Traditional and new forms of young women’s political engagement in a transitional context

TUNISIA AS EXAMPLE
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Maryam Ben Salem
Project: Young Women and Political Participation: Institutional and Informal Mobilization Paving the Way to Future Actions

Research Team:

Maryam Ben Salem
Senior Researcher and Study Author

Azza Chaabouni
Research Assistant

Lilia Ben Salem
Senior Advisor

Giorgia DePaoli
Project Coordinator

Project supervisor

Dr Soukeina Bouraoui
CAWTAR’s Executive Director

Center of Arab Women for Training and Research -CAWTAR-
www.cawtar.org

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Mohamed al-Bouazizi, a street fruit vendor, in protest of the confiscation of his wares by the authorities, sets himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid. This act sparked in his city on December 17, 2010 wide movements of protest that rapidly propagated to other cities (Meknassy and Menzel Bouzeyene). On December 28, 2010, President Z.A. Ben Ali gave a speech warning agitators of “harsh sanctions”. Other cities in turn drew in, mainly Gafsa, Gabes, Kasserine, and Sousse protesting against the unemployment of university graduates, police repression and officials’ flagrant nepotism. On January 12, a general strike was launched in Sfax by the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), thereby politicizing people’s demands. In a demonstration held in Sfax bringing together about 50,000 people, slogans were clearly political calling for more freedom, while quarters of the political party in power, the Constitutional Democratic Rally or RCD, were devastated and burnt down. Social unrest reached Tunis the capital in the second week of 2011. The media blackout which partly accounted for the failure of the mining basin’s rebellion in 2008 hence isolating protesters, was redirected by bloggers broadcasting on the Facebook social network (relayed by satellite TV channels as F24 and Aljazeera) photos and videos of demonstrations, denouncing police repression, contributing more
or less to rallying public opinion against repression on protesters. The withdrawal of the army combined with the lawyers’ support and mainly the General Union (UGTT) ordering a national strike on January 14, 2011 were decisive in the collapse of the regime. In fact, on the same day, Ben Ali fled the country for Saudi Arabia while hundreds of Tunisians were protesting across the Ministry of Interior, the repression’s most powerful symbol, chanting the now famous slogan “DEGAGE!” The twist of fate made of 2010 the UN International Youth Year at the suggestion of Z. A. Ben Ali, which witnessed the birth of a collective action conducted by Tunisian youth that the community wanted to flatter, but which was for long economically marginalized and kept away from a tightly protected public space.

By relieving the participation arena, the “January 14 Revolution” revived interest for research on politics and relationships between co-citizens, particularly youth which had been for long perceived to be apolitical, shut away in their private sphere: do youth actually participate more than before the Revolution? Do they prefer other forms of participation/engagement to party support? Do their political practices and perception of politics reflect any crisis in the representation system?

In this study, we hope to answer some of these issues by focusing on a special category: Women. Our focus in this study is specifically young women due the persistent poor representation of women in politics and more particularly that of young women.

The emancipation of women at all levels has been a major challenge in the overall politics of the Tunisian State, for it emerged since independence as Tunisia’s specific character with regard to other Arab countries, reflected in the promulgation of the Personal Status Code in 1956. Women’s political, civic and social rights in Tunisia are guaranteed, with the exception of some pertinacious discriminatory provisions in the personal status code including heritage inequalities. While the Ben Ali Regime tried to remain in line with the feminist approach of Bourguiba, its policy towards women seemed more to have manipulated the issue. Designated by Sophie Bessis as the “Champion of brochure design,” the regime was very keen on emphasizing figures showing off women’s accrued participation in public spheres, hence the State’s modernism while at the same time shrouding its “democratic deficit.” The limit of this façade feminism is reflected in the regime’s rejection of ensuring full equality between men and women. On the other hand, the careful study of figures shown by the regime stressing its great modernity clearly reveals contradictions inherent to authoritarian systems trying to “divert individuals away from civic awareness to establish a trivial reign.”

3 According to Amin Allal the country’s political and economic geography shows that the map of socioeconomic disparities matches the “map of protests” of the previous years. Allal Amin, « Trajectoires révolutionnaires » en Tunisie, ; Processus de radicalisations politiques 2007-2011 », Revue française de science politique, 2012/5 Vol. 62, p.824.

Official figures reported on important participation rates in elections (89.40% in the 2009 Presidential elections) though other sources relayed opposite trends for women and youth. Women accounted for 27.57% in the 2009 Parliament and 33% in municipal councils (May 2010 elections); this increase is mainly due to the adoption of a voluntary quota by the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD). Participation was to some extent limited in spite of women's access to education (women represented 59.5% of university students in 2009) and to the job market, particularly to State and private senior positions (in 2007, women represented 31% of the lawyers and 40% of the academia). As for youth, results of the 2003 Report on Arab Women Development -“Arab Adolescent Girls: situation and perspectives”- show that young people are not particularly interested in organized political action and in the traditional concept of domestic politics, but hold negative views on political parties and movements. On the other hand, according to the third Consultation on Youth, 16.7% only of surveyed youth claimed they were engaged in civil society and 27% only said they voted.

Popular disengagement and apathy of the mass towards politics characterized Tunisia under Ben Ali. By opening up political opportunities and extending engagement beyond the party in power –RCD- and its satellite parties, and by reducing risks associated with engagement in the opposition, the January 14 Revolution is expected to reduce obstacles hindering political participation in Tunisia, including women’s participation.

Tunisian women were literally pervasive in international media during the Tunisian Revolution. The top news in papers and news channels repeatedly relayed images of women activists and ordinary women at the heart of protests and in other fronts. The image of engaged and militant women conveyed by the media contrasted with the stereotyped perception of Arab passive women confined in the private sphere. However, shortly after the revolutionary euphoria, there has been an obvious return to marginalization observed in pre-revolution studies, a state where political women activists remain well under-represented in decision-making spheres.

Thanks to the parity law on electoral lists for the election of the National Constitutional Assembly –NCA- in October 2001, women were able to collect 29.82% of the seats (65 women out of 218 seats).

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6 http://www.businessnews.com.tn/details_article.php?t=520&a=19191&temp=1
8 2007 Indicators of the Tunisian Agency for External Communication. (www.tunisie.com).
9 The 3rd National Consultation on Youth was conducted in 2006. The sample covered 5,000 young men and women aged 15-24 years, spread throughout Tunisia.
11 Parity on electoral lists was promulgated by the Higher Commission for the Achievement of the Objectives of the Revolution. This law regulating the electoral process imposed parity and alternation between men and women on all electoral lists. It recommended rejecting lists not complying with the parity/alternation principle.
elected representative\(^{12}\)). This rate constitutes a slight increase compared to the number of women parliamentarians under Ben Ali (27.57%) but it is still below expectations. Only two women were appointed Ministers in the Jebali\(^{13}\) Government, the first was in charge of Environment while the second was responsible for Women and Family Affairs. The new Government\(^{14}\) includes only one woman, the Minister of Women, Family and Childhood.

On the other hand, women are far from holding decision-making positions in political parties and in unions. In the most recent elections of the Labor Union’s executive board –the Tunisian Workers General Union- no one of the four women candidates could make it to the board. In political parties, data provided reflect women’s limited presence in political or executive bureaus\(^{15}\).

### Women representation in national executives of political parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Party</th>
<th>Number of women members of political bureaus</th>
<th>Total number of members in the Political Bureau</th>
<th>% of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican Party</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennahdha</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nidaa Tounes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>19.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ettakatol (Democratic Forum for Labor and Freedoms)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisian Workers’ Communist Party POCT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress for the Republic –CPR-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women are absent from traditional participation structures; are they more inclined to participate in a “non-conventional” manner? What kind of changes in terms of degree and form of political participation did this major turning point in Tunisian politics induce? Have motivations underlying political engagement processes evolved? What are the obstacles faced by engaging women, considering that engagement costs have diminished after the January 14 Revolution? These are some initial questions that this study is planning to answer. It

\(^{12}\) http://www.anc.tn/site/main/AR/docs/composition/compos_s.jsp

\(^{13}\) The Troica Government made up Ennahdha Party, Ettakatol (Democratic Forum for Labor and Freedoms) and the CPR (Congress for the Republic), was set up after electing the National Constitutional Assembly – NCA in October 2011.

\(^{14}\) Government chaired by Ali Laaridi\(d\) set up in March 2013 after the resignation of Hamadi Jebali.

\(^{15}\) The choice of political parties is based on representation at the National Constitutional Assembly also taking in consideration emerging coalitions. Some parties represented at the NCA are not mentioned due to the unavailability of data.
aims at understanding individual logics\textsuperscript{16} pertaining to young women’s political participation taking in consideration various and varied forms of participation, ranging from activism in parties and associations to occasional participation in punctual events.

**Problem and hypotheses**

Our preliminary observations led us to develop a hypothesis suggesting that young women do not engage in politics in spite of higher educational skills and the contraction of engagement risks, due to the negative perception about politics and mainly about representative democracy.

The fact that young people rather fall back on associations’ programs and activities or on occasional protests instead of voting or joining party structures seems to be due to two factors: age and the nature of political offer. The purpose is then to explore the extent to which the transitional context has reconciled youth with politics after 23 years of authoritarianism (party in power prevailing over the political space, which in addition was selective, satellite political parties, political forums highly controlled by the State, etc.).

It is recognized that when critical perceptions go the rounds about well-established party structures and well-set political practices, the tendency to engage becomes weaker\textsuperscript{17}. The hypothesis inferring the decline of conventional participation and party activism to the profit of social participation is not specific to the Tunisian context, but seems to be an international phenomenon, mainly in Western countries\textsuperscript{18}.

The Tunisian Revolution has changed the vision people had on youth not willing to engage in politics, as it showed that they were actually interested but differently. Authoritarianism affects engagement by increasing participation costs (risks taken by engaging in protest movements), and by implying rejection of politics. The change witnessed since the Revolution in the structure of political opportunities (new context of democratic transition) has to some degree increased participation opportunities (this observation concerns our responders\textsuperscript{19}).

\textsuperscript{16} Individual logics refer to logics characterizing individuals in their interaction with the social world, as opposed to collective logics more interested in investigating collective interests of a given group. In this regard, the individual constitutes the focal point of the study.


\textsuperscript{19} According to the National Youth Consultation of 2009, the participation rate of young respondents (18-29 years) in the elections is 25%. The enrollment of young people to vote for the election of the ANC has not exceeded 20.42% for the age group 18-30 years against 18.48% for 31-40 years and 21.52% for age 41-50 years. If changes are minimal between the three age groups, we see that the female enrollment rate decreases ostensibly based on age and contrary trend among men, in which the enrollment rate increased from 51.40% (18-30) to 67.27% for 51-60 years. The rate is calculated based on the number of registered voluntarily until July 28, 2011 voters, 1,350,240. At the close of registration on 14th August 2011, the total number of registered voters voluntarily reached 4 108 202. Data disaggregated by sex and age are not available for the total number of registered voters and non-registered. Source : Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections, Rapport sur le déroulement des élections de l’Assemblée nationale constituante, février 2012, pp. 105-107. http://www.isie.tn/Ar/
Nonetheless, this change has not transformed visions about politics, and we noted the persistence of informal protest practices such as cyber-activism (there are not many cyber-activists connected with political parties), in spite of their shift from underground to mainstream20 in addition to young people still attracted by associations and protest movements (demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes, etc…) at the expense of political parties.

Our observations helped us to refine one part of our hypothesis: the negative vision of the political system in general, and more specifically of representational democracy, defines the form of political participation. The nature of political offer (democratic transition vs. authoritarianism is but one of several other factors contributing to the negative vision held about politics. It would therefore be necessary to inter-connect: a) contextual effects (macro-level), b) the social and cultural properties of social actors and their differentiated socializations and social experiences (micro level); c) the political organization or actual community (meso level) to determine differences in terms of forms of political engagement.

Our second basic hypothesis is that the type of young women’s participation is distinct and has its own characteristics making it different from the political participation of young men. Characteristics relate to both the type of participation and the engagement rate. In terms of participation, the purpose is to know to which extent the gender identity and the gendered socialization, involving representations from the political/militant spheres based on male/female opposition, contribute to shaping women’s militant practices and guide their engagements.

Concerning the engagement rate, it will relate to the way women mobilize their resources and develop capitalization strategies to evolve in a given political space taking in consideration obstacles facing them as women. This also includes exploring their rapport with rewards favoring sustainable engagement.

On the other hand, we need to note that the purpose of this study is not to make a monographic description of the different forms of participation, nor to focus on social actors’ various reasons, but rather to identify factors favoring passage to act (Action Taking) and maintaining this type of activities. In other words, we are interested in why and how young people participate in politics to later build some knowledge about this issue, while looking for significant recurrences according to studied profiles, which can be mobilized when implementing positive actions aimed at reinforcing young women’s political participation.

Before further exploring the problem and the approach we used, it is necessary to define key concepts and to give count on the political participation of young women in Tunisia.

**Definition of concepts**

The concept of political participation is very large. The first criteria differentiating it from other forms of participation, mainly social participation, is its relation with the world of power. However, due to the wide range of political activities and practices (simple interest in politics, participation in the electoral process, higher and more sustainable engagement), which criteria can one keep to define political participation?
participation? Various indicators have been mobilized by researchers to refer to political participation; based on the specific objectives of each research, such indicators may be reduced to the voting act as they may be multi-dimensional.

In this specific case, we are not planning to limit our research to the conventional (or formal) political participation relying on institutional means of expression. This type of participation may be divided into two categories:

- Punctual electoral participation, which constitutes the first phase of citizen engagement,
- Permanent participation in more or less institutionalized organizations, aiming at defending and promoting a given cause (affiliation to parties, unions and associations).

We will focus in this research on the second category, which is easier to track, given difficulties to collect reliable information about the vote\(^\text{21}\). On the other hand, investigating young people’s ability to “politically opine” as expressed by Yves Déloye\(^\text{22}\) and the way youth’s political choices are tailored during elections cannot be part of an action-research, however attractive it is. On the one hand it was difficult for us to mobilize a large number of young people for the sake of this research due to our limited time and means and on the other, studies concerning voters’ choices relate this capacity to socializations or to the influence of peer groups, which are elements accounting for the limited ability of any action-research to influence or induce change.

We will therefore focus on conventional participation, which is the permanent engagement in a given party or union, including informal participation (occasional or regular participation in social movement\(^\text{23}\) events without necessarily the perpetuation or assignment of a Militant Role). The scope and visibility of politically active people with no partisan or ideological backgrounds since the January 14, 2011 Revolution justifies our interest. It seems to bring a new dynamics to conventional political participation, and to reflect deep political, social and cultural transformations (globalization, withdrawal from public spheres, reaction to the bad reputation of the party system …) affecting participation forms and manners. Nonetheless, we will particularly look in this category to sustainable actions (cyber-activism, engagement in associations, and independent activism), leaving aside event-based participation as it cannot be easily observed and requires a specific survey protocol: the longitudinal research.

As we consider different types of participation and their duration, we would use the term “Militant Engagement” in addition to that of political participation. Militant engagement referring to “any form of durable participation in a collective action aiming at defending or promoting

\(^{21}\) Data related to the electoral episode on October 23, 2011 (election of the National Constitutional Assembly), mainly broken down by gender and age, are not available.

\(^{22}\) Yves Déloye, “Pour une sociologie historique de la compétence à opiner “politiquement”. Quelques hypothèses de travail à partir de l’histoire électorale française », Revue française de science politique, 2007/6 Vol. 57, p. 775-798.

\(^{23}\) “any organization or group of organizations implementing action strategies made up of a series of interactions and targets, preferably including recourse to protests” … which means “a well thought action first targeting a specific sector of the State”, Olivier Fillieule, *Stratégies de la rue*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1997, p. 37-39.
a given cause" seems to be more appropriate as it may include a wide range of activities. On the other hand, responders to our survey not affiliated with any party or union often make a clear distinction between politics that they reject and "citizen" or "militant" engagement, which they claim to advocate. The separation between both concepts (politics and militant action) must be seriously considered for it would justify the choice of the term "militant engagement". Social actors resort to specific practices to convey their demands to public authorities, to express grievances or to try to influence political decisions. With this, they aim to transform "the balance of power conferring this [political] field its structure at a given time" while trying to maintain and preserve their autonomy and exteriority with regard to this field.

Youth, subject of the study

The population studied in this research is made up of young women. This choice is pertinent if we consider the change potential that can be induced by youth, mainly in a transition context. This choice presupposes from a purely normative point of view, that youth constitutes a category with a special perspective of the notion of change, including values, beliefs, engagements, and practices determined by their age, characterizing them from other groups (mainly adults). That said, the "youth" notion raises a definition problem in sociological terms: what are the criteria used to demarcate this state? When does passage from childhood to youth then to adulthood occur?

The definition based on age criteria is a classification method most often used by public policies geared towards youth. In Tunisia for example, youth ranges between 18 and 29 according to the Youth National Observatory. While the "youth starting age" now set at 18 can be justified by the legal voting age, the "youth ending age" -29 years- cannot be as well justified. It seems arbitrary, defined by default, and shall be considered invalid from a scientific perspective.

For Pierre Bourdieu, youth is just a word, and cannot therefore be studied as a homogenous social category. It would be more appropriate to refer to "young people", a term that may take into account the variety of social reality. In fact, youth is a social invention; it is progressive from a historical point of view, perceived differently from one society to the other and in different periods, as it can be influenced by the social and cultural changes affecting society: delayed marriage age, later access to the job market, hence postponed access to adulthood. O. Galland


26 Institution reporting to the Ministry of Youth and Sports in charge of monitoring youth’s concerns and expectations, the execution of research studies and prospective studies about youth and the organization of national consultations in order to prepare development plans.

27 The classical breakdown institutionalized by opinion polls defines five age ranges (18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-64, 65 and more). This breakdown is defined for practical considerations.


defines Youth in terms of existence cycles, and is therefore considered to be a transitional period or passage marked by identifiable phases leading to “adulthood”. He identifies four successive phases: end of studies; leave from family home; integration in the job market, and constitution of the couple; individuals plan those phases according to their own choices. The limit of this model is based on an “adulthood” reference, while steps marking the beginning of this phase are not as clear.

Therefore, instead of confining Youth within an age range, we prefer to question the influence of some biographic phases and passages on engagement, including self-construction, empowerment and progressive adjustments, based on phases identified by O. Galland, where boundaries remain changing and dynamic according to various factors (social belonging, level of studies, etc.). The objective is to highlight the way activism is shaped and designed by youth as a “transitional period”, a pivotal age between two states, the first being defined as a situation of dependence, the second by a state of autonomy and the recognition of principle skills.”

In selecting our sample, we worked on integrating various age range categories (responders' ages range between 18 and 60 with a large majority in their thirties: 30-35 years). This choice is particularly pertinent when combined with the analysis of trajectories. If we look at the life paths of our responders, we do in fact provide the means to check the “biographic availability” hypothesis considered to be more important during youth hence favoring engagement. Moments and experiences marking passage from “a state of weightlessness” and indetermination (time devoted for studies and distractions, submission or autonomy from parent control, discovery of the activism universe in college) to autonomy (access to the job market in addition to benefits changes occurring throughout life including marriage and maternity), represent factors that must be taken in consideration to analyze militant investments’ reinforcement or weakening times. On the other hand, the approach based on the analysis of trajectories also enables us to update engagement generational differences. If we take in consideration their actual contexts (the rise of revolutionary ideologies in the 1960s', Ben Ali's authoritarianism, the post-January 14, 2011 democratic transition), we can define the main differences in terms of responders’ perception of this activity.

The participation of youth is crucial in the political elite's renewal process, and their disengagement can jeopardize democracy. Women, as a social category suffering of exclusion, or self-excluding themselves for different reasons from the political space, should be subject of specific research.

The adoption of a gender-based approach will examine “not only various rhetoric appeals fostering sex differences, but more generally, the social construction of sexual difference in the economy of social relationships

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between genders, structured by “male” dominance over “female”, evolving throughout history and across the social space.”

Based on this definition, we will try in this research to identify the way male and female representations contribute to shaping activists’ trajectories (constitution of an engagement platform, action, risk taking spirit, activism price, etc.).

**Literature Review**

In spite of the theoretical and practical interest stirred by the Tunisian case, women's political participation has been subject to very few studies. In fact, available literature discusses women's political participation without any focus on young women. On the other hand, this literature focused on some specific aspects of women's political participation without taking in consideration correlation between the participation individual level (motivations, availability systems), the individual's living environment (women's pertinent networks) and the socio-political context. Classification we established based on literature dealing with women's political participation opposes two major categories: 1. Research studies exploring this issue based on a socio-historical or juridical approach. For example studies dealing with the genesis of women's movements in Tunisia more focused on macro-social conditions have enabled the emergence of these movements or on the contrary, have faded them and enabled their conditioning by the authorities.

2. Studies focusing on the juridical aspect were limited to the analysis of legal conditions allowing women to have access to politics.

The advantage of this type of research is that they provide a clear vision about the state of women's participation, key factors and actors playing a role in this process. This is namely the case of the baseline survey on women's political participation conducted by B. Gribaa in the framework of the UN-INSTRAW & CAWTAR joint project. This study delves into the legal, social and political frameworks as well as positive actions implemented by States, development projects and women's movements in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. It also reports on different stakeholders contributing to women's political participation and existing power relations.

The sociological approach has been more productive in analyzing women's political participation in Tunisia: works focusing on women's political participation in various institutions (labor unions, political parties) have tackled this issue by examining mechanisms deployed by organizations to favor or on the contrary to tighten women's participation in structures. This is by all means an interesting approach though it does not give full count of their engagement and the reasons inciting women to renounce or not to their activism and especially to the way they interpret their situations and define strategies to maintain their engagements. In fact, relations between activist leaders and

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35 Dorra Mahfoudh Daroui (Dir.), *Lecture dans la réalité de l’union à travers la littérature et les témoignages*, Tunis, Tunisian General Labor Union: Department of Studies and Documentation, 2006, p. 270.
members are neglected and the issue of women's political participation is considered in a static mode, looking into the cause-effect relationship between structures and women's motivations.

An action-research conducted in the framework of the UN-INSTRAW & CAWTAR joint Project analyzed trajectories of active women in local politics and identified diverging trends in terms of engagement between men and women and with regard to the underlying logics of women's participation. The study's pitfall is that it has not taken full advantage of responders’ biographic experiences in identifying logics, perceived only from the political structures’ and organizations’ point of view and not from individuals’ standpoint. As for the identification of obstacles and opportunities, authors did not focus enough on the theoretical and practical scopes of this issue, including engagement costs, strategies developed, and resources mobilized by women to take advantage of opportunities or to overcome obstacles. In fact, when we consider the number of obstacles facing politically active women, we may wonder to which extent they may discourage participation and how politically engaged women can bypass them.

At the national level as well, there is a lack of systematic and focused studies investigating youth’s political participation with the exception of the 2003 Arab Women Development Report: Arab Adolescent girls: Situation and Perspectives, which constitutes the only reference exploring this issue. The national report was drafted by Imed Melliti and Dorra Mahfoudh Draoui36 and though it constitutes the only study on the subject, it just focused on adolescents’ relation with politics, without paying attention to the gender approach, nor to youth's engagement in political activities. This can be explained by the target group's young age, but even though, the research denotes Tunisian adolescents’ lack of interest in politics and concern about transnational political issues only such as the Palestinian issue.

Since the January 14, 2011 Revolution, politics as a research subject has recovered glory in Tunisia. Paradoxically, the transitional context (organization of the first free elections and access to power of the Islamist Movement ENNAHDHA) seems to have tightened the space and drew sociologists’ attention to two issues: Islamism and the political opinion of ordinary citizens. Several research studies now in progress investigating the issue of women and public life take on this topic from the perspective of relationships between secular or progressive groups and Islamists, or relationships of ordinary citizens and the public opinion with politics. Most studies are not available to us, and we cannot therefore include them in the State of the Art. The only studies published so far have focused on ordinary citizens37, a social category that has for long been neglected by research, as it could not be easily surveyed in an authoritarian context.

36 Imed Melliti and Dorra Mahfoudh Draoui, De la difficulté de grandir : pour une sociologie de la jeunesse en Tunisie, Tunis, Centre de Publication Universitaire, 2006, p. 273.

To summarize, literature related to women’s political participation in Tunisia did not consider the link between engagement individual logics and the micro-logical and macro-logical levels\(^{38}\). On the other hand, the loss of interest in women’s militant and political engagement, in other terms neglect of “politically professional women” as a research topic and the little interest granted to the evolutions and transformations of engagement logics since the January 14, 2011 Revolution justify interest in this study, which tries to give count of the complexity and diversity of participation methods based on the engagement’s procedural approach. Our study explores this phenomenon starting from the individual while taking in consideration, on the one hand the link between macro-social transformations and engagement, and on the other the organizational configuration of activism\(^{39}\).

### Research Question and Theoretical Framework

By engaging thoughts about the correlation of contextual factors (type of political offer, school civic education, democracy, and the perception of women social actors about their sociopolitical environment), it would be possible to identify individual logics accounting for political participation. Participation will then be considered as a process and not in a monolithic way as an achievement. The procedural analysis implies considering the temporal aspect, hence identifying individual paths leading to political participation, and explaining evolutions and changes arising when engaging in this social activity. The career concept developed by Hugues (Hugues 1958) later used by H. Becker is his study on deviance may be used in the analysis of political engagement\(^ {40}\). The career concept is a “sequential model of a diachronic analysis, used to understand the development of motivations, based on the activist’s progression and the structural\(^ {41}\) macro-social framework impacting conditions of his/her actions. The target group in this study is by essence a population in transition. Changes and the evolution of the player’s position in the social structure, whether at the level of the status (access to university, marriage, change of residence) or in the form of biographic incidents (school failure, unsuccessful love story) cannot be neglected in the analysis, because any change would imply reinterpreting the situation, and hence modify motivations, expectations, and social behaviors over time. Therefore, the study of various trajectories covered by politically active women from this angle will enable the identification of factors reinforcing or weakening participation and investment in this activity. In fact, it is not enough to know why would women participate in politics, but also to explore the way they persevere in this social activity.

When analyzing political participation, our goal is to study the different variables that can simultaneously or successively come into force, and which may be differently interpreted by the players, including:

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39 Frédéric Sawicki and Johanna Simeant, Art.Cit, p. 20.
- **The micro-level:** This refers to the players’ individual trajectories (social origin and successive positions held by the players in the social structure) including the interpretation activity. Interpretation, a focal point in the interactionist perspective, helps to understand how individuals integrate and interpret social interactions. We can therefore see that over the life of an activist, a number of variables are mobilized to bring purpose and value to engagement⁴² (identity construction, experiences, social condition, changes implied by activism on identity and on the individual’s living style, including material and psychological constraints, time and effort spent in this activity).

- **The Meso-level:** This refers to the analysis of mechanisms deployed by party organizations and other entities for recruitment and the creation of attachments (mechanisms encouraging youth participation, relations between young and senior individuals, position within the organization and development opportunities, etc…)

- **The Macro-level:** How do the type of political offer, party positioning, opacity of the electoral process, and the nature of the political system influence young women’s choices for political engagement? In this regard, we cannot neglect the analysis of economic, political and social factors conditioning the forms and degrees of young women’s participation.

By setting forth these three dimensions, we hope to redraw different trajectories used by politically active young women, in order to identify individual logics pertaining to political participation. The study will cover three axes, each including a number of research questions:

1/ The first axis will analyze a new form of political participation: cyber-activism. A now very common hypothesis in the sociology of engagement suggests that youth had rather engage in association activities than vote or join political parties. One objective of this research is to check this hypothesis to try to understand by making the comparative analysis of conventional activism and cyber-activism, reasons underpinning the choice of civic and social engagement rather than party activism.

This particularly interesting form of political participation needs to be studied more carefully: marches to protest against censorship on the Internet or against Israel, petitions denouncing the shutting down of Facebook, or Facebook’s satirical groups constitute protest actions against the State, mainly initiated by youth. Young women did contribute to all of them, and they were not necessarily affiliated with political or social movements. This type of participation raises the hypothesis of passage from the “professional” political participation to an “on-call” participation, in response to individual and immediate interests. To which extent do retreat in the private space, discredit of party systems, globalization and technological developments favor participation in this type of activism? Does the massive emergence of Facebook groups, Internet satirical blogs using caricatures and photo-editing, or groups specialized in investigative journalism reflect some kind of citizen resistance against political systems not fulfilling citizens’ expectations?

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⁴² “How at every biographical phase, attitudes and behaviors are determined by past attitudes and in turn, condition future possibilities”. Olivier Fillieule, «Propositions pour une analyse processuelle de l’engagement individuel » Post scriptum, Revue française de science politique, 2001/1 Vol. 51, p. 201.
2/ The second axis relates to young women’s motivation to engage in politics. To do this, it is crucial to analyze readiness systems and individualization processes leading to the formation of apperence for engagement. We will therefore investigate different factors leading to engagement (weight of socialization, social and cultural properties, influence of significant people, social world experiences, meetings, biographical incidents, professional positioning, etc…) as well as implementation modalities. By analyzing male and female representations transmitted during various socializations of which mainly the primary one, we suggest to highlight women’s relations with activism. We will try to find out to which extent women’s self-exclusion from decision making positions or from visibility (taken as rewards for activism) are due to the fact that they are “socially constructed women”.

3/ Exploring individuals’ reasons and motives to react and to make choices is certainly interesting for research but cannot be sufficient, as it does not enable us to identify factors that may ensure the sustainability of political participation. In this regard, two hypotheses can be discussed:

- The first suggests that returns on activism – material and symbolic rewards, generated by activism, deliberately or involuntarily deployed by the political organization – contribute to the reinforcement of political activism. This notion, that sometimes seems controversial when not well understood, infers that beyond official reasons aimed at collective goals, participation is often driven by individual interests. Daniel Gaxie, who conceptualized the notion of returns, defines it as follows: “Anything that may be referred to as satisfaction, advantage, pleasure, delight, fortune, profit, benefit, reward, incentive, or gift generated by activism. These are sensitive components in activism and may be analyzed (and also referred to) as returns (not necessarily sought for as such and most of the time not monetary) yielded by involvement in the activity of a collective organization.” The input of analysis in terms of career to understand rewards integrates the relational dimension and different visions about returns, and the sense/value given depending on differences of positions held in society or in political organizations. In other terms, rewards may mean something for an individual and not for another; they may act at a special time in life and become totally insignificant at a different time. Our purpose is to determine relations between the expectations of social women actors and their rewards, to define the ideal types of trajectories and profiles of politically active women. Our ultimate goal is to identify rewards having the most considerable effect according to women’s profiles and to translate them in positive actions.

In this regard, media exposure as a social recognition instrument has been identified as a powerful participation engine. For politicians, being visible means being recognized as a legitimate player; we will therefore examine young women’s perception of this variable in order

43 Delphine Dulong and Frédérique Matonti, «Comment devenir un(e) professionnel(le) de la politique ? » Learning roles at the Regional Council of Île-de-France, Sociétés & Représentations, 2007/2 n° 24, p. 251.

44 Several sociologists consider that the notion of rewards adds to the disenchanted vision of activism and underlies a utilitarian vision.

to check how important and to which extent it is useful for their activism careers, and how they can put in place media exposure strategies.

- The second strategy relates to the role of the mentor in political learning and in the identification process. The acquisition of political and cultural skills is considered by most research studies related to engagement as a powerful engagement engine, and failing to acquire appropriate learning often leads to failure. It is therefore important to analyze interactions between the two stakeholders in order to find out how a formerly engaged political woman can provide beginners with her knowledge, know-how, and networks, and whether she would convey young women’s claims to decisional spheres. By involving them through sensitization and training, senior political women will actively participate in reinforcing learning opportunities (acquisition of the political, cultural and social capital, vital resources in politics), facilitate the evolution of young women in political life and favor feminine group solidarity.

**Empirical Strategy**

The choice of tools was made based on an epistemological position, or the comprehensive approach. This position allows to explore the meaning of individual and collective behaviors: i.e. to highlight the significance put by each individual to his action and identify reasons accounting for responders’ attitudes and practices. In this regard, interviews do not constitute ways to test pre-established hypotheses, but a co-construction process of the meaning of social actions.

A) Baseline of women’s political participation:

We received from the National Youth Observatory results of the 4th National Consultation on Youth conducted in 2010 broken down by gender. We also collected information about women’s presence in political organizations and in labor unions at the decision making level, without any exclusion. Data would help us to define a baseline survey about the presence of women in political structures. The information sought concerns only formal and sustained participation, as we were unable to collect quantitative data about informal participation. However, these data would allow us to check the hypothesis of whether young women better engage or not in social organizations (associations) than in professional politics. But, in addition to difficulties in collecting data from various stakeholders, the rapid transformations in parties, the creation of new ones, the dissolution of others, and the formation of party coalitions made the few data collected obsolete.

46 Term used by Levinson to analyze transition between the end of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood: the mentor is usually older and more experienced in the field that the young person is getting ready to come into. Daniel Levinson, the seasons of a man’s life, New York, Ballantine, 1978, p. 97.


48 Data we were provided concern the “youth and participation” aspect.
B) Survey based on semi-structured detailed interviews:
The choice of the detailed interview method aims at collecting information about individuals’ reasons for action, which is our first research question. As predispositions cannot be perpetual, this method also enables us to report on the variation of motivations across time. The interactionist perspective is based among other elements on a phenomenological approach aimed at exploring how individuals interpret the world and their social experiences. Interest in players’ subjective moods requires the exploration of life stories; they provide information about the evolution of subjective interpretations guiding individuals’ behaviors across time, depending on their interactions with the social world.

In addition to reasons for action – why would young women engage in politics? – the detailed interview gives us information about the various forms of participation: how do young women pick up their engagement method? What are the variables that play a role in maintaining engagements? The impact of some variables such as gender and age in the choice of political engagements was explored. In addition, the influence of the social and professional position, socio-cultural properties, socialization, education, peer groups, important people, biographic incidents, meetings, social promotion or downgrading, change of status, in short anything that can somehow shape individuals’ choices.

C) Focus Groups:
Four focus groups have also been organized: two focus groups were devoted to cyber-activism. The first involving women cyber-activists and women active in the traditional sphere, aimed at defining this practice compared to participation in political parties or in associations. The second brought together men and women cyber-activists and was organized one year after the first one; it tried to track the development of this practice one year after the Revolution and to investigate gender-based discrimination in this domain. The third focus group explored men-women relationships in party structures, while the fourth examined senior-junior relations, and particularly the transmission of know-how and of inter-generational political know-how.

D) Online observation:
The observation of the performance of 12 cyber-activists on Facebook, selected based on their notoriety (not mediatic only) and the diversity of their profiles has enriched our corpus. Observation focused on onsite debates, and on internet users’ comments on cyber-activists’ publications and statutes in order to better understand the evolution of cyber-activism’s challenges and relations between various stakeholders.

In addition, we monitored and analyzed conversations and publications on Facebook related to political women and we watched some women’s personal Facebook accounts and pages.

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49 The study was conducted between February 2011 and May 2013.
50 i.e. one year after the January 14, 2011 Revolution.
51 They are 6 ladies (Bent Trad, henda hendoud, Fatma Arabicca, Jolanare Jo, Massir Destin, Amira Yahyaoui) and 6 men (Z, Azizi Amami, Hamdi Kaloutcha, Big Trap Boy, Kerim Bouzouita et Chut libre).
52 We deliberately chose Facebook from a range of other tools available because of its popularity in Tunisia compared to other tools (Twitter, blogs, etc…). We were able to note in this regard that even the most prominent cyber-activists tend to favor this tool.
Construction of the Sample

Forty-one detailed interviews were conducted with a mixed panel of women and men\textsuperscript{53}, enabling us to explore the contrasted relations that politically active men and women have towards politics as well as between politically active young women and older women.

When making up the sample of politically active young women, we tried as much as possible to have it best represent various participation patterns (cyber-activists, independent activists, labor union activists, and members in associations and in political parties), political affiliations (opposition/party in power). On the other hand, we also took in consideration the variety of sociological profiles since the social background, the economic, social and cultural capital, whether inherited or acquired, may be determining in terms of motivations and/or expectations, the modeling of participation patterns and engagements sustainability conditions.

When forming our sample of women acting in conventional politics, we mobilized CAWTAR’s contact network in political organizations. However, for cyber-active young women, our technique was more the snow-ball effect. We started with a little number of people we already know, and through them we worked on reaching out to other young women.

Data Analysis Method

Questions stated in the Interview guide will help us to answer the research issue while at the same time set the framework for interviewees. A good preliminary knowledge of the field, the challenges, conflicts, and even of interviewees’ profiles improves the quality and pertinence of the maintenance grid and facilitates the survey process.

A special focus was put on relations built between interviewees and interviewers. The relation’s asymmetry may be in favor of either party; this is why surveyors should try to build relations based on trust and mutual respect, they also should properly use the Interview Guide and give scientific credit to their work, while avoiding symbolic violence that could be generated by the Guide towards individuals coming from popular social categories\textsuperscript{54}.

When conducting interviews, surveyors must pay attention both to iterated answers as well as to non-vocal replies (body language, eye expressions, attitudes, hesitations) that can help us better understand answers, and namely “politically correct” replies, designed to protect deep thoughts. Risks of artifacts are also present in qualitative surveys. In fact, it is usually difficult to make interviewees talk about their personal experiences and their own vision of the world. Affiliation to structures often binds individuals to talk on behalf of the group and not in their own name (use of “we” instead of “I”). The use of prompts is the best way to avoid this trap.

\textsuperscript{53} We decided to assign pseudonyms to our responders in order to preserve their anonymity. We kept pseudonyms already chosen by interviewed cyber-activists only when we believe that they are known and may reveal responders’ identities.

Data collected from individual interviews have been analyzed using different pertinent variables: age, gender, social background, professional status, socialization, engagement history, etc.; these variables in fact provide information about the different relations and perceptions of activism and hence of any rewards that can be generated from there. On the other hand, special focus was put on analyzing key events that can modify or maintain conduct: change of status, biographic incidents, encounters, learning, experiences, etc.

Index of activists interviewed

Ahlem, a 62 year-old woman, retired secondary school teacher, divorced and mother of a child, adhered to GEAST Perspectives in 1970, then militated with the UGTT, the Human Rights League, and finally joined a feminist association;

Alia, a 36 year old woman, Ph. D researcher in marketing, works as a Journalist, single, her father is a car dealer and her mother is a middle manager both are apolitical, she became a cyber-activist in 2005;

Amina, a 57-year old woman, pharmacist, married to an optician, her father was a farmer and her mother a housewife, she joined a feminist association in 2003;

Athena, a 30-year old woman from Tunis, dental surgeon, single, her father was a secondary school teacher and her mother taught in elementary schools, both are apolitical; she started activism during the 2008 mining basin events.

Basma, a 26-year old woman from Tunis, chair of an association, she holds a Master Degree in political science; her father is a university teacher and her mother is a middle manager; Basma is single and started activism in associations in France where she studied and founded her association in 2011;

Bent Trad, a 31-year old woman residing in Tunis, university teacher and single, her parents are union activists and secondary school teachers.
She first joined UGET when she was at the University, then enrolled in two associations to finally end as a blogger;

Dalenda, a 29-year old woman living in Tunis; journalist, single, her father is a Senior Technician and her mother is a housewife. She joined an opposition party in 2008;

Donia, a 40-year old woman from Béja, teaches graduation students at a secondary school, now working on a Master Degree in Modern Civilization, married and mother of two children; her father was a civil servant and her mother is a housewife; both are apolitical; she joined Ennahdha movement when she was 14 (in 1985);

Farhat, a 32-year old man from Tataouine, holds a vocational training certificate in carpentry; his father retired from the Ministry of Interior and is a labor activist while his mother is a housewife. Farhat is married, has a child and has been active in an association since 2011;

Farida, a 35-year old woman, teacher of Theatre, single, started blogging in 2006;

Fatma, 46 years from Bizerte, secondary school teacher, mother of two children, married to a secondary school teacher; her father was an army officer while her mother was a nurse. She has been member of an opposition political party since 2005;

Undecided girl, 22 years from Bizerte, student and single, her father is a secondary school teacher while her mother is a housewife; she started blogging in 2010 and joined a political party in 2011;

Ghada, a 46-year old woman from Tunis, journalist, her father was a farmer and her mother is a housewife; she became a union activist in 2002;

Hamadi Kaloutcha, a 33-year old man from Ksar Hellal living in Tunis, part-time journalist, studied political science abroad then shifted to marketing (does not hold a Master degree), married and has no children. He started cyber-activism in 2003;

Hanen, a 32-year old woman living in Tunis, her parents were left-wing activists, divorced, independent activist;

Hayet, a 45-year old woman living in Tunis, holds a Master Degree in Law, lawyer, divorced and mother of a 15-year son, her father used to work in insurance and her mother was a university teacher (studies in nuclear engineering); she joined the Tunisian Women’s National Union in 1998 then the RCD in 2000;

Hela, a 32-year old woman living in Tunis, student, her parents were left-wing activists, her father is a union active banker while her mother is a retired secondary school teacher, married and mother of a child, feminist and has been active in an association since 2000;

Hind, a 27-year old woman from Bizerte, she studied 3 years at the University, works as a commercial manager in a private company and is single, her father was a plain worker and her mother’s level of instruction is elementary, both are apolitical. She joined a political party in 2011.

Imen, a 32-year old woman living in Tunis, project assistant in an NGO, divorced, studied architecture and cinema (5-year in college), Imen's
mother works in a public administration, her father is retired, and she is an independent activist;

Ismehen, a 33-year old woman from Mornag, holds a B.S in Marketing; she engaged in Master studies but did not make them to the end. She is single, her father works in commerce and has an elementary school level. Her mother is an illiterate housewife, and both are apolitical. She engaged in a legal opposition party in 2006.

Jolanara, a 33-year old woman from Tunis, Ph.D in French literature, university teacher, single, her father was an immigrant worker in France and her mother is a housewife; both are apolitical. She started blogging in 2007;

Kenza, a 42-year old woman from Kef, secondary school teacher, divorced and has one son, she founded an association after the January 14 Revolution;

Kouka, a 25-year old woman from Sidi Bouzid, optician, single; her father is a bailiff (used to be a Senator) and her mother was a secondary school teacher before shifting to school nursing. She started blogging in January 2011.

Lobna is a 38-year old woman from Mateur; agricultural engineer, single, her father was a photographer before he died, her mother is a housewife; she joined an opposition party in 2000;

Manel, a 36-year old woman, Ph.D researcher in political science, lawyer and single; her father was a police officer and her mother used to work in a Ministry, both are apolitical; she joined an association in 2011;

Mehdi is a 33 year old man, Ph.D Researcher, single; his parents are apolitical farmers; he started cyber-activism in 2006;

Moez, a 35-year old man from Tunis, engineer in microelectronics, his father was a dentist, his mother worked in an administration and both are apolitical; Moez is single and tried to create an association in 2011 but his project failed; he is now active in another association;

Mohamed Ettounsi, a 34 year old man, computer engineer, lives with a partner and is father of three children, cyber-activist;

Mouna, a woman aged 38, originating from Zarzis and lives in Tunis; she works as a computer and management technician in a company based in Tunis, single, her father is an illiterate immigrant in France and her mother is an illiterate housewife. She joined a political party as a secretary;

Nidhal, a 36 year old man, engineer, married and father of a child, cartoonist; he integrated cyber-activism in 2011;

Nour, a 33-year old woman from Tunis, university computer teaching assistant, married and mother of three children; she joined an association in 2011;

Raoudha, a 60-year old woman, from Mateur but lives in Tunis, she is a retired school orientation counselor, married with a labor union activist, two children, activist since her university years, and president of a women’s association;

Sadika, a 35-year old woman, Ph.D. researcher in sociology, single, her parents are apolitical, has been active in a women’s association since 2000;
Safia, a 49-year old woman, holds a B.A in law and an M.A in management; she works in real estate, married and has two children; her father was a lawyer and her mother is a housewife (secondary school level); she started blogging in 2006 and became active in the field in 2011;

Samira, a 46-year old woman, holds an M.A in public and financial law, lawyer and single; her father was an elementary school teacher and her mother is a housewife (elementary school level); she joined an association in 1995;

Sana, a 33-year old woman from Menzel Bourguiba, holds an undergraduate degree in English, unemployed, married with an elementary school teacher active in an extreme leftist party, mother of two children and is currently pregnant; her father worked in a farm and her mother is a housewife, both are apolitical; she was first active within the students' association then integrated her extreme leftist party in 2005;

Sarra, a 44-year old woman, holds an M.A. in management, and works as a trainer, she is married to an engineer and is mother of two children; her father was a chemist and her mother a teacher. She joined a political party in 2011.

Selim, an 18-year old man from Tunis, student and single; his father and mother are secondary school teachers, he joined the cyber-dissident group TAKRIZ when he was 13 years (in 2007) and is one of the cyber-activists arrested on January 6, 2011;

Sinda, a 24-year old woman from Tunis, student, her father was a militant in Ennahdha party, she is single and has been active in Ennahdha since 2011;

Thouraya, a 26-year old woman from Gafsa, is currently a Master student, engaged with a militant of her own party, her father worked at the Phosphate Company and her mother is a housewife, she joined an unrecognized left opposition party in 2006;

Zeineb, a 32-year old woman from Tunis, holds a B.S in computer science, works as a journalist, she is single, her father was an apolitical shopkeeper, she started blogging in 2009, and presents herself as a feminist cyber-activist.
Before the January 14, 2011 Revolution, relations between the State and citizens were literally degraded. Under the authoritarian regime of the deposed president Z. Ben Ali, citizens were either subordinates of a person representing and exercising irrevocable authority (tyranny, divine or absolute monarchy, dictatorship), or fully disengaged from the public domain and huddled up in their private spheres. This retreat was confirmed by several research studies and surveys on the political participation of youth. According to results of the 2010 National Consultation on Youth conducted by the National Youth Observatory, 8.4% only of the 9926 responders aged 18-29 years were engaged in a civil society organization. Out of 783 responders, 43% were engaged in political parties, 7.4% in associations and 4.6% in labor unions. These figures reflect the lack of interest in politics on the part of youth, because of risks this activity entails. In fact, 48% of all responders stated that they did not participate because that was not allowed.

56 Imed Melliti and Dorra Mahfoudh Draoui, De la difficulté de grandir Op.cit., p. 273
57 These data are for indication only. As the national consultation conducted in 2010 under Ben Ali was obviously biased, we must be very cautious with these figures. First, we are not sure about responders’ actual perception of Civil Society, and then the total number of civil society affiliations was 9926, while 783 only claimed they were members of political parties. Therefore, party affiliations seem to be oddly high compared to other affiliations (unions and associations); we also don’t know whether this rate concerns all responders or only those stating they were civil society activists. We may question conditions surrounding the execution of this consultation and responders’ profile. We also note that the civil society affiliation rate dropped from 18% to 8.4% between the 3rd and 4th Consultations, i.e. between 2006 and 2010, and we may need to know the reasons thereof. Was this due to an age-range difference? (15-24 years in the 3rd and 18-29 years in the 2nd), or did many young people actually withdraw from civil society between consultations?
Chapter 1. Emergence of a new form of political participation: 
Cyber-activism and citizen activism

Traditional and new forms of young women’s political engagement in a transitional context Tunisia as example

Table 2. Cross Tabulation gender * political party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oui</td>
<td>Non</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Cross Tabulation gender * civil society affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oui</td>
<td>Non</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>4366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>4723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>837</td>
<td>9089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Youth Observatory– 4th national consultation on Youth

Risk constitutes a key variable in explaining youth’s lack of interest in politics. The climate of political violence and oppression prevailing under Ben Ali conspicuously increased costs of engagement in the opposition. While literature shows that risk is not always the direct and single reason for the desertion of engaged activists\(^\text{58}\), it remains true that it inhibits collective and unconscious militant ambitions. However, the January 14 Revolution led by disillusioned youth denied the Youth’s disengagement theory. The 2008 uprisings in the central western mining basin in Gafsa were led by an “unstructured working class and socially and politically deprived youth\(^\text{59}\).” Passage from a depoliticized mindset to revolutionary actions and the emergence of participation practices identified by political science as non-conventional deserve further study.

The political emulation marking the period stretching between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011 is slowly leaving room for the enforcement of citizenship. There is shift from an emotional and identity register (national belonging, empathy towards murdered or tortured co-citizens, anger for injustice), which certainly and strongly contributed to popular mobilization, to a more abstract and rational register: citizenship\(^\text{60}\). Dominique Schnapper admits that citizenship “is based on asserting the equality of the civil, juridical and political rights of men, though men’s historical origins and religious beliefs are different as are their economic and social conditions. Citizenship confirms the value of the Rule of Law and respect of human rights to

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humanly organize relationships between men, while their social world experience is constructed on rivalries and conflicts, where the stronger very often forces upon the weakest.”

Elections held on October 23, 2011 represented the first opportunity offered to Tunisians after the January 14, 2011 Revolution to enjoy citizenship’s fundamental right: the vote. Nevertheless, the abstention rate in the National Constitutional Assembly elections was very high, as 52% only of the eligible population voted, including 6% young voters. On the other hand, protest movements have literally become pandemic after the Revolution: strikes, petitions, demonstrations, public speaking and on social networks, engagement in collective fighting actions, etc. Protest movements do not fall in the scope of representative democracy. O. Fillieule stresses in this regard political science’s reluctance to integrate the analysis of protests, due to the prescriptive theory of representative democracy, which conventions imply that social demands need to go through a set of filters, crowned by the action of vote. Such practices include cyber-activism, street protests, sit-ins, strikes, roadblocks, petitions, etc … identified by surveyors as “citizenship engagement”, which is different on the one hand from the “conventional” political engagement, and on the other from passive citizenship which fate is determined by political representatives.

Do these new forms of action and expression, breaking with Youth’s institutionalized and organized collective actions, reconfigure relations between individuals, the State and society?

By focusing on cyber-activism, we try to highlight logics inherent to militant practices that were invisible before the January 14, 2011 Revolution, comparing it with conventional political participation. In a second phase, we will try to understand to which extent and how this practice may put in question representative democracy. Finally, we will try to explore how individuals consider themselves to be cyber-activists and take ownership of processes making of cyber-activism a full political activity.

SECTION I. CYBER-ACTIVISM: ATTEMPT TO DEFINE A PRACTICE

Cyber-activism is an assortment of political activism, journalism and art expression (videos, posts, caricatures, music, etc.). Blogs, Facebook and Twitter accounts constitute media platforms enabling the public broadcast of statuses, articles, news, songs, caricatures, videos, and poems with political or social contents.

In order to avoid confusion, it is necessary to clearly make the distinction between cyber-activism/cyber dissidence and the use of social media by ordinary citizens as a platform for participation in public life. It constitutes a civic engagement “revealed in informal conversation and exchange networks where citizens learn to express their feelings and to take position about issues of public interest.”

This last form of participation cannot be assimilated to activism, as it involves isolated individuals occasionally engaged in specific causes.

61 Ibid. p. 97-98.
In this regard, Malcolm Gladwell notes that “social networks are extraordinarily efficient to increase participation, but they can achieve this only by reducing the motivation level required by participation. 

Gladwell’s observation allows us to clarify two main differences between cyber-activism and engagement sustainability rates.

Haithem Mekki, cyber-activist: “Today, everyone believes they are cyber-activists, it’s just trendy, and gives the impression to gain back wasted time. It’s just an illusion to stay home and have the impression to be revolutionary or militant […] Cyber-activists do the same as ordinary militants but on the Internet and not on the Rock of Socrates.”

If cyber-activism is a form of militant activism, it would be necessary to investigate similar and dissimilar features shared with conventional political participation. The first distinctive element in cyber-activism is the absence of the “quest for power” or “disinterest”. As a new culture of protest, cyber-activism is defined as a countervailing power aiming at monitoring the performance of political representatives.

On the other hand, cyber-activists usually hold negative perceptions towards party structures. In fact, we noted in our responders’ replies a binary and simplistic vision of politics. They oppose politics in the strict sense of the term characterized by the manipulation of public opinion and other constraints (certainly inherited from the former regime) to the sphere of militant cyber-dissidence, defined by sincerity and freedom. The critical view held by cyber-activists about political parties leads us to review a hypothesis that was partly put in question by the Revolution: Youth’s lack of interest in politics. The Revolution indeed showed that young people were interested in politics but at the same time proved that they resented conventional participation structures.

Various forms of participation share this position: access to power (characteristic of the political domain) as opposed to militant activism representing a counter-balance to power (specific to the militant sphere). Our analysis shows that cyber-activists’ practices relate to militant activism and not to politics. Cécile Pêchu defines militant activism (component of the political sphere) by opposing it to party structures. It is characterized by resentment towards political parties’ quest for legitimate political authority, and calling for “activism for the sake of activism” and hence the...
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...continues on the next page...

survey shows that the choice for cyber-activism responds to an ethical need for freedom, and the desire to get rid of hierarchy characterizing party structures.

Alia, a 36-year old woman from Tunis, Ph. D in Marketing, works as a journalist and is single, her father is a car dealer and her mother is a middle manager; both are apolitical; she became a cyber-activist in 2005: “in a party, you’re labeled, you can’t make your point anymore. Self-criticism is prohibited. In parties, leaders decide and all others obey.”

The dynamics of cyber-active engagement is opposed to affiliation to parties, which implies full membership and adherence to the party’s orientation and organization and a considerable time allocation. We may compare cyber-activists to the “full militant” profile described by Jaques Ion as: “the one who puts at risk his own life as a soldier entirely devoted to his cause. Formed within the group, which becomes above all, promoted thanks to it, and therefore donates himself and may even sacrifice his private life, neglecting the present to better prepare for the future […]. The entire individual is required, but at the same time the private person is rarely valorized, as the collective entity can prevail only when personal features are turned off.” This definition stresses various elements characterizing conventional activism: obedience to hierarchy requiring suppressing the individual to the profit of the collective, and the very high investment degree that is required. In fact, one of the key conditions to have access to politics is time availability. But full investment is even more difficult for women under the pressure of the double working day (reconciliation between professional life and household tasks).
On the other hand, in conventional activism, quitting constitutes a very high price with regard to investments made on activism activities and in the view of party members who may consider withdrawers as traitors. On the other hand, disengagement costs in cyber-activism are far less due to the absence of hierarchy and loose ties linking members of the virtual community.

Cyber-activism is characterized by the absence of hierarchy preventing the development of activists’ personal development. This type of activism preserves individual autonomy. But while the use of the Internet spares time by avoiding long trips to attend meetings (often long) and offers direct access to information, it does not reconcile between private and public lives, which is also the case of conventional activism. This lies the biggest difference between cyber-activism and “citizen participation” on the web, where we can participate simply by clicking on “Like” or sharing a link without leaving one’s couch.

SECTION II. CYBER-ACTIVISM: AN INDICATOR OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY FOR YOUTH?

Cyber-activists’ perceptions of politics reflect their suspicions about representative democracy. While they are interested in politics and tend to participate, they proclaim their repulsion towards politics as an exercise of power, founded on the achievement of corrupt individual politicians. “Politics” for them refers necessarily to cheating.

The erosion theory and endangerment of Western democracies is increasingly important in political science works. This crisis is not only reflected in the decline of citizen activities, but in citizens’ acts of defiance towards their elected representatives, revealing an obvious lack of confidence.

In Western countries, probation of democracy over time has led to this crisis. The long years of democratic experience has shown limits, confirming for example that democracy was a matrix for the exclusion tragedy, as described by Francis Farrugia. How can we interpret the

71 The weakness of links is not systematic. Some situations, mainly in times of crisis and repression, may reinforce group solidarity within the virtual community. This is for instance the case of Ferida who was arrested by police because of her activism on the Net and supported by the bloggers’ community. The fact that some bloggers acting anonymously have gone public to support her is one reason for her to continue activism “I would let them down if I gave up.”

72 This crisis is not limited to a specific category but seems to be widespread throughout society; it is not specific to Tunisia. In European democracies, the notion of representative democracy is put in question today and is mainly reflected in the loss of interest in politics on the part of youth and an increasing use of demonstrations (please see: Anne Muxel, « La participation des jeunes : soubresauts, fractures et ajustements », Revue Française de Science Politique, Vol. 52, n°5, 2002, pp. 521-544.). The emergence of initiatives such as OpenGov and pirat parties reflect a crisis at the level of political representation.

existence of this crisis, especially among youth, in a country undergoing democratic transition? How does it manifest? And what are the visions and values underpinning citizen practices calling for democratic resurgence?

The emergence of this crisis in Tunisia after January 14, 2011 is not necessarily reflected in concrete and well-thought alternatives, such as claims to set up participatory structures, as is the case of some nascent initiatives: OpenGov⁷⁴ and Souti Nouaslou⁷⁵. They express a societal need for transparency and accountability required from political decision makers. According to Mohamed Ettounsi, co-founder, OpenGov is a company aiming at ensuring participatory democracy complying with the ideals that technology can finally achieve.

Mohamed Ettounsi, a 34 year old man, computer engineer, living with a partner and father of three children, cyber-activist. “I do not have my new way for making politics, which is a little …. which is not participatory, an ageing democracy with non representative leaders. Democracy has never been practiced as it was thought in the beginning. There are not only Greek philosophers, there is also the far-eastern world; there is a definition of democracy; in India, there is a democracy. Practically, that was not possible, we can’t invite the entire population to sit in Parliament, to listen to everyone and to elect what we call today collective intelligentsia. This model has never been implemented, with the exception of Belgium which could survive one year with no Government, because its institutions are very open, and they have an e-administration or an e-Government.

Marking a break with an abominated authoritarian regime, the transition phase is characterized by the considerable increase of citizens’ aspirations and expectations for change, which increases the disenchantment process. As stated by Tocqueville: “It is not always when we go from bad to worse that we come across a Revolution. People having for long borne without any complaint and as if they did not exist the most oppressive laws may often violently reject them when they get lighter.”⁷⁶ Inspired from Tocqueville’s analysis, the notion of relative frustration suggests that the gap between expectations and the actual satisfaction level may excessively grow when the situation worsens after an improvement or an opening phase.⁷⁷

In the Tunisian context, this devolution is the perception of threats that the Revolution and freedoms gained by “political professionals” will be confiscated; for some, this was confirmed by the election of the National Constitutional Assembly – NCA. This electoral episode was for a large majority of our responders, and particularly for those not involved in conventional participation modes, a confirmation of their negative perception of politicians. The electoral campaign revealed manipulation of representative democracy, offering space for a new market where image, the notion of territory, the fight for positions and the race for profit prevail over civic virtues. Consequently, elections represented a rapid disenchantment about the political game.

Selim, 18, from Tunis, student and single; his father and mother are secondary school teachers; both are apolitical; he joined the cyber-

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⁷⁴ http://www.opengov.tn/fr/
⁷⁵ http://www.souti.org/
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Dissident group TAKRIZ when he was 13 (in 2007) and is one the cyber-activists arrested on January 6, 2011: “all politicians are dishonest, they do all they can for their own interest and I am sure they do nothing by conviction. Even the so-called opposition parties did nothing and were part of Ben Ali’s propaganda, I can understand they were bound to, but they were not convinced. This is why I decided not to join any party, even if I knew some members of ETTAJDID Party who really hated Ben Ali. They did not have my freedom on the Internet, and the freedom of being anonymous.”

We have indeed noted a strong belief among responders that the universal vote as a mechanism allowing people to govern themselves is an illusion. People blame politicians for expressing—deliberately or not—their desire to get to power. Competition to reach power positions in the State, which is a constituting element of representative democracy, has become a discriminating criteria as it would imply the prevalence of individual and/or partisan interests’ over the general interest.

Farida, a blogger, single, aged 35, is a Theatre Teacher and has engaged in blogging since the Gafsa mining basin’s events. She is very well known for her engagement and risks she took under Ben Ali: “I discovered Ettajdid Party in my blogging activity; I was for some time attracted by the different music it produced, the boldness of its journalists, the audacity of its politicians and the party’s discourse was not ordinary. This is what I liked in this party, but I could not make the step to join the party, I may be scared of parties or something … at the end of the day, we see the same faces, before or after Ben Ali, very cynical dinosaurs dominating politics. They are afraid of the new generation which can adhere to parties only if it agrees to serve dinosaurs. I was for instance very disappointed by the last congress of Ettajdid Party when they said: “we will have no management anymore, we will create a party coalition.”

Resorting to protests, as a form of citizen expression cannot be explained only by disenchantment and the necessity to constitute a counter-balance, a requirement to protect the Revolution. Practices comply with an ethical conception of freedom and individuality.

Our survey conducted with youth engaged in these two participation forms confirm the awkwardness felt by youth and their feeling for not being represented in conventional participation structures. Their young militant activities in party structures confirm an already well-anchored idea that political parties mobilize youth for electoral stakes or for show-off, although they come from militant families. As for those engaging in protest activities (association of unemployed university graduates, and especially cyber-activists), their adverse relations with political parties (some of them even had brief deceiving experiences) are motivated by their ethics for freedom and individuality and not by their feeling of exclusion from decision making.

The difference between protests and conventional political practices is the absence in the first of the quest for power, in other terms the “lack of interest”. As a new culture of protest, cyber-activism is defined as a counter-balance aiming at monitoring political representatives. The citizen engagement in associations, in the blogosphere, or in street mobilizations responds to the need for freedom and emancipation. The vertical hierarchy of parties and the partisan loyalty obligation constitute for them a major obstacle discouraging people to adhere. On the other hand, web-based protests, street demonstrations and activism in associations preserve individuals’ autonomy and moral integrity.
Basma, a 26-year old woman from Tunis chairs an association. She holds a Master Degree in Political Science; her father is a university teacher and her mother is a middle manager; Basma is single and started association activism in France where she studied and founded her association in 2011: "we've never joined an opposition party because we considered that we were not represented by the then existing opposition parties; not only there were no Youth parties and even youth would not join anyway, parties represented a wealthy elite … I must say we want another approach to politics. For me and for all those who created this movement, we believe that politics means being interested in public affairs, and hence all citizens must be interested in their country. You take care of your country by flagging a damaged road, and you ask the State to repair it because you pay taxes, and this is for me also politics; you must hold people accountable but at the same time you must contribute to your community on the local or national level etc. then when I say that I or we hold political positions not necessarily to the right or to the left, not at all, our association is on the contrary mixed, the only thing you must do is invest yourself, share your thoughts and take firm positions if need be, and this is the way I look at politics, it must be done with citizens and for citizens, it’s neither a matter of position nor of … ambition.

While some consider these practices to be a threat to democracy, according to Rosanvallon, they constitute a necessary complement to electoral representation mechanisms, compensating their difficulties and reinforcing confidence, but not questioning representative democracy.

SECTION III. FROM UNDERGROUND TO STREAMLINING: THE POLITICAL PROFESSIONALIZATION OF CYBER-ACTIVISTS IN PROSPECT

The January 14 Revolution has conferred glory and notoriety to the web, by legitimizing cyber-dissidents and turning them into true political actors, after being considered part of the marginal protest culture before the Revolution.

Due to censorship imposed by the former Regime, cyber-activism was previously confined in the culture of protest, but today constitutes a sub-culture giving new life to the standard militant action. Amateurism is increasingly filling for professionalism, and the ability to portray the world is no more reserved to political professionals, but is also open to ordinary citizens having direct access to public opinion through the web.

However, the major role played by cyber-activists in the Revolution –at least in mobilizing and relaying information collected from the media and the public opinion – made us focus on the legitimization process of this practice, or the actual recognition of cyber-activism as an integral political/militant form of participation.

Legitimacy refers for us to what Max Weber defines as “a state that is justified to exist.” In other terms, if something is recognized by others, it may be considered legitimate. In “traditional” politics, recognition
is granted internally by peers (within the party structure) through a nominations system, and externally through elections. While elections constitute a requirement to ensure the legitimacy of political actors, they remain well insufficient. For R. Rangeon, “legitimacy is later enforced by the elected representatives when their capacity to speak and act on behalf of their constituents is recognized.” 79

In the light of the classical opposition between “political professionals and laymen” 80, new players (cyber-activists) are emerging, increasingly investing the public space and disturbing this harmony. In this regard, we may consider that the January 14 Revolution, by sparking political awareness has also placed the “political demarcation” issue at stake. This issue raises the question of legitimizing cyber-activism as a political/militant practice. Legitimacy requires recognition of the players’ political qualifications (capacity to make political comments and to forge others’ opinions).

One fundamental issue we try to answer in this research is to define politics and the types of activity that may be referred to as “political participation”.

In conventional participation forms, engagement is naturally classified political participation, while politics is usually associated with party-based participation; cyber-activists, and to some extent activists in associations are dubious when defining their practices and hang back on calling them “political”. Responders instantaneously reply “citizen engagement” or “citizen participation”. This type of replies does not necessarily mean that responders fully dissociate their activities from politics. Responders often later stress the highly political character of their practices, emphasizing the fact that their contributions are different from party-based participation methods.

The media and inter-community recognition/denial modalities will be thoroughly analyzed in the second chapter dealing with Action Taking. Our goal is to know to which extent the legitimization process (through recognition mechanisms) has standardized protest practices? What are the strategies adopted today by cyber-activists to maintain their specificities and prevent them from being streamlined and mixed up with other genres, with regard to the massive access of new players to the web sphere.

As we examined the cyber-activist’s identity construction process based on confronting the otherness and looking for others’ recognition (by the media, by the cyber-activists community, by Internet users, labeling, identification and group solidarity), we were able to identify modalities through which cyber-activists try to codify a practice supposed to resist standardization.

### Revolutionary Legitimacy

The participation of cyber-activists in the time of the revolution constitutes the main element legitimizing this practice. In December 2010, in the heat of popular protests, Lina Ben Mhenni a Tunisian woman blogger and activist gave interviews to the French news

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channel France 24. Slim Amamou posted videos of popular meetings. Cyber-activists had been arrested few days before Ben Ali’s departure, hence giving a revolutionary character to people so far unknown by the large public. Idealized by the media and presented as doers of the Revolution, cyber-activists gained legitimacy giving them some notoriety in the sphere of cyber-dissidence. This authority is first reflected in their power to recognize who can pretend to be a cyber-dissident or not.

Hamadi Kaloutcha, a 33-year old man from Ksar Helal, lives in Tunis, works as part-time journalist, studied political science overseas then shifted to Marketing (did not go through to Master Degree), married and has no children, joined cyber-dissidence in 2003: “in cyber-dissidence, we were arrested. Ben Ali picked out the leaders: those he considered to be the leaders. They actually included people who upset him the most. I can tell you that on Facebook, there are totally unknown people who were remarkably useful and efficient. No one has heard of them after the Revolution, while others by far less efficient, who had never done anything and who today show off as “flagships”. H for example who introduces herself as a cyber-activist! Please show me any subversive text. Give me subversive texts that can convince me today that you’re part of the community. Are you kidding me? I looked at H’s blog and could not find what she was talking about.

For cyber-activists who were active before the Revolution, their awareness about the purely political dimension of their activity on the web came after their interaction with social actors. They were first arrested by police, then idealized and referred to as cyber-activist by the media, and by virtual or real interactions with other activists on the Net (mainly to learn specific communication techniques and strategies, etc…)

Hamadi Kaloutcha: “I finally knew that everyone represented a group [cyber-activists arrested on January 6, 2011, and he was one of them], but as far as I am concerned, I was not part of any of them, neither TAKRIZ nor others, I am a Rhinoceros. The cop told me, and I was surprised to hear this “you’re an opinion leader on Facebook”. So I am an opinion leader on Facebook! (laughing) I told him “Me, an opinion leader? How can you say this?”; he brought a table to show me what I didn’t know about my impact, etc. The truth is that this came as a full surprise to me! I got to know that business and all the stuff around. Before, I thought I was just one of many, I didn’t know I could do anything on my own. And here it is, cyber-dissidence. They made me do it, I didn’t look for it”

Nevertheless, for newcomers and due to the loss of media interest in this practice, recognition by others is made through the “cyber-activists’ community.” The use of the word “community” here is very pertinent, as recognition of membership to a virtual community depends on the values and principles shared by this developing community. Codes are being defined by instigators mainly to “regulate” passage from the status of the Net ordinary user to that of cyber-activist. This practice therefore reflects a professionalization process that is almost similar to what we see in the traditional political sphere marked by the separation between professionals and laymen (or common citizens).

**Field legitimacy versus the legitimacy of numbers**

The use of the Internet by political parties, whether formal, using web pages explicitly affiliated to parties, or concealed under borrowing names or presumably “neutral” groups, has added a lot to an already
existing confusion between cyber-dissidence and “cyber-collaboration”. On the other hand, many people have joined the oppositional field after January 14, 2011. Even the “common” use of Facebook as a social network has considerably changed, as everyone started sharing political information, expressing thoughts and making political analyses. The revolutionary legitimacy held by active cyber-activists before and after the revolution is now put at stake by the legitimacy of the number, put forward by newcomers.

Hamadi Kaloutcha: “let’s say that there is no fact to be dissident anymore because the sphere of dissidence has finally grown, and that there is a new wave of freedom and the landscape has totally changed. Today however, media is doing more or less this job, and that was not the case before. Even our press is still wire-based with no true analysis, but work is done. Before, we used to be one family on the Internet, we would talk about thorny topics in the great silence imposed by Ben Ali who had control over all media outlets, etc… There was total vacuum. After January 14, everyone started to jabber on the Internet turning the Net into a general hubbub. It has become very difficult to shout more than others. The field has totally changed and we no more talk about the same thing.”

With this change in context, cyber-activists draw from their revolutionary legitimacy a symbolic authority enabling them to review and finalize the cyber-activist’s profile.81

This profile is not organized in an executive document. It can be observed through positions taken by interviewed cyber-activists and through online exchanges we have been monitoring on Facebook.

The online observation of exchanges made between Tunisian cyber-dissidents clearly shows the importance of field activism in legitimizing cyber-activists’ political actions. Big Trap Boy, a currently prominent cyber-activist, published a note on Facebook criticizing recourse to violence by militants of the Popular Front during an anti-violence conference. Internet users’ reaction was to put in question the legitimacy of Big Trap Boy blaming him for “being stuck to his computer screen and not on the ground”.

The influence of cyber-activists on public debate seems to be key issue in the logic of activism on the Net, particularly since the Revolution. In fact, the increasing competition on the web and the loss of essence due to the dissolution of cyber-activists’ first vocation, i.e. struggling against media black-out by conveying information to the public, have led to major changes on the ground.

One of the main transformations noted is the shift to Facebook and Twitter at the expense of blogs. Blogs are now reserved to a category of specialized Internet users, somewhat sharing the same values or viewpoints, or in other terms well bought-in for the cause. The logic to influence public opinion is the main reason for this change. In fact, considering themselves to be opinion leaders or social safeguards, Facebook provides them with the possibility to have a much larger audience. Mehdi is 33 years old, teaches at the University, still single and became cyber-active after the Revolution. Well aware of his ability to guide public opinion, he is proud to show the rate of his influence.

81 An initiative for the transmission of cyber-militant know-how and for the development of cyber-activism charter was launched by the Tunisian Bloggers Association, including 10 male and female bloggers. This initiative has not been enforced yet.
measured with the clout score or to show off the number of shares on his Facebook posts.

Mehdi, 33 years, lives in Tunis, Ph. D Researcher, university teacher, single; his parents are apolitical farmers; he joined cyber-dissidence in 2006. “As I noticed that when I talked others listened, I decided to talk. I am no more active on blogs, but rather more on Facebook and Twitter, as others listen. I know that on Twitter, I am followed by 10,000 followers including activists, major NGOs and world groups, American Secretaries of State, Ministers, etc. I know that when I say the weather is gloomy, people will read it, that when I write something, it will have an impact, which incites me to write international [...], we [cyber-activists], can introduce any topic in the public debate. If we want the public debate to focus tomorrow on Bob the Sponge, we can do it, each individually, be it Aziz, Haitham, or a journalist from NAWAT; we know that if we want to mobilize, we can do it.

Influence obviously procures satisfaction to those who hold it. Although it constitutes a major reward to activists, replacing the symbolic pride of all the risks taken before the Revolution, influence is presented by Mehdi as a result of the new militant mission of cyber-activists: be the “conscious of the Revolution”. In addition to the large reputation acquired during the Revolution, there was a “lack of interest” on the part of cyber-activists.

“A politician will be in a strategic calculation logic. He will somehow get dirty and will lose some purity. Politicians cannot be unanimously appreciated with some exceptions. However, cyber-activists can have a reputation of purity, a Don Quichotte notoriety, with no fear or grief, who are not corrupt and don’t get in any type of calculation. They represent the conscious of the Revolution and even that of the Nation. They are conscientious objector”

Fig 3. Post of the blogger « Z » denouncing blogs’ desertion

Debat Tunisie: I note that for some weeks now, my blog has been dominating the most read articles page www.Tn-blogs.com which should be very flattering, but the blogosphere production has considerably regressed and lost its past “competitiveness”. This shows that the pre-Revolution bloggers have all migrated to social networks preferring 140-character tweets and Facebook posts to critical analysis. Without much nostalgia to the anti-purple “e-hideout era”, we can miss dynamism and synergy between bloggers, and the debate culture they generated.
Today, although censorship has gone, this emulation literally disappeared to the profit of an abundance of tweets and FB posts that no more interact. Paradoxically, now that debates can be constructive, they have almost all disappeared …

Values of cyber-activism

All cyber-activists are not on the ground, in demonstrations, in sit-ins, or looking for information to share. Recognition modalities, or the admission of new members in this sphere requires sharing some specific values. One of the most important values we identified is independence from political parties to ensure freedom of expression. When Slim Amamou, a Tunisian cyber-dissident and one initiator of the “Nhar Ala Ammar”82 happening joined Mohamed Ghannouchi’s Government83, his act was very badly perceived by his cyber-activist colleagues. Engaging in politics can in fact be considered as a failure to observe the lack of interest principle guiding cyber-activism. Mehdi is a cyber-activist and is proud to claim his independence from parties, which allows him to criticize them all with no distinction. Party engagement is seen by cyber-activists as an impediment for the freedom of expression.

82 March held on May 22, 2010 in Tunis to protest against Internet censorship.
83 Prime Minister under Ben Ali since 1999, Mohamed Ghannouchi declares himself Acting President in a TV speech given after the fall of Ben Ali. This situation lasted for 24 hours until definitive vacancy was officially declared by the Constitutional Council which appoints to this position the Speaker of the Parliament Foued Mbazaa in compliance with article 57 of the Tunisian Constitution. He forms a National Union Government on January 17, 2011 but resigns on February 27, 2011 after violent demonstrations lasting several days.

In fact, one key characteristic of cyber-activists is to advocate freedom and rights regardless of political affiliation. As they supported a rapper, Weld 15, arrested and sentenced to two years in jail for a song comparing policemen to dogs, the arrest and bad treatment inflicted to Salafis involved in the assault against the U.S. Embassy was also denounced by cyber-activists in the name of freedoms.

The online observation of cyber-dissidents’ standpoints and exchanges clearly indicates that these elements constitute recognition and acceptance criteria for activists on the Net.
Conclusion of the first Chapter

This Chapter does not specifically address women’s issues, but conditions required for the emergence of militant practices, which seem to mark youth’s disappointment of politics. By comparing it to conventional politics, we have tried to highlight features characterizing this form of participation (individualism, freedom of expression, deliverance from submission to hierarchy, subversion, loss of interest). The changing perception about politics contributes to the challenge now facing participatory democracy. There are calls to implement participatory democracy in Tunisia, still confined to some initiatives, such as OpenGov, faced by the resistance of the elected members of the National Constitutional Assembly in trying to enforce transparency, or the Bawsala Association (Compass), prevented to attend the Assembly’s sessions when it started denouncing the representatives’ absenteeism.

While we are not about to find a solution to this crisis, it seems essential for us to launch a debate about the problem. Other democratic models have been able to go around verticality problems or the exclusion of laymen from power, but they still have other problems to go through. Participatory experiences in many countries, mainly in France, have shown that the exclusion of laymen still persists and constitutes a particularly tough problem facing representative democracy 84.

In analyzing the evolution of post-revolution cyber-activism, we see that laymen are once again excluded from public debate. Ordinary citizens do participate, but their participation is limited to expressing their thoughts, guided by opinion leaders certainly “uninterested” but well informed. Doesn’t this constitute an elite-mass separation confirming the dispossession of laymen by political professionals?

Taking in account the major differences identified between cyber-activism and "conventional" participation in terms of relations with politics, we will discuss in the following chapter the different Action Taking approaches used by each participation model, based on a comparative approach.

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CHAPTER 2

Distinct modes of political engagement / activism: conventional participation and cyber-activism
As stressed by Fillieule, the notion of career\textsuperscript{84} when applied to political engagement “enables us to understand how, in each phase of the lifecycle, attitudes and behaviors are determined by past attitudes and behaviors, which will in turn condition future opportunities, hence defining engagement periods across the lifecycle.”

The “career” concept is particularly pertinent to determine how a social actor makes the initial step to engage in politics, which means how a predisposition is transformed in action, and the way he/she puts together the reasoning of his/her social practices.

A predisposition for engagement refers to “a trend, a leaning, a propensity” that may be accompanied by appetite or disgust towards politics. A predisposition is “a product incorporated in a past socialization (explicit or implicit), and can only be constructed with time\textsuperscript{85}.” Consideration of time implies that a predisposition may be reinforced or weakened depending on “training”.

We noted that political or activist engagement is not simply a reproduction of family socializations (most responders come from apolitical families). Different secondary socializations are as important, if not more. On the other hand, political engagement very often constitutes a self-construction process and a personal development project, using political reconstruction “based on accumulated knowledge and established powers\textsuperscript{86}”. This is namely the case of cyber-activism, characterized by the detachment of the subject from the State and from standards and rules designed for the conventional political sphere. On the other hand, different experiences gone through by individuals (settlement abroad for studies, lack of regard, injustice, gender-based discrimination, poverty, etc…) contribute as much or more to socialization, described by Bourdieu as the incorporation of plans of action and action in the politicization process.

Without denying the role of initial socialization in inculcating action schemes and perceptions guiding individuals’ conduct and choices, this observation makes us lean towards the social experience suggested by François Dubet. This notion refers to individual and collective behaviors dominated by the heterogeneity of their constituting principles and by activities performed by individuals who have to account for their activities within this heterogeneity\textsuperscript{87}. The advantage of this definition is that it explains the way individuals make use of various action logics in their social engagements: the social integration logic (socialization), the strategic logic (individuals aim for objectives and rationally mobilize

\textsuperscript{84} “A succession of phases, behavioral changes and individual perspectives. Every phase requires an explanation and one cause acting in one phase of the sequence may have insignificant impact on another phase … the explanation of every phase constitutes one portion for the explanation of the final behavior … the variable predisposing an individual to engage in a specific phase may not take place because the individual may not have reached the process level that helps him make that step”. Howard Becker, Outsiders, op. cit., p. 45-46.


\textsuperscript{86} For Michel Foucault, power is immanent, it is not unified by the top, but is exercised in “local cells” (relations between penitent and confessor, child and educator ….). Michel Foucault, Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison, 1975, rééd. Gallimard, coll. « Tel », 2003.

\textsuperscript{87} François Dubet, Sociologie de l’expérience, Paris, Seuil, Coll. La couleur des idées, 1994, (273 pages) p. 15.
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Their means) and the subjectivization logic (individuals mobilize an imaginary for subjectivization).

Our goal is therefore to analyze the three action logics all together in order to understand our responders’ political/activist engagement:

1- Primary and secondary socializations will be considered as a dialectic process between socializing and socialized entities, and between the socialized and the social world. Based on the comprehensive problematic context, we will focus on the individual who will be considered as an acting subject, who acquires, evaluates, and actively adapts his perception patterns in the framework of social interactions, insisting on the effects of valorization, judgments and denigrations that can modify or maintain attitudes and behaviors acquired during childhood.

2- Individuals’ action strategies: For P. Bourdieu, the life form is “a system of predispositions acquired through implicit or explicit learning, operating as a system of generators and generating strategies”. The action strategy does not mean only knowing how to play (as conditioned by the life form), but also the way a social actor positions himself/herself and defines his/her position in a given context or in the social structure. The actor’s subjective stand, the way he/she interprets past experiences, the range of possibilities, his/her position and resources, the emotional relation with painful or happy experiences play a major role in guiding the strategy.

3- Subjectivization: It refers to the personality individual construction process, which is the personal work performed to acquire a political culture and to crystallize attitudes and political viewpoints through different social experiences conflicting with socialization. According to Foucault, emancipation constitutes a personal subjectivization project similar to existence aesthetics. We will therefore analyze elements mobilized by social actors in their own biographic construction.

The interactionist perspective adopted in this research tries to understand, based on responders’ stories, the way their interactions with others contributes in shaping their choices, attitudes, perceptions of the world, and to the construction of their identity. As stressed by Molly Andrews “the goal is not to reproduce what has actually happened in responders’ stories, but the way they remember this and ultimately the way they explain what actually happened.”

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze different modalities used by young women to engage in politics, by studying both the trajectories of women activists in traditional participation structures and experiences of women cyber-activists. We therefore plan to analyze both engagement predisposition systems, and when, why and how predispositions are actually translated in women activists’ effective engagement.

We will highlight modalities for the transmission or formation of predispositions to engagement. Is the difference between women choosing conventional engagement and others resorting to cyber-activism due to distinct predispositions, yielded by different


socialization and subjectivization processes? Taking in account the fact that we are specifically interested in this study in young women, it would be worth to explore the impact of gender and age-based socializations on predispositions for political and active engagement, and the different forms of engagements.

SECTION I. PREDISPOSITIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT: FAMILY HERITAGE AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

People engaged in traditional structures usually come from activist families (reproduction effect of family socialization) or were members of union or party structures during university study years.

Hela, a 32-year old woman, feminist activist member of the Tunisian Democratic Women Association –ATFD– is a quasi ideal and typical case of reproduction. She describes her engagement as a natural outcome being the daughter and grand-daughter of activists. She experienced meetings, political gatherings and demonstrations since she was five. After a phase of rejection during adolescence due to an exhaustion of activism, Hela started to be very active in associations since she turned 20, engaging in the ATFD, the Tunisian Cine Clubs federation, and a brief passage by UGET, the Tunisian Students Union. She describes her decision to engage as a “return to the cradle”, with reference to her family background. Her militant choices are shaped by her family heritage: feminism she inherited from her grandmother, a pioneer of the feminist movement in Tunisia, then from her mother, an also active militant in left-wing movements. Her engagement with the Tunisian Cine Clubs Federation reflects her desire to continue work initiated by leftist movements in the sixties and the seventies to which her parents contributed, but is also in line with her profile as a true heiress in charge of preserving family assets.

Hela : “It’s the same, it’s also a piece of heritage as my grandmother was a pioneer of the autonomous feminist movement then my mother was also an activist. But I don’t think that I engaged simply because my parents wanted me to. I made this choice on my own, I wanted it and engaging with the Tunisian Democratic Women’s Association was crucial for me at some point in my life, for being aware of all discriminations and inequalities facing women in their daily lives … I closely followed activities performed by the association, which was to me the most appropriate setting to advocate women’s freedoms and gender equality, and also because I consider ATFD to be a real school, a learning space, where one can share common values and principles about the feminist movement, this is how I became an activist. […] quite similarly I joined the Tunisian Cine Clubs Federation as I believe it constitutes an exchange forum, an open space that considerably contributed to the Tunisian leftist movement struggle in the sixties, the seventies and even in the eighties, and that we had to continue the struggle, as at some point, things were not clear in AFTCC, so a number of young people wanted to revive things and worked on putting them back on track.”

The case of Hela shows how familiarity with the world of activism and militant structures can facilitate action taking. This step may not be as easy when one is not familiar with this world and when the sense of activism is not already crystallized. In this regard, we
should mention her initial feminist standpoints, almost reflecting a conditioning process:

“I was then the first student and secretary general of a FB (Federal Bureau), the only activist member of an administrative council, I fought hard to have on my card a clear inscription of Female Member\textsuperscript{90} and not just Member عضو. I was told “how can you ask for this, that does not even exist in Arabic to feminize the term Member. I didn’t care and I would just add it myself on my card. Same applies for the title of Secretary General, as every time we were mentioned in releases or in any other document, every time they cited the Arts Faculty and would cite me as the Secretary General, they would use the male form of the title, and I would insist to use the female form. I literally had to fight for this.

Although the replication phenomenon exists, there are other illusive but important differences between responders in terms of activism/parenthood connections. Responders’ citizen practices and their perception of democracy are definitely shaped by their early learning, but their political attitudes may not be stable and are far from being a mere replication of what they have learnt in their families.

Bent Trad, a 32-year old woman, university teacher, single and daughter of union activists. Her parents’ affiliation with the Labor union directed her to UGET (the Students Union) when she first joined university. She also had a brief experience with the Tunisian branch of Amnesty International then with the Tunisian Cine Clubs Federation. Ideologically positioned on the left because of her family heritage, her own left activism experience led her to leave this universe that she believed was too close and dogmatic compared to her expectations and perceptions. By rejecting all forms of political affiliation, she keeps away from inherited standards that she considers to be constraining, and resorts to blogging, a practice that better corresponds to her subjectivity. Considered as a loophole, blogs represent a forum for the exchange of thoughts and beliefs and for the expression of one’s identity:

Bent Trad: In fact before I shifted to blogging, I was an active militant on the ground. I come from a militant family, my parents are labor union activists, but when I long thought about, that was not a choice, that’s where I’ve grown up, so in University I was with UGET, and at that time there were two students’ labor unions, one legal and the other not. I was in the one not recognized by the State, later I did some with Amnesty, not much and I quickly left. I wanted something much more active. I joined the Tunisian Cine Clubs Federation. In the last two years there were not, at least not for me, organizations that would fulfill my expectations. So I resorted to blogging. I launched mine in 2010 during the “7il Blog” campaign (start your blog) […] I left UGET because it offered me little, to join a communist party that turned out not to be my cup of tea; there were hyper dogmatic fellows, hyper cloistered; each has got his Koran. I read Marx and Lenin, and they allowed me to look differently at the World and at systems, but I noticed that Marx’ and Lenin’s works were considered almost like the Koran, which may lead to pretty shitty events such as El Kasba 2; that’s not the right way; the world moves on and develops. I can’t stand this. I say there are two

\textsuperscript{90} The word member/affiliate cannot be declined in the feminine form in Arabic. Even when we add the letter T to feminize the word, common usage wants the term member/عضو to be used only in the masculine form even in the case of women as is the case for the term Secretary General.
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Imen, a 32 year old woman, project assistant in an NGO and now divorced. She studied architecture and cinema (5-year university curriculum), her mother works in a public administration, her father is retired; she is an independent activist: it was very hard, very hard, and it was clear to me since I was six or seven, and here I understand what is dictatorship. I did not only see my father being arrested, I also saw many others living in my neighborhood. People, who were not necessarily ‘frightening’ or ‘threatening’ the system of State security. I started to understand that retaliation could affect everyone and that they may happen to us as well. They may affect anyone anytime. As soon as we say any little thing against the system, we are stigmatized, demonized and we can be subject to all forms of torture; we’re never spared”.

Samira is a 46 year old lawyer and member of the Young Lawyers Association. She considers her family to be politically engaged although it has no party preference. Her father used to oppose Bourguiba and was jailed for few months after independence while her younger brother became member of Ennahdha party, spent four months in jail and was eight years subject to judicial control. Samira’s family members often talk about politics at home, but independence from parties was a common code of conduct, with the exception of her brother who decided to join a party that was illegal. Experiences of political “injustice” against her father then her brother justify Samira’s late engagement in addition to her reluctance to join extremes, right and left, and UGET is somewhat like this: it’s a digest of people who don’t want to debate, who would fight to know whether Gamal Abdennassar was a chief or a leader, or whether Saddamm Hussein did this or that. A while ago I was in Manouba, and I saw with big astonishment that people were still waving photos of Saddam Hussein and Gamal Abdennassar while in fact I don’t think we should still be there”.

The case of Imen shows how confrontation with State violence can lead to crystallizing early views about politics and build a special desire for “protests”. Her father, a supporter of the Islamist movement Ennahdha, was arrested and jailed for four months. Her mother was a labor union activist. The politicization of her parents favored her activism predispositions. Imen started to be interested in politics since her young age by attending Islamists’ circles and meetings. After this short and brief Islamist experience, Imen’s political track took a literally opposite direction: Anarchism. Her mother, a labor union activist, did not share her husband’s political views and frowned on her daughter’s nascent religiosity. When her parents got divorced, Imen and her three brothers and sisters were raised by their mother, who replaced the father’s referential model. Her mother removed her scarf by force, after she was bound by her school teacher to wear it at the age of seven. Her sympathy towards leftist ideologies is drawn from her mother’s syndicalism and her popular background. She thought of joining UGET before even going to University. Although close to the Popular Front (a leftist coalition), she is not yet member of any party. She considers herself to be an independent activist, actively participates in demonstrations and sit-ins and engages with all causes matching her ideals. Her willingness to remain a free electron does not correspond to cyber-activists’ refusal to obey to structures. It is due to her anarchist beliefs and her rejection of all forms of power, that she looks at very unfavorably due to her early experience of her father’s imprisonment.

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political parties. In fact, as she saw her brother ruin his life for an early engagement, she did not want to engage in any activity before her studies were over. She never joined any political or union structure before her Master Degree. On the other hand, the family heritage of “independent opposition” directed Samira to associations and justify her reluctance to engage in parties even after the January 14, 2011 Revolution.

Samira, a 46-year old woman holding a Master Degree in Public and Financial Law, lawyer and single, her father was an elementary school teacher and her mother was a housewife (elementary school instruction); she joined an association in 1995: “What I learnt from my father and family is never to be member of the party in power. Never. We’ve always been independent”

Samira was not politicized during her university studies, and it’s only when she engaged in a Master program in Law that she first got in touch with the Young Lawyers’ Association. The culmination of her engagement was her participation in the association’s elections. Her brother’s connection with a prohibited movement excluded the entire family from politics, including from the most elementary participation form which is the vote. The possibility to vote she was offered by the association represented for her a way to get rid of exclusion.

Samira : “I remember very well elections held right after my twentieth birthday … and I did all I can to participate but they refused to put me on the list, and told me they would call me for the next elections but they never did. I finally found out that my entirely family and I could not receive voters’ cards because my brother was member of Ennahdha Party. Even my grandfather who had been receiving his voting card for twenty three years stopped receiving it. I was frustrated for not being able to participate in elections. I therefore joined the association’s elections and then felt I started to play a different role.”

SECTION II. SOCIALIZATION IN AN APOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT: ACTIVISM AS A SELF-CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

Many of our responders come from fully depoliticized environments, and no members of their families were or are active in politics, with the exception of some relatives affiliated with the RCD, more by opportunism than by conviction. Political affiliation, when existing, is often discredited and even denigrated by responders. There are no discussions about politics in small families or with relatives, and therefore there is no transmission of explicit political knowledge. Without denying the primary socialization’s role in inculcating action and perception patterns and guiding individual’s conduct and choices, this observation leads us to reconsider our theory stating that individuals are passive receivers. Socialization will be considered as a dialectic process between the socializing part and the socialized individual, and between the latter and the social world. Based on the comprehensive problematic context, we focused on individuals supposed to be active players, acquiring, evaluating and actively adapting perception patterns received in the framework of social interactions, and insisting on valorizations, judgments and denigration effects that can modify or maintain
attitudes and behaviors acquired in their childhood 91.

The shift from non political stand to party activism

When predisposition is not inspired by the family, it’s generally a school teacher, a peer student, or membership in school structures (scouts, school youth association and clubs) that stands behind interest in politics. this is the case of Thouraya from Gafsa, and second year Master student in Bank Economy. Thouraya is 26 years old and is married to an activist from the socialist party that she joined in 2006. Her father retired from the Gafsa Phosphate Company and her mother is a housewife. Touraya’s first contact with politics was built on the Marxist literature through her political economy teacher, member of the party and comrade with “an impressive career since he was in secondary school”.

When the family is not politicized, it may act on maintaining commitments by valorizing or encouraging practices or choices. However, for some responders, the fact that their parents have never done politics or talked about can constitute an obstacle hindering their engagement, as they may strongly oppose them when they hear of their affiliation to opposition parties.

91 If we focus on primary socialization in the family framework, because all responders agree that school played no role in instilling the culture of citizenship. When we ask them about the influence of school and particularly of history and civic education manuals, replies we got were sarcastic. Considering the discourse conveyed by these manuals to be useless is not a hazard and deserves study. This reception is very likely (that’s only a hypothesis) influenced by parents’ attitude towards politics and citizenship.

Thouraya is a 26 year old woman from Gafsa; Master Student engaged with an activist of the socialist party, her father worked at the Gafsa phosphate company and her mother is a housewife, she joined a non recognized leftist party in 2006: “My father and my mother were obviously not politicized, and have never joined the RCD, they are really away from politics as many other citizens, and they used to support anyone leading the country, that was my disagreement with my family, as had they been active in politics or in labor unions, they would have supported me”

Sana, a young 32-year old woman joined the Tunisian Workers Communist Party when she was 20. Her trajectory is a true example of how biographical elements can contribute to the formation of predispositions for politics. Her political engagement corresponds to a self-construction process nurtured in a family opposition pattern. Born in a poor and “chauvinist” family, made up of five girls and three boys, injustice experienced in her childhood shaped her opinions about the world and mainly about politics. Her father, a former resistant was violent with her mother who preferred boys to girls even when serving food. The gender-based social construction grants men the right and legitimacy to express their thoughts and the decision-making power in their families, relegating girls to lower social positions and limiting their schooling perspectives (her older sisters had to drop out from school). Sana’s experience is full of social injustice and inequalities based on gender, which incited her to engage in political activism, representing a way out of her totally different family context.

The father’s violence on the mother, the mother’s injustice toward girls, and the violence and jealousy shown by her brother were the catalyst for her revolt or as she described were her “revolutionary seeds”. The
us that in the seventies classes were split in two: leftist and the right wing, and that students would go out to the street, riot and face bullets, etc. and our teacher would tell us: why are you like this, why is this generation so unaware? don’t you read? Even in literature classes, she would bring us various books of Victor Hugo, Marx … she would bring us books we were not used to, she would prepare us for university … we went out for a walk, and 6th and 7th grade class students made all preparations and invited all school students to join, and we made a demonstration ending in a 3-day strike (no classes for three days) and we were beaten and arrested … Ben Ali’s police clubs were used against secondary school students chanting slogans in favor of Free Palestine and Zionists Out, slogans that had nothing to do with the regime. At that time we had not yet engaged in … “

The role played by the teacher (cited in the interview excerpt) in conveying interest in politics was determining. It echoed Sana’s revolt against injustice she had gone through. She was supported by union active teachers in her graduation year. These biographical elements played a major role in shaping her political orientation, especially that her brother who embodied the devil, was member of the RCD, the former party in power. She very early developed the idea that a system producing people like her brother can only be sinful. Past experiences are mobilized by Sana to interpret former injustice and failure episodes. In this regard, the fact that she was bound to do English at school while she wanted French represented an addition grievance against the system.

Although she had no political party affiliation when she first joined university, Sana knew she was leftist and did not want to join the RCD or UGET. But the social injustice she had gone through made her adhere to UGET’s ideals and get closer to the students’ union. The way
she explains the politicization of union activities reveals identification made by Sana between her claims as a student and union claims and demands. Students’ claims pertaining to their life conditions seem to mix with the students’ union’s claims.

“I followed their activities [UGET], and I got to know the boys, politics progressively came in my life […] in fact, students come with their social claims, then it’s you who would help him/her develop … you can’t separate politics from union activism, so you need to help the student develop to get to political claims, as union claims were picked up by the former political regime, that of Ben Ali.”

Without becoming a full member of the students’ union, Sana engaged in speeches, debates and activities held by UGET, where she found her personal satisfaction. Speeches and self-expression “fulfilled “ her and enabled her to break with the patriarchal environment she grow up with, preventing girls from speaking or defining their destiny.

But her Action Taking or when she actually engaged with the Communist Youth Union was made possible thanks to the moral and financial support of her comrades. As she could not cover her expenses (rent an apartment, pay photocopies, food, etc.), the financial aid she received made her join the party’s group of activists.

On February 2, 2002, there was the trial of Hamma Hammami, Samir Taamallah and Abdejabar el Gandouri. That day, I understood that this party irritated the system and therefore I decided to engage. I talked about to my comrades members of the Youth Communist Party who wholeheartedly welcomed me and supported me, as I already mentioned to you, I had to financially count on myself. My sister used to send me 10 or 20 dinars for the dorm, food and the rest of it (contemptuous laugh). They supported me morally and they even raised funds … a comrade sold her gold necklace to rent me a student-flat in El Omrane, which cost at that time 60 dinars per month, and she did not do it for benefit because she actually sold her necklace. I was really grateful to them, I was watching the way they behaved with each other and with members of other parties, and I never heard them insult or say odds, while other groups would shout at each other to show off … all these factors made me choose the UJCT and therefore became a base activist”.

The comparison that Sana makes between her family, which abandoned her, and the group of activists who supported her, reflects the shift of allegiance from one side to the other. Sana maintained a level of engagement that is similar to her commitment for success at school (loophole in the beginning, then a way to take revenge on her brother, hence social denigration). Her engagement is presented as a form of emancipation and an elevation allowing her to take control of her destiny and not be subordinated to others’ choices.

“We always say that the family is a social contract pulling you to the bottom … do you understand? […] I was not ready to go backwards, not even by one millimeter, done”
Citizens, from submission to engagement: cyber-activism

We are particularly interested here in socialized responders from apolitical environments, having engaged in citizenship protest activities, as these cases clearly show the shift from passive citizenship to active and engaged citizens.

We must also note that we relate citizen practices to politics because responders have established this link, even when their practices are not directly connected to the political sphere, referred to as “conventional”: “everything relates to politics, all choices we make are political choices” says Farida, a woman blogger.

Cases presented here have been selected as they reflect a total break in terms of political/citizenship attitudes between parents and their children, and also because the specific features of their citizenship engagements. They perfectly reflect transition between two forms of citizenship: subject and engaged citizens.

Selim is very smart in computers and joined the Takriz cyber-dissident group when he was 13. His early engagement very much contracts with his apolitical parents, with whom he never talks politics. His passion for computers allowed him to discover a new world, which greatly influenced his vision about democracy that he summarizes in two main things: freedom of expression and freedom of information. Our responder first said that his opposition to Ben Ali was mainly due to the latter’s “narcissism”. However, he later told us more about how his relation with politics started. Fascinated by the computer world of piracy – he spends more than 18 hours per day on his computer screen – he heard about hackers hired by major computer companies. He tried to make an attempt and hacked the Internet site of a company based in the Berges du Lac area in Tunis, then went and met the director to tell him he was the author and that he can restore his Internet site. As he expected to impress his interlocutor by his high-tech skills in spite of his young age—and even expected to be offered a job or a scholarship—, he was taken to the police station, where a police officer slapped him on the face and scornfully ordered him to go home. This experience greatly influenced his negative perception of power, represented by “El-Hakem” officer (the Ruler), but the discovery of a character called Captain Crunch conveying the idea of free information, incited him to consider computer hackers to be real heroes.

Selim, an 18-year old man, student, he joined the cyber-activist group Takriz when he was 13: “In one of the films I watched about hacking, Captain Crunch, the famous computer hacker said: good information enriches, and bad information impoverishes, and long live free access to information, which means Internet users should be able to choose which information to look for, and nothing should be imposed on them”.

He found in the Takriz cyber-dissident group a community that recognizes his skills undervalued by others, mainly with regard to hacking. His perception of engagement is largely inspired by the free software logic. According to him, real democracy is where freedom of expression and information is guaranteed. His citizenship/political engagement is punctual, conditioned by threats facing these values. In other words, he considers himself to be a Super Hero that would step in whenever freedom of expression is at threat.
Distinct modes of political engagement / activism: conventional participation and cyber-activism

Chapter 2.

Traditional and new forms of young women’s political engagement in a transitional context: Tunisia as example

This young woman’s empathy towards the rights of the mining basin’s populations incited her to create a blog, another universe introduced to her by a patient, a senior officer at the Ministry of Interior. While this blog was a just means for her to release her emotions, she started to actively engage -on the ground- only after the Revolution, when participation opportunities increased. She felt guilty for just being a blogger and not being able to use her skills for this cause.

Athena: “As I told you, in my blog I would only write. After the elections [October 2011], I joined the “Manifest” Association, and that’s when I felt guilty. I felt the difference between a blogger and a cyber-activist and all the rest. Sincerely, I did nothing. I had to do something. I thought I should stop being passive; so I joined the association, I took part in a demonstration but started action only in Bardo 1. There were several volunteers organized in shifts to watch. For the mining basin, everyone knows that people there have teeth health problems.”

This is also the case of Besma, a young 27 year old woman engaged in associations, who started to be interested in politics in general under the influence of her highly politicized friends from different nationalities, who conveyed to her the “desire to change things”. Then she met with a young Political Science Tunisian student with whom she moved on to action by co-founding an association aimed at “sensitizing Tunisians to the need to engage for the country”. She went to France to study Spanish and Latin-American civilization and decided to pass the Paris Political Science exam without telling her parents. When she passed the exam and told her parents she wanted to engage in political studies, she was greatly discouraged because that would jeopardize her professional career.

Athena is a young woman doctor aged 30; her citizenship engagement corresponds to a founding social experience. She sees herself to have been “totally disconnected” when she was a university student. Her meeting with a patient, a senior staff at the Ministry of Interior who showed her censored opposition sites, was decisive in her engagement. She started from that time to follow what was happening in the country, namely the Gafsa mining basin’s events. Totally invested in this cause in social media and on the ground with a local association, her engagement makes of her a real “alien” in her family as her parents are totally disengaged from politics.

Athena is a 30 year old woman from Tunis, surgeon dentist and single. Her father is a secondary school teacher and her mother teaches in elementary schools, and both are apolitical. She engaged in politics during the 2008 mining basin’s events in Gafsa: “my parents only lately started to be interested in events happening between December 2010 and January 14, 2011 when debates started to emerge, but never before. The March 20 manifesto was a crucial element that served the Revolution... and impacted the 2008 mining basin events. I showed the manifesto to my mother, she read it and then asked me, where is this basin located? What happened in 2008? Yes, that is serious”

I talked quite long with one of the group founding members and I expressed my desire to join them. He told me I had to go through a series of tests to know whether I was skilled enough. He asked me to write an article that only them would read, and that was a poem against censorship. They liked it so much that they published it in the last issue of the online magazine “Takriz”

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Traditional and new forms of young women’s political engagement in a transitional context Tunisia as example

I “I passed the exam; it was really taboo to say we would engage in politics or anything like that, well. probably not taboo but that was not necessarily valorizing, so I did not want to talk about to my father and my mother. I went and passed the exam by myself as I was really interested and seriously wanted to engage for my country […] My family tried to discourage me by telling me, “fine that was a personal satisfaction and you passed the exam, but that’s enough, now leave it, doors are shut in Tunis and you won’t get a job … you were a smart student, why would you engage in things that don’t fit you? You should know, your family has never been interested in politics” … I have no parent lawyers or opponent uncles or others part of the system … may family is definitely neutral.”

In the three cases described above, we note that attitudes and practices break with family socialization, but at the same time they follow some continuity. Experiences leading to citizenship engagement (coincidental discovery of a cause, openness on a new citizenship culture abroad, virtual socialization) exposed above are not enough to fully understand the redefinition process of the real sense of Citizenship engaged by our responders. In fact, perception patters taught from childhood constitute a prism through which individuals interpret social experiences and interactions. Therefore, understanding reasons for the adoption of the engaged citizen attitude by individuals growing in an apolitical context, requires distinction between submission by choice and submission by necessity. This distinction is fundamental as it enables us to understand the logic behind our responders’ citizenship engagement.

Although responders have engaged in citizenship activism breaking with their apolitical parents, the latter, though passive, could convey to their children a negative vision of the Ben Ali Regime. Parents’ absence of engagement in politics was more due to fear than to lack of interest. Political violence under Ben Ali was such that the internalization of authoritarianism led to the establishment of self-control as an absolute social behavior standard92. For several reasons (fear of denunciation or punishment, lack of confidence in the political elite) annihilated all forms of public discussion and debate on these concepts. Responders do not perceive parents’ passivity as a form of acceptance, as it keeps them beyond the system: they are not part of the game, but are out of it. The fact that political discussions or critics of the system are rare, or that they are done behind closed doors anchors responders’ belief in political blockage. On the other hand, parents’ reactions when they get to know about their children’s activism or “subversive” ideas reflect more their fear for their future than the absolute usefulness of their engagement. They actually believe that engagement is pointless in their current context.

Selim: “Before Bouazizi’s act of suicide, I asked my mother for some advice for my articles as she was a French teacher. They were of course apolitical but still had their own position against Ben Ali. They just wouldn’t share it.”

Responders’ engagement options also follow some continuity of the primary socialization built within their families, though apolitical. The distant and negative relation between parents and politics is reflected in responders’ positioning. This is referred to by B. Lahire as the “silent” socialization made up of the social universe, its rules, standards and classifications. Parents’ political behaviors and attitudes (taboo about politics and fear) are implicitly conveyed and are reflected by responders, not by rejecting politics but through the negative perception of politics. This reflects the shift from an apolitical logic to an a-power as described by Athena.

SECTION III. POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION
GENDER APPROACH

One of the most remarkable characteristics of political engagement before the January 14, 2011 Revolution is that it was secretly performed, particularly when engaging in the opposition. Parents were never informed by fear of preventing the militant career’s development and also by fear for the family. Risk perception is however not gender biased. Parents’ fears and taboos surrounding Ben Ali’s politics affect both boys’ and girls’ socialization process.

Mehdi a 33-year old activist engaged since the mining basin’s events never talked to his parents about his activities, and his parents’ reactions when they finally found out about his engagement are not any different from girls’ parents’ reactions: “take care”, “your future is at stake”, etc.

Thouraya, a 26-year old woman, member of an illegal leftist opposition party since 2006, talked about her family’s disagreement of her engagement in the opposition, but rejects the fact that this had to do with her being a woman.

“No, it’s not because I am a woman, it’s because I am in the opposition. This is the problem, but that has nothing to do with me being a woman or a man; if my brother had been engaged in politics, they would have had the same reaction. It’s not a matter of men or women.”

Lobna explains her renunciation to inform her parents about her engagement with UGET by her desire to be autonomous and independent. She considers her action to be a personal choice where her parents should have no say. The exclusion of her parents from her personal life and activism is more a desire for individuation and emancipation rather that fear of them objecting her engagement.

Of all responders, only Besma mentioned the effect of gender-based aspects on risk taking. In trying to persuade her not to undertake a research on Islamists, her family and mainly her fiancé at that time, used arguments stressing her naivety and vulnerability as a woman.

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I forced my way in a rather conservative environment, and my parents would tell me that being a woman, that would be like suicide “you engaged in politics, a man’s world”; my fiancé asked me to disengage and totally disagreed with my decision; he told me “… you are a girl, too naïve, you know?” I was naïve for them. “they will eat you even if you are highly committed, you will see”, finally I am glad I resisted as otherwise I would have been frustrated .. they would tell me “let the boys go instead”; for them I shouldn’t go because I am a woman. They would also tell me “you take stand, you will be stigmatized […] at the end, you will reflect a very bad image”, but I did it in spite of all they can think, and I am very proud, hehe, very satisfied, do you understand?”

Nevertheless, there is a big difference related to the social construction of sexual differences. According to Julie Pagis, “Politics is traditionally associated with the values of conflict, power, and strength, and is therefore excluded from women’s spheres” 94. How does the Family contribute to the transmission of differentiation between male and female that would shape predisposition and political representation systems?

The political domain “encompasses male resources, starting with the voice that must be conveyed with no microphones, and its correlate – the body (the case) of the orator.” 95 The gender-based socialization contributes to allocating men the capacity and legitimacy to talk to people and to take decisions. Values such as self-confidence, fight for one’s own rights, imposing oneself and public talk are perceived by responders as either being male skills or resources that must be acquired to be able to find one’s way in this “strongly male” environment where men make no efforts to impose themselves or to be recognized.

To the question on whether they talked politics at home, Safia and Fatma spontaneously stress the value of the “male” education they received. The correlation they make between “masculinity” and “ politicization” reveals their perception of politics as a “male” universe or requiring “male” resources.

Safia’s engagement in favor of women’s rights is an engagement motivated by injustice towards women she witnessed as a child (her father’s contempt of women in general) and paradoxically by acquiring “male” skills.

Safia, a 49 year old woman, she holds a B.A in law and an M.A in management; she works in Real Estate, she is married and has two kids, her father was a lawyer and her mother was a housewife (secondary school level); she started blogging in 2006 and became a field activist in 2011. “No, ok, there is something special in our home: we talk openly about politics, and I think many Tunisians do the same; however there is something unique, it is that my father is a super jingo but not really a chauvinist. In fact there are 5 of us, four girls and one boy. First, we were three sisters, then a boy and finally another sister was born to my father’s great misfortune, as he had always wanted to have boys but he had mainly daughters. The age difference between me and

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95 Delphine Dulong et Frédérique Matonti, « Comment devenir un(e) professionnel(le) de la politique ? » L’apprentissage des rôles au Conseil régional d’Île-de-France », Sociétés & Représentations, 2007/2 n° 24, p. 252.
my brother is 11 years, so my birth was a real bad news for him as he no more wanted to have girls. The family’s mindset wanted us girls to work twice as much and to literally struggle to acquire rights and show we can be as efficient as men. We always had this duality, which is that even if we were girls, we always had to fight to show that we’re equal to men. We’re born with this mentality, we have rights, equality etc. but that was controversial for my father, there was no equality between men and women. Men are men and women are bullshit, with the exception of his daughters who had to be like men. Apart from us, all other women were for him just bullshit, including his own wife. For him, men are on the top and women are at the bottom, but since God gave him four girls, they had to be like men, so we had to fight and show what we could do, and since we were asking for equality, we had to prove we were equal, we had to fight for our rights and to look like men, so we all started to look like men, we had to fight over and over, but there was no clear reason.”

According to Fatma, the tension between women’s characteristics (wisdom, timidity and obedience) valorized by her mother and men’s properties inculcated by her father (self-confidence) led her to take action. Her unconscious compliance with the feminine modal was shaken up by politics, which represented an opportunity for her to embody the masculine values her father wanted her to acquire. Discussions about politics in the family were limited to her exchanges with her father. The father’s image is ever-present in responders’ stories, being the politicized character contributing to the transmission of interest in politics. The mothers’ voice is almost inexistent. The main obstacle preventing women’s political participation is their poor self-confidence, induced by education continuously advocating gender differences, and inculcating women socially interpreted feminine attitudes, representing real obstacles in the political sphere.

Fatma, a 46 year lady from Bizerte, teaches in secondary schools, married and mother of two children, her husband is also a secondary school teacher, her father was an army officer and her mother was a nurse. Fatma joined an opposition political party in 2005: “My father brought me up insisting on the fact to have a character, a strong personality and self-confidence. Women’s problem in Tunisia is not their lack of competence as commonly believed but the lack of confidence instilled to them from their childhood, trying to over-protect them against all sins. In political meetings for example, men do not find it difficult to loudly express their thoughts and people listen to them only. If we can overcome these obstacles, we will be able to achieve the women/men equality […] I was able to take the floor in general meetings as I could get rid of my timidity and face the world. As I see it, timidity is part of our education, expressions like “my daughter is quiet, she is shy” were common and I thought I just had to comply. But later, when I started school, I noticed that timidity was preventing me from going forward. I see the same thing happening with my students, they really want to talk now, especially girls, they want to impose themselves, not like boys who just need to be there. If we implement an education system based on debates and thinking, we will have a better structured society.

Donia, a 26-year old woman joined the Islamist Ennahdha movement when she was 14. She is a secondary school teacher engaged to an
Chapter 2. Distinct modes of political engagement / activism: conventional participation and cyber-activism

In my circles, and I noticed that women’s needs were superficial and did not match my ambitions or needs, but I would enjoy participating in men’s debates … my brother had many friends who would come to see him and I would listen to them talk. They were affiliated to the Islamist movement, so I listened to their discussions and watched the way they behaved with each other … they were clean and sincere … I was drawn by them, especially that on the other side, I was watching deviance, corruption, etc.”

Relying on her “masculine” predispositions, Donia joined this movement. The strong care shown to her by her brother’s fellows played a lot in her decision to engage. Rewards she received for her school and intellectual performance through symbolic and material incentives offered to her by her brother’s friends greatly impacted Donia’s relation with activism. This type of valorization has been maintained by the party. Engaged at the age of 14, she was appointed the party’s representative to school students as she was “particularly smart”. Excellence is strongly acknowledged and rewarded by the party through nominations and appointments, which constitutes an important drive for engagement.

Donia: “My awareness of women and their rights started to grow in my family. I grew up in a family of three girls and only one boy. My mother favored him, but not my father, peace on him, who was tough with my brother, while he brought us up, we the girls, in a way to build a strong personality… he would always test us, by asking us for example to go in the night and look for something from the neighbors, in order to teach us not to fear the dark, while he was watching us from far. He taught us how to be responsible and play an active role. I started to be full of awareness from my early years. I grew up in an environment with few girls around. Our neighbors had no daughters with whom we could play, so I spent most of my time with boys. I started to see things from a different angle, and I was not caught in girls’ fake needs, such as makeup or dolls…. This is why I had more men than women
SECTION IV. CYBER-ACTIVISM: SPECIFIC MODALITIES FOR ACTION TAKING

Random meetings and biographic incidents may act on the decision to engage. The university constitutes a particularly suitable frame to take action due to the presence of the very active Students’ Union (UGET) in addition to several political parties. However, one finds out about political involvement only once engaged. Action taking corresponds to a marking event in the individual’s lifecycle. In traditional participation structures, action taking corresponds to a deliberate decision that usually comes after a long thinking process and is the output of initial militant experiences sparking the politicization trend.

In the previous chapter, we highlighted some elements that may explain the action taking process: encounters that reveal and spark militant predispositions, ideological elective affinities, identification of the woman social player with a social group sharing with it the same life conditions, public speaking as a self-assertion means to enforce values and attitudes valorized from childhood, the moral and financial support provided by members of a political group creating an emotional attachment and a feeling of loyalty towards the political structure, etc.

On the other hand, action taking in the case of cyber-activism is not always consciously or intentionally made. In other terms, one cannot self-proclaim cyber-activist, or simply by sharing political or subversive political information on the Net. There are no subscription fees, no membership cards, or responsibilities assigned to the activist. Action taking modalities are more complex for two reasons: on the one hand, confusion to define the quality/identity of cyber-activists, and on the other subjection to other’s recognition.

Cyber-activists’ positioning ambivalence: Recognition-Contempt dialectics

The legitimization of practices, world visions, life styles, positions in groups, and any given field primarily depend on recognition. Recognition largely contributes to modifying self-representation and practices. The hyper media coverage of cyber-activism soon after the Revolution is just one of the most visible forms of recognition. The e-Revolution expression that has spread since January 14, the national and international media solicitation of (men and women) cyber-activists, or the fact to attribute revolutionary merits to cyber-activists are all forms of recognition that propelled this protest practice from a previously marginal and invisible status to a socially recognized and valorized activity. I suggest to analyze how interviewed women cyber-activists internalize and interpret others’ perception of their practices.

Therefore, by applying the interpretation model used by H. Becker (symbolic interactionist approach), I have tried to understand how players (women cyber-dissidents) position themselves in the political sphere and the way they define their identity and practices.

Recognition differentiated modalities

The recognition and legitimization modalities deployed in the conventional political sphere cannot be replicated in the web domain. Cyber-activism by nature implies a much broader recognition platform and at the same time leads to instable relations. In fact, the cyber-activists’ recognition modalities use two channels: Internet users and the media, which have greatly contributed to imposing cyber-activists’ political vocation. While women cyber-activists are subject to contradictory approbation and contempt views, these reactions do not affect their activism as much as political professionals, who may be sanctioned by vote or by being excluded from their parties’ decision-making positions.

The recognition modalities and hence impact vary according to the participation mode. In fact, for women members of parties, associations, or labor unions, recognition is first expressed by members of the political structure through elections or appointment in key positions, mutual support and group solidarity in case of crises. For the players, peers represent the group of reference and the ultimate source of recognition. Support shown to the player by members of the political structure mitigates any doubt about engagements made; this is the case of Ghada, a union woman activist, who found in the symbolic “bonuses” generated by her group the strength to go beyond the different obstacles she came across: repression, threats, scarifying the private life, etc… Attachment can therefore be explained by the possibility offered to activists to express their individuality and also excellence in a group that acknowledges this excellence and allows for it to be recognized by others. Dewey stressed that “the best way for a person to fulfill oneself is not to consciously cultivate one’s specific distinction, but to immerse in collective life. By exclusively focusing on a self-creation project, the individual would deprive himself of much greater resources required for self-enrichment.”

Après la révolution, et malgré la montée fulgurante de certaines figures de cette communauté virtuelle, elle demeure une communauté en construction, qui n’a pas d’identité politique propre. L’individuation qui caractérise le cyber-activisme implique une extension des rapports de reconnaissance. Celle-ci se situe à un niveau plus élargi et ne se limite pas aux pairs (acteurs politiques) ou les autres cyber-activistes. L’internaute Lambda constitue également aux yeux des bloggeurs une instance de reconnaissance. L’exposition des bloggeurs aux commentaires des internautes, médias, rend ainsi les cyber-activistes soumises à des influences contradictoires : reconnues par certains et rejetées par d’autres, elles ont du mal à définir leur position au sein du champ politique.

Ambiguities of the hyper media coverage

Women members of parties interviewed or attending our Focus Group tend to define cyber-activism as a new form of political participation with an indisputable efficiency. Female cyber-activists did not deliberately intend to do politics when they started blogs or Facebook pages even if they talked politics. It’s only when other parties – close circle, family, colleagues, media and even political professionals – recognized their political input that they started to be aware of their political role and weight.

Chapter 2. Distinct modes of political engagement / activism: conventional participation and cyber-activism

Traditional and new forms of young women’s political engagement in a transitional context: Tunisia as example

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The role played by national and international media in valorizing and covering the impact of cyber-activism in the Revolution can explain this stand. They are less critical toward cyber-activism then cyber-activists. In addition and since the Revolution, cyber-activists have been solicited as a source of political information or as political analysts and opinion leaders. They are aware of their actions’ impact on public opinion: the capacity to influence public opinion on issues related to politics. This is the case of Alia who confesses not to like politics and that her vocation was imposed on her by others. As shown by Becker in his study about deviance, it’s not practice that qualified political activism but the way they are interpreted and classified by others in social interactions. She was bound to see herself as a political player because she was labeled as such.

Alia’s trajectory perfectly illustrates the variability of self-positioning and representation according to recognition modalities. She started a blog in 2005 in order to express “all and everything”. Although she regularly talked politics, often in a satiric way, she says that she never meant to do politics: she was just expressing her thoughts on issues of concern to her.

Her arrest for more than seven hours in a police office for taking part in a demonstration against censorship known as “Sayeb Salah ya Ammar” constitutes a traumatizing experience that led her to reevaluate her practices and redefine her identity. This biographic incident raised her awareness about the political nature of her web-based activity and at the same time revealed the precariousness of her independent status against repression threats. This experience can hence explain her position about partisan threats.

Alia, a 36-year old woman, she became a cyber-activist in 2005: “when I was released, I called a friend of mine who works in a paper to share with him my run of bad luck, he told me “this is politics”, I told him “but I don’t do politics”; he explained that “in Tunisia, when we express thoughts, this is called politics”, but me at no time did I feel I was doing politics even if many consider me to be an activist; there must be a definition of politics … I see myself as a citizen and nothing more. To me, doing politics is being affiliated with a party and acting in this regard, now doing politics is the fact to express one's points of view, and this is citizenship. I don't feel like I am doing politics, may be, I don't know!! This has been the case since the Revolution, before they would tell me I spoke too much, not even that I was in the opposition … before I would not mind at all any way.”

One of the most important changes in interpreting social experiences is the relation between repression and women responders before and after the Revolution: while she didn’t stand her arrest which she looked at as a humiliating and shameful experience that she tried to dissimulate, the Revolution has turned this type of experience in a symbol of activism and is now looked at as a reward rather than a constraint.

Alia: “Now (after January 14, 2011) this has become cool stuff, but before being arrested was not very valorizing.”

Labeling according to Becker is efficient only to some extent. The degree of media coverage focusing on cyber-activists (as a recognition tool)
determines the construction of their political or activist identity. The relation of cyber-activists with politics can be explained by the post January 14 recognition/contempt contradictory perceptions: women cyber-activists are regarded by some as legitimate political players, while others denigrate them and question their ability to have political opinions (unpleasant comments, attempts to distrust information they provide). This ambivalence also explains difficulties they have to define themselves and to determine their position in this domain, and also to interpret the notion of political participation: they consider cyber-dissidence as citizen and not political actions. They stick to a restricted interpretation of participation, limited to membership in parties or candidacy in elections. This attitude can particularly be observed among the most media-exposed bloggers such as Lina Ben Mhenni or Alia, who were subject to denigration and over-valorizing campaigns, which led them to proclaim their independence and stress the citizen and non-political aspect of their actions, still from a politician perspective. After a highly controversial intrusion in the political sphere, Lina has been saying it loud in her various blog posts, that she represents no one and that she talks only in her name (see photo below reading: *I am a Tunisian citizen, not an Islamist, not a communist, not part of Batman's January 14 Front, not affiliated with any party. My political claims: a Constitutional Assembly and a Parliamentarian System, removal of rusty figures from the Government especially Chebbi, Ghannouchi, fed up with them. You want to flout me? Will get you one day*). By claiming to be watch-dogs and counter balance powers, cyber-activists stress their key principles making up their identity (independence, freedom and sincerity).

Fig 5. Placard brandished by the blogger Lina Ben Mhenni, posted on her blog in which she reports its independence vis-à-vis political parties and ideologies.

Source: http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com

Kouka received less media attention than Alia, because she only recently started blogging (since the Revolution) and is hence less subject to the recognition/denigration conflicts. While she agrees with Alia about the fact that party affiliation reduces freedom of expression, she believes that blogging or independent activism represents a less constraining political participation option:

Kouka is a 25 year old woman from Sidi Bouzid, she is an optician and single; she started blogging in January 2011: “Joining a party? What for? If it’s just to say what I want to say, that’s fine, I can say it in my own name, why would I do it on behalf of a party?”
The least media exposed women bloggers, hence the least subject to critics, are more cautious about their political role. A post-revolution young female blogger for example considers the fact to influence public opinion with her ideas and information, already makes of her a political player and gives her enough legitimacy to act in this domain. The lack of media coverage makes her less subject to others’ negative or positive perceptions, and her sphere of interaction is still limited to her closest circle. Moreover, unlike Lina and Alia who have acquired public notoriety after the Revolution, the two female bloggers mentioned above are still anonymous (using pseudo) giving them immunity against personal attacks. Anonymous cyber-activists can in fact dissociate their virtual identity from their real ones, hence giving them protection.

Ben Trad’s dubious attitude in defining her blogging activity reveals ambivalence for the positioning of female social players in the political and militant spheres. Not being on the ground, particularly during the decisive December 17, 2014 – January 11, 2011 period, she was not subject to media interest. Field activism seems to be a selection criteria in cyber-dissidence, which leads her to voluntarily exclude herself. On the other hand, she has a critical attitude toward the media coverage of some women cyber-activists and seems to be skeptical about their role in the Tunisian Revolution.

Her blog represents for her an outlet but at the same time a safeguard for citizens. She comments on her safeguard role, which she doesn’t claim to be, leaving it to her most popular cyber-activist colleagues. Bent Trad’s refusal to present herself as a citizens’ spokeswoman reflects her feeling of being illegitimate for not having contributed to the revolution momentum as other cyber-activists did.

“I am not part of this category extensively covered by the media. As a matter of fact, I rarely take part in bloggers’ events; they have lately created an association [the Tunisian Bloggers Association], working well apparently; I first refused to join because I didn’t feel I was concerned, as I often told them I didn’t create my blog to become cyber-dissident, it would be a lie. If I said the opposite. Just look at my blog, I always say for fun: I started my blog not to have to see a psychiatrist, it costs much less and I don’t believe bloggers made the Revolution, that can’t be possible, it’s either everyone made it, or it happened by itself! Lina Ben Mhenni’s case is probably different because she was a little on the ground then. That was not my case. It’s true that I contributed some literary texts, that was… I think… on December 12, but I didn’t feel I had to shoot demonstrations and pose for pictures to show I was there. I see my blog as a safeguard, I strongly believe the people needs this; well, probably not the people, anyway I don’t know what people refers to, but as far as I am concerned, I need an outlet […] if I had a message to convey with regard to all of this (blogosphere), I think all bloggers must be the safeguard of the people. We always know that bloggers’ freedom of expression is special. It does not obey to the standards of editors, of the public or of readers, and therefore they can write at a distance with a lot more freedom. I think that blogs must absolutely remain as they are, even if they may have a dissident vocation in the future. Then, we may accept to appear in the media; I did some interviews, then decided not to give anymore simply because we had to remove words and ideas … I am not a politician, I am not bound to say things in a consensual form to be appreciated by people, I am not into that: I say things as I feel them and I can’t say them easily in the media.”

The least media exposed women bloggers, hence the least subject to critics, are more cautious about their political role.
As they are subject to recognition modalities, women cyber-activists are in the process of defining their identity and their positioning in the political and activist sphere. The January 14 Revolution revealed the latent reconstruction process of political action and legitimacy, allowing people to act and have political opinions, which calls on us to explore the real reasons for these transformations.

SECTION V. INVESTIGATE INTER-GENERATION DIFFERENCES AND CONTEXTUAL EFFECTS ON ENGAGEMENT

To go back to one of the main characteristics of our target group, which is youth, it would be useful to explore the context's effects on political engagement, mainly by focusing on the risk-taking factor. It is not our goal to analyze the impact of political transformations on political engagement, but the way specific situations “crystallize political attitudes” and to understand the “period’s and generation effects” on political behaviors. In fact, while the generation of the sixties and the seventies was marked by the prevalence of revolutionary ideologies and conflicts (May 68 effect), valorizing engagement and risk taking in authoritarian contexts, the accession of Z. A. Ben Ali to power induced a drastic change in the Tunisian political domain, marked by stiffened relations with the opposition, that had to be either marginalized or subjugated, and by a de-politicization structured policy, that made people resort to their private spheres. Political engagement opportunities were limited to three options: RCD, décor opposition or illegal opposition.

In our sample, responders represent various age groups, based on the conventional breakdown structure: 18-24 / 25-34 / 35 – etc. The question is what is the difference between responders aged 18-24 and others aged 25-34 years in terms of connection with politics and hence their engagement potential? Apparently, not much! In fact, responders from both age categories belong to the same historical and social space and to the same political context marked by political paralysis and loss of interest.

The one major difference noted at the level of political attitudes is between the group aged 60 and more on the one hand, and all other age groups on the other. The most important feature of this difference is the perception of engagement borne by our responders' parents particularly at the level of the social valorizing of engagement. Although our sample is not large enough to claim universality of our results, I think it would be useful to stress some preliminary observations related to effects of the different contexts on militant engagements.

The two responders aged 60 and more started activism at the end of the sixties. In spite of Bourguiba’s authoritarian regime (1956-1987),

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Raoudha, a 60 year old woman from Mateur but lives in Tunis, she is a retired Orientation Counselor, married to a labor union activist, has two children and has been an activist since university, she is president of a women’s association: “When I went to faculty, I left my village to settle in the Capital; I started to explore the political world and watch people speaking in general meetings. A friend of mine once asked me “are you Destourian or Progressive?” so I said … I did not answer, then she asked me another question “or maybe you’re neutral”, so I said “I am neutral” (laughs). Once back home, I started to think and soon after I joined the French corporation [UGET structure].”

Raoudha’s father did not at all interfere in her militant career. He started to worry when his sister was arrested. His reaction was to encourage his daughters to have “normal” activities for young ladies. But Raoudha was not concerned as she was living on her own and her father no more “had control” on her. Raoudha’s case shows that even when the father is not politically engaged, there is no real opposition. His daughter’s militant engagement was part of the tradition emancipation through the educational movement he was encouraging.

A question asked by a student to know whether she was Destourian or progressive was decisive in her engagement. In fact this question showed her it was impossible not to have a political stand because the “be neutral” alternative was raised when Raoudha couldn’t reply.

The opposition could enjoy to some extent some freedom, particularly at the University used to be called the “Free Citadel”. The Tunisian University used to be the space for students’ protests, initially between Destourians (Constitutional) and leftists, then between leftists and Islamists. From the sixties to the eighties, the students militant sphere rallied three major groups of activists: first, domination of the Neo-Destour, then its removal by leftists, then emergence of the Islamists as a protest counter-balance power.

Until the end of the sixties, the students movement mainly included Destourian students affiliated with the then only Destourian Socialist Party (PSD). From the early seventies, a large number of ideologically leftist students started to emerge in the Tunisian University and particularly in the Tunisian Students General Union – UGET. This was made at the expense of Destourian Students who had full control of the Union in its 1966 Congress held in Tabarka.

In this context marked by students political conflicts, Raoudha, today a 60-year old teacher, engaged in UGET. As a child she witnessed violent clashes between members of her family, supporters of Ben Youssef and Bourguiba. She was on the side of Bourguiba’s supporters under the influence of her aunt, a “great fan of Bourguiba”, who lived at her home. The first time she took part in a demonstration was to support Bourguiba’s position toward the Palestinian issue. It was the arrest of a student from her school who she admired for his extensive knowledge that marked her first stand against Bourguiba’s Regime.

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Chapter 2. Distinct modes of political engagement / activism: conventional participation and cyber-activism

120 121

Traditional and new forms of young women’s political engagement in a transitional context: Tunisia as example

Traditional and new forms of young women’s political engagement in a transitional context: Tunisia as example

Sana had to replace their families by their political groups, due to their family pressure and the absence of support.

Stories told by responders having engaged after the revolution about political life in Tunisia under Ben Ali differ from stories told by activists engaged in the sixties and the seventies. Political life is said to have been empty, meaningless, and militant engagement would be absurd. In addition to parents’ discouragement to engage in politics due to related risks and dangers, several responders allude to the absurdity of engagement that they consider useless in a context where “nothing happens”, and where it would be ineffective to militate.

Manel, a 36 year old woman, Ph. D researcher in political science, lawyer and single, her father was a police officer and her mother a Ministry employee, both are apolitical, she joined an association in 2011, started her militant career in the Young Lawyers Association. She justifies the lack of interest in politics by the lack of events that are worth militating for:

“For me, I started engagement when I became a lawyer. Before the Bar, I had no political life, with the exception of some participation to demonstrations supporting Palestine, that was it. In addition, when I was studying, there were no events: in the late eighties and in the nineties, when I was in primary then in secondary school, there was no major event for me to attend. But when I became a lawyer, I got to know the Young Lawyers Association. It was in 2007 … then in 2008 during the Association’s elections.”

We are not claiming here that risk related to engagement was less important at that time than under the Ben Ali Regime. Raoudha’s sister was jailed and Ahlem was sentenced to a suspended four month imprisonment and was dismissed from her job. The main differences between the two contexts is the role of revolutionary ideologies as a generation marker and the social valorization of militant engagement and risk taking.

Responders who started activism under Ben Ali and who grew up and developed in a context of political lethargy where opposition engagement was simply prohibited think that social disintegration initiated their activism. Activism was either underground, splitting their identity into two (anonymous militant identity versus social identity), or socially repressed, first by the family then by friends and work colleagues leading to social isolation as was the case for Ghada, Lobna and Sana. The first had to break with her fiancé who asked her to either give up activism or break. She had to bear the price of her political engagement as with all members of her family. Lobna and

I “My dad was an activist so I always saw him campaigning. I know that in 1968 I found letters we’d exchanged. I didn’t tell him everything because I didn’t want him to worry but I would tell him about demonstrations, about extraordinary events and debates we had, focusing on details I know he would listen to, but he never showed me anything … then I went back home for the summer, and I remember we came across Slimene Ben Slimene so my dad presented me to him as a Maoist. He was proud to introduce me to his friend as a revolutionary, as someone who wants to make a revolution as Mao Tsé Toung did in China; I know he tried to understand but he didn’t know everything, me too I was not …”

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Moez, a 35 year old man from Tunis, is a micro-electronics engineer, his father is a dentist and his mother a civil servant, both are apolitical; Moez is single and tried to create an association in 2011 but his project failed, he is now active in another association. His interest in Politics started at the time of the first Gulf War by reading papers his father used to take home. His interest was exclusively focused on international politics. The way he describes politics in Tunisia under Ben Ali reflects his aversion toward the trivial questions it was possible to tackle: corruption, nepotism, personality cult, and total disillusion for change:

"I was not interested in politics in Tunisia. There was no politics beyond Ben Ali. You’ve got the impression … or the idea I’ve always had is that left parties and all opponents we had in Tunisia had no chance. In fact politics in Tunisia, or when we talked politics, it was limited to stories on corruption and theft: this one stole, the other had control on the Bank of Tunisia or on a car dealer, we would talk about these issues or about the situation of agriculture in the country. There were no other subjects for us to possibly talk about. Our government was made of technocrats and bootlickers: “thank You Mr. President … Mr. president!” there was no politics apart from Ben Ali, and we could only observe the dominance of the Ben Ali Mafia and the Trabelsi family."

The case of Kenza, 42 years from Kef, is even more determined. She has a dual citizenship, teaches in secondary schools, divorced and mother of a daughter, she founded an association after January 14. Kenza was already politicized before the Revolution, but her interest was limited to French politics where she could vote (her mother is French) in favor of the Socialist Party. For Kenza, the political context under Ben Ali literally wiped out her feeling of being part of this country. It’s only after the January 14 Revolution that she started to consider activism to be a national duty:

"the political life in Tunisia was more like a comedy, and as I didn’t want to be an actor … it was politically closed … my only political act was to vote in the French elections. I was interested in political movements in France and took stand in this area, but otherwise, nothing. I didn’t do anything with associations here as well as I didn’t find anything suitable for me and couldn’t work in their conditions, I only did Couch Opposition as everyone else, we talked in private homes, we were not satisfied, and nothing more, I wouldn’t give donations to the 26-26 Fund, I simply refused, that was it until the Revolution. I did not really feel I was Tunisian. But I am in fact Tunisian, Muslim and Arab; I am aware of this, but when it comes to patriotism, I did not have the feeling I was Tunisian. I was here because my parents were here, this means had my parents decided not to stay here, I would have gone; I was bound to live here because the father of my child is here, otherwise I would have gone. I was not feeling well here than an extraordinary event happened, I think it was for everyone, after the Revolution, I started to feel something … I don’t know, I recovered myself, I repossessed my nationality and my country … I had a boost of energy, a desire to do something, to act; that was a very special feeling."

Common points shared by different responders include the absence of identification toward specific ideologies or political structures in Tunisia under Ben Ali, the lack of incentives to engage on the part of family and friends, in spite of their dissatisfaction and their more or less politicization level. The use of non conventional settings to talk about politics, often limited to “couch discussions”, or the expression of interest in politics through transnational issues such as the Palestinian cause or French politics, confirm that disengagement from politics and the total apathy toward Tunisian politics only constitute a latent
Conclusion of the Second Chapter

Engaging in activism is not only favored by the political socialization and the explicit transmission of beliefs, ideologies and the ways to be and to do. In the absence of inherited resources that can be mobilized in the political/militant sphere, responders have put together resources acquired and constructed in the framework of considerable experiences. Political culture in particular is usually acquired in an independent way, under the influence of a classmate or a teacher, in the framework of democratic participation experiments abroad, or by taking part in political competitions at the University.

The interpretation made by responders about their experiences (injustice, political or social exclusion) reflects a subjectivization process whereby militant engagement is seen as a self-construction process and where own rules are designed to be able to resist to various powers: Family, Society or the State.

In this regard, gender-based socialization seems to be a fundamental element in creating desire for militant engagement. As we will see in the following chapter, socialization considerably affects militant careers, and consequently modifies the notion of reward and militant strategies.
Chapter 3. Resilience to maintain militant engagement: conditions for the success and failure of young women’s militant careers

Understanding ways to maintain militant investments constitutes a crucial issue for engagement sociologists. Several mechanisms have been identified by studies exploring militant engagements: access to militant, social or cultural capital, access to power positions, satisfaction of fulfilling duties, excitement about collective action and risk taking, group solidarity, attachment to a group or to a person, and lateral contracted challenges that would prevent disengagement even in the case of serious ideological disagreements. The reinforcement of militant investments can also be through identification to a role or to a mentor or the product of skill selection and appointment mechanisms used by political groups.

In this regard, we suggest to explore mechanisms enabling militant women to be taken in consideration with regard to the high price of activism. What can lead a woman activist, either member of a party or a cyber-activist, to quit or to convert her activism?

In a militant career, resources acquired in previous phases may be degraded while others may be mobilized. The notion of rewards\textsuperscript{102}, structured around the strategy, may explain reasons and times to maintain or break engagements, often corresponding to awareness, inadequacy or concordance between the social actor’s expectancies.

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\textsuperscript{102} “What can be referred to as satisfactions, benefits, pleasures, delights, profits, benefits, bonuses, incentives or rewards for militant activism. These sensitive components may be analyzed (and at the same time designed) as rewards (not necessarily looked at such and most of the time non monetary) granted after involvement in a collective organization”. Daniel Gaxie, « Economie des partis et rétributions du militantisme », \textit{Revue française de science politique}, 1977, vol. 27, n°1, pp. 123-154. Daniel Gaxie, « Rétributions du militantisme et paradoxes de l’action collective », \textit{Revue suisse de science politique}, 11 (1), 2005, pp. 159-190.
\end{flushright}
of his/her engagement, and the satisfaction generated thereof, be it material or symbolic.

By exploring our responders' careers, of the different mechanisms mentioned above, three specific modalities have drawn our attention:

1- Rewards to activism; our focus will be made primarily on three aspects: a) Holding a permanent position as a way to reconcile public and private lives, a particularly thorny issue for politically engaged women; b) Link with the cultural capital which explains transformations at the level of militant logics. The depreciation of knowledge and abilities provided by the militant organization implies changes in terms of attachments or loyalty vis-à-vis the organization and hence the search for recognition; c) Access to decision making positions and public speaking.

2- Media visibility as a form of recognition. If recognition is considered as an reward, we prefer to address it separately as in addition to the social actors' satisfaction, it puts at stake important transformations in the way social actors see their activism and the way others look at them (discriminations, invisibility, gender-based offense) involving the adoption of specific strategies. The issue of media visibility constitutes a means to highlight obstacles facing women trying to find their way in politics.

3- Mentorship as an inter-generation relation favoring political learning.

SECTION I. REWARDS OF MILITANTISM

One of women’s engagement specificities is the denial of all forms of rewards or the search for personal satisfaction from militant engagement. The most recognized rewards by responders are symbolic and emotional. Regardless of the cause (women’s rights, freedom of expression, communism, Islamism, etc.), this is the first justification put forward by female responders to explain their engagement. Mechanisms such as group solidarity or collective action excitement also reinforce their engagement, particularly in times of crisis. The activism's over-generating effect seems to be fundamental in our case where “the acquisition of personal satisfaction is closely related to the performance of party activities” 103.

Rewards, mainly material, are officially denied, but the researcher’s role is indeed to reveal them through responders’ stories, practices, behaviors, and particularly through times of uncertainty, hesitation, reduction of militant investments or militant conversions.

We will focus on three types of rewards (1/ cultural capital, 2/ retributions supposed to compensate engagement’s high costs in terms of budget and time, and 3/ decision making and public speaking) due to their special incidence on women’s militant careers (existence of obstacles specific to women) or transformations they may induce on the link with activism in general.

Depreciation of the cultural capital in militant logics

Access to knowledge and know-how is not considered to be a reward by most responders. Our survey has shown that the main reason for this attitude is confusion between political skills and school or professional skills. This confusion is not specific to the Tunisian political class. Several factors can be employed to explain responders’ different perceptions about this type of rewards: first, women activists’ social origin, the preliminary possession of cultural, social or militant resources. Then, the engagement timeframe: when this happens at the end of studies, the social actor possesses school, cultural and professional skills that can be used to serve the party; finally the transformation of the political context where militant engagement is taking place.

A) Social Origin

Most responders either come from middle to upper middle class, with an institutionalized or objectified cultural capital, or represent class emigrants, who were part of the popular class but have been able to acquire an institutionalized cultural capital thanks to education. Therefore, they don’t look at the party or the association as a structure offering post-school socialization. Their educational knowledge and professional know-how are put at the service of the party or the association.

This is mainly the case of Besma, who co-founded an NGO. Besma’s father is an engineer and her mother is a University teacher, she studies political science in Paris. She thinks that she holds theoretical knowledge about politics, and that her association activities give her the opportunity to practice field work. Militant women’s relations with field work and with the population have been of particular interest to us and made us consider two hypotheses. This attitude may be interpreted as a replication of the political activism perception founded on the separation between an educated elite and the ignorant mass. The scouting position and the mass guidance function generate a feeling of satisfaction. This attitude may reflect a typically female relation with activism, where women replicate roles that are socially constructed and assigned to women, such as listening, serving, and supporting others (mainly the most economically, socially and culturally underserved people).

To go back to the relation between social origin and the importance granted to cultural capital in engagement, we should note that the absence of an inherited or institutionalized cultural capital does not necessarily make social actors valorize access to knowledge and new skills. Two responders come from underserved social backgrounds lacking cultural capital. Nevertheless, in their interviews none of them raised the issue of acquiring political knowledge and know-how, or a new cultural capital. Sana, a 33-year old woman, active in POCT, comes from a poor and a non-educated background, and she is the only secondary school graduate in her family. While ideology is important to her, she doesn’t look at as a resource increasing her self-esteem or social value. She looks at it in terms of affinities and identification with her class conditions. Relation with the ideology is more emotional than intellectual. In her childhood, Sana resorted to reading. She sees in her instruction a way to take revenge of her brother and social conditions, but does not mix it with the party’s ideology that she considers to be an instrument for social and political struggle.
Farhat holds a CAP 104 in carpentry; his father worked for a ministry and his mother is an illiterate housewife. He joined an association after January 14 where his activism gives him the feeling to be useful. Being unemployed, he found in the association which aims at disseminating the culture of participation, a means to get rid of social and political relegation, both for himself as well as for other young people from his city. His father lost his job because he was in the opposition. He was neither able to recover his job nor develop another career. Farhat lived this event as a great injustice: “a 30 year long career and now he is retired … he is classified category 3, which means second-rate … second rate in Tunisia after 30 years of labor and I would be ashamed to get his salary … if I received a bank transfer of 265 dinars now, I would refuse it … I would give it back to them … I would renounce to …”

Farhat also took part in protests preceding Ben Ali’s departure along with his brother who was injured. He very rapidly gave up when he found in associations and in political parties “the same old system’s faces”, perpetuating the exclusion of ordinary citizens. Farhat questions the control held by educated classes on the public debate while excluding the “real people which made the Revolution”, “Now anyone learning two words, with a 4-year university level would give you lessons and pretend to know everything, why? Do simple citizens know nothing?”

He certainly earns a social value from this opportunity to use his local notoriety for the “good cause”, but his participation in decision making in the association, which represents a confirmation of his social value gives him more, while confirming compliance between the association’s project and practice:

“I try to take profit of my good reputation to make sure girls join the association and take part in its activities. Do you understand? And there are working women and others with no jobs? Do you understand? I try to teach them values of participatory democracy by involving them in decision making, they trust me so much that they know that what we are doing is for the country’s benefit, and that I only need to take decision. I’ve become a dictator because of them (laughs), I can be qualified as a dictator, but they have full confidence in me. Even with A or S, when there is a decision to make, in Tataouine or in Tunis, we discuss it by phone and we always exchange thoughts and ideas. Do you understand?”

**B) Engagement Age**

The responders’ age when they engage in political structures reflecting their school achievements seems to be a fundamental variable in their relation with learning and their perception on the accumulation of cultural capital as a reward for their activism. Literature shows that cultural resources held by an individual favor engagement105. We do not imply we will study correlation between level of instruction and engagement possibilities, but to see how the life phase called youth contributes in the definition of a special relation with some type of rewards, cultural in our case, particularly when social actors lack inherited cultural resources.

The case of Sadika, a 35 year old woman from Mahdia, active in a

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104 Vocational training.

women's association, well reflects this relation between engagement age and the deficit of cultural resources. She joined AFTURD when she was a second year sociology student. Her unfamiliarity with the world of activism and some specific terms were filled by the association that she discovered when she was a student (her teachers told her about).

She considers the different forms of learning acquired in the framework of her activism as a continuation to her university training. Her “simple and apolitical” social origin was for her an obstacle toward excellence in her sociology studies, where one must be “skillful, open on various disciplines to be able to succeed in sociology classes, know about politics, development, human rights, economy, history and philosophy.”

Sadika’s first experiences with the association revealed awkwardness due to the discrepancy between her family’s lifestyle, that she started to get away from because of education and the world of intellectual activism at the association. The latter matches her education and enables her to perform well, which was for her a way to fulfill herself and to develop her lifestyle.

“Sociology is a discipline that you cannot just learn and be silent. You have to act; it’s true that here in AFTURD at the beginning I did not feel comfortable, why? I must say I had the feeling I came from another world with very simple ideas, where I would just revise and do my homework within my family where I didn’t have … My father was an elementary school teacher, my mother is a housewife, even in my extended family, there is no one engaged in politics; my family members are very simple with a simple life; they work then go home; I mean at home when I talk to them about sociology or associations, they don’t understand what I am talking about and they would ask me what I was doing, they would wonder what women’s rights were and what they entailed.

School learning is mixed with learning acquired from activism, which provides activism with an intellectual feature where the production of knowledge becomes a form of activism:

“What I liked in AFTURD at the beginning when I joined, I felt a little lost because people were … I was probably not mature enough to understand and not well trained, I was still in my second year in college, and little by little I acquired new skills and started to understand the logic of things, the notion of “civil society”, human rights, development, research, power, politics, opposition … slowly over a period of three years, and I think I was able to build my theoretical orientation. I confess, it was a little blurry. After B.A. graduation I looked for a job. I couldn’t find one matching my sociology diploma. Here in the association I was a simple member. I worked as a training coordinator for a project. For me that was for the experience, the salary was not interesting, it was even symbolic, but for me it was an opportunity to understand better and to know all aspects of an NGO: coordination, training … then the first conflict with my family came through, when they asked me to go back home. They said: “What’s this job?, you must find a job in the public sector, that was less for the job then for me being a woman, and for them I shouldn’t stay on my own in Tunis … I resisted, first because of my character and then my training, my convictions and what I learnt in the association.”

Sinda is a 22-year young activist from Ennahdha movement; she is one of the very few responders who explicitly expressed the importance of acquiring knowledge and know-how throughout her career and also
of expanding her social capital. She run for the National Constitutional Assembly, hoping to take profit of the Youth Quota. Her affiliation with the movement follows her father’s activist path and represents a natural continuation that was made possible thanks to the Revolution. Before the Revolution, she was not engaged in politics and the only discussions she had about this issue concerned the faith of Ennahda’s activists, among them was her father. Her father’s political affiliation and its impacts on the family have played a key role in her decision to engage despite her lack of familiarity with this domain. Her father refused to tell her what actually happened, as “he didn’t feel he wanted to talk about” after his imprisonment. This experience boosted her curiosity about politics. She describes her engagement as an opportunity to “understand what politics meant” which enabled her to “get to know new people and to perform new activities.”

As she is very new in politics and is still very young, she is looking for this kind of reward. Therefore, her premature engagement and the absence of cultural or militant resources previously acquired make of her engagement a learning and self-construction phase, and not an activity where she would be using already acquired skills. Once in the party, her ignorance of political concepts marginalized her in the group. Knowledge and control of a proper political language was for her an integration requirement:

“I said, in the beginning I had no experience, I felt I was on the margin, but later when we started to know each other, other members started to coach me and to help me to go forward. By listening to their conversations, I found it first hard to follow, they would speak in intense French and talk about concepts that I could not understand but which I have learnt since then”

The learning process conditions value given by social actors to one type of acquisition at the expense of others. One of Senda’s most valorized possessions is “leadership”, a term that means for her “fulfill one’s duties and have capacities”. Sinda considers it to be an ultimate goal that must be reached and a required condition to ensure a successful political career.

This concept was introduced by different training programs held by the party and by international organizations and Senda could acquire necessary skills in the field of political competition, hence reduce the gap of knowledge. Required skills seem to be mixed with the electoral competition logic as shown in the following excerpt:

“I made a lot of door-to-door campaigning to get close to the people, to try to know what they think and hence persuade them. For me, doing this is acquiring a skill.”

C) From ideological struggle to electoral campaigning

Relation with political knowledge and skills seems to characterize the Islamist movement. In fact, research has shown the importance granted to the acquisition of the cultural capital in Ennahdha movement’s militant logic since it was created at the beginning of the seventies. The selection of men and women militants obeyed to very strict criteria and to intellectual and cultural training. The movement wanted to ensure that all members had enough intellectual skills, and also worked on shaping an intellectualistic orientation through a number of incentives (encourage readings, educational support, gifts awarded to the most school successful militants, emulation of ideological control)106.

106 See in this regard: Maryam Ben Salem, Le militantisme en contexte répressif. Cas du mouvement islamiste tunisien, Ph.D. research thesis in political science, under the supervision of Daniel Gaxie, Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, 2013.
However, the case of Senda reveals a major transformation at the level of the type of skills valorized by the movement in that leadership seems to replace ideology. The example of Donia, Ennahdha’s other militant confirms it. Donia is 40 and joined Ennahdha when she was 14 when the movement was still illegal; the valorization of her school performance determined the intellectualist orientation of her engagement. This orientation mixes with the control of an ideology which is at the same time Islamist and “Progressive”. The context where activists operated at that time (the eighties) largely determined this orientation, as the Islamists’ legitimacy to act in the political sphere had to go through an idea-based fight against the other dominating activists, the leftist students. The control of an ideology was a precious resource for Islamists in their competition with the leftists. Though that was not part of the generation of the eighties, the party’s underground operation has maintained this type of militant logic. The legalization of the movement in 2011 and its participation in the elections determine its current conduct in the political sphere. This context seems to have produced an obsolete ideological model to the profit of skills that can be mobilized in electoral race: the voters’ mobilizing capacity requires “leadership”.

Thouraya, member of a leftist party, also considers the acquisition of a social capital to be an important objective that can be mixed with ideology. Her engagement in activism was made through a teacher who initiated her to the ideology, and the first structure she integrated was a circle devoted to Marxist theorization. We note interests for ideological production in both political trends: the extreme leftist (Marxist, Leninist and even anarchist literature) and Islamism, this mainly concerns those who engaged before the Revolution and who operated underground. Political mobilization was mainly performed at the University, hence for an educated population, with potentials for intellectualism and the challenge of political fights was about imposing a specific vision of the World.

We note a decreasing interest in ideological production which was one of the most important rewards for the 1960-1980 activism. The ideological bursting and the removal of borders between ideologies (among the large number of political parties, two poles have preserved very clear ideologies: the extreme left and Islamists) constitute major factors. To us, it is mainly the urgency of this transition phase and the electoral competition logic that led to this transformation. The challenge is now to rely on political staff that is able to convince heterogeneous populations in the social and cultural spheres, when a large part of this population is uninterested and not concerned by ideological arguments.

Hind’s recruitment by a recently created party confirms this reasoning. As was the case for other responders joining politics after the Revolution, Hind is proud to offer the different types of capitals and know-how she holds to political competition, even though she lacks experience in the field of activism. In terms of political experience, Sinda is not more novice than Hind. The latter was solicited by a work colleague to join a party and run for elections due to her professional know-how and social capital in the region. Hind’s personal resources (notoriety, professional know-how) motivated her selection as a candidate and were mobilized to serve in her political activity.

107 See Chapter 2
Chapter 3. Resilience to maintain militant engagement: conditions for the success and failure of young women’s militant careers

Hind, a 27-year old woman from Bizerte, she went to college for 3 years and works as commercial manager in a private company, she is single, her father was a worker while her mother has an elementary level of instruction and is now housewife. She joined a political party in 2011 “Mr. A. H president of the party called me and told me he needed an active woman, motivated and very well known in the Bizerte area. So he chose me. At first I was not very convinced but later I said ok.”

Hind later decided to quit this party and join another one as she considers that her contribution was not valued enough. We note that this woman activist does not show gratitude to the party which enabled her to acquire skills and know-how she would probably not have acquired otherwise. This shows that the party’s recognition of their input and contribution is the most important to maintain and preserve engagement.

Parity imposed by the composition of the NCA’s electoral lists played an important role in the constitution of political vocations among women who were previously depoliticized, as is Hind’s case. Visibility she could get being active in the elections working for her party enabled her to be solicited by two other political structures which tried to hire her. The case of Hind reveals how the political staff recruitment approach, based on identifying women with local notoriety, contributes to imposing skills that are then topped up on militant skills.

Holding a permanent position at the party and women’s biographic availability

The issue of conciliation between the public and private lives for politically active women has become a fact. The relation between different life spheres and the militant sphere is key in reinforcing engagements, in terms of time to be allocated to activities that are directly related, and also changes in the social actor’s perception of the world and of activism. F. Passy stresses in this regard that “life stages are domains with their real and symbolic borders, their own logic and dynamics: work sphere, studies, family, affective, political engagements sphere, entertainments, etc…. the more a sphere is active, the bigger place it holds in an individual’s life. The more the political engagements sphere is intimately connected to other spheres of the player’s life, mainly his affective, family or professional sphere, the more likely this player can stabilize his political engagement.”

Youth is always considered to be a life period when the biographic availability is supposed to be the most important. Anne Muxel questions this idea by saying that “the 38-46 year life period seems to be relatively fertile in terms of change in attitudes and behaviors, which also means the most probable phase for political mobility.”

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We suggest to investigate the Youth timeframe as a life phase when engagement probabilities and the intensity of engagements would be greater than that of other life periods (adulthood, adolescence, seniority). Based on an analysis matching rewards and costs of activism (time, effort, self-sacrifice, etc...), we have tried to understand mechanisms that play a role in maintaining militant engagements when costs of activism increase.

The analysis of our responders' militant careers shows that activism usually starts with University, a life period when time availability is much bigger and which corresponds to the first real exposure to political tensions. This said, the biographic availability is very often disturbed by major transformations marking the 25-35 year timeframe (completion of studies and graduation, beginning of active life, marriage birth of children, etc.). Such changes favor the temporary interruption of activism and conversions in activism tracks.

Raoudha is 60 years old, she was a Perspectivist and is currently a union activist. She talks about difficulties she faced in her militant career since she had her children. In spite of her husband's support, the work social division in her couple reflected the traditional distribution of roles, where women are in charge of the household and must look after children. The consequence was that Raoudha had to turn to feminine militant structures, offering better adapted meeting hours for women's needs. This choice represented a turning point in her militant career:

> Raoudha: “the real distress we lived as a woman, as a mother, was about children; I was much more responsible because I was a teacher and I worked half-days, so I was responsible for school pick-up, I was in charge of planning, anticipating, preparing the food and all the rest of things, you see! it was .... I had a lot of tasks that I didn’t negotiate, probably because I was already in charge ... you see. I don't want to blame the other party. Someway, my education, the fact of being responsible, I inherited this feeling from my mother, who had taught me how to be responsible with all values that go with it, but when things accumulate, things can just break out in a way .. I may not be able to manage, it's all conflicts 'I am alone, I do everything alone' ... I blame the other and it was more a hellish vicious circle. Even on a conscious level, my husband did really incite me to militate, to join structures, etc. do you understand? But it impinged on our daily life ... but what women already and generally endure with a double working day, we have a triple working day, because in addition to work, we have to attend meetings, we must ... one of the reasons I withdrew to join a feminist movement is that there were no specific conditions for women to militate; for men it was unlimited, endless meetings, I am very much for the organization of union working times and schedule.”

Sana, a paragon of the full militant, was able to maintain the same degree of activism after marriage because her husband was a militant in the same party. This said, the birth of her three children imposed on her one choice: no more attend meetings held in the evening. This choice kept her away from decision-making circles.

Jolanare, is a 39 year old blogger, she currently teaches at the university, and was active in UGET when she first joined college for studies. When she left Tunisia to complete a Ph. D thesis, she stopped activism, than
she engaged in blogging after the January 14, 2011 Revolution. If she had started blogging before the Revolution, she would have been disconnected from the field, which contrasts with the logic of cyber-activism requiring bloggers to be active. It’s only once her thesis was complete that Jolanare could devote time for political activism.

Jolanare: “Everyone would go downtown to demonstrate, but then I had to defend my PhD. On January 2, 2011 I travelled to France to stand before the Jury. It was January, I can’t tell you … It was very complicated. Just think about … I was preparing my speech when I heard ‘Ben Ali fled the country’, there was chaos in the country … and all the rest of it. Thank God, I had my parents and my brothers who were with me in France for my defense, that was ok! but it was quite difficult … and then I came back home and the field work … let’s say … started, it became more political then. But the time of the Revolution was just blogging.”

The preservation of militant engagements is often made at the expense of other professional, affective and family spheres. Both Ghada and Basma had to break their engagements because their respective fiancés opposed their militant engagements. While Basma could find a new partner, a militant “who shares her viewpoints”, Ghada had to sacrifice her affective and family lives to the profit of her militant career. As a labor unionist under Ben Ali, Ghada’s life pace was particularly constraining and dangerous, punctuated by threats, cop trailing, personal attacks … This type of sacrifice may slow down and even interrupt the progression of militant careers, it very often constitutes a leverage further strengthening militant investments. Investment in the role, in different forms of sacrifice, in relations with the group’s comrades, in facing external constraints, mainly desertion psychological costs, etc... are all elements that play a role in the engagement’s stability. In Ghada’s case, sacrifices constitute lateral challenges increasing desertion costs. If we look at it this way, all other sacrifices she may have made would seem useless and absurd.

The overlap between the private and militant spheres also contributes to increasing dependence and loyalty vis-à-vis the group. Full engagement can be made, according to Jacques Ion, only when “the entire individual is required, but simultaneously, the private person belongs only rarely, because the individual can express the collective entity only when hushing personal characteristics…” Full engagement can be made, according to Jacques Ion, only when “the entire individual is required, but simultaneously, the private person belongs only rarely, because the individual can express the collective entity only when hushing personal characteristics…” This is Lobna’s case, who was offered a job at her party, she was able to go around the harmful consequences of her affiliation to an opposition party under Ben Ali, of which mainly the loss of her job. Her party’s support reinforced her emotional belonging to the group and even replaced her family which did not support her.

Lobna: “When they abandoned me [my family members], I found refuge in another family, my party … there was solidarity, they wrote ‘why?’, for my story. They cancelled my contract, I should have been tenured four years after holding that position, but they rejected it because of my affiliation to an opposition party. They brought another person to do my job when this is illegal. I was not supported by my family, my party colleagues supported me financially. They offered me a job at the party for me to manage. I was in charge of the studies unit …”


Chapter 3. Resilience to maintain militant engagement: conditions for the success and failure of young women’s militant careers

Women’s public speaking and decision making

As we mentioned, most responders reject the idea of political professionalization and prefer a more idealistic form of activism “active participation, absence of salary, not mainly geared toward financial profit, generally presented as exemplary because its intensity reflects the value and importance given to the organization’s activities."

On the other hand, the acquisition of purely political or cultural knowledge and know-how seems for most responders secondary compared to access to public speaking and decision making, which can be made possible through engagement, and which represent the most appreciated form of reward, and therefore constitute an important incentive for activism.

Fatma: “My dream is to reach a position where I can stand behind a historical decision for my country and which can improve women’s situation in Tunisia.”

Thouraya, member of a leftist political structure, considers that her knowledge of the party’s literature has enabled her to reach decision-making positions; she explains the value of this reward:

“I studied the literature as necessary, which tells you how I get so high in the party structure and … so far I am with them and I represent them in the highest spheres … the Central Committee holds the ultimate right for decision and it contains a number of young people, this is the reason for me to be there as a young politician”

We make the difference between public speaking and decision making, as the first does not necessarily reflect an upgrade/promotion in the party. Public speaking is limited to some responders operating at the level of the base to the power of sharing thoughts in meetings, taking part in demonstrations or in general assemblies, without necessarily impacting the party’s policies or going beyond the scope of the party or of subject meetings. In other terms, public speaking may be considered to be a step before decision making, which constitutes a reward. Sana for example literally refuses to hold a decision making position in her party, for she thinks her voice is heard and relayed by POCT’s spokesperson, and prefers field work:

Sana, aged 33, from Menzel Bourguiba and activist in POCT: “No, I’ve always refused it. I don’t want to become a leader simply because I see myself … I am a ‘field girl’ and sincerely what we’ve got in POCT contrasts with the common idea that we have leaders and managers, that’s not true. Everything is discussed, and what the official spokesman Hamma Hammami says matches what the base thinks. He always talks with the base before he addresses the media.”

We must note that public speaking is almost lived as the time to release potential, a self-assertion time or an experience enabling the speaker to impose herself in a universe considered to be exclusive for men, where the chance for women to be seriously heard by peers is smaller. Nevertheless, all responders without exception mentioned difficulties as women for their speaking to be recognized by their male party fellows. Women must hold exceptional skills to be able to find their way, while it would be enough for men just to exist. Responders are usually well aware of their skills and think they’ve got nothing to envy men for. Obstacles standing against public speaking and decision making as identified by our responders relate more to gender and youth. The public speaking right is generally easily granted to men and not to women. On the other hand, the weight of pressures women usually bear often leads to their exclusion from decision making spheres.

Young people feel they are particularly excluded from decision making, but the element that drew our attention is that it’s mainly cyber-activists, not taking part in partisan activism, which make this statement. In fact, they justify their refusal to join political parties by the exclusion of young men and women from decision making spheres and the domination of seniors in partisan and union structures. Cyber-activism is characterized by the individual’s possibility to directly have access to public speaking and to transcend rigid hierarchy. But here as well, public speaking cannot reach the status of decision making. The power of influence held by cyber-activists in fact depends on their notoriety and their revolutionary legitimacy, which cannot be easily obtained as we previously mentioned.
SECTION II. ROCOGNIIZING WOMEN’S PUBLIC SPEAKING IN POLITICS THROUGH THE PRISM OF MEDIA VISIBILITY

Obstacles preventing public speaking and decision making have a direct impact on political women. As stressed by Derville, *media coverage filters political personnel by reinforcing preeminence of those who are considered the politics heavy-weights*. 

Consequently, media impacts recognition at two levels: recognition by the public and recognition by and within the home political organization. Considering visibility to be a form of recognition, it is necessary to explore political women’s awareness about this challenge and the impact of their media visibility on their political careers.

The issue of political women’s media visibility strongly relates to the notion of recognition. Axel Honneth points out that “recognition depends on media which express the fact that the other person is supposed to hold a social value.” In this regard, media visibility would constitute a major challenge for political women as coverage by the media represents a form of statutory recognition, in the sense of recognition of a participation right which consecrates the status of political player. We will then explore the existence of claims for visibility expressed by political women and media strategies designed for conventional and new media.

Honneth also highlights the close link between recognition and representation, expressing the individual’s social value. The positive or negative value attributed to a person determines the act of recognition. We cannot study the media visibility or invisibility without taking in consideration sexist clichés, stereotypes, and slanders conveyed by the media. Focus will be put on the image of political women in the new media i.e. Facebook as they enable us to see internet users’ representations of political women, with no politically correct limitations or language adjustments imposed by conventional media. This analysis enables us to evaluate the impact of sexist slander on visibility strategies adopted by women in politics. We will specifically focus on the relation between social reality – women’s actual participation in public life – and media representations.

State of political women’s media visibility in Tunisia

In Tunisia, relations between social reality and media representation correspond to the hegemonic standard-ideal defined by E. Maché. It is characterized by the “absence of problematic questioning around gender social issues […] which is sexist in itself.” We should first note that this problem is not specific to Tunisia and is does not relate to any specific political context. The quasi-invisibility of political women in the Arab World, particularly in Tunisia, is confirmed by the many surveys
and studies conducted on the media about this very subject. In fact, the Middle East regional report related to media monitoring said that in the Arab Region, women covered by the media and/or subject of the news are under-represented. We also note that political news bulletins, which are the most broadcast, devote only 10% to women’s voices. The report also reveals that women contribute only 19% as experts and 12% as spokespeople. As sources of the news, they represent 16% only of the national news.

On the other hand, monitoring reveals a feminization of the news sector; women represent 57% of the anchors and journalists and 33% of reporters (knowing that this specialty is usually dominated by men).

Finally, this study also unveiled that the news in general reinforces gender-based stereotypes throughout the region: 81% of the news convey clichés while 4% only fight them.

As for the Tunisian case, we note that political women’s media visibility did not necessarily improve after the January 14, 2011 Revolution in spite of the transition context favoring women’s participation in politics. The opening up of political fields, the decrease of risk variables, the abundant political offer, the feeling to have to contribute to the democratic transition, and parity on electoral lists constitute a wide range of opportunities to participation motivating action taking. Although it is difficult to put a number on women’s engagement in politics since the Revolution, we may easily note an increasing women’s presence in political parties, unions, associations and on the Web. But the comparison between studies conducted before and after the Revolution shows that political women are still ignored by the media.

A report called “Media Coverage of Women’s political Participation in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia”¹¹⁶ focused on how the media covered politically active women before the January 14, 2011 Revolution. This study showed that media in Tunisia (written, audiovisual and electronic) do not reflect the diversity of women’s political participation. During the transition phase, the situation did not improve much, as media monitoring shows that politically active women continue to be subject of a very limited media attention with 10.4% for radios, 10.21% for television and 2.85% only for written press.¹¹⁷

This quasi-absence from the media considerably reduces the symbolic power of politically active women, as their exclusion from the media scene constitutes an implicit non-recognition of their skills and of their legitimacy to act in the political arena. Therefore, we need to investigate the reasons behind the exclusion of women from the media debate. Are they due to gender-based stereotypes, and even more so the idea that the Debater, “a politics specific competence that is indispensable for relations between political professionals”¹¹⁸ would be reserved to men?

The answer to this question is given by a study conducted in early July 2011 on producers and anchors of TV debates (11 men and 5 women) in the framework of the Women’s Image Media Monitoring Arab Network. The 16 interviews conducted with responders working

¹¹⁷ Femmes et rapports de genre au fil de la presse tunisienne en période de transition. Rapport préliminaire n°1, ATFD, 1-25 août 2011
¹¹⁹ Five months after the Tunisian Revolution on January 14.
in three public and private Tunisian TV stations explained the absence of women from the TV media space. An analysis of answers given by the interviewed individuals shows that they are deeply convinced that men participants are more in number, more predisposed and more motivated to talk politics.

On the other hand, the interviewed noted that when they wanted to invite women public figures, their unavailability (due to family occupations), the need to refer to their husbands or to their family members to take part in debates, in addition to their fear of not making a positive impression are the main reasons invoked for them to participate.

In addition to production conditions requiring instantaneous replies to urgent requests, other reasons were also stated, including the appearance or “looking good” issue, the lack of awareness about the role of the media, demanding and selective guests (compared to other participants), and the lack of self-confidence.

Paradoxically, this analysis also shows that TV debate anchors and producers believe that women invited to debate on the media, though marginalized, are usually straightforward, initiate constructive, precise and rational debates, properly prepare their interventions, provide immediate answers to questions, and are audacious. Similarly, most of the time, they would oblige other debaters to observe some debating ethics (respect to others, speaking time, non diversion from agenda points, etc…). Still according to the interviewed anchors and producers, women’s discourse is different from men’s in that women tend to provide rigorous pragmatic justifications instead of abstract theoretical extrapolations. Most of the time and more than men, they also tend to provoke new topics and to place politics in the framework of a societal project.

This study also highlights some other obstacles preventing women’s media visibility in addition to stereotypes: lack of time due to family and professional constraints (double working day), lack of self-confidence, and importance of image. Without denying the existence of gender stereotypes, this study leads us to redirect our attention to political women in order to better understand reasons of the lack of media presence. Do they look at access to visibility as a form of political recognition? Does media visibility constitute for political women a drive for their political careers? Do they employ media strategies and do they compete for visibility?

**Challenge of media visibility for political women: any strategies to ensure media coverage of women’s political actions**

Our research raises the issue of media visibility as a form of recognition that contributes to preserving political women’s militant engagement. We found out that the surveyed women active in politics, be them members of political parties, active in associations, labor unionists, etc. do not all have the same perception of visibility and do not value it equally. In fact, when we ask them about their visibility, this term does not necessarily refer to media visibility. Surveyed women spontaneously talk about the visibility of their political actions to their electoral base through direct outreach.
They assimilate visibility to the limited face-to-face, temporal and spatial interactions, which corresponds in Voirol’s definition to immediate visibility as opposed to media visibility. When asked about their access to visibility through the media, most interviewed women consider this aspect to be secondary. This constitutes a specific profile of political women, women acting behind the scenes, not because they are bound to but simply because they want it. Working behind the scenes does not represent for them a minor role but a way to work in the field which is for them at higher interest. The binary vision carried by our responders about politics, sometimes interested, at the service of their own interests, and other times disinterested favoring general interest, accounts for the negative stand with regard to media visibility, which is considered to be a personal visibility strategy serving to feed the politician’s ego.

This woman, who engaged in a party and run for the elections of the National Constitutional Assembly seems to pay more attention to the impact of her political action on her immediate circle. According to her, her reputation, her values and her action give her more legitimacy than TV appearances, which do not reflect women’s political weight.

Fatma, 46, from Bizerte, has been member of an opposition political party since 2005. “During the days of the Revolution, the image of one woman in a crowd of men drew people’s attention, but that does not stop here, it also has to do with women’s ability to have weight. Many parents want me to teach their kids; I don’t do overtime classes, they think I am authentic. Once I had a problem with an RCD Director due to my political views; I would regularly send reports to the Minister to reveal his misconduct. Legitimacy can be truly gained only if we fight for citizens’ rights.”

Is Fatma’s choice to stay away from the media due to gender-based representations of Activism, assigning women the role of attention-giving, the “gift” quality being usually women’s social prerogative, while men are assigned the attention-getting role? In stories told by our two responders, the same distinction was established between women’s and men’s roles which they contest. Men’s public speaking is legitimate for the simple fact that they’re men, while women must make twice the effort to impose it.

Efforts political women have to make do not relate to improving oral speech techniques or rhetoric control, but the ability to listen. What women look at first is being close to the people: women victims of violence, impoverished women, students’ parents … this notion of activism seems to make women self-exclude themselves from decision making positions and media visibility, as what women are first looking for is recognition by the people, or in other words the field work legitimacy.

Fatma answers the question whether she is recognized by her peers within the party, stressing respect she won on the part of her school colleagues, students’ parents, and her family members. This respect was gained thanks to her listening capacity. Does this constitute a

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120 Olivier Voirol, « Les luttes pour la visibilité » Esquisse d’une problématique, Réseaux, 2005/1 n°129-130, p. 95-97

121 Affiliated to the political party in power under Ben Ali, the Democratic Constitutional Rally – RCD-

strategy to overcome the lack of recognition within the party or is it the product of women’s predispositions to better listen and serve others?

| “Yes, thanks to the Revolution, I won respect of everyone in my school, I give them appropriate advice and share with them the news. Even members of my family who follow the Islamist party show respect to me, as women have the skill of adapting their discourse. In Politics, we cannot be rigid as women in the RCD, but we should always listen to the people” |

Basma looks at media visibility as a “small reward for work achieved, as we think that after all we only did what we had to do”. Media coverage however, and mainly its pervert effects, constitutes one of the reasons she refused to join a party or to run for elections, favoring the “healthier” sphere of associations. Pervert effects mean discrimination between political men and women at the level of media processing and reception. Political competition is the symbolic pressure that weighs on women in politics.

| Basma, a 26-year old woman from Tunis and active in an association: “I’ve also found out that this is not a very simple task … not to do politics in Tunisia … but I think in the future I will really receive extensive media coverage, and if this happens, one can be rapidly and more easily stigmatized than men, well for now there is still nothing but I believe you need to be awfully careful about your image than a boy” |

We also noted that when responders are indeed aware of political women’s media invisibility, this by no means constitutes a problem for them or a challenging issue.

| Raoudha, a 60 year old labor unionist from Tunis and president of a women’s association: “Generally speaking, there are big deficiencies … we also saw that even when women are very visible on pictures showing demonstrations, where they contributed a lot, coordinated and played a very important role in conveying news and information between women bloggers … and in spite of all that, if you look at pictures of the Revolution, you’ll see that women were very present in Tunisia and in Egypt, probably more in Tunisia because they … but then in the media, on TV stages, in debates … very very little, it’s really very very little … this means there are very few women. They are not called up, they’re only called up to talk about women’s issues I think … well this is a fact and everyone knows it … there is a lot to do.” |

Raoudha explains her lack of interest for visibility by the underground culture she has grown up as a union militant under Bourguiba. Visibility meant then risk taking and danger, but she is well aware that things have changed.

On the other hand, other responders suffer from the lack of media visibility that they consider to be a lack of recognition for work performed in their party structures. They are certainly less than the initial group. In this case, obstacles to visibility are not due, according to them, to malfunction at the level of the party or the union favoring men and relegating women to secondary roles behind the scenes. Reasons for invisibility relate to ideological factors and to the media which practice what we call gender-based discrimination.

Nour, a University computer teaching assistant aged 33, married and mother of three children, is active in associations. She deplores women’s lack of media visibility, which she explains by a cultural
deficiency or the lack of political competence, and by the resignation attitude characterizing women. Women, instead of imposing themselves by work and by media …

I “Women’s media visibility is not good at all, women must impose themselves, every time I go to a public space, I hear questions like “will you preserve women’s assets? So I say this is something we must extract as it won’t just be handed to us, rights must be extracted … look at those women commentators … just an image … they don’t know how to ask questions, they have no culture. We don’t have cultivated women. There is not one woman knowledgeable in politics, in religion or is interested in what’s happening in the world. They studied and they say ‘we’re afraid for her rights’ so I answer ‘you must fight for them, you have no assets.’”

For Donia, women’s media invisibility concerns specifically Ennahdha’s women activists and not political women in general. According to her, media professionals are twice unfair vis-à-vis Ennahdha’s women. First, an ideology-based injustice, deliberately excluding Islamist activists from the media, favoring progressive militants only, and then a gender-based discrimination. She believes that while in her party men are more represented in the media than women, discrimination is exercised by the media and not by her party.

I No, but this has nothing to do with Ennahdha party, this is due to the media which reach out to specific people … it’s not the party that decides who should go on the media. This is a personal issue, my husband for example has been invited by Al Jazeera, Hannibal and Attounissia, they invite him to talk but they don’t invite women … women’s absence is imposed, it is not wanted and decided by the party that does not want women to talk.”

In the framework of this study, we noted the scarcity of media visibility strategies at the individual level. As for the collective level, they are simply absent. There is in fact no race or competition for visibility and recognition, and this issue is confined at the level of some women’s rights associations123.

On the other hand, considering the importance taken by some UGC124 platforms since the Revolution, namely Facebook, and the instantaneous visibility they provide to individuals not requiring intermediate tools as is the case for conventional media where women’s participation depends on the invitation of media professionals, we tried to explore the existence of visibility strategies by examining women’s presence and the use of these platforms.

Henry Jenkins considers that the Web 2.0 applications have operated a paradigmatic shift by enabling consumers to move from the status of recipients to that of participants, stressing that “the new digital environment expands the scope and reach of consumers’ activities” (Jenkins, 2006: 215). Expansion means that the digital environment widens the scope and reach of the politicians’ activity and image. In fact, by being interactive, it offers a space where politicians play an ambivalent role generating the news about themselves and their activities, as well as receivers, ensuring visibility and managing their e-reputation. The interactive aspect of the new media allows politicians

123 They concern training initiatives in Communication for political women conducted by NGOs, international organizations and associations.  
124 User Generated Content
to better know their popularity, the way their messages are received, their actions are assessed and their public image.

Although these tools constitute a barometer to measure (men and women) politicians’ popularity or lack of popularity, women politicians do not seem to be very aware of this opportunity. Interviewed political women say they do not systematically resort to new media, and even less more as a visibility tool. For them, they constitute an information tool. They use it simply to monitor the news, to share posts on Facebook or to comment them. They tend to open Facebook pages more than public figure blogs, although open and accessible for all.

A search on Facebook accounts held by NCA members showed that 38 women members only out of 65 actually use Facebook, including 21 operating public figure’s pages. This choice reveals a gap at the level of self-presentation and representation between those who introduce themselves as political women and others who use media as any other person, and who look at Facebook as a means to communicate with their friends and family and not as a means for political communication. Public pages reflect political women’s willingness to share their actions with the public, while personal accounts confine them in the private sphere.

**Sexist slander, an obstacle preventing political women’s presence in the new media**

Political women don’t massively invest in UGC platforms, but they are still present in networks. In most cases, their presence is more a “breaking in” operation, not necessarily sought by political women. Their public interventions and appearances are almost systematically relayed on Facebook and massively commented. Access of political women to new media needs to be looked at very carefully, as reactions tell much about Gender stereotypes in a public debating space that does not care a lot about political correctness. Facebook offers another face of Gender stereotypes targeting political women that differs from stereotypes conveyed by conventional media. In these media, political women are most of the time excluded from public debating space, and when they are represented, they are considered to be women first, then they are boxed in their gender, confined to questions related to women’s rights and often relegated to their traditional family-mother role. It is important to know what type of stereotypes are conveyed in the new media, and whether they differ in terms of form, and what about the essence of these stereotypes?

Facebook has become the favored space for public debate, but also a space for libeling and critics targeting politicians, whether in the Government or in the opposition (depending on the user’s partisan preferences). Insults, slanders, sarcasms, and verbal violence are certainly not limited to women but in the case of political women, the register is explicitly sexist. “Slander is a serious and intentional insult that aims at disgracing or discrediting a person, but that does not include libeling or defamation elements as it does not refer to a specific fact” 125. Our goal is to make a discourse analysis of Facebookers’ comments in order to identify the sexist content of slander made and to investigate distinct reactions of political women subject of insults.

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Evelyne Largèche considers that it’s the reception of slander that makes it look such\textsuperscript{126}. Slander sets up a relation of dominance by reducing the slandered to the analysis of the sexist slander targeting political women, and offers the advantage of better identifying stereotypes geared towards political women.

Slanders are considered to be sexist when they affect women in their moral integrity and specifically concern .. Claire Olger showed that in the case of French political women, sexist slander comes in action when political women have access to public space or when they get full immersion in this space\textsuperscript{127}. We noted that this was also the case in Tunisia as publications, videos shared by internet users and debates are usually sparked further to actions or statements made by political women. Reminding political women of their gender identity through sexist slander, beyond hurting, symbolically excludes political women players from the political sphere and asserts persistence of the idea of men’s dominance. Slander often includes suspicion about the parity principle that enabled “incompetent women” to invest the political sphere without knowing the proper codes.

The first type of slander refers to a negative and discredited vision of women’s status. The most often used term in the Facebook lexicon is Harza, a public bath employee in charge of body care and of cleaning people’s body dirt, to hint to incompetent political women. This term refers to gossip, collectively believed to be a women’s prerogative, and to highly devalued job.

The most common slanders address women’s morals (women of bad morals, divorced women, prostitutes, whores, lesbians, witches). For political women subject of slander, this represents a denigration of their social value, inherent to their honor for slanderers. Insults related to women’s physical aspect are also frequent (tackiness, butches, badly dressed). Slanders rarely address content of women’s discourse or actions performed by political women, but rather their status as women.

The second type of slanders concerns the discriminatory perception of roles assigned to men and women, which means the public space attributed to men and the private space considered to be women’s natural environment. Many insults do in fact focus on areas reserved for women, including household tasks, and openly refer to women’s illegitimate political position.

This comment on a video featuring an NCA member, which out of 148 comments, mostly insulting, proclaims that women’s access to the political field can only be harmful:

“A house where the chicken performs the hen’s tasks is due to failure.”

In return, compliments made to political women either concern their moral integrity (women with good morals) or their virility. The use of the term “rajil” (men) or “rjoulia” (virility/masculinity) is not always pejorative for those who use it, although very sexist. This presumed “compliment” suggests that political women showing political competence, know-how and knowledge cannot be women as


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Women usually don’t have these skills. Holding such skills therefore implies annihilation of their feminine traits and stresses their ability to internalize the power’s “masculine rules in order to find their way in the political sphere.” (Sourd, 2005). The most revealing example is that of a political woman, which photos at the funerals of the Martyr Chokri Belaid (funerals are by customs reserved for men), were relayed on Facebook with comments comparing her to a man politician who was not present. Violating basic Arabic grammar rules, this comment used a verb declined in the masculine form to assert the female politician’s “virility”, and used the feminine verb format for the man politician who failed to attend hence stressing his inferiority.

“(M the political woman) He came while she (X - Tunisian political man) did not come.”

The third type of slanders concerns age. Insisting on the social single status, using the term “old Miss” implies that women’s political engagement was made possible because they did not comply with the norm i.e. being married and having children.

In his reply to the burst of insults commenting a video of an NCA women member, one internet user writes with a condescending tone: “don’t tell us this, this is a sour lady because she is old, and it is common that an unmarried spouse who gets old becomes sour and starts to look after the operation of the Caliph’s harem.” This type of slander reflects the belief that an old woman has no role anymore to play in society as she is no more fertile. Therefore, the sexist slander diverts the critical issue by literally putting in question women’s presence in politics. Slander thereby focuses on political women’s characteristics. Their feminine prerogatives and the traditional role they’re assigned become the only elements that can be looked at to justify their incompetence. Incompetence which is supposed to be criticized, regardless of being a political men or woman, becomes, through sexist slander, a specific feature to political women only as it relates to them being women.

Finally, discrimination reflected by slander is not only sexual. It may include racist insults (negress) or calls for violence. On a woman minister’s Facebook account, a comment on a video she posted showed twenty times “Rape her than bring her to court!” (September 26, 2012).

Openly racist slanders (negress) addressed to the chairwoman of the Tunisian Journalists Union, seek to reduce her to the color of her skin and hence show her that she is racially inferior and dominated by others, which justifies insults. Racist insults reduce the insulted person to “the single aspect of his personality perceived by the racist: skin pigmentation.”

The specificity of the slander register is that, by reducing political women to their clothing, physical or moral aspect, it removes them from their political role and hence puts in question their legitimacy to act in politics.

To face insults, political women’s reactions range from indifference to self-assertion and justification. Some fully assume their positions and their actions disregarding sexist critics and slander. However, others look critically at this tools which they consider to be a “space for gossip”.

128 Qu’est-ce qu’une injure sexiste ?, Le bureau des chiennes de garde, juillet 2000 (http://www.chiennesdegarde.com/article.php3?id_article=9)
This is the case of Sana who explains reasons for which she decided not to use Facebook:

“In honestly, I use it to take part in discussions more than any other thing, that’s why I told you Facebook played a role during the Revolution but now we feel it has changed and has become a space for gossip where people insult each other unlike before. Even when they post an event, comments are never objective. People would share information but with comments that are often subjective or offending parties, you see? I am personally against this, I always want to discuss with people regardless of their beliefs, provided we can discuss with mutual respect. You convince me or I convince you.”

A particularly interesting case concerns an NCA women deputy of Ennahdha party who asked to censor Facebook and to impose fees to be able to use it. The reasons for her stand, the least we can say is iconoclast, was the denigrating campaign she was subject to after some statements she made in the NCA. This denigration campaign even led the chairman of Ennahdha coalition to ask her to resign from the movement because he considered her to have ruined its image. She talked on television and launched an attack against Facebook users: “I may have indirectly or unconsciously harmed the coalition. Facebookers are libeling me and I didn’t do that on purpose, I like this movement [Ennahdha] and I like this coalition (…) Facebook is not a real Media outlet.”

Are different reactions to sexist slander due to political women’s self confidence and militant experience? Or do they depend on masculine/feminine traits assigned by society? In other terms, don’t women accept slander because they have grown up in a way not to accept verbal violence, although tolerated in the case of men politicians?

Media monitoring shows that Tunisian political women suffer from a lack of visibility in both conventional and social media; their image is affected by gender stereotypes acting on the recognition of their political status. Such invisibility is generally interpreted as a form of discrimination due to the exclusion of political women by media professionals from the media scene. However, reasons lying behind this fact are much more complex and are partly due to political women themselves. The two studies in fact reflect the absence of political women’s awareness about the importance of media visibility and strategies. This observation raises a number of issues that should be further examined: why don’t political women take in consideration the importance of media visibility and why don’t they take it as a challenge for political legitimacy? What are the differences in profile between political women having different stands with regard to media visibility? On the other hand, taking in consideration both the visibility state of political women in the media and their relation with their media image, we should be in a position to ask about the notion of recognition. Can we in fact talk about denied recognition when recognition is not even claimed? In other terms, can we talk about injustice when the situation, i.e. invisibility, is not always considered to be unfair and does not induce collective actions against unfairness?
Women’s cyber-activism: ambivalence of instantaneous visibility

Unlike the conventional political sphere dominated by men, in the Tunisian blogosphere the issue of men-women parity is not at stake. There is no specific discrimination against women and their rights to participate are not denied.

While discrimination and male chauvinism in the conventional political sphere leads to the exclusion of women from the media scene, this does not exist at the level of the blogosphere as the Internet allows for the individual’s instantaneous visibility with nor relays or intermediaries.

As stressed by Jolanare, discrimination is more at the level of reception of content produced by women cyber-activists. In fact, there are limits imposed by internet users on female blogging. Being the main instance for recognition, internet users arbitrarily judge what is worth to be written by women and what is not.

“Go back to your kitchen, how do you know about these things? [politics]”

The incident that happened in the Carthage Palace at a conference held to celebrate the International Internet Freedom Day confirms Jolanare’s idea that freedom of expression is reserved for men only. In fact, her intervention on “Feminine Blogging” and how this type of literature is received by a conservative public raised violent reactions on the part of the public.

“Feminism is badly perceived. That’s not the time, that’s not a priority”

Women’s issues are considered to be secondary, whether in the conventional political sphere or on the web. Zeineb, a feminist cyber-activist talks about resistance on the part of men cyber-activists when asked to mobilize to advocate women’s issues. She made a call to mobilize people to protest across the Egyptian Embassy but her call was rejected “for not being timely.”

On the other hand, several cyber-activists have become the favorite target for critics. Farida, a very active blogger who started activism since the Gafsa mining basin’s events says that the denigration campaign targeting her does not affect her as she was used to this type of practice under Ben Ali. However, she talks about with a lot of pain and stresses the difference between defamation under Ben Ali and in post-Revolution Tunisia.

Farida, 35, teacher of theatre and single, she started blogging in 2006: “Fear has changed, we no more fear cops but other citizens. We fear that another person who doesn’t know us aggresses us simply because he heard that we may not be as patriotic as he is. Standards of patriotism have changed; now each and everyone can humiliate you by questioning your patriotism, your feminism, your religion. Attacks are not limited to women, they target all those who are different. People call me “the libertine intellectual”. I don’t care, I assume being feminine. Women (bloggers) are the target not only because they’re women, but also because they are cultivated, they work and above all they’re famous, they’re exposed! How dare you be exposed?! Society outperforms in the art of denigration, because it’s empty, people have nothing to do. But it’s well expected .. and you say things they don’t like, you don’t let them live “in peace” with their ignorance .. when you do this and make them think, it’s normal they will slag you off. Who
are you? ... you’re a .... and a ..... so the issue turns into a Turkish bath gossip.

The impact of denigration campaigns targeting female cyber-activists (insults, distrust of information they publish, blog reporting) depend on the blogger’s profile. Bent Trad for instance considers that the burst of insults she receives and the reporting of her blog as “inappropriate” constitute a recognition of her influence. Relation with adversity is made possible by one remarkable feature of cyber-activism: Anonymity. “In a perfect anonymity situation, words are as free as air, with no origin and no depository. They interfere with nothing, those who receive them are nobody, and cannot therefore be diverted or betrayed” 130. This female blogger whose blog and Facebook comments may seem shocking may be “politically correct”, as attacks she is subject to are impersonal: they target the fictitious character she created.

For Athena, anonymity leaves the shadow of doubt on the cyber-activist’s sexual identity which may give protection against sexist assaults.

“It’s may be because I am new, but many of them talk to me as a boy. They’d write me comments like “thank you bro ...”

According to Hamadi Kaloutcha, some feminine usages can profit cyber-activism. The use of fictitious names and feminine characters may represent a subversive strategy to force one’s way into the web sphere. Sonia Antit is a fictitious character created by a young female cyber-activist on Facebook in 2009. She picked for her profile a photo of her German girl friend in order to attract the largest number of fans and friends, and be able to post and share political content with a large audience not necessarily interested in politics. According to Kaloutcha, anonymity protects and the feminine character contributes to the acceptance of posts, even when subversive:

“I had dozens of thousands of fans; she would publish subversive stories, articles, and any other stuff. And all men on her page, even those who wanted to insult her .. no more could. They were all mushy with her. This is one example of how feminine features can offer an advantage compared to men.”

While anonymity allows for full freedom of expression, can we consider it to be a mechanism that can reduce risks related to engagement? While this is true in some cases, saying yes to this question would be neglecting the fact that risk is in a way a form of reward to activism, which greatly contributes to building up the activist’s notoriety. It is in fact risk taken under Ben Ali that provided cyber-activists with a symbolic authority, not only among public opinion, but also with the cyber-activists community. Hamadi Kaloutcha, a cyber-activist, stresses the value of anonymity.

Hamadi Kaloutcha : “Everything changed, very little has not changed. Before, I was tapping in the dark, I wan anonymous on Internet. Anonymity procures a lot of ease in terms of arguments. When we’re anonymous on the Internet, we make others reply to arguments only. Many, who lack arguments to continue the fight, would turn to the person. When we’re anonymous, they can’t have this pleasure. Even my way blogging or expressing out my thoughts has changed. Now everyone would remind me that I am dual citizen, that my mother is a

foreigner, and all the rest of it. As they know something about my life, they harp it on and on.”

SECTION III. MENTORSHIP

Political know-how and know-to-be is not an innate science. It is a process for the learning of techniques and ways-to-do that is often long and tortuous. Mentors contribute to activism and political action, by conveying the appropriate political/militant knowledge, know-how and know-to-be and by providing resources that are required to survive in a highly competitive domain.

According to Levinson “the Mentor is in general significantly older with a much longer and bigger experience in the world that the young person is planning to go into. There is no one usual word that can be appropriate enough to describe the type of relation we are thinking about. Words like “guide” or “guru” are probably the closest but their connotations may lead to confusion. The term “mentor” is generally used in a narrow form, to refer to the teacher/student relationship, to the advisor or the counselor. In our sense, it refers to all of them and even more.”

Mentorship relations between newcomers to the political scene and experienced/confirmed individuals in fact constitute a mechanism maintaining the militant engagements of young activists. Mentorship refers to a process of coaching, guiding, and transmission linking two individuals, the mentor and the mentored. The mentorship relation offers the possibility to confide in peer with full confidence, to ask questions, to expand one's thinking and hence to avoid making mistakes; in other terms, it allows the acquisition of skills required in politics through another person's experience.

There are three types of transmission: 1- Transmission of information; 2- Transmission of specific skills and competencies to enable the how-to-do ability; 3- Transmission of the how-to-be through modeling and in a more or less implicit way. In this regard, mentorship, or the inter-generation transmission of political knowledge, know-how, and know-to-do constitutes a way to renew the political class and to reinforce young women's political participation, both at the limited party level or at the overall political space.

Responders do not use the same term for mentor in their stories. We did not deliberately use it in the interview guide in order to avoid confusions at the level of interpretations. Nevertheless, responders did mention one or more people with whom they share several features and which contribution was decisive in their action-taking process. The question that we are trying to answer is to know, which role do these people play in maintaining militant investments? How is this role perceived by responders and does it correspond to a Mentor's profile? Are we witnessing changes in terms of relations between young people and older individuals? Did the identification-to-others process change?

Most women responders did not identify mentors as such, with the exception of Ismehen, a 33 year old woman who joined a legal opposition party in 2006, when she was first hired as a secretary. At the beginning, her contribution was not really militant engagement, but rather fulfilling professional duties. Though she comes from a non-politicized family, her scouting experience and the influence of a school teacher sparked
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Ismehen’s interest in political issues. A party woman leader invited Ismehen to attend training sessions, to travel abroad, and to make some public speaking which helped her to acquire new skills and expand her network.

While this lady favored action-taking by activating Ismehen’s militant predispositions, she also initiated her disengagement. The rule of the game regulating the Master/Student relationship being loyalty, Ismehen was bound at some point to act against her principles and convictions. In fact, once Ismehen stopped obeying this lady by adopting positions that run against what others expected from her at a time of crisis for the party, this relation became destructive.

Several women responders, young activists in political parties ended up leaving their initial structures due to communication problems they faced with people they identified at the beginning of their political careers as being their mentors.

The main conclusion we came to about mentorship relations is that identification by our responders of persons having influenced them or contributed to their political learning and introduction, does not correspond to the mentor definition given by Levinson, due to the absence of the Master/Student relation. The type of relations we have identified reflects more a modal which contributes to reinforcing involvement in the role and consequently maintains and preserves activism.

Nour is a university computer teaching assistant, she is 33 years, married and mother of three children; she is engaged in an association: “Ah .. there are many, many … political leaders … wealthy people who could have had a peaceful life, but who decided to give it up and devote themselves to others, to protect them against injustice, etc. those who are deprived of their basic rights .. while the first have all. These are my models. Those who refuse to be dependent of anything .. I mean the fact to admire a country that seems stronger than us or to adopt ideas carried by their family and friends .. no, no, for me everything needs to be reconsidered. During the Revolution, the president of my association, he lived in Sidi Bouzid and is one of those who made the Revolution … he was with the people, on December 17 as a labor activist, he brought together other teachers and asked them to rally across the Governor’s office, he initiated the first demonstration and motivated people. Then he was really smart, politically smart … and even though, he did not engage in any political party neither did he run for elections as independent because his engagement is purely patriotic; for me he represents a model to follow.”

We also note some eclecticism in responders’ identification of their models. Responders often talk about several people, picking up one or various qualities for each of them, which they adhere to or admire. Identification refers more to the moral and militant qualities of the individual who represents a model. Therefore, models encourage engagement, with no process for the transmission or learning of know-how:

Hela is 32 years and is from Tunis, she has been a feminist activist in an association since 2000. “In fact, I have a problem with models and I think this is specific to our generation, because we … I mean unlike my parents’ generation, which model is all the people who preceded them, I don’t mean there is break between my generation and the previous one … not at all, I think there is continuity, at least continuity between the old generation which militated and the young generation that decided to militate, and there are not many of us, but
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the difference, is that we … I don’t know, this is personal, based on what I’ve seen and heard here and there in my close circles, youth find hard to identify themselves with a model to follow, they are more like free electrons which have piled up and built themselves […] I would say people, who … helped me to … build myself and who’ve contributed to make of me what I am today are my grandparents, this means … it’s mainly grandfather because he … I mean when I started activism, my grandfather was already there, and we even were at some point in the same fights. Unfortunately my grandmother no as she had already gone when I was 17, but she was somehow my model as I got to know her career; I knew […] when I decided to engage as I said before, I did not always agree with my grandfather on several points, but do recognize him the fact to always be optimistic, so when we deal with someone who actually passed away at the age of 92 and until that age he had never given up […] he constitutes a real model in terms of engagement, or activism, but he is not the model, I don’t see him as such and I don’t live it that way, he taught me tremendous things as others did for me, but he was not my model.”

Concerning cyber-activism, we cannot also specifically talk about mentorship and even the less so about inter-generation transmission, considering the fact that most cyber-activists come from the same age group. The person considered by responders to influence their careers may have the same age as cyber-activists, with whom they have virtual relations. They may represent “heroes”, such as the famous Captain Crunch who enabled Selim to discover cyber-activism and with who he has not contact at all, not even virtual.

The relation between Captain Crunch and Selim can be assimilated to fascination by super-heroes. This is the way he sees his engagement.

Selim is a kind of a masked hero of the freedom of expression, who would burst out of the dark whenever this freedom is threaten.

For cyber-activists, the “model” acts less in the transmission of the know-to-do (such as trolling or the use of proxies to bypass censorship) than in the transmission of militant values (freedom of expression, defense of rights and freedoms with no distinction). In fact, the learning of cyber-activism specific techniques is made through exchange not in a master/student teaching process. The way to do things and to be for cyber-activists are acquired on the spot through virtual exchange, and are done more via impregnation than through explicit transmission.
Conclusion of the third Chapter

The analysis of sustained militant investments and career failures highlight opportunities and obstacles facing women’s militant engagements. As we have seen, relations with rewards depend on responders’ trajectories, social origins, experiences, while the meaning and value of rewards differ from one person to the other and from one period to the other throughout an activist’s career. Nevertheless, a set of symbolic and material rewards are particularly valuable to women: professionalizing engagement as a means to reduce engagement costs in terms of time and recognition of input by peer fellows.

Activism is less seen as a way to reinforce skills attributing a social value to women activists than a means to practice knowledge and competences through field work offered by activism. From this perspective, recognition of this contribution by the militant organization replaces loyalty toward this structure.

The analysis of the media visibility of political women enabled us to better examine its relation with recognition. Does the search for recognition mean open requests for recognition and visibility? Not necessarily. Does the denial for recognition that we studied through sexist slander result in the development of visibility strategies to overcome obstacles? The answer is no. This analysis raises a fundamental question: afflicted in their search for recognition by gender-based discriminations, do women militants resort to field work and to the people in order to find recognition that is denied to them elsewhere, or is this feature specific to women, replicating in their activism roles that are socially assigned to women: listening and serving others?

The study of mentorship relations has shown the importance in some cases of this relation in action-taking and in imposing militant vocations. However, we noticed the quasi-absence of this type of relations, both in conventional and cyber-activisms. The mentor character is replaced by other equally important profiles to cyber-activists, and which influence is mainly operated through the transmission of values than that of know-how.
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General Conclusion and Recommendations

As a conclusion, we suggest to consolidate results presented at the end of each Chapter and put forward a set of recommendations aimed at reinforcing the militant/political engagement of young women in Tunisia:

> The loss of interest on the part of youth in conventional politics reflected in the emergence of new practices such as cyber-activism, constitutes a plea to reconsider the political configuration in Tunisia, especially that the democratic transition now going on represents the best framework to perform this operation;

While cyber-activism does not have to comply with the politico politician logic which it actually rejects, it brings to light dysfunctions characterizing conventional participation structures:

- A very rigid hierarchy and a horizontal construction excluding youth from decision making spheres: it is therefore necessary to conduct advocacy campaigns with political parties and labor unions to soften this hierarchy and put youth forward. It is as important to listen to young members and invite them to contribute. The implementation of think-tanks within parties and inviting youth to freely discuss the “party line”, to make critics, suggestions, and proposals would contribute not only to establishing dialogue between generations but mainly to vitalize parties. Young people would find their place in the structure and the most innovative will be invited to take part in decision making;
• Work on implementing participatory democracy, and the adoption of measures such as accountability and transparency in political structures has become a requirement as they would reduce the gap between politicians and citizens. The contribution of political parties in support of transparency and accountability would help to achieve them;

• Prevalence of personal interest among politicians. It is true that politics is competition for power. However, access to power should not become the actual target; the goal should be the implementation of a program reflecting the common project of a group of people.

• Convey to youth the fundamental values of democracy, such as listening to others, respecting others’ points of view, the need for debate and the spirit of compromise.

> The gender-based socialization contributes to the constitution of political representations and social roles transposed on the political sphere, which accounts for women’s self-exclusion from decision making positions and media visibility. Therefore, it is necessary to act from childhood in order to establish the culture of equality and participation.

• The importance of sensitizing youth about family environments based on equality and cooperation between couples, which tend to be more united when choices are freely made by men and women. It is in the family framework that children learn not only equality between genders but also the way to make choices, to express themselves and to contribute to decision making.

• Raise awareness about gender equality from early childhood, through sensitization campaigns targeting parents, and integration in school civic education manuals of modules dealing with gender equality. There is need to insist here on teachers’ attitude toward students, boys and girls, and on teaching pedagogy that have to convey the values of equality, listening to and respect of others;

• Implement within parties criteria for access to decision making based on merit and not on masculinity. When fulfilling their claims for recognition, women’s attachment to their political structures will grow bigger;

• Raise the awareness of political women about the importance of media visibility and increase the number of training sessions on political communication, mainly strategies to overcome gender-based discrimination (libeling, sexist slander, etc.)

• Train militant women, cyber-activists or activists in parties and unions about advocacy and communication techniques to help in integrating women’s rights on the public debate’s list of priorities;

> The importance of biographic availability in engagement: the age of youth is particularly suitable for political / militant engagement due to time availability. However, marriage and the birth of children slow down engagement as they complicate the balance between private and public lives. In this framework, sharing responsibilities in the couple would be required to overcome this type of obstacles.
Maintain the parity principle on electoral lists in forthcoming elections. This positive discrimination initiative largely contributed to the emergence of political vocations among initially depoliticized women. Nonetheless, a thorough study needs to be conducted to ensure that this choice does not lead to stigmatizing women selected for just being women and not due to their competence.

The importance of transmitting political know-how and know-to-be to preserve militant engagements. In the framework of this project, our hypothesis was that this modality would contribute to strengthening engagements. As we observed dysfunctions at the level of relations between generations, and noted that communication problems between the young female militant and the person she identified to be her model would lead to disengagement or militant reconversion, we have put in place a training program aimed at reinforcing and facilitating the sharing of political knowledge and know-how between generations. This experience should be further replicated.

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