Negotiating the "In-between"
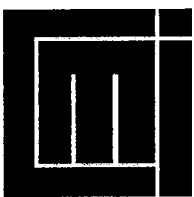## Modernizing Practices and Identities in Post-colonial Tunisia

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Report
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Summary:

The study focuses on the Tunisian post-colonial process of modernization and its effects on Tunisians of different generations, gender, and educational backgrounds. Interviews with illiterates as well as university graduates show that level of education contributes more to a modernization of individual preferences than both gender and generation. Gender is, however, the main determining factor for how educated "modernized" Tunisians experience and handle their intermediary positions between tradition and modernity.

Sammendrag:

Studiet fokuserer på den post-koloniale moderniseringsprosessen i Tunisia, og dens følger for tunisiere av ulike generasjoner, kjønn, og utdanningskategorier. Gjennom intervjuer med analfabeter så vel som universitetsutdannede blir det vist at utdanningsnivå bidrar mer til modernisering av individuelle preferanser enn både kjønn og alder. Kjønn er imidlertid bestemmende for hvordan utdannede, "moderniserte" tunisiere opplever og takler sin spesielle posisjon mellom tradisjon og modernitet.

Indexing terms:	Stikkord:
Modernization	Modernisering
Gender relations	Kjønnsrelasjoner
Tunisia	Tunis

Contents

Preface

Listen, my girl: Before it was not the same. We can not compare. Before it was a life, and now, it is another life.

This thesis is the evidence that I did not follow this advice of my eldest informant, Mustfa.

There have been times when I regretted ignoring his advice; times when I fully agreed with him that the project of comparing "before" and "now" and their implications for the lives of the Tunisians was indeed impossible.

Still, I evidently have not been able to give up the project — in between the moments of despair it just seemed too good an idea to be wasted. Whether it was worth the effort is up to the reader to decide.

1. Introduction

Situated in the heart of North Africa, Tunisia is geographically and culturally a part of the Arab World. Still, Tunisia is today in many ways a non-typical Arab country. Since independence in 1956, the state has undergone a thorough process of social structural change, that has been markedly inspired by Western liberal ideas of social organization. Central elements of the society have as a result been significantly changed. An increase in access to formal education, a growing geographical and social mobility, and a considerable success of the national population control programs, are among the factors that have changed the society in general, and the structures and functions of the family and the local community — cornerstones of Arab-Muslim social organization — in particular, since independence.

The objective of this study is to examine consequences of this post-colonial structural change for Tunisians who experience it in their daily lives. The basic point of departure is the assumption that such a thorough change in social structures will lead to changes in the lives of those who are exposed to it. In order to test this assumption, changes both in people's practice, thought, and also self-perception — or identity — will be objects of examination.

When dealing with identity in a Tunisian context, it is impossible to pass the country's Arab-Muslim inheritance entirely without mention. This cultural inheritance holds a significant position in the Tunisians' minds; recent political events have illustrated that in spite of Tunisia's post-colonial development away from a traditional Arab-Muslim society, people are still Arabs and Muslims to themselves, as well as Tunisians.

Over the last fifteen years, Tunisia has experienced the rise of a considerable Islamist movement. This movement reflects a general tendency of increasing religious fundamentalism that today characterizes most of the Arab World. The rise of fundamentalism in Tunisia should partly be understood as a reaction against the "Westernization" of the society, and thus as a search for a Muslim identity, after the long period of Western influence that first started with the colonization.

The Islamist revival is, however, a rather recent phenomenon that is significant within particular sections of the Tunisian population only. The

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idea of an Arab Nation is another central factor of identification, that more than the Islamism characterizes the population in general. This idea has also a longer history among the Tunisians. Still, its influence is today as clear as ever: The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the following American presence in Saudi Arabia, took place during the field-work period of this study. People's reactions to these events were strong testimonies of the nature and intensity of the Arab identity, as it exists among the Tunisians today.

Both the Arab Nation and Islam are what one may call "trans-national" aspects of the Tunisians' identity. These aspects are significant for the majority of the Tunisians' self-understanding, and their existence should be kept in mind. The focus of this thesis is, however, on entirely other and more local levels. It focuses on social universes that traditionally have been of fundamental importance for both social life and identity-formation in Tunisia: The local community, and particularly the family-group.

Because of the significant importance of these social universes in the Tunisian society, they will be objects of considerable interest in this thesis. Firstly, they are the universes examined in the theoretical analysis of the social point of departure of the post-colonial social change. Secondly, they also constitute main arenas for the analysis of the Tunisians' social life today.

This study will thus deal with post-colonial social structural change as it appears in people's practices on the arenas of the local community and the family-group. In the same way it will examine the change in people's conceptions of the meaning and importance of their interaction on these arenas. It will also focus on identity as it is created, expressed, and changed in the spheres of these traditionally significant social arenas.

A central characteristic of the post-colonial social change is the decrease in the importance of these social universes in the lives of the Tunisians. Particularly for the post-colonial generations, there is a tendency of change away from the local community and the family-group as the fundamental social universes, towards an increased importance of new universes, that have appeared as consequences of the post-colonial structural change. This thesis will also examine the nature of this shift in social universes for the young generations, and its implications for their practices, and thoughts, and also for their sense of identity.

As this study has been conducted within clear limits both as to scope and time, limitations of the rather extensive theme presented above have been necessary.

Certain aspects of the post-colonial change in social structures have therefore, because of their large impact on social change in general and because of their particular relevance for the topics of interest to this study,

been chosen as representative of the general structural changes in Tunisia after independence. These aspects will be discussed in chapter two, as parts of the historical background for the study.

The family-group and the local community have already been presented as social arenas of fundamental importance for the traditional Tunisian social organization, and therefore as the social universes of examination in the theoretical analysis of the social point of departure of the post-colonial changes. This analysis will, as a part of the general theoretical framework of the thesis, be presented in chapter three.

Certain limitations and operationalizations have also been guiding the practical implementation of the study. Because the local social community figures as a main field of interest, it has been natural to concentrate the research around one such community. A small town, situated in the North-Eastern corner of Tunisia, has been chosen as the physical setting of the study.

The nature of the information required for the analysis has furthermore made me opt for data-collection based on extensive interviews with a rather limited number of informants. In addition, the fact that the main object of the study is to examine change over time has made a sample of informants based on several generations a reasonable choice. The fact that the nature and function of the family-group is a main field of interest has made me concentrate on informants of both genders, who mainly belong to the same families. The methodological approach to the study will be presented and discussed in chapter four.

The second part of the thesis contains presentations of the information about practices, thoughts and senses of identity provided by the individuals who appear as informants in the study. It furthermore contains discussions of this information, seen in relation to the principles of the traditional Tunisian social organization presented in chapter three, and the post-colonial changes in social structures presented in chapter two.

This second part of the thesis is organized according to main themes of the interviews, and treats topics like marriage, physical reproduction, formal education, occupation, and the informants' relations to the family-group, the local community, and the national-level society. Throughout the presentations and discussions, the focus is on changes in practices, ways of thinking, and senses of identity between the generations of Tunisians that the informants represent.

2. Historical background[1]

2.1 The colonial period

When Tunisia formally declared its independence from France in 1956, the country was left with the enormous task of creating a nation state from the remains of the colonial rule. The preconditions for accomplishing this task were, however, in many ways more favourable in Tunisia than in other newly de-colonized North-African states. Several factors contributed to this favourable situation:

The type of colonization that Tunisia was exposed to, had relatively limited effects on the pre-colonial social organization of the country. First of all, Tunisia was colonized for a relatively short period of time, from 1882 to 1956. Secondly, Tunisia was never actually a colony; the country's formal status was that of a French protectorate. This distinction was furthermore not merely of a formal character, it also had significant practical effects: The plan for Tunisia was one of "private colonization" — the French state's interference was kept low, while private enterprises were encouraged to take whatever advantage they could of their country's control of the area. As this strategy for colonization turned out to be rather unsuccessful, the last period of the protectorate saw a considerable rise in formal interference from the colonial power; still, the French presence never constituted more than seven per cent of the total population, and the period of the protectorate had relatively limited effects on Tunisian social life.

Pre-colonial Tunisia had by the last half of the nineteenth century reached a relatively advanced stage of state-building; administrative control of the country through the transformation of the hinterlands, or *Bled al-Siba* — "Land of Insolence", into *Bled al-Makhzen* — "Government Land", had for some time been a concern for the central administration (Anderson, 1986). When France occupied the area in the early 1880's, it found a country equipped with relatively well-developed administrative structures.

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[1] The data presented in this chapter are extracted from the following sources: Anderson L., 1986; Gallagher C.F., 1968; Hudson M.C., 1977; Anderson J.N.D., 1958; *Information Report,* 1988; Sutton K., 1980; Ferchiou S., 1989; Office National, 1989; Ministry of Culture and Information, 1989; Republique Tunisienne, 1962; Republique Tunisienne, 1977; Republique Tunisienne, 1984; Republique Tunisienne, 1987.

Probably as a consequence of France's low ambitions of formal involvement in Tunisia it based the colonial administration on these existing structures, rather than developing new ones particularly designed for the needs of the colonial power. As a result, the discontinuity caused by the introduction of the new rulers was moderate in large parts of the country; the existing power-structures of the provinces stayed largely unchanged. At the time of independence, Tunisia possessed a state administration that was well suited to the task of administrating an independent state. In this way, the colonial power continued the process of state-building started in pre-colonial Tunisia. Tunisia's colonial experience may therefore be characterized as moderate, and even to some degree constructive, if seen from a state-building point of view. (ibid.)

Another factor that facilitated the creation of a stable, post-colonial state, was the ethnical and religious homogeneity that characterizes Tunisian society. Unlike its neighbouring countries, Tunisia has no Berber population of any significance. More than ninety per cent of the inhabitants are Sunnite Muslims; the main religious minorities, Jews and Christians, only constitute a few per cent of the population. At independence, the formation of the new state was thus not complicated by ethnical or religious unrest and rivalry. Since Tunisia has a rather long history as a political unit, the definition of the new state as such created little controversy.

One of Tunisia's most significant assets at the time of independence was, however, the existence of a major, mass-based political party with more than thirty years of political experience; the Neo-Destourian Party.

Habib Bourgiba, the party's creator and leader, had recognized the importance of broad popular support; as a consequence, the Neo-Destourian Party's activities before independence were characterized by pragmatism rather than ideology. The party's actual ideological base — nationalistic, secular liberalism — was not a central feature of its practical policy, which aimed at including as many groups of the population as possible in the base of party sympathizers. The party approached this aim through the creation of a nationwide network of clientelist structures, based on provincial core party-members' practical support to the local population.

This practical, clientelist strategy turned out successfully for the Party. It furthermore had significant consequences for the national political situation at the time of independence: First of all, it resulted in a shift of provincial power from traditional patrons to patrons of the "modern" political and economic sectors, a development that came to facilitate significantly the implementation of the new post-colonial reforms. Secondly, it resulted in a general decentralization of power from the Capital, Tunis, to the provincial centres. Finally, the strategy's success

secured the Neo-Destourian party considerable legitimacy within most sections of the Tunisian population — a support that later became essential for the party's ability to consolidate the new post-colonial regime's position during the first crucial decade after the independence.

The national level of organizational structures in Tunisia escaped colonialism with a relative minimum of discontinuity. To an even larger extent, this was also the case for the social organization of the provincial local communities. The larger parts of the Tunisian population experienced rather moderate changes in their practical daily lives as a consequence of the colonization; the general tendency was one of stability. Major characteristics of the provincial life were thus preserved: Geographical and social mobility remained low, illiteracy remained high; agriculture remained the dominating sector of the economy. And local every-day social life continued until independence to be based on principles that had been dominant for centuries.

2.2 The post-colonial period

Tunisia gained independence in 1956. From the beginning, the Neo-Destourian Party stood out as the sole realistic candidate for the task of governing the new state, due to its broad popular support, its long political experience, and its extensive nation-wide clientelist network. In addition, the party's charismatic leader, Habib Bourgiba, personally played a central role for the legitimacy of the party. He enjoyed a considerable popularity within the Tunisian population; on his return from French detention in 1956, he was celebrated as the liberation personified and welcomed as the new Tunisia's Grand Father. When Tunisia became a republic in 1957, he was the evident candidate for the presidency — a position he was to hold for decades.

Once in power, the Neo-Destourian Party set out to realize its ambitious and controversial plans for Tunisia: Its transformation into a modern, secular nation state, based on a combination of a "modern" interpretation of Muslim principles and Western liberal ideas. The Party's interpretation of liberalism did not, however, include the democratic elements; until the eighties, Tunisia remained an authoritarian one-party state.

The new law of personal status introduced by the new regime in 1957 indicated the radical nature of the intended changes: As the first Arab state it prohibited both polygamy, and the Muslim law of divorce, or repudiation. Through the successful implementation of these and other changes in the civil legislation, the government took a significant step towards the secularization of the state while it consolidated the regime's position. More

than three decades later, Tunisia has still remained the Arab country that most diverges from the *Sharia* — the Islamic law — in legislation.

A regime's implementation of social reforms of such a fundamental character clearly requires both a considerable practical political power and a large extent of legitimacy. The Neo-Destourian government had both, as a result of the party's activities during the late colonial period.

The young state had a long way to go to reach the aim of a modern, "developed" nation, however: In 1953, less than 17 per cent of the children of primary school age were actually engaged in any formal kind of education — secondary schools were as good as non-existent. In 1956, only 15.3 per cent of the population were literate; 25.5 per cent of the men, and 4 per cent of the women. 39.8 per cent of the women between 15 and 19 years of age were married. The agricultural sector employed eight times as many people as the industrial sector, and 67 per cent of the population lived in rural areas.

The new regime's model for economic development was based on liberal principles, but with significant state involvement. The expansion of the state sector was thus from the beginning a task of high priority. From 1955 to 1960, the number of Muslim state employees rose from 12,000 to 80,000. This was partly a result of the replacement of French officials, partly of a general growth in the public sector. Official positions were to a large degree used as awards to party members; this expansion served to strengthen the clientelist system of the Neo-Destourian party. (Anderson, 1986)

Development of the educational sector was another area of high priority. Already by 1958, 38 per cent of the children of primary school-age were attending school; 56 per cent of the boys, and 20 per cent of the girls. The female participation may seem low; in a society where girls, until the independence, had lived in almost total confinement, it is actually quite remarkable, and points towards another of the regime's main priorities; the emancipation of women through their increased participation in all spheres of public life.

By 1960, Tunisia had passed the first crucial phase of consolidation; the country had a new constitution, rivalry both within and outside the ruling party had been settled, the regime was widely recognized as the legitimate rulers of the new state, and the first development programmes were already in place.

2.2.1 The sixties

> The seriousness of the efforts directed toward true modernization, which involve freeing the whole society from the stagnant side of traditional life and the bonds of the past, emerges in all undertakings: the sweeping legal changes dealing with the family, the emancipation of women, new attitudes towards religion, very rapid educational progress, and moderation both in internal and social reconstruction and in foreign affairs. The most notable factor appears to have been the ability to combine change with stability in shifting dosages but without excess in any single direction (Gallagher 1968, p.8).

The sixties were to become the experimental period of Tunisia's post-colonial history. The Neo-Destourian party went through a significant radicalization early in the decade; the liberal principles were to a large extent replaced with socialist ones. One of the results of this political turn was a vast program of collectivization, initiated in 1964. Most sectors of economy were involved, but the consequences for the agricultural sector were particularly large.

The hopes for this decade were high: The government estimated an annual growth-rate of 6 per cent. Full primary school-enrolment was furthermore expected to be reached by 1966. This was also the decade of the first program of population control. In 1962, the Tunisian population had reached the number of 4,332,200, and in 1961, the average number of children per woman was 7.1. The ambition was to diminish the growth rate significantly through female sterilisation and distribution of contraceptives. In addition, the legal age of marriage for girls was risen from 15 to 17 in 1964 and free access to abortion for married women was granted in 1967.

These hopes were only partially met. The actual annual growth rate turned out to be 3.3 per cent — a highly respectable rate, compared to other African de-colonized countries, but still little more than half of the estimated growth. Full primary school enrolment was not achieved; by 1964, 92 per cent of the children had enroled, but as late as 1968, only 77 per cent of the children of primary school age were actually attending school — 94 per cent of the boys, and 59 per cent of the girls — which indicates a high rate of early drop-outs, particularly for girls. Still, the percentage of married women under twenty had dropped to 18.5 per cent. Again, compared to other countries in similar situations, the achievements were quite remarkable, but still insufficient to meet the expectations for the decade.

The population control program also turned out to be only partially successful. By 1968, one third of the target number of users of

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contraceptives was reached, with the result that only 3.6 per cent of the married, fertile women used contraception. In addition, a significant reduction of infant mortality took place in the later years of the decade, as a result of the development of the health-sector — from 211.3 per thousand children less than five years of age in the period 1963-67, to 161.9 in the period 1968-72. This achievement to some degree came to counter-weight the total effect of the population control programme.

The program of collectivization furthermore proved to be a failure. It met considerable opposition among the population; in a society where private property, particularly farmland, had been the main base of wealth and status for centuries, people were less than happy to have to work what used to be their own land for modest wages. The fact that the proportion of the rural population by 1966 had decreased to 63 per cent may be seen in connection with the implementation of this program.

This resistance did not result in any significant organized political opposition, however; the Neo-Destourian Party — in the sixties called the Neo-Destourian Socialist Party — remained the only political alternative throughout the decade. The continued legitimacy of the regime combined with its firm repression of all organized political oppositional activity contributed to this lack of competitors on the political arena.

By the end of the sixties, the general failure of the socialist experiment to realize the aims set for the decade led to a turn in the regime's political line. The program of collectivization was called off, and the properties were returned to the previous owners. The Prime Minister in charge of it was arrested, Bourgiba declared his great disappointment in him, and claimed his innocence in the former's unpopular policies. He thereby established a position of his own that he was to keep for the rest of his presidency, as a king-like figure, above the practical policies of his regime.

2.2.2 The seventies

"Harmony, balance, cohesion, tolerance, contentment" — these are the words which spring to the mind of one who, having completed a long and difficult voyage through Arab politics, finally comes to rest in Tunisia (Hudson 1977, p.377).

The seventies saw a return to the liberal principles that initially had been the ideological base of the Neo-Destourian Party. The economy was opened to foreign investments and national private initiatives were encouraged. Development of the tourist sector became a main priority. The state

remained heavily involved in the economy, however; throughout the decade, its share of the total activity never fell below 50 per cent.

The turn away from socialism also implied a shift in the social policy of the government. The country's economy had proved unable to provide the intended rapid improvement of the living conditions for the whole population. The regime thus had to choose between a continued policy of general improvement, which implied a significant reduction of the desired pace of development, or a policy of economic growth based on liberal principles, which implied that concerns for the welfare of significant groups of the population had to be given up. The choice fell on the last strategy, and the new, liberal social policy came to benefit particularly the provincial entrepreneurs, that had been the core group of support for the Neo-Destourian Party from the beginning. The regime thus continued and broadened its former successful strategy of clientelism-based support into the seventies.

In spite of the significant policy shifts, the development of the social sectors of high priority continued to show rather stable results during this period. By 1975, 47.5 per cent of the Tunisian population lived in the urban areas of the country. The illiteracy had been reduced to 55 per cent of the population 42.3 per cent for men, and 67.9 per cent for women. Still, by 1976, the aim of full primary school enlistment was not yet achieved; only 42.9 per cent of the total number of enrolments were girls.

This disparity shows that there still were girls deprived of formal education. At the same time, however, the fact that girls accounted for 36.2 per cent of the secondary school enrolments, indicates that higher education also for girls had become a priority at least within some sections of the population by the mid-seventies.

Concerning population control, improvement continued to be modest. During the period from 1966 to 1975, the annual population growth-rate was 2.3 per cent a rather low rate, as compared to those of other North-African countries at the time. By 1973, the birth rate was down to 3.8 per cent, and the continued programmes of family planning had by 1975 led to a situation where 10 per cent of the married, fertile female population used contraception.

For the first half of the seventies, the results of the shift back to liberalism in economic policy were highly satisfactory. From 1970 to 1976 the Gross Domestic Product grew by nine per cent. At the same time, however, the economic differences within the population also grew. When the economy in 1977 faced the beginning of a period of decline that was to continue into the eighties, the result was significant political opposition to the regime. The trade unions were a major force in the opposition in

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itself an indicator of success for the objective of industrializing the country. In 1977 Tunisia also experienced its first general strike — several more were to come. A new base of protest came to the fore in the seventies: The Islamic fundamentalist movement entered the political arena. It was the first political force of any significance to question the political regime as such.

By the end of the decade, close to a third of the Tunisian population was living below the World Bank's poverty-line. The official unemployment rate was twelve per cent — the real rate was probably much higher. 230,000 Tunisian citizens were registered as working abroad — also a modest estimate, but still equal to the part of the population occupied in the industrial sector. The former certain way to personal prosperity and upward social mobility, academic training, began to fail, and for the first time, there was significant unemployment also within the educated groups of the population.

2.2.3 The eighties

> Chaos in the domestic policy of the country, rising intolerance, insecurity, social tensions, a stagnating economy, laxity, suspicion, erosion of Tunisia's image and loss of her prestige on the international scene, an old and ailing President of the republic surrounded by a small group of favourites concerned mainly with the pursuit of their own interests: such was the situation in my country on the Eve of the 7th of November 1987, a situation which threatened to plunge the country into civil war and lead its economy to bankruptcy (Ambassador of Tunisia in Ankara M. Frini, in SESRTCIC 1988, p.5).

Until the eighties, the liberal ideals of the post-colonial regime had been restricted to the economic sector. Politically, Tunisia was an authoritarian one-party state, and opposition to the ruling Neo-Destourian party was met with firm repression. As the political opposition grew during the seventies, this situation became increasingly problematic. The continued refusal to permit competing parties caused considerable disapproval within the population, particularly among the members of the growing educated middle class.

In 1980, the Prime Minister of the seventies, Hedi Nouira, was replaced by the more liberal Mohammed M'Zali. Under him, Tunisia experienced the first careful attempts of democratization. In 1981, Tunisia had the first free elections in its post-colonial history. As the regime by then had recognized only one other political party but their own, and as the Neo Destourian Party did not give up its old habit of manipulating the elections,

the practical effect of the reform was rather limited. All the same, this was to become the first step in a fumbling and unstable process of democratization. Two more parties were recognized in 1983, and with the three that were recognized in 1988, Tunisia had by the end of the decade seven legal political parties.

Being anti-constitutional, the fundamentalist movement has remained illegal until today. Still, it grew in size and importance throughout the eighties. The effects of this movement, combined with the general disapproval of the political and economic conditions in the population, created a major national political crisis by the end of the decade. President Bourgiba had by this time passed eighty; he had lost his former firm grip on the country's politics, and was guided by advisors of varying quality.

After the brief liberalization of the early eighties, the regime again met the political opposition with repression. Imprisoning leaders from both the trade-unions, the political parties in opposition, and the fundamentalist movement, and repressing all political demonstrations with considerable force, it maximized the crisis rather than solving it.

By 1987, the situation had become critical, with nation-wide strikes, both among workers and students, several incidents where members of the opposition were killed by the police, and fundamentalist bomb-attacks on tourist-hotels in mid-season. Tunisia faced larger political problems than ever before in its short history while the regime's legitimacy and strength was at an absolute low point. On 7 November 1987, the old and senile Bourgiba was removed from his permanent presidency — he had himself elected president for life in 1974. The coup was led by a group within the Neo-Destourian Party, and it took place without any use of violence.

In his early fifties, the new president Ben Ali did not belong to the generation of politicians who had earned their reputation during the fight for independence. A convinced liberal, he fitted into the Neo-Destourian political tradition; still, his interpretation of the Party's ideology also to some extent included the democratic aspects of it. In fact, one of his ambitions at the take-over was claimed to be a thorough democratization of the country's political system. There was also the task of recovering the national economy, which had been in decline ever since the late seventies.

In spite of all the problems the new president had to face, he took over a country that had been through a considerable change since its independence, and that compared to other developing countries had come far in the process of social reform and modernization:

By the end of the eighties, the population was approaching eight million, twice the population at independence. The annual population growth rate was as low as 2.4 per cent, however. The average life-expectancy was 65.7

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years for men, and 66.9 years for women. 38.8 per cent of the population was less than fifteen years of age, an eight per cent reduction since 1966. 49.8 per cent of the married, fertile women practised some kind of contraception.

In 1988, only 4.3 per cent of the girls under twenty were married; at the same time, the female proportion of the pupils in primary school had reached 45 per cent. In secondary school, 44 per cent of the pupils were girls, and they also constituted 37.8 per cent of the university students. As early as in 1984, 21.9 per cent of the female population was engaged in paid labour, as against 5.6 per cent in 1966. At the same time, however, as much as 17 per cent of the population between ten and fourteen years were illiterate.

By the end of the decade, well over fifty per cent of the population was living in urban areas; still, rural-urban migration remained relatively low, 3.9 per cent in the period 1979-84. In 1984, 72 per cent of the households were electrified, as against 15 per cent in 1954.
And in 1987, 75 per cent of the households had running water, 68 per cent more than at independence.

The Tunisia that in 1987 experienced the first change of president since independence, was thus quite different from the society that welcomed Bourgiba back from French detention in 1956.

The optimism that first characterized public opinion after the change of president soon faded away, along with the broken promises of the new government. Considerable reforms, both economic and political, have actually taken place since 1987. The difficult economic situation, together with the conservative attitude and general rigidity of the huge Neo-Destourian state bureaucracy, has, however, served to reduce the practical effects of these reforms.

Depending heavily on the tourist industry both for supplies of foreign currency, and for the domestic job market, the Tunisian economy is today wide open to international influence. The European economic depression of the late eighties, as well as political incidents like the Gulf war, has had a negative influence on the state's financial situation during the last years.

Today, the most striking feature of political life in Tunisia is the fundamentalist movement. Since it first appeared in the seventies, it has grown to become one of the more significant in the Arab World. In May 1991, a fundamentalist coup-attempt was exposed. By then in its last phase of preparations, it would probably have had a rather good chance of success, if realized. Even though the movement has considerable support, the supporters are to a large extent to be found in particular sections of the population — among students, most of whom are facing an uncertain

occupational future, and others who have suffered under the neglect of the regime since the turn in social policy of the early seventies. The fundamentalism may therefore be seen as a political movement of protest against the late post-colonial Neo-Destourian regime.

The rise of a powerful religious fundamentalist movement in a country that has been through such a vast process of modernization as Tunisia may seem unexpected. In fact, the rapid social change of the post-colonial period may be a main factor behind this development. From the beginning a top-down affair, the rapid process of modernization has given the population little time to adjust itself to the new kind of society. The rise of fundamentalism in Tunisia may therefore also be seen as a result of the need of the people to retrieve their roots and cultural identity.

Still, the fact remains that post-colonial Tunisia is the Arab country that has experienced the most significant social change away from a traditional Arab-Muslim society, towards a model of social organization similar to the Western one. Whether this development will continue in the future, or whether the fundamentalist forces will gain in influence, remains to be seen.

2.3 Regional differences

One central feature of the Tunisian society, remarkable for a country of this moderate size, is only vaguely suggested above: The considerable differences in living conditions between the geographical regions of the country. The present significant geographical lines of division correspond to a large extent to the historical ones separating the hinterlands *Bled al-Siba* and the government-controlled areas, *Bled al-Makhzen*. The fact that the *Bled al-Siba* during the last century was made available for taxation, and thus lost its traditional political autonomy, does not seem to have implied that it became fully integrated in the social organization of Tunisia. The fact is that even today, these areas stand out as hinterlands, through their low participation in the various sectors of "new" Tunisia. Their average level of education is lower, their participation in institutionalized political life is lower, their economic situation is worse than in the rest of the country. Their resistance towards integration and modernization is well known, as is the fact that the areas are centres of non-institutionalized political movements of protest. This situation may indicate both a general neglect of the areas on the part of the post-colonial regime, and an active reluctance among the people in these areas to accept their status as integrated parts of the Tunisian state.

While the *Bled al-Makhzen* included most of the coastal areas of Eastern Tunisia, the *Bled al-Siba* roughly covered the innermost Western parts of Tunisia. In order to get a picture of the present differences between the areas, one may for instance examine the rates of illiteracy among children, and the practice of contraception in some of the Tunisian regions:

Table 2.1
Rate of illiteracy among children 10-14 years of age in some
Tunisian regions 1984 (in per cent)

	Dist. Tunis	North-East	Centre-West	South-West	Average
Urban Boys	3.6	3.0	6.3	2.9	3,4
Urban Girls	7.3	5.5	15.1	11.2	7,5
Rural Boys	8.3	14.7	19.7	12.7	15,1
Rural Girls	21.9	34.1	57.9	37.6	44,3

Source: *Recensement General de la Population et de l'Habitat vol.3* Republique Tunisienne Ministere du Plan 1984 p.60-64

Table 2.2
Rate of married, fertile women practising contraception in
some Tunisian regions. 1988 (in per cent)

	D.Tunis	N.-East	C.-West	South	Average	Rural	Urban
Any contr.	63.9	57.1	31.5	41.4	49.8	34.6	60.5
Modern contr.	51.5	41.3	27.3	32.6	40.4	30.1	47.6

Source: *Enquête Démographique et de Santé en Tunisie 1988* Office National de la Famille et de la Population, Tunis, Tunisia, and Institute for Resource Development/Macro Systems Inc. Colombia, Maryland USA 1989 p.70

We see that there are significant regional differences in Tunisia both concerning illiteracy among children, and practice of contraception. Even within regions, the differences may be considerable. The rate of illiteracy in the particular North-Eastern *Gouvernorat* of Nabeul, to which the town of this study belongs, for instance, differs to some degree from the general

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situation in the region: While the illiteracy of urban children of both genders is approximately the same as for all the North-East, 3.2 per cent for boys and 5.5 per cent for girls, the rates for rural children are significantly lower; 11.3 per cent of the boys, and 26.4 per cent of the rural girls were illiterate in this *Gouvernorat* in 1984.

These figures reveal significant regional differences concerning topics that are central to this study. Therefore, the study does not aim at producing results that can be applied to all Tunisia; the objective is rather to provide an analysis of the situation in one socially and geographically clearly defined group of Tunisians.

The study will have relevance for the entire Tunisian society, however. More than that, it should be able to contribute to the understanding of the social organization and social mechanisms that are prominent in most parts of North Africa. Tunisia shares the Arab-Muslim cultural tradition of all this area. Even if the social changes of the post-colonial period have had significant impact on the lives of the Tunisians, the Arab-Muslim principles continue to be important elements in small-scale social life. The post-colonial social development may have weakened the actual impact of these principles more than it has changed them qualitatively. The future will show whether the importance of these principles will be further weakened, or whether they will continue to constitute the basic values of the society.

2.4 Summing up

Tunisia's colonial period, as well as its post-colonial period, has been characterized by relative political continuity and lack of conflicts, as compared to the recent history of the other North African states. This had several consequences for the present situation in the country:

First of all, the post-colonial political regime has enjoyed considerable legitimacy in the population since independence, again as compared to the situation in other North African countries. The recent rise of the fundamentalist movement has changed this picture, however.

Secondly, the stable political situation during the first decades after independence made it feasible for the Neo-Destourian regime to implement a radical project of modernization. Some of the major achievements of the social reforms, like the introduction of compulsory school, the legislative changes concerning family and civil life, the access to birth-control, and the general improvement of people's material situation, had a profound influence on the common Tunisian's daily life. The actual degree of influence seems to vary between the regions of Tunisia; it is, however,

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clear that all parts of the country have experienced considerable social change during the post-colonial period.

One may assume that the actual nature of the impact of this social change will vary between the different generations of Tunisians who have experienced the post-colonial period, depending on the stage in their lives at independence. The generations born after independence may have adjusted to the changes relatively easily, both because they have no other experiences than the post-colonial one, and because they to a large extent have had access to the social institutions representing modern society, like the educational system. The generations born before independence, by contrast, have to a much larger degree had to adjust to the changes without benefiting from them personally; for instance they experienced an increased alphabetization of society, while themselves remaining illiterate.

It is therefore also reasonable to assume that the actual degree of modernization of the individual Tunisian's life as a result of the general modernization of society will vary significantly. While the generations born during the colonial period, due to their personal lack of access to the modern facilities of society, probably have continued to lead their lives much in accordance with traditional principles, the post-colonial generations have had a larger possibility to integrate aspects of the modernization in their personal lives. One may thus expect to find considerable generational variation both in way of living and in mentality within the Tunisian population.

Due to the still considerable proportion of Tunisians born before independence, one may assume that on small-scale social levels, traditional Arab-Muslim principles continue to affect social life. The next chapter will examine the actual nature of some of these Arab-Muslim principles for social organization in more detail, and present theoretical aspects of social change of importance to the analysis presented in this thesis.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Some fundamental principles of traditional[2] North-African social organization

Treating "traditional North-African society" as a homogenous social and cultural entity is a dubious thing to do. On the one hand, North-Africa consists of a multitude of societies, all with their own particular characteristics. As we saw in the previous chapter, not even "traditional Tunisia" can be regarded as a socially and culturally homogenous area. On the other hand, there are significant similarities in the traditional social organization of the entire Mediterranean area, Southern Europe included. This has been pointed out in a number of social science-studies, and it makes treating North-Africa alone as a cultural macro-unit less than self-evident (see f.ex. Tillion, 1983).

For the sake of a perspicuous presentation of some essential principles for an understanding of any North-African society still left with traces of its cultural tradition, I still find it convenient to use this somewhat dubious concept. The following discussion should, however, be read as a conventional presentation of certain aspects of a system of social organization, rather than as an authentic description of any particular society that has existed in time and space.

I will concentrate the discussion on two principles that above others characterize the traditional North-African societies: The *kinship-group* as fundamental social and moral unit, and the strict division of this unit, as well as the whole society, according to *gender*.

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[2] "Traditional" is in this thesis not to be understood as denoting a static, particular kind of society, practice, or way of thinking, but as a set of principles characterized by a particular logic. The "traditional" societies, practices, or ways of thinking are thus thought of as being in processes of change, but within this "traditional" framework of meaning and logic.

3.1.1 The kinship-group

Patrilinear descent is the principle according to which the significant kinship-relations are traditionally defined in North-African societies. A woman's kinship-affiliation will thus be decided by her relationship to men, as the kinship-affiliation of a man is decided by his relationship to other men.

An individual's patrilinear kinship-group constitutes a base of fundamental importance throughout the life-course, both concerning practical organization of the daily life, and the individual's understanding of his or her general purpose in life. Membership in a kinship-group implies imperative obligations and responsibilities, as well as undeniable security and support. The patrilinear kinship-group is a main factor of identification; to the individual member itself, and to the social community. The principle of patrilinear kinship influences most aspects of social life:

The typical composition of a traditional North-African household reflects the influence of the principle of kinship on the *practical* social organization: Sharing a *dar* — house — is a couple, their adult sons, and possibly grand-sons; each with their own wife and children. A kinship-group will, however, most often include a number of households; the principle of mutual loyalty and support reaches beyond the walls of the *dar*, and has in theory no physical limits.

The traditional concept of the ideal union of marriage reflects the *moral* and *ideological* influence of the principle of kinship: Endogamous marriages are in general regarded as superior to exogamous marriages, and of the endogamous, the union of patrilinear parallel-cousins is the ideal type. Therefore, in an ideal marriage, the bride will not change kinship-affiliation, nor household as a result of the marriage. The patrilinear kinship-relations are conceived of as intimate and exclusive to such an extent that ideally, no outsider should ever be included in its unity (Tillion 1983).

The patrilinear cousin-marriage should, however, be understood as an ideal type, rather than a description of actual marriage-practices; exogamous marriages have been, and still are, much more common than endogamous ones in most North-African societies. In such cases, the bride will, particularly after having given birth, change family-affiliation from her natal family to her conjugal family. In the same way, her children will be regarded as members of their father's family. The married woman's loyalty is expected to shift to her conjugal family after marriage, and she will be regarded as a representative of her in-laws rather than her natal family. Thus, while a man belongs to the same family all his life, a woman will as a result of an exogamous marriage change family-belonging.

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The patrilinear kinship-group may in a traditional North-African context be characterized as the most significant social unit in the sense that individual members of a group will tend to perceive themselves, and at the same time be perceived by others, as parts of a kinship-unit, rather than as individual actors with kinship-relations. Based on his experiences from Kabylia in Algeria, the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu characterizes the traditional Kabylian Berber-society, for instance, as "..a society in which the individual exists only through the group, the respect and the love of the group" (Bourdieu 1965 p.220).

The kinship-group constitutes the fundamental form of a "collective self", or "us", as opposed to "significant others" in a social system of relative conceptions of "us" and "others", depending on the context: As a member of a household, the rest of the kinship-group may be the "others", while as a member of the kinship group, the village may be the "others". Faced with a total stranger, the whole village may represent the "us". In any case, the protection of the integrity of the significant "us" involved will be a main concern (ibid). It is thus a social system characterized by relativity in identification and detachment, but where the patrilinear kinship-group constitutes the most significant and permanent composition of a collective self.

3.1.2 The gendered society

At the same time as the patrilinear kinship-group is conceived of as the fundamental social, moral and practical unit, its duality with regard to gender-composition constitute an equally fundamental line of division within it. This line furthermore penetrates the whole society, and divides it into female and male spheres, as well as female and male arenas.[3]

This gender-segregation implies a general conception of individuals as gendered to such an extent that gender-neutral criteria for human conduct have practically ceased to exist; the ideas of "the good woman" and "the good man" may be characterized as complementary, rather than similar (ibid).

Such an extent of complementarity according to gender is made possible by the relative lack of the idea of individuals as autonomous social beings.

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[3] "Arena" is here understood as physical space, as location for interaction, while "sphere" is understood in relation to the symbolic division of the society into male and female.

In order to constitute a meaningful social person,[4] a woman is dependent on the female roles and statuses the kinship-group provides her with, as daughter, wife, and mother. In the same way, a man becomes a meaningful social person through his male roles and statuses as son and father. The woman and man thus represent complementary values, and depend on each other in order to constitute a practical and social meaningful entity. The male qualities are, however, regarded as superior to the female, in the same way as the men are regarded as superior to the women.

This fundamental social and moral dichotomy of male and female is reflected in a number of corresponding dichotomies, relating to most aspects of life, and expressing the overall gendered conception of mankind and society. In the following, some of these dichotomies will be examined closer:

Outside vs. inside

This dichotomy refers to the *physical* division of the society according to gender, into male and female arenas. The "inside" is the female arena, in practice referring to the *dar* the house of a household. The construction of a traditional *dar* — rooms built around an enclosed courtyard — makes it possible to be physically outside, and still, per definition, "inside", within the four walls of the house. The "inside" is the women's world. Most of their lives are spent in this arena: as children, together with their mothers, as young women waiting in seclusion to get married, and as wives and mothers — then possibly in another *dar*, as a result of marriage.

A woman as a rule leaves the "inside" only in order to enter the "inside" of an other *dar*, and when she does, she is veiled to the extent that she obtains total individual anonymity, she is only recognizable as a woman. The traditional veil may thus be seen as a symbolic extension of the "inside". In rural areas, women may work on the land if their labour is needed. Still, the seclusion of women within the *dar* remains the ideal, both morally and socially, an ideal to be let down only when economic conditions make it impossible to conform to it (Abu Sahra, 1982).

The men spend the better part of their lives on the male arena of "outside". As a rule, they return to their home only for meals and sleep. A man who spends too much time "inside" is regarded with suspicion, and his behaviour is defined as unmanly. The "outside" includes the streets, shops, the market, and the cafes; arenas of men's interaction with other men. A

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[4] "Person" is here understood as "a socially defined being, with a number of statuses (rights and duties in relation to others) that put him/her in certain positions vis-à-vis others in the society" (Tesli 1990 p.461-62 — my trans.).

male child meets the "outside" for the first time at an early age; with time, he gradually changes arena, until he as a young boy has become an integrated part of the men's world. While women are veiled beyond individual recognition when entering the "outside", the men perform there without disguise; most of their time is furthermore expected to be invested in the "outside" appearance.

Public vs. private

The dichotomy of public and private is closely related to the one mentioned above, but refers to the gender-divided *cultural spheres* of men and women.

As discussed earlier, both women and men are regarded mainly as representatives of their kinship-group. At the same time, the women are essentially performers on the "inside" arena, an arena that is associated with the intimacy and privacy of the group.

The women are thus the representatives of the kinship-group *for* the kinship-group. Through their daily interaction with the other women of their household, as well as with the women of the other households of the kinship-group, they serve as intermediaries between the different sub-units, and as strategists in the planning and execution of "family-business". The women are thus the "executive leaders" of the daily running of the household and the kinship-group in general. They are the every-day maintainers of the intra-group relations; it is their business to be occupied with the topics that concern the group on an every-day basis. The women's culture is a domestic, private culture.

The men, by contrast, are the representatives of the kinship-group to the "outside" world. Their culture is characterized by formal relations with the "significant (male) others". While the women are occupied almost exclusively with domestic and private tasks in their interaction, family relations are considered to be an unsuitable topic for discussion in the male world. The men are to deal with political matters, with trade, monetary-transactions, and religion. The male culture is a public culture.

Production vs. reproduction

This dichotomy relates to the *functional* aspects of the gender-segregated society. In the same way as the women's lives physically are lived "inside", and the female culture is private and domestic, the female functions are related to the family-sphere, and are performed on the "inside" arena, throughout the life-course. The main function of the women is as reproducers of the kinship-group; physically, through childbearing, morally, through the upbringing and socialization of the children according to the principles for proper group-members, and practically, as the responsible for

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the food-preparation. A woman's significant functions and roles are thus all inseparably related to her membership in a household and a kinship-group.

A woman's status will depend on her performance of her functions, particularly her physical reproductivity. Her functions, her control, and thus her power, are correlated with the number of her offspring. The female functions and statuses may thus be said to be cumulative in nature, reaching a high-point when a woman resides as the mother-in-law of her sons' wives, and as a paternal grand-mother. The female status-hierarchy is, however, primarily relevant to the women. A woman's status is created by women, and for women; it provides a position primarily within the female sphere, and on the female arenas.

The men's main functions are as producers and providers. The male functions are thus also closely related to men's roles as members of a family and a kinship-group, but unlike women, the men's functions lead them away from the arena of the family, the "inside". The men's family-related functions are primarily conducted "outside".

A man's occupational life is thus important: in his relation to the family, as provider, and in his relation to the public, male sphere, within which he does his work. Since the occupational life is so essential to men's total life, the male life-course is not cumulative to the same degree as the female life-course. Old age and physical inability to work may put a stop to the occupational career, thus causing a significant role-loss at the end of the life-course. Still, like the women, a man also achieves status in the male hierarchy through his reproductivity and general position within his kinship-group; this male status is, like the women's, of a cumulative character.

The main functions of both women and men are defined by and related to their family- and kinship-membership; the female functions are, however, inseparably connected to the private family sphere, and the "inside" arena, while the male functions take place within the public sphere, and on the "outside" arena.

Patrilinear kinship and gender are thus the essential and interlocking principles according to which the traditional North-African society are organized. The nature of this organization implies divisions of the social universe into complementary spheres and arenas; the lines of division are furthermore extensive, and influence most aspects of the society. Its implications for the physical, cultural and functional aspects of social life have been briefly discussed above.

In a society characterized by this kind of social organization, the gender- and kinship-characteristics of an individual will necessarily imply a number of limitations and restrictions on the individual's life. In order for such a strictly regulated social system to be maintained, one may assume that there will be a higher idea behind it; a value-system that gives meaning to the individuals' adaption to the rules. The last dichotomy that will be discussed here, reflects this basic value-system of the traditional North-African societies.

3.1.3 Honour vs. shame

The dichotomy of honour and shame reflects the fundamental value-system that gives meaning to the traditional North-African social organization. This value-system deserves the characterization "fundamental" both because of its importance, and because of its scope: It holds a position as the imperative value, superior to all competing values, and it is at the same time integrating all significant principles of the social organization, including gender and kinship, in its system.

The relations between honour and shame constitute a complex set of norms and principles; the fact that these norms and principles are partly categorical, partly relative in nature, adds to the complexity. It is exactly the importance and extent of this value-system that often make it appear ambiguous to an outsider; its imperative nature provides it with a sacred status beyond discussion, or even reflection. The norms and principles related to it have to a large extent obtained a character of intuitive, self-evident knowledge (Bourdieu 1965).

The nature of the relation between the dichotomy of male and female on the one side, and honour and shame on the other side, is not the least ambiguous of the relations within this value-system. This ambiguity is also reflected in the diverging interpretations of the relations that are to be found in the considerable amount of analyses that have been conducted on the logic of honour and shame — a classical topic in social science-studies of the Mediterranean societies.

In her study of a Moroccan village, the Swedish anthropologist Eva Evers-Rosander states that "Shame is linked to a woman's respectability, just as honour is an integral part of a man's reputation." (Evers Rosander 1991 p.13-14). She understands shame as a female value, while relating honour to the male value-system. Other studies do, however, suggest that this interpretation is too one-dimensional. The definition of these relations provided by Bourdieu in his study of traditional Kabylian Berber-society,

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may provide a more accurate basis for an understanding of the mechanisms of honour and shame as they will appear in this study:

Fig.3.1
The relations of honour

H'URMA - H'ARAM	NIF
Honour	*Point of honour*
(honour in so far as it is attached to me)	(honour in so far as I am attached to it)
Capable of being lost, sacred and secret	Capable of defending h'urma, public

H'URMA or ESSER
Esteem, honour, glory, respectability, is
acquired, conquered and defended before other people
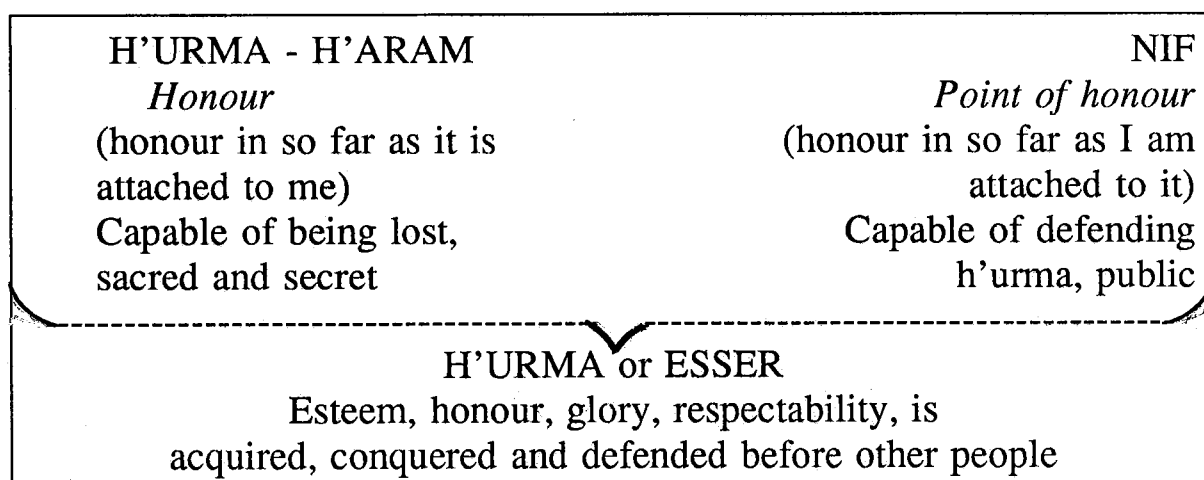
Source: Bourdieu 1965 p.218.

This figure sheds light on a fact that is essential for an understanding of the mechanisms of honour and shame: The dichotomous concepts are in fact neither strictly feminine, nor strictly masculine; they are above all collective in nature. In Bourdieu's words:

> If *h'urma* is identified with the sacred of the "left hand", that is to say essentially with what is feminine, *nif* is pre-eminently the manly virtue. The opposition between these two aspects of sacredness, like the opposition between *h'aram* and *nif*, does not in any way exclude their complementary nature. It is indeed the respect for the sacred of the "right hand", for the name and good repute of the agnatic family, which motivate the riposte to any offence against the sacred of the "left hand" (Bourdieu 1965 p.219-220).

In order to grasp the full meaning of the concepts of honour and shame in North-African societies, one will have to relate them to the overall collective nature of the social organization. The collective honour of the patrilinear kinship-group represents the ultimate value and at the same time the ultimate end in the collective's relations with society. The above mentioned dichotomies of female and male space, culture and function, adapted to the gendered rules for conduct, should be understood as parts of a group's strategy to preserve — and, if possible, increase — the collective

honour of the kinship-group. The preservation of the collective honour of the patrilinear kinship-group thus stands out as the ultimate and sacred value that gives meaning and direction to the individual's social life. Or, according to Bourdieu: "The duty of defending what is sacred is imposed upon one as a categorical imperative" (ibid p.220).

The general division of the group and the society into gendered spheres is, however, also present in the concept of collective honour. The female sphere of honour is associated with the female members of the group, their arena, "inside", and their culture and functions. This sphere of the collective honour is furthermore associated with values like passivity, vulnerability, and secrecy. On the other hand there is the male sphere of honour, associated with the male arena, "outside", and the male interaction that takes place there. It is furthermore associated with values like activity, conquest, and publicity. Together, these two "honours" constitute the collective honour of the group; the complementarity of the genders is thus a fundamental principle also in the relations of honour and shame.

But still, what is the point in being honourable? Of what use is the honour of the group to its members, that makes it so important to them to avoid shame?

3.1.4 Some general characteristics of traditional North-African societies

Returning to the model of honour presented above, we see that the collective honour also implies "esteem, glory, respectability" — in other words, social status. In a small-scale society of a tribe or a village — the typical traditional North-African society — social and political life is strongly based on face-to-face interaction. The weight of the words and acts of an individual will depend on the position he or she holds in the community. Since the individuals are perceived as representatives of kinship-groups rather than as autonomous actors, it will be the collective status of the group the individual represents that determine evaluation of his performance.

The protection of the collective honour of a group will thus be a precondition for the defence of the group's position in the community. At the same time, it will be meaningful to the individual to defend and protect the honour, and thus the social status, of the group he or she represents. The interest of the kinship-group, maintenance of the collective honour, thus becomes superior to the interest of the individual member. The interest of the group becomes the interest of the individual, because he for the

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"others", as well as for himself, has little significant social existence other than as a part of the group, and because he will draw on the collective honour of his group when claiming a position in the social and political life.

Honour is not the only element that constitutes a group's social status. It is, however, the dominant one, in the sense that it will serve as a principle of evaluation of the other elements. Material wealth, for instance, may lead to an improved social status, but only if the economic capital is transformed into *symbolic capital*,[5] through investment in objects that are morally "right" according to the rules for honourable behaviour. Money spent on hospitality, on celebrations of marriages and other significant occasions for the group's exhibition of its qualities to the social surroundings, and money spent on the pilgrimage to Mecca and the contributions to the poor prescribed by religion, will tend to pay off in symbolic capital, which in turn will lead to respectability, increased honour, and improved or renewed social status — values that again will produce favourable conditions for further increase of economic capital.

Adaption to the religious rules is also a central element of honour and social status. The traditional North-African societies are commonly, and rightly, associated with Muslim culture and values. However, the group-oriented, gender-segregated, and honour-shame directed principles for social life described above are of pre-Muslim origin (Evers Rosander 1991). A number of theories have been developed in order to explain the rise of such a particular social system; the French anthropologist Germaine Tillion, for example, argues that its source is to be found in the ancient transformation of the Mediterranean areas into the first agricultural civilizations in the world (Tillion 1983).

Still, the North-African societies have existed within a Muslim cultural context for more than a thousand years. During this period, the pre-Muslim values have merged with the Muslim ones to the extent that they appear in popular religious interpretation as prescriptions of Islam. Concepts that,

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[5] Based on his Kabyle studies, Bourdieu argues that in such societies, the economic capital will have an intermediate character, the *symbolic capital* "in the form of the prestige and renown of a family and a name" (p.179) to which it may be transformed representing the conscious end. This is so, he argues, because the inefficiency and low yield of the labour makes a purely material evaluation of the outcome an insufficient incentive; the symbolic capital thus adds a higher, immaterial meaning to the labour.

The fact that symbolic capital through its impact on social and business relations again will tend to generate economic capital, and thus in reality may be seen as a strategy to increased material wealth, is thus "forgotten", as the immaterial output has been given status as a nobler end (Bourdieu 1977).

strictly speaking, have no intrinsic connection, have come to bear the same meaning. Thus, the secular, pre-Muslim moral "good" has merged with the religious, Muslim "good". In the same way, shameful behaviour — that is, secular morally bad behaviour — has become identical with religious "bad" behaviour. Secular morals are thus equated with the morals of Islam, and the religion is held up as the legitimator of the entire moral system. It is therefore doubtful whether the religious background of the North-African societies possesses the key to an understanding of the existence of their particular kind of social and moral system. An examination of the general characteristics of the societies in question may be more useful in order to get an idea about the conditions under which such systems may occur:

The typical traditional North-African societies are *small-scale societies* of tribes or villages. In addition to their modest size, that makes face-to-face interaction the dominant form of social life, several other qualities will characterize such societies: They will be *homogenous* with regard to industries and ways of living. Whether nomadic tribes or agricultural villages, the greater part of the population will be occupied with similar activities, and thus make similar experiences. Such societies will furthermore be *stable* with regard to social composition, social mobility, and general ways of living. Continuity rather than change will be a main characteristic. Relative *isolation* from the outside world and external influences will furthermore be a dominant phenomenon. There will be a low degree of geographical mobility, in the sense that there will be little permanent individual movement between communities.

The design of the moral and social system described above clearly suits this kind of societies. First of all, the close face-to face kind of interaction opens for an extent of social control that will be a precondition for the strong other-directedness that characterizes these societies. At the same time, it provides an intensity in punishments and awards of individual performance that makes social control hard to ignore. Secondly, the homogeneity of their social composition makes the "others'" evaluation of individual performance acceptable and relevant. As they experience the same kind of reality as the individual, they constitute a credible court of judges. Thirdly, the stability of the society corresponds to the stability of the moral system — a system that clearly awards conformity rather than innovation, and thus is basically conservative in nature. And finally, the relative physical and cultural isolation provides a central precondition for the maintenance of such social and moral systems: The community in which an individual exists should be unique to the individual to such an extent that he or she finds it necessary and at the same time worthwhile to

accept the limitations on individual life that the community imposes. It should be the only social reality available to the individual.

Bourdieu has the following reflection on the relationship between the social system and the moral system of this kind of societies:

> Perhaps the conclusion is that the important position accorded to the sentiment of honour is a characteristic of "primary" societies in which the relationship with others, through its intensity, intimacy and continuity, takes precedence over the relationship one has with oneself; in which the individual learns the truth about himself through the intermediary of others; and in which the being and the truth about a person are identical with the being and the truth that others acknowledge in him (Bourdieu 1965, p.212).

Here the attention is drawn also to another aspect of the traditional North-African social life, an aspect that will be the last topic of this discussion: The meaning of *identity* in such societies.

3.1.5 The meaning of identity

Based on his studies in Morocco, Clifford Geertz in the article "From the Native's Point of View" argues that the categorization of individuals according to kinship-belonging, or any of the relative significant "us'es" mentioned earlier, actually gives room to an extensive individual creation of public personality. This is so, he argues, because this type of categorization (which he calls "nisba-type") implies that only an identifying framework around the interaction is provided; the filling-in of the frame is left to the individual actors:

> Nisba-type categorization leads, paradoxically, to a hyperindividualism in public relationships, because by providing only a vacant sketch, and that shifting, of who the actors are — Yazghis, Adlunis, Buhadiwis, [family names] or whatever — it leaves the rest, that is, almost everything, to be filled in by the process of interaction itself. What makes the mosaic work is the confidence that one can be as totally pragmatic, adaptive, opportunistic, and generally *ad hoc* in one's relations with others — a fox among foxes, a crocodile among crocodiles — as one wants without any risk of losing one's sense of who one is. Selfhood is never in danger because, outside the immediacies of procreation and prayer, only the coordinates are asserted (Geertz 1976, p.234).

For a study of public interaction as such, this is probably an accurate argument. It should, however, be clear from the discussion above that this interpretation becomes somewhat problematic when placed in a larger context:

First of all, it should be evident that this argument will apply to only half of the population, namely the men. "Hyperindividualism" is hardly a suitable characteristic of the women's rare performances in the public arena; as we have seen, their physical appearance veils all personal characteristics but the one ascribed to them through their gender. "Individual personality" in relation to significant others thus seems to be a part of the male roles, rather than a fundamental and self-evident aspect of any individual being. Instead of indicating a society characterized by hyperindividualism, this actually seems to suggest the opposite, namely a society in which the individuals are subject to a superior force so significant that it can deprive half the population of a publicly expressed individual personality.

This force has been discussed above — the interest of the collective, or, more specifically, the patrilinear kinship-group. We have seen that it constitutes the primary principle guiding individual social performances, both in the sense that it defines the relations between the individual members of a group, and their relations to the "others", and in the sense that it represents the fundamental value towards which the individual members' performances in the defined relations are directed. In other words, it constitutes a fundamental value that conditions the individual's rationality, and guides the choices between alternative ways of performance.

This may give the impression that the inter-personal relations within the group and between the group and the "others" are both static and totally pre-determined; they are not. These relations will first of all change with the changes in roles and statuses of the individuals involved. Thus the relation between a father and son, for instance, will change as a result of the son's marriage and fatherhood, in the same way as the son's relations to the "others" will change as a result of his new status and role. Secondly, the individuals will, within limits, have choices between alternative strategies of interaction. These choices will evidently have significant effects on the social relations. The individual's identity as defined by others will thus be in a constant process of relative change throughout the individual life-course, but at any time within the absolute limits set by the superior factors of identity; the individual's group-belonging, and gender. First and foremost it is the kinship-group that defines who you are; and your gender that defines how you act to be who you are.

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The fundamental individual identity is thus defined by group-belonging and gender. Within the limits of this definition, the identity is constantly negotiated, adjusted and confirmed through interaction. The definitions set by kinship and gender may in turn be seen as functions of the moral code, valuing the protection of the group's collective honour above all other values.

The individual may thus be characterized as a secondary existence, and at the same time a gendered existence, that is given social form, meaning and purpose through belonging to the collective that constitutes the significant "us". It is, however, the collective of significant "others" that constitute the ultimate arbiter, that evaluates and defines the quality and nature of the individual social existence, and transforms it into social status.

The influence of the significant others' evaluation and definition of an individual is, however, not restricted merely to the spheres and arenas of social interaction; it also profoundly affects the individual's self-understanding, Bourdieu argues:

> The point of honour is the basis of the moral code of an individual who sees himself always through the eyes of others, who has need of others for his existence, because the image he has of himself is indistinguishable from that presented to him by other people. "Man is man through men; God alone", the proverb runs, "is God through himself" (Bourdieu 1965 p.211).

The individual's *self-concept* is conditioned by the way it is conceived by the significant others; it exists for itself as through the eyes of the social surroundings. The individual's personal being and social being thus overlaps, the one making little sense without the other. His or her social being will, furthermore, as a logical consequence of the general gendered division of the traditional North-African societies, be evaluated and confirmed primarily by other individuals of the same gender — "Man is man through men" — and he will be so in the male, public sphere of the "outside". In the same way, women will be women for women, in the female, private sphere of the "inside".

We are thus dealing with a concept of identity that is fundamentally *group-related*, *gender-related*, and *other-dependent*, implying that an individual's identity will be fundamentally collective and gendered in

nature, and that it will be formed and defined by the "others" rather than by the individual itself.[6]

"Social identity" and "identity" will thus overlap to the extent that there will be little significant practical distinction between the concepts. More significant distinctions will probably be those caused by group-belonging and gender.

This is the background for the interpretation of identity that will constitute the conceptual point of departure for this study's analysis of social identity. The concepts of "identity" and "social identity" will thus be given the same meaning, and should be understood in relation to the other-dependent identity discussed above. The emphasis will be put on the gender- and group-dependent aspects of identity.

The principal object of this study is, however, to examine a possible *change* in social identity. The change is furthermore assumed to turn away from this "traditional" sense of identity, towards an increasingly individual and less gender-dependent sense of identity. This "modern" concept of identity will, when applied, be called "individual identity".

3.2 Theory of social reproduction and change

In the previous section, some general principles characteristic for the traditional North-African societies, and the effect of these principles on the social organization in general, and on the concept of identity in particular, were examined.

I will now turn to the question of how such social environments — or any social environment — is reproduced, and how they may change. The discussion will be based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, and on the theory of change that it implies.

3.2.1 Habitus, structures, and practice

According to the 1983 edition of Routledge's Latin Dictionary, "habitus" means "condition, state, habit; attire, dress; feature, appearance; disposition, feeling" — a concept with a wide meaning, obviously.

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[6] This is not an attempt to deny the existence of an inner, psychological kind of individual identity. It is, however, a suggestion that any such identity will hold a clearly secondary position to the other-dependent identity, and that it will have a modest function in the process of categorizing and defining individual members of the society.

Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" — the concept around which his theory of practice is constructed — is of a still wider, but more structured meaning. It embraces the meanings ascribed to it by the Routledge's definition, but as fragments of a larger contextual system:

> The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produces *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (Bourdieu 1977 p.72).

In this way Bourdieu introduces his discussion of *habitus*. In order to get a clearer idea about its meaning, it may be useful to decompose it somewhat:

Habitus is the "data-base" of knowledge that conditions human action, interaction, and social existence, in "a particular type of environment", "environment" here meaning any stable group of people with a common social reality and history, such as a class, or a small-scale community, like a village, or a tribe.

Habitus is furthermore made up of "structured structures" — structures organized into durable systems of principles. The habitus contains *objective* structures, which define the limits of the reality of the social environment, and thus the limits of social life within it. It also contains *cognitive and motivating* structures, which define what is valuable and what is not in the environment, and thus give human action and interaction meaning, direction and aims. The structures are structured through previous collective experiences; they are products of the environment's collective history.

At the same time as the structures are structured, they are "predisposed to function as structuring structures" — meaning that as the structures are preconditions for action and interaction, they will structure action and interaction, and thus at the same time be reproduced through action and interaction.

In spite of the fundamental functions of these structures, or rather, exactly because of their fundamental importance, they are invisible to the actors which act according to them. The habitus is an intuitive kind of historically generated knowledge, internalized in the actors to such an

extent that they will be unconscious of its existence. Habitus is thus "history turned into nature, i.e. denied as such" (ibid. p.78).

As a consequence, this knowledge, so essential for the social existence of all members of the group, is not to be thought and learned in any explicit way — obviously, as nobody is aware of its existence. It is thus reproduced in time — transmitted to new generations of the group — through *practice*, and observation of practice.

This implies that abstract ideas, like the idea of male and female, will be learnt and internalized parallel to the knowledge of male and female practice — the idea of what a man *is* is learnt through observation of what men *do*.

It furthermore implies that the degree of reproduction of habitus will be high; as the knowledge is not explicit, it can not be the object of discussion, or even reflection, with the result that it can not be changed as a result of conscious human will or intention.

Habitus thus contains the internalized structural framework that makes social life both possible (objective structures), sensible (cognitive and motivating structures), and stable (reproduction through practice).

Habitus has, however, no determining power on social action and interaction, and social practices can neither be deduced from the objective structures, nor the circumstances that produced them:

> The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus. It follows that these practices cannot be directly deduced either from the objective conditions, defined as the instantaneous sum of the stimuli which may appear to have directly triggered them, or from the conditions which produced the durable principle of their production. These practices can be accounted for only by relating the objective *structure* defining the social conditions of the production of the habitus which engendered them to the conditions in which this habitus is operating, that is, to the *conjuncture* which, short of a radical transformation, represents a particular state of this structure (ibid. p.78).

On an individual actor's level, this means that the collective's habitus internalized in him, together with his own previous experiences with practice, will condition his practice in the sense that it will define the

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situations of practice and their possible outcomes, without determining the actual outcome.

The habitus thus defines the possible situations of practice the individual may face, i.e. the actor's possible alternative ways of acting, as well as it defines the priorities of the individual in the actual situation, i.e. the actor's normative evaluation of the possible alternatives, but the choice between pre-defined alternatives, and the choice of strategy to realize the chosen alternative, is left to the actor.

This is a description of a situation where "you want what you can, and you can what you want" — a situation of relative freedom of choice, limited by the habitus within which definition of reality the choice takes place.

There will thus be room for human rationality in practice, but the rationality will be guided by the actor's internalized knowledge of the objective and the cognitive and motivating structures that will be preconditions for any action and interaction, and of which the actor has no freedom of choice. Thus, habitus will have a defining rather than determining effect on practice.

3.2.2 Social change

In the discussion above on the reproductive capacity of the habitus, its ability to recreate the structures of the past into the future stands out as one of its main features. Or, in Bourdieu's words: "The habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" (ibid. p.82).

Explaining social stability on the background of the theory of practice is thus not the problem. Turning to the question of social change, by contrast, we have so far seen little evidence of how this may come about.

We may, however, assume that as it is the habitus that defines the social reality, and as the knowledge contained in habitus is internalized and "invisible", and thus beyond discourse and reflection, a precondition for change may be that the invisible become visible, and thus questionable. This implicit knowledge may become explicit if it is confronted with a habitus of a different nature.

In his discussion of generation conflicts, Bourdieu implicitly treats this more general problem:

> This is why generational conflicts oppose not age-classes separated by natural properties, but habitus which have been produced by different *modes of generation*, that is, by conditions of existence which, in

imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa (ibid. p.78).

It is thus "habitus which have been produced by different ... conditions of existence" that is the source of generation conflicts, so-called "habitus-conflicts". But, what is the source of different conditions of existence, conditions that again will be generated in the habitus?

The source may be changes in the objective structures. The introduction of a compulsory school-system in an environment that has previously had no kind of formal education, for instance, may result in a change in the collective habitus.

As the habitus is produced and reproduced through practice, any change in the objective structures may not necessarily change it. Only when the structural changes produce new pre-defined alternative ways of practice, and only when these new alternatives are found valuable, and therefore chosen as *strategies* of action and interaction, will the practice acquire new shape and content, that in turn may be absorbed by the habitus. The existence of a system of formal education as such will have little influence on the habitus unless people actually find it worthwhile to make use of it.

There is, however, yet another obstacle to change in the habitus; as Bourdieu points out:

> as a result of the hysteresis effect necessarily implied in the logic of the constitution of habitus, practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that to which they are objectively fitted (ibid. p.78).

This implies that the more radical a change in practice is, the more intense the negative sanctions from the environment will tend to be.

"Radical" may here refer to the mere extent of the change, as compared to the existing practices. The experienced radicality of a change in practice will, however, also depend on the nature of the practice that is challenged. If this practice reflects a principle that is of fundamental importance to the environment, (such as the principle of honour and shame in the traditional North-African societies), even a small change may be met with massive sanctions, as it will represent a fundamental threat to the environment.

The intensity of the sanctions against a change of practice will depend on the degree to which it will be adjustable to the existing principles of the environment. In other words, it will depend on the degree to which it is experienced as corresponding to the existing cognitive and motivating

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structures. Sanctions against school-attendance in a traditional North-African society, in which formal education has been unknown, is a function of the way this change in practice is thought to be related to the fundamental principles of the society, such as the principle of honour and shame.

In any case, the new alternatives of action caused by changes in the objective structures will have to be chosen as strategies of practice by a sufficiently large number of actors for the impact of the changed practice to become significant enough to have an influence on the habitus — the history of the group — or significant enough to resist the effects of the negative sanctions they may be met with. If only two of the children of a village are sent to school, the effect of this practice will be so insignificant and deviant compared to that of the others, that a sanctioning from the environment will hardly be necessary. In the same way, if only two children are kept home from school, the effect of the sanctions of the family that refuses to adapt to the new practice, expressed through their refusal of school-attendance for their children, will hardly be able to change this practice.

If, however, the changes in the objective structures lead to collective new practices, and if the extent of the change in the practice is sufficiently significant, this change in practice will result in a change in the reproduction of habitus, which means a change in habitus, which means change in the collective history, which means change in the collective perception of the world; what it is, and how it works. As Bourdieu put it in the phrase quoted earlier, it will lead to new "definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable". And, one may add, the valuable.

In the end, as the meaning of abstract ideas is learnt through observation in practice, it may also lead to change in the actors' understanding of each other, and in the actors' understanding of themselves — in other words, to change in (social) identity.

Within this theoretical framework, consequences of the Tunisian post-colonial structural changes for the practice, thought, and identity of different generations of Tunisian men and women will be analyzed.

On the basis of Bourdieu's theory of practice, it is reasonable to assume that the post-colonial structural changes will have affected the different generations of Tunisians differently, and that it will have resulted in different generational practices, and possibly also in different generational

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habituses, that in turn may be expressed in different generational senses of identity.

In a society where the family-group traditionally constitutes a fundamental unit, one may furthermore assume that a situation of profound, lasting social change easily will result in generational conflicts within families. The nature and extent of such conflicts, as well as strategies applied by different generations in order to cope with them, will also be examined.

4. Methodological framework

4.1 Choice of approach

Ever since my first contact with Tunisian society, one thing has puzzled and impressed me more than anything else: The tremendous social change that has taken place since independence in 1956, and the Tunisians' ability to cope with it. Out of this puzzlement and admiration rose the questions that this thesis is concentrating on: What are the consequences of such a rapid social change for people's practices, and for their conceptualizations of themselves and their social universe — what are the effects of this change on their sense of identity?

There are several possible strategies to answering this question. The question initially arose as a result of contact with Tunisians struggling with the effects of the social change on their daily lives; asking these people was an intuitively obvious thing to do. After a more serious consideration of the task I had in mind, I came to the conclusion that data-collection based on interviews might indeed be a fertile approach to the actual problem. At the same time, my earlier experiences suggested that the topics could not be dealt with in a direct manner; questions like "how would you describe your base of social identity as you experience it" would probably yield meagre results. The problem would have to be approached indirectly, through an analysis of *indicators* of both thought and identity, and the change in them. Knowledge of people's way of thinking would be necessary as well as information about their way of acting. Interviews focusing on people's own evaluations of their reality, as well as their actual life-courses and the factors influencing them, might thus provide an appropriate base of information.

The object of my interest was not so much practice, thought, and identity in itself, as it was the anticipated change in it. The *time-perspective* was therefore an essential component of the strategy of data-collection. In order to provide such a perspective, information about people's life-situation and ways of thinking at different points of time would be required. A prospective approach to data-collection was, due to the limited time-perspective of the project, not feasible. Retrospective interviews seemed to be an acceptable alternative. Hence I decided to interview *three generations* of adult Tunisians. In order to add a family-group perspective to the study,

it furthermore seemed natural to choose as informants individuals who were related to each other by *kinship*.[7]

As discussed in the previous chapter, Arab societies are generally known to have a tradition of rather strict gender-segregation; Tunisia adheres to this tradition. It is therefore reasonable to assume that *gender* will influence significantly the Tunisians' life-experiences, and thereby their base of identity. In order to get a picture of the significance of gender for identity-formation, I decided to have both genders equally represented among my informants.

As argued in chapter two, one of the most central characteristics of the post-colonial social transformation in Tunisia was the introduction of a compulsory school-system. While most Tunisians born before the independence are illiterate, those born after 1956 are generally at least able to read and write; a relatively large proportion of the post-colonial generations have furthermore received academic training. Several significant changes in life-situation seem to be related to higher education; occupation within the "modern" sectors of economy and increased geographical mobility are some of them. As both higher education in itself and its wider consequences may be assumed to cause changes of some significance in an individual's base of identity, as well as in his or her practices and ways of thinking, I decided to include young Tunisians of both *high and low education* in my group of informants.

These demands to the group of informants seemed appropriate for the task of studying an anticipated change in practice, thought, and identity in post-colonial Tunisia. At the same time, information covering the life-stories of three generations, represented by informants of both genders and of different levels of education, would obviously constitute a complex base of analysis. An analytical framework for further work on the project was thus needed. For reasons that will be discussed below, the so-called "life-course approach" was found to offer such a framework.

4.1.1 Characteristics of the life-course approach

A fundamental principle of the life-course approach is its historical perspective. It is *processual* in nature; its principal aim is to analyze change, or stability, over time. The basic assumption is that there is:

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[7] Due to the high number of children in most Tunisian families, there are normally considerable differences of age within the generations. "Generation" is thus here defined in terms of the informants' relations to each other, as grandparents, parents and children, rather than in terms of birth-date and age.

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a connection between individual development and social change. The core of the argument is that a change takes place in human behaviour from birth to death. This happens as a result of an interplay between biological, cultural, social, historical and evolutionary influences and their placing in the individual's, the group's or the cohort's lives (Skrede and Tornes 1983,p.12 my trans.).

The connection between two social spheres holds a particularly fundamental position within the approach: The development of *individual or aggregate life-courses*, that take place within the possibilities and restraints of the *social structures* surrounding them. The ultimate focus of the approach is on the *inter-relations* between life-courses and social structures, and their development over time. In order to analyze these inter-relations, knowledge of the individual or aggregate life-course as well as of the social structures is required. "Life-course" may be defined as:

> the main activities, roles and events which an individual or a group engage in during a longer time-span (Skrede and Tornes 1983, p.9 my trans.).

Life-courses are approached through the timing and appearance of central *events,* marking *phases* within them. They may be studied from several angles, depending on whether the study has a time- or a theme-focus. The substantial assumption is that changes in timing or appearance of events in aggregates of life-courses may serve as indicators of structural changes in the society in which the life-courses take place. Life-courses may therefore be seen as representative of the historical period in which they take place; they provide information exceeding the personal experiences of the individuals in question.

The individual is, however, not to be understood merely as a carrier of trends in time. Life is influenced by choosing between available alternatives. The variety of life-courses within a birth-cohort, for example, may thus be as relevant an object of study as the similarities. The nature of the field of study, as well as the theoretical approach and personal attitudes of the researcher, will influence whether the individual is regarded mainly as an actor in its own life, or in terms of a carrier of values and priorities laid down by the social surroundings.

The principle of change — and stability — as a *process in time* is fundamental to the approach. On the one hand, the individual development is seen as a biological and social process, limited only by birth and death. On the other hand, the social structures are seen as in constant reproduction

or change in time. The individual and the social time-dimensions develop in parallel, and are inter-related.

Thus, the background for stability or change in both the history of an individual life-course, and in the history of the society in which it takes place, is to be found in both of the historical dimensions, and an analysis of the nature of their inter-relations can reveal this background. The life-course approach provides an analytic framework for such an analysis. It does, however, more than that — it also provides a framework for *comparative* analyses; of different individual life-courses, or the life-courses of different aggregates of individuals, or the effect of different historical periods on human life-courses.

It should be evident that the actual research-designs suitable for answering such different kinds of questions will vary considerably. Research-strategic considerations will be decisive for the design that may be advantageous in each case. Due to the nature of the research-project in question here, I have opted for a design based on a *non-aggregate* kind of life-course analysis:

Studies of *individual life-courses* are generally rather different in character from studies of aggregates of life-courses. As a rule, the individual is studied at a non-aggregate level when detailed accounts of each life-course are considered desirable, and when information about the individuals' covert as well as overt behaviour is required (Boocock, 1978). Like analyses of aggregates, studies of individual life-courses may focus on change over time, or variation within a period. The typical method of data-collection for such studies is the interview; often in-depth-interviews of an open, unstructured nature (Sørensen and Sørensen, 1984). Due to the priority of detailed and varied information about the individual life-courses, the total number of individuals studied is normally relatively restricted. It may be claimed that this can cause a problem of representativity; the special qualities of extensive interviews, combined with the possibility of drawing on other sources of information, like statistics, for an evaluation of some of the individuals' experiences as compared to those of the groups with which they are associated, may reduce this problem. The main argument in favour of such research-designs is, however, to be found exactly in the idea behind the life-course approach: Life-courses are representative of the period to which they belong, and their characteristics indicate the effects of the inter-relations between the social dimensions significant to their development; life-courses contain information exceeding individual experiences.

As the approach requires information about the development in different social dimensions, the access to relevant information will often depend on

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different kinds of sources. The use of several methods of data-collection is thus a common characteristic of most kinds of life-course studies.

From the discussion above it should be evident that the life-course approach both allows and often requires rather advanced analytical designs. The ability to combine and analyze a complex of dimensions of time and society, and thereby the nature of their inter-relations, is a central characteristic of the approach, and also its main advantage. It is thus also well suited as an analytical framework for the multi-category approach that is applied in this study.

4.2 The data-collection

4.2.1 Choice of sample

Two inter-related questions were tied to the task of defining a geographical and social universe for the study of change in practice, thought and identity in post-colonial Tunisia: First of all, what number of informants would I realistically be able to deal with, and how should they be selected, given the size and nature of my project? Secondly, and depending on the answer to the first question, what kind of universe would it be relevant to define?

Two families of informants seemed to be a realistic basis for data-collection, given that they were relatively comprehensive with regard to the above defined categories of both genders, three generations, and different levels of education. As the local community was a social universe of significant relevance to the study, it was furthermore natural to concentrate the research on one such community.

My previous experiences with the Tunisian society originated mainly from the local community of a small North-East Tunisian town that I choose to call "Bled".[8] My relationship with this particular town singled it out as a favourable setting for the field-work: As the daughter-in-law of one of the local families, I already had an established and integrated role in the community, a position I could expect would open doors that otherwise would have been closed to me. I already had an extensive social network there, ready to assist me with my project. In addition, much of the introductory work of a student of a culture other than his or her own had already been done during my previous stays. In short, I knew the environment I would be facing, how to fit in and function.

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[8] The name of the town, its inhabitants, and the family-names and first-names of the informants are replaced with fictitious ones.

One particular group of the inhabitants of Bled was particularly well suited for the purpose of the study: the local Beldiyin middle class.[9] Several factors made this social group interesting: First of all, in Tunisia, a student can hardly manage without economic support from the family. The family's approval is thus still to a large degree a necessity for young people who wants to study. A certain level of material wealth is required for a family in order to have the opportunity of allowing their children to have a higher education.[10] As the North-Eastern region of Tunisia is one of the wealthier regions of the country, most of the middle class in Bled are in such an economic position. Access to and effects of higher education are main topics of interest in this study; these factors were thus important to incorporate in the sample of informants.

Secondly, while the Tunisian upper classes and the higher middle classes generally are considerably "Westernized" with respect to their lifestyle and priorities, the provincial middle class has still preserved much of the "traditional" Tunisian values in their ways of living. It would be necessary for me to have access to information about these values. Thirdly, in the families of the Beldiyin middle class it is common to find a varying level of education among the members of the youngest adult generation. Finding suitable families of informants would therefore be possible.

My family-in-law belong to this local Beldiyin middle class. We already knew each other well, and they were familiar with my generally quite disturbing personal characteristics — blonde hair and strange tongue. I had been living in their household on several occasions before, and was also going to stay with them during the fieldwork; this provided me with a special opportunity to learn about the family and the relations between its members. In addition, the family filled the formal demands of a suitable informant-family in most central respects, and the members were positive to my project and willing to assist me with information. The family thus stood out as a particularly well suited group of informants. I therefore had a rather favourable base to work from; during the field-work, I realized how good it actually was. Of all the informants, my in-laws proved to be the more positive and informative. I am convinced that their previous

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[9] "Middle class" is here defined in terms of both occupation and material wealth. Occupationally, the middle class includes self-employed people, like farmers, craftsmen, and tradesmen. Material wealth is measured in terms of possession of a colour-TV, refrigerator, and phone. The class-membership of a family is decided according to the occupation and wealth of the male of the second generation of the informant-families.

[10] "Higher education" is here defined as education of any duration on university-level.

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experience with me — even though in a different role — was the main reason for the constructive results.

The choice of the other family of informants was influenced by several concerns: In order to draw on my favourable position as a member of a local family, this relationship should be known to the family. While filling the criteria defined above, it would also be preferable that it was different from the other family in some respects, in order to get a picture of some of the variations within the universe of Beldiyin middle-class families. One of the traditionally highly regarded families of the town seemed suitable; the families will be introduced in more detail later.

An unforeseen problem turned up during the process of selecting informants: Due to the often considerable difference of age between husbands and wives in the elder generations, finding suitable families with men of the eldest generation proved to be difficult. One of the reasons why the second informant-family was selected, was in fact the presence of a live grand-father. However, he became so ill during my stay that an interview was impossible. The other informant-family has no man of the eldest generation still alive. In order to find a solution — however unsatisfactory — to this problem, the group of informants was supplemented with two male members of a third family. They were chosen according to the same criteria as stated above.

I thus opted for a research-strategy that is quite the opposite of the classical, positivist ideal of objectivity and neutrality. My objective was to collect as much reliable and valid information as possible[11] through direct communication with individuals belonging to a rather closed, small-scale social community, organized according to kinship, and relating to persons according to their family-background. With this aim in mind, I found that being a daughter-in-law in such a community would provide better results than being a "nobody". Initially this was an attitude much guided by intuition; after having completed the fieldwork, I found that it was true.

4.2.2 The structure of the interviews

For two reasons I decided to use a rather structured guide for the interviews: It would secure a minimum of basis for comparisons of the different categories of informants. In addition, the fact that an interpreter

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[11] "The decisive activity of a researcher in the field is to collect good data" (my trans.) (Hammersley and Atkinson 1987, p.6).

would be required for the interviews made some kind of written instructions desirable.

The guide was organized according to the life-course events and phases chosen to be the main topics of the interviews: Marriage, reproduction, education, professional life, and migration. These topics seemed to cover most central aspects of the lives of the informants, and could also be expected to provide a picture of significant differences between their lives; the topics seemed suitable for a comparative analysis of this nature.

A central characteristic of the interviews is the weight that is put on the informants' own evaluations of their lives as compared to those of the others, and also their own ideas about the reasons for the differences. For the younger informants, who had not yet come very far in their own life-course, hopes and expectations for their future lives, as well as the experiences they so far had gained, were seen as important.

Questions concerning the mentioned life-course events and phases constituted the main part of the interviews. A section on attitudes towards religion and politics was added. It was assumed that such attitudes might serve as indicators of identification with social institutions of different character — Islam, a traditional cultural element,[12] and the post-colonial political regime.

The main principle behind the structuring of the interviews was the assumption that information about ways of thinking and sense of identity could not be obtained in a direct way. The concern for valid indicators of thought and identity was central. The principal idea was that information on the life-course phases and events would indicate the social norms for decisions on an individual's life-course, and thus the nature of the accepted individual space within the social system. The informants' own evaluations of these practices would in turn indicate their degree of adaption to the norms, and their self-conceptualization as opposed to the evaluating of others in their social surroundings. Opinions about the practice of their own generation as compared to those of other generations would furthermore provide an impression of the change in self-concept over time. Differences in attitudes towards arranged marriages vs. marriages based on love relationships might indicate the strength of the idea of one-self as an individual, as opposed to the idea of one-self as a part of a greater unit — the family.

A weakness of this type of interview-design is the fact that it is the researcher who decides what topics are to be regarded as important. The

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[12] Islam is here understood according to its traditional meaning for the Beldiyins, not the meaning it is given by the fundamentalist Muslims.

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informants' own evaluation of the relevance and importance of the topics are thus lost. Still, the above mentioned advantages of this particular design were found to be sufficiently significant to favour this approach to the process of interviewing.

4.2.3 The data-collection

As mentioned, the assistance of an interpreter was required for the interviews. Use of a mediator of this kind may be a source of complication. I found that it also had positive aspects:

First of all, I found my interpreter's connections within the local community to be of great help in the process of selecting informants. As a native Beldiyin, she had few problems of getting in contact with suitable families, and her guarantee for me and my intentions resulted in positive answers from informants who would otherwise have refused to assist me.

During the interviews I heard her "translate" my questions into an understandable and socially acceptable form, in addition to translating the conversation in a strict sense. In this way, she probably saved me from more embarrassment than I will ever know.

The presence of a third person was required also for other reasons than the one strictly related to communication: According to the Tunisian moral code, I could not, due to my sex and age, enter into an interview-situation with a male informant alone. A number of the interviews were conducted in closed rooms, and some of them went on for hours. Without a third person present, I would probably have caused a social scandal — hardly a sound basis for the interviews. Also during the interviews of the female informants, I generally found the presence of the field-assistant comfortable, as it clearly served to reduce the tension between the interviewer and the interviewed when sensitive topics were discussed.

The durations of the interviews, as well as the actual interview-situations, varied. The initial plan was to conduct individual interviews, but in practice, some of them turned out to be group-interviews. Due to the size of the households, it sometimes proved difficult — and also unnatural — to be alone with the informant. Hence some of the interviews contain significant elements of spouses', children's and others' comments to the topics discussed, and also regular discussions between them. In the beginning this was a source of frustration to me. By second thought, I found that instead of messing up the interviews, it actually provided valuable additional information on differences in opinion, and on relations between family-members. All in all these "group-sessions" proved very informative, and raised the quality of the total information gained.

The interview-data were supplemented by information from other sources. For reasons that will be discussed later, the celebrations of important life-course ceremonies, particularly the marriage, were made objects of observation. Documentation of different kinds constitute a third source of information.

The presentation and analysis of the data are structured according to the main themes of the interviews: Marriage, reproduction, formal education, occupational life in a wide sense, and migration and relation to place of origin — that is, the small Tunisian town "Bled".

5. Bled

5.1 The town

Bled has, like so many other Tunisian towns and villages, a long history. The name of the town is of Roman origin, and one of the main attractions, the fortress, is evidence of the role of the town during the Roman period. First built by these early colonizers, it has followed Bled through the centuries, and was last used for military purposes during the second world war.

The ground surrounding the fortress hides ruins of Roman settlements. A few villas have been dug out, revealing mosaic-floors and marble columns. Most of it, however, is still under the turf — to the great annoyance of the owners of the ground, who are neither allowed to exploit the historic sites, nor able to make the government buy them out.

The fortress and the Roman remains lie near the harbour, which, partly thanks to foreign development aid during the sixties, has been expanded to a degree that makes it one of the best harbours of North-East Tunisia. This, of course, has been very advantageous for the fishermen of the town, especially after the new facilities for delivery of fish was built in the mid-eighties. The fisheries school is right next to the harbour, and most of the fishermen and their families live in this area. As a consequence of the quality of the harbour, it has also to some extent been used as a base for off-shore oil-activity. In the last few years a direct boat-connection has been established between Bled and Sicily. After the new harbour was completed, it has also become people's favourite place for evening-promenades that are very popular during the summer-season.

The town-centre of today's Bled is, however, situated about one kilometre from the seashore. This town-centre was founded during the Arab era. Still, it is no typical Arab town, it lacks the *Medina* and the walls surrounding it. The houses of the old part of the town are, however, of the traditional Tunisian design: Facing the street is only a wall and a door, revealing nothing of the size and standard of the *Dar* behind. The rooms are built around a courtyard, with doors and windows opening towards it. Until quite recently the normal household-pattern — in Bled as in most of Tunisia — was one where the sons of a family stayed in their father's house when they married, each son's family living in one of the rooms

surrounding the courtyard. Today most families — that is, parents and children — live separate from their relatives, in their own houses or flats. It is still very common, however, that the houses of relatives lie close together, sometimes one family may occupy a whole quarter of the town. The difference is that today each brother has a whole flat instead of just a room, and the entrances of the flats are now more often facing the streets, instead of the courtyard.

The newer quarters of the town are, by contrast, characterized by apartment blocs of flats and villas; hardly anybody building a new house today chooses the old *dar*-style.

Bled has about 30,000 inhabitants. As the town is old, there are several families with deep roots in the community. Today people move in from the near-by agricultural areas, and the town is growing visibly. People from other parts of Tunisia also find Bled to be an attractive place to settle down, for several reasons:

The climate is known to be good there, particularly in summer. As Bled lies almost as far North-East as one can get, and along the coast, the temperature is often as much as ten degrees lower than in the Capital, which is only one hundred kilometres away. The nature, and especially the beaches, are furthermore very nice. Recently one of the local beaches was even awarded the title "the Best Beach of Tunisia" by a travel-magazine.

Still, tourism is not a big industry in Bled. To the extent that it exists, it is of a rather private character. Surrounding "The Best Beach of Tunisia", for example, lies a complex of summer-villas, known as "Petit Paris". The name, and most of the villas, are remains from the colonial period. At that time the French owned most of the houses; today they belong to Tunisian upper-middle-class families, some of which are of local origin, others not. The quarter has a private atmosphere, and there are no public establishments there — except for one restaurant, which is frequented mostly by local people.

The villas of "Petit Paris" are not the only remains from the colonial period to be found in Bled. Still, this part of Tunisia was not a core-area for the French, and compared to other Tunisian towns, the signs of a colonial past are few.

For the time being, there are only two beach-hotels in Bled, and they are both quite small. One of them receive charter-tourists, but due to the low hotel capacity they are few. In addition there is a half-completed bigger hotel-complex — originally a European project, which went bankrupt half-way through. Today part of it is run by the local authorities, but very inefficiently.

The small amount of tourism in Bled is to a great extent a result of conscious planning by the local authorities. In the same way as they have been wary about this particular industry, they have also cautiously regulated the ordinary industry. The few existing factories have been concentrated in a special area outside the town, and there is no heavy industry. This policy, along with other factors, has helped preserve the character of Bled as a typical small community, with few means of public entertainment except for the obligatory cafes, a few restaurants — mainly of bad reputation — and the quite recently built cinema, which repertoire mainly consists of carate-movies.

Bled thus features most of the characteristics of a "typical" Tunisian small town. The basic traditional rules for small-scale community-life are preserved — in principle, if not in degree. The new era has certainly reached the town, but it changes *chwaia bi chwaia* — little by little. Few things indicate that any radical change will occur in the nearest future. There are plans to expand the sea-contact with Italy with a car-ferry line, and rumours say that an Italian has bought the bankrupt hotel-complex, with plans of completing it and run it in full capacity. The town's new sports-hall has just been completed, and is said to be one of the best in North-Africa. The most obvious sign of the development of the town is, however, perhaps the widespread building of new private houses.

Still, even if things evidently change, the pace of development allows the community to adjust itself along the way. Most probably, Bled will be more or less the same town in ten years time as it is today.

5.2 The Beldiyins

The Beldiyins are proud of their origin. This is, however, not a special phenomenon for this town — most Tunisians have a strong sense of identity related to their native local community, and are generally proud of it. It is often held that people coming from specific places have specific characteristics as a result of it: The Sfaxians are hard-working and materialist, people from Matmata are very traditional and "backward", and so on. The Beldiyins, on their hand, claim to be more open-minded and modern than most Tunisians. Mohammed, one of my informants, puts it like this:

> Even the French people liked Bled a lot. They cried when they had to leave. Petit Paris — they enjoyed life here, people here. They found that they could live as they wanted here, freely. Beldiyins are open to new things. We have been influenced by the French, the Italians — many other

people. The fathers in Bled are not like the fathers in the rest of the country. We are more open, more liberal.

This is not entirely untrue. The Beldiyins themselves explain their modern attitudes by the geographical location of the town: Due to the short distance by sea to Europe, Bled has through history had extensive contact with other cultures and other people. This is evident in the Beldiyin population — there are more blond and blue-eyed people among them than what is common in Tunisia in general. Some of the family-names mirror this "international" past: L'Englise (the English), Schilli (the Sicilian).

Bled, and all the Cap-Bon-area that it is a part of, is one of the richer parts of Tunisia. There are, furthermore, not remarkable differences in people's economic abilities. This is, of course, relatively speaking. The standard of living varies considerably in Bled, but few Beldiyins are "poor" if seen in a national perspective. There are, for instance, no local beggars in Bled. Begging occurs only on Mondays — the local market-day — when both merchants and beggars travel long distances for the occasion.

Farming and various agricultural enterprises are important ways of earning a living in Bled. The typical Cap-Bon farm is not very large. Most of them are run by one family, perhaps together with some of their married sons and their families. Due to the good water-resources in the area, the agricultural production consists mainly of vegetables, various fruit, and other water-intensive products. Most farmers harvest twice a year. This type of agricultural production, which makes small-scale-farming possible, may be seen as one of the factors behind the relative economic equality in the area. In North-West-Tunisia, by contrast, where farming is concentrated on cereals, most farms are much larger, and as a consequence more people are labourers without their own land.

As land is still regarded as a lucrative and safe object of investment, it is quite common that people who work or have a business in town buy farm-land, and let other farmers exploit it on a share-crop-basis.

In addition to agriculture and fishing, small-scale trade and handicrafts are important ways of earning a living in Bled. Many Tunisian towns and villages have a handicraft speciality: Kairouan is the Carpet-town, Nabeul the Ceramic-town, and Sfax the Gold-town. Bled's speciality is wooden furniture. In almost every street of the town there are furniture-workshops. The sounds and smells of wood-work are prominent in the total impression of the town.

After independence, there has been a large increase in the general level of education in Tunisia. The Cap-Bon area has today more than the national average share of educated people. One possible explanation of this fact is

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the relative wealth that characterizes the area. Economic ability makes it possible for families to provide their children with an education. The relatively high level of education, it is reasonable to presume, may again have increased the tendency to open-mindedness among the Beldiyins. Or was it perhaps the liberal attitudes of the Beldiyins that allowed the children to study in the first place? Probably both explanations are of some relevance.

People with higher education often leave Bled. This is partly a necessity, as there are few jobs to be found for educated people in a town of this size. My interviews indicate that living away from Bled may also be a personal choice. Several factors seem to influence this choice: The ambition to have a professional career makes it necessary to move to the larger cities, preferably Tunis. In addition, there seems to be a certain feeling that a "modern" job in administration or teaching may be difficult to combine with strong family-relations in the town where one works. A wish to obtain greater personal freedom may also make it attractive for academically trained people to live away from their native community. I will discuss this point later on.

Even when Beldiyins leave to live and work elsewhere, they generally maintain strong relations with their home-town. They often prefer to invest in land and houses in Bled rather than where they actually live. Most of them also use every opportunity to return home — in holidays, week-ends, and of course for all the big religious festivals. It is furthermore common to return home for all the important celebrations in life — engagements, marriages, births, and circumcisions. As these occasions are associated with the extended family in most of the world, this may perhaps not be very surprising. In Tunisia, however, ceremonies attached to such occasions also seem to play a very important role in the families' relation to the local community. One may actually say that they are public occasions rather than private ones.

The rituals connected to the central life-course ceremonies do to some degree change in Bled today. The change seems, however, to consist of a change in extent rather than a change in principles. They continue to hold a significant position in most Beldiyins' social lives; particularly for those still living there. I shall return to the position such ceremonies hold in the local community below.

Today people are both moving to and from Bled, and many Beldiyins spend at least parts of their lives away from their home-town. Compared to what was common only a couple of generations ago, geographical mobility is considerable.

The degree of social mobility is also remarkable, compared to only one generation ago. Several factors are of importance for this development. These are aspects of the life of the Beldiyins that I will elaborate more extensively later on.

My informants all belong to this local community of Bled, in the sense that they are born and have spent their childhood in the town. Several of them now live elsewhere, returning to Bled only for holidays and special occasions. They all belong to the youngest generation, and most of them are academically trained. Their parents and grandparents have, with one exception, spent all their lives in Bled.

The informants may be characterized as "typical" inhabitants of Bled, in the sense that they are representative of a significant part of the population. Even so, they have their own unique life-stories. I shall now proceed to a brief presentation of these representatives of the Beldiyins.

5.3 The informant-families

The Tejer-family

The Tejer-family has lived in Bled for generations. Still, it is not an important family of the town. It has never been particularly rich, or remarkable in any other way. The family is, however, a respected member of the local community.

Mahmoud, the head of the Tejer-family, was born in 1923, and is by Tunisian standards already an old man. He is today not dependent on his own labour for the support of his family; he owns a farm outside town, and he has some shops and store-houses from which he receives rent. In addition, he owns a house in the best commercial area of the town, and a small summerhouse at the beach. His business is now more like a hobby — he would not know how to make the days pass without it.

Habiba, Mahmoud's wife, is sixteen years younger than her husband; the difference in age is not exceptional for married couples of their generation. They are both unable to read and write; another characteristic that is common for most Beldiyins of their generation.

They had twelve children; two boys and three girls are "in the grave", six girls and a boy are alive. Their eldest daughter has studied at the University, and she now lives in Bled, where both she and her husband work as teachers. The three next daughters have only seven years of education or less. They are now all fulltime housewives, and they, too, live in Bled with their families. The son lives in Europe, where he works as a data-engineer; he will probably stay there for many years to come. Several Beldiyin families have male relatives in Europe; going there is quite

accepted — for men. The two youngest daughters in the family both have an academic education. One has finished her studies, and is now working as a teacher, but in a town far away from Bled. The youngest one is still a student.

The children of the Tejer-family thus have highly varying degrees of education. This situation is, however, by no means special for them. In fact, this is a rather common feature of this generation of Beldiyins. It is quite possible to find a professor, a teacher, a bread-seller and a close-to-illiterate housewife within the same flock of brothers and sisters of the early post-colonial generations.

I have concentrated my interviews with the Tejer-family around Mahmoud, Habiba, and two of the daughters: Meriem, who went to school for only four years before she dropped out, and who is now a full-time mother of four; and Nora, the young teacher who works far away from Bled. I also interviewed Habiba's mother, Aisha, who is the only one of the eldest generation still alive.

Mahmoud's sister and her family lives near by the Tejer-house. As their father moved away from the "Tejer-area" of town when he married, they are the only relatives of their branch of the family living close to each other. Their children have grown up together. The two eldest sons, Mohammed and Lassad, have been interviewed because of the lack of sons in the Tejer-family.

The Tejer-family is, as mentioned, a relatively new recruit to the local middle class. The family is unremarkable in every way. It is a small family; small in absolute numbers, and small in the sense that it has few male members in the last generations. Mahmoud's branch of the family also lives separate from most of the other Tejers in town. The family is thus in fact in a rather unfavourable situation, according to traditional values. These conditions may have implications for the family's way of living and thinking, as we shall see.

The Muaddaf-family

The Muaddaf-family differs from the Tejer-family in many ways: It is one of the larger and more important families in Bled. For generations the family has provided one of the bigger mosques in town with *Imams*. This is a position they could not hold unless they had some kind of education; the Muaddaf-men have been literate for generations, a fact that has also introduced them to other advantageous positions in Bled.

In the same way as inhabitants of certain towns are said to have special characteristics, members of certain families are also believed to have some specific character in common. The Muaddaf-family is known because of its

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intelligence; they themselves claim sincerity to be a character that the family appreciates and tries to cultivate.

The family is very much aware of their special position in town, and it exercises rather strict rules and demands concerning the behaviour and life-style of its members. The concern for their position and honour may perhaps also explain why Tahar, the head of the actual branch of the family, categorically refused to be interviewed.

Born in the twenties, Tahar is about as old as Mahmoud Tejer, but the age is all they have in common. Tahar has worked all his life as a civil servant in a good position in Bled, but is now retired. In addition to his pension, the family has other sources of income, like farmland. Tahar has several brothers, and in general the Muaddaf-family is a large one. The men of the extended family are furthermore very much in charge of it. All my Muaddaf-informants refer to Tahar — and his father before him — as strong, authoritarian personalities.

Tahar's wife, Fatheia, is also his maternal cousin. They have four children, two daughters, and two sons. Their mother's mother, Fatoma, is, like Aisha Tejer, "more than seventy". She and her husband now live with their son in Bled, but earlier they lived in Tunis for many years.

I have concentrated the interviews of the Muaddaf-family around Fatoma, the maternal grand-mother, her daughter Fatheia, and her four children.

The Falleah-family
The Falleah-family lives in the outskirts of the town; I interviewed two of its male members in order to supply my material with some more adult men. Mustfa was eighty-two years old at the time of the interview, and he was proud of his age. He used to be a farmer, but stopped working years ago.

His son, Hassan, was born in 1940. He lives with his family — his cousin-wife and their children — in a house right next to Mustfa. Hassan is a merchant, he has a grocery-shop near by. He has many brothers; the age-difference between them is considerable, as is the difference in their level of education. All the Falleahs live in the same quarter of Bled.

These are the people who were so kind as to provide me with the bulk of the material on which this thesis is based: The interviews. As we shall see, they are different, but still in many ways similar; they share a background as Beldiyins, and they share the status of a Tunisian small-town middleclass.

The next section will present and analyze their life-stories in more detail, focusing particularly on timing and character of important life-course occasions and phases like education, professional life, migration, marriage,

and reproduction. Before turning to this analysis, I will, however, discuss briefly some social aspects of kinship-groups, and their celebrations of life-course events in the Beldiyin community.

6. Marriage as life-course phase and life-course event

6.1 Marriage as life-course phase

> One should get married. If someone is not married, he lives like a donkey (Mahmoud, 2nd.gen. Tejer).

> Especially for a girl marriage is necessary. Because if she does not get married, people will underestimate her, and she will not be well seen in the society (Fatoma, 1st. gen. Muaddaf).

As argued in chapter three, the patrilinear kinship-group holds a fundamental position in the North-African societies. Traditionally, households based on patrilinear kinship-relations have constituted the basic units in the Tunisian society concerning production, social organization, and ideology. Today, there is a general tendency of "nuclearization" of the households. Still, the family maintains an essential role in the society; ideologically, and practically.

The institution of *marriage* holds a position of central importance within this kinship-dominated social system. As extra-matrimonial cohabitation have been — and still is — socially unacceptable, marriage is the only legitimate way of forming a family, and thus create one's own fundamental social unit.

Seen from the individual's point of view, marriage is the most important phase in life. In addition to the significant status it provides in itself, it is necessary in order to get access to most of the other statuses and roles that are regarded as valuable: An independent position towards parents is normally obtained only when forming a family. Parenthood is furthermore essential for both genders concerning their status in the local community, and also within the kinship-group. In addition, having children and thus securing the continuation and growth of the family is generally seen as a primary objective in life. Other life-course phases are to a large extent regarded as preparatory or concluding phases of the marriage-phase. This is particularly the case for women, who according to traditional values ideally should have no working-career but the domestic one, and who are supposed to spend large parts of their life within the household-sphere. It

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also to a significant degree applies to men's life-phases, however. Even though men will have an important working career in the public sphere, a main purpose of work is to be economically able to get married, and later to fulfil the obligations as provider of the family.

Being married is thus important in order to achieve the respect and acknowledgement of the social surroundings. In short, the society demands that an individual is married in order to accept it as a full member.

Traditionally, the decision about whom and when to marry is a collective family-responsibility. The process of decision-making is as a rule the responsibility of the married women within a family, even though the consent of the male members will be a precondition for the realization of a marriage. Until recently it has been quite common that the individual actually getting married has had no influence on the choice of spouse. Today this is changing — at least for certain groups of youths. It is now more accepted that they choose their own partner, or at least that they are asked for their opinion before the decision is made.

In accordance with this collective family-approach to getting married, the well-being of a family-member in his or her marriage is also conceived of as a collective responsibility. Even though the wife is thought of as a member of the husband's family after marriage, her parents and brothers will remain her protectors in case of conflicts with her husband or in-laws. Thus, being married according to the traditional concept of the institution implies managing a complex set of inter-personal and social relations within and between the families involved; it may be seen as a union of representatives of two families, as much as a personal relationship based on affection. As the tendency of the youth choosing their own partner increases, this understanding of marriage as a collective project decreases. Today, one may find both "collective" and "individual" marriages co-existing, even within the same family and same generation. The definition of what kind of marriage it is, will depend on how it was arranged.

There are two kinds of conceptions of marriage as life-course phase in Bled at the present; one based on collective ideas, and one that is more associated with individuality. Whether the last one will constitute a real alternative for a person about to get married, will, however, depend on his or her family's attitude to the "individual" marriages. Whatever concept of marriage is applied, most young Beldiyins will get married one way or another. Extra-matrimonial cohabitation is not a possible alternative, and even for those who might not wish to establish a relationship to a person of the opposite sex, it is hard to stay single. The social burdens related to such a status is regarded as considerable by my young informants, while the

elder ones find it hard to understand why anybody should wish to stay unmarried at all.

Engaging in marriage as a significant phase in one's life-course is still a precondition for a meaningful adult life. It is, however, generally regarded as a rather popular social institution, and even the most radical-minded seem to find marriage and organized family-life to be a positive and meaningful aspect of life.

6.2 Marriage as life-course event

> I am for the traditional marriage, because one will not get married twice in one's life. So we should profit from this ceremony (...) And besides, my family insisted on this traditional marriage. So I did not say no to them (Leila, 3rd.gen. Muaddaf).

> I find the rituals of marriage in our society to be a massacre of the masculine personality, and even more of the feminine personality. It is an exhibition that covers a lot of suppression, and which expresses sexual fantasies which should be eliminated the sooner the better (Nejib, 3rd.gen. Muaddaf).

Beldiyin social life is characterized by celebrations and ceremonies related to life-course events. The events traditionally celebrated are all associated with the family: Births, circumcisions, engagements, marriages, and funerals. The celebrations serve multiple functions; they maintain the network of duties and obligations within the extended family, and they also constitute an important arena for the families to confirm and increase their social status in the local community. Much attention is paid to the way the ceremonies are performed. The standard of the performance is a sign of the family's economic, social, and even moral abilities, and a good "show" will tend to improve the status of the celebrating family.

The celebrations also have an important entertaining function; especially for the women, who are the main participants in the ceremonies, and who have few other socially accepted means of entertainment but the celebrations of the life-course events. More importantly, the planning and realization of the celebrations of the life-course events are traditionally the tasks of the married women of a family. Because the family holds such an important position in the Beldiyins' lives, and because the performances of the celebrations are so essential to the family's reputation, these are tasks of outmost importance, and provide the women with considerable power and influence both within their kinship-group, and in the local community.

Recently, celebrations of new life-course events, not traditionally associated with the family, have occurred on the Beldiyin women's party-repertoire; children's success in school. The passing of the sixth grade exam, and particularly the success in the Examen Baccalaureate, are today occasions of considerable festivity in Bled; the celebrations follow a similar pattern to the traditional life-course event celebrations. Still, the social marking of such events has not become obligatory and ritualized in the same way as the traditional ones; whether they are performed is to a large extent an economic question. This introduction of new celebrations may be seen as women's strategy to increase the number of significant events of which they are in control, and in so doing their arenas of influence and power.

Of the celebrated life-course events the marriage is the most important one. This is evident from observing the different celebrations: The marriages are by far the most time-consuming and costly ones. In addition, they attract the most people, they require that the guests are nicely dressed, are most spoken of, and so on.

The importance of the ceremony of marriage is quite understandable. First of all, it is the celebration of the most fundamental social institution in the society. As argued above, the marriage is furthermore the individual's gate to adult life, and thus to the bulk of the other important life-course events. Moreover, it is a union of two families, implying an opening up of the integrated family-unit to external influence, and an acceptance of new obligations and duties. In addition, the marriage activates all the most central social relations in the local community. A description of a traditional marriage as it is celebrated in Bled today may serve as an example of the multiple social functions of the celebrations of life-course events, and the importance of the position they hold in the local community:

6.2.1 The celebration of traditional marriages in Bled

Most Beldiyin marriages take place during the summer-season, but the planning and preparations for a traditional marriage take years. The bridegroom is supposed to provide a fully furnished house or flat, which implies years of saving. The bride, on her hand, has to prepare her trousseau, which among other things should contain kitchen-utensils and the necessary amount of blankets, pillows and other textiles.

The planning of the actual celebration of the marriage also takes a long time. Many things have to be arranged: new clothes for all the family, reservations of the different professionals who are necessary in order to

celebrate a marriage properly, booking of the place where the marriage is to take place, and so on.

What is today called a "traditional" marriage in Bled lasts three days. Before they used to last for five days, but this changed about a generation ago. Of the three days, two are exclusively for women.

The first night is called the "henna-night", and is a women's affair. The women of the two families gather in the houses of the parents of the bride and the bridegroom in the evening. One *Derboka*-player, a drummer, is present, singing songs that are special for marriages. From time to time she sings about one of the women present — then this woman has to dance, and to pay the player. All the women dance, and all of them pay, but those sung for should pay more. These are normally close relatives of the person who is to be married. The main point of this preparatory celebration is to gather the female members of the family.

As the evening proceeds, the time comes for the relatives of the bridegroom to go to the house of the bride's family, where the female relatives of the bride are gathered in a similar way. The women go through town in a procession: The *Derboka*-player goes in front, singing and drumming, and the women follow, ululating. People stop and watch the procession; in this manner the local community is informed that this family is now celebrating the marriage of a son.

When the procession arrives at the house of the bride, the women are served lemonade and cakes, and the dying of the bride's hands and feet with henna begins. A professional woman is there especially to perform this task. After the application of henna is done — the bride sits in front of all the guests during this operation — the women of the bride's family start dancing. The closer relatives — the bride's mother and sisters — open the dance, and the others join them. Then the women of the bridegroom's family dance. The two families should not mingle at the floor. The henna-dyer and the derboka-player is paid in the same way as earlier that night. The party is over when the bride is carried to bed; she has to sleep with the henna-paste on, and can therefore not walk.

At day-time on the second day of the marriage-celebration the closer female relatives of the bride gather in the home of her parents. Her body-hair is removed with a mix of melted sugar and lemon-juice, and her hands and feet — now bright henna-red — are dyed again, black. These operations may be performed either by a woman of the family, or by a professional.

At night, the women of the two families gather again. In the meantime the bride has been to the hair-dresser, and is made-up and hair-dressed. She is wearing a coloured evening-dress, similar to the one she wore on the

henna-night, but usually not the same. This night she normally also wears a small veil, covering the lower part of her face. When the bridegroom's family arrives, she is seated on a throne in front of the guests. The high point of the night is when she stands up, her eyes closed and her hands on her hips, for about twenty minutes. This is a symbol of her virginity. Except from the performance of this ritual, the night very much follows the pattern of the previous one; family-vice dancing, serving of cakes and lemonade, seeing-and-being-seen, and the paying of the musicians and the woman guiding and assisting the bride.

The two first nights are celebrated in an ambience of cheerful expectation. The women ululate frequently, an expression of happiness that characterizes all the celebrations of life-course events, except funerals where the dead person was married.

The men are absent on both these nights. A few assist the women with practical tasks, like carrying chairs and cases of lemonade. They are, however, not dressed up, and also in other ways it is made clear that they are not taking part in the celebrations. At the end of the night some more men — mostly young boys — show up, in order to escort the women home.

The third night is the great night of celebration. Some people celebrate all three nights at home — because their courtyards are big enough, or because they can not afford to rent the cinema or the out-door-scene, which are the alternative locations for marriages in Bled. In the cases of celebrations at home, the two first nights are spent in the home of the bride, while the last night is celebrated in the bridegroom's home.

On this third day preparations go on from early morning. Members of the families gather and assist each other. The most important event during day-time is that the bride goes to the hairdresser, and stays there all day — at least six or seven hours. Her family is waiting for her at home, and in the evening some of the women from the bridegroom's family also arrive. When the bride returns from the hair-dresser's, she and her closer family are driven to the place where the celebration is to take place. The bride is driven first in a long procession of cars — it is the responsibility of the bridegroom to provide as many and as nice cars as possible for the procession — they tour the town, and honk constantly. In some cases a marching brass-band is leading the procession of cars. This is the present form of the important ritual of the bridegroom's bringing of his bride from the house of her parents to her new home.

The bride is normally wearing a traditional marriage outfit: Long, wide trousers covered with pearls and spangles, and with a short top decorated in the same way. This ceremonial dress weighs at least twenty kilos, so the

brides often need assistance when walking. The bridegrooms normally wear dark suits.

The guests arrive; this third night may well attract a couple of hundred invited people. The women wear all their jewellery and their best dresses: Gold lamé, spangles, and high-heeled sandals. Many of them have dyed their hands and feet with henna as a sign of happiness. They are seated in rows, facing the couple, which is seated on a throne in front. The men do as a rule not sit down; they stay in the rear, chatting. At the most, they are wearing white shirts, many of them have not changed clothes at all. From time to time they disappear; they visit the nearest cafe for a little while. Even on this night it seems important to signalize that the whole thing interests them only moderately.

A band, playing either modern Arab popular music or traditional marriage music, starts their show. After a while, the female relatives of the couple start dancing. The other women follow — they all dance in front of the rows of people. The young unmarried girls tend to dance the most, and the better they are dressed, and the better they dance, the longer they go on. The others sit, watching them, while they are served lemonade and cakes. Men dance only rarely; some of the young boys may do it, but then they as a rule dance separated from the women. Boys and girls may dance together only if they are brothers and sisters, or close cousins.

Half way through the night the bride may disappear, and return dressed in white wedding-gown and bridal veil. Whether this is done or not is an economic question. Then it is time for the newly wed to dance, and then the photographer gets busy; pictures of the couple with all thinkable combinations of family-members are to be taken. Often the event is also videotaped.

Late at night the party is over. The couple is driven to their new home, accompanied by the closest family.

Next morning, the first visitors come to see the newly wed. All day relatives come to pay their respect, and to admire the new home. The visitors are mostly women, and the bride receives them dressed in a new, short, white dress. The visitors are served tea, lemonade, and cakes.

For seven days after the celebrations everything is calm. During this period the bride is not supposed to leave her new home. On the seventh night after the third night of the marriage, people go to the home of the newly wed. Women predominate among the guests. They come to pay their respect to the couple, and to admire the home. For the first time gifts are given — money-gifts to the bride personally. There is *Derboka*-music again, and the couple and the guests dance. During the night the bride will withdraw, and return in a new outfit. This procedure should be repeated at

least half-a-dozen times — it is a show of the personal wardrobe the family of the bride has provided her with. (All the dresses and outfits used during the marriage is the economic responsibility of the bridegroom, whether they are bought or rented.)

This night is the formal end of the marriage-celebrations. The following weeks the couple will be invited to lunches and dinners given by most of the married members of the families. All in all special celebrations linked to the marriage take place for at least a month. And the title of *Arosa* — bride — sticks with the brides for several months. According to the statistics, within a year it will probably be replaced by *Oumm* — mother.

This is how a traditional marriage is celebrated in Bled today, roughly described. More rituals are connected to this event than the ones mentioned here. The rituals left out of this description do, however, serve similar functions as those mentioned. (For a more elaborate description of traditional North-African marriage-celebrations, see for example Abu Sahra 1982, and Evers Rosander 1991.)

The legal part of the marriage, the signing of the contract, is not an integrated part of the social marriage. It may take place at any time; it is quite common to sign it — and thus be legally married — already at the time of the engagement. It may also be done on one of the days of the marriage celebration, or shortly before it. A legal marriage is, however, not regarded as a marriage — living together when only legally married is considered as fornication. The social marking of the union is a necessity.

6.2.2 Alternatives to the traditional marriage-celebration

Recently, an alternative kind of marriage-celebration has emerged in Bled. It has existed as a possible alternative for a relatively short period — not much longer than ten years. This marriage-celebration is only of one night's duration. That night resembles the third night of the traditional marriage, but may be somewhat more modest.

The most important single traditional ritual that may be excluded in the new marriage-practice, is probably the bride's confirmation of virginity on the second night. The fact that this ritual is sometimes integrated in the one-night celebration, indicates its importance. The most significant difference between the two ways of celebration is, however, the alteration of the whole concept of marriage implied by the new alternative. The women's part of the marriage is drastically reduced. In the new form, the marriage furthermore looses much of its public character; the aspect of promotion of a family's social status in the local community is thus weakened.

The vast majority of marriages celebrated in Bled are still conducted according to the traditional practice. The alternative one-night-marriage is gaining ground, however, and will probably be even more popular in a few years time. The advantage of the "new" marriage celebration most important to people is its low economic cost, as compared to the traditional one. The disadvantage that seems to bother people the most, is the decrease of the public aspect of the celebration — which, it is feared, may lead to a weakening of the family's social status.

6.3 Trends of change in marriage-practices in Bled

We have seen that the marriage still holds a position of fundamental importance in the lives of the Beldiyins; both as life-course phase, and as life-course event.

Changes in ways to be married

Two conceptions of marriage as *life-course phase* co-exist in Bled today; one characterized by the idea of marriage as a collective activity, and one that is based on an idea of marriage as a more individual activity.

The collective kind of marriage reflects the traditional view of the institution as basically a family-matter, concerning both the actual matching of the partners, and married life. A wife's problems with her in-laws are regarded as her entire family's problem, and vice-versa. This kind of marriage reflects an idea of marriage as a union of kinship-groups and families, and, as a consequence, a perception of the partners as the principal representatives of their families in the union.

The individual kind of marriage is a relatively recent phenomenon. In such marriages, the choice of partner is an individual matter; through this choice it is also implicitly understood that the couple assumes the responsibility for their future married life themselves to a much larger degree than what is the case in the collective marriages. Still, the practice of "individual" marriages is group-dependent, in the sense that the possibility of practising such a marriage to a significant degree will depend on the attitude of the families of the partners. An absolute rejection of the idea by the family will often constitute such a burden for the couple that a realization of their plans may be impossible.

Being married — one way or the other — is, however, close to an absolute demand from the social environment in order to be accepted as a full adult member of the community. The continued undisputed position of marriage as a fundamental social institution and as an equally fundamental life-course phase, indicates that the kinship-group and family and the

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attendant roles and statuses still hold a principal position in both the individual lives and the Beldiyin social life.

Changes in ways to get married

Also when it comes to marriage as *life-course event*, i.e. the ceremonies contained in the celebration of the marriage, there are two alternative ways co-existing in Bled today: the three-day celebrations, and the simpler one-night celebration.

The three-day celebration is the traditional way of getting married in Bled. This kind of celebration is characterized by a form, meaning and function that reflects the traditional North-African principles for social organization, and it may be argued that even though these celebrations are strongly associated with the kinship-group, they are actually public events, more than private ones:

First of all, we have seen that the entire celebration is of a thoroughly other-directed nature. The "others" to which the performances are directed vary, as do to some degree the "us'es" involved, even though they are all based in the kinship-group as an identifying and motivating unit.

The various processions are the rituals most clearly directed towards "the others" in general. They have both informational and exhibitional functions. The women's processions of the two first nights is a female presentation of the bridegroom's family; they have essentially an informational function. Still, the exhibition involved is not insignificant; it exhibits both number — it is important with a large procession — and looks. The car-procession of the last night — today's form of the important ritual of the bridegroom's bringing of the bride to his home — is, by contrast, primarily a male exhibition. It shows the bridegroom and his male family's ability to mobilize a large number of car-owners, and as a car is an important status-symbol in Bled, this procession indicates the family's social relations with people of a certain standard. The eventual marching brass-band leading the procession adds to its grandiosity, and as it is expensive to rent, it also indicates the bridegroom's economic status to the "others". It furthermore catches the "others'" attention, as does the honking of the cars' horns.

The parties also clearly involve "us'es" and "others". Their physical arrangement emphasizes the total impression of a show: the guests are seated in front of a scene, on which the significant actors of the different parties perform. The two first nights belong to the women. The female members of the two families about to be united compete, thus constituting the group of "significant others" for each other. The hostess of the party is the object of intense interest. Her performance is thoroughly examined by

the members of the other family: What kind of cakes has she bought, the cheap ones, or the expensive ones? What does her home look like, what is the quality of her furniture? and so on. Throughout these parties, the women of the two groups perform separately. Through their family-vice dancing, they show each other their jewellery, party-dresses, and also their dancing-abilities, which indicate grace and femininity.

The third night is the high-point of the marriage-performance. While the previous nights involve relatives only, a large number of non-relatives are invited as guests this night. The invitations are guided by rules of reciprocity in social relations, and a large number of guests are in itself a confirmation of the family's respectability, as reflected in their large social network. The bridegroom and his family's economic status is furthermore exposed this night more than the other nights, through the choice of location for the party, the bride's dress, the quality of the band — in short, through the visible economic input to the party.

Thus, the third night the male and female members of a group perform together, and in front of the most important audience of the entire marriage; well aware of the fact that the performance on this night will be the topic of discussion and evaluation all over town the next day, and that everybody is looking for a mistake, or preferably a little scandal. The wish to perform without mistakes is one of few interests that unite the two kinship-groups involved in the common "us", directed towards the guests as "others", and indirectly towards the local opinion in general.

Through this examination of the other-directedness of the celebrations, the importance of the kinship-group in the traditional marriages is also revealed. The marriage is basically a competition between two kinship-based "us'es". The two groups try to outdo each other, in order to win the support and approval of the "others". It is also an internal competition between the two groups; they are in the process of being united, which implies that new relations of obligation are to be created. A "victory" on the marriage-celebration arena will provide the winning group with a favourable position when these new relations are to be negotiated.

The traditional marriages require participation from the entire significant kinship-group of the families involved. The overall function of the participation is symbolic; the presence of a large number of relatives is in itself a statement of the size and importance of the group. Also in the practical tasks involving the kinship-group is the symbolic aspect present; there is a fixed division of labour concerning these tasks, involving both gender and the exact kinship-relations between the members. The two first nights require the presence of the female members of the group only, and the collecting of the bride in her home on the third night involves specific

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women relatives of the bridegroom only. A failure to fulfil one's kinship-defined obligations in a relative's marriage will be seen as a sign of weak kinship-bonds and existing conflicts within the group.

An important function of the traditional marriage-celebrations is thus the activation and maintenance of kinship-relations that today, as a result of the "nuclearization" of the groups, to a large degree may be inactive in daily life.

One particular feature of the traditional marriages indicates to which degree a marriage-celebration is regarded as a collective kinship-performance rather than a union of two individuals: Throughout the celebrations, the couple getting married to a remarkable degree remain passive. They play no active part in their own marriage-party, but serve as objects of display for their group. Of the two, the bride is the one most involved in the parties, as her presence is required throughout the three nights. All the same, her passivity is striking: Dressed up, made up, decorated with jewellery, she is seated in front of the guests. She is expected to remain silent while she is observed and evaluated, applied with henna, and so on. One of her few active tasks during the celebrations, her standing up in order to confirm her virginity, should be seen mainly as a confirmation of her family's morality and respectability, as they have been able to protect their daughter until her marriage.

The bridegroom's presence is required only on the third night. On this night, his appearance is similar to the one of the bride: Together they sit on display in front of the guests. They should not be too verbally active, and should not leave their throne. The main actors of their marriage-celebration are not themselves, but their relatives, particularly their female relatives.

Here we see in operation the general gender segregation of the traditional society. The women are the main actors of the performances, particularly during the two first days of the celebrations. These parties are the ones most restricted to the female, "inside" arenas of the involved *dars*. The women of the kinship-groups are the actors on these nights, "outsiders" are not included.

The third night has a more public character. It includes the men of the groups, non-relatives and guests, and it is celebrated either in the bridegroom's *dar*, or on a public arena — the cinema, or on the out-door scene. It is decidedly the most public, male, "group-for-others" inspired night. Today, women and men celebrate together in the same room on this third night. Still, an invisible line is drawn in the middle of the common space; the women stay in front, the men stay in the rear. Earlier, this line of division was also physical; the men and women celebrated in separate parts of the bride-groom's *dar*.

Most stages of a marriage are, however, clearly female-associated; from the choice of spouse for a family-member, via the planning of the party and the execution of it, to the principal evaluation of it. The marriage-arena also serves as a "market-place" for new marriages; the mothers of grown-up sons get an opportunity to examine possible daughters-in-law while the young girls dance in their nicest outfits. Another feature stressing the general femaleness of the marriages, is the marriage-professionals, who traditionally are women, normally married women. This is an accepted female working-career, and it is furthermore an extremely lucrative career. Today, it is probably the best paid job any Beldiyin woman can have; far more lucrative than a job as a university-teacher, for instance.

We thus see that a traditional Beldiyin marriage activates all traditionally significant principles of social organization: The kinship-group as the main collective actor in the celebrations, and the division of gender in all its expressions: Women and men primarily perform separately. The "inside" is the arena for the women's parties, while the "outside" arena plays a more important part in the celebrations that involve men. The overall other-directed way in which the marriage is celebrated furthermore indicates its importance as a means of promoting the kinship-group in the local community. This is achieved through a considerable transformation of economic capital into symbolic capital; a large amount of money is invested in the performance in order to achieve the approval of the ultimate social court of judges, the significant others of the local community. While it is primarily the women who take care of the performance, the men provide the economic capital required for a proper performance.

The traditional marriage-celebrations in Bled today appear as more conservative in conformity to the traditional rules for social life than do the daily lives of most Beldiyins. It is a conserving rehearsal of the traditional values, but not in any way "folkloristic" for the actors involved. To them, it is a real thing, not a nostalgic show in memory of how things used to be. Even though the daily conditions of existence may have changed from the traditional life, the traditional values are still valid, real and important to the larger part of the Beldiyins, who still practice the traditional way of getting married.

Lately, a new, shorter and simpler one-night alternative to the traditional marriage-celebrations has emerged in Bled. The one night celebration resembles the third night of the traditional celebrations — a change that implies a number of alterations of the traditional meaning of the marriage: Firstly, the fact that the two women's nights are left out, implies that the influence and power of women related to the celebrations is drastically diminished. Secondly, certain central symbolic acts are often left out, such

as the bride's confirmation of virginity — which again means a reduction of this traditionally essential point in a marriage. Thirdly, the economic input is drastically reduced, which implies that the possible symbolic capital to be gained is correspondingly reduced. The reduction of the number of parades also reflect this relative lack of a public aspect, or other-directedness, in the new marriages. Together, these factors lead to a total marriage-practice that is significantly more modest, less costly, and less gendered than the traditional one.

The new, "individual" practice of being married mentioned earlier, and the new, "modest" practice of celebrating the union of marriage are strongly, but not necessarily linked together. Both of them imply, as we have seen, a radical alteration of the traditional conceptions of marriage both as life-course phase and life-course event. These new practices confront the old ones, making explicit the cognitive and motivating structures behind them. This is noticeable in the strong opinions most Beldiyins have about the two alternative practices:

Not very surprisingly, there is considerable reluctance and resistance towards the new practices among the Beldiyins — particularly among the women (which is not very surprising, given the importance of the traditional marriages in their lives.) My material does, however, suggest that the resistance towards the new practice of *getting* married is actually larger than the one directed towards the new practice of *being* married. Or, put differently, there seems to be a larger change in the practice concerning how couples get together and live together, than in the way their union is celebrated. While relationships often will be initiated privately, and thus are not so conspicuous, the celebration of the union of marriage is a major event in the local community, and will be observed and evaluated thoroughly. This may be interpreted as yet another sign of how significant the "others'" evaluation of the group performance is to the majority of the Beldiyins, and how essential such performances still are as generators of symbolic capital for the kinship-groups.

New marriage-practices, quite profoundly different from the traditional ones, are gaining ground in the Beldiyin community. This indicates that certain changes in the conditions of life for at least a part of the Beldiyins have taken place. As these new practices involve a smaller amount of economic capital — transformable into symbolic capital — it may indicate that an investment in symbolic capital in the Beldiyin environment will be

of less relevance for the people who choose to practice the new kinds of marriage phases and events.

These new practices put less weight on both the group-aspect and the gender-aspect of the marriage, both as life-course phase and life-course event. In the new practice of marriage as *phase*, the choice of spouse is primarily an individual decision, and the married life is conceived as more of an individual responsibility. In the new practice of marriage as *event*, the aspect of promoting the kinship-group through the celebration is diminished quite radically, as are the principles of gender-segregation in the celebrations.

According to the discussion of identity in chapter three, the new marriage-practices may also be seen as indicators of a new kind of identity among certain groups of Beldiyins; a less group-based, less gender-based, and less other-dependent kind of identity than the one that still seems to be dominant within the Beldiyin population.

Factors influencing the Beldiyins' marriage preferences will be discussed in the next section, which deals with the informants' experiences with marriage — both as life-course phase, and as life-course event.

7. Marriage

7.1 The women

7.1.1 The experiences of the two eldest generations of women

> I just knew that I was engaged, I did not know how, or when (Fatoma, 1st.gen. Muaddaf).

The women of the two eldest generations of informants to a large extent have similar experiences with their engagements and marriages. Common to all of them is that they were very young at the time of the marriage.

Aisha, the Tejer grand-mother, does not know how old she was when she got married to the man who used to come and sell fish at their door, but she had not yet had her period. But, as she says, "my husband accepted that. He said that he could wait."

Fatoma, the Muaddaf grand-mother, has been told that she was fourteen when she got married, and twelve when she got engaged. Both women claim that their age when they married was normal at that time, and they both explain the reason for the low age in the same way. Aisha puts it like this:

> Because, for example, if a girl was born in a good family, well known,
> so the family of the boy did not care about the age. The important thing
> for them was that the girl was from a good family.

This illustrates to which degree the marriage has been viewed as a union of families, rather than a union of individuals. It may also explain why the alliances were decided without the participation of the girls involved. Like in the case of Fatoma:

> Nobody asked for my point of view. My family-in-law did not come to
> the house to ask for me, they went to see my father at his work, he
> agreed, and that was all.

Their daughters, Habiba and Fatheia, had similar experiences with their marriages. None of them had any influence on the choice of their partners.

Both of them were older when they got married, though; Habiba Tejer has forgotten her age, but her husband knows: She was sixteen. Fatheia Muaddaf, by contrast, did not get married until she was twenty-one. Even though she was exceptionally old at the actual time of marriage, the alliance was arranged when she was five, and she was formally engaged when she was seven, so the plans were settled well in advance. Fatheia is the only one of these women who is married to a relative, a maternal parallel cousin. They all got married to local men, however, and did not leave Bled as a result of the marriage. None of them knew their husbands until the wedding-night.

Except from Fatheia, who was older than the average, all these women report their marriage-ages to be normal for their generation. There seems to have been a slight rise in the average age of marriage from the eldest generation to the next. The rise does not seem to have been of any great significance for the women's experiences of getting married, however. Habiba has probably a point when she explains that:

> Before, girls did not go to school. So, when they became older, they had no other alternative but marriage..... They had no reason to wait, so they married.

It is evident that these women had no way of expressing their opinion about their marriages at the time they took place. What is their opinion about the way they got married today?

They all, with the exception of Fatoma's daughter Fatheia, find that they were too young when they got married. The reaction of Aisha on her wedding-night illustrates the way they may have experienced the situation:

> When I got married, I was very young. So the first night I ran away, to my mother-in-law. I passed the first nights with her, I did not live with my husband until after fifteen days.

Why do they find the age unsuitable today? The main objection seems to be that they were generally badly prepared for married life. Fatoma puts it this way:

> No, it was not a good age. Because girls at that time did not meet with each other, they did not speak with each other. So, we did not know anything about marriage, or life in general. In addition, we were under pressure from our parents. Because of this, I found myself in a completely new environment when I got married. (...) If it were now, I would never have accepted to marry at that age.

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As mentioned, Fatheia is the only one with personal experience of marriage between relatives. She is quite satisfied with her own relationship, but does no longer support the general idea — too many times she has seen it create problems within the family, and particularly for the girls in question. Habiba shares her point of view, and in addition she does not like it because it "is not good for the blood". Their mothers, by contrast, support the custom, because you know what you get when you marry a relative:

> It is not bad to get married to relatives. Because it is better to get someone you know than someone you do not know. In some cases a girl from outside can dis-unite the family.

says Fatoma. Aisha agrees with her. For these women, the consequences of marriage for the total family-group seem to be the main concern.

Concerning the rule that the family chooses partners for their children, the opinions are somewhat less differentiated. Fatoma sees the move away from this rule as a negative one. Because, as she says:

> I think that parents should have influence on their children. Because parents are more experienced, and they are usually looking for the best for their children (...) It was better before. At that time the girls and boys obeyed their parents. The mother asked for the girl for her son, and did everything by herself. And it was rare that couples failed.

Her daughter Fatheia seems to have the same idea, but finds that today, parents can only give advice. This is, in fact, a problem that occupies her very much these days. Her two sons are getting old enough for marriage — but how is she going to assure that they get married to suitable girls?

Aisha and her daughter Habiba have also realized that today, the position of parents is as advisors. Still, Aisha finds that

> parents should have influence on the marriage. Especially if, for example, the family of the man is not good. Then the family of the girl should intervene, and advise her not to get married to him. But if he is a good boy, why not? They should encourage her to get married to him.

Again, we see the tendency to evaluate the family of the individual in question rather than the individual in itself. The idea that one gets married to a family rather than to a person, still seems to be strong.

The views on marriage held by these women may appear as ambiguous and inconsistent in some cases. Aisha, the Tejer grandmother, for instance, states that she is dissatisfied with the timing of her marriage — she was too

young. Still, she obviously married her daughter Habiba off at a similarly young age, causing her the same kind of problems she had herself. This may not be as strange as it seems: A significant feature that characterizes all the elder informants, is this lack of ability to compare the time of their childhood with the present one. Aisha, for example, says: "I can not prefer before for now, or now for before. The times are different. Before was a time, and now it is another time." One may assume that a major social change is the reason for these problems of comparing. Thus, the conditions of existence may also have changed to such an extent that the criteria for a good marriage then and now have to appear inconsistent, which in a way they are.

7.1.2 The experiences of the women of the young generation

> There were two men from the family who both wanted to marry me, and the family got together to decide whom of them I should marry (Leila, 3rd.gen. Muaddaf).

> I met him at the university, three years ago. We studied together. We met each other every day, we ate together — that is how we met (Nora, 3rd.gen. Tejer).

Of the female informants of the third generation, two are married, one is legally married only, and one has no commitments to a man. Meriem and Leila, the two married ones, are older than Nora and Jalila, who are not yet married. This can, however, not account for the difference in civil status — when Meriem and Leila were the age of Nora and Jalila, they were both already mothers, and had been married for years. A more plausible explanation may be that Meriem and Leila have never got a higher education. The stories of how they got married support the suggestion that this is a fact of significance:

Meriem Tejer never got any further than fourth grade in school; she failed, and was expelled. After dropping out, she stayed home. When she was twenty, her husband came to Mahmoud, Meriem's father, to ask for her, after having been advised to do so by a cousin who was the neighbour of the Tejer-family. Mahmoud found it to be a suitable alliance, and asked Meriem for her opinion. As she trusted his manner of judgement, and as she liked the man, she agreed. They got married when she was twenty-one. The advice of the family was essential to her:

> They (the parents) should advice their daughter or son. And I think that
> if, for example, my father said to me not to get married to my husband,
> I would accept that. Before my husband I was engaged to another one.
> But then my father told me that he was no good. So I followed the advice
> of my father, and broke relations with him.

Meriem met with her future husband frequently during the time of engagement, so she did not marry a stranger. Today, she is satisfied with her marriage — both the timing and the marriage in itself. She finds marriage and the establishment of a family to be a natural and fundamental stage in life. Marriages within families do not please her, though. It is not good for anything — not for the children, and not for the family.

Leila, the eldest Muaddaf-daughter, has quite different experiences with her marriage. She finished secondary school before she stopped studying in order to form a family. She was twenty-two when she got married, but by then she had been engaged for four years:

> My father decided, and I could not say no to my father. And I did not
> know him (the husband) very well until we married. Not before. There
> were two men from the family who both wanted to marry me, and the
> family got together to decide which of them I should marry. They chose
> my husband, because he is a Muaddaf. The other one did not have our
> name.

Like Meriem, Leila finds marriage to be a necessary and natural stage in life. She is also content with the timing of her marriage — "I think that it is the best age for marriage, after twenty." As for being married to a relative she is, however, negative to this custom, which she personally has found to cause her problems. She is also against parents intervening in the children's choice of spouse;

> Because I think that if a girl or a boy choose the partner by themselves,
> afterwards, if there are problems or something, they will assume the
> responsibility by themselves, because it is their choice.

This is actually a rather interesting attitude, as the same argument is often used in support of the opposite view. It is generally seen as an advantage that the problems occurring in an arranged marriage will be regarded as collective problems.

Like their mothers and grand-mothers, Meriem and Leila got married the traditional way. They furthermore support this way of getting married, and find economic inability to be the only reason to abstain from it. The elder

women are somewhat more reluctant towards the traditional marriage-celebrations than these young women. The elder all prefer the three-nights-marriages to their own, that lasted five nights. They also seem to be positive to the one-night-marriages, because they are less expensive, and less tiring. "One night is sufficient", says Habiba.

Nora, the younger Tejer-daughter, is legally married. She and her boyfriend chose to sign the contract in order to solve a practical problem — as they are both teachers, they need to be married in order to be assigned to jobs in the same town. It did not work, however — not even the government accepts a signed marriage-contract as a proof of marriage. She does not regard herself as married, but is planning to be next summer; then she will be twenty-five.

Nora met her future husband during her time as a student in Tunis:

> I met him at the university, three years ago. We studied together. We met each other every day, we ate together — that is how we met.

Personally, Nora had no problems with her family concerning the relationship with her boyfriend. But lots of her friends have:

> You know that in general it is very difficult. But in my case, with my family, I did not find any difficulties. Especially with my mother. Because from the beginning I made it a habit to tell her everything, to be frank with her (...) But this does not exist in all families. It is really — it is rare. I am lucky.

What if her parents had objected to her choice of partner?

> I think that I would have continued, because — I am convinced. I chose him, and ... I do not know. It depends on the reason, why they refuse him. If I find out that this reason is acceptable, for example, is logical, perhaps I would stop.

Personally, Nora does not find marriage to be necessary for a couple who wants to live together; she does, however, recognize that such relations are socially impossible in Tunisia today. She and her boyfriend would like to celebrate their marriage the simple way — a one-night-party for family and friends. But Nora does not think it will be possible, because neither her family nor his like the idea. They want a proper celebration:

> Because my mother, for example — I spoke with her on that subject, I said to her that if we ... Because now we are legally married, we have the

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contract. He can for example come and take me without anything. She said: You are not — cheap, or (...) They take into consideration people. What will people say? "Why is she doing like that, why is she getting married like that?"

Getting married is important to Nora, but not at any prize:

> It is important — if we can relate that to the society — because... especially the situation for girls. A girl who is twenty-five years old and not married, is a big problem. But I think that if I for example did not meet a man that I agree with, and that I know that I can live with, I think that marriage has no sense. With anyone — I think it has no sense.

Today, there seem to be two different standards in operation concerning suitable age for marriage: For girls without higher education, it is problematic to reach the age of twenty-five and still be single. For girls who are studying, by contrast, this is a fairly normal situation. Higher education seems to delay marriage by about five years for girls today. For both categories there has been a significant rise in the average age of marriage, however, as compared to the previous generations.

In Nora's case, what is decisive for the timing of the marriage?

> Of course the material situation, because we have to prepare things for the house, furnishing the house — the minimum — with two wages, my wages, and his. And second, we have to get work in the same town.

Jalila, the younger Muaddaf-daughter, is still unattached. As a student, she is for the time being concentrating on her studies. Marriage is not on her mind, she only knows that she will stay single until she has completed her education. Certain things concerning marriage she has made up her mind about, though:

> The important thing is that I find somebody that — that we understand each other. That is the important thing. I do not think about house, or money, or anything like that.

She has, in fact, strong opinions on several general aspects of marriage. She is certain that she will find her own future husband, and marry him, in spite of the reactions of her family. And she definitely wants only one night of celebrations when she gets married, still independent from the family's attitudes. If she gets married at all, that is. She could well imagine her life single; she might for example find a good job more tempting than marriage.

Both to Nora and Jalila the custom of marrying relatives is rather unattractive. First of all because it may harm the children, but also, says Jalila, because such marriages tend to create problems for those involved. Generally, they find that the choice of life-companion should be a personal task. Parents may interfere within certain limits, they may give their opinion of the alliance, but nothing more. In general, they seem to understand marriage as a rather individual decision, both concerning the choice of spouse and the different aspects of married life. The right to decide for themselves in these matters is quite essential to them.

This is how the female informants reported their experiences and attitudes towards marriage. For most of them, the main factor influencing the timing of their marriages has actually been when they were asked for by the family of their husbands. The girls, or rather, the family of the girls, have most often played a passive part in the process of creating alliances.

The initiative is thus traditionally with the man and his family. One would assume that this fact influences the men's experiences with this social institution. I will now turn to their accounts of the different aspects of marriage.

7.2 The men

7.2.1 The experiences of the two eldest generations of men

> Let me tell you a story: A man wanted to get married, but he knew no women — he had not seen anyone, there were no women outside in the streets. So he put on a sefseri, and went from door to door as a woman, pretending that he was selling eggs. Like that he saw a girl that pleased him, he asked for her — and like that he got married (Hassan, 2nd.gen. Falleah).

When Mustfa Falleah was twenty-seven — which was a long time ago, as he is now eighty-two — his father told him to go to Tunis to buy the necessities for his marriage. When the jewellery and dresses for the bride were bought, they brought it to the house of her family, together with oil and other foodstuff for the marriage. The bride also got half of the cow that they had slaughtered for the occasion. Then he got married. He had no influence neither on the choice of his wife, nor on the timing of the marriage:

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I was ashamed for my father, so I could not say no to him. It was he who decided everything. But there were some who could decide for themselves.

The marriage took place when it did in order to avoid that Mustfa had to serve three years of military service. He reports, though, that most men got married at that age when he was young. He is also content with his age when he got married.

Mustfa supports the right of parents to interfere in their children's choice of spouses — "if a son or a daughter want to get married to a partner from a bad family." He does, however, see their position as advisers only.

Marriage is important to Mustfa: "I can not imagine a life without marriage (...) I should form a family." He does not approve of marriages within families, though, for genetical reasons. He explains why people used to prefer this kind of marriages this way:

> They wanted to get married to relatives because they knew each other. It was better than to get married from outside. But many married from outside. I, for example, did that. And — before, there were not many people, so we could not choose.

Mustfa is a supporter of the old, grand marriages. Because, as he says:

> It was happier, better than now. Before, they killed a cow so that people could eat, but now — they buy four kilos of meat at the market!

Mahmoud Tejer did not get married until he was thirty-two. He is not very happy with the age; he would have preferred to be a couple of years younger. He was not able to choose, however; it was the economic situation that decided when a man could marry, and as he was poor, he had to wait. He also had to get his sisters married first — as his father was dead, they were his responsibility. He was, however, older than normal: Most of the men of his generation got married in the period between twenty-five and thirty.

It was Mahmoud's mother who suggested that he got married to Habiba. He did not know her, but agreed when asked for his opinion. He could not have chosen his wife all alone, he says, "because we could not see girls at that time. Even if it were my cousin, I could not see her, or meet her." In other words, the community was so gender-segregated that finding a wife without the assistance of a female relative was practically impossible — the men hardly saw women.

Marriage within the family has no special position compared to other relationships, as Mahmoud sees it. If two relatives want each other, why not? He has a quite interesting explanation of why these relations used to be so popular, however:

> It was regarded as a good thing, especially if someone was rich. He preferred to marry his son or his daughter to a relative so that the property stayed in the family. And the relations between the towns, between for example Bled and Dar H., were confined. (Dar H. is the neighbouring town, eleven kilometres from Bled.) People from Bled did not go to Dar H. So one did not know much people, like today. So they were somehow obliged to marry somebody from the family.

Like Mustfa, he stresses the physical lack of alternatives as a significant explanation of internal marriages.

Mahmoud cherishes married life, and can not imagine life without it. He loathes the ceremonies of marriage, however, and does only attend them in cases where it is absolutely necessary. It is, then, perhaps only natural that he prefers marriages nowadays: The shorter, the better — and less expensive. Also concerning his children's choice of spouses he has a liberal view: "I think that the family should have no influence on the decision. If the boy and the girl want each other, it is ok."

Both Mustfa and Mahmoud got married during the time of colonization, before the big changes in the social life of the Beldiyins had occurred. Mustfa's son Hassan, by contrast, got married in the sixties; by then, things were somewhat different:

> I knew my wife before, she was my relative. So I chose her, and I sent my mother to ask for her.

Then what decided the timing of the marriage?

> There were two reasons: The first one was that I wanted to form a family. The second one was that I loved my wife, so I wanted to marry her as soon as possible.

Hassan is the only representative of the elder generations who mentions love as a factor influencing the choice of life-companion. He is also the only one who is married as a result of his own, personal choice. Still, the advice of the parents was essential to him, and he generally thinks that parents should advise their children in these questions. But within limits — not like before.

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The marriage took place when he was twenty-three. It was a traditional marriage-celebration, alternative ways had not yet occurred in Bled. He was somewhat younger than the average, but he still finds that the age was perfect. He married his relative out of love, but it was not exactly a disadvantage that she was from the family:

> It was very important to me. Because when a man chooses to marry a relative, it is easy for him. If he marries an outside-girl, her family will demand a lot of him: Jewellery, and — many things. But inside the family it will be easy. No conditions, no — .

We see that the men of the two eldest generations generally had somewhat more influence on the circumstances around their marriages than the women of the same generations. Still, this freedom seems to have been rather dependent on the individual's family; Mustfa had no more choice than his wife probably had, for instance. According to Hassan's story, these rules were about to change already in the sixties. How are they today?

7.2.2 The experiences of the men of the young generation

> When I wanted to marry, I met with many girls, but we did not understand each other, so I cut it. And after that my mother told me about my wife (Lassad, nephew of Mahmoud Tejer).

> I used to refuse the marriage-concept. I believed in the free union. But in our social context it is almost impossible to practice this, the free union — it is practically forbidden (Nejib, 3rd.gen. Muaddaf).

The two Muaddaf-sons are not yet married, while both the nephews of Mahmoud are. It is hard to say why — they are all about the same age. Studies may have delayed the event for some of them, but it is doubtful whether this is a factor of any decisive significance in these concrete cases, as we shall see. "In my family they marry late", says Tarek Muaddaf. Together with other factors, this may actually be of some significance.

Lassad, the nephew of Mahmoud Tejer, was twenty-seven when he got married. He had made up his mind about when he wanted to get married long before — his economic and occupational situation had been the same for years, so there were no material reasons for waiting that long. Anyway, it was a normal age for marriage. He had certain problems with finding a girl that he liked:

When I wanted to marry, I met with many girls, but we did not understand each other, so I broke it off. And after that my mother told me about my wife. I told them that it was a condition that I met her first. So I met her, and she pleased me, so we went to ask for her, and we stayed engaged two years before we married.

It is important to Lassad to stress that he chose his wife on his own. He does not approve of too strong interference from the family in these things — only if the boy does not live in Bled, and does not know the girls of the town. In general, it is better to take the responsibility of the choice alone.

Lassad married a relative of his. The fact that she was from the family was not on his mind, though — it just happened to be like that. He makes a point of stating that love may exist also between relatives:

Perhaps [they like marrying relatives because] they want to make the family closer to each other, and also, sometimes, the two — the girl and the boy — perhaps they love each other, before the family decides.

Lassad had a traditional marriage-celebration, but does not like it much himself. He would have preferred to have a short celebration, and then be able to afford a honeymoon with his wife instead. He married like that because of his mother. His elder brother Mohammed had a short marriage, and she wanted one of her sons to marry the traditional way.

Lassad's elder brother Mohammed got married directly after graduating from the university, and could hardly afford his one-night-marriage. Still, even if he had the money, he would never have wasted them on a traditional marriage. He met his wife while he was a student:

I knew my wife at the university, the second year at the university — I studied for four years. We stayed together for two years without deciding to marry — we tested and tried each other. In the third year, we decided to go ahead, and to tell people that we were going to marry.

Mohammed was only twenty-four when they married — a very low age,

especially for the cultivated boys. They are twenty-four or twenty-five when they finish studying. And they work for at least four years — to earn money to build a house, to buy the gold for their wives — you need a long time. So the normal age for students, and for cultivated boys, is about thirty.

They married "in a terrible material situation", but did not mind it; they just wanted to live together:

I did not discuss with myself at that time — "is it better to marry at this age, or is it better to wait?" ... The question is not the age, but to find a partner that one can found a family with, and one can — marry.

Today, Mohammed is very content with the timing of his marriage. It was, however, a struggle with both the families — his mother wanted him to marry a Beldiyin-girl, while his father-in-law wanted his daughter to marry a Sfaxsian, as their family originates from Sfax. The families also objected to the material situation they were in when they married. But they were stubborn. "In this period you have to be hard." In the end, their families gave in. But even if they had not agreed, Mohammed is certain that he would have married his wife anyway.

Personally, Mohammed could imagine himself staying single throughout life — to him, marriage is not an absolute necessity. But when placed in a larger context, he finds it to be important:

We must think about in which family, and in which society we live. In Tunisia, it is very important.(....) To have a career, for example, for my professional life, I must be a good example with my family — I must be married, I must be a respectable man. In Tunisia, to be married is a necessary point in order to complete the — "bonne image de l'homme".

Mohammed would actually have preferred to live with his wife without being married — at least for a while. But

here in Tunisia we do not find this. It is very rare. We may have this kind of marriage — if we study with the girl, for some period. But I think that we need this kind of marriage, because although we study together with our future wife, although we discuss before the marriage, we may find problems — because, quite simply, we do not live together. (...) So, to live together is very important — the best way to get to know your partner well, is to live together. (...) And the marriage will be the final decision.

Mohammed is clearly a man of strong opinions on this subject. Still, he thinks that the interference of the parents as advisers may be a good thing in some cases — "because most of the Tunisian boys cannot make the nice choice." He has no objections towards marriages within the family. He actually sees a few advantages with it:

It is better, because you can save a lot of time. To combine your family with a family from Sfax — that takes time. It may be better to find one from your family, because then you have "le terrain favorable".

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Even though Tarek Muaddaf has become thirty years old and has a settled life-situation, he is not yet engaged or married. This fact does not bother him, however:

> In my opinion there is no fixed time. It arrives when it arrives. (...) We can marry early, and we can marry late.

Marriage is important to him, but it has to be a relationship based on love. If the situation is right, nothing will stop him. If he does not meet the right girl, however, he prefers to stay single. Like Mohammed, he finds that this may cause social problems, though.

Tarek has no objections to relatives marrying among themselves, as long as they love each other. He does not think that parents should have any influence on their children's choice of partners, however:

> The up-bringing of the children stops when the children grow up and become adults, and go to the university, and — because they will perhaps know more than their parents, have more experience than their parents. So, I do not think that it is good, that it is right.

If and when he marries, it will be a simple celebration — even if his family objects. The largest problem will probably be with the family of the bride, though — not his own.

Like his elder brother, Nejib Muaddaf is not engaged or married. He has got a girlfriend, but that is still unofficial. Lately, he has started to consider marriage:

> I used to refuse the marriage-concept. I believed in the free union. But in our social context it is almost impossible to practice this, the free union — it is practically forbidden. Because neither the society, nor the religion, nor the law, nor the human concept here allow the couples to live together without getting married. So, living together would not allow personal ease and relief. (...) So, marriage and free union are the same, the only difference is that the ceremony of marriage is an etiquette that the society imposes. (...) Now I have started considering marriage, because in our society it is a brake not to be married. It makes it difficult to advance. Of course, it requires a partner with an image that I believe in. But when this is the case, I permit myself to think about marriage.

Nejib's opinion of the traditional ceremony of marriage has already been quoted elsewhere — he sees it as a massacre of the gendered personalities of those involved. On the basis of this view, he refuses to be exposed to a traditional marriage:

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So, even if I will have to face a conflict with my family, even if they reject me, I will never be engaged to get married in the traditional way. (...) I imagine my marriage to be in the municipality, simply because we need the signature. (...) A simple and rapid marriage.

It is evident that Nejib has a rather individual approach to the questions concerning marriage — an approach he shares with all the academically trained informants, and an approach that will be a main topic in the discussion below.

7.3 Trends of change in marriage-concepts among the informants

Some features stand out as particularly remarkable in the above: Firstly, there has been a significant rise in the marriage-age for women during the three generations. In contrast to this, the marriage-age for men has remained fairly stable during the same period. Secondly, there are distinct differences in marriage-practices to be found also within the youngest generation; level of education rather than gender seems to be of significance for the differences. Each of these features will be discussed in more detail below.

7.3.1 The women

Timing of marriages
The marriage-stories of the three generations of women informants show that there has been a significant change in the timing of entrance into the married life-course phase. The rise in marriage-age furthermore seems to have been particularly large from the second generation to the third. The total effect of the rise is considerable; the difference between Aisha Tejer's age at marriage and that of her grand-daughter Nora is close to fifteen years.

As we saw in chapter two, this rise in marriage-age for the youngest generation of women is a nation-wide phenomenon. The introduction of a legal lower age of marriage — seventeen years for girls since the sixties — evidently must have been an effective brake on the practice of early marriages. Still, the tendency of postponing marriages seems to go further than the law imposes. In 1988, only four per cent of the Tunisian girls under twenty were married (see ch.2). The fact that none of the younger female informants got married before they had passed twenty years of age,

correspond with this general tendency. One may thus assume that other factors than the law of legal lower age have influenced the standards for suitable marriage-age for girls during the post-colonial period.

Habiba Tejer states, as quoted above, that before girls got the possibility to go to school, there was nothing that gave any reason to marry late. There were no significant preceding life-course phases that could influence the timing of the marriages of the colonial generations of girls. The introduction of compulsory school after independence changed this; a new pre-matrimonial life-course phase occurred in the lives of the young girls. Even though, as we have seen, this phase's actual duration may vary significantly, its mere existence could be a factor of relevance for the general rise in marriage-age, as it introduces the idea that there are other central aspects of the life of a young girl than her coming marriage. The fact that some girls today continue to study way into their twenties, and thus marry very late as compared to the previous generations, may also have contributed to the general postponement of girls' marriages.

The change in standards for suitable marriage-age for girls is thus a result of changes in attitudes, as well as changes in girls' objective situation. As women traditionally act as major marriage-brokers for their children, their experiences will be important for the practices to which they expose their daughters. Still, Aisha, for example, had her daughter Habiba married off at a similarly young age as her own, even though she herself had negative experiences with her early marriage. This may be explained by a low degree of change in the general conditions of existence from her own generation to her daughter's. Put differently: by the time Habiba got married, it was still not socially possible to marry late for girls. As Aisha explains above, the most attractive girls — the girls from the best regarded families, who also had a spotless personal reputation — were married off early. A late marriage would be a sign that the girl for some reason was in low demand — a stigma that would do neither the girl personally, nor her family any good. The social burdens related to a late marriage may thus have been regarded as heavier than the individual burdens related to an early marriage. As a result, the practice of early marriages for girls were reproduced in the next generation.

The introduction of formal education for girls provided a reason to postpone girls' marriages. It is reasonable to assume that the elder women, because of their own experiences, have been positive to this possibility to delay their daughters' marriages. The introduction of formal education may thus have had an *indirect effect* on the timing of girls' marriages in general, even if many of the girls actually have had quite brief personal contacts with schooling.

The *direct effect* of education on the timing of marriage for girls is, however, varied. Today, those who continue their studies have their marriages delayed for about five years, as compared to those who leave school early. There seem to be two separate standards for women's suitable marriage-age today; one applying to girls with low education, and one applying to those who continue their studies.

This difference in timing is, however, only one of several aspects of change in marriage-practices that, according to the marriage-stories of my young female informants, seem to correspond with level of education:

Perceptions of marriage
For the young women with low education, the difference in timing is actually the one thing that distinguish their marriage-stories most from the ones of their mothers and grand-mothers. All these three generations of women share in central respects a common experience of marriage — both concerning the actual practices and their general perception of the institution. True enough, Meriem Tejer got the possibility to object to her parents' suggestion of husband for her; she did, however, not wish to make use of it. Their advice weighed so much for her that she felt comfortable with their choice. Her understanding of her marriage as a collective family-affair to a considerable degree seems to match the marriage-concept of her parents. The other young woman with low education, Leila Muaddaf, faced a marriage-practice even more similar to the one of the elder women; she had no influence on her marriage at all.

These young women to a significant extent seem to share both the marriage-practice and the general concept of marriage with their mothers and grand-mothers; in some respects they are even more conservative than their elder female relatives. The understanding of marriage as a collective family-affair thus seems to be the dominant one both for the elder women and for the young women without higher education.

Nora and Jalila, the academically trained young women, express radically different attitudes; both concerning the general perception of marriage, and preferences for marriage-practices. Nora has already chosen her future husband by herself, and Jalila is expecting to do so; they both find the idea of being married as a result of other considerations than love meaningless. They both reject the idea of celebrating their marriages the traditional way; Nora seems ready to do so as a compromise, but reluctantly. They distance themselves quite markedly from the practices of their female relatives — a fact that they are highly aware of themselves. They do not deny the possibility that their sisters and mothers are happy in their marriages, but cannot imagine themselves being satisfied in a similar situation to theirs —

they conceive their personal situation as qualitatively different from the situation of their female relatives.

We also see that Nora has left the traditional passive role of a bride-to-be, and plays an active part not only in the choice of her husband, but also in the planning of their marriage. She is in a position to do so because of her higher education: As a working woman, her income is as important for the preparations of the marriage as the one of her future husband. A main factor deciding the timing of her marriage is exactly her occupational life; they cannot marry until they have been appointed teachers in the same town.

On the basis of the above, one may then conclude that for the young generation of women informants, level of formal education seems to be a significant factor for differences both in marriage-preferences and in marriage-practices. While the young women with low education seem to share both marriage-conceptions and marriage-practices with their elder female relatives, the academically trained women to a significant degree practice, or expect to practice, their marriages in a quite different and more "individual" way.

7.3.2 The men

Timing of marriages

In contrast to the case of the women, the marriage-age for men has, according to the male informants, changed little during the last three generations. The normal age for founding a family is today, as before, between twenty-five and thirty years for men. In the same way as the timing has remained stable, the factors influencing the timing also seem to be much the same: A certain economic ability is still a main precondition for mens' marriages.

The introduction of compulsory school has seemingly had little significant influence on the men's marriage-situation in general. Mahmoud Tejer's nephew Mohammed, who himself married early for his generation and situation, states that even academic training normally does not change the timing of marriages today. If anything, higher education tends to postpone men's marriages, as it will postpone their entrance into the working-force, and thus delay the point of time when they have generated enough money to marry. Higher education may change the way in which men earn money, but not the fact that they should do so before getting married. Still, Mohammed's marriage illustrates that it is possible to deviate from this rule, as it also illustrates that such a deviation may be difficult to practice, because of resistance from the families involved.

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Generally, the male informants of all generations report to be more satisfied with the timing of their marriages than the female informants. The fact that the men have been considerably much older than the women when they got married, as well as the fact that they seem to have had more influence on their marriages, may be of significance for their greater satisfaction. Still, the elder informants' personal influence on their getting married was limited. An individual approach to choosing a wife seems to have been practically impossible in their time; the strict gender-segregation of the community made the assistance of female relatives required.

Perceptions of marriage

Even if the men generally seem to have had some more personal influence on their marriages, most of them still share both marriage-practice and general conception of marriage with the majority of the women: Marriage is to them a desired phase in life rather than a personal relationship based on romantic love. It is basically a collective family-related project; the family has played an important part both in the marriage-arrangement of most of the men, and in their married life. As in the case of the female informants, this concept of marriage exists in all three generations; Lassad, the young man without higher education clearly has an understanding of marriage closer to the one of the elder men than to the one of his educated age-group. Also for men it is the level of education rather than the age that is decisive for the way in which marriage is conceived.

Like the young, educated women, the young, academically trained men express views on marriage that are markedly deviant from the ones of their male relatives. Their deviant views are reflected in their actual marriage-practices: Mohammed chose his wife by himself, and out of love, and he married before he was, according to traditional standards, economically prepared for it. He also resisted the objections of the involved families, and he seems to regard it as his right to do this. Correspondingly, the two Muaddaf-boys have refrained from marrying at a conventionally right age, because they have not yet met the right girl. In all cases, love — the presence of it, or the absence of it — is a decisive factor for their deviations from the traditional marriage-practices. None of them can imagine adapting to the traditional concept of marriage. As the girls with higher education, they do not deny the possibility that their lowly educated relatives are content with their marriages; they do, however, clearly not identify with their situation. Mohammed's way of dividing his age-group according to level of education illustrates his experienced distance towards those with less education than himself: Most of the Tunisian boys are not capable of making a nice choice of partner, he states; unlike cultivated boys

like himself, they may therefore be better off with the advices of their parents than on their own.

Also for the young men the length of education seems to be an influential factor both for their conception of marriage, and their actual marriage-practices. It is clear that the educated men have a more individualized approach to the topic — to the extent that they tend to regard acting in opposition to the opinion of their family a normal thing to do. The role they give their families in their marriage-planning is thus the opposite of the traditional one, that is characterized by cooperation within the family-group.

Education — both the introduction of compulsory school in general, and academic training in particular — has however, had a less fundamental influence on the young men's marriage-practice than on the marriage-practices of the young women, as it has altered neither the timing, nor the factors influencing the timing of men's marriages in any significant way. Today, like three generations ago, a certain economic ability is the main precondition for the men's marriages.

We see that it is primarily the young, highly educated Beldiyins who prefer the recent individualized ways of marriage both as life-course event, and as life-course phase as described in the previous section.

It seems as if the possibility to practice these new ways is experienced as essential to them, and that they personally distance themselves from the traditional marriage-practices to a considerable extent. Both the young men and women with an academic training seem to regard their conditions of existence as qualitatively very different from those of their relatives. It is clear that they see their higher education as the main reason for the qualitative difference in their lives.

These young academically trained people approach the topic of marriage and married life in a rather different way from the others. While the informants with low education give an impression of being in harmony with their social surroundings — to the degree that the fact that it is "normal" is the best argument in favour of a practice. The young academically trained informants, by contrast, seem to evaluate and negotiate their personal preferences in relation to the social restrictions on their freedom to act, as a natural strategy to the task of creating both a socially realizable and individually acceptable life for themselves. Concerning marriage, most of them come out with similar minimum demands: They refuse to enter a relationship based on other principles than love, they demand to choose

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their partner on their own, and they want to get married in the simplest way possible.

Even though both the ideal preferences and the minimum demands of young educated men and women are much the same, the two genders seem to have somewhat different experiences concerning the possibilities of realizing them — the social limitations they have to relate to are evidently not quite the same:

The academically trained men tend to express themselves more categorically about these things than the women — "even if they reject me, I will never be engaged to get married in the traditional way", states Nejib Muaddaf. The men generally seem to be quite determined to act on their own will. Mohammed, the married academically trained man, went very much against his family's wishes when he got married — both in his choice of wife, and in his timing and celebration of their union. In short, the men seem to regard the right to do as they please in these matters as more self-evident than do the women:

Nora is in a position to choose her own husband. She does, however, recognize that her case in many ways is exceptional: "it is rare. I am lucky". She also seems ready to compromise on her celebration of marriage — she is aware of her parents' opinion, and will, if necessary, respect it: "They take into consideration people. What will people say? Why is she doing like that, why is she marrying like that?" She does not seem to take people's opinion personally into consideration; it is important to her family, not to her. Still, she is ready to do what is necessary in order to please "people", for the sake of her family.

If we relate these gendered differences in possibilities of realizing personal marriage-preferences to the discussion of the principles of honour and shame in chapter three, they appear as reflections of the traditional gendered perceptions of members of a group — the family, or the local community. According to the traditional principles of North-African social organization, a woman's sexual modesty is one of her main contributions to her family's honour, and thus its reputation. Her passivity in relation to male "others" is another main female contribution to the collective family-honour. The marriage is the most sexualized social institution existing. Any dubiousness in a woman's performance of the socially required rituals for entering this institution will be of great danger to her family's honour. A considerable pressure towards conformity from the family of a girl who wants to get married in an unconventional way must be expected.

The men's traditional honour-preserving behaviour is, by contrast, characterized by active relations with "others", and a generally challenging and conquering kind of performance. A love-relationship will be potentially

morally bad mainly for the involved woman and her family. In addition, the traditionally active role of men, in family-relations, as well as in relations with "others", justifies a man's determination of realizing his own plans, while the passive role of women makes a similar determination illegitimate. An academically trained woman will be more dependent of the permission of her family-group to behave in an unconventional manner. For both genders, however, the traditional gender-roles constitute the outer limits of their possible un-traditional marriage-practices.

The influence of traditional principles is evident also in the *timing* of the marriages of the academically trained informants. The men express an overall relaxed attitude towards getting married: "it arrives when it arrives", says Tarek Muaddaf. The men's age as such does not seem to be of relevance to these matters. Nora, by contrast, is highly aware of the fact that "a girl who is twenty-five, and not yet married, is a big problem". Hence higher education does not seem to replace youth as a female asset on the marriage-market. It provides a postponement, sets a new standard for when a girl is "old", but does not change the fact that she eventually will be so. The young educated women still have to relate to socially set time-limits concerning suitable marriage-age, while the educated men — like all men — seems to be evaluated mainly according to their material situation; they are not "devaluated" as a result of age. Again, we see the framework of traditional principles constitute the social limits for the possible un-traditional practices.

Academically trained young people tend to marry each other. Seen against the background of the differences in their ideas of marriage as compared to the ideas of the young people without higher education, this is hardly very surprising. The academically trained people often meet their future partners as students at the university — which is also not very surprising. These practices have, however, implications that may turn out to be quite problematic in relation to the families involved, as they actually challenge a number of traditional principles of social organization:

The "student-couples" often originate from different areas in Tunisia. Marriages across such geographical distances is a quite new phenomenon; according to Mahmoud Tejer, Beldiyins hardly travelled a distance of eleven kilometres in their lifetime when he was young, and they certainly did not marry that far away from Bled. This reported low geographical mobility corresponds with the general principles of traditional North-African social organization discussed in chapter three: The local community constituted both the relevant social universe to its members, and one of their significant relative "us'es".

Mohammed's description of his marriage-negotiations suggests that these principles have significant impact on the elder Beldiyins' ways of understanding unions of marriage: The fact that his fiancée was not a Beldiyin girl was actually the main objection of his family to his marriage-plans. In the same way, he was not wanted as a son-in-law by the family of his fiancée because he was not a Sfaxian like them. In their case, the problem was overcome; still, as he says, "to combine your family with a family from Sfax — that takes time".

We see that the academically trained people's marriage-practices break with central traditional principles. The conception of marriage as a union of families is not applicable to a situation where the families belong to different social universes. The "student-marriages" not only require that the involved families accept to have no influence on the choice of a new family-member; they also require that people who all their lives have been relating to others on the basis of their family-affiliation, accept as new members of their family individuals who appear on the social arena alone, without any identifying family-affiliations, and thus without any social identity or value in their universe. In Mohammed's, and also in Nora's case, the families have accepted the situation. But as Nora states, she is lucky; a lot of her friends have different experiences with their attempts of practising individualized marriages within a traditional social context.

We see that the traditional principles for social organization, characterized by group-related and gender-dependent definitions of accepted procedures, still constitute the ultimate limiting framework around the possible marriage-practices for the young people who, as a result of their academic training, have developed preferences that diverge from the traditional principles. We also see that their preferences are characterized by a profoundly more individualized approach to marriage both as life-course phase and as life-course event. The principal guardians of this limiting framework are the families of which the young people are members; their possibility of realizing their individualized ideals will depend on the good will of their traditionally most significant group whose influence on their lives they seek to diminish. This situation will, as argued above, be particularly relevant for the women. The story of the young Muaddaf-sisters illustrates to which degree this may be the case:

Leila Muaddaf had no influence on any aspect of her marriage. Her family decided whom she should marry, and the considerations behind the choice indicate a fundamentally traditional approach to the task from the part of her family: "They chose my husband, because he is a Muaddaf. The other one did not have our name." The timing of her marriage was also

decided by others; she was engaged when she was eighteen, and married when she was twenty-two.

Her younger sister Jalila is twenty-three; she is a student, unattached to any man, and has no plans of getting engaged in a relationship for some time yet. Her family has given her permission to study; a possibility they denied Leila, because she was engaged to get married to the man they chose for her. The two sisters live in different realities today; because of Jalila's education, they will probably do so for the rest of their lives. Leila lives her life in an environment characterized by traditional conditions of existence as a result of her family's decision; her sister leads a "modern" student-life, and will probably as a result later lead a "modern" adult life, because her family has decided to allow her to do so. Hence her individualized life-style is preconditioned by the will of her traditionally defined superiors — her family. In line with the traditional dependency of a girl on her family, the two sisters have had to accept the lives they were given. As it happened, they turned out to be quite different.

Once the young informants have become students, the demands directed towards them concerning adaption to the traditional marriage-practices seem to change, as compared to the demands directed towards those without higher education. Their families seem to acknowledge that a change takes place in their lives parallel with their academical training; they seem to enter a new social category. The young educated informants themselves seem to be highly aware of their intermediate situation; on the one hand they defend what they regard as their minimum rights of individual choice, on the other hand, they accept that there are social limits they cannot cross. They are in a situation of constant negotiation; their aim is to be able to unite their individual ideals and their familial and social obligations in a practice that is acceptable to all involved parties.

More than their individualized ideals of marriage, the ability to negotiate a social situation where these ideals can be realized indicates that these young people possess a distinct conception of themselves as autonomous individuals. Or, put differently: A sense of individual identity will be a precondition for the ability to manoeuvre into a social situation that provides room for an individual identity.

8. Children

> I like — we all like — children, because — before, they said that women should have children to guarantee that their husbands did not divorce them (Aisha, 1st.gen. Tejer).

> I can not imagine a life without children. Because of one reason: I love children very much. That is why. I want to have children (Nora, 3rd.gen. Tejer).

Child-births as a consequence of an organized union of woman and man are probably one of the most universal characteristics of human societies. The connection between marriage and children has until quite recently been strong in Tunisia — both physically, as effective means of controlling the number of children have become available only lately, and also mentally, as the founding of a family has been the main objective of the union of marriage. Significant changes have taken place both in attitudes and in practice concerning child-births over the three generations, though. This section will deal with these changes in more detail.

8.1 Number of pregnancies, and means of limiting them

8.1.1 The two eldest generations

Fatoma, the Muaddaf grand-mother, had her first baby one year after she got married. The children continued to come; sometimes she had a pause of three months after a birth before she got pregnant again, sometimes eight months. Ten of the children she had grew up, five of them died. She was lucky to keep such a large number; her mother gave birth to twenty, but only eight of them survived. All women had such numbers of children at that time:

> We did not know any kind of planning but the traditional ones, and they were not efficient. Sometimes I used them, but I got pregnant. I wanted to plan, and to have a limited number of children, because my husband was a farmer, and I worked hard in the house. Moreover, I was young and

thin. But I could not, there was no possibility. All women had children until they stopped naturally.

Because she was too young to conceive when she married, Aisha, the Tejer grand-mother, did not have her first son until two years after her marriage. It was, however, normal to get pregnant right after the marriage for those who were physically able, she says. The only means of controlling the number of children that she knew of, was breast-feeding — and that was not a very reliable method. In the end, she had only five children left, though; a small number compared to the average of her generation.

The mother of Mustfa, the eldest Falleah, had sixteen children, but eleven of them died. He himself has six sons and two daughters still alive; a rather large number for his generation. He and his wife had to wait two years before they had their first son:

> We did not want to wait two years to have a child. It was from God. So it was not normal at that time.

After this first birth, God continued to be the only one in control of the fertility of Mustfa's wife.

By the time Aisha's daughter Habiba got married, few changes had taken place. She had her first child about one year after the marriage:

> It was normal. Directly after the marriage we should have a baby. They did not care if for example the wife was young, and could not have a baby at that age. Many of the girls died when having their first baby. I had big problems myself. I passed two days in labour — and after that I had my first daughter.

To Habiba Tejer and her husband Mahmoud, breast-feeding was the only means of limiting the number of children. The result has in their case been six girls and a boy who survived, and two boys and three girls "in the graveyard". "Every year we had a child", says Mahmoud, and laughs. They tried to limit the number, but were not very successful, as the means were so inefficient.

Fatoma's daughter Fatheia had a unique opportunity right from the start of her marriage: The doctor gave her "medicine from France" that made her able to choose when she wanted her children. But, she stresses, this was not at all normal at that time. First she and her husband decided to have two, and after that, another one. Jalila, the youngest child, was not planned. Practising family-planning at that time was not easy:

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All my relatives, and my mother-in-law said to me: How? It is impossible, how, it is few, four children are not sufficient at all. But Tahar and I insisted. We wanted only four children, to have them well brought up, and well educated, and able to live in a good situation. That is better than to have many children.

Fatheia's access to contraceptives was indeed exceptional; when Hassan, Mustfa's son , got married more than ten years later than her, he and his wife were still without any reliable way of controlling the number of children. They first had a son one year after the marriage; he died. Later, they had six children who grew up.

Little change in the general conditions for child-bearing took place between the first and the second generation; even if the mortality of children seems to have been slightly reduced, it still has been considerable for both generations. The women of both generations had their children at home, aided by midwives without any formal training. These generations of women were generally unable to control their fertility; the case of Fatheia must be regarded as exceptional, particularly when we see that even Hassan and his wife were unable to make use of modern contraceptives, more than ten years after Fatheia started using them.

8.1.2 The young generation

As Meriem and Leila are the only young women who are married, they are also the only young women who are mothers. Meriem, the daughter of Habiba and Mahmoud, has four children today; her first son was born nine months after the marriage:

> It is normal. Especially for non-educated girls. Directly after the marriage they should have children.

After the first birth, she has, however, been planning the number of children, and the spacing between them — by using an IUD, still by far the most used kind of contraceptive in Tunisia.

Leila Muaddaf did not want a child right after the marriage. She found herself unable to realize her wish, though:

> Before, I planned to wait one year before getting pregnant. But people — especially because — my brother-in-law got married one month before us, and his wife got pregnant at once. So people said: Why not you? Can you not have children? So I was obliged to get pregnant.

Today, Leila has two girls. Even though she had a bad start concerning family-planning, she is now practising it successfully.

Neither Meriem nor Leila have lost any children, and while their mothers and grand-mothers had their children at home, they have given birth at the hospital.

Mohammed and Lassad, Meriem Tejer's cousins, are the only fathers of the last generation, for evident reasons. Lassad has one son — he was born exactly one year after the marriage. Having a child the first year is still very normal, according to Lassad. He wants another child — preferably a girl — but not yet. Two children are enough, because

first of all, many children are tiring for the mother, and for the father, too.
And also, it is better to get two, and make them live in a good situation, than to have five, for example, and live in a bad situation.

Mohammed, Lassad's elder brother, also wants only two children. He already has one son, and the next is on the way. They waited three years after the marriage before they had the first one; he will be three years old when he gets a brother or sister. Both Mohammed and Lassad plan their families actively, and consider it a natural thing to do.

We see that while the two eldest generations of informants to a large extent have been unable to control their number of children and the timing of them, the informants of the third generation have access to effective contraceptives, and find it natural to use them. The mortality of children has furthermore decreased drastically for the third generation, a fact that places them in a situation where they are able to go through few pregnancies, and where they can rely on the plausibility that the children they bear will survive. This is indeed a different situation as compared to that of their parents and grand-parents.

8.2 Attitudes towards reproduction

8.2.1 The two eldest generations

There is one thing all the informants of the two eldest generations agree on: Having children is one of the main objectives of an adult person's life. All these informants are parents themselves, and they all would have experienced a life without children as meaningless.

They also agree on that they have had too many children. The only one being reasonably content with her number of children, is Fatheia Muaddaf.

She is also the only one who has been able to control the number of her pregnancies. All the others report a wish to have had the same possibility as her.

We see that, on the one hand, the elder informants cannot imagine a life without children. They also tend to have an understanding of marriage and children as more or less interlinked, as is evident from Mahmoud Tejer's way of expressing himself about marriage: "Marriage is important, so that the population grows." Participation in the human reproduction seems to be understood as a self-evident and necessary task.

On the other hand — with the exception of Fatheia, they find that their personal participation in this task has been too pervasive. They are unhappy with the large number of children they have brought into the world. The more exact considerations behind this view, however, vary:

To Fatoma, the eldest Muaddaf, a fundamental reason to have children is to produce inheritors who will continue the family and the property. The security in her old age is, however, important to her. But four children are sufficient — in contrast to the ten surviving children she had herself. She finds that young people today have too few children, as a result of wrong priorities:

> Because of the difficulties of life, and the high prizes. And in addition,
> people now want to travel, to entertain themselves, to wear nice clothes,
> to buy a car, to build houses. They imitate each other, and give
> importance to image.

According to Aisha, the Tejer grand-mother, child-bearing used to be a necessity for women in order to keep their husbands. She does, like the others, report that sterility used to be a common reason for divorce — for men. Another solution practised until it was abolished after independence, was that the man married another woman if he could not have children with the first one:

> What could we do about it? It was not good, especially if the husband
> kept his first wife, and got married to another one. That was really
> terrible.

The women, on the other hand, tended to accept the situation if their husbands were unable to give them children. Divorce is no solution to women, as it is to men, according to Aisha: "Because men can get married to another, and even socially ..."

Mustfa Falleah points out a practical problem related to this:

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The problem before was that there were no doctors and health-care. So sometimes the men divorced their wives, and married again, to find that they could not have children in the new marriage, either. There was no way of finding out whose fault it was. But the women said nothing, and stayed with their husbands, without having children. I think that a woman should also divorce a sterile husband, in order to have a family.

Few share this view with Mustfa, and no-one else puts it as categorically as him. Most of the others think that a sterile couple should stay together; it is God's will, and nobody's fault. In some cases it might create insolvable problems, though; in such situations divorce is the better solution.

In Mustfa's opinion, the possibility of family-planning is a sign of progress. He has eight children himself, but finds that two or three children are enough, particularly these days, when everything is so expensive.

Aisha's daughter Habiba and her husband Mahmoud share the same view on these things; they both wish that they had the possibility to have less children, mainly because they could not really afford to provide properly for the ones they have. It is better to have few children and give them all what they need. In addition, Habiba thinks about the health of the mother; having a lot of children is not good for a woman, it wears her out, and makes her less capable of bringing them up properly.

Children are important to Habiba, though. Like Fatoma, she is concerned with her old age; the children are her security, and this is essential to her.

Fatoma's daughter Fatheia shares the concern of her mother and Habiba; her children will take care of her when she grows old. Still, even with only four children, she actually finds that she had too many; three children are the ideal number to her. She is very content that her married daughter Leila practices family-planning, but thinks that she should have one baby more; two are not enough.

As the youngest of the eldest, Mustfa's son Hassan is somewhat surprisingly conservative in these matters: He is happy with his six children, and thinks that

planning, and getting less children, is good — but only for poor people, and those who are economically in the middle. But those who can afford a large number of children, why not? They should have many children.

While the elder women generally see the children-as-providers-aspect as an important reason to have children, none of the men mention it. They tend to find the continuity of property and family to be essential in this connection; they seem to regard their reproduction as some kind of social

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obligation. The ideal number of children is for all the elder informants lower than the number of living children they have had themselves. The exact number varies somewhat, but seems to be around three or four. This opinion is shared with the youngest women without education:

8.2.2 The young generation

Meriem, the daughter of Habiba and Mahmoud, has four children:

> I do not want to have more. That is sufficient. My husband wants more, but this is enough. I get tired like this.

Leila Muaddaf also finds four to be the ideal number. Still, she will not have that many children herself — she is satisfied with her two daughters:

> I decided to have that number because the children take all my time. And I feel that I am already growing old because of the children. So I want to take care of myself, not spend all my time with the children, and doing housework. I want to stop to take care of myself.

Still, having children is important to her:

> I think that it is very important to have children, especially because I am the kind of person who gets tired quickly, so I need someone to talk to. In the morning I have the housework and all that, but in the afternoon I have nothing to do. So I need a child to speak with — like that I feel that I have something to do.

Here, we see Leila contradicting herself: She wants only two children in order to have some time to herself; at the same time she finds children important in order to have something to occupy her time with. This is perhaps not so strange as it seems; she is probably thinking about two kinds of life here — her life as a housewife, and her life as a working woman. She has tried both; I will return to this problem of hers later.

Nora, Meriem's unmarried sister, does not plan to have more than two children. This is because of economic considerations, and because of her health, and also, she admits, because of her job. Anyway, she will wait at least three years after her marriage before she gets pregnant: "Because we have other things to do ..." Why does she want children at all, then?

> I cannot imagine a life without children. Because of one reason: I love children very much. That is why. I *want* to have children.

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If Jalila, Fatheia's youngest daughter, gets married, she will have one, or possibly two children only:

> I choose this number because with few children the mother can bring her children up better than with three or four. She has time to educate them, to bring them up better than with many children. (...) less children mean less problems, and less expenses.

Nora's cousin Lassad shares the view of the elder men concerning the purpose of getting children: "It is good to have children, so that my name continues to live, and does not die with me." His brother Mohammed's view differs considerably from his brother's; he finds children to be a good thing because they enrich the family life, and makes the every-day life more pleasant.

Fatheia's eldest son Tarek is rather reluctant towards the idea of getting children; still, he may have one, or maximum two:

> Because life is expensive. And the education is expensive, because we should educate our children very well. And I think that it is a responsibility. And I think — another thing — because normally, if it depends on me, perhaps I will never have any children at all. (..) Because perhaps they will — after, in the future, they will say, perhaps, "Why? Why was I born?" Perhaps they will blame us, their parents. Perhaps. (..) Because of the world-situation, and religion, and God, and — etcetera. Many problems.

Tarek's doubts about having children are shared by his brother Nejib. He claims other reasons for his attitude, though:

> I frankly do not like children. Perhaps the reason is the nature of my job. I am a primary-school teacher — I usually frequent children from the village I work in, children who are unfortunate, dirty, impolite, vulgar — future gangsters. In addition I think that I do not like children because I personally reject my childhood, that marked me a lot. (...) But, I think that I will have two. A girl and a boy — like that it will be balanced. But of course, it is not certain.

The young, uneducated girls seem to share their parents' ideal concerning number of children — at least in theory. Lassad, on the other hand, shares the elders' idea of the purpose of children, while he prefers to have less of them. In general, the young people without higher education seem to have much of the same conception of family and children as the previous generations.

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The educated young people, by contrast, report a rather divergent attitude towards their own reproduction. They tend to see children as less of a necessity, and seem to have considered the possibility of not having any as a realistic alternative to becoming parents.

8.3 Trends of change in reproductivity

Two features stand out as particularly remarkable in the above: Firstly, the change in ability to control one's fertility that has taken place from the two eldest generations to the last, and secondly, the difference in the way this ability is practised among the informants of the third generation.

Possibilities of family-planning
The informants of the two eldest generations report to have had little opportunity to control their fertility, as there were no effective kinds of contraceptives available to them. Fatheia Muaddaf, who got "medicine from France", is the only exception to this rule.

Even if, as we saw in chapter two, family-planning programmes from the beginning were a main priority for the post-colonial regime, the early effects of the programs were moderate. By 1968, only 3.6 per cent of the married, fertile Tunisian women practised contraception. The situation of most of the elder informants is representative for the general situation in Tunisia at that time. Fatheia's "medicine from France" was indeed a rare possibility when she started using it in the late fifties — not only in Bled, but all over the country.

As a result of the lack of means of controlling the number of children, most of the women of the two eldest generations have been through a tremendous number of pregnancies. This tendency was further increased by their early marriages; as we saw in the previous section, the timing of these women's marriages to a considerable degree corresponded with the start of their fertile life-course phase. As a consequence, these women have been through close to as many pregnancies as are physically possible.

The high mortality of children reduced the number of children actually surviving — with more than a half, in some cases. Still, it is evident that the total effects of these women's reproductive situation — constant pregnancies, the care of the surviving children, and the loss of those dying — must have resulted in a situation where their reproductive role has taken the better part of their time and energy throughout their adult lives.

As reported in chapter two, the child-mortality rates dropped markedly during the late sixties. At that time, the women of the second generation

were approaching the end of their reproductive period; these changes had little impact on their reproductive situation.

By the time the children of these women got married, remarkable changes in the objective structures concerning reproductivity had taken place, however. First of all, effective means of contraception had been made available to those who wanted to make use of them. Secondly, the child-mortality had decreased to an extent that made it irrelevant for the decision of how many children to have. Together, these two factors have produced a situation where couples today are able to plan their families quite well, if they want to.

As we saw in chapter two, the number of women who actually make use of the available contraceptives have also risen remarkably since the late sixties: By the end of the eighties, half of the married, fertile Tunisian women practised some kind of contraception. This indicates a change also in the cognitive and motivating structures concerning reproductivity during this period.

The increase in the practice of contraception among the informants is even more remarkable; all the married informants of the youngest generation plan their families actively, and those who are not yet married, expect to do so. The ways in which they practice family-planning, however, vary significantly. The variation corresponds with their level of education:

Ways of practicing family-planning

The married young informants with low education all had a child within the first year of their marriages. According to Meriem Tejer, this is very common, "especially for the non-educated girls". As we have seen, Leila Muaddaf tried to break with this pattern, but the pressure from the surroundings was too strong; she had to give in and become pregnant soon after her marriage.

To the elder informants, it seems to have been important to have the first child as soon as possible after their marriages. They report to have tried to limit the number of children in general, but none of them attempted to postpone the birth of the first child, even though, according to Habiba, there was a considerable risk involved in the first pregnancy, as a result of the mothers' low age.

The birth of the first child seems to have been of some particular importance, both for the elder generations, and for those of the young generation who have little education. There may be several reasons for this. Mahmoud expresses a common view on the nature of marriage when he states that "marriage is important, so that the population grows". There seems to be general agreement between these informants that physical

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reproductivity is a main purpose of marriage. There may have been little reason to postpone the fulfilling of this main purpose.

There is, however, probably more to this than a general wish to reproduce oneself. As discussed in chapter three, it has, according to the principles of the traditional North-African social organization, been the birth of the first child rather than the ceremony of marriage that has consolidated the young wife's position in her family-in-law. The first child has secured the woman's married status. Aisha confirms the relevance of this point when she states that "before, they said that women should have children to guarantee that their husbands did not divorce them". This emphasizes the importance of women's traditional role as physical reproducers discussed in chapter three. The birth of the first child is a confirmation of a wife's reproductive ability, and of her value as a married woman. The fact that women's presumed infertility is reported to have been a common reason for divorce in the generations of the elder informants, further supports this argument.

As we saw in the previous section, the young informants with low education both got married, and practice their married life in accordance with traditions. Accordingly, the young women hold positions as traditional housewives in their marriages. There is no evident reason why their role as reproducers should have lost its relevance — both to themselves, and to the surroundings. Proving one's reproductive ability at an early stage in the marriage may still be of importance for these young women. Leila Muaddaf's story about how she was unable to postpone her first pregnancy confirms this argument: "So people said: Why not you? Can you not have children? So I was obliged to get pregnant."

None of the academically trained informants seem to feel personally concerned by the custom of having a child as soon as possible after marriage: Mohammed and his wife waited three years after their marriage before they had their first child. Nora, his cousin, is planning to wait at least as long as them, "because we have other things to do ...". This seems to imply two things. First of all, the academically trained young people tend to be socially able to postpone the birth of their first child; compared to Leila, they seem to be exposed to less social pressure. Secondly, they are evidently interested in making use of this opportunity; unlike most of the other young informants, they seem to find the postponement of the first child to be of significant value. Young people — and particularly young women — with higher education are perceived differently by the social surroundings than the young people without higher education — they are not required to prove their reproductive abilities in the same way. The young academically trained informants perceive themselves differently from

the other informants of the third generation — their reproductive role seems to hold a less dominant position in their lives.

After having the first child, the young informants with low education plan the number and timing of the following child-births. They do, however, want more children than their academically trained relatives. They tend to find three to four children to be the ideal number, an opinion they share with their parents and grand-parents. The main reasons reported for not having more children also corresponds with those given by the elder informants, and relate to economy and the mother's health.

The same reasons for limiting the number of children are also given by the academically trained young informants. Their preferred number of children is, however, only one or two. This may indicate that they have other and higher standards for the necessary economic means that are required in order to provide for a child in a proper way; the fact that their consideration for the well-being of the mother includes her professional career, may also account for their lower ideal number of children.

As remarkable as the differences in preferred numbers of children, however, is the different way in which the educated informants reflect on having children. First of all, they tend to relate both the question of having children at all, and the question of when to have them, more directly to other aspects of personal long-term plans for the future. In addition, more philosophical ways of treating the topic seem to be relevant for at least some of them: Tarek Muaddaf, for instance, seriously considers his *right* to bring children into the world. This stands in sharp contrast to Lassad, the young male informant with low education who wants to have children who can carry on his name.

The post-colonial changes in objective structures relevant to the human reproduction have put the third generation of informants in a situation where they are able to control their fertility from the beginning of marriage. The ways in which they make practical use of this ability, however, vary significantly, and in correspondence with their level of education.

The possibility of the lowly educated young informants to practice what one may call the "traditional ideal reproductive life" implies a number of central changes in their married life-course phase, as compared to the one of the elder informants. The reproductive phase of the young women take markedly less time and energy than the one of the elder female informants: First of all, the later marriages of the young generation postpone the start of their reproductive phase significantly. Secondly, the lower number of children leads to an earlier end of their reproductive phase. And thirdly, the fact that they loose fewer children on the way, and in general go through fewer pregnancies, makes the reproductive phase less intense. One may

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expect that this change in the "traditional" reproductive pattern has led to a considerable shift in time-use, and in the way in which the role of a "traditional" wife and mother is performed today. This may in turn lead to a change in the general perceptions of wife and mother over time.

No fundamental changes in the traditional perceptions of married women seem to have taken place yet, however. The way Leila Muaddaf sees her life shows that for a married woman in a traditional social setting, children are still a necessity. Without them, she would have nothing to do she says. Her days would have been empty. There does not seem to be any role available to these women that could replace the reproductive one — if they are not mothers, they can not be anything else. The traditional idea of a married woman seems to be unchanged — the way in which the idea is practised has evidently been through a change during the post-colonial period, however.

The academically trained married women have "other things to do" than having children. They are allowed to do these "other things" by their social surroundings; the pressure on them to prove their reproductive abilities seems to be weaker than on their lowly educated contemporaries. They are conceived of in another way by their families and social surroundings.

It is even clearer that the young educated informants also conceive of themselves as different from the others. They have, as a result of their education, other essential purposes in life than having children. They also reflect on reproduction in a more "individual" way than the others: Nora wants to become a mother because she loves children, while Nejib is reluctant towards becoming a father because he does not like children. Compared to the considerations of the lowly educated young informants, who want children because it is necessary and normal, or because they want their name to survive, the reflections of the academically trained young informants are remarkable, and suggest that they understand their reproductivity in a quite different way from the traditional one.

Certain post-colonial structural changes — the decrease in child-mortality, and the introduction of contraceptives — have resulted in a situation where people today are able to plan their reproductivity. It does, however, seem as if it is other post-colonial structural changes — the introduction of higher education — that influence the way in which the young people want to practice their reproductivity, and the way in which they are expected to practice it by the social surroundings. Concerning children, higher education seems to lead to a more individualized approach, a tendency that in turn

may be seen as an indicator of the existence of an individualized sense of identity among those who have such an education. On the other hand, the lack of higher education seems to correspond to a more family-directed and collective way of perceiving one's physical reproduction, and to, one may assume, a more family-directed and collective way of perceiving oneself.

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9. Education

The topic of education and its impact on the lives of the Beldiyins has already been introduced. We have seen that the level of education varies considerably among the informants, and that higher education particularly tends to have an effect on several other central aspects of the lives of those who have obtained it. This section will examine changes related to the introduction of compulsory school after the independence, and the informants' personal experiences with these changes.

As we saw in chapter two, access to formal education was practically non-existent for most Tunisians before the independence. The *kutteb* (koranic school) was the only institution of education available for the vast majority of the population. In theory, this system of education could lead all the way to the Zitouna University in Tunis; most people were only briefly in contact with the *kutteb*, however. As we shall see, this was an educational alternative that in practice, if not in theory, was offered to the male part of the population only.

The *kutteb* may be characterized as a semi-formal system of education; it was not compulsory, and the studies were not following a standard time-frame. Each pupil stayed as long as desired by his family, and followed his own pace in the studies.

The introduction of compulsory school[13] for both boys and girls shortly after the independence constituted a major change in post-colonial Tunisia. We shall now see how significant this change has been for the lives of the Beldiyin informants:

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[13] The present Tunisian educational system is in most respects similar to the French. All children spend six years in primary school. (Before, children could be expelled also from primary school, as the case of Meriem illustrates. This rule was changed in the early 1980's.) There are two kinds of secondary education: Three years of professional training for those who do not qualify for theoretical secondary education, that lasts for seven years. Of these seven years, the four last are specialized. Theoretical secondary school is completed by Examen Baccalaureate, that qualifies for university-studies. These may be of either two, four, or six years' duration.

9.1 The two eldest generations of informants

> There is no woman of my age in Bled who has gone to school (Fatoma, 1st.gen. Muaddaf).

> I thought about that [I wanted to go to school]. Especially since the Kutteb was near our house, so I saw the boys going ... But at that time girls could not go to the Kutteb (Habiba, 2nd.gen. Tejer).

> My father tried to make me go to the Kutteb, but I refused. I preferred to go with the cows (Mahmoud, 2nd.gen. Tejer).

9.1.1 Level of education

None of the women of the two eldest generations have ever had any formal education. As the quote of Fatoma, the Muaddaf grand-mother, shows, this was the normal situation for all the women of her age. According to Habiba, Aisha's daughter, this was also the case for her generation of Beldiyin-girls. Fatheia, the daughter of Fatoma, was in brief contact with the *kutteb*, but had to stop. She gives the following explanation of why she could not go to school:

> I never went to school, because of my grandfather — he was very severe. He could not imagine that a girl could go to school. For him, a girl who went out was a bad girl, a girl who went out, was not good. And all people would see her — so it was not good.

The women all report to have wanted an education already when they were young:

> I thought about that. Especially since the *kutteb* was near our house, so I saw the boys going ... But at that time girls could not go to the *kutteb*

says Habiba Tejer. Fatheia felt the same way; she did, however, find a way to learn at least something:

> I liked very much to go to school, especially since I was clever. But at that time girls could not make decisions for themselves. When my brothers came back from school, I used to do mathematics with them, and usually I was right — I did the calculations in my head, and usually I was right.

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Her mother, Fatoma, tried the same thing; she asked her brother to teach her to write, but she never succeeded in learning it. She reports that her only formal education is some *surats* from the Koran, enough to enable her to pray. Aisha, Habiba's mother, is in the same situation.

Fatheia attended *kutteb* for a short period; formally, it was open to girls. She had to stop, however, because her attendance was found morally reprehensible. None of the other elder women attended *kutteb* at all, for the same reason. They say that no girls of their age did so; together, these facts indicate that this educational institution in practice was unavailable to the Beldiyin girls. Even for most boys, a short stay at the *kutteb* was all they could count on, however. Like in the case of Mustfa, the eldest Falleah:

> When I was young, first I went to the *kutteb* — after that, my father brought me with him to the land, to work there.

His period as a pupil was not long enough to teach him to read and write; today he knows neither.

Mahmoud never went to *kutteb* at all. "My father tried to make me go to the *kutteb*, but I refused. I preferred to go with the cows", he laughs. After independence he attended an evening-course for a period; he was, however, too busy with his work to be able to complete it. Today he knows how to write his first name, and he has his own system for the books of his shop; nobody else understands it.

Mustfa's son Hassan is the one of the elder men who attended *kutteb* for the longest period; he sat for the exam that would allow him to continue on a higher level. He did not pass it and dropped out after that. As a result of his *kutteb*-attendance he is today able to read and write Arabic, however.

While the women report that they missed schooling already when they were children, Mahmoud did what he could to avoid it — the interest in education seems to have been varying during the childhood of these informants. How have the informants of the two eldest generations experienced their adult life without knowledge of reading and writing?

9.1.2 Experiences with illiteracy in adult life

With the exception of Hassan, all the informants of the two eldest generations regret that they never received a formal education. The reasons for their regrets seem, however, to be somewhat different for the women and the men:

The women report to be bothered by a general feeling of being ignorant; in addition they would like to be literate. Education as a way to get an occupation has, however, not been on their minds:

> It is not a question of occupation or work; I want to study to know — know how to write and read, and to know many things about life. I do not need money. I have a husband who provides for me. So it is not a question of money.

These are the words of Fatheia Muaddaf. Her mother Fatoma expresses her similar experience this way:

> I wish that I had gone to school, and I miss it a lot. For example, when I went to Mecca, I wished that I could read and write. I also travelled to the south of Tunisia. I discovered many traditions there that were new to me, and then I wished that I could make notes of everything that was new to me. I would like to know things, and to be able to write whatever I like, make notes of things. But I never thought about work.

The women have, however, not experienced much difficulties in their daily lives as a result of their illiteracy. As Habiba says:

> I do not have any difficulties. Especially since my husband is like me, he did not go to school — .

Fatheia shares Habiba's experiences to a large degree:

> I do not find many difficulties. But in some cases, like if I want to phone somebody, and I do not know the number, or if somebody phones to me, and asks me to take a message — then I wish that I knew how to write and read.

These women still seem to live under conditions where literacy to a large extent is superfluous. Illiteracy is a handicap mostly in rather exceptional situations; connected to travels, or other outstanding events. As only about two per cent of the households in Bled has a phone, the dilemma of Fatheia may be said to be a problem of luxury. In short, the main concern for these women seems to be their lack of general knowledge. They would have liked to know more of the world.

The men, by contrast, do not report to suffer from a similar feeling of general ignorance. Mustfa Falleah has, however, a special interest that he would have liked to cultivate:

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I wish that I could have gone to school so that I could have studied the Koran, to know the religion of Mohammed, and the Christianity — to compare, and to know both religions.

Mahmoud Tejer misses an education for two reasons:

Because, especially when a man grows old and has nothing to do, he can at least read a newspaper, or the Koran. (..) I find many difficulties in my daily life, especially in my job. For example, if somebody asks for a receipt, I cannot help him. Or if somebody buys something from me without paying, and I want to write it down, I cannot do that.

Being able to read and write, Mustfa's son Hassan does not regret not having further education — on the contrary:

I have not missed education, because — those who passed the exam [that I failed], were appointed as teacher assistants. At that time, they got fifty dinars a month. And I earned more than them in my job. So I was happy that I did not succeed in the exam.

The men tend to have a more practical attitude to education than the women; their needs seem to be more specialized, directed towards jobs, income, and also religion. In addition, they have more difficulties in their daily lives as a result of their illiteracy, mostly in connection with their professional lives. Still, none of them report to have experienced serious problems caused by their lack of formal education; their functional difficulties do not seem to be of fundamental character.

The perceptions of education seem to be rather different for the two genders. Their thoughts about the education of the children and grand-children also reflect this gendered divergence in views:

The eldest women, Aisha and Fatoma, to some degree share the men's practical attitude to education: If it does not lead to increased income, it is not very important. They do, however, also express an understanding of the view of their daughters Habiba and Fatheia, who find other values of the education of their children more important than the economic output. Habiba has the following evaluation of the situations of two of her daughters — a housewife without higher education, and a teacher:

There is a big difference between the two, because — it is not only a question of how to live, how to eat — money. It is also a question of culture. If, for example, somebody speaks or discusses something, the one without education cannot understand him. This is the most important thing for me.

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Her husband Mahmoud has a quite different view on the benefit of education for his children:

> I think that those of my children who could not carry on their studies, live better now. I speak of the economic situation. They live better than those who carried on their studies.

"What about their culture? Is that the same also?" Habiba asks him. "Culture? What is culture?" Mahmoud answers her, and laughs.

Mustfa Falleah and his son Hassan share Mahmoud's material approach to the evaluation of their children's education; Mustfa sees no difference between the lives of his educated and non-educated children, while Hassan seems to find a slight advantage for those who have studied — their chances of getting a well paid job are, according to him, somewhat better.

In spite of this evident divergence in views on the value of education, all the informants of the two elder generations somewhat surprisingly agree on one thing: The children should study as long as possible — both girls and boys. As the men mainly evaluate education on the basis of material gains, and as they seem to think that studies do not necessarily lead to a better economic situation, there is in fact no evident reason explaining their positive attitude to higher education. I will return to this problem later.

Now, let us see how the youngest generation experiences the need for and consequences of education:

9.2 Educational level of the young generation

> I think there is a big difference between my life and the lives of the educated women. I think that they are freer than me (Meriem, 3rd.gen. Tejer).

> They [the educated] do not live better than us, than me. Because economically I do not think that they earn more than me, and even in the way of life — (...) — the rhythm of their life is very tiring (Lassad, nephew of Mahmoud Tejer).

After independence there has been a tremendous development in the educational sector in Tunisia. Still, as mentioned earlier, the actual level of education varies considerably within the younger generations. Fewer Tunisian girls than boys continue their studies; doing so, however, seems to have larger consequences for the girls, as we shall see:

9.2.1 The young women

Meriem Tejer failed and was expelled from school after only four years of education. Today, she regrets this:

> I feel very sorry about my education, and I think that if I could, now, go back to school — to the first class in primary school — I would do that, and study from the beginning.

The main reason for her regrets is the same as for her mother — a wish for general knowledge:

> The important thing for me is to be educated, to be cultivated. So, if I could choose — [I would like to be] a primary school teacher, for example. Because the important thing for me is not to get a job, but to be educated, to know things in life. That is the important thing.

Like Meriem, Leila Muaddaf is today a full-time housewife, and without any professional training. She studied for thirteen years, however, and did not stop because she failed, but because she was to get married:

> For me it is not O.K. I regret that I did not continue my studies, and I think that it is better for a girl not to get married or engaged while she is studying. Because she cannot compromise between her studies and a husband or fiancé. It is better for her to get engaged after her studies.

As accounted for earlier, Leila was not in a position to influence the timing of her marriage. She is thus not to blame for the situation she is in today. Her mother Fatheia also recognizes that it was wrong to have her married at such an early stage in life, and does not want to repeat the same mistake with her younger daughter Jalila:

> I think that the life of Jalila will be better, of course. Because with Leila — for me, that is a loss. She studied until the *bac*,[14] and now she is in such a dilemma: She cannot carry on her studies — with her children she lost that. And with her bac she cannot do anything. So for me that was a lesson. With Jalila, I advise her not to get engaged until she finishes her studies. Like that, I think that she will be better off than her sister.

Jalila has taken Fatheia's advice — so far she has studied for seventeen years, and she is still unattached. To her, the most important incentive to

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[14] Examen Baccalaureate.

study is the study in itself; she appreciates her life as a student. Gaining qualifications for a professional life is also of importance to her. In general, her decision to study is guided by individual concerns; the possibility that the family might need her economic support has not been on her mind.

Habiba's daughter Nora has finished her studies — after eighteen years of education, including four at the university. Her reasons for choosing a higher education are the same as Jalila's — she wanted to be qualified for a professional career, and also to experience life as a student. She finds this period to have been very valuable to her:

> It taught me a lot, more than it changed me. I knew it would allow me to see, to know something new — to get many experiences, to know many people of different minds.

All these young women recognize the importance of a higher education — particularly for girls. Meriem sees it like this:

> I think that there is a big difference between my life and the lives of the educated women. I think that they are freer than me. First of all, economically they are better off than me — they have their own wages, and — for example, they can go out whenever they want. They can for example drive a car, and — they live better. Better than me. I am in the house doing housework — that is all.

Leila has the same idea:

> There is of course a difference between someone who studies until the bac, and someone who has a higher education. There is a difference intellectually. The one who continues her studies in higher schools is more cultivated than the other.

Both Jalila and Nora share their lowly educated sisters' view on the value of higher education. And as they have had the privilege of going to the university themselves, their basis for comparing the lives of educated girls to the lives of girls with little education are even better. This is how Nora sees it:

> Educated and non-educated people in the same family do not live in the same situations. For example, my sisters, who are not educated, have never left Bled. Or at most, they have been to Tunis. So they have not had this experience of — at university — to live alone, for example, in a dormitory — to take this responsibility. To meet with students from different towns, from the south, from — many towns in Tunisia. Even

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from outside, from foreign countries. So this experience has — I think — an importance.

The importance of higher education for girls is recognized by all the young women, whether they have one or not. Like for their mothers, the elements of general knowledge, and also personal development, represent significant benefits. Academical training seems, however, to imply even more important changes; according to the informants, the changes in a girl's life caused by higher education are quite fundamental. Meriem's evaluation of her own situation illustrates this point very well — and Nora's evaluation is an even better illustration of the fact that the main consequence of higher education for girls is not the potential economic or educational gain, but a completely different kind of life. The fact that early obligations towards a husband or fiancé seem to disqualify the girl for higher education, suggests that plans for a traditional married life and higher education are mutually excluding aspects of young Beldiyin girls' lives.

9.2.2 The young men

After obtaining his primary-school certificate, Nora's cousin Lassad decided to leave school and start working with his father in the construction-trade. He has therefore only six years of education, but has never regretted his choice. In no way does he envy those who have completed their studies:

> They do not live better than us, than me. Because economically I do not think that they earn more than me, and even in the way of life — of course, those who continue their studies will get married to a working woman, both of them will be working outside — the rhythm of their life is very tiring. Contrary to that, I got married to a woman of the house; I come back to my house and find that all is ready — the house is clean, my son is clean, lunch is ready — . So I think that I live better than them.

Mohammed has more than three times longer education than his brother Lassad; nineteen years all together. It was important to him to get a higher education for several reasons:

> Because in Tunisia it is the first way to become a — man. And to have your independence from your family, from society — . (...) Here, without studies, there is nothing.

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Individual independence seems to have been a significant incentive for him to continue his studies. At the same time the lack of individual independence — or rather, his obligations towards his family as the eldest son — was an equally important reason to both start studying, and to stop:

> I have always thought about it — since I was small, I knew that I was the biggest boy. Not everybody has this responsibility. My cousin, for example, has never had to think about it. His father (Mahmoud) manages on his own. (...) So, I both had to start studying, and to finish studying quickly, because my family needed me. My father was getting old, and they had no other income than his wages. And my brother Lassad had done a lot to help them — it was my turn, and I could not be selfish.

Mohammed thinks that education makes a large difference for the kind of life you lead:

> My wife and I, we have — "notre propre vie". For my friends without university-education — they are tied to the family, tied up by the customs — for us, it is a little bit separated, this.

Tarek, the eldest Muaddaf-son, studied even longer than Mohammed; he has twenty years of education. He denies that he had any choice but to continue his studies:

> No, no. Because, to get a job in Tunisia — I was obliged. (...) To get a job in Tunisia, you must have a minimum-level [of education]. Licence, a diploma of engineering — it is — not sufficient to have a very good situation, but a normal situation.

Still, he felt no economic obligation toward his family to continue his studies. It was his personal wish for a decent job, and also his interest in his particular discipline that were the most important incentives. While Mohammed finds absolutely nothing to envy those without higher education, Tarek thinks that they have one advantage:

> Perhaps the financial situation. Money, perhaps. Sometimes we feel that — we want to do many things, but the lack of money ... perhaps. That is the only thing.

As Mohammed, he finds that education has a large effect on people's way of thinking. His brother Nejib does not wholly agree with this:

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High education can never qualify the individual. It is rather the individual who may be able to enrich his personality through higher education. Generally it is the person who manages to do this that succeeds in life.

Nejib has got sixteen years of education; he stopped studying after one year at university, because he was not allowed to study the discipline he wanted. He has no regrets about not completing his studies; what he does regret, is not having been able to study psychology, as he wanted. To him personally, work and career does not mean much; there are other and more significant values in life, he says.

Like the elder men, Lassad does not recognize personal development as a consequence of higher education. The economic aspect is the most important criterium of evaluation also to him. The young men who have a higher education, by contrast, find the development in personal attitudes to be one of the most important consequences of long studies. As Nejib points out, this is not a consequence of necessity, but at least one will have a better chance of improving one's personality when studying. The professional and economic aspects are also important to them. Here, one should notice Tarek's statement: He envies the uneducated their economic situation. Like in the case of the elder generations, we find a rather ambivalent and confusing perception of the value of an education: At the same time as Mohammed states that "without studies, there is nothing", it is generally recognized by the young male informants that the economic benefits of higher education may be limited.

9.3 Trends of change in educational practices

Two features stand out as particularly interesting in the above: The drastic increase in the availability of formal education since independence, and the distinct gendered difference in the ways this development is evaluated by the informants.

Effects of increased access to formal eduation
According to the informants, the *kutteb* — the only available institution of education in Bled during the colonial period — was frequented by boys only. Boys normally spent a relatively short period of their childhood as pupils at the *kutteb* — if they went there at all. The purpose of most of the boys' *kutteb*-attendance seems to have been a minimum of religious education as much as literacy. For the elder informants the result is that only the youngest of the elders, Hassan, is able to read and write; the rest of them are more or less illiterate.

Information presented in chapter two suggests that the colonial educational situation in Bled may be representative for the general situation in Tunisia at that time. At independence, fifteen per cent of the Tunisian population were literate. The distribution of literacy among the genders was, however, rather unequal: while twenty-five per cent of the men could read and write, only four per cent of the women had these skills.

The Tunisian women were thus almost completely excluded from the available institutions of education until independence. According to the elder female informants, the main reason for their exclusion was the arena in which the *kutteb* was situated; girls were not supposed to leave the *dar*, and as the *kutteb* was "outside", it was not possible for them to go there. As Fatheia states, "I never went to school because of my grand-father — he was very severe. He could not imagine that a girl should go out to school".

As we saw in chapter two, the establishment of a nation-wide compulsory school system was a main ambition of the post-colonial regime. As a result of this ambition, ninety-two per cent of the children in Tunisia were enroled in first grade in primary school eight years after independence. Other information presented indicate that the actual duration of the education of many of these children was relatively short; still, the fact remains that the vast majority of the young Tunisian girls by 1964 had been introduced to a new life-course phase — the first phase that was situated "outside". In less than ten years, the insurmountable barrier preventing women's presence "outside" had been removed.

The actual increase of literacy in the population is only one of several significant consequences of the introduction of compulsory school. At least as important, seen in a perspective of social change, is the opening up of the "outside" to the girls.

As we have seen, formal education held a rather insignificant position in most people's lives before independence. Except from boys' possible *kutteb*-attendance, education was no explicit and standardized institution, but an integrated part of the general up-bringing. It was taken care of by the family; the education thus belonged to the private sphere, and it also to a large degree took place on the "inside" arena. The compulsory school system introduced a number of major changes in this traditional educational setting. The changes concerned both the actual nature of the childhood, and the kind of knowledge that was provided as a part of their education:

One significant change was that a large part of the children's time was spent away from home. This time was invested in an institution of a quite different structure and purpose than previous institutions known to the local community. The structure of the *kutteb* was at most semi-formal; it was not

obligatory, and it followed no standardized time-schedule. Its curriculum was overall religious; training in Islam was the main purpose, while literacy was a possible consequence of this training rather than a main aim.

The compulsory school represented quite different values; the values of the new society the regime wanted to create. First of all, the institution was organized according to national standards for educational practices. It contributed to diminish the regional isolation that until then had characterized the Tunisian society. Secondly, the education was secularized; Islam was reduced to a subject among others, while it earlier had constituted the framework within which the entire education took place. Thirdly, new kinds of knowledge were given priority; as a part of this, literacy was promoted to a main aim. And finally, the education of boys and girls became more equal, while it earlier had been characterized by complementarity rather than equality, as argued in chapter three.

The introduction of compulsory school after independence thus had a number of significant consequences: A drastic increase in literacy, a general opening up of the "outside" for girls, and, more specifically, the introduction of a first "outside" female life-course phase. It led to a reduction of the qualitative differences in the childhoods of boys and girls, and a "de-domestication" of a significant part of their time. In addition, it contributed to the unification of the new state on a national level, and led to a secularization of and general shift in central elements of children's education. Together with the fact that less than ten years after independence, more than ninety per cent of the children of first grade age in Tunisia was enroled in this new institution, and the fact that the trend of school-attendance has been steadily increasing since then, this makes it reasonable to argue that the introduction of compulsory school has been one of the most significant single factors of social change in post-colonial Tunisia.

The introduction of compulsory schooling contains a considerable potential for general social change. However, the stories of the young informants indicate that the direct effects of access to formal education *as such* on individual life-courses have been variable. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Meriem and Leila, the young female informants without higher education, today lead adult lives that in central respects are similar to the lives of their mothers', and even their grand-mothers'. This also seems to be the case concerning the role of literacy and formal education in their adult lives:

Above, we have seen that the elder women report to have few practical problems with their illiteracy in their daily lives; one may therefore assume that their life as housewives do not require literary abilities. This also

seems to be the case for the lowly educated young women. Meriem states that she would have liked to start her education all over again, from first grade in primary school. One may thus assume that whatever she learned during her four years at school has been forgotten, which again may imply that she has had little use for it after dropping out of school. At the same time, Leila, who after thirteen years of studies evidently is literate, complains that her life as a housewife gives no room for her favourite activity, reading. This information suggests that these young women's formal education has little influence on their practices as full-time Beldiyin housewives; like their mothers' and grandmothers', their lives do not include literary activities to any significant extent. Today's "traditional" young women's practices do not seem to have changed much as a result of the younger housewives' educational background.

Accordingly, we see that the "outside" life-course phase introduced to the lives of these young women as a result of their school-attendance has not been followed by other phases similarly linked to the "outside". After dropping out of school, Meriem for the most part stayed home until her marriage. After she got married, she has been a full-time housewife, occupied with traditional female "inside" tasks. The same is at present the case for Leila, even though she has also had other experiences, as we shall see in the next chapter.

The same tendency of low concrete change in literary practices from the elder generations to the younger is also evident in the case of Lassad, the young male informant without higher education. He chose to leave school after six years of education, to join his father in the construction-business. He probably has more use for his literary abilities in his job than the young housewives have in theirs; still, the fact that he does the same work as his illiterate father, suggests that his job does not require advanced literary abilities, either.

The concrete way in which these young informants lead their adult lives does not seem to have changed much from the practices of their elder relatives, even though they, unlike the elders, all have periods of compulsory school-attendance behind them. It also seems as if the knowledge they obtained at school have limited practical relevance for their present adult lives. The introduction of formal education *as such* has apparently not resulted in radical changes of the "traditional" adult practices.

This argument is supported by the informants' own evaluation and categorization of education; as we have seen above, they all stress the importance of *higher* education, rather than of education as such, as a factor causing significant change in general conditions of existence. The fact that

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academic training changes one's life is recognized by all the informants; the actual way in which they evaluate the consequences of higher education varies, however, according to the informants' gender:

Gendered evaluations of formal education
The women, independently of their age and level of education, tend to emphasize the aspects of personal development that an education implies. They relate this aspect to higher education especially, and recognize that it has particularly large consequences for the living-conditions of women. Meriem's thoughts about the lives of her academically trained equals in gender and age illustrate this point well: "I think that they are freer than me. First of all, economically they are better off than me — they have their own wages, and — for example, they can go out whenever they want. They can for example drive a car, and — they live better. Better than me. I am in the house, doing housework — that is all."

The women informants see higher education as a gate to an entirely different life for girls. Academic training provides women with knowledge, freedom, economic independence, and a key to the "outside".

In line with this picture, the women with little or no education seem to be aware of their own ignorance, as compared to the knowledge of the highly educated women; they report this feeling of ignorance to be a main result of their lack of education — more bothersome than the practical problems caused by their illiteracy. The same perception of higher education is also shared by the young women who have obtained it. Nora reports that she finds the personal development implicit in her job-career most important, and, like Jalila, she explicitly states that the economic gain is not so important. The women's understanding of education may thus be characterized as *generalist*; both in the sense that they tend to evaluate the total concept as important, rather than particular aspects of it, and in the sense that they report to see it as a gate to an entirely different kind of women's life.

The male informants, by contrast, reveal a more *particularist* attitude in their evaluation of higher education. The men with little or no education recognize no other aspect of higher education than its potential economic output in a later job-situation; they do not admit that *higher* education has any value in itself.

The elder male informants also approach the question of education *as such* in a similar manner. First of all, they report to have more practical problems with their illiteracy in their daily lives than the women. Their problems are related to particular situations; their occupational life, and their religious practices. They seem to have a larger practical need for

literacy than the women, a fact that may explain their tendency of giving education of shorter duration more value.

The young men who have obtained an academic training do, like the women, recognize a higher education's cultivating and developing qualities, and find it significant. Still, to a larger degree than the academically trained women, they emphasize the economic aspect of higher education, the aspect that their lowly educated male relatives find so important. All the men tend to evaluate education according to practical and economic criteria, while the women seem to be more occupied with the general effects of education on the individuals' — and then particularly the women's — lives.

The divergence in men and women's attitudes towards both formal education in general, and higher education in particular, may find an explanation in the principles of traditional North-African social organization discussed in chapter three:

Men are traditionally producers and providers, the responsible for the material situation of the family-group. Men who live according to these principles for gendered division of work will naturally evaluate the introduction of formal education mainly according to these principles. For such men, an education's value will equal its potential to improve the performance of their provider-role. This will particularly be the case in the evaluation of academic training, that clearly is an alternative professional qualification, and an alternative way of fulfilling the provider-role. For "traditional" men, higher education will tend to represent a modern approach to the fulfilment of a traditional male role, rather than a radically new feature in their lives.

Women's traditional roles are, by contrast, related to non-material functions, as physical, moral, and practical reproducers of the family-group. The direct relevance of formal education for their practice of these functions appear to be lower. The stories of Meriem and Leila, who have education, but report not using it in their situation as housewives, support this assumption. Education will appear as a qualitatively new, and — strictly speaking — useless value, seen in relation to their traditional gender-roles. One may assume that as a result of this situation, the women will tend to evaluate formal education independently from their own practical use for it, and in a more general way.

This argument is further supported by the women's reported perceptions of higher education as a gate to a qualitatively different kind of women's life. Formal education qualify women for a new life. To men, by contrast, education represents an alternative way of qualifying for the practice of their traditionally defined gender-roles. As this discussion is closely linked to the topic of the next chapter, occupational life, it will be continued there.

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We have seen that personal experiences with the post-colonial system of compulsory school have led to major concrete changes in the adult life-courses of some of the young informants only. A *certain level* of formal education, rather than formal education *as such*, seems required in order to obtain significant changes in the total life-courses of the young informants.

The low degree of actual change in individual life-courses as a result of a shorter formal education does, however, not contradict my argument concerning the post-colonial introduction of compulsory school as a major factor of general social change. Significant changes in the social conditions of existence for both men and women are reported to have taken place since independence. All the elder female informants claim that today they experience no restrictions on their freedom to move "outside"; in sharp contrast to the situation earlier, they may now leave their *dar* as they like. In addition, the traditional veil, the *sefseri*, is no longer required for younger women when they go out. It would be reasonable to relate this general opening up of the "outside" to women of all ages to the particular legitimation of girls' presence "outside" provided by compulsory schooling. Hence there has been a radical reduction of the restrictions on women's *physical* presence "outside" since the independence.

There are still considerable *functional* restrictions on most women's presence "outside", however. Today, women may *be* there; many of them do, however, still have nothing to *do* there. It is not formal education as such, but *higher education* that today provides young women with lasting "public" functions that are situated "outside", as we shall see in the next chapter.

10. Occupation

In the last chapter we saw that the educational level of the informants varies significantly — both between the two eldest generations and the youngest, and within the youngest generation. We shall now see that the nature of the occupational life of the informants varies as much, and that this occupational variation is closely related to the educational previously discussed.

10.1 The experiences of the two eldest generations

> I think that my work is as important as my husband's, and sometimes even more important (Fatheia, 2nd.gen. Muaddaf).

> I like my job because it allows me to get friends, and I like it also because of the money. My job allows me to live a respectable life (Mahmoud, 2nd.gen. Tejer).

10.1.1 The women

Since Aisha, the Tejer grand-mother, got married, she has been a housewife. After the death of her husband, she has been living alone in her house. Only the last three years has she had an income of her own; one night a week she rents a room to some merchants who come for the weekly market. She enjoys earning some money, so that she does not have to ask her children for economic assistance so often. Still, they have to support her, she is far from economically independent.

As the only informant of the two eldest generations Fatoma, the Muaddaf grand-mother, has spent a period of her life away from Bled; she spent twenty years of her life in Tunis, because of her husband's work. She returned to her native town many years ago, however; now she and her husband live with one of their sons. All her adult life has she been a housewife — without any income of her own:

How could I have an income without any education? I passed all my life taking care of the children. My husband worked. (...) I have always wished that I had my own income.

Aisha and Fatoma have in common their opinion of housework: "it is a tiring, but important work", as Fatoma puts it. Both of them also evaluate the housework of the women to be as important as the work of the men — Aisha express her opinion thus:

I think that we can call the housework a job in itself. Because the women, especially before, without washing machines — they did all things by themselves. They cleaned clothes, and — they got tired. Like the men who worked outside. It is the same.

Even if both genders lived tiring lives she does, however, find that the lives of the men were easier:

I think that men lived better than women. Before, the women could also go out, to their parents' house, or to their sisters' house, but men's lives were easier.

Fatoma does not share her opinion; she finds that the traditional lives of a husband and wife are equal, but different — as long as "they agree with each other and understand each other".

None of the two old women are today housewives in the proper sense of the word; Aisha has her own house, but no husband or children to care for; Fatoma's husband is alive, but she has no house of her own. Still, their days are occupied with the activities of a housewife — Aisha prepares daily lunches and dinners for one, and Fatoma assists her daughter-in-law in the house. In the afternoons they visit their children and other relatives — their lives are spent within the context of family and household.

Their daughters Habiba and Fatheia still have husbands, and in holidays also children, to care for. None of them have any income of their own today, but both of them used to sew for people when they were young. Habiba stopped because the children took all her time; Fatheia stopped when she got married, because her husband did not want her to work — he did not need her economic support. She has never wanted an income of her own, her husband provides for her to her full satisfaction. Habiba, by contrast, has missed it; she has even wanted to have a job outside her home:

I wanted to have a job outside, but I could not because of the children. I spent much time bringing them up, and also with the housework. And I helped my husband doing his job, so I did not find the time to work. In addition, at that time I was not supposed to leave the house. Even if I wanted to go to the house of my parents, I went out dressed so that only my eyes showed. And what kind of job should I get? There were no jobs.

Both these women classify themselves as housewives. We see, however, that at least Habiba has been assisting her husband in his job, in addition to her housework and twelve live-born children. It is therefore not surprising that she "did not find the time to work".

Habiba and Fatheia find the tasks of a housewife to be of great significance; at least as important for the family as the jobs of their husbands. "I think that my work is as important as my husband's, and sometimes even more important", says Fatheia. Particularly the part of the duties that is related to the up-bringing of the children is seen as a big responsibility.

For them, the traditional gendered division of labour in the marriage has been the only alternative. They have, however, no problems with accepting other arrangements concerning the tasks of home and family; they find it quite natural that men take part in the housework in cases where both partners are engaged in wage labour outside the home. As their mothers, they support the increasing tendency of educated married women working — a wife should "help her husband" support the family if she is trained for a suitable job, as the men should "help their wives" at home in those cases when they both work. Their attitude to these questions appears to be quite uncomplicated, and to a degree guided by purely functional concerns. Habiba expresses her view this way:

I think that it is good for the men, too, because before, the women used to stay at home. So, they shared the work. She worked inside, and he worked outside. But now, both of them work outside. So, for example, the first who come back home, should do the housework, and — they should share. And it is good for both of them.

Still, both Habiba and Fatheia find that engagement in wage labour is not only positive for the women. When living according to the traditional division of labour, the women are without any economic responsibility for the family, and are spared such worries. When comparing the traditional duties of a wife to those of a husband, Habiba explains her view thus:

> The life of the woman is easier. Because she does the housework, and
> after that, she can take a rest. But the man, he works from the morning
> — all day. He can not take a rest.

The daily lives of Habiba and Fatheia are characterized by their duties as housewives. The first part of the day is usually spent on regular housework; the second part of the day they do extra work, like preparing different textiles for the house, or they go to visit relatives, or receive visitors. Quite a few central household-tasks are as a rule conducted in co-operation with the women of the family, even if they do not belong to the same household. Typical tasks are the preparation of a year's stock of cous-cous, or the baking of cakes for the celebration of the end of *Ramadan*, the month of fast. As their mothers, Habiba and Fatheia spend their lives within the context of family and household. The most significant differences between the present lives of them and their mothers seem to be related to their varying stages in the life-course; as younger women, they still have house and family intact, and more duties than their mothers, rather than different duties.

The lives of mothers and daughters in the two eldest generations are in most central respects similar. They are characterized by tasks closely related to the family and household, both work and leisure. These two activities are not easily distinguished — work and rest are two aspects of the same concept of occupation in a traditional life of a housewife. The differences found, can to a large degree be accounted for by different stages in the life-course.

10.1.2 The men

The father of Mustfa, the eldest Falleah, brought him to the fields at an early age; he has been a farmer ever since. He loved his work, and misses it now that he is old and unable to keep it up. Without the work, there is little left for him to do:

> Before, I spent all the day in the fields. Then I worked a lot. But now —
> what can I do? I wake up, pray, have breakfast, and after that I sit here,
> all day.

He liked his work for two reasons; the nature of the work in itself, and the money it provided.

Mahmoud Tejer, too, finds the material output of his job to be one of the main aspects of it:

I like it because it allows me to get friends, and I like it also because of the money. My job allows me to live a respectable life.

Today, Mahmoud is a merchant, but he has had several occupations in his life:

At first I was a shepherd. Then I worked in the stone quarries. I also worked in a cafe, and in agriculture. And after that, I started as a merchant.

As reported before, he preferred the work as a shepherd to the *kutteb* when he was a boy. He has been engaged in wage labour most of his life — from the age of five or six until today. When he was around eleven years old, his father died; he left him the sole responsible for his mother and four sisters. "I have suffered a lot during my life, and I also worked very hard," he answers when asked if he has had a good life. He is content with his life now; both the nature and the pace of it. Still, in a way he longs for the time when life was harder:

My life before, when I was young, was better. Because I used to work and think about nothing. But now, when I grow old, I feel something like a complex of inferiority. I feel that I am old, and can not carry on my work, and especially since I have not many sons.

Even if he has slowed down the pace of his work considerably the last years, most of his day is still spent in a job-situation. He rises at four in the morning, prays, goes to his shop, and stays there all day, except for his lunch-brake in the middle of the day. He does not return home until eight at night. He does his business in the shop, but the time spent with his friends and acquaintances there is at least as important to him.

Hassan, Mustfa's son, is also a merchant. He used to trade in fish, but now he has a shop next to his home. His day is very much like Mahmoud's; it is spent in the shop. He is home only for lunch, and at night, after nine or ten. He loves his work, for the same reasons as his father and Mahmoud like their jobs: the material output, which enables him to take care of his family, the social life it provides him, and in addition, he likes the physical part of it, that keeps him fit.

Hassan is the only one of the male informants belonging to the two eldest generations who finds that his work is a little bit more important than the one of his wife, who works in the house. Like all the women, the other elderly men claim to recognize their partners' work as equal to their own in importance. All the elderly men also say that they support the idea of

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sharing the housework when the wife has a job outside the home. Mahmoud puts it like this:

> The man should help his wife, because if he does not do that, the wife can not bring her children up very well. She can not do two jobs at the same time, can not work both outside and inside. It is too much for her.

Also for these men this kind of division of labour does not seem to be a problematic topic — at least in theory. All of them practice the traditional gendered division of labour themselves, however, and it is clear that they do not personally consider taking part in their wives' work. Still, a general attitude in favour of an upheaval of the traditional gender-roles, held by men of this age and background, is in itself worth noting. So is the respect they have for their wives' work with the house and family. This attitude is, however, reported to be of relatively new date; it is a phenomenon that to a large extent has developed after the independence. Again a quote from Mahmoud:

> I think that equality is good for the women. Because before, women were under-estimated. And men, for example, a husband, if he wanted to divorce his wife, he did that without telling her. So now, with equality, their situation is better.

The greater part of these men's adult life seems to be invested in their job — "outside". The stories of the elderly male informants indicate that the job is of significant importance for a man's self-image. Mahmoud finds that the fact that he is old and unable to work as hard as before gives him a feeling of inferiority. Mustfa's experience of his old age points in the same direction. On the basis of the above, one may also assume that a man's occupation and his occupational performance is of considerable significance for his reputation and status within the local community; his ability to lead "a respectable life" seems to be strongly associated with his occupational life. The economic aspect is thus only one of several benefits of having a job.

10.2 The experiences of the young generation

> I cannot imagine myself not working. If, for example, I am convinced to stop working, I stop, but I cannot accept that my husband, or anybody else, imposes that on me. Especially after this long period of studying. Yes, I think that it is my own life. I have to decide (Nora, 3rd.gen. Tejer).

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> I think that one should work. That is the main element [in a good life]. Because with work, many problems will go away. (...) I do not mean money, but work in itself. This movement, and change — . One should pass one's time working, better than using it for other things (Lassad, nephew of Mahmoud Tejer).

10.2.1 The women

Meriem, the Tejer-daughter with only four years of education, has no income of her own, the work in the house takes all her time. She was occupied with housework in the home of her parents before she got married, too, except for a six month period when she worked as a seamstress in a garment-factory. Like her mother and grandmother, she finds the tasks of a housewife to be important, but tiring work. She thinks that housework is the responsibility of the wife, also when she has work outside the home:

> I think that the wife should be responsible for her children, her house, and also her husband. Even if she works outside, she should take this responsibility. It is an important thing.

The work of a housewife is as important to Meriem as the work of a husband. A woman is best suited for the work in the house, she thinks, a man cannot replace her. Meriem shares her mother's evaluation of housework as compared to the job of a husband:

> I think that my life is better. I am free, when I want to do housework, I do it, when I do not like this, I leave it for another time. But my husband has certain — he should follow the time, he is obliged to follow the time. To go to work at a certain time, to come back at a certain time. He is not free like me.

Meriem's daily life is in most respects similar to the daily lives of her mother and grand-mother — though the fact that she has small children makes a difference. In the morning she feeds and cleans the children, then she does the housework. In the afternoon, she sews clothes for herself and the children. She is busy, and quite happy with her life. She only misses one thing:

> If I had enough time, I would like to sew, and earn my own money. That is the thing that I miss.

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Leila Muaddaf is also a full-time housewife. She did, however, work as a secretary in Tunis the first period after her marriage. After she had the children she stopped; it became too much for her. She misses her job, and hopes to find another permanent position — it is better for her to work. In Bled it is not easy, though, not like in Tunis. Like the other housewives, she finds her duties to be very tiring, but important — as important as her husband's work.

Leila's day is typical for a young housewife: She gets up, dresses and feeds the children, cleans the house, washes clothes, prepares lunch. In the afternoon, she stays home, goes to visit her parents or other relatives, or perhaps she takes the children to the beach.

Men leading a traditional kind of life live better than women in the same situation — before they get married, Leila thinks. After the marriage, they face the same problems, however, and the lives become similar. Both have to work hard in order to have a well-functioning family.

Leila leads a temporary life; she is not very happy with it. She is looking forward to when their new house will be completed; then she can move from her mother-in-law, with whom she is now staying, and live with her husband and children — if only her husband will find a job in Bled. For the moment he lives and works in the Capital. She also hopes to find a job for herself. Until she fulfils this hope she will, however, continue to live her life in a way very similar to the lives of her mother and grand-mother — a life dominated by the traditional female tasks related to the family and household.

Nora Tejer has been working as a teacher for one year after she finished her studies. The work is very important to her:

> I cannot imagine myself not working. If, for example, I am convinced to stop working, I stop, but I cannot accept that my husband, or anybody else, imposes that on me. Especially after this long period of studying. Yes. I think that it is my own life. I have to decide.

When she first started studying, she did not want to become a teacher. After she had completed her education she found that she had no other alternative, however. Today, she is happy that it turned out like that; to her own surprise, she loves teaching:

> To me, I think that the most important part of my job is to feel that you are giving something to another. You are — I do not know how to say this — giving something interesting to another ... They listen to you — they are interested in what you are saying. Yes. I try to give them all that I know. This is the most important thing. It is enjoyable.

There is also another reason why she finds a teaching job suitable; it is a job easily combinable with a family:

> When I think about the future, as a woman, and my house — it is better
> to have three months [of holidays], for example, with my children. And
> that counts. Better than working every day.

Because of her job, Nora now lives in another part of Tunisia. Before she moved there, she spent five years in Tunis as a student. She has thus not lived in Bled since she was nineteen. She shares a flat with some colleagues during the year, but returns to Bled in the holidays. As she works in a small town, there are few means of entertainment; her days are spent at work, or at home, doing the minimum of housework required of a working woman living alone.

Fatheia's youngest daughter Jalila is still a student, and has not yet any job-experience. She does, however, regard the possibility to get a job after finishing her education as very important, because:

> I think that I will get the respect of people, and also, working — there are
> usually new things in work, and in our life in general, when we work.

Like Nora, Jalila does not find the economic aspect of a job to be the most important one. She does not want to work as a teacher after she has finished her studies; her father tries to convince her that it is the job most suitable for her, but she refuses — she would like to use her education working for a company.

Both Nora and Jalila find it self-evident that the traditional life of a man is significantly much better than the traditional life of a woman. The man has his freedom to go where he wants, and the authority to make whatever decisions he likes on behalf of the family. The wife, by contrast, is left with the hard and tiresome housework, and with few possibilities of leaving the house.

The occupational lives of Meriem and Leila, the young female informants without higher education, are in central respects similar to their mothers', and even grand-mothers'; again, the differences can to a significant degree be explained by their different stages in the life-course. The two young women's attitudes towards their own situation differ, however: Meriem is satisfied with her life, her main ambition is to find time to earn some money of her own by sewing. Leila, by contrast, has experienced the life of a professional woman, and is longing to return to it. She has problems accepting her present situation.

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The lives of Nora and Jalila, the two young academically trained women, stand in sharp contrast to the lives of all the other women: They have already spent significant parts of their lives away from Bled as a result of work or studies; their profession has become a central part of their self-image, and they find a life without work hard to imagine, and it should not be imposed on them. Even if Nora includes her future family in her job-considerations, it is clear that her professional career means much more to her than a way of assisting her husband with his economic obligations. Economic concerns are not essential to them; the aspect of self-realization is more important.

The occupational lives of the young uneducated women are more similar to the occupational lives of their mothers and grand-mothers than to those of their educated sisters, both concerning their practices, and their perceptions of these practices. This tendency has been made clear also in the previous chapters; the women's occupational stories confirm it.

10.2.2 The men

Lassad, the nephew of Mahmoud, has been working ever since he left school after six years of education. His mother did not want him to enter the construction-business like his father, so she made him start learning how to make furniture. But he left the furniture's workshop after three months, and has been building houses ever since.

For the time being, his activities has led him to Tunis; he is living there with his Beldiyin wife and son. They do, however, spend much time in Bled, particularly during the summer-season.

Today, Lassad has his own small company, and finds that the main advantage of his job is the freedom it gives him. The better part of his day is occupied with work; he normally goes home at six in the afternoon, but often works extra hours after supper.

Like the elder men, Lassad evaluates the work of his wife to be as important as his own — particularly the responsibility for the children. He also thinks that the traditional Tunisian gender-roles produce lives that are equal in burdens and advantages for men and women. As accounted for earlier, he finds the traditional way of life more convenient than the way of life practised by academically trained people; it provides a more pleasant pace of life, and it also gives a man the possibility to concentrate on his job.

The work is of outmost importance to Lassad; he actually names it as the main ingredient of a good life:

I think that one should work. That is the main element. Because with work, many problems will go away. (...) I do not mean money, but work in itself. This movement, and change — . One should pass one's time working, better than using it for other things.

Lassad's elder brother Mohammed lives in Tunis with his teacher wife and their son. He has been working in a bank there after he completed his studies. He also studied in Tunis, and he even went to secondary school outside Bled. He has not lived in his town of origin since he was a young boy.

Mohammed considers himself lucky to work in a bank — it was what he hoped for when he was a student. He finds that his job has increased his insight in politics, economics, and the society in general. This is to him an important aspect of his job:

I am lucky to work in this bank, and in this service, because — to work in a bank — where in the bank? You can work there as a labourer. O.K? But to work in the bank — to assist the board of administration, to discuss the projects, which are the better ones — to follow the hotels — which is good, which is not good — it is very important. (...) My personality has developed a lot. And when I speak with friends, I find that I know most things better than them. So, it is very good to work in an important agency.

Mohammed's day is for the most part spent at work; in the morning he takes his son to his wife's mother, who looks after him during the day. Then he goes to work, and stay there until six. On the way home he picks up his wife and child — normally, they spend the night at home.

Contrary to all the informants dealt with so far, Mohammed finds the work of housewives to be of no importance, and he has little regard for housework in general:

It is a waste of time. Really, even with my wife, I am irritated, because she works a lot in the house. (...) My mother — what has she seen of the world? She has seen nothing. She has seven children, and a husband, and she passes all her day in the house. She prepares this and that. She has got nothing. We have always food, and our clothes are always clean, but her — she has gained nothing. I am against furious housework. (...) The human beings are made to live outside.

In line with this view, Mohammed finds that the traditional life of a man is very much better than the one of a woman:

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My father has certainly lived better than my mother. Thousand times better than my mother, certainly. (...) My mother cannot go outside. He can. He worked hard, but he could go out at night, to cafes, and — .

Tarek, the eldest Muaddaf-son, lives and works in Tunis. He also studied in Tunis, and except for a short period, he has been living away from Bled for about ten years — all his adult life. As he is not married, he lives alone. He has not been as lucky as Mohammed — his job is not the one he hoped for:

It is interesting, but I would — it is not my dream-job. (...) The economic part [is most important], perhaps. The financial. Because it is not very bad, and if I will stay there, perhaps, it will be interesting. With time — if I climb the scale ...

Tarek does his own housework, but does not invest much time in it. The first half of his day he spends at work. In the evenings he stays home, or goes to the town-centre to meet friends; they have dinner together, or just go for a walk.

Like Mohammed, he does not find the situation of his mother and his housewife sister to be very good for them:

Their situation would have been better, perhaps, if they were not full-time housewives. (..) I feel sorry, of course. I said to you, in my opinion, the job for a girl is some kind of liberation. She must work. It is a liberation for them, for girls. To be liberated is the most important thing. Here in Tunisia. Perhaps it is different outside?

He also shares Mohammed's evaluation of the traditional lives of men and women in Tunisia:

The man has all the advantages. He is outside all the time. That is why, for example, I said that — why a job is a liberation for a girl. With a job she has much contact with people, and hear many opinions — different opinions. She can get many opinions of life. That is why, in this situation, the man is so far from his wife.

Nejib, Tarek's younger brother, has been working as a teacher in a small village in the Cap-Bon-area for the last four years. Before that, there was his uncompleted studies, and his army-service, so he has not lived in Bled for years. He is tremendously dissatisfied with his present situation, but with his lack of a diploma, he can not choose between jobs. He does not like his job, and he hates the place where he lives: "It is mortal. It is an

unbearable village, life there is disgusting." Because of his feelings for the place, he leaves it as often as possible. As Bled is the biggest town in the area, he often goes there — as a better alternative. He hopes to be able to change job soon. The only reason for remaining in his work, is that he needs the money. He does, however, admit that his profession has an importance in a social context:

> Today I have a medium social status: I am not Nejib Muaddaf; I am Nejib
> Muaddaf, the teacher. In the society that has importance.

Nejib has a clear opinion about the traditional Tunisian society and its consequences for the two genders:

> The traditional society contains slavery, and is a typical repressive society.
> The woman has been oppressed, imprisoned at home — taking care of
> children, doing housework — staying home in order to satisfy the needs
> of her husband, and that was all their lives were about. Women have
> never had rights beyond these limits. Within the recent society, there are
> changes. The idea of women helping the man in work and helping him
> managing his home exists, but it is very annoying for the man to accept
> this situation, this new idea. This new situation is created by the meagre
> wages the society provides the workers with. The man can no longer
> satisfy his material needs alone. But the men are usually against this
> development; there is just nothing they can do about it, in order to protect
> their earlier position. The men still regard the women as their personal
> belonging.

Personally, he finds equality between husband and wife to be an evident principle:

> Both woman and man have the same right to study and to work. This is
> clear, it should not be a problem. As far as the social tasks are concerned,
> I think that they should be shared, as life is shared by a couple. My
> personal consideration towards the phenomenon is simple: Life is shared,
> so the tasks are shared — that is all there is to it.

Again, we see that Lassad shares both the practices and perceptions of life with the elder men rather than with the educated men of his own age. Unlike the elder men he has, however, left Bled to live and work in the Capital; a fact that may be seen as a function of the general increase of geographical mobility discussed in chapter two. He also shares the elder men's respect for the housework of their wives, but he himself takes no part in it. Like the young women with low education, he lives a life that in

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central respects is similar to the lives of the elder generations, and in accordance with the traditional North-African principles of social organization.

The young men with higher education diverge from all the other informants in their view on traditional female work as housewives. They give it little importance, and also little respect; it is, in Mohammed's words, "a waste of time". At the same time, they claim to support the idea of men taking part in domestic tasks.

While the elder men, and also Lassad, to a large extent have been creating their own jobs, the young educated men are all employees, with less possibility of influencing their own job-situation. Still, and even if they may not be entirely happy with their present jobs, they tend to be satisfied with their kind of occupation. Being a higher functionary in a bank, or a principal engineer in a company, or even a teacher, definitely seems to be more status-generating than having a shop at the corner. Like in the cases of all the other male informants, as well as in the cases of the young, academically trained women, the profession seems to constitute a significant part of the self-image of the young, highly educated men.

10.3 Trends of change in occupational lives

Concerning the occupational lives of the informants, higher education rather than generation and gender stands out as a main factor of change — both for *practices* and *concepts*. This tendency, also found in the previous chapters dealing with marriage, physical reproduction and education, is thus further strengthened by the occupational stories of the informants.

10.3.1 The informants without higher education

The occupational *practices* of the two eldest generations in most central respects correspond with the principles for traditional North-African social organization discussed in chapter three. This is also the case for the occupations of the young informants without higher education:

Practises of "traditional" occupations
The young female informants without higher education have at the present occupational lives that share all central characteristics with those of the elder women. Like them, they are full-time housewives, and their practice of this occupation is similar to the practice of their elder female relatives, as we saw in the previous chapter. The occupational pasts of the young

housewives, however, vary somewhat from the ones of the elder women: They have for limited periods of time been engaged in wage labour "outside". A general change has taken place in the accepted income-generating occupational activities for this category of women during the three generations represented by the informants: Aisha and Fatoma, the eldest women, have never earned their own money. Their daughters Habiba and Fatheia have had an independent source of income as seamstresses, but they both performed the job "inside". Meriem and Leila, the youngest housewives, have for a shorter period been engaged in wage labour "outside"; Meriem worked in a garment-factory for six months before she got married, while Leila was a secretary in the early period of her marriage.

The fact that the youngest women have worked "outside" is, however, probably of less significance than the fact that they, like their mothers, gave up their income-generating occupations when their duties as wife and mother required it. The women of this occupational category are first and foremost housewives; they may engage in alternative occupations only as long as it does not affect their domestic duties. Meriem and Leila's brief "outside" careers should probably be seen as a consequence of the general opening up of the "outside" to women, rather than as an indicator of a fundamental change in the perception of the housewife-role.

The men of the two eldest generations have been engaged in jobs "outside" ever since they were young boys — contrary to the occupational stories of the women, and in accordance with the complementary nature of the traditional North-African gender-roles discussed in chapter three. They are all self-employed, and their occupations are what one may call "traditional", in the sense that they have existed as occupations in Bled for a long time, and they require "traditional" skills, rather than modern ones, like formal education. The job, or rather the job-situation, occupies most of these men's time, and it constitutes a general framework around their "outside" existence, as their social life is reported to take place mainly within the job-situation. It is also clear that the elder men's self-image is closely related to their occupational life, and that a loss of it, like the cases of Mustfa and Mahmoud indicate, may be experienced as humiliating and lead to a life that is "empty".

The occupational story of Lassad, the young male informant without higher education, corresponds in most central respects with those of the elder men. Like them, he started working while he was still a boy, and like them, he is self-employed within a "traditional" occupation, construction. It is evident that the job means a lot for Lassad's self-image.

The traditional perception of the individual as a part of a larger family-group lies implicit in — and is at the same time a precondition for — this

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complementary division of labour between the genders, as argued in chapter three. This collective understanding of the individual is particularly clearly expressed in these informants' ways of *conceiving* their own occupational lives:

Perceptions of work
Habiba assisted her husband in his work for several years; the actual tasks she performed was of importance for a significant part of his business, and her labour resulted directly in an income — received by her husband. Still, she does not regard this as work, but as "helping my husband". In sewing for people she was, by contrast, "working".

While Mahmoud's material situation made him need Habiba's assistance, both economically, through sewing, and through her help with his work, Fatheia's husband made her stop earning money by sewing after they married, because he did not need her help. Several things are worth noting here: First of all, sewing and other textile-works has been an accepted way of earning an income for women over a relatively long period. The fact that this kind of work can be practised "inside", and that it is regarded as a typical feminine occupation, may to some extent explain this. We have also seen that Meriem continues this tradition of women's accepted income-generating occupation among the young generation. Before she married, she practised it "outside"; now, because of her present situation as housewife, she finds it necessary to practice it "inside" — if she can spare the time for it at all.

Secondly, Fatheia's husband was opposed to the idea of having a wife who earned money. Considering the social position of the Muaddaf family, one may assume that a working wife would be shameful to him and to the family, as it might indicate that he was not able to fulfil his duties towards her. The Tejer-family, by contrast, has improved its social position considerably during the generation of Mahmoud and Habiba. Their economic situation at the beginning of the marriage did first of all not allow them to take the kind of considerations that was important to the Muaddaf-family; secondly, their more modest social position may have made such considerations less imperative, as they had less to defend.

Still, Habiba counts as work only her sewing — a socially accepted activity for a woman. Her other work is reduced to "helping my husband". This might indicate a playing down of the importance and character of her assistance, as it would not really be suitable. This explanation may have some relevance; it can, however, not stand alone. Habiba's part of her husband's work was a "woman's job" — refining of dairy-products — and the work was done within the walls of the *dar*. It could therefore hardly be

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regarded as shameful conduct in itself. The fact that she fully recognizes her part in the family's general material achievements also suggests that there must be something more to it.

A plausible explanation is that Habiba experiences the family as such a fundamental unit, and its maintenance as such a fundamental objective, that accounting for her separate input of work becomes more or less meaningless. According to this explanation, Habiba experiences herself as half of the adult team responsible for the wellbeing of the family, rather than as a separate individual with a personal occupational life. Her efforts have, however, at the same time been restricted by certain social rules for suitable female practices. It may thus be argued that she understands her work as the effort of a wife rather than the effort of an individual.

This way of perceiving one's work also seems to be of relevance for the men, even if their work is physically and conceptually more clearly distinguished from the "inside" arena and the "private" sphere, and thus also from the family-group, than the work of the women. We see that Hassan appreciates his work because it allows him to provide for his family, and that Mahmoud finds that it allows him to live a respectable life. According to traditional North-African moral principles, one should be able to fulfil one's material obligations towards one's family in order to be a respectable man; to do so, one should work. One may assume that also to the men without higher education is work, social respectability, and family-obligations are so closely related that it is difficult — and more or less meaningless — to distinguish them.

The occupational lives of all the informants without higher education are still practised much according to the traditional North-African principles for gendered division of labour. This concerns the nature of the tasks the men and women undertake, and the physical arenas in which they are practised. Uneducated women of all generations are still occupied "inside", with family-related tasks, while uneducated men of all generations are still occupied "outside", with public-related tasks. The post-colonial *physical* opening up of the "outside" to the women has not changed the traditional *functional* division of labour between the genders when it comes to the informants without higher education.

One might expect that a perception of men's and women's lives as complementary, but equally necessary parts of the collective life of the family-group logically would imply that the genders will be equally evaluated. As stated in chapter three, this has not been the case in the traditional North-African societies. A number of social scientific studies confirm that North-African women generally are conceived of as inferior to men (see for instance Bourdieu 1965 and 1977, Evers Rosander 1991).

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It is therefore a quite remarkable feature that the informants without higher education all express a significant degree of respect and appreciation for the work of the opposite gender. None of the informants suggest that the women are regarded as inferior to the men, or that they themselves have a more negative self-image than their husbands. The actual basis of the women's self-image is, however, to be found in their "inside" lives, while the men's basis is mainly in their "outside" lives.

Accordingly, the women tend to regard the men's living-conditions in general, and their occupational situation in particular, as little better than their own — some of them actually state to the contrary. This indicates two things: First, the traditional North-African concepts of individuals as fundamentally gendered, and of men and women's roles as defined by the superior needs of the family-group, are central to these informants' understanding of themselves, their partners, and their marriages. Secondly, the actual position of the genders within this traditional conception has changed, and this has resulted in an increase in the status of women and their input of labour in the family-group. The elder informants themselves report that such a change has actually taken place during their life-time; a change that has improved the living-conditions of the women particularly. A significant source of this change is, according to the informants, the post-colonial legal reforms, particularly the personal code of 1957. As we saw in chapter two this law abolished polygamy, and introduced a new law of divorce more favourable to the women.

This "new" traditional concept of men and women's "complementary equality" is particularly clearly expressed in these informants' understanding of the concept of "equality between the genders". Fatheia Muaddaf's definition of the concept is a good example of the way in which it is understood by both the men and the women without higher education:

> For me, equality between the genders means that the partners live with each other, understand each other. They should discuss things, they should manage their lives together; if something is good, they do it, if something is bad, they leave it — . And even if the wife is not educated, and works at home, they should live together, understand each other. That is equality — that is life.

This concept of equality does not imply equal rights to do equal tasks, but rather the right to be respected for doing the tasks that are ascribed to one by gender.

The "new" traditional evaluation of the genders also makes it easier to understand another rather unexpected feature in the stories of the uneducated informants. As argued in chapter three, the traditional principles

for gendered behaviour reflect the very fundament of the traditional North-African moral-system. One should therefore assume that there would be a considerable resistance towards the new gender-roles that are emerging in the Tunisian society today, and that are practised mainly by the academically trained young Tunisians. Still, the informants who live according to the traditional gender-roles express an overall un-complicated attitude towards these new and rather deviant ways of organizing family-life. Some of the informants like it, others do not, but none of them condemn the new practices as morally reprehensible. Habiba's reflections on the division of labour in the marriage illustrate that this quite fundamental change in gendered behaviour is regarded as a practical rather than moral matter:

> I think that it [educated women working] is good for the men, too, because, before, the women used to stay at home. So, they shared the work. She worked inside, and he worked outside. But now, both of them work outside. So, for example, the first who comes back home, should do the housework, and — they should share. And it is good for both of them.

Even if the traditional occupational practices of the uneducated informants do not seem to have gone through any fundamental changes during the post-colonial period, their conceptions of possible and acceptable gendered practices seem to have been revised quite thoroughly. The uneducated informants' *opinions*, rather than their actual practices, indicate a change in the direction of more liberal *principles* for the occupational careers of both genders. In order to see this change of principles in practice, we must turn to the occupational lives of the informants with higher education:

10.3.2 The informants with higher education

Both the occupational *practices* and the occupational *concepts* of the academically trained informants are distinctly deviating from those of the uneducated informants examined above:

As Jalila is still a student, Nora is the only academically trained female informant who has occupational experience. Her present occupational situation is, however, typical for young, academically trained women; the majority of them become teachers like her, and many of them also live away from their community of origin as a result of their job. Increased geographical mobility is thus a common consequence of highly educated women's professional careers.

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Nora's occupational *practices* are in all central respects contrary to those of the uneducated women: While all the housewives live in Bled, she has moved to another part of the country as a result of her job. She furthermore works "outside", in a salaried profession. Unlike the housewives, she is economically independent. As she has not yet established a family, her present situation does not give any indications of how she will combine her future family-related domestic work with her professional job; it is, however, clear that she is not planning to let a housewife-role interfere with her teaching. She takes it for granted that her children will attend a kindergarten, and that she will continue her job on a full-time basis. Her plans correspond with the practices of the majority of Tunisian women in her position, and are plausible descriptions of her future occupational situation.

While the married women without higher education first and foremost are housewives, the academically trained women have an opposite ranking of wage labour and housework: The professional career comes first.

Jalila's expected occupational career is similar to the one of Nora. She does not want to become a teacher, but then neither did Nora at the same stage in her studies. Teaching is the most common and the most accepted profession for academically trained women today; a career in a private company or in public administration is hard to obtain — women are not popular there. Even if higher education takes the women a long way in the direction of an equal occupational situation with the men, there are still clear social restrictions on their careers.

To both of these young women, the professional career constitutes a fundamental value. They are not at all willing to compromise on this point — their professional life is their own.

The occupational *practices* of the academically trained young male informants in most respects equal those of their female colleagues. Like them, they all live away from Bled as a result of their work, and like them, they have "outside" jobs that generate income. They are also employees, rather than self-employed. Like the women, they tend to regard housework related to their actual or potential marriages as secondary to the job they are professionally trained for.

The educated men's *perceptions* of their occupational lives also have similarities with those of the young educated women. The profession constitutes a central part of their self-image, and also an individual value and an individual right — the men, too, experience their professional life as their own.

The educated men's evaluation of the various aspects of their profession diverge from those of educated women, however. Even if the men regard the personal development-aspect as essential, they also tend to give more

importance to the economic and the social status-related aspects of the work. As we have seen above, these are the same occupational aspects that the uneducated male informants found most valuable in relation to their "traditional" jobs.

As stated in chapter seven, academically trained Tunisians tend to marry each other. The "student-couples'" family-organization will be one in which both the adult family-members are engaged in professional careers "outside". Higher education thus changes the occupational pattern of the family-group in the direction of a significant increase in the time and labour invested "outside". This change is evident both in the actual occupational practices, and the occupational evaluations of the academically trained informants.

This tendency of a devaluation of the "inside" occupations is also evident in the academically trained informants' evaluation of the traditional female occupations — an evaluation that differs markedly from that of all the other informants. The educated young women recognize the work of their mothers and uneducated sisters as hard and admirable; still, as they could never imagine themselves in a similar occupational situation, and as they evidently are planning to ignore significant parts of the traditional housewife's work in their own future family-life, they do not give the housewife-occupation significant importance; their own "outside" professional life is much more valuable to them.

The young academically trained men express themselves even more categorically about this topic: Housework is a "waste of time", states Mohammed; he pities the occupational lives of his mother and uneducated sisters. The other men join him in this view; Tarek states that women have to work "outside" in order to be liberated, while his brother Nejib sees the traditional housewives as slaves, and as a cardinal example of the repression of women that characterizes the Tunisian society.

Correspondingly, all the academically trained informants agree that men's traditional life is "thousand times better" than women's traditional life, as Mohammed puts it, because the men have been allowed to live "outside". The "outside" life has a value in itself to these young academically trained people; an occupation "outside" will also be more valuable in itself than an occupation "inside".

We see that the concepts of occupational life that correspond with professional "outside" jobs — jobs that are results of higher education — are fundamentally different from the occupational concepts that correspond with the traditional North-African principles for social organization. The traditional concepts are characterized by a fundamental group-relatedness, and an equally fundamental gendered division of labour. This implies that

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the family-group is linked together in an *organic* way; the adult members perform different, gender-defined tasks, that are equally necessary for the maintenance of the group. One may also assume that this occupational situation will lead to an occupational self-image, or identity, that is characterized by the individual's group-membership and gender.

The occupational concepts of the academically trained informants are, by contrast, characterized by an individualization and a "de-genderization" of the occupational life. Seen in relation to the organization of the family, this implies that the group will be linked together in a more *mechanic* way; the adult members perform the same tasks in parallel, and independently of their gender. This makes it reasonable to assume that the educated informants' occupational self-image, or identity, will be characterized by the individual's occupational "de-genderized" self-sufficiency.

The educated informants have as a result of their "outside" professions devaluated the "inside" arena, the "private" sphere, and the work that belongs there quite drastically. According to them, the significant arena for both genders is the "outside". This attitude is reflected in these young people's definition of "equality between the genders": Equality means equal rights to study, and to work — "outside". It means equal legal rights, and also equal social rights. According to this definition, which differs radically from that of the uneducated informants, men and women are equal when they are able to live similar lives. This definition implies that equality between the genders, as well as women's emancipation, in practice means women's occupation within the traditionally male "outside" arena, and within the traditionally male "public" sphere.

We have seen that higher education tend to change the informants' occupational practices and perceptions quite radically, and that, as a consequence, the organization of their entire adult lives deviates markedly from the one practised by the informants without higher education. Comparing the occupational lives of the educated of both genders with the occupational lives of the uneducated of both genders we see, however, that the changes caused by higher education for men and women are not of the same nature.

In the previous chapter it was argued that for men, higher education represents an alternative approach to traditional male functions, rather than a re-definition of the male role. This is so because academic training qualifies for "outside" income-generating occupations.

Higher education qualifies a man for an alternative approach to the fulfilment of the traditional male role as producer and provider. It implies a shift from one kind of "outside" occupational situation to another, but not a shift in the purpose of the male occupational life.

The educated men represent occupational competitors to the men without higher education, in the sense that they fulfil the same duties in another way. The fact that the academically trained male informants tend to emphasize the same aspects of their occupational life as the uneducated men do — income and social status — further supports this argument.

This competitive situation may shed some light on the uneducated male informants' vague and somewhat contradictory evaluations of higher education found in the previous chapter. One may assume that the educated men's new and different means of obtaining traditional male aims appear as confusing, and even threatening, to the men who have no personal access to these means. The men without higher education tend to approach this problem through denying the existence of other aspects of a man's higher education than those common to their own occupational situation: They emphasize that higher education does not necessarily result in a higher income than their own, and at the same time they refuse to admit that academic training has other qualities than the income-generating one. "Culture? What is Culture?" laughs Mahmoud, while Lassad states that his life has a more pleasant rhythm than the lives of the academically trained people. This is a quite logical reaction; too strong acceptance of the existence of superior qualities of the educated men's lives from the part of the uneducated men could be taken to imply that they themselves were in an inferior position concerning the fulfilment of their traditional male duties as providers of the family. They would be in danger of admitting that they fulfil their obligations less than satisfactory.

The academically trained women, by contrast, stand in a qualitatively different relation to the uneducated women. In the previous chapter it was argued that for women, higher education represents a gate to an entirely new kind of life. The information presented in this chapter indicates the fundamental nature of the changes introduced to women's life-course by higher education.

A main consequence of higher education for women, is the change of significant occupational arenas. We have seen that it leads the women permanently out of the "inside" as an occupational arena, and provides lasting occupational life-course phases that belong "outside", and that are related to "public", rather than "private" functions. The time and energy spent "inside" with family-related tasks decrease correspondingly for the higher educated women.

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The academically trained women leave the traditionally defined female role, in order to lead an occupational life that shares most central characteristics with that of the men. In a society that has been profoundly gender-segregated, both physically and functionally, this is a rather remarkable change. The female informants themselves tend to perceive the housewives and the professional women as belonging to two different categories. On the basis of the above, this actually seems to be a valid argument: The two kinds of women represent two qualitatively separate occupational careers. Their occupational practices are performed according to qualitatively different principles, and also evaluated according to qualitatively different criteria. As suggested by the information presented in the previous chapter, these different female careers seem to constitute mutually exclusive concepts and practices.

This situation may also explain why, in sharp contrast to the uneducated men, the women without higher education express an astonishing degree of both acceptance and appreciation of the new kind of women's life. It clarifies why these women are able to recognize the value of education in all its respects:

These women's performance of their traditional duties is not an object of competition between them and the educated women. As they belong to different occupational categories, their practices are not comparable; the uneducated women are not threatened by the new practices of their educated sisters. One may assume that this situation provides the uneducated women with a liberty in relation to higher education that the uneducated men do not possess; this allows them to acknowledge the improvement of women's lives that they evidently find higher education to imply.

Even if the occupational lives of the educated women are similar to the men's, they have not obtained an equal occupational position as theirs. None of the informants, not even the educated women themselves, seem to give the professional women the same economic responsibility as the men. The uneducated informants see the women's income-generating jobs as means to "help their husbands" fulfil their economic duties, while the low importance given to the economic aspect of their jobs by the professional women themselves indicates that they as well do not see themselves as main providers.

The educated women have seemingly not been integrated in the same occupational category as the men as a result of their "male" occupational practices, but constitute a new and third category adding to the two that traditionally have existed. The educated women do not seem to represent a occupational threat to the uneducated men in the way their male

colleagues do. The general opening up of the "outside" to the women that has taken place during the post-colonial period makes their presence "outside" acceptable, and diminishes the threat to the family honour that their "male" behaviour otherwise might have implied. Men without higher education may therefore allow themselves a tolerant attitude towards these female "deviants".

The educated women may potentially represent a more significant threat to their male colleagues and actual or potential husbands. As we have seen, these men claim to have outgrown the traditional interpretation of the society, and they see themselves as quite different, more advanced, and more "modern" than the uneducated men. Their concept of advancement implies a different understanding of equality between the genders; to them, equality means equal rights to similar lives.

Mohammed is the only one of the educated male informants who is married and has children, and therefore in a situation where these theories of equality between the genders should be applied in practice. Discussions between him and his educated wife during the interview indicate that this practice does not take place entirely without problems; other information suggests that in this respect they are quite representative of the majority of the young educated Tunisian couples. The practice of the principles of equality and women's emancipation constitutes a major source of conflict and frustration in the "modern" marriages in Tunisia today. Seen on the background of the rapid shift in gender-roles these young people have experienced, this should come as no surprise.

On the basis of the discussion above, one may conclude that academic training and the kind of occupational life it qualifies for has a fundamental impact on both the practices and the conceptions of the informants who have obtained this level of education. According to the informants' stories, higher education and the jobs it tends to lead to have another important consequence: There is a strong connection between academic training and geographical mobility. Without exception, all the educated informants live away from Bled; either because of ongoing studies, or because of jobs obtained as a result of completed studies. Among the informants without higher education, there are only three exceptions from the general tendency of spending the entire life in Bled: As a representative of the eldest generation, Fatoma clearly deviates from the rest with her twenty years in the Capital. Her grand-daughter Leila has spent a period there because of her husband's job, but is now back in Bled on a permanent basis, and Lassad has also been temporarily to Tunis because of his work.

The next chapter will among other topics look into how the informants experience their different migrational practices themselves; it will examine

the informants' relations to their family, their local community, and the society in general.

11. Relations to family, local community, and society

11.1 Family-relations

The stories of the informants show that there has been a change in family-structure from extended family households toward nuclear-family households during the last three generations. According to them, this is a trend that characterizes most households in Bled. This change has developed gradually; the pace of re-structuring seems, however, to have been particularly strong during the sixties:

The informants of the eldest generation have all spent most of their married life in extended family households. The second generation, by contrast, has generally started married life in the household of the husband's family, and has left to settle on their own after a few years. Hassan Falleah and his wife had their two first children while they were living in the house of his father Mustfa, then they built a house of their own, and moved out. Fatheia Muaddaf also spent the first five years of her marriage with her parents-in-law, before she and her husband bought a house next door to them. Mahmoud and Habiba Tejer had their own house from the start of their marriage, but Mahmoud's widowed mother lived with them until she died.

Turning to the third generation, we see that only Leila is living with her in-laws in a household comprising two adult generations. She had, however, her own home from the start of her marriage, and the present arrangement is of a temporary character. One thing should be noted concerning the case of Leila, however: Even though she has problems of getting along with her mother-in-law, moving in with her parents does not seem to be an alternative for her. In line with other information, this suggests that in cases where extended family household is practised today, the traditional rule of living with the husband's family still seems to be dominating. A married woman's return to her parents' house may easily be interpreted as her leaving her husband.

The other married informants of the third generation all had their own households after they got married; this is the desired and expected situation also for those who are not yet married. The informants speak of this change

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in family-structure from extended family households to nuclear-family households as a general phenomenon; Mahmoud, for instance, says that "all members of the family used to live together in the same house, but now, everybody lives separate from the family". There is reason to regard this as a general trend, at least in Bled and the surrounding areas.

All the informants who have experienced life in both kinds of household prefer the new alternative. The fact that most of them find that this development weakens the family-bonds, does not alter this attitude. Hassan, who seemingly holds a deviating view, may express a central effect of separate households on family-relations:

> Perhaps the contrary is the case. The way of living now increases the solidarity. Because before, when they used to live in the same house, there were usually quarrels and problems between the family-members. But now, when everybody lives separate, one does not have this. One brother invites the other to his house — all are friends. So I think that this way of living increases the solidarity in the family.

The splitting-up of the extended family into separate households is strongly associated with the general improvement of the economic situation after independence. From the point of view of the informants, the extended family households thus seem to have been an economic necessity in a time of limited resources; the ability to leave this situation behind is regarded as a undisputable sign of progress.

The changes in family-structure that have been experienced by the last three generations of Beldiyins deserve to be characterized as formidable. In chapter seven we saw that the average age of marriage for girls has risen considerably, and in chapter eight that the number of children have decreased even more considerably. When the splitting-up of the extended family households into nuclear-families is added to this picture, we face a change in household-pattern from units consisting of up to thirty individuals distributed across three to four generations, to today's dominating pattern of households containing four to six individuals distributed across two generations. This development is, as mentioned, experienced as overall positive by the informants.

The above mentioned post-colonial changes in the family-structures is a phenomenon that has influenced *all* the informants' conditions of existence. Turning to other dimensions of family-relations, the situation is less homogenous. The actual families themselves, their history and different social positions stand out as central factors behind the differences, as we shall see:

11.1.1 The Tejer-family

The Tejer-representatives draw a picture of a harmonious group in describing their family. We have seen earlier that Habiba and Mahmoud exercise relatively little control over the lives of their children; they have for instance no particular wish of getting involved in the children's choice of life-companions. Meriem was happy to take the advice of her father concerning her marriage; Nora, by contrast, wanted to make her own choice, and was allowed to do that. This relative lack of involvement in the other family-members' affairs is regarded as a virtue by the Tejers; Mahmoud actually makes a point of stating that he never interferes in his children's lives unless he is directly asked for help or advice. When that is the case he is, however, happy to assist them.

Also regarding the elder members of the family the Tejers are fairly liberal; the case of Aisha indicates this. By her own choice she lives alone, an unusual situation for a woman of her generation. She does, however, appreciate the freedom of living by herself; she resists the idea of being "under a daughter-in-law". Even if her children are not very happy with the situation, which may easily be interpreted by the surroundings as a consequence of her children abandoning her, they let her have her way. (As Aisha is Habiba's mother, she is not the responsibility of Mahmoud; still, he agrees with and supports his brothers-in-law's practice concerning her.)

At present, there is little economic dependency between the different generations of Tejers. Mahmoud helps his youngest daughter, who is still a student, as he has helped all his academically trained children through their studies. There are also some distant relatives receiving his regular economic assistance; except from that, the family-members cope on their own economically. This present situation does not, however, in any way rule out material assistance between relatives as a possibility; it is just not needed at the moment. The Tejers of all generations find economic assistance to family-members in need to be a self-evident duty.

None of the Tejers can actually think of any negative aspects of their family-membership. Even though they recognize mutual obligations concerning material and practical assistance, they do not experience this as a burden. In addition, no unacceptable restrictions on individual freedom or unreasonable expectations in any other way are reported by the family-members. They do, however, state that this is not the case in all other families, and they consider themselves lucky because of this relative lack of control from the family.

The definition of the ideal family held by the majority of Tejers reflects the actual situation within their family; the weight is put on emotional

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aspects of family-life. Meriem's definition is representative for the general view of the Tejers:

> I think that to have a good family, first of all we should bring up our children. We should learn them to do good things — not to steal, for example. Secondly, there should be an understanding between the husband and wife. No problems in the family.

All the Tejers express concern for the other family-members. The well-being of the children tend, however, to be particulary important to the elder women. The quality of Habiba's entire life seems to be determined by the children's situations:

> I think that this period of my life is the best, because now all my children — all my daughters are married and live good lives, they live in understanding with their husbands.

Aisha expresses a similar attitude, and also for Mahmoud the children's lives are of big importance:

> It is very important for me to meet them, and I want that they live in a good situation. (...) I no more think about my own future. I now usually think about the future of my children.

Still, Mahmoud makes a point of stating that he does not visit his children — he meets them when they come to see him. This may be seen in connection with his wish not to interfere in their affairs, but is probably more closely connected to the traditional gendered division of family-related functions discussed in chapter three; the maintenance of family-relations through visits is a part of the women's "private" culture. Mahmoud's behaviour may also be understood in light of the fact that according to the traditional social code, receiving visitors instead of visiting is a sign of social regard and status (Abu Sahra 1982).

The Tejers living in Bled see each other regularly; the women also cooperate on several practical household-tasks, as reported earlier. The members of the family who live elsewhere are reported to be missed, but their absence is accepted; Nora, the young teacher, does not feel any pressure to visit Bled. Still, for her own sake, she comes as often as possible; once a month during the year, and for all the holidays. Her wish to see her family is the strongest incentive for her visits; friends come second. Nora feels comfortable with her family; none of the Tejers find

difference in generation or level of education to be a source of conflict or obstacle to communication.

In short: According to the dominating concept of the ideal family among the Tejers, they seem to have one in most respects. The Tejers also tend to share the evaluation of the general development within the family; each generation lives better than the previous. Material concerns are important elements of their evaluation, and also the increased level of education. The family has been prospering during the post-colonial period; elements of "modern society" have made possible the improvement of both their material and their social status. It is reasonable to see the relative liberal-mindedness and individual freedom of the family in connection with its positive experiences with "modern times".

11.1.2 The cousins

The economic relations within the cousins' family are quite different from those of the Tejer-family; both Mohammed and Lassad contribute to the maintenance of their parents on a regular basis. Still, this is not perceived as a burden. On the contrary, Mohammed says, "I am proud. Because I am able not to take from my family, but to give to them".

Mohammed's idea of the ideal family corresponds to a certain extent with his cousin Meriem's:

> The ideal family for me is to have a mother and a father who makes a good couple, and children who succeed in their studies. It is only that.

His younger brother Lassad generally agrees, but adds good economy as an important aspect of an ideal family. They are both satisfied with the relations between the members of their own family. Lassad thinks that his parents are totally satisfied with his life; Mohammed finds one source of conflict only:

> Sometimes my mother says that she wants me to visit a certain person in the family, or that my wife should attend a certain ceremony — we have a very big family here —. That is the only problem. Except from that, they are very content with me, and very content with — everything.

Mohammed does experience conflicts between him and his family because of varying interest and engagement in the Beldiyin social life. This divergence in attitudes he finds to be based on unequal educational backgrounds. Except from this, he does not find any problems of

communication as a consequence of the different levels of education within the family:

> I use their language. When I speak with my mother, I do not speak like when I speak with you. My mother has her own language, in line with her mentality. With uncle Mahmoud, you see I use another language, and with Habiba I use a language — it depends.

Mohammed seems to be quite conscious of the way he deals with the situation; in any case, he does not find it very problematic.

Mohammed and Lassad agree in their evaluation of the family: It prospers, both economically and educationally. Certain reported incidents indicate that the experience of individual freedom is somewhat less in the cousins' family, however; the circumstances around the marriages of the boys described in chapter seven suggest that this may be the case. Still, Mohammed's way of dealing with the obstacles to his marriage shows that his parents' dominance in their children's lives is negotiable. In short, the relations within the cousins' family share central characteristics with those of the Tejer-family.

11.1.3 The Muaddaf-family

The family-relations within the Muaddaf-family differ quite radically from those of the Tejers. All Muaddaf-informants find considerable burdens related to their family-membership; while Fatoma and Fatheia, the elder women, actually seem to be proud of them, the youngest informants find them to be mainly negative. These burdens are closely related to the family's special social status — I let Leila speak for all of them:

> Yes, I feel burdens on me. Because I am the daughter of the Muaddafs. Before my marriage, when I was studying, I could not dare — I had not the courage to for example stop in the street and speak with a boy, it was really impossible, because I was the daughter of the Muaddafs. Even now, there are many things that I want to do, but I cannot, because I should remember that I am the daughter of my family. For example, if I had problems with my husband, and wanted to divorce him, it would be impossible. Because I am a Muaddaf, and my husband is a relative of mine.

While the young Muaddaf-women tend to find their family-membership positive in sum, the young men think that they would have been better off without it. None of the young Muaddafs are very occupied with the

family's special social status; if anything, they seem to be bothered by it. Nejib expresses his feelings for his family-membership thus:

> There are more negative sides. Because I do not believe in my family. I do not mean my parents, my brother and sisters, but the bigger family. I have never believed in it, and I do not feel honoured to belong to it. (...) They usually try to oppress my personal choices, to intervene in my personal affairs. This is why, in some situations, I find myself obliged to moderate my desires, in order to calm my family. And I know that I have no choice.

The social status of the Muaddafs seems to result in a larger exercise of control over the family-members' lives: In chapter seven we saw how Leila was married to a relative because he had the same family-name. Her sister Jalila will probably be spared the same experience; still, we have seen earlier that her father tries to influence her choice of occupation according to what is considered suitable for a Muaddaf-woman. Nejib finds his family's constant interference in his life intolerable, and also Tarek feels that his father is not content with his present situation, and that he tries to influence his personal decisions.

The definitions of an ideal family also differs considerably among the Muaddafs. The younger ones tend to share the Tejer's opinion; they emphasize the importance of openness and a good relationship between the parents and children. The ideas of Fatoma and Fatheia, by contrast, are clearly influenced by considerations of the family's position. Fatheia's definition follows:

> The ideal family for me is — as we do in our family — we should not do bad things, we should not go out whenever we want, we should not speak with everybody. And even for my children, I hope that they follow our way. That they do not, for example, get married to girls that we do not like, and — they should follow our way, in order to get an ideal family.

Fatheia finds her present stage in life to be filled with worries, because of her unmarried sons:

> How will they get married? I think about the girls they will get married to. Especially because we are of a good family, so it is difficult to find girls at the same level. And in addition they should be good-looking, of course, and with education. I would like them to work. I worry that they will find girls that are not good. And some in the family want them to get

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married the traditional way, others not — so I am usually tired, more tired than before, tired of thinking.

Even if the actual situations of Habiba and Fatheia differs we see that for both of them, the concern for the children to a large extent is decisive for the quality of their lives as they experience it. It is also clear that Fatheia's ambitions for her children are influenced by the idea of belonging to a special family. Her mother's way of thinking is in all central respects similar to Fatheia's. None of them find higher education for girls to be an obstacle to the preservation of the family's position, though; the contrary seems to be the case. Still, a proper Muaddaf-girl should not go out whenever she wants, or speak to unsuitable persons — the two ways of life may appear as somewhat complicated to combine.

Fatoma, the Muaddaf grand-mother, and her husband live with their son, and are, like Aisha Tejer, totally dependent on economic assistance from their children. Jalila receives help for her studies; between the other Muaddafs, there are no regular economic relations at the present. Occasional assistance is given both by children and parents, but in general they cope on their own. Still, all the Muaddafs find economic assistance to family-members to be a self-evident principle.

Like the Tejers, the Muaddafs who live in Bled see each other on a regular basis. Those living elsewhere return to Bled quite often. They do, however, not mention the family as a special reason to come — it is more a question of breaking the rhythm of their occupational lives. "If I had a car, perhaps I would go somewhere else ..." says Tarek. Also Nejib goes to Bled primarily for other reasons than to see his family:

> Not really because of the family. My family has never been a need for me. I could be away from them one, two, three years, without being bothered. The most important thing for me is my personal integrity. The fact that I am here in my room makes me at ease; it makes me feel that I am existing. In the village where I work I am non-existent; because I refuse to live there, there is nothing that ties me to that village. What makes me come here, are my things; my books, my records and cassettes. Even if I spend all the time here in my room, without going out, it does not bother me.

The young Muaddafs also seem to have problems of communication with the other generations of the family — not necessarily because of the difference in education, though:

My father and I are on different wavelengths. You know? He has a special manner of thinking, and I have another one. It is special — *bon*, his context is not the same, he was born in the twenties, he has seen the second world-war, and — we do not have the same context, we have not the same — it is not the same. Not the same financial situation, too. And he is a member of a big family. It is not the same for me. (...) I think that if we have not the same way of thinking, we have no similarities in our lives, no?

This is part of Tarek's description of his relationship with his father. It is also representative for Nejib and Jalila's experiences with him.

The Muaddafs' evaluation of the development of their family is considerably more ambivalent than the Tejers'; actually, there is an opposite tendency to be found. Fatoma thinks that her parents lived better than herself; while she married a peasant with a big family to support, they were well off economically. Tarek, too, finds that his father has probably had a better life than him, both concerning economy, and other things. All the young Muaddafs find great differences in their ways of living as compared to their parents' lives. Diverging contexts of time, and different perceptions of life in general are the reasons they see behind these differences.

There seem to be significant generational differences in the Muaddafs' experiences of their family-memberships. Diverging attitudes to the family's special social status stand out as a core factor behind the differences. The two eldest generations tend to give it great importance, and therefore accept the personal restrictions they find necessary in order to preserve it. They seem to find the preservation of the family's social status to be a main objective in life. The young Muaddafs, by contrast, seem to find the family's status to be outdated, in a way, and of little importance, as they experience the restrictions that it imposes as a negative and even intolerable element in their lives.

The Muaddaf-family's status has its base in the traditional social order of the local community; it dates back to the colonial and pre-colonial period. The characteristics of the family that created this position — male literacy and the *Imam*-status — are values in decline in the modern Tunisian society. Formal education is no longer an exceptional asset, and the traditionally highly estimated position as *Imam* meets considerable competition from new prestigious positions in the local community.

The elder Muaddafs' demand that the family-members conform to the traditional "other-directed" rules of conduct, may be understood as a strategy to preserve the family's social status. As this position has its base in the traditional social order, they try to maintain it by following the social

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practices of that order. This conservative attitude seems, however, to create considerable problems and difficulties of communication between the elder and the younger generations of the family, as the young Muaddafs do not find the family's status to be important enough to deserve what they experience as a considerable sacrifice of personal integrity. The family's advantageous "public" social position seems to have significantly less advantageous effects on the "private" personal relations within the family.

11.1.4 The Falleah-family

All the members of the Falleah-family living in Bled have houses in the same quarter, so even though their households are separate, they spend a lot of time together. As reported earlier, Mustfa has six sons of quite different ages. In addition to their economic support of their old father, the sons have assisted each other a lot in getting started with their shops, work-shops, and the other ways in which they earn their living. This support between brothers is a source of obligations; because of the economic and moral debts between them, they do not feel entirely free to do as they wish. Hassan does find that there are burdens related to his family-membership, considerations towards the family that restrict his personal freedom. These obligations do not seem to have damaged the good relations within the family, however; the Falleahs are known to appreciate each other's company.

Hassan's definition of an ideal family reflects this combination of emotional and material aspects:

> I think that before getting married one should have both the economic and
> the emotional side in order. And after getting married, one should bring
> up the children well, and be able to afford their needs. That is how you
> get a good family.

Mustfa and Hassan do not find difference in education to constitute a problem within the family. Mustfa thinks that his parents had better lives than him, because they were better off economically. At the same time, he finds that his grand-children, too, have better lives than him, both concerning economy and education. In general both Mustfa and his son are content with the lives of all the family-members, and find the post-colonial social development to have been generous to the family.

While all the informants have been similarly affected by the post-colonial changes in family-*structure*, the different informant-families have rather diverging practices concerning maintenance of the family-*relations* and control of the family-members' individual lives. The Tejers stand out as the family whose conduct diverges most from the traditional North-African principles for social organization, while the Muaddaf-family is the one whose conduct is most in line with these principles. The implications of these diverging practices will be examined later.

11.2 Relations to the local community

Turning to the informants' relations to the local community, Bled, generation and level of education again stand out as main factors behind the differences. Most of the information on this topic is to be found "between the lines"; the informants have described their relations to Bled mainly in indirect terms. There is, however, no lack of statements clearly indicating the position the local community holds in the different informants' lives.

11.2.1 The two eldest generations

With the exception of Fatoma Muaddaf, who spent twenty years in the Capital, all the informants of the two eldest generations have lived in Bled all their lives. They have only been out of town a few times. Aisha is, however, the only one of these informants who has not performed the *hajj* — the pilgrimage to Mecca. Most of the informants have at least experienced this longer journey. The travel to Mecca holds a very special position in the lives of these people, however, and should not be regarded as an ordinary trip abroad. The fact that Mahmoud Tejer has been to Mecca three times, and his wife Habiba has been there twice, while they have otherwise not been abroad, indicates that the reason for these journeys is not a liking for travels in general, but religious commitment. Actually Mahmoud loathes going away from Bled; as often as possible, he leaves his occasional business in Tunis to be taken care of by others. His whole existence is centred around Bled, and he has little curiosity for the world outside.

The nature and extent of Mahmoud and Habiba's ties to the local community is indicated by the way they approach problems in their lives; Habiba's description of the family's handling of an unknown suitor to one of their daughters is a good illustration:

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At that time we did not know the family of her husband. So, my husband gave him a period. He said to him: Give me a week, or two weeks, and I will give you my answer. And during that time, he asked many people who knew him and his family. And after that, when he was sure that everything was O.K., he agreed.

As the suitor was a Beldiyin, this was an appropriate way of dealing with the situation. This strategy is, however, clearly not applicable to the case of Nora, for instance, as her boyfriend originates from a completely different part of Tunisia. We have seen that this concrete problem has been solved in practice by Mahmoud and Habiba's withdrawal from the decision-making. It is, however, worth noting that they do not account for their way of handling this situation when describing their practices concerning the children's marriages; one may assume that incidents like this fall outside the kind of social situations they have standard means to cope with.

The way Mahmoud deals with his participation in the national elections may serve as another illustration of the same approach: Voting is generally held to be a typical national-level-activity. Still, Mahmoud makes up his mind through interaction with his local community. He knows little of the parties' policies, but asks his acquaintances to tell him which of the candidates that are good; then he votes on the basis of this information.

The importance the elder Muaddafs give to their family's special social position also indicates a strong orientation towards the local social community. Their position is of local origin, and it is of little use to them elsewhere. And because the family's status to a little degree is based on exceptional material wealth, they are in fact special in Bled's social universe only. The fundament of the elder Muaddafs' pride thus seems to imply a strong local orientation from these members of the family.

The language of the elder informants is another illustration of their dependency on the local community. Places are usually referred to in terms of their location in relation to properties of acquaintances; street-names or formal addresses are not used. Thus, a car-crash happens in front of the house of the H.-family, or next to B.'s shop, not in Avenue Bourgiba, for example. The same is the case regarding their perception of time; for them, a certain thing did not happen in 1982, but in the year when a cousin built a second floor on his house, or the year when a daughter had her second child.

It seems as if the elder informants are tied to their local community in quite a profound way; if these persons were removed from Bled, they would loose fundamental cornerstones on which they construct their entire social existence.

11.2.2   The young generation

All the informants of the young generation seem to have more contact with the world outside Bled than their elder relatives. The general increase in geographic mobility mentioned in chapter two may probably account for a part of this tendency. Level of education does, however, to a considerable degree decide the extent and nature of the young informants' geographic mobility. It also seems to influence their relationship to Bled.

Meriem Tejer has lived in Bled all her life. Her husband has spent periods working in The Middle East and in another Tunisian town; during these periods, she has stayed in Bled with the children. This is a solution to such situations much practised by people with low education, and it may be seen as an indicator of a strong sense of belonging to the local community.

Leila Muaddaf spent the first years of her married life in Tunis, but is now in the process of returning to Bled, a fact that she is very pleased with. Lassad still lives in Tunis, but also he and his wife have concrete plans of building a house in Bled and move back as soon as his business allows it. Generally, all the young informants without higher education express a strong sense of belonging to Bled, and those who live elsewhere seem to regard their situation as more or less temporary.

The informants with higher education also report to have positive feelings for Bled. None of them live there, however, and they seem to be considerably less eager to return than the others. Most of them actually express satisfaction with their present situation; their stories suggest that living away from their local community of origin may be a strategy to avoid certain problems:

Nora Tejer likes Bled a lot, and appreciates her occasional stays in her original local community. Still, for several reasons she has no wish for a permanent return to the town. First of all, she sees a potential problem in combining her professional life with her family-relations; it would not be easy to teach relatives, or to give them just marks in school, she thinks. Secondly, she and her fiancé want to live away from their families — not because they do not want them near, but because visiting them then will present a variation in their lives:

> I want to be near my family all the time, but I do not want to live in Bled, because I think that it will be routine. A boring life. But if we visit them from time to time, I feel that there will be a change in my life.

Nora makes a clear distinction between her occupational life and her family- and holiday-life:

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When I come back to my town, I forget all about my work, I leave it in the town where I work. And I try to live with my family. I separate the two lives. And when I go back to the town where I work, I leave the life with my family.

Mohammed shares Nora's approach to his Bled-existence. He loves Bled, but is not planning to return on a permanent basis for a long time:

If I return to Bled, it will not be as a functionary. Not on salary-work. Perhaps, in ten years, if I start a project with my friends — why not. A good hotel, a good restaurant —. After ten years I will have a lot of experience from my job, and a lot of contacts — why not.

Like Nora, Mohammed divides his life into work and holidays:

For me, it is psychological. For me, Tunis means work. And Bled is for relaxation, for breathing. If I stay in Tunis too long, I am out of balance.

We saw above that Bled represents a resort from the routine of working life also to Tarek and Nejib. Their sister Jalila has the same attitude, but she could actually imagine moving back to Bled after her studies, if she got a job there. The chances are, however, small.

Bled seems to represent non-occupational aspects of life for the young informants with higher education. The idea of combining occupational life and life in Bled is rather unattractive to them. A possible permanent return to their original local community tends to be associated with retirement-like situations; Tarek, for instance, could imagine running a small farm there some time in the far future — a return now is out of the question.

Bled is thus far from indifferent to these informants; it satisfies a significant need for relaxation and family-life. The fact that they all return to Bled for the celebrations of the traditional life-course events — engagements, marriages, and also their sons' circumcisions, indicates that they to a significant extent identify with their community of origin. At the same time this illustrates the importance of these celebrations as occasions for families' self-promotion in the social community, as argued in chapter three and chapter six.

Still, the academically trained informants tend to solve the problem of combining their occupational life and the practices it requires, and the practices related to the family-life in a small-scale social community, by separating them both geographically and mentally. This way none of the parts of their life suffer; this solution involves a minimum of compromise.

There is a fundamental change in the academically trained informants' relations to Bled, as compared to the elder informants, and also to a considerable extent the young informants without higher education. To the elder informants, their local community is the fundament of their entire social existence. Also to the young informants without higher education the town constitutes a significant base for their social life — all of their social life, not just a part of it. Bled is evidently important to the informants with higher education; it does, however, only constitute a part of their total social life. It seems to be regarded as problematic to combine Bled-life with the other parts of their life.

The preferred solution to this problem seems to be a geographical and mental separation of the different dimensions of their social life; Bled is for family-life, holidays and relaxation, while the place where they work or study is for occupational life and the life-style it requires. This solution actually seems to work quite well; both for the academically trained informants themselves, and for their Beldiyin families.

11.3 Relations to society and state

We have seen above that the elder informants tend to have a more fundamental orientation towards their local community than the young ones. In relation to this, a clear tendency in their stories stands out as quite puzzling: At the same time as they are profoundly locally oriented, the elder informants report both a larger commitment towards the post-colonial Tunisian regime, and a larger participation in institutionalized political activities than the young informants:

11.3.1 The two eldest generations

All the elder informants regard independence in 1956 as the most important political happening in their lifetime. It is worth noting that they generally associate this happening strongly with the first president, Habib Bourgiba; some actually refer to it not as "the independence", but as "the day when Bourgiba returned from France". The reasons given for the independence's importance are quite homogenous; Fatheia Muaddaf's evaluation covers most opinions:

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The independence was important. When we first heard about it, we were very happy. Because we would be free. From that time all people could work, all children could go to school. Not like under the colonization, when people who had money could be educated, and poor people could not.

The country's freedom in itself is seen as a significant value. The improved possibilities of work and material prosperity is also mentioned as a central positive consequence of the independence, particularly by the men. Again, the women tend to emphasize non-material aspects:

The most important things that the independence brought Tunisia, is the education of our children. And second, the liberation of the women.

This is Habiba Tejer's view, which she shares with all the women. Also the men recognize the improved situation for women after the independence, which again is associated with the new personal code that was introduced in 1957.

A sign of the legitimacy the post-colonial regime enjoys within this category of informants, is the fact that they with few exceptions vote regularly. Even Aisha and Fatoma, two illiterate old housewives of "more than seventy years", participate in every election. Habiba explains her participation thus:

I think that it is one of my rights. Before, women had no right to do that. But why not? Now we are allowed to do it, so we should do it — we should vote.

Hassan has the following view on voting:

I think that it is both a duty and a right to vote. Like that I can participate, and choose the one that I want.

In sum, all the elder informants find that the conditions of existence for most Tunisians have improved drastically as a consequence of independence. The situations before and after independence seem to be experienced as very different; so different that the eldest informants actually claim that they are not comparable. The rise in economic wealth, the introduction of compulsory school, and the improved situation for women — and men — are reported to be the most significant consequences of the independence. This positive development is to a large extent associated with one person; the first president Habib Bourgiba. The fact that all the

elder informants participate in elections on a regular basis indicates a recognition of the legitimacy of the post-colonial regime. One may assume that this legitimacy is based mainly on the informants' positive experiences with the regime during the early post-colonial period. Their attitudes toward today's concrete political situation support this assumption:

The elder informants report little interest in present national politics. The low interest seems to be based on a lack of understanding of political life; disappointment with the late political development also seems to be of significance. Some of them tend to associate political interest and engagement with trouble. Fatheia expresses this idea most clearly:

> I am not interested in politics. Many things do not please me, but I do not intervene. Because I want to live in peace. No politics.

The regard for the present politicians is not very high, either; Fatoma speaks for most of the elder informants when stating that

> Some of them destroy, others repair. And there are more of those who destroy than those who repair.

At the same time as they express a strong basic support for the post-colonial regime, and recognize that it has improved their life-conditions significantly, the elder informants are reserved in their attitude towards the concrete present political development in Tunisia. An objection held by several of them, is that the politicians do not follow the religion. Still, it is worth noting that none of these informants, who are all sincere Muslims, have any regard for the Islamic fundamentalists — not as a political movement, and not as interpreters of the religion. They express a considerable suspicion towards them; a general idea is that they dress according to the Muslim rules, and think that this allows them to behave as they like. The elder informants represent what one may call a "traditional" Tunisian way of interpreting Islam. Habiba's view illustrates this interpretation well:

> It is not important. To wear this kind of clothes, and do bad things, for example — . The more important for me is to behave — to do good things. Because — religion and belief are in our harts, not in the kind of clothes we wear.

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11.3.2 The young generation

The young informants, who have not personally experienced the independence, all find "The Seventh of November" — the change of president in 1987 — to be the most important political event in their lifetime; that is, among those who find any important political events to have taken place at all. The general evaluation of this change three years after, illustrates the young informants' general feelings towards national politics, however; disappointment and lack of interest. Nora expresses the common opinion of her generation:

> Of course, when Zin (the new president) took the power. Because it was the first time that this happened. From the beginning, from when I was born, I lived with the same situation. I knew that Bourgiba was our president — the same things, nothing new. But with this change, we hoped that there would be a new life for us. But it is the same. Only the persons changed.

The young informants without higher education show a genuine lack of interest. None of them have ever voted; Lassad and Leila — as well as Jalila — have never received the papers necessary for participation in elections, and none of them have bothered to make an effort to get them. To the extent that they find national politics to influence their personal lives at all, they name mainly negative effects, like increase in food-prizes, as examples. Like the elder informants, none of them have much faith in the politicians. Leila puts it like this:

> Perhaps there are some who take care of the country, but then there comes one and takes all the money, and we are back where we started. So if we advance five years, we are put back five years again.

The young informants with higher education to an extent share the attitude of the others towards politics. Still, their apathy seems to be more situational; several of them report that the hopelessness of the present Tunisian political life makes them stay away from it. If the country had a proper political system, they would have reacted differently. Nora says:

> If we lived like in other countries, if we had a real political life, politics would have a influential role in our lives. But like this politics — one party masters all the country — it is not interesting at all. And of course it has a bad influence, a negative influence, on our lives.

Some of the academically trained male informants have been politically active in different oppositional movements earlier; it has caused them considerable trouble, however, and they have pulled out, in order to protect themselves. Nejib has the following experiences with Tunisian politics:

> I am very interested in politics, but I find that it is better for me to stay away from this activity, because, as I told you, my political past could create difficulties for me. In fact I am not very interested in Tunisian politics, because politics are disgusting here. Anyway, I think that Tunisian politics are secondary politics. Compared to what is happening in the world, politics in Tunisia has never been important, and it can never be a part of the international politics that change the world. It is the politics that change the world that interest me, the politics of the dominating and leading countries.

Mohammed is the only one of the informants with higher education who votes regularly, and who show genuine interest for Tunisian political life. He does, however, report to be quite alone with this attitude to national politics:

> Yes, I vote. And I believe in it. Most of my friends do not believe in voting — I do.

A few of the others have participated in elections once or twice; some are actually embarrassed to admit it, however, and stress that it is not a regular habit.

The informants of the young generation seem to identify with the Tunisian political regime to a much *lesser* degree than the elder informants. At the same time, they tend to have a clearer idea of Tunisia as a national state, independently from the actual regime, than the elder ones. Mohammed, for instance, complains about elder people's lack of interest in the national honour:

> The honour in Tunisia is very closely related to the women. The honour of the nation, the country, means nothing here. (...) One speaks a lot about honour. But when the Israelis came here and bombed us, nobody in the families, not the fathers, not the mothers, spoke about honour.

The informants who have not personally experienced the independence, seem to have an overall negative perception of the post-colonial political regime in Tunisia. The elder speak of Bourgiba, the first president, with affection; to the young Tunisians, he is mainly a favourite object of jokes

— to them, he is a symbol of corruption, cynicism, and political decay. Personal experience with the early post-colonial period, as well as the colonial period, seems to be of importance for the basic attitude towards the political regime as such. The difference in voting-behaviour between the generations should be seen in this connection.

The young informants — particularly those with higher education — do, however, seem to have a stronger idea of Tunisia as a national state, independent from the actual regime in power. This generation's increased contact with other parts of the country, may have contributed to this situation. The fact that Tunisia has been an autonomous, independent state all their lives, and that they therefore have no other image of their country, is probably also of significance. As important is probably the fact that all the young informants have been in contact with the institution of formal education introduced after independence — an institution that, as argued in chapter nine, has contributed significantly to the integration of the younger generations of Tunisians in the new, independent national state.

A general feature of all the informants' political attitudes is that they regard present, concrete, national politics with both scepticism and lack of interest. They seem to expect nothing good from the authorities, and try to cope with their lives in spite of the national politics, rather than with the help of it.

11.4 Trends of change in relations to family, local community, and society

The change in household-structure that has taken place in Bled during the last three generations deserves to be characterized as remarkable. The average size of households has decreased significantly as a result of the decrease in physical reproductivity, and the "nuclearization" of extended family-households.

It is reasonable to assume that the splitting up of the extended family households into smaller units may have resulted in a weakening of the extended family-relations of mutual support, obligations and control that, as argued in chapter three, traditionally have been strong in the North-African societies. The elder informants, who have experienced both kinds of household-structure in practice, confirm that such a change has taken place.

Still, the case of Leila, who in spite of her problems with her mother-in-law seems unable to move in with her parents, indicates that the traditional patrilinear principles of family-organization have not yet been through any

significant *qualitative* changes; their importance seems, however, to have decreased.

All the informants find this development to have been overall positive. In addition to the reported decrease of conflicts within the families, the "nuclearization" of the households also seems to be experienced as a result of material prosperity, and as an increase of comfort in the informants' lives.

Turning to the nature of the present family-relations within the informant families, the families' specific histories seem to be of large importance. According to the traditional North-African principles for social organization, the Tejer-family is actually in a rather unfavourable situation: It is small, with few male members, and with no particular traditionally founded social position in Bled. This originally unfavourable situation seems, however, to have had a positive effect on the family's present situation. First of all, their traditionally defined modest social status seems to have given the eldest Tejer-generations a positive attitude to the post-colonial social development. Their favourable experiences with the recent social changes seem to have made them more open also to the "modern" moral aspects of life. At the same time, the small size of the extended family leaves the Tejers relatively free to deviate from traditional rules.

These conditions seem to have eased considerably the generational conflicts that will be unavoidable in a society in rapid change. The Tejers have been able to preserve good relations within the family, in spite of individual differences between the members.

As we have seen, the Muaddafs have a very different family-history. They have a special social status to protect, a position that originates from the traditional social order in Bled. In addition, the extended Muaddaf-family is large, with many influential and dominating male relatives, who exercise a considerable degree of control on the individual members. Even if Fatheia and Tahar had wanted to give their children more personal freedom than they actually have, it would probably have been difficult, because of the influence of the extended family.

As a result of the post-colonial social changes, the Muaddafs' social position is in decline. This development seems to be counteracted by the elder generations through conformity to the traditional other-directed rules of conduct. As the youngest generation is a product of the new times, they seem to experience this behaviour as out-dated. In addition, their own preferences are so influenced by the values of the new times that they experience the demands of the family as a major obstacle to a proper life. Their reactions are of two kinds: Leila seems to have accepted that her family plays a major role in her life; in any case, her situation as an

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uneducated housewife does not allow her to object. She needs the support of her family, without it she would be worse off. For the academically trained young Muaddafs, withdrawal from the family-scene seems to be the solution. This is particularly the case for the boys.

This situation tends to influence the young educated Muaddafs' relation to Bled as a whole. Even though they return to their community of origin regularly, the boys in particular report that this is mostly because practical obstacles prevent them from going elsewhere. Nejib explicitly states that his family-membership has a negative influence on his social life in Bled:

> In certain situations I am presented as the grand-child of ... or the son of ... This is very common in our society, your name comes second, it is the family-name that is regarded as important. This is a handicap, and I would like to leave Bled, in order to try to protect my integrity.

The informant-families' particular histories seem to be of influence for their perception of the recent social changes. The connection between the families' past and present may furthermore be characterized as *negative*; a modest position in the traditional social order tend to lead to an ability to adapt to the "modern times", and vice-versa. In any case, family-belonging seems to constitute a significant — positive or negative — part of the self-image of all the informants, regardless of gender, generation, and level of education.

The informants' relation to the local community is connected to their relation to the family. Level of education has an even more significant influence on the informants' relation to Bled, however. As argued in chapter three, low geographic mobility and a conception of one's local community as the only significant social universe are characteristics of the traditional North-African social organization. The low mobility of the elder informants, as well as their way of approaching social life in Bled, indicate that these characteristics are relevant as descriptions of their relations to their local community of origin.

This approach to Bled is also present among the young uneducated informants; even if the tendency is somewhat weaker for this generation, they seem to share the elder informants' perception of Bled as their "real" social universe.

Higher education seems to change the informants' relation to Bled in a fundamental way; it introduces a central new dimension in the lives of the informants — a dimension that neither has any connection to Bled, nor seems easy to combine with the Bled-part of their lives. The academically trained informants handle this problem by separating the two parts of their

lives, both physically and mentally. This suggests that their professional life and their family-life are practised according to different kinds of principles, which again suggest that the kind of social and professional life obtained through academical training is qualitatively different from the traditional social life in Bled. On this background, one may assume that the Bled-life is of less fundamental importance for the self image of the highly educated informants than for the informants without higher education.

Turning to the informants' relation to national society and state, generation seems to be a factor of large significance. The two eldest generations, who have personally experienced the independence, have a more positive perception of the post-colonial political regime than the others. The young informants — particularly those with higher education — seem to have a clearer idea of Tunisia as a national state, independent from the actual political regime in power.

The post-colonial social changes — some of which were examined in chapter two — seem to have had a distinct influence on all the informants' social practices, as well as on their perception of the social world in which they live. The actual *nature* of this influence vary significantly between the informants of the two eldest generations and those of the young generation, however. The elder informants tend to relate the changes — that they find overall positive — to the independence as their starting point, and to the post-colonial regime as their cause. The young informants' perceptions appear more as *results* of these changes; the principles of the post-colonial society are to a larger extent internalized in them, and seem to lie behind their entire idea of the social reality in which they live.

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12. Identity

> A good life consists of obeying your husband, your family, and your father, and of having good children (Fatoma, 1st.gen. Muaddaf).

> I think that in order to have a good life, one should usually go for trips, and — change the atmosphere, not only spend the life between house and work. One should change, have a varied life, be entertained (Jalila, 3rd.gen. Muaddaf).

In chapter three I argued that the traditional North-African concept of identity is fundamentally group-related, gender-related, and other-dependent, and that as a result, there will be little practical distinction between the meaning of the concepts of "identity" and "social identity". Therefore, these concepts are understood as equivalent in the study, at the same time as the gender- and family-related aspects of identity have been given attention when this "traditional identity" has been studied.

As also discussed in chapter three, a main purpose of the study is to examine a possible change in this "traditional" sense of identity among the informants, a change in the direction of a more individualized and "de-genderized" sense of identity — here called "individual identity".

On the basis of this interpretation of the two concepts of identity, the information about the informants' thoughts and practices presented in the previous chapters has been seen as indicators of the different kinds of identities among them. So far, the thoughts and practices have shown a strong connection between the informants' level of education and their way of understanding themselves. Higher education seems to lead to an increased individualization of self images.

This tendency can be seen even more clearly in the informants' interpretations of certain concepts that have a strong bearing on their self-understanding. This chapter will examine their different interpretations of "honour" and "individual freedom". In addition, it will present the informants' very diverging ways of describing themselves.

12.1 Honour

The informants' definitions of honour are rather diverging — not only between the uneducated and the educated, as one may expect, but also within the generations. In order to understand this divergence in definitions, Tarek Muaddaf's clarification of the concept may be useful:

> There are perhaps many kinds of honour. Like for example the honour of the wife, and the honour of the man himself. The honour of the wife in Tunisia is still — *puh*, it is very important.

Tarek's statement corresponds, one should note, with Bourdieu's definition of the concept of honour presented in chapter three. We shall see how the male informants speak of male honour, while the women speak of the female honour; however, they all agree that fundamentally, honour is a collective family concern.

All the informants of the eldest generation agree that honour is very important in Tunisia. Fatoma Muaddaf is the one who expresses this view most categorically:

> It is better for one who looses his honour to kill himself. Honour means everything in Tunisia. It is equal to life. Especially for those who have a close relationship to the religion.

The eldest also agree on what one should do to preserve one's honour — one should stay away from "bad things". The bad things mentioned vary, however, between the genders: To Mustfa Falleah, it is drinking. In addition, he observes, one should say prayers in order to be an honourable man. He describes men's honour-preserving behaviour particularly. Aisha, by contrast, points out the fact that "girls should not go with boys" in order to preserve the honour — and describes women's honourable behaviour. All the eldest informants agree that an individual's deviance from the code of honour will harm the entire family as much as the individual alone.

The informants of the second generation, too, find honour to be one of the most important elements in life — "An honourless man is worth nothing here. All people will speak about him", as Hassan Falleah puts it. The degree to which also the second generation finds individual honour and family-honour to be intertwined, is illustrated by Mahmoud's definition of the concept:

> If one has good children, who have good jobs and lead good lives, this is honour. But if someone lives a bad life, without taking into consideration

respect for other people, respect for the job, and for the family, this man has no honour.

At the same time as he links the honour closely to the conduct of the entire family, it seems clear that Mahmoud, as Mustfa, describes the men's honour-preserving behaviour.

Like Aisha, Fatheia Muaddaf gives a description of the honour of the women in particular:

> The honour of the family, the honour of the girl is primary. If a girl has her honour, she can marry the best boy, even if she is not wealthy. And it is the same for a man.

Fatheia finds the women's preservation of their honour and the family-honour to be very closely related; in fact, it seems to represent the same thing for her. This connection is further strengthened by the definitions of honour held by the informants of the young generation, as we shall see:

Leila and Meriem, the two young housewives, agree that honour is very important in Tunisia, and that it is related to the girls' behaviour much more than to the boys'. Leila expresses herself quite clearly about this:

> I think that honour is related to women in Tunisia. We cannot speak about the honour of men, because men can do bad things, can be bad, and — it is a man, here, we do not do anything with them. But for women, it is very important. It is difficult, for example, that a woman do bad things, and that anyone will accept her afterwards. That any boy will marry her. So it is very important for the girls.

Here, "bad things" should be understood mainly as pre-matrimonial sexual activity. This illustrates a feature that is central to the younger informants' perceptions of honour in general; more explicitly than the elder they link it to sexual behaviour, and then particularly women's sexual behaviour. Lassad is an exception; he shares the elder men's concept of honour:

> I think that honour has a main importance for me. It is not related to women only, but to men and women alike, to both of them. For me, when a man or a woman preserves the honour, he can live with confidence in himself. He has an importance in the society. But without honour he cannot live. He will have no confidence in himself, and even people, the point of view of people, will be against him.

Even if he claims to define the honour for both genders, it seems as if Lassad, like the elder men, describes primarily men's relation to honour.

Like Hassan, he implicitly links the question of honour to people's opinion, and thus its other-related nature.

All the informants without higher education, of all generations and both genders, agree that honour is not only extremely important in the society, but also very good. Even Leila, who seems to find the demands for honourable behaviour to be somewhat burdensome, states that the importance of honour is a positive thing, "because it limits the bad things in the society". These informants all seem to find the social benefits of honour to be more significant than the restrictions the principles of honour impose on their individual lives.

When put together, the uneducated informants' conceptions of honour correspond with Bourdieu's definition presented in chapter three: The men's reported honourable behaviour reflects their traditionally defined role, characterized by "outside" social relations with "others", and by occupational and religious tasks: An honourable man should not drink, he should perform his prayers, he should respect other people, take his job seriously, and respect his family. It thus corresponds with the active kind of male honour that, according to Bourdieu, is men's contribution to the collective family-honour.

An honourable girl should, by contrast, put briefly and in Aisha's words, "not go with boys". A woman should, first and last, not be sexually promiscuous in any way; if she is, she will ruin her entire family. The reported content of the women's honour corresponds with the passive nature it is given in Bourdieu's definition, as well as with their female "private", "inside", secluded life in general.

All these informants' statements that honour is basically a family-matter, complete the picture of their understanding of honour as a reflection of the "traditional North-African" notion of honour presented in chapter three.

Fatheia Muaddaf states that honour is as important today as it was before, because

> girls and boys study now, and know a lot about honour. So they understand the notion of honour, and refuse a man or a woman without honour.

Fatheia's ideas about what children learn in school does, however, correspond rather badly with the facts; her youngest son Nejib's interpretation of honour suggests that she has misunderstood:

> Honour. In Tunisia, and in all the Arab-Muslim countries, we speak a lot about honour. Listen — the word "honour" is usually associated with sexuality, at least in the Arab-Muslim countries. Even if we do not refer

to sexuality in the society, honour is still related to sexuality, indirectly, through fantasies, etcetera.(...) in most cases we speak of honour as an element concerning the women's role in the society. I consider it an idiotic and pro-slavery concept, because it involves the elements of women's oppression, like prohibiting freedom of contact, communication and expression.

Both Fatheia's other educated children share their brother's opinion about honour, but express themselves rather briefly on the topic: "It has no meaning to me", says Tarek, while Jalila quite simply states that "it is nonsense".

The concept of honour does make sense to Mohammed, the Tejer-cousin; to him it means something else, however:

> The honour in Tunisia is very closely related to the women. The honour of the nation, the country, means nothing here. There are some exceptions, but in general, when one talks about honour, it means the women. For me, that is not honour.

Nora's reflections about the role and function of honour in her society is a good illustration of the educated informants' problematic and intermediary position between their own moral preferences and those of their social surroundings:

> Yes, of course [I think a lot about honour]. Because even if I am convinced that... Educated people are generally torn between this: The mentality — the religion, and their education. Even if I was convinced that I should have, for example, a sexual relationship with the man I agree with, even before the marriage, I cannot have that; because of my family, and because of the society. (...) In some cases honour is good, and in some cases it is bad. It is good, because some people do not know how to use their freedom... you know, it is good to limit the bad sides of our society. But if all people were conscious, knew how to use their freedom — if they had sexual relationships because they agreed with the other person, loved this person, if they were conscious of that, I think that it would be good. But what we need is consciousness. People are not — that is what we need in Tunisia.

As argued in chapter three, the concepts of honour and shame represent the basic moral principles in the traditional North-African societies — the principles on which the entire social organization is built. One may therefore assume that an individual's attitude to honour will reflect to which degree he or she identifies with the social system it represents.

Once again, we see that level of education stands out as a more significant factor for change than gender and generation. All the informants without higher education recognizes not only that honour is important in their society, but also that it should be so — honour represents a fundamental value in their lives.

The academically trained informants, by contrast, all distance themselves from the concept; they recognize its social importance, but see it as a problem — particularly for the women. They report that the demand that they adapt to the moral code of honour represents an obstacle to their ability to lead the lives they personally find right. Honour is thus defined as a negative force, and also as a hindrance to their individual freedom, that, as we shall see in the next section, is experienced as a very important — but rather problematic — value in their lives.

12.2 Individual freedom

Since "honour" represents a main element in a moral-system that requires the individual's subjection to the family-group, "individual freedom" may be seen as its logical opposite. We shall see that it is to a considerable degree experienced this way by the informants — particularly by the women.

All the men of the two eldest generations share a common and clear perception of individual freedom. Their interpretation has certain similarities with the classic, negative definition of the concept; I let Hassan Falleah speak for them all:

> Individual freedom means that nobody bothers you, that nobody intervenes in your affairs, and that you do not intervene in other people's affairs.

All the elder men find individual freedom to be rather important; relating their interpretation of the concept to the traditional North-African male role, it is understandable why this is. The image of the man as an independent, honourable actor interacting with other men of equal social status on the "outside" arena, does not encourage relations of submission and domination between men. The importance the men give to individual freedom as they understand it is not inconsistent with their male notion of honour, but rather a logical part of it.

When turning to the women of the two eldest generations, their perceptions of individual freedom are less homogenous, and also less clear.

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Habiba and Fatoma have the same idea of what it means to be free; it is to be allowed to do good things. Habiba speaks:

> I think that individual freedom means that if I want to do something —
> a good thing, for example, nobody will be against me, against my
> freedom. But if I want to do a bad thing, of course my family, my
> husband, will be against me. And when I want to do something, I should
> take into consideration the reaction of the family, the reaction of my
> husband.

These two women express rather modest demands for individual freedom; their perception is not inconsistent with their traditionally defined female roles, as it in fact only implies a freedom to do what women are supposed to do in any case.

Aisha, the Tejer grand-mother, has her own, concrete way of understanding individual freedom; according to her definition she has it, as she has been living alone since her husband died:

> In my own house I am free. When I want to go out, I go out; when I
> want to eat, I eat — and I prepare what I like. I do not want to be under
> a daughter-in-law.

Aisha is very fond of this freedom of hers, and is constantly turning down all suggestions from her children to give it up, and move in with them instead.

Fatheia Muaddaf is the only one of the elder women whose interpretation of individual freedom approximates the one of the elder men; her interpretation thereby also implies that freedom is something she has not — a fact that she is aware of:

> Freedom means that one can do what one wants, can make decisions
> without involving anybody. For me it is impossible to do that. I cannot
> make decisions alone. I feel that I have someone dominating me. I cannot
> do anything my husband dislikes.

Her perception of individual freedom is in contradiction with her traditionally defined female role, a contradiction she acknowledges — and solves, by accepting that she cannot be free.

Fatheia's housewife-daughter Leila shares her mother's interpretation of individual freedom. Like her, she also recognizes that she is not free:

It is difficult to say that I am free. I never felt that I was free. (...) It is important, but it is difficult — I say it again. There are only rare cases of girls who live freely.

Meriem Tejer, the other young housewife, tend to share her mother and Fatoma's understanding of the concept, rather than the one of Leila and Fatheia:

I think that individual freedom means that one is free to do what one wants, but within limits. Limited freedom — not to be free to do bad things.

Lassad, the young man without higher education, shares the elder men's opinion about individual freedom, as he shares their opinions about most things: Freedom is the right to be left alone with one's private decisions, and with life in general.

Concerning individual freedom, the informants without higher education share the framework of meaning within which they understand the concept. Their definitions are, however, clearly diverging, according to gender. Their gendered conceptions of freedom are not inconsistent, but rather *complementary* — except for the cases of Fatheia and Leila. These women have solved the conflict between their understanding of freedom and their traditional female role by accepting that individual freedom is not for them; they have given up this value in favour of their submission to their family-group and the society.

With only one exception, the young, academically trained informants support the negative definition of individual freedom held by the uneducated men. The fact that half of the educated informants supporting this definition are women, as well as the fact that they do not suggest that this is a value they are not entitled to because of their gender, make their interpretations rather remarkable. It is reasonable to see these women's demands for individual freedom in connection with the previously presented argument that they, because of their education, have come to constitute a new category of women in the society.

Nejib Muaddaf is the one who distances himself from the other academically trained informants' definition of individual freedom; it does not contain enough freedom for him:

I am totally against this notion of freedom. I believe in the absolute freedom, since freedom is not an excluded element. It is a catalyst that should enrich the individual's personality. This is how the individual can be able to choose his situation, and his own autonomous life. (...) So,

freedom consists of trying to conceive the world in your own way, and to be completely free to see the world the way you like. When I say world, I mean the society, individuals, etcetera.

The academically trained informants value their freedom highly. Still, in their society they have to struggle to defend it. Mohammed is, however, optimistic concerning the long-term conditions of this value:

In my opinion, the individual freedom is a mentality. And it will come with time in Tunisia. Because — for example, my generation, the young people. What we have done, is the contrary of our fathers. Personally, I have no problems with my father, but most young people have. My friends want to go out at night — their fathers say no. But later — I will let my son go out. O.K? It will come with the time. This will become a part of the individual freedom of my son.

We have seen that the young, academically trained informants all tend to reject honour as a concept of any value or positive connotation. At the same time, they emphasize the importance of individual freedom. They abandon the hallmark of the moral-system of their society, and praise its logical, and, as we have seen, also its practical opposite. This indicates rather strongly the existence of a distinct individual identity among them; an identity that at the same time seems to be relatively gender-neutral.

The informants without higher education, by contrast, see honour as a main value in their lives, and the women are ready to sacrifice their personal freedom if it contradicts the traditional principles of honourable conduct. The fact that the uneducated men all find individual freedom to be a rather important aspect of their life, does, as argued above, not contradict their even larger fondness of honour, as a degree of individual independence is a characteristic of men's traditionally defined code of honour. The thorough division of the uneducated informants' interpretations of the two concepts according to gender strengthens the argument that among these informants, a sense of identity characterized by the individuals' gender and belonging to a family-group is dominant.

12.3 "Who are you?"

The existence of two fundamentally different concepts of identity among the informants is even more clearly expressed in their descriptions of themselves, of who they are. The question appeared to be rather hard to understand for the informants without higher education; some of them were not able to answer it until they were told to present themselves, as to a

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stranger. Those who presented themselves and those who described themselves did it in similar ways, however; the additional question did not seem to contain a different meaning. The fact that the uneducated informants in general had difficulties in understanding the question, while all the educated informants understood it easily, and in an entirely different way, is a rather interesting feature in itself.

With minor variations, all the men without higher education describe themselves by their name, their fathers name, their profession, and their place of origin. Let us start with the eldest informant, Mustfa:

> I am Mustfa ben[15] Mohammed ben Falleah. (a person present: *Hajj* Mustfa?) No. I should not call myself that, because it is a duty. It should not be mentioned with the name.

His son, Hassan, is rather more informative:

> I am Hassan Falleah. I was born in 1940. I am Tunisian, and I was born in Bled. And I am a shopkeeper.

Mahmoud had big problems of understanding the question, even when he was asked to present himself:

> I am Mahmoud Tejer, son of Ahmed. (his son: and how do you present yourself when you meet new people at the *hajj*?) My name is Mohammed, I come from Tunisia. What more should I say? I have no education, no profession, so that is all.

Mahmoud's nephew Lassad did not initially understand the question, either:

> I would give him my name, and my profession. And if he was from Bled, and knew the families, I would tell him that I am the son of my family.

The women without higher education tend to understand the question in the same way as the men, but they give importance to other aspects in their descriptions of themselves; to them, only their family-relations to men seem to be of significance for who they are. Fatoma Muaddaf understands the question immediately:

> I am *flen,*[16] the daughter of *flen*, and the wife of *flen*. That is all.

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[15] "ben" means "son of" in Arabic.
[16] "flen" means "N.N." in Arabic.

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Her daughter, Fatheia, needs some help before she is able to answer. When she does, it is in the exact same way as her mother:

> I would say that I am — my name, the wife of — my husband, and the daughter of — my father.

Habiba Tejer answers in her own way:

> I am Habiba bent Najjar.[17] Tejer.

She smiles while doing so; I believe she is leaving something out — on purpose.

Her daughter Meriem, by contrast, does not leave out anything when asked to present herself:

> I am Meriem, the wife of Nasser Schilli. If they do not know Nasser, I say that he is the son of Mohammed Schilli, who worked as a carpenter. And if they do not know, I say that I am the daughter of Mahmoud Tejer, who has a shop there and there. That is how I present myself.

Leila Muaddaf is the only one of the women without higher education who deviates somewhat from the way in which the others describe themselves; she seems to understand the question a bit like the educated informants do, even if she prefers to get the additional question before she answers:

> I would say that I am a girl from Bled, and that I live in Bled. I am married, I have two girls; I used to live in Tunis, for two years. I am now building my house. Of course I have faced problems in my life ....

she says, and smiles.

Gender rather than generation is what distinguishes the uneducated informants' approach to the question of who they are; the differences caused by gender are corresponding to their gendered social positions defined by the patrilinear principles of the traditional social organisation.

The academically trained informants all understand the question in a fundamentally different way. One of them escape the task of answering; Jalila Muaddaf chooses the easy way out with a quick "I do not know. I am searching". Also her brother Tarek after some reflection finds that he is not certain about the answer:

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[17] Her maiden family-name, not her father's first name.

I do not know. Who am I? It is a very difficult question. You see, perhaps, now I am not very — how can I say it — even me, I do not know exactly who I am. I am looking for someone. I am looking to concretize my principles, my opinions — I am looking for this — who I am. I think — until now, perhaps, I am not mature.

His brother Nejib seems to be rather aware of who he is; on the basis of his answer, one may assume that his self-understanding makes life difficult for him:

Who am I. It depends. I would not like to fall in the pit of narcissism, and neither in the one of paranoia. (...) I want to be independent, sovereign of myself; to commend myself by myself, to decide myself by myself. I know very well that it is a paranoiac trait, but I do not mind, because it plays an important role in my life, and I try to safeguard this personality. But as a definition, I am a citizen of a society whose people, and mentality, are not mine.

Nora has been given the last word in this presentation; her description of her life sums up its main point:

Perhaps I can divide my life in two parts — life before university, and after university. Of course, before university, I studied in primary and secondary school; I knew nothing but to study, and — at home. Of course I had my entertainment, I played volleyball, for example, and — I had some entertainment.

But after that, at university, even my — how can I say it — even my thinking changed. Because I had many experiences, at the university — I met many people from different countries, — I lived another, different life. So, at university I changed, and after that, of course I try to have my own ideas, to look at life differently....

The informants conceive themselves in fundamentally diverging ways. While the uneducated express self-images that reflect the traditional North-African principles of social and moral organization, academic training seems to have led to a new sense of identity among the educated informants, characterized by individualization and "de-genderization".

New educational practices, made available by the post-colonial structural changes, and chosen as strategies of action by the academically trained

informants, seem to have led not only to new ways of thinking, but also to new ways of understanding oneself.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, all the educated informants find that their living-conditions have improved as a result of their academic training. This does not, however, imply that their lives have become less problematic than they otherwise would have been; the educated informants find themselves in a difficult and intermediary situation. The divergence between their personal preferences and the expectations of the social surroundings is a constant source of frustration; "I am a citizen of a society whose people, and mentality, are not mine", says Nejib.

The post-colonial structural changes have also influenced the lives of the uneducated informants. Even if their actual practices have remained quite similar, their way of perceiving their situation seems to have become more reflective, as a result of the new basis of comparison provided by their educated relatives. The "new" practices have made the traditional, "invisible" *habitus* more visible, also to those who lead lives in accordance with it. Their social reality is therefore no longer a "traditional society", as the term was understood in chapter three: They no longer live in a stable, homogenous society, that constitute the only social reality imaginable. The uneducated informants are also in an intermediary situation as a result of the post-colonial changes; their position "in-between" is, however, of a different nature than that experienced by the academically trained informants.

The informants are living under rather complicated conditions; the fact that their different intermediary positions imply different kinds of problems, make it all the more difficult. Their ability to cope with these conditions — in relation to themselves, and in relation to each other — is impressive. Some are more successful than others; still, they all reveal remarkable skills in finding strategies through which they can negotiate social situations that allow for a required minimum of room for different practices, thoughts, and senses of identity.

13. Conclusion: Negotiating the "in-between"

Tunisia has undergone tremendous social change since independence in 1956. A sketch of the social point of departure of this post-colonial change was drawn in chapter three: North-African societies have traditionally been characterized by a gendered, collective, and other-directed kind of small-scale social organization.

The post-colonial *structural changes* have contributed to a development departing from these traditional North-African principles of social organization. The introduction of a compulsory-school system, a thorough change in the preconditions for control of human reproductivity, and significant changes in civil legislation are changes that have been given particular emphasis in this study.

This is the historical and social background for the *main* objective of the study; an analysis of post-colonial structural change as it appears to Tunisians who experience it in their daily lives.

We have seen that the structural changes have had significant effects on the *conditions of existence* of all the individuals figuring as informants in this study. However, the actual nature of these effects vary significantly. The informants' *gender* seem to influence the nature of their experiences; their age at the time of independence stands out as a main *generational* line of division.

The informants of the *two eldest generations*, who were all adults at the time of independence, report to have experienced the general economic growth, the "nuclearization" of the household-units, and — particularly for the women — the general opening up of the "outside" to women's physical presence, as some of the more central changes in objective structures that have influenced their *personal* post-colonial conditions of existence. The elder informants have furthermore experienced these changes as being overall positive.

The elder generations have, however, had to relate to a number of other structural changes; changes that, because of the age factor, have had limited relevance for their personal life-courses, while having significant consequences for the life-courses of the *young informants*. The elders have

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had to cope with the fact that the practices of their children or grand-children have become markedly different from their own, as a result of new social structures that have not affected them personally.

The social changes that the elder informants have experienced as remarkable have been relevant to the young informants as "fait accomplis". One may therefore assume that the different *post-colonial structural changes* have different *meanings* for the different *generations* of informants, as well as different *consequences* for their actual *practices*.

A central structural change that has been of personal relevance to the young generation alone, was the introduction of a compulsory-school system, including access to education at university-level. The large increase in the availability of contraceptives, together with the decrease in child-mortality has provided the post-colonial generations of Tunisians with a possibility to choose other reproductive practices than the elder generations. For the young women, the introduction of an legal lower age of marriage in particular, and the significant rise in the average age of marriage for girls in general, have clearly influenced their life-courses. The increase in geographical mobility furthermore seems to have affected mainly the young generation.

The post-colonial changes in social structures have provided the young Tunisians with *new alternative practices*, and with a potential ability to change the nature of central phases of their life-courses. The informants' approaches to these alternatives show, however, that the actual ways in which they are evaluated, and thus practised, vary considerably also within the young generation. The changes in objective structures seem to affect the young informants' *cognitive and motivating structures* in different ways. All the young informants have practices that deviate from those of the elder informants, but the nature of the deviations vary. *Level of education* has been identified as a main factor of influence on the different practices within the younger generation:

The young informants *without* higher education show a general tendency of choosing between available alternatives practices that to a significant degree correspond with the principles of the traditional North-African social organization. We have seen that a low level of formal education tends to lead to later *occupations* that in most respects reflect the traditional, gender-defined division of labour: The women become full-time married housewives; they spend the majority of their adult lives "inside", taking care of "private" tasks. The men, by contrast, lead "outside", income-generating occupational lives — within traditional occupational branches. The occupational lives of the young informants without higher education reflect the traditional *complementary* nature of the *gendered division of*

labour, and the *organic* way in which the family-group traditionally is composed.

The general post-colonial change in *age of marriage* for girls seems to have least effect on the lives of the young women without education. They marry much later than their mothers and grand-mothers, but significantly much earlier than the young women with a higher education. Accordingly, the *reproductive practices* of the uneducated young couples deviate from those of their elder relatives, but not as significantly as they deviate from the reproductive practices of the academically trained informants. We have also seen that the young, uneducated informants have a higher *geographical mobility* than the elder generations, but their mobility is rather lower than that of the informants with a higher education.

All informants, regardless of gender and generation, recognize that a higher education leads to significant changes in individual social conditions of existence. The women do, however, tend to value formal education higher than the men. The educated informants find their living-situations to deviate most markedly from those of the others, and in a positive direction.

In any case, the practices of the *educated informants* are remarkably different from those of the others. They are characterized by a general tendency of *"de-genderization"* and *individualization,* and they deviate in a fundamental way from the traditional principles for social organization:

The educated young women tend to *marry later* than any of the other female informants; they also take a more active role in the planning of their own marriage than the other women. Both the men and women with higher education have chosen, or expect to choose, their partners on their own — a practice that clearly deviates from that of the other informants. In addition, they tend to practice a different kind of celebration of their marriages than the others; their "new" marriage-celebrations break with the traditionally important position of such life-course events as promoters of the family-group in the local social community. Their married life is practised is an individualized way, as compared to the collective family-approach to the marriage as life-course phase by the other informants.

The "student-couples" tend to *postpone the birth of their first child* once they are married — contrary to the other informants, who proved their reproductive abilities as early as possible in their marriage. The educated informants want to have less children than the others, and the woman's professional career is presented as a main reason for this, as well as for their later marriages. Studies and the following professional life of the educated informants also tend to increase their *geographical mobility* considerably, as compared to the other informants.

These deviant practices of the educated informants indicate that higher education leads to a kind of life that is qualitatively different from that of the uneducated young informants. The young informants' *thoughts* show even better than their *practices* that higher education constitutes a fundamental line of division concerning the way in which life is conceived:

Even if the actual practices of the young, *uneducated* informants deviate from the practices of the elder generations, the *considerations behind* their practices, as well as their perceptions of life in general, show that they understand themselves and the society in which they live in a similar way as their elder relatives. Even if the "traditional" practices of the uneducated informants have changed during the three generations of informants, they still deserve the name, as they appear as results of *cognitive and motivating structures* based on the *traditional principles of social organization*.

The informants with *higher education*, by contrast, express conceptions and ideas of life that deviate even more from the traditional principles than their practices. Their practices should be seen as functions of *compromises* between their own individualized ideas of life, and the restrictions on their ability to realize these ideas, represented by their families and social environment. Their actual freedom to realize their ideas is heavily dependent on the attitudes of their individual families, that in the first place have to allow them to study. This dependency on the traditionally most significant group's willingness to allow its members' life-courses to take a direction that would distance them from the group and weaken its control over them, is a common feature of the lives of all the educated informants. It seems, however, to be particularly strong for the young women.

Even if the influence of the family is a factor that should be taken into consideration by the educated informants in their adult lives, the family's decision to let a member study tends to alter its expectations and demands of this individual's future practices. There seem to exist *different standards* for the expected life-courses of the youth without higher education and the highly educated ones. This is particularly the case for the educated women; I have argued that they have come to constitute a *new social category of women as a consequence of their academic training*, supplementing the two gendered categories which have their roots in the traditional social organization.

The stories of the two main informant-families indicate that the attitudes to the post-colonial changes tend to depend on the families' particular histories; a *high social position* in the traditional social order of Bled seems to have a *negative influence* on the family's adaptability to the social changes, and vice-versa. This suggests that the post-colonial social changes introduce principles that are qualitatively different from that characteristic

for the traditional social organization, and that they in theory will tend to be mutually exclusive.

The informants' ability to cope with their family-situations within this web of generational and educational differences is impressive. These Tunisians all possess remarkable skills in combining the theoretically incompatible principles of the "old" and the "new".

Even if the educated informants apparently stand out as those who most consciously and actively *negotiate* a social reality in which they can combine a maximum of their own individual preferences with a minimum of required considerations towards their families and social surroundings, the two eldest generations are actually those who have experienced the more thorough structural change — and correspondingly thorough changes in perceptions — during their life-time. The fact that several of the changes have had no direct effects on the direction of their personal life-courses, have made their situation all the more difficult. Still, they show an astonishing ability to cope with the changes that take place around them.

This ability to adjust to the new times is especially required for the elder informants' relations to their younger family-members; they are facing a development demanding that they give up significant parts of the elders' traditional control and power over the younger. As we have seen, this process is not taking place without problems; still, the elders' acceptance of their new and reduced position in relation to their children's lives are remarkable, particularly when the practices they themselves were exposed to in their childhood are taken into consideration.

The young generation of informants on their part have to accept the restrictions the elder relatives impose on their lives, restrictions that may constitute significant obstacles to the realization of the kind of life they prefer. These restrictions are clearly experienced as more burdensome by the educated young informants, as their preferred practices deviate so markedly from those accepted by the elders. While the young informants without a higher education may feel more at ease with the demands from the family, they have to accept that their brothers and sisters as a result of studies live in ways that are significantly different, and, in the opinion of some of them, also significantly better than their own.

The informants are thus engaged in constant processes of *compromises*, *negotiations*, and *re-definitions* in relation to each other. These processes go on within a cultural context where the family-group still constitutes a fundamental unit, as well as a fundamental value. The maintenance of

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communication between family-members of different generations, gender and educational levels represent both a significant value and a social necessity to all implied parts, the academically trained ones included.

The informants' stories suggest that a variety of *strategies* fitted to the task of managing this situation have been consciously or unconsciously developed among them. Some of these strategies have been examined: We have seen that the elder women approach their children's formal education in their own particular way, and give it their own particular *meaning*, through including the important exams in their repertoire of celebrated life-course events. We have also seen that when children's marriage-practices come to deviate so markedly from the traditional practices so that the elder informants are unable to relate to them through their own perceptions of the socially possible, the problem may be solved by the parents' *withdrawal* from decisions concerning the marriage-process. This is, however, one of the generational conflicts most difficult to overcome, one of the situations where strong and diverging interests are exposed most clearly.

The educated informants of the young generation have their own particular strategies, developed to deal with their situation as citizens of two different worlds of thought and practice: They *separate* the two worlds from each other, both *mentally*, and *physically*. In cases where this solution is of no help, as in the marriage-celebrations, they may draw on these celebrations' traditional functions in order to mediate their own, untraditional message. We have seen that they tend to insist on celebrating their marriages in the "new" way, in spite of considerable resistance from the family and the social surroundings. One may assume that the educated informants use the marriage-celebrations' traditional informational function as a means to proclaim their intentions to lead an un-traditional life.

The informants of different *categories* develop different *strategies* in order to cope with the different *intermediary situations* they are in as a consequence of their different *experiences* with the *post-colonial structural changes*. I have argued that the differences in experiences with these changes are of such a fundamental character that they affect not only the individuals' practices, but also their way of understanding themselves — for themselves, and in relation to the society. The experiences have influenced the informants' *identity*.

The uneducated informants of all generations have perceptions and thoughts that in most central respects are similar and correspond with the traditional North-African conception of individuals as *gendered, collective,* and *other-directed.*

The academically trained informants, by contrast, have a way of thinking that diverge fundamentally from that of the others, reflecting an

understanding of themselves as *autonomous individuals*, rather than as gendered parts of a family-group.

It is thus higher education, rather than generation or gender, that stands out as the main factor for change in the informants' practices, thoughts, and senses of identity. The post-colonial structural change has influenced the conditions of existence of all the informants; it has furthermore influenced the social reality in which they live, to the extent that it has lost central characteristics of "traditional society". Depending on their individual experiences with the social changes, all the informants therefore live in different *"in-between" situations.*

It is, however, the academically trained informants who seem to find their intermediary situation most problematic, and who at the same time are most conscious of having developed strategies by which they can negotiate acceptable social conditions. I have argued that more than their new practices, this ability of the educated informants to relate to themselves and the social surroundings as separate entities indicates that their self-perception is distinctly more individualized than that of their uneducated relatives. I give the last word to Mohammed, bank-manager and cousin of the Tejers; he describes this intermediary position better than me:

> I am an Arabic boy, who is educated, but who sometimes finds contradictions between his origin and his education (...) Sometimes, when something shows up, you do not know where it will end. An Arabic origin, the up-bringing provided by the family — this has also an influence. We say that it has not, but that is wrong. I try to change — I pretend to be cultivated, but I know that there are holes in my cultivation, and that on the bottom I am an Arab, pretending.

13.1 Concluding remarks

Parts of this study of Tunisian post-colonial change in practice, thought, and identity could evidently have been done differently. A weakness of the *theoretical* approach to the theme is perhaps that little importance has been given to the considerable number of theories existing on the nature of traditional patrilinear kinship-relations. One may assume that such an approach to the data-material could have shed additional light on the information it contains.

I did, however, not find that a thorough analysis of the patrilinear kinship-group as it used to exist in a traditional social context could defend any central position in the thesis, which main focus has been on the change away from these principles. In short, I find that my theoretical approach

provides a limited, but sufficient basis for an empirical analysis of Tunisian post-colonial change in practice, thought, and identity.

Still, an evident *methodological* weakness of the study should be seen in relation to my choice to minimize the discussion of these elements in the theoretical approach: I have treated as close relatives people who, according to the mentioned theories, do not formally stand in such relations to each other. Both the eldest female informants are *maternal* grand-mothers to the families presented here, and therefore, according to the patrilinear principles for family-organization, not formally members of these family-groups. One should therefore leave open the possibility that an examination of families with *paternal* grand-mothers could have changed the picture of generational family-relations. Relating this methodological weakness to the theme of the thesis, and to the fact that in practice, the members of the informant-families are actually closely related to each other, I cannot see that it constitutes a major problem of validity. The considerable advantages of my particular sample of informants discussed in chapter four justify in my opinion this somewhat problematic methodological manoeuvre.

When I first started working on this study, one of my main ambitions was to present equally the practices and thoughts of both genders. I found the idea of analyzing change in family-relations in a society where the family-group traditionally constitutes an organic unit through an examination of only one gender quite meaningless. Still, in retrospect, a certain imbalance in the presentation of the two genders in favour of the women is undeniable. There is probably several reasons for this: As a foreign woman in a gender-divided society, it generally proved harder to obtain contact with the men than with the women. The fact that the topics dealt with in the interviews to a considerable extent were of a kind that, as argued in chapter three, traditionally is regarded as belonging to the "private" culture of the women, probably added to the problems of obtaining good interviews with men. Given these preconditions for the data-collection, I actually find the result rather acceptable.

My approach to the theme of this study is rather narrow, a fact that implies certain limitations: As argued in chapter three, "Bled" is hardly a representative — in the sense of "average" — Tunisian town. As argued in chapter four, the middle-class Beldiyins cannot unproblematically be treated as representatives of the entire Beldiyin population. Even if the study clearly presents Tunisians' experiences with the country's post-colonial structural changes, the result can therefore not be claimed to represent the way in which Tunisians in general have experienced these changes. The tendencies described in this thesis may serve as indicators of possibly general tendencies in post-colonial Tunisia only. A broader approach to the

theme could have constituted an interesting alternative to that presented here.

Yet another problem related to my choice of approach should be mentioned: In this study, a clear connection between higher education and individuality in a "Western" sense has been established. The recent Islamist revival among Tunisian students suggests rather strongly that this connection is not necessarily a universal one. Islamic fundamentalism is a fascinating, but vast phenomenon; I have chosen to leave it entirely out of this thesis. A study of fundamentalism's consequences for practices, thoughts and senses of identity in Tunisia would, however, be an interesting project for the future.

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