decisions aiming to seriously deal with these neighborhoods.

A Poor neighborhoods has its outside identity but this does not mean that it is one unified identity from inside. Within the geographic space of the neighborhood, there are multiple identities that coexist some times and clash some other times. A dialectic of proximity and divergence governs the different categories within this space: the youth and the elderly, middle income categories and destitute groups, the patriarchic mentality and hints at women's emancipation, religiosity and profane behaviors, and many other multiple dualities. Violence, delinquency, selling alcohol and drugs secretly, theft, etc. are aspects tightly linked to the overcrowded peripheral neighborhoods.

Within this space, on the one hand, the feeling of resentment against the State, against the filthy rich, the idea of “ sorting things out” “teslik” or finding whatever solutions to problems. On the other hand, multiple forms of resistance and dissent.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Teslik means to find a way out in very narrow alleys used by inhabitants in poor neighborhoods and suburbs in France. Evenel, Cyprien.(2005). Sorting things out , or the D system in poor and disadvantaged neighborhood and segregation.





**THE EXPECTATIONS:  
WHAT STATE FOR  
WHAT SOCIETY?**

In the first part of the analysis, we have brought to light the psychological and social effects of the risks of the dissemination of the epidemic. Through the collected data, we have confirmed the importance of studying the behaviors of individuals and their reactions through their social positions and their daily life. The human being is not always a creature whose behavior is driven by reason. The human being is an instinctive, emotional, symbolic and social creature.

The second part of analysis aims at understanding the expectations of these fragile categories and their representations of the State and society whose main task is to guarantee a decent life for all people.

## **II.1.Social Solidarity after the Revolution**

To negotiate a possible “common” is not easy today because it is not discussed from a moral perspective, rather it is discussed from financial level related to the future wealth and economic resources of the State and their distribution. Seif states that “people are really exhausted. They would like to dream in our poor neighborhood (Douar Hicher). If there is any political will to change reality, people living in these neighborhoods should not be ignored.”

This narrative that restores and revives ideas such as dreams, solidarity, justice, collective not individual liberation is found in the discourse of the marginalized and should be considered as political rehabilitation. What does it suggest? Healing the political actions in

emotions, passions of joy that drive towards “ a power and desire to act”. What is at stake is, according to Khalil Abbas “Unburdening politics from bureaucracy. We did not under a democratic regime under the former regimes of Ben Ali and Bourguiba. Regardless of the names used, the transition to democracy has failed, to a large extent, in establishing a true democracy”

Do we really need a pandemic that has hit the whole society to renew the claim for a true democracy? This true democracy should prioritize all forms of equality among citizen without any discrimination.

In the beginning of this analysis, we have demonstrated that fear is transformed into panic when people lose any hope to vanquish the different forms of danger that threaten their lives. This emotion also underpins the behaviors and specific discourses widespread in social “ margins.”

Houcine , a citizen with special needs, is a peddler in the city of Gafsa. With the lockdown, he has lost his job and consequently any source of income. He states “ I have faith and trust only in God. Life and death are determined by God. One day, we will die and move to a better life.” He adds “ I need an electric wheel chair. This manual wheel chair has become unbearable. I will be greatly thankful for any donor who can help with electric wheel chair, be it the government or people of goodwill.”

Relying on God’s protection and mercy has been expressed by many respondents “ God is our only refuge,

nobody else” states Ribh. “We have no alternative but patience and God’s mercy” states Zaara who works in the farming sector before being confined to her house with the general lockdown. Praying God and asking His Mercy is a natural refuge and an important psychological comfort factor for many people. In this vein, many psychological and social studies confirm that the resurgence of this religious feeling, even among non-religious people, is understood since we are going through a crisis which raises many existentialist questions that transcend old rational equations. However, this should not mean that we are ushering in an era dominated by the religious feeling in the sociology of the “margin” which renders this feeling a factor of mobilizing people against the strategy of the States.

The reality is different. Closing mosques and banning group prayers have been a measure approved and adhered to by many people and did not lead to any form of protest. Sihem from Ettadamoun neighborhood wonders why people gather at night and start glorifying God in Jbel Lahmar (is a poor neighborhood located in the suburbs of Tunis. It is one of the oldest and most populated slum in the capital) and Sidi Hassin (a poor and overcrowded neighborhood located in the west of the capital ). “This behavior and practice are not acceptable. We glorify and pray God individually and secretly to lift this epidemic. This type of behavior is rejected, dangerous and leads to the dissemination of infection.” According to the arguments expressed by Sihem, there is a clear revival of the religion of individual piety not religion and a tool to disobey State rules. Far from that, Hamida reveals that an Imam in her

neighborhood went on the minaret and used the loud speaker to urge people to respect the lockdown , to stay home and to abide by government protective measures.

A quick historical comparison between the reality of society, its culture and the performance of its rulers in Tunisia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century helps us notice the beginning of a transformation that makes faith and religion coexist and do not collide with the consensus within society on what is not religious ( scientific, legal and civil). This means, in modern political philosophy, the separation and distinction between individual ethics and public ones. This separation means that we expect from society common ethics based, on the one hand, on the rejection of rugged individualism, selfishness and, on the other hand, on the consolidation of the values of solidarity .

In Tunisia, we can notice the emergence of lineaments of a collective moral conscience independent of the religious space either through new civil society associations, different campaigns which have appeared lately or group and individual initiatives to volunteer, help and donate that are distinguished from charity and philanthropy.

Ayoub, the Sudanese refugee, mentions the role of the campaign “ the Kitchen of the poor and destitute” which visited their residence and offered them food assistance. He also mentions the role of civil society associations in bringing to the forefront their suffering and fear. Thanks to their efforts, some of the refugees were transferred to live in the dormitory of the Tunisian

Union of Women in the capital. Jamal and Mohamed, members of the coordinating committee of workers in low paid jobs ( cleaning, gardening and security) provided by municipalities in Mednine have joined the volunteer movements to help people in queues in front of post offices and centers for the distribution of in kind assistance.

Karima from Kairouan has suspended her sit-in the capital in which she and other unemployed have been claiming the right to employment to return to her hometown and to express her willingness to volunteer and help. She uses her face book page to urge people to strictly abide by the lockdown measures.

The most telling image to express this willingness to volunteer and to show solidarity is stated by Hamida “ I am a nurse who graduated in 2008. I volunteered in the local hospital of Sbiba (a city in the Midwest of Tunisia) in the governorate of Kasserine with the outbreak of the H1N1 virus. I have some work experience and I am aware of the threat of this epidemic. If the ministry asks me to volunteer, I will not hesitate even though my mother is fighting cancer and needs continuous chemotherapy sessions.”

Zouhour Grira, head of the Bhar Lazreg District in the municipality of La Marsa ( a coastal town in far north eastern Tunisia near the capital Tunis) confirms the importance of these acts of solidarity with immigrants “There are a large number of migrants settled in Bhar Lazreg. Many of them work in municipality in different jobs, others are employed in precarious jobs and many

women are employed as housekeepers. With the lockdown, their financial situation got worse and the municipality did not waste time to launch solidarity initiatives to help them through food products and purchasing coupons. Many people joined this initiative and made it a great success. On the other hand, we organized, in coordination with the association Doctors of the World, medical free consultations for those who are sick and need treatment once a week.”

Hedi from the village of Fernana comes from a poor family and Hassib is a member of the Executive Office of the Union of the Unemployed in the Governorate of Jendouba (is a city in north-western Tunisia) underline the role they play to support the national effort, both civil and governmental, to contain the risks of the dissemination of the infection. They also play an active role in helping people in their areas. This spirit claimed by two young activists of social movements refutes the preconceived idea about social movements as simply contestation movements.

Habib, General Secretary of the Security Guards Union in the governorate of Bizerte ( is the northernmost city in Africa, located 65 km north of the capital Tunis) highlights the importance of support provided by trade unions to their sector “ The total number of people working within this fragile model through subcontracting and tripartite contracts is around 7 thousand workers without social and health coverage and retirement pension. Most of the workers are not members of unions for fear of being fired or arbitrarily transferred to work in remote areas. Thanks to Union representation and the

support of the regional Union, we, in Bizerte, succeeded to guarantee to our workers pay rises and social security. These rights proved helpful during this challenging period. However, the situation of other colleagues is different. There are really tragic cases in our sector.”

All these testimonies and others, in the society of the “margin” and in many other prosperous social milieus and businesses whose social and economic situation are more comfortable, reveal some elements of a possible formation of an active citizenship . This citizenship looks for what is common for social solidarity for “ The Ethics of Care” different from slogans denoting selfishness , patronage and nepotism . This ethical tendency weighs heavily on societies worldwide urging them to reorder priorities. These societies are expected not to consider the commercial sector with its driving forces of benefit and profit and the “military complex” worth huge budgets for armaments as the sectors that deserve the highest level of public spending. Instead, society is expected to prioritize the needs of all members of society ( health, food, care ,etc, the preservation of peace and conservation. All Social efforts should be oriented towards helping the other.

All the efforts conducted by all members of society, especially the youth and women, contribute to the liberation of societies of individualist tendencies and the dominance of traditional visions.

Two illustrations of the “ ethics of care” and helping the other come out of the interviews we have conducted. Ballamassi, who is an immigrant, accurately



illustrates the care for the other when he appreciates the initiative of the municipality of La Marsa to help and house Sub-Saharan immigrants in the Youth Center, to urge people to donate to assist these immigrants who lost their jobs in cafes, restaurants and houses; etc. In addition to the initiative of an online platform to show solidarity with immigrants. “The Ethics of Care” goes beyond nationality, religion and color to take a promising human face.

Seif from Douad Hicher offers the second illustration. “The collection and distribution of all forms of assistance by volunteers are not conducted on family and blood bases; rather, they are based on human solidarity.”

In the context of practical economic alternatives, Moncef El Houadi stresses the fact that rural areas have all the prerequisites and conditions to achieve self sufficiency. This should be the number one priority of future public policies in coordination with the inhabitants of rural areas.

Habib, the security guard, stresses auto-organization and union affiliation as recourse in the struggle for rights. This suggestion to work for what is common and shared requires a new societal and political balance of power that allows fragile categories to have their say.

In its fight against corona epidemic; the whole society is simultaneously facing a struggle of values between the values of individualism, profit and private property and

the values of sharing, fair distribution and solidarity. This struggle is primordial in the Tunisian historical context and the context of macro- sociology of the “margins” when we analyze it from a political perspective rather than an ethical one.

## **II.2 A Social democratic state or chaos**

The “Tunisian Exception,” with its justifications and significances, is a phrase intentionally used as a pretext to hide many shortcomings and injustices both historical and current. During the period between 2011-2014, the phrase “Tunisian exception” was reduced simply to one objective: to free the country from a possible theocratic state. This objective, although important, is nothing but a fallacy because the constitution of 2014 clearly stipulated that Tunisia is a civil state and it is also a social state. Out of 148 articles in the constitution, 30 articles stipulate the economic, social and environmental rights. This clearly indicates that the constitution of the post-oppression era is a possible ground for the common. To implement the ideas written in the constitution, we need a new social contract between the government and the people, all people.

Ribh from Ksar Hilal ( a town and commune in the Monastir Governorate), who was fired when the factory closed, says that she took part in a protest action on March 8, 2020 (Women’s World Day) in front of Radio Monastir

“I waved the Tunisian flag attached to it the court ruling which stipulates that I was victim of an unfair dismissal and that I have the right to be compensated. However, I have not received any penny. I took to the streets to defend my right. We were preparing an important peaceful demonstration on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020(Labor Day). Today, with the lockdown nothing is clear.” Ribh does not seem to give up her right; rather, as she is going through the Corona crisis, she is more than ever determined to fight for it.

Ribh’s sister Hamida’s who has been living in Kasserine ( a city in the west-central Tunisia) states “ I have been an activist for some time in the sit-ins and protests for the right to employment. I participated in the electoral campaign of candidate Kais Said ( the current president of Tunisia) and I went with him to many regions. I still have good relations with the local coordinating committee of his campaign. We are waiting for the possible reforms after the end of this crisis. If nothing changes, we will take to the streets again.”

It is unfair to say that space of marginalized people is apolitical or unconscious. This space is trying to come up with possible and new political visions. It is also breaking barriers since the revolution. This space uses unusual mobilization means and methods ( social media, Rap music, street art, Ultras soccer fans). It is also developing and adopting a legal and political discourse taking its fundamentals from the constitution and the values of social justice and the equality of opportunities.

What can be noticed during these last few years is the concomitance of these “ new politicizations”, mentioned by the sociologist Denis Merklen<sup>50</sup> with the advent of a new generation of young scholars in the fields of social sciences, writers, journalists in close coordination with the actors in the spaces of the “margin”. Sofience Jaballah talked about intellectuals scholars or academicians who investigate the marginalized neighborhoods objectively, proper to academic and scientific research and at the same time activists who are involved in militant actions to change reality.

The politicization alluded to in this context is the act through which the conscience of rights is transformed by marginalized groups into social and economic capability to mobilize people to reform public policies. In the context of Tunisia, this means also translating the ideals of the revolution such as fair and genuine development and combating poverty and corruption into tangible actions and public policies in reality. This has not happened yet. This disappointment has been noticed through several testimonies, initiatives and peaceful support campaigns. Assessing the announced government measures, Hamida states “The State today has sided with the people not with capital. This is very important.” There is a tacit acknowledgement that the

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<sup>50</sup> Sociologist, lecturer at Paris Diderot University - Paris 7 and member of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Social Issues - IRIS, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales de Paris. Also teaches at Sciences Po Paris and the Institute for Advanced Studies on Latin America. Is a member of the editorial board of the magazine *Problèmes d'Amérique Latin*

economy should serve the interest of all people and not the other way around. All the economic, monetary and investment policies should serve tangible and durable development not meaningless rates of growth.

Criticizing the previous development model adopted before the revolution and continues to guide public policies after the revolution despite endless promises by successive government to reform it, Abdeljelil Bedoui<sup>51</sup> calls for economic growth that serves durable and fair development. However, all the post revolution options have simply continued applying the old model without any meaningful reform. This models favors imports over of investing and stimulating local industries, gave up the policies of economic sectors and regional development poles, endorsed wholeheartedly all the tenets of the new liberal doctrine , and subscribed to the creed of globalization. This happened in 1986 when Tunisian announced its intention to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) and in 1995 when Tunisian practically became full member in this organization. Any serious assessment of this integration in globalization through the partnership with the European Union points to two main beneficiaries or winners: The European financial Oligarchies outside and

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<sup>51</sup> Bedoui, A. (2019). What alternatives to fair and just development, synthesis of the studies on development alternatives. (in French) FTDES. <http://ftdes.net/rapports/Model.alternative.abstract.ar.pdf>

the corruption system inside. As for the main losers or victims, we can cite the Tunisian people in general and poor and fragile categories which in one way or another were decisive in overthrowing the old regime. The outbreak of the Tunisian revolution should be understood as a reaction against and rejection of these deadly options.

The second theme frequently underlined in the testimonies is combating corruption . During this crisis, corruption has taken many shapes such as monopoly, speculation, exorbitant prices and the new filthy rich. This time because they are direct victims of this corruption, poor and low income people joined civil society in massively decrying and condemning corruption. This happens sometimes in harmony with, and some other times in confrontation with, the National Anti-Corruption Agency (INLUCC), top governmental officials including the President of the Republic and the Head of Government.

The fact that the majority of poor people decry the exorbitant prices, speculation and patronage should be understood as another round of democratic struggle for good governance , transparency, accountability and against impunity for fraudsters, tax evaders, corrupt people and corrupters. This new round of mobilization aims at putting more pressure on political and economic elite to purify political and economic life, to bring to justice anyone involved in corruption or misuse of power and to propagate the experiences of what is known as the islands of honesty. The mobilization of civil society associations and whistleblowers against precariousness

marginalized neighborhoods is another round of mobilization. The Tunisian Economic and Social Forum has urged authorities to protect the rights of workers in the cleaning sector. The Tunisian Human Rights League, playing its historic role, has drawn attention to the risks of implementing the lockdown and the violation of human rights. Numerous civil society associations have vehemently criticized a draft law proposed by Mabrouk Korheed (MP) and other MPs that would restrict the public's rights and freedoms under the pretext of fighting "fake news." This is just another manifestation of the movement that has swept Tunisia calling for a more free and fair society. Another illustration of this movement is the decision of Association of Tunisian Judges to request the general prosecutor to investigate the non respect of the confinement by a businessman in one of the hotels in Sousse.

While Tunisians are fighting the Corona virus as a health hazard, the country is witnessing two paradoxical tendencies. On the hand, the aggravation of speculation and monopoly of food products and price manipulation. On the hand, acts and initiatives of solidarity that swept the whole country to ease the suffering of poor and excluded social categories. Despite the fact the different actors may have acted separately without coordination, they are united in a broader vision related to the project of the State of law that is just and fair to all its citizens. This State has been a major objective, still unachieved, of the Tunisian Revolution. The civil society and underground society still cherish this perennial hope.

Hayet, Secretary General of the Crafts and Services Federation underlines the fact that “ many professions do not have trade union representation. Therefore, they find themselves powerless and unable to collectively defend their rights. The post-Corona crisis should be considered an opportunity to be seized. They should make out of difficulties they have been going through and enduring a militant force apt to be channeled and organized. Trade unionism needs also “ new and vibrant forces”

If we are considering of ways for social integration, union affiliation, for example, can be an effective one. For example, women working in the cleaning sector under labor contracts that perpetuate exploitation and humiliation do need labor union affiliation to collectively defend their rights. It is high time to break with this intellectual nonchalance that acquiesces to parallel sectors whose workers do not enjoy trade union representation, etc.

The advantage of the Corona crisis is to favor a collective awareness that reality should change. To transfer this health crisis into an opportunity to listen carefully to the legitimate claims of underground society, to influence public policies and to boost synergies in order to defend the idea that we, collectively, can lead a better life after the epidemic. Certainly, not in an unjust society as it is these days.





**FROM THE LOCAL TO  
THE GLOBAL: THREE  
PRELIMINARY  
CONCLUSIONS**

In the previous parts of our analysis, we were able to clarify the specificities of how the society of “margins,” and invisible communities have dealt with “the revolution” in social life imposed by the Corona epidemic and the preventive policies adopted by the government, especially the general lockdown measures. Interior and rural regions have not been simply passive receivers of these public policies, rather, they are proving time and time again that these communities abound with individuals who have positively interacted with these policies.

The situations of social fragility, the isolation of the interior regions, the nature of life within poor neighborhoods and the suffering of its inhabitants have rendered their daily life, from the perspective of sociology of the “margin,” different from the experience of life in other social contexts and environments. These differences or forms of discrimination, at the time of the pandemic, have been exacerbated.

In the last part, we focus on three axes to ponder the post health crisis era. First, we explore the relationship between “structured “society” and parallel communities or what we have called the sociology of the “margin”. We question the meaning of “national unity” and consensus in light of a society that is torn apart and unjust, and the lessons of we can draw from this current crisis. The purpose is to try to find efficient way to

canalize these lessons into a comprehensive plan to fight for.<sup>52</sup>

The second axis is related to the expected international and local awakening of the world conscience in relation to the second and third generations of human rights. By this, we mean the economic, social and environmental rights which means a return to the philosophical and political debate around the principles of freedom and equality. In other words, will the tension between liberalism and social democracy end up seriously raising the ideas of right, justice and other social issues as the main tenets of in the process of the institutionalization of democracy in Tunisia?

The third axis is related to a more comprehensive interest within social and critical philosophical studies in

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<sup>52</sup> Touhami, Habib. “ no tool exists to objectively measure inequalities.

However, the Gini index is a tool that is globally acceptable. In economics, the **Gini coefficient** sometimes called the **Gini index** or **Gini ratio**, is a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income or wealth distribution of a nation's residents, and is the most commonly used measurement of inequality. It was developed by the Italian statistician and sociologist Corrado Gini and published in his 1912 paper *Variability and Mutability* .

The Gini coefficient measures the inequality among values of a frequency distribution (for example, levels of income). A Gini coefficient of zero expresses perfect equality, where all values are the same (for example, where everyone has the same income). A Gini coefficient of one (or 100%) expresses maximal inequality among values (e.g., for a large number of people, where only one person has all the income or consumption, and all others have none, the Gini coefficient will be very nearly one). (Wikipedia). In Tunisia, the coefficient is 0.398.

the criticism of neo-liberalism as an ideology and a vision for society, human beings and the world. More specifically, the criticism of individualism as a way of existence in contrast to praising what is common such as the principles of social and human solidarity.

### **III.1. Structured Society and the Sociology of the margin” in Tunisia: Ten years after the revolution**

The aim is not to draw a permanent and thick wall of separation between the world of those “ included” and that of the “ margins.” Contemporary social theories point out that the mechanisms of integration and exclusion, between those “ inside” or those “ outside” according to society’s hierarchical and value systems, are not static. These social categories deemed “outside” are not monolithic. They include women, black immigrants, the sick, gays, and migrants, etc.

Blacks in American society had been classified up to the 1960s through the dominant legal and cultural standards as outsiders, excluded and subject to discrimination.<sup>53</sup> The millions of outcast or “untouchable” in India are also classified as outsiders who live at the margin of society.

Colonizers considered and treated people in the colonies as “inhuman creatures.” Franz Fanon, relying on

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<sup>53</sup> Dalits or the untouchables are considered, by the Indian caste system, as outcastes. They can only hold positions and jobs considered “impure”. According to the 2011 census, 16.6% of the Indian population are Dalits (201.4 million people). (wikipzdiaorg).

his experience as a psychoanalyst in Algeria during French colonization, studied the inferiority complex disseminated among natives by the practices of the colonizer or the “White Man ideology.” The French had inculcated Algerians the feeling of fear and humiliation instead of self esteem. This type of behavior is not only practiced by foreign colonizers but also by all domestic forces of oppression.

Contemporary sociological studies have broadened the Marxist perspective. Alan Touraine<sup>54</sup> from example, tried, in the 1990s, to change the social paradigm to focus on the issue of transversal exclusion encompassing geographic space, professions, age, people with special needs, gender, etc. “we are currently living a time of transition from a vertical society with people at the top and people at the bottom, to a horizontal society. The underclass had been previously convinced of their ability to undermine their society for another model. Today, it is no longer a case of being “up” or “down” but “in” or “out”. Those who are outside would like to get inside. In other words, they go through a harsh social, psychological and existentialist experience. The ghetto is an integral part of the liberal society. We had been a society marked by discrimination, we have become a society based on segregation.”<sup>55</sup>

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54 born on August 3, 1925 in Hermanville-sur-Mer (Calvados), is a French sociologist of social action and new social movements, director of studies at the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.

55 Touraine, A. (1991). In front of exclusion. In *Citizenship and Urbanity* (pp.171-173), Editions Esprit.

Whether we consider that inequality has an economic significance related essentially to income and the living standards or we widen the significances of marginalization and fragility to include the territorial and symbolic space in addition to the policies of social recognition, we will stand in front of a double bind: the health imperative of a national strategy to combat the pandemic stumbled upon the evidence of social fracture that opposes “organized” to parallel society. This opposition renders unlikely a uniform policy.

The topic of this study is not how the wealthy and middle classes are coping with the lockdown and the transformation of their way and pace of daily life and its psychological, family and relational effects. None can deny that this is an interesting topic worthy of investigation in comparative sociological studies to better fathom our society. Our focus in this is marginalized, excluded and invisible communities. Since we do not have “field study” materials related to a sample of these communities, the study relies on available analytical literature and observations taken from media coverage.

Relying on a classical reference in sociology, Emile Durkheim<sup>56</sup> considers work as the main factor for social integration. Work allows people to set themselves free of traditional solidarity and other archaic forms and

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<sup>56</sup> David Émile Durkheim was a French sociologist. He formally established the academic discipline of sociology and—with Karl Marx and Max Weber—is commonly cited as the principal architect of modern social science. Wikipedia

Durkheim, E. (1950). *Essays in Sociology*. PUF.

structure in order to modernize their social relations. Civil society, political and trade union associations, an outcome of this modernization, help consolidate political integration in the labor world.

For a closer understanding of contemporary societies we may refer to Bourdieu's field theory. The French sociologist theorizes the concept of "field" to study integration and exclusion mechanisms. He considers that the social world is divided into several fields and sub social spaces such as artistic, political, cultural, educational, sports, religious, and media fields.

For Bourdieu, has elaborated the notion of "field" in order to tackle the mechanisms of integration and exclusion. The social world is strewn with interrelated whether artistic, political, cultural, religious and journalistic, etc. Each field is relatively autonomous. Within each space, social hierarchies and class differences are manifested. This space is where conflict and competition around distinctions and symbolic and material privileges and the struggle for power and domination take place. Depending on material and symbolic capital possessed by every individual in society, this conflict is organized. Every field is marked by a group of rules which underline the logic of competition, struggle, dominance, common life and exclusion and inclusion.

In the Tunisian context, the Tunisian State has succeeded in leading a top-down modernization led by civil, urban and global elites who have established the mechanisms of integration. The corporate State, based

on the representation of professional groups, crafts and interests, has left its imprint on this plan. In addition, this approach was more exclusive than inclusive. Hence, the marginalization of the rural areas (economically, symbolically and politically) and the elitist drift. This elitist and exclusive process led to an authoritarian State incapable of containing anger and social dissent which ended up overthrowing the system.

Hamadi Rdissi<sup>57</sup> has summarized this process of integration when he argues that any unequal relation between a strong State and a weak civil society necessarily hinders social change.

The relation has been reversed since 2011. Indeed, the democratic transition has been marked, to a large extent, by an integration process - initially confrontational then consensual- of the Islamists in the political field. However, it was deemed very difficult to integrate marginalized, fragile and unrecognized social categories either because of liberal economic and social options or because of the weak civil and political representation of the marginalized groups themselves.

As we are going through the Corona crisis in a democratic and pluralistic context, three new trends have emerged:

First, the transformational trend in the relationship which was described by Hamadi Rdissi in 2006 between a strong State and weak civil society into a relationship

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<sup>57</sup> Tunisian academic and political scientist.



between a weak State and a strong, alerted vigilant society. The weakness of the State means the inability of its “left hand” to use the expression of Bourdieu . By “left hand,” the French sociologist means the State’s social vocation highly affected in terms of spending under the pretext of austerity. This means that the State, despite the fact that it represents democratically the general will and it is elected through free and fair elections, has not embraced and implemented fair and equitable economic and social just policies to achieve the long awaited development. The transformation from an authoritarian and strong State to the “State of laws and rights” is considered a historic achievement for Tunisians after the revolution. However, for us, it represents an unfinished achievement as long as a social justice has become an utmost priority.

Second, the structured society, heir of the first integrationist process conducted by the State and trade unions is the main beneficiary of the democratic transition. The social ladder put into place after the independence, health and administrative reforms, the emergence of new elites engaged in civil activities, and various associations, integrated many categories thanks to the division of labor and the structuring of social and democratic fields. Today and once again we can notice the level of structure, organization and efficiency of this free society that is functionally independent of the state, a strong ruling party and a dominant religious space . These days, Tunisians can be proud of a society that is dynamic and invents tens of solutions and initiatives for solidarity action.

Third, parallel , marginalized and unorganized social categories ( rural areas, the poor neighborhoods, fragile and destitute categories, and unemployed youth) are the focus of this study. These categories have a unique presence and interests. Unlike other categories, these “ margins” set foot in the public space biologically unprotected . The virus has granted them the right to be treated as equal to other structured and wealthy categories. The Corona virus is democratic since it threatens everyone without discrimination. All bodies, which are likely to infected and to diffuse the infection, are visible. Today, the discourse of denial of the existence of these marginalized and stigmatized categories ( delinquency, ignorance, backwardness, violence) , which used to be dominant and prevailing in the past, has become obsolete. These stigmas attached to the inhabitants of the suburbs and the neighborhoods have been borrowed from a certain sociology of the State in Europe. More than that, some of these studies link between the extremism, violence and the lack of civism, the absence of the spirit of citizenship, illegal immigration and the “ mentality “ of these “ dangerous” categories . This “essentialist” position, definitely, reproduces the mechanisms of moral and psychological oppression discussed by Fanon by oppressive and authoritarian domestic forces.

This opportunity made possible by the Corona virus to raise and discuss the issue of the recognition of these “ margins” first by the State and by the “ standards” of integrated society. This claim of “ integration” has been raised by structured society. In so much as we have recorded negative manifestation of

citizenship and indifference in the discourse of influential people in the sociological space of the “margin,” we have also recorded and observed the development of an increasing awareness of social citizenship ( social rights) and a better organizational readiness. This readiness has become visible through campaigns, proximity groups and the bridges constructed by the “margin” with structured and organized social society thanks to the freedom of mass media, the right to organize and most importantly the dissipation of fear of oppression.

The importance of the parallel and the “margin” does not stem from its role as a temporary trigger or a permanent driver of the values of pity and kindness, despite their importance; rather, it stems from its entry into the public sphere or space, as a major actor, due to the epidemic. This makes social integration ( work, recognition, health and social security) and political integration a vital issue. More than that, it is a prerequisite for the democratic transition process.

The sociology of the “margins” is not dumb or rather we do hear neither their babble nor their howl. At best, the “ margins” speak for themselves and they are able to produce their own intelligible discourse of liberation . The State today does not seem to be autistic which supposes that we have an opportunity to achieve two main missions. The first, to build a permanent bridge between on the one hand, structured and integrated society that benefited from the State’s previous integration policies and , on the other hand, the society of “ margins” that exert pressure for a well deserved

recognition and integration. This mission needs a historic bloc, using Gramsci's words, that is inclusive of like-minded dispersed categories. There also a need to develop, what Antoni Negri<sup>58</sup> calls the "common" for all this multitude.

The second mission is to build a unified political and value base representative of this bloc powerful and well organized enough to combat corruption, to insist on liberties, fair and just development and the democratization of wealth and its distribution.

### **III.2. Economic and Social rights: The new compass**

Many writings dealing with the philosophical bases of human rights have striven to link between scientific progress and the courage of the enlighteners who dared challenge clericalism. The individual is a new idea: He/ She has come out as a chrysalis of humanism, a new philosophical discovery. This free individual in the public space is in essence the practical, legal and ethical achievement of the philosophical achievement of the Human being as a free creature. Benjamin Constant<sup>59</sup> has set the bases of this conviction when he announced "For each of them, it is the right to

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<sup>58</sup> Antonio "Toni" Negri is an Italian Spinozistic-Marxist sociologist and political philosopher, best known for his co-authorship of *Empire* and secondarily for his work on Spinoza. Born in Padua, he became a political philosophy professor in his hometown university. Wikipedia

<sup>59</sup> Henri-Benjamin Constant de Rebecque, or simply Benjamin Constant, was a Swiss French political activist and writer on political theory and religion. A committed republican from 1795, he backed the coup d'état of 18 Fructidor, and the following one on 18 brumaire. Wikipedia

be subjected only to the laws, and to be neither arrested, detained, put to death or maltreated in any way by the arbitrary will of one or more individuals. It is the right of everyone to express their opinion, choose a profession and practice it, to dispose of property, and even to abuse it; to come and go without permission, and without having to account for their motives or undertakings. It is everyone's right to associate with other individuals, either to discuss their interests, or to profess the religion which they and their associates prefer, or even simply to occupy their days or hours in a way which is most compatible with their inclinations or whims. Finally it is everyone's right to exercise some influence on the administration of the government, either by electing all or particular officials, or through representations, petitions, demands to which the authorities are more or less compelled to pay heed." However , limiting the roots of human rights philosophy only in its first generation and in the revolution in human thought, the bravery of the philosophers and the boldness of poets, artists and the religious reform movement hides an another historic reality. the At the end of the renaissance, a new class of traders and merchants emerged and expanded their activities and economic transactions free from the authority of the church and the aristocrats.

Briefly, we can say that the historic era during which philosophers the raised the banner of enlightenment, Europe had ushered in a new era marked by a longing for liberty and freedom against reactionaries and obscurantist social and political forces, against feudalism that hinder private ownership, the freedom of movement, the right to self determination,

against papal spiritual and political authority that imprisoned the mind and hinders progress and against absolute monarchies that perpetuate their dominance. At that time, it was essential to conduct a fierce fight to establish and secure these new values. In the wake of the enlightenment, political liberalism, as an ideology, considered the rational individual the focal point of its world vision. This individualism has been sanctified by the declarations of the French and American revolutions, then by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights soon after the Second World War. This alliance between the campaign of new thought and the emerging social categories against the church and the conservative aristocracy in its economic perspective started losing its usefulness and started to retreat historically. This new generation of rights did not fully succeed in fighting capitalist exploitation of the majority of people. New social theories came to forefront, critical philosophers who guided the movement against bourgeois oppression exercised by capitalists, the colonial tendency and the rise of fascist movements. Formal liberties are not longer sufficient to guarantee a respectful and dignified life. It is wrong to understand this as the denial of the value of individualism and civil freedom, rather, it is oneway to push toward a more comprehensive human rights philosophy that conquers new spaces .

Humanity has lived, for half a century, a debate, sometimes heated and some other times calm. On the one hand, the theorists of new liberalism and its vision and doctrine that only the free market was able to distribute resources and investments in a just way and to allow people to decide their fate and destiny. On the

other hand, the theorists critical of liberal globalization and its tangible disadvantages and damages worldwide reflected in growing poverty, the wide gaps between classes, nations and continents, between the income of different social classes, and the destruction of the regulatory institutions which may tame the unfettered market and the profit instinct.

This is a brief reminder of the roots of the intellectual and political debate that will emerge after the pandemic whose features and landmarks have started to appear here and there in mass media outlets and social networks. Today, in Tunisia we should raise this universal debate in view of our historical, political and social contexts.

None expected that beginning of the millennium would witness ousting an authoritarian regime through a popular revolution as it happened in 2010-2011.. A peaceful revolution, led by no leader, group of people or political party, with widespread participation by the Tunisian people from all classes and convictions. All the Economic analyses of the domestic indices ranging from the educational level, the domestic product, women empowerment and rights through the Code of Personal Status and a large middle class have made us predict a stable democratization process, a top-down political transition. Political stability was based on the authoritarian power of the state and a weak civil society. Indeed, 50% of those affiliated with the ruling party at that time (CDR) were unemployed and belong to fragile categories. They joined the party for multiple motives: fear, private interests and unawareness. Because of this

reality, none was able to foresee the coming of a political earthquake in 2010 and 2011.

The revolution has offered new horizons and new opportunities to establish rights and freedoms and to break with any form of oppression. It was followed by a public debate, marred by political, Salafist and fundamentalist violence, between two visions of institutions: Civil versus religious. Despite a constitutional compromise between these two visions, the debate still endures. Then, the claims raised by the social, youth and trade union movements essentially related to economic and social rights and justice emerged to the forefront.. These days, at the time of the pandemic, the Tunisian society, like any society around the world, is getting ready for a new battle between those who would like to make poor, fragile and middle classes pay the price of the crisis and those who would like to use the crisis as a starting point for a more just and fairer society. In other words, a call for a social second republic as mentioned in the constitution with regard to the articles that guarantee the most important social and economic rights avowed by the second generation of human rights.

However, the issues are far from being binary. We cannot deny that this theoretic and practical effort to elucidate what is at stake are not sufficient to elaborate a clear platform to unite all the social actors who need to overcome being dispersed. To enumerate the causes, personal and objective factors is beyond the scope of this study. Some of them are known to everybody. What is more useful here is to seize this opportunity and this



turning point domestically to situate the demand of social justice within the Tunisian current political process. We suggest three questions to contribute to the coming ideological battle. **Let's agree on the meaning of democracy:**

- In Tunisia, we have moved beyond the arguments and debate about “procedural democracy” which assumes that the electoral process is at the core of the authority placed in elected officials and ensures that all procedures of elections are duly complied with. This democracy regulates partisan, political and intellectual pluralism and assumes that regular elections are prerequisites to implement the sovereignty of the people. These day, none in Tunisia refuses to take part in the political operation, even though some would like to change its rules. In Tunisia, we have achieved what Alain Tourane calls the “State of Rights” ( in Tunisia, this State is still nascent) which strives to set the legal foundations for life within society. The idea of popular sovereignty is still in gestation with some questions that have remained unanswered, stating with the complex relations between sovereignty and democracy. The question is: What are the conditions that make popular sovereignty lead to democracy?

- The first condition is to guarantee the rights and liberties for all without exception. None has the right to breach the rights of individuals and minorities. The second condition is economic and social. We should all consider that inequality is unacceptable. Regardless of its origin or excuse such as the idea that inequality is a natural result that is inevitable. The clear differences in terms of income and the access to health services,

education, culture, clean and healthy environment are not inevitable, rather, they results or outcomes of policies and options. As such , they can be altered. The absence of equality is not the responsibility of individuals; rather, the responsibility Stat and the social order and not individuals.

For many decades, opposition political parties have persistently attributed the absence of distributive justice to authoritarianism. Today, there many endeavors to attribute the absence of justice to democracy. In other words, to exempt the State from any social and economic responsibility. The States has given up any regulatory and control role on the economy and society.

To answer this new liberal doctrine, we refer to theories that preach the idea of social justice. Any talk about human rights separate from the rights of citizens is simply separating between the real human being and the abstract one.

Today, in Tunisia, the real human being is the citizen as defined by the constituting of the revolution. The State has the duty to guarantee the right to water, health, education, employment and just regional development. The State is also expected to protect its citizens' natural resources and to guarantee sustainable development for their off springs. Social justice should be the essential base that supports trade union, social and political struggle after the revolution

This same revolutionary inspiration that nurtures research in the sociology of social action. The high visibility of the “ margins” in the public space brings back to our collective conscious the mission to stress the forgotten obligation of social justice in the process of the Tunisian

revolution to achieve freedom and dignity. This visibility forces us to think about linking between the theory of social justice and the numerous popular convictions. Democracy is what enables us to continue raising and debating the issue of social justice freely and persistently.

### **The battle for the meaning of reform**

After the elections of 2014, Tunisia ushered in a new turning point in terms of the social and intellectual struggle about the meaning and the significance of reform. Between 2011-2014, the fundamental disagreement opposed those who advocated religious reform to those who defended a more secular idea about the State. This debate brings us back to the intellectual field and to confrontation between approaches that date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century between conservatives and liberals and the intellectual civil war between “religious extremists” and “the secularists” that has not taken place. After these debates, everyone in Tunisia has accepted the fact that the second republic would be democratic and does not exclude anyone.

During the second phase, which spans the period 2014-2020, the debate has emphasized the future of the economy, society and wealth production and distribution. This debate no longer draws the demarcation lines on ideological bases between secularists and the conservatives rather on a liberal-left (social) basis.

Who are these people who call themselves new reformers? These people, according to Michael Camau, are technocratic “elite,” technocratic businessmen, corporate managers working in the Mediterranean economic space that open on globalized economy and

work on what Camau calls “discursive alliance” about economic liberalism. These Tunisian “elites” are up to date, open, smart and successful. They are classified, according to French researchers, depending on their size, interests, practices and their relational networks since they share the same vision and the same discourse of reforms embraced by funding international organizations and institutions.

This alliance around the discourse of reforms in Tunisia which meant practically more privatization, austerity measures, reviewing the subsidy system, the dismantling of the welfare state and creeping privatization of health and education with one system for the rich and another for the poor and low income people. This doctrine woven by the dominant “discursive alliance” has been criticized internationally and locally. Internationally, the rise of voices inside the economic and political field to stop the excesses of capitalist globalization such as “liberal equalitarian,” New Keynesians, and the different Leftist groups. They voice the necessity of reviewing the idea of the total withdrawal of the state from the economic field. Locally, a counter “discursive alliance” starts to be shaped around true democracy that is the democracy linked to social justice.

The third entry to understand the necessity to raise the social issue as linked to social change and reform may be classified under the banner “nature abhors a vacuum.” The authoritarian regime, in collusion with parts of the “elite” succeeded in appeasing and containing popular discontent by retracting the social issue through secular charity programs targeting fragile

and poor categories (26-26 Fund) transformed into political propaganda for the president and the ruling party. This succeeded thanks also to the relational network woven by the ruling party (DCR) and local and regional officials. Before the revolution, mass media tried and succeeded to a large extent, to make people believe that the social issue is detached and separate from the democratic issue. The latter has to do solely with political freedoms and liberties. This discourse and argument were used by the former political regime to present the opposition as an “ elite” insisting on reforms, freedoms and rights as isolated and unrepresentative of the demands of the people for social reforms. This authoritarian model in relation to the social issue has not resisted and collapsed beginning with the protest in the mining areas in the south west of Tunisia (the Governorate of Gafsa) in 2008 as the first warning and ending with the revolution in 2010 that overthrew the regime and its social and economic approaches.

The collapse of the oppressive regime and the rise of new political “elites” does not mean the end of the social issue; rather, the issue is still widely discussed under different labels. The new political class united around the democratic transition have really prioritized the social issue . The State has left the space of activism to new undemocratic forces such as the Salafists. Having acquired a place in the public sphere through preaching and education, they integrated the economic and commercial field in the sector of clothing both new and used, public transport and small retail shops... This parallel commercial activity which is sometimes unstructured is, according to the researcher Mootez

Fatnassi, an dgateway to build an economic base for these Salafist groups. These projects, deemed profitable, helped them finance their customer networks and recruit people from all social categories, including delinquents and former inmates, to employ them in retail shops while working changing of their behaviors and convictions to align with the behaviors and manners of the religious groups.

This is an example of a process of economic and social integration of the “ margins” that is highly conducive to political integration. This approach of the Salafists to the social issue takes from social rights their global, political significances and their subversive potential to limit them to the realm of ethics and charity.

We can measure the damages caused by the withdrawal of the State from the realm of the social issue, the desertion of the precarious and marginalized spaces by civil and progressive groups. Today, this retreat threatens the whole democratic process.

A study published some years ago by the NGO Alert International sheds light on this issue.

### **III.4.The limits of individualism, the return of the state and the importance of the common**

There are many analytical papers and opinion articles in the fields of human and social sciences which adopt the thesis of a new world marked by meaningful changes and reforms in the post-Corona era. This new world, according to their findings and analyses, will, once again, recognize the necessity to overcome its old and obsolete illusions after the health crisis.

By these old illusions, we mean the failure of the project of new liberal globalization and the fall of the illusions of progress and freedom in an open world with unfettered market economics as its doctrine.

To understand what is happening, we have to go back briefly to the most important features of the succeeding economic, social and political transformations the world went through. In order to ponder our current situation, we bring back the striking analysis of the British historian Eric Hobsbawm in his well known trilogy which dealt with the transformations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: The Era of Revolutions (1779-1848), the Era of Capital (1848-1875) and the Era of Empire (1875-1914) and finally his publication in 1994 of the Era of the Extremists which is a brief history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1914-1991) with its three periods: “The Era of Disasters” between 1914-1945, “The Golden Era” (1946-1970) and the Era of the General Crisis (the Fall of the Eastern Bloc and the Rise of the Unipolarity).

All these periods were marked by radical transformations: The birth of capitalism and its development, the means of the production, new thoughts and doctrines, social organizations and international relations. The connecting thread of the works of Hobsbawm is the epistemological founding of the idea of the globalization of world history through the process of capitalism.

In his works, Hobsbawm has insisted on the fact that under the capitalist system, the history of ordinary people, their revolts and their revolutions have not stopped. Can the steamroller of globalization and its enormous capacities for exploitation, alienation and contempt overcome this resistance? This question remains unanswered in Hobsbawm work.

Capitalism went through cycles, from expansion, crisis to recovery. Progress, as the central creed of capitalism, has never been harmonious as claimed by the legend of liberalism: The destiny of human beings, their ways of life, freedom, justice have not coped with the frantic pace of technology. Distortion has been the rule. The human cost of the liberal reign worldwide, particularly in non-western nations, has been criticized by many thinkers from different convictions.

It is apparent that during all these transformations of capitalism, the profitability of capital has shrunk the role of productive economic sectors in favor of speculation and annuities, with more immaterial than concrete labor and the flexibility in terms of the movement of capital.

The reticular and “clientelism” expansion of this same capital, accelerated by the digitalization of planning and production should be considered important transformations as “the major transformations” described by Karl Polanyi<sup>60</sup>. On the other hand, these transformations and their deep and comprehensive

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<sup>60</sup> Karl Paul Polanyi was an Austro-Hungarian economic historian, economic anthropologist, economic sociologist, political economist, historical sociologist and social philosopher. Wikipedia



impacts have changed the significance of work, time, place and social relations.

All the prophecies such as the death of thought, the death of ideology, the end of history, the end of work and the end of politics should be reviewed today as we are going through, not the continuity of history, but an unprecedented acceleration of events worldwide. Since the beginning of the millennium, nothing has been static to use the expression of David Harvey<sup>61</sup>, all movements are fluid in all directions without any final destination.

In conjunction with this, the forms of inequality are multiplying and racism and forms of dominance of people and communities are in the rise. In this context, popular resistance movements are back defending fundamental rights while rejecting the dictatorship of the new market.

The advocacy of freedom, peace and the different forms of justice whether economic, social, moral, environmental or gender and the respect of minority rights are facts propagated by mass media joined in this endeavor by networks of horizontal movements. Only the New Conservatives are “monotheistic,” victims of autism, blind and dumb to these dissenting voices that are transnational.

After many decades of resignation to political and economic liberalism, we have witnessed lately the development of a new economic policy and new theories that have been revolutionizing political philosophy free

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<sup>61</sup> David W. Harvey FBA is a British-born Marxist economic geographer and Distinguished Professor of anthropology and geography at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He received his PhD in geography from the University of Cambridge in 1961. Wikipedia

of eurocentric tropisms. In the same context, aesthetics, epistemology and moral philosophy are drawing new world frontiers integrating the idea of equality and common life. Everywhere, new researchers contest the monopoly of managerial “expertise” on the economy, mass media, geopolitics, etc. The philosophers are again acclaimed and their moral and political idea have swept the public space denouncing money-kings, and reemphasizing the ethics of common life, coexistence, the values of right and justice.

The good news is the presence of the philosopher worldwide and the blossoming of a philosophy, no longer abstract and theoretical; rather, open and engaged with what is happening in reality, in the daily life of ordinary people. Due to the lockdown, intellectuals have left their ivory towers and committed themselves to studying and analyzing all aspects of daily life.

The “philosopher-citizen” has embarked on the a theoretical and practical experience of the world, the reflexivity in tackling the complexity and fragmentation of reality.

The world has never stopped its movement, transformation and flow. It has changed on different fronts, especially after the acceleration in the pace of globalization and the fall of the Berlin Wall: The structure of production, trade transactions, war, the new nature of immaterial work, the new international division of labor, the essence of human and social relations, the multiple forms of estrangement, contempt, racism and inequality, the revolution in people’s ways of life and communication, the enlargement of the

democratic fields and even temperatures on earth which have reached record levels. All these major transformations challenge the intellectual and value certainties of the classical era. These transformations are also driving towards what looks like the ethical order and the possible emergence of a worldwide civil disobedience movement to defend a healthy life on earth as a primordial condition, dignity, freedom and justice.

All these issues should be part of the priorities of philosophy these days.

We do not live in a peaceful world and we cannot understand it without reinventing our tools.

We cannot act on this world and change it without understanding the unprecedented mechanisms of dominance and the manifestations of estrangement that have resulted from this dominance. To achieve that objective, this study comes to continue research conducted in my Master dissertation in which the researcher focused on the ethics of resistance as developed and discussed by Antonio Negri at the time of the empire. The researcher strove to discuss the formation of resisting groups and the necessary shared human horizon. This means the re-foundation of philosophy, theoretical and practical, to counter neoliberal globalization to suggest an alternative one.

What Thomas Piketty<sup>62</sup> is writing these days about the deconstruction of capitalism of the current century, its new contradictions, the severity of social paradoxes and the widening social differences, is part of

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Piketty is a French economist whose work focuses on wealth and income inequality. He is a professor at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, associate chair at the Paris School ... Wikipedia

this critical perspective. The main argument of Thomas Piketty, widely referred to by those who oppose contemporary capitalism, is that capital gain of capitalism these days is mainly derived from the financial capital; profits derived from purely financial bank investment are, by far, more profitable than investments in industries to produce goods and employ people. Finance and real estate are more profitable than real economy. This planetary aberration has led to a colossal monopolization of wealth by a tiny minority. Indeed, according to the last World Bank report referred to by Piketty, half the world population, that is 3.4 billion people live with less than 5.5 dollars a day while the number of there 2208 billionaires with a daily profit of 2.5 billion dollars.

For some years, we have been reading about the manifestations of the “intellectual uprising” of Joseph E. Stiglitz<sup>63</sup> who, after quitting the World Bank, has denounced the excessive liberal doctrine of this international financial institution, the austerity policies imposed on poor nations by the IMF and supported resistance movements especially for the sake of environmental justice, etc. Before the outbreak of the Corona crisis, he published in November 2019 a straightforward article entitled “the end of neo-liberalism and the rebirth of history” in which he analyzed what he called “The major disillusion.” In the article, also,

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<sup>63</sup> Joseph Eugene Stiglitz is an American economist, public policy analyst, and a professor at Columbia University. He is a recipient of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences and the John Bates Clark Medal. Wikipedia

he stated that ordinary citizens have been fooled and cheated through a fraudulent operation .

These days, we are witnessing , according to Stiglitz, the political repercussions of this major fraud and deception: The mistrust in the “elites,” in the political economy sciences to which neo-liberalism makes reference, and the political system highly corrupted by money.

The truth is that despite its denotation and designation , the era of neo-liberalism was far from being liberal. Proponents of this intellectual doctrine are not definitely tolerant with their critics. Those economists who have adopted innovative and modernist points of view that break with traditional ones have been considered heretics to be avoided, and in the best cases confined and isolated. Neo-liberalism abhors to “ The open society” claimed by Karl Popper<sup>64</sup> . This is the last cry of the World Bank expert and the critic of the insolent neo-liberalism.

Piketty and Steglitz and others have become relentless critics of capitalism, responsible, according to them, of fractures of the world and neo-liberalism that aims to legitimize an economic devastating rational.

Let’s we go back in our analysis to the Corona pandemic. In fewer than two months, the invisible virus has transformed “ The global village” as expressed in the narratives of globalization into a panic-struck village. Fear is a collective feeling shared by everyone regardless

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<sup>64</sup> Sir Karl Raimund Popper CH FBA FRS was an Austrian-born British philosopher, academic and social commentator. One of the 20th century's most influential philosophers of science, Popper is known for his rejection of the classical inductivist views on the scientific method in favour of empirical falsification. Wikipedia

of any form of differences because nature that transmits the infection crosses all borders even those seemingly protected by the Gods. The virus may infect people who think they secure and protected by magic, prayers or body guards. The virus does not fear the mightiest armies and it may penetrate fiscal paradises and the islands of the rich. We are all vulnerable and we are all responsible of disseminating the infection.

To what extent can we say that humanity was in need for a new pandemic to understand we share a common destiny and that stubborn individual solutions lead only to hell?

Since the 1970s, we have been living the beginning of a transformation toward a new world marked and governed by a structural paradox between processes and sectors of capitalist expansion and the dissociation of the historical political entities inherited from the first era of modernity. These entities have established the authority of the State as the authority reflecting the popular will.

This means that we are in the midst of what Samir Amine<sup>65</sup> describes as the “the management of chaos” in the sense of a tendency toward the totality of the economy and the dissociation of what is political despite its legitimacy in terms of human values.

The rebounds do not stop at the center of the capitalist system but they expand to its peripheries that are subject, more than any time in the past, to the loss of

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<sup>65</sup> Samir Amin was an Egyptian-French Marxian economist, political scientist and world-systems analyst. He is noted for his introduction of the term Eurocentrism in 1988 and considered a pioneer of Dependency Theory. Wikipedia

the fundamentals of life, be it economic, political, cultural and environmental. Peripheral areas are still stigmatized as the geography that nurtures barbarism, backwardness and terrorism in a racist plan to isolate them and consider them a burden on the globalized economy.

In times of the second globalization, the content and the forms of the traditional authority of the State are disbanded and disconnected. This globalization marked the end of the world of the social contract philosophy supposed to shift the legitimacy of the authority of the State from God to the popular will. This modern State based the oneness of territory, people and political authority has ceased to exist. These days, this triangle has lost its meaning in front of the power of multinational companies, the weakness of governments, the free cross-border movement of goods and investment, images and information.

The empire, defined by Negri as an unprecedented form of globalization, is not based on treaties and conventions and does not require any federal source to rule the world democratically. The sources of its new norms and standards are at the same time commercial, industrial, communicative, and sometimes military. In short, it is a globalized bio-political mechanism.

What is being globalized these days is not the movement of capital and goods but also the movements of the wind, air and the bodies carrying the infections and viruses produced by nature anywhere and everywhere. The speed of the dissemination of the infection from Wuhan in China to the rest of the world is a good

illustration. Before the Corona virus, we can mention SARS, Ebola and Mad Cow, global warming, the crises of droughts, the environmental repercussions of the aggrandizement of the cities at the expense of forests, the exhaustive and irrational exploitation of mineral resources and the genetic modification of plants as a source of our food shock us with an obstinate reality that nature has borders that cannot be penetrated. We are not the masters of the world. Mastering science and worshipping the free market are not a refuge against leading a life devoid of moral values.

Technical innovations have invaded our life. They shape our means of production and even the pace of our daily life. These innovations have provoked the communication revolution and leads social, administrative and bureaucratic organization which itself supports production machines. They also transform the State's legal and administrative arsenal to a tool to modulate the nature of social relations. Therefore, we fathom the new roles of the State that are deemed appropriate to the age when it possesses all means of control and set free the market to regulate itself . When the State adheres to its social and regulatory role to correct injustices , it is considered mediocre and archaic. The dissemination of the epidemic is a fateful moment and an opportunity to ponder two problems that have been affecting the ambivalent conscience of humanity for decades which are considered subjects and themes of philosophical and intellectual incessant interest.

The first problem is related technology or science and the cognitive mind. It is not limited to nihilism after the expulsion of magic from the world to use the Max



Weber's expression nor to what humanity has come to possess in terms of technological nuclear ability to destroy itself instantly. Humanity is also capable of destroying itself gradually by presuming that the logic of profit is able to delay the threats against environmental balance, the way we produce our food, beverages, clothes, the manufacturing and the marketing of medicines and cosmetics according to the logic of the market or the technology of genetic control of the natural heritage of plants, animals and even humans. This genetic control is carried out in a cold and insolent biotechnological way that derides any form of value control. The problem of "science and technology as an ideology" is that it opens the ways of technical control over the whole society and life. These days, this ideology urges us to realize the need to renew the necessity of being conscience of the current ethical questions as a commitment for the common good. This interest in ethics comes back to the public space after a long period of political and scientific lethargy to unveil the threats to human existence: the nuclear risk, the degradation of the environment, the biotechnical threats, all founded on individual nihilism.

Technology that has transformed the West into an automaton without a soul, transformed the bureaucratic system paired up with the harshness and severity of the "Logos" over "Eros" into a doctrine, and the effects of the "era of disasters" are all clues to what the West is going through in terms of Schizophrenia. The latter despite claiming that it offers humanity a model of its liberation and progress and the conceptual and epistemological pace of a shared internationality, stands

today in the age of globalization unable to bear the consequences of its decisions and options. The hidden hand of the market that stands unable to cope with all the repercussions of the Corona virus acknowledges that the omnipotent authority of the State is the only refuge for humanity. Paradoxically, during the pandemic, while World Bank remains silent, the world is led by the World Health Organization.

A lot has been written recently about the Corona virus in relation to the “State of exceptional times,” the strict lockdown in most countries in the world and the intensification of controlling people through the use of drones and robots, even chasing unruly passersby with sticks as in India. Regardless of the perspectives, we run up against the paradoxes of globalization that seems at a loss. The opening of borders has become very risky for native people, not only those living in “Fortress Europe” but also those of countries of the South. Likewise, the measures to control people’s bodies has become a solution to protect them one against the other. Suddenly, strictly abiding by the directives of the state of control and mistrust of the other has become a prerequisite of individual safety.

No need here to criticize the seriousness or the absurdity of “Wuhan paradigm.” What we can say is that for the moment the choice is a purely technical model and not a political one for international governance of cities. What is deemed urgent is to defend the authority of the State and its role away from the phobia of crises.

The second and most important problem regarding the lesson we can draw from this” fair and just

virus” is the strong rise of the idea of equality. The rich, whether individuals, classes and countries, are not able to guard themselves against the virus depending only on themselves and their resources, all combined. Hating the poor, immigrants and simple minded people and erecting fences around them will not shield them against the virus. Humanity is confronted to a common challenge that requires collective, not individualistic, solutions. Forgetting or neglecting what is common and the obsession with the cocoon of individualism have had tragic consequences. Today as we find ourselves between the viral threat and the utterly undemocratic austerity injunctions dictated by the neoliberal model. The inhuman logic of this dictate will pressure governments to order doctors to let the elderly and a percentage of the sick die because the budgets of their countries cannot afford to treat them at a time that the same international policy has allowed 1% of rich people own around half of the wealth of humanity. This tragedy denies life and inflames anger. The falsity of neoliberal globalization wants us to believe that we have reached the end of societies and the end of what is globally common. Can we say that the nihilism of neoliberals has reached its end?

As demonstrated by Robert Castel<sup>66</sup>, individualism is a factor of “social disaffiliation” and affects the relation of individuals with primary socializing institutions and with political and civil intuitions as well.

In this dark context, the idea of “common” rises as a solution to escape global selfishness and injustice.

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Castel (1933-2013) was a French sociologist and researcher at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales. Wikipedia

Through the project of the common comes back the idea of the just welfare state not only as a remedy during times of crises but as a refuge for humanity against its self destruction. This idea is widely discussed within international political circles. For instance, the issue of debts that burden poor countries and more precisely debt service that takes precedence over human rights: The Lebanese government, under popular and street pressure, has recently refused to pay its debts. The idea of the common raises also the idea of international solidarity as proven by Corona virus which does not infect people according to their color, religion, wealth and gender.

To think of the common is to think of being together not isolated. It also means that we work, strive and think about possible solutions with others not against them. This new approach may be considered the beginning of ethical and ideological victory over the neoliberal ideology.

There are many calls around the world for the convergence of resistance movements and for transforming fear, this sad feeling, into a desire to meet and gather as a happy feeling as expressed by Spinoza. For Spinoza,<sup>67</sup> there is an exhilarating relation between the power of understanding and the power of doing and the happiness of doing. Every willing action that takes us further into the manifestation of the desire for existence is in harmony with an everlasting happiness.

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<sup>67</sup> Baruch Spinoza was a Dutch philosopher of Portuguese Sephardi origin. One of the early thinkers of the Enlightenment and modern biblical criticism, including modern conceptions of the self and the universe, he came to be considered one of the great rationalists of 17th-century philosophy. Wikipedia

How can we free ourselves of the circle of fear and sadness? Are we going to think only about our safety and whether this individual safety can be considered possible and ethical? Are we going to favor the safety of our nations and communities or the safety of humanity?

Tunisia has started early publishing the contribution of its scholars to this international intellectual workshop that criticizes this inhuman new capitalism. Mounir Saidani underlines the challenges encountered by human and social sciences scholars to serenely tackle the impact of the pandemic due to the fact that local and international media outlets have been focusing on national egoism in the fight against the virus. He calls for moving from the national analysis to worldwide study of these impacts and for transforming Covid-19 moment into an opportunity for real future changes and reforms. Mounir Saidani<sup>68</sup> suggests connecting all research laboratories around the world to exchange studies, arguments and findings. This should not be limited to economic and financial laboratories; rather, this should include biological epidemic laboratories and interdisciplinary laboratories of human and social sciences.

Soumaya Mestiri<sup>69</sup> has investigated the philosophical and social debate about the relation between the

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<sup>68</sup> Professor of Sociology, Tunis El Manar University (High Institute for Humanities)

<sup>69</sup> **Soumaya Mestiri** (born 1976) is a Tunisian philosopher. Her thesis was published as a book in 2007 by the House of the Sciences of the Man and was renamed *From the Individual to the Citizen: Rawls and the Problem of the Person*, followed in 2009 by another book, *Rawls: Justice and Equity* (Wikipedia)

individual and the collective. For her, there was a previous tension in this relation that has clearly resurfaced these days about the social responsibility of individuals. She contends “ The rush for these individuals right continue” even though the individual does not fulfill his social responsibilities in a proper way. The key word is society. Since the theoreticians of the social contract , regardless of their diversity- even though new liberals have shown more sympathy towards Rousseau than Locke or Hobbes- thought about society but neglected the commitments of the individuals towards this society. The real anxiety was related to thinking about a political and legitimate authority, that is the State. Even if we admit that the State exists to prevent dominance and control within society, individuals have a specific number of duties simultaneously toward the State and towards society. Soumaya Mestiri refers to the Noble Prize winner Amartya Sen<sup>70</sup>, who defended positive freedom and negative freedom considering that freedom is essentially social which means commitments and responsibilities and duties. Through this major change,

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<sup>70</sup> **Amartya Kumar Sen** CH born 3 November 1933) is an Indian economist and philosopher, who since 1972 has taught and worked in the United Kingdom and the United States. Sen has made contributions to welfare economics, social choice theory, economic and social justice, economic theories of famines, decision theory, development economics, public health, and measures of well-being of countries.

He is currently Thomas W. Lamont University Professor, and Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University. He was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 1998 and India's Bharat Ratna in 1999 for his work in welfare economics.

we liberate liberalism from its legal base and integrate it into a new paradigm with an ethical objective. Such ethical objective of freedom becomes the major test for political rule; individuals actions and those of economic actors.

Hakim Ben Hamouda <sup>71</sup> offers several domains that point to the fact that humanity has thrown off the shackles of neo-liberalism. The first domain is related, in my opinion, to the issue of national sovereignty and borders. Globalization was built on the principle of the retreat of the principle of political and economic sovereignty for the benefit of international institutions and organizations and the free movement of multinationals and international investment. However, this principle is subject these days to a lot of criticism. Some governments have already started seriously rethinking this principle.

The second domain concerns the return of the State and its strategic overriding role played during and after this crisis. This smashing comeback of the State in the fight against the health fallout of the pandemic as in the management of its economic and social dimensions has shattered old concepts defining the regulatory State and the necessity to limit its interventions in correcting the imperfections of the market. These ideas may be considered behind the hegemony of neo-liberalism during the period of major victories. These days, we witness a remarkable retreat of these ideas.

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<sup>71</sup> Hakim Ben Hammouda is a Tunisian economist and was recently appointed the interim Finance Minister of Tunisia by the Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa. He has previously worked with the African Development Bank. Wikipedia

The third domain in which we witness a remarkable retreat of the neoliberal ideas is the re-emergence of the social issue. The rise in social differences in democratic societies has contributed to the criticism campaign that, in the last few years, targeted globalization and its contribution in this increasing marginalization. However, the Corona health crisis has contributed to the comeback of social issues to the forefront such as solidarity and the urgency to invest in health and education in order to establish new social relations marked by solidarity and synergy.

The fourth domain concerns the globalization of production and the development and consolidation of a set of global values that have favored labor division worldwide.

The fifth domain in which we have noticed a serious questioning of the basis and values of globalization concerns financial globalization which has accompanied the globalization of production in most advanced and developed countries. The economic crisis or recession of 2008 contributed to the retreat of this orientation and the Basel III regulations contributed to limit adventurous decision among speculators in the financial sector. The current crisis will, surely, play a major role in the retreat of financial globalization.

The sixth domain which indicates the retreat of neoliberal globalization concerns the issue of governance of globalization and the temptation to limit the role of international institutions such as the United Nations, WTO, the World Bank or the IMF and regional organizations for the benefit of multinationals and narrow interests. However, this crisis triggered the return of



international organizations, this time, to contribute to supporting the role of the national State during crises provided that they listen to the needs and claims of the weakest and most destitute.

These are samples and preliminary suggestions for the expected role, theoretically and practically, of social and human sciences in the coming battle. In this role, the value of academic liberties, highly cherished, will enable these sciences to serve society in the coming tests and challenges.

## Conclusion

This study has been conducted under the pressure of two urgent factors; research and action. By shedding light on what we have called societies of the “margins” and that of precariousness, our aim has been to break with the unilateral perspective of approaching individual and collective social behavior that blames the “ margins” for being unconscious and irresponsible. This unfair evaluation can be contradicted by counter facts showing a sharp civil, national and human spirit expressed by several categories despite their belonging to the world of fragility. It can also be contradicted by the unbearable tough living conditions of around 3 million Tunisians under the lockdown.

Our methodology was mainly pragmatic stemming from our conviction of the multiplicity of social processes and the complexity and ambiguity which makes any stereotyping in explaining the society of the “ margins” worthless.

The study did not choose nor it was within the scope of it to discuss and analyze thoroughly shocking social phenomenon and manners such as stigmatizing

Corona patients, the refusal to bury dead people in some regions, the dissemination of domestic violence the victims of which are kids and women or the refusal to stay in lockdown centers, etc. The workshop of sociological and psychological research is still open. These social phenomenon are disturbing and disclose may hidden sides in our society.

This study can, by no means, be considered complete and thorough. Conducting research and collecting and analyzing data in a very short period of time did not help us find enough time and adequate conditions to conduct a straightforward field survey and in situ interviews. The accelerating evolution of the health situation and its fallout certainly induces us to enrich this preliminary study that should be considered work in progress.” It important that we need to analyze our society in all its manifestations. This study repositioned the issues of the fragile categories, limited income people, the regions and neighborhoods as a top priority for politicians during the democratic transition. No political integration and no institutionalization of participative democracy can succeed without economic and social integration. That is the axiom and presupposition we have in the Forum.

More than ever, decent work, the right to decent and affordable health services, the right to education and other social services, the urgent plans to promote and develop the poorest regions, our food self -sufficiency, sovereignty, and the protection of our national economic fabric are all considered prerequisites to an effective integration aiming at producing wealth, justice, equality of opportunities and respect. As long as we carry on

relying on the same economic policies and as long as we do not transform and translate the expectations of the disadvantaged categories, regions and areas into a central objective in the conception and design of policies and their implementation, democracy in Tunisia will remain fragile and crippled.

One of the convictions that has become firmer, after the many interpretations and analyses related to the health crisis, the mechanisms to deal with it and what will happen after the crisis, the next round of confrontation between the poor and weak people all over the world on the one hand and the minority or Oligarchy that controls the world economy and monopolizes benefits, is that the world is ushering in a new era. Today, it seems that many NGOs, many trade unions and political movements are sharpening their arguments waiting for the mobilization of people for the coming confrontation.

It is incumbent upon Tunisians and nations of the Maghreb to be ready for this fight by acquiring all necessary means and tools. We cannot claim that people are fully aware of their rights and their readiness to defend them; rather, what is necessary is that we think, imagine and set the proper framework, a roadmap to fight with the people who are sincere in their commitments to enter the arena.