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“Dégage”

-Thousands of Tunisians in front of the ministry of interior on the 14th of January 2011-

Life in Revolution

Yasmin Haloui

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I would like to thank first of all my parents: Laroussi Haloui and Marianne Beerthuisen, my sister and brother.

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I realize I am blessed.

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Before anything else, there is something you need to know and understand. This revolution was the revolution of dignity. It felt, for the first time, as if Tunisia was ours. It was ours and we had to and could do everything to protect it. It was ours and we were proud of it. But at the same time we were terrified of the militias, of what might happen. We were really terrified.

-Rim-

Chapter one: Introduction

I stopped, stood against the wall and allowed the giggling little girls in their pink elementary school uniforms to pass. The streets in this old part of the city of Tunis were narrow and passage was negotiated. A man standing with his back at me was obstructing the way. He was pulling his impressive ambulant sandwich stand which was producing an ironed crack sound as the old wheels started turning and brought the object into motion. A car riding down the one way road was waiting for the stand to be removed and the men, women and children walking on the road to make way for his passage. He claxoned and then rode passed us. Islam took me by the hand and pulled me into one of the various little streets. We walked through the ocean of mingling sounds reaching out from shops and restaurants. The sounds of taped coran verses, of radio talk shows and modern arab pop music intertwined with greetings of acquaintances, jubilant manly laughs and loud heated discussions. Social life was unfolding. Two and half months after the revolution, normal life seemed to have retaken its course.

Islam was taking me to the 'aswak¹: "We have to go there. The second hand clothes are of such a quality that they would go through the piles before sending them here." *They* are the former president's family and his in-laws. Some boots were etalled at the first stand and Imen wanted new ones. We started going through the pile. As we reached the end of the long table with shoes, we overheard a discussion between the woman standing next to us and the owner of the shop. A violent confrontation between ambulant merchants and policemen was taking place. The woman laughed, a bit embarrassed perhaps as she looked at us. Nowadays she quickly would get scared, she admitted. But the confrontation was taking place further away, a few blocks away, not here. Such seemed to be the general social agreement and rationalized evaluation of present reality. The change in what was being conceived as normal and secure was the product of what Ivana Macek (1997) conceptualized as the process of 'negotiation of normality'. The owner of the shop responded by silent agreement. Imen merely smiled in response to the woman and meticulously investigated a boot she was now holding in her hand. She disapproved of it and we continued our journey through the aswak.

A few stands further, I found my self going through piles of second hand blouses and shirts. We were standing in the middle of a square, surrounded by clothes, women and the few sellers, hiding from the rain drops under a tent. The stands were rudimentary; simple old wooden tables and steel

¹ Aswak is the arab term for markets.

poles to hold up the weight of the tent. Our vision of the sky was thus obstructed, but I could still hear the noise of a helicopter I had seen before we walked on to the square and under the tent. It was obviously taking part in the confrontation between the police and the merchants; flying back and forth above the square. Its noise would get harder and softer. Without taking her eyes up from the clothes she was judging Imen who was clearly irritated said: “We have heard you. Now go away with your annoying noise.” I looked at her and then started looking around me. No one reacted to the sound. Those who were not standing under the tent were not even looking up. No one was looking up to the sky. No one, but one man, who was turning around right and left, searching for the helicopter.

In the midst of this market where localized dynamics of the global capitalist market system; where social and human needs, wants and consumerism persisted; where relative, limited spatial security seemed to prevail, daily normal life continued. Yet this everyday reality that did not allow for itself to be disturbed by the violent confrontation taking place only a few streets away, was different from what it used to be. It was a reflection of the ‘normality of the abnormal’ (Taussig, 1992). Parts of this new reality were intrusions of waves of violence and war-like scenarios. Trying to make sense of this change and the construction of the normal abnormality, logic dictates me to turn back to the most recent and extraordinary event that shook the life of millions of Tunisians and brought about change, namely the fourteenth January Tunisian revolution. On Friday the fourteenth of January 2011, at the end of yet another day of revolt, Prime Minister Mohammad Gannouchi appeared on state television. He announced that president Ben Ali was unable to take on his function as the president of the state. Gannouchi would as such, temporarily take over his duties. Meanwhile, Ben Ali fled Tunisia and sought refuge in Saudi Arabia.

It had all started twenty nine days earlier, on the seventeenth of December 2010, when an ambulant merchant, Mohammad Bouazizi living in a southern city near to Sidi Bouzid performed a desperate and ultimate act of contention. He emulated himself with paint fuel and set himself on fire, in front of the local municipality building. The contentious political performances diffused. The social networks and media shaped an opportunity that permitted citizens to express their contention in public spaces, albeit digital, from within the private and relatively safe spaces of their rooms and houses. Videos of repressed protests and other unstoppable massive protests, images of the injured and the martyrs, images of the repressive apparatus at work, images of the military protecting the demonstrators from the violence of the police and images of Tunisians speaking out on the crimes and corruption of Ben Ali and his clan spread too quickly for the police regime of Ben Ali to contain. 219 people died. Some were killed while demonstrating; others were killed or wounded while

performing ordinary everyday life activities and other less ordinary activities. The use of indiscriminate violence intensified starting from the fourteenth of January, when Ben Ali fled Tunisia. Chaos was orchestrated. Insecurity staged. Ben Ali's militias and snipers shot at civilians standing at crossroads, at their windows. Terror infiltrated each space of the everyday and the normal. Disorder and terror were utilized to render legitimacy to Ben Ali once he, after a few days would come back. Welcomed as the savior and national hero he would resume his duties as president of the Tunisian republic. While in comparison to other cities such as Tunis and Sfax, Hammamet was relatively calm, it is nonetheless the story of life in revolution in Hammamet that I chose to recount. And I will explain the reasons for this choice.

Hammamet is a north eastern economically well developed city. It was only on Wednesday the twelfth that active participation in the revolt started. The confrontation between demonstrators and police resulted in the authority's fleeing and a subsequent power and security vacuum. The experience of the vacuum was shaped by the phenomenon of widespread lootings. Some targets were clearly linked and framed in terms of the revolt against the corrupt ruling clan. Yet other targets reflected the economy of chaos; a seemingly anarchical way of acting that obeyed no other rule than that of profit. On Friday the fourteenth, the experience of insecurity and abnormality intensified by rumors of men randomly going into houses, stealing and raping women. The inhabitants of Hammamet were also being kept informed of the extent of violence in other bigger cities of Tunisia. They were kept aware of the immanent danger and the state of emergency that prevailed. Aware and in a popular gesture of bravery, society reorganized; rose up to the chaos and resisted the militias and criminals. Albeit the violence and chaos and unlike many other cities, in Hammamet everyday life persisted. Normality was able to resume, albeit changed and transforming into abnormal normality.

I arrived in Tunisia on the twenty sixth of February 2011 and spent four months conducting research in the city of Hammamet. Facing the broadness of the topic of the Tunisian revolution and my own undecidedness, I found myself, at the first stage of the field research, conducting exploratory interviews. These unstructured interviews that resembled more informal discussions started directing my attention at what seemed to have shaped the experience of many of the people I spoke with, namely the abnormalities of everyday life; the fear, the insecurity, the suspension of some aspects of normal everyday life. These abnormalities that formed then the initial guideline of my research drew my attention by their contrast, to the normalities that did persist. The experience of the revolution

was at the heart of my interrogation. The normal and the abnormal that shaped the everyday became the notions that guided and informed my analysis of the actions of the interviewed inhabitants of Hammamet and the role it played in the dynamic between the unfolding of the revolution and the reconstruction of order. Along these months I conducted twenty in-depth interviews, in addition to the various informal conversations. With most informants I had multiple encounters. The length of the interviews was of an average of forty five minutes. Being a native from Hammamet, contact and language has been no issue, nor has it presented any challenges in terms of understanding and translation. But I need to denote the fact that I am situated in a process of translation. The findings are my informants' interpretations of what they experienced. They present it to me and followingly I interpret them myself². The research process thus can not be separated from the process it analyzes; the discursive construction of social reality. I and my research are part of the discursive construction of social reality.

The question I attempt to answer in this thesis is *how did young inhabitants of the city of Hammamet experience and cope with the unfolding of the Tunisian revolution in Hammamet?* In order to answer this specific question, two distinct components need to be analyzed and researched. First is the specific construction of the extraordinary aspects of and reality of the revolution; dynamics brought about by revolutionaries, by the looters and the militias. Second are the actions of the informants. At first differentiated, these two components need to be continuously analyzed in relation to one another. This analysis enables us to understand action as producer and outcome of reality; effected by and effecting the constitution of the revolution. Meanwhile there is another point of focus in the puzzle which is the ways the actions of individuals are shaped through continuities structured; whether through the agent's production of stability or change.

The argument is that continuity, structured by individuals, structure and anti-structure defined through enabling and constraining ways the actions of individuals in Hammamet. Normality and abnormality both evolving in continuity informed the repertoire of action of the informants. Normality is conceptualized as stable routine action and understanding and perceptions of norms. Abnormality is conceptualized as changed routine action and understanding and perceptions of norms. More specifically, I argue that normality became the source of the repertoire of resistance and contention against the looters, the militias, the criminals and the reality of violence itself. Ultimately I realized that I was also providing an answer to a question I had not intended to pose, namely how the Tunisian revolution came about, in the local context of Hammamet. I tried to make sense of

² This method has been represented to me by my supervisor Jolle Demmers as she explained the concept utilized and developed by another researcher, who has been unknown to me.

three aspects of reality; firstly, grasp the various dimensions of everyday life in the unfolding reality of the revolution which is mainly understood through the reality of chaos. Secondly, make sense of the affects the specificities of its violence, had on the individual. Thirdly, through the actions and reactions of people, grasp the processes of the construction of society and the reconstruction of order. Trying to understand these three aspects I stumbled on the account and dynamics of the massive and successful mobilization of the Tunisian people.

The framework developed as a tool to analyze the dynamic between the actions of young inhabitants of Hammamet and the unfolding of the revolution which was dominantly translated in the creation of disorder and a power and security vacuum, is a synthesis that incorporates various levels of analysis. At the first level; Giddens' structuration theory which presents an analytical model to analyze the constitution of society and thus the reconstruction of order, intertwines with a theoretical understanding and approach in analysis of the discursive construction of social reality. Words and action as discourse. On a second level the framework is complemented by the concepts of repertoire and social condition. Repertoire is an analytical tool developed by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, which as a contentious repertoire they define as "arrays of contentious performances that are currently known and available within some set of political action" (2007: 49). The concept of repertoire is here used for its ability to connote and highlight the construction and evolution of the array of actions available to individuals through time, space and shaped by the conditions. And rather than looking at condition solely as the product of violence, here it is conceptualized as a social condition; product of violence but also of social reality (Lubkemann, 1968).

Reflecting back on the research process I feel the need to acknowledge that in a situation such as this, where studies on this particular case were almost non existent and where the main source of information are the people themselves, the task of controlling the information is no less significant, yet considerably harder. It seems that the only option is to control the facts of events through their repetition by various inhabitants of the city, including informants but also inhabitants who did not fall into the category of respondents. The statements made are thus, until further research only applicable to this case; to this group of informants. Yet the reader also needs to realize that this representation of the revolution is ingrained in the academic project of grasping the construction of social reality. Thus there is no one truth, but rather truths that represent the disparate and personal experiences of the studied processes. But which are also subjectable to more abstract theorizations enabling researchers to understand the similar and disparate processes that underlie them; to understand the construction of reality, of social life and build forth academic knowledge.

In addition to the fact that this thesis will be one of the first products of a 'in the field' research and analysis of the specific experiences and processes of the Tunisian revolution, there is another aspect that renders this study very relevant. A core component of this thesis is the interest in understanding the construction of society. The represented experience of the Tunisian revolution, which is also a reconstruction of order in the context of chaos, is thus a reflection of this interest. In the case of the revolution in Hammamet, the state structure broke down and it brought about a larger experience and reality of chaos. The inhabitants of the city coped with and reacted to this reality. Order was reestablished. The opportunity for understanding, through on the field acquired insights, the processes of and the dynamics between the brake down of order and the reestablishment of order has been very rare.

One of the objectives of this thesis is to represent in its fullness the nuances and struggles of Tunisian civilians in the revolution. I attempt to make sense of the dynamics between the unfolding of the revolution and the construction/ re-construction of order, to investigate the role normality and abnormality played in the evolution of the revolution, yet also understand the ways the unfolding of the revolution affected everyday life, the choices, possibilities and constraints it imposed on the repertoire of actions of individuals experiencing a violent and extraordinary context. Said in simpler terms, I attempt to understand and theorize a human face of life and social life in a violent reality.

The body of the thesis is organized as follows. In the first ethnographic chapter, which is chapter two, I will present a historical overview grounded in Hammamet and the five days span this analysis deals with. In addition I will clarify the theoretical framework I attempt to develop in order to make sense of the events in Hammamet as well as clarifying through the limited theory available and mainly through the empirical reality the notion of normality used here. In chapter three, I attempt to unravel what is not obvious at first sight. I will analyze as such the collective enterprise of observation'. In the fourth and fifth chapters, I analyze more closely reality in a violent context, the production of the repertoire of action and the construction of meanings and enactments of resistance. Chapter four and five are intimately related as the first is mainly a representation of life as dominated by the violent phenomena, while the second represents living life around violence, urging thus the reader to see beyond the violence and transcend the perverse fascination for violence. It incites to see humans as dignified beings. And finally I will end with the conclusion.

Chapter two: The unfolding of a revolution

The past couple of years, no demonstrations have shocked daily life in the city of Hammamet. The few spontaneous expressions of outrage initiated at the only high school of the city, never left the building. Police had always been present; observing the pupils as they were holding the flag of Palestine, chanting their solidarity with its people and demanding their freedom; disciplining and controlling them as soon as they passed the doors of the school into broader society. But on this particular Wednesday afternoon, things were changing. Contention was no longer expressed in terms of the Palestinian cause. The Ben Ali dictatorial regime was directly targeted and challenged.

The shift was extraordinary. A few days earlier, a few hours previous to the demonstration in Hammamet, the uprisings taking place in various cities of Tunisia were only subject of whispers, followed by imminent shushes. Everybody knew about it. Most did talk about, read about and watch the events unfold on the AlJazeera, France24 news channels and facebook. But these acts of resistance were private, and secretive; hidden transcripts to use the concept by James C. Scott (1990). But the first hand absence of contention in public spaces did not mean that it was non existent, but rather that it was invisible. It merely reflected the conditioning by the regime of the socio-cultural spaces and repertoires of contention. While starting from the 17th of December, demonstrators enacted their frustrations and performed their contention; the dictatorial regime reacted, continued its policies of oppression and adapted them to the changes in repertoires of those mobilizing. Yossra who is a young student of ICT , and as such informed of the proxy war on the internet and albeit limited, the vehicle the digital space offered for contentious claim making, explained that before Ben Ali left on Friday, she did not dare share information on the unfolding revolt. “At the entrance of schools, policemen with wireless internet connection and computers were randomly stopping pupils. They ordered them to log on onto their facebook account. They controlled the videos and information they shared with their friends³.” Through these processes of disciplining, the regime and the state established the normality in their relation with society and the Tunisian people. But there seems to be a limit to what a people can take and the wind of change was about to blow over Tunisia. The following accounts relate the events of Wednesday the twelfth.

Wednesday was the first day demonstrations took place in Hammamet. I was at my work, when people told me that a march was going to take place. It was around 12 o'clock, maybe

³ Author's interview with Yossra, Hammamet, on 5 Juni 2011.

one... I called my parents. They told me that everybody in the neighborhood was standing at their doorsteps, waiting. We spoke with our bosses and we permitted to leave. My parents came with the car. I couldn't wait to leave work. While riding home I saw it; all the way from work to our house, people were standing at the doorsteps waiting. Everybody was outside waiting; old, young, men, women,...⁴

-Mohammad-

On the 12th of January, at around 3 pm, a big march took place in Hammamet. The crowd was moving towards the city center. I was sitting in the coco bango when I saw them walk by. My two sisters wanted to join the march. But I refused. I said that they couldn't go. It was scaring and I expected it to turn out of control. But my sisters went nonetheless and I was obliged to join them. Near to the signal café, tear gas was used. There was a lot of it. And one of my sisters continued walking forward. She almost lost consciousness. But I held her and gave her a clap in the face. She regained consciousness and went home, while I continued with the march⁵.

-Mounir-

I demonstrated. I joined the march. I had never seen people like that before. They were angry and frustrated. They were speaking out about it. They were speaking out about their opposition to the regime and chanting the same slogans as everywhere in the nation: 'Bread and water and no to Ben Ali'. 'Dignity, employment and freedom'. They demanded the judgment of the corrupt Trabelsi family as well. Even those who did not join in the march were standing at their doorsteps and as we passed, joined in the chanting of these slogans⁶.

-Aymen-

While I was standing at the sideline watching the demonstration, men passing by had assured me that there was nothing to be scared of. It was a peaceful demonstration. It was organized and clam. But when the police prohibited the demonstrators from moving forward, a group of young men run towards those standing at the barrage. The agents were scared and used tear gas against the crowd. Starting from then it got out of control. I was still standing at the

⁴ Author's interview with Mohammad, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011.

⁵ Author's interview with Mounir, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

⁶ Author's interview with Aymen, Hammamet, on 14 March 2011.

sideline watching. But an older man passed by and ordered me to go home. The demonstration was no longer peaceful⁷.

-Ines-

The exact same happened as in Egypt. You remember the scene of the police car riding in circles in the midst of the crowd of people demonstrating? That happened here as well. But young men who had covered their faces attacked the car and burned it. The crowd gained in trust and continued attacking the police. It is then that the police started shooting in the air⁸.

-Aymen-

My sisters went home, but I stayed and continued the march with the demonstrators. After a while I decided to go home to see whether my sisters had arrived safe. While I turned around and walked away, I heard firing. It is then that Souissi had been hit, killed. When they killed him, the crowd, enraged, went mad. Normally when such a thing happens, the police must have thought, the people would get scared and would leave. But it was the contrary that happened; they fought back⁹.

-Mounir-

While I was watching what was taking place at the police station, women from my neighborhood; mothers came and asked us to go look for their children, drag them out by force from the crowd of protesters...So many women came. They came when they heard stories about a young man hit in his leg, another man killed. My mother came as well. She was looking for my brothers and me¹⁰.

-Aymen-

We were standing on the rooftop of our house, watching what was taking place. We would go upstairs and then run downstairs and hide. Meanwhile strangers came to hide in our house. They had trouble breathing because of all the teargas¹¹.

-Ines-

⁷ Author's interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

⁸ Author's interview with Aymen, Hammamet, on 14 March 2011.

⁹ Author's interview with Mounir, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

¹⁰ Author's interview with Aymen, Hammamet, on 14 March 2011.

¹¹ Author's interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

“Off course I threw and hit them with stones. When you finally get the chance to act out against them, wouldn’t you do it?¹²”

-Moncef-

I had never before seen people fighting back against the police¹³.

-Aymen-

When I arrived near to the police station, I saw women standing on the rooftops watching, celebrating and encouraging the men. I saw a man who was wearing a helmet to cover his face throwing with the stones at the police station. A friend of mine, standing next to me, was hit in his shoulder with a bullet and was taken to the hospital. I saw a young man standing alone, facing a ‘tiger’ officer, while the rest of the group had run the street. He faced the agent who was holding a stick in his hand took a bigger stone and threw it at the agents, hitting him in his stomach. The agent quickly run away. I also saw a woman who joined the men and was hitting with stone. She was wearing a trousers rolled up to her knees. Obviously she was cleaning when it all started¹⁴.

-Mohammad-

After people had attacked and burned the police station, almost all police agents fled from the city. In the lagarre area, the STEG (Tunisian Corporation for Electricity and Gas) as well as a number of banks were targeted by the mass. The STEG was emptied by a group of men, while others standing around them watched. When these people left, other men passed by on their motors, searched through the pile of computers on the street and took what was on first sight unbroken¹⁵.

-Rabab-

Magasin General was targeted. People broke in and emptied it. It lasted until the evening. When I walked to the city center, I passed by men and women pushing supermarket chariots filled with food, electronic utilities, diapers....I saw things I had never seen before. The city center looked like a scene from a war movie. Men were drunk. Others were walking around

¹² Author’s interview with Moncef, Hammamet, on 12 Juni 2011.

¹³ Author’s interview with Aymen, Hammamet, on 14 March 2011.

¹⁴ Author’s interview with Mohammad, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011.

¹⁵ Author’s interview with Raba, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

with long, big knives or sticks. It was like in a civil war. I encountered people I knew. We watched, but we did not know what to do¹⁶.

-Aymen-

“The attack with stones on the police station, the breaking continued on. A number of men decided to halt it. They fought along the side of the few policemen who stayed. It is only then that calm returned in our neighborhood¹⁷”.

-Ines-

“Until Wednesday I did not believe the stories of the uprising. I did not believe it until I saw it happen in front of me. I witnessed it myself¹⁸”.

-Rabab-

As the political contention- performed- was unfolding and shifting from peaceful protests to direct violent confrontation between the protesters and the police agents, the interaction between the Ben Ali regime and the wider group of protestors, the state and a portion of society was changing. It is in terms of the processes of interaction that Tilly and Tarrow approached political contention; “The central mechanisms of contentious politics are interactive” (2007: 28). And even though they acknowledged the broader social bases of political contention, they constrain their analysis to the mechanisms and processes that involve the phenomenon of contentious politics. In Hammamet, on the 12th of January, as the regime/ protestors dynamic was changing; it was not merely the political contentious reality that was being reinterpreted and redefined. It was the dynamic of the regime and society, the regime and the people that was being shaken at its fundamentals. With each performance of defiance and the subsequent collective conquer; the defiance of the police who using a vehicle threatened the crowd violently, in an attempt to disperse the protestors; a young man’s defiance of the special unit police agent, throwing a stone at him and standing victorious followingly. With each act and performance of defiance, society and social life were adapting, normality and order were gaining in extraordinariness, shifting to abnormality.

The power dialectic between the people and state authorities had been altered. The unconceivable was taking place. But the reality these performances of contention construed was transcending solely

¹⁶ Author’s interview with Aymen, Hammamet, on 14 March 2011.

¹⁷ Author’s interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

¹⁸ Author’s interview with Raba, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

the political to affect each and every aspect of social life. As Ines was recounting the events of that afternoon, she could not help herself but laugh. “You will not believe it”, she said “Family and people on the street had warned me that a demonstration was coming our way. But I just went to the jeweler and ordered the earrings I wanted prepared for my marriage.” Looking back, it seems absurd to Ines that she has defied the danger and threat ahead. But in that instance, being the product of her local knowledge, in time and place, Ines did not imagine possible, nor did she expect what took place in the following hours to happen. Simply because it was not part of the way things worked. The revolt had through the specific evolutions of the contentious performances, through the newly created power balance, created a power vacuum, a security vacuum and chaos. It would unfold, evolve and impact various aspects of everyday life and social reality.

The inquiry revolves around the experience of chaos and insecurity. It has been most intense during the five day period that started on Wednesday and ended on Sunday. On Monday a relative normal and ordered life was restored. The demonstrations in Hammamet, as has already been stated, started on that particular Wednesday afternoon, the twelfth of January. What followed this extraordinary day was a calm night. But on Thursday the thirteenth of January, day two of our five days chronology, unrest started again. Looting spread and now included more than only regime related targets. It included the bigger business in Hammamet.

People said that demonstrations were going to take place again. We heard that it were going to be peaceful demonstrations. We got scared nonetheless and we closed the front door of the bakery. We had sticks and stood in front of the door. All the other shops had closed. It was around 11.30 in the morning and there was almost nobody anymore on the street. If you would throw 10 cents on the street you would have heard it. It was unbelievable. The only ones who would pass by, were men and were almost running. Then they finally came. At first it was peaceful. But then a young woman walked to the shoes center as the crowd was passing and called for the rest to come. They did not. So she grabbed a stone and started hitting the iron door with it. A few boys came back. And little by little they all came back. They broke the doors, got in and took all the shoes and bags that were inside.... A lot of people came when they heard that the shoes center was being looted and watched, as we did. The looters continued stealing until a few police agents came. The agents arrested some people and sent

the rest out. Then one of the agents put fire in the shop and closed the door. They did it to end the stealing, so that there would be nothing to steal anymore. The building was still on fire the following day¹⁹.

-Rabab-

“In the house of Sofien ben Ali, a lot of people were stealing. But there were also a lot of people who came to see the house and watch what was happening, like myself. I only went to watch²⁰”.

-Ines-

When looters tried to pass through our neighborhood, a car blocked their way. They started running. I was outside and was watching them. When these men started running, I did the same. I run into our house. I did not know what was going on. But I run. I went to the window and looked at what was exactly taking place. I saw a police car. They drove into our neighborhood and chased the thieves. They hit a man with the car. He fell on the floor and I assumed that he would not get up. But as soon as he touched the ground he stood up again and run away. I was really scared, petrified even. I saw it happen but I could not laugh. Normally I would laugh. It was like a ‘camera cachee’. But I could not²¹.

-Maram-

“That afternoon, I saw these cars meant for children as toys, those they can ride and that cost around 500 dinars, lying in the street. There were also a number of teddy bears lying around. Bicycles as well. The people were taking them from the ground, riding them and laughing²²”.

-Haythem-

The third day which was Friday, signaled the start of the civil vigilance movement after the spread of rumors on men randomly breaking into houses and raping women. But Friday was also the day president Ben Ali fled and the start of the popular struggle against his militias.

We were at work, when my boss came. He was holding sticks and told us that everybody was, starting from now, going to guard and protect his house, his business, his family...Everyone in the city was going to do that and so we did as well. I went outside of the shop and looked at

¹⁹ Author’s interview with Raba, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

²⁰ Author’s interview with Ines, Hammamet, on 16 March 2011.

²¹ Author’s interview with Maram, Hammamet, on 26 March 2011.

²² Author’s interview with haythem, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011.

what was happening. All along the main avenue, the owners of the shops, their sons, their employees were holding sticks, or whatever. They were protecting it. A bit further away at the main entrance of one of the neighborhood, a big group of young and old men was standing. They too were holding sticks. Obviously protecting their neighborhood²³.

-Rabab-

On the 14th, people started guarding their neighborhoods. That afternoon, I was with my nephew and a friend had called and told us about it. So we went out to see what was happening. A young man we know passed us by. He was holding the stick of a parasol. It looked as though it would brake with the first hit. My nephew made a joke about it. The man looked at him and pulled a sword out of the long tube. It was like in the movie 'kill bill'. My nephew apologized immediately²⁴.

-Nabil-

The night Ben Ali run away, all the young men and older men of our neighborhood stayed up, outside guarding. We had heard that there were armed people who had stayed loyal to Ben Ali and his regime and that they were on their way to Hammamet. They were riding in their cars through the cities and were shooting at people as they drove by, indiscriminately. So we all went out to face and stop them. We made barrages from whatever we could find and that would be efficient to stop them. We put barrels at the entrances of our neighborhood. We prepared stones at every corner and we had our sticks. We all spent the night outside. We made a few fires. Back then in January the nights then were still very cold. All these little groups of young men gathered around them, talking and waiting. We were not organized, but we had to some extent agreed on what to do as soon as we saw or heard a car approach. The first nights were terrifying. The militias did not come. But since that night and until a few weeks after, we guarded our neighborhood day and night²⁵.

-Mohammad-

On Saturday and Sunday, day four and five, the struggles stood central in the experience and shaping of the activities; normal as well as abnormal. On Monday relative normality resumed.

²³ Author's interview with Raba, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

²⁴ Author's interview with Nabil, Hammamet, on 7 May 2011.

²⁵ Author's interview with Mohammad, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011.

Setting foot in theory

The subject at hand is life in a violent context, the effects of violence on social relations, on norms and values, on rituals, on activities of everyday life. Lubkemann challenges the approach to war, that is essentially defined by a Clausewitzian understanding of it as evolving around “the pursuit of politics by other means”; in other words the phenomenon of violence. He joins those who transgress the perceptual barriers built by the perverse human intrigue for violence, to turn around and see within the shadows of academic built knowledge, people living life; people no less human or subjects by effect of the extraordinary circumstances that shape their daily realities. Through research “grounded in people and the way they experience conflict and the enactment of violence” (Nordstrom & Martin, 1992:5), what Lubkemann, Nordstrom, Martin and others do is highlight the human and the realization of social life; a reality that is ultimately not solely defined by violence. Tailored by “good ethnography”, war ought to be approached as a social condition, Lubkemann argues. It is shaped by the primary interest in “*the everyday social life and its realization*” (1986: 14). Not a violent condition but a social condition, which implies the study of the “realization and transformation of social relations and cultural practices throughout conflict” (Lubkemann, 1968:1)

Some might comment that the revolution in Tunisia was a revolution and not a war and as such would argue that academic knowledge on war ought not be applied in the analysis of the revolution. True the revolution might not have been a war²⁶, but should studies of violence be about the shotguns fired? A fact is that they don't. The violence varied along the spectrum from violent imaginaries, to threat, to physical violence. Yet life in this social condition continued. The everyday is the first affected by violence according to Jabri's analysis on war: “a cruel reality that has an immediate impact on the everyday and the mundane” (1996, 4). The everyday is also that which links the normal to the extraordinary of conflict, through the discursive and institutional continuities it defines and that legitimize violence, conflict and war (Jabri, 1996). The everyday is a demystified form of the mystic, religious, symbolic and higher forms of the organization of social life, its cultural scripts and meaning. In the context of realities in violence, they collide with the conditions imposed by reality upon its practice and interpretation. The everyday is the chosen space of analysis in this thesis.

²⁶ War is defined in terms of the number of casualties, which did not exceed the thousand. Yet arguably emic notions are guiding understandings within social research and analysis. This non-violent uprising was described by many as creating a war-like situation was violent. Some informants said it has been a war.

At dawn, when the first sun glows separate, at the horizon, the darkness of the night from the surface of the earth, it is time for the first of the five daily prayers. As everyday, the voices of men simultaneously rise from the minarets of the various mosques to call for prayer. The same ritual that has been honored for centuries, is repeated everyday by pious men, transcending thus by the contextuality of the present in time and place, to symbolize and construct the experience of continuity, truth, security and stability. Undoubtedly, on Thursday the thirteenth of January, things did not go differently. At dawn, the 'athan' ruptured the night and signaled the time of the 'subh' prayer and the start of a new day. Continuity was enacted and the events of the previous day were dismissed, at least for a few minutes. Maybe more for those who chose and dared to challenge the darkness and the uncertainties of the dawn and the reality outside, to walk to the nearest mosque and there perform the rituals with others. Yet this continuity was enacted through a very specific type of ritual, namely a religious and sacred one. So even if it is reasonable to expect that the sacred transcends, at that moment in time a limited eruption of violence, is it also reasonable to expect that other aspects of social life would as well? Is it reasonable to expect that social relations, norms and values, social rituals of the everyday, activities of everyday life, etc withhold within them a similar potential for resistance, resilience and/or endurance? Should we imagine this potential in terms of stability as exemplified in the previous description or in terms of change? And is the structure that which withholds this potential and dictates it, or is it the agent who creates it or maintains it?

Whether one perceives the matter of resistance, endurance and resilience in terms of 'going on' or rising up, the theoretical analytical tale starts with the tension between continuity and change. A fact is that these are ultimately always coexisting and interconnected. Even social change is an ambiguous expression of continuity, as Anthony Giddens stated trying to make sense of this tension "[...] Every process of action is a production of something new, a fresh act; but at the same time all action exists in continuity with the past, which supplies the means of its initiation" He continues: "The most disruptive modes of social change like the most rigidly stable forms, involve structuration" (1979: 70). In order to grasp the processes of continuity and within it the various forms of change in the constructed social realities of individuals, action as lived discourse is the chosen primary locus of investigation. Routine and traditions; social, cultural, political and economic, in terms of what is deemed normatively normal and usual by the individuals, are expressions of stability. Transformations in these routines or traditions, challenging and reconfiguring what is deemed normatively normal and usual, are here conceptualized as changes. Yet both evolve in relation to continuity which is structured. Structuration is Giddens' analytical exploration of the processes of the constitution of society and the interconnectedness of structure and agency. Unlike many he dismisses the never ending discussion of structure *or* agency, to synthesize both and explore their

mutual constitution. He argues that structure is constructed by the social actions of the agent and simultaneously these actions are given their meaning by these same structures. The social system is produced and reproduced by the social practices of the agents; in other words by the day to day activities of the individual, which constructs everyday life and thus defines continuity (Giddens, 1979).

The case under study is deconstructed as follows; the national context is the revolt of the Tunisian people. The local context is a power and security vacuum and an ordered disorder. The dynamic at the heart of the analysis is the dialectic between the vacuum/ordered disorder constructed and the reconstruction of order. The points of focus are the moments where in which violence intrudes and becomes part of lived reality and the instances constructing people's reactions to violence but also to the social condition constructed. There is in addition to the previous stated normatively informed notion of normal and abnormal, another abnormal and by consequence also normal; the extraordinary realities of conflict defined by the aspect of violence. The point of focus, in abstract terms is thus the repertoire of actions available to the various individuals in society and which is conceptualized here as the medium between structure and agency caught in the process of structuration. Repertoire is a concept developed by Tilly & Tarrow in the analysis of contentious politics. Repertoire is defined by Tilly & Tarrow as "arrays of contentious performances that are currently known and available within some set of political action" (2007: 49). Though my intention is not to conduct an analysis of contentious politics, I do borrow Tilly & Tarrow's concept of repertoire in order to explore the ways structure and agency, through their interconnectedness shape the array of actions available to people, in certain contexts, at certain times and places. Repertoire is the outcome of the mingling of perceptions of what is legitimate contextually, knowledge of repertoires past, knowledge of successes past, knowledge of the present situation, knowledge of limitations and resources and the risks people are prepared to take. It is thus the product of the tension between structure and agency.

A main theoretical starting point is the conceptualization of the constitution of society through structuration, which renders a differentiating analysis of structure and agency as the sites of change and stability irrelevant. Yet what is not irrelevant is the enabling and/or constraining effects Giddens argues structure has on agency (1979: 70). He recognizes that the dialectic of control does withhold a certain characteristic of conditioning and in fact constraining in the process of social reproduction, yet he refutes the idea that structure is solely constraining and delimiting. He casts little clarity on the dynamics of constraint and enablement of structures, being aware of this he declares: "It is one of the specific tasks of social theory to study the conditions in the organization of social systems that

govern the interconnections between the two”, with the two referring to structure as enabling and structure as constraining the agent (ibid). The concept of repertoire will be an analytical tool to analyze at once the interconnectedness between these two and their conditioning through the organization of social systems.

But as a social researcher, one is not solely driven by the questions and interests one has developed before delving in the experience of field research. A social research ought to be conscious of the social reality he tries to analyze and let it, or better said the informants guide him and point his attention to what matters in empirical reality and following analyze and theorize it. As such in my theoretically informed quest for repertoires, the empirical caught up. An interesting insight is that normality was the essence of a repertoire of actions people drew upon to resist and contest the regime, the militias, the looters and also the social condition. As such the repertoire of normality expressed a continuity that transgressed the characteristics of the chaotic reality. But as it transgressed the difference between order and disorder, and as it was used by agents to shape their acts of resistance and contention, normality was no longer normal.

Stating it more simply; this is the framework that guides the analysis of the dynamic between the construction of disorder and the construction of order is informed by structuration that represents the dynamic and relation between structure and agency/action. This dynamic is placed in the social condition; that acknowledges ‘condition’ in violence and in social constructed reality. Mediating between structuration and the social condition on one level and structure and agency on a second level is the concept of repertoire.

Normality and abnormality

On Thursday morning, a semblance of normality resumed. People had to go to work. Groceries had to be done. Children had to be cared for. Social life was to continue its course as best as possible. As best as possible, because the semblance of normality that was carried on, resumed in such a way that it reinforced the extraordinary circumstances of the violent ruptures of normality and the everyday. The performance of the activities that embodied the lived memory of the usual, were enacted on this morning in an altered manner. They constructed the deviation of the usual. And these deviations were anomalies, in a similar sense as Erikson intended the word to mean when he discussed ethnic

anomalies. They were eruptive intrusions within the established order. They did not annihilate the order, for they were products of it and as such only graspable through it; through these structures of meaning. And yet they remembered those whose hegemony it was, that their world was as fragile and as threatened as any. This is essentially what characterized the daily life of those living in the context of violent realities. Life became different. It changed and this change was uncontrollable, unchained, human in every sense of the word. As will be revealed in other parts of the thesis, it is fear, it is danger, it is threat, it is tears, it is loss, it is the worst nightmare, it is the worst scenario, it is hope, it is pride, it is laughter, it is dignity, it is freedom, it is resistance, it is resilience, it is endurance.

In an attempt to understand life within the context of violence, of violent change, the concepts of normality and abnormality offer a significant insight into the human aspect of the experience of reality. The relation between normality and abnormality is characterized by an ambiguous interconnectedness and a ubiquitous coexistence along the continuum of their construction. They are emic concepts in Macek's approach, defined by social beings in interaction with their social environment (1997; 26). To Jabri, normality and abnormality are informed by social order; its persistence and construction, its breakdown and destruction (1996: 6-7). The most intriguing and perhaps also most insightful description of their relation is given by Michael Taussig:

“I am referring to a state of doubleness of being in which one moves in bursts between somehow accepting the situation as normal, only to be thrown into a panic, or shocked into disorientation by an event, a rumor, a sight, something said, or not said- something that even while it requires the normal in order to make its impact, destroys it” (1992: 18).

What underlies all three perceptions and the realities they attempt to describe and understand is the fact that abnormality is only graspable through its comparison to normality, and normality is the product and the outcome of everyday activities.

The essence of the notion of revolution is fundamental change. But life in revolution does not only entail willful change. It is also change that is imposed, that intrudes within the spaces of the private, after the doors have been closed. It persists even when one goes to sleep. It impacts the choices people make. And still more than that. Naturally, the activities the informants carried on through the everyday and especially on this specific instance varied according to the social and economic specificities of each and every individual, their obligations and their social roles. But once we move to a higher level of abstractness by transcending the particularities of their personal tales, we are enabled to fully grasp the dynamic between the normal and the abnormal in the everyday of this revolution.

On Thursday morning, at an unusual early hour of the morning, the people who had to go to their work mingled in the streets with those who had decided to get all the food and supplies they could imagine themselves to need for the upcoming hours and maybe even the upcoming days. The patterns of shopping defied the normality of their routinized and daily nature. A young woman, Rim who works at a local bakery said, recounting the events of that day: “Early in the morning, at 7 and 8 o’clock, people were already doing their groceries. The people who came to buy bread in the bakery bought 10 or 20 baguettes at once. People were scared; getting what they needed quickly and then going home. Everything that needed to be done outside of the home was done in the morning. Most people did not leave their houses in the afternoon.” Others prolonged normality by going to work as usually. But even this mundane activity was in various ways penetrated by the abnormal and extraordinary. The normal logic of everyday was disrupted by the logic of feelings of fear, insecurity and most importantly, reflecting the experience of the breakdown of order, a feeling of unpredictability. Rabab stated:

Off course I went to work, I had to. You can’t leave people without bread. But I was nonetheless scared. It was a chaos and people were obviously very scared. Scared and at the same time happy with the braking of the barriers of oppression. But we were afraid, afraid because we did not know what was going to happen²⁷.

Ines²⁸ explained that when she went to work on Thursday, she and her colleagues did not open the shop. Her boss was present and they were asked to load in all the supplies in his car. They emptied the shop, just in case. That day, Rim²⁹ explained, she and her colleagues had not done any work. They talked about what happened the previous afternoon, what might happen next. They talked for the first time openly, yet still carefully about Ben Ali.

Tunisian national TV was not a trust worthy source of information. Other social spaces, usually more neutral and thus less controlled and constrained continued being a reflection of people’s social reality and sustained their role in its construction. They became the sites of the construction of collective knowledge and the construction of the abnormal normality; what was to be expected and what could be predicted in this extraordinary context. As such imagine the sites of everyday gatherings; the lines at grocery stores, the group of customers at the bakery, a corner in the neighborhood where usually the elder men gather for their morning coffee and their paper reading, but imagine also the rooms of

²⁷ Author’s interview with Raba, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

²⁸ Author’s interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

²⁹ Author’s interview with Rim, Hammamet, on 10 June 2011.

teenagers and young students connected to the digital world; mainly facebook but also twitter. Some young informants explained that they spent their day on facebook; afraid or unwilling to leave the house they chatted and shared videos and the latest information on the evolution of the revolt. Through these everyday activities, continuity was produced but the abnormal was also part of it.

A semblance of normality lingered as people took on their usual activities. But simultaneously abnormality was also introduced into the realm of the ordinary, through the private enacted and collectively expressed fears, through the extraordinary measures undertaken to reorganize and reestablish a form of security. The effects of the unfolding revolution were mainly, at this stage of its evolution only real, by the realness of their consequences on everyday life. People adapted everyday activities to their feelings, fears, anxieties and were at a stage of awaiting what would turn out to be really real. Thus it is essential to attend the reader to one very particular aspect of this account of the construction of reality. Namely that what is presented here is a specific experience and perspective of the group of people I got the opportunity to get to know and interact with. These perceptions emanate from their individual experiences, their positions within the unfolding events, the norms and values they hang on to.

To confront in the sense of testing the preceding established analysis, a different experience is contrasted with the previous accounts of the abnormal normality. Some people ignored the transformed reality and dismissed the contentious violent events of the previous day to be as they usually did a one time occurring incident and thus irrelevant. They were struck by the unimaginable change and the occurring of the unexpected once and once more. Hala for instance, explained that walking was her way of dealing with stress. That morning she ignored her mother's worries and walked to the city center, as she always does. She walked to the sites she had been told had been burned.

I thought it was over. I thought it would not happen again. And so I went for a walk as I usually do when I am stressed out. I wanted to see what had taken place the previous day. I had only heard about it and not seen it. Everything seemed normal. But then, while I was in the city center, I got a call from my mother. I had to go home. She had heard that new demonstrations were going to take place. 'They' were already on their way. So I hurried home. On the street everybody was talking about it. And hurrying to get what they needed and go to their homes. I wanted to take a taxi, but the few who were still driving around, would not

stop. There was almost no one anymore on the street. I run to our house. I was in total panic³⁰.

So the everyday life, everyday activities were being conditioned by the political and social reality of the revolt. People seemed to have little choice as they were confronted by the life cycle of the revolution, which was being brought in motion by the actions of other people. It was performed and acted out, structured as such by a group of people and imposed on others. Others who did not refute the discourse of the first ones, nor exposed their thoughts on their actions. These others are the people whose perceptions, interpretations and realities are represented here. The revolution to them was an exterior force upon them. What was to people such as Hiba unexpected, took place. This time the contention was different and people started to realize it. Rabab explained her fear in terms of the unknown: “We were afraid because we did not know what could happen.” Order was changed. They were experiencing this reality for the first time. Like infants, they had not been prepared by experiences of the past to the events ahead. The social reality of the revolt unfolded again. It imposed its violent reality on the inhabitants of Hammamet.

A bold presentation of the events of the unfolding revolution have been presented in this chapter. What probably is the history of the revolution in Hammamet has been represented through the personal accounts and experiences of young informants. These experiences were dominated by the abnormal and the attempt to deal with the chaos, the fear, the unpredictability. But as people adapted their actions and routines to the imagined threats, they reinforced the abnormal and threatening aspect of reality. Thus by reproducing the abnormality and reinforcing it; structuring it. They were victims of the condition and adapting their everyday to their fears. But noticing the shift from Wednesday to Friday, this account fails to explain the difference in action between both days. The analysis fails to grasp the complexity of what is taking place. There is more. In the words of Hval: “Society is a very mysterious animal with many faces and hidden potentialities, and...it’s extremely shortsighted to believe that the face society happens to be presenting to you at a given moment is its only true face. None of us knows all the potentialities that slumber in the spirit of the population.” (Vaclav Havel, 1990 in Scott, 1990). This ‘more’ will be the subject of the following chapters and analyses.

³⁰ Author’s interview with Hala, Hammamet, on 10 May 2011.

Chapter three: The negotiation of normality and the production of resistance

The collective enterprise of observation

The accounts of the revolution were abnormal in more than one way. The revolution itself transgressed the imagined boundaries of the possible which is created by the practice of continuity; undergoing in silence the power of the powerful. Revolt was impossible, even unimaginable, yet now it was real. The accounts of the revolution were also abnormal because of the reality of phenomena that defied the non-violent uprisings' superior morality, but ultimately defined it. This phenomenon which was the looting that had broadly taken place had been recounted by all informants with no exception. These sceneries of looting were spectacular and had been witnessed in various ways; either directly, through gossip or through videos relating the sceneries, shared on social media. They were spectacular in their extent, spectacular in their absurdity, spectacular in their violence, spectacular in their abnormality. The lootings had already started on Wednesday afternoon, but intensified on Thursday. It was no longer the politicized system through its symbols that was being targeted. Contention was being redefined and its boundaries negotiated. The targets became less anonymous and less political.

While some inhabitants of Hammamet were trying to deal at best with the abnormality past, imagined and around them, holding on to normal daily activities, constructing a relative normality, early in the morning on Thursday, other people intruded into the houses of corrupt members of the presidential family. The information spread and people went to the houses; to loot, to contemplate the riches of the corrupt family, to witness and to remember. Even though some people described these riches, it quickly fell into obliteration when they started recounting the acts of looting they had witnessed, shadowed by the judgmental dismissiveness of its absurdity.

All the stealing that took place was unbelievable. When I arrived at the house, people were taking out the doors. Some were even breaking the expensive floor. Real professionals, handymen, were at work and every professional would stick to his own area of expertise. There were people fighting about what belonged to whom. Some young men took the jetski.

Another man I recognized took a refrigerator. He told me it was his. There were people who stole and there were people who bought the stolen stuff. Imagine that!³¹

-Ines-

It was really shameful.... I went to look in the house of Sofien. There was this man, his hand was in the sewerage and he was trying to pull something out of it. I was astonished and I said it. I asked him whether that which he was trying to pull out was really worth all this filth.

-Mohammad-

The physical filth Mohammad highlighted was merely symbolizing his perceived abjectness of the undignified and immoral act he judged the stealing to be. Notions of purity and impurity strongly shape everyday actions, traditions and rituals in Tunisian Islamic society. Purity in Islamic tradition is not only informed by a physical understanding of filth; dirt that transcribes itself on the individual to construct a pure or impure body. Purity is also understood through normative constraints and understandings of right and wrong, of haram and hallal. Acting out the haram de-purifies the individual and the body. This man went through both forms of de-purification; physical and normative and the question Mohammad addressed to him as to the worth of the object the man was preoccupied with stealing, hints to this double de-purification. While this man transgressed them, Mohammad was holding on to the boundaries that shaped in normal circumstances, normal notions of dignity, humility, shame, pride and honor.

As the looting spread; activities were produced by a growing group of people. A new meaning for the looting was being framed and the social practice redefined by a changed discourse, reproduced a new structure. This signaled the breakdown of the existing order and produced, as Jabri declared; behavior which is unacceptable in times of peace (1997: 7). Taboos were broken and redefined. Stealing and looting became an act of setting straight injustice and corruption. At least to some. Mohammad stood there and he held onto what he believed and what was normally deemed to be hallal and haram. As such the meaning and legitimacy structures were transformed into sites of contestation. In the afternoon, it was no longer only the houses of Sofien Ben Ali and Sakhr AlMatri that were being looted; others were also targeted; well known and respected inhabitants from Hammamet as well as a-political businesses. The boundaries of contentious legitimate performance were being dictated by the economy of profit in sustained chaos and the opportunities in the making. Normative boundaries were being displaced collectively and negotiated individually.

³¹ Author's interview with Ines, Hammamet, on 16 March 2011.

We heard that my uncle had been threatened. But he had hired 20 to 30 men to protect his shop. They stood in front of the doors, holding sticks. I was with my aunts, mother and nephews in my aunt's house, facing the shop. Everytime we would hear noise we would run up the roof to see what was happening. Standing on the rooftop we could see that behind the shop a group of people were standing and waiting for the looters to come break the doors and penetrate in the shop. Once open they would start looting with them. On the main road, a garbage collector had been set on fire. A few minutes later the police came and dispersed the people that had gathered around the fire. Then they left. While we were sitting in the living room, waiting for the announced important speech, we heard the loud noise of stones being thrown against an iron door. The shop was being attacked. I hid on the balcony and watched. The stones were really big. I looked further into the street and there they were. A big crowd was coming our way. My aunt had an artificial firearm, but it looked like a real one. And so my mother was shouting at my aunt to give it to her. "I will fire with it in the sky", she said. "It is just to scar them." But my aunt did not know where it was. It was her husband's. Outside they were screaming 'allah akbar' and then would throw with the stones towards the shop. I thought they had gone into the shop. My mother was shouting to my uncle, calling him. I shouted to her that she should her keep quiet. What if they came to the house? To us? We were all women alone in a house. Meanwhile my uncle had been hit on his head. If god have had wanted it, he would have been dead. Then we heard the police cars arrive. My uncle and his neighbors had called them. Once they came, the crowd run away. It was over. But the policemen were also scared. They were screaming to the men my uncle had hired "You have to fight them with us.' It was as if we were in the middle of a war³².

-Islam-

The demonstrations in Hammamet were started by people who believed in the revolution and who wanted to realize change. But they were joined by those whose aim was to break, steal and loot. They hijacked the demonstrations. What is the relation between stealing alcohol and the demands of the revolution? If these men went to bars and broke them because they thought that drinking should be prohibited in Tunisia, then I would be able to understand it. But breaking a bar or a shop to get the alcohol and drink it? I could not understand it³³.

-Haythem-

³² Author's interview with Islam, Hammamet, on 16 May 2011.

³³ Author's interview with Haythem, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011.

These accounts of the revolution highlight a number of aspects of its abnormality. Yet a fact is that the accounts themselves are part of the abnormality of the revolution. They are the oral testimonies of an ambiguous dynamic at the sites of looting, between looters and witnesses. A question that many might already have asked themselves is how did people such as Mohammad who refuted the legitimacy of the lootings act against this phenomenon? Wouldn't it be logical to expect people to have reacted against it? When I met Mohammad for the interview, two months had already passed since the revolution. Yet time had seemingly not demeaned the disdain he felt by the actions and scenes he had witnessed during the breakdown of order. It was enacted through his voice, on his face and through the words he used. He told me about this one instance. While he was sitting on the sidewalk, near to the entrance of the house of Sofien Ben Ali who was being looted, he saw an older, obviously religious man riding his bicycle. The man stopped in the middle of the street. With a loud voice, spoke to the people around him. He told them that what they were doing was haram. He asked them to stop. While he was standing there, another man also religious at first sight, rode by on his motor. His wife was sitting behind him, his daughter in front of him. He was carrying with him objects he obviously had just taken out of the looted house. The older man addressed to him directly and said: "Shame on you. May god show you the way. You should be a virtue to the people, not stealing with them." The man said: "I could use this. What can I do?" And he continued his way. I walked to the older man and said to him: "Uncle, don't waist your time. They don't understand." He looked around him, took his bicycle and left.

Mohammad sat there and watched reality unfold. He watched. And this is the answer to the first question is: Mohammad watched, as did Ines, Haythem, Islam, Maram, Rabab, Aymen, Nabil, Mounir, Sami and many others. They *all* watched but did not merely watch. Within the discrepancy of it being defined as merely an act of watching and it being defined as something that involved more than that, lies the answer to the second question. Contradictions in the situational logics of various social settings; power laden situations alerted Scott to one of the arts of the practice of resistance (1990). The tension in the active attempts of people to be present at the sites of lootings but once at the site, merely watch and observe is a contradiction of the situational logic that points to the possibility that there is more than meets the eye in the passiveness of the silent by the side contemplations of the stealing. I choose to dismiss the 'possibility' and by consequence argue in a hypothetical way that, in contradiction to their passiveness; these acts of observations form an act of resistance. Even though people had no mean to enforce order, through the act of mere observation, the witnesses resisted the domination of a new structure and the establishment of the new hegemony. They resisted the anonymity and secrecy of the act of looting and the anonymity of the guilty once order would be reestablished. They engaged in the collective enterprise of observation; an act; a

social practice informed and shaped by the continuity of notions of the normal, produced and reproduced. Social and cultural scripts of 'times of order' sustained their meanings in the chaos and became the source that informed the repertoire of contention and ultimately the repertoire of resistance.

Rabab recalled what she has seen at the looting of the shoes center; a young woman chose the shop to be targeted, probably out of mere greed and started the braking the door. The rest of the looters followed. Scary men holding long knives, gave orders to other men loading the supplies in a car. Men threatening one another. Women grasping a dozen of bags at once. A man putting boxes of shoes on his motor, leaving probably to his house and then coming back for another load. People picking up shoes and bags lying around on the ground meters away from the shop. Moncef had also witnessed the looting and recounted his memories; he had heard that it had been attacked and went to see for himself what was taking place. He was standing in the middle of a group of people, inhabitants of the neighborhood and other people he did not know. They watched. At the front doors the police had chased away the looters, closed the doors. The shop was on fire. Moncef said: "The shop was on fire and still people were going in by the backdoor to take stuff. While it was on fire..."³⁴. Rabab, Moncef and many others observed people looting; observed in a similar way as detectives and police agents on a crime scene observe and are expected to notice every little detail that is deemed relevant. Rabab, Moncef, Mohammad, Ines, Haythem, Islam, etc resisted through observation.

Observation becomes surveillance. Visibility was the trap, a trap construed in the social organization in similar ways as it was in the analysis by Foucault (1977 [1975]) of the measures to be undertaken in the case of the eruption of the plague and of the panopticon. The disciplinary mechanism faced disorder with order, impurity with purity, boundaries were drawn and groups constructed. Foucault's observation and discipline is complemented by the analysis of resistance and the hidden transcript by Scott (1990). The hidden transcript is the expression of domination and the creation of a space of resistance. Resistance is un-observed, contention and disorder are created, but still in the order. The discrepancy between both analyses lies in power. For the disciplinary mechanism is a reflection of the power to enforce order and purity, while the hidden transcript reflects the constraining effects of power dynamics on public spaces. Observation and discipline, resistance and power dynamics intertwine to construct the collective enterprise of observation and to define its practice in enabling and constraining ways, as will be analyzed in the following passages. The collective enterprise of observation is thus a practice of the art of resistance, a normative disciplining, the public

³⁴Author's interview with Moncef, Hammamet, on 12 Juni 2011.

performance of contention and structured by normality. To highlight this, two questions will be answered in the following passages; how do the various components of observation, discipline, resistance and power enable and constrain the construction of the collective enterprise of observation? And how is contention created?

An act of resistance in the social condition of the revolution

Scott (1990) represents resistance as the practice of an art, Nordstrom (1992) in terms of creativity. But through us widely acknowledging these analyses, what resistance really appears to be is the domain of academics imaginations; silences and gaps filled by our analysis of reality. Obviously we do not always nor necessarily need the explicit words of informants telling us that what they do is resistance. It is an untamed spirit, a way of life. The dilemma persists. Speaking from the position he calls the absurd³⁵, Albert Camus proposes a life of resistance, pronounced in the words of James Wood: “We must oppose the word’s meaninglessness with our revolt, our freedom and our passion (in Camus, 2000 [1942]: X). He presents Camus’ dilemma, who “cannot evade death, instead as it were, he will (in both senses of the word) entertain death, keep it busy (Wood in Camus, 2000 [1942]: XI). But the challenge, our challenge remains as follows; the line between living everyday life and resistance in everyday life to the social condition is a matter of metaphysics; only discernable through the consciousness of the acting people themselves. As such Wood wrote on Camus’ life of resistance to the absurd: “...when Camus comes to tell us how we can live with the absurd, he can do no more than tell us to do what we already do –which is live” (in Camus, 2000 [1942]:XI). So how should we then identify and characterize silent resistance? From a stand of idealism, we view resistance as a conscious revolt and defiance, the open statement of the hidden transcript, but there is more to the story of resistance than the spoken social truth to power. We grasp silent resistance through the dynamics and processes of the socially constructed reality; through the conflicts, contestation and contentions; through the contradictions in the situational logic to use Scott’s term once more.

The recognition of the contradiction initiates in the stories on the lootings. The descriptions in the recountings of the memorized scenes of looting are meticulous in their details, in their descriptions of the absurd; even months after the actual events took place. Several of those who recounted and

³⁵ The absurd to Albert Camus is an expression of the unreasonable. The great unreasonable matter to him is the meaninglessness of life and the attempt of people as meaning givers to give it, though meant to end a meaning.

judged these actions as abnormal and wrong chose to be present at the scenes of looting, to witness the events, to observe those who were stealing, even though they had no means to stop them.

We stayed up all night because we knew that there were people coming into our neighborhood and stealing. We wanted to know who it was. Four of us stayed up all night. At around 6am, still in the dark, we saw white things moving. It were refrigerators and other supplies from the looted houses being stolen. We went to look. We met two groups at a Carrefour. The first group was emptying the house and bringing it that far. The second group was loading it in a van and taking it away³⁶.

-Haythem-

After Bahroun was stolen, men with covered faces were riding around on the squads they had just taken. They passed by our neighborhood while I was standing outside. I tried to film them with my mobile phone. I was holding it up, but then they saw me and asked me what I was doing. I got scared and went quickly inside. What was taking place in Hammamet was unimagineable. That same day, people had looted the shop of Hamadi Abid. A few men passed by our neighborhood. I discretely filmed them as they were holding the clothes in their hands³⁷.

-Islam-

A number of people recounted their attempts and their successes at capturing scenes of looting on video. Several videos of lootings had been made available on social media spaces such as facebook. Inhabitants of all over the Tunisian territory watched looters run out of Tunisia's biggest malls situated in the capital, holding in their hands kitchen utilities, loading the bigger furniture on cars. Facebook that had become part of the organization of normal everyday social interaction was maximizing the gazes, thus by maximizing the shame and the scandal, for there was no hegemony as long as some did only watch, as long as these gazes and the dishonor they constructed persisted. For what if people they knew recognized them? Karima told about her father who had forbidden his children to take anything from the houses being looted. Yet he took a plant; a souvenir of the miraculous reality. His family confronted him with the possible consequences of his actions. He could have been filmed and the video could be broadcasted on national TV or on facebook. "Imagine the shame", Karima said. "He got really nervous³⁸", she explained.

³⁶ Author's interview with haythem, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011

³⁷ Author's interview with Islam, Hammamet, on 16 May 2011.

³⁸ Author's interview with Karima, Hammamet, on 18 May 2011.

If one would to be describe it very boldly, than this would be the account of the collective enterprise of observation; people went through the effort to be witness and watch the looting, to record its aftermath and then did nothing. One might ask why should we believe that this is resistance? To grasp the essence of resistance of the collective enterprise of observation, we need to understand the power dynamics created at the sites of looting, the subsequent social organization, as well as the performative processes of the construction of its meanings. The acts of looting were performed. The performance targeted three audiences. The first audience was the regime of Ben Ali and his clan. The second audience was the people who joined in the looting. The third audience was the people who merely watched, observed them, the looters in the full act of their looting. The message to the first audience; the regime was contentious. It was a lived discourse of contention and claim making, signaling that the regime lost its legitimacy, was corrupt, had taken what was rightfully that of the people, that they; the people now were going to take back what was theirs and that they did in fact have the power to oppose the regime and its apparatus.

The essence of the messages to the two last audiences was similar, namely the legitimacy of the acts of looting. On the walls of the houses of Sakr AlMatri and Sofien Ben Ali, tags connoted that their houses and belongings were the properties and rights of the people to own. People were attesting as such that they were merely taking what was rightfully theirs. The intensity and force, the choice of symbols and way of performing the legitimacy were linked to the obviousness of the legitimacy of the target of looting. The less obviously legitimate the targets of looting were, the more powerfully their legitimacy was enacted in the performance of its legitimacy. The men, who attacked the shop of the uncle of Islam, screamed ‘God is great’ with every stone they threw against the iron door, as though it was in name of god they were acting. That which differentiated the second from the third audience was the divergence in meaning and conditions of legitimacy, as will be set forth in the following paragraph. Yet there exists a grey zone between both positions. The targeting of the belongings of corrupt members of the ruling family was framed as a contentious performance. It was an outburst of the hidden transcript enforced by the repression and power of the regime. And one might wonder, in analogy to Scott’s (1990) analysis of Mrs Poyser’s³⁹ speaking truth to power, whether inhabitants of Hammamet felt that the looters, did to a certain degree speak in the name of the whole repressed population? And as such was it an act of resistance; a symbolic reconfiguration of the power relations? If it was, than they were harder to contest, their moral boundaries blurred. This contested truth in construction was reinforced in its unclarity by the large groups of people taking what was

³⁹ For the analysis of Mrs Poysner’s speaking truth to power, see Scott, 1990: 8-10.

presented as the property of the people. The gene and taboo of the act of stealing was reinterpreted and lost in relevancy and legitimacy. The extent of the acts, the framing, and the open declaration that it was different probably convinced some. And yet the looting was contested.

At the sites of looting, society was being organized in a different way and new group boundaries were being constructed between looters and witnesses. Some looters as they were confronted by the silent gazes of people who stood by the side and did not join in their project, confronted by their outspoken dissatisfaction, attempted to challenge these group boundaries. They attempted to challenge the interpretation of the normal, construct the new normal, the new rules, and the abnormal normal, by attempting the inclusion of these Others. Trying to achieve this they encouraged the observers to join in the looting, to cross the boundary of the normal and its rules, to become part of the construction of the new hegemony, rules, normality.

We were sitting in our garden, when neighbors came and told us that the house of Hassan Trabelsi was being looted. We went to watch what was happening. People passed us by running. They left the house of Ben Hassan by the backdoor, so that the police would not see them. They forgot that God did see them. It was unbelievable, they lifted the beds out the house, the mattresses, everything. People would pass us by, holding, lifting all these stolen objects and they would not say a word. But there was this one time. As looters were passing us by my mother could not stay silent anymore. She made a remark and merely said: 'Ellotf, ellotf.' The man, who was walking by, looked at her and said to her: 'Haja do you want clothes?' So my mother said: 'No I am not allowed. It is haram.' He didn't reply and continued his way⁴⁰.

-Hala-

I still did not know about the looting of Bahroun, the toy shop. I saw all these people with toys and bicycles and was wondering what was going on. A man walked passed me. He had a new bicycle and he said to me: 'They opened Bahroun. Go quickly and take what you want'⁴¹.

-Haythem-

There was no hegemony constructed for the abnormality of the situation, embodied by individuals such as Haythem, Mohammad, Ines, Hiba's mother and others was branding its judgemental gaze on the looters, redefining their normality as not normal, reproducing in silence and through passive

⁴⁰ Author's interview with Hala, Hammamet, on 10 May 2011.

⁴¹ Author's interview with Haythem, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011.

actions the continuity of normal norms and values. Structure and anti-structure were contesting one another. Each and every time the looters started their criminal acts; people gathered around them and observed them. The bystanders chose to be witnesses and shaped the stage for a silent trial. It is through the effect people have through their actions on the social system and the construction of social reality that we might identify resistance. Answering a previous asked question, in this case resistance was a reality.

Macek's (1997) notion of negotiation of normality withholds an aspect of dealing with and adapting to the reality lived, as such change at the individual level one's actions and notions of what is to be accepted, tolerated in order to cope with the exterior environment. The looters redefined their norms of conduct in accordance with the opportunities created. But others did not change these norms of conduct; they merely adapted their reactions to what normality outside the spaces of the private, newly meant. Mohammad, Haythem, Hala, Ines, etc did not have the power or the means to enforce their notion of order and normal. Thus they had little other choice than watch, observe the looters. They had little other choice, than by their silence and willful exclusion of the group of looters enact their disapproval, their resistance, their normal and their rules. I asked Moncef, as he told me about and described the looting of the shoes center, why he and the other by standers did not act to stop the looting. This was his explanation:

The men looting were very dangerous. They were holding knives and even swords. It was very dangerous. Perhaps we could have acted against them, but most men were standing there with female family members. What about them? If we would have acted at that moment, we would have put them in danger⁴².

As such there is another aspect that needs to be highlighted more thoroughly and which is the tension that is produced by the individual discrepancies of the process of negotiation shifting to spaces of collectivities. The negotiation of normality is understood by Macek (1997) as taking place at the level of the individual and is analyzed as such. But the negotiation of normality as a social process takes also place at the level of the collective and becomes a process of mediation of normality. The dynamics of power construct the power laden space of confrontation between those who changed their notion of the normal and those who held onto the normal; to the old rules of conduct. The new hegemony is constructed by those who hold the power to define the new truth (Macek, 1997). Different spaces of power balances were created by the power vacuum. And these different spaces of

⁴²Author's interview with Moncef, Hammamet, on 12 Juni 2011.

power created different spaces of enforced hegemony. Each household defined the new or lingering norms of conduct. But once outside the private realm, outside in a space where no power prevailed, the colliding notions of normal and abnormal lingered with no one of the redefinings prevailing over the other. Normality had to be mediated.

The process of mediation was the product of the dialectic between the two structures produced at the sites of looting. Structure and anti-structure collided. The structure produced by the anti-looters would be the counter-structure, as it was more heavily conditioned by the constraints of reality and power. The anti or counter-structure is produced by non-action for non-action is action as well. This active non-action; motivated and rationalized by discursive continuities; produced the structure that withheld notions of normal normality. It persistently reframed looting as taking what was not personally yours, as such an illegitimate act of theft. It challenged the structure produced by the looters and contested it. But it always needed to be a silent contestation, because open contestation was a dangerous matter. Rabab told me of that one instance; while she and her colleague Rawia were standing outside watching the looting of the shoes center, Rawia had publicly expressed her disapproval. Her boss walking by her, also disapproving of the looting told her nonetheless to shut up. What did she know of haram and hallal? What would she do if they would after hearing her decide to come up to this business and loot it?⁴³ People experienced and perceived themselves to have little other choice. Silence secured their safety and survival as they faced the strategies of control of the looters, the inspiration of fear and threat through the use of violence. This control was not hegemonic, yet fairly effective in the context of the need of meditation. And silence was a strategy within the repertoire of actions people could draw from, that seemed to come naturally to a population that had seen colonialism being replaced by two dictatorial regimes; the second worst than the first. This insight adds another level to the aspect of continuity and normality that I attempt to grasp, yet silence was this time accompanied by observation. People didn't look away, didn't hide nor ignored but rather faced that which bothered them, within the constraints and enablements of the overarching reality of the revolution structured.

The collective enterprise of observation lingered on the night of Thursday. On Thursday evening, after a day of widespread disorder and contention, former president Ben Ali appeared on national TV in a live speech. For the first time in twenty three years of reign, he spoke in the Tunisian Arab dialectic. He openly recognized the politics of dictatorship, repression and human rights violation. Promises were made; no censorship, no new re-elections of Ben Ali, a drop in food prices, more

⁴³ Author's interview with Rabab, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

jobs,... As soon as the speech of the nervous president ended, people went out to the street. Most did so to celebrate. As would appear later that evening, those who instigated and initiated these public celebrations were police agents dressed as civilians, all riding around in rented cars. People recognized the play staged. It was part of the normality of socio-political reality in Tunisia. Bessem described in the following terms:

As I was looking around, watching people I had seen looting in the afternoon, chanting and dancing after the speech, I realized that this all must be a lie. It was a play that staged a message to the people: all was good., now it had to end. We quickly realized an act, a movie. It was a movie like all the others we got used to here in Tunisia. A president winning elections with a percentage of ninety nine is impossible. We had enough of it. The only thing we wanted was the fall and change of the regime⁴⁴.

During that night, many people on-line and off-line negotiated hegemony and reality and continued mobilizing. The following Friday would be imprinted in history and Tunisian collective memory.

⁴⁴ Author' interview with Bessem, Hammamet, on 29 May 2011.

Chapter four: Living with violence

On Friday morning, personal evaluations were made; individuals observed life on the street, talked with neighbors and family members, trusted and guessed on their instincts to make the right analysis of reality and what one could or should expect to happen next. At this crucial stage of the unfolding of the revolution; a moment wherein was decided whether revolt would continue or frustration would be appeased and revolt thus ended, knowledge was key in the process of decision making and evaluation. People with access to facebook had unraveled the staged masquerade, and along the night, revolt was encouraged and mobilization sustained. People who did not have access to facebook had a different perception of reality; theirs was shaped by outbursts of happiness after the speech, by what people had dared to say when it seemed like the expected became uncertain again, by their personal desires on whether stability was valued higher than democracy or not. Thus as products of their own knowledge and means and spaces of acquiring such knowledge, different people guessed different realities.

“Thursday passed and then Friday came. I was scared. But all seemed calm again. Ben Ali was still president and it looked like it was going to stay that way. So I went to the house of my aunt⁴⁵.”

-Ines-

“After Thursday evening, after the little concessions and promises made I sensed that this would not be the end. Friday morning I said to my mother that it might turn out to take a while before this all would be resolved and end. I told her that we could perhaps better prepare for the worst. We had to go buy supplies; pasta, couscous, and most importantly flour and smid. So if there was no bread, we could at least make some home⁴⁶.”

-Islam-

Islam described what turned out to be an enterprise as she and her mother dedicated almost their entire day to getting all the supplies they might turn out to need. Other people spent their day, as they got used to do the last days, on facebook. Still others mentioned that they went to Tunis. They

⁴⁵ Author’s interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

⁴⁶ Author’s interview with Islam, Hammamet, on 16 May 2011.

had heard from friends, from family, from facebook that a demonstration was going to take place at the main avenue in Tunis; the Habib Bourguiba, in front of the ministry of interior. The rest became history. Back in Hammamet, Islam and her mother were getting prepared for the worst as many others did.

“The line for the bakery was unbelievably long. People would get at once a dozen breads. So bakers started selling a fixed amount of bread per person. All shops started doing that, whether it was for supplies such as milk, water, or flour, etc. After hours, we finally managed to get flour. But when people finished doing their groceries that day, there were no food supplies anymore left in our neighborhood grocery, only cleaning utilities. I had to go to various other shops to finally find some pasta. That same day my mother made us some bread. Saturday, once again there was no bread at the bakeries, but we had made some.⁴⁷”

Regularly the mother of Islam would bake traditional Tunisian bread. This was a tradition, doubled by it being an economic strategy, because the bread is less expensive and lasts longer. But it is also a tradition and an economic strategy that honored through oral tradition the role of women in the family system. A folktale recounted to us at school described the wisdom of a woman who during years had everyday baked an extra bread and sold it. She had not told her husband and along all these years had saved the money. When her daughter was of marrying age, this woman and her husband had to prepare her dowry. From her savings, this woman had put together one of the most expensive dowries they had ever seen in the village. Her family and daughter had been greatly honored in consequence. What was normally an economic strategy and esteemed as the practice of the continuation of tradition was now a strategy to deal with the insecurity and unpredictability of the chaos. This is one example of the way the repertoire of normality offered the means to face the abnormal and resist it, through what people already know and almost instinctively already do.

Around mid-day, new evolutions started re-shaping reality once again.

“So I was at my aunt’s, but then my mother called. She told me that there were men going into the houses of random people, stealing and raping the women. I had to come home right away. My brother came with the car and brought me to our farm. Then my uncle came and he brought me home on his motor. We went through the corniche. And I saw all these men standing outside with the sticks in their hands. Once I got home, I called my fiancée who was

⁴⁷ Author’s interview with Islam, Hammamet, on 16 May 2011.

in Tunis. He told me that they too were guarding their houses. They had heard the same stories of rape and stealing. My aunt who was living in Bizerte called us and it was the same in her town as well. Staring from then, from that day on, people everywhere guarded their neighborhoods.⁴⁸”

-Ines-

The violent outbursts of frustration, the experienced violence of the lootings had not triggered a massive response. People adapted. People resisted the creation of a new order, but this resistance was constrained, chained to the conditioning and power of those who condemned the acts of looting but had no power to enforce order. Frankly, they did not have the will; they were not prepared to endanger their lives for the sake of the belonging of corrupt members of the family of Ben Ali. It remained as such as long as a certain boundary was not crossed. The threat that was now emanating from a group of men randomly entering houses and raping women was worth the physical confrontation and danger. It was even worth dying for. The sexual violence was crossing a boundary of violence that is deemed legitimate and acceptable. At the heart of these very personal and human decisions, lies also a socially and culturally constructed fundament. The house is in Islamic tradition a private and mainly feminine space, where women could unveil and where they were safe from unregulated sexualized relations with men. The house became a socially and culturally constructed sacred place, strongly informed by meanings of penetration and violation and a boundary not to be crossed.

Construction of fear, ‘au féminin’

In accordance with gendered codes of conduct, the social rules that define femininity and masculinity, it was mainly women who described the fear they had experienced. When I explicitly asked young men about fear, they would confirm it, rationalize it and very briefly described it: “Yes off course we were afraid. There were armed people riding around in cars. We had only sticks and knives; a piece of wood. It was terrifying⁴⁹”. And though this fact was reason enough to be terrified, the fear many women experienced can not be grasped solely through the phenomenon of violence. Fear ‘au féminin’ was constructed by the social condition.

⁴⁸ Author’s interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

⁴⁹ Author’s interview with Nabil, Hammamet, on 7 May 2011.

Michael Taussig cited Edmund Burke's observation on the working of fear: "No passion so effectively robs the mind of all of its powers of acting and reasoning as fear". He added: "To make anything terrible obscurity seems in general to be necessary." (Burke, 1757 in Taussig, 1992: 2). Burke all too possibly might have been right.

Friday night was terrifying. Preparing for the worst, I had filled an empty plastic bottle of water with bleach and I had made little wholes in it. So if a criminal would get near I would squeeze the bottle and the bleach in his face. We had also hidden knives everywhere in the house. They were everywhere but in the kitchen where they are supposed to be⁵⁰.

-Rim-

Many had prepared for the worst and many had described the plans they had elaborated and prepared in case criminals or militias would come into their neighborhood; a hidden room to hide in, stones placed all over the house to be utilized when necessary. The greatest fear seemed to be that women would become victims of the violence and abuse of the criminals. They were constructed as the targets of the imagined sexual violence. This does explain further the logic of men barely mentioning fear while women described lengthily the fear that imparted its power on their lives. It imparted its power on their normality and their everyday life which had to be adapted to the potential threat.

Lying in my bed, I would hear the men running around in our neighborhood. You would hear a whistle and then the mad sound of the group of men running." Ines laughed. "A whistle followed by chaos. With their white ribbons tied on their arms, as the military had asked the civil vigilance groups to do in order for them to recognize them, they were running around the neighborhood. One evening, a cat caused a total chaos in our neighborhood. A cat was walking on the roof of a neighbor. A woman heard it make a sound, or she must have seen a shadow or so as she looked from a window on the roof of the neighbor. The point is, she got scared and started screaming. All the men were running around looking for a man, but all they saw was a cat." Ines starts to laugh again. I asked her whether she was afraid. This was she answered: "I was terrified. You know...Now I am laughing about. My brother as he came

⁵⁰ Author's interview with Rim, Hammamet, on 10 June 2011.

back from the night vigilance and explained what had happened, would be laughing about it as well. It was funny. But during the night, when it was happening, we were all terrified⁵¹.

-Ines-

A feeling of insecurity and fear prevailed. It became a constant and silent presence that reshaped the interpretation of every sound, every crack. It reshaped the parameters of security/insecurity; hours, places, people. It resulted in an experience and evaluation of security in inexistent and elusive terms.

It was one of these typical cold winter nights. As we always do when it is so cold, we; my aunt, my mother and I slept in the little room next to the living room. But we also did not want to sleep alone. In the middle of the night, my mother and I got woken up by a sound. Someone was walking on top of the roof. We were terrified. We called the grandson of aunt awaicha. He was guarding the neighborhood with other young men. We called him and told him that we had heard noise coming from the rooftop. A group of the civil vigilance team came running to our house. They climbed over the wall surrounding our garden. We could hear them talking outside. Aunt awaicha's grandson was still on the phone, he had not hang up. He told my mother that they encircled our house, but there was no one. "We could come outside and see for ourselves if we wanted to." But my mother refused, she said that she would not, under any condition open the door and leave the house. She would stay safe inside. It is only later that we realized that the sound we had hears was from the barrel standing on the roof. A cat must have jumped on it, as they do so often⁵².

-Islam-

Imen and her mother were laughing as they informed me of the absurd outcome of the story, the reality of their fear. It was a sound, they had heard a thousand times. They had been used to it and on any other day, probably had not even noticed it. Yet on that particular night, in this particular reality, in the obscurity of... the sound of the barrel was imagined to be the sound of a thief or a militia walking on their rooftop. But this time the most usual sound had scared them. Similar stories of cats had been related by others. Similar stories of the paradoxical dynamic of the absurd and fear had been related, but fear was not meant to be logical.

⁵¹ Author's interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

⁵² Author's interview with Islam, Hammamet, on 16 May 2011.

Saturday night must have been the most scaring night of my life. My aunt, my mother, Safa and I we were watching national Tunisian TV. People from all over the country were calling to ask for help and rescue. They gave information on where they were and what was happening. People called telling that they had seen militias coming into their neighborhood in such and such a car, in an ambulance, in a taxi. They used different cars. But that night, a woman called, she was hysterical and was crying for help: “You have to be quick. Come. They are already near to the manufactory of dynamites. I live next to it. If it explodes, half of Tunisia will be destroyed by the blast.” The woman on the telephone was crying. The presenter of the program went crazy. She got confused and was terrified. She said to the woman on the telephone that she had to be careful. She was walking around on the show, screaming to people that they had to contact the military: “Call the military. Call them. The dynamite factory! People help and save us. Soldiers where are you? Policemen where are you?” The woman on the show was going crazy. Meanwhile you could still hear the woman on the phone crying. I was sitting in my bed, tucked in the blanket. I had my hands on my chest. I was terrified. I thought that was the end. But the military caught the militias at the entrance of the manufactory. They had pulled out with helicopters and arrived on time to stop them⁵³.

-Islam-

Women were imagined as the main targets of the threat and violence. In a spirit of resistance, in order to survive, their daily activities were adapted to the threat. They were restrained in their mobility, enclosed for large parts of the day to the safe zone of the house. Their lives were reorganized along a time and spatial boundaries, varyingly including and excluding them from public life. The understanding of the violence and the measures reorganizing daily life undertaken in consequence abided to normative notions of normality and continuity. The women are the symbolical embodiments of purity. They are represented as innocent beings, victims rather. Their innocence is imagined through sexual purity, as well as through normative and physical powerlessness. This renders them objects of control, discipline and savior. And so the daily life of these young women became abnormal, through these persisting structures of meaning. It was this abnormality that shaped and reinforced existing representations of their role as victims and which ultimately reinforced and defined their experiences of fear. The young women were constantly remembered of their victimhood and their powerlessness through the extraordinary and extended rules that dictated their lives.

⁵³ Author’s interview with Islam, Hammamet, on 16 May 2011.

Obviously there is more than one explanation for the fear; less socio-cultural and more related to practical aspects of reality. Trying to explain the prevailing feeling of fear, Maha stated:

“We did not know what was going to happen. We heard that there were people dying, people killing. We heard bullets being shot. Was it going to go back to normal? Were we going to go back to school?⁵⁴”

-Maha-

“I was very afraid. People had said that there would not be food enough. At the groceries, the owners had already decided to sell supplies according to specific quantities per person. We bought food we could save for a longer period. I was worrying about my fiancé, who was guarding⁵⁵.”

-Ines-

The argument is that normality and thus abnormality constructed, during the relatively violent context of the revolution a repertoire for resistance and contention. In a continuity of constructed notions of gendered normality, the actions -scripted- that inform reactions to the violence and the announced threat were fed by the representations of femininity and masculinity. The reorganization of social life was regulated along the lines of divides of these gendered social representations and roles and reinforced thus by normal notions of social reality, yet with a constant presence of the abnormal; its constant imagination and conceptualization in daily life and activities in relation to threat and violence. Men had to fulfill their roles of warriors and protectors of the feminine; of the purity of their household. Women had to abide to the rules in order to be able to be protected from evil men and fulfilled their role of caregivers.

I have spent a lot of time watching TV, in order to understand what was going on. On Tunisian national TV, there was a live program. You could call the studio in case of emergencies; when you were under attack, when you saw militias in your neighborhood,...There were militaries at the studio and they were in contact with troops all over the country. This way they organized military and security actions⁵⁶.

-Ines-

⁵⁴ Author's interview with Maha, Hammamet, on 28 May 2011.

⁵⁵ Author's interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

⁵⁶ Author's interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

“Hammamet was calm, but we were afraid. We watched the national TV and had heard the plights of people all over the country, the plights for help and rescue. It was mainly because of all these stories that I was terrified⁵⁷.”

-Hala-

A scenario by the dictatorial regime, not unfolding

A curfew, on the whole territory was announced to start at 6pm. At around 4pm, it was announced that the curfew would start at 5pm. People who were still outside, had to run to their homes, to make it one time. At 5pm, the streets were deserted. The girls and women who mostly, had not dared leave the safety zone of their neighborhood were inside. The men and boys who had spent their day guarding, who had stood by the barrages they had installed at every entrance of their neighborhood, waiting for thieves and rapists, went inside as well. The curfew was in place. Public life had halted. Life was enclosed in the house. An important announcement that would be broadcasted on national TV was awaited. Rumors had already spread about Ben Ali's fleeing, but nothing was sure, yet.

On Friday afternoon, AlJazeera announced that Ben Ali had left Tunisia. We were all home and were watching TV. When Gannouchi spoke to the people on Tunisian TV and announced that he would be taking over the functions of president, we knew for sure that Ben Ali had left the country. We did not know exactly what had happened or what was going to happen, but we hoped for the best. We spent that night preoccupied with the discussions on TV about which amendment of the constitution ought to be applied in such a situation. The prime minister takes over the duties of the president in case he is unable to perform his duties. Yet Ben Ali had run away. People were discussing whether it was amendment 56 or 57 that should be applied. Meanwhile we were also following the information on the trajectory of the plane of Ben Ali. Was he going to Libya, to France, to Italy...? At around midnight he landed in Saudi-Arabia. And I went to sleep. But you know?... The revolution was a subsequent follow up of events. This phase of Ben Ali fleeing lasted a few hours, experienced as seconds. Soon we realized what was really going on; with the police, the snipers⁵⁸.

-Ines-

⁵⁷ Author's interview with Hala, Hammamet, on 10 May 2011.

⁵⁸ Author's interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

I went to my grandmother on Friday afternoon. It was a whole lot of trouble to finally get there. Everybody on the street was holding a stick, a sword, a knife,...I saw a few police cars drive around, but it was a total chaos. I stayed at my grandmother's with my nephew. He had spent the day in Tunis demonstrating at the interior ministry. Together we watched the news. Ben Ali had fled. Later that night a friend from Tunis called me. He told me that on Saturday another demonstration would take place. It was necessary. According to a family friend who was a lawyer, the amendment used applies to a situation wherein which the president was for a temporary period unable to fulfill his duties. The government was waiting for Ben Ali to be able to come back. Tarek told me about a scenario set in place and which would enable Ben Ali to come back as a hero and regain his function as head of the state. This scenario already started unfolding that same night⁵⁹.

-Nabil-

Haythem described his recollections of Friday night, after former president Ben Ali fled. It was the night that his militias were set loose all over the Tunisian territory.

“It was terrifying. We had heard that they were coming from Mahdia, coming to Hammamet. They were armed and trained. It was a war. We were leaving our houses that night, preparing to fight the armed militias. We assumed that we would die that night. We were prepared to die that night. We said goodbye to our families. My mother held me as though she would never see me alive again. Before going outside I said the shahadatay⁶⁰. I was prepared to die, but I was worrying about the women. Who would protect them if we would be killed? These men were capable of horrible things⁶¹.”

-Haythem-

“It was chaos and so the people had to protect themselves. We had to protect our sisters and mothers, our house and properties, our neighborhood. So, when the curfew would start and people were supposed to go and stay home, we, mainly the young men who did not have to go to work the following day, we would go outside. But everybody would stick to his own neighborhood. We would get out armed with knives, a hammer, a stick, etc. And we elaborated a system. When ever there was a danger; men who tried to get into houses or tried

⁵⁹ Author's interview with Nabil, Hammamet, on 7 May 2011.

⁶⁰ The shahadatayn are two sentences Muslims say to testify that god is one and Mohammad is his profet.

⁶¹ Author's interview with Haythem, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011.

to do something else, whatever danger, we would whistle. Young men from all the surrounding neighborhoods would come and help catch the men and eradicate the danger⁶²”

-Mounir-

The incentives for both Mounir and Haythem but also other men, to join in the popular movement of self-defense had nothing to do with greedy calculations or political motivations. Rather their motivations, the logic of their choice tied up in socio-cultural disciplining of their masculine selves and notions of honor and respect. Discipline is presented by Foucault (1975) as a mechanism for social organization that serves the purpose of countering disorder. He represents the practice of disciplining as the social organization of the body in time and place. The disciplined feminine was confined to the secure house, while the disciplined masculine was to take place in the battlefield; on the streets to face the danger of the militias and the criminals. Masculinity was triggered by a call of duty. The imagination and understanding of masculinity was a space of the mundane that could not be allowed to fall into disorder. Disorder was met with discipline. The ontological and epistemological vacuum, which Macek (1997) argues are created by insecurity, were met by ontological and epistemological normalities transformed into certainties by the reinforcement of their reality through their disciplining. Social life was managed and reorganized in terms of the maximization of security on various levels of reality and imagination.

The chaos was a *mélange* of the state/authority power vacuum as police agents fled their posts, which had started in Hammamet since Wednesday and the organized orchestration of chaos and insecurity by armed men who chose to stay loyal to the dictatorial regime and were following the order of Siryati, at that time head of presidential security forces. A scenario set up by the regime of Ben Ali, as recounted by all informants, on facebook, in journals and magazines, was based on two phases and followed the line of thought and discourse the regime had adopted in the last couples of years. The myth of this regime as guarantor of the security of Tunisians and stability of Tunisia was going to be enacted by the militias. These men staged chaos and instability and would create what the regime had professed it was saving the nation-state of. Once Ben Ali, a few days after his departure would come back, he would be welcomed as the man of the situation, the man who had protected Tunisia and now would save it from chaos. “The militias were men belonging to and loyal to the RCD⁶³. They rode around armed, got into the houses of people and attacked them. They attacked shops; groceries, vegetable shops, butchers. They attacked people on the street”⁶⁴. The mundane was

⁶² Author’s interview with Mounir, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011

⁶³ The RCD is the political party of former president Ben Ali.

⁶⁴ Author’s interview with Maram, Hammamet, on 26 March 2011.

the target of the militias. So if the incentive to react, mobilize and resist the militias lies in a mainly socio-cultural logic, this does not necessarily explain the strategy of resistance chosen. Why then did these young men, did society apprehend such a strategy of resistance? And perhaps the better question to ask here is how did the self-defense movement start?

The birth of a resistance

I asked Nabil during our interview whether he remembered when the self-defense started and how it had started. This is what he answered:

On Friday the 14th, people warned us that there were people riding around in cars, that they entered into houses and were stealing. People started guarding their neighborhoods. That afternoon, I was with my nephew and a friend had called and told us about it. We were home and still did not know about what was going on outside. So we went out to the street to see for ourselves. A young man we know passed us by. He was holding the stick of a parasol. It looked as though it would brake with the first hit. My nephew made a joke about it. The man looked at him and pulled a sword out of the long tube. It was like in the movie 'kill bill'. My nephew apologized immediately. And we joined the group of men who were guarding. In the neighborhood of my grandmother everybody was outside and we had gathered on the street. At 5pm the curfew started. We were still outside, but then someone came out of his house and said that an important announcement was going to be made on Tunisian TV. Everybody had to go inside and watch it. After the speech, we went outside again and we spent the night outside guarding. We stayed until the morning⁶⁵.

-Nabil-

I asked Ines the same questions on when and how the self-defense movement started; two questions I ended up asking almost all my informants. Ines explained that when she arrived home, the young men of her neighborhood, including her brother and nephew were standing at the entrance. They were prepared for the fight with these criminals. They had heard that the fight had already started. They would catch them. There was no way these criminals could escape with all the men awaiting

⁶⁵ Author's interview with Nabil, Hammamet, on 7 May 2011.

them. She stated: “They just decided to guard and so did it. It was funny⁶⁶.” At this stage, the enemies were said and thought to be criminals who had escaped the prisons in the chaos of the past few days. They were rapists, thieves and killers who had been sentenced to life imprisonment. They were not scared of anything and had nothing to loose. At this stage, the resistance movement of self-defense was very similar to a street fight. And yet it was. It had nothing to do with a simple street fight. There was no state authority to perform its task of procuring security. People figuratively and literally stood up for themselves. It was thus a popular movement of empowerment in a stateless state. Haythem captured in a few words what he and many others, stated had felt during these couples of days: “Tunisia was ours and we had to defend and protect⁶⁷.”

This was not a simple street fight. This popular and spontaneous movement for self-defense was existent all over the city of Hammamet, all over the Tunisian territory. People tried to guess where it had at first initiated. Through telephone and over social media, people informed one another on the phenomenon. The message of this diffusing information was clear; this is what is happening and this is what we need to do. Rabab explained that her employer had spoken with friend, came back with sticks perfectly shaped and similar to the sticks many men had acquired in the neighborhood. Through social relations and networks, through the intertwining and continuity of the real world and the digital world, the popular movement of self-defense gained in extent, in power. It was a reality that became the source of a pride that resonated through various interviews. As Haythem had explained, Tunisia was theirs, that of each and every individual Tunisian and simultaneously of the collective of Tunisians. This pride resonated in an account Moncef recounted. When answering the question on when and how this movement initiated, he said that everyone was alert to everything that was happening. A few young men had at the beginning of the chaos stayed up in the neighborhood and ha kept an eye on what was happening. The movement gained in extent and seriousness with the subsequent evolutions. He then started to describe, with an all too clear sense of pride and admiration, the events at the stadium. This was an event, another informant; Aymen had explicitly stated as the beginning of the self-defense movement.

I told you...It all started with the stadium of Hammamet. A few friends and I were going to a café. Yassine was there as well. When we arrived to the café we usually go it, it was closed. So we decided to go to the following one. There we run into people holding wooden sticks. They

⁶⁶ Author’s interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

⁶⁷ Author’s interview with Haythem, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011.

said that they were going to the stadium because there were people who were intending to burn it. They would protect the stadium. People started gathering and the crowd grew. As we were standing there, a car of the police passed by. The agents signed to us that we were doing good work. I remember a young man saying to them that they were cowards and that the civilians now had to protect the police. The car drove away. Each one of us alerted and called a few friends. After a little while, a massive crowd of men had encircled the whole stadium. There were so many of them that they were standing shoulder against shoulder. You could not pass through them. They protected the stadium⁶⁸.

-Aymen-

At the light of these various answers the question becomes; is there really a point in time and place that can be identified as the point of initiation of the movement of self-defense? Isn't it rather an evolution, in fact the construction of a repertoire of resistance and contention? A construction that evolved from and by the regulating power of the socio-cultural logic, from a repertoire that formed action in the context of the normal, enriched by spontaneous actions that built upon this knowledge to cultivate new forms of resistance and contention within this repertoire and within the conditioning power of reality. The description of an evolution is to be noticed in a number of the depictions of the self-defense movement. Recounting the night of Friday, Rim explained the following:

On Friday night, the men in our neighborhood stayed home and each in his own house was going to protect his own family. I thought that that was a bad idea. In our family there were only two men to protect all the women. What if a group of men would try to get into our house? We would not stand a chance. I asked my brother why it was not the whole neighborhood that would guard the neighborhood together. Luckily starting from the following night that it is the way it was organized⁶⁹.

Haythem described the process of creation of the movement of self-defense in his neighborhood, relating the need for action and yet also the constraints imposed on them (the young men) by the facts on the ground:

“In the neighborhood we had trouble with all what was happening. There were so much people and what seemed like a hundred cars a day, while normally it was always very quiet. It

⁶⁸ Author's interview with Aymen, Hammamet, on 14 March 2011.

⁶⁹ Author's interview with Rim, Hammamet, on 10 June 2011.

were almost only people who came to steal, we did not know them. We were troubled by all this. They even entered the house of another neighbor. On the first day we agreed to do something about it. We ordered people to get out of the house of Sofien Ben Ali and closed the door. We thought it would be over. But the next day it was the same. We agreed upon the fact that we would not be able to contain and oppose all these people and so we decided that at least, we could try to limit their access to the rest of the neighborhood. We encircled the looted houses to make sure the looters would not get into the rest of the neighborhood. And at night we would close the doors of these houses⁷⁰.

-Haythem-

This was an instance of what of what grew through emergency, with time and organization into several weeks long lasting popular initiative to protect the community. But it still necessitated time to be learned, to be perfectionned.

We still hadn't done anything. We were sitting on the pathway. Everybody was sitting in front of his house. People were talking about what was going to happen and what already had happened. There were cars that passed by, running. But this was the first night and we had not really organized yet. This road was also one of the main roads in Hammamet, we could not just close it, nor all the other roads that led to it. We couldn't stop the cars when they rode by at 150km/hour. I remember that there was one car that rode by, very fast. They hit a pathway and then rode into another side street. A few minutes later, the militaries came and they asked us whether everything was ok and whether we had seen anything. We told them about the car. Later we heard a number of bullets being shot. That was our first night⁷¹.

-Nabil-

With a smile on his face, as he recounted an anecdote, that exemplified the process of evolution of the movement, Aymen stated: "Every day it got better and we improved the organization. Everyday we would learn something ...". He explained it further:

"There was an instance; a car that did not want to stop. One of the young men standing on the roof, hit it with a stone and so the driver stopped. A woman was sitting in the car and fainted out of fear. She was sick and her husband was bringing her to the hospital. He cried and asked whether we could let him go. Off course we let him go. We called people in the

⁷⁰ Author's interview with Haythem, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011.

⁷¹ Author's interview with Nabil, Hammamet, on 7 May 2011.

other neighborhoods and told them about the car and the woman needing to go to the hospital, so that they would not be stopped anymore. At first we worked independently, but later the neighborhood started working together. We shared mobile numbers to communicate with one another, warn one another. We controlled cars and would call the following barrage set up by the following neighborhood to inform them that we had checked the car. We used facebook as well, to keep informed. I remember that one day, I had an internet-cle⁷², so we installed the computer on the table outside near to our barrage and we constantly checked facebook⁷³.

-Aymen-

From observation to primitively armed yet socially organized popular resistance; this is the shift that took place between Wednesday; the first day and Friday; the third day of the period of five days studied here. It would be wrong to perceive this shift as instant and a simple product of the moment on Friday afternoon of its actual active initiation. The self-defense movement ought to be conceived of in terms of the normative notions of normality. Normal notions of what the role of women and men is in society. What they ought to do and how they should act in general. But even more precisely, what they ought to do and how they should act in the face of violence. It was the expression of social and cultural knowledge transmitted and constructed by the collective through time and space; an expression of continuity and now once again produced and reproduced. But this specific strategy of resistance was also the product of less recent experiences, knowledge taught by reality; the spontaneous act of popular protection of the stadium, the rudimentary exclusion of looters from the rest of the neighborhood surrounding the looted houses, the learning and perfecting of the self-defense movement through time and experience, through sharing of experiences. What is presented here is the account of the construction or structuration of a repertoire of resistance, which was shaped by sustained notions of normative normality enacted though through an abnormal and changed routine. It was informed by an existent repertoire and further shaped by the constraints and possibilities in the reality, by the social relations and interactions and by social and cultural understandings of reality.

The representations of life in revolution presented in this chapter are also an account focusing on the various ways violence affects and shapes everyday life. These representations reflect the ways violence dominates the everyday and conditions the people in their choices. Yet what I also tried to do is shed light on the array of ways violence does not condition the actions of the people. Ben Ali's

⁷² The cle is used to access wireless internet.

⁷³ Author's interview with Aymen, Hammamet, on 14 March 2011.

militias were intending to annihilate the uprising by orchestrating chaos and using violence as a mean for terror. They might have assumed that people would hide at home, in their safe zones thus by bringing the revolt to an end. Yet this did not happen. The people chose in the context of chaos and insecurity a different path. In the following chapter, I continue the analysis of the spirit, the construction and the repertoire of resistance.

Chapter Five: Living beyond violence:
Resistance in the resistance

The reorganization of society, along gendered lines mainly, could easily have been anticipated as it was an instinctive continuation of the structures and in fact obeyed a cultural and social logic. It was a production and reproduction of continuity through daily activities informed by notions of the normal. Yet reality is more complex and the manifest resistance against the militias, the criminals and the looters withheld a latent resistance against the constraints of the social condition itself. These acts of resistance were ingrained in spaces of enablement. Within the spaces of threat and constraints the revolution and its violent unfolding bound individuals to the strategies it ‘naturally’ structurally produced. Yet people identified spaces of freedom; more enabling and less constraining, which they utilized to escape the constraints and along the process of structuration create the ability for revolt against the violent context and social condition. In the reorganized social lives of inhabitants of Hammamet, new forms and meanings of resistance and contention were shaped and enabled by and through normality. In the context of extraordinary reality, living normally became a form of resistance against the structure produced and reproduced by the loyalists to ZABA⁷⁴. Three main strategies within normality’s repertoire of contention and resistance will be analyzed. The first will analyze the repertoire of action used by women to challenge the time and spatial boundaries as well as the gendered boundary of the construction of warrior-target role. Secondly and thirdly I will analyze respectively, what I will refer to as the ‘positive process of identity construction’ and humor which ought to be conceived as ways that have been utilized to resist the direct and negative effects of violence on the everyday.

Challenging the gendered boundaries of resistance

I was walking through the main street in Hammamet with Samia and we were talking about all that had happened during the revolution. And then Samia suddenly said: “We are still terrified at the sight of rented cars. I still notice them every time one rides by⁷⁵.” And I looked at my right and I saw a

⁷⁴ ZABA is a shortening of the name of the former Tunisian president Zine Alabidin Ben Ali.

⁷⁵ Author’s interview with Samia, Hammamet, on 19 April 2011.

dark blue car passing. It was a rented car noticeable by the blue sign board. Samia was still following it with her gaze until it turned around the corner. Taking on the challenge of grasping fear, which as Linda Green states is “elusive as a concept; yet you know it when it has you in its grips”, Taussig writes and successfully grasps the essence of the experience of fear as described by a number of young Tunisians: “undermining meaning while dependent on it, stringing out the nervous system one way toward hysteria, the other way toward numbing and apparent acceptance” (1992:11). He grasps the plenitude of the reality of fear; its nuances, its power over the individual; its disappearances and appearances within the self, the way one accepts it and the way it becomes normal, yet remains a threatening power at the lurk. “The first days I was afraid but later not anymore, because I got used to it. Once you get used to something, you hear it everyday, it is no longer frightening⁷⁶.”

I met up with Hala on a sunny Monday afternoon. The post-revolution challenges caught up with. On the corner of the street, a few young men had been in a fight. A group of friends had caught up with them and were preparing for a fight. But the militaries came and as quickly as the disorder started, it ended. When asked by her experience of confinement, she told me:

“My mother was very scared. But I could not stay home anymore, so I went to the hairdresser and the hammam. This was when it was still chaos outside. Why I went? I wanted my hair to be done, off course. [laughs]. Classes had all of a sudden stopped and they could all of a sudden start again. So I needed my hair to be done, in case I had to go to college again. Just imagine! What if all of a sudden I had to leave to go to Tunis again. Would I then have to go with an awful haircut? My mother was terrified and asked me to get a taxi when I had finished and come home immediately. Rabbi yostor⁷⁷, that is all. I remember that at the hairdresser women were talking about how scared they were⁷⁸.”

I was amazed, here she was; Hala, a friend I had known for years. We would always make fun of the fact that she was the most scared person we knew. And then, while snipers were told to be shooting randomly at people, while the country was described by many as going through a civil war, here she was, Hala, telling me that she went to the hairdresser. The look on my face must have translated my stupefaction. She started laughing. So I asked her whether there were many women at the hairdresser. She replied: “Yes off course. Do you think that life stopped? We were just scared.” Instinctively, I

⁷⁶ Author’s interview with Maram, Hammamet, on 26 March 2011.

⁷⁷ Which means God protects us.

⁷⁸ Author’s interview with Hala, Hammamet, on 10 May 2011.

presumed and represented to myself a life put on hold by the violence, the threat but more importantly by the all consuming feeling of fear. In the specific case of this study, the experiences of violence varied; some has been literal and physical. But what mainly dominated was barely violent in the literal and physical sense of the term, rather imagined. It was violent by the consequence of the rumors, the insecurity, the instability, the threat and fear that were the result, in Hammamet of the intertwining of horrific accounts on violence in other cities, the vacuum in Hammamet itself and the awareness that it could at any moment happen here and that it could be directed at them.

Fear penetrated all spaces of the individual's life and person. It held the people under its power. The militias by their use of what might seem as indiscriminate violence yet which was clearly intended to instigate terror and instability was penetrating all the aspects of people's lives. "The biggest revolt and resistance during these days was that against fear. Fear dominated what we felt and thought. It was caused by the stories on the militias who riding around in hired cars, shot at people walking on the street. We were told to be careful and to stay inside and yet people went by their daily life as normal as possible. We went outside, we went for groceries. We knew these stories, but we had to and we could not let them win⁷⁹". People were aware of the danger. They knew and yet. At some point in the interview with Maha and Nabil, the tone of the conversation became less serious. Funny anecdotes as both were calling them were being remembered and shared, but whether the laughter at that instant in the interview; months after the chaos, did also reflect a possible moment of laughter and escape during the actual violent days is almost impossible to know.

"A friend of mine, she a bit crazy, said that once they had heard noise and then they; the women in the neighborhood got out holding knives and sticks."

While laughing, she added:

"My brother once had to go outside. What he then did is put a casserole on his head⁸⁰."

Yet what this 'funny anecdotes' does connote is in fact the discrepancy between the imagined boundaries set socially and culturally in the organization of society and then again the practice of them. These anecdotes were recounted when I had asked the very broad question about the experience of fear. Maha stated that she had spent all her days at home. She would not leave the house. This is the social and cultural rule imagined of how things should be done. It was connoted in the initial phase of the answering process during interviews. But once I would continue my quest for

⁷⁹ A very wise woman told me this. It is a description by my mother, who lives in Hammamet, of her experience of these few days.

⁸⁰ Author's interview with Maha, Hammamet, on 28 May 2011.

detailed descriptions, nuances in the practice would appear. These nuances are not conceivable imaginatively, which would explain why to Maha the imagination of her friend and the other women in her neighborhood doing this seems so absurd and hilarious. Nonetheless these nuances are practiced. And the divergence between imagination and practice in fact grasp and reflects the essence of the divergences between the approaches of Nordstrom& Martin (1992) and Lubkemann (1968) and those they present as representing conflict in terms of the violence.

The gendered imagination of violence and the reorganization of society along this systemization gave way to the construction of the masculine warrior as a civil vigilante and the feminine target and caregiver. The way this reorganization took place was through the exclusion of women from the potential acts of violence, the actual acts of resistance, defense and guarding, in addition to the reorganization of time and space in gendered terms; times and places safe for women. Women were constrained to their protected neighborhoods and houses. During the curfew they would not leave the house. This reorganization did mainly affect the liberties of movement of women and girls. Haythem stated that during these days women had to stay home and so it was the case of his sister and mother. The repertoire of daily activities was reduced, conditioned by evaluations and constructions of zones of security and insecurity. The home and the guarded neighborhood were considered to be the safest zones and so many girls described how they spent their days in these constricted areas.

I was very bored and annoyed. I was used to be able to go where I wanted. But back then, during these days, it was very unsafe. I could not leave the house or our neighborhood, which was very stressful. I was very happy with the revolution, but the immediate days after the 14th were hard. We were not used to this. It was really scaring. [...] Because I could not leave our neighborhood, I spent all my time watching news channels, like AlJazeera or I would go to a neighbor and look on facebook. I wanted to know what was going on. I wanted to see what was exactly happening. I wanted hope and some reassurance⁸¹.

-Hala-

“I spent most of the time at home, but I followed everything through facebook, where videos on what was happening were available⁸².”

-Maram-

⁸¹ Author's interview with Hala, Hammamet, on 10 May 2011.

⁸² Author's interview with Maram, Hammamet, on 26 March 2011.

While confined to these safe zones, the young women spent their days watching news channels. Those who had access to internet spent their days on facebook. The objective was to get information and to know though confined, what was going on outside, in the city and in Tunisia. In the patriotic words of Hala: “It is my country. I want to know⁸³.” Constrained from the actual act of defending the country, knowledge became an expression of patriotism and a mean of empowerment; defiance of the constraint. Those who had access to internet, took actively part in the practice of resistance, though digitally. Haythem explained how his sister had set up a facebook page that was meant to include a broad network of inhabitants of Hammamet. The objective was keeping the inhabitants and mainly the young vigilants, informed on what was happening in various parts of the city and also the country. She challenged her exclusion from the resistance movement and the gendered mobility restrictions imposed on her, in this context, by society.

Facebook reinforced its position as a tool for resistance during the immediate post-revolution period. It became a prevalently feminine weapon to counter the spatial and time constraints imposed on the socio-culturally constructed targets of violence and a medium to their inclusion in the popular movement of resistance. Facebook was already part of the normal everyday life of thousands of Tunisians. It was a re-localization of social dynamics and reality in the digital sphere. Rumors, music videos, football comments, educative and religious informations, etc were all shared. Yet now this normal activity was being used to share the extraordinary. Resistance was produced on-line to reinforce the efforts in the real world. “I spent my nights on facebook and I would go to sleep at 4 or 5 in the morning⁸⁴” Maha said, which coincided with the end of many of the night shifts of the self-defense movements. She further recounted:

“Facebook was all girls. The discussions were funny and ironic. ‘Are there bullets being shot in your neighborhood?’ ‘Are there militaries in your neighborhood?’ were the questions that had replaced during the chatting the usual question of ‘how are you?’⁸⁵”

-Maha-

But even in off-line reality exceptions were created by flaws in the gendered organization of security. Women on certain occasions took part in guarding, as do these following accounts testify:

⁸³ Author’s interview with Hala, Hammamet, on 10 May 2011.

⁸⁴ Author’s interview with Maha, Hammamet, on 28 May 2011.

⁸⁵ Author’s interview with Maha, Hammamet, on 28 May 2011.

In the morning there were no men on the street. They were asleep as they had passed the night guarding. Almost all the women of the neighborhood were standing outside in circles, talking. We shared the information and stories we had been told by our husbands when they came home early in the morning; the thieves they had chased, the information on the other neighborhoods, more details on what had happened during the past days. And because there were no men to guard, we the women were standing outside with the sticks, just in case. But during day light, it was always calm⁸⁶.

-Sana-

On Friday afternoon when we first heard of the rumor of men getting into houses and raping women, most men in my neighborhood were still at work. The few that were there took position at the entrance of the main street. But they were with so few that most women in neighborhood decided to join them and guard with them, until the men came home⁸⁷.

-Hala-

The gender notions that inscribed on the women the role of targets, did also inscribe on them their role as caregivers. From within this position, their repertoire of normal actions as caregivers presented them with an array of actions that did challenge the imposed constraints. Fulfilling their social role as young women responsible for getting the groceries and preparing the meals for the rest of their families, Ines and Rim made use of this task, opportunity to wonder around the streets of Hammamet, passed their neighborhood.

In the morning I would finally be allowed to get out of the house. I would have spent hours, starting from the previous afternoon before 5pm at home. It is then that the curfew would have started. I could not even look out the window. So first thing in the morning, I had to get out of the house. [...] Hammamet has been relatively calm. On some occasion we heard shootings. But we were mainly concerned with looting and stealing. There was also a rumor that snipers were hiding in the Yasmina hotel. The first time Rim, I and some cousins went to do groceries, which was on Saturday, we went to a jeweler in the Kochkach center (which is at the other side of the city center). It was amazing. Everybody was feeling free; people were cursing Ben Ali, discussing what needed to happen next, talking about the fact that they did not want him or any of his family members back to power. Everywhere people were talking

⁸⁶ Author's interview with Sana, Hammamet, on 1 Juni 2011.

⁸⁷ Author's interview with Hala, Hammamet, on 10 May 2011.

about this; at the vegetable shop, at the butcher, in the cafés. Everywhere the TV was on AlJazeera. Everybody was talking about politics. We discussed things we had never discussed before. We talked with people about politics, about Ben Ali. Rim and I made a list of what we needed for groceries and then we would go walking through Hammamet. We would get the chance to see what was happening. We only saw two policemen. And I remember that I thought that the guns they were holding looked like toys. We walked through Hammamet searching for soldiers, but we could find none⁸⁸.

-Ines-

Changing social relations

At a meeting of the local commission for the protection of the revolution, a man expressed his concerns about impunity. The looters were known, some people had a list of their names, and they had been recorded and seen. “We know who they are”, he said. He explained that he had asked witnesses to testify and file a complaint against the looters, but they refused. These people were friends, acquaintances, neighbors. They could and would not do that. The boundary constructed through stories and persistent through the memory and recounting of the events of the revolution condemned and judged the looters. It shed on them a cloud of dishonor that persisted after the reestablishment of order. But these stories belonged to the context of the revolution and chaos. As order was reestablished, it mattered less. It mattered only in the shame that was still being cast upon them and related, through the fact that people knew how dishonorably they had acted. This anecdote exemplifies the peculiar effect violence has on in-group dynamics and personal relations; constructing and deconstructing them in a correlation with the order it constructs, the taboos it establishes and lifts (Jabri, 1997: 7). The advice of a woman I got to know in Hammamet when I told her about my research was to ask about the relation between people during these few days in January. During these days people who had not spoken with each for years, were talking together, she stated. A high number of informants confirmed this.

“Our neighbors...I did not talk to them in years. We had had a number of fights and we stayed on bad terms. But during these nights as we guarded, their son guarded with us off

⁸⁸ Author’s interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

course. I did not have long and good conversations with him, but we did talk. Now again, we don't talk anymore⁸⁹.”

-Mounir-

At the heart of this notifiable social phenomenon is the broader effect the reality of violence had on the relations between people, and which is also brought forth in the following story:

One night, I remember, a group of sixteen or twenty people came walking in into our neighborhood. I was with one other guy and as soon as I had seen them, I got my phone and called a guy from our neighborhood and said to him: “Get out now and call everyone.” After two or three minutes, the doors of the houses started opening and the men came out. Meanwhile one man from this group of twenty asked: “Is this house of M.Gueddich?” I said yes. So he responded: “He owes me money.” They got over the wall and gates. But now we faced them all together and someone had already called the militaries. When they heard the militaries coming they run away⁹⁰.

-Nabil-

The danger was real, and various strategies within the repertoire of resistance were created to, if not control and eradicate it at least contain it. But there were also other forms of resistance; less obvious, less violent in their imaginations. As this story exemplifies, in the face of violence, chaos and un-trust, a widespread movement of solidarity came about and shaped another story of the Tunisian revolution. The transformation of social relations, the tightening of social bonds challenges in a very philosophical, spiritual abstract sense the negative aspects of the “war” against the militias. As such it is a contradiction, but is it really contradiction in the situational logic? The large scope of research effectuated on social identities in contexts of conflict prove that boundary construction and reinforcement is a social process that takes place always socially and experienced as simply naturally in the face of common threats (Wimmer, 2008; Fearon and Laitin, 2000). Yet what I want to focus on is the positive social process of the construction of identity.

⁸⁹ Author's interview with Mounir, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

⁹⁰ Author's interview with Nabil, Hammamet, on 7 May 2011.

By the big barrels lit with fire to counter the cold of the night, tea, coffee, sweets, mini pizzas, fear, danger, threat, life stories, jokes and mockeries were shared. I define it as being a positive process because it shaped through the experience of sharing; fear, threat but even more so, belongings, riches, food or whatever one could bring.

That first night the neighborhood café opened and served us coffee. He served us coffee for free. And if we wanted something we could get it. Another shop opened and gave us cigarettes for free. Anybody who had something would get it out and share it, to keep the people awake⁹¹.

-Nabil-

The great thing about the self-defense was that the relations between the neighbors and people became tighter. There are always people from your neighborhood you don't know, but during the revolution, you would talk with everyone, spend the whole night outside with these people who were at first stranger, guarding the neighborhood together. We would go out at 11 pm and guard until 5, 6 or 7am. There was a very special atmosphere. The men would go home, bring food their wives had prepared and share with all of us outside. We went through this together. In every neighborhood, people nicknamed and assigned positions to one another. Every neighborhood had the 'leader'; 'the general', 'the soldier', etc. We had also a lot of fun⁹².

-Mounir-

The men in my neighborhood had put barrels and lit fires in them. There was a whole atmosphere. The guarding was very serious, but there was more to it. I did not know a lot of people from my neighborhood. During these I learned to know them and we became friends. It created ties. [...] We organized the sharing, some people would be responsible for the coffee, another person for the tea, a third for sweets, which I did. There was also a man whose wife would every evening prepare little pizzas for us⁹³.

-Nabil-

⁹¹ Author's interview with Nabil, Hammamet, on 7 May 2011.

⁹² Author's interview with Mounir, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

⁹³ Author's interview with Nabil, Hammamet, on 7 May 2011.

“The boys really got spoiled. From every household they would be getting food⁹⁴.”

-Ines-

The enterprise of mockery

An acquaintance, Amine published some photos he took on the second night of the guarding. The curfew was still imposed that afternoon and night. In order to identify the men who were guarding in their neighborhood, walking rounds, etc the army had asked the men to wear something in white. Amine and his friends posed for the photo camera while holding their primitive and less primitive arms; sticks, a hunting weapon, as so many other Tunisians had done. They were wearing the white clothing as well; white slippers. They were joking and having fun. Maha had stated during our interview that fun has been a part of the guarding experience.

“I have seen a lot of photos of ‘Jbel ahmar’ for example, where the young men were dancing and signing⁹⁵.”

-Maha-

There have been moments where the fear was dominated, conquered and the enemy; the militias and the reality they created mocked through the very act of humorising the situation. Reality in conflict, as has been stated in a previous part of the thesis, does not solely incorporate stories about violence and fear nor victimhood. People resisted the militias; they resisted the world they constructed; they resisted them through mockery and the humor a group of young men normally would share, the jokes they would instigate.

It was during the day. We had found a thief in one of the houses of our neighborhood and so we were running after him. I was going crazy, screaming and calling for the rest. One of the guys had the stick in his hand and hit the man once or twice. He kept running. He then got another hit and I thought he would fall but he continued and ran directly to Wael who was standing in the middle of the street. There at his feet he fell on the floor. Wael very gently took his hand and said to the man to go with him. He held his hand and started walking to the sideway and waited for the military to come. I was going crazy. I could not stop laughing

⁹⁴ Author’s interview with Ines, Hammamet, 16 March 2011.

⁹⁵ Author’s interview with Maha, Hammamet, on 28 May 2011.

anymore; Wael caught and held a thief by his hand. The rest of the day we made jokes about it. We still do⁹⁶.

-Mohammad-

One of my friends living in the other neighborhood told me about this. He and his neighbors were sitting during one of the guarding night on seats on the pathway. It was very dark in the street and cold. It was already late and when they saw something move behind the tree. They fell silent, watched and awaited. What seemed a man standing, hiding behind the tree did not move. One of the guys asked the man to show himself. When he finally did he moved forward very slowly. He was holding what looked like a sniper's long arm. He was aiming at the young men holding sticks. He stopped.

And then Mounir said laughing very loudly:

“All the young men run away. They were all gone. They were terrified. But you know it was not sniper. It was one of the guys of the neighborhood, known for his jokes.”⁹⁷

The ruptures in the fear ridicule the danger, the situation and the enemy. Yet when facing the reality of the social condition, what Taussig defines as the doubleness of being dominated and imposes its reality on the young men. The men moved from a situation wherein all seemed relatively normal, a situation where one estimated he could make jokes to the threatening reality of the struggle against armed militias; the state of emergency.

Giddens urged academics, as mentioned earlier, to study the conditions in the organization of social systems that govern the interconnectedness between structure as constraining and the structure as enabling the agent. The three last chapters highlight the evolution of repertoires of action conditioned simultaneously by social life, by violence and by the realization of social life in violence. Life is reorganized by these conditions and repertoires. Yet the conditions do not ultimately allow solely for the limitation and containment of the individual; the agent. The accounts presented in this last chapter have provided illustrations for that. The biggest of all changes in the Tunisian revolution and which was the Tunisian revolution itself was enabled by the containing conditioning of structure. It were social and cultural rules that organized society and social life that told people to resist and fight the threat; through support and care giving as the women did who cared for the men, through

⁹⁶ Author's interview with Mohammad, Hammamet, on 13 March 2011.

⁹⁷ Author's interview with Mounir, Hammamet, on 10 April 2011.

more active forms of fighting as the men did and through fighting their common biggest fight; the war against fear.

Chapter six: Conclusion

This is one account of the Tunisian revolution. An account of the many and which presents its due shortcomings. The lap of time under scrutiny is of five days. Five days that present an intensive account of individual experiences of the revolution and which combined do represent a reflection, merely a reflection of the collective experience of the revolt of dignity. I do not present the heated debates on whether this is really a revolution of the people, a coup or something else; whether the revolution has already taken place or still is being fought. Nor do I discuss the crucial role facebook and other social media played in the constitution of the revolution. I do not represent the experience of elder people who have experienced colonization, de-colonization and the Bourguiba era, or the experience of political activists, internet activists or human rights activists.

I analyzed the construction of repertoire, yet in an account focusing on five subsequent days of the unfolding of the revolution, I fail to represent the longer process of repertoire construction of resistance and other possible forms of resistance. Resistance is not a feeling, an act that merely pops up, from the inexistent. It is an evaluation and negotiation of the risks, the possible gains and losses. It is the result of a constructed understanding and a way of interpreting reality. It is constructed by the oral history on past struggles, by the social construction of gender role, honor and the representations of war and warriors. Resistance is thus a phenomenon that transcends the conceptualized boundary between war and peace. The dichotomous imagination of the world of war and the world of peace are challenged. Resistance belongs to both worlds, and as was highlighted in this thesis, so does normality which is prevalently conceptualized in terms of realities of peace.

The interest in this thesis is the dynamic between the unfolding revolution evolving from chaos to a reconstructed order. More precisely the interest lies in the role of the individual as an acting agent evolving in a continuous relation with reality; the social condition. His actions reproduce the structure and the structure produces the meaning of his actions; structuration as such. Little can be added to the rather mechanical yet poignant descriptions of the constitution of society of Giddens' structuration theory. But I do want to address a conceptualization of structure Giddens (1979) criticized and refuted. He stated: "the identification of structure with constraint is [also] rejected" (1979: 69), though he does point to a nuance in the dialectic of control. Far removed from able to contest theoretically and abstractly Giddens refutation, nor willing to do so, I nonetheless feel enable to bring evidence that supports this refutation, but also challenges it to look even further. Structure enables and constraints. But could structure constraining enable the individual to produce change?

In the terminology of the structuration theory, describing the realization of the revolution would entail a recognition that the rationalized actions of the agent in response to the social condition of violence resulted in an unintended consequence, which was the revolution.

Through structural conditionings of social interpretations of reality; through the social condition the biggest of all production of structure enabling action and change took place in Tunisia, namely the Tunisian revolution. The Tunisian revolution, I argue was the result of a successful national and massive mobilization of armed struggle and popular support. Though this is the usual cause for the success of a revolution, insurgency and resistance movement, the way the successful mobilization came about is less usual. Protest in Tunisia, was characterized by its spread in place, simultaneousness in time but it was never massive. The biggest protest might have been on Friday the fourteenth, the same day as the fleeing of former president Ben Ali. It is thus hard to believe that the revolution of the fourteenth was a direct result of massive nationwide and sustaining protests. In fact I would argue that it was the phase starting on Friday afternoon, when people stood up together in the form of self-defense movements to fight the militias and the criminals escaped from prison, that consolidated the revolutionary path and led to its success. Starting from that Friday, the military with a percentage of the police and a massive portion of the police were all actively involved in the elimination of threat and the sources of disorder.

The trigger for the population to join actively in the struggle was the direct threat the militias and the criminals posed to their safety, to their everyday life, to their houses. The normal and the everyday prevalently dismissed by conflict analysts for its very normality, while in the case studied here, it informed the repertoire of contention and resistance in addition to being directly involved in the dynamics of mobilization of popular support and armed struggle. Still further research in Tunisia and in other cases is needed to be able to generalize such an argument.

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