Marta Scaglioni

Becoming the *'Abid*
Lives and Social Origins in Southern Tunisia

Antropologia della contemporaneità

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Ledizioni

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PART TWO
Becoming the *'Abid*

To Zeira, Zohra, Monia, Khaula, Leyla, Shaadia, Marwa, Zohra, and the little Raudha, with the hope that your pain is rewarded in this life. To countryside women, and then to my mother and to my grandmother, for the privilege of having inherited their values.
In April 2019 seven Tunisian female workers died when the pickup truck which carried them to the countryside collided with a minivan. With the wish nobody will ever cry mothers, sisters, or daughters for something like this again.

To the little one who came to the world with a bent nose, Arturo.

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Post-2011 debates on race and racism in Tunisia

After mass protests overthrew the former dictator, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011), a renewed sense of freedom of expression brought to the fore issues previously considered taboo in pre-revolutionary Tunisia. The consciousness that human rights were no longer borrowed Western values but inalienable rights for all (Bahri 2014) stimulated, among other things, discourses on ethnicities and minorities (Christie, Masad 2013). A specific debate on racism (*'unṣuriyya*) and discrimination (*tamyīz*) against "black" people entered the national debate, profiting from the climate of loosened censorship in the media and in politics. Racism and the existence of an ethnic minority in Tunisia – "black" Tunisians but also "black" foreign nationals – began being addressed by talk shows on television[1] and online articles[2], and slowly gained prominence.

A foreword is necessary at this point. My understanding of "blackness" in today's Tunisia refers to "social blackness", since it is more a socio-cultural construction (Wade 2015, p. 3) rather than a physical, measurable characteristic. Racial constructions will be treated in this book as empirical conventions, or as «local ethnography» (Hall 2011, p. 30), and therefore the terms "black" and "white" will be put in quotation marks throughout[3].

Arguably, without the political implications of the so-called "Arab Spring"[4], no debate on racism and racial problems would have been possible, and probably not even not even my research[5]. Yet, racial issues and their impact on the discourses on human rights have been neglected by post-2011 academic literature, which has focused mainly on women's rights (Marks 2013) and on the rise of Islamist movements (Merone, Cavatorta 2013; Perkins 2013; Christie, Masad 2013), leaving ethnic minorities in the background. Little scholarly attention has been devoted to the changes in racial thought in North African countries (Bahri 2014), and very few studies have tackled the current debate on "blackness" in Tunisia (Pouessel 2012a; Pouessel 2012b; Scaglioni 2017; Abdelhamid, Elfargi, and Elwaer 2017).

However, in civil society, several black rights associations have emerged and started addressing the phenomenon of racism against "blacks" in Tunisia, bringing racial problems to the fore. They lobbied for the introduction of a law punishing racist acts and words, which was eventually introduced on 9 October 2018[6]. Law 11/2018 would have been an unimaginable achievement in pre-revolutionary Tunisia, as would the very existence of black rights associations. In general, after 2011, associations made the most of the enhanced freedom of speech: following decree-law no. 88/2011[7], which regulates their formation and their statutes, 4,997 associations were established between January 2011 and December 2012, about 2,500 a year, against an average of 191 per year in the 2000's, bringing the number of associations from 9,969 in 2010 to 14,966 in 2012[8]. They experienced a quantitative and qualitative leap: «After 2011 you ask, 'What do you do?' [for a living] and everyone answers, 'I have an association.'»[9].

Among these organisations, ADAM and M'nemty[10] were the most visible in the public sphere. ADAM was dismantled in 2012, leaving M'nemty, and its charismatic member Saadia Mosbah[11], in a prominent position regarding the defence of black rights. Currently, a constellation of activists, sympathisers, and supporters gravitate around this association. They are mostly "black", middle- upperclass, urban-based, and highly educated. Most of them are women. Their agenda envisages the eradication of racial discrimination, seen as targeting a variety of "black" actors: "black" Tunisians, "black" sub-Saharan students, and "black" refugees who fled 2011 Libya (Scaglioni 2017).

Even though the understanding of the history of slavery is central to the analysis of racial thought and of racism in Tunisia, black rights associations do not address "black" slave descendants as a category *per se*, and rarely elaborate the legacy of historical forms of slavery which manifests itself in today's racial issues. Black rights advocates themselves do not retain overt links to the history of slavery in the country, apart from a physical characteristic – "blackness" – which could hint at an alleged slavery past, however rarely articulated. This contrasts with other post-slavery contexts such as Mauritania and Mali, where political mobilisation of slave descendants has recently emerged, fighting the stigma attached to slave descent (Hahonou, Pelckmans 2011, p. 2).

In the activists' eyes, what lumps together different actors is the experience of racism vehiculated by a phenotypical marker (Scaglioni 2019, p.

29). Black rights activists depict discrimination against "black" Tunisians as «institutionalised racism and structural exclusion» (Abdelhamid, Elfargi, and Elwaer 2017, p. 19, my translation from French). It is seen as hailing from governmental institutions, accused of perpetrating strategic discriminatory plans against "black" people in the educational, professional, and social fields. A specific, conscious, deliberate, methodical exclusion of "black" people from key positions and implementation projects is blamed on the government: «a new hypothesis, that of a lack of official budget for schools where the majority of students are black» (Abdelhamid, Elfargi, and Elwaer 2017, p. 21, my translation from French). Moreover, activists contend that "blacks"' more limited access to education would hinder "black" Tunisians from being appointed to high-ranking professional positions, such as political careers, and keeps them away from media and public spheres, in a sort of imposed "invisibility" and disempowerment. However, in addition, they fight an everyday, mocking – and sometimes violent – form of racism, perpetrated by the Tunisian population itself.

In their discourses, slavery is present as a remnant of a faraway past, which has left an overlap between "blackness" and the label "slave", inscribing an alleged slavery past onto a phenotype. "Blacks" in Tunisia are indeed often addressed as "*abīd*" (Arabic for "slaves"[12]), intended here as a derogatory epithet for dark-skinned individuals, which is also in use in other North African countries (for instance, Egypt: Powell 2012, p. 3).

> Tunisians say, 'No, but we are friends of the blacks, there are no problems,' but in fact they don't hesitate to say, 'Oh, slaves'. They don't hesitate to say, 'Oh, *waṣīf* ["servant", also synonymous with "slave", Bédoucha 1987, p. 403], 'Oh, *kaḥlūsha* ["blackie" in a feminine form, from *kuḥl*, "black"]. They don't hesitate to say, 'You're descended from slaves!' They don't hesitate to tell you, 'But in the end you're a black. You're a black and you'll remain a black'.[13]

«He said he didn't have to serve slaves», recalled Saadia Mosbah, a leading figure in M'nemty, when denouncing a racial incident at a petrol station[14].

Therefore, slavery is indeed present in the activists' discourses, but through a "broad definition". Firstly, it is a label attached to a phenotype, and deeply insulting. Secondly, it is used as an encompassing category which comprises also «metaphorical slavery», that is, forms of labour exploitation akin to slavery (Rossi 2009, p. 5). Slavery is, in fact, often defined as an ongoing

project of negation of blacks' basic workers' rights, especially in relation to human trafficking[15]:

> There are girls, entrusted by their families to cold-hearted middlemen in French-speaking African countries, who move to upper-class neighborhoods in Tunis with a tourist visa and then their passport is seized and they work as maids without going out, without ever going back. We [M'nemty] intervened in one case: a girl from Ivory Coast: she was abused and then she was sick. She went to the hospital and when her fellow countrymen went to visit her she asked, 'Where is my child?', because she had got pregnant, you know? By her employer. And the child was taken away from her. We called her fellow countrymen and they repatriated her without her child. Is that not slavery (*esclavage*)?[16]

Benedetta Rossi (2009) demonstrates how activists' positions usually stand in contrast to a narrow interpretation of slavery, since they seek to maximise their coverage and the public attention they attract (Rossi 2009, p. 7) by an all-inclusive approach, and "narrowing down" is not their goal. British sociologist Julia O'Connell Davidson (2015) unpacks the «universal, transhistorical definition of slavery» (O'Connell Davidson 2015, p. 52) behind the liberal "new abolitionist" movements such as the NGO "Free the Slaves"[17] (O'Connell Davidson 2015, p. 6) highlighting how an all-inclusive approach often hides precise political agendas.

On the contrary, in today's Tunisia, there is little debate on «classificatory slavery» (Rossi 2009, p. 5), that is, the remnants of classical slavery which are still discriminating individuals through an inherited stigmatised status. Nonetheless, as I will argue in this book, any effort to pinpoint race and racism in Tunisia cannot overlook a centuries-long history of slavery, which left clear ramifications in today's forms of discrimination. Activists, for their part, theoretically recognise a connection between historical slavery and today's discrimination:

> The history of Tunisian blacks is the missing link in the chain of the official history of Tunisia. Reconstructing this history is a major project which has to be taken seriously by researchers and by all components of civil society. Certainly, reconciliation with the African dimension of our country is also one of the problems which have to be tackled in order to better understand and accept our geographical and geo-political 'identity'.[18]

However, their encompassing approach tends to lump together different "black" actors in an all-embracing category of "Tunisian blacks", regardless of their historical and genealogical past.

The purpose of my research is to render the ethnic group of "Tunisian blacks" in one particular region, the Southern governorate of Mednine, as a nuanced, heterogenous social group which does not rely solely on "blackness" as a marker to define itself.

While I was inquiring about the history and legacy of "black" slavery in the south of the country, in fact, I encountered the activists' discourses and their agendas. At that time, my research took a turn, incorporating the research questions about how the racial framework which they proposed was insufficient to tackle racial discrimination in the region where I was studying.

I argue that the racial framework the activists rely on is "biology-based", and the term *race*, often used in French[19], indicates mainly skin colour. Phenotype groups together different actors, associated by the experience of anti- "black" racism, which can take different forms, from institutionalised discrimination to everyday insults and extreme phenomena such as human trafficking.

Ethnic boundaries in southern Tunisia

The main outcome of my research is that the «criteria for marking difference» (Wade 2015, p. 3) between ethnic groups in Southern Tunisia are both bodily features and genealogical origin (*'aṣl*)[20]. Contrary to Jonathon Glassman's (2011) claim that «language we call 'race' places more explicit emphasis on the metaphor of descent […] than does language we call 'ethnicity'» (Glassman 2011, p. 11), the language of *race* in today's Tunisia, as it is widely employed by associations and activists, obscures genealogical lines in favour of phenotypical characteristics. Activists connect to a broader language which sees a renewed emergence of the term "race", after the post-WWII euphemisation "ethnicity" (Wade 2015, p. 83), in civil society, academia, media, and politics. On the other hand, my understanding of "ethnicity" in Southern Tunisia is far from being the replacement of biology with culture (Balibar 1991, p. 21): the term indicates the interaction of biological features with other factors, such as origin, professional domains, and

everyday practices such as clothing. It also wishes to overcome the idea that «race is something blacks have; ethnicity belongs to whites» (Holt 2000, p. 17).

Current differentiation between social categories in Southern Tunisia fits with the classic definition by Frederick Barth (1969) of "ethnic groups" or "ethnic boundaries" (Barth 1969, p. 10). According to Barth's (1969) definition, ethnic groups have «a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order» (Barth 1969, p. 11). "Black" ethnic groups are consistently homogeneous with their "white" neighbours in terms of cultural, religious, and linguistic background. What distinguishes them is mainly origin, which "essentialises" certain physical, psychological, and moral characteristics, inscribing them in individuals. "Essentialism" is intended here as a «pervasive cognitive bias that leads people to view members of a category as sharing a deep, underlying inherent nature (a category 'essence'), which causes them to be fundamentally similar to one another» (Rhodes, Leslie, and Tworek 2012, p. 13526). Origin translates into a "social colour", since some social groups are racialised as "black". "Social colour" is, however, also essentialised through other physical characteristics: flat nose, robust body, curly and kinky hair. "Black" will be employed in its local dialectical translations, such as *iswid* (fem. *s*ūdā, plur. *sūd*) and *'asmar* (more "brown"; fem. *samrā*, plur. *smur*).

Ethnic boundaries are always also social ones (Barth 1969, p. 15) and do «crucial organizational work and [...] [are based on] categorical differences» (Tilly 1998, p. 6). I suggest, in fact, that the differences they reproduce in Southern Tunisia consist in what Charles Tilly (1998) defines as "categorical and durable inequalities", that is, «long-lasting, systematic inequalities in life chances [that] distinguish members of different socially defined categories of persons» (Tilly 1998, p. 6). Along with the construction of ethnic thought over time, in fact, as Bruce Hall (2011) convincingly argues in *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960*, it is important to analyse the specific effects that ethnic constructions have and what consequences they engender in practice at the level of the social structure (Hall 2011, p. 13). The hierarchical classification of southern Tunisian society consists in «manifestations of deeper, economic contradictions» (Hall 1980, p. 307), referring to an elaboration on race and racial relations which portrays them as both sociological and economic phenomena.

This book forms part of the academic debate on the emergence of race and ethnicity in the African continent, which sees, on the one hand, an academic stream portraying racial categories and the consequent racial discrimination as a Western – colonial – invention or as a response to imposed Western categories (see the classic work on the Rwandan genocide: Mamdani 2001, 2009). On the other hand, recent scholarly research in Muslim West Africa envisages racial constructions of differences as pre-existing the colonial encounter (Hall 2011, p. 16), arguing that the French articulated their own ideas with local ideas of race (Hall 2011, p. 106). The case study of southern Tunisia follows the second academic thought, since the French arrived in an already highly hierarchised and racialised context, sometimes using ethnic distinctions to their own political advantage, sometimes misunderstanding them. As Nancy Hunt (1999) convincingly argues in the case of Congo, in fact, the colonial encounter cannot be used as a cliché to explain all aspects of African history.

Last, this study follows recent academic reflection which aims to link North Africa to its continent, overcoming the compartmentalisation of North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. XIII), that is, the scholarly tradition which treats the two regions as academically separate, one belonging to Islamic and Middle Eastern studies and the other to African studies. Trans-Saharan studies have emerged in the last decades, aiming to overcome the "Saharan divide" in social sciences (Lydon 2005; Bentahar 2011; McDougall, Scheele 2012. For Tunisia: Pouessel 2012b). These also include inter-disciplinary efforts to analyse the genetic impact of the trans-Saharan slave trade on North Africa (Harich, Costa, Fernandes, Kandil, Pereira, Silva, and Pereira 2010). Understanding racial issues as a product of the trans-Saharan slave trade helps reconnect the two edges of the Sahara and highlights how individuals living in the desert have always had connections to the southern parts of it.

Southern Tunisian post-slavery hierarchies

In southern Tunisia, racialisation processes are the outcomes of centuries-long phenomena, and the language of slavery is central to their understanding. The label *'abid* is not a mere «anachronism» (Rossi 2009, p. 314) but should be analysed along a diachronic line right up to today's forms of

discrimination. Southern Tunisia is a "post-slavery society", that is, a society where abolition has been achieved in its legal sense, but equality and full emancipation for slave descendants still have a long way to go (Lecocq, Hahonou 2015, p. 184). In the region, the legacy of slavery has created different categories of actors; some of these may or may not be made up of actual slave descendants, but one should go beyond this simplistic distinction. What is important is the fact that some individuals are accorded an alleged slavery past, making them classificatory slave descendants.

Little mention is made of the post-slavery nature of Southern Tunisian society in the public discourse of black rights activists. Nonetheless, "black" Tunis-based advocates are themselves the product of racialisation processes that stem from the history of slavery in Tunisia, which affected the whole country.

The term "racialisation" here contrasts with *race*, used by activists, because the latter refers to a definition of difference which is too biology-based and does not have a precise translation in Arabic (Hall 2011, pp. 9-10). On the other hand, the term "racialisation" proves «indispensable to an historical understanding of race» (Glassman 2011, p. 7) and is therefore applied to the analysis of the historical processes of construction of differences in the region. Racial ideas in southern Tunisia cannot, in fact, be unravelled or explained without re-constructing their historicity, «seeing how historical forces shape and change the meanings of these terms over time and space» (Holt 2000, p. 18). The term has the advantage of highlighting how racial categorisation is always something processual, contextual, and changing.

In this book, the analysis is limited to the southern governorate of Mednine, which, as my argument will make clear, has experienced specific post-abolition trajectories, different from other parts of Tunisia, and is the place where the remnants of slavery have proved to be more resilient.

When I was in Tunis, in fact, I had this conversation with Sana, a 32-year-old schoolteacher and PhD candidate from Tunis, whose mother comes from the southern region of Mednine:

> My mother is from Djerba and we had a house there, together with our relatives. Djerba has a big community of blacks, and my grandmother had slaves [she probably meant house servants of slave origin]. My grandmother and a black woman had been breastfed together. I met her [the "black" woman] a few times; I used to call her *shūkūlātiyya* [chocolate woman]. This woman used to come to our house once or twice a year because she was a good cook,

and came for special occasions such as weddings and ceremonies. She was not paid, normally, and my family used to say, «that's the family's duty, so also hers». Once I saw her at my home and unintentionally I yelled, «Mum, Mum, here is *shūkūlātiyya*! ». She laughed. Now she is dead, but it breaks my heart to think that she had to leave her family and house to do our housework. Her children were born free.[21]

Shūkūlātiyya could have not been born into slavery, neither could her children have been the first ones to be born free in her family, since Sana must have witnessed these scenes in the 1980's, and slavery was abolished in Tunisia in 1846. This story is, however, very meaningful, because it reports the existence of post-abolition forms of servitude, which engulfed "black" slave descendants in a patron-client relationship with their former masters and their descendants. These post-abolition patronage relations were the norm in the southern region of Mednine, and they contributed to shaping and defining the racial set-up of the region, which still survives today. These post-slavery trajectories are consistent with other areas of the African continent. Jean Schmitz (2009) argues that ex-slaves entered voluntarily into clientelistic ties with their former masters in the Senegal river valley, in order to gain access to land and to forge a legitimate line of descent. The "benefits of belonging" (Bouman 2003) – that is, protection, legitimisation of the former slaves' lineage, and access to land and resources – were the primary movers behind the creation of such forms of patronage in Tunisia as well.

Post-slavery trajectories left an ethnic mark on the hierarchisation of Southern Tunisian society. The social group of the *ʾaḥrār* (literally "freemen") racialised itself as "whites" (*bīḍān*) and as different from the two socio-economically inferior categories, that of the *shuwāshīn* (Bédoucha 1984, p. 82) and the *ʿabid*. These categories crystallised after abolition, and, at that time, *ʾaḥrār* lineages were not necessarily former slave owners, while *shuwāshīn* and *ʿabid* bore and still bear the mark of "classificatory slavery". *Shuwāshīn* is a Tunisian Arabic term widely used in the Tunisian South, in Libya, and in parts of Eastern Sahara to refer to an intermediary category between *ʾaḥrār* and *ʿabid*. Moving westward, the term seems to be replaced by *haratin* (Valensi 1986, p. 827)[22]. Edward Evans-Pritchard, in his seminal study *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949), describes «*shawashna*, [*shuwāshīn*] [as] descendants of Arab men and Negresses», as opposed to «*ʿabid*, full-blooded Negroes» (Evans-Pritchard 1963 [1949], p. 42). It referred generally to native-born "blacks", mainly descendants of freed slaves,

or to persons «of a servile origin» in general (Bédoucha 1987, p. 403, my translation from French). *Shuwāshīn* and *ʿabid* were not interchangeable terms after abolition, and referred to different periods of importation and settlement: the term *ʿabid* indicated a more recent origin (Montana 2013, p. 125) and a darker complexion. *Shuwāshīn* and *'abid*, in fact, were and still are racialised as "blacks" (*sūd*, *smur*). In the neighbouring Governorate of Kebili, Geneviève Bédoucha (1987) describes a social hierarchy articulated in *'aḥrār*, *shuwāshīn*, and *waṣīf*, where the latter category «means slave and invokes the origin» (Bédoucha 1987, p. 242, my translation from French). Remco Ensel (1999) has shown similar dynamics within the social hierarchy in the Moroccan Dra River Valley, where «skin colour played a prominent role in the respective image and self-image of the inhabitants of the oasis communities, but only as an element of a more wide-ranging set of cultural ideals and practices that divided the population into strata such as Haratin, Shurfa (sing. Sharif), *Aḥrār* (freemen) and *'Abīd* (descendants of slaves) » (Ensel 1999, p. IX). Tunisian *shuwāshīn* were, in the 1980's, small, endogamous pockets of isolated families or groups (Bédoucha 1984, p. 83), «a deeply atomised social group […] intimately tied to *'aḥrār* families» (Bédoucha 1987, p. 255, my translation from French).

The ethnic boundaries between these categories are marked by phenotype and by genealogical origin. On the one hand, *shuwāshīn* and *'abid* are endogamous lineages racialised as "blacks", and indeed display darker skin tones, but, on the other hand, they are "black" because they belong to *shuwāshīn* or *'abid* lineages, exemplifying processes of inclusion and exclusion through genealogy, which define those who do not belong (Glassman 2011, p. 12). Origin (*'aṣl*) becomes a wider metaphor for "Arab origin", and its absence makes a person *shuwāshīn* or *'abid* – while, in contrast, *'aḥrār* can proudly boost deep, Arab lineages.

"Whiteness" needs some clarification, too, as the term *bīḍān* is less used than the term *'aḥrār* – and often in an adversative way: «who do you mean, the *sūdā* ["black" woman] or the *bīḍā* ["white" woman]?[23]» This, I contend, can be reconnected to the general reluctance of Arabs to resort to colour to define themselves, which was also observed by the historian Chouki El Hamel (2013) in Morocco (El Hamel 2013, p. 74). In the construction of ethnic minorities, «the bias of phenotype» (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 15, my translation from French) is the marker of "blackness" rather than the racialisation of certain groups as "whites": the creation of an ethnic boundary is,

in the end, the creation of a stigma – that of "blackness" – which is based on non-Arabness.

Arab origin (*'aṣl*) and "Arabness", or Arab identity, are discrete analytical concepts which are not interchangeable. The early Islamic period ignited processes of Arabisation through religious, cultural, and linguistic lines, when the Arabs conquered North Africa (for Sudan: Sharkey 2008, p. 22). In the Tunisia of recent times, Arabisation overlapped with the "Tunisification" process ("*taounasa*", Pouessel 2012a, p. 151). In the post-independence period, in fact, former President Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987) stressed that all Tunisians shared a common identity, muffling ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity: hence the pre-2011 taboo on acknowledging the existence of minorities. Among southern ethnic groups, a common belonging to a shared Arab identity is not questioned, but origin and phenotype stress the existence of ethnic cleavages. Some social categories, however, feel that they are located outside the Tunisian and Arab "imagined community" (Anderson 1983), a sentiment sharpened by the daily experience of racist discrimination.

Ethnic boundaries in southern Tunisia are effective, in the sense that in a practical way they shape the everyday lives of individuals. As a matter of fact, *'aḥrār* have higher social and moral status as a result of their noble Arab lineages. *'Aṣl*, in fact, crafts one's social and moral personality, as it is connected to *sharaf*, honour[24], with the consequence of demoting individuals who cannot retrace their origins very far, and enhancing the status of those who can boast a solid, deep lineage, especially if their origins trace back to the Arab peninsula. "Black" slave descendants display lineages which are less deep, «less known, less certain, and, at the same time, less valuable» (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 935, my translation from French). As a consequence, they also display less honour.

Also, *'aṣl* is a distinct concept from *nasab*, which can be translated as "agnatic descent" but transcends the individual and refers, «on a larger scale, to a genealogical ordering of groups, which constitutes tribal self-representation» (Leder 2015, p. 57). The two ideas, in the Arab understanding, are closely intertwined, as *nasab* rests upon origin and exemplifies the way «origin marks behaviour and attitude» (Leder 2015, p. 58). They convey both biological and social notions, and while *'aṣl* is connected to *sharaf*, *nasab* relates to *ḥasab*, "high status", "nobility", "ancestral honour" which

«is left by […] fathers […] a perfect model of behaviour to be imitated in all circumstances of life» (Izutsu 2002, p. 63).

Sharaf is conceptually connected to *ʾaṣl* but it is also entangled with the legacy of slavery. American sociologist Orlando Patterson defines slaves as social outcasts and dishonoured persons (Patterson 1982, p. 13). Similarly, Martin Klein (2005) elaborates on how post-slavery social hierarchies in French West Africa in the early twentieth century were articulated according to local codes of honour (Klein 2005, p. 840).

Sharaf in Southern Tunisia is moulded by Arab origin and by the legacy of slavery, and in turn moulds social and everyday practices, such as clothing: Bédoucha (1987) reports that in the 1980's, in the oases of the Kebili governorate, the *jabba*, the white male tunic, was a sign of honour and a prerogative of the *ʾaḥrār* (Bédoucha 1987, p. 244). *Shuwāshīn* and *ʿabid* lineages hold less honour, but are not completely devoid of it. John Iliffe's argument, in *Honour in African History* (2005), is that, historically, slaves also had their sense of honour, especially in their acts of resistance to their masters' abuses. Classificatory slave descendants in southern Tunisia put in place several strategies to enhance and conserve their honour, which will be unpicked in the second part of this book.

Gosbah

After hearing *shūkūlātiyya*'s story, I realised that the Southern regions of Tunisia were the best place to carry out my fieldwork. The opportunity arose when I got in touch with some activists, and they directed me to a community of classificatory slave descendants in the southern region of Mednine, which they identified as a springboard to fight anti- "black" racism.

On February 15th, 2015, in fact, an open letter in French appeared on Facebook and was quickly shared across social networks and blogs on the internet[25]. It was addressed to the Tunisian Parliament, directly to the deputies, by Maha Abdelhamid, a PhD student in Paris and human rights activist who was passionately involved in the debate on discrimination and racism against "black" Tunisians. "Black" Tunisian herself, she intended to outline the situation of roughly 5,000 "black" inhabitants of a village in the southern governorate of Mednine, Gosbah, who were suffering from an institutionalised kind of geographical, economical, and social segregation.

Treated as inferior (*inférieurs*) citizens, deprived of any material or intangible means, having no infrastructure, "blacks" and "whites" are even separated by a small dried-up river. Furthermore, intermarriages are a deep-rooted, hard-to-fight taboo, creating a situation which is poignantly described as *apartheid*. In Maha's open letter, the 'Abid Ghbonton are said to take two separate school buses to go to the *lyceé* (high school) in Sidi Makhlouf, shockingly denounced as "buses for whites and buses for blacks", in a country where a proudly boasted Mediterranean identity aligns Tunisian society more to European countries than to Africa.

The 'Abid Ghbonton is the lineage name of a classificatory slave descendants' community in Gosbah, an *'imāda* (sector, or in French *secteur*) which belongs administratively to the *mu'atamadiyya* (district, or in French *délégation*) of Sidi Makhlouf, which comprises 23,728 inhabitants[26]. The 'Abid Ghbonton's lineage name, *'abid*, indicates an alleged slavery past, ascribing to the 'Abid Ghbonton the status of slave descendants, regardless of whether their ancestors were actually enslaved or not. Today, all references to a possible past of slavery are silenced, making it a «public secret» (Rossi 2009, p. 10). In Gosbah, the silence surrounding slavery and the meaning of *'abid* is resounding, and the absence of any debate on this word and its implications is a sign of the wide-spread taboo covering the legacy of slavery. Alice Bellagamba (2012) traces the embarrassment surrounding the stigma of slavery descent in post-abolition Gambia, showing how suppressing the shameful label has the function of enhancing social cohesion. Similarly, in the district of Sidi Makhlouf, avoiding references to the ascribed slave descendant status of the 'Abid Ghbonton has the advantage of keeping the social structure knitted together.

Historically the 'Abid Ghbonton were *shuwāshīn* who were re-named *'abid* at a later stage, and nowadays both terms are used to indicate them. The 'Abid Ghbonton are racialised by themselves and by others as "black", especially in juxtaposition to the "whites" (*bīḍān*), who are the *'aḥrār* lineages living in the region. Their history developed through a bound relationship to the Ghbonton, a group of *'aḥrār* descent mainly residing in the village of Sidi Makhlouf. Each lineage group is called a *qabīla* (plur. *qabā'il*), which is a large social group which relies on a common patrilineal ancestor to define itself. The *qabīla* functions as an «identification of the individuals and of the groups, of the names [which] perpetuate themselves in a secular way»

(Bonte, Ben Hounet 2009, p. 14) in a society which has no written records of its genealogies, contrary to other Arab contexts (Fabietti 1994, p. 67).

The creation of an ethnic boundary stems from the history of the post-abolition period, since the two lineages were tied by clientelistic forms of servitude in the past, bequeathing the ethnic boundary to the present. The ethnic boundary still creates structural inequality, since the 'Abid Ghbonton are of lower socio-economic status and are geographically marginalised to the least fertile part of the land. They pursue less profitable educational and professional careers and suffer from daily discrimination. The ethnic boundary is sustained by strict endogamic norms, in the sense that intermarriages between Ghbonton and 'Abid Ghbonton are such a hard-to-eradicate taboo that violations of the rule are punished through expulsion from the Ghbonton lineage. Endogamy is in fact imposed unilaterally by the Ghbonton, who strive hard to preserve their higher status through the rebuttal of hypogamy, that is, "marrying downwards" (Regnier 2014, p. 112).

Ethnic groups are far from being fixed entities, and ethnic boundaries can be crossed if to do so would assist the social production of cultural difference (Fabietti 2016, p. 155). Hence, it is not my intent to essentialise the 'Abid Ghbonton as an ahistorical social group, but rather I am trying to elaborate on the heritages of precise historical phenomena, which, necessarily, highlight the differences rather than the similarities between the 'Abid Ghbonton and their neighbours. As a matter of fact, the 'Abid Ghbonton recently renegotiated their socio-economic status, and put in place strategies to make up for their shorter genealogies, their social inferiority, and their lessened honour.

Methodology

My fieldwork developed gradually over a long time, which was necessary in order to acquire linguistic skills (in the Tunisian dialect) and acquaintance with the community. I spent almost two years, with many interruptions, living amidst the 'Abid Ghbonton.

Slavery, being a highly sensitive issue, is blanketed by a sense of shame and of things unsaid[27]; therefore collecting data was an extended, challenging process, achieved through participant observation. Discrimination based on a classificatory slave past is taboo, as well, and a "culture of silence"

hinders direct engagement with the issue of racism. This silence renders discrimination along ethnic boundaries especially persistent. I like to echo Janet Carsten's words in her *After Kinship* (2004): «it is harder to challenge what has never been said» (Carsten 2004, p. 49).

Racism is so pervasive that finding an assistant, a person who would help me with translations and interviews and was willing to move to Gosbah, proved to be very hard. Girls from Tunis were relatively open-minded regarding living with "black" people, but at the same time unwilling to live in the countryside, deprived of many basic comforts (running water, toilets). Girls from the south, on the other hand, but especially their families, were sceptical, or openly racist against the 'Abid Ghbonton. In the south, the widespread perception of *shuwāshīn* and *'abid* as violent, rude, and uneducated made southern families even less willing to let their daughters come with me to Gosbah. The impasse was eventually overcome, paradoxically thanks to the same racist attitude which was making things difficult. When I asked Mariam, a 20-year-old "white" girl from Tatouine, in the South-Eastern region next to Mednine, if I could meet her family, I found a very friendly and relaxed attitude, especially from her mother. She explained to me:

> I am not worried about Mariam going to live amidst brown ones [*smur*]. "Black" people are kind people. You know, when they are babies, they are not "black" but *foncées* ["dark" in French]. Behind their back, they have a black spot, which grows according to the growth of the child, and takes the whole body when they are adults, apart from their hand palms. "Black" adults are strong and powerful. I am not worried about her living there, because they won't marry her. A marriage between one of my daughters and a "black" person is out of the question.[28]

Besides the folklore-driven prejudices Mariam's mother was displaying, the openness the "whites" show towards the "blacks" in the South appears cloaked by a superficial paternalistic benevolence which conceals strictly hierarchised social structures and a creeping racist attitude.

On the other hand, public figures such as activists and journalists were easily accessible due to their public profile and even eager to talk to me; they wanted me to speak for them and bring their activities "back to Europe". With them, I had little difficulty using semi-structured interviews, but on the other hand, I had other problems. In Gosbah, two brothers had contacts with black rights associations, but in turn had no apparent support from their own

community. One of the black rights activists, Mehdi, introduced me to the 'Abid Ghbonton community but kept me apart from other 'Abid Ghbonton who had different opinions on racism and political activism. When I finally wriggled out of his grip, he broke contact with me. Generally, the activists had an ambivalent attitude: on the one hand, they tried to use me as their foreign spokesperson, to get publicity and – probably – access to international funding; on the other, they pushed their political and racial views, trying to curb moves and opinions which were not in line with their ideas. Lina, a 30-something "black" woman from Zarzis, in the south of Tunisia, once told me that she had been a member of a black rights association but was later ostracised and gradually left behind by the more radical secular female activists when she started wearing a hijab, the Islamic headscarf[29].

The main issue at stake was, however, the reconstruction of the nebulous history of the 'Abid Ghbonton. Given the scarcity of archival documents about them, I had to combine written – both archival and secondary – and oral sources. By "secondary sources", I mean ethnographic and historical research already done in the area, as well as articles and travel accounts. Oral sources were the most significant, for their consistency and their originality. I spent hours visiting the elders in Gosbah, listening to their stories about the old days, and participating in the fascinating ceremony of drinking tea with them. I am very thankful to the 'Abid Ghbonton ladies who hosted me, or, as they say, who "made tea (*ṭaybū tī*) for me", with open arms and few prejudices. I followed their everyday activities through participant observation and collected their ideas on "blackness", marriage, and beauty, while peeling potatoes and watching *musalsalāt* (TV series, soap operas) at dusk. My research is therefore and necessarily a gendered one. Like Lila Abu Lughod (1986) in a Western Desert's Bedouin community, in fact, my gender and my status – a foreign woman – gave me privileged access to the women's sphere, a part of Gosbah which is usually hidden. A newcomer to the village is, in fact, puzzled at first by the visual absence of women: the main road is for men, with shops and cafes, while the backyards of the houses are the places where women socialise, gossip, take care of children, and draw water from the wells.

I have tried to connect the past to the present through oral history, in light of the paucity of written sources. Since the seminal article by Martin Klein, *Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery* (1989), scholars of African slavery have tried to incorporate the voices of subjected groups through collecting testimo-

nies from oral sources, where alternative versions may emerge (Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein 2013b). Heterodox versions of history are a characteristic of African societies (see the classic work by Vansina 1985). Even if slavery was almost absent from the 'Abid Ghbonton's historical reconstructions, their stories led to "environments of memory", that is, «the social networks and contexts of interaction in which people learn about the past together with the genres, conventions and values that shape the ways they talk about the past» (Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein 2016, p. 176).

I have tried to combine different methods of inquiry, from life histories to oral legends and songs, following what other scholars operating in post-slavery contexts did before me. Ann McDougall (1998) working in Mauritania, for instance, saw life histories as a useful tool to triangulate the construction of the self – and therefore, to give insights into issues like gender – and historical data. Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (1976) collected oral versions of the past among the Touareg in Niger, as they were passed down from generation to generation. Rosalind Shaw (2002), in Sierra Leone, interpreted musical rituals as symbols of the trauma of past raids by slavers. Another example of reconstruction of the origin of a slave descendant group through local narratives is David Graeber's (2007) work in Madagascar. Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein's (2013b; 2016) recent collections of publications also use a combination of these sources.

Addressing issues of race and ethnicity, on the other hand, meant working with present-day representations, which were unearthed through daily interactions with the actors. It also meant reflecting on myself and on my own racial positioning towards a country – Tunisia – where I used to go unnoticed, and towards my home country – Italy – where I appear relatively dark-skinned. Through ethnographic research, I learnt how to understand myself through the other. Progressively, I incorporated Southern Tunisian culture and my *habitus* changed in the way I was using my body, developing "somatic modes of attention", that is, «culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others» (Csordas 1993, p. 138). In this sense, I developed the ability to perceive the surrounding environment actively using myself and my positioning as a tool of research. At the end of the fieldwork, for example, I was surprised at how good I had become in identifying the ethnic boundaries between *shuwāshīn*, *'abid*, and *'aḥrār*, and I could define myself an "insider".

As the topic of the research is constantly evolving, I needed to set a time-frame beforehand. My field research ended in June, 2016. However, some further developments needed to be included in this book: not least, Law 11/2018 was approved after I completed my PhD but cannot remain outside this analysis. Unfortunately, some recent encouraging steps towards the eradication of racial discrimination in Tunisia are beyond the time frame of my research and will be left to future scrutiny[30].

Outline

The first part (Chapters One and Two) is devoted to the theoretical framework, moving from the academic debates on slavery, with a specific focus on Tunisian slavery, to the scholarly literature on race (Chapter One). Chapter Two deals with Islamic and Tunisian abolition, and with the historical trajectories followed by freed slaves in Tunisia after 1846. In the second part, Chapter Three is dedicated to an attempt to reconstruct the 'Abid Ghbonton's history, starting with archival documents and integrating them with oral sources. Chapter Four gives an account of the 'Abid Ghbonton's marital alliances and how they speak of "blackness" and race, especially women. A consequential structure discloses the path from racial ideas, as defined within marital strategies, to the more recent questions of what level of consciousness there is within the post-slavery community, and what strategies of emancipation were pursued by the 'Abid Ghbonton. A specific focus on post-slavery professional paths is the subject of Chapter Five, where I delve into the music genre *ṭāʾifa*[31], developed by the 'Abid Ghbonton. Chapter Six is devoted to the current issues the 'Abid Ghbonton are facing, such as national and international migration. Chapter Seven will describe the encounter of black rights activists and the 'Abid Ghbonton, and the current situation of the classificatory slave descendants community.

Transliteration, names, and pictures

Classical Arabic terms are transliterated according to the IJMES (International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies) Translation System, and Tunisian dialectical words follow the IJMES system only if their root is

retraceable from Classical Arabic. If not, I asked my interlocutors to transcribe them, and they did it following more closely the pronunciation - thus letters like −*e* and -*o* appear, which are not present in the IJMES chart. Words which are in current use in English and are present in the Merriam Webster Dictionary[32], such as jihad, hammam, and hijab will not follow the IJMES system and will not be italicised. I have tried to conceal the identity of my informants and of those whom I interviewed as much as possible, and reported the true forename only of individuals who have a public profile (activists, journalists, and so forth).

Pictures are, unless otherwise indicated, mine. Interviews were always recorded with the consent of the interviewed persons. Tunisian Arabic and French were the favoured languages, and translations were carried out by me with the help of assistants. Any inaccuracy, mistake, or shortcoming is attributable to me.

PART ONE

Chapter one
Notions and debates about slavery and race in Africa and in the Ottoman Empire

African slaveries

The classical debate on slavery in African history has dealt more with colonial times and abolition (Watson 1980; Lovejoy 1981; Toledano 1982; Robertson, Klein 1983; Lovejoy 1983; Miers, Roberts 1988; Lovejoy 1989; Lewis 1990; Savage 1992; Lovejoy, Hogendorn 1993; Toledano 1998; Segal 2002; Lovejoy 2004; Toledano 2007; Wright 2007; McMahon 2013; Stilwell 2014) than with its existence in modern times (O' Connell Davidson 2015) or its contemporary legacies (Rossi 2009; Hahonou, Pelckmans 2011; Rossi 2015; McDougall 2015; Colosio 2018). Obviously, speaking of "African slavery", «as if a form of slavery were co-terminous with the continent» (Cooper 1979, p. 106) hides the heterogeneity of "slaveries" in Africa as different institutions varying between different geographical and historical contexts; and therefore it will be treated here as a theoretical convention. Given that slavery has been formally and legally abolished in every African country, Rossi (2009, p. 5), a post-slavery scholar, suggests switching to new analytical tools to frame today's "slaveries". According to her, the term «slavery» remains attached to the remnants of abolished historical forms of enslavement, while «forms of exploitations akin to slavery» are classified as «metaphorical slavery» (Rossi 2009, p. 5). Regarding the legacy of slavery, the rubric «classificatory slavery» refers to the «stigmatisation on the grounds of inherited or putative status», while by «extraverted slavery» Rossi means «exogenous discourses opening new fields of thought and action around the notion of slavery» (Rossi 2009, p. 5).

In Western popular understanding, slavery is often conceptualised as the antithesis of freedom, or, the other way round, one could say that «the concept of "freedom" can properly be formulated as the antithesis of "unfreedom" – a state of servitude» (Leach 1963, p. 74). The two concepts are highly stereotypical constructions (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 5) and mostly

diverged only with abolition (Bellagamba 2017, p. 1). The main problem lies in the fact that the common wisdom definitions of slavery rest upon the Western historical and philosophical tradition, thus running the risk of « apply[ing] Western concepts of 'slavery and freedom' to institutions in other cultural and historical contexts» (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 5) and «treat[ing] the African phenomenon as a deviation from the Western one» (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 6). Conceptualising freedom in Africa, for example, is problematic because often, «in many African contexts, freedom might better be defined as the ability or right to belong» (Stilwell 2014, p. 8) rather than the possibility of doing «what one pleases» (Stilwell 2014, p. 8), which Pakistan-born anthropologist Saba Mahmood terms «negative freedom» (Mahmood 2005, p. 11).

Belonging is crucial to the definition of African slaveries: according to Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (1977), slavery in Africa, rather than being the antithesis of freedom, is placed within a «continuum of marginality» (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 18) and dependence, where the mildest forms are marriage and parentage (Stilwell 2014, p. 7) and the harshest is slavery. On the other hand, Claude Meillassoux sees slavery as the opposite of kinship, and not as part of a continuum of belonging, but rather a «qualitative change» (Meillassoux 1992 [1986], p. 19, my translation from Italian).

The controversy between Meillassoux (1975) on the one hand, and Miers and Kopytoff (1977) on the other, is a starting point in African historiography. All of them portray slaves as outsiders, but Meillassoux sees slavery as a mode of production (or exploitation) that always needs new inputs, i.e. the constant buying (or raiding) of new slaves. Miers and Kopytoff (1977), instead, underline the specificity of African slavery, arguing that slaves were continually integrated into the local society. This debate is to be attributed to the general climate of de-colonisation of knowledge prevailing in the 1970's, when African studies scholars (Meillassoux 1986; Miers, Kopytoff 1977; Lovejoy 1981) attempted to highlight the specificities of the African slave systems and to then re-integrate them into the broader circuits of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Paul Lovejoy's (1983) "transformation thesis", for example, holds that the external slave trade, that is the trans-Atlantic trade, shaped African society economically and demographically, also impacting on «the incidence of slavery in Africa» (Lovejoy 1989, p. 386).

«Debates about the nature of African slavery began in the 1970s» (Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein 2016, p. 2): efforts aimed at the definition

of what slavery was identified specific characteristics which are considered to lie at the core of the institution.

First, a pivotal feature, which can be found in almost every definition, is property. Whether simply equating slavery with property (Tuden, Plotnicov 1970) or basing a more articulated effort to outline slavery on it, ownership is central to understanding African slavery dynamics, together with kinlessness and violence (Stilwell 2014, p. 5). Miers and Kopytoff (1977) called the universality of the property concept into question, particularly in African contexts, where individual rights are not easily discernible from ownership. African concepts of "rights-in-persons", that is, the «rights that one person or group exercises over another» (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 7), depend greatly on the cultural context where these rights are conceived. These rights, in Miers and Kopytoff's (1977) analysis, are in fact barely comparable to Western ideas of property. They transcend the individual and are borne by lineage groups or households, that is the kinship group of the masters.

Second, the distinction between "belonging to" and "belonging in" (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 10) a group is fundamental to framing African slaveries: «"belonging to" […] denote[s] that the individual is part of the wealth of his corporate group, while "belonging in" […] refer[s] to his position as a member of the group» (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 10). The former refers to the acquisition of individuals by masters and the second indicates the absorption, that is the full integration, of slaves and their descendants into the kinship group of the masters.

Third, during my research focused on a classificatory slave descendants' community, I had to reckon with the "slavery-to-kinship" pattern (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 22). In short, the "slavery-to-kinship pattern" sees slavery in terms of transfers of 'rights-in-persons' within kinship systems, which are "open" to the absorption of outsiders, thereby making slaves quasi-kin. Slaves are subsequently absorbed by a kinship group, especially after emancipation. The pattern has several theoretical advantages, such as the representation of slavery as a process rather than as a state of being, and proposes an inclusive mode of slavery. Nonetheless, the "slavery-to-kinship continuum" risks the essentialisation of the concept of African slavery and of its homeostatic, functionalist nature. Scholars such as James Watson (1980) complicate the "openness" of the system described by Miers and Kopytoff (1977) with "closed" systems in Asian contexts, where kin groups tend to be «exclusive – the problem was to keep people out» (Watson 1980, p. 12),

and slaves remained outsiders rather than being incorporated. According to Watson (1980), «the differences between the dominant modes of slavery that emerged in these two continents correspond to different concepts of property» (Watson 1980, p. 11). In 'closed' systems land is a scarce and valuable resource, whereas in "open" systems land is plentiful and wealth resides in people.

Hypotheses on the origin of slavery appear linked to the supposed "openness" or "closedness" of the African slavery systems, too. Jack Goody (1971) explains the two modes by pointing out that Africa has an ample supply of land, in contrast to feudal Europe. Therefore, power and social distinction was conveyed in Africa by possessing people, who made up most of the booty in raiding, while in Asia and Europe land was the primary source of wealth, giving birth to phenomena such as landlordism and an exclusive system of slavery. The underpinning idea is that slavery in Africa emerged as a response to the need of chiefs and kin groups to have control over people, whereas land was abundant.

From the 1980's onwards, several analyses turned to the emancipation of slaves and to the official abolition of slavery (Miers, Roberts 1988; Lovejoy, Hogendorn 1993). Other academic shifts occurred in the 1990's and 2000's when marginal voices began being incorporated (such as female slaves' narratives: Robertson, Klein 1983; McDougall 1998), along with non-traditional sources, such as oral histories (Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein 2013b; Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein 2016). This "block" of literature was essential during the development of my fieldwork, since the lack of documents on the trans-Saharan slave trade forced me to focus on oral legends and histories, transmitted by the elders of 'Abid Ghbonton, to attempt to reconstruct their past history[1].

Nowadays, reflection on modern forms of bondage and servitude, as well as on post-slavery relations, in the contemporary world is increasing. Various analyses of the legacy of forms of slavery, such as marital taboos, have emerged recently (Klein 2005; Pelckmans 2012). The Bellagio Rockfeller Foundation Workshop of 2007 – 'Finding the African Voice' – marked a turning point. Interest in slavery resurged and was mirrored by the growth of anti-slavery movements in the African continent, thanks to the democratisation reforms and the inflow of foreign aid to West Africa in the second part of the 1990's (Hahonou, Pelckmans 2011, p. 7).

Islamic slaveries

Historical slavery in Tunisia can be subsumed under the category of "Islamic slaveries", which, however, covers a wide range of different contexts and institutions[2]. As R. David Goodman (2012) convincingly argues, the notion of Islamic slavery «resonates closely with colonial representations and obscures more than it reveals» (Goodman 2012, p. 145). The author goes as far as to claim that, in the Moroccan context, the term should even be avoided. By "Islamic slaveries" here I mean all forms of historical slaveries which have been regulated by Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

Historically, Islam has been a connecting element between the African continent and the external world, and for more «than seven hundred years before 1450, the Islamic world was virtually the only external influence on the political economy of Africa» (Lovejoy 2011, p. 15). North Africa in general, and Tunisia in particular, have been a crossroads between the African continent and the Mediterranean and Ottoman world, importing slaves from the Niger Bend, Lake Chad, Darfur, the Nile basin, and Ethiopia (Toledano 1982, pp. 21, 27, 28).

A quick overview of Islamic legislative opinions on slavery is therefore necessary before moving on to a description of Tunisian historical slavery.

The existence of slavery is assumed by the Quran, which «regulates the practice of the institution and thus implicitly accepts it» (Lewis 1990, p. 5). The Quran contains various references to slavery and slaves, who are called in Arabic *'abid* (for a male slave - singular) or *'ama* (for a female slave - singular). *'Abd* also indicates a more general idea of submission to God, a virtue highly valued in Islam and recurrent in Arabic male first names. The Quran usually paraphrases the concept of slavery and slaves with expressions such as "those whom your right hand possesses" (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 2; Lewis 1990, p. 6) and *riqāb* (literally necks, sing. *raqaba*) (Ennaji 2007, p. 56). «*Raqabā* […] [refers] to the observation, the guard, the surveillance» (Ennaji 2007, p. 56, my translation from French), and can indicate the ancient practice of tying slaves' hands to their necks, but also draws a comparison between enslaved individuals and cattle, both considered to be merchandise at that time, since *riqb* is the rope used to tether animals (Ennaji 2007, p. 56).

In a nutshell, under Holy Law, individuals are slaves if born into slavery, captured, or imported, «the last either by purchase or in the form of tribute from beyond the Islamic frontiers» (Lewis 1990, p. 7). Thus, Islam

introduced the presumption of freedom (Lewis 1990, p. 5), contrary to pre-Islamic societies, since the inherent status of human beings came to be considered that of freemen (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 15) and «in all dubious cases, such as foundlings of unknown origin, […] [the assumption] was in favour of freedom» (Segal 2002, p. 36). In Islamic legislation, «there was prolonged historical debate over who could be enslaved legally and who could not be» (Lovejoy 1981, p. 15). Enslaveable people were, in Islamic thinking, infidels, because «slavery was conceived of as a form of religious apprenticeship for pagans» (Lovejoy 2011, p. 15). «Islam interdicts the enslavement not only of freeborn Muslims, but also of subjects [of the Muslim state, *dhimmiyyūn*] or people of the book» (Botte 2010, p. 20, my translation from French), that is Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Sabeans, and Samaritans. «Neither the purchase of a slave from non-Muslims, nor the seizure by raiding or kidnapping were lawful methods of obtaining a slave» (Hunwick 1992, p. 7), although such methods were commonly used (Segal 2002, p. 37). Heathen slaves had to be converted, but still remained slaves, because for a Muslim, it is forbidden to enslave fellow-Muslims, but not to keep a converted slave (Lewis 1990, p. 9). In Tunisia, the conversion was necessary, since the "paganness" of the slaves would have prevented them from committing themselves to tasks such as preparing meals, slaughtering animals, engaging in sexual intercourse with their masters, or serving in the military (Jankowsky 2010, p. 44).

References to force and violence for the sake of enslaving in the Quran are clear:

> So when you meet those who disbelieve [in battle], strike [their] necks until…you have inflicted slaughter upon them, then secure their bonds, and either [confer] favor afterwards or ransom [them] until the war lays down its burdens. That [is the command]. And if Allah had willed, He could have taken vengeance upon them [Himself], but [He ordered armed struggle] to test some of you by means of others. And those who are killed in the cause of Allah – never will He waste their deeds (Quran 47: 4)[3].

In the Islamic scripts, the slave is represented as an incapable subject, comparable to an individual of minor age in terms of his obligations and rights, who is not able to apply him or herself assiduously to religious practice. Even though, in theory, a Muslim slave had the same religious status

as his or her free co-religionaries, in Muslim countries «slaves were excluded from religious functions or from any office involving jurisdiction over others» (Lewis 1990, p. 7), such as leading prayers (Botte 2010, p. 24). In that, the slave was comparable to women; moreover, he or she was not bound to perform the Friday prayer, like «the woman, the child, and the sick» (Botte 2010, p. 24, my translation from French).

A paternalistic stance regarding slaves underpinned their treatment in Muslim countries, and some sayings attributed to the Prophet endeavor to curb masters' abuses:

> Fear God in the matter of your slaves. Feed them with what you eat and clothe them with what you wear and do not give them work beyond their capacity. Those whom you like, retain, and those whom you dislike, sell. Do not cause pain to God's creation. He caused you to own them and had He so wished he would have caused them to own you (Hunwick 1992, p. 7).

The master should not load the slave with hard work and should provide him with food and clothing similar to his own (Segal 2002, p. 35); «contrary to other […] societies, especially in [ancient] Rome and Greece, Muslim societies acknowledged the validity of marriages between slaves» (Botte 2010, p. 26, my translation from French). Nonetheless, in Muslim contexts, «while maltreatment was deplored, there was no fixed *sharī'a* penalty» (Lewis 1990, p. 7). As for female slaves, the Quran openly forbids masters to prostitute their slaves:

> But let them who find not [the means for] marriage abstain [from sexual relations] until Allah enriches them from His bounty. And those who seek a contract [for eventual emancipation] from among whom your right hands possess – then make a contract with them if you know there is within them goodness and give them from the wealth of Allah which He has given you. And do not compel your slave girls to prostitution, if they desire chastity, to seek [thereby] the temporary interests of worldly life. And if someone should compel them, then indeed, Allah is [to them], after their compulsion, Forgiving and Merciful (Quran 24: 33)[4].

Nonetheless, it broadly happened in practice (Botte 2010, p. 26): *baghiya*, Arabic for prostitute, was a term widely used to define a female slave (Ennaji 2007, p. 74).

Although recent analysis has tried to analyse the trans-Atlantic and the trans-Saharan slave trade as opposite sides of the same coin (Lovejoy 2004), there is general agreement that the two trades did not compete numerically with one another because of different gender demands (Austen 2010; Lovejoy 2004). Scholarly analysis of the trans-Atlantic slave trade between the 1680's and 1860's has shown how slaves shipped to the Americas were predominantly male and «it was more likely a result of African supply patterns than European demand» (Lovejoy 1989, p. 381). «More women were retained in Africa than men […] [and] the incidence of polygyny increased as well [during the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade] » in West and Central Africa (Lovejoy 1989, p. 387). Internal demand, in fact, has to be considered, as the trans-Saharan slave trade absorbed women more than men, «for a variety of purposes […] musicians, singers, and dancers», «domestic work as cleaners and cooks, washerwomen and nursemaids» and «concubines» (Segal 2002, p. 38). Concubinage appears thus as a key feature of "Islamic slaveries", as it is regulated in detail by sharia (Islamic law) and it «is probably the most frequently identified characteristic of so-called Islamic slavery» (McDougall 1998, p. 291). The Quran is very clear regarding the possibility of taking concubines:

> And whoever among you cannot [find] the means to marry free, believing women, then [he may marry] from those whom your right hands possess of believing slave girls. And Allah is most knowing about your faith. You [believers] are of one another. So marry them with the permission of their people and give them their due compensation according to what is acceptable. [They should be] chaste, neither [of] those who commit unlawful intercourse randomly nor those who take [secret] lovers. But once they are sheltered in marriage, if they should commit adultery, then for them is half the punishment for free [unmarried] women. This [allowance] is for him among you who fears sin, but to be patient is better for you. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful (Quran 4: 25)[5].

Ronald Segal (2002) contends that «there was no social degradation in being a concubine» (Segal 2002, p. 39), and that that they could «be tried out as potential wives» (Segal 2002, p. 39).

The control over the reproductive and sexual capacities of slaves by their masters was at the core of the institution of Islamic slavery. On the other hand, Meillassoux (1986), extending the analysis to the African continent,

contends that women were absorbed by the internal slave trade for their productive rather than reproductive roles (Meillassoux 1992 [1986], p. 113 - 117). According to the French Marxist scholar, in fact, since slaveries reproduce themselves through the continuous injection of new elements – raided or purchased slaves – «the reproductive role of the woman weakens in favour of her functions related to or derived from her slave status: that of worker or neutral agent of power» (Meillassoux 1992 [1986], p. 116, my translation from Italian) and «the case of concubines […] cannot be considered as a norm in female slavery» (Meillassoux 1992 [1986], p. 117, my translation from Italian). Meillassoux's theory on female slavery (1975) has been contested, especially because it counterposes production and reproduction too sharply, underplaying the complex interrelations between them (Cooper 1979, p. 110). Anyway, the institution of concubinage was undoubtedly important in Ottoman-Islamic systems of slavery and left profound legacies in today's North African societies.

Manumission for concubines followed specific paths, in fact, since a *'umm walad* (literally "mother to a boy"), that is a concubine who gave birth to her master's child, acquired specific legal rights (Lewis 1990, p. 8). When the master was still alive, she was subject to the normal regulations governing a female slave (Hunwick, Powell 2002, pp. 97-120), such as being prohibited from inheriting. After his death, however, she was granted *mudabbar*, or post-mortem emancipation (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 99). In Morocco, «a female slave who is recognized as having given birth to her owner's child» was called a *mustawlada* (from the Arabic root *walada*, "to generate"), while a slave «who has been freed upon the death of his or her owner» is a *mudabbar(a)* (Goodman 2012, p. 157). Some concubines became so influential as to be considered fully-fledged wives, and many rulers – for example Ahmed Bey of Tunisia (1835-1855), who abolished slavery – were born to "white" concubines (van der Haven 2006, p. 47). Slave wives had the advantage of distancing the political elites, who were of Ottoman origin, from the Tunisian population, preventing marital alliances with local families (Medici 2005, p. 183).

Contrary to the North Atlantic slavery regulations[6], children born to a *'umm walad* were legally considered free (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 99; Segal 2002, p. 37). However, children born to a slave father assumed his slave status, given the prevalent patrilineal pattern of Arab societies. As a consequence, concubines' offspring were integrated into the host societies,

and inter-generational upward mobility was a feasible path in North African and Arab contexts.

This set of characteristics is the hard core of systems of Islamic slaveries, but the risk of essentialisation must be carefully avoided. "Islamic slavery" «presented itself as a complex phenomenon with an extraordinary variety of servile situations, a major disparity of juridical statuses» (Botte 2010, p. 19, my translation from French). Secondly, the interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence could differ greatly from what people actually did and what practices they considered righteous regarding slavery. In practice, "Islamic slaveries" must be understood as a constructed, historical institution rather than in its ahistorical form, since it followed different rules across geographies and histories. Goodman (2012), in the Moroccan case, demonstrates through the analysis of notarised court records how «approaching and characterizing slavery through an emphasis upon generalizations about Islam […] remains problematic» (Goodman 2012, p. 153).

North African jurisprudence, following the Maliki school[7], crystallised all the rules regarding slavery, slave purchase, well-treatment, and manumission in the first seven centuries of Islam, and «remained authoritative down to the time when Muslim nation-states began to formulate their own individual codes of law in the twentieth century» (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 23). Slavery in Tunisia, however, was subject to a pluri-legal system, similarly to what happened in other parts of the continent[8]: the Maliki and the Ottoman Hanafi schools, for example, coexisted under Ottoman rule in Tunisia (1574-1881), and overlapped with customary practice.

According to Behnaz A. Mirzai, Ismael M. Montana, and Paul E. Lovejoy (2009), the essentialisation of "Islamic slavery" led to the attitude hurdle of the "good-treatment thesis" (Mirzai, Montana, and Lovejoy 2009, p. 12). The perceived absence of big plantation systems, the relatively easiness of absorbing freed slaves, and its predominantly domestic nature (Medici 2005, p. 160) contributed to the scholarly idea that Islamic slavery showed more benevolent traits, especially compared to the cruelty and inhumanity of the American plantation system. Yet some forms of plantation systems occurred in the Muslim world, too. The cotton boom of 1861-1864 in Egypt, for example, due to the retrenchment of US exports during the Civil War (1861-1865), triggered high demand for slaves in Egypt, to be employed in labour-intense agricultural tasks, and «enslaved Sudanese were

carried into the Egyptian countryside to work the cotton fields» (Toledano 2007, p. 13).

As for African slaveries, Lovejoy (2011) claims that «the transformation of slavery from a marginal feature in society to a central institution resulted in the consolidation of a *mode of production* based on slavery» (Lovejoy 2011, p. 9), while «a *slave mode of production*[9] existed when the social and economic structure of a particular society included an integrated system of enslavement, slave trade, and the domestic use of slaves» (Lovejoy 2011, pp. 9-10). Additionally, «the expression 'slave system' […] describes a self-contained, self-sustaining set of organic relationships, both at the economic and at the social level» (Dal Lago, Katsari 2008, p. 4). First advanced by Moses Finley (1980), the concept of "slave system" implies the intertwining of elite wealth with slave ownership, a well-established system of buying and selling slaves, a high percentage of workers being enslaved labourers, and the profits made by states and institutions from slavery and the slave trade (Dal Lago, Katsari 2008, p. 5). Being closely related, the "slave mode of production" and the "slave system" are based on the pervasiveness of the institution of slavery within society and are often referred to as the North Atlantic slaveries.

On the other hand, the specificities of the American plantation systems – such as the degree of physical and psychological violence put in place to extract labour from slaves – are not a structural element of the Islamic systems of slavery. This is due to the fact that «the slave was not a chattel to be sent into the fields. Rather, he lived with the family. Master-slave relations were face-to-face» (Brown 1967, p. 469). Nonetheless, Muslim contexts could experience both "modes of production based on slavery" and "slave modes of production", as the abovementioned case of Egypt shows. Slavery in Tunisia, specifically, never had a major economic impact and was far from being a pivotal feature of the economic structure. Slaves were «absent in the economic structures of the city […] [and] were in the realm of domestic affairs» (van der Haven 2006, p. 43). There is no record of slaves being used in the professional guilds of Tunis, even in the most labour-intensive ones (van der Haven 2006, p. 43). Arguably, even if Southern Tunisia experienced the close connection between elite status and slave ownership which remained in the social hierarchisation of society, we cannot speak either of a "slave mode of production" or of a "slave system" in Tunisia when slavery was lawful.

Considered as «the first obstacle on the way to an open and honest treatment of slavery in Ottoman and other Islamic societies» (Mirzai, Montana, and Lovejoy 2009, p. 12), the attitude hurdle of the "good-treatment thesis" needs to be tackled. It comes from Western as well as non-Western angles, as, according to Ehud Toledano (2009), both the "patronizing" Western Orientalist tradition and the "defensive" Middle Eastern debate have participated in shaping the "good-treatment thesis" (Mirzai, Montana, and Lovejoy 2009, p. 13), that is, the belief that «[slavery in the Ottoman Empire] was far milder because slaves were not employed on plantations, were well-treated, frequently manumitted, and could integrate into the slave-owning society» (Mirzai, Montana, and Lovejoy 2009, p. 13). The Muslim defensive attitude traces back to the attempt to contest Western political and military influence, or even back to the abolitionist period, when Western powers justified their invasion with the compelling project of abolishing slavery. As for slavery in the Ottoman Empire, «European criticism of Ottoman slavery elicited a defensive – though complex and differentiated – reaction from Ottoman officials, writers, and intellectuals» (Toledano 2007, p. 16), and even now, there is a certain resistance to alluding to the internal slave trade in Africa, and non-Africans speaking about it is frowned upon, because they are seen as unqualified by reason of their colonial slavery past. Achille Mbembe (2000) identifies slavery as one of three unifying centres (together with colonisation and apartheid) from which the identity of Africans developed, through the representation of the self and the rejection of outsiders (e.g. Europeans) descriptions (Mbembe 2000, p. 17). Narratives on slavery thus risk "victimising" the African continent: if slavery must be remembered as only the trans-Atlantic, in fact, then Africans are the victims of it.

However, the "good-treatment thesis" has come under criticism lately because it neglects the atrocities and harshness of the trans-Saharan slave trade and of forms of extreme exploitation of slave labour. Theoretically, moreover, it is incorrect because it essentialises the Islamic world denying its internal differences, and treats slave-holding households as immutable social units. Moreover, the idea that the slave could be integrated into the kinship system of the master contributed to the representation of slavery in the Islamic world as "less harsh". The "integration model", however, «cannot be applied to every historical period and its weaknesses were that it treated groups of relatives as immutable social units without conflicts and

internal differences and that it was not sensitive to gender relations» (Brivio 2017, p. 44).

As contended in the seminal work by Miers and Kopytoff (1977), the attitude hurdle stems from the idea that the Western model is the yardstick for comparisons. However, in their eyes, the Anglo-American system of plantations is far from being the «norm in historical and cultural perspective» (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, pp. 5-6).

At a methodological level, moreover, the assumption underpinning the "good-treatment thesis" rests upon a precise chorus of voices, that is, those of masters and of colonial officials. The lack of sources, not surprising for a mostly unwritten part of world history, limits the work of historians to a handful of culturally and linguistically filtered colonial documents and to oral transmission of the most recent part of the history of slavery.

The comparison between the trans-Atlantic and the trans-Saharan slavery and slave trade also proves useful for addressing questions of racial transmission between generations of slaves and their descendants.

Race in North Africa

Historically, in North Africa, the construction of racial ideas has followed contingent paths, and comparing it to racial constructions in North America is incorrect (Walz, Cuno 2010, p. 8) and creates misunderstandings. Although a certain hierarchisation of humanity has always existed in the minds of pre-historical populations and Berbers (Lewis 1990, p. 17), «the advent of Islam [seventh century AD] created an entire new situation in race relations» (Lewis 1990, p. 18). Bernard Lewis's (1990) work claims that race was of minor importance in antiquity, meaning that Romans, Greeks, and Punics made «cultural, not racial, statements» (Lewis 1990, p. 17) about "others", along with pre-Islamic Arabia. Allegedly, in fact, pagan and pre-Islamic Arabia attached no stigma to "blackness" (Lewis 1990, p. 19). However, recent interpretation (Hall 2011) has moved away from this colour-blind representation of the pre- and early Islamic world, in favour of the conviction that every society hierarchises its neighbours, according to the overlapping of physical and cultural features. «What we might call proto-racial ideas were clearly present in notions for outsider groups» (Hall 2011, p. 12) in Greek and Latin sources, given that all racisms ground dis-

crimination in biology and «claim a congruence of 'cultural' categories with 'natural' ones» (Hall 2011, p. 11). Racial representation of others is traceable in early North African writings: coastal inhabitants as well as Mediterranean people «refer to people from the interior of the continent as "black": the Greek term "Ethiopian" (also used by Romans and not denoting any specific region of Africa) means "burnt face" » (Austen 2010, p. 8).

Segal (2002) claims that the Arab conquest, its advance, and the importation of "black" slaves from sub-Saharan Africa were the major factors behind the emergence of colour prejudice amongst Arabs (Segal 2002, p. 46). It is correct to claim that a change in the understanding of racial issues in North Africa occurred under the patriarchal caliphs, especially under the Umayyads (661-750 AD; the Umayyads ruled in Islamic Spain until 1031 AD), which was the second caliphate after the death of Prophet Mohammad and extended its territory to an area reaching from the Iberian Peninsula to today's Pakistan. On the one hand, the patrilinear and patrilocal system spread, and on the other hand, slavery and the slave trade imported high numbers of "black" slaves to North Africa (Lewis 1990, p. 41). The Arab conquest, in fact, and the consequent Islamisation of the region, at a very speedy pace, brought with it a huge number of captives (El Hamel 2013, p. 8) who were seized in wars and offered as tributes by subjugated rulers. The first and most famous example is «a pact (*baqt*) made between Muslim Egypt and Christian Nubia, which began according to tradition in 652, [and which] required Nubia to furnish 360 slaves annually to Egypt» (Goldenberg 2003, p. 132).

Even though «to the Muslims […] the civilised world meant themselves» (Lewis 1990, p. 42), they inserted themselves into broader racial hierarchies which were already prevalent in North Africa and combined Southern European elements. James Sweet (2003) shows how racial ideas in North Africa were crystallised and transferred across Europe, where the Iberians promulgated the idea that enslaving sub-Saharan Africans was righteous (Sweet 2003, p. 6), which would then become the framework of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In the eyes of the Europeans, well before the sixteenth century, there was a cultural and racial distinction between North African Arabs and sub-Saharan and "black" Moors: «though legally in the same category of enslaved "infidels", Islamic Africans were distinguished from "white" Moors by the term "Negro" » (Sweet 2003, p. 7). Race became

an aggravating factor that made "Negro(es)" doubly enslaveable (Sweet 2003, p. 7).

From the Arab conquest of North Africa onwards, people of Arab descent came to define themselves in opposition to the *sūd*, the "blacks", a word from the same linguistic root as "Sudan". «The Arabic word for the regions south of the Sahara, Bilad-es-Sudan, translates as Land of the Blacks» (Austen 2010, p. 8).

In spite of the well-articulated racial ideas the Arabs introduced, for them "race" had no precise linguistic or religious codification, there is no direct translation of the word "race" in Arabic. «In different contexts, certain words (Ar. Qawm, qabīla, 'irq) stand for race» (Hall 2011, pp. 9-10) and can be used as an imprecise replacement, «but there was no Arthur de Gobineau or Herbert Spencer of the West African Sahel» (Hall 2011, p. 10). «*'Irq* signifies rootedness […] Today often used in the context of ethnicity (*'irqiyya*), the term refers rather to the way origin marks behavior and attitude» (Leder 2015, p. 58) and thus is the closest to the current understanding of ethnic differences.

From a religious standpoint, Islamic references to races are difficult to justify. The Quran is often quoted as the colour-blind Holy Book, and it clearly states:

> O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted (Quran 49: 13).[10]

These distinctions clearly disregard any phenotypical difference, but only suggest «an awareness of difference» (Lewis 1990, p. 22).

Racial labels for "blacks" originated from pre-Islamic sources. Islamic societies had access to ancient Greek sources, mainly the "Geography" of second century physician Ptolemaeus (100-175 AD), which divided the world latitudinally into seven areas, where the fourth, the Mediterranean one, was looked up to as the most civilised. To Greek eyes, the greater the distance from this area, the less the degree of civilisation. Interestingly enough, then, this concept, unconnected with colour, considered Swedes as well as sub-Saharans as inferior human beings (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 35).

The two main pre-Islamic theories on race are Noah's curse on Ham's progeny in the Bible (Book of Genesis 9: 20-27) and Galen's environmental theory about human differences, dating back to the second century AD.

First, Ham was cursed because he laughed at his father Noah's nakedness while the latter was drunk. Ham's son Canaan was doomed to be the slave of Ham's brothers, Sem and Jafat. As Semitic people are descendants of Sem, this passage of the Bible was commonly used to justify their domination over sub-Saharan "blacks", from an Arab as well as a Christian perspective, even if the Biblical passage does not describe anyone as "black" (Goldenberg 2003, p. 142). The curse of Ham was inherited by the Muslim tradition which stressed Ham's "blackness": «Ham, the son of Noah, was a white man, fair of face. God (…) changed his color and the color of his descendants because of the curse of his father. […] God increased and multiplied them, and they are the Blacks (*al-sūdān*) » (Wahb b. Munabbih, as quoted in Hunwick, Powell 2002 p. 37). Muslim tradition crystallised the "blackness" of Ham from pre-Islamic sources, since the Quran never mentions the Hamitic myth nor Ham's skin colour (El Hamel 2013, p. 62).

The Muslim version «saw Canaan as the ancestor of various groups of black Africans, Ham was the ancestor of other dark-skinned (*sūdān*) peoples, such as the Sind, Hind, Barbar/Berbers, Copts, and the Kushites (*ḥabasha*)» (Goldenberg 2003, p. 166). This interpretation is applied with difficulty to North African "racial" theories, because Berbers were amongst the biggest slave traders in the Sahelian zone, but are not Semitic. In Morocco, this theoretical impasse was bypassed by a typical feature of racial attitudes in North Africa: the reconfiguration of local genealogies. Berbers and even some "blacks" managed to rearrange their lineages, in order to appear to be of Arab (and thus Semitic) descent in order to climb to high religious and political positions (El Hamel 2013, pp. 86-104).

Second, the environmental theory quoted the second-century Greek physician Galen (129-201 AD). Galen depicted "blacks" as slow, mentally retarded, and defective because of the place they lived in, attributing these negative characteristics to climatic conditions. The Tunisian fourteenth-century writer Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) committed to the environmental argument, and claimed that

the curse of Noah upon his son is there in the Torah. No reference is made there to blackness. His curse was simply that Ham's descendants should be

the slaves of his brothers' descendants. To attribute the blackness of Negroes to Ham, shows disregard for the nature of heat and cold and the influence they exert upon the air and upon the creatures that come into being in it (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 38).

After Ibn Khaldun's rejection, the myth of Ham continued to find favour among later writers and thinkers and was brought into play by the well-known seventeenth century Timbuktu scholar, Ahmed Baba (1556-1627). Ahmad Baba's list of people who could and could not be enslaved is often quoted in the examination of racial theories in North and West Africa. His main intent was to discourage the enslavement of fellow Muslims, and to condemn the colour prejudice condemning "blacks" to enslavement, thus rejecting both the Hamitic myth and the environmental theory: according to the scholar, the only enslaveable subjects were infidels, and no alleged ethnic inferiority could justify the subjugation of human beings (El Hamel 2013, pp. 79-85).

The fast Islamisation of sub-Saharan countries, in fact, led to increased numbers of "black" actors in Arab countries on the one hand, and to the hurdle of the enslavement of "black" fellow Muslims on the other.

First, an increase in pilgrimages, which moved vast groups of people across distant and remote places, favoured the mingling of populations and the development of racial ideas (Lewis 1990, p. 18). Mansa Musa (1280-1337), ninth emperor of Mali, went to Mecca in 1324-1326, accompanied by a sumptuous retinue and many "black" slaves. Sold or freed during the journey, they remained in the transit countries, such as Egypt, shaping racial ideas on sub-Saharans[11].

Second, in the nineteenth century, «an increased demand for slaves arose from "rejuvenated Islam" […] [and] as a result of the jihads and Muslim commercial expansion in East Africa» (Lovejoy 1989, p. 389), and posed the problem of the slaving zones moving «inland during the early nineteenth century» (Lovejoy 1989, p. 389), where slave traders were not so careful regarding slaves' religious adherence. «By 1835», in fact, «West Africa had come under the dominance of the *jihād* regimes[12] […] [which] laid the foundation for the conversion of the majority of people in West Africa who were not already Muslims to Islam» (Lovejoy 2016, p. 13). Lovejoy (2016) argues that, if the jihads of West Africa «reduced the number of enslaved Africans who could have gone to the Americas» (Lovejoy 2016, p. 133), they

«had an impact on the slave population of the Maghreb and the Ottoman Empire» (Lovejoy 2016, p. 157). The numbers of enslaved West Africans who were sent to North Africa increased, amounting to one million from 1776 to 1850 (Lovejoy 2016, p. 157), to the extent that it is referred to as "second slavery" (Lovejoy 2016, p. 159).

Together with the jihads, Lovejoy (1989) argues that the trans-Atlantic slave trade increased the «enslaved population that was retained in Africa» (Lovejoy 1989, p. 394) from the seventeenth century onwards. These increases in slave raiding led to the enslavement of fellow Muslims, an unexplainable phenomenon in religious terms. Therefore, scholars of African slavery consider other "frontiers" between communities (Lovejoy 2004) which came into play with regard to slavery, one of them race. «A "don't ask, don't tell" policy» (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. XV) was established, and «slaves could be purchased from Muslims in the borderlands of Islam on the tacit assumption that they were originally captives taken in a *jihad*» (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. XV).

Racial thinking doubtlessly came into play with an overarching religious justification of slavery and enslavement. The overlapping of "blackness" and "slavery" stems from the early centuries of Islam (Goldenberg 2003, p. 133), but the idea that «black Africans […] were "natural" slaves» was eventually crystallised in Morocco by the seventeenth century (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 42). The Moroccan ruler Mulay Isma'il (1668-1727) ordered the forced recruitment of "blacks" into his army (*'Abid al-Būkhāry*), claiming that, even if free, they were runaway slaves, thus connecting "black" and unfree, and codifying it in writing (Meyers 1977; El Hamel 2013). For the first time in the history of North Africa, an official decree specifically targeted "blacks", implying their duty to serve as slaves, thus setting skin colour as a precise social marker (El Hamel 2013, p. 85). The atrocities perpetrated among the Moroccan population by these soldiers consolidated popular prejudices that "blacks" were violent, aggressive, and brutal (Meyers 1977, p. 440).

In Tunisia, the overlapping of slave status with "black" skin has deep roots. In the fourteenth century, Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) believed that "negroes" were rightfully enslaved and «the Negro nations are, as a rule, submissive to slavery» (Segal 2002, p. 49) because they had few human attributes and were similar to dumb animals (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 38).

However, "blackness" in the Middle East and North Africa is a situated concept which distances itself from the Western racial understanding. Classical work on race in the Middle East and North Africa (Lewis 1990; Hall 2011; El Hamel 2013) has portrayed race as dependent on genealogical origin rather than on mere skin colour. The absence of Arab origin and "blackness" overlapped and created "frontiers" between *dār al-ʾislām* (the abode of Islam) and *dār al-ḥarb* (the abode of war, where it is lawful to enslave people). According to Hall (2011) it was the absence of Arab descent, rather than religion, that made a person enslaveable, and race was a socio-cultural construct which built upon the absence of Arab lineage, always determined by the father's line, and on an alleged slavery past. The intertwining of "blackness", servile status, and exogenous origin informed racial discrimination and racism, intended as

> representations of human difference that posit a direct connection between physical and mental qualities that are constant and unalterable by human will, based on hereditary factors or external influences such as climate or geography (Hall 2011, p. 11).

A comparison with trans-Atlantic ideas of race casts light on several differences. In North America, the "one drop rule" was prevalent and became «law in several states after 1910» (Wade 2015, p. 165), claiming «that any black ancestry, however far back, consigned an individual to the wrong side of the white/black divide, determining (disadvantaging) where s/he could live, what kind of work was available, and whether marriage or even relationships could take place with a white partner. One drop of 'white blood', though, did not carry the same weight in defining racial status» (Rattansi 2007, p. 7. See also Smedley 1993). "Blackness" was transmitted through a "race-kinship congruity" (Wade 2015, pp. 119-120), a pattern which assumed that both parents contributed physically to the child they conceived together. In Brazil, skin colour was of major importance (Klein, Vidal Luna 2009; Schwarcz 2012).

"Blackness" in Arab lands, on the other hand, entailed a high degree of miscegenation. Mixed marriages, between a freeman and a slave woman, were not uncommon, and the pattern of transmission of race, and therefore of status, followed the father's line. Children born to a free father and to a "black" enslaved mother were legally freemen and were admitted into Arab

society, allowing them in turn to marry freemen, considered as "whites". Marriages between a free woman and a slave men were socially disapproved of.

This happened broadly in Tunisia, as well, where patrilinearity could offer an opportunity for inter-generational upward social mobility, accounting for the low visibility of Tunisia's "black" community which is still the case today. As in other North African contexts, in Tunisia no distinct colour divide developed (for Algeria: Brown 1967, p. 470).

Ottoman and Tunisian slavery

For a long time the history of North African slavery and of the trans-Saharan slave trade has been neglected by Western historiography, which has focused predominantly on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, regarded as an incomparably cruel historical event:

> for every gallon of ink that has been spilt on the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its consequences, only one very small drop has been spilt on the study of the forced migration of black Africans into the Mediterranean world of Islam and the broader question of slavery within Muslim societies (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. IX).

This neglect is a factor in an unapologetic depiction of slavery as a solely Western sin, due to Arabs' high sensitivity regarding their collective historical past. In addition, the construction of North African post-independence official historiography has erased post-slavery legacies such as ethnic heterogeneity. In Tunisia, a «cultural monolithic nature» (Pouessel 2012a, p. 143) in the post-independence period disowned ethnic minorities and was the result of the nation-building process initiated by the first Tunisian President, Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987), and of the broader pan-Arabist project launched by Egyptian President, Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-1970). As a result, in pre-revolutionary Tunisia, cultural, religious, and ethnic heterogeneity was stifled by the dictatorial context (Pouessel 2012a, p. 144).

As for the trans-Saharan slave trade, some of the scholarly inattention to the slave trade across the Sahara is justified by the difficulty of finding data and documents (Walz, Cuno 2010, p. 2). Most "black" slaves were absorbed

into the countryside, which produced few written records. This also has to do with the fact that the Islamic world is a civilisation of cities, and «its law and its literature deal almost entirely with townspeople, their lives and problems, and remarkably little information has come down to us concerning life in the villages and the countryside» (Lewis 1990, p. 14). Much of what we do know, in fact, is inferred from reports by colonial officials or Western travellers and missionaries. In Tunisia, various information on the slave trade and slavery can be inferred from reports by Western observers during the Ottoman period (Stanley 1786; Jackson 1804; Clapperton, Lander 1829; Temple 1835; von Pückler-Muskau 1837; Richardson 1848; Frank 1851; Nyssen 1929) and by French officials (Rebillet 1895). According to Amy Aisen Elouafi (2010), these travellers' accounts were permeated by an orientalist stance regarding Tunisians, which further shaped the racial divide between Europeans, Arabs, Berbers, and "blacks" (Elouafi 2010, p. 255), and hyper-sexualised Tunisian women (Elouafi 2010, p. 256).

The few historical sources give us an incomplete idea of slavery and its numbers. According to Richard Jankowsky (2010):

> unlike the African diaspora in the Americas, the descendants of slaves and other sub-Saharans in Tunisia have not produced a group of outspoken scholars, novelists, and other public figures who have written "Africa" back into national culture and historical narratives (Jankowky 2010, p. 43).

When Islam became the predominant faith throughout North Africa, after the Arab conquest following the death of the Prophet Mohammed (632 AD) (Iliffe 2007, p. 55), «the rapid conquest and expansion […] brought a plentiful supply of new slaves» (Lewis 1990, p. 7). In Tunisia, when Uqba ibn Nafi (622–683), leader and companion of Prophet Mohammad, founded Kairouan in 670, Arabs broke the Berbers' and Byzantines' resistance and established the Muslim province of Ifriqiya (Iliffe 2007, p. 56). The Arab Aghlabid dynasty (800-909) traded in slaves and appointed "black" military slaves to a «special corps» (Segal 2002, p. 53). The Aghlabid were replaced by the Fatimids (909-1171), who «slaughtered all the black military slaves, evidently in distrust of their loyalty […] [and] enlisted a black corps of their own» (Segal 2002, p. 53). The Tunisian "black" corps, however, did not «equal the historical and numerical relevance of the Moroccan model» (Medici 2005, p. 167, my translation from Italian). The trans-Saharan

slave trade was ongoing in that period, transporting "black" slaves from the "land of black people" (Sudan) to North Africa. In 972, the Fatimids left Ifriqiya for Egypt and left their North African lieutenants, the Zirids (972-1148) (Segal 2002, p. 53), who «maintained the tradition of employing a black corps in the ruling courts» (Montana 2013, p. 22). Later on, after the Almohads (1159-1160) and the Hafsids (1229-1574), Tunisia was conquered by the Ottoman Turks, who, however, relied predominantly on local dynasties to rule. In the fourteenth century, the Hafsids responded to internal «factional rivalry» (Montana 2013, p. 23) by employing «black slaves as military guards» (Montana 2013, p. 23). In 1705, the Husaynid dynasty was founded, and ruled until the French Protectorate was established (1881) (Montana 2013, p. 25).

Montana argues that, «in the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest in 1574, Ifriqiya (Medieval Tunisia) […] [experienced] a gradual revival of the caravan slave trade» (Montana 2013, p. 10). As a consequence, the history of slavery in the country cannot be analysed separately from the research stream which emerged in the 1980's on the Ottoman-Islamic slavery and slave trade (Toledano 1982, 1998).

Under the local North African ruling elites during Ottoman rule, slavery in Tunisia thrived in both its forms: "white" and "black", and slaves' social mobility and economic and social status were "colour-bound" (Medici 2005, p. 160), that is, easier for "white" slaves. "White" slaves, «*kuls* […] Ottoman elite slaves […] were *mamluks* (military slaves) of eastern European origin, mostly from Georgia, Circassia, Abazah, and other Levantine Mediterranean territories such as Greece» (Montana 2013, p. 12), and could quickly climb up the hierarchies in royal residences (the numbers of *mamālīk* in Tunisia were relatively limited compared to other Ottoman provinces (Oualdi 2016, p. 474), becoming extremely powerful and influential in the Palaces of the Beys.

"Black" slaves, on the other hand, were raided or purchased in Sudan, the land of "black" people, or «*bilād al-zinj*» (Rahal 2000, p. 16), that is, sub-Saharan Africa. Conventionally, the route which has moved slaves to the southern Tunisian countryside is named by scholars (Wright 2007, pp. 89-102) after Ghadames, an ancient oasis in southern Libya. More precisely, it is rather incorrect to speak about a "route", as it consisted rather of capillaries and networks of paths (Savage 1992, p. 3). A regular influx of caravans, most likely every six months, transported captured slaves in

a journey which lasted from seventy to ninety days (Medici 2005, p. 168) and had high death rates. Responsible for the transport, nomad Tuaregs (Medici 2005, p. 168) were in contact with the local communities of the oases, which acted as "hubs" for the commercial trans-Saharan traffic. The community dwelling in Ghadames was involved in the trans-Saharan commerce for centuries because of its favourable position, serving Tripoli, Tunis through Gabes, Algiers, Constantine, and the Algerian Souf through Ouargla, an oasis-town.

In spite of their formal subjugation to the Sublime Porte[13], Ghadames' inhabitants started paying tribute to the Karamanli (the dynasty ruling Tripolitania from 1711 to 1835, formally subject to the Ottoman Empire) only in 1810, and later had to be re-conquered by the Turks in 1843 due to their indomitability (Wright 2007, p. 89). The Ghadamsi had special ties with the Ajjer Tuareg (a confederation of Tuareg nomads moving through western Libya and eastern Algeria), with whom they were commercial partners (Wright 2007, p. 89). The Ghadamsi merchant class usually acted as middlemen between the northern cities and the nomads. As they traded in slaves coming from the Kanem Borno Empire, Hausa was commonly spoken in the streets of Ghadames (Wright 2007, p. 90). Southwards, in fact, the route was connected to the Hausa states and to the Niger Bend through Ghat (Fezzan, Libya) and Tuat (an oasis in the desert area in central Algeria).

Calculating the numbers of individuals passing through the Sahara is particularly difficult, since written and archival documents are sporadic and non-exhaustive. As this is one of the greatest causes of distress to scholars, Elizabeth Savage in her edited collection *The Human Commodity* (1992) suggests focusing on the qualitative context of the trade rather than on the quantitative, to better grasp the nature of trans-Saharan slavery. During the 1988 Bellagio conference (Savage 1992, pp. 1-3), the organisers, Humphrey Fischer and Micheal Brett, warned that studies on slavery and the slave trade risked being too narrowly focused and theoretically isolated. Therefore, they wanted an inclusive approach to the study of the trans-Saharan slave trade, recommending "micro-studies" of individual communities to replace "macro" ones where data such as demographic statistics are lacking (Savage 1992, p. 2). Efforts at including slave narratives and oral histories in the reconstruction of the trans-Saharan slave trade aim to fill the gaps left by the lack of documentation; nonetheless, there have been multiple research attempts to estimate the slave imports numerically, especially regarding Libya and

Morocco, since Algeria and Tunisia «did not play a very significant role in this commerce» (Austen 1992, p. 229).

Although his numbers have been contested by more up-to-date studies, Ralph Austen's (1992) calculations on slaves passing through Fezzan are highly relevant to this analysis, since slaves in the southern Tunisian countryside were most likely recaptured on their way from Ghadames to Tripoli or re-imported from Ghadames to Tunisia. He estimates that before 1800, 2,700 slaves a year entered Murzuq, an oasis in Fezzan, and Ghadames[14], and that a «regular portion went from Fezzan to Tunisia, but mainly via [Ghadames]» (Austen 1992, p. 231), basing his claim on the report of a member of the French envoy in Ghadames (1724-25) that there were two annual caravans of slaves to Tunis (Austen 1992, TABLE 2/E/4, p. 225). «The Tunisian slave trade was most active during the reign of the Husaynid Dynasty (1705-1881), during which far more than 100,000 slaves entered Tunisia» (Jankowsky 2010, p. 50). Annually, between 1,000 and 1,300 slaves entered Tunisia in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Medici 2005, p. 168), but many of them were re-exported to the Eastern markets in the Ottoman Empire.

As previously mentioned, scholarly analysis (Lovejoy 2016) shows how the jihad of the early nineteenth century expanded the slave trade from Hausaland, after it was absorbed into the Caliphate. The holy wars were launched to fight against slave raiding, especially when they consisted of «taking Muslims as slaves» (Mack 1992, p. 90) but they resulted in an increased number of slaves being captured and purchased by northern nomads, and only partially reducing the raids against Muslims.

In the nineteenth century, the importance of Ghadames decreased due to the French conquest of Algeria (1830) and to Tunisia's abolition of slavery (1846) (Wright 2007, p. 93). In the late 1840's demand ceased, and the oases lost much of the slave trade. The only place in Tunisia where Ghadamsi merchants could export their wares was the southern countryside, where abolition was adamantly opposed by big slave owners (Montana 2013, p. 87).

The British Vice Consul in Ghadames, Charles Hanmer Dickson (1848-1854), recorded some numbers regarding the slave trade, but unfortunately little has survived, although we can still reconstruct part of his notes (Wright 2007, Tab 7.1, p. 94). The traffic decreased drastically during his years of office, and the average fell to 445 slaves entering the oasis every year, five times less than in Murzuq in the same period. Slave deaths seem

to have been slightly higher on this route (Dickson estimates losses of 20%, which is in line with Ralph Austen's analysis: Austen 1992, p. 226, Table 2. F) especially in one of the final stages, from Ghat to Ghadames.

Ghat is an oasis south of Ghadames, at the frontier between Libya and Algeria, and has always been a good hub for the trans-Saharan slave trade. Under the protection of the Ajjer Tuareg, a Tuareg confederation, it escaped direct control by the Turks. After the Ajjar Tuareg tried to seize the oasis in the 1860's and 1870's, the Ottoman Empire re-occupied it in 1875, as they feared that the Tuaregs would divert the trade to the French colonies (Wright 2007, pp. 96-97). Various political conditions in the nineteenth century (the jihad of the Fulani, the European presence in the Maghreb) gave Ghat a short-lived advantage over other routes (Wright 2007, p. 97). It lay in a favourable position: to the south it was connected to Air, a massif in Northern Niger, and thus directly to Bornu, the Hausa states, and the Niger Bend. Northwards its route went up directly to Ghadames, and it was therefore well connected with the big markets of Tripoli, Tunis, and eastern Algeria. To the West, Ghat was linked to Tuat and In Salah, two oases in Algeria, thus having access to the whole Moroccan and Western Algerian market. In addition, caravans which chose to pass through Air and Ghat avoided direct and heavy Turkish taxation.

Britain had already established a diplomatic post in Ghat in the 1840's. Statistics by the British explorer James Richardson (Wright 2007, 7.2, p. 99), who left Ghadames for Ghat in 1845 with the intention of going further south, hint at the fact that slaves arrived in Ghat at an average of 1,000 per year, from all the lands of Africa, even from Nupe (lower Niger, already involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade). James Richardson also tells us that Ghat was used as a hub for importing slaves illegally into Tunisia and Algeria after slavery and the slave trade were abolished (Richardson 1848). Souf Arabs (in today's southern Algeria and southern Tunisia) used to go south to purchase slaves in Ghat, avoiding the French controls. Also, British Consul George Crowe reported on illegal activities in the Souf area in 1848, underlining how prices had grown because of the hazardousness of selling there (Wright 2007, p. 100). The raising of prices for fear of the mounting abolitionist European attitude was also recorded in Ghadames (Wright 2007, p. 101).

Once imported into Tunisia, "black" slaves were assigned the most labour-intensive, physically demanding jobs, especially in the countryside. In

spite of their conversion and their acculturation by language and customs, their skin colour remained an inescapable social marker which excluded them from social mobility and noble genealogies and could not «eradicate prejudice» (Jankowsky 2010, p. 44).

"Black" slavery was definitely incorporated into the Ottoman slavery system in Tunisia in the 1600's (Montana 2013, pp. 13-14) and became an economic asset under the Husaynids. The "black" slave market in Tunis, the Suq el-Birka, displayed a wide array of "human commodities" until its closure in 1841, where purchases were regulated by a *dillāl* (chief slave auctioneer), who was in charge of signing the certificate of purchase in the presence of a notary (*'adl*) (Rahal 2000, p. 17). The Tunisian market sold female slaves rather than men, and

> as the trade increased at that time, the number of enslaved West Africans entering Tunisia also rose, approaching 1,000 to 1,300 per annum. To be sure, female slaves entering Tunis outnumbered men by a ratio of two to one (Montana 2011, p. 155).

The large number of slave women in Tunisia was linked to the purchasers' request for concubines (especially in royal palaces), and by the need of affluent households to employ servants for domestic chores (Larguèche 2002, p. 396).

Regarding prices, few sources record them. In eighteenth-century Tozeur, caravans coming from Ghadames exchanged slaves for two or three hundred kilos of dates (Larguèche 2002, p. 395). From the eighteenth century, however, information is more abundant and shows a great irregularity of prices, with fluctuations depending on gender (female slaves were purchased for 450 piastres by the Royal Palace in 1823, but men only for 350, Larguèche 2002, p. 395), health and strength, age, and women's beauty (Larguèche 2002, p. 396).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Dr. Louis Frank, a medical doctor visiting Tunis, wrote a description of the situation of "black" slaves in the capital in his *Histoire de Tunis*:

> The number of blacks (*nègres*) is consistent in Tunis; the houses and streets are, so to say, crowded and upon my arrival in that city, I could not speculate about where this overabundance of individuals came from, for from their

colour they could evidently not be locals (*indigènes*); what triggered my puzzlement is that there is not more than one caravan, which brings around a thousand or one thousand two hundred every year (Larguèche 1990, p. 18, my translation from French).

Tunisian historian Abdelhamid Larguèche (1990) claims that, in the middle of the nineteenth century, between 10,000 and 50,000 "black" slaves were in Tunisia, with an overall population of two million (Larguèche 1990, p. 19).

In general, the numbers of slaves in Tunisia were contained and slaves appeared to foreign travellers to be well-treated and well-fed. In spite of the harsh conditions of the shipping through the Sahara, in fact, those who survived were integrated into Tunisian households as servants, maids, and concubines. The Islamic legislative framework for slavery contributed to the maintenance of acceptable conditions through detailed recommendations about physical punishments, emancipation, and chores. According to the Tunisian anthropologist Ahmed Rahal (2000), the Swiss philanthropist Henry Dunant, visiting Tunis in 1875, reported that "black" slaves were treated in a humanitarian way (Rahal 2000, p. 17).

This was the situation when the Husaynid ruler Ahmed Bey took the unprecedented decision to abolish slavery in Tunisia, setting the example for other Arab and European countries.

Chapter two
Abolition in Muslim countries and in Tunisia

Muslim abolitionism

If slavery in the Middle East has received little attention from scholars, as it was generally considered an embarrassing phenomenon, even fewer words have been said about its abolition. The Palestinian writer Edward Said (1978), for instance, who has demolished so many prejudices about Islam and the Orient, is silent on both issues. Scholarly work has long considered the difficult path to the abolition of slavery in the Islamic world as a Western imposition rather than as an endogenous achievement, and most scholars who have dealt with the issue follow the model of the exogenous origin of abolition (Lovejoy 1981; Toledano 1982, 1998, 2007; Miers, Roberts 1988; Hunwick, Powell 2002; Botte 2010). Such a paradigm states that without Western intervention, Muslim countries would have not been able to abolish slavery, since «from a Muslim point of view, to forbid what God permits is almost as great an offense as to permit what God forbids» (Lewis 1990, p. 78).

John Hunwick and Eve Troutt Powell (2002) claim that «there was never any formal movement for the abolition of slavery, or even the suppression of the slave trade in the Muslim world» (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 181). One of the most authoritative sources in Islamic studies, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2012), also supports the classical theory of Islamic abolition as exclusively responsive to foreign pressure:

> although Islam, in teaching and in actuality, has favored the emancipation of slaves, it was only under an overwhelming foreign influence that it began, about a hundred years ago, an evolution in doctrine and in practice towards the total suppression of slavery, its abolition in law and custom ("Abd" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2012, p. 36).

The list of supporters of the exogenous origin of abolitionism is indeed very long. Lovejoy (1981) blames adherence to tradition for hindering ab-

olition in Muslim countries, and regarding the African continent, historians Suzanne Miers and Richard L. Roberts (1988), in their seminal work, claim that the top-down liberation of slaves has never been an indigenous African concept (Miers, Roberts 1988, p. 8). According to these scholars, abolition is to be ascribed to foreign pressure, especially to some Western associations which lobbied to abolish slavery, such as the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society[1], since «the first successful sustained movement among the European powers […] took root in Britain where it drew its inspiration from new philosophical, economic, and religious ideas» (Miers, Roberts 1988, p. 9). Roger Botte (2010) claims that «the initial impulse in favour of abolition in the Muslim world, first of the trade and then of the institution of slavery itself, came from Europe» (Botte 2010, p. 27, my translation from French), and that «the idea that slave trade and slavery could be morally and religiously reprehensible was a totally foreign concept in the Muslim world» (Botte 2010, p. 28, my translation from French).

The model of abolition having an exogenous origin holds that the historically unquestionable endurance of this institution appears to be linked to the tolerant attitude of Islam towards slavery, since it is an integral and even sacred part of Islam (Botte 2010, p. 14), and its interdiction would be problematic from a theological point of view. As for the Ottoman Empire, Toledano (1982) argues that «the social – and to an extent economic – importance of Ottoman slavery, the Islamic sanction which attached to it, and its relatively mild nature account for the fact that the Ottomans expressed no desire to abolish the institution» (Toledano 1982, p. 91).

On the other hand, the "good-treatment thesis", which is the idea that slavery in the Islamic world showed milder features than its trans-Atlantic counterpart (Toledano 1982, p. 4; 2009, pp. 12-14), favours the idea of an endogenous abolition. According to these theories, abolition was already an important part of the institution of slavery in the Muslim world, given the strong emphasis the Quran puts on the manumission of individuals. Nonetheless, abolition differs from manumission, since the latter indicates a voluntary, paternalistic, and individual act. Miers and Roberts (1988) convincingly argue that emancipation, considered as «selective manumission at the discretion of the owners» (Miers, Roberts 1988, p. 8), reinforced rather than undermined slavery in Africa, as it manifested the power of the owners over their slaves (Miers, Roberts 1988, p. 8).

Toledano (1982), who has written many pages on the milder nature of Ottoman slavery, claims that «a great deal of what was achieved in the suppression of the African traffic to and in the Ottoman Empire was in fact wrung out of the Porte by British pressure» (Toledano 1982, p. 11). Moreover, he supports the idea that foreign pressure for abolition was strenuously resisted from inside the Empire and describes the Ottoman attitude towards foreign abolitionist pressure as "defensive" (Toledano 2007, p. 16). Europeans were in fact perceived as intrusive, slavery being part of the foundations of the Ottoman social order (Toledano 2007, p. 16). To tell the truth, in most Muslim countries under foreign colonisation, «European law […] [came] into conflict with Islamic law» (Botte 2010, p. 23, my translation from French), and the Western exogenous juridical order led the subject governments to consider any abolitionist measures with suspicion, as legislative interference. Moreover, the abolitionist campaign «became a tool in service to colonial political interests and a crucial part of propaganda in the foreign policy of the British and the French» (El Hamel 2013, p. 241), with the unspoken aim to "civilise and modernise" colonised countries (El Hamel 2013, p. 241). Ann McDougall (2005) shows how, in Mauritania, orientalism strongly shaped abolitionism, with the European eye portraying the «stereotypically cruel, vicious Arabs» (McDougall 2005, p. 958) committed to a practice which was considered an inalienable right in Islam. Colonialist intervention was often justified by the persistence of the "barbaric" practice of slavery, but concerns were raised more about the enslavement of Christians by Maghribi corsairs, especially during the Congress of Vienna (1814-15). "Black" Africans' enslavement, in fact, was of secondary importance on the colonisers' agenda.

Recently, however, some scholars' hypotheses have hinted at Muslim abolitionism being something more than a simple response to Western pressure (Clarence-Smith 2006) and described the role of local Muslim abolitionists as fundamental in order to turn foreign abolitionist pressure into law. Lovejoy (2016) himself underlines how opposition to slavery arose in West Africa, and that historiography has focused more on European abolitionism rather than discussing «the protection of Muslims from enslavement, prohibitions on their sale, and efforts to confront the dangers of subsequent abuse» (Lovejoy 2016, p. 211). In the Ottoman Empire, local abolitionist elites absorbed Western ideas, and others found «refuge in Islam» (Toledano 1982, p. 278), since egalitarianism was a hard core of the Islamic doctrine.

It is obviously hard to say whether there would have been abolitionist movements in Islamic countries without Western intervention. What is known, however, is that, in parallel to Western pressure, a well-educated Muslim indigenous elite started campaigning against slavery, regarded as an obsolete, inhuman, and unproductive way of extracting labour, as in the case of Tunisia.

The Tunisian case is at the crossroads of these two abolition experiences. «Only nominally an Ottoman regency, [Tunisia] tried to restrict the slave trade as early as 1841» (Toledano 1982, p. 277), while «the suppression of the Ottoman slave trade was a gradual, long-drawn out process» (Toledano 1982, pp. 12-13). Following British direct and indirect pressure, in fact, «the Ottomans made some concession in 1847, [but] comprehensive action was not taken until the mid-1850s» (Toledano 1982, p. 11). In 1857, the slave trade in Africans was outlawed everywhere apart from the Hijaz (western part of the Arabian Peninsula) (Lewis 1990, p. 80), but it took other steps to eradicate it: in 1880 an Anglo-Ottoman convention for the suppression of the slave trade in Africans was signed, followed by the 1890 Brussels Act against the African slave trade (Toledano 1982, p. 11).

In Tunisia, on the other hand, slavery was outlawed earlier than in the rest of the Ottoman Empire and before the establishment of a French Protectorate in the country (1881). It is conventionally dated 1846 and the event is brandished as a source of national pride today, especially by black rights activists. In 2019, after lobbying by the human rights organisation INLTP (*Instance Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes*)[2], 23rd January was declared a national day of celebration in Tunisia, honouring the day that the then ruler Ahmed Bey (1837-1855) freed all the slaves in the country[3].

On the one hand, this ground-breaking legal decision was facilitated by indigenous humanitarian movements and by the diffusion of abolitionist sentiments among the Tunisian "intelligentsia" (Botte 2010, p. 65); on the other hand, similarly to many other cases (for example, Egypt[4]), abolition was a decision taken behind closed doors in the Bey's palace and had limited resonance and ideological support within the population. Tunisian abolition took the form of an imposition from above of a decision taken among the elites which met fierce resistance from southern slave owners. At a more local level, especially in the south, governors, who were indigenous Tunisians, were reluctant to abolish slavery in their territories because

they «used slave labor on their agricultural estates» (Montana 2013, p. 126) and had a clear sense of the monetary impact abolitionist measures would have had on the southern agriculture-oriented economy. They denounced abolition as a «*daya' al-mal* (financial loss) » (Montana 2013, p. 126). The financial loss was offset by the concealment of slavery under other forms, such as patronage or clientelistic relations, tying subjects who were *de jure* free into informal agreements of subjugation. Larguèche (1990) claims that the subjugation of "black" individuals survived until after the establishment of the French Protectorate, as evidenced by jurists in the south (Larguèche 1990, p. 36).

In Tunisia, even if abolition was decreed before the establishment of the French Protectorate, colonialism played a role in Ahmed Bey's decision, which came as a way of avoiding otherwise unpreventable Western domination. Ahmed Bey witnessed the French conquest of Algeria (1830) and the fall of Constantine (1837), which had close ties to the Tunisian provinces, and understood that the events were only a prelude to «a similar campaign in Tunisia» (Perkins 2004, p. 13). A few decades later, on 12th May 1881, the Bardo Treaty was signed between representatives of the French Republic and the Bey Mohammed es-Sadiq (1859-1882). «It acknowledged the bey's sovereignty, but placed Tunisia's external relations under the supervision of a French resident-minister and its army under the command of a French general» (Perkins 2004, p. 12). As pointed out by the American scholar of African history, Donald Vernon McKay (1945), the French colonisation of Tunisia, along with the Bey's indebtedness to Parisian bankers and bondholders, was also driven by «national pride, political prestige […] and strategic interests» (McKay 1945, p. 371). The latter were motivated by the geographical position of the country, favourable to commerce and to military activities, and thus the Treaty «allowed France to station troops throughout the country» (Perkins 2004, p. 12).

Abolition and "collective manumission"

Despite abolition, many North African countries experienced a «slow death» (Lovejoy, Hogendorn 1993) of slavery. The persistence of *de facto* slave relations and slavery-like forms of work has many drivers behind it, such as the difficult interaction of colonial and local administrations in the implemen-

tation of abrogative policies, the internal resistance of slave owners, and the colonisers' ambiguous stance towards abolition in certain areas. In Algeria, slavery was abolished in 1848, together with the other French colonies, but it encountered «the resilience of pre-colonial institutions» (Brower 2009, p. 806) and its application to "black" sub-Saharan slavery was retarded by an ambivalent attitude on the part of the colonial administration, which enforced the abolition of "white" slavery with more zeal (Daddi Addoun 2010). «Slavery in Algeria was hardly "abolished" but withered slowly» (Brower 2009, p. 806). Abrogative measures were introduced gradually in Morocco by the French administration (Sikainga 1998, p. 65) and culminated, in 1923, with the circular of the delegate to the French Resident, General Urbain Blanc, abolishing the slave trade (El Hamel 2013, p. 264), which, however, still did not lead to «an outright abolition of slavery» (El Hamel 2013, p. 264). Moroccan rulers were very dilatory in promulgating abolitionist laws and also the French in Morocco «adopted a gradual approach in the abolition of slavery» (Sikainga 1998, p. 65) as «anti-slavery legislation was introduced in a piecemeal fashion» (Sikainga 1998, p. 65). The interplay of French colonial and indigenous rule was a fundamental factor in the delay of the application of abolitionist measures, worsened by the fact, as historian Martin Klein (1999) persuasively argues, that the French colonial rule had at times ambiguous attitudes, sometimes supporting slave owners in order to co-opt their alliance in Saharan areas.

This book follows the general argument that the Quran and the holy scriptures do not contain clear abrogative elements regarding slavery, and the religious framework of abolition had to be provided by interpretative efforts on Quranic equality principles. In Mauritania, for example, as Ann McDougall (2005) convincingly shows, belated abolition (1980) was «argued completely in terms of Islam and coincided with the imposition of *sharia* law» (McDougall 2005, p. 963), leveraging Islamic principles of equality and the institution of manumission.

In detail, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is extremely advanced and detailed on manumission rather than on the concept of abolition, recommended as a pious act. Death-bed liberation of slaves was openly solicited and perjury could be atoned for by feeding ten poor people, clothing them, or freeing a slave. The Prophet clearly encourages the purchase of a slave's freedom by the slave himself (*mukātaba*) (Botte 2010, p. 15) and the Quran identifies liberation in a "contract" (*kitab*), promoting it as follows:

> And those who seek a contract [*kitab*] [for eventual emancipation] from among whom your right hands possess - then make a contract with them if you know there is within them goodness and give them from the wealth of Allah which He has given you (Quran 24: 33)[5].

Manumission is, by definition, individual liberation following a one-sided decision by the slave-owner, since without the approval of the master, the emancipation contract could not be signed (the word *mukātaba* comes from the Arabic root *kataba*, "to write", e.g. to sign a contract, the same as in *kitab*): «[the] master, he is the agent while the slave is passive» (Ennaji 2007, p. 58, my translation from French).

The Quran ratifies the voluntary and free liberation of slaves by their owners (*'itq*): in Tunisia, the word *ma'atiq* defined «ancient freed slaves» (Montana 2013, p. 125) in the abolitionist period, indicating that they were liberated by their owners' will. Manumissions are such an important part of Islamic thought that part of the *zakāt*, the alms-giving constituting one of the five pillars of Islam, is devoted to purchasing the redemption of «slaves who wish to be freed» (Bausani 2005 [1980], p. 51, my translation from Italian).

One of the consequences was that, in many Muslim countries, rather than abolition, rulers applied «collective liberation» or «general emancipation» policies (Botte 2010, p. 7, my translation from French), and therefore slavery was eliminated only with difficulty from the religious imaginary. Instead of policies targeting the very concept of slavery, abolition in Muslim countries has to be considered as the application of an already well-defined Islamic principle at an individual level, that of manumission, at the collective level, thus reinforcing the concept of slavery itself in the mind-set of the population (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 8).

French scholar Roger Botte (2010) describes a reformist attitude amongst Islamic jurisconsults, which intensified in the eighteenth century due to the encounter with European progressive and liberal ideas (Botte 2010, p. 20). It took hold shortly before colonisation in most Muslim and Arab countries and embraced the idea that a progressive abolition is inherent in Islam, because the Quran already contains the seeds of a progressive emancipation. Muslim reformers had to find ingenious arguments to sustain the suppression of slavery in the nineteenth century, and mostly moved within the

field of Islamic interpretation of the holy sources, or *ijtihād*, which claim that what is revealed by God can be reinterpreted in order to adapt it to our days, it being historically and geographically situated (in the seventh century Arabian Peninsula) (Botte 2010, p. 21). However, rather than calling for abolition, this tradition seeks to multiply the possible legal applications of manumissions (Botte 2010, p. 22). Among the supporters of this stream, Mohammed Qutb (1919-2014), an Egyptian ideologue of radical contemporary Islamism, contends that seventh century Islam introduced the presumption of innocence (not everybody could be enslaved), and the principle of manumission, some eleven hundred years before Europe did so with the French revolution (Botte 2010, p. 36)[6].

In Tunisia, the first critical interpretation of slavery in the Quran was carried out in the nineteenth century by the '*ulamā*' (religious scholars) in the service of Ahmad Bey.

Tunisia's early abolition

Tunisia was the first country in the Arab world and the Middle East to abolish both "white" and "black" slavery, with a set of three decrees from 1841 to 1846. Formally under the Ottoman Empire since 1574, the Tunisian rulers, the Husaynid Beys, enjoyed relative independence from the Sublime Porte. The Ottomans attempted «to resolve and contain European, mainly British, pressure: the Empire prohibited the traffic in Africans in 1856» (Toledano 2007, p. 10). Similarly, Ahmad Bey of Tunisia (1837-55) soon acknowledged that the only remaining strategy to avoid French intervention was «to borrow from the West in order to be protected against the threat from the same West» (Larguèche 2003, pp. 330-331), and Tunisia abolished "black" slavery two years before France did the same in its colonies: «in April 1848, the Second Republic abolished slavery in all French colonies, including Algeria. The law marked the second time France had outlawed slavery in its territories, and unlike the 1794 attempt, this abolition was definitive» (Brower 2009, p. 808). Tunisian abolition of slavery dates to before the US, Brazil, and some European countries abolished slavery[7].

Ahmad Bey, the first Muslim ruler to oppose slavery institutionally, considered himself a moderniser and independent leader, and he soon understood that he had to cope with Europeans «on his own terms, and not sim-

ply as an underling of the Ottoman Sultan» (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 182). The far-sighted ruler addressed abolition as a series of «measures for progressive abolition» (Botte 2010, p. 59, my translation from French).

Ahmad Bey's decision was motivated by a combination of factors, ranging from economic and political to personal reasons.

Firstly, slavery in Tunisia was a «social practice without a significant economic dimension» (Larguèche 1990, p. 37, my translation from French), with some exceptions such as "black" slaves employed in the southern agricultural sector. Nonetheless, the hard core of agricultural production was in the hands of free manpower, since "black" slaves were not enough numerically «in the rural areas to be significant at the production level» (Medici 2005, pp. 167-168, my translation from Italian). "Black" slavery was, in fact, mainly domestic and concealed within private households. However, Roger Botte (2010) doubts Larguèche's (1990) theory on the slight economic relevance of slavery in Tunisia, on the grounds that abolition triggered in some regions «a real [economic] shockwave» (Botte 2010, p. 85, my translation from French). However we portray it, it is true that, far from being an economic asset, the liberation of slaves was resisted by southern slave owners, both out of economic concerns and because slaves were, for them, a status symbol. On the other hand, the abolition of the corsair activity (1816) and of the capture of Christians (1819) in the Mediterranean sea, following the Congress of Vienna (1815) (Botte 2010, p. 59), had an important financial impact on the Bey's treasury. The missed taxation income from the corsair activity worsened the economic situation (Montana 2013, p. 52) under Hussein II Bey (1824-1835), and Ahmad Bey inherited a government plagued by an economic crisis and by the consequences of the struggles for power. Corsairing, which reached its peak in the seventeenth century, «allowed the Beys to endow themselves with white servants» (Bouzid 2005, p. 126, my translation from French), and to collect «one tenth of all booty taken by Tunisian corsairs» (Bouzid 2005, p. 127, my translation from French) «crucial […] to supporting the high elites of the *makhzen* [Ottoman government] power» (Medici 2005, p. 172, my translation from Italian). Moreover, the Beys had the right to purchase all European captives taken in such activity for State purposes (Bouzid 2005, p. 127). Some European governments went as far as paying regular tribute to the Bey to protect their citizens (Bouzid 2005, p. 127). The taxation of the proceeds of the corsairs' *razzias* (raids) was significant for the Beylical

treasury to the extent that, in order to counterbalance the «losses in maritime revenues […], Mahmud Bey (1814-1824) [decided to tax] caravans at higher levels» (Montana 2013, p. 52), but the jihads in West Africa caused «the Ghadames caravan trade to Tunisia to slow down» (Montana 2013, p. 65) in the following period (1830-1841).

In short, the numbers of slaves traded in Tunisia were lower than other North African countries, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa. «In 1841 [date of the first abolitionist decree] no more than twenty to thirty slaves, most of them women, were bought or sold in the *Sūq al-Birka* where the weekly slave market in Tunis was held every Friday» (van der Haven 2006, p. 44). Pierre Pennec's (1964) account reports that slaves were almost absent from the economic structures of the city of Tunis in the nineteenth century. The survey was carried out in the most important guilds of the city, where no slaves were employed. As a useful comparison, in the nineteenth century the numbers of imported slaves from sub-Saharan Africa to Morocco «varied from 2,000 to 8,000» per annum (El Hamel 2013, p. 246), and an estimate of «a total black population of half a million by the end of the nineteenth century» is reasonable (El Hamel 2013, p. 246). Moreover, the numbers of imported slaves did not decrease in the nineteenth century, unlike in Tunisia.

Secondly, in Ahmad Bey's mind, political considerations or «political interest» (Botte 2010, p. 61, my translation from French) acquired greater relevance than economic ones. His abolitionist policies were based on the assessment of the geo-political role of North Africa and were framed only afterwards within a theoretical and religious justification. Foreign, e.g. European, pressure on North African territories had begun to intensify in that period, and Ahmad Bey, advised by enlightened assistants and '*ulamā*'[8] (Sunni scholars), managed to get the "white", slave-owning elite on his side, by playing the card of the forthcoming Western intervention. Apart from the French conquest of Algeria, Tripoli was re-occupied in 1835 by Ottoman forces (Botte 2010, p. 65), and Ahmad Bey felt completely surrounded, and tried hard to wriggle out of the imposition of the *tanẓīmāt*, «the Ottoman Government's ambitious reform programme» (van der Haven 2006, pp. 51-52) by Sultan Abdülmecid (1839-1861).

The abolition of slavery was, essentially, the Bey's attempt at keeping any justification for a future invasion to a minimum, as colonial intervention was often rationalised in terms of a civilising mission against the barbaric practice of slavery in African countries. Moreover, tensions were already

extant between the Beylical Palace and Western consulates, especially over the issue of runaway slaves. Slaves used to seek protection from a violent or mistreating owner in foreign consulates, e.g. French and English, and in the St. Louis Chapel on the hills of Byrsa, Chartage (Botte 2010, p. 61). This constituted a diplomatic impasse, and Ahmad Bey feared that it could turn into a pretext for the French to invade Tunis. In the early nineteenth century, «the office of the Bash 'Agha […] chief of the black skinned […], the chief judge over all black slaves in the Regency» (Montana 2013, p. 91), an official in charge of settling controversies regarding "black" slaves, was created in order to put an end to the phenomenon. It was, in fact, after a "black" family sought shelter in «the Saint Louis chapel to avoid being sold separately» (Montana 2013, p. 93) that Ahmed Bey issued his second decree, in 1842, pronouncing that all children born to a slave were legally free.

Thirdly, an additional driver lies in his background: he was particularly sensitive to the issue since his mother was herself a Sardinian slave (van der Haven 2006, p. 47), whose opinions he rated highly[9]. The stronger personal driver, however, lay rather in his education and his inclinations. Every foreigner who visited him reported how much he was fascinated by European culture and by its *rūḥ al-waqt* (spirit of the time), as well as Ahmad's «naive and spontaneous enthusiasm» (van der Haven 2006, p. 48). Contacts with Western anti-slavery societies predated the year of abolition, and Ahmad Bey became member of a French anti-slavery association in 1842 (Larguèche 1990, p. 28).

His efforts tended to frame the abolitionist decree within a precise religious paradigm: he stated, in his 1846 letter to the Legislative Assembly, that «avoiding something that is permitted for fear of committing something that is forbidden is [an act of] *sharia*» (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 184). Collective liberations of slaves were not infrequent before the official abolition: a well-established tradition saw the emancipation of the Palace's slaves upon the death of a Bey. In 1835, 600 "black" slaves were liberated in Tunis on the occasion of the Bey Al-Husayn II's death (Larguèche 2003, p. 402; according to Medici 2005, p. 175, 800 slaves were liberated).

The first Beylical decree addressing "black" slavery dates back to 1841, and ordained the closure of Tunis' "black" slave market, the *Sūq al-Birka* in the medina, and prohibited the export of slaves (van der Haven 2006, p. 53). He also abolished the office of the «*caid-al-birka*, who superintended market operations [… and] abolished the tax imposed by the government

on each sale (which netted the Beylical state an annual revenue of 300,000 piastres» (Medici 2005, p. 174, my translation from Italian). However, the sell of slaves outside the market was unregulated. One of the most likely consequences was that slaves «coming from the Sahara regions were sold on the spot in the south to the interested parties and not directed first to the official markets in Tunis» (van der Haven 2006, p. 53).

The second decree came in December 1842, and prohibited the export of "black" slaves; from then on, everyone born in Tunisia would be free. The last decree on slavery was issued by the Bey in 1846, when he ordered the immediate release of all slaves. The emancipation decree was issued on January 23rd, 1846 (25 *muḥarram* 1262 in the Islamic calendar). The decree had to be specified and supported by religious authorities, who issued fatwas according to both the Hanafi and the Maliki rites. The existence of the two juridical schools could have prevented a unitarian juridical-theological position regarding the abolition of slavery, but «this was not the case» (Botte 2010, p. 62).

The *project de decret* (bill) entailed five articles: the complete abolition of slavery and the interdiction of owning, selling, or purchasing slaves of "black" race or any other human race (art. 1). Violation of the regulation was punishable by imprisonment (up to five years) and financial penalties (from 500 to 3,000 piastres) (art. 2). Whoever acquired slaves abroad, by heritage, gift, or marriage, must free them immediately, providing them with a liberation document (art. 3), and the same went for anyone who possessed slaves at the moment of the decree (art. 4). Art. 5 ratified the right to inherit of freed slaves, who would be subject to the same regulation as was in force for freemen (Larguèche 1990, p. 82).

The asymmetry between popular sentiment regarding slavery and the enlightened decision of the Bey was probably underestimated by the Bey himself. Although most reactions to Ahmad's decrees were enthusiastic, and domestic resistance was limited (Larguèche 1990, p. 34), they encountered overt opposition in the south and among the Bedouins, who contested the anti-sharia nature of Ahmed Bey's decision. Several factors were behind the distance between provincial authorities and the central Beylical government: «the local authorities' representation in the central administration in Tunis, the economic impact of emancipation on agricultural production, and the sectarian and cultural divide between the South and the rest of the Regency» (Montana 2013, p. 125). Obviously, most of their concerns were of an economic nature: the fiercest resistance came from the oases, where slaves were

consistently employed in agricultural labour. Lucette Valensi (2009) argues that part of the financial crisis which led to the 1864 riots stemmed from people missing the income from the slave trade in the South. In 1864, in fact, «the financial situation in Tunisia led to the increase of Tunisian debt to France to about 28 million francs. At the end of the year, the prime minister of the Bey, Mustafa Kasnar [Muṣṭafā Khaznadār, Prime Minister from 1837 to 1873], tried to get a substantial new loan, but Napoleon III granted only five million francs. In order to increase state revenues, Kasnar, with the Bey's agreement, decided to raise tax levies through the doubling of *al-magba* [*majba*, Ottoman per capita tax]*,* causing protests from the inhabitants and insurgency amongst the Bedouins, led by Ali Ibn Ghadaham, in the region of Talah [southern governorate of Kesserine]. The riots spread from the hinterland to the coast» (Battaglia 2014, pp. 12-13).

Recent scholarly attention (Botte 2010, p. 61) has underlined how the Beylical edicts did not overtly condemn the theoretical principles behind slavery but imposed the liberation of slaves on their owners. This interpretation presents Tunisia's early abolition as a «collective emancipation» (Botte 2010, p. 7, my translation from French), rather than as an institutional abolition. The unclear nature of the Beylical decree and the internal resistance are considered to be the reasons why slavery endured so long (Larguèche 1990, p. 36), especially in the South, and it required an additional decree (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 938). A «*seconde abolition*» ("second abolition", Larguèche 1990, p. 36), in fact, was solicited by the French authorities, and entailed new laws proscribing the slave trade in 1880. However, according to Ines Mrad Dali (2005), neither "abolition" represented «a decisive date for the acquisition of social freedom» (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 938, my translation from French).

In conclusion, in spite of the doubtlessly innovative nature of Ahmad Bey's decision, eradicating slavery was more a top-down imposition than a shared experience. As a consequence of the difficult road towards full abolition, slavery in Tunisia found alternative ways of surviving, concealed as milder forms.

What happened to freed slaves?

Even though it had been officially abolished, slavery in Tunisia persisted in the twilight zones of the regime, since forms of legal slavery (intended here

as the remnants of abolished historical forms of enslavement (Rossi 2009, p. 5) outlived the abolitionist decrees (Larguèche 1990, p. 40; Medici 2005, p. 178). Moreover, slavery-like relationships continued covertly until recent times, leaving a "bitter legacy" (Bellagamba, Greene, and Klein 2013a) which is still visible today.

Calculating the numbers of freed slaves in Tunisia is a very difficult task, because literature is scarce. In André Demeerseman's (1996) work on social categories in the city of Tunis after Ahmad Ibn Abi Diyaf (1804-1874), slaves are not mentioned. Larguèche (1990) estimates that around 1850 there were 150,000 "black" individuals, including those who were free and still enslaved (Larguèche 1990, p. 19). Even though Tunisian archival documents do not contain numbers of freed slaves, Montana (2013) analyses Western reports, such as those by Sir Thomas Reade, British consul general at Tunis (1782-1849), who reported that «the number of slaves freed within two days of the enactment of this decree was between 30,000 and 50,000 out of the Regency's total population, which ranged 2,000,000 to 3,000,000» (Montana 2013, p. 99). Roger Botte (2010) suggests that "blacks", both free and enslaved, formed 6% to 8% of the overall population in the second half of the nineteenth century (Botte 2010, p. 83). Franco-Tunisian historian Lucette Valensi (1967) mentions a series of censuses taken from 1856 onwards, which allow her to evaluate slaves and liberated slaves: 6,000 to 7,000 (Valensi 1967, p. 1278). The two latter works prove that slavery was still operational in some parts of the country.

After 1846, slavery persisted even at the level of the ruling class. Straight after Ahmad Bey's death (1855), his successor, Mohammed Bey (1855-1859), used slaves again, and «his attitude toward slavery no doubt reflected the response of the Husaynid ruling class to abolition» (Montana 2013, p. 121). The reluctance of the Palace and of the elites to free their slaves impacted especially on concubines, who continued to be purchased from abroad to populate harems (Montana 2013, p. 121).

The trajectories of freed slaves in the North and South of the country diverged sharply after abolition, as did those of "white" and "black" slaves. In the South, a reconfiguration of slavery ties under new terms, and in the North, the sharp severance of master/slave relations, are the basis of the different pathways taken by former slaves. "White" *mamālīk* in the cities, for example, were absorbed into the highest echelons of the social hierarchy, carrying out official tasks, but under a regular contract and with a free

status, and they were «rapidly freed» (Botte 2010, p. 34, my translation from French). Even abolition, therefore, was "colour-bound" in Tunisia and favoured "white" slaves. On the other hand, "black" slaves experienced a long transition from slavery to freedom, and their skin colour acted as a blatant marker of their inferior social status, relegating them to «social inferiority» (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 935, my translation from French). Amidst freed "black" slaves, various emancipatory paths led northern individuals to acquire freedom more quickly.

In Tunis, in fact, the Bey's "black" slaves were freed and employed as subordinates (Rahal 2000, p. 18). Privately owned "black" slaves in urban Tunisia and in the Sahel, on the other hand, were released but ended up in situations of deprivation, impoverishment, vagrancy, prostitution and peddling, since economic retrenchment in the second decade of the nineteenth century (Bouzid 2005, p. 136) prevented them being hired as domestic servants in the middle-upper strata of society, providing an «open door to social marginalization» (Larguèche 2002, p. 402). "Black" freed slaves made up a class of urban sub-proletariat (Botte 2010, p. 90), and the men became «bread-sellers, peddlers, masseurs in public *hammams*[10], […] or simply vagrants, […] [while] women could, of course, become (or remain) domestic workers, sweet-sellers, or employees in public *hammams*» (Botte 2010, p. 90, my translation from French).

Making little difference in socio-economic terms, abolition had the effect of coalescing "black" freed slaves along alleged ethnic lines in *dūr* (Classical Arabic for "houses", singular *dār*[11]) – "alleged" since freed slaves in the same brotherhood or *dār* did not necessarily share «the same ethnic background or language» (Montana 2011, p. 157), and individuals hosted in Dar Hausa, for example, had probably been raided by Hausa-speaking people southward from *hausalands*, and taught Hausa at an early age. Dar Songhay, Dar Bornu, Dar Hausa, and Dar Waday were established and provided shelters where freed slaves could gather and where they performed musical, devotional, and mystic rites, reminiscent of *bori*, female-led cults which accommodate Islamic practices alongside "pagan" ones[12], and accompanied with music (*stambeli*)[13]. Contrary to "white" brotherhoods, which gathered along genealogical lines (Botte 2010, p. 68), freed "black" slaves organised according to their supposed geographical origins, well before 1846, and this provided emancipated slaves with mutual assistance and protection, even welcoming "black" newcomers (Botte 2010, p. 69). Geographical origin

overlapped with time with genealogy, too: «the mythical recall to a Bilalian ascendance offered them an incontrovertible Islamic belonging [...] Blacks thus claimed their own *nasab* (lineage), the real key to any social identity and belonging which Arab and Islamic culture recognises» (Medici 2005, p. 169, my translation from Italian)[14].

Dūr predated abolition, as, in 1808, the jurisconsult Ahmad al-Timbuktawi addressed a letter to the Bey Hammuda Pasha (1756-1814), expressing outrage at *bori* sub-Saharan cults spreading in Tunis (Botte 2010, p. 72), whose idolatry expressed itself in «possession trance, animal sacrifices, and the cult's perceived links with the *jinns* [spirits or demons in the Islamic tradition] » (Montana 2013, p. 152). Even though «Husaynid Tunisia was an Ottoman regency that tolerated accommodation between orthodox Islam and Sufism or Islamic mysticism [...] aimed as societal control of the populace» (Montana 2011, p. 155), *stambeli* contributed to the socio-cultural construction of "blackness" as "impiousness" and of "blacks" as «bad Muslims» (Botte 2010, p. 71, my translation from French) by jurists and theologians. The perceived "less piousness" of "blacks" also stems from the pre-abolitionist period, since according to Islamic law, only pagans could be enslaved, which percolated into popular thinking. Before independence (1956), there were fourteen *dūr jam'aa* (communal houses) in Tunis (Rahal 2000, p. 23), even though few have survived to the present day.

Another meaning attached to "blackness" was linked to perceptions of beauty and chasteness. In the cities, in fact, prostitution was often one of the few professions left for freed female slaves, due a post-abolition «general context of impoverishment and rural exodus» (Botte 2010, p. 91, my translation from French). Prostitution was regulated in Tunisia at the time of the establishment of the French Protectorate (1881) (Larguèche 2002, p. 286), even though «tolerated and even regulated prostitution is a much more ancient fact» (Larguèche 2002, p. 286, my translation from French). Shortly before the colonial conquest, 8.5% of prostitutes in Tunis were of "black" slave origin and bore surnames such as «*Shûshân*» (from *shuwāshīn*, descendant of "black" slaves) or «*Barnâwî*» (from Bornu) (Larguèche 2002, p. 291)[15]. After abolition, a street accommodating brothels in Tunis' centre was named after *Bousaadia*, a figure in Tunisian folklore representing a "black" woman (Larguèche 2002, p. 291). Along with how difficult it was for them to pursue other careers, historical analysis shows how "black" female freed slaves or descendants of "black" freed slaves were also absorbed

into brothels because there was a high demand for them. The stereotypical construction of "black" bodies as active reproducers (Holt 2000, p. 39) and their hyper-sexualisation accounted only partly for their attractiveness. Oral tradition accorded a special place to "black" prostitutes in the tastes of Tunisians, because of popular magical beliefs, as a sexual encounter with a "black" woman was believed to heal certain venereal diseases (Larguèche 2002, p. 291). "Black" bodies were considered to be a catalysing vector which absorbed negative elements, preventing them from afflicting "white" bodies. These ideas are still present today, and "black" individuals are accorded magical powers against evil forces and misfortune because they assimilate them. In the 1990's, according to Dalenda and Abdelhamid Larguèche (1992), around 10% of prostitutes in Tunis were of slave descent, and the legacy of the overlapping of "blackness" with meanings of lasciviousness is still vivid. Nowadays, a common complaint by "black" women is that they are considered to be less pious and more sexually available, and therefore come to be assaulted and verbally harassed more on the streets[16].

On the other hand, in the south of Tunisia, resistance to slavery was so fierce that certain areas remained untouched by the Beylical decree. Also, some freed slaves progressively became free peasants. However, a common path left to freed "black" slaves in the South entailed a continuing attachment to their former households, despite *de jure* liberation. After abolition, in fact, some Islamic institutions were dusted off and acquired new force, framing former slaves as *wuṣfān* – domestic servants – or employing them in small-scale agriculture. Former slaves attached themselves to former masters in better-off households, in order to avoid anonymity, through semi-familial and economic ties.

Firstly, *mrubbin* (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 936) were mostly girls entrusted to the custody of better-off families in exchange for a small sum of money, and who carried out unpaid domestic work, living in their households. The phenomenon did not involve only "black" young girls, but many "black" freed slaves' children ended up as *mrubbin* (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 941). Secondly, *khamisat* (Mrad Dali 2005, pp. 942-945) relationships involved two persons, a land owner and a poverty-stricken individual, and the latter agreed to work the former's land for one fifth of the harvest, also doing some unpaid collateral work – such as improving roads – sometimes under threat of imprisonment (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 943). The relationship did not imply any legal contract. Progressively, *khamisat* came to be related to slave descend-

ants' communities (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 944; Botte 2010, p. 91) also due to an historical connection between slave labour and date groves and gardens in the Saharan oases of North Africa (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 131). The transition from agricultural slavery to *khamisat* happened smoothly, and still in the 1980's «nobody [could] draw a clear-cut border between the two conditions» (Bédoucha 1984, p. 94, my translation from French). *Khamisat* work relations tied *'aḥrār* (freemen) and *shuwāshīn*, but no formal rules regulated personal relations between them. Practically, however, the relation was one of dependence, to the extent that «a whole *shūshāna* family [family of *shuwāshīn*] was at the service of a *ḥurra* (freeborn) family» (Bédoucha 1984, p. 95, my translation from French). Following the renegotiation of relationships between former masters and former slaves, however, and following the increased mobility of slave descendants in the 1970's (mainly emigrating to France), many *shuwāshīn* were able to purchase the land they were working on as *khamisat*, or work for multiple owners, or negotiate better conditions (Botte 2010, p. 92).

Slavery morphed slowly into free agricultural labour and into *khamisat* as these institutions are clearly connected: for example, Lamjed Bouzid (2005) argues that after abolition the number of agricultural tenants increased, probably because many freed slaves or descendants of slaves gained access to land. However, the transition was a quantitative as well as a qualitative one, and forms of *de jure* slavery gradually disappeared. Contrary to Ines Mrad Dali's (2005) assumption that Tunisian abolition was a «semantic» one (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 941, my translation from French), it inserted freed slaves into a different analytical framework, which entailed new life conditions. For example, the «*kham*ès» (share-cropper, Mrad Dali 2005, p. 942) had the right to mobility, to own land, and to build a family without needing to ask for the land-owner's consent. Ines Mrad Dali (2005) goes as far as arguing that *khamisat* can be subsumed under the theoretical umbrella of «modern slavery» (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 944, my translation from French), and creates a rhetorical parallelism between current forms of labour exploitation and historical forms of slavery. As Julia O'Connell Davidson (2015) convincingly argues, the "modern slavery label" often does not stand up to academic scrutiny and hides broader political and economic issues risking the "normalisation" of other forms of labour exploitation.

Wala'

In Tunisia, both *mrubbin* and *khamisat* provided unattached individuals with a form of protection: however, the most common Islamic institution under which freed slaves were framed was that of *wala'*. Even if it was mostly used for freed "black" slaves, *mamālīk* could be tied under *wala'*, too, intended as a «juridical bond of clientage, comparable to patronage» (Medici 2005, p. 166).

Wala' is in fact an Islamic patronage relationship in which ex-slaves added *'abid* or *shuwāshīn* to the name of their former masters to distinguish themselves from the latter's lineage. This happened in many Muslim areas, where a freed slave remained a client of his/her former master, sometimes even legally, perpetuating a social practice which resembled slavery. In this typical Islamic relationship, the patron and the client are called *mawlā* (plur. *mawālī*), and they are related in a fictive kinship tie. Usually, a freed slave often inherited only «a first name followed by the name of the former master» (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 940, my translation from French), but in some cases he or she inherited the lineage name, creating a semi-familial tie. The relationship led freed slaves to settle down independently but still required them to carry out part of the former masters' work (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 935). The acquisition of a patronym functioned to counterbalance the absence of «*nasab*, of patronym, the absence of an ascendance and, as a consequence, […] the lack of a real and legitimate belonging to the society where one lives» (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 940, my translation from French). Tunisian society, similarly to Arab societies in general, was and still is deeply hierarchised through kinship coordinates, and loyalty and patronage are essential tools for survival, especially in cases of absence of *nasab*. Regarding the historical Ottoman world, Toledano (2007) argues that «attachment to a household gave an individual protection, employment, and social status […] a sense of belonging and identity, both social and political» (Toledano 2007, p. 29), always dependent on the master's status. The undesirable consequence of this, though, was that unattached subjects used to find life hard in their own society. Lack of affiliation meant, at the extreme, social marginalisation and «both physical and economic danger» (Toledano 2007, p. 29).

From a theological point of view, *wala'* is regulated by some hadith attributed to the Prophet, which are mainly concerned with giving one's *mawlā* away or selling him/her, which is rigorously forbidden (El Hamel 2013, p. 49). *Wala'* was not only applied to liberated slaves but could also bind

unattached people with a free past, because they needed affiliation. The client-patron relationship «entailed deference, public marks of honor, and other obligations» (El Hamel 2013, p. 57), and often led individuals to follow their patrons to the big cities (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 946).

Arguably, in rural Tunisia, clientelistic ties replaced slavery relations, as it was «difficult to find a practical situation preferable to the one they enjoyed as slaves, being fed and lodged» (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 939, my translation from French). The *wala'* relationship worked in two ways. On one hand, it allowed small and medium-scale land owners to rely on free manpower after 1846. On the other, since the slave was a de-socialised person, it provided freed slaves with a legitimisation of their lineage and with a semi-familial protection. Former masters continued to choose the spouses for their former slaves in many areas, and treated their workers almost like sons, bestowing gifts on them on special occasions. *Wala'* relationships, however, entailed high degrees of paternalism. The relationship was a "semi" but never a "full" familial belonging, since it was not of a reciprocal nature (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 948). Former masters could inherit from former slaves, but the opposite could not happen. Marriages between the two social groups were formally forbidden (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 946).

The semi-familial tie was especially visible when patrons married, when the *shuwāshīn* or *'abid* participated unpaid in the preparation of the ceremony (like *shūkūlātiyya*'s in 1980's Djerba) and sang and entertained the soon-to-be-married couple and their guests (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 946).

In the southern governorate of Mednine, the 'Abid Ghbonton are an example of a *wala'* relationship. It is impossible for us to say whether they were manumitted by the lineage of the Ghbonton or if they were freely roaming subjected individuals in the southern regions and attached themselves to the Ghbonton. Certainly they gained affiliation, protection, and the legitimisation of their lineage, which is, as in many other *shuwāshīn* lineages, not deep, not known, and not certain (Mrad Dali 2005, p. 935). Several elements hint at a *wala'* relation in the history of the 'Abid Ghbonton: their lineage name, the social prohibition of intermarriages between them and the Ghbonton, and their activity as singers at weddings.

1. ʿAbid Ghbonton women, waiting for the trucks on the main road of Gosbah.

2. A woman working the land in Gosbah.

3. Internal courtyard of a house in Gosbah at dusk.

4. Skin-whitening creams. Market in Gabes, southern Tunisia.

5.Tayfa singers performing at a wedding in Gosbah.

6. Tayfa singers dancing and waving the red neckerchief.

7. The courtyard of a house in Gosbah, with octopuses hanging to dry in the sun.

8. Women collecting babūch (clams). Picture by Jenny Tsiropoulou.

9. Main street in Gosbah leading to the higher part (fūq) of the village.

10. The village of Gosbah.

11. Gosbah in Tunisia.

Projet de décret—

─ ٢٨١ ─ ١٣٠ ─ ٢٤ ─

Vu le décret du 25 Moharrem 1262 pres-
crivant l'affranchissement des esclaves de race
noire dans la Régence;

Considérant qu'il y a lieu d'en
généraliser les dispositions et de les compléter;

Nous avons pris le décret suivant:

Art. 1

L'esclavage est entièrement aboli dans
la Régence.

A partir de la promulgation du
présent décret, il sera interdit de procéder
de vendre ou d'acheter des esclaves
de race noire ou de toute autre race
humaine.

~~Est égale~~ La participation
à tout trafic ou exploitation de
ce genre sera également interdite.

Art. 2

Toute infraction aux
dispositions ~~qui précèdent~~ de l'article
précédent sera punie d'un emprisonnement
d'un an ~~au moins et~~ à cinq ans
et d'une amende de 5 00 à 3 000 piastres.

En cas de récidive, la peine
sera de cinq ans à 10 ans de travaux
forcés.

12. Decree of abolition of slavery, ANT January 23, 1846. Source: Larguèche (1990).

Art. 3

Ceux qui deviendront possesseurs d'esclaves en pays étrangers, par héritage, don ou mariage, devront, sous les peines énoncées dans l'article précédent, les affranchir immédiatement.
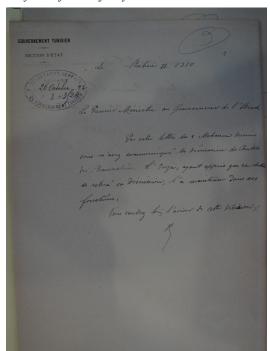
Art. 4

Ceux qui détiennent actuellement des esclaves devront ~~les exposer~~ les affranchir par devant deux notaires et leur remettre un acte notarié constatant leur affranchissement.

Un délai de six mois qui courra à partir de ce jour est accordé aux détenteurs actuels d'esclaves dans la Régence pour l'exécution des prescriptions qui précèdent. ~~Passé ce délai,~~ Passé ce délai, ~~tout détenteur d'esclaves~~ tout détenteur d'un ancien esclave non affranchi dans les conditions susindiquées, sera puni conformément à l'article 2 ci-dessus.

Art. 5

A partir de la promulgation du présent décret, les successions des personnes tombées précédemment en esclavage seront réglées conformément à la loi qui régit les successions des personnes libres. Mais le droit de patronage subsistera à l'égard ~~des successions~~ ouverts avant la date précitée.

13. *Decree of abolition of slavery, ANT, January 23, 1846. Source: Larguèche (1990).*

14. ANT Serie A, File 182, Dossier 19/3, 1889-1893, document dated 22 October 1892 (or 30 rabīʿ al-ʾawwal 1310 in the Islamic calendar). The General of the Brigade Leclerc, Commandant of the Brigade of Occupation of Tunisia, communicates the real reasons behind shaykh Ali ben Lagha's resignation to the Resident General.

15. ANT Serie A, Carton 182, Dossier 19/5, 1908, document listing the possessions (goats, camels, olive trees, donkeys, jewellery, rooms in Mednine) of the witnesses who testified in favour of shaykh Nasser ben Aoun ben Chemakh in court.

17. ANT Serie A, File 1892, Dossier 19/3, 1889-1893. On 26th October 1892 (indicated as rabīʿ al-thānī 1310 in the Islamic calendar), the French Prime Minister wrote to the Governor of Arad, confirming that the shaykh of the "Chouachin" [shuwāshīn Ghbonton], Ali ben Lagha, had withdrawn the resignation he had previously submitted.

PART TWO
Becoming the 'Abid

Chapter three
Freeing the *'abid*

«elly tqolu ya sidi ibiēk feddalal
If you call someone "master", he will sell you at an auction» (Yetiv 1987, p. 43)

Gosbah and the 'Abid

To visit Gosbah, you have to go to Sidi Makhlouf first, by taking a minibus (*louage*) which comes from Mednine. Once you arrive in Sidi Makhlouf, a little village with paved streets and some essential facilities – a hospital, a pharmacy, a high school, a post office, some basic shops and cafés – you need to wait for another minibus in the small parking place situated at the entrance of the village and ask to be taken to Gosbah. The old age and the bad condition of the minibuses for Gosbah are striking, since they belong to the countryside service, and are more like trucks than regular buses. You get a glimpse of the ethnic boundary between the *'aḥrār* and the 'Abid Ghbonton from Gosbah's drivers, who are all dark-skinned.

Once Sidi Makhlouf is left behind, the rest of the way goes through the countryside. Driving on unpaved, jolty roads, you eventually reach the main street of the village (*kāyās*, "street" in Tunisian Arabic), which splits the village into two sides that are mirror-images of each other. Houses overlook the unpaved street from both sides.

The houses are one flat block of concrete, with the biggest room for the grandparents, and the other smaller rooms, facing an internal courtyard, for the sons of the family, until they get married and set up households of their own. Given the patrilocal system, the male members usually build a house in the same compound as their families, while when the daughters get married they move to wherever their husbands live.

Demographic data are not up-to-date and are available only for the district of Sidi Makhlouf as a whole, so internal ethnic distinctions are not identified: with a population of 25,206, illiteracy (29.34%) and unemployment (18.75%) are higher than the national rates[1]. The district of Sidi Makhlouf has high percentages of workers in the agriculture and fishing

(15.88%) and construction (29.35%) sectors, even compared to the region of Mednine itself[2], which relies heavily on rural activities. Sidi Makhlouf is characterised by poverty and lack of infrastructure, in line with the regional trend, and the south and the interior are amongst the most impoverished regions of Tunisia.

Poverty in Gosbah is signalled by the absence of a proper sewerage system, as poorer houses have a small lavatory outside in the courtyard, with a squat toilet connected to an old-fashioned sewage canal system. High-income families, by contrast, mark their different status by building modern toilets inside the building, as well as installing running water systems. Most households, in fact, draw water from the well every day, a predominantly female task. Women use a complicated and fascinating system of saving water for different uses, in order not to waste it. The scarcity of water is central in 'Abid Ghbonton discourses, and I heard many women fighting and insulting each other with the epithet, "water-waster"[3].

The 'Abid Ghbonton live a very communal life, and their basic unit – the family – combines with other families along kinship and territorial lines. They speak of three levels of internal social organisation: the *farqa*, the *'arsh*, and the *qabīla*. Many families aggregate into a *farqa* (plural *farqāt*), and several *farqāt* make up an *'arsh* (plural *'urūsh*), a cohesive social unit which shares the same patrilineal ancestor. The largest of the social units, *qabā'il*, are comprehensive social groups which are often translated by the 'Abid Ghbonton as "tribe" (in its French version, *tribu*). Being a classic notion in anthropology (Morgan 1851), the term "tribe" has been indicated as a typical structure of "societies without a state" (Bonte, Ben Hounet 2009, p. 13) or of Arab societies in general, since they tend to display forms of solidarity based on kinship and suffer from the stereotype of being «group-oriented» (Fabietti 2016, p. 109). Nonetheless, the conceptualisation of the term has undergone harsh criticism for its Euro-centric connotations (Jenkins 1986) and for its disregard of the heterogeneity of the contexts it has been applied to (Biebuyck 1966, p. 500).

The 'Abid Ghbonton use it as an emic term to describe themselves. The tribe or *qabīla* of the 'Abid Ghbonton comprises three *'urūsh*: the *tuwāyma*, *nuwājī*, and *khaḍḍ*āra. The social sub-division of the *qabīla* 'Abid Ghbonton mirrors the geographical and territorial division of the village of Gosbah, where one side of the *kāyā*s (street) is inhabited by the *'arsh nuwājī*, the other by the *'arsh khaḍḍ*āra, while the *tuwāyma* live at the higher end of the street,

the "upper town" (*fūq*), where the main mosque and the market are. I lived amidst the *nuwājī*, the biggest *'arsh* in Gosbah, and also the and the most respected for its number and for the educational level of its members.

Consistently with other Arab societies (Fabietti 2016, p. 94), the collective and individual identity of the 'Abid Ghbonton employs the genealogical line as a tool to position individuals within the social structure. The tribal structure serves to categorise and identify individuals genealogically and socially (Bonte, Ben Hounet 2009, p. 14). «What do you come out from?» (*ashnuwwa tukhruj*) is the typical question which is used to identify the individual, and refers to a genealogical marker, that is, patrilineal descent. Southern Tunisians resort to relatively recent devices, such as surnames, to identify themselves, along with patronyms (a formula qualifying the bearer as the son/daughter of his/her father) and with the names of their *qabīla*, *'arsh*, or *farqa*. According to Andrew Shryock (1997), Jordanian tribespeople represent their history as an eternal present, since the past and the present are inseparable (Shryock 1997, p. 35). "Genealogical imagination" connects temporality vertically, so that speaking of individuals today means commenting on their origins and defining them through an imagined genealogical past (Shryock 1997, p. 11).

The way the 'Abid Ghbonton shape and contextually mobilise their identity corresponds to the classic "segmentary theory", which sees descent groups allying according to multiple levels (primary, secondary, tertiary…), and appealing continuously to higher-level segments. The model was theorised in situations of feuds and warfare (Evans-Pritchard 1940; for an overview of theorisations on "segmentation", "segmentary lineage theory", and "tribalism": Abu Lughod 1989, pp. 280-287), although it has since been contested for its ideal nature which is often far from real practices (Peters 1967), and for its unrealistic equalitarian and communitarian representation of the society (Bonte, Ben Hounet 2009, p. 19).

Bédoucha (1987) claims that the social hierarchisation in the Kebili oases stems from the delicate and complex system of managing water, which is based on a segmentary pattern (Bédoucha 1987, p. 188). The 'Abid Ghbonton seem to resort to the same pattern to identify themselves and to talk about racism: some years ago, for example, the relationship between the *nuwājī* and the *khaḍḍāra* escalated into a fight, whose consequences are still vivid today. However, once when *khaḍḍāra* pupils faced racism in the school in neighbouring Sidi Makhlouf, some *nuwājī* fellow schoolmates sided with

them. When they speak of racism outside Gosbah, they often state that «the most racist are the closest ones»[4], referring to Ghbonton institutionalised racism in strict social norms such as endogamy. Nonetheless, «when you go out, we are all southern Tunisians»[5] vis à vis northerners, who are considered as having different cultural traits, such as dialect; as one interviewee commented, «Every two words, a French one»[6] referring to the northern dialect, whereas the rural and the southern dialects are only slightly francophone. In Gosbah, the segmentary structure of society is far from being equalitarian, and internal hierarchies partition the community along gender, social, and economic lines, while some "segments" hold more importance than others.

At the simplest level, families usually work together in tasks such as harvesting and sheep herding, while the preparation of spices and cooking are the domain of the family's women, and children usually look after younger children. Daily life happens in the main room, where women gather to eat during the day and to watch TV at dusk. The 'Abid Ghbonton eat according to sex and age, with the women eating after the men, and the children last. The grandfather is the one who takes decisions and has the right of veto over the marital partners chosen by his children and grandchildren. Also, the agricultural work is strictly divided according to gender and age. Women do the shepherding, and the barn (*qawaj*) behind the house is their place, where they gather and socialise. Harvesting and agricultural activities have also become women's work, ever since they became less profitable and men started looking for work outside Gosbah. At a higher level, some land is owned by congregations of families – *farqāt* – and is worked collectively. Further up, the *'urūsh* gather to take important decisions, such as the settlement of fights and disputes. The task is assigned to the male elders of each *'arsh*, the *shuyūkh* ("chiefs"), who are accorded authority by virtue of their age and respectability. Sheikh (in Arabic: s*haykh*, plural *shuyūkh*) «means [male] "elder", in the sense of prudent and worthy of respect for [his] wisdom deriving from experience» (Fabietti 1994, p. 23, my translation from Italian) and his function is political, mainly concerned with mediation and conflict settlement.

Agriculture is not indeed very productive, «not like the old days (*zaman*)»[7], and comprises the cultivation of wheat, spices, and some vegetables. More affluent households have olive trees: «they [neighbours] are rich and live in a nice place. They have olives (*zaytūn*) [olive trees] »[8]. Environmentally speaking, Gosbah is a very hard place to live. Limited to the west by the small

river Zass, to the east and to the south by other two creeks, with few roads in and out and little transport the community is remote. The isolation of the village reinforces the cultural identity of the 'Abid Ghbonton. Nowadays, all these streams have dried up and water is scarce in the whole village – definitely not sufficient for subsistence agriculture. Spiny plants and rocks cover most of the land, and most of it is wasteland or covered with garbage.

While women work the land, children take care of each other and, apart from the youngest ones, carry out some small chores, like running errands. Men usually work outside the village, even for very long periods, as construction workers, fishermen, or in the tourist sector, especially in summer. For most of the year, therefore, women are alone and live in the more private spaces, far from the public eye, such as their houses (*diyār*), the courtyards of their houses, and the internal streets of the village, and seldom gather in public spaces such as cafés or the main road (*kāyās*), even if they sometimes access these spaces to shop or to walk.

Spatial segregation along gender lines is a well-known topos in Middle Eastern studies, in what scholars term «harem theory» (Abu Lughod 1989, p. 287), which is «an older, Orientalist, imaginative world of Middle Eastern women which […] shapes anthropological discourse producing a negative foil» (Abu Lughod 1989, p. 288). In a later much-cited publication (2013), anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod unveils the Western orientalist gaze which sees Muslim women as needing to be "saved", based upon the idea that Western human rights are universal (Abu Lughod 2013, p. 219). Despite the separation of sexes in Gosbah, in fact, on looking more closely, 'Abid Ghbonton women enjoy a certain degree of freedom of movement, and work outside the house, mainly as clam-collectors on the shores around Gosbah, with the agreement of the male members of their families.

As described in the seminal work by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1966) on the spatial segregation of the Kabyle Berber women in Algeria, the reclusion of women in domestic spaces is related to the upholding of honour (*nif* in Kabyle). Honour over women (analytically distinguished from honour connected to *'aṣl*) is a recurrent category in the representation of the Muslim world, together with the "honour crime" (Abu Lughod 2013, p. 113), revealing an orientalist view. However, honour is not restricted to the Middle East, as the idea that women are the repositories of honour is shared along the Mediterranean coast and connects Middle Eastern societies to southern European ones through a "bridge" which creates a common his-

torical and geographical space (Péristiany 1966). In this area, then, honour is an element which depends on the private and hidden parts of society, the realm of women, and the vulnerability of women translates into the vulnerability of honour. Honour as a Mediterranean concept can also be found in more recent and public realms: Gregory Feldman (2019) hints that honour may be an organising principle for the activities of undercover policemen in Southern Europe (Feldman 2019, p. 57).

Amidst the 'Abid Ghbonton, honour, whether conceptually connected to *'aṣl* or to the control over women, can be translated into Arabic as *sharaf*, although, as the anthropologist Michael Herzfeld (1980) pointed out in his elaboration on the concept of honour in two rural Greek communities, translations risk jeopardising our understanding of local terms and systems of meaning. *Sharaf* is conceptually connected to control over women, which in turn is intensified by the prevalence of the endogamic or "Arab" marriage system (Fabietti 2016, p. 181). In Gosbah, there is a tendency to marry the son/daughter of one's father's brothers or sisters, the patrilateral cross- and parallel cousins, thus tying marital bonds within one's own lineage group. Mohammed Jouily (1994) claims that at the time of his research members of different *'urūsh* could marry, but that members of the same *'arsh* had "priority" (Jouily 1994, p. 86). As a result, the authority of husbands over women is seldom counterbalanced by that of the wives' fathers and brothers, since they often belong to the same lineage group, creating a "double pressure" (Fabietti 2016, p. 181) which proves functional in the preservation of honour. The *shuyūkh* (chiefs) step in in conflicts when women's honour is openly questioned, since disputes often have to do with the disruption of honour. In general, marriages involve the whole of both families, as «in a kin-based social order, marriages are far too important to be left to individuals» (Abu Lughod 2013, p. 117).

Sharaf, honour, has other implications apart from its "incorporatedness" in women. As Paul Dresch notes in Yemen (1989), *sharaf* derives from one's ancestors, and from their glorious deeds in the past. In southern Tunisia, some *qabā'il* can claim to have noble, Arab lineages, which in turn bestow on their members *sharaf*, intended here as "respectability" (Fabietti 2016, p. 188). The notion of *sharaf* is strictly interwoven with that of genealogical origin (*'aṣl*), then, as Arab origin entails nobility and moral qualities which make its bearers "respectable". Strictly interwoven, *ḥasab* ("high status", "nobility", "ancestral honour") derives from *nasab* (agnatic descent). Today's

individual honour and nobility are crafted by "genealogical imagination" and by the behaviour of the ancestors, since «history is *now* as it happened *then*» (Shryock 1997, p. 35). Genealogical origin is a fundamental tool to hierarchise *qabā'il* in southern Tunisia and accords a moral reputation to their members. The flip side of the coin is that *qabā'il* with an unclear, non-Arab, exogenous origin, such as the 'Abid Ghbonton, lack or have less *sharaf*, and are hierarchised accordingly in a lower social position.

Among the 'Abid Ghbonton, the lack of an Arab origin essentialises moral as well as physical characteristics which are considered to be passed down inter-generationally, such as their "blackness". Contrary to western contexts, where "blackness" is imagined mainly as a biology-based skin colour, the 'Abid Ghbonton's "blackness" is conferred on individuals by their genealogical background, and similarly, "whiteness", rather than being a phenotypical marker, is a socio-cultural construction which is passed down along genealogical lines. Bédoucha (1987) asks herself rhetorically, regarding the *'aḥrār* in the Kebili area: «what is it to be *ḥorr* [*ḥurr*, "freeman"], in the end, if it is not, also, and above all, to be a member of a lineage which has a history, a past, prestige, even more than being an owner (even if the prestige of the lineage is strictly connected to property) or more or less white? » (Bédoucha 1987, p. 251, my translation from French).

Gosbah has very few facilities. A primary school takes children up to the *sixième*, the sixth grade, i.e. until they are eleven or twelve years old. A few shops sell fresh vegetables and canned food, as well as dairy products, pastries, cigarettes, and top-up cards for phones. A small market on Fridays sells chicken, vegetables and clothes. Nonetheless, mosques abound: there are three, and another one is under construction, thanks to remittances from the Gulf, where some 'Abid Ghbonton workers migrated in the 1980's. The community puts a lot of effort into practising Islam and behaving as good Muslims, to make up for their lower social status and as a reaction to the *'aḥrār*'s perception of them as less orthodox. The Ghbonton of Sidi Makhlouf are suspicious of the 'Abid because they ascribe to them an inclination to stealing and violence, which they see as a consequence of the 'Abid Ghbonton being "less pious". On their side, the 'Abid Ghbonton react to the sedimentation of negative stereotypes upon them.

Worldwide, "black" skin colour is associated with a set of negative stereotypes – physical strength and violence, especially stealing and rape, and lack of an orthodox and pious religion (Curtis IV 2014) – whereas

"whiteness" is correlated with social prestige, beauty, purity and chastity. The same can be said for the 'Abid Ghbonton. One day, while, I was sitting in a café in Gosbah with a group of Abid Ghbonton youths, they discussed the question of racism. Stressing the extent to which "blackness" is accorded negative meanings in everyday language, Majid, a 20-year-old 'Abid Ghbonton blacksmith, complained: «In Tunisian you even say, what is *Barça* [the Spanish football team] doing? White or black [meaning, is it winning or is it losing]? »[10] In Majid's words above, "blackness" is associated with failure and "whiteness" with success. The ascribed impiousness of the 'Abid Ghbonton often equates to a greater inclination to crime, which is a transcultural construction attached to "blackness" (Shelby 2005). Thus, the 'Abid Ghbonton have to struggle with all these prejudices daily, juggling with the label of "slave descendant" and with the preconceptions attached to it, such as dishonesty, aggressiveness and lack of morality. For example, a few years ago, Ramzy, a young 'Abid' Ghbonton man from Gosbah, was – probably wrongly – accused of having stolen some cash from a minibus driver from the "white" Ghbonton tribe, who rushed to Gosbah screaming that the *'abid* had stolen his money. The 'Abid Ghbonton were appalled by the accusation, since Ramzy was a «respectful and religious man, with a long beard»[11]. The youths reacted unanimously, scornfully rejecting the accusation, and even went so far as to accuse the minibus driver of defamation, an official complaint which got nowhere. As this example shows, the "public silence" surrounding the legacy of slavery, which has the function of enhancing social cohesion (Bellagamba 2012, p. 445), is broken by the verbalisation of the label *'abid* in moments of altercation, which disrupts the social order. In these cases, the term *'abid* is neither a lineage name nor a social category, but a painfully insulting epithet.

The negative meanings attached to the status of ascribed slave descendants come mostly from the Ghbonton in Sidi Makhlouf. Whenever I spoke to them, in fact, they reacted with surprise to the fact that I was living in Gosbah. «But the 'Abid are poor, and… are you not scared? » asked the librarian of Sidi Makhlouf's *Dār el Thaqāfa* [House of Culture]. Then she added: «I mean, they are good people. Poor people are better than the rest»[12]. This mixture of superiority feelings, fear for their alleged "aggressiveness", and benevolent paternalism is a typical Ghbonton's attitude towards the 'Abid Ghbonton. The latter often complain about episodes of discrimination in public offices and institutions in Sidi Makhlouf.

The 'Abid Ghbonton have to go to Sidi Makhlouf, where the Ghbonton live, every day to access basic services, as their village is deprived of facilities. The doctor comes to Gosbah once a week, on Thursdays, and receives patients in a small infirmary which remains closed through the rest of the week. Both the hospital, with its emergency ward, and the pharmacy are in Sidi Makhlouf. Pupils from Gosbah attend high school in Sidi Makhlouf, because studying in Mednine or Djerba is very onerous for their families, who have to pay for a place in the student residence (*foyer*). In many cases, as a consequence of racist episodes occurring in Sidi Makhlouf, parents decide to withdraw their children from the high school. In the best scenario they later enrol them in other institutions, but most of the time the children eventually drop out of school. Yasser, a thirty-year-old 'Abid Ghbonton, had a fight when he was in the high school in Sidi Makhlouf, which the headmaster formally accused him of starting. In his words, it was about

> someone insulting me, and my family, saying that we are rude. I reacted and had a fight. I went back home and told my father: I am not going to school any longer. I failed my year (*dūblīt al-classe*). My father was so angry. He decided to send me to Djerba, where I went to a private school. I got my baccalaureate (*bac*) there[13].

The 'Abid Ghbonton's encounters with the Ghbonton happen, therefore, on a daily basis, and shape their cultural identity, constantly reinforcing the ethnic boundaries through daily practices and interactions. The woman I was living with, Karima, a sixty-year-old illiterate farmer, lives on social security, being an elderly widow, and receives 150 dinars a month (about 47 Euro). She has to go to the post office in Sidi Makhlouf at the end of the month to receive her social security cheque, and on that day the office is always very crowded. When I went with her, I saw how the space reflects the social division along gender and ethnic lines prevalent in Sidi Makhlouf: two queues, one for men and one for women, were formed spontaneously, and the 'Abid Ghbonton women crowded shyly at the end of the room, waiting for their turn, while in Gosbah I was used to seeing them squabble over the queue in shops – and jump it most of the time.

Once I went with Karima to the electricity company, STEG (*Société Tunisienne de l'Electricité et du Gaz*), because it had cut off the supply to her house. To my great distress, since I needed electricity to switch on my com-

puter and work, I discovered that she had stopped paying her electricity bills in 2011, because after the revolution she thought that the «state (*dawla*) was not there any longer»[14] and she did not need to pay bills. The revolution had a very superficial impact on the lives of Gosbah's women, because for them it was confined to the rise in prices and the devaluation of the Tunisian dinar, and had no direct advantages. After failing utterly to get an answer from the electricity company, we managed to speak with an officer in Mednine, who treated Karima contemptuously, seeking my complicity to denigrate her for her ignorance of the current political situation. I challenged him furiously, and he answered, «You have to understand that we are full of these people here. The *'abid* come here screaming and pretending. Look at her, she can't control her voice and comes here in slippers»[15]. The discrimination moves through different levels: being a woman, a farmer, and an *'abid*, she experiences «intersectional subordination», that is, «the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment» (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1249).

Unlike the STEG officer, the 'Abid Ghbonton attach different meanings to the term *'abid*. The term refers to a precise historical category and to a lineage name. When the 'Abid Ghbonton use the term *'abid*, they always add "Ghbonton" at the end, and always decline the plural form, often in an adversative way. When Zohra, a forty-year-old 'Abid Ghbonton woman, was explaining to me the friendship ties between two girls going to the same high school in Sidi Makhlouf, she told me: «She is a Ghbonton. But she does not live in Gosbah», and when I asked «What *'arsh* does she belong to, then? », she answered, «She is not from our *'urūsh*! She is a Ghbonton, not an *'Abid* Ghbonton! »[16]. On the other hand, when the *'aḥrār* use *'abid*, they can use it as a derogatory epithet to refer to the lineage of the 'Abid Ghbonton: «They called me *'abid*, and it made me so angry I punched him» said an 'Abid Ghbonton man, recalling a fight in high school[17].

Older generations use this definition as a common ethnonym, while younger generations try to detach from it, given the derogatory meaning attached to it. They are aware, nonetheless, that saying «I come from Gosbah» equates to «I am an 'Abid Ghbonton»[18], since few people living in Gosbah are non- 'Abid Ghbonton.

The feeling of shame attached to the label *'abid* hails from the past of slavery implied in the word, which is, however, adamantly denied by some of

the ʿAbid Ghbonton. For them, it is just a lineage name. Even though their historical trajectory appears consistent with that of other slave descendants in the area, the ʿAbid Ghbonton divide into two camps: those who claim «there were no slaves here»[19], and those who leave the door open to this hypothesis but underline that they themselves, unlike most, could be descended from free individuals. In general, nobody remembers anyone doing agricultural or domestic chores for the *ʾaḥrār* for free. Most ʿAbid Ghbonton try to disassociate themselves from the stigma of being slave descendants.

In 2013, after some youngsters from Gosbah went to universities in the big cities in the north, the story of the ʿAbid Ghbonton leaked out and sparked public interest. The friend of a boy from Gosbah, a young man with an interest in and talent for film making, came to the village to visit his university friend, and filmed a short movie titled "'Abid Ghbonton", which came out in 2012[20]. Unfortunately, few have ever watched the movie, since it was withdrawn very quickly from the internet, but not quickly enough to avoid sparking rage among the ʿAbid Ghbonton. The reason why it was withdrawn was, allegedly, a sort of censorship by the government. Most ʿAbid Ghbonton, on the other hand, told me that it was «outrageous»[21] that their people were portrayed as slaves even in the title. When I asked them why they did not hesitate to define themselves as *ʿabid*, however, one answered:

> If you go to Sidi Makhlouf or Mednine, what can you do? Everybody knows you're an ʿAbid Ghbonton. Because of the colour and where you're from. But in Tunis, nobody knows. I worked in Djerba, and nobody knew. I made a career quickly: I became a tour guide in a German company[22].

Their rage is probably due to the fact that the ʿAbid Ghbonton react against racism defining their identity according to segmentary patterns, and appeal to a shared identity with their neighbours ("southern Tunisians") when interacting with more distant social units, that is, "people from Tunis", seeking solidarity. Moreover, they have recently been trying to renegotiate their inferior social role, supposedly by rejecting their lineage name vis à vis people coming from outside Sidi Makhlouf, conscious that their classificatory slavery label is impossible to wash off as long as their interactions are limited to their close neighbours.

People without an Arab origin

The 'Abid Ghbonton lack an Arab origin: theirs is exogenous and vague. Its vagueness is epitomised by the absence of a holy place in Gosbah where the founder would have been buried: a *zāwiya* – a religious stronghold and site of pilgrimage and devotion (plural *zawāyā*)[23]. When asked, they answer that «Gosbah does not have a *marābuṭ*» (a holy founder), and neither does their lineage. A *marābuṭ* would imbue the community with normative and structural cohesion: this is an irrefutable fact. Rather than assembling in front of the tomb in Sidi Makhlouf, commonly identified with the *'aḥrār* lineages there, the 'Abid Ghbonton used to gather in neighbouring Mareth at the *zāwiya* of Sidi Yahia, until after 2011 political Islamist movements and revivalist Islamic thinkers labelled these ritual practices as "haram" (religiously forbidden) or "women's stuff", because the veneration of saints is frowned upon by more orthodox Muslims as an unorthodox practice.

The 'Abid Ghbonton are always "looking for a grandfather"[24], as genealogies are the outcome of a continuous process of manipulation and rarely «tell the truth» (Fabietti 2016, p. 120, my translation from Italian). Manipulating their genealogy works to enhance the status of their lineage and to expunge the alleged legacy of slavery from their history.

Even without any precise idea of their origin, the 'Abid Ghbonton seem to converge on the idea that their ancestors moved to today's Gosbah in recent times. Most legends and collective memories point to the settlement of "black" individuals next to the Ghbonton lineage: «There are white Ghbonton because they were here before, and they mingled with the ['Abid] Ghbonton population»[25]. In their collective oral memories, they indicate the *'aḥrār* through the racial marker – "whiteness" – rather than their historical role as "masters". The movement of the community from a holy place to a non-holy place is a common foundation legend among North African tribes.

The question of origin, being so strictly interwoven with their slavery past, is extremely sensitive and difficult to address with them. I moved carefully between different sources, that is, pre-existing literature on the slave trade through Ghadames, archival documents, and oral sources, as I collected them in the interviews with the 'Abid Ghbonton's elders. I echo Uli Linke's (2015) distinction between history and memory in her review of the theorisations of collective memory: if «*history* is often used to describe representations of the past that appear in written or narrative form», «the term

memory, by contrast, is conventionally applied to those oral, visual, ritual, and bodily practices through which a community's collective remembrance of the past is produced or sustained» (Linke 2015, p. 181).

By combining historical (archival) sources and the 'Abid Ghbonton's collective memories, I argue that it is impossible to claim with certainty that the 'Abid Ghbonton are the descendants of the "black" slaves retained along the Ghadames route, but historically many "black" slaves transported through the trans-Saharan slave trade were kept in the southern Tunisian countryside. Some of them remained bound in a clientelistic relationship, *wala'*, after being manumitted by their former masters. North African fourteenth century scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) noted that patron-client relations in North Africa tended to be moulded according to a parental structure (Ibn Khaldun 1967). Similarly, *wala'* provided freed slaves with a fictive familiar framework. Regardless of whether they were enslaved in the past or not, the 'Abid Ghbonton were probably tied to the Ghbonton by a *wala'* clientelistic tie, which imparted the latter's lineage name to them. At that time, the 'Abid Ghbonton gained access to land, and to the legitimisation of their lineage, but had to add *shuwāshīn* to their lineage name. It is hard to say when this happened, since their lineage name does not appear in archival documents conserved in the Archives Nationales de Tunisie (National Archives of Tunisia)[26] until the end of the nineteenth century. Without any memory of their alleged past enslavement or of doing domestic chores for the *'aḥrār* without payment, the 'Abid Ghbonton tend to mythicise their past as an ideal time when they were nomads, prior to their settling in Gosbah. Islamic notions of time are «marked by a series of flashes of existence with momentary breakthroughs to eternity» (Böwering 1997, p. 65), which impacts on the notion of historiography and on the understanding of progress. Similarly, much of the 'Abid Ghbonton's effort is put into attributing pride and respectability to their ancestors rather than to their present members through the narration of single episodes in the past. In order to add to their *sharaf*, the 'Abid Ghbonton's oral legends often indicate their ancestors as "guardians" of the neighbouring *'aḥrār*.

The 'Abid Ghbonton's discourse on origin abounds with hypotheses and conjectures. Most 'Abid Ghbonton, when referring to "black" slaves in Tunisia, place their origin in Sudanic Africa without any being any more specific: «Of course there were slaves who were brought from the south, but that was long time ago»[27]. Some of them have precise ideas about their own

tribe: «Once the TV came to interview us. They told us that we probably come from Ghana. I don't think so, I think we come from Saguia el-Hamra»[28]. Saguia el-Hamra is located in the Spanish Sahara and is inhabited by the Sahrawis. According to a «recurrent tradition» (Bédoucha 1987, p. 174, my translation from French), noble lineages in southern Tunisia originate from Saguia el-Hamra, which endows them with an «inexhaustible supply of sanctity» (Bédoucha 1987, p. 174, my translation from French), so this is part of the effort to ennoble their lineage, too. Another interpretation could be that the 'Abid Ghbonton are trying to re-integrate their lineage into the lineage group of the Ouarghemma, the bigger *qabīla* comprising both Ghbonton and 'Abid Ghbonton. The Ouarghemma, in fact, place their origin with little doubt in Saguia el Hamra, and even indicate accurately the movement of their founder, Abdallah al-Sharif (whose surname, by the way, means "noble" and comes from *sharaf*, honour), from the Western Sahara to Tunis and later to the Tunisian south east.

A minority of the 'Abid Ghbonton, furthermore, dogmatically deny any connection with sub-Saharan Africa or with the desert: «There were no slaves here. It is known that black people lived here before»[29]. As mentioned before, slavery remains a «confidential lineage matter» (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 38).

Becoming the 'Abid

The epithet *'abid*, even if painfully stigmatising, is connected with their history and their settlement in the area. Tunisian anthropologist Mohammed Jouily (1994) argues that their lineage name *'abid* was a later imposition from the outside, because the 'Abid Ghbonton were named *shuwāshīn* at the end of the nineteenth century (Jouily 1994, p. 57).

Waṣīf, on the other hand, means "slave" and historically indicates people whose ancestors had definitely been bought and had worked for the *'aḥrār* (Bédoucha 1987, p. 243). Recently, the word has undergone a semantic turn, and has come to designate "black" Tunisians according to their phenotype. The 'Abid Ghbonton are no exception. «I lost a match because I was fighting against a *waṣīf*, who was so big! »[30] recalls a Ghbonton boxer, indicating with this term an 'Abid Ghbonton. Nowadays, the term *waṣīf* addresses the skin colour, with an added reference to a servile position, thus

loading the characterisation with a derogatory connotation. The term has come under attack by post-2011 black rights activists[31], with the slogan, "*waṣīf* is not a colour!".

Archival documents show that the 'Abid Ghbonton were recognised as "*shuwāshīn* Ghbonton" at the end of the nineteenth century. If there are traces of the Ghbonton lineages in the archives, it is because the French authorities feared that someone would escape paying the *majba*, a much-detested Ottoman per capita tax introduced in the seventeenth century by the Muradid dynasty (1613–1705). Between 1892 and 1893, the French General Leclerc, Commandant of the Brigade of Occupation of Tunisia, announced that Ghbonton *shuyūkh* appointed by the government had reported a lower number of contributors, in order to steal money from the *majba* payment. He demanded an immediate census of the population and the dismissal of the guilty *shuyūkh*[32].

The 'Abid Ghbonton first appear in the documents in 1892. On 27 July 1892, the Prime Minister of the Tunisian government under French rule, Aziz Bouattour (1882-1907), received a letter from the Governor (*ʿāmil*) of Arad[33], Youssef ben Ali[34], announcing the resignation of the *shaykh* of the *chouachin* (*shuwāshīn*) Ghbonton, Ali ben Lagha. Elsewhere the *shaykh* is said to have resigned for health reasons[35], and the registration of his resignation was worded thus:

> Here I have the *shaykh* Ali ben Lagha, *shaykh* of the *shuwāshīn* Ghbonton, who said that he is Muslim and that he is not able to work anymore because of what happened to his knee. So he wants to retire of his own accord. That was on Friday, 27 […] Ramadan 1309 (25 April 1892) and the resignation was sincere.[36]

The 'Abid Ghbonton's designation ranges from "Ghbonton", to "*chouachin* (*shuwāshīn*) of the Ghbonton", to "the *negroes*[37] named *chouachin* of the Ghbonton"[38]. Shortly afterwards, the *shaykh* withdrew his resignation, which was, in the officials' eyes,

> a pretext. In reality, this native (*indigène*) had taken this decision following some conflicts, without importance, which tired him out in the exercising of his functions.[39]

The letter from General Leclerc announcing the return of the *shaykh* Ali ben Lagha was addressed on 6 December 1892 to the Resident General of the French Republic, a consultative institution representing French interests in Tunisia. The administrative structure the French built up in Tunisia kept the illusion of the country's sovereignty, while firmly controlling its population through local government officials (Perkins 2004, p. 43). On 29 April 1889, Ali ben Lagha was again elected *shaykh* of the "*chouachin Ghobenten*"[40].

The series of documents on *shaykh* Ali ben Lagha proves that the two lineages, the 'Abid Ghbonton and the Ghbonton, were already divided in 1892, and at that time, the *shuwāshīn* had their own *shaykh*. In a document dated 30 October 1893, General Leclerc communicates with the Resident General about the attempt to bring together the four tribes of the Ghbonton under one *shaykh*, Mohammed ben Othman Eddakhili, *shaykh* of the Awled (*'awlād* stands in Arabic for "boys" or "sons", in this case "sons of") Youssef, a tribe belonging to the *'aḥrār* Ghbonton. The Ghbonton, comprising three "white" tribes and one "black" (*shuwāshīn*) is a sub-group of the bigger *qabīla,* Ouarghemma. The Ouarghemma, a *qabīla* which comprises both the Ghbonton and the 'Abid Ghbonton, is one of the biggest tribes in the South and lives mainly by agriculture and smuggling across the border.

Merging the four tribes turned out to be impossible, for reasons of "colour" (*lūn*)[41]. On 20 October 1893, in fact, the tribes agreed on a definitive division, and each group kept its own elected *shaykh*. On the one side, the lineages of the Awled Youssef, Awled Brikat, and Awled Mohammed constituted a tribe and remained under Mohammed ben Othman Eddakhili; whilst on the other, Awled Abdallah, Kheleifa, Barka, and Nwagy (the last three were *shuwāshīn* lineages) had another *shaykh*[42]. Jouily (1994) maintains that the division of the *shuwāshīn* Ghbonton (Kheleifa, Barka, and Nwagy) from the other Ghbonton tribes was still recent at that time, and was advocated by the *shuwāshīn* themselves, who were longing for a "place in society"; it was accepted by the French officials with the aim of keeping them "under control". Arguably, the division corresponded to the people of *shuwāshīn* lineage being settled next to the *'aḥrār* Ghbonton, when they gained access to their own land.

In 1913, Nasser ben Aoun ben Chamakh, *shaykh* of Awled Youssef, Awled Brikat, and Awled Mohammed (*'aḥrār*), reported that he had been attacked by two men, who beat him and injured him. The case was brought to the

court of Mednine, and many witnesses testified in his favour[43]. The two men were probably *shuwāshīn*, forefathers of the 'Abid Ghbonton. Jouily (1994), in fact, reconstructs a series of episodes where some 'Abid Ghbonton assailed members of other non- *shuwāshīn* tribes in the same period. The unrest even brought the intervention of the military administration and of the *wazīr* (high-ranking chief) Ouarghemma, and Nasser ben Aoun ben Chamakh was fined 100 francs for impeding the capture of the *'anfār* (bandits), which, however, he vehemently denied[44]. Relations between the *shuwāshīn* of the Ghbonton and the Ghbonton were tense, a result of an accumulation of accusations of aggressiveness and violence on the part of the *shuwāshīn*, which reinforced the perception of the 'Abid Ghbonton as "bandits".

The local authorities and French officials had an idea of the racial divide between the *shuwāshīn* lineages (*negroes*) and non-*shuwāshīn* ones in terms of "colour", but probably did not have a precise understanding of the genealogical differences between the *qabā'il*, since they tried to merge them. Clearly, the lineage name of the 'Abid Ghbonton in the 1890's was *shuwāshīn* and not *'abid*.

According to documents held in the National Archives of Tunisia, however, there might be another possible hypothesis for the origin of "black" individuals in the south of Tunisia, as described by Tunisian anthropologist Ines Mrad Dali (2009) in her doctoral thesis. It concerns runaway slaves from Tripolitania (today's eastern Libya) to southern Tunisia. One of the consequences of Tunisia's early abolition (1846), in fact, was that it attracted slaves from neighbouring countries, especially Tripolitania, seeking freedom and hoping for an amelioration of their condition. Their escape was instigated by three factors: one was the enduring informal institution of slavery in Ottoman Libya, as the slave trade to Libya continued after its formal abolition (1856) and Italy's occupation of the country (1911) (Altaleb 2015). The second was the more favourable French jurisdiction (compared to that of the Ottoman Empire), and last, the imminent Italian-Turkish war (Mrad Dali 2009).

Documents recorded by the French authorities kept track of the movement of several individuals, mainly men, who came to southern Tunisia at the beginning of the 1890's. They were probably recently imported slaves, from Bornu and Baghermi, and settled down in Gabes, Tataouine, and surrounding areas (Mrad Dali 2009). They arrived at the same time as free

manpower, attracted by the lively Tunisian job market (Mrad Dali 2009). Being recently imported, they would have been named *'abid*.

In the 'Abid Ghbonton's case, however, I tend to consider the patronym *'abid* as a late imposition from the outside, and not as evidence of a more recent Libyan origin. The densely-structured contrast with the Ghbonton, in fact, creates a "lenses-like relation", or an «alliance/relation link» (*rabṭ 'alaqa taḥālaf*) (Jouily 1994, pp. 56–57, my translation from Arabic), since the 'Abid Ghbonton are used to seeing themselves through the eyes of the Ghbonton, who shape their identity and their horizons. It hints at a long-standing connection between the *shuwāshīn* and the other Ghbonton tribes. In addition, the 'Abid Ghbonton's oral histories and legends I collected during my fieldwork use the patronym *shuwāshīn* to refer to their own lineage in the past.

In any case, *'abid* is more a derogatory term than *shuwāshīn*: today, the majority of "black" people in the south refer to themselves as *shuwāshīn*, trying to avoid the more painful *waṣīf* and *'abid*. *Shuwāshīn* is now synonymous with "black", and, contrary to *'abid* with its clearer connotation of slave descent, it blurs their alleged slavery past.

The seven brothers, or the 'Abid Ghbonton's foundation story

According to the 'Abid Ghbonton's elders, «the Ghbonton are the sons of (Awled) Mehemed, sons of (Awled) Yousef, sons of (Awled) Abdallah and us *shuwāshīn* »[45]. The relationship between the various sub-tribes within the Ghbonton is explained by the 'Abid Ghbonton in these terms:

> There are four tribes [*qismīn*, literally "departments"] and we are considered to be the brothers of the Awled Abdallah, us the black people, brothers with the same father. This Abdallah married a black woman from our tribe, who gave birth to Boroka and Neji. Boroka and Neji got older and one gave birth to Toumi and Khedhr, and Neji gave birth to one child [and those three children are the forefathers of the three sub-tribes of the 'Abid Ghbonton, *tuwāyma*, *khaḍḍ*āra, and *nuwājī*][46].

The unique relationship the 'Abid Ghbonton have with the Awled Abdallah is confirmed by the ANT documents previously mentioned, where they are reported to have shared the same *shaykh* in the past.

The story Ali ben M'barek told me depicts an invasion by Libyan people (*ennewayel*) who killed all the men while Boroka and Neji were absent. The village is described as Lefje (stemming from *'alf jāy*, "thousand came", a mythical place).

The story seems to contradict the pattern of transmission of race in Arab societies, since Boroka and Neji were "black" but came from the patrilineal line of the Awled Abdallah, who were "white". But moving beyond the simple explanation of "whites" and "blacks" as half-brothers with the same father, I consider the ʿAbid Ghbonton's affiliation to the *'aḥrār* Awled Abdallah as a form of clientelistic tie, *wala'*. Eric Wolf (1951) shows how in pre-Islamic Mecca individuals tended to conceptualise social relations in terms of kinship, even if these were not based on consanguinity. Similarly, I argue, the ʿAbid Ghbonton describe their position within the *qabīla* Ghbonton in parental terms, tying themselves to the Awled Abdallah.

> Toumi and Neji and Khedri: their father (*bābahum*) was a *ḥurr* [here he means "white man"]. I don't know from where he came, he married a black woman (*ʿabda*); that's why they call us slaves. This man was also married to a *ḥurra* ["white" woman] before the black woman (*ʿabda*), and the history stayed like that, black and white are brothers[47].

In some versions, the founders of the three "white" tribes are indicated as "grandfathers":

> The beginning is our grandfathers (*ajdūd*), sons of Abdallah, sons of Mehemed, sons of Youssef, and those people of Gosbah: those are our fathers; they got older and died and we settled here[48].

It is noticeable that when asked to list the Ghbonton sub-tribes, the ʿAbid Ghbonton mention their own lineage at the end, verbalising the rigid hierarchy among the four lineage groups. In their foundation legends, the lineages of the *'aḥrār* came to be indicated by the figure of a father, and their relationship to them as a brotherhood, articulated as a "black"/ "white" difference.

"Blackness" and "whiteness" for the ʿAbid Ghbonton are far from being physical markers, but are elements conferred on individuals by virtue of their family background – that is, through a vertical genealogical line. On

the other hand, belonging to a Ghbonton lineage and being ʾaḥrār is not about being epidermically "white" or being juridically free, but is about boasting a lineage with an Arab origin – the prestige of the ʾaḥrār. Socio-economic status can counterbalance the racial label, but the lack of Arab origin is difficult to wash off, especially when individuals interact in the same social context. Moreover, social debasement is an easier process than upward social mobility. In the south-west of Tunisia, for example, groups of ʾaḥrār can "shuwāshanise" ("*devenir Shūshān*" (masc. of *shuwāshīn*), Bédoucha 1984, p. 88), by impoverishment or miscegenation with *shuwāshīn*, and even if the renegotiation of relations led many *shuwāshīn* to buy land formerly owned by ʾaḥrār, the origin of the lineage remained the criterion for according prestige and higher social status to individuals.

Similarly, in Gosbah, even in the frame of new socio-economic relations where ʿAbid Ghbonton can accumulate considerable wealth, their non-Arabness keeps the ethnic boundary undiminished. The term ʾaṣl itself came to be synonymous, for the ʿAbid Ghbonton, with "Arab origin", as they claim not to be «original (ʾaṣliyyīn) by the father's name»[49], meaning that they hold a shallow, less deep patrilineal lineage which lacks ʾaṣl, or Arab origin.

The ʿAbid Ghbonton received their land at the time of their settlement: «Ghbonton are all sons of Mehemed, sons of Abdallah, sons of Youssef, and our people. Here, this is their own; they divided it [land]; they gave each tribe a piece, with a property certificate»[50]. Needless to say, the ʿAbid Ghbonton received the least fertile land: «they [ʾaḥrār lineages] served their interests for a period of time. They served their interests, and all the, as we say, 'interests' [they should have given] to Gosbah they gave to Ragouba [part of the district inhabited by ʾaḥrār] »[51]. Their insistence on their right to the land, constantly repeated in the interviews, suggests that their ownership rights have been frequently questioned, evidently by the other three ʾaḥrār tribes: «Now they [the ʿAbid Ghbonton] settled here and nobody can deny this, that this land is ours and everyone who was living here received a certificate of ownership»[52].

Some stories describe the ʿAbid Ghbonton as *raḥal* (nomads), and others say they follow a transhumance pattern:

> When we were young we went everywhere, and in the days when the French were here, we would go to Marhoul and Firga [untraceable places today]; we

would stay there and then return here in summer, a period of time when there were marriages.[53]

Ancient 'Abid Ghbonton are also referred to as *bad*ū, Bedouins, who

lived where it rained. We ploughed and collected olives and dates. We were living only by that; there was nothing and when it rained… no one could be patient (…) We settled where it rained; we went and lived with camels and horses and where it rained sheep lived (…) Thank God we didn't know doctors: we used herbs. And me, without wishing to boast, I went everywhere, even Tunis, Sousse, and Monastir, Sfax, Gabes.[54]

All these elements indicate a pattern of transhumance from the mountains to the seaside, even though they stress the fact that they were *raḥal*, and some surnames come from that: «people used to live like *raḥal*. They came to the seaside during summer for the weather and moved to the mountains during winter. Not transhumance, nomads»[55].

A second foundation legend explains the origin of the larger *qabīla* Ghbonton (comprising, then, sons of Abdallah, sons of Youssef, sons of Mehemed, and 'Abid Ghbonton), and shows some similarities with the previous one.

The history of Gosbah. Seven brothers came – that means, there are those who say – from Saguia el Hamra, between, maybe, Mauritania and Morocco. There are those who say Berber, from the desert outside. One of them was named Ghbonton: how and why was he called Ghbonton? [The seven brothers] lived together and they separated. They separated and lost touch with each other. One was Hawiwy, because *hawaya* was the name of the place. (…) Another one lost touch with them. They searched and searched; they didn't find him. They called him "the disappeared" – Elghabay. One said "they hated me" (*carh*ū*ny*) but misspelled it and he was named Tarhūni. One went to Araadh and they called him Aardhawy; one went to Ghraaya and they called him Ghrayri[56].
The one named Ghomrassni, they said to him, "Hide your head" and he remained named like that [*ghomrasny* means "cover my head"].[57]

In many versions two other brothers appear: «the third one named Wederni, a word he says, I don't know its meaning, and then Jlidi – maybe

his original first name is Boujlida [father of Jlida] »[58]. Sometimes one called Touzni appears in the stories, but «I have forgotten why they gave him this name»[59].

The 'Abid Ghbonton's origin is unclear, but many of them are scattered across the Libyan border: «Tarhūni went to Tripoli, a big village there [pointing at the border]. He said 'They hated me!' and they named the place Terhūna after him»[60]. Then «six stayed here and they settled in a *najāt* [a group of tents] »[61].

The following version of the legend was recounted by one of the *shuyūkh*, who came from an old and respected lineage, the Rahhal. The *sharaf* placed upon his lineage "whitened" him, as he is considered "whiter than the rest", showing how moral selves are always linked to origin and to one's ancestors, and that "colour" is accorded following vertical, genealogical lines, rather than phenotype.

> Khalifa: They walked to Libya [trespassing]; Tarhūni stayed, the others settled here.
> Marta: Were they black?
> Khalifa: *Khaltūn* (mixed), *fihūm we fihūm* (there were some and there were some).
> Marta: Who came to Gosbah of these seven brothers?
> Khalifa: *Al-'ukhrīn* (the others) *sitta* (six) *hunā* (here). Where there was a source of life [water], they went.
> Marta: Who founded Gosbah?
> Khalifa: Only one, Elghbontny. That's why we are called Ghbonton.
> Marta: Who was here before?
> Khalifa: *Laradh* (name of tribe), *'arab* (settlers) of Mareth (a village in the Governorate of Gabes). He went to the Aradh and they named him Ardhawi.
> Marta: And Ghrayri?
> Khalifa: Because he went to the Ghraaya (name of tribe).[62]

Khalifa Rahhal's legend raises interesting issues. First, they were "mixed", and second, they seem to have acquired their lineage name *from* the tribes they were settling next to, pointing to a *wala'* kinship terminology.

The 'Abid Ghbonton were ranked at a lower level: «They live together now mixed (…) but they were feeding their animals before, they were working for them»[63]. Jamaa does not recall the 'Abid Ghbonton performing tasks for the *'aḥrār* lineage counterpart directly, but he knows it happened in the

past. Another elder, Ali, added several references to a slavery-like life condition: «it [slavery] is not present, it was enslaved there were other people who obliged them (…) [Gosbah] was founded now now [very recently] before other people controlled the people of Gosbah»[64].

In the eyes of the 'Abid Ghbonton, poverty and lack of resources were inherited from this period. "Ghbonton" is said to come from the word "*ghbuntun*ī", that is, "they treated me badly", because his brothers left him the least fertile land. Therefore, within the social hierarchy of southern Tunisia, the *qabīla* Ghbonton is even lower on the ladder than other *'aḥrār* lineages, which can boast nobler lineages. The 'Abid came off worst: «They came here together and everyone took a place, they belonged to the district of Sidi Makhlouf [the Ghbonton], Gosbah [was] by itself, and Ragouba by itself»[65]. But Gosbah was not a good place: there was little work and people were poor. («They felt full even with a little meal»[66], meaning that they had to be satisfied with only a little food, since there was no more). The poorness of the place still affects the people of Gosbah today and tarnishes the name of its inhabitants:

> They didn't care about having land or where they would live, but now, as you can see, this place where we are living is not suitable for living. You feel desperate about how they could live here. And those who find their relatives living here or who settled here (…) You can't build here, you can't do anything[67].

The difficulty of surviving without protection made it easier to accept an inferior position:

> We lived with nothing (*balash*). Life was empty (*fārgha*). Before, there was nothing to live on, and France did not give people jobs. There was the *makhzan* (government, system) and people who worked in the *makhzan* lived, and people like us, the outsiders (*barraniyyīn*) did not have anything to live on[68].

On the other side of the coin, *'aḥrār* lineages had to provide a justificational framework to perpetuate unequal relationships and extract free labour from the 'Abid Ghbonton. According to Bédoucha (1987), in southern Tunisian oases the racial framework which justifies the division between *wuṣfān* and *shuwāshīn* on the one side and *'aḥrār* on the other is relatively

recent (Bédoucha 1987, p. 244). The racial set-up was invoked by *'aḥrār* during the 1970's and 1980's, because social relations between the two categories had progressively changed, and the *'aḥrār* felt the need to strengthen their authority, resorting to the only permanent marker they could cling on to (Bédoucha 1987, p. 244).

When challenged on their ascribed colour and on their lineage name, the 'Abid Ghbonton say

> Yes, you feel that this word is inferior to other names (*taḥassīhā kilma 'aqall min lukhryn*). I am telling you that because now the other names originate from the grandfather's name, but *shuwāshīn*… There is inferiority (*fīhā alnaqaṣ*) in this name, even in our piece of land: they worked for the other three brothers. Yes, they worked, yes. The history is difficult to know.[69]

Thus their colour appears to be a "social colour", and is interwoven with the label "slave" (*'abid*) and with their previous unpaid work for the *'aḥrār*:

> That was the history of before (*hākā tārīkh qabal*). There were the black-skinned people in tribes (*kānit qabal fī njū lāsmar*); they put them to work as slaves; they named them slave (*yuḥūṭū wuṣfān yuqūlū 'abīd*) and we still had this name for a period of time [in the past] but now, no. Now they have begun to inter-marry, but before they called us slaves (*qabal yuqululna 'abīd*) – this is true (*ḥaqq*) – and we called them masters (*waḥna nqululhum asyadna*).[70]

From slavery to wala'

Ideas on race, heritage, and genealogy are contextually crafted by the 'Abid Ghbonton, with the main purpose of positioning their lineage in history and escaping the stigma of being classificatory slave descendants. This is consistent with other post-slavery contexts, where memories of being freemen are sometimes retained, sometimes crafted anew (Rossi 2009, p. 2). The 'Abid Ghbonton either reject or mitigate their alleged slavery past from their collective memories. Their attempts to renegotiate their inferior social role, however, clash with an inescapable social marker – their lack of an Arab origin (*'aṣl*) which materialises into the absence of a lineage founder with his tomb in the village. Their non-Arabness crafts their moral selves, lessening their honour (*sharaf*) and moulding their appearance, making them "so-

cially black". Their collective oral memories attempt to enhance *sharaf* within the social fabric of southern Tunisia, crafting memories where they hold the special role of protecting the *ʾaḥrār* against foreign invaders. Alongside this, the foundation legends strive to legitimise the village of Gosbah with a movement of immigration between two points, a mythical place and a historical one, enhancing the social status of the lineage, too.

Becoming clients of the Ghbonton and receiving land from them, under the *wala'* system, meant achieving the legitimisation of their lineage by acquiring the lineage name – Ghbonton – of the *ʾaḥrār*, but being separated by the term *shuwāshīn*, hinting at their ascribed slavery past and their phenotype: dark skin. Similarly, in other Arab contexts (for pre-Islamic Arabia: Wolf 1951), the terminology of kinship was used to conceptualise forms of relationships other than consanguineous ties, such as post-slavery patronage.

The ʿAbid Ghbonton's "ethnic boundary" stems from this period, which is, however, hard to position in time. Undoubtedly, they were already freed and had their own land and *shaykh* at the end of the nineteenth century, when they appear in documents preserved in archives. The *wala'* relationship the two groups established is a consequence of how difficult it is for unattached individuals to survive in a society – such as Arab society – which places importance on affiliation and kinship. It is highly likely that the ʿAbid Ghbonton were de-socialised people who needed to be re-socialised, according to Patterson's idea that the slave, by definition, is an alienated individual who is not entitled «to any legitimate social order» (Patterson 1982, p. 5). The movement out of slavery coincided with the insertion of the ʿAbid Ghbonton into a new social order; kinship was used as a terminology to frame the relationship between the ʿAbid Ghbonton and the *ʾaḥrār*, and it is still in use when speaking of their past history.

Their history could provide further evidence of a "slavery-to-kinship pattern", which scholars assign to African systems of slavery (Miers, Kopytoff 1977), since they were probably slaves who were absorbed into the descent group of the *ʾaḥrār*, whether they were their former masters or not, under a *wala'* tie, which resembles a familial frame. The movement can thus be compared to the «greater and greater incorporation [of slaves] into the institutions of the host society» (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 19) which culminates in emancipation, but also comprises the lifetime and intergenerational social mobility of enslaved persons (Miers, Kopytoff 1977, p. 20). In the ʿAbid Ghbonton's case, a progressive social mobility through *wala'*

indeed took place, but the patronage relationship they established with the *'aḥrār* Ghbonton is an unequal one, a "lenses-like relationship", because, as in a mirror, the image is not identical but reversed: *opposite*. The 'Abid Ghbonton are not integrated into the Ghbonton lineage, but rather the ethnic boundary between the two lineages is maintained by the prohibition of intermarriage and by geographical marginalisation. On top of that, daily discriminatory practices deepen the divide between *'aḥrār* Ghbonton and the *shuwāshīn* Ghbonton. The 'Abid Ghbonton can suffer from discrimination which entails paternalistic and innocuous mocking, but which can also assume very violent and unjust forms. I heard many times from my interlocutors sentences like «This is not racism: Tunisians are like that, they are always very parochial and localist. You should listen to someone from Tunis speaking of someone from Sfax! »[71]. However, racism (*'unṣuriyya*) in Sidi Makhlouf overlapped with a structural, historically-driven form of discrimination which hails from a deeply-ingrained mind-set, stemming from an ascribed slavery past and from genealogical differences. The seeming impossibility of escaping the social niches attributed to social groups in southern Tunisia – or the lack of opportunity to do so – marks a painful and enduring socio-economic inequality.

In more recent times the *shuwāshīn* Ghbonton experienced a further social debasement, which stands in contrast to Miers and Kopytoff's (1977) view of emancipation as a social advancement through the "slavery-to-kinship continuum". At some time in history they became 'Abid, in fact, probably at the beginning of the twentieth century, as they were *shuwāshīn* Ghbonton until the end of the nineteenth century. A possible explanation is the attempt by the *'aḥrār* to re-affirm the social hierarchy by intensifying the racial divide, as *'abid* is more racially charged than *shuwāshīn*. This is consistent with the recent resurgence of discrimination by colour in other social set-ups in southern Tunisia (Bédoucha 1984; 1987).

In the chapters that follow, I will delve into the social mechanisms which maintain the ethnic boundaries – such as endogamy – and into the professional cleavages amongst the *shuwāshīn* Ghbonton compared with other lineages in the area.

Chapter four
Marrying the *'abid*

«*Ba'd lakḫal ma yosboĝ sabaĝ*
After black, no dyeing [color] is possible (Yetiv 1987, p. 12) »

While watching TV at dusk in Gosbah, surrounded by the women of the household I lived in, I remember asking myself how they could understand what was going on in one of their favourite soap operas, an Indian one. The soap opera was in Hindi, with subtitles in Classical Arabic, and I knew that all of them were illiterate. Nonetheless, they made up the plot. I was totally fascinated by the imagination they showed in assuming the relationships between the actors without understanding what they were actually saying. I heard it many times, but I was always shocked at sentences like, "She can't be his wife, she is brown (*samrā*)" or "Look how ugly he is, he is black (*iswid*)!", especially because I knew that an 'Abid Ghbonton woman racialises herself as *samrā* and *sūdā*, too. Whenever the issue of colour came up, women always appeared willing to explain racial issues to me – to my great surprise, since I had great difficulty speaking with their men about slavery. For example, Monia, a thirty-year-old 'Abid Ghbonton woman, was adamantly convinced that "black" women could never marry "good husbands"[1]. Slima, a sixty-something-year-old, also an 'Abid Ghbonton, told me once that «blackness is the worst thing God did to me»[2].

Spending most of the time amidst women, due to the spatial segregation of sexes prevalent in Gosbah and to my position as a young, female researcher, inquiring about issues of race came as the most natural first move to make after settling down amidst the 'Abid Ghbonton. Gosbah's women, in fact, spend large parts of their time speaking about their "blackness" or trying to conceal it. The meanings the 'Abid Ghbonton attach to "blackness" are entangled with other social institutions, primarily marriage, and to multi-faceted ideas connected to beauty, social and educational status, and chastity.

The 'Abid Ghbonton participate in conversations about their "blackness" as vertically inherited from their ascribed slavery ancestry and their less deep

genealogical lineage, showing how processes of racialisation are also self-ascriptive. Their racialisation is a fluid, contextual process which hails from the larger social environment in southern Tunisia, and involves both the *shuwāshīn* and the *'aḥrār*. I argue that the ethnic boundary between the *'aḥrār* and the 'Abid Ghbonton is maintained by the strict endogamic rules which prohibited intermarriages between the 'Abid Ghbonton and *'aḥrār* lineages in the past. The ethnic boundary moved a couple of decades ago, but only between 'Abid Ghbonton and non-Ghbonton *'aḥrār* lineages, and it still stands as an unsurmountable barrier between the 'Abid Ghbonton and the Ghbonton, who are still separated by the strict prohibition of intermarriage.

The ethnic boundary experienced two moments of intensification: the first was the renaming of the 'Abid Ghbonton as *'abid*, probably at the beginning of the twentieth century, and probably as an imposition by the *'aḥrār* Ghbonton. Secondly, consistently with what happened in the southern Tunisian oases (described by Bédoucha 1984; 1987), a couple of decades ago the ethnic boundary started to be much more about phenotypical markers. As in the Kebili region (Bédoucha 1987, p. 244), this probably happened to counterbalance the recent renegotiation of social hierarchies. Scholarly analysis in North Africa has pointed out that, in the 1960's, «color itself [was] relatively marginal» and «no "color bar" developed in Northern Africa. The spectrum of "black"-"white" relationships [was] explainable in class, not caste, terms» (Brown 1967, p. 470). However, more recently, physical markers have become more dominant.

Nowadays, among the 'Abid Ghbonton, phenotypical features are invoked to pinpoint social differences, similarly to southern Tunisian oases where «inferior social condition is intimately connected to a physical character» (Bédoucha 1987, p. 249). On the one hand, race appeals to biologically based human characteristics (Winant 2000, p. 172), but on the other, it remains a social category and is always necessarily a social construction (Wade 2015, p. 3). As Thomas Holt (2000) convincingly argues, its social constructedness does not mean that it is «unreal or untrue, but in the sense of being an agreed-upon set of understandings that may be deployed both by those within the designated group as well as by those outside it» (Holt 2000, p. 13). Similarly, "blackness" in the case of the 'Abid Ghbonton represents a socio-cultural construction sustained by both sides of the ethnic boundary: both the *'aḥrār* and the 'Abid Ghbonton themselves.

The ethnic boundary consists in a sort of discrimination which can be overcome by «contact, integration, and assimilation» (Winant 2000, p. 179), as miscegenation (which I intend here in the broader sense of "interracial marriages" between *shuwāshīn* and *ʾaḥrār*) is a feasible yet rare occurrence in southern Tunisia. Today, mixed offspring have the possibility either of «hypodescent», where «the children born to such unions always inherit the social status of the parent with an inferior status» (Regnier 2014, p. 118, my translation from French) or of «hyperdescent», that is, the integration of offspring of mixed couples into the higher social and racial status. These new patterns of transmission of "social colour" stand in contrast to the historical pattern of transmission of race through patrilineal lines, mainly because women contribute more, racially, to their offspring.

After delving into the meanings attached to "blackness", both by the ʿAbid Ghbonton and by the *ʾaḥrār*, this chapter intends to analyse the marital strategies of the ʿAbid Ghbonton and how they have changed over time, arguing that these changes have impacted on the ethnic constructions and their transmission. The ethnic boundary between the ʿAbid Ghbonton and the *ʾaḥrār* Ghbonton, however, has remained untouched, and exceptions to the rule fall into the category of «unilateral marriages», that is, «unions where the couple is recognised only by one side» (Regnier 2014, p. 111, my translation from French). The last part of the chapter will be devoted to the race-evasion strategies put in place by ʿAbid Ghbonton women – always, however, aimed at inserting themselves into the "white" *ʾaḥrār* lineages, and distancing themselves from the perceived ugliness attached to "blackness". These strategies are far from the recent movement of "black" women in Tunisia who claim to be proud of being "black" and embrace their natural hair and skin colour, a movement passionately supported by black rights activists.

The origin of "blackness"

"Black" and "white" are commonly used by the ʿAbid Ghbonton as well as by their *ʾaḥrār* neighbours: while the Arabic term *ʾabyaḍ* is used for "white", a number of terms indicate different nuances of "blackness": *ʾasmar*, *noir* ("black" in French), and *iswid*. In the privacy of their households or when

they gather in cafés, however, the *'aḥrār* may use the derogatory *waṣīf* and *'abid* to refer to the 'Abid Ghbonton.

The construction of racial attributes is sustained by both sides of the ethnic boundary, that is, by the 'Abid Ghbonton and by the *'aḥrār*, especially the Ghbonton. The Ghbonton, in fact, participate greatly in imposing this category from the outside. Kamal, a twelve-year-old boy, got into a fight in Sidi Makhlouf with a Ghbonton boy:

> He [Ghbonton child] told me I had a nose like a potato, and then I answered him "so you do!" But he said, "We are whites (*bīḍān*). We are thin (*ḍaʿīfiyyīn*, in Tunisian Arabic)". I shouted at him that we [the 'Abid Ghbonton] do not value thin people [*ḍiʿāf* is the Classical Arabic plural and also means "weak"] and if he wanted, I could beat him [showing him how strong he was, contrary to the Ghbonton boy's "weakness"][3].

During my conversations with the 'Abid Ghbonton elders, which took place in the main rooms of their two or three-roomed houses, with the accompaniment of tea and biscuits from the *hanūt* (small supermarket), I noticed that their biggest distress in the reconstruction of the village history was the shortness of the line of descent they could retrace. Unlike other contexts, such as the Senegal river valley, where slave descendants were able to forge new genealogies to wash away their slavery stigma (Schmitz 2009), the 'Abid Ghbonton's re-ancestralisation of their history as "protectors of the *'aḥrār*" did not side-step the stigma of ascribed slave descendants.

In the case of the *andevo* – slave descendants – of South Betsileo in Madagascar, Denis Regnier (2014) shows how the attempt to legitimise their lineages by building tombs was not sufficient to get rid of the label of slave descendants or the uncleanness connected to their slavery past. Similarly, the 'Abid Ghbonton's absence of an Arab origin could not be washed away, and mirrored their lessened moral and religious authority. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the absence of an Arab lineage is what is commonly identified by scholars as the mover behind the racialisation of individuals as "blacks" (Lewis 1990; El Hamel 2013; Hall 2011). Historically, racial commutations have been passed down along the patrilineal line, identifying individuals as "black" because of their genealogical descent from non-Arabs. Interracial marriages created offspring who were racially classified by means of their vertical descent line rather than their appearance. Nowadays, for the

ʿAbid Ghbonton, race is still a multi-layered construction in which genealogy and appearance are intertwined, given the prevalence of patrilineairy, and yet there have been significant changes to how race is transmitted, giving more importance to women.

ʿAbid Ghbonton marriages and the tendency to isogamy

Bruce Hall (2011) shows how merely equating race and identity is not sufficient to frame discrimination, and that what must be asked is how the structures of ideas about racial difference actually work, and how they make racial arguments (Hall 2011, p. 13). Racism is, in fact, an inadequate analytical tool for encompassing the everyday experience of the ʿAbid Ghbonton, who are rather affected by "processes of racialisation" when it comes to social domains such as the marital and professional ones. To understand what race actually *does*, one should start from marriage.

Marriage is undoubtedly the most important celebration among the ʿAbid Ghbonton, and the moment all ʿAbid Ghbonton girls romanticise about. It reflects a custom widespread in the whole Middle East, «where weddings are the highlights of social life, even among the poor, and marriage is regulated and recognized» (Abu Lughod 2013, p. 91). In Gosbah, a tendency for patrilineal cousins to marry, the so-called "Arab" or "endogamic marriage" (Fabietti 2016, p. 100), is widespread. "Arranged" marriages are often adamantly refused by ʿAbid Ghbonton girls, who seem to have relative freedom of choice, but usually choose their fiancé following the *muṣāhara* (affinity) rule: they marry individuals from their patrilineal descent group or from those with which their families have tied alliances. Families related through marriage relationships are called *al-nisb* (from *nisb*, "relation", "descent", "lineage"). Even though marrying with the consent of the families or tribes is the socially preferable choice, marriages by elopement («*hurūb bi-al-nisā*», literally "running away with women": Jouily 1994, p. 90)[4] are also an integral aspect of life among the ʿAbid Ghbonton. These marriages are celebrated secretly and hastily, and later recognised officially by the family members.

In Tunisia as a whole, "white" people hesitate to give their daughters to people racialised as "blacks", whether clearly recognisable as slave descendants or not. The preference accorded to isogamy (same-status marriage) intertwines with racial concerns. In general, families are reluctant to let their

daughters marry a stranger – be he from another village, another lineage, or another country – and marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men were outlawed until 2017. This has led to a very high percentage of consanguinity, a phenomenon that skyrockets in the Tunisian countryside (25,36 %) (Ben M'Rad, Chalbi 2006, p. 64). Moreover, "black" skin, to "white" Tunisians' eyes, stands for inferiority in social status and for a set of negative meanings, even when it comes to foreigners. While sipping a *direkt* (macchiato) in a café in Tunis I overheard this conversation:

> …then she [a girl, probably from his family] got married to someone from there, in the US [I interpreted from the conversation that the girl was studying in the US]. Her father nearly had a fit [literally "shock", *ṣadma*]. But, thank God, he is not black [*noir*][5].

In Tunisia, the reluctance to marry "black" people can be interpreted as a social practice which is rooted in deeper historical phenomena. Alongside the general reluctance to let daughters marry foreigners, whether they are from another lineage, village, or country, the institution of *kafā'a*, which might be roughly translated as equality of birth and social status in marriage (Oßwald 2017, p. 165), has played a paramount role in discouraging unions between different social strata.

Originally, in pre-Islamic Arabia, *kafā'a* was meant to prevent a woman marrying beneath her social status, thus dishonouring her family. It reflected the «right of the bride as well as of her family» (Oßwald 2017, p. 165, my translation from German). "Beneath" meant in terms of piety, character, wealth, profession, and ultimately freedom and descent (Lewis 1990, p. 86). Since descent is intertwined with colour, "being beneath" also came to mean "being black"; marrying a "black" individual meant marrying downwards, i.e. hypogamy. At the same time, "white", free men could easily procreate with "black", enslaved women or concubines. On the other hand, in the past, a marriage between a free woman and an enslaved man was strictly interdicted. *Kafā'a* left a legacy in today's Muslim societies, including in Tunisia. One of its outcomes is that a man can marry downwards more easily than a woman.

In rural Tunisia, other factors can be held accountable for the widespread rejection of interracial marriages, such as a preference for "endogamic" or "affinity" marriages. Endogamic marriage is prevalent throughout the Arab

world and is considered by scholars to hark back to pre-Islamic, desert and nomadic societies (Fabietti 2016, p. 102) It is a way of keeping women, their offspring and their property within the same descent group (Fabietti 2016, p. 102) and of consolidating alliances within a segmentary social pattern. Marrying within one own's patrilineal extended family generally means marrying within the same ethnic group.

Interracial marriages

Nonetheless, in Tunisia as a whole, interracial marriages have become more frequent recently. This more relaxed attitude occurs within a frame of generally changed social relations between "blacks" and "whites" and is related to a higher degree of mobility of the Tunisian population. Mixed marriages are common nowadays, because «things have changed with new generations of Tunisians»[6], even though resistance from both sets of parents can be fierce, as in the case of Amal, a young "black" student of economics from Djerba.

> My [older] sister married a white guy and my parents… my parents were furious. Now, however, he is like a son to them. I met my fiancé on Facebook, he is older and from Mednine [and "white"]. My parents agreed with the marriage, but his family does not want to hear of it.[7]

As for the ʿAbid Ghbonton, a tendency to marry within the same status is widespread among all the Ouarghemma tribes, and the *shuwāshīn* of the big *qabīla* have generally a hard time finding "white" spouses.

In the Kebili oases in the 1980's, Geneviève Bédoucha (1987) reported that *shuwāshīn* families practiced endogamy (Bédoucha 1987, p. 243) and marriages between *ʾaḥrār* and *shuwāshīn* were rare and had the only outcome of "shuwāshanising" the *ḥurr* (Bédoucha 1987, p. 247). Some marriages between a male *ḥurr* and a female *shūshāna* (fem. sing. of *shuwāshīn*) happened because the latter was considered to be healthy and fertile, able to give birth to sons (Bédoucha 1987, p. 247), who, however, were "shuwāshanised". In the past, the situation of the ʿAbid Ghbonton may have been similar to that of the *shuwāshīn* in Kebili, because the first "mixed marriages" in Gosbah happened some decades ago. By "mixed marriages", however, I mean marriages between *shuwāshīn* and non-Ghbonton *ʾaḥrār*, because

marital unions between the 'Abid Ghbonton and the Ghbonton were not supposed to happen in the first place – and not even now – because of their inappropriateness. For the Ghbonton, the "ethnic boundary" between the two *qabā'il* goes beyond the racialisation of the 'Abid Ghbonton as "black" and entails a complicated historical relationship which is based on the legacy of an ascribed past of slavery and of a historical institution, *wala'*.

If the *'aḥrār* agree that marrying an 'Abid is not desirable, because of his/her colour (*lūn*) and poverty, marriages between the Ghbonton and the 'Abid Ghbonton are totally out of question. In a country where the legislation is considered to be amongst the most advanced in the Arab region, especially regarding civil rights, strict social laws punishing marriages between two lineages, seemingly on the sole base of skin colour, are an embarrassing reality, particularly for an outsider. I experienced many times a reaction of astonishment and incredulity when I reported the story of the "black Romeo and white Juliet" to my Tunisian friends, mostly urban middle-class northern Tunisians.

As far as the 'Abid Ghbonton can remember, a marriage between the two lineages has happened only once. Some ten years ago, Soulef, a "white"-skinned woman who was Ghbonton, met Ameur, a "black" 'Abid Ghbonton man, by the river dividing the two communities while they were herding sheep. They fell in love and decided to get married. Given the firm opposition of her family, Soulef had no choice but to flee from her parents and seek shelter in Gosbah to marry Ameur, and since then she has lived in the 'Abid Ghbonton territory. However, her relocation to her husband's territory is not simply a case of the patrilocal pattern prevalent in Tunisia. Since her elopement, her family have rejected her and her offspring, who were expelled from her family's lineage, and refuse to have any contact with her children. Even though Soulef was aware that she was going against her family's will, she probably did not expect such a harsh reaction on their side. By marrying Ameur, indeed, she not only broke the isogamy rule, but married an *'abd*, a classificatory slave descendant, and therefore encountered social punishment for their unilateral marriage. As Holt (2000) argues, interracial unions become a public problem when they result in offspring (Holt 2000, p. 38), but "the black Romeo and the white Juliet" story posed no problem for the racialisation of their offspring. Nobody seems to have doubts that Soulef and Ameur's children are "black": Soulef "shuwāshanised" through her children, similarly to the *'aḥrār* in the governorate of Kebili in the 1980's, where

anyone who marries a *shuwāshīn* became «negrified» (Bédoucha 1987, p. 249, my translation from French).

The rebuttal of hypogamy by the Ghbonton rests upon the "ethnic boundary" which essentialises certain "internal qualities" (Rhodes, Leslie, and Tworek 2012, p. 13526), but, on the other hand, these qualities are lodged in a physical set of external markers, such as dark skin colour, curly hair, flat nose, and robust constitution. The Ghbonton, in fact, use precise phenotypical markers to contradistinguish themselves from the 'Abid Ghbonton. The "historicity of race" comprises a genealogical construction which passes down moral and social, but also physical characteristics along lines of descent.

In the past, the *'aḥrār* dwelling in the region avoided hypogamous marriages with bearers of this "essentialised" feature – "blackness" – and left the 'Abid Ghbonton with a restricted marital pool, made up mainly of other 'Abid Ghbonton and of *shuwāshīn* women from neighbouring lineages. On the other hand, as previously mentioned, the 'Abid Ghbonton preferred "affinity" (*muṣāhara*) marriages to keep tribes together and avoid creating conflicts. An outsider like Sharifa, a non-Ghbonton *shūshāna* from Mednine, was worried more by the deprivation of the 'Abid Ghbonton when she decided to marry one of them. This happened some thirty years ago, and she had to move to Gosbah, following the patrilocal custom.

> I fell in love and decided to follow him, but I didn't know Gosbah was so… bad. Bad meaning poor. I don't like the countryside when it is poor: I am a city-dweller. My family was worried. My father asked me: are you sure you want to live in Gosbah?[8].

In recent years, the 'Abid Ghbonton have gradually started reaching out to non-Ghbonton *'aḥrār* lineages in the area for matrimonial alliances, but always the couples are made up of an 'Abid Ghbonton man and a non-Ghbonton *'aḥrār* woman. Usually, impoverished *'aḥrār* families in the region surrounding Gosbah are more willing to give their daughters to the 'Abid Ghbonton. This started happening, according to my observation, some fifteen to twenty years ago, even though Khulud, a "white" woman from Algeria, married an 'Abid Ghbonton more than thirty years ago. Miscegenation with "white" partners was already a choice at the time of Jouily's (1994) research and was a preferable choice for educated young

boys from Gosbah who wanted to escape «*tahmīsh*» (marginalisation) and «*nisyān*» (neglect) (Jouily 1994, p. 89), and for whom outside spouses represented social advancement. He uses the word *az-zawāj al-khārijiyy*, "external marriage" or "exogamy", indicating that the spouse was "external", but not necessarily "white" (Jouily 1994, p. 89). The Tunisian researcher claims that in "exogamy" professional and educational levels were preferred over colour (*lūn*), suggesting that 'Abid Ghbonton men were already marrying "white" women in the 1990's (Jouily 1994, p. 88).

Currently, a few women in Gosbah are *'aḥrār* and thus racialised as "white" in the village, and they got married at different times. Two sisters from a small village next to Mednine married two 'Abid Ghbonton, the first some fifteen years ago, the second around 2010. The first 'Abid Ghbonton who proposed to the oldest was «very rich and very in love»[9], while the other had to overcome the resistance of the family, which was, however, mainly due to his poverty rather than to his skin colour or his socially inferior condition. The 'Abid Ghbonton are considered to offer less money to the bride than other suitors, but the hostile attitudes of the brides' families seem to have softened lately.

The custom of *mahr*, that is the transfer of money from the groom to the bride, sanctioned in Islamic jurisprudence (Fournier 2010, p. 9), is a fundamentally important operation in the establishment and consolidation of relationships between the *al-nisb* (families related by marriage). The amount of *mahr* is calculated according to the social status and personal qualities of the bride, and is first offered by the groom and then negotiated with the girl's father. This Islamic institution was banned under Bourguiba, who paid a symbolic one dinar (currently around 0,30 Euro) as the *mahr* for his wedding (Labidi 2001, pp. 121-122), because he regarded it as a purchase agreement, and therefore as an objectification of women. Regardless of the "one-dinar system", the 'Abid Ghbonton and many rural communities have continued the *mahr* tradition, because it is still an essential tool in creating alliances between families.

The transfer of *mahr* from the groom to the bride is a fundamental operation to tie and consolidate relationships between *al-nisb*. In short, 'Abid Ghbonton elders prefer that girls of the family marry into other 'Abid Ghbonton tribes in order to keep or strengthen alliances, which are ratified by the transaction of the *mahr*.

Up to twenty years ago, other *shuwāshīn* families were concerned with the incontrovertible lower economic position of the 'Abid Ghbonton, but still the only feasible marriage the 'Abid Ghbonton could aspire to was with other *shuwāshīn* lineages in the areas. On the other hand, *'aḥrār* families strenuously opposed mixed marriages, with the *shuwāshīn* in general and the 'Abid Ghbonton in particular, for economic but mainly social reasons. Nowadays, however, some *'aḥrār* families are beginning to accept their daughters being married to an 'Abid Ghbonton, but economic worries remain a constant reproach, especially from the fathers' and brothers' side. Raudha, a *ḥurra* and one of the two girls from the same family who married 'Abid Ghbonton men, met fierce resistance from her older brother, a government employee who holds a teaching position in a school and is looked up to by his community. «He does not visit me any longer, nor my children»[10]. When I asked why, a mixture of racist, safety, and economic concerns emerged:

> I understand that he is worried. Because Gosbah…is not a nice place. He wants me to lead a better life, not work hard with goats… animals. People from Gosbah are considered to be violent and dishonest. It is not true; my husband is nice[11].

Khulud from Constantine (Algeria) recalls that thirty years ago no "white" women were to be found in Gosbah. She met her husband while he was working in Algeria. His skin colour was not a problem for her, even though she does not like living in Gosbah: «there is nothing…nothing new. The few shops always have the same things! I don't feel at ease because I am… an outsider [*barraniyya*]»[12]

She is "white" and tends to establish connections with "white" women in Gosbah, both because she shares a common identity with them (built on their outsider status rather than on their skin colour), and because 'Abid Ghbonton women ostracise her and her "white" female friends, regarding them as "posh", "water-wasters", "asocial". Her daughters are racialised as "white", too, although the father is an 'Abid Ghbonton. Married to men from Gosbah, the girls' first and foremost obsession is defending their appearance as "whites", and distancing themselves from the label of *shuwāshīn*. At the same time, they are highly preoccupied by their offspring's skin colour. The following conversation took place between me, Khulud, Hilel,

one of Khulud's daughters, and Mohammed, Khulud's youngest son, in the presence of Hilel's one-year-old baby, in January 2015:

> Hilel: Do you like my baby girl?
> Marta: She is very beautiful.
> Hilel: Does she look like those in Gosbah?
> Marta: I don't know what you mean.
> Khouloud: For God's sake tell her no! No, no!
> Marta: No!
> Hilel: Does she look like her father?
> Marta: I have never met her father!
> Mohammed [laughing]: The father is like that! [pointing at the handle of a coffee pot, of an intense black].
> Marta: I think she resembles you, especially her straight hair.
> Hilel: Mum! Mum! Did you hear what she said? She has straight hair, not curly hair!
> Marta: But even with curly hair, she would be very beautiful.
> Khulud: You see! It is not a problem; she says so!

Hypo- and hyper-descent

The recent normalisation of interracial marriages among the 'Abid Ghbonton poses several questions related to the racial and social rank of the offspring of such unions, because «hypodescent» (Regnier 2014, p. 118), that is the inheritance by the children of the social and racial status of the socially inferior parent, is greatly feared by the socially superior spouses. Hypodescent, however, has never been the rule in Tunisia, since historical slavery racialised individuals not only through colour, but also through patrilinearity.

Patterns of transmittance of ethnicity in southern Tunisia give interesting insights into how racial ideas have changed, following socio-economic transformations. There, colour attribution is always contextual, and mirrors changed socio-cultural and economic structures, such as the renegotiation of social relations.

The 'Abid Ghbonton inhabit a "forced social category", that is a «category whose membership is imposed on people» (Regnier 2015, p. 155), characterised by the essentialisation of a set of qualities «which they all share» and are «necessary and fixed» (Wade 2015, p. 117), epitomised by "blackness".

This essentialised core of qualities is, however, constituted through performance and is not inherited *en bloc*, but is modelled and re-transformed at the moment it is passed on to the offspring. In the Kebili region in the 1980's, marriages between *'aḥrār* and *shuwāshīn* engendered children referred to as «*šerkiyîn*», that is, «mixed» (Bédoucha 1987, p. 402[13]). The 'Abid Ghbonton, on the contrary, developed no clear no specific terminology for the offspring of interracial marriages, showing how race is, for them, continuously and contextually negotiated for each individual, who may achieve a certain degree of race-evasiveness and resistance.

Miscegenation is commonly sought after by the 'Abid Ghbonton, because "whiteness" is accorded positive qualities (such as docility, beauty…) and, incidentally and unspoken, mixed marriages are a way to upward social mobility and ascent through the social hierarchy of southern Tunisia. In the 'Abid Ghbonton's eyes, the counterpart of "blackness" – "whiteness" – is, in fact, associated with positive qualities, similarly to other contexts. In Colombia, for example, Peter Wade (2015) showed how "whiteness" has a moral connotation, and refers to «hard work, sexual propriety, progressiveness, modernity, and beauty» (Wade 2015, p. 147).

It seems, however, to be a strategy which is only feasible for 'Abid Ghbonton men, since 'Abid Ghbonton men enjoy more freedom in their marital choices. Marrying *'aḥrār* women enhances the social status of 'Abid Ghbonton men in the eyes of their fellows, who tend to envy them for the alleged "more docile nature" of their brides. Wassem is very proud of his wife, at least partly because he knows that his community is jealous, and envies him. Hamid, Gosbah's blacksmith, in fact, joked in a café:

> I want a wife whose hair moves in the wind! I want a white woman. Black women are aggressive! They always think about money. Look at Wassem, he married two black women and it didn't work, and then finally a white one. I want to marry a white woman but…their family. They wouldn't want it! – I want an orphan![14].

Historically, the *kafā'a* was applied particularly to women rather than to men, in order to prevent daughters from dishonouring their families.

The burgeoning of the tourist sector in the past few decades led many 'Abid Ghbonton to work on the island of Djerba as hotel attendants or barmen, and many became acquainted with foreigners whom they later mar-

ried. If marrying a "white"-skinned woman gives the husband great prestige, marrying a foreigner is considered the height of a man's expectations in life, as it enables him to emigrate and look for better life and job opportunities abroad.

The 'Abid Ghbonton forged a new niche for children born to these unions, who may be racialised as *iswid* or *'abyaḍ*, pinpointing racial differences even within the same family. Wassem describes his three children as "white", because they have a "white" mother. In my eyes, they all look mulatto, with some nuances narrowing the last to "black" and the first to "white". The "white" mother, however, like Hilel, is constantly checking her children to spot some features connected to "blackness", especially the girl. «You see, her hair is growing and it is curly. She is getting to be *samrā*»[15]. Growing into a "brown" woman is not desirable in the mother's eyes, since she will have less chance of getting married and finding a good husband.

According to Lila Abu Lughod (1989), the pattern of patrilineal kinship and Islamic Arab patriarchy are two "theoretical metonyms" of the Arab world, that is, concepts to which the anthropological theorising of the Arab world is restricted and which seem to define the quintessential nature of the questions in the region. Ethnographic data, however, help academic studies «break out of the compelling zones to which they have been drawn» (Abu Lughod 1989, p. 299). Amidst the 'Abid Ghbonton, the more recent racial understanding of *métissage* (interracial mixing) contrasts with the strict patrilineal pattern, which was an inescapable principle for classifying people while slavery was still in force.

The weakening of the patrilineal pattern of transmission of social colour emerges clearly from the conversation I had with Hilel. Even though Hilel belongs to her father's lineage, and hence has inherited his social colour, she is considered to be "white" by her fellow village men and women. Indeed, with a complexion which is between "white" and olive-coloured, she appears "whiter" than many girls in Gosbah, probably also due to her massive use of beauty products and foundation. However, when she walks down Sidi Makhlouf's streets, amidst the Ghbonton, she is considered a *shuwāshīn* due to her genealogical origin and lineage name, a designation which carries social meanings of "blackness". She is very concerned about the appearance of her one-year-old baby girl and worries that she might turn out *samrā* (brown).

Hilel's obsession with her baby shows how being an 'Abid Ghbonton means having certain essentialised physical characteristics, as her question – "does she *look like* those in Gosbah?" –clearly suggests. The essentialisation of being an 'Abid Ghbonton means, for Hilel, having dark skin and curly hair. The possibility of *growing* (or not) with these characteristics suggests that there is a gap between "social colour" and racial attribution. Far from being inherited as a fixed set, ethnic connotations are increasingly defined by the 'Abid Ghbonton in terms of colour and other physical markers. Colour is nowadays a characteristic which can define hypo- or hyper- descent.

Furthermore, with the dilution of the pattern of patrilinearity, women acquired a greater importance in the transmission of "whiteness", at least compared to historical slavery. In southern Tunisian oases, in fact, in the 1980's, marriages between *'aḥrār* women and *shuwāshīn* men did not take place, unlike the reverse (Bédoucha 1987, p. 249), and therefore, women were only capable of transmitting "blackness" rather than "whiteness".

In Gosbah, as aforementioned, Hilel is racialised as "white" because her mother is non-*shuwāshīn*, and because her skin is actually "whiter" than that of other 'Abid Ghbonton. Crucially, this happens *in spite of* her father's *shuwāshīn* status. Similarly, Hilel's daughter has some chance of not growing up as a brown (*samrā*) if her skin remains light, *even though* her father is "as black as the handle of a coffee pot".

Within these changed patterns of racialisation and marriage, data on the 'Abid Ghbonton seem to indicate a resurgence of the importance of colour as a social marker, which I consider to be a way of counterbalancing the dilution of the strict patrilineal system of inheriting race which was prevalent in the past. The emphasis on physical markers, the recent exogamous marriages of 'Abid Ghbonton men, and the various ways of modifying bodily appearance resorted to by women are all bottom-up race-evasion strategies aimed at resisting the imposition of a forced social category.

Race-evasion strategies

Transcultural constructions attached to "blackness" (Shelby 2005) include laziness, disreputability, physical and brutish force, and ugliness. In Tunisia, historical constructions accorded to "black" skin encompass both physical and moral traits – physical strength and violence, inclination to crime, es-

pecially theft and rape, lack of religious orthodoxy and piety, sexual excess, and magical powers – all of which stemmed from slavery and post-slavery trajectories.

The negative stereotypes accorded to "blackness" have deeply gendered connotations. From the pre-abolition figure of the concubine to the post-abolition prostitute, the triangulation between (freed) women slaves, "blackness" and sexual availability has remained ingrained in popular racial thinking. In post-abolition times, in the north and in the coastal cities, freed female slaves did indeed end up in brothels, as they lacked the affiliation and protection which would allow them to navigate Tunisian society. Nowadays, many "black" women, especially those who reside in Tunis, complain of being sexually harassed on the street because of their skin colour. The 'Abid Ghbonton women feel safer within their community, whereas outside they perceive men as threatening, as they feel they consider them to be "sexually available". They are assumed to adhere less strictly to Islamic moral rules, because they are considered "less piously Muslim" due to their honour (*sharaf*) being less. A middle-class, non-'Abid Ghbonton "black" journalist from Zarzis, in South Tunisia, confirmed that negative racial prejudice blighted the daily experience of 'Abid Ghbonton women: «They [men on the street] catcall me saying, 'Hey you, blackie, do you want to have sex with me?' I sometimes feel like my body is public»[16]. However, from my observation, at least in the countryside, 'Abid Ghbonton women behave in a conservative and highly religious way, similarly to their *'aḥrār* rural female counterparts.

The 'Abid Ghbonton's attitude towards various realms of their daily life and vis à vis the *'aḥrār* can be analytically subsumed under what Palckmans termed the «loyalty style» of behaviour (Pelckmans 2015, p. 293), which entails deference and humbleness as sources of social honour, since they have less *sharaf*. Interestingly, however, "stereo-styles" work slightly differently for women. 'Abid Ghbonton's women are often mocked for their extravagant taste for clothes, jewellery, and makeup. «Other women don't do it»[17] is a recurrent remark when 'Abid Ghbonton women appear at weddings wearing flamboyant gold necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. The relatively higher degree of freedom enjoyed by 'Abid Ghbonton's women in the choice of clothes, often described as «young women's clothes on old women's bodies»[18], reflects the lower honour their lineages hold. Less *sharaf* can also explain the higher participation of *shuwāshīn* and *'abid* women in outdoor activities, especially in agriculture, which allows them to enjoy relatively

more freedom of movement outside their households. The conservation of *sharaf* is, in fact, achieved through the spatial segregation of *'aḥrār* women to private spaces, and they rarely work outside their houses. In the 1980's, some *shuwāshīn* lineages constituted endogamous «deeply atomised social groups» (Bédoucha 1987, p. 255, my translation from French) attached to *'aḥrār* lineages, whose women resorted to using *shuwāshīn* women to accomplish outdoor tasks, such as fetching water from wells. Generally, *'aḥrār* lineages put special effort into avoiding physical, open-air work, and this restricts women's movements more tightly. Today, *'aḥrār* women rarely work the land, unlike *shuwāshīn* and *'abid* women, who hold less *sharaf*, which would prevent them from wearing showy outfits and from committing to morally equivocal activities, such as going out. I spent much of my time and energy following *'abid* women, who spend their days going alone to the Friday market, working on the land and in the fish industry, and covering long distances while sheep-herding. As for *'aḥrār* women, it has to be said that status concerns are intertwined with aesthetic ones, since they avoid exposure to sunlight for fear of becoming dark-skinned.

In Gosbah, spaces and daily practices are segregated along gender lines. Women usually occupy the secluded parts of the village, while the streets and cafés are men's domain. Within the house, the main room is inhabited by the male head of the family, be it the father, the grandfather, or the eldest son. This is usually the room with the television and where guests are received, and is furnished with cupboards displaying the good china, and with the best mats and carpets. Women live in other rooms, where they cook and do the laundry, or gather outside in the stables to chat or take care of goats and sheep. The strict social hierarchy is also shown by the order in which the family members eat: once the big, round dish of couscous or *makarūna* (noodles) is ready, young girls bring it to the men, and then the leftovers, or some other dishes which have also been prepared, are given to the women, and then, later, to the children.

As soon as I arrived in Gosbah, the community decided that I had to live with Karima, a 60-year-old widow whose two children were living one in another village and one in another country (Libya), because she was the most economically vulnerable member of the *'arsh nuwājī*. Since she was not working any longer (she used to go to the sea shore to collect clams) and was living on social security, she used to take care of the toddlers of the neighbouring allied families (*farqāt*), helped by the young girls from the

same *farqa* when they were not in school. Hence, I lived among women and children, and learned less of how the men navigated society in Gosbah. Moreover, during the winter the men are usually absent from the village, returning sporadically from their jobs as fishermen, construction workers, and seasonal workers in Djerba and Libya.

Like Abu Lughod (1986), my position as a foreign, unmarried woman gave me access to gender-segregated spheres usually interdicted to foreign observers. While building personal and affective relationships with the women of my household as we cooked, tidied up, and watched *musalsalāt*, I gathered precious information on marriage strategies and aspirations, ideas on beauty and "blackness", and relations with *'aḥrār*.

'Abid Ghbonton women have become used to seeing themselves through the eyes of the *'aḥrār*, mainly Ghbonton, and this shaped the relationship they have with their appearance (Frisina, Hawthorne 2015) and their habitus (Bourdieu 1977), which means the set of practices which represent a cultural way of using and being within the body (Fusaschi 2008). Asymmetries of power appear to be embodied in 'Abid Ghbonton's women, and standards of beauty and proper appearance are imposed on them by the dominant group (*'aḥrār*). "White beauty" is idealised as opposed to "black ugliness". The aesthetical supremacy of "whiteness" is a transcultural stereotypical and ideological construction (Wade 2015, p. 147) but is also context-specific and stems from the history of racialised slavery in Tunisia. The search for "whiteness" is, therefore, not new. "Black" women in the big cities and on the coast, however, are developing a debate on whitening beauty practices as a form of exclusion and are embracing their natural hair and skin colour to resist and overcome the victimisation of "blackness" as ugly and inferior[19]. The 'Abid Ghbonton women, by contrast, perform resistance by trying to narrow their appearance to the *'aḥrār* and thus to "whiteness", rather than the contrary. Through the use of objects (faux braids, jewellery, garments) and practices (whitening creams, skin treatments such as scrubs, avoidance of sunlight), they combat the perceived inferiority of "blackness", and try to insert themselves into the *'aḥrār* dominant lineage as a strategy for upward social mobility.

'Abid Ghbonton women commonly attach to "blackness" a set of meanings which range from social inferiority to lower educational level and ugliness. For example, Zohra, my neighbour, used to claim that out of her four girls, one was "white", Khaula. When challenged as to the reason, she

admitted: «Khaula is the only one who went to high school»[20]. Most 'Abid Ghbonton women, in fact, especially those over the age of forty, are illiterate. Even though Habib Bourguiba made primary school compulsory for everyone, «there was work at home and in the countryside (*rīf*). We did not go to school. My father did not want us to. I wish I was like you, Marta, and wrote books (*niktib al-kutub*) »[21]. Governmental controls probably did not get as far as Gosbah.

Whitening practices have probably always been popular among the 'Abid Ghbonton, but we do not have any record of that. Nowadays, the 'Abid Ghbonton claim that younger generation are more concerned about their appearance and resort more to beauty products, probably due to the more frequent interactions they have with the outside world. "Whiteness" is valorised and, similarly to what Jemima Pierre (2013) contends in her work on post-abolition Ghana, it can be intended as a «historical, cultural and social set of practices, as well as ideas and codes, which practically and discursively structure the power and privilege of those racialized as whites» (Pierre 2013, p. 72). In Gosbah, as well, it reflects broader issues of power, and asymmetrical relationships between different social groups.

Even older women envy other women's "whiteness" and try to conceal their "blackness" with whitening cosmetic practices. The most popular home remedies are the use of *ṭīn* (clay), the complete concealment of hands, feet, and face before marriage (to avoid sun tanning) and getting fat in order to "stretch the skin and dilute the blackness". Younger girls prefer going to the hammam to scrub their skin and resort to skin bleaching cosmetic products, some of which, those containing mercury, have been labelled as dangerous by the WHO and are banned in the European Union and in some African countries[22]. No statistics on the use and availability of skin lightening products are available for Tunisia, but they are commonly for sale in markets and shops.

Chapter five
Working as 'abid

«*exdem ya* āb*di wana nīnek*
work, my servant, and I will help you (Yetiv 1987,
p. 62) »

Mohammed and Sana

On May 27th, 2016, people in Gosbah were pacing up and down and the atmosphere was full of excitement and expectation. I had just come from the *ghriba*, the annual pilgrimage of Tunisian Jews to Djerba, and I was welcomed at the bus station in Mednine by Yassin, my informant and close friend. He told me straight away that his older brother, Mohammed, was getting married to Sana, one of our neighbours. The wedding, spanning three days, had already started the day before, when the girls gathered to go to the hammam (popular steam bath). The girls prepared the bride by epilating, scrubbing, decorating her skin with henna, and applying make-up, singing and ululating all the while. In the days after that, the real celebration took place. All through the feast, the bride was concealed under a *safsārī*, a long, white veil covering her completely, even her hands, and by another red veil underneath. Tradition expects the bride to be uncovered on the very last day of the wedding, a task reserved for the bridegroom. On the second day, a parade accompanied the groom to the bride's house, to "ask for her" and take her away, and a musical group played drums (*ṭabbala* and *darbūka*), a bagpipe (*mizwid*), and the flute (*nāy*) throughout.

Once at Sana's house, we attended the *kiswa*, the display of gifts given by the groom to the bride, which she proudly lifts up to show to all the participants gathered in her courtyard. The gifts are usually meant for the newly-weds' house (things such as bedsheets and blankets), or for the bride (things like make-up, gowns and day-dresses). Last of all, the two wedding rings are shown to the audience. A tradition which is particularly strong in Gosbah involves any man from the village named Mohammed or Ali having to undo a plait of hair of the bride after the *kiswa*, which he is able to do when attending girls lift up her *safsārī*.

The most solemn part of the wedding ceremony is, however, the last one, on a Sunday, which takes place at the newlyweds' new house. Following the predominant patrilocal pattern in Tunisia, the new house is built in the same compound as the groom's father's. The apartment has to be built or bought by the groom and his family, and it is an inescapable prerequisite for proposing to the girl of his dreams.

On the last day there is *tayfa*, the music which makes the 'Abid Ghbonton so proud and so well-known in the region. «Everywhere you go, they tell you that we are singers»[1]. I had never been to a performance before Mohammed and Sana's wedding. *Tayfa* developed at the intersection of an economic need (the singers are payed by the hirer – the family of the groom – and are paid for improvising songs praising the couple by people who commission them on the spot, during the ceremony) and the overlapping of the social groups of *shuwāshīn* and *'abid* with jobs as musicians at ceremonies. *Tayfa* contributes to reinforcing the ethnic boundary separating the 'Abid Ghbonton from other social categories, namely the *'aḥrār*, who resort to the musical genre as an accompaniment to their weddings. As «paired categories» where «actors on the two sides engage in mutual labeling» (Tilly 1998, p. 67), the 'Abid Ghbonton's identity is encapsulated in the label "musicians": "the 'Abid Ghbonton, the *tayfa* singers" is how they are widely known in the south. *Tayfa* goes beyond its function as a musical performance and involves the transfer of social meanings which depend on the categorical connection between the 'Abid Ghbonton and their neighbours. The transfer of money, as «*compensation*, which is a monetary exchange for goods and services» (Tilly 1998, p. 42), is deeply «rooted in rich social matrices» (Tilly 1998, p. 45), and serves to re-state publicly the categorical inequality the 'Abid Ghbonton occupy. In many post-slavery contexts, in fact, having money to spend is a manifestation of a person having classificatory freeborn status, because «the ability to have others working for oneself» (Pelckmans 2015, p. 292) is a characteristic of the elite stereo-style. The "elite stereo-style" is considered to be a «behavioural style typically associated with freeborn status. It refers to specific actions as expressed in codes and expectations of honour. Expectations about honourable behaviour concern, for example, the avoidance of physical labour, demonstrable body control, and the explicit expression of religious piety» (Pelckmans 2015, p. 290). The *'aḥrār* of Southern Tunisia display a habitus, made up of external features (clothing) and behaviours, which stands for their honour and for their religious piety.

The avoidance of work, or, the possibility of having others work for them – in this case at weddings – enhances their social status.

Nonetheless, the 'Abid Ghbonton gain compensation from this public enacting of the ethnic boundary: they accumulate economic as well as social capital in the form of honour, which makes up partly for the absence of an Arab origin. In other parts of the country, in fact, lineages of *shuwāshīn* and *'abid* resort to music to enhance their prestige in the eyes of other lineages.

In Kebili, the *shuwāshīn* often host «specialised lineages of musicians and dancers whom one calls upon […] for family and village ceremonies» (Bédoucha 1987, p. 256, my translation from French). A special niche for "black" individuals has been carved throughout North Africa in the musical and celebrative domain: in the Moroccan Dra River Valley, the social distinction between *haratin*[2] and *'abid* rests upon the fact, among others, that the *'abid* are «those people who make music» (Ensel 1999, p. 29). In Berberophone south-eastern Moroccan areas, the *ismkhan* (Berber for "slaves") distinguish themselves proudly from the *haratin* by their phenotype, the status their former masters imparted to them through a patron-client relationship, and their musical performances at ceremonies (Becker 2002, p. 104).

In Tunisia there are several "black" music types which show different characteristics in different geographical areas.

In Tunis, *stambeli* developed in the *dūr* of Tunis and consists in a devotional, mystic rite which engenders possession and trance in its players as healing practices. The performance of *stambeli* is connected to the North African trend of «'black brotherhoods of musicians, traditionally believed to be descendants of 'African' slaves» (Goodman-Singh 2002, p. 75). These «communities were founded by ethno-religious congregations» (Rahal 2000, p. 9, my translation from French), such as «*Stambali* or *Bori* in Tunisia, *Diwan* in Algeria and *Derdeba* in Morocco» (Rahal 2000, p. 9, my translation from French). The most well-known is the Moroccan *gnawa*, which shares with *stambeli*, among others, the cult of saints, mysticism, and the types of instruments used (Goodman-Singh 2002; Kapchan 2002; El Hamel 2018). The underpinning element in *gnawa* and *stambeli*, however, is their connection to sub-Saharan Africa, since they were developed by «displaced sub-Saharans» (Jankowsky 2010, p. 4, for *stambeli*), most of the practitioners being «descendants of African slaves» (Goodman-Singh 2002, p. 75, for *gnawa*). Both music styles retain sub-Saharan elements, such as

the languages they are sung in: Songhai, Sokole, Hausa, and Fulbe are the languages of *gnawa* (Goodman-Singh 2002, p. 79), while *stambeli*'s chanting is performed both in Tunisian Arabic and in *'ajmī*. This word means «not only "foreign" and "non-Arabic", but also "incorrect" and "barbarous" […] originating in various languages of sub-Saharan Africa but mostly derived from the Hausa and Kanuri languages» (Jankowsky 2010, p. 109). David R. Goodman-Singh (2002) argues that *gnawa* can be theoretically analysed as historical evidence of slavery and the slave trade in Morocco. Similarly, *stambeli* in Tunisia was undeniably born in sub-Saharan slaves' *dūr* and developed as a support network to help people cope with the alienation and the grievances of slavery (Montana 2011, p. 158). These networks developed and survived the abolitionist phase because they were able to provide uprooted subjects from ethnic minorities with a system of mutual aid, bequeathing sub-Saharan cultural features to today's musical performances.

In the southern regions, on the other hand, "black" music styles lack the mystic and thaumaturgic elements, and performances show very little connection to the southern fringes of the Sahara. For example, the language of the performances is Tunisian Arabic. Despite their heterogeneity, these southern music styles' performers all belong to the *shuwāshīn*, *'abid*, or *wuṣfān* lineages, so they are all subsumed under the label of "black music". In Nafta, in the region of Tozeur, the cult of Sidi Marzoug, the ancestor of the "black" community in the Chott el Jerid (a salty lake in Southern Tunisia), is celebrated through a musical performance called *banga*. On the other shore of the Chott el Jerid, in the region of Kebili, « the *shuwāshīn* […] [are the ones who] entertain the *'aḥrār*» with music (Bédoucha 1987, p. 256, my translation from French). Many other musical performances are associated with "black" people in the south of Tunisia, ranging from the very common *ṭabbala*, singing with the accompaniment of drums – often performed by "black" female singers – at weddings, to the "*gougou*" in Zarzis, "les jongleurs de jarres" (jugglers of jars): "black" dancers who balance several earthenware jars on their heads.

Northern and southern music styles share the social and racial categorisation of their performers, even though the latter do not exhibit sub-Saharan slave descendants' characteristics, such as a sub-Saharan language. In the south, these practices articulate along local ethnic boundaries which are prevalent in the social hierarchy of southern Tunisia, and which can also be found in other Maghiribi contexts (for southern Morocco: Becker 2002).

The classificatory slave descent of some of these musicians interacts with their racialisation as "blacks" and marks these performances with the legacy of an ascribed slavery past. Some of these musical practices, in fact, belong to classificatory slavery contexts and entail notions of submission and deference which can be subsumed under the «loyalty style» (Pelckmans 2015, p. 293), comprising elements which leverage deference and humbleness to enhance social honour vis à vis hegemonic groups.

Tayfa belongs to this trend. It is exclusively played by the 'Abid Ghbonton, but the audience is varied. Over the years, it has allowed the musicians to accumulate financial and moral capital, which they have in turn reinvested within their community, Gosbah. A "blacks' job", traditionally despised, eventually imparted honour and pride upon them. Christine Hardung (2009) shows how the investment of hard work is a strategy used by slave descendant groups in Benin to improve their status. The 'Abid Ghbonton, classificatory slave descendants, strive to enhance their social status through *tayfa* in a similar way, albeit always within the pre-existing social hierarchy. The 'Abid Ghbonton's efforts, in fact, are aimed at acquiring the characteristics of the *'aḥrār* – social status, honour, "whiteness" – by climbing the social ladders instead of questioning their very existence.

With Ben Ali's regime (1987-2011) and with the economic transformations occurring in those years, younger generations of 'Abid Ghbonton began attaching different meanings to those musical performances, and blamed them for their inferior social condition, identifying the legacy of slavery in them. They slowly moved away from this profession and stripped *tayfa* of its high moral status.

Menial jobs

All over the country, whether unattached or *wala'*-bound, "black" freed slaves found themselves socially and economically marginalised after abolition. Continuing a pre-abolitionist tradition of commitment to socially inferior jobs, they still occupied the lowest occupational levels of society after 1846. The presence of socially inferior jobs is difficult to justify in Islamic countries from a theological point of view, but it is undeniable that they exist. According to the French scholar of Islamic studies, Robert Brunschvig (1962), in spite of a proudly boasted egalitarianism the Quran and the ha-

dith would, in fact, encourage fraternity rather than equality, implicitly justifying social inequalities. In Tunisia, "slaves' jobs" (*khidmāt al-ʿabid*) were those performed by "black" slaves and overlapped "blackness" and despised professional domains.

When slavery was in force, "black" slaves were already employed as blacksmiths, which are traditionally connected to inferior social strata in the Muslim world (Brunschvig 1962, p. 45), especially in North Africa and in the Sahel. In the countryside, agricultural "black" slaves had to undertake the humblest and most physically demanding tasks, such as washing the master's wool mantle (*burnūs*), transporting and spreading manure on the fields, and helping out with all sorts of domestic chores. This continued after abolition, to the extent that Bédoucha (1984) stated in the 1980's, «it is not rare to hear that a *khamessāt* [agricultural worker] does a slave's job» (Bédoucha 1984, p. 94, my translation from French). The *bakhkh*ār, the person who spread incense (*bukh*ār) during the Friday prayer, was also usually "black", and activities such as shaving or circumcising were usually performed by "blacks" (Jouily 1994, p. 45).

"Slaves' jobs" belonged both to the domestic and agricultural spheres and to the magic and mystical domains. Some "black" slaves, in fact, practised fertility-related devotional cults of saints and ritual practices, according to a common paradigm which sees "black" people as bearers of magical powers and as talismans, to the extent that celebrating a wedding without a "black" person being present is still considered a bad omen in Tunisia. "Black" women especially are still considered to hold special «mysterious and powerful abilities to manipulate the spirit world and to protect against misfortune» (Jankowsky 2010, p. 17) and to make «the evil eye [*ʿayn*] fly away» (Jankowsky 2010, p. 18), and in the past they were specifically sought after to breastfeed *ʾaḥrār* babies and to attend weddings and childbirths (Jankowsky 2010, pp. 17-18). They made evil spirits disappear, as «their dark black colour imposes respect in festive ceremonies, because prevalent popular belief holds that the black colour scares craziness and it [craziness] goes away» (Jouily 1994, p. 50, my translation from Arabic). Historically, "blacks" were thought to hold special «prophylactic and exorcising» powers (Larguèche 2002, p. 292, my translation from French), which would divert evil and diseases onto themselves, as "blacks" acted as a catalyst, especially women. Oral tradition accorded a special function to "black" prostitutes, that of curing venereal diseases through sexual intercourse (Larguèche 2002,

p. 291). In modern day Tunisia, "black" women who are so dark-skinned as to be referred to as blue (*zarqā*) hold a specific position in celebrations as good luck charms. The connection between "blackness" and magical powers which would make the evil eye "fly away", in fact, still remains today. In November 2013, the singer Ghazi Ayadi came under harsh criticism from black rights activists because he introduced a "black" candidate in a Hannibal TV show as someone who could crush the evil eye[3].

Another domain historically reserved for "black" people in Tunisia is the "traditional" or popular (*sha'bī*) music sector. Throughout the Muslim world, the connection between "black" people and music has both theological and social roots. Given the controversial nature of music in the mainstream Islamic tradition, in fact, musicians are regarded as following an inferior profession. According to Robert Brunschvig (1965), pre-Islamic traditions, various interpretations by different Islamic schools, and everyday practice have established a social hierarchy of jobs in Muslim areas (Brunschvig 1965, p. 44). Throughout the Muslim world, being a musician is regarded as an inferior profession (Shiloah 1995, pp. 31–44), and music has come to be associated with "black" people.

In addition, the connection of "blacks" with magical powers was widespread in all regions of Tunisia and crystallised in the idea that having a "black" person – often as a musician – attending the ceremonies was a luck-bringer and a protection against the *'ayn*, the evil eye. Here the magical function of blacks is epitomised by its positive side, which is the good omen or the good luck charm. The equation "blacks" = lucky charms, and the overlapping of music and "black" slaves, carved a professional niche for *shuwāshīn* and *'abid* as performers at weddings. In the region of Mednine, and more generally in the Tunisian south, "black" singers and dancers are still in high demand for wedding ceremonies.

Sidi Bilal's legacy

In Tunisia, as in many other Arab countries, some "black" individuals claim to descend from Sidi Bilal, "saint" Bilal, an Islamic historical figure who appears in the stories of the hadith as a companion of the Prophet Mohammed. Bilal ibn Rabah (580–640 AD) is described as a tall man with "black" skin, and the tradition goes that he was born into slavery in Mecca,

most probably to an Ethiopian mother, and was the first to call Muslims to prayer by intoning the *'adhān*. By tracing their origin back to the only "black" figure recorded at the time of the Prophet, "black" Tunisians seek legitimacy and social recognition within their own society, which often categorises them as «geocultural outsiders» (Jankowsky 2010, p. 17). By reconnecting their experiences to a highly respected figure such as Bilal, in fact, they attempt to legitimise their belonging to the Islamic *'umma*[4] and fight against racial discrimination. Moreover, being descended from Bilal, whose melodious, high-pitched voice enabled him to perform as a caller-to-prayer (muezzin), justifies the musical career undertaken by many "black" singers in the Maghreb.

«In Tunisia, as in the whole Maghreb, groups of black Muslims present themselves as descendants of Sidi Bilal, or "sons of Sidi Bilal" » (Rahal 2000, p. 18, my translation from French). Although *stambeli* brotherhoods trace their foundation back to Sidi Saad, a freed slave probably originating from Bornu (Jankowsky 2010, p. 63), they were still popularly designated as *jama'at sidi Blal* (communities of Sidi Bilal or Bilalian communities). Even if the connection between Bilal and "black" Tunisians has no historical basis, Bilal holds a «primordial importance» for them (Rahal 2000, p. 18, my translation from French), and is a fundamentally identitarian reference.

Sidi Bilal epitomises not only the movement out of slavery, but also out of paganism. The first muezzin in history, in fact, converted when he was still enslaved and endured brutal torture at the hands of his master. It was Abu Bakr (573-634 AD), the first Caliph and Prophet's companion, who manumitted and saved him. According to the Islamic written tradition, Bilal remained attached to Abu Bakr, his liberator, in a *wala'* relation (Rahal 2000, p. 20).

The conflation of "black" skin with the status of *kuffār*, pagans, is deeply entrenched in the Tunisian mindset, and stems from the Quranic prohibition of enslavement of fellow Muslims. In the south-east, *shuwāshīn* are perceived to be "lesser Muslims" and strive hard to prove they belong to the *'umma*. Nonetheless, the perceived less orthodox attitude of "black" slaves, which still impinges on today's *shuwāshīn*, allowed them to commit to professional domains – such as music – which the *'aḥrār* would refrain from, for fear of seeing their moral authority degraded.

The reasons why music is considered socially inferior – at times even frowned upon or openly banned – by orthodox Muslims, especially certain

interpretative schools, are manifold. There are no explicit references to music and its performance in any Islamic source of law. Some exegetes, however, interpret the following suras (chapters of the Quran, literally, "rows") (Quran 31: 5-6) as a reference to music:

> Those are on [right] guidance from their Lord, and it is those who are successful
> And of the people is he who buys the amusement of speech to mislead [others] from the way of Allah without knowledge and who takes it in ridicule. Those will have a humiliating punishment[5]

and in particular, "the amusement of speech" as «diverting talk» and as a metaphor for music (Shiloah 1995, p. 32). The advocates in favour of a "music ban" have pointed to some sura which are, however, controversial. One of the most popular internet portals on Islamic exegesis and Islamic digital archives interprets the first three verses of sura 23: 1-3 as following: «Indeed successful are the believers those who in their prayer are humble and those who keep themselves aloof from Vain (words and deeds) », stating that "Vain" is in fact a reference to «all useless entertainment, wasteful of times [sic] among which music has been specifically mentioned»[6].

Supporters of the lawfulness of music and singing, on the other side, would cite some hadith where the Prophet and his wife Aisha are reported to listen to some girls performing popular songs, or to the recurrent references to a beautiful voice for singing as a gift from God[7].

In general, however, playing music is not forbidden (haram) like betting, gambling, prostitution, or selling and consuming alcohol, but it can be sometimes "disapproved of" (*makrūh*). The despisal which beleaguers musicians, therefore, is more of a social nature rather than due to a clear command of the Prophet.

According to musicologist Ammon Shiloah (1995), music came to be identified with transcendental and uncontrollable powers, whose main source is doubtlessly the devil (*shīṭān*). Some less mundane forms of music, nonetheless, are tolerated even by its most arduous adversaries, such as folk songs and chanting, because they resemble closely the *'adhān* and have a preponderance of words over tunes.

As a matter of fact, music in Muslim popular understanding is often connected to mysticism, or Sufism, which is frowned upon by orthodox

Muslims and jurists, in Tunisia specifically by Wahhabis (Montana 2011, p. 156). The sedimentation of the meanings of music in the popular understanding created a stigma attached to mysticism and musical performances which targeted healers and musicians, as well as devotional cults linked to the worship of saints. The most widespread interpretative Islamic school in North Africa, however, the Maliki school, is very tolerant towards musical performances. Jouily (1994) goes as far as to accord "black" minorities in the Maghreb wider liberty to practise these syncretic cults because of the prevalence of the Maliki interpretation in the Muslim society they are living in (Jouily 1994, p. 52).

According to anthropologist Michela Pasian (2010), social scientists have developed two different interpretations of Islam: on the one hand, an orientalist literature sees Islam as a totalising political religion, intolerant to religious pluralism. On the other hand, Islam has also been described as politically neutral and private, with a high tolerance of mysticism and religious hybridation. In Niger, according to Michela Pasian (2010), this binary reading of the religious Islamic phenomenon was supported by the colonial administration, which described an orthodox Islam and a "black" Islam (*Islam noir*). In the French colony of Senegal, «the French colonial concept of *Islam noir*» denied «the orthodoxy of black African Islam» (Babou 2016, p. 176).

This dichotomy proves too simplistic when we take into consideration some North African elements, such as the cult of saints, which are alien to the Holy Scriptures, but have been practised by a large majority of Arabs. The cult of saints plays an important part in *stambeli* ceremonies, where a pantheon of saints and *jinnī* (spirits) is evoked in order to induce possession and ecstasy for healing purposes.

Marabutism, from *marābuṭ* – saint – is a widespread practice in Tunisia, and originates from the pre-Islamic time. With the introduction of Islam to North Africa, the cult of saints blurred with Islam, and absorbed the Islamic *jinnī* (spirits). The sorcerers' supernatural powers were allocated to the saints (Rahal 2000, p. 54). Each saint has a *zāwiya* (tomb), an object of pilgrimage for the local communities, and most saints are historical figures who founded a village.

Saints are considered to have healing power and *baraka*, God's blessing or charism. By virtue of these gifts, they are able to exert miracles, mostly connected to health issues. In Tunisia, even though some saints are connected to specific diseases (Sidi Halfaoui and his *zāwiya* in Bab Elkhadra, a popular

quarter in Tunis, are frequently visited by those who suffer from jaundice), most saints accept pleas for fertility.

Gosbah, without a founder, developed a devotional cult for Sidi Yahia, whose *zāwiya* is in neighbouring Mareth, in the Governorate of Gabes. Sidi Yahia is more popular among the 'Abid Ghbonton than Sidi Makhlouf, the saint of the *'aḥrār* in the town named after him. Nowadays, however, the numbers of worshippers are decreasing, and people say it is «mostly a woman's thing, like talismans against *'ayn* and all this nonsense»[8], and many *zawāyā* were vandalised in the south-east after the 2011 uprisings, when a religious resurgence led to the banning of non-orthodox or haram practices, such as the cult of saints or prostitution[9].

Stambeli

In the North, *stambeli* musical groups emerged through brotherhoods practising religious and mystic cults, who gathered in *dūr* (houses), shelters for «blacks in exile» (Rahal 2000, p. 24). *Stambeli*, a music genre with devotional, mystic tones, probably comes from the word *isṭanbūlī*, "from Istanbul". It had close ties with Ottoman and Husaynid rulers in the past, who wished to closely control confraternities but also showed a personal veneration for saints (Larguèche 2002, p. 407). These communal houses, *dūr*, established ties with Sufi orders, the *ṭarīqāt* (singular *ṭarīqa*), without becoming one (Montana 2011, p. 155). Sufism, a mystic Islamic movement which aims to connect its members to God through musically-induced ecstatic conditions, was highly influential at the time of the Husaynid dynasty, to the point that all beys were part of a Sufi *ṭarīqa*, such as the «Qadiriyya and the Shadhiliyya» (Montana 2011, p. 155).

The *Stambeli* brotherhoods, or the *jam'aat Stambeli*, were organised according to the supposed origins of the freed slaves, contrary to the strict genealogical line grouping together the individuals in "white brotherhoods" (Rahal 2000, p. 22). Without a common ancestor, their founder is considered to be Sidi Saad, but other saints are worshipped and are objects of pilgrimages by the *dūr jam'aa*: Sidi Amor, Sidi Belhassen, and Sidi Frej (Rahal 2000, p. 24). Ahmad al-Timbuktawi, a Fulani Muslim religious reformist, in fact condemned *bori* practitioners in Tunis during his visit to the city in 1808 (see Chapter Two; Montana 2011, p. 45). Even today, orthodox

Muslims usually frown upon *stambeli*, if not openly condemn it. The 'Abid Ghbonton frequently point to *stambeli*, it being well-known and popular in tourist areas. Most of them overtly disapprove of the cult for its non-orthodox nature and label these phenomena as "bizarre", "women's stuff", and haram.

The general condemnation is due to the presence of sub-Saharan religious elements within the cult practiced by the fraternities. «Thaumaturgy, intercession and ecstatic rituals» (Montana 2011, p. 156) seek a connection with a pantheon of spirits and saints. The «*Stambēli* spirit pantheon […] [embodies] the encounter between sub-Saharan and North Africa» (Jankowsky 2010, p. 74) and is made up of *bori* ("black" divinities) rubbing shoulders with popular saints in the Maghreb region. Through falling into trance and being ritually possessed by spirits, moreover, the *'arifa*, the priestess of the cult (the word stems from the Arabic verb *'arafa*, "to know"), has the power to heal diseases and sometimes even cause them (Rahal 2000, p. 28). During séances, *stambeli* agents perform impressive acts such as being possessed by the spirit of an old woman and thus speaking with her voice, predicting audience members' future, or reading minds. In addition, the strongly gendered component of the rites, where the high numbers of women present mirrored the ratio of slave imports to Tunisia, led many Islamic scholars to accuse *stambeli* of encouraging debauched behaviour in women, who sang and moved and dressed in too lax a way. Instrumental accompaniment is played on a *kumbrī* (pronounced *gumbrī*) (a wooden, three-stringed bass-register lute), a *ṭabla* (double-headed barrel drum) and *shaqshiq* (metal clappers) (Jankowsky 2010, p. 97 - 107).

Nowadays, *stambeli* brotherhoods are recruiting members from among "white" people and «women belonging to the underprivileged social echelons» (Rahal 2000, p. 27, my translation from French), even though a man can act as *'arif* ("knower") too. In 2016, I was present at a performance by the group Sidi Ali Lasmar, whose member, Riadh Zaouech, originally from Libya, enthralled the audience by guessing their thoughts. Like the Moroccan *gnawa*, *stambeli* has gained a niche in the tourist sector, and performances are re-created in hotels for tourists and on demand. Most *stambeli* groups record CDs, and have an agent, a Facebook page, and a website where you can get in touch with them to organise private concerts.

Another popular figure of "black" mystical music and folklore is BouSaadia, recurrent at *stambeli* celebrations and weddings. According to

legend, he was the first *stambeli* musician, and the figure as responsible for guiding sub-Saharans to the *dūr*, probably after being freed or upon their arrival in Tunis. The figure of Bousaadia is marked by «transitions from displacement to placelessness to emplacement» (Jankowsky 2010, p. 45). I was told his story in these terms by a student in Tunis:

> Bousaadia is a legend. He was a "black" from Central Africa whose daughter was sold as a slave. He sets off on a long journey to look for her and follows news of her from country to country. He goes to Mali and they tell him that she in Libya. He goes to Libya and they tell him that she is in Tunisia. In Tunisia he adopts a weird strategy to find his daughter: he dresses himself up and goes to all the weddings. His figure becomes legendary, and in every wedding there is a "black" with a mask and the headdress of Bousaadia. Not in all weddings, not in Tunis. But in Djerba yes, and maybe only those of "black" people.[10]

Here the legend of Bousaadia incorporates elements connected to the trans-Saharan slave trade: displacement, uprooting, and long-distance movement. It represents a convergence point for all those newly arrived sub-Saharan migrants, with its flamboyant "otherness". Tunisian historian Larguèche (2002) indicates a street in Tunis where there is a brothel named BouSaadia (Larguèche 2002, p. 291). In places where the figure is not popular at weddings, such as Gosbah, it remains ingrained in popular discourses, where it serves as a scary figure in children's tales: «*'uskut jāk al-Boussadia!* » means «Shut up, or Bousaadia will come for you! ».

Tayfa, the prestige of the ʿAbid

«The south is characterised by special things, [it] is characterised by poetry. People here are poets, they sing at marriage ceremonies»[11].

Tracing back the origin of *tayfa* is an arduous task. *Tayfa* has accompanied every step of the ʿAbid Ghbonton's journey to becoming settled, according to them. The ʿAbid Ghbonton even justify the denomination they carry – *'abid* – by their activity as singers: «You feel like this word is inferior to the other names, but we are called ʿAbid because we sing *tayfa*»[12]. In the south of Tunisia, some people call weddings where "black' music is played «*'arīs*

bil 'abid», meaning "wedding with the slaves", showing an intrinsic relationship between the musical entertainment at weddings and "black" people: «a wedding is not a wedding if there is no *tayfa*»[13].

The 'Abid Ghbonton who play *tayfa* call themselves *ṭwālib*, "those who request" (Ben Abdeljelil 2003, p. 109), which is also a common name for slave descendants on the island of Djerba. All over the south, "black" people who perform in weddings are called *ṭwālib*, and probably this designation stems from their past as semi-nomadic or wandering poet/singers, who would sing for newly-weds or at ceremonies in exchange for food and gifts. However, they could also be called *ṭwālib* because singers collect money from the audience in exchange for songs praising the donor, thus increasing their earnings. The 'Abid Ghbonton, who are usually so sensitive about accusations of begging, and use it as an insult amongst themselves (many women were accused in my presence of going to other cities and begging for money, «*yuṭlub*ū», they beg), do not attach any bad meaning to the collection of offerings, as it is not considered an act of "begging".

On the other side, as mentioned previously, the transfer of money – «compensation» (Tilly 1998, p. 42) – refers to wider social relations where the *'aḥrār* re-state their «elite-style» (Pelckmans 2015, p. 289), a prerogative of their classificatory freeborn status, by distributing money.

Tayfa is not the only musical style developed by *shuwāshīn* or *'abid* in the south, but all *tayfa* music players are 'Abid Ghbonton. *Tayfa* belongs to the southern popular musical tradition and corresponds to other musical performances throughout North Africa. Scholar of African Art Cynthia Becker (2002) describes the *sadaka*, an annual festival in southern Morocco, run by the *ismkhan*, a social group of slave origin. Their performances share various elements with *tayfa*, such as the ascribed servile descent of the musicians and the collection of money. Moreover, the musicians' dress and song themes show some similarities. However, *tayfa* lacks any mystic element and its singers do not fall into trance, contrary to *sadaka*, the Moroccan *gnawa*, and the Tunisian *stambeli*. *Tayfa* is, in fact, completely devoid of any mystic element – such as contact with *jinn*ī, or trance and possession phenomena – as well as of any healing power.

Tayfa belongs to the southern popular musical tradition, and *tayfa* singers regard *stambeli* as a deviation from Islam: «Those there are haram [*ghad*ī *elharam*] »[14]. In *tayfa*, «the religious and magical aspects are completely absent» (Ben Abdeljelil 2003, p. 114, my translation from French). It can be

reconnected to *shuwāshīn* and *wuṣfān* lineages in the South which perform music for village and family celebrations, but there are also music groups who play for propitiatory rites for rain (Bédoucha 1987, p. 256, my translation from French) or for pilgrimages.

In short, *tayfa* is played on one day of a wedding, which traditionally lasts three days in the Tunisian countryside. If one spouse is already divorced, the wedding lasts only two days and does not include *tayfa*. *Tayfa* enlivens weddings within the 'Abid Ghbonton community but «we are called to everywhere, from Mednine, to Mareth, to Benikhaddesh»[15]. *'Aḥrār* lineages put a special value on the 'Abid Ghbonton performing at their weddings, even though they have recently started resorting to other types of musical group, especially for the younger generation. *Tayfa* is seen as a traditional musical entertainment, compared to the music of other groups, who have introduced modern technological elements (microphones, loudspeakers, pre-recorded accompaniment, popular pop songs…). On closer inspection, however, the tribes hiring *tayfa* belong to the Ouarghemma, and if they are called to more distant places (for example, Djerba), it is because they are going to play for displaced Ouarghemma tribe-members (Jouily 1994, p. 121).

Tayfa is played by several *farqāt*, groups, made up exclusively of men, unlike *stambeli* groups with their high rate of female participation. Today, there are between six and ten members of a *farqa*, according to my observation, with around six singers, one drum player (the drum – *gasa* or *edderz* – is the only instrument played in the *tayfa*), a "crier", the one who incites the audience to give money, and the *ra'īs*, the chief. Every *'arsh*, 'Abid Ghbonton tribe, has one or more *farqa*, with the *'arsh nuwājī*, the most prominent tribe in Gosbah, having the highest number of *farqāt*.

According to Jouily's observation in the 1990's, *khaḍḍ*ara lineages had no *tayfa* groups, and that affected their social status within the community. Particular skills, such as the ability to play drums, create poetry and improvise, and a strong, resonant voice are passed down from father to son. The songs are not just about the wedding couple, but can tackle broader issues like generational conflicts, life in the desert, and the history of ancient times. The songs are improvised mainly by the *ra'īs* and passed down to the other members, who learn them by heart.

During their performances, which can last the whole night and usually take place in the courtyard of the newly-weds' house, they wave sticks and

enact choreographies, seizing the space and the attention of the audience with highly theatrical movements and rhythmic, declamatory recitation. Their dress is also remarkable, since «it does not correspond to any ordinary dress in Tunisia, but, to our eyes, it recalls the ample clothes of Tuareg and Africans [probably meaning sub-Saharans] » (Ben Abdeljelil 2003, p. 163, my translation from French). It consists of a long, white tunic (*jabba*), a white shirt, white trousers, a white belt, and a red cap called *shāshīa,* with a long, crocheted tassel. Everything is embellished with red foulards (neckerchief) and covered by a *herram*, a white woollen mantle which is traditional dress for nomads in Tunisia (Ben Abdeljelil 2003, p. 166). The celebratory occasion also enables the 'Abid Ghbonton to distinguish themselves through their clothing: usually, especially in the oases, the white tunics are the privilege of *ʾaḥrār*, showing their higher social status, while *shuwāshīn* wear plain, often second-hand clothes (Bédoucha 1987, p. 244). Being connected to honour, the *jabba* stands for the enhanced social status and consequent honour *tayfa* singers display through their music. Becker (2002) contends that Moroccan *ismkhan* wear the colour white because it stands for «*baraka* or spiritual blessing. In Islam, the colour white is associated with religious purity» (Becker 2002, p. 107).

During their performance, the *tayfa* singers wave their foulards along with their sticks, in a highly choreographed way, accompanying the pitches of their voices as they sing.

Tayfa is perceived differently by different generations. *Tayfa* players and the older generation esteem their activity highly and attach great value and prestige to it, to the extent that «they see the rest of their time as a long wait [until the next performance] » (Ben Abdeljelil 2003, p. 158, my translation from French). The prestige attached to it is also linked to their performances at festivals and at national celebrations in front of high-profile figures. For example, they performed at the opening of the football African Cup of Nations in Tunisia in 1994[16]. «Sometimes we met President Bourguiba for his birthday in Monastir: we went to him to sing there… We worked at weddings here every night in Djerba, Tataouine, Bengarden, and Benikhdech… in the south»[17]. Singing at the former president's meetings and celebrations was regarded as a great source of pride, since he occupies a respectable place in their historical memories. «Songs about how he brought independence to Tunisia, how he was working hard for that, and his modesty and his courage»[18]. His efforts to boost the bourgeoning tourist sector were greatly

appreciated since they benefited *tayfa* activities, too: «there were advertisements before, for tourism… Bourguiba invited us to sing»[19].

Pride comes also from the sense of being entrusted by God with the task of perpetrating memories of the old days: «Their deeds remain in stories to be told by *shuwāshīn*» says a *tayfa* song, performed by *tayfa* player Mansour[20]. Moreover, the social capital they accumulate with *tayfa* makes up, in their eyes, for the absence of an Arab descent, and will eventually ennoble their lineage: «At the beginning Gosbah was nothing, but thanks to God and its [Gosbah's] people, Gosbah came to the top, not like before»[21]. As Lotte Pelckmans (2015) argues, ritual occasions offer a vantage point to observe social boundaries in post-slavery contexts, and weddings do for the ʿAbid Ghbonton what religious occasions do for other tribes: they prove their existence (*ʾabāt*) and enhance their social status (*mkāna*) vis à vis the *ʾaḥrār*. Besides the enhanced prestige they attach to their lineage, the ʿAbid Ghbonton are grateful to *tayfa* because it relieved them from earning their living through laborious, unrewarding, physical work, even though agriculture and sheep herding remain the staple economic activities in Gosbah.

Tayfa does not allow the ʿAbid Ghbonton to accumulate only social and moral capital, in fact. During their performances, songs are interrupted by a sign from the drummer, who leaves the floor to the crier who leads the operation of collecting money (*ramū*). Specially directed songs are sung to those who give money to the *tayfa* group. The money collected is added to their wage, which is agreed upon before the celebration with the groom's father, and the biggest share is given to the *raʾīs* (chief). The crier oscillates the whole night between the audience, arranged in an orderly circle, and the musicians, who collect the requests and improvise songs to praise the donors. According to Mahfoudh Ben Abdeljelil (2003) this system of paying the musicians is widespread all over the Tunisian south (Ben Abdeljelil 2003, pp. 128-130).

The process of hiring *tayfa* groups for a wedding is very characteristic of southern musical groups. When not from Gosbah, in which case the agreement can be reached in person, the couple, and usually the groom's family, go to Mednine, to a central square, where *tayfa* groups (usually the *raʾīs*) wait on the stairs of the mosque to be hired (the square is *shāriʿa al-manṣūr el- ḥūsh*). Apart from the money that will be directly paid by the groom's family[22], the couple must be able to afford a big wedding financially, in order to allow the *tayfa* singers to collect enough money from the guests.

If there are not many guests at the wedding, the families make up for the missed income which would have come from the *ramū*. The concept of hospitality tied to the value of generosity – within the wedding – enables the *tayfa* singers to collect enough money when they travel and sing outside of Gosbah: «We sing at the marriages of generous, well-behaved [people] because when a guest comes from the outside he is welcome here: they care about the outsider more than themselves»[23].

Their improvised songs undergo a sort of crystallisation in their memories and are sometimes written down, for example by researchers[24]. However, *tayfa* belongs to the tradition of unwritten, oral poetry which is popular throughout North Africa, and like many other oral music genres, it engages with history. Themes of *tayfa* songs are «parents, revolution, *naj*ā (plural of *enjū*, tribe), desert life, and praising the bride and bridegroom»[25] and ʿAbid Ghbonton feel that they are entrusted with the role of "guardians of history", which they take up with pleasure and with sacral respect. The *ʿarīs bil ʿabid* are an occasion to go back in time through the history of the tribe as far as two centuries ago (Jouily 1994, p. 132).

Their poetry is «elaborate in its nature to be sung. It is versified, formed and measured to be executed on a melodic tone, which ensues from a particular rhythmic knowledge, mastered by the singers through routine and traineeship» (Ben Abdeljelil 2003, p. 262, my translation from French). Their themes tackle ancient times, when «people used to live like *raḥal* [nomads]»[26], and the *waqt*, "time" or "bygone days". Political songs are not uncommon, too, especially regarding great historical figures such as Bourguiba, Mohammed Boudiaf[27], or Saddam Hussein. Some poems go as far as to tackle issues such as the UN support of Israel, the drought in Somalia or the US intervention in Afghanistan.

The most recurrent theme, however, is poverty, and the economy in the old days as compared to today. A song I collected is about old days and poverty:

> Bread is scarce (*gidd gidd*), sauce is scarce, there is nothing else
> (living) costs have increased
> This household I am managing with effort (…)
> And I came to the audience to tell it, and they asked me what I saw
> We even sold our dresses, just the wall is left
> I have a daughter I send to school and she asked me [to pay for] the *foyer* [dormitory]

Also the brother came with her, and there are fights at home
He got angry and went to his grandmother, and asked "Why, Dad?"
Today it has been years since I fought her. If she exists or not, it's the same!
Everybody expresses his wishes to me and says "give me!"
And so goes the one who is lost in a small family, he owns two chickens
An old man living in his corner and his horse are a burden
I have a daughter named Zeina and she asks for shoes
There was a fight, so I took my stick out
A family has ten hands; it is a hell for those who listen
She is afraid I may stab her; I am afraid to find a FIAT
She went to the police to sue me, they told her she does not have anything
A poor man comes every time to us and has neither shelter nor bed
They brought me medicines which do not cure nor heal
One asked me for a shirt, the other trousers
The whole family plagues me, I have no money [*māl*]
I don't even own water and I am unemployed
The relation must be forgotten, and (…) doesn't like anything
Barefoot with bare legs and my sandals are broken.[28]

Former president Ben Ali is rarely present in the 'Abid Ghbonton's poems, probably because he himself was reluctant to be praised by popular oral poetry. Censorship could not stretch its long arm to *tayfa* songs, and singers claim to have never been prevented from singing about any issue, because the government did not care about oral poems. Although his enthusiastic backing of modernisation against all forms of backwardness could have affected *tayfa* negatively, Ben Ali's massive investments in the tourist sector opened up new professional possibilities for the 'Abid Ghbonton and for *tayfa* players, who began singing at festivals (from southern Tataouine to northern Tunis) and playing in tourist hotels in Djerba.

Tayfa, the modesty of the 'Abid

Tayfa is "praise poetry", meaning that its songs usually praise someone, whether historical figures of the past or living individuals. The 'Abid Ghbonton are especially known for this ability, and in the past, they wandered from one village to the other waiting to be hired, and sang and praised well-off, prominent people in exchange for agricultural products. Nowadays, eulogies are

still a pivotal element of the *tayfa*: praising the bride and the groom, as well as the lineage and the family of those who offer them money, is part of the performance. Using this system, they manage to accumulate resources and funds to overcome difficult harvests or to invest in business activities.

If the association of socially inferior jobs with "black" individuals is widespread throughout Tunisia, *tayfa* is stereotypically connected with the 'Abid Ghbonton by means of their classificatory slave status, similarly to wedding music in other post-slavery contexts (Pelckmans 2015, p. 286). The 'Abid Ghbonton, when they sing, enact practices and discourses which reproduce social boundaries between classificatory slave descendant and freemen status groups. The ethnic boundary separating the 'Abid Ghbonton from the *'aḥrār* lineages is reinforced by the deferential style adopted by *tayfa* singers as well as by the words of the songs.

Tayfa can be analytically subsumed under the «loyalty style», which entails deference and humbleness as sources of social honour (Pelckmans 2015, p. 293). In the *tayfa* poems, terms related to the newly married couple overlap with slavery terms. It is not unusual, in fact, to hear the 'Abid Ghbonton refer to the groom and bride, or to the donors, with *Sidi* and *Lella*, which were used to address masters in the past. In a song collected by Ben Abdeljelil (2003) describing a traditional wedding, the bride «climbs up onto a seat, that one with a nice saddle, and it is a *waṣīf* who leads the animal» (Ben Abdeljelil 2003, p. 375, my translation from French), while the groom is referred to as «the man of our mistress (Lella)» (Ben Abdeljelil 2003, p. 375, my translation from French). These appellations are not casual. Some 'Abid Ghbonton reported to me that within living memory, the 'Abid Ghbonton used to refer to the *'aḥrār* as *sidi* in the case of men and *lellty* (my mistress) in the case of women. They also told me that *'aḥrār* used to call them *baba* (for 'Abid Ghbonton men) and *dada* (for 'Abid Ghbonton women), which was a familiar, paternalistic way of addressing slaves in the past. I have, however, never experienced it firsthand, probably because these appellations are disappearing nowadays. According to Bédoucha (1984), the phenomenon of *'aḥrār* who used *babak* (your *baba*) and *dadak* (your *dada*) to speak about absent *shuwāshīn* among them still existed in the 1980's.

The loyalty style often implies receiving gratuities as a respectable way of making a living in post-slavery societies, and classificatory slave descendants derive honour and pride from subaltern, deferent behaviours (Pelckmans 2015, p. 294). Similarly, *tayfa* is, for the 'Abid Ghbonton, a way of increasing

their honour (*sharaf*), epitomised by some exterior traits, such as clothing. *Tayfa* could be a reminiscence of a post-slavery relation, where classificatory slave descendants, stemming from a fictive familiar tie with their former masters (*wala'*), topped up their income by moving from one village to the other – usually inhabited by *'aḥrār* lineages – praising the best-off families in exchange for food and gifts. Their loyalty style was probably encouraged by Islamic ideology and by the rigid social hierarchy of south-eastern Tunisia, which valued conforming rather than deviation. If the modesty of *tayfa* could be the extension of past hierarchies between *'aḥrār*, *shuwāshīn,* and *'abid*, *tayfa* singers do not perceive anything discriminatory in the nature of their activity, because the honour and prestige attached to it enabled them to move upwards – socially and economically – albeit within a closed paternalistic system.

The social hierarchy, in fact, is not threatened by the social and economic enrichment of the 'Abid Ghbonton through *tayfa*. Despite the accumulation of socio-economic capital, in fact, the «loyalty stereo-style» they enact reproduces categorical inequality between them and the *'aḥrār*. The nature of *tayfa* – a half improvised sung poetry – combines scripting and shared local knowledge, giving rise to «deep improvisation» (Tilly 1998, p. 54), similar to other musical genres such as jazz. The ethnic boundary is thus maintained by the intertwining of processes of both emulation and adaptation, in what Tilly defines as an «intense ritual» (Tilly 1998, p. 55), a special occasion where solidarity is seemingly engendered, but hostile interactions and unequal structures can cohabit.

Tayfa performances reinforce the moral and cultural ethos of the *'aḥrār*, which the 'Abid Ghbonton embrace. Even though *tayfa* performers enhance their social status, they ascend social ladders but never actually question them. Similarly, Olivier Leservoisier (2009) shows how in Mauritania the MaccuBe's strategies of upward mobility do not seek to reform the social order they are embedded in.

Paternalism is highly significant variable in the relationships between the *'aḥrār* and the 'Abid Ghbonton, percolating through *tayfa* and reflecting the wider set of relations between *'aḥrār* and *shuwāshīn* in the south of Tunisia. In the south-west, as Bédoucha (1987) convincingly argues, the *'aḥrār* base their relationship with the *shuwāshīn* on a fictive familial bond («we eat from the same plate…we offer gifts to the *shuwāshīn* children as if they were our children» Bédoucha 1987, p. 257, my translation from French) which

is, however, paternalistic, as «generosity requires submission and gratitude» (Bédoucha 1987, p. 257, my translation from French).

Generational gaps

When I first approached younger people in Gosbah, who were the closest to me and more open, I noticed that nobody under the age of fifty engages in *tayfa*. When I started enquiring, on the one hand I had the impression that they perceived *tayfa* as a paternalistic relationship, and on the other I felt the bitter disappointment of their fathers because the «younger generation… they do not want to sing *tayfa* any longer»[29]. Yassin, 29 years old, refused to undertake the same job as his father: «White people look after *tayfa* because they perceive us as slaves; they want to be praised by us… Sometimes the songs say, 'Look how lucky you are, to marry such a white man'»[30]. Yassin's is no isolated case: most of young 'Abid Ghbonton do not want to commit to the practice and learn the job from their fathers any longer.

Regardless of the perceived patronising nature of *tayfa*, everyone agrees that the economic and social capital gained through this activity has benefited the community in many ways, especially in a period spanning from Tunisia's independence (1956) to the economic slowdown of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Apart from investing in economic activities or private properties, such as building houses to allow male children to get married, *tayfa* singers spend their income on education and infrastructure: «I managed to send all my six boys to school and to university»[31]. In the elders' eyes, however, economic gains are perceived as inferior to another form of capital, that is, prestige or honour: «When we walk around dressed in *tayfa* clothes, everyone respects us»[32].

This is exactly where the older and younger generations' perceptions of *tayfa* diverge: young people would feel ashamed of singing *tayfa*, even though, within the borders of Gosbah, they are proud of their fathers «with the white dress singing to people»[33]. Young people's perception of *tayfa* is connected to a broader renegotiation of *'aḥrār/ shuwāshīn* relationships. As early as the 1990's, Jouily (1994) reported that educated young people in Gosbah did not want to perform *tayfa* any longer, and attached a negative meaning to it, regarding it as "mocking" the community of 'Abid Ghbonton. Structures perpetuating the legacy of slavery are very clear to younger gener-

ations of classificatory slave descendants. The 'Abid Ghbonton feel uncomfortable about being invited to *'aḥrār*'s weddings, because they end up being treated as servants. «You can't go to a wedding and sit. They don't drink tea with you, they put a jug of juice in your hand [expecting that you serve it to the guests] »[34].

The ascending strategy of Tayfa singers, in fact, never questioned the social hierarchy of southern Tunisia. Their strategy was more aimed at emulating their former masters, incorporating their social and moral ethos, rather than at renegotiating ancient relationships of serfdom or trying to subvert them. *Tayfa* songs and practices, in fact, reproduce categorical boundaries between them and *'aḥrār* lineages, and are particularly sought after by *'aḥrār* spouses to reinforce their social superiority. The investment of *tayfa* revenues in the education of *tayfa* singers' offspring had the paradoxical result of distancing the latter from this musical style, and young people are now refusing to take on the vocation of their fathers.

Chapter six
Today's *'abid*

«al-horru horrun walaw hetta es-zemanu bihi, wal-'ab-
du abdun wa-inkana saygu dahabi
a freeman remains a freeman even if destiny betrays
him, a slave remains a slave even if he works gold
(Bédoucha 1984, p. 92, my translation from French)»

So far, my analysis of the community of the 'Abid Ghbonton has delved into various domains of their social life which clearly define the boundary between them and other social groups in the area, especially those made up of *'aḥrār* lineages. This ethnic boundary forms «a frontier […] [or] into a complete perimeter separating ins from outs, social relations across the perimeter restricted and coordinated, and a hierarchy concentrating control over social relations in one or a few locations» (Tilly 1998, p. 61). However, there are some places along the boundary where distinctions appear more blurred or where internal solidarities or «locally available boundaries» (Tilly 1998, p. 71) cut «dividing lines» (Tilly 1998, p. 71) across the "complete perimeter".

Recent socio-economic changes in southern Tunisia shape, on one hand, the insertion of non-*shuwāshīn* individuals into the category of classificatory slave descendants, posing a «homogeneity problem» (Rossi 2015, p. 315), which is the «risk that using "slave descent" as an analytical category may make us attribute to slave origins conditions that derive from circumstances shared with other marginalized groups» (Rossi 2015, p. 315). The activity of clam-collecting, mostly performed by 'Abid Ghbonton women, is an example.

On the other hand, dividing lines cutting across the category of classificatory slave descendants allow individuals to escape the ethnic boundary. This happens mainly thanks to mobility, which questions the homogeneity of the category from within, albeit with controversial outcomes. To be exact, I am not referring to lines which divide the community of the 'Abid Ghbonton internally – such as gender, professional, or status – but to dividing lines which question the location of the ethnic boundary itself, pushing individu-

als beyond the status of classificatory slave descendants – which is ultimately the status of *shuwāshīn* or *'abid*.

Babūch, the gold of the sea

Babūch is a word in Tunisian Arabic which, in Gosbah, means "clams" (in classical Arabic: *maḥ*ār). The 'Abid Ghbonton women are known in the area because they work as clam-collectors. Every day, during the winter season (when the weather is not too hot), around four hundred women leave Gosbah and its surroundings to go to the seashore alongside the roads leading to the island of Djerba. I experienced at first hand a couple of days of clam-collecting, accompanying the women to two beaches called Bideya and Jurff. The trucks honk early in the morning, and «women leave the beds they share with their husbands and jump on the trucks»[1]. Every truck can carry around 20 women, who are packed in like «livestock»[2].

After a thirty-minute drive, the trucks arrive at the shore and the women move to the beach, with calf-high waterproof boots and a basket, and spend up to eight hours bent over, looking for the *'ayn,* the "eye": the hole the *babūch* create on the surface of the sand. A certain amount of experience and skill is needed in order to recognise the good *'ayn,* distinguishing them from the ones which do not correspond to a *babūch* underneath.

In the meantime, the men – three or four including the driver – sit on the beach and prepare couscous and tea, and wait for the harvest. If asked why they do not help, they answer that it is "normal"[3], because they "drive and sell" while women joke that men are not good at collecting clams because "they do not have eyes". When they have finished harvesting the clams, traders come from Sfax and buy directly from the 'Abid Ghbonton men. What happens to the *babūch* after that is hard to tell. Certainly clams have to be checked by the government food safety agency and given a certificate with which they can be sold. According to the "Sfaxiens", the purchasers from Sfax, clams harvested by the 'Abid Ghbonton are meant for the international market, mainly Italy, or for fancy restaurants in Djerba or on the coast. The 'Abid Ghbonton often asked me at what price clams are sold in Italy, and I struggled hard, in turn, to understand what price they are paid for them, because prices fluctuate constantly. *Babūch* are "the gold of Gosbah" because the price is calculated on the total availability day per day.

Jouily (1994) recorded that clams fetched one or two dinars (around 0.3 or 0.6 Euro) per kilo in the 1990's, but *babūch* today fetch from 2.5 to 6 dinars (around 0.79 to 1.90 Euro) per kilo. It depends, ultimately, on how many *babūch* are collected on that very day on that beach and others, since the price is set by the "Sfaxiens" who buy from all the beaches. The "Sfaxiens" represent different companies, but they all agree upon the price, imposing it on the women before buying. When women complain that they only get a low price, between 2.5 (around 0.79 Euro) and three (around 0.95 Euro) dinars per kilo, it is because the "Sfaxiens" organise themselves into a cartel. «If we collect too many clams, the price gets lower»[4]. This system is profoundly unfair, since every woman wishes to collect as many clams as possible, but meanwhile she also hopes that other women collect less than she does, creating tensions and competition. In addition, the shore is divided along *'arsh* lines, with women belonging to the same big families sharing the same areas, and sometimes disputes over territories arise, deteriorating into huge arguments.

The clam collectors are very aware, as their discourses show, that they are exploited economically, but regretfully admit, «What can we do? I have to give my kids food»[5].

The downsides of clam collecting are several, and can lead to serious health issues. Bent for such a long time over the water, with their legs immersed, the women have to stop going to the shore at around fifty years old. Afterwards, acute pathologies such as painful rheumatism prevent them from doing this job, and also impede otherwise very easy activities and movement in their everyday life.

Clam collecting is not commonly defined as a "slave job", but, undeniably, almost all clam collectors are women from the 'Abid Ghbonton lineage, and everybody agrees upon the low social status attached to the activity, also stemming from the harsh conditions and the extremely low salary. Over time it has become a job attached to the category of classificatory slave descendants, and specifically to the community of the 'Abid Ghbonton. However, recently, following the relocation of some *'aḥrār* women to Gosbah after they married 'Abid Ghbonton men, the presence of "white" women on the shore increased. Also, other impoverished *'aḥrār* women have started collecting clams, even if they are not resident in Gosbah. This new phenomenon complicates the analytical relevance of the classificatory slave descendant status, which has stretched to incorporate other members – at

least in some domains – who do not share the ascription of a slave descent. This happens at a socio-economic level, and money problems are what allow *'aḥrār* women to cross the ethnic boundary – this time, from the outside to the inside.

Hasna, a white woman from Mednine, told me, «I married into Gosbah [an 'Abid Ghbonton] and all the women were going, so I went. The family needs money»[6]. Hasna is therefore now affiliated to a slave descendant category in one specific domain, posing «the causal relevance problem» (Rossi 2015, p. 315). Paraphrasing Rossi (2015), in fact, one could ask oneself if slave descent is the causally relevant factor explaining the circumstances of the clam-collectors in Gosbah (Rossi 2015, p. 315). The anthropologist warned against the risk of attributing slave origins to marginalised groups which share some features with slave descendants but not their actual past enslavement (Rossi 2015, p. 315). In Gosbah, the «homogeneity problem» (Rossi 2015, p. 315) of the category of classificatory slave descendants works as follows: the 'Abid Ghbonton's status is an ascription from the outside, and interweaves supposed slave descent, "blackness", and socio-economic inferiority, but today one of these features – poverty – is shared with other social groups in the Tunisian south, who can fall into the category of slave descendants in spite of their *'aḥrār* origin.

Another interesting point is connected to the absence of honour, which enables 'Abid Ghbonton women to perform a job outside their homes, and which appears to be shared by other *'aḥrār* women collecting clams. Whether stemming from their lower socio-economic status or from the association with other classificatory slave descendants, "white" women going to the shores every day also enjoy greater freedom of movement. Clam-collecting, is, in fact, a valuable social occasion, when women go out of their households and socialise among themselves, gossip, exchange ideas, and build alliances. At the time of Jouily's (1994) research, during the harvest season women used to move to the shore and sleep there, in *barārīk*, shacks, provided with shops and organised according to *'urūsh* (Jouily 1994, p. 96). The activities going on around the shacks were the catalysts of social relationships, and new alliances and marriages were organised while the 'Abid Ghbonton lived next to the sea. Women used to bring their children with them, something which is impossible now, because «they slow down the work and women do not need to sleep there in tents anyway, because now we have trucks»[7].

Moreover, unlike *'aḥrār*, middle class women, clam collectors earn a sum of money, however small, which acts as a potential means of emancipation. Many 'Abid Ghbonton women stress the difference between 'Abid Ghbonton women and women from the outside, who live in other regions.

> Women here do gain something. In the North, men drink, and women have to hide their money, and get beaten. Here, if they don't like their husbands, they just leave. Because they have money, they can survive. Divorces are very common; maybe it comes from the Islamic institution of the four wives. "Whites" think we are violent, brutal, ignorant. But if you go to Siliana [North-West region] men beat their wives! We don't.[8]

Domestic violence is a serious concern in Tunisia, even though the statistics are unofficial and vague[9], and no statistics exist on Gosbah. However, I never witnessed a single violent episode, not even against children. It is true, however, that it could have been a response to my presence. Nonetheless, women in Gosbah get many benefits from working as clam collectors, which, being socially despised by other lineages, means they have no competition, similarly to *tayfa* musicians. Even if consciously exploited, 'Abid Ghbonton women accord the job social and economic advantages they are reluctant to give up:

> If your man treats you bad, you leave. Myself, I am divorced. My husband as well has been divorced three times! It is true that it is not good, but if you don't get along, what can you do? The most important are the children, they stay with their mother. The husband has to pay for them, and for the mother.[10]

The progressive legislation on women's rights in Tunisia accords wives many rights regarding divorce, based on the equality of man and woman in issues of divorce. Women can initiate divorce and are entitled to alimony payments (Charrad 2008, p. 128). 'Abid Ghbonton women's access to the institution of divorce, however, lies in their capacity to earn money for themselves and for their children. In the case of the 'Abid Ghbonton clam-collectors, then, less honour can become an advantage. Referring to the classic concept of "stigma", as it was first conceptualised by Ervin Goffman (1963), the ethnic boundary materialises as a normative set of expectations of a specific social category into which society is organised and

which carries discredit. The 'Abid Ghbonton are a stigmatised category, but, nonetheless, the activities they perform, both *tayfa* and *babūch* collecting, cause them to have no competition, and the source of discredit is used to obtain "secondary advantages", such as the accumulation of economic capital or freedom of movement.

At the internal level, the category's homogeneity is challenged by some inner lines which divide the community according to socio-economic cleavages. A higher social status in Gosbah is in fact epitomised by the fact that women do not collect *babūch*, especially the "white", *'aḥrār* ones. The three daughters of Khulud, a "white" woman from Algeria, put a lot of effort and money into enhancing their appearance with make-up and clothes. They wear fashionable Western dress, different from the traditional southern Tunisian clothes of young girls (*fūṭa*) and women (*malḥafa*), and prefer trousers to long skirts. Hilel and her sisters wear a veil which is more draped over their heads than tied, and do not wear a second knotted veil underneath, because it is something «girls working as *fallāḥ* [farmers] wear, otherwise they get a headache from the sun»[11]. Khulud's daughters, in fact, when asked if they had ever gone to the seashore to collect *babūch*, answered with repulsion, "*wallay lā*" (Oh no)!

While visiting many households and being invited to drink tea by different families, I noticed that higher social classes within the community are characterised by a few clearly recognisable elements, even if social distinctions within the village of Gosbah appear relatively blurred, given the overall poverty and lack of infrastructure. Higher social classes are epitomised by "verticality" inside the houses. The traditional rural Tunisian household, like the one I was living in, has few vertical elements: big carpets are used as couches, tables, and often as beds. Kitchens and toilets are outside, and poorer houses have no running water or sewerage. By contrast, apart from a system of running water and "proper toilets", higher-class houses are equipped with cupboards and couches in the main room, the one used as a living room when guests are visiting. Cupboards display a wide array of ornaments, not only the "good china", which is also to be seen in other non-rural Tunisian houses. This taste for useless accessories, often regarded as "vulgar", is strongly criticised by outsiders, especially "white" people, and reflects the alleged "bad taste" Gosbah women are accorded with by outside women.

Djerba, the land of milk and honey

Taha is a handsome, 35-year-old something man and the director of Dar el-Shabāb ("House of the Youth"), a government cultural centre in Sidi Makhlouf. The fact that he, an 'Abid Ghbonton, is head of that institution shows how investment in higher education, mainly as a result of *tayfa* activities, has proved successful for climbing the social ladder of the rigid southern Tunisian society. Taha's father, in fact, is a renowned *ṭayfa* singer, now retired, and has managed to send all his boys to school, even though the daughters had to sacrifice for their brothers, and stay home to help their parents («a solidarity tax»[12]). However, he married a woman from Gosbah, Hiba, who graduated from university. In one primary school in Gosbah, the director, a non-'Abid Ghbonton, remembers exactly the year when the first 'Abid Ghbonton teacher was hired: 1994 – probably because it seemed like an extraordinary event in the eyes of the community[13]. Before 1994, all the teachers working in Gosbah were *'aḥrār*.

Getting information on Gosbah from Taha was difficult, since it seems that there are no official data on anything: even the register of births and deaths does not, according to him, correspond to reality. No official records on the *carnet blanc*, the social security cheque that several individuals in Gosbah receive, are available, and he claims that school dropout rate is high: probably 80% of the 'Abid Ghbonton do not pursue education after primary school, which is the highest level taught in Gosbah.

The director of one of the few primary schools in Gosbah gave me a quite depressing picture of school dropout, too. When I interviewed him, he introduced the problem straight away:

> Many pupils register for school but never show up, and some drop out in the *première* or *deuxième* (first or second class). I try and speak to the parents. But what can I do? A boy dropped out and I spoke with the father. He found it difficult to come back. Teachers also try to speak with the parents. Children who come without books and notebooks, they have to buy everything. Up to last year, the whole community took charge of the poorest families and bought books, but now there is no money any longer. Children are needed at home to work and to take care of younger brothers, and so the problem is bigger for girls. They offer some courses for adults at three o'clock, to teach them how to read and write, to fight against *al'amiyya* (illiteracy)[14].

Illiteracy affects all women older than fifty, and is total, since they cannot write, read, nor count, and some of them even claim that they «don't understand money»[15].

Although education was a strategy that many people pursued in the 1980's and 1990's, lately few people invest in sending their children to university. In 2017 in Gosbah, I could count a handful of pupils enrolled at university, and most of them were girls. If, on the one hand, girls emancipate themselves through studying and living in another city, usually in a dormitory (*foyer*), on the other, with higher education being perceived as a non-remunerative professional path, they are still supposed to earn less money and stay at home when they have families, whereas boys, the breadwinners, are pushed to look for unskilled jobs outside Gosbah.

Nowadays, male youngsters in Gosbah prefer pursuing their own dreams in other ways. There is little work in agriculture, and not a profitable activity any longer. Water is becoming a "luxury", and what crops can be grown are just enough for family consumption. Everybody says that in the old days it was better, but according to Jouily (1994), production in the 1990's was not sufficient for any surplus to be traded with the outside, either (Jouily 1994, p. 99). Today, the Friday market mirrors the village's poverty. Twenty stands show few goods: vegetables, clothes and shoes, detergents and soaps, but not chickens or other animals, as there are in the market in Sidi Makhlouf, and few "superfluous wares", such as toys, beauty products, and so on. According to Taha, intensive agriculture is not feasible due to poor distribution of water, although the government envisages the improvement of the irrigation system. However, Gosbah is not so poor, because

> The situation is similar to many other places; Toujane [place in the governorate of Gabes] is similar (*kīfkīf*). The state has forgotten its countryside. Gosbah is better off, even, because social networks are extensive and strong, but the big injustice is the lack of infrastructure, which is the state's responsibility.[16]

Young men often look for jobs in the Mednine region, especially on the island of Djerba, and in Libya. Some work as painters and decorators, some in cafés, others in restaurants. During the tourist season, young 'Abid Ghbonton men in Djerba work as bouncers in discos, night watchmen, and barmen. They usually rent flats where they live all together, sometimes overcoming the tribal divisions that separate them in Gosbah. These men

are bachelors, and are saving money to get married. The most remunerative jobs are those in Libya, which seems, however, to have an upsetting effect on them, probably because of the extremely dangerous situation after 2011.

> Libya needs everything: waiters, bar attendants, everything. But living in Libya…is a strain. My mind gets upset, I can't go out. I put on my jacket and pull up my hood, I go to work. I finish working, I pull up my hood, and go home. This is my life there. Libyans, they have no culture.[17]

During my stay, moreover, young men working in Libya came to be regarded with increasing suspicion. The terrorist attack in Bardo, on March 18th, 2015, and the one in Sousse, on June 26th, 2015, profoundly affected the community. My neighbour, who had worked in Libya seasonally for some years, was arrested in autumn 2015 because the secret services found some conversations he had had with *daesh* (ISIS) on the internet, and seized his computer. Soon the word 'terrorism' (*'irhāb*) was on everybody's lips. The women I was living with appeared very scared: «Take care: in Gosbah there are many terrorists»[18]:

> Some days ago a woman with a niqab took a taxi in Mednine. But the taxi driver was smart enough to realise that it was a man and took him to the police! It was a terrorist disguised as a woman!.[19]

And

> Abdelkader [young man from Gosbah] went to work in Libya and came back strange. I think they put something in his coffee.[20]

Power of suggestion or not, I experienced a rise in religious sentiment and an increase in tension in the last phase of my fieldwork. I noticed more integral veils on the streets, while Gosbah's inhabitants have always been proud of the freedom their women enjoyed, and people gave me reprimanding looks, because I was not in full compliance with women's standards of dress and behaviour. I have always been taken for a Tunisian, due to my complexion and physical features. A few things, however, made me stand out in the countryside: my reluctance to wear a veil, or my tendency to wear a turban

which left my neck showing, and my attendance at cafés and the frequency of interactions with men in my age group.

Progressively, I also noticed an increase in the alcoholism rate, with unemployed young men sitting stranded in front of Gosbah's shops, mixing juice with pure alcohol and drinking this ghastly beverage all day long, stunned and dazed.

The police in Sidi Makhlouf did not help, either, since they became ridiculously worried about me, and asked me to let them know wherever I went, for security reasons. They went as far as taking my personal telephone number and calling me for trivial reasons, to the point of harassing me. Even if the official motivation was "terrorism", I suspected on several occasions that the Sidi Makhlouf policemen, all *'aḥrār* men, were clumsily suspicious of the 'Abid Ghbonton. I was asked many times "Are they treating you well?", or I could read a clear expression of astonishment on their faces when they knew that I was living amidst the 'Abid Ghbonton. A couple of times, moreover, they drove to Gosbah and patrolled around it, whereas I had never seen them before, not even when big fights occurred, with the precise intent of warning the 'Abid Ghbonton that nothing should happen to me.

The crackdown on terrorism had many effects on life in Gosbah, since the frontier with Libya was regularly closed for a couple of weeks in a row, cutting the 'Abid Ghbonton off from their relatives on the other side of it. Economically, the biggest distress was the crisis which affected the tourist sector. I found myself many times commenting on the terrorist attacks in cafés with people from Gosbah, and every time the biggest concern from their side was the reduced influx of tourists to Djerba.

Djerba is indeed more appealing to 'Abid Ghbonton youth than Libya, even if jobs and consequently economic gains are decreasing. Nonetheless, everybody in Gosbah has a success story in his or her family linked to the island «where you can drink milk and honey»[21].

Mohammed, a handsome man about 30 years old, with a nice, open smile and glasses, works in an extremely fancy resort in Midoun, the second biggest city on the island of Djerba. He has been working there for twelve years, mainly as a bartender, from 10 am to 8 pm six days a week, and with a yearly contract. He is happy, because he can earn money, and live next to the sea with his friends from Gosbah. His eyes fill with nostalgia every time he mentions Gosbah, but he does not want to go back, or at least, not until he gets married. «Guys who work in Djerba are lucky, even if they don't go

to school, they speak three, four, five languages. Me, myself, I speak English, German, a little bit of Russian». «And Arabic, » I add. «Yes, Arabic and French, of course»[22]. With the decrease in tourism from Germany, Italy, and France, Russians are flooding the Tunisian coasts, and workers in the tourist sector soon adapted to the newcomers.

Taher, on the other hand, is around fifty years old and has a permanent contract as a night watchman in a hotel in Gabes. Gabes, far from being a tourist destination, attracts passing businessmen and Libyans, who go to Tunisia to access the health service or for holidays. Since he has a stable job, he settled in Gabes and moved his family there. On the other hand, Adel, thirty years old, is always on the move. He got in touch with me to ask me for accommodation in Tunis, because he was about to take a plane to France. He had always worked in the tourist sector in Djerba, since he was very young, and he made a career very quickly in a German tourist agency. Fluent in German, he was soon picked out by the boss and trained to be a professional entertainer. «I flew to Turkey very soon, to learn the job», and «I used to work in the discos in the resorts, all night long. Then, during the day, as an entertainer in pools or on the beach. I was young and full of energy»[23]. He recently got tired and decided to move to France, where he has many contacts and a girlfriend he met in Djerba.

On the surface, these stories are narrated by their friends and family members as success stories. Everybody is proud of his or her relatives who accumulate economic capital in Djerba. Highly-skilled professions and higher education are not looked up to, apart from in a few families (Taha's being one of them), and workers in the tourist sectors are seen as having special qualities such as the ability to speak various languages, which is sometimes regarded as a genetic or innate characteristic of the 'Abid Ghbonton: «We are not Arabs. We come from Africa, from Mali, from who knows where».[24]

Looking more closely, however, 'Abid Ghbonton men are mainly employed in low-skilled jobs, which often comprise interactions with forbidden substances (alcohol) or activities (dancing in discos with unmarried non-Muslim women). Even though they claim that «in Djerba, nobody knows about you, and you can make a career very quickly»[25], the ethnic boundary follows them, through their darker skin and through the simple question *ashnuwwa tukhruj?* ("What do you come out from?"), which is sufficient to re-categorise them into the classificatory slave descendants status. They carry with them the negative meanings attached to "blackness" and

to classificatory slave-descent, like the laxer attitude towards religion and their perceived lack of morality, stemming from the absence of an *'aṣl*. As in their careers as musicians, their lower social and moral authority allows them to commit to jobs which would be considered religiously questionable and therefore looked down upon by the *'aḥrār*. Similarly, their careers as bouncers in discos and as night watchmen show how "blackness" is accorded specific characteristics, such as physical violence, brutality, and strength, which can be exploited at a professional level. Ironically, therefore, young men escaping *tayfa* activities because they consider them demeaning fall back into long-standing categories stemming from their alleged slavery past.

We don't know how to do *harga*

In spite of the controversial outcomes of jobs in the tourist sector in Djerba, which allow the 'Abid Ghbonton to ascend the socio-economic ladder but maintain the ethnic boundary untouched, mobility can be a great resource for the male members of the community. Some boys and men did, in fact, leave Gosbah and manage to achieve success, demonstrating how the boundary of the category of slave descendants can be crossed from the inside to the outside, over "dividing lines" (Tilly 1998, p. 71) which emancipate individuals from their inherited categorical inequality.

But, circularly, access to mobility is also shaped by the categorical inequality intrinsic to the social structure of southern Tunisia, which draws lines between the social groups of *'aḥrār*, *shuwāshīn*, and *'abid*. Some migration opportunities, in fact, seem to be less accessible to *shuwāshīn* and *'abid*.

«We are people from the Sahara: we don't know how it works, and it is very expensive»[26], I was told when I expressed my astonishment regarding the low percentage of 'Abid Ghbonton who take the sea route to try to reach Europe.

In Gosbah, I have never spoken to anyone who has relatives who have "done *harga*" (or *ḥarraqa*), a term crystallised in common usage in Tunisia which, however, comes from the Algerian word indicating the action of "setting on fire" (*ḥarraqa*). «The term harga, meaning 'burning', is used throughout North Africa to refer to the symbolic 'burning of the border' involved in crossing the Mediterranean Sea without papers» (Zagaria 2019, p. 58). It defines the action of embarking on a journey by boat to reach

the European coast, mainly the Italian island of Lampedusa, a route which brought more than 20,000 Tunisians to Italy in the first months of 2011, after the collapse of Ben Ali's regime (Zagaria 2019, p. 58).

The difficulty of finding 'Abid Ghbonton people who have done *harga* is probably also a reaction to my position as a foreign researcher, and additionally an Italian, which may have triggered a sense of shame for the presence of illegal Tunisian migrants on Italian soil, who are often perceived as criminals in Tunisia, mainly drug-dealers (the Italian word for drug-dealer, *spacciatore*, is widely known throughout Tunisia). However, I had no difficulties in collecting stories of illegal migration, but only by land, not by sea.

Samir, for example, flew to Turkey and then crossed into Greece, where he stayed some years illegally, working in the informal sector. After much effort and many years, he finally reached France, one of the most desired destinations for Tunisians, where he regularised his situation by marrying a «nineteen-year-old girl»[27]. The recent emergency of refugees fleeing from war-torn Syria was also exploited by some 'Abid Ghbonton to reach Europe as refugees (*lāji'īn*). Haytham, who was already living in Greece without papers, joined a group of Syrian refugees and reached Germany. When his asylum claim was denied, he married a German woman, as his Facebook page shows.

The 'Abid Ghbonton claim not to resort to the sea route because "they don't know how to", which, however, sounds improbable, given the large number of fishermen in the village, its proximity to the sea, and the high percentage of 'Abid Ghbonton working on the island of Djerba and in the fish industry. Rather, emigration from southern Tunisia has strict "selection at the exit"[28], selecting those on the other side of the ethnic boundary, often *'aḥrār*. *Harga* is expensive, and 'Abid Ghbonton lack the social network which can sustain them once in Europe. When asked, a general mistrust of the sea emerges, probably because they only recently became fishermen, and were once living in the desert as herders and had little contact with the sea. In general, the possibilities of leaving Tunisia by sea or through legal ways are difficult for every stratum of the population, but they seem to be less available to the weakest social strata in the more marginalised areas. The reasons are several, and can comprise economic and social factors, and the 'Abid Ghbonton are affected by both.

However, Gosbah's inhabitants have found their own emigration patterns, which mainly involve marrying foreign women. The whole country is full of

stories of foreign women seduced and abandoned, or "used", with the aim of getting a European passport, who are mockingly called "passports with blue eyes".

Collecting the stories of young, newly-married 'Abid Ghbonton men who emigrate following their German or French brides, I delved into a world of desperation and alcoholism on the men's side. I have to admit, however, that I have never spoken to their female counterparts. The intrinsic institutional asymmetry embodied in these marriages, the severance of their ties with Gosbah, particularly the interruption of pre-existing romantic relations with 'Abid Ghbonton girls, harsh migratory trajectories, and the short life of these unions with foreign women, create poignant situations of loneliness and marginalisation.

Samy, a forty-year-old man from Gosbah, now lives in Germany, but when he was young he dreamt of studying languages and staying in Tunisia, maybe working in the tourist sector. Coming back from a period studying in Germany, he was arrested at the airport, probably because he had spent a short vacation in Syria. In the 1990's, Ben Ali's paranoia regarding possible conspiracies amongst the Islamic movements translated into a systematic crackdown on their supporters, with torture and human rights abuse as the main tools of the regime (Wolf 2017, p. 73). Samy never spoke about it with anyone, but his brothers suspect that he was «heavily tortured»[29]. As soon as he got a job in Djerba, moreover, his employer received a letter from the government which advised him not to hire him, probably because of his criminal records. Frantic and hopeless, he decided to move out of his country, and followed a German lady he met in Djerba in the 1990's.

From then onwards, his family received little information about him, which was, however, reassuring: he got married, had two children, found a job. His brothers were, however, not convinced, because he never came back to Tunisia, and the only time one of his brothers went to Germany, he refused to meet him at such short notice. On another occasion, he was warned in time and the two brothers met, but Samy showed up with neither wife nor children, claiming that they had other things to do. However, he has always sent money home to help his family, especially his sisters.

With the proliferation of Facebook, his brothers discovered that he was divorced and highly probably had no children, and he did not come back to Gosbah for fear of disappointing his relatives, especially his mother, with the truth. His Facebook page is an ongoing nostalgic hymn to Tunisia, its

food, and its traditions, and the few pictures of himself show him with different women, but often alone, drinking. The gap between expectations and reality around the *harga* is often hidden by the migrants themselves, who perpetuate images of effortless wealth combined with the maintenance of their homeland's values and lifestyles, and this is more than often very far from the truth. Migrants trigger jealousy, which pushes others to undertake the *harga* (Zagaria 2019, p. 65).

In reality, for the 'Abid Ghbonton, the possibility of crossing the ethnic boundary exists, but comes at a high cost, often implying the severance of all ties with the community of origin. The category someone belongs to is, in fact, hardly questioned as long as mobility happens within the southern region of Mednine. Lines of emancipation and migratory trajectories divide segments of the same community and allow individuals to reduce or to overcome the categorical inequality they inhabit, but the reduction at the individual has little impact, as categories must change as a whole in order to achieve equality and full emancipation (Lecocq, Hahonou 2015, p. 184).

2016 demonstrations

In Gosbah «in 2011, little, if anything, moved»[30]. The uprisings which shook the country and led to the fall of former President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011 did not find many supporters in the southern-east region of Mednine. The south has historically been mistrustful of the central government, feeling a sense of being neglected and experiencing the lack of investment in infrastructure as a profound injustice.

During the independence period, the south coalesced around the figure of Salah Ben Youssef (1907-1961), who was secretary-general of Neo-Destour, the party led by Habib Bourguiba during the anti-colonial fight. Hailing from Djerba, he gathered substantial popular support in the region of Mednine, which emerged during the Constituent Assembly elections held in March 20th, 1956. Feeling threatened by his pan-Arab opponents (which included Salah Ben Youssef, as this was his tendency within the party), as soon as he was elected president, Habib Bourguiba found over a hundred activists guilty of plotting against him. Among them, he executed eight from Mednine and personally ordered the execution of Salah Ben Youssef while the latter was in Germany (Wolf 2017, p. 25).

The 'Abid Ghbonton, although deeply respecting the political authority of Habib Bourguiba, sided with Youssef in 1955, when they sent a delegation to meet him (Jouily 1994, p. 101). He still occupies a place in their memories and discourses, and is still quoted as the reason why the north betrayed them: «We, in the South, we were for Youssef, we respect him»[31].

The sense of being neglected by the central state accompanied them in the following decades, when a systematic lack of investment created a profound gap between the north, along with the coastal cities, and the south or the inland, a phenomenon dubbed "coastalisation" by scholars (Clancy-Smith 2014). Therefore, the outburst of demonstrations in Mednine in January 2016[32] was welcomed with astonishment by the local population. The clashes were triggered by the murder of a young man in Kasserine, Ridha Yahyaoui[33], and riots spread like wildfire. The border region with Libya has always been a hotspot for the police, since it lives on illegal activities like smuggling, and it reacted very violently to the attempts by the government to get them under control[34], but these January protests were something new, and had a political agenda.

The young men channelled their anger over the high unemployment rate and the high cost of living into violent, politically immature demands, because in the end «they [went from Gosbah to Mednine] to ask for their rights, but they are not politically trained»[35]. The protests degenerated into raids on supermarkets, theft of food, and petty crimes, which were soon suppressed violently by the police. Young men from Gosbah spoke of a "second revolution", but their dreams were shattered very soon by the harsh suppression. The community, especially the women, sided with them, because the increases in the price of staple products and in unemployment were regarded as "unbearable" and dominated their discourses of that period. «It is right to break shop windows if one is hungry! Poor people (*fuqār*) are right! Of course breaking in is forbidden (haram), but if I was there, I would do it as well»[36], and «You see it, how much do diapers cost? How much was a potato before the revolution (*thawra*)? »[37]. Women did not take part in the fights. Moreover, as a strategy to find a job, many young men in Gosbah had recently decided to join the army, and the protests were soon abandoned.

The 2016 January clashes took place in Mednine, because, according to my informants, the 'Abid Ghbonton would not have dared to protest in Gosbah or in Sidi Makhlouf. Obviously, for them, Mednine represents the

institutions, with many demonstrations targeting public buildings such as the city hall or government offices. However, the minor disorder that occurred in Sidi Makhlouf («a few kids burning some tyres, just to avoid going to school»[38], according to a teacher at the high school) did not entail the participation of the 'Abid Ghbonton. When challenged on the reason, they answered: «Even if ready and trained for democracy, kids in Gosbah do not do politics», and «We don't care. Women here do not even know how to vote»[39]. But then, 'Abid Ghbonton men went as far as Mednine to protest.

At a national level, the 'Abid Ghbonton unite with southern Tunisian tribes, because «we are all a big tribe, the same»[40], but then, when it comes to local representation of their lineage, they know that they cannot maintain this stance at a community level because other tribes – mainly *'aḥrār* tribes – prevent them being appointed to any political position at the local level. The following conversation took place between me and one of Gosbah's blacksmiths, Samir:

> Samir: The state has never helped us [the 'Abid Ghbonton]. They should have backed our requests to have a black deputy in this area.
> Marta: Who doesn't let you have a black delegate?
> Samir: They, the other tribes. Once a black man was elected governor of the Governorate of Tataouine. They did all they could to remove him from office.[41]

In this general climate of distrust of authorities, and given the profound regional cleavages, it is not surprising that the 'Abid Ghbonton found it difficult to build bonds of solidarity with black rights activists, who represent a middle-class urban identity. However, apart from the cultural divide, the activists did not understand the social cleavages which carved ethnic boundaries between the 'Abid Ghbonton and other lineages racialised as "white" – the *'aḥrār*. The difficulties of finding a common language and common goals were, in fact, based on overlooking the ethnic boundaries, and exacerbated by the use of a racial "black" and "white" divide by the activists. At a deeper level, the misunderstanding rests upon the neglect of the historical and diachronic development of ideas of race and ethnicity in southern Tunisia, and upon the borrowing of an exogenous racial framework – coming from the Euro-American world.

Ben Ali turned everything the same colour, *mauve*[1].

The 'Abid Ghbonton and black rights activists

Well before 2011, racism against "black" people was questioned in some online letters and articles, but it was not until 2015 that Gosbah gained prominence at a national level, with Maha Abdelhamid's open letter to the Tunisian parliament[2]. To tell the truth, however, the 'Abid Ghbonton were already in touch with Tunis-based activists before 2015, after the documentary "'Abid Ghbonton" was filmed by Ramzi Béjaoui in 2012, although, following its quick withdrawal from the internet, it soon became yesterday's news. Moreover, a commemoration of the abolition of slavery was organised by M'nemty[3] on January 23rd, 2015, in the House of Culture Ibn Rachik, in Tunis. During this event, a short documentary was played, which had been filmed in Gosbah some time before. Evidently, M'nemty and the 'Abid Ghbonton had already been in touch before 2015. I did not know the people who were interviewed, and, since nobody in my *'arsh* knew anything about it, I inferred that the 'Abid Ghbonton who appeared there belonged to another tribe. Challenged by the journalists, they complained about the lack of infrastructure and services in Gosbah, and about the fact that no journalists had ever reported their situation to the Tunisian public. The documentary then moved on to filming the queue for the doctor, who comes once a week to the small *infirmerie* (infirmary), which is equipped to deal with minor injuries. The whole portrayal of Gosbah showed a needy and under-resourced village, and its inhabitants as poor, emaciated, and ill-clad. This narration is still a major theme in their discourses, and goes along with the "institutional apartheid" established by the "whites in Sidi Makhlouf". During a speech on January 23rd, Saadia Mosbah, prominent black rights activist[4], claimed:

> in Gosbah, school pupils are forced to take different buses, one for blacks and one for whites. On March 21st, the International Day for the Elimination of

Racial Discrimination, we will go to Gosbah (…) and we will put black kids on the whites' buses.[5]

In 2015, therefore, relations between the blacks rights activists and the 'Abid Ghbotnon became confrontational, when Gosbah gained national coverage in the media and a direct encounter between the activists and the community could not be avoided any longer. The two activists in Gosbah, Mehdi and Youssef, were already communicating with M'nemnty and ADAM on online platforms and Facebook pages, and collaborated to organise a march in Sidi Makhlouf to fight against racial discrimination. Taking advantage of the fact that the World Social Forum held in Tunis in March 2015, in fact, M'nemty called for a march in the neighbouring city of Sidi Makhlouf. The date, March 21st, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, was chosen to «bring to the fore the problem of the enduring discrimination present in Gosbah»[6]. However, the participation of the 'Abid Ghbonton in the march was close to zero.

At the time of the march, I had already settled in Gosbah, and I witnessed M'nemty's march and the 'Abid Ghbonton's rejection of it. The *'umda* (chief of the *'imāda* of Gosbah, a role not unlike that of a mayor) Khaled Niri, went as far as claiming that «there is no problem of racism; the story of the buses is completely unfounded»[7], and even the main anti-racism activists of Gosbah spurned the event.

Almost a year after the march, the two activists tried to mobilise Gosbah's youth in different ways. According to them, the 'Abid Ghbonton's non-participation in the march could be blamed on their fear of reprisals by the *'aḥrār* in Sidi Makhlouf. They were, as far as the activists understood, afraid or ashamed to speak about the racial discrimination they suffered daily. However, according to the two activists from Gosbah, carrying on the fight against racism was essential, and other strategies had to be devised to mobilise Gosbah's youth. Mehdi, therefore, tried to shift the focus from racism to unemployment, one of the biggest concerns in Gosbah, particularly in the light of the recent protests that had occurred in January 2016.

In the same month, Mehdi gathered some young people together in a café in Gosbah. He organised a meeting with some journalists from Al Jazeera, who were reporting on racism in Tunisia, and who had previously got in touch with me, as well. The documentary which came out from that[8] portrayed Gosbah only superficially, because the journalists did not manage to

find a way into the community. Mehdi, in fact, concealed the true intentions of the Al Jazeera journalists because he knew that the ʿAbid Ghbonton would reject them. He therefore organised a meeting in Gosbah to talk about unemployment. The journalists I spoke to on the phone had a detailed plan: to go from Gosbah to Zarzis, then Djerba, and film some scenes about the «black community and racism»[9]. Even though Mehdi managed to gather some young people from Gosbah in the café, the meeting did not take place, because the journalists were late and the ʿAbid Ghbonton left in the late afternoon.

Around eleven young people showed up at the meeting, hoping that something about jobs would come out. They were *tuwāyma* and *khaḍḍāra*, both boys and girls, but no *nuwājī* members came, and they even answered Mehdi rudely on the phone, because he was «putting pressure on them»[10]. The young people appeared profoundly disappointed and frustrated by the meeting, because the journalists did not come, and Mehdi came out with the racism issue again, while they were expecting some concrete job opportunities. «He is a fanatic. He wants to impose his views on us. I am sure he does not get along with these journalists, either»[11] and «we are not afraid of foreign journalists but of Tunisian journalists, who do like Photoshop [who put words in our mouths] »[12]. «Racism is everywhere. Do they think it is unusual in Tunisia? Why don't they look at England [although Al Jazeera is a well-known Qatari broadcaster, the documentary was an "Al Jazeera English" initiative, and the journalist interviewing the ʿAbid Ghbonton was English]? They have racism there too! »[13] and «racism is worldwide»[14].

From their side, the Al Jazeera journalists were hasty and superficial, and misunderstood the dynamics going on in Gosbah. The documentary opened with the problem of racism in Tunisia, with these words: «and in the South of the country, we found evidence of racial segregation that was disturbingly reminiscent of apartheid»[15]. The discourse on apartheid had already been introduced, by Maha Abdelhamid in her 2015 letter to the Parliament: «*la Gosba, un cas d'apartheid tunisien*»[16] ("Gosbah, a case of Tunisian apartheid"), and in many conversations I had personally with Saadia Mosbah. The case that there was apartheid in Gosbah was justified mainly by the issue of the segregated buses.

Some years ago, the municipality in Sidi Makhlouf decided that buses coming from the rural *ʿimādāt* (sectors), that is not only Gosbah but also Drujj and Ragouba, inhabited by the *ʾaḥrār* Ghbonton, had to be split into

two, one coming from Gosbah and one from other *'aḥrār* neighbourhoods. These buses took pupils every morning to the high school in Sidi Makhlouf, the only institute in the whole district. According to Chaker, my informant, the incident was triggered by some Gosbah pupils who behaved rudely on the bus, and the *'aḥrār* Ghbonton pupils' parents complained to the municipality. The officials received the formal complaint and established two separate buses, travelling from different quarters.

The story bounced quickly across the social networks after it was discovered and advertised in Maha's letter. Al Jazeera put it in these terms:

> We were heading to Sidi Makhlouf, a town where mostly white Tunisians live. But, as we approached the outskirts, the local police spotted Saadia [Mosbah, the activist who was travelling with them] and stopped the car. After they had detained us for several hours, we were allowed to continue but without Saadia. […] Saadia believed the police had another reason to delay our journey. We'd heard that school children in Sidi Makhlouf were being segregated by colour and forced to travel on separate buses. "Looking at the time, they don't want us to see the buses" [says Saadia]. […] We rushed to film the buses [inside Gosbah], we spotted them and followed at a distance. We have been told one of the buses picks up only white children and the other carries only black children.[17]

After introducing Gosbah and the segregated buses in this way, the speaker goes on to say that what they had seen after following the buses left them appalled, and the camera focuses on the back of a bus where an image advertises two different yogurts, one vanilla-white and one chocolate-brown. The journalist seems to imply that the bus carrying "black" children is somehow marked by the commercial message of a black yogurt. However, the advertisement is very widespread in Tunisia and portrays both yogurts at the same time, and appears on many buses nationwide.

Afterwards, Al Jazeera journalists, in order to understand how the segregated buses came about, met «one of the very few mixed couples in Gosbah, an overwhelmingly black village»[18]. They arrived at the conclusion that Ameur and Soulef's marriage, the "black Romeo and white Juliet" case, «so outraged the people in the surrounding "white" towns, that they insisted "black" and "white" children should travel separately»[19], thus establishing a connection between the two events, supported by Ameur's words: «Because of our marriage, they introduced segregated buses»[20]. The couple even

speaks about the yogurts in the interview: «The bus for white kids only has an advert for white yogurt, but the bus for black kids has one for chocolate yogurt too. They segregated the buses to stop mixed marriages»[21].

Nonetheless, endogamy is a social mechanism which rests upon the century-long histories of slavery in the region and which serves to maintain the ethnic boundary between the *shuwāshīn* and the *'aḥrār*. This particular kind of discourse, that of Tunis' activists, is based on a colour-coded distinction between "blacks" and "whites", where actual colour is a key feature. No further analysis is made of the social groups of southern Tunisia, implying that it is evident to everyone what "black" and "white" refer to in visual terms. However, race in Gosbah is something elusive to a foreigner's eye. Even the "mixed couple" colour distinction appears very blurred.

On their side, the 'Abid Ghbonton claimed: «Here colour is not the only problem. We have many other problems and racism can also take other forms: regional, tribal»[22].

To introduce the activists' discourse, however, we need to introduce first the background of black rights associations and their development after 2011.

The category of "black" Tunisians

Tunisia's pre-revolutionary homogenisation of society left room for a post-revolutionary activism which tends to lump together many different actors by the marker of phenotype, and thus to essentialise the category of "blackness", and thus to misunderstand long-standing historical trajectories. As activists often tend to build categories from within (Tilly 1998, p. 67), black rights activists in Tunisia downplayed cross-cutting lines within the category of "black Tunisians" in order to build a «categorically defined network» (Tilly 1998, p. 67) and «speak authoritatively for the whole» (Tilly 1998, p. 67). The creation of the category rests upon the adoption of an exogenous racial framework, mainly stemming from Western historical experiences. The essentialisation of a "black minority" is the result of the Western-based racial theoretical constellation, which is more rigorously phenotype-based, epitomised by the term *race*.

In my interviews with the activists, the presence of "black" people was implied and everybody seemed to agree on what racism is. It is, in the activists'

words, a kind of diffused «institutional»[23] discrimination against specific individuals, which pervades the Tunisian civil society but percolates from the institutions and allows racist structures to be perpetuated. Implied in their outcry, the concept of racism in Tunisia rests on an implicit or explicit reference to physical appearance or biology, and essentialises certain characteristics embodied in "black" people, which are accorded cultural, moral, social, religious, and even political meanings. The "black" community is, for them, a trans-regional and national community, bearer of homogeneous characteristics and subject to a common experience of racist discrimination.

And indeed, the more I interviewed dark-skinned people, in Tunis or elsewhere, the more I managed to collect personal stories of everyday discrimination and racism, which were reported by people socially defined as "blacks". However, "blackness" seemed to be a more fluid and slippery concept which rested upon social perceptions rather than tangible, measurable markers. The first problem I encountered, in fact, was the difficulty – for me – to distinguish "black" from "white" people, while Tunisians were perfectly at ease in identifying *kaḥlūsh* (blackie), *'asmar* (brown-skinned), *iswid* ("black"), from *'abyaḍ* ("white"). Skin colour did not seem to be the only physical marker Tunisians resorted to: when Moncef Marzouki, the fourth Tunisian president (2011-2014), was defeated by the subsequent president, Beji Caid Essebsi, in the presidential election in December 2014, many Tunisians called him a "black man". In response to my puzzlement, they told me that « [he might be] not black black, but you see it from his nose, flat and large»[24]. It is particularly ironic that Moncef Marzouki, identified as "black" by the Tunisian population and with a large appeal and consensus amidst the "black" southern population, stated that «Tunisian people are homogeneous, without minorities»[25].

Slavery is present in the activists' discourse as an historical past event which left the "black" community suffering from an «anachronism» (Rossi 2009, p. 314), in the form of searing insults such as *'abid* or *waṣīf*. These are currently being denounced by activists[26], along with other terms which are deeply offensive, such as *qirda* ("monkey", pronounced "girda" in Tunisian Arabic) or *mumassakh* ("dirty"), among others[27].

Nowadays, "black" Tunisians are estimated at 10-15% of the population. Black rights activists consider these numbers to be too low, but, since the ethnic composition of Tunisia's population has never been addressed by the INS (Institut National de la Statistique)[28], we must assume that these guess-

es are biased. Some ballpark figures are present in the literature but have not been updated. Leon Carl Brown (1967), for example, quotes Robert Capot-Rey's *Le Sahara français* and claims that in the 1950's a quarter of the population of the region of Djerid[29] in southern Tunisia was made up of "blacks" (Brown 1967, p. 479), but the south has higher percentages of people racialised as "blacks".

The absence of official statistics is due to precise reasons which are to be found in the pre-revolutionary, nation-building period.

The nation-building process

In the post-independence period, marked by the presidencies of Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987) and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011), the absence of official statistics was the result of a deliberate political choice and strategy: counting people and measuring diversity meant creating it, and inoculating it with political meanings. Labelling individuals as "blacks" meant, on the one hand, ascribing them an involuntary identity; on the other hand, it meant acknowledging their presence and, consequently, their problems. Therefore, when post-2011 activists took on the challenge of coming out as supporters of black rights, they had to construct a category of "blacks", because its existence had been previously denied.

In their public speeches and online articles, black rights activists had to disentangle several thorny historical issues, one of them being the silencing of ethnic minorities before 2011. The Republic in Tunisia was founded in July 1957, when the constituent assembly voted to abolish the office of the Bey and bestowed the Bey's legislative and executive powers on the president, Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987) (Perkins 2004, p. 132). Throughout all the North African countries, Maghrebian post-independence leaders drew legitimacy from their anti-colonial stance, and built the newly-born republics by fighting against their colonial past (Melfa 2016, p. 493). Whereas the colonial powers were Christian, the newly-formed Tunisia built its legitimacy on Islam, and while the colonisers were European, Tunisians had to be Arabs.

Through a "tunisification" («*taounasa*», Pouessel 2012a, p. 151) of the state apparatus, Bourguiba promoted the modernisation of the country. In a context where the unity of the Tunisian population was considered a paramount political goal, in order to progress towards a fight against "backward-

ness", Arab ethnicity and language were portrayed as the only admissible form of belonging, whereas ethnic pluralism was denied institutionally and politically, along with any other form of alterity. During the pre-revolutionary period, "blackness" was not officially recognised as a form of diversity or as a separate identity, and the «official policy of denial» (for the Middle East: Kumaraswamy 2003, p. 249) regarding all minorities was facilitated by the cultural, linguistic, and religious uniformity of Tunisians, whatever their skin tone was.

This trend was shared by most North African countries (for Algeria: Blin 1988) which also underwent a post-independence nation-building process, following pan-Arab nationalist ideologies first promoted by Egyptian president Gamal Abd-el Nasser (1956-1970).

Not all minorities were stifled in the same way, though, which reveals how some minorities were considered more rabble-rousing than others. Religious and political minorities were the most persecuted. Bourguiba's successor, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, launched a fierce campaign against Islamist movements (Wolf 2017, p. 66), supporting his international political and strategical alignment with the US government, which adopted Morocco and Tunisia as beachheads to the Middle East, especially after the international fight against Islamic terrorism was launched after 9/11 (the terrorist attacks of 11th September, 2001). Yet Tunisian society, feeling a kind of detachment from the state and from its policies, revealed its own strength in the form of a clandestine Islamist political movement, which managed to flourish despite continuous and harsh repression, and resulted in today's political party, Ennahda (Christie, Masad 2013; Merone, Cavatorta 2013; Perkins 2013).

Minorities experienced a different degree of recognition, too: even if "blacks" were not considered as bearing specific traits, Berbers were soon recognised as a minority and the repression they endured became less severe. Although the Berber language was frowned upon (in Libya, for example, Berber people's names were banned[30]), Berbers held a sort of fascination which was exploited for touristic purposes (Pouessel 2012a, p. 145).

The official policy of denial percolated to civil society and was adopted by Tunisian citizens, who, on the one side, verbally denied any difference between "blacks" and "whites", but on the other, perpetrated covertly racist and discriminatory acts, targeting citizens with a swarthy skin colour. "Blacks" themselves did not resort to shared identity coordinates to mobilise or cooperate, even though, in the words of activist Maha Abdelhamid,

«of course we spoke about racism, at home, amongst ourselves, but it was a taboo: we could not speak about it [openly]»[31]. Enduring racist attacks and the feeling of social inferiority were the elements that "black" Tunisians shared.

This trend was mirrored in the public educational and cultural sectors. Although Tunisia was recognised to be "plural" ("*mosaïque*" in school books and curricula), history was always conjugated in the past tense, and Africa was absent from the «possible identitarian horizons of Tunisia» (Abassi 2000-2001, p. 150). Nowadays, even though state schools can choose to include historical multiculturalism and the trans-Saharan slave trade in their curricula, these are treated as outdated issues which, most importantly, have no present-day outcome or consequence. Driss Abassi (2000-2001) demonstrates how pre-revolutionary history books used in the *cycle primaire* (primary school) and the *lycée* (high school) moulded specific ideas of nation, identity, patriotism, and national history, shaping the collective memory of Tunisians. Images of "blacks" or slavery used to find no place in school books, exhibitions, or museums: the Museum of Folklore and Popular Art in Djerba, one of the places where slavery proved extremely enduring, relegates images of swarthy individuals to menial jobs (preparation for weddings), but does not include them in the "minorities" section, where Ibadi Berbers and Jews are represented; slavery is only briefly contemplated in the historical section[32]. According to the custodian, «There is no need, since blacks and whites are the same»[33], meaning that blackness is commonly perceived as a past phenomenon, which arose and declined with slavery.

Through a focus on Tunisia's glorious Punic past, even today pupils are led to develop strong patriotic feelings and to be proud to be part of the Arab world and of the Arab-Islamic civilisation, thus shaping an Arab/Mediterranean identity and sense of belonging, an historical «Mediterranean paradigm» (Abassi 2000-2001, p. 149).

The emphasis on cultural, religious, and ethno-linguistic homogeneity went along with the «unanimity myth» (Melfa 2016, p. 499, my translation from Italian), implemented by a repressive one-party government. No serious dissent was brooked, and inevitably the oppressive system, mellowed by a façade of «*pluralisme contrôlé*» ("controlled pluralism", Perkins 2004, p. 209), excluded some from its fold. The denial strategy was then operating at a national-political level and served the government's repressive policy,

which suppressed the voices of "black" Tunisians, who ended up on the social periphery.

During Bourguiba's era, the president's fight for modernisation and progress entailed a high degree of mobilisation: society was actively courted to participate in political affairs, obviously always through the medium of a one-party system. Mobilisation along sectarian lines, inherently autonomous and thus surreptitiously seditious, was to be curbed. Since 2011, activists have undertaken the task of redressing the official historiography and hagiography, highlighting what had been concealed and interpreting what had been emphasised by the previous regime. One of the historical tangles that is currently being tackled by black rights associations is Bourguiba's stance towards "black" minorities, as well as Tunisia's identitarian ties with the African continent. Bourguiba is a yardstick in the historical reconstruction of Tunisians' identity, being the *père fondateur* (literally "founding father") of the nation. His widespread literacy programme is highly valued by Maha, for example, who admits that

> Despite all of this [Bourguiba's denial of a black minority], I cannot criticise Bourguiba's policy in its entirety, because, to a large extent, I would not have been able to write this piece if it were not for his policy of democratising education[34].

In parallel with his nation-building process, Bourguiba is considered one of the fathers of the *francophonie* (the quality of being French-speaking, which binds alliances between France and its ex-colonies) along with former Senegalese President Leopold Senghor (1960-1980), with whom he built strong diplomatic ties and a personal friendship (for an overview on the *francophonie*, see Holter, Skattum 2008). Bourguiba's policies did not, therefore, completely disown the ties of identity between Tunisia and Africa. However, he was reported to have claimed that his Senegalese counterpart was a very smart and educated man who had to be looked up to as a «white man with black skin»[35], corroborating the common perception of "blacks" as scarcely educated and lacking intelligence and ability. Bourguiba is accused by activists of being racist:

[Bourguiba] was influenced by Ibn Khaldun, who portrayed blacks degradingly, similar to the way colonial anthropology portrayed black Africans, who were seen as "beasts" lacking human intelligence.[36]

Undeniably, Bourguiba left little political space for "black" Tunisians, excluding them from all his development projects, speeches, and political activities. This will not be surprising, given his official policy of denial: being unrecognised, "black" Tunisians could not be the targets of empowerment policies. However, the almost complete absence of "black" politicians indicates both their lack of social mobility and the pervasive nature of the governmental policies which permeated Tunisian society with a ubiquitous racist attitude. Tayeb Sahbani, Bourguiba's only "black" minister, was reportedly a victim of racist acts[37].

Recently, the case of Slim Merzoug, dubbed "General Slim", was dug up by black rights activists, in 2011[38]. After completing his studies in Paris, Slim, a "black" Tunisian, came back to Tunis in the 1960's, and was offered a diplomatic post in sub-Saharan Africa by Bourguiba with these words: «I'm sending you as an ambassador to a country in sub-Saharan Africa, so you will be fine among your people»[39]. Contemptuously refusing, Merzoug moved to his hometown, Gabes, in South Tunisia, and attempted to organise a black movement in Gabes and neighbouring towns (Arram, Mdou), with the ultimate aim of gaining political visibility and representation. Bourguiba soon interned him in the Razi psychiatric hospital, in Manouba, where he remained confined until his death in 2001 (Abdelhamid, Elfargi, and Elwaer 2017, p. 32).

Bourguiba's perception of Tunisia's "black" community continued a widespread North African paradigm: despite centuries of the absorption of "black" slaves and "black" free individuals into Tunisian society, and despite their cultural, linguistic, and religious uniformity, he still perceived them as exogenous.

The image of a homogeneous, peaceful and stable Tunisia aimed at maintaining international political alignment and at attracting massive numbers of visitors in the touristic sector was promoted under Ben Ali. Under his government (1987-2011), no other notable changes occurred regarding black rights. Indeed, no "black" delegate was elected to the Parliament, and the electoral behaviour of slave descendant communities in the southern

rural periphery remained characterised by a deep distrust of politics and by the feeling of being disregarded by the central state.

However, according to anthropologist Stéphanie Pouessel (2012a), the harsh repression of Islamist movements under Ben Ali's government led to a timid reconciliation with the African roots of the country. As a matter of fact, in order to move away from economic and political ties with the Gulf countries, worryingly perceived as supporting Islamist movements, Ben Ali timidly shifted diplomatic and political alliances towards sub-Saharan Africa. This trend was reflected in the cultural and economic sectors. The introduction of sub-Saharan movies into one of the biggest Tunisian festivals, the Journée Cinématographique de Carthage (JCC, or Carthage Film Festival), was considered a novelty but was nonetheless always funnelled through Tunisia's "Afro-Roman roots". A JCC playbill in 2012 portrayed a "black" girl wearing an earring shaped like Tanit, a Berber Punic Carthaginian goddess and a national symbol emblazoned on billboards and in company brands.

JCC boarding staff were accused of adopting an anti-nationalist stance with the choice of a "black" Tunisian as the JCC emblem. The perception of "blacks" as exogenous, and thus non-Tunisian, remained ingrained as a legacy of slavery, and popular thinking associated "black" skin with the status of «geo-cultural outsiders» (Jankowsky 2010, p. 17).

In conclusion, the debate on black rights predates 2011. At the same time, the pre-revolutionary Tunisian state, however strong, showed many contradictions which, to the careful observer, predicted its collapse. Its inability to encompass different ethnicities was in fact prophetically pointed out by some scholarly work: P. R. Kumaraswamy (2003), in fact, foresaw that most of the troubles Middle Eastern countries were about to face came from their minorities, because «most of the post-Ottoman states [were] yet to evolve a national identity that would encompass and reflect their multi-ethnic social composition» (Kumaraswamy 2003, p. 244).

After 2011: rise and development of black rights activism

The so-called "Arab Spring", which began in late 2010 with Tunisia as its epicentre, was a major game changer. Triggered by the self-immolation of street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi (1984-2011), popular demonstrations

overthrew former dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, who fled the country for Saudi Arabia on January 14th, 2011. The change was historic, first because the domino effect led to the collapse of other Arab authoritarian governments, and secondly because it took Tunisian society by storm, spreading a profound optimism about social and political change. «While the uprisings took place in response to economic hardships and political repression, discussions in the legislature quickly centred on identity topics, particularly the role of Islam in society» (Wolf 2017, p. 130), but also on minorities' rights. Therefore, issues which were considered taboo and thus avoided in public and media debates came to the fore, so that citizens (especially activists) ventured to speak about them publicly. Racism and racial discrimination were among them.

In 2011 Pandora's box was opened, and civil society proved ready to put minorities' rights on the political and social agenda: «[from] the time of societal 'equality' under the rule of Ben Ali, until the time of the post-revolution [when] we only saw colour»[40]. Associations committed to the eradication of racism and racist discrimination emerged for the first time, in a climate where associationism was thriving throughout Tunisia, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Nonetheless, the emergence of associations in Tunisia did not occur in a vacuum, but was anticipated by political and economic events such as the strengthening of civil society and the readjustment of socio-economic disparities. Associationism, moreover, was also common before 2011, but was controlled and co-opted by the medium of the ruling party (RCD, Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique), whereas dangerously seditious individuals were openly banned from promoting their views.

Before 2011, some isolated individuals (especially outstanding "black" public figures, who could leverage their famous profiles to speak their minds) were already addressing racism in their public speeches, interviews, and performances. One of the most renowned "black" musicians, Salah Mosbah, frequently brought the issue of racism to the fore, complaining of having been discriminated against or "exoticised" because of his skin colour[41]. Salah took part in the demonstrations in front of the Ministry of Interior in January 2011, to ask for Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali to step down. He is reported to have been arrested, subjected to harsh beatings, and then released. However, this event was allegedly pushed to the background by the press, which preferred giving prominence to "white" activists[42]. He prompt-

ly denounced the racist attitude of the media and of Tunisian society in his songs[43], but was often accused of being «paranoid», of «suffering with a minority complex», and of being «arrogant»[44].

After the Tunisian weekly online newspaper *Jeune Afrique* devoted two special issues in 2004 to the topic of racism in North Africa[45], a "black" Tunisian dancer, Afet Mosbah, published an open letter of denouncement in 2004[46], when dissent against the government was still limited to some isolated and harshly repressed uprisings in the south and the interior. Her letter, which appeared on the website of *Jeune Afrique*, and spread quickly on social networks and blogs, was signed by the dancer, who was residing in France. It denounced racism and racist discrimination in her own country, triggering a lively debate.

Shortly before 2011, discussion platforms and groups appeared on the internet, and raised questions and debates on racism and racist discrimination, and eventually paved the way for the embryonic yet lively political activism which emerged rapidly after the popular uprising in 2011. «In 2011 we wrote the first page» says Maha[47], meaning that many others are yet to come.

The "Arab Spring" eventually opened the discussion on racism and made various "black" people come out and denounce the reality of the discrimination they were suffering. An outraged audience challenged Moncef Ben Mrad, a journalist, who overtly used the word *waṣīf* on Hannibal TV in February 2011[48]. In April of the same year, a Facebook group appeared (*Assurance de la citoyenneté sans discrimination de couleurs*[49]) and an article titled *Un minister tunisien noir? Yes we can? No we don't want one!*[50] pointed out how social and political mobilisation of "black" Tunisians had been an ongoing process well before 2011.

The Facebook page *Assurance de la citoyenneté sans discrimination de couleurs,* which is still active (in September 2019, it had 1,096 members), was soon joined by other social network groups, such as *Les Noirs en Tunisie*[51], *Je suis fière d'être black*[52], *Témoignages pour dénoncer la discrimination de couleurs*[53], and many more. These groups, and social networks in general, played a paramount role in putting the activists living in the north in touch with communities of slave descendants in the south, such as the 'Abid Ghbonton.

The first Tunisian association against racism and racial discrimination, ADAM, was established in May 2012. Its inauguration party at the House

of Culture Ibn Khaldoun, in Tunis, was attended by several scholars working on slavery[54]. The online website states that ADAM was founded for the equality and development of "black" Tunisians, and that among its goals are listed as: the defence of the principles of justice, equality and tolerance between all the individuals and sections of society, the fight against all forms of segregation, discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion, and the support, in partnership with the official structures and the organisations of civil society, of the rights of the "black" minority on legal, economic, cultural, and social levels[55].

Among their numerous activities, ADAM have been particularly focused on promoting campaigns and writing open letters to political institutions. At that time, the post-2011 assembly was drafting a new constitution (*dustūr*), and that offered many possibilities for incorporating laws penalising racist acts and behaviour.

A leading figure in the fight against racial discrimination, Saadia Mosbah, who was a charismatic flight assistant from Bardo, Tunis, withdrew from ADAM before it was established, and founded another association, M'nemty, in 2013[56]. ADAM and M'nemty worked together and with other individual activists. They signed a letter asking the Presidency to declare the 23rd January a national day for celebrating the abolition of slavery in Tunisia[57], and it was declared a national celebration in 2019.

2013 was also the year that Tunis first hosted the World Social Forum, which was then followed by another set of conferences and meetings in 2015. Activism for black rights experienced a shift during the 2013 forum, when it made contact with international associations. The «biggest roundup of civil society […] engaged in social development, Fair Trade economy, environmental issues, human rights, democratisation…»[58] was a stage for ADAM, who could organise talks and build alliances with overseas anti-racist organisations, mainly US-based or Brazilian ones[59]. 2013 marked a shift not only in the internationalisation of the movements, but also because the associations took the political struggle to another level, trying to co-opt other parts of the country (the south and the interior) and other strata of civil society.

At the same time as the fresh impulse linked to the establishment of M'nemty, in 2013 a march was organised with the aim of connecting the north to the south[60]. However, this march, which anticipated the 2015 one heading to Gosbah, showed how popular support was shallow, and how

black rights activism was not yet integrated at all over the country. Civil society in the south, in fact, boycotted the march, and media coverage was close to zero[61]. Turnout in Sfax was higher than in Gabes[62], where the regional branch of the Tunisian League for Human Rights boycotted the event[63]. The real success, however, occurred in Tunis, where the march ended up at the Constituent Assembly in Bardo. The organisers were received by some delegates and the Director of the Office of the Ministry of Justice in charge of Human Rights, and asked for some prompt measures against racism. The officials promised to take the issue into consideration, but there was no follow-up.

To outline the profile of the activists, there was a striking preponderance of women, who were generally well-educated, originally from the south, but mostly residing in Tunis or elsewhere in the North. All the activists and supporters appeared to be highly digitally educated and preferred the internet as a means of communicating. The marked presence of women can be connected to their long-standing commitment to social and political affairs under Habib Bourguiba and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. On Bourguiba's tomb three epithets are engraved: *al-mujāhid al-ʾakbar* (the Supreme Combatant), *bānī al-Tūnis al-jadīda* (the Architect of New Tunisia), and *muḥarar al-mrā* (the Liberator of Women). In the *Code du statut personnel* (Code of Personal Status: a series of laws promulgated in 1956 with the aim of reforming women's and families' rights), Bourguiba enhanced the position of women significantly: they can now benefit from rights that are unthinkable for women in the rest of the Arab region, and in some cases were even accorded sooner than in some European countries. Ben Ali's state feminism, later on, also benefitted secular female activists, although it co-opted them into state-sponsored associations in order to control them.

After 2011, the goals of black rights associations, although varying, show some similarities. Following the creation of a Constituent Assembly and the subsequent debate over the draft of a new constitution, in fact, some emotive themes emerged and were supported by minority groups, such as the introduction of "hate crime", that is a law fighting against racial discrimination, which is a common thread throughout the activists' discourse. «Racism is institutional; therefore we need a response in law» Maha said in the 2015 World Social Forum[64]. Some activists went as far as proposing the introduction of "minority protection rights". The proposal by some

deputies to grant "black" Tunisians specific minority protection rights was scornfully rejected by Saadia Mosbah[65].

Saadia, in fact, stresses the importance of the recognition of full citizenship rights, because they were treated as "second class citizens" in spite of their homogeneity with "white" Tunisians: «We want a beautiful and colourful Tunisia, where everybody is treated the same»[66]. The main concern of many activists is the disempowerment of "black" people, who should obtain the same opportunities and rights as "white" Tunisians, who are accused of perceiving them as exogenous and originating from the outside (*al-barra*). In the first stage of their activism, they focused mainly on "black" Tunisians, while slowly absorbing other elements into their struggles, especially after opening up to international movements in 2013. They made contact with sub-Saharan students residing in Tunis, for example, and "black" refugees fleeing from the 2011 Libyan crisis.

The strategies they intend to deploy to attain their goals are clearly stated on ADAM and M'nemty's websites and strongly emphasise the importance of educating younger generations in fighting against racism. "Black" skin, in their words, is a social construction, and is indissolubly tied to social and educational status. "Blacks" are considered as disempowered because they have less access to secondary education; thus race seems intertwined with the concept of education and consequently socio-economic success in life. «I go to primary schools to teach children what racism is. Once I asked them about colours. How many colours are there? And they told me *'aḥmar* (red), *'akhḍar* (green), *'azraq* (blue), and *waṣīf* (servant)», Saadia told me[67]. "Black" is still popularly associated with a lower level of education, socio-economic inferiority, physical strength, violence, aggressiveness, and laziness, as this denunciation by a "black" young man proves:

I experienced a lot of discrimination when I was younger; now it is better. This was due to the colour of my skin, *foncé* (dark, in French). They would stop when they understood I belonged to the upper-middle class. When I was a kid I fell off my motor-scooter and broke my wrist. I was taken to the public hospital [in Tunis]. I had never been to a public hospital before. I still remember the shock of the smell, the crowd, the dirt. I remember clearly that I refused to eat their food. I called my mother, asking her to bring some food over. I underwent two operations; I still have a plate in my wrist. When I woke up, I could not move my wrist and was still dizzy. I overheard the doctor saying to someone: «This was not supposed to be an articular plate! »

in French. Then they turned my wrist and it was so painful that I screamed in French, «What is happening?! Why shouldn't it be an articular plate?! ». The doctors were amazed and embarrassed. I now know that they were sure that they would not be understood, because they associated my skin colour with a lower level of education and consequently with poor fluency in French. It is like priests, in the past, who spoke an elitist and exclusive language among themselves, Latin. So they had to operate on my wrist again. They couldn't wash their stereotypes out of their minds, because, after the first local anaesthetic did not work, they did another one, in my armpit, and then they proceeded with the operation. I screamed, «Wait! I can still feel pain! » and they downplayed my fears: «Oh, you are young and strong. A solid *kaḥlūsh* [black-ie], you will survive»[68].

At the political level, M'nemty claims to be apolitical[69], meaning that its struggle does not align with any existing Tunisian political party. However, as it is easily imaginable, rights activists never operate «outside of power» (Abu Lughod 2013, p. 173). If before 2011 political representation was denied to "black" Tunisians, in fact, things changed little after the revolution. Only one "black" deputy was elected to the Constituent Assembly, in charge of drafting the new constitution[70]. Bechir Chamam, elected as a member of the Islamist party of Ennahda, however, never spoke overtly about racial discrimination and, when directly challenged by journalists, he claimed that his Islamic upbringing allowed him to get over minor incidents related to cultural backwardness. Later on, when the 2012-elected Troika government[71] was ousted by popular protests triggered by the assassinations of two leftist opposition politicians[72], the 2014 elections saw some "black" deputies being chosen for the Assembly of the Representatives of the People. All of them, according to activists[73], were aligned with Ennahda. Contrary to the newly-born political movements set up by minorities after 2011 (for instance, the left-wing *Union Populaire Républicaine*, created by the Tunisian Jew Jacob Lellouche (Pouessel 2012b), "black" politicians chose right-wing, Islamist movements to express their presence, but not their stances: their agendas did not contemplate any law against racial discrimination. On the other hand, black rights advocates operating in the civil society clearly distance themselves from the "obscurantism of the bearded ones", that is, Islamists[74].

The drivers behind "blacks" being co-opted into the Islamist parties are manifold. First, the regions where "black" people are more numerous are

also the strongholds of Ennahda. Second, in the words of Huda, a "black" journalist, «Ennahda was clever enough to open its arms to everyone, without any discrimination»[75]. It is true that, after 2011, Tunisian civil society withheld support from M'nemty, ADAM, and Aqaliyet (Arabic for "minorities", which was ostracised because of its struggle for homosexuals' rights). The *Femmes Democrats* (ATFD), coming from a long-standing tradition of state-sponsored political mobilisation, accused black rights advocates of suffering from a "minority complex"[76].

The homogenisation of the category of "black" Tunisians

In order to take the struggle against racial discrimination to public spaces and to mobilise popular support, blacks rights activists built a category (Tilly 1998, p. 67) of "blacks" from within. The goal of creating a category is that, «if recognized, [it] enjoys some sort of collective advantage» (Tilly 1998, p. 69). In this case, the advantage consists in legal protection (against racism) and general empowerment of its members. For black rights activists in Tunisia, drawing a line between insiders and outsiders meant identifying certain bodily features – the complexion, along with other minor traits such as hair type – which are indicators of a racial classification at work and of an experienced racism. The experience of racism is, in fact, a common denominator among the members of the "black" community, according to their spokespersons.

And indeed, according to my interlocutors, what kept "black" Tunisians together before the rise of activism was the painful experience of racism: «I complained … to my family. They harass me, they don't want me [to marry their son]. [The harassers] were my neighbours, and nobody cared [outside my family] »[77]. Before 2011, the category was not an explicit one, because racism was subjected to cultural censorship, and «speaking of black and white …was a taboo»[78], as well as a shameful acknowledgment. Before the uprisings, there was nothing like a collective identity as "blacks", unlike other proud ethnic groups such as, for example, Berbers. They were well aware, however, of their physical markers – darker skin being the most important – mainly because they were constantly reminded of it by others. Racism and an ascription from the outside were what made them "black", as a "white" individual would go so far as to state: « [people say] no, there is no racism

in Tunis. If they tell you there is, they are lying. I have friends that are black, and they don't mind when I call them n*gger»[79].

The activists' discourse portrays Tunisians with a darker complexion as a monolithic, solid category which is "fragile and marginalised" and could be targeted by empowering policies *en bloc*, just as "women", "the middle class", or "the poor":

> Most probably, it is not a choice, but rather a voluntary, conscious exclusion that is favoured politically. Bourguiba was clever; he knew that black people are a fragile, marginalised demographic. Despite this, he did not include them in any of his development projects or speeches. Bourguiba stood against tribalism and chauvinism; he supported women, the middle class and the poor in one way or another. Yet, he did not support blacks, even though they are Muslims who speak Tunisian Arabic and despite the fact that he was able to understand the different fabrics of Tunisian society, the nature and mechanisms of racism, and discrimination against blacks.[80]

«Whether descendants of slaves, indigenous peoples or immigrants…»: so starts the well-known article by Maha Abdelhamid, *Black Tunisians historically marginalized*[81], which was translated into English and gained relevance and attention throughout Tunisia and abroad.

Under the category of "blacks", especially after 2013, activists included different actors, such as "black" foreign students, who profited from the scholarship system established by Ben Ali with aligned countries, "black" refugees (former sub-Saharan unskilled manpower, who fled Libya en masse in 2011[82]), and a "visible minority", that is "black" businessmen who came to Tunisia after Ben Ali's neoliberal structural adjustments, and after his economic liberalisation policies attracted sub-Saharan banks (For an analysis of the delocalisation of the BAD – Banque Africaine de Développement – and of its employees to Tunis: Mazzella 2012).

Even though these actors are lumped together through the lens of colour, they can diverge or share much more than relying solely on skin colour would suggest. "Crossing lines", such as institutional, genealogical, economic differences, can divide segments of the same category, so that, for example, some of its members spend «much of their time tending other categories» (Tilly 1998, p. 67) where their "blackness" is secondary or irrelevant. Together with "black" Tunisian Nationals, in fact, the "black" community

appears to include "black" foreign nationals, as well, who share "blackness" as a feature but are at a different socio-economic and institutional level.

Sub-Saharan bankers, for example, identify themselves institutionally, linguistically, and sometimes also religiously as "different" from the Tunisian population. They are labelled "visible" because they have socio-economic power that makes them stand out from the crowds of Tunis, together with their skin colour, and this contrasts sharply with the plethora of metaphors which activists use to define Tunisian "blacks", which pivot around the concept of invisibility. «Paradoxically, they ["black" Tunisians] are quite visible to the eye as they are black among a majority of white people; however, a blind eye is deliberately turned to them, their needs and their rights»[83]. In spite of their insertion into the same homogeneous category of "black" Tunisians by activists, "black" bankers jump out in the eyes of Tunisians as bearers of a conspicuous economic power. A taxi driver once told me:

> I was driving past a black guy in a suit in Lac [Saudi-built quarter, home to various embassies] and I thought, 'Go ahead, make my day! [he thought he was an affluent sub-Saharan ambassador or bank man] but then he said something in *darja* [Tunisian Colloquial Arabic]. *Dommage*! [what a pity] [84].

In spite of their "elitist" nature (Mazzella 2012), however, sub-Saharan businessmen and diplomats have reported being victims of racism, too. They also appear to have misunderstood Tunisia's historically dense phenomena and to think about race differently. After happening to suffer from racist acts and words, they started questioning the condition of "blacks" in Tunisia, coming out in public and in the activists' arena: «I was working as a flight assistant and a sub-Saharan businessman came to me, cagily asking "but if you black Tunisians suffer so much, why don't you go back?" » Saadia told me.

Hailing from totally different backgrounds, "black" sub-Saharan students also participated actively in the debate on black rights in Tunisia, contributing their own ideas on race and ethnicity. Profiting from bilateral agreements on student mobility between Tunisia and sub-Saharan countries, especially French-speaking ones and those in West Africa, they came during Ben Ali's era to study at the universities in Tunis or other big cities. French-rather than Arabic-speakers, with a high concentration of Christians, and with less economic power than businessmen, they suffer a different – and,

at times, worse – form of racism from that targeting "black" Tunisians. They often complain of being denied rented accommodation in the city or of being harassed by official authorities. Mako, a 33-year-old student from Ivory Coast, had his passport stolen before my eyes by the airport attendants during security control. When the police claimed to have found it, they asked him for money to get it back, a sort of tip. He gave them 10 dinars (3.16 Euro), but they complained that it was too little. After I intervened animatedly, the police decided to give him his passport back. Their vulnerable institutional position, due to their reliance on the visa system to be able to reside in the country, makes them even more likely to suffer from racist discrimination than "black" nationals.

Racism against sub-Saharan students came to the fore particularly after February 1, 2015, when the Tunisian national football team was eliminated from the Total African Cup of Nations following a match with Equatorial Guinea, and ASEAT (*Association des Étudiants et Stagiaires Africains*) reported several violent physical attacks on sub-Saharan students on the streets of Tunis and Sfax[85]. Before that, in October 2014, an open letter appeared on Facebook, signed by a Malian student in Tunis, Maria Touré[86], denouncing a distressing everyday reality of verbal and physical abuse, and publicly claiming to even fear for her life[87]. The letter found ample resonance in the social media. Sub-Saharan victims of racism complain that Tunisians lump them together through the medium of phenotype and overlook significant differences between them:

> For the attackers, the nationality of their victims was of little importance. The skin colour was sufficient to define them as a target […] Alassanne, a young Ivorian guy […said,] "I supported the Tunisian team. And, as I left that café, they wanted to rip my clothes off. And I am not an Equatoguinean! Would you attack some Italians for a problem with Finnish people?!"[88]

Black rights activists' discourse

Shifts in theoretical approaches to racial thinking have commonly been linked to sociopolitical pressures in global history (Winant 2000, p. 169), and Tunisia opened up to debates on racial issues following the 2011 uprisings. However, activists drew from a pre-existing debate on race which referred to the North Atlantic – mainly North American – racial constella-

tion, which tends to see race as beginning with European colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century, and being enshrined later, in the nineteenth century, in biology. Racial ideas about "blackness" were indeed informed by Western racial representation, especially in recent times thanks to the vulgarisation of popular "black" artists and activists and by their struggle, as well as by their personal support for movements such as Black Pride.

Firstly, the heavy emphasis on colour, described as the lowest common denominator of an essentialised "black community" in Tunisia, aligns their racial ideas to Western ones.

> Tunisians are brown, black, pink… and that is thanks to genetics! I have two granddaughters, from my daughter, who is dark-skinned. One is blonde, the other *foncée* [dark]. My daughter's mother-in-law once told me: this [the blonde one] is my niece, that [the other one] is yours![89].

Moreover, the choice of the vehicular language – often French – inserts their struggles into international and Western movements, in a country where choosing to speak in Tunisian Arabic, Standard Arabic, or French is never a neutral choice. French actually accentuates the cleavage between them and southern rural communities, which are only slightly Francophone.

Secondly,

> racism in Tunisia is not the same racism of *apartheid*, of America, of South Africa. It is a social racism, entangled in the mentality that is inherited, transmitted from one generation to the other, in a "gentle" manner, but also very violent.[90]

Despite this, activists usually refer to politically legalised forms of racial segregation which operated in North America until the 1960's and in South Africa until the 1990's. This is a consequence of the racial framework they use. In the case of the 'Abid Ghbonton, they speak of «ghettos, which are economically separated from the rest of the country [and] were established in the south. There, transportation is subpar and ghettos are only inhabited by blacks»[91]. The clear-cut racial distinction between "blacks" and "whites" justifies the comparison between racist behaviours and particular historical phenomena, especially *apartheid*.

Thirdly, even though phenotype is the ultimate source of the divide between "blacks" and the rest of the population: «black individuals – locals and foreigners alike – living in Tunisia today often face discrimination, prejudice and even violence because of their skin colour»[92], activists are aware of the socio-cultural nature of "being black". They often state that, in Tunisia, "black" individuals have undergone a process of stratification in recent decades, and "black" and "white" can by no means be understood as factual, objective colours.

If they overtly deploy a biological definition of "blackness", in fact, they tend to be aware of the contextual nature of race, which is mediated by other aspects (class, culture), and is constituted through performance. A 2017 book by Maha Abdelhamid, Amel Elfargi, and Moutaa Amin Elwaer is titled Être *noir, ce n'est pas une question de couleur*, that is, "Being black is not a question of colour", showing how activists have recently been nuancing their phenotype-based racial thinking.

Nonetheless, American ideas resonate in public speeches and demonstrations, where North American and South African icons are portrayed on billboards and posters. Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and Malcom X are summoned up to defend the cause of "blacks" in Tunisia, often together with Thomas Sankara and local artists and poets. *M'nemty* means "my dream" in Tunisian Arabic and can be interpreted both as a homage to Tunisian singer Fadhel Boubaker[93] and as a reference to Martin Luther King[94]. According to Pouessel, «the revalorisation of black colour in Tunisia is widely inspired by international movements like the Afro-American movement "black is beautiful" or by figures like Malcom X» (Pouessel 2012b, p. 88). One of the most important events that activists organise is *Noirs à l'honneur*, which translates roughly as "black and proud"[95]. It occurs on a yearly basis, hosting "black" musicians, artists, and academics, along with "white" supporters. The same concept appears repeatedly in the Facebook groups "*kahlouch w kahloucha*" ["black" men and "black" women][96] and "*fiere d'être kahlouch*" [proud to be "black"][97], which bring together "black" Tunisians online offering tips on hairstyles and recreational videos about "black" people around the world. The celebration of "black" beauty and identity as separate and "African" (meaning sub-Saharan African) recalls Black Pride movements in the US, and is achieved through music, video clips, and social media. In these pages, rappers and "black" singers such as Michael Jackson and Rihanna rub shoulders with traditional "black" Tunisian music styles such as *stambeli* and

banga. Young "black" Tunisians post pictures of "black" American actors and actresses, perceiving them as socially successful models. The identity ties with sub-Saharan Africa are dusted off and are absorbed by popular culture and conveyed through internet platforms. Sub-Saharan music and movies are now part of the cultural capital of every young Tunisian, and North American "black" music – specifically rap – fills concert halls all around the country[98]. "Black" beauty styles – such as Afro hairstyles – are used to boost pride in belonging to a continent, Africa, which was named after Tunisia itself[99].

Recent developments

«I decided to put an end to racist discrimination in Tunisia: the revolutionary, free, and dignified Tunisia»[100], Tunisian Prime Minister Youssef Chahed solemnly claimed, symbolically referring to the revolutionary motto ("bread, freedom, human dignity, social justice"), when law 11/2018 outlawed all forms of discriminatory and racist acts, insults, and threats. Since October 9th, 2018, in fact, racist discrimination in Tunisia is punishable with up to three years' imprisonment and a 1,000 dinar (315,60 Euro) fine. Based on the constitutional principle of equality of all citizens regardless of colour, nationality, gender, or religion, the law penalising "hate crimes" is specifically intended to eradicate racism against "black" people. The associations which lobbied for the introduction of anti-discriminatory laws, among them FTDES (Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Èconomiques et Sociaux), greeted it as a historical event and the result of a long and hard fight to eradicate racial discrimination. The law, in fact, although it comprises discrimination based on origin, mirrors the racial framework of the associations which were lobbying for it – epitomised in the use of the word *race*[101].

   Tunisia has still a long way to go to fully eradicate racial discrimination. The application of law 11/2018, in fact, was again at the centre of a public debate in December 2018, when the President of AIT (Association des Ivoirien en Tunisie), Coulibaly Falikou, was violently murdered in Tunis for trivial reasons[102]. According to eye-witnesses, in fact, the Ivorian national was attacked in the night between December 23rd and 24th by some Tunisian youths in an attempt to steal his phone and wallet. There was a shared consensus around the hypothesis that his murder was racially mo-

tivated. The Ivorian community, the biggest sub-Saharan community on Tunisian soil, with around 6,000 members, reacted with anger and called for a demonstration to be held in the centre of Tunis on December 25th, which eventually brought together sub-Saharans, human rights activists, and several representatives of Tunisian civil society[103]. In the aftermath of the assassination, Mohamed Fadhel Mahfoudh, Minister of Relations with Constitutional Authorities, Civil Society, and Organizations of Human Rights, and leader of the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet which won the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize, commented on Radio Express FM that a commission would be soon appointed at ministerial level to encourage the application of law 11/2018 and to support victims of racism in their official complaints (Scaglioni 2019).

Undeniably, the biggest achievement of black rights associations is bringing to the fore the issue of racism. As I have been studying black rights and "black" communities in Tunisia since 2014, I was amazed by the extent of the popular support for the demonstration held in December 2018. Undeniably, the actions of black rights associations have had a major impact on the Tunisian media, changing Tunisians' sensibility regarding racism in a positive way. When I was carrying out my field research, I was already constantly surprised by the growing media interest in the issue, both abroad and in the national media. TV talk shows, articles in blogs, newspapers, and documentaries tentatively introduced debates on racial discrimination, interviewing "black" actors and activists. However, they rarely tackled slavery and its legacy, and thus often failed to understand historically dense phenomena. In January 2016, while I was living among the 'Abid Ghbonton, Al Jazeera sent some journalists to film a short documentary on racism in Gosbah[104], and they interviewed me. I had to engage in an exhausting conversation with a journalist who was insisting that «slavery is still operational in 2017 Tunisia».

Conclusion

In post-2011 Tunisia, the debate on anti-"blacks" racism flourished, as it was taboo under Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's government. A handful of black rights associations emerged after 2011, fighting for the introduction of a law punishing "hate crimes", specifically targeting "black" people. Law 11/2018 was introduced in October 2018, greeted as an historical event by black rights activists, and envisaging harsh punishments for racist discrimination or «preference [...] on the basis of race, colour, ancestry»[1]. Stemming from a western theoretical tradition, the term *race*, as it is used by black rights activists and often in French, refers to skin colour and has a biological foundation. However, relying mainly on phenotypical markers is insufficient to address the daily discrimination experienced by many individuals racialised as "blacks" in today's Tunisia.

Firstly, activists created a category of "black" individuals *ad hoc* to mobilise and widen their support basis, lumping together different actors through the marker of phenotype. The essentialisation of a «categorically defined network» (Tilly 1998, p. 67) goes hand in hand with the creation of it, because the "black" community did not share a sense of belonging before 2011. And also afterwards, the alleged monolithical nature of the category of "blacks" in Tunisia showed internal contradictions, as it was made up of very different groups of individuals with different trajectories behind them (Scaglioni 2019).

Secondly, the term *race* with its biological background is less accurate for the pinpointing of «criteria for marking difference» (Wade 2015, p. 3) in the southern Tunisian community in which I carried out my fieldwork. As I unpicked in the second part, *Becoming the 'Abid*, "blackness" in the southern Tunisian community of the 'Abid Ghbonton is less a question of skin colour than of genealogy, which passes down certain physical and internal essentialised (Rhodes, Leslie, Tworek 2012, p. 13526) qualities from generation to generation. The social groups of southern Tunisia have been moulded by the century-long history of Islamic slavery, which left a difficult legacy which still lingers on to the present, and cannot be reduced to a "black"/"white" dichotomy.

On the other hand, the activists tackle slavery in a tangential way, and often decline it to «metaphorical slavery», that is a form of extreme labour exploitation akin to slavery (Rossi 2009, p. 5).

The 'Abid Ghbonton, however, stem from the history of slavery in the region and are now affected by «classificatory slavery» (Rossi 2009, p. 5), that is the remnants of classical slavery which are still differentiating individuals through an inherited stigmatised status. It is, however, difficult to state without doubt that historical slavery has affected the community of the 'Abid Ghbonton, or that, in other words, the 'Abid Ghbonton's ancestors were actually enslaved.

Nonetheless, I argue that the significant historical phase which actually shaped today's social classification of the 'Abid Ghbonton is the post-abolitionist period. Following the early abolition of slavery in Tunisia (1846), in fact, freed "black" slaves or "black" individuals were engulfed in patronage and slavery-like relations which provided them with protection and legitimisation of their lineage, but crystallised subaltern social relations between *'aḥrār* – literally "freemen" – *shuwāshīn* – persons of servile origin – and *'abid* – descendants of slaves. In the 'Abid Ghbonton's case, *'abid* is probably a late imposition from the outside, as they were termed *shuwāshīn* in documents at the end of the nineteenth century.

Although both *shuwāshīn* and *'abid* are racially-charged terms, indicating people of servile origin whose skin tone are darker than those of the *'aḥrār*, these social groups also show other differences. *Shuwāshīn* and *'abid* have shorter lineages, whose depth and importance is less than those of the *'aḥrār*. In other words, *shuwāshīn* and *'abid* cannot trace their genealogies very far back in time, and their origin (*'aṣl*) is considered to be non-Arab. They have, on the contrary, vague and exogenous origins. Genealogical origin, in southern Tunisia, is not just something which is confined to the past, but shapes the moral and physical self of the individual in the present. The concept of "genealogical imagination" by Andrew Shryock (1997) defines the connection of past and present through a vertical temporality, implying that speaking of individuals today means commenting on their origins and defining them (Shryock 1997, p. 11). This definition entails physical characteristics – *shuwāshīn* and *'abid* are "black" because they lack an Arab origin – but also affects the moral sphere of a person – determining how "noble" or "honourable" an individual is. Noble, Arab, long lineages can boast *sharaf* – honour – while non-Arab, shorter genealogies have less *sharaf*.

In the case of the 'Abid Ghbonton, the densely-structured contrast they present with the Ghbonton – an *'aḥrār* lineage living in their same area – creates a "lenses-like relation", because of the long history binding the two lineages and of the social norms which shape today's relation between them – since strict endogamic rules prohibit intermarriages between them.

The concept of "boundary", which defines the "categorical and durable inequality", distinguishes members of different socially defined categories of persons (Tilly 1998, p. 6). In the case of the 'Abid Ghbonton and the Ghbonton, but more broadly the social categories of *'abid* and *'aḥrār*, the boundary drawing a line between the two lineages is an "ethnic" one, because it is verbalised with terms referring to the physical appearance of the *'abid* – *smur* ("brown", pl.), *sūd* ("blacks"), *wuṣfān* (literally "servants", but defining a darker skin tone) – rather than to the ascribed "whiteness" of the *'aḥrār*. "Ethnicity" proves more useful than "race" for grasping the genealogical nature of phenotypical distinction, and therefore I tried to juxtapose the race-based discourse of the activists to lines which cut the "ethnic boundary" within the social set-up of southern Tunisia.

The "ethnic boundary" separating the 'Abid Ghbonton from the Ghbonton can only partially be explained through the social set-up of southern Tunisia, as it consists of a more extreme form of categorical inequality, that is a «complete perimeter separating ins from outs» (Tilly 1998, p. 61) where social relations between the categories are restricted and coordinated, mainly through the social mechanism of endogamy. Although, in fact, intermarriages between *'abid* and *'aḥrār* have begun to occur recently, a strict prohibition still hinders marriages between the 'Abid Ghbonton and the Ghbonton. Breaking the rule of isogamy, that is, same status marriage, in the Ghbonton's lineage, is punished by the expulsion of the *'aḥrār* from his/her lineage. Therefore, exceptions to the rule fall into the category of «unilateral marriages», that is, «unions where the couple is recognised only by one side» (Regnier 2014, p. 111, my translation from French), that is, by the 'Abid Ghbonton.

The "ethnic boundary" has an effect (Tilly 1998, p. 72), and marriages are only one domain where the effect is visible, because categorical inequality invests various aspects of the 'Abid Ghbonton's lives. In spite of the strategies they put in place to cross the "ethnic boundary", the 'Abid Ghbonton's efforts are aimed at entering the higher social class, that of the Ghbonton, by hiding their descent and their "blackness", rather than by subverting the

prevalent social hierarchy. They internalised the cultural and moral ethos of their masters and the social hierarchy of the region, trying to cross the "ethnic boundary" rather than questioning it. If emancipation «refers to progress and to diminishing inequalities through positive change» (Lecocq, Hahonou 2015, p. 184), and post-emancipation to «a situation where emancipation has been achieved and equality has been reached» (Lecocq, Hahonou 2015, p. 184), the 'Abid Ghbonton stand in between these two historical moments. This can be ascribed to the tentative insertion of the 'Abid Ghbonton into the Ghbonton's lineage which, however, has never fully happened. The ascribed slavery descent, for them, is not a «closed slavery past» (Lecocq, Hahonou 2015, p. 186), but still needs to be discussed.

Their strategies aimed at crossing the "ethnic boundary" without questioning it are manifold. Firstly, the 'Abid Ghbonton do not retain any memory of their unfree origin, and have crafted histories which aim at «silencing slavery» (Rossi 2009, p. 5). They have managed to renegotiate their genealogy, undertaking the role of protectors of their former masters, with the goal of enhancing their *sharaf*, a prerogative of Arab lineages with traceable ancestors.

Secondly, the 'Abid Ghbonton, especially women, put in place daily colour-evading strategies, such as "skin-whitening" stratagems. Their strategies strive to narrow their appearance to that of the *'aḥrār*, rather than developing a discourse of acceptance and celebration of "black" skin and curly, natural hair.

Thirdly, professionally, the 'Abid Ghbonton are relegated to a narrow range of jobs to which honourable lineages do not commit for fear of debasing their social status, such as being musicians at weddings. Holding less *sharaf*, the 'Abid Ghbonton can perform socially inferior jobs, which allow them to gain economic capital. Their activity as singers at weddings is, moreover, a way to enhance their honour and social status, although always within the boundary marked within the social hierarchy of southern Tunisia.

In conclusion, the "ethnic boundary" is still in place and firmly distinguishes social categories in southern Tunisia, and movements outside it are rare and require the quitting of the area, for example through migration to Europe. According to Frederick Barth (1969), ethnic structures are the outcome of «coherent, exhibiting recurrent regularities, but [are] not entities in themselves since their structure derives entirely from the actions and interactions of individual drivers» (Barth 1969, p. 49), while the creation

of an "ethnic boundary" between the 'Abid Ghbonton and the Ghbonton is a densely structured, history-driven, collective entity, which maintains continuous pressure on the two sides of the border and through systems of social closure, exclusion, and control. The creation of the "ethnic boundary" is, in the end, the creation of a stigma – that of "blackness" – which is not only about physical appearance, but triangulates status, genealogy, *and* physical appearance.

This is not to say, though, that the phenotypical aspect of the "ethnic boundary" is marginal in the perpetration of the stigma. Recently, in fact, physical markers seem to have acquired greater importance. If social constructions of "blackness" in southern Tunisia corroborate the classical theory on "blackness" in the Middle East as a matter of absence of Arab lineage (Lewis 1990; Hall 2011; El Hamel 2013) or a question of status (Brown 1967) rather than skin colour, today's 'Abid Ghbonton ideas of "blackness" rely increasingly on a language of biology and physical appearance. "Blackness", as a socio-cultural construct, and its transmission undergo changes over time. In today's Tunisia, the transmission of "blackness" in the past, which followed strict patrilineal lines, has given way to a more fluid inheritance of physical markers, which draw from both parents, giving women a more important role in the racialisation of their offspring.

Nonetheless, as mentioned at the beginning of this conclusion, giving physical appearance a prominent role, as in the activists' discourse, is insufficient to understand the differences between social categories in the south of Tunisia. Post-2011 activists, for their part, put great emphasis on epidermic factors. They support a racial constellation which is exogenous and Western-based, and functional for their international alignment with other anti-racism entities, thus overlooking the specificity of the local conception of "blackness". Moreover, the theoretical codification the activists resort to is not neutral, and has specific resonances in their social and political agenda. Tunisian black rights activists support a "celebration of blackness", fighting the negative ideas attached to "black" skin, and embracing their natural physical appearance as a political tool to combat the prevalent racial hierarchy.

In addition, different racial constellations inform different ways of contrasting racism and of mobilising individuals at a social and political level. Black rights activists purport a response to racism which is institutional and legal, and has culminated in the introduction of a "hate crime" in Tunisian

legislation. However, when an activist started a campaign to ask Gosbah inhabitants to sign a petition for the introduction of the crime of racism in 2015, he collected very few signatures. «He asked me to sign a letter for the introduction of this crime, but I told him, we don't want laws, we want jobs»[2], meaning that the solution the 'Abid Ghbonton envisaged to the problem of racism was through the socio-economic renegotiation of the social hierarchy prevalent in their area.

Glossary

ʿabd, ʿabda, ʿabīd	slave (m, f, pl)
ʿadl	notary
ʿajmī	non-Arabic language
ʿālim, ʿulamāʾ	Sunni Muslim scholars
ʿāmil	governor
ʿarifa	woman leading *stambeli* performances, literally "the knower"
ʿarsh, ʿurūsh	tribe (s) - a cohesive social unit which shares the same patrilineal ancestor.
ʿayn	evil eye (literally "eye")
ʿimāda, ʿimādāt	sector (s)
ʿumda	chief of a sector, "mayor"
ʿunṣuriyya	racism
ʾabyaḍ, bīḍā, bīḍān	white (m, f, pl)
ʾadhān	call to pray
ʾaḥrār	freemen
ʾama	female slave
ʾanfār	bandits
ʾaṣl	origin
ʾasmar, samrā, smur	brown (m, f, pl)
ʾawlād	boys, sons
ʾirhāb	terrorism
ʾumm walad	literally "mother to a boy" – a concubine who has given birth to her master's child
ʾumma	worldwide community of Islamic people
al-nisb	families related through marriage

bāb 'ālī	Sublime Porte, a gate of the Topkapı Palace, used as a metonym for the central Ottoman government
babūch	clams (Tunisian Arabic)
badū	Bedouins
baghiya	prostitute
baraka	God's blessing or charism
bilād al-zinj	country of "black" people
bori	Hausa religion characterised by spirit possession cults
burnūs	mantle
dār al-ʾislām	abode of Islam
dār al-ḥarb	abode of war
dār, dūr	house (s)
darbūka	drums
darja	Tunisian colloquial Arabic
dawla	state
dhimmiyyūn	"people of the book" (Islamic term which refers to Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Sabeans, and Samaritans)
dillāl	chief slave auctioneer
diyār	houses (pl)
farqa, farqāt	social unit comprising several related families
fiqh	Islamic jurisprudence
fūq	upside
gasā or *edderz*	drums
hanūt	small supermarket
haratin	an intermediate social category between *ʾaḥrār* and *'abid* in Western North Africa
harga (from ḥarraqa)	illegal migration to Europe, literally "to burn"
ḥasab	high status, nobility, ancestral honour

ḥurr, ḥurra	freeman, freewoman
ismkhan	Berber for "slave"
iswid, sūdā, sūd	black (m, f, pl)
jinnī	spirits
kafāʾa	equality of birth and social status in marriage
kaḥlūsh(a)	"blackie" (f)
kāyās	street (Tunisian Arabic)
khaḍḍāra	one of the three sub-tribes of the ʿAbid Ghbonton
khamisat	share-cropping
kuffār	pagans, infidels
kuḥl	black
kul	Ottoman elite slavery
kumbrī	wooden, three-stringed bass-register lute
lājiʾīn	refugees
mahr	transfer of money from the groom to the bride
majba	Ottoman per capita tax
makhzan	government, system
makrūh	disapproved
mamlūk, mamālīk	"white" military slave (s)
marābuṭ	saint
mizwid	bagpipes
mrubbin	children entrusted to the custody of better-off families in exchange for free domestic work
muʿatamadiyya	delegation
mudabbar	post-mortem emancipation
mudabbar(a)	slave who has been freed upon the death of his/her owner, domestic worker
muḥarram	first month of the Islamic calendar
muṣāhara	affinity
musalsalāt	soap operas

mustawlada	female slave who has given birth to her master's child
nasab	agnatic descent
nāy	flute
nīgrū	negro
nisb	relation, descent, lineage
nisyān	neglect
nuwājī	one of the three sub-tribes of the 'Abid Ghbonton
qabīla, qabā'il	tribe (s) - comprises several *'urūsh*
qirda	monkey
ra'īs	chief
rabī' al-'awwal	third month of the Islamic calendar
rabī' al-thānī	fourth month of the Islamic calendar
raḥal	nomads
ramū	collect of money
raqaba, riqāb	neck (s)
rīf	countryside
riqb	rope for tethering animals
safsārī	white veil used by the bride during her wedding
shaqshiq	metal clappers
sharaf	honour
shāshīa	red cap
shaykh, shuyūkh	chief or elder (s)
shīṭān	devil
shūkūlātiyya	"chocolate" woman
shūshān(a)	singular (m, f) of *shuwāshīn*
shuwāshīn	descendants of freed "black" slaves
stambeli	Tunisian music style and devotional cult mixing sub-Saharan and Islamic elements
ṭabbala	drums

ṭabla	drums
tahmīsh	marginalisation
tamyīz	discrimination
tayfa (ṭāʾifa)	music style performed by the ʿAbid Ghbonton
thawra	revolution
ṭīn	clay
tuwāyma	one of the three sub-tribes of the ʿAbid Ghbonton
walaʾ	Islamic post-emancipation patronage relationship
walāya	governorate
waṣīf, wuṣfān	servant, servants
wazīr	high-ranking chief
zāwiya, zawāyā	tomb of a saint, tombs
ABBREVIATIONS	
ANT	Archives Nationales de Tunisie (National Archives of Tunisia)

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Notes

Acknowledgments

1 http://shadowsofslavery.org/. Last access: 22/04/2020.
2 http://www.bigsas.uni-bayreuth.de/en/index.html. Last access: 22/04/2020.

Introduction

1 Among many others, the "black" poet Anis Chouchen became very vocal regarding racism. Here on Al-Mayadeen, a Lebanese channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_52nQ-Zhxj8. He adopted his surname while trying to reconnect to the history of slavery and post-slavery of his country (Last access: 26/02/2020).
2 Among many, on Le Monde: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/12/29/racisme-la-tunisie-doit-proclamer-son-africanite_5403434_3212.html (Last access: 26/02/2020).
3 Apart from "black rights", which is a lexical construction where black is intended as a non-local term referring to a universal human rights' framework.
4 The term has been questioned by recent academic and journalistic reflection, for its essentialisation of the Middle East by Western observers (Aita, Bini, Lawson, Paggi, Sorbera, and Trentin 2014).
5 My field research spanned the period from March 2014 to June 2016, albeit with many interruptions. It was sponsored by the ERC-grant SWAB (Shadows of Slavery in West Africa and Beyond. A Historical Anthropology) 313737, at the University of Milan-Bicocca under the supervision of Prof. Alice Bellagamba. I completed a PhD in Anthropology at the University of Bayreuth (Germany) under the supervision of Prof. Georg Klute and through a Co-Tutelle Agreement with the University of Milan-Bicocca.
6 FTDES, EuroMed Rights, CRLDHT, (2018), LAW ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN TUNISIA: A HISTORIC STEP IN ACHIEVING EQUALITY. Available at: https://euromedrights.org/publication/law-on-the-elimination-of-all-forms-of-racial-discrimination-in-tunisia-a-historic-step-in-achieving-equality/ (Last access: 27/02/2020).
7 http://ostez.blogspot.it/2013/12/decret-loi-n-2011-88-du-24-septembre.html (Last access: 27/02/2020).
8 http://foundationforfuture.org/en/Portals/0/Publications/Etude%20SC%20english%20Version%20Finale.pdf (Last access: 20/08/2019).
9 Interview with Taha, February 2015.
10 http://jamaity.org/association/association-mnemty/. M'nemty means "my dream" in Tunisian Arabic (Last access: 27/02/2020).

11   For a beautiful portrait of Saadia Mosbah: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/tunisia-racism-fight_n_6856554?ncid=engmodushpmg00000006 (Last access: 11/03/2020).

12   Singular masculine: *'abd*, singular feminine: *'abda*. These are the correct transliterations according to the IJMES Transliteration System. However, from now on, the term *'abid* will be employed instead of *'abīd*, since it is also a lineage name in the southern part of Tunisia and is transliterated like this by the actors themselves.

13   Maha Abdelhamid, a human rights activist involved in the fight against racial discrimination, interviewed during the World Social Forum, March 2015. My translation from French.

14   http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2016/03/tunisia-dirty-secret-160316153815980.html (Last access: 26/02/2020).

15   National attention has been recently devoted to the phenomenon: see, among others, http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/23858-traite-des-etres-humains-en-tunisie-des-verites-difficiles-a-cacher, https://nawaat.org/portail/2013/06/25/traite-des-etres-humains-en-tunisie-aussi/ (Last access: 26/02/2020).

16   Interview with Saadia Mosbah, March 2015.

17   https://www.freetheslaves.net/ (Last access: 26/02/2020).

18   Letter by Maha Abdelhamid to the Tunisian Parliament, (2015), available at: http://www.makaila.fr/2015/02/tunisie-la-lettre-de-maha-abdelhamid-aux-deputes-tunisiens.html. My translation from French (Last access: 26/02/2020).

19   For example, in Law 11/2018. DCAF, Le Centre pour la gouvernance du secteur de la sécurité, Genève, (2018), Projet de loi organique no. 2018/11, relative à l'élimination de toutes les forms de discrimination raciale: "*Art 2* – Au sens de la présente loi, on entend par discrimination raciale, toute distinction, exclusion, restriction ou préférence opérée sur le fondement de la race, la couleur, l'ascendance ou toute autre forme de discrimination raciale au sens des conventions internationales ratifies" ("Within the meaning of the present law, one understands by racial discrimination all distinctions, exclusions, restrictions or preferences by race, colour, ascendance, or any other form of racial discrimination as defined by the international conventions", my translation from French): https://legislation-securite.tn/fr/node/56778 (Last access 26/02/2020).

20   For a historical account of the importance of genealogy in the development of Muslim societies: Bowen Savant and de Felipe (2014). For the classical debate on how origin shapes one's social, moral, and physical self in a Muslim society: Geertz, Geertz, and Rosen (1979, p. 92).

21   Interview with Sana, March 2014.

22   *Haratin* is an intermediate social category between *'aḥrār* and *'abid* in Western North Africa. For Morocco: Pandolfo (1997), Ensel (1999), El Hamel (2002), Ilahiane (2004). For Mauritania: McDougall (2005).

23   Masseuse in a hammam in Mednine, racialised as "white", January 2016.

24   For an historical overview of honour in the African continent: Iliffe (2005). For an analysis of honour as a Mediterranean concept: Péristiany (1966). For the construction of one's honour as related to ancestors and genealogical origin in the Middle East: Meeker (1976).

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25 http://makaila.over-blog.com/2015/02/tunisie-la-lettre-de-maha-abdelhamid-aux-de-putes-tunisiens.html (Last access: 27/02/2020).

26 33.475874, 10.429287. A district is an extended territory comprising both rural and urban areas, which refers administratively to a city or a village – in this case, Sidi Makhlouf. The pyramidal administrative structure in Tunisia comprises twenty-four governorates, divided into 264 districts, sub-divided into 350 municipalities, the urban part, and 2,073 sectors, the rural one. The district of Sidi Makhlouf is attached to the governorate (*walāya*) of Mednine. These are all forms of découpage administratif, a form of administration of the peripheries that the post-independence Tunisian government inherited from the French colonisation. For the evolution of the administrative structure in Tunisia from pre-colonial times: Belhedi (1989).

27 For similar dynamics in other contexts: Klein (1989), Greene (2003).

28 Interview with Slima from Tatouine, 27/11/2015.

29 Interview with Lina, June 2016.

30 Among them, I would like to mention, with great sympathy, Anbar, a movement of "black" women which involves many of the activists I met during my stay in Tunisia: https://www.espacemanager.com/anbar-ambre-un-mouvement-de-femmes-noires-tunisiennes-voit-le-jour.html (Last access: 13/04/2020).

31 This is the correct transliteration according to the IJMES Transliteration System. From now on, *tayfa* will be employed, because it is how the ʿAbid Ghbonton transcribe it.

32 https://www.merriam-webster.com/ (Last access: 13/04/2020).

Notions and debates about slavery and race in Africa and in the Ottoman Empire

1 I collected some documents on the ʿAbid Ghbonton in the Tunisian National Archives. However, most of my information on the reconstruction of the ʿAbid Ghbonton's history came from oral legends and from the memories of my informants.

2 Scholarly work on Islamic systems of slavery spans from the historical slavery in the Ottoman Empire (Toledano 1982; Toledano 1998; Toledano 2007) to Morocco (Meyers 1977; El Hamel 2002; Goodman 2012; El Hamel 2013) and to its legacy in Mauritania (McDougall 1998; McDougall 2005). Consistent work has been carried out in West Africa on historical Islamic slavery (Lovejoy, Hogendorn 1993; Lovejoy 1983; Hunwick 1985; Lovejoy 2004; Klein 2005) and its legacy (Hahonou, Pelckmans 2011; Pelckmans 2012; Gaibazzi 2012). On the Eastern coast, apart from the seminal work by Frederick Cooper (1977), Mordechai Abir (1985) interrogates the relation of the Ethiopian slave trade to the Islamic world, and Jonathon Glassman's book (2011) tackles the legacy of slavery in colonial Zanzibar.

3 www.quran.com (Last access: 03/03/2020).

4 www.quran.com (Last access 04/03/2020).

5 Source: www.quran.com (Last access: 26/09/2019).

6 For an overview of North American slavery: Smedley (1993).

7 The Maliki and the Hanafi schools are both juridical schools, meaning that they provide interpretations of Islamic law. The Hanafi, founded by the Persian scholar Abu Hanifa (d. 767), is one of the most liberal ones and was the official Ottoman source

of jurisprudence. The Maliki school, on the other hand, was prevalent in North Africa and originates from the interpretations of the *imam* Malik ben Anas (d. 795 or 796) (Bausani 2005 [1980], p. 40).

8   Post-slavery studies have focused on contexts where pluri-legal systems were the norm when slavery was in force: Lecocq and Hahonou (2015).

9   According to Finley, the slave mode of production originated in the Graeco-Roman world: Pargas, Roşu (2017).

10   Source: www.quran.com (Last access: 18/03/2020).

11   For the story of Mansa Musa: Badru (2006).

12   The state of Fuuta Bundu was established in the 1690's, Fuuta Jalon in 1727-28, Fuuta Toro in 1775. As a result of the Islamic movement spreading throughout West Africa in the nineteenth century, the Sokoto Caliphate was founded by the Islamic reformer Usman Don Fodio (1754-1817) in 1804, while the Empire of Kanem-Borno was reformed in 1810 and the Hamdullahi Caliphate in Masina was founded in 1817. See Lovejoy (2016).

13   *Bāb 'ālī*, historical name attached to the central government in the Ottoman Empire.

14   His numbers, discussed in Austen (1992), have been downgraded by Ralph Austen (2010) himself, and are mostly based on Renault (1982).

Abolition in Muslim countries and in Tunisia

1   Created in 1839, now Anti-Slavery International. Britain abolished slavery in the homeland and in its colonies in 1833, while the slave trade to British subjects was outlawed in 1807 «on the grounds of high moral principle as well as national economic interest» (Miers, Roberts 1988, p. 9).

2   https://www.coe.int/fr/web/tunis/inltp (Last access: 14/03/2020).

3   https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/tunisie-le-23-janvier-d%C3%A9cr%C3%A9t%C3%A9-journ%C3%A9e-nationale-de-labolition-de-lesclavage/1371711 (Last access: 14/03/2020).

4   Egypt's case is also paradigmatic: its rulers were themselves major slave owners and Egypt was subject to foreign, that is European, pressure, due to its indebtedness. Khedive Ismail (ruler of Egypt from 1863 to 1879), the far-seeing initiator of an economic and cultural renewal, was himself «a large slave owner» (Hunwick, Powell 2002, p. 182), but, nonetheless, decided to cut off the supply of slaves in Sudan, which had become an extension of Ottoman Egypt in 1821 (Hunwick, Powell 2002, pp. 182-183).

5   www.quran.com (Last access: 15/03/2020).

6   The French revolution is often the yardstick for the comparison between emancipatory ideas in Muslim countries and in Europe. It had, indeed, a profound impact on the Tunisian Beylical courts: Napoleon's civil code was translated by Tunisian Bey Hammouda Pasha (1782-1814) and was familiar to the Husaynid dynasty (Larguèche 1990, p. 34).

7   The USA abolished slavery in 1863, Brazil in 1888, and Portugal in 1869 (Botte 2010, p. 60).

8   First and foremost, Hayreddin Pasha, a *mamlūk* (military slave) from Circassia, who was appointed colonel in 1842 and later became Minister of the Navy, Prime Minister, and Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire. Then, functionaries like Mustapha Khaznadar (1817-1878), «a *mamlūk* from the Greek island of Chios, the Bey's Treasurer» (van der Haven 2006, p. 46). On the theological side, there are at least three *ʿulamāʾ* who played a major role in influencing Ahmad: Muhammad Bayram IV (1805-1861), Brahim Riahi (1766/67-1849/50) (Botte 2010, p. 62), and Mahmud Qabadu (1812-1871) (van der Haven 2006, p. 47). Moreover, Ahmed's decisions were steered by an *ʿālim* «professor at the Zaytūna Mosque» (van der Haven 2006, p. 47), Muhammad Siyala (d. 1832). Also, Ahmad ibn Abi Diyaf (1804-1874), the Bey's secretary, influenced Ahmad's decisions (van der Haven 2006, p. 47).

9   She was taken in a raid on the island of San Pietro by corsairs in 1798, together with her sisters. Her name was Lella Djenatti.

10   Steambaths of Ottoman origin.

11   *Diyār* is also widely used.

12   See the classic Froboenius (1913, pp. 560-573) and Palmer (1914). For an analysis of *bori*'s political and historical significance: Masquelier (1993). For an historical account of *hausa*-speaking cults in Tunis and Tripoli at the beginning of the nineteenth century: Tremearne (1914).

13   See Chapter Five. See Jankowsky (2010) and Montana (2011).

14   For the common descent from Sidi Bilal, see Chapter Five.

15   Chances are high that "black" prostitutes were much greater in number. Moreover, Abdelhamid Larguèche (2002) bases his statistics only on police reports and also misses informal, hidden brothels.

16   Interview with Huda, June 2016.

Freeing the ʿabid

1   These data refer to 2014: *MÉDENINE, A travers le Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat 2014*, INS, Institut National de la Statistique, www.ins.tn (Last access: 20/03/2020).

2   *MÉDENINE, A travers le Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat 2014*, INS, Institut National de la Statistique, www.ins.tn (Last access: 28/04/2020).

3   The centrality of water in the oases of the Kebili region in Tunisia is addressed by Bédoucha (1987).

4   Interview with Mohammed, December 2014.

5   Interview with Khaled, April 2015.

6   Interview with Mohammed, December 2014.

7   Interview with Mohammed, fifty years old. December 2014.

8   Interview with Karima, sixty years old. February 2015.

9   Honour related to identity (see Introduction).

10   Interview with Majid, Gosbah, October 2015.

11   Interview with Hasan, Gosbah, June 2015.

12   Interview with the librarian of the House of Culture, April 2016.

13   Interview with Yasser, May 2015.

14   Interview with Karima, sixty years old. Karima, sixty years old, April 2016.

15   Officer of STEG, *Société Tunisienne de l'Electricité et du Gaz*, Mednine, April 2016. He does not belong to the Ghbonton lineage but to an *'aḥrār* one.

16   Interview with Zohra, March 2015.

17   Interview with Ashraf, 23 years old, January 2016.

18   Interview with Wassem, 30 years old, April 2015.

19   Interview with Seif, policeman, 50 years old, December 2014.

20   The director is Ramzy Bèjaoui: http://directinfo.webmanagercenter.com/2013/03/22/projection-premiere-du-film-abid-ghbonten-une-memoire-pour-loubli/ (Last access: 28/04/2020).

21   Interview with Mohammed, 50 years old from Gosbah, November 2014.

22   Interview with Adel, 40-something year old tourist operator and agent from Gosbah, May 2016.

23   *zāwiya* means "angle", "coin", but also "little mosque", where religious brotherhoods are based. Erected on the tomb of a saint, *zawāyā* are sites of devotion, pilgrimage, and education. See Bédoucha (1987) for southern Tunisia. They can also have a political function within the community where they are located: Scheele (2006) for Algeria; Hagopian (1964) for Morocco.

24   Personal conversation with Mohammed Jouily, February 2015.

25   Interview with Khalifa, 80 years old, March 2015.

26   From here on, the Archives will be indicated with the acronym ANT.

27   Interview with Karima, January 2016.

28   Interview with Houssem, 40 years old, December 2015.

29   Interview with Mohammed, December 2015.

30   Interview with Wajdi, 30 years old, "white" boxer from Gabes, December 2014.

31   http://www.slateafrique.com/195999/tunisie-discriminations-dans-len-fer-des-noirs-tunisie-racisme (Last access: 23/03/2020).

32   ANT Serie A, Carton 182, Dossier 19/5, 1908.

33   ANT Serie A, File 182, Dossier 19/3, 1889-1893, document dated 27 July 1892, or 2 *muḥarram* 1310 in the Islamic calendar.

34   The Governorate of Arad was a French administrative unit corresponding to the natural region of Arad, spanning from the highland of Jeffara, at the border with Libya, to Gabes, and including Gosbah. The name of the governor appears in ANT Serie A, File 182, Dossier 19/5, 1908, document dated 27 July 1892, or 2 *muḥarram* 1310 in the Islamic calendar.

35   ANT Serie A, File 182, Dossier 19/3, 1889-1893, document dated 22 October 1892, or 30 *rabīʿ al-ʾawwal* 1310 in the Islamic calendar.

36   ANT Serie A, File 182, Dossier 19/5, 1908, document dated 25 April 1892. My translation from Arabic.

37   Here *negroes* is doubtlessly a French term, but it could be interesting to recall that the word *nīgrū* ("negro") is commonly used throughout North Africa, probably lent by the colonisers and Arabised, in any case with a pejorative connotation.

Notes

38   «les negroes dits chouachin des Ghbonton», ANT Serie A, File 1892, Dossier 19/3, 1889-1893, document dated 9 October 1892.

39   ANT Serie A, File 182, Dossier 19/3, 1889-1893, document dated 22 October 1892, or 30 *rabī' al-'awwal* 1310 in the Islamic calendar, my translation from French.

40   ANT Serie A, File 182, Dossier 19/3, 1889-1893, document dated 6 December 1892.

41   ANT Serie A, Carton 182, Dossier 19/5, 1908, document dated 30 October 1893.

42   ANT Serie A, Carton 182, Dossier 19/5, 1908, document dated 20 October 1893.

43   ANT Serie A, Carton 182, Dossier 19/5, 1908.

44   ANT Serie A, Carton 182, Dossier 19/5, 1908.

45   Interview with Ali Mbarek el Toumi Louichi, April 2016.

46   Interview with Ali Mbarek el Toumi Louichi, April 2016.

47   Interview with Mabrouk Maaguel, December 2015.

48   Interview with Nasser Louichi, April 2016.

49   Interview with Houssein Dabouba, December 2015.

50   Interview with Nasser Louichi, April 2016.

51   Interview with Ali Guerrida, March 2016.

52   Interview with Nasser Louichi, April 2016.

53   Interview with Dhaw Louichi, April 2016.

54   Interview with Dhaw Louichi, April 2016.

55   Interview with Chnina ElKody, December 2015.

56   Interview with Chnina ElKody, December 2015.

57   Interview with Houssein Dabouba, December 2015.

58   Interview with Houssein Dabouba, December 2015.

59   Interview with Ali Mbarek El Toumi Louichi, April 2015.

60   Interview with Chnina ElKody, December 2015.

61   Interview with Jamaa Jamoum, December 2015.

62   Interview with Khalifa Rahhal, March 2016.

63   Interview with Jamaa Jamoum, March 2016.

64   Interview with Ali Guerrida, December 2015.

65   Interview with Ali Guerrida, December 2015.

66   Interview with Ali Guerrida, December 2015.

67   Interview with Houssein Dabouba, December 2015.

68   Interview with Nasser Louichi, April 2016.

69   Interview with Houssein Dabouba, December 2015.

70   Interview with Jamaa Jamoum, December 2015.

71   Sued, around twenty years old, amateur comedian from Gabes, March 2015.

Marrying the 'abid

1   Interview with Monia, May 2016.

2   Interview with Slima, January 2015.

3   Interview with Kamal, March 2015.

4   For marriage by elopement in Pakistan: Marsden (2007).

5   Conversation which took place in Café de Paris, Tunis, February 2016.

none
none

6   Interview with Khadija, 80 years old, May 2016.
7   Interview with Amal, 20 years old, Djerbian student in Gabes University, October 2014.
8   Interview with Sharifa, "black" woman from Mednine, May 2016.
9   Interview with Wassem, 40 years old, December 2014.
10   Interview with Raudha, 35 years old, December 2014.
11   Interview with Raudha, 35 years old, December 2014.
12   Interview with Khouloud, 50 years old, originally from Algeria, January 2015.
13   Coming from the verb *sharaka*, meaning "to associate", "to unify".
14   Interview with Hamid, blacksmith, 40 years old, December 2015.
15   Interview with Raudha, March 2015.
16   Interview with Lina, June 2016, Tunis.
17   Interview with Karima, November 2015.
18   Interview with Mariam, December 2015.
19   For an overview of the "black" feminist movement and the theorisation of "black beauty": Tate (2009). Ngozi Adichie (2013) gives a beautiful insight into identity issues linked to "blackness" between the US and Nigeria, and the classic literature by Hooks (1981, 1984, 1992) is a milestone for those who want to approach black feminism.
20   Interview with Zohra, 40 years old, April 2015.
21   Interview with Shaadia, March 2015.
22   https://www.who.int/publications-detail/mercury-in-cosmetics-and-skin-lightening-products (Last access: 07/04/2020).

Working as the *'abid*

1   Mohammed's father told me proudly on his son's wedding day, May 2016.
2   An intermediate social category between *'aḥrār* and *'abid* in Western North Africa.
3   Personal conversation with Ines, supporter of a black rights movement, December 2014.
4   Community of Islamic people.
5   quran.com (Last access: 08/04/2020).
6   https://www.al-islam.org/music-and-its-effects-a-h-sheriff/quran-music (Last access: 21/09/2019).
7   This was the case for King David, whose singing attracted birds and domestic animals, which were fascinated and appeased by his melodious voice.
8   Interview with Mohammed, 50 years old, policeman, December 2014.
9   Personal conversation with Yassin, 30 years old, May 2016. After 2011 the brothel in Mednine was also shut down.
10   Interview with Omar, March 2014, Tunis.
11   Interview with Ali Ben Marek Eltoumi Ellouichi, 80 years old, April 2016.
12   Interview with Hussein, 50 years old, December 2015.
13   Interview with Mohammed, 31 years old, who was busy organising his own wedding, which took place in May 2016.
14   Interview with Mabrouk, December 2015.
15   Interview with Ali Ben Mbarek, April 2016.

16 As described by Ben Abdeljelil (2003). Unfortunately, I never found any records nor has anyone in Gosbah been able to recall this event for me.
17 Interview with Dhaw, April 2016.
18 Interview with Dhaw, April 2016.
19 Interview with Dhaw, April 2016.
20 Interview with Mansour, April 2016.
21 Interview with Ali Ben Mbarek Ettoumi Ellouichi, 80 years old, April 2016.
22 In the 1990's, Mohammed Jouily observed that no *tayfa* singer had a bank account and that monetary transactions happened in cash (Jouily 1994, p. 118). I saw the same happening during my fieldwork, although I assume that some singers have a bank account by now.
23 Interview with Ali Ben Mbarek Ettoumi Ellouihi, April 2016.
24 Up to now, I know only two ethnomusicologists who have worked with *tayfa*: Mahfoudh Ben Abdeljelil and Monji Souai. Mohammed Jouily (1994), however, mentions Mohammed Marzouki, who studied *tayfa* in 1962.
25 Interview with Larousy Dabouba, January 2016.
26 Interview with Chnina Elkody, December 2015.
27 The President of Algeria's ruling Supreme State Council who was fatally shot in 1992.
28 Song collected in January 2015 during the celebration of a wedding, my translation from Tunisian Arabic.
29 Interview with Larousy, January 2016.
30 Interview with Yassin, May 2016.
31 Interview with Khalifa, Yassin's father, November 2015. The four girls, however, were not mentioned and did not pursue higher education.
32 Interview with Larousy, January 2016.
33 Interview with Mohammed, May 2015.
34 Interview with Ramzy, January 2016.

Today's *'abid*

1 Interview with Yassin, February 2015.
2 The transports for women working in agriculture or in the fish industry in the South came under attack in April 2019, when a truck collided with a minivan and the incident killed seven women day labourers, together with the drivers, in the governorate of Sidi Bouzid: https://thearabweekly.com/outcry-tunisia-over-women-farmers-deaths-van-crash (Last access: 09/04/2020).
3 This short documentary, filmed by the journalist Sandro Lutyens, was shot at Bideya beach for Huffington Post Maghreb: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOKTyEa_vJc (Last access: 09/04/2020).
4 Interview with Khaoula, 24 years old, from Gosbah, February 2015.
5 Interview with a woman collecting clams, February 2015.
6 Interview with Hasna from Mednine, January 2015.
7 Interview with Bachir from Gosbah, February 2015.
8 Interview with Ramzi, February 2015.

9   https://africanmanager.com/violence-conjugale-en-tunisie-le-nombre-de-femmes-vio-lentees-va-crescendo/ (Last access: 09/04/2020).

10   Interview with Rabiha, March 2015.

11   Interview with Haga, January 2015.

12   Interview with Taha, February 2015.

13   Interview with the director of one of the primary schools in Gosbah, December 2015.

14   Interview with the director of one of the primary schools in Gosbah, December 2015.

15   Interview with Oumm Saad, 80 years old, March 2015.

16   Interview with Taha, February 2015.

17   Interview with Fethi, April 2015.

18   Interview with Zohra, November 2015.

19   Interview with Marwa, November 2015.

20   Interview with Zohra, November 2015.

21   Interview with Yassin, April 2015.

22   Interview with Mohammed Ibrahim, May 2015.

23   Interview with Adel, May 2016.

24   Interview with Bachir, January 2016.

25   Interview with Adel, May 2016.

26   Interview with Chaker, January 2016.

27   The story was told to me by a distant relative, Kedda, in January 2016.

28   For an analysis of a similar phenomenon in West Africa: Gaibazzi (2012).

29   Interview with Karim, January 2016.

30   Interview with Mohammed, January 2016.

31   Interview with Khalifa, March 2015.

32   http://nawaat.org/portail/2016/02/23/tunisia-explodes-again/   (Last   access: 09/04/2020).

33   http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/tunisia-violence-streets-kasserine-youth-return-protest-in-complete-revolution-1539357 (Last access: 09/04/2020).

34   https://m.news24.com/Africa/News/South-Tunisia-stages-strike-after-deadly-clashes-20150210 (Last access: 09/04/2020).

35   Interview with Bachir, January 2016.

36   Interview with Zohra, January 2016

37   Interview with Monia, January 2016.

38   Interview with the English teacher at the high school in Sidi Makhlouf, January 2016.

39   Interview with Yassin, February 2016.

40   Interview with Khaled, December 2015.

41   Interview with Samir, March 2015.

7. Post-2011 activism

1   Personal conversation with Saadia Mosbah, human rights activist, November 2014. Ben Ali was obsessed with his favourite colour, *mauve*, which was ubiquitous in all official buildings (especially RCD's, "Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique", Ben Ali's party) (Filiu 2011, p. 36).

Notes

2   http://www.makaila.fr/2015/02/tunisie-la-lettre-de-maha-abdelhamid-aux-deputes-tu-nisiens.html (Last access: 09/04/2020).

3   Black rights association whose leading figure, Saadia Mosbah, is one the most prominent black rights activist in Tunisia. See http://jamaity.org/association/association-mnemty/ (Last access: 09/04/2020).

4   See https://www.huffpost.com/entry/tunisia-racism-fight_n_6856554 (Last access: 09/04/2020).

5   Saadia Mosbah, House of Culture Ibn Rachik, January 2015.

6   Interview with Saadia Mosbah, January 2015, Bardo, Tunis.

7   Interview with Khaled, March 2015.

8   http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2016/03/tunisia-dirty-se-cret-160316153815980.html (Last access: 09/04/2020).

9   I had this conversation on the phone with a man named Lotfi, probably the fixer of the Al Jazeera journalists' group.

10   Interview with Yassin, January 2016.

11   Interview with Mohammed, January 2016.

12   Interview with Samy, January 2016.

13   Interview with Yassin, January 2016.

14   Interview with Magdi, January 2016.

15   http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2016/03/tunisia-dirty-se-cret-160316153815980.html (Last access: 09/04/2020).

16   http://www.makaila.fr/2015/02/tunisie-la-lettre-de-maha-abdelhamid-aux-deputes-tu-nisiens.html (Last access: 09/04/2020).

17   http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2016/03/tunisia-dirty-se-cret-160316153815980.html (Last access: 09/04/2020).

18   http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2016/03/tunisia-dirty-se-cret-160316153815980.html (Last access: 09/04/2020).

19   http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2016/03/tunisia-dirty-se-cret-160316153815980.html (Last access: 09/04/2020).

20   http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2016/03/tunisia-dirty-se-cret-160316153815980.html (Last access: 09/04/2020).

21   http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2016/03/tunisia-dirty-se-cret-160316153815980.html (Last access: 09/04/2020).

22   Interview with Bachir, January 2016.

23   Maha Abdelhamid during the 2015 World Social Forum in Tunis, in March 2015.

24   Interview with Samy, 40 years old, film maker, November 2014.

25   My translation from French, http://geopolis.francetvinfo.fr/derapages-racistes-en-tuni-sie-59623 (Last access: 09/04/2020).

26   http://www.businessnews.com.tn/les-noirs-ne-sont-pas-tunisiens,519,55322,3 (Last access: 09/04/2020).

27   For an overview of street insults, watch the video on racism in Tunisia by AlJazeera, "Tunisia's Dirty Secret", at http://video.aljazeera.com/channels/eng/videos/people-and-power---tunisias-dirty-secret/4804916680001 (Last access: 09/04/2020).

28 http://www.ins.tn/fr/statistique-tunisie-institut-national-de-la-statistique (Last access: 09/04/2020).

29 This word refers to a pre-desertic region which belongs administratively to three nations: Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.

30 Personal conversation with Younes, Libyan journalist, 30 years old, June 2016.

31 Interview with Maha Abdelhamid, March 2015.

32 Interview with the custodian of the folklore house in Houmt Souk, Djerba, March 2014.

33 Interview with the custodian of the folklore house in Houmt Souk, Djerba, March 2014.

34 http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/06/black-tunisians-history-racism.html#ixzz4wcTytKFu (Last access: 09/04/2020).

35 Interview with Mohammed, 50 years old, December 2014.

36 http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/06/black-tunisians-history-racism.html#ixzz4wcTX1Iix (Last access: 09/04/2020).

37 http://www.pressenza.com/fr/2013/08/tunisie-bourguiba-etait-il-raciste-en-vers-les-noirs/ (Last access: 09/04/2020).

38 http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/06/21/bourguiba-raciste-lincroyable-destin-de-slim-marzouk/ (Last access: 09/04/2020).

39 My translation from French, http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/06/21/bourguiba-raciste-lincroyable-destin-de-slim-marzouk/ (Last access: 09/04/2020).

40 This is extrapolated from a document which appeared on 14th January 2011, signed by Mansour Hamrouni and Maha Abdelhamid: https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Compendium%20English/part%203/54%20Abdel%20Hamid%20Mansour%20Hamrouni%20EN.pdf (Last access: 11/04/2020).

41 http://www.jeuneafrique.com/133754/societe/racisme-en-tunisie-slah-mosbah-ne-veut-plus-tre-le-noir-de-service/ (Last access: 10/04/2020).

42 https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Compendium%20English/part%203/54%20Abdel%20Hamid%20Mansour%20Hamrouni%20EN.pdf (Last access: 11/04/2020).

43 https://www.senxibar.com/Racisme-en-Tunisie-Slah-Mosbah-ne-veut-plus-etre-le-Noir-de-service_a18065.html (Last access 10/04/2020).

44 Personal conversations with students at the University of Sousse, May 2016.

45 http://www.jeuneafrique.com/99821/archives-thematique/le-racisme-au-maghreb/ and http://www.jeuneafrique.com/132367/archives-thematique/racistes-les-maghrbins-suite/ (Last access: 10/04/2020).

46 http://www.jeuneafrique.com/112359/archives-thematique/etre-noire-en-tunisie/ (Last access: 10/04/2020).

47 Interview with Maha, March 2015.

48 https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Compendium%20English/part%203/54%20Abdel%20Hamid%20Mansour%20Hamrouni%20EN.pdf (Last access: 11/04/2020).

49 "Assurance of citizenship without colour discrimination", https://www.facebook.com/groups/112877068794818/ (Last access: 10/04/2020).

Notes

50 http://www.webdo.tn/2011/07/06/opinion-un-ministre-tunisien-noir-yes-we-can-no-we-dont-want/. It was published on 6/07/2011 (Last access: 10/04/2020).

51 "Blacks in Tunisia", https://www.facebook.com/black.never.go.back/?hc_ref=ARTD-fY9n42RzzYr9e-n1cbhdKQLDThk7_5YrtRso0nXXujiM3RuKMAJksNmLsLjP6S8 (Last access: 10/04/2020).

52 "I am proud of being "black"", https://www.facebook.com/noireTn/ (Last access: 10/04/2020).

53 "Evidences to denounce discrimination of colours", https://www.facebook.com/groups/121574424592995/?ref=br_rs (Last access: 10/04/2020).

54 https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Compendium%20English/part%20 3/54%20Abdel%20Hamid%20Mansour%20Hamrouni%20EN.pdf (Last access: 11/04/2020).

55 https://ggjalliance.wordpress.com/2013/07/01/blacks-in-tunisia/ (Last access: 11/04/2020).

56 http://jamaity.org/association/association-mnemty/ (Last access: 11/04/2020).

57 https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Compendium%20English/part%20 3/54%20Abdel%20Hamid%20Mansour%20Hamrouni%20EN.pdf (Last access: 11/04/2020).

58 https://fsm2016.org/sinformer/a-propos-du-forum-social-mondial/ (Last access: 11/04/2020).

59 Brazilian associations such as Conan and Unegro, among others.

60 https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Compendium%20English/part%20 3/54%20Abdel%20Hamid%20Mansour%20Hamrouni%20EN.pdf (Last access: 11/04/2020).

61 https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Compendium%20English/part%20 3/54%20Abdel%20Hamid%20Mansour%20Hamrouni%20EN.pdf (Last access: 11/04/2020).

62 Sfax is the industrial capital of Tunisia, located on the coast, and Gabes, although also on the coast and some 150 km from Sfax, is considered to be a southern city.

63 https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Compendium%20English/part%20 3/54%20Abdel%20Hamid%20Mansour%20Hamrouni%20EN.pdf (Last access: 11/04/2020).

64 Interview with Maha Abdelhamid, March 2015.

65 Interview with Saadia Mosbah, November 2014.

66 Interview with Saadia Mosbah, November 2014.

67 Interview with Saadia Mosbah, November 2014.

68 Inteview with Najib, 40 years old, from Tunis, May 2016.

69 Interview with Saadia Mosbah, November 2014.

70 After Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia, his parliamentary spokesman (and former Foreign Affairs Minister under Habib Bourguiba) Beji Caid Essebsi (1926-2019) was appointed interim prime minister, dissolved the infamous Ben Ali's party, RCD, and called for the election of the Constituent Assembly, where the Islamist party Ennahda came out as the biggest political force, although it did not gain a majority of seats.

71   The Troika government comprised Ennahda, the biggest political actor after the 2012 elections, in a coalition with CPR (Congrès pour la République, also known as ElMottamar, Moncef Marzouki's party) and Ettakatol.

72   Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi. The population's resentment went so far as to ask the Troika government to step down, backed by the Quartet (a group of four associations committed to the national dialogue: UGTT (Tunisian General Labour Union), UTICA (Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts), LTDH (Tunisian Human Rights League), and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers. The Quartet is very familiar to a Western audience because it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015) and by the National Salvation Front, a group of secular forces, among them the political party Nidaa Tounes and some civil society associations. Responsibility for the assassinations had been claimed by Abou Mouqatel, a terrorist affiliated to Islamic State, and they resulted in light being shed on the supposed violent wings of Islamic parties, primarily the ruling Ennahda, which rushed to distance itself from Islamic terrorism.

73   Conversations with ADAM and M'nemty's members during the 2015 World Social Forum.

74   Interview with Saadia Mosbah, November 2014.

75   Interview with Houda, June 2016.

76   Interview with Saadia Mosbah, November 2014.

77   Interview with Ines, 25 years old, October 2014.

78   Interview with sociologist Aziza Darghouth, May 2015.

79   https://ggjalliance.wordpress.com/2013/07/01/blacks-in-tunisia/ (Last access: 11/04/2020).

80   http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/06/black-tunisians-history-racism.html#ixzz4wcScQgQZ (Last access: 11/04/2020).

81   http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/06/black-tunisians-history-racism.html (Last access: 11/04/2020).

82   http://allegralaboratory.net/forgotten-refugees/ (Last access: 11/04/2020).

83   http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/06/black-tunisians-history-racism.html#ixzz4wcOzK75S (Last access: 11/04/2020).

84   Interview with a taxi driver, November 2014.

85   http://geopolis.francetvinfo.fr/derapages-racistes-en-tunisie-59623 (Last access: 11/04/2020).

86   http://atelier.rfi.fr/profiles/blogs/racisme-lettre-poignante-d-une-tudiante-afric-aine-aux-tunisiens (Last access: 11/04/2020).

87   http://atelier.rfi.fr/profiles/blogs/racisme-lettre-poignante-d-une-tudiante-afric-aine-aux-tunisiens (Last access: 11/04/2020).

88   My translation from French: http://mag14.com/actuel/35-societe/2962-racisme-raton-nades-dapres-match-a-tunis.html (Last access: 11/04/2020).

89   Interview with sociologist Aziza Darghouth, May 2015.

90   Interview with Maha, March 2015.

91   http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/06/black-tunisians-history-racism.html#ixzz4wcRrOj8W (Last access: 11/04/2020).

92   Najwa Younes, journalist for Tunisia Live: http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/01/20/confronting-race-on-the-170th-anniversary-of-tunisian-abolition-day/ (Last access: 20/10/2017).

93   Saadia Mosbah claims that she chose the name of the association from a song by Fadhel Boubaker, interview with Saadia Mosbah, November 2014.

94   «I have a dream» is the most famous address by Martin Luther King Jr. at the March on Washington, 28th August 1963. King was the leading civil rights figure, whose nonviolent action led to the ending of the *de jure* segregation of "black" Americans with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. See King, Martin Luther, Jr, in Richardson, Luker (2014).

95   http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/01/20/confronting-race-on-the-170th-anniversary-of-tunisian-abolition-day/ (Last access: 20/10/2017).

96   https://www.facebook.com/groups/1643884445891396/?fref=ts (Last access: 21/09/2019).

97   https://www.facebook.com/groups/609570035785893/?fref=ts (Last access: 21/09/2019).

98   For the spread of rap music movements in Tunisia, see Barone (2019).

99   The Roman and Medieval designation of Tunisia, Ifriqiya, came to define the whole continent.

100   My translation from Tunisian Arabic: https://www.brut.media/fr/international/une-loi-contre-le-racisme-votee-en-tunisie-3b3b3c97-c506-4248-b669-ab29ed467b8e (Last access: 11/04/2020).

101   https://legislation-securite.tn/fr/node/56778 (Last access: 11/04/2020).

102   https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/meurtre-de-falikou-coulibaly-deux-nouveaux-suspects-arretes_mg_5c279f06e4b08aaf7a90f714 (Last access: 21/09/2019).

103   http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2018/12/25/meurtre-de-coulibaly-manifestation-contre-le-racisme-a-tunis/ (Last access: 11/04/2020).

104   http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2016/03/tunisia-dirty-secret-160316153815980.html (Last access: 11/04/2020).

Conclusion

1   My translation from French: https://legislation-securite.tn/fr/node/56778 (Last access: 17/04/2020).

2   Interview with Ramadan, 40 years old from Gosbah, May 2015.

Antropologia della contemporaneità

La collana "Antropologia della Contemporaneità" si propone come uno spazio di riflessione, condivisione, dibattito e approfondimento per gli studi antropologici. Interrogarsi sugli assetti sociali e culturali in cui viviamo, a partire dal riconoscimento della simultaneità che avvolge tutti, è il filo conduttore della collana. Ricerche etnografiche contemporanee e classici della disciplina possono contribuire in modi diversi a costruire quella particolare consapevolezza contro-intuitiva che è la forza della disciplina antropologica e che può offrire una prospettiva inattesa da cui leggere situazioni, contesti, conflitti, dinamiche, discorsi, organizzazioni, pratiche che richiedono di essere rese meno opache.

La collana adotta un sistema di double-blind peer review.

Titoli pubblicati

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