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Labidi, Lilia

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Schwerpunkt

Lilia Labidi

Celibate Women, the Construction of Identity, Karama (Dignity), and the "Arab Spring"

Zusammenfassung

Zölibatär lebende Frauen, die Konstruktion von Identität, *Karama* (Würde) und der „Arabische Frühling"

Untersuchungen über den „Arabischen Frühling" tendieren dazu, die wirtschaftlichen und politischen Bedürfnisse Jugendlicher zu fokussieren, adressieren jedoch nicht ihre sozialpsychologischen Bedürfnisse, wie etwa den unerfüllten Heiratswunsch und dessen soziale Konsequenzen. Der Beitrag diskutiert den Fall zölibatär lebender Frauen in Tunesien, für die es aufgrund der hohen Jugendarbeitslosigkeit und daraus folgender Probleme schwierig ist, Übergangsrituale zu durchlaufen, die sie von der Kindheit ins Erwachsenendasein geleiten und ihnen die vollständige Integration in die Gemeinschaft ermöglichen würden. Um in ihrer durch den diktatorischen Staat dominierten Lebenswelt dennoch Selbstkontrolle zu erlangen, haben sie für sich eine Form der asketischen Lebensführung gewählt, indem sie den *hijab* tragen, den Koran lesen, das tägliche Fasten praktizieren und die *hudud* neu verhandeln – also die moralischen und rechtlichen Grenzen, die schon lang Gegenstand breiter Debatten und sozialer Reformen sind; gleichzeitig unterstützen sie die Frauenrechte, so wie sie in Tunesiens Familienrecht verankert sind. Der Beitrag widmet sich besonders dem hierauf bezogenen politischen Diskurs im ‚Arabischen Frühling' seit 2011 und dem Bemühen, eine „moralische Persönlichkeit" zu entwickeln.

Schlüsselwörter
Tunesien, enthaltsame Frauen, Rituale, „Arabischer Frühling", Nahdha

Summary

Studies of the "Arab Spring" have tended to focus on the economic and political needs of youth, but have not addressed socio-psychological needs such as an unfulfilled desire for marriage and its social consequences. This article discusses the case of celibate women in Tunisia who, because of the high rate of youth unemployment and its social consequences, find it difficult to accomplish the rites of passage that would take them from childhood to adulthood and allow full integration into the community. In order to gain control over the self in a social context that was dominated by a dictatorial state, they have chosen a form of asceticism, wearing the *hijab*, reading the Qur'an, practicing daily fasting, and re-negotiating *hudud* – that is moral boundaries and legal limits that have long been a subject of wide debate and of social reforms; at the same time, they support women's rights as expressed in Tunisia's Personal Status Code. Particular attention is paid in this article to the political discourse after 2011 and efforts to construct a "moral personality."

Keywords
Tunisia, celibate women, rituals, "Arab Spring", Nahdha

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1 Introduction

Starting in Tunisia in December 2010 the Arab world began to experience political upheavals that have shaken the entire region and the wider world ever since. In Tunisia, this upheaval, often labeled as "Arab Spring", was largely led by youth. Numerous analyses have focused on the motives for their rebellion in a country that was cited by the World Bank and the IMF as a model in achieving economic success, and which explained the "revolution" of December 2010/January 2011 that led to the fall of the Ben Ali regime as motivated by political factors such as the totalitarian system, the police state, corruption, etc. Rarely did these analyses take into account the unconscious motives in the youth's behavior. In this article I want to throw some light on the demands made by youth from an anthropological and psychoanalytic perspective; this may help us understand the significance of the revolution's slogans such as *Shugul, Hurriya, Karama* (Work, Freedom, Dignity) or *Shughul, Hurriya, Karama Wataniyya* (Work, Freedom, National Dignity) (Ammar 2013).[1]

To contextualize these slogans chanted during the December 2010/January 2011 period, we must keep in mind that the region has experienced very significant transformations over the past decades leading to a renegotiation of gender relations. These transformations include the fact that the population between 15 and 29 years of age has grown by 50 percent and those under 25 years of age constitute between one and two thirds of the population, with one quarter of youth in universities throughout the region. Tunisia, in particular, among other shifts, has also seen an improvement in health indicators, a lowering of maternal and infant mortality, and life expectancy now over 70 years for men and women. On the other hand, the unemployment rate in Tunisia increased from 2.3 percent in 1984 to 3.8 percent in 1994, reaching 10.2 percent in 2004. By 2008, this rate had doubled to 21.8 percent, with women university graduates, especially those living in rural areas, having twice the unemployment rate of men (Institut National de Statistiques 1999, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008).

Unemployment in the region led to significant emigration of men from rural areas to the coastal cities, and from Tunisia to Libya and the countries north of the Mediterranean. It has also led to the phenomenon of involuntary celibacy – something the region never experienced in the past. The proportion of unmarried women went from 17.7 percent in 2001 to 37.5 percent in 2006, with a 50 percent rate of celibacy among men in similar age groups (Ben Amor 2009). Because of a lack of economic means and an understanding of sexuality conceived within the framework of Islamic ethics, young people are unable to carry out certain rites. A study in a number of Muslim countries carried out by the Pew Research Center (2013) examined views on religion and its im-

1 This paper uses material from about a dozen unstructured interviews with celibate women from different economic, geographic, educational, and social backgrounds, carried out in Tunis in 2009/2010. These women are now living in urban settings, but maintain contact with their regions of origin. Often they have a sister or brother working abroad, in Europe or in the Gulf countries. The cultural impact of the Gulf countries is visible in the dress worn for family celebrations as well as on other occasions. In addition, this group of women belongs to the generation that grew up with satellite television and regularly follows religious programs coming from the Gulf.
Some sections of this paper were written when I was a member of the Visiting Scholars Program at the Council on Middle East Studies, Yale University, 2009/2010.

pact on politics, morality, etc. and shows that, after the uprising, 89 percent of Tunisians considered sexual relations outside marriage to be immoral.

The combination of these aspects – improvement of some indicators yet a growing lack of control over one's life – strengthened feelings of discontent, often accompanied by strong feelings of failure, feelings that found expression in slogans such as *Shugul, Hurriya, Karama* (Work, Dignity, Freedom) that were chanted during demonstrations taking place after 26-year-old Mohamed Bouazizi's desperate step of self-immolation in December 2010 – a gesture that many youths saw as reflecting their own despair. This combination has had a crucial impact on notions of identity. I will try to show here how aspects of identity construction are tied to cultural forms, to the political context, and to new societal demands that push for a renegotiation of *hudud*: the moral boundaries and legal limits that have long been the object of a wide debate in Tunisia and in the Arab world at large and where changing interpretations have gone along with reforms and significant changes in public and private life.

In the first part of this discussion I will show how the identity of men and women is constructed in Tunisian society and culture using the concept of the "moral personality" and how the impossibility of realizing one's goals on the social level affects this construction, leading to the concerns that youth expressed during the "Arab Spring" in their demand for *karama* (personal dignity). In the second section, I will discuss the role that sexuality played in new social movements before 2011 and how youth were using the internet to give visibility to their demands. I will also look at the appeals made by Rached Ghannouchi, leader of the moderate Islamic political party Nahdha who, since his return from exile in 2011, called upon young men to marry and not be captive to the traditional model of the appropriate spouse (virginity, youth, not divorced, etc.), and we will see how these appeals were received by the civil society. In the third section, I will show how women who are no longer adolescents, who remain unmarried not by choice, also demand *karama*, and how they define *karama* as a way to emphasize the will of the individual to dominate (sexual) desires in order to gain control over the self. In this, they are strategically choosing a life-style similar to asceticism, a term I am using to refer to a set of religious and moral attitudes.

2 The Construction of Identity

In the following, I will show how rites play a fundamental role in many areas of social and cultural life: in constructing the societal imaginary for both women and for men; in constructing a "moral personality"[2]; and in the ways the construction of identity ar-

2 This notion of "moral personality" follows Immanuel Kant's view, as articulated by William A. Galston, who writes: "Kant's account of moral personality allows us to speak of the dignity and inviolability of every individual and to understand individuals as bearers of rights, simply by virtue of their humanity. Kantian moral theory provides a philosophical foundation for the derivation of legitimate authority and rational principles of social organization from freedom, equality, and autonomous consent – the predominant values of our democratic age" (Galston 1982: 493). Fouad M. Moughrabi was also concerned with the concept of the moral personality. He noted that Arab researchers trained in the West did not only use studies carried out by Western researchers in the context of the Arab defeat in the June 1967 war against Israel, but that they were also irritated

ticulates with the notion of karama. In such constructions marriage constitutes an important aspect of moral identity in a society in which a worthy individual is someone who respects him-/herself (yikram nafsahu/ha), keeping oneself distant from trouble and disorder. The notion of karama takes on, with the Sunnah (the practices of the Prophet Muhammad, his words and actions, etc.) a particular meaning where marrying means fulfilling "half of one's religion". A second aspect of submission to the symbolic order in this regard is the mother's success in separating herself from her son, and the father's success in recognizing the limits of his power.

I will also show how the situation of unmarried youths leads to the emergence of groups of well-educated men and women whose celibacy is not a result of their deliberate choice which calls our attention, as Bourdieu suggests, not so much to the contrast between the initiated and the uninitiated, but to those who are unable to practice these rites (Bourdieu/Thompson 1991: 117–118). The unmarried, the "unitiated", are those who do not fulfil their sexual urges in a way recommended by Islam to its followers, where marriage elevates the value of prayers: for example, a *hadith* that the Prophet said: "Two *rak'at* (prayer movements) prayed by a married person are better than the night-vigil and the fast of a single person." This echoes a view that the unmarried are placed on society's margins.

In recalling this moral framework of sexuality, we understand better the urgent demand for *karama* in the context of the "Arab Spring" and the intensity of despair among youth. This will push us to explore, at a first stage, the articulations among different rites of passage – some that are secular and some that, in a few cases, have a religious dimension that reinforces its meaning, suggesting an underlying unity that Westermarck, who spent considerable time describing some rituals in the region, did not address (Westermarck 1968).

The articulation among the different rites will allow us to see the construction of what I call "moral personality". The relational system that appears shows us how, via these rites, we witness a controlled regression concerning what psychoanalysts call primary traumatisms. And we also see how the obligatory public representations of certain rites lead to a demarcation between the conscious and the unconscious, to submission to the symbolic order and the principles of justice.

I will show, via an analysis of personal rituals taking place in public and encompassing both secular and religious phenomena, how the succession of these rituals over the course of a person's life contributes to the construction of men's and women's identity, to masculinity/femininity. The rituals on these occasions have a similar structure for males and for females, rather than the masculine model serving as a basis for discussion of the feminine model, as is the case for Freudian theory (Freud 1923). Here, I will use Winnicott's definition of religious ritual to draw a parallel with the play of children in the pre-oedipal and oedipal stages of development. For children under six years of age, not only is play a healthy realm of make-believe, but the make-believe is felt to be real, which can help us understand how the ritual of *okssa* (which, as we will see later, puts a woman's hair in ponytail form, signifying restraint and control) is actualized and rein-

by the weaknesses that plagued their respective societies and exaggerated their criticisms with the hope that their appeals might motivate leaders to act more quickly in bringing about needed reforms (Moughrabi 1978: 109).

terpreted (for Winnicot's views, see Merkur 1991: 23). We will also see how the model of "moral personality" suggests another reading of psychological development which integrates the stages of psycho-sexual development in the Freudian model (oral, anal, phallic, period of latency, genital stages) with Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development, while remaining more complex.[3]

These rituals convey a conscious symbolism where the idea of chaos is not derived from the external reality of nature but is instead based on the internal reality of the unconscious (Merkur 1991: 16–17). We will see how certain rituals, such as the public rituals of circumcision for boys and *al-Ijbar* for girls, and the private rituals of *r'bat* for the son and *okssa* and *tasfih* for the daughter, while not performed at the same age for males and females, treat the connection between separation-return-continuity as the foundation of morality. This model of "moral personality" will also help us to understand those whom Pierre Bourdieu labels the "uninitiated" (Bourdieu/Thompson 1991: 117–118), and why cases like remaining unmarried, being sterile, and the death of a boy before marrying, are viewed as disturbing the social order.

I would also like to draw attention to the fact that in this article I use terms and concepts employed by members of the society being discussed, and these are used to show the importance of their articulation in the societal imaginary. In other societies other terms would be used – in Europe, for example, discussions might involve terms such as subjectivity and/or autonomy.

2.1 Rituals and the Internal Reality of the Unconscious

Via an analysis of some rites of passage taking place in public and encompassing both secular and religious phenomena, we will see how the succession of some rituals over the course of a person's life contributes to the construction of men's and women's identity, to masculinity and femininity.[4]

Stage 1: Birth – Infancy.

The birth of a male infant is marked by an important ceremony taking place on the seventh day after birth, when the infant is given a name and when a ritual is performed showing the symbolic defense of the family's possessions, symbolizing the infant's struggle to claim a place within his lineage. The son, up until his circumcision, will be raised among women.

The arrival of a girl is celebrated as for the son, but with fear that the daughter will lose her virginity before marriage.

3 Erikson's stages are: trust vs. mistrust; autonomy vs. shame and doubt; initiative vs. guilt; industry vs. inferiority; identity vs. role confusion; intimacy vs. isolation; generativity vs. stagnation; ego integrity vs. despair (Erikson 1993: 247–273).

4 The circumcision ceremony for boys continues to be practiced throughout the Maghreb, in both rural and urban areas, often with music and a significant audience, depending on the socio-economic level of the family. The internet provides opportunities to see these ceremonies and the number of visits these sites receive shows the high level of interest for these ceremonies. In Europe, among populations of Maghreb origin, although the circumcision itself takes place in a clinic, the ceremony is often carried out upon the family's return to their homeland.

Stage 2: Circumcision of Boys: Resolution of the Oedipus Complex – Good/Evil

2a. *Khitan* (circumcision), usually taking place at the age of 4 to 6 as a public ritual, when the child is supposed to be capable of distinguishing good from evil, is called the "little marriage" or "opening the door". It is roughly at this age that Freud situates the resolution of the Oedipus complex. The *khitan* can only take place with the agreement of the mother – if she postpones this too long, say until the son is 8 or 9 years old, the men will steal the boy (even men from outside the family may do this) and have the circumcision performed.
2b. Here, propitiatory rites (i.e., rites that ask for something, like protection) show how difficult the separation is for both son and mother, and particularly for the mother. The preparations concern mother and son (the women of the family go to the *hammam* (public bath), their feet and hands are painted with henna, and both mother and son wear new clothes for this occasion), symbolizing rebirth in a new state and attracting the community's attention.
2c. With pomp and ceremony, on the circumcision day the mother and son lead the assemblage, followed by relatives and neighbors, and the men follow after. Reaching the boundary of the village or neighborhood, the women congratulate the mother, and then the father, son, and men take the leading position of the assemblage, with the women going back to where the men were.
2d. During her son's circumcision, the mother publicly displays her suffering: her hair wildly scattered on her head, she holds a mirror in one hand and, with the other, holds a coin to her forehead. While doing this, she is seated and her feet are in a basin of water where a piece of metal has been placed so that her feet and her spirit remain cool as she endures her son's pain and does not run to save him from the operation.
2e. Several days after the circumcision, the barber/or male nurse who has performed the operation brings back to the mother the skin that has been removed during the operation, and the mother will then pay him for the operation.

Stage 3: Pre-Adolescence/Celibacy

After his circumcision the son will be mainly among the male family members and will have the symbolic status of head of household when the father/older siblings are absent.

For the daughter the following rites are performed on the private level:

3a. The *okssa* ceremony: with her hair tied in a ponytail held by a ribbon, as a metaphor for modesty, this is a simple ceremony bringing together only women who are close to the girl.
3b. The *tasfih* ceremony: this ritual is performed by an old woman who makes seven scars on one knee of the young girl, with the blood wiped away with dried grapes and the following phrase pronounced by the girl, "I am a wall, he is a thread", meant to protect the young girl from any sexual relationship.
3c. In case of rape, where sexual relations are viewed as illegitimate by the community, the girl receives *diya* (compensation for an injury or a killing) equivalent to the

mahr (compensation for the loss of virginity) as is determined by her social rank, to be paid by the rapist or, if he is unable to do so, by the community or the state. Since independence, the rapist is obliged to marry his victim and cannot divorce for two years; if he refuses he must serve a prison term. Today, although the law has not changed, judges with increasing frequency sentence the rapist to a prison term, saying that marriage will take place only after release.[5]

Stage 4: Marriage

This involves legal and public recognition of a relationship that will lead to legitimate offspring; the public nature of this is termed *al-Ichhar*. The following rites for men are private, except the first one, which is a public rite:

4.1a The groom will pay the *mahr* to his future wife.
4.1b The return of the son to his mother and recognition of his dependency on the mother: whereas the man's sexuality has been uncontrolled during the period between circumcision and marriage – Hichem *Djaït* speaks of elastic sexuality before marriage (referring mainly to homosexuality[6]) – he is now placed, symbolically, under the mother's control. Three days before the marriage, the mother secretly performs the *r'bat,* that is, she puts knots on a string that she places on her son's back.
4.1c During the three days before the ceremony, the groom is accompanied by his "ministers", who stay close to him during this transitional period at the end of which, the mother untying the *r'bat,* the son is liberated.
4.1d The family anxiously awaits confirmation of the sexual potency of the groom. An Iranian miniature from the 14th century (1396) painted by Janayd shows a marriage where those in attendance display the blood-stained sheet and make offerings to the groom, while the deflowered bride cries.

Rites for women: the following rites for women are public:

4.2a The marriage cannot take place without the father's agreement. The bride receives payment of the *mahr* from the future spouse, which can be paid in two parts: *mou'ajil*, the expenses for the ceremony, paid before the ceremony takes place,

5 From 2011 on, feminists have been very active in Tunisia and Morocco to eliminate Law 227bis and Law 475 of their respective penal codes, which allow a rapist to escape a prison term by marrying his victim. In Morocco the suicide of Amina Filali following her marriage to the man who had raped her – a marriage imposed on her by her family – sparked a mobilization in civil society, including artists who used installations, photography, documentary films, etc. – which led to changes in the law in 2014. In Tunisia, the case brought by "Mériem" in 2012 against two policemen whom she accused of raping her while they were on duty, led to civil society mobilization against the rape of women. Further, the marriage in the region of Kef in 2016 of a 13-year-old girl to the 21-year-old unemployed brother of her brother-in-law, who had made her pregnant – a marriage authorized by a judge – also mobilized civil society and social media, with demonstrations in front of parliament against allowing rapists to escape prison by marrying their victims who were below the legal marriage age. In this case the judiciary annulled the marriage and the law was later repealed (see Zouari 2016).

6 The Tunisian historian Hichem Djaït uses the concept of elastic sexuality (1974).

and *mou'akhar*, a sum that is the woman's exclusive property, to be paid on the date indicated on the marriage contract. If the *mou'akhar* (the second part of the *mahr* payment) is not paid on the agreed date, sexual relations are prohibited between the married couple.

4.2b The *outia* ceremony: three days before the marriage ceremony the mother, in public, partially cuts the bride's hair, saying that this is to distance her from how she was spoiled in her father's house (anxiety, questioning of sexuality, etc.), and the groom's family brings jewelry to her as compensation.

4.2c The young woman proceeds to the *jalwa* ritual. Dressed in beautiful clothes, the bride raises her open hands to her shoulders, palms facing forward, as a sign of peace, and turns around in a full circle.

4.2d In the presence of women of the family only, the undoing of the *tasfih* (stage 3b) takes place: here, the performance is reversed without scarification – and the girl will say the opposite of the *tasfih* sentence: "I am a thread, he is a wall".

4.2e *Ijbar*: on the day of the marriage, the father presents his daughter and publicly puts his hand on her head, as a sign of *ijbar*, obliging her to renounce her fantasies.

4.2f The family awaits confirmation of virginity, the showing of blood on the sheet from the marriage bed.[7] In the presence of virginity, the day following the marriage and for the seven days following, the groom is taken away from the bride from morning, when the bride's aggression is the strongest as a result of her experience of deflowering, until evening, when her aggression has diminished and she is eager for her husband's return. In the absence of virginity, the groom will usually annul the marriage and, in extreme cases, the bride's father/brother murders the bride ("honor crime" which had become very rare by the 1990s and which, since then, is a criminal act under Tunisian legislation).

Stage 5: Adult Stage

5a. In cases of sterility, there is a private ritual for women on the occasion of *Ashura*, the celebration of the dead, which suggests the status of a woman unable to have children is similar to that of a dead person.

5b. The arrival of a daughter is an affliction for the father. The mother is saved from sterility but is afflicted for not having a boy.

5c. With the arrival of a son, the father is honored. The mother is liberated from her lower status and attains a status of "mother of a son". Proverbs and songs that were used throughout the country into the 1980s and that are still heard today in rural and poor urban areas (Labidi 1989) testify to the importance of the newborn boy for the mother.

7 While still practiced on occasion in rural areas, showing the blood-stained sheet is no longer seen among the Tunisian middle class, with the just-married couple usually spending their first days in a hotel or on a honeymoon voyage. See Labidi (2007), Labidi (2008).

Stage 6: Submission to the Symbolic Order – Becoming a Full Member of the Community

For the father, in urban as in rural areas, the ritual sacrifice of a ram is mandatory for each head of household once a year on the day of the *Aid al-Adha/al-Kbir*[8].

6.1a Before the Aid, children decorate the ram and feed it, clean it and play with it in the neighborhood that is the child identifies with the ram. The ram is explicitly substituted for Ismail (God called upon Abraham to sacrifice his son Isma'il), and the process of substitution in sacrifice, as a symbolic transaction, displaces and conceals violence.

6.2a This ritual, whose form is very important, points to the father's submission to the symbolic order. For the mother, it is through accepting the circumcision of her son (see stage 2) that she becomes a full member of the community and demonstrates that she is not a phallic dominating mother.

6.1b This ritual points to the mother's submission to the symbolic order as she attains the status of a full member of the community and the son is saved from psychosis, accedes to culture, science, religion, etc.

6.2b If the son dies before his marriage, the funerary rites are explicit in specifying the "not good enough mother" – the phallic mother, in the social imaginary.

2.2 Conception of the Self

We have seen how the rituals are connected to one another and how each stage is related to the preceding and the subsequent one. Here, the rituals convey two elements. First, there is a conscious symbolism where the idea of chaos does not derive from the external reality of nature but is instead based on the internal reality of the unconscious (Merkur 1991: 16–17). Noureddine Toualbi shows, in Algeria, that when a boy's circumcision is practiced without ritual in the hospital, this increases the child's trauma as it decreases the event's social significance by abandoning the traditional ceremony that surrounds it (Toualbi 1975; Chebel 1993). Here, the ritual is consistent with the concept of play discussed by Winnicott, where we saw in the case of circumcision how the entire ritual is a performance and provides for a "healthy" separation from the mother. The success of this ritual also presupposes "a good mother" which means in Winnicott's terminology a mother identifying with her child's needs to separate from the mother and then to return to her, to see her in a new light. In Tunisian speech this rite is called *halan el-bab* (opening the door) or *le petit marriage* (the little wedding).

The second element is the role played by representation in these rites. Certain rituals, such as the public rituals of circumcision for boys and *al-Ijbar* for girls have an unconscious function. Others like the private rituals of *r'bat* for the future husband and the *okssa* and the *tasfih* for the daughter, as well as their reversals, have conscious functions, and treat separation-return-continuity as the foundation of the "moral personality". In these circumstances, the rites that relate to the separation of the child from the parent of the opposite sex, boy from mother, girl from father, enable the boy as well as the girl to construct the self in a stable manner. If the mother is unsuccessful, for ex-

8 *Aid al-Adha or al-Kbir* is the Sacrifice Feast to commemorate the willingness of Ibrahim/Abraham to follow God's command to sacrifice his son Isma'il/Ishmael.

ample, in carrying out the circumcision of her son, or is psychologically absent or too dominating, clinical evidence shows us that the boy runs the risk of depression and/or other psychological problems (Toualbi 1975; Ben Chehida 1995). The "good-enough mother" as described by Winnicott is the mother who, in the case of circumcision, shows herself as an ideal mother through performing the required rites, i.e., is attentive to all forms of dialogue, of creative play. She shows herself capable of inspiring in the child the frustration that is necessary for him/her to develop desire and the capacity for individuation. The "good-enough father" plays a similar role with regard to the daughter in the case of *ijbar*. The final element is that these rituals have a similar structure for both sexes, rather than one serving as the model for the other.

This structure, which we are calling the "moral personality", corresponds to a significant extent to the stages of Sufi self-development and integrates the stages of psycho-sexual development in the Freudian model with the psycho-social stages of Erik Erikson, even while going beyond them. We find in each of these rites of passage stages (preliminary, liminal, postliminal), as they have been described by Arnold van Gennep (1960) and developed further by Victor Turner (1969, 2001) and see how these ceremonies, operationalizing the structure of the "moral personality", allow youths to structure their lives in stages, providing a satisfying conception of the self and a relationship to the group.

All of this helps to identify that the slogans in evidence during the "Arab Spring" in Tunisia had precursors during the first decade of the 2000s; at this time there were already signs that we were witnessing a new kind of social movement in the region, which a number of writers noticed and described in works that were precursors of the "Arab Spring", e.g. Basma Kodmani (2011).

In the next part of this discussion we will see how active movements, other forms of expression, and life-style strategies among unmarried youth appear to be gaining force in various Arab countries to protest against the celibacy affecting both men and women. This situation of celibacy, a new one for the region, focused the attention of researchers and politicians, who called for taking into account the habitus of youth which needs to be seen as a major contributing element to the stability of a country (e.g. Hegazy 2007).

3 Involuntary Celibacy and Sexuality

Whereas the states of the Arab world may see involuntary celibacy of youth as a way to reduce the birth rate, they also see it as a threat to national and international security, a perception reinforced by clandestine emigration and the participation of Tunisians in *jihad* in Libya, in Iraq, and in Syria since January 2011.

3.1 The Internet, Sexuality, and New Types of Social Movements

Among the main obstacles to marriage for a youthful population throughout the region are the costs of the wedding, unemployment, and the price of housing. This has led to an increased use of the internet by youth and, while states feared the effects of the internet

on the political level, we see that, before January 2011, the internet was providing a forum for expression to social movements of a very different sort.

In Morocco, the internet has promoted marriages between Moroccan women and foreign men from a variety of countries (18 nationalities in all, including Europeans), with the number of such marriages increasing from about 1,000 in 1997 to about 6,000 in 2007 (Labidi 2010; also Laaroussi 2010 who mentions several cases of marriage between Moroccan women and Quebec men who met via the internet). In Egypt, a number of different activities testify to this new development. Blogs written by women and treating their celibacy have been noticed by publishers.[9] As a symptom of the situation, the announcement of the second marriage of Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif at the age of 57, after the death of his first wife following a long sickness, led to public criticism, with unmarried adults denouncing disparity in the social system and creating a Facebook page entitled "Why Nazif gets married while we can't". Following an example that occurred two years earlier in Saudi Arabia, young Egyptian men appealed via Facebook – an appeal that quickly gained thousands of participants – for a strike in March 2010 against making any further progress on the road to marriage, with the aim of pushing families to reduce the cost of marriage for young people.

In Tunisia, a number of studies show that the dominant desire among youth was to emigrate, to the extent that the authorities refused to make some of these studies public. In addition, until the uprising in 2010/2011, the internet in Tunisia was heavily censored and was not a forum as popular as it was in Egypt and Morocco; its use among youth became widespread only following the uprising.

We should mention here that the increased wearing of the *hijab* during the 1990s did not stop women who wore it, as with Tunisian women in general, from using contraception and/or abortion, enabling them to have fewer children and exercise control over their bodies, a central feminist demand, and to seek judicial recourse when their rights were violated. In 2009, the average number of children per woman had decreased to two (versus nine in 1956).

Wearing the *hijab* in the 2000s is being experienced and interpreted in a variety of ways. In Tunisia, girls often wear the *hijab* against the will of their parents (for whom it may signify a form of social regression), and see it as signifying a struggle against sexism and anarchy, an element for liberation. Several studies carried out in the region mention that, for women, the *hijab* is viewed as a protection against feelings of nakedness, against impurity, as providing an alternative to the isolation of being restricted to the home, and as asserting the sexual ethics required of their gender in the Muslim order (Hessina 1994; Mahmood 2011; Deeb 2006; Winegar 2002, especially 153–154).

Also, some see the *hijab* as increasing a woman's mobility, providing physical and emotional security, and serving the paradoxical purpose of challenging and underscoring the notion of the unchanging, eternal female and her associated traditional roles. Mervat Nasser (1999) advances a psychological interpretation suggesting that women in Egypt wear the *hijab* because they need to find solutions to new pressures placed upon them

9 In 2008, the publisher Al-Chourouq published the chronicle, *Ayza atgawes* (I want to get married) from a blog written by Ghada Abdel-Al and *Orz bi-laban li chakhsein* (Rice with milk for two) by Rehab Bassam. Both started their blogs in 2004. Abdel-Al's case will be discussed later in this paper.

globally, including conflicting cultural messages and contradictory cultural expectations; and it is also a sign of women's pursuit of self-definition, development and power negotiations, within the progressive differentiation of a society undergoing change.

After the *hijab* began to be worn as a statement of self-affirmation vis-a-vis parents or employers, we see, in the context of state feminist practices, that with the marriage crisis, two main strategies emerge among women wearing the *hijab*. For some wearing the *hijab* is a response to men's preference for marriage with women who, in addition to their modesty, show the outward signs of it as well (Hawkins 2008). For others, wearing the *hijab* and fasting outside the month of Ramadan in order to preserve their dignity (*karama*), is a way to control their impulses and behavior, similar to Islamic recommendations for men who do not have the means to marry. This situation mostly affects women who spent a number of years in higher education, women who after university education remain unemployed and working-class women who are unwilling to marry someone without employment. A majority of these women, in the context of a police state where Islamists were a target of repression, were not engaged in political, feminist, or trade union activities.

Among the Tunisian women I interviewed belonging to this last group was 31-year-old Fatma (a pseudonym) from Tozeur, a southern Tunisian town. She has been living in Tunis since 1998, where she studied medicine. Her parents are teachers and she is one of four children, two boys and two girls. Her maternal uncle is a doctor and practices in Tozeur. After her medical studies she specialized in occupational medicine. Unmarried, she lives with a group of other unmarried women, wears the *hijab*, prays regularly, reads the Qur'an either alone or with a group and, since 2004, regularly fasts outside the month of Ramadan.

Her relations with her colleagues are difficult, for they reproach her assiduousness.

"If I simply work more than they do, problems arise with my colleagues. There is also the question of different socio-economic levels. And then, if you don't dress like the others problems arise with the senior personnel (...). Today, medicine is a difficult field if you don't belong to a powerful family circle."

After successful completion of her residency she chose a specialty she thought would expose her less to the ethical conflicts arising in contact with hospitalized patients.

"I experienced a number of disappointments during my internship and I discovered things that didn't conform to my medical ideals. On the one hand there are the constraints the institutional hierarchy places upon the practice of medicine in the hospitals and, on the other hand, there are the conditions that patients are subjected to (...). Now, having chosen occupational medicine, I no longer have to shoulder the same responsibilities a doctor faces. As an intern, I was thinking about the patients, about their treatment, even after I left the hospital (...)".

She concludes by saying that she wants to go work in "the Gulf countries, because medicine in Tunisia is no longer what it used to be."

Although wearing the *hijab* makes her the target of reprimands from the hospital and university administrations, she keeps wearing it, even while adjusting it "according to administrative whims that required that the hijab allow the hair to be seen. As for dress, that was easier because I wear trousers with a blouse or vest that reaches to the knees, in order to avoid problems."

Fatma began to fast regularly in 2004, a period that was marked by her feelings of solitude, a difficult socio-economic context, and widespread discontent among the population. After being unsuccessful in the competition for a residency and suffering a loss of morale when she experienced unemployment after her medical internship, she says she found solace only in the religious programs on the Islamic television channel *Iqra* and in fasting.

"Living alone, I fast without limit, it doesn't disturb me at all. I fast on the days that are recommended for the fast and the ten days of the Hajj, for when you fast you have an '*Ajir*' (a good deed) that opens for you the doors of Paradise, called *Bab al-Rayyan* (the gate through which a person who fasts enters Heaven on the Day of Judgment). Also, when I don't feel anything while listening to the Qur'an, then I fast in order to be closer to God. When I'm thinking only of life, of worldly goods, then I fast (...). And when I fast I forget myself, I think only of others, of the poor, and I feel closer to God. No one knows that I fast. I don't speak about it, so that I won't lessen its effect. As an unmarried person, I can fast as much as I want."

Before the "Arab Spring" began, state responses to growing celibacy varied according to the means at their disposal and the cultural context. In Iran, temporary marriage was raised as a solution to the psychological problems of youth and for poor people, and some states in the Gulf countries have chosen to set up funds to support marriages. The Tunisian Ministry for Women, the Family, Childhood, and the Aged, confronting figures showing the high percentage of unmarried women, distributed announcements over a number of years encouraging marriage, but this had no perceptible effect.

In some countries, NGOs organized collective marriages. While collective marriages within families, sometimes of modest means, often take place, what is new is that, contrary to the general trend of the individualization of such practices since independence, these societies now seem to be returning to collective marriage ceremonies to counter the celibacy crisis in the region, ceremonies that may be organized by government institutions, by civil society, and/or by political parties. In Tunisia before 2011, information concerning collective marriages was only briefly mentioned by the media, often without naming the organizers, although the political leadership's approval was required given the size and locale of the event. After 2011, marriages organized by the *Al-Afef* association, close to the Nahdha political party, used locales such as sports stadia, swimming pools, hippodromes, and took place in the presence of officers of this party and were often well-publicized events. The collective marriage that took place in 2012 in Ezzahra (a suburb of Tunis) was telecast by *Al-Jazeera*.

Tunisian families, during the month of Ramadan 2010 – a unique period during the year when families watch televised serials produced specifically for this occasion – discovered the series *Ayza Atgawez* ("I want to get married"), taken from the blog written by Ghada Abdel-Al which was a great success in 2004 and was later published as a book in 2008 by the Egyptian publisher Al-Chourouq. The story treats the difficulties a young woman pharmacist working in a public hospital has in finding a husband, and the book was translated into several languages. The televised serial was very popular in Tunisia, representing an experience that was very widespread and many Tunisians could easily empathize with the personage of the young pharmacist, played by the Tunisian actress Hind Sabri (she also produced the series), who faced problems common to many young unmarried Tunisian women.

When the Minister for Women's Affairs in the Hamadi Jebali government Sihem Badi, who had lived in France for almost two decades before her appointment, declared in 2012 that *orfi* marriage was a case of individual freedom, this led to much criticism from secularist women, feminists, and independent women researchers, and she was obliged to retract.[10]

3.2 The Response of the Nahdha Political Party to Women's Demands after January 2011

In May 2012, Rached Ghannouchi, leader of the Nahdha party, who had returned to Tunisia in 2011 after more than two decades in exile in Great Britain, addressed issues relating to the family. He stated that the party recognized the Personal Status Code and what had been already achieved for Tunisian women, and that the Nahdha party had voted for political parity for women in 2011, which allowed 49 women to enter the Tunisian Constituent Assembly in 2011, among them 42 members of the Nahdha party. He also reassured women by saying that the Islamic model of the family was monogamous and that polygamy had been authorized only to solve certain social problems particular to periods of war. In this context, he expressed his pain at seeing young people turning away from marriage and called for solutions to the problems of unemployment, solutions that would make it possible for most youth to marry.

I should mention that since Nahdha party members returned from exile, marriages of the party leaders' children have been given significant media attention. Several months after their return the association *Al-Afef* (Purity), which is close to the Nahdha party and looking to support marriage for those who wished to marry but were in difficult economic situations (some were more than 40 years old and/or had been political prisoners), took up the cases of 25 couples (among the 100 couples who actually applied to marry). The association, formed by businessmen from the Tunis suburb of Manouba, supported these couples by furnishing their dwellings, financing the wedding ceremony, providing courses to prepare the couple for living together, and even continued contact with them after the marriage. With the public dimension (*Al-Ichhar*) of marriage constituting an important aspect of Islamic marriage ceremonies, and with public display also making the association's activities more visible, the couples went from Avenue Habib Bourguiba in the center of Tunis to the hippodrome at Ksar Said (Manouba) in open carriages usually used for tourism. Then at the hippodrome, the ceremony took place with each couple seated on a sofa, as is done during private ceremonies. For three

10 Sihem Badi, after having been sentenced to two years in prison in 1992 for her political activities, went to France where she studied medicine. Her return to Tunisia in 2011 took place in the context of the victory in the October 2011 elections, of a coalition that included her political party, the *Congrès pour la République* (CPR, a secularist party). Following this election, she was appointed Minister for Women's Affairs. Her vision of women's rights, marked by her experience in Europe, where the rights of married women or unmarried couples are protected, quickly showed its limitations in the Tunisian context where her approval of *orfi* marriage, which allows a couple to have sexual relations without contravening religious dogma, was seen as putting at risk women's rights and the rights of children born of such a relationship, since the *orfi* marriage contract was not legally registered and the children of such unions were not seen as legitimate (Omrane 2012; Meziou-Douraï 2012).

consecutive years, 2011–2013, the *Al-Afef* association organized collective marriage ceremonies with great fanfare.

The theatrical nature of these celebrations took place at a time when Nahdha was facing opposition to its notion of "complementarity" to define relations between husband and wife, a notion that had been proposed by Nahdha's Constituent Assembly members. Controversy over placing this notion in the new constitution, when women's and human rights associations favored the term "equality", dominated from the summer of 2012 into the year 2013, and put Nahdha on the defensive. Other events over the following months, such as bringing the artist Nadia Jlassi before the court for her installation depicting women who were being lapidated; the case of Mériem, a young woman raped by two policemen; the case of Amina "Femen" who put a topless self-portrait on her Facebook page, with the inscription "My body belongs to me, it isn't the honor of anyone" and who was arrested for having written "Femen" on a small wall of the Kairouan cemetery on the day when the salafist party *Ansar Al-Shari'a* was to hold its convention; were all widely publicized in the media and contributed to diminishing women's support for the Nahdha party.

In August 2014, on the occasion of celebrations marking the 1956 promulgation of the Personal Status Code, Rached Ghannouchi once again took up the theme of marriage for unmarried older women and for divorcees, and said he was struck by the increase in divorces and celibacy. He called upon youth to marry women even when they were older, evoking the case of the Prophet Muhammad who married Khadija when she was in her forties.

In this context and making various calls and actions in favor of marriage for single women and those over the age of 30 and/or divorced – something that was viewed by many feminists and independent women as an intrustion into private life – Nahdha was not able to attain the levels of success in the November 2014 legislative elections that it had reached in the previous elections. To understand why Ghannouchi's appeal did not have much success, we need to consider some characteristics of the "mystic-ascetic unmarried women" – who are unmarried not by choice, but who also do not wish to enter into a marriage that will lower their status or will force them to support an unemployed spouse.

4 *Hijab,* Fasting, and the Subversion of the Dominant Model of the "Moral Personality"

Social science research in the region over recent years has shown that youth prefer to practice abstinence before marriage, as is the case with the group we are calling "mystic-ascetic unmarried women" (Ghaffari et al. 2009). Through fasting, praying, and wearing the *hijab*, the "mystic-ascetic unmarried women" demonstrate self-control before marriage. How far is this case of unmarried women who are kept "in-between" – no longer children, yet not married and full adults – relevant to the issue of the "moral personality"?

Their strategy has two main components. First, by wearing the *hijab,* they engage in a form of activity that involves a sustained interplay between exposing and concealing

– the *hijab* here hides the *okssa* (ponytail), which has a phallic character, thus hiding masculinity and constituting a ritual teaching the pre-adolescent girl to restrain herself. In *Çabra Hachma, sexualité et tradition*, I showed how long hair that was not braided was interpreted as inviting sexual relations (Labidi 1989). Similarly, wearing the *hijab* here signifies modesty – that the individual is not ready to practice sexuality, while the *hijab* becomes a boundary/*hudud* that is not transgressed.[11] Second, "mystic-ascetic unmarried women" fast to renounce all that appetite implies. Their bodies attain a kind of non-reproductive sexuality, a desexualization, a non-fertile look, up to and including a purge of femaleness – forms described in research on anorexia – but, in this context of women mystic-ascetics, not to the point of allowing themselves to become sick or to commit suicide, which would violate Islamic precepts (Qur'an 4, Sura 29, Women). They attribute to the fast the control of sexual impulses. This makes these women a particular group, where they pursue their struggle without allowing themselves to be engulfed by renunciation or by the pleasure of pain.

Now, if we expand our discussion to include youth in general, we can suggest that the submission of youth with similar characteristics (age, education, marital status) to religious and/or cultural precepts, supports the hypothesis that *hijab,* fasting, and prayer all play a protective role against depression (Vasegh/Mohammadi 2007: 218, 222). In the absence of studies on this subject in Tunisia prior to January 2011 – the Ben Ali regime did not permit studies that explored the Islamist milieu – studies carried out in other Arab or Muslim countries experiencing celibacy problems similar to those seen in Tunisia can be useful, even though the situation regarding women's rights differs from country to country. A study carried out among 129 women and 33 men, all university students in Kuwait with an average age of 20, shows that those who are more religious tend to be happier (Abdel-Khalek 2009). Another study among a group of 285 Iranian medical students (53 percent males and 47 percent females, aged between 20 and 31 years old with 97 percent Muslims), reported that all of the religious variables were found to have negative correlations with anxiety and depression scores. One of the reasons for this may be a result of benefits flowing from integration into a structured group that shares ethical norms and that allows individuals, on the psychological level, access to subjectivity. These studies corroborate the orientations taken by the women in our group, represented here by the case of Fatma, the young woman doctor mentioned above, who adopted certain precepts and reinterpreted them. They follow the tenets of their faith and share also in the rituals and rewards of Islam (Elias 1988: 209). Their veiling and anorexia are affirmations of a certain kind of feminism.

This group of women, unable to accomplish the ritual of marriage and excluded from achieving the standard construction of the "moral personality", constructs another "moral personality" model that subverts the standard. In wearing the *hijab,* women repress the symbolism of the phallic origin, and by fasting and following a code without compromise, the code itself is subverted. The case of these "unmarried mystic-ascetics" subverts the dominant notions of the "moral personality" as constructed through rites of passage that would otherwise keep them in a devalued status.

11 For a discussion of how dress constitutes a language and how the dress worn by wives whose husbands work abroad 11 months a year – a dress worn inside out with a black belt – indicates the husband's absence and the solitude of the woman's heart, see Labidi (1980; 1989).

5 Conclusion

It is important to note that, starting in the 2000s, many young women with various levels of education were unable to fulfil their desire for dignity/*karama* and to realize themselves by finding employment and marrying a man who they believed would satisfy their expectations and with whom they wanted to share their lives, showing a loss of options available to them. This discussion has enabled us to show how the appeals for *karama* (dignity) during the "Arab Spring" were tied to the person's wish to control sexual needs and desires related to the construction of identity. We saw how unmarried women, in reinterpreting notions of ethics and becoming "mystic-ascetics" before 2011, without breaking with women's rights as contained in the Personal Status Code, expressed feminist principles that the personal is also political. Focusing on this group of unmarried women, we see how important it is for those who cannot accomplish the standard rituals to find a strategy that enables them to construct a "moral personality" via reinterpretations and reformulating rituals, thus avoiding depression and other abnormal behaviors.

Has the revolution significantly changed their living condition? The economic and social conditions of youth continue to be extremely difficult and many still see leaving their country as the only solution. In this new context, "mystic-ascetic unmarried women" seek new emancipatory gender situations, certainly within an Islamic framework but one where the private and public spheres have become political. The significance of this politicization of these spheres seems to have escaped many in Tunisian society, with some seeing this as a return to outdated religious views and/or moral views, as in the effort to satisfy needs through practices such as *orfi* marriage and in the return to "honor crimes". On the other hand, the political elites returning from exile or who spent considerable periods in prison, as well as those who pursued public political activity during the Ben Ali period, do not seem to have fully understood the importance of developments related to youth – such as the difficulties of marrying, and unmarried women choosing a mystic-ascetic orientation – that occurred over the past two decades in a society increasingly open to the wider world, and leading to a cohort of youth that is "uninitiated" and remains marginalized.

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Author's details

Lilia Labidi, Dr., Professor of Anthropology and Psychology at the University of Tunis; Fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study, Uppsala, Sweden. Research focus: history of the feminist movement in the Arab world, identity construction, sexuality, women's rights, work of women artists in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.
E-mail: labidi.lilia@yahoo.com