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## ***DEVELOPING DIFFERENCES***

***A STUDY OF HOW ORGANIZATIONS FRAME SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN TUNISIA AFTER THE 2011 UPRISING***

Author: Evie Soli

Supervisor: Dalia Abdelhady

Examiner: Ann Kull

## **Abstract**

This study is based on a ten weeks fieldwork in Tunis during the fall of 2013, where I interviewed seven organizations working on social development in marginalized areas. The thesis examines conditions for social development in Tunisia nearly three years after the uprising in 2011, and specifically how different actors perceive themselves and others. Combining post-development theory, social movement theory and Fraser's critical theory of justice, the analysis provides an understanding of how these organizations frame their work. This in turn leads to a critical discussion on ways of framing development with regards to processes of social marginalization and political divisions, which form important contexts in which the organizations operate. The central argument is that there is a need to consider historical formations of elites in relation to the previous regimes' promotion of secularism in Tunisia, women's rights and the suppression of Islamic activism in order to understand how the organizations operate with regards to religion, gender equality, charity and development. The results suggest that despite commitments to principles of equality and visions for sustainable development, there are risks that some forms of development may contribute to maintaining social and political differences in Tunisia.

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# 1 Introduction

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Iran continue to use state structures to consolidate extremism as the law of the land, and to export these catastrophic models. Qatar now joins them in promoting fundamentalists across the regions with its money and its media. From the Sahel to the Caucasus, a creeping ‘Islamization’ narrows social space, assaults women’s rights, and transfigures lifestyles. (Karima Bennoune, 2013)<sup>1</sup>

In this quote Bennoune identifies a concern that has been a central part of the public discourse since the uprising took place in Tunisia in 2011. The democratization process and the opening of the political system revealed a high level of tension between Islamists and secularists, something that has played out in public spaces and in media and fueled by political assassinations and violent acts. Gray notes that secularists, often represented by the opposition to the Islamist government that was in rule from October 2011 to January 2014, have expressed concerns that Tunisia is on the road to become an Islamic state.<sup>2</sup> This means a setback for citizens’ individual freedom – especially that of women. After the fall of Ben Ali’s regime, new actors have emerged in Tunisia working on political, social and economic empowerment. Some of these have a specific focus on women’s rights and empowerment of women, claiming gender equality to be their overall aim. Other organizations have emerged in response to humanitarian crises in the most marginalized areas and have undergone a change from mainly charitable activities to social development. These are framing their work not with human rights and gender equality, but rather they are claiming to support and empower the family, without challenging cultural norms in the communities they work in. This study aims to explore differences in the way that organizations present themselves in terms of background and

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<sup>1</sup> Karima Bennoune, *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight Against Muslim Fundamentalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2013), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Doris H. Gray. “Tunisia after the Uprising: Islamist and Secular Quests for Women's Rights.” *Mediterranean Politics* 17 (2012): 285-287.

the current sociopolitical context that surround their work. In order to do so I have interviewed seven organizations that work on social development in less privileged areas in Tunisia, where three center their work on gender equality and the other four have shifted focus from mere charity to what they define as social development. The overall aim is to understand how the organizations frame their work, and what this might tell us about the contexts they operate in. Al-Ali has argued for viewing women's organizations in Egypt not as isolated groups but rather in terms of coherence between organizations and the wider political context they operate in.<sup>3</sup> I suggest doing the same with the organizations that constitute this study, and I will emphasize how social and political divisions are reflected in the way they frame their work.

## **1.1 Research questions**

The thesis aims to answer these two questions:

- 1. How do organizations frame their work for social development?**
- 2. How do we contextualize differences in framing with regards to larger social and political discourses in Tunisia?**

## **1.2 Disposition**

In order to provide answers the following work will begin with a chapter providing a historical background with emphasis on how the relation between historical discourses on secularism and Islamism are related to nation building and formation of elites. Women's rights have been a central issue throughout Tunisia's history, and rights based empowerment of women will be discussed in the literature review in chapter three. Part

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<sup>3</sup> Nadjé Al-Ali. *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East – The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 185 ff.

of the literature will provide an understanding of some characteristics of mainstream Western discourse and Islamic development discourse. Moreover, this section will provide an argument against dualistic thinking in terms of secular-Islamist as a tool for analyzing the kind of organizations that appear in this study. Chapter four will explain the methodological framework and show that categorization in terms of Islamic/Islamist and secular did not turn out as constructive during the interviews and abandoned as limiting for the analysis. The theoretical framework that will be presented in chapter five has been chosen in order to analyze the organizations in terms of what they do and how they work with regards to local and global processes of inclusion and exclusion, and if the organizations reflect or challenge these processes. Chapter seven will be based on the findings presented in chapter six, which in combination with the literature and theory will pose the argument that although the organizations frame their work in different ways, there also appear to be similarities between them all. This includes not only the way they frame their work, but also how they are involved in processes of social and political divisions that work to constitute rather than challenge structures of inequalities in the society in which they operate.

## 2 Historical background

In 2011 Tunisia became world known as the country where the Arab revolutions started. Although the uprising took much of the world by surprise, Tunisia had seen protests over social and economic marginalization repeatedly over the last three decades. Academic and journalistic works have also contained criticisms of the implementation of economic reforms aiming to integrate the country in the global economy, questioning global financial institutions' labeling of Tunisia as an "economic miracle." In the years that have followed the departure of Ben Ali's regime, attention has been called to the state's failure to provide solutions for deeply rooted regional social and economic disparities. The opening of the political system has enabled people to organize in different ways to work towards social and economic development in Tunisia's most disadvantaged areas.

### 2.1 Secularization and elites

Much of English-language literature on the secular-Islamist division in civil society deals with events occurring in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially with attention to women's rights and changes in the personal status code under the dictatorships of Bourghiba and Ben Ali. In order to understand existing tensions between secularists and Islamists one should take a look at how secularism evolved in Tunisia prior to the French colonization. As Perkins and Brown have noted, in the decades leading up to the invasion in 1881 there had already been the start of a process marked by massive borrowing from an alien culture. More and more Europeans, mainly French and Italians were settling in Tunisia, and Western ways were felt in cheap European goods, architecture, dress and habits.<sup>4</sup> According to Perkins the French education system mainly benefited Europeans residing in Tunisia, but also a small part of Tunisians working in the administration of the

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 53-55.

Leon C. Brown, *The Surest Path: The Political Treatise of a Nineteenth-Century Muslim Statesman - A Translation of the Introduction to The Surest Path to Knowledge Concerning The Condition Of Countries by Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 5-8.



protectorate. However, as Perkins notes, the prevalent cultural *hegemony* made it impossible for Tunisian elites to gain the same status as European settlers, simply because they were Arabs.<sup>5</sup> Perkins also holds that French attempts to include Tunisians and especially religious students of the Zeitouna University in the secular, Francophone education system was part of a strategy to promote secularism and thus reduce the power of the ulama and to prevent the potentially powerful identity of pan-Islamism.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.2 The state, gender and religion

Some have described it as a turnabout when Habib Bourghiba and his fellow pan-Islamist nationalists achieved independence in 1956 and allowed the state judicial system to absorb the sharia courts. Moreover, the regime introduced a Personal Status Code (PSC) that granted women a series of rights.<sup>7</sup> The PSC included the abolishment of polygamy, it allowed women to file for divorce, increased the minimum age for marriage, and strengthened women's child custody rights. These changes, according to Keddie, were occurring at the time not because of a feminist attitude or as results of a women's movement, but rather as a step to break the power of the ulama and transform the social environment in favor of the new government.<sup>8</sup> Perkins has described how Bourghiba's French-rationalist education was the grounds for his independent *ijtihad* which aligned traditional dress to old-fashioned thinking, condemning the veil as an "odious rag" as well as discouraging male traditional dress.<sup>9</sup> This mentality as well as social programs promoting education, modernization and the state control of religious institutions such as

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<sup>5</sup> Strinati defines hegemony as: "Dominant groups in society (chiefly but not exclusively the ruling class) maintain their dominance by securing the "spontaneous consent" of subordinate groups through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups." Dominic Strinati. *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 165. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 62-63.

<sup>6</sup> Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 61-67.

<sup>7</sup> Nikki R. Keddie. *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 141-142. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 135-137.

<sup>8</sup> Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 141.

<sup>9</sup> Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 137.

the Zeitouna-mosque, was well received internationally as progress and enlightenment.<sup>10</sup> This tendency continued under Zine al-Abidine Ben-Ali's dictatorship (r. 1987-2011), who held up the status of women's rights as well as portraying Islamists as terrorists who would be jailed or exiled.<sup>11</sup> In spite of the suppression of Arab Muslim identity under Bourghiba and Ben Ali, and the following disappearance of Islam from public life, religious identity was not eliminated. Rather, the state-enforced French-style laïcité as well as the creation of an elitist Francophone education system and the control of religious institutions provoked many Tunisians. As Perkins and others have pointed out, most Tunisians' worldview derived from different sources than the sources of Western-educated elites.<sup>12</sup>

### **2.3 Structural adjustment of the economy**

According to Perkins, Tunisia's economy had gone from privileging mainly the European settler population and marginalizing Tunisians during the protectorate, to socialist tendencies following independence.<sup>13</sup> However in the 1970s, reforms were made, transforming the economy to be liberal and extroverted, based on petroleum and tourism. Still, only small, connected elites benefited from the reforms, and most Tunisians suffered from declining living standards.<sup>14</sup> During the 1990s the regime established the Tunisian National Solidarity Fund (FSN), which implemented projects concerning drinking water, housing, health care and schooling in a number of Tunisia's most marginalized areas. According to Perkins one of the motivations behind the FSN was to

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<sup>10</sup> Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 140-141.

<sup>11</sup> Gray, "Tunisia after the Uprising," 286.

<sup>12</sup> Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 7. Rikke H. Haugbølle and Francesco Cavatorta. "Beyond Ghannouchi, Islamism and Social Change in Tunisia" *Middle East Report* 262 (2012): 20-25.

<sup>13</sup> Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 171-174. Fabio Merone and Francesco Cavatorta. "Salafist mouvance and sheikh-ism in the Tunisian democratic transition." Working Papers in International Studies, Centre for International Studies, Dublin City University, No.7, 2012: 7.

deprive Islamic social agencies of the opportunity to do the same.<sup>15</sup> Perkins also notes that the result of the project was a reduction of poverty to the lowest in the Arab world, with the exception of the oil-based Gulf-economies. According to the World Bank the increase in GDP per capita from 645 TD in 1965 to 2,480 TD in 2005 proves the implemented development strategies in Tunisia to be successful.<sup>16</sup> The World Bank especially holds up the empowerment of women to having contributed to an increased level of human development in Tunisia.<sup>17</sup>

Presenting a somewhat different view on the social implications of the World Bank's structural adjustment plans in Tunisia through the 1990s, others have argued that it further marginalized a part of the population. King argues that in spite of the national economy growing stronger in the 1990s, with more manageable budget deficits and external debts, World Bank reforms failed to promote rural equity and rather empowered large land owners and excluded Tunisia's poor from new market arrangements.<sup>18</sup> Therefore the state policies supported by the World Bank instead caused economic inefficiency and led to a strengthening of rural landowners, while the rural poor remained clientage.

## 2.4 Divisions in development

In Tunisia, the Southern regions used to be most resistant to foreign colonization, observed through different currents of ideologies like Marxism and Arab nationalism before Islamism emerged in the 1970s and evolved into an oppositional force to Bourghiba's and Ben-Ali's specific nationalist-secularist politics.<sup>19</sup> The 1990s also

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<sup>15</sup> Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 196.

<sup>16</sup> Mina Balamoune-Lutz. "The Making of Gender Equality in Tunisia and Implications for Development." (World Bank Report: Gender Equality and Development, 2012): 1.

<sup>17</sup> Balamoune-Lutz, "The Making of," 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen J. King. "Structural Adjustment and Rural Poverty in Tunisia." *Middle East Report* 210 (1999):41-42. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, 196-198.

<sup>19</sup> Allison Pargeter. "Localism and radicalization in North Africa: local factors and the development of political Islam in Morocco, Tunisia and Libya," *International Affairs* 85 (2009): 1033-1034.

brought new policies in terms of the Barcelona Process and later the ENP, which defined the relationship between the EU and its neighbors. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is the EU's official strategy for offering of "a privileged relationship" to 16 of its closest neighbors in the Mediterranean.<sup>20</sup> The common values that are referred to as a commitment are: democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development. In lines with the World Bank and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gender equality is a cornerstone in development, and ending poverty is linked with the full productive employment of women outside of the agricultural sector.<sup>21</sup> Hence development that is funded by UN- and EU organs can be viewed as promoting regional integration through a discourse based on the values presented above. Since independence, the Northern and coastal areas have benefited the most from investments and development, although human rights could not serve as a basis as it does today. After 2011 it has become possible for development agencies and local organizations to apply religious symbols in their work, which has enabled transnational and local NGOs to carry out charity and social development projects that openly refer to Islamic values of solidarity with the poor and orphans.<sup>22</sup> Some of these were established in the most marginalized areas of the South from where they have expanded their activities also to other parts of the country, including urban disadvantaged areas of Tunis.

One of the large global charity providers is Qatar Charity, an NGO that started to operate in Tunisia after 2011. It represents a development discourse centered on "family, women and children; education and culture; productive projects and investment and waaqf."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "European Neighborhood Policy," accessed May 13, 2014, [http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/about-us/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/about-us/index_en.htm).

<sup>21</sup> "The gender dimension of the Millennium Development Goals Report 2013," last modified July 1, 2013, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/7/the-gender-dimension-of-the-millennium-development-goals-report-2013/>.

<sup>22</sup> Fabio Merone and Evie Soli. "The Tunisian associative system as a social counter-power," last modified October 22, 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/evie-soli-fabio-merone/tunisia-islamic-associative-system-as-social-counter-power>.

<sup>23</sup> Davidsson points out that Qatar Charity presents itself as an NGO, but is in reality closely linked to the Qatari establishment from which it receives financial and logistical support in order to help poor families

The motivations behind Qatar's involvement in Tunisia have been subject to attention and public debate with suspicious overtones.<sup>24</sup> Still, there is not much academic research on the motives behind Qatari and other Gulf countries involvement in Tunisia, but Khatib and Roberts are among those holding that rather than exporting ideology Qatar's increased international profile is part of a strategy to protect itself from the danger of being a small state among powerful neighbors.<sup>25</sup> A question that arises is whether one neighborhood policy is more political or carrying stronger ideological sentiments than the other, however this could be a topic for research in a future study.

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and orphans. Christopher M. Davidson. *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies*. (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 2013), 56-57. Mahi Khallaf. "The State of Qatar." In *From Charity to Social Change: Trends in Arab Philanthropy*, ed. Barbara L. Ibrahim and Dina H. Sherif (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008): 161.

<sup>24</sup> "Qatar pays price for its generous support to Muslim Brotherhood," accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58685>.

<sup>25</sup> Lina Khatib. "Qatar's foreign policy: the limits of pragmatism." *International Affairs* 89 (2013): 431. David B. Roberts. "Understanding Qatar's Foreign Policy Objectives." *Mediterranean Politics* 17 (2012): 438-439, accessed September 29, 2013, doi: 10.1017/S0043887111000050. The reader should be aware that Roberts is employed at the "Doha Office of the Royal United Services Institute for Security and Defence," Qatar.

### 3 Literature review

The following literature has been selected to facilitate a discussion on women's rights as a main framework for development, with emphasis on Muslim majority countries. Empowerment of women as part of development discourse has been discussed by many academics that have pointed out potential challenges in terms of conflicting interests and structures of power. This chapter intends to contribute to an understanding of whether women's rights and empowerment can also be produced in different contexts and without necessarily being framed in a language of human rights. Moreover, what will be brought to issue is whether categories like secular and Islamic/ist are appropriate tools for analyzing these discourses on development.

#### 3.1 Rights-based empowerment of women

One word which is widely applied in development discourse and that indicates positive change is "empowerment." However, the term has been described by Parpart, Rai and Staudt as a concept that "tends to underplay or ignore the impact of global and national forces on prospects for poor people's (especially women's) empowerment."<sup>26</sup> The authors note that while first being introduced by NGOs in the 1980s as a reaction to top-down policies with agreements between governments and with the intention of challenging existing power structures, "empowerment" entered mainstream development discourse in the 1990s.<sup>27</sup> Tadros defines four categories of women's empowerment projects in the Middle East, based on division of power.<sup>28</sup> These are:

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<sup>26</sup> Jane L. Parpart, Shirin M. Rai, and Kathleen Staudt. "Rethinking em(power)ment, gender and development: an introduction." In *Rethinking Empowerment – Gender and development in a global/local world*, ed. Jane L. Parpart, Shirin M. Rai and Kathleen Staudt (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Parpart, Rai, Staudt, "Rethinking em(power)ment," 10.

<sup>28</sup> Mariz Tadros. "Between the Elusive and the Illusionary: Donors' Empowerment Agendas in the Middle East Perspective." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30 (2010), 227-228.

- “Power to”
- “Power within”
- “Power over”
- “Power with”

According to Tadros the first category involves capacity building, leadership promotion and gender mainstreaming, while the second promotes self-esteem and psychological support through education for girls and training for women.<sup>29</sup> She argues that most projects falls in the category of “power to” and “power within.” The third and fourth categories; “power over” and “power with”, are defined respectively by conflict and direct confrontation between powerful and powerless interest groups, and the active promotion of social mobilization and building alliances and coalitions. Tadros notes that the two first categories are the ones that receive donor support, while the two last receive no or minimal support from donors. Although not applying the exact same categories, Parpart, Rai and Staudt also argue that women’s empowerment discourse has failed to offer women power over official institutions or power to demand fundamental change through collective political action.<sup>30</sup> An important point, which both Tadros and Abu-Lughod have made through analyzing the work of the National Council for Women (NCW) in Egypt, is that women’s movements do not necessarily pose a threat to political, economic and social foundations of authoritarian regimes.<sup>31</sup> One example of how women’s rights can be viewed as separate from political circumstances is Abu-Lughod’s account of a campaign against sexual harassment on the streets in Egypt during the Mubarak-regime. The campaign only focused on anonymous harassment and did not deal with sexual harassment as part of the security forces attacks on female protesters.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Tadros, “Between the Elusive,” 228.

<sup>30</sup> Parpart, Rai, Staudt, ”Rethinking em(power)ment,” 6-8.

<sup>31</sup> Tadros, “Between the Elusive,” 28. Abu-Lughod, “The Active Life of ‘Muslim Women’s Rights’: A Plea for Ethnography, Not Polemic, with Cases from Egypt and Palestine.” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, 6 (2010):,” 5-6.

<sup>32</sup> Abu-Lughod, “The Active Life,” 14-15.

In order to avoid asking simplistic questions of whether Muslim women have rights or not, which will not grasp the complexities of how rights are produced and affected by governments, religious institutions and the corporate world, Abu-Lughod argues for ethnographic studies of women's rights as they are mediated and transformed in various social contexts, or "social worlds" as she has named it.<sup>33</sup> The active life of "Muslim women's rights", Abu-Lughod holds, can best be understood through how they are shaped and perceived in different social and political contexts, including their travel through networks and institutions.<sup>34</sup> According to this view, women's rights are also produced in relation to Islamic law and interpretations of it, and can hardly be viewed objectively as something static that exists in opposition to sharia and Islamic political parties. Neither should it be taken for granted that rights-based empowerment projects are necessarily responsive to social and political circumstances in communities in which they are implemented.

### **3.2 Women's rights in a wider political context**

Sardar Ali has argued that CEDAW is based on a predominantly Western liberal feminist discourse "that insists on individual rights of woman to the exclusion of the multiplicity of her identities."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, she notes that critiques of CEDAW include a problematization of conflicting human rights principles such as gender equality on the one hand and the right to freedom of religion and custom on the other.<sup>36</sup> Sardar Ali argues that the failure of CEDAW, and also Islamic declarations such as Cairo Declaration of Human Rights, is that women's rights are on the lower rungs in a

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<sup>33</sup> Abu-Lughod, "The Active Life," 2-5.

<sup>34</sup> Abu-Lughod, "The Active Life," 5.

<sup>35</sup> "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" accessed May 13, 2014, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>. Shaheen Sardar Ali. "Women's rights, CEDAW and international human rights debates: towards empowerment?" In *Rethinking empowerment – Gender and development in a global/local world*, ed. Parpart, Rai and Staudt, (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 64.

<sup>36</sup> Sardar Ali, "Women's rights," 64-65.



hierarchy of rights.<sup>37</sup> Neither do any of these declarations suggest a methodology to provide a solution to the problem of conflicting rights, she argues. Another critique directed towards women's rights as part of development discourse is what Abu-Lughod and Hasso perceive as a double discourse observed in the Arab Human Development Report of 2005, which they both argue on the one hand promotes women's rights and freedom, and on the other hand sets the conditions and limitations for the ones they claim to support.<sup>38</sup> Abu-Lughod argues that the internationalization of women's rights needs to be framed in such a way that it does not "become grounds for arguments about the 'clash of civilizations' and their associated political, economic and military agendas."<sup>39</sup> In her criticism of the same report Hasso also expresses concern over discourses that facilitate militarized and humanitarian interventions rather than encourage fundamental improvements in most women's lives. Moreover, Hasso argues that the ADHR is situated within a neoliberal human development framework, and that it reinforces rather than challenges Arab state power.<sup>40</sup> She problematizes the "global women's rights" discourse in the sense that women are constituted as a global category, and that the global women's rights discourse are "part and parcel of transnational feminist governmentalities, which manage, normalize, and even constitute a range of inequalities among women."<sup>41</sup> This is what Mohanty stresses when she criticizes Western feminist scholarship for assuming non-Western women to be a homogenous group, bound together by oppression. Mohanty holds that transnational feminism needs to be "attentive to micro-politics of context, subjectivity and struggle, as well as macro-politics of global and political systems and

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<sup>37</sup> Sardar Ali, "Women's rights," 70-71. "Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam." Accessed May 11, 2014. <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/cairodeclaration.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod. "Dialects of women's empowerment: The international circuitry of the Arab Human Development Report 2005." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009): 8-9. Frances S. Hasso. "Empowering Governmentalities Rather than Women: The Arab Human Development Report 2005 and Western Development Logic." *International Journal for Middle East Studies* 41 (2009): 63-64.

<sup>39</sup> Abu-Lughod, "Dialects of," 2.

<sup>40</sup> Hasso, "Empowering Governmentalities," 64.

<sup>41</sup> Hasso, "Empowering Governmentalities," 68.

processes.”<sup>42</sup> The global women’s rights discourse has been formulated by Sayigh as part of “a polemic against Islam” and “an obsession with Arab women as a topic of international concern and research.”<sup>43</sup> In the case of Palestinian camps in Lebanon, Sayigh claims that it is a political choice of the UN and the international community that NGOs in the camps spend large sums of money on projects concerning women and less on other issues that need attention, such as poverty, child labor, corruption and colonialism. These critical perspectives all highlight a need for increased awareness of oppression on several levels, and form a background for exploring how gender tend to be central in discourses that are based on an idea of a clash of civilizations .

### 3.3 Modernity versus traditions

Norris and Inglehart have claimed that “the most basic cultural fault line between the West and Islam does not concern democracy – it involves issues of gender equality and sexual liberation.”<sup>44</sup> Bahi shows how the authors she refers to represent a view that human development and modernization generate systematic, predictable changes in culture, and in specific gender roles in any society. According to this logic industrialization will bring education for women, and consequently a reduction of fertility rates and increased participation of women in government.<sup>45</sup> Then, during a postindustrial phase, women will gain more power through moving into higher positions in management as well as in political life. Bahi notes that women are often in the focus of conflicting and ambiguous interests with regards to the state, international agendas, and heterogeneity, which brings to question cultural and religious identity.<sup>46</sup> In the Tunisian

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<sup>42</sup> Chandra T. Mohanty. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 228.

<sup>43</sup> Mayssun Soukariéh. “Speaking Palestinian: An Interview with Rosemary Sayigh.” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 38 (2009): 23.

<sup>44</sup> Riham Bahi. “Islamic and Secular Feminisms: Two Discourses Mobilized for Gender Justice.” (Working Paper, EUI Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, No. 25, 2011), 2.

<sup>45</sup> Bahi, “Islamic and Secular,” 2.

<sup>46</sup> Bahi, “Islamic and Secular,” 1-3.

context, both Zeghal and Gray hold that women are in the center of the debate on different conceptions of living.<sup>47</sup> Zeghal argues that the Islamist and secular camps have been and still are mostly concerned with conceptions of freedom and ways of living rather than with notions of the “pro-Islamic” state and the “pro-democratic” secular state.<sup>48</sup>

The political divisions observed in Tunisia today need to be seen in relation to the history of government suppression of Islamists and promotion of state feminism. Gray points out that there is a fear among secularists and feminists that if Al-Nahdha is in power they will change the Personal Status Code (PSC) and that the future will see new conservative laws based on sharia.<sup>49</sup> This is an important point with relevance to the World Bank’s claim that the Tunisian state’s gender reforms have been a cornerstone for economic progress in the past, a claim that ignores the complexities involved in this process, including what Abu-Lughod would describe as the governmentalization of rights.<sup>50</sup>

Charrad has explored the relation between the Tunisian state and gender policy through history and finds that shifts in Tunisian state policy on women’s rights has been a result of social and political groups contesting over state power. She argues that

...shifts in state policy from the 1930s to the 1990s had in common the fact that they had less to do with varying degrees of commitment to Islam or feminism on the part of the leadership, and much more to do with the political struggles for state power dominating the national scene at any given historical moment.<sup>51</sup>

Kandiyoti has also pointed out that the expansion of women’s citizenship rights in Arab countries is related to secularism as part of nation-state building. She holds up what has happened in e.g. India and Pakistan when such state projects have failed:

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<sup>47</sup> Malika Zeghal. “Competing ways of life: Islamism, secularism and public order in the Tunisian transition.” *Constellations* 20 (2013): 262-266. Gray, “Tunisia after the Uprising,” 289.

<sup>48</sup> Zeghal, “Competing ways,” 255.

<sup>49</sup> Gray, “Tunisia after the Uprising,” 287.

<sup>50</sup> Abu-Lughod, “The Active Life,” 5.

<sup>51</sup> Mounira M. Charrad. “Policy Shifts: State, Islam, and Gender in Tunisia, 1930s-1990s.” *Social Politics*, Summer (1997): 285.

As religious and ethnic identities become increasingly politicized, they tend to sacrifice women's hard-won civil rights on the altar of a politics of identity that prioritizes control of women. Governments struggling to shore up their legitimacy may choose tactically to relinquish control of women to their immediate communities and families, thus depriving female citizens of full legal protection.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, Kandiyoti points to Bangladesh as an example of how the government attempted to balance gender ideologies implicit in conflicting development projects.<sup>53</sup> In this case the US funded projects aimed to empower women through participation in the labor market, while aid from wealthy Muslim countries, i.e. Saudi Arabia strengthened religious education that promoted more control over women. According to Kandiyoti this might also be observed in other countries where conservative ideologies are increasing and where women are harnessed by funding agencies in order to fulfill the visions of modernity and economic development.<sup>54</sup> These perspectives suggest that dichotomies like secularist/modernist and Islamist/traditionalist might be strengthened by the idea of confrontation between Islam and “the West”, where women tend to be important markers.

### **3.4 Challenging dualistic thinking**

Abu-Lughod has argued for a more nuanced understanding of Islamism and secularism in Egypt. Through an analysis of popular culture she shows that ideas of marriage, the nuclear family, the woman's role as the caretaker of the family and the value of love in marriage is generally found to overlap in secular and Islamist discourse. She holds that although Islamists are often assumed to be more traditional than so called progressives,

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<sup>52</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, introduction to *Women, Islam & the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 12.

<sup>53</sup> Kandiyoti, introduction, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Kandiyoti, introduction, 14.

this is not always the case.<sup>55</sup> The categorization of Islamists has also been discussed by Schewedler, who highlights a tendency in scholarship on political Islam to view moderates as supporting liberal democratic reforms, while radicals do not.<sup>56</sup> She argues that instead of focusing only on Islamist groups in order to categorize them on background of whether they express democratic commitments or not, there is a need to focus on other local and global political actors in order to understand more of the context in which they act.<sup>57</sup> Hafez's ethnographic study of Islamic activist women in Egypt provides an example of how the dualistic thinking of "secular" and "religious" can be challenged.<sup>58</sup> According to Hafez the women in her study understood religion not as "al-din wa al-dawla" (religion and state), but rather as something private.<sup>59</sup> Hafez's study shows that the women are implementing a set of secular agendas along with Islamic ideals, such as viewing religion as a private category more than a public affair. Hence notions of womanhood, activism and religion are discursively produced.

Tadros in fact suggest that we should abandon terms such as "religious" vs. "secular", "moderate Islamist" vs. "radical Islamist", "feminist" vs. "Muslim activist" on an analytical level, on the grounds that such binaries do not necessarily describe people's agency in different contexts.<sup>60</sup> Like Tadros, Al-Ali problematizes the "modern-traditional" and "western-indigenous" dichotomizations, which in her view is representing a rigid East-West divide.<sup>61</sup> She holds up findings from her ethnographic

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<sup>55</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod. "The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Postcolonial Cultural Politics." In *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod, 243-269 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 251.

<sup>56</sup> Jillian Schewedler. "Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis." *World Politics* 63 (2011): 348-352. Accessed May 11, 2014. doi: 10.1017/S0043887111000050.

<sup>57</sup> Schewedler, "Can Islamists," 372.

<sup>58</sup> Sherine Hafez. *An Islam of Her Own: Reconsidering Religion and Secularism in Women's Islamic Movements*. (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 79.

<sup>59</sup> Hafez, *An Islam of Her Own*, 124-125.

<sup>60</sup> Mariz Tadros. "Introduction: Gender, Rights and Religion at the Crossroads." *IDS Bulletin* 42 (2011): 8, accessed May 08, 2014, doi: 10.1111/j.1759-5436.2011.00194.x.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Ali, *Secularism*, 22-26.

research in Egypt which shows that the gender training packages provided by Western organizations is often based on Western feminism and its problems and not considering the specific context and history of Egyptian feminist struggles.<sup>62</sup> This relates to what has been problematized by Hasso and others; that if global women's rights discourses exist within a neoliberal human development framework and local struggles are not taken into consideration, in the end inequalities might be reconstituted.

### 3.5 Charity and social development

Ibrahim has accounted for what she argues is a change in Arab philanthropy in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Lebanon, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE. Based on field studies from the different countries Ibrahim claims that there has been a shift from an old, stagnant practice of charitable giving towards projects aiming for more sustainable change.<sup>63</sup> Her findings show that although with long traditions, charity as a concept is dynamic and can be strategic and effective in addressing underlying causes of social problems. Ibrahim defines charitable giving as “contributions to causes that alleviate the immediate suffering or wants of people in need” and which is commonly known as “zakat.”<sup>64</sup> Zakat is the third pillar of Islam and requires Muslims to give a portion of their wealth in order to help the poor and thus provide social stability. Ibrahim underlines the difference between zakat and sadaqa, explaining that since sadaqa is less structured, “it recently has been explored as a way to extend Muslim civil society organizations’ work to more development-oriented approaches and support for art, culture, or environmental protection.”<sup>65</sup> Thus charity can also include voluntary work and free services, as well as being used to mobilize funds for economic development projects in poor areas. In her study of four transnational Muslim NGOs, Juul Petersen has found that the two UK based

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<sup>62</sup> Al-Ali, *Secularism*, 175-176.

<sup>63</sup> Barbara L Ibrahim, introduction to *From Charity to Social Change: Trends in Arab Philanthropy* ed. Barbara L. Ibrahim and Dina H. Sherif (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>64</sup> Ibrahim, introduction, 12.

<sup>65</sup> Ibrahim, introduction, 5.

organizations; Islamic Relief and Muslim Aid represent a different ideology and conception of aid and Islam than the two Gulf-based NGOs, Islamic Relief Organization and International Islamic Charitable Organization.<sup>66</sup> In line with what Ibrahim has found, Juul Petersen argues that the former two organizations have developed from only implementing religiously oriented projects such as Qarbani sacrifices, Ramadan meals and orphan sponsorships to more of a secularized development strategy focused on sustainability.<sup>67</sup> This she defines as a secularized form of aid. While studying these organizations, Juul Petersen has found that there is not necessarily something extraordinarily Islamic about those that have a charity profile besides being humanitarian and development oriented.<sup>68</sup> The two latter NGOs on the other hand, have a vision that is based on religion, and they work to promote an Islamic culture rather than a development culture, representing a “sacralized form of aid.”<sup>69</sup> These studies pose an argument against viewing Islamic charities as essentially different from development organizations that define themselves as secular.

### **3.6 “Faith based organizations”**

In her doctoral thesis on transnational Muslim NGOs, Juul Petersen has found that there are two tendencies in how these organizations are presented in development literature. Either they are viewed as “fronts for political, sometimes terrorist organizations” or as “faith-based organizations, seeing them as effective tools in the implementation of development projects.”<sup>70</sup> Jones and Juul Petersen argue that the structural adjustment plans that were carried out in developing countries during the 1980s and 1990s in general

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<sup>66</sup> Marie Juul Petersen. “For humanity or for the umma? Ideologies of aid in four transnational Muslim NGOs.” (PhD diss., University of Copenhagen, 2011).

<sup>67</sup> Juul Petersen, “For humanity,” 201.

<sup>68</sup> Juul Petersen, “For humanity,” 183-184.

<sup>69</sup> Juul Petersen, “For humanity,” 15.

<sup>70</sup> Juul Petersen, “For humanity,” 28.

led to an opening of developing space, and where actors in development began to introduce policies applying concepts such as “human development”, “social capital” and “participation.” The authors explain what they call a “religious turn” in development with the fact that religion did not disappear – in lines with what Berger has accounted for as the “desecularization of the world” – as well as international security measures after 9/11 that has led to an increased interest in Islamic activism and organizations.<sup>71</sup>

According to Jones and Juul Petersen recent development literature has defined a certain type of NGOs as “Faith Based Organizations” (FBOs) and emphasized strengths and qualities that secular organizations do not have:

Religion and religious organizations are seen as relevant and useful tools in carrying out development work, capable of facilitating processes of development based on organizational features such as their historical rootedness, popular legitimacy, infrastructure, networks and motivation.<sup>72</sup>

Hence local knowledge and religion as a motivating force for people’s trust and recruitment of volunteers makes FBOs potential tools in the implementation of development projects and distribution of aid. This is in lines with what others having claimed is an invention in development policy for overcoming what has been perceived as the obstacle of religion.<sup>73</sup> Juul Petersen argues that a problem with such an instrumental understanding of these organizations is that:

this perspective invites an ahistorical focus on current organisations and their activities, particularly those whose activities potentially complement mainstream aid. As a result, perhaps unintentionally, the literature on transnational Muslim

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<sup>71</sup> Peter L Berger. “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview.” In *The Desecularization of the World – Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger, 1-18. (Washington: The Ethics and Public Policy Center and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999).

<sup>72</sup> Jones and Juul Petersen, “Instrumentalist,” 1296.

<sup>73</sup> Andrea Cornwall. “Introductory overview – buzzwords and fuzzwords: deconstructing development discourse.” In *Deconstructing Development Discourse - Buzzwords and Fuzzwords*, ed. Andrea Cornwall and Deborah Eade, 1-18. (Warwickshire: Practical Action Publishing Ltd., 2010). Jones and Juul Petersen, “Instrumentalist,” 1291-1294.



NGOs often presents them as a rather static and homogeneous group of organisations.<sup>74</sup>

Tadros has also expressed a concern with this growing trend in incorporating religion and involving religious authorities in development projects, and she notes how religion can be viewed as an instrument to promote human rights:

...religion has also become an important entry point in development policy and practice in the light of the entrenchment of neoliberal policies and the rise of identity politics. Faith-based actors have been brought to centre stage as providers of welfare services, mediators of social change and as arbitrators in administering justice. Some Western donors have also espoused an agenda of engaging with Muslim leaders while adopting a religious framework for advancing human rights in 'Muslim communities'.<sup>75</sup>

Although Tadros is critical to an instrumental approach to religion, she is emphasizing that religion should not be ignored as a potential important mobilizing force.<sup>76</sup> However, it would be wrong to view religion as the only approach to community engagement since people can have multiple identities and capacities besides religion. Juul Petersen notes that while studies of local and transnational Muslim NGOs can contribute to a better understanding of the popular mobilization of Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Hezbollah, there is also a need for more academic research that aim to go beyond the religious appearance and explore the heterogeneity and changing nature of the organizations.<sup>77</sup> What Juul Petersen and Tadros argue can be related to how development strategies aim to change cultural norms in order to promote gender equality. If development is based on a dualistic thinking in terms of conceptions like traditional versus modern or Islamic versus secular, rights or no rights, then this assumes some essential differences between groups of people or organizations that might not be the

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<sup>74</sup> Juul Petersen, "For humanity," 764.

<sup>75</sup> Tadros, "Introduction," 1.

<sup>76</sup> Tadros, "Introduction," 8.

<sup>77</sup> Juul Petersen, "For humanity," 22.

case. An openness to go beyond appearances is a necessary step towards exploring how discourses are produced.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter has focused on literature that highlights how a promotion of women's rights does not necessarily challenge oppressive states and global structures. It has been suggested by some of the authors that a sole focus on gender in development could lead to ignoring other problems that cause social marginalization and oppression. The main conclusion here is the importance of context. Women's rights are discursively produced, not only in NGOs or in terms of human rights, but in relation to religious institutions, governments, and in the different social worlds where people's realities are constructed. Based on the literature one could also suggest that the way that governments' politics of secularism and Islamism, where women tend to be important markers, is an important part of the context in which discourses on development emerge and unfold. Understanding these realities in terms of oppositional binaries like Islamic-secular and progressive-traditional might limit our ability to go beyond appearance and to see how individuals and organizations respond to the contexts they operate in.

## 4 Methods

In the beginning the idea for this study was to explore meanings of divisions along secular and religious lines in Tunisian civil society after the revolution started in 2011. However, it turned out to be a long process to find a scope through which to perform the study. In the following I will emphasize the role of meetings with people representing different parts of Tunisian civil society and the availability of organizations in the process of recruiting research partners. The participants will be briefly introduced before methods of data collection and transcription and analysis will be discussed. Finally, there will be a section on ethical considerations that were raised during the research cycle, with special attention to issues of categorization.

### 4.1 Selection of participants

From the beginning a qualitative approach was chosen. According to Hennink, Hutter and Bailey qualitative research is “useful for exploring new topics or understanding complex issues; for explaining people’s beliefs and behavior; and for identifying the social and cultural norms of a culture or society.”<sup>78</sup> The methods of in depth interviews and participatory observation seemed to be suitable since I aimed to establish more of an anthropological study of an organization. Using elements of ethnographic methods was thought to center the study on motivations and construction of identity for volunteers/activists in one or two organizations that defined themselves as Islamic. However, as it turned out I was not able to gain that sort of access to organizations. What was thought to be the first meeting in a series of interviews and observations was in many cases the only one achieved. Some organizations were discovered through other organizations, in lines with what Hennink Hutter and Bailey names “the snowball-

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<sup>78</sup> Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey. *Qualitative Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2011), 10-11.

method,” however this method did not accumulate as many new contacts as desired.<sup>79</sup> The choice of participants in this study largely depended on information obtained from internet searches and journalists who were interested in social development. It often turned out to be more difficult than expected to get appointments within a time reasonable with regards to my three months’ time frame. Even in cases where I already had an appointment, plans changed due to offices being closed for holidays, cancellations of appointments or finally obtaining an appointment in the last month of my stay in Tunisia. Thus selection of organizations was to a large extent depending on the organizations’ willingness to meet, and often methods for collecting information had to be adjusted to the character of the meeting once it occurred. It turned out that visiting organizations without an appointment was the most effective, even if this also resulted in a rejection in some cases.

To three of the interviews I was accompanied by a journalist that I had established contact with when I arrived in Tunisia. We agreed that I would do the interviews based on my interests, and that his function would be to translate where necessary since he spoke Tunisian Arabic fluently. It turned out that the journalist functioned as a gate opener. Firstly, his language skills enabled him to convince the organizations about giving us some time. Although he was Italian of origin, he had been residing in Tunisia for a decade and appeared well accustomed to communication and language. Also, because he was a male journalist and some years older than myself, I had a feeling that he gained more respect than me as an English speaking female student. Although the purpose was always to plan and select participants in a non-randomly way, as Hennink, Hutter and Bailey have argued to be necessary in order to ensure diversity and justification for the research topic, the selected participants should not be considered to represent a full picture of organizations involved in social development.<sup>80</sup> Still, as will be shown in the following the participants do have some common factors that make them suitable for a case study of contemporary ways of framing development in Tunisia.

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<sup>79</sup> Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, *Qualitative*, 100.

<sup>80</sup> Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, *Qualitative*, 83-85.

## 4.2 Introduction of the participants

There are seven organizations included in this study, whereof four are local organizations that emerged after 2011. The three last ones are all Tunis-based organizations that have a special focus on gender equality. The organizations are:

- Wattaniyya Charity: Has a clear charity aspect in its work, focusing on supporting poor people with basic resources such as school equipment, water and technical equipment. It also runs special campaigns in Ramadan, providing food and gifts for the poor.
- Baraka: Founded in Germany several years ago, but appears only to work in Tunisia. In addition to campaigns similar to Wattaniyya Charity, Baraka aims to contribute to social development through supporting small businesses in rural areas. According to information material they do this in close cooperation with Qatar Charity.
- Tunisian Committee for Coordination of Charity (TCCC): Functions as a coordinator for other charity organizations, as well as providing its own trainings for volunteers. They distribute resources as well as encourage and support local businesses.
- Hope for Tomorrow: Operates only in one neighborhood in Tunis, where it functions as a resource center for orphans. Moreover, they are involved in renovations of homes and supporting small businesses in the neighborhood.
- Center for Gender in Development (CGD): Since its establishment in Tunisia in 1993 the organization has been producing research and contributed to smaller development projects in rural areas, mainly helping to start and support women's business projects through training and financing.
- Association for Social Inclusion in Tunisia (ASIT): Supports local businesses through provision of training and resources. Has since 2005 been aiming to economically empower women through micro-finance projects in the Tunis

neighborhood where it holds office. After 2011 it has expanded its activities and become more outspoken about human rights and specifically women's rights.

- Creating the Future: Has its main office in Jordan and started working in Tunisia in 2011. Provides technical and financial support to initiatives of civil society organizations on the areas of democracy, human rights and good governance.

In addition I have included the branch office of a larger, transnational organization that was established in Tunisia in 2012, namely Qatar Charity. This organization will be viewed in terms of its partnership with several of the organizations rather than being treated as a distinctive participant. The organization is included mainly because it turned out to bring some strong connotations among some of the participants in this study, something I consider relevant with regards to the organizations perceptions of each other.

### **4.3 The interviews**

Before going to the first organization I had a list of questions that I had formed based on informal conversations with new acquaintances in Tunis; academics as well as news stories, political analysis and academic writings. On all occasions I would be invited into an office or another room where I would sit down with the director. I would introduce myself as a student from Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Lund, Sweden, and that I was doing a study on organizations in Tunisia with specific focus on charity. On the occasions where the journalist was with me, he introduced himself as a journalist living in Tunisia, and that he was there out of a journalistic interest as well as for translation. I made it clear that the results would be used for my thesis and that the participants would be anonymous according to the university's guidelines. Either in the beginning or in the end I also asked for permission to use the information and to quote them in a journalistic article on charity organizations, which I got the permission to do. I would begin by asking about the background of the organization; how it started, the size of the organization and what their visions are. The list of questions included working methods, with whom they work and which partners they cooperate with and examples of the process of a project. If it felt appropriate I would ask if they were politically or

religiously affiliated, but in some cases I felt that the humanitarian aspect had gotten so much emphasis by the interviewees that it almost felt provocative to ask this. However, if natural, I would ask in the end of the interviews if they agreed on the assumption that there is a new Islamic civil society emerging in Tunisia, without asking directly if they felt like a part of that. Another topic that I felt was potentially sensitive was the funding. This derived from an email correspondence with a Tunisian development expert who claimed that charity organizations are less transparent when it comes to their funding than what secular organizations tend to be. Therefore I would try to hang the question of funding and donors on something related to that in their answers; as an apropos. For example, they would show me a video or pictures from a project they had done, and I would comment that it looked costly and thus ask how they could finance it. The course of the conversation made it necessary to shuffle the questions I had prepared both since some answers covered several questions and other questions were raised during the conversation. In lines with what Clark has described, my experience was that semi-structured interviews in many cases increased the sense of rapport and trust and made the conversation more spontaneous and genuine than if I would have followed the list of questions.<sup>81</sup>

#### **4.4 Aiming for the insiders' perspective**

During the interviews I asked if it was possible to meet with some of their volunteers, intending to understand what motivated them in their work. I got the chance to meet with volunteers of two organizations. After the first interview with Wattaniyya Charity, and continued attempts to get in touch with more of their volunteers in the southern part of the country, the director invited me to come by and observe an activity that included packing and distribution of meat to a number of poor families in the Medeneen area in the South. There I had a dialogue with some of the volunteers about their motivation for their involvement. However, since people were busy working it was not possible to conduct

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<sup>81</sup> Janine A Clark. "Field Research Methods in the Middle East." *Political Science and Politics*, 39 (2006): 419.

any interviews that day. Back in Tunis I obtained the contact information to one of Wattaniyya Charity's office assistants, and when we met it turned out that she also was a volunteer and had been requested by the director to do an interview with me. Another two assistants joined in, and I got the chance to ask them all some questions about their volunteering. Their answers were short, and my attempts to ask follow-up questions and to probe mostly resulted in only one sentence. In the end I asked if they knew some other volunteers I could meet with, and they said they would try to arrange it. However, I got no response when I reminded them per email. The other organization where I successfully arranged a meeting with volunteers was Hope for Tomorrow. The first time I went there I was prepared to meet with the director and one volunteer, but upon arrival it turned out I was meeting with the director, three volunteers and one neuropsychologist. Thus I got the chance to do a spontaneous interview with a whole team of people involved, and it turned out that this interview proceeded much easier than the previous group interview. I returned to Hope for Tomorrow a second time, where I attended an English class and got the chance to talk to the children that participated as well as one of the parents. In the very end of my stay two volunteers took me to see a house in the neighborhood that the organization was helping to renovate.

#### **4.5 Analyzing and transcribing interviews**

Out of the in total 9 interviews that constitute the core of this study, whereof two are from the second meeting with two organizations, six are recorded and transcribed. During the remaining four, notes were taken carefully throughout the interviews, noting nearly verbatim what was being said by the interviewees or the translator. Whether the interviews were recorded or not depended on how planned and arranged the interview was. It felt less comfortable to ask for permission to record in the cases where I had obtained a spontaneous appointment, since the participants were not prepared for the interview. In the cases of recorded interviews, these were transcribed without the use of a transcription program. The transcription included every word said as well as all sounds effects, interruptions and pauses. However, for the purpose of making reading easier all



citations used in the thesis have been edited into coherent sentences. Such editing has only been done when the message appears clear and the content is not affected as a result. When something has been removed in between two relevant statements occurring in the same answer to a question, this is marked by a [...]. When the notes and transcriptions were ready, the texts were scanned for themes that occurred in all the interviews. A mix of inductive and deductive coding was applied. Some topics could be recognized in the interview guide, such as background and mission of the organizations. Other topics were singled out as reflecting what was important to the interviewees, such as how the different representatives for organizations related to categories like Islamism and charity. The themes were first identified to be: background of organization, organizational structure, self-presentation, gender aspect in projects, and their view of how Islamic and human rights based development differ. While writing up the findings, the themes were reduced into “structure and mission”, “self-presentation and view of others” and “aspects of charity and development”, as this turned out to cover the common themes.

#### **4.6 Ethical considerations and concerns**

What became increasingly apparent throughout the research process was the importance of choice of terms. The representatives of CGD, ASIT and Creating the Future generally seemed used to talking to students and had much to say about their mission and strategies as well as their views on charities. Since the interviews with these organizations occurred rather late in the study when I had already centered my attention on what I perceived as charities, the conversations tended to turn towards what in the interviews would be named Islamic organizations. However, it should be emphasized that it was me who brought up the mention of “Islamic” or “charities”, and not that the organizations presented themselves in relation to these. In fact none of them seemed to consider charities as doing anything similar to themselves, and the term “Islamic” tended to be converted to “Islamist” by the interviewees – a term often applied in public discourse as contradictory to secularism and human rights. Given the strong opinions some of the participants turned out to have, and the dichotomization of secularists and Islamists in

Tunisia, I ended up reconsidering the use of “Islamic” throughout the interviews. Only because I perceived them as Islamic, it was not necessarily what characterized them the most. Also, even if it would have been right to label them Islamic or Islamist, there is a wide difference between all Tunisian Islamists; their members come from very different backgrounds and ideologies are formed in different contexts.<sup>82</sup> In an environment which is already marked by fear and mistrust, terms and conceptions could probably have an effect on people’s attitude towards each other. I have deliberately avoided labeling some of the organizations “secular” because I would like to avoid the Islamic-secular dichotomization all together in my analysis. In this study I would rather show how differences in the organizations’ strategies might function to align them with a certain side rather than assuming that secular and Islamic are natural categories that define them as fundamentally different in nature. When terms such as “European organizations” or “Islamic” appeared during some interviews, this was mostly a matter of easing conversations according to language skills, and can be referred to as what Hennink, Hutter and Bailey describes as translation of research questions into a more “colloquial language.”<sup>83</sup> Finally, based on my experience that some of the issues in the interviews are sensitive for the participants, and in order to better conceal participants’ identities for the sake of anonymity, I have decided to change the names of all organizations and volunteers that participate in this study.

## 4.7 Limitations

From the very beginning of the research cycle it was obvious that my lack of sufficient skills in Arabic and French was a serious limitation. First of all it means that my insight in existing literature on the topic is limited to what is written in English, when much of what is written about Tunisia and North Africa is in French and Arabic. When it comes to selection of participants, the way they were selected would have been easier to apply if I had sufficient knowledge of French or Arabic to carry out interviews in one of these

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<sup>82</sup> Schwedler, “Can Islamists,” 351-352. Merone and Cavatorta, “Salafist mouvance,” 3 -4.

<sup>83</sup> Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, *Qualitative*, 117-118.

languages. Clark has remarked that many researchers experience more confidence if a local research assistant is involved in meetings with participants.<sup>84</sup> In this study it would probably have been an advantage to hire a Tunisian translator who could participate both in the recruitment process and translate during interviews, but this was difficult to arrange because of budget limitations and because it was not possible to schedule many of the interviews. In the two interviews where the journalist translated, it has to be considered that he is not a native Arabic speaker and thus is there an increased risk that some content has been lost in translation. On the other hand, it was probably an advantage that we had a common interest in the topics raised in the interviews, which meant he could understand my intentions and thus formulate my questions in an appropriate way. Finally, the timeframe of this study turned out to be too short considering the time consuming process of recruiting participants. The problem that I experienced has been pointed out by Wiktorowicz, who points out that it can take time to build trust and familiarity with members of movements where networks are opaque for research.<sup>85</sup> In accordance with what Wiktorowicz notes, I found it difficult to obtain sufficient information about the function of networks and alliances through organizational charts and secondary material.

## 4.8 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed reasons for why the study has been shaped the way it has, and the different factors that affected the choice of participants. Overall the participants were chosen on basis of a combination of their availability and strategic planning. The selection has been affected by limitations in language and challenges related to appointments; however a part of the process was eased considerably by a journalist who functioned as a gate opener. Participatory observation and in depth interviews were found to be inadequately appropriate methods for the interview situations that occurred. Overall

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<sup>84</sup> Clark, "Field Research," 419.

<sup>85</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz. Introduction to *Islamic Activism: A social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), 22-23.

the information achieved was mostly about the organizations as presented by their official representatives. The common themes can be categorized as the organization's mission, view of themselves and others, aspects of charity and development, as well as some examples of how volunteers were motivated in their work. In conclusion, although there have been some challenges that limited the preferred diversity of participants and more of an in depth perspective, what has resulted is an explorative work on the nature of the research topic.

## 5 Theoretical framework

The following will provide a theoretical framework for the interpretation of different forms of social development. As we have seen, organizations can frame their work for development differently although their overall aim is to bring increased welfare for people that are exposed to poverty and social marginalization. This aim can also be understood as an attempt to increase people's ability to participate as citizens, and can be accounted for in terms of Fraser's three dimensions of justice. Although this study is not explicitly concerned with analyzing the concept of justice, Fraser's discussion provides a useful tool that can be used to explore and situate different approaches to development that goes beyond descriptive terms such as "sustainability", "empowerment" and other "buzzwords." In order to analyze processes involved in development, elements of social movement theory will be applied together with a post-development perspective, which will in turn enable us to further contextualize different ways of framing.

### 5.1 A three dimensional justice

Fraser defines justice as "parity of participation" and which "requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life."<sup>86</sup> She identifies three dimensions that impede people from full participation, and which must be inherent in theories of justice. The first is maldistribution, which is about economic structures that deny some people the ability to interact with others as equals.<sup>87</sup> This is about class structure of society, which privileges some over others and is of economic character. Maldistribution may include unequal income and wealth, access to food, water and other resources, as well as access to the labor market and education. The second dimension of injustice is misrecognition, which equals status inequality.<sup>88</sup> According to Fraser this is about institutional hierarchies

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<sup>86</sup> Nancy Fraser. "Reframing justice in a globalizing world." *Global Inequality: Patterns and Explanations* (2007): 5.

<sup>87</sup> Fraser, "Reframing justice," 5.

<sup>88</sup> Fraser, "Reframing justice," 5-6.

of cultural value that hinder interaction between people as peers. One example is gender inequality, where women might be disfavored with regards to opportunities for careers and influential positions because they are expected to prioritize the family. Another example may be the suppression and stigmatization of religious groups, which is likely to result in limited opportunities for certain groups to participate as peers in a given society. The third dimension of justice has to do with representation, involving who is included and excluded in the political community where the recognition and distribution take place.<sup>89</sup> In Fraser words it tells us “not only who can make claims for redistribution and recognition, but also how such claims are to be mooted and adjudicated.”<sup>90</sup> The challenge regarding representation, Fraser claims, is that struggles for justice are often framed in ways that dispute the “what” of justice, which can be of material or cultural/legal character, while taking for granted that the “who” is the national citizenry and the unit for justice the territorial state.<sup>91</sup> According to Fraser misframing is the sort of misrepresentation that defines the age of globalization, and can best be observed in weak or failed states that cannot provide its citizens with economic justice, let alone claim the rights on behalf of marginalized groups vulnerable to exploitation and changes in the global economy.<sup>92</sup>

## **5.2 The state as provider for justice**

Fraser explains how the notion of the territorial state as provider for justice is working against an understanding of other obstacles that prevent some people from participating as peers:

Channeling their claims into the domestic political spaces of relatively powerless, if not wholly failed, states, this frame insulates offshore powers from critique and control. Among those shielded from the reach of justice are more powerful

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<sup>89</sup> Fraser, “Reframing justice,” 6-7.

<sup>90</sup> Fraser, “Reframing justice,” 6.

<sup>91</sup> Fraser, ”Reframing justice,” 2-3.

<sup>92</sup> Fraser, “Reframing justice,” 8-10.

predator states and transnational private powers, including foreign investors and creditors, international currency speculators, and transnational corporations. Also protected are the governance structures of the global economy, which set exploitative terms of interaction and then exempt them from democratic control.<sup>93</sup> This is in line with Trouillot's claim that globalization has made it unclear what the state and its power really is. In his view, the state can be defined as a set of processes, and the state can be experienced through the effects of these processes.<sup>94</sup> Trouillot also claims that the peripheral state is weakened through the processes of globalization, and that NGOs and trans- and national institutions have taken the role of producing state effects in peripheral societies.<sup>95</sup> In order to overcome the illusion of the territorial state as providing for people's justice, Fraser argues that a new framing for justice should be post-Westphalian, which she suggests should follow the "all affected principle":

On this view, what turns a collection of people into fellow subjects of justice is not geographical proximity, but their co-imbrication in a common structural or institutional framework, which sets the ground rules that govern their social interaction, thereby shaping their respective life possibilities, in patterns of advantage and disadvantage.<sup>96</sup>

This is not to say that the territorial state is irrelevant, but that states are integrated in the global economy in different ways. Fraser argues that there are other structures than only the state itself that have an impact on people's chance to live a good life.<sup>97</sup> One interpretation of such is that when international institutions impose land reforms and other structural changes on national economies, states might end up facilitating the workings of such policies rather than protecting the poorest of its citizens. This can be explained by applying a post-development perspective.

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<sup>93</sup> Fraser, "Reframing justice," 9-10.

<sup>94</sup> Michael-Rolph Trouillot. *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 5.

<sup>95</sup> Trouillot, *Global Transformations*, 86.

<sup>96</sup> Fraser, "Reframing justice," 13.

<sup>97</sup> Fraser, "Reframing justice," 14.

### 5.3 The trajectory of development

Escobar offers a post-development perspective through which he argues that development was invented to serve the interest of Western capitalist paradigms.<sup>98</sup> He gives an account of how poverty on a global scale was a discovery of the post-World War 2 period, and that “massive poverty in the modern sense appeared only when the spread of the market economy broke down community ties and deprived millions of people from access to land, water, and other resources.”<sup>99</sup> Development was institutionalized and professionalized with the creation of the International bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1944. Escobar holds that development evolved into a discourse with the establishment of development studies in the social sciences.<sup>100</sup> As pointed out by Fraser, the ways modernization unfolded in and outside Europe was accompanied by a belief that Europe and the West was superior to other parts of the world, a critique which can be recognized in what Escobar defines as an

...unquestioned desirability of economic growth (...) which would allow for the replication in the poor countries of those conditions characteristic of mature capitalist ones (including industrialization, urbanization, agricultural modernization, infrastructure, increased provision of social services, and high level of literacy.<sup>101</sup>

A discourse, in Foucauldian terms, produces and circulates truth and knowledge about social groups. The truth, morality and meaning produced through development discourse was based on the idea that poor countries were dependent on capital investments from developed countries in order to advance socially, culturally and politically. Theories of

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<sup>98</sup> Arturo Escobar. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 24-35.

<sup>99</sup> Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 22.

<sup>100</sup> Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 44-46.

<sup>101</sup> Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 38.



development were invented in academia and by experts in fields such as economy, education, nutrition and agriculture, viewing the poor as objects to be studied and managed. According to Escobar technological and social innovations against poverty were invented to prevent social and political unrest as consequence of economic underdevelopment in developing countries, and in that way ensure continued prosperity for Western countries.<sup>102</sup> The poor should be provided with education, health, hygiene and morality in order to transform them into consumers. Cornwall has argued that one way to introduce new reforms and policies in development is through the use of buzzwords. In her view words such as “poverty reduction”, “rights based”, “participation” and even “development” itself are buzzwords that suggest good things that people often spontaneously agree with.<sup>103</sup> Cornwall characterizes buzzwords as gaining their power ...through their vague and euphemistic qualities, their capacity to embrace a multitude of possible meanings, and their normative resonance. The work that these words do for development is to place the sanctity of its goals beyond reproach.<sup>104</sup>

Cornwall also points out that the words constitute a language which is typically not used by the lay person, thus leaving it open what they might mean in practice and suggesting that development is better left to experts.<sup>105</sup> These views indicate that development discourse has evolved in response to security and economic needs of donor countries more than local needs in communities that are targeted for development. Instead of being actors, poor people become objects that are to be transformed according to programs.

## 5.4 NGOization of social movements

Choudry and Kapoor have outlined the evolution of human rights organizations since the Cold War, arguing that in general their work have been compatible with the maintenance

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<sup>102</sup> Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 22-23.

<sup>103</sup> Cornwall, “Introductory overview,” 2.

<sup>104</sup> Cornwall, “Introductory overview,” 2.

<sup>105</sup> Cornwall, “Introductory overview,” 3.

of existing geopolitical structures of authority and wealth.<sup>106</sup> After the Cold War the focus has been turned to strengthening of civil society and good governance, but that the effects have too often been the strengthening of liberalism and undermining of democracy.<sup>107</sup> Choudry and Kapoor claim that instead of contributing to building of social movements with a solid grassroots base, professional elites of NGO representatives are the ones that are most influenced by international networks.<sup>108</sup> Processes of professionalization are driven by neoliberal policies, and organizations that claim to represent the poor and marginalized tend to overshadow and displace mass based movements.<sup>109</sup> These issues have been discussed by Jad, who demonstrates how the NGOization of women's movements have resulted in a depolitization of women's movements in Palestine and in other Arab countries.<sup>110</sup> Jad argues that this includes a process of professionalization, and that many NGOs are top-down and lack democracy within the organizations.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, there is a lack of constituency because projects are often short-lived and the organizations are not based on a broad involvement of local people. This adds to the perspectives of Escobar, Choudry and Kapoor that suggest a tendency that development programs on poverty reduction are serving elites rather than changing structures that are causing poverty. Wiktorowicz notes that from a sociopsychological perspective, the emergence of Islamic activism has been explained as protest over elitization, westernization and the failure of state-controlled economic policies.<sup>112</sup> However, Wiktorowicz argues that social movement theory can include more of the complexities of Islamic movements by viewing them as actors that make strategic choices. This view can work to challenge the popular perception of Islamists as

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<sup>106</sup> Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor, introduction to *Ngoization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects*, ed. Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2013), 4.

<sup>107</sup> Choudry and Kapoor, introduction, 5.

<sup>108</sup> Choudry and Kapoor, introduction, 6.

<sup>109</sup> Choudry and Kapoor, introduction, 8-9.

<sup>110</sup> Islah Jad. "The NGO-isation of Arab Women's Movements." *IDS Bulletin*, 35 (2004): 34-42, accessed May 11, 2014. doi: 10.1111/j.1759-5436.2004.tb00153.x

<sup>111</sup> Jad, "The NGO-isation," 34.

<sup>112</sup> Wiktorowicz, introduction, 6-7.

fundamentalists whose actions are determined by ideology.<sup>113</sup> One example of how social movement theory can be used to grasp complexities involved is Clark's study of Islamic charities in Jordan, Yemen and Egypt. Clark applies social movement theory and the concept of horizontal ties in order to show how Islamic charities have emerged in response to states' failure to provide services and social welfare to all its citizens.<sup>114</sup> More than aiming for political control and spreading a religious message, Clark finds that charities function as a way to earn money through providing services that are not provided by the state.<sup>115</sup> Her study of health clinics and well established charitable organizations shows that the most wide reaching consequence of the charities' work is the strengthening of middle class networks.<sup>116</sup> More than serving interests of the poor, members of the middle class is strengthened and empowered in terms of professionalism, networks, learning, work experience and other benefits that might come with involvement in charities. In other words, while horizontal ties are strong, vertical ties between different classes tend to be weak. Hence a broad involvement of local people volunteering to improve conditions for others does not necessarily imply a struggle that addresses structures and dynamics that create and maintain advantage and disadvantage.

## 5.5 Summary

According to Fraser, globalization has brought a need to reconceptualize struggles for justice. If struggles based on redistribution and recognition assume sovereign states to be the context in which justice is to be achieved, and without taking into consideration that parts of the population is not able to participate politically as citizens, then the dimension of political representation is missing. Transnational human rights NGOs can be viewed as

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<sup>113</sup> Wiktorowicz defines Islamic activism as: "the mobilization of contention to support Muslim causes." Wiktorowicz, introduction, 2.

<sup>114</sup> Clark, Janine A. *Islam, charity, and activism: middle-class networks and social welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>115</sup> Clark, *Islam, charity and activism*, 35.

<sup>116</sup> Clark, *Islam, charity and activism*, 3-4.

processes that constitute a challenge to the notion of the sovereign state as the sole provider for justice. However, organizations that work on social development, where the poor are considered objects that are to be managed or to undergo cultural change in order to fit with processes of modernization and economic change, can be seen to work under a paradigm that is undermining people's agency. Other more grassroots oriented approaches to development may offer an alternative in terms of volunteerism and a broader mobilization of people, but in the same time carry elements of elitism and objectification of the targets for development. The framework presented here suggest that if justice is to be achieved including for the most marginalized, then processes causing the exclusion of some from participating as peers need to be addressed.

## 6 Findings

In this section the data will be presented. The organizations have been divided into two subsections based on some of their common characteristics. The first part of each subsection will present findings about the organizations, which is structured under: structure, background and mission, how the organizations perceive themselves and each other, and finally aspects of distribution of resources and sustainable development. For the first four organizations I have included a part on outcomes of volunteering, since volunteers are essential to the organizations' work and what constitute an important difference to the other three organizations.

### PART ONE

Wattaniyya Charity, Baraka, Tunisian Committee for Coordination of Charity (TCCC) and Hope for Tomorrow

#### 6.1 Structure, background and mission

What is most distinctive about these organizations is that they are all carrying out charity during Muslim holidays; all four organizations are organizing campaigns in the time of Ramadan and Eid al-Adha to the benefit of poor people. This is mainly about distributing food or sweets to families that reside in marginalized areas around Tunisia, and who the organizations consider too poor to be able to provide themselves with food for the holiday. Moreover, all the organizations are covering some or all of these activities:

- food distribution
- renovation of houses and schools
- digging of wells for water supply
- material and financial support to orphans
- distribution of school material to children
- provision of technical equipment to farmers and fishermen

These four organizations were all established in 2011, after the departure of the old regime. Since then they have established offices in Tunis with employees and are now working with local partners that contribute to localizing needs for charity and development in the central and southern regions of the country. The regions they operate in include some of Tunis' suburban areas as well as Medeneen, Gafsa, Gabes, Sousse, Babel, Sidi Bouzzid, Zawwan, Jandouba, Tatouine and Kasserine. Per October 2013 Hope for Tomorrow was the only one of these that limited its work to Tunis, but also this organization aimed to expand to other areas as they grow bigger. When it comes to finance, the common method is that they receive suggestions for projects by individuals or other organizations. After a study of conditions in the relevant area a project is implemented with the help of volunteers. While Hope for Tomorrow appeared to be completely run by volunteers, also with regards to administration and activities in the center, all the other organizations apply local volunteers to carry out their charitable activities on the ground.

## **6.2 “The smile on their faces”: Outcomes of volunteering**

During the second interview with Wattaniyya Charity, three female assistants in the Tunis-office explained that they had been volunteers with the organization before they were employed. However, they still continue to do voluntary work. Siba explained how she started to work for Wattaniyya Charity:

I was a volunteer before I was employed. I'm actually an English teacher; my education is English civilization and literature. But the job market for teachers is very tough, so I couldn't find a job. So I work here. I love children –that's why I joined the association; to see the smile on their faces. We are giving money to orphans, helping children in that way. [...] Before the revolution we didn't know about poverty in Tunisia. Now it's important to find ways to help them to be a part of society. We want to give them a different life, to integrate them.

Wedad, the fundraising office assistant explained her motivation for volunteering like this:

The first project I joined one year ago, when I saw the smile of the children... Especially in rural places, the smile of the children is amazing. Like when we distribute schoolbags, because many children cannot go to school. Their situation is so bad.

Rana, another program assistant said about her volunteering experience: "Volunteering is a good experience. You become more responsible through helping needy people."

Responsibility was also emphasized by a volunteer in Hope for Tomorrow. Maryam, a master student in physics explained what motivates her to spend four hours per week to teach children mathematics:

For me, personally, I like educating children. And in the same time I am studying. I will become a teacher in two years, so I need the experience. And I give them help; because they are in a difficult situation and they need someone helping them. Education in Tunisia is not so...

On request she elaborated on why volunteering is important for her:

And it's important to participate in associations. It builds a personality; it helps in communication. So it's important to participate in associations. For me, it has given me the skill to communicate with others. Before I was quite shy, but now I communicate with others. I have become more open, more outgoing. So it's beneficial both for me and for the children.

These volunteers expressed that networking, working experience and personal development along with a desire to help others were important motivations for volunteering. The fact that one of the volunteers did not know about poverty prior to the uprising shows that she is not from a marginalized area herself. On a travel to Medeneen in the South I met with volunteers from Wattaniyya Charity that were packing and distributing meat to poor families in and around the city on the day of Eid. The five out of about fifteen volunteers I talked to answered short and concisely on the question of why they were spending Eid volunteering: "To do good." Some of the volunteers explained that they were spending time on volunteering because they were unemployed. At least one of them received a piece of meat through the same campaign, which was sponsored by Human Appeal and Islamic Relief. Siba at the Tunis office confirmed that many of the organization's volunteers are unemployed. She estimated the number of volunteers on a

national basis to be about 600, whereof about 90% are unemployed. Siba also emphasized the good relation to the other volunteers as important for her: “We are like a big family, a good team. We have dinners together and sometimes we travel together. We are more than friends, we are like a family.”

### **6.3 Religious and political affiliation**

Throughout the different interviews it appeared important for the representatives to stress that their organizations are not political, and that they are not affiliated with any political party. The director of Tunisian Coordination Committee for Charity (TCCC) said in her presentation that the organization set as a demand that all its partners should be legal, and that no “extremist organizations” were allowed to join their network. On the question of what they see as their values, none of the organizations used the term “Islamic” or “religious” about themselves, and none referred to religion throughout the interviews. Still, a look into their appearance in social media brings to view frequent references to Islam through posts and pictures with religious texts, Quran citations and reference to Islamic ethics. Hope for Tomorrow refers to its work as *kefala*, which is an Islamic charitable concept. In an interview with the director of Wattaniyya Charity, one of my questions was formulated in such a way that it suggested that the organization was Islamic, to what the director responded by saying; “We are not Islamic. We are not political. I hate politics; I have never wanted to get into that. We are humanitarian, politics is not our field.” In the same response he emphasized that they have worked together with UNHCR on humanitarian issues. (I got a sense that my use of the term annoyed him, and in the future I tried not to apply the term Islamic in interviews.) On the question of their relation to Qatar Charity, the director of Wattaniyya Charity said that they are partners, but that he would rather not see public attention around this partnership because Qatar is negatively perceived by many Tunisians. The director of Baraka also stressed that the organization is not political. When asked if Baraka is connected to Al-Nahdha, the director replied:



One must separate between politics and humanitarian work. The association is not affiliated with a party. The poor areas have social needs, and this is not political affiliation. The association has nothing to hide. The question one must ask is: ‘Who is benefiting from the help?’ and evaluate on basis of objective studies of real needs. Listen to us instead of what others are saying about us. What is important is who is benefiting, not who is funding.

None of the organizations mentioned zakat as a method of raising funds, but all receive money from individuals and organizations in Tunisia and abroad. Wattaniyya Charity and Baraka use Zeitouna Bank, a Zeitouna mosque-university affiliated bank which provides Islamic finance services in accordance with shariah.

#### **6.4 Cooperation based on shared values**

All the organizations said that they are cooperating with other organizations that share their values. Through the interviews and reading of information material it became clear that they are all affiliated with each other, except Hope for Tomorrow. Members of the organization said that they operate with a database that holds information about their projects and receivers, but they did not elaborate on which organizations they share this database with. Although it remains unclear if it is the same database, volunteers with Wattaniyya Charity also referred to such a system which provided information about which projects receivers were benefiting from. Wattaniyya Charity and Baraka both have a partnership with Qatar Charity which means they are involved in many of the same projects. During the interview with TCCC it appeared that this organization’s president was the same as for Baraka. When asked if there is a difference between Baraka and European-funded NGOs working with social development in poor areas, Baraka’s director replied that their purpose and vision are the same, but their ways might be different. She exemplified this with the Eid-campaign, through which Baraka provides poor families with food and other necessities. None of the organizations in this section mentioned human rights and gender equality as guidelines for their work, whether through the interviews or in their information material. Answering the question of

whether they have a gender aspect in their work, such as empowerment of women, volunteers of Hope for Tomorrow did not know the meaning of gender and the word was translated to the Arabic “jins”, or sex. They answered that everyone is equal in their organization, and that they do not make any difference between boys and girls – although boys tends to be more demanding at a certain age. Hope for Tomorrow, Wattaniyya Charity, Baraka, and TCCC mentioned the family as important. On the question of whether they have gender specific projects, like helping women to establish small businesses, Siba replied that Wattaniyya Charity does nothing like that. The organization aims to help everyone, the whole family and not specifically women. She remarked: “But all associations have their own way, it’s ok, it’s good that others are also trying to help.” Baraka’s director also explained that they focus on the family, which they try to empower through access to water, education and income. The integrity of the family was emphasized by the director as important. In comparison, the director of TCCC held the view that empowerment of women is important, but that it is better left to local organizations. When asked specifically on how she viewed the approach of European-funded organizations on this, she stressed the importance of cultural sensitiveness, and exemplified this with their strategy of helping women to generate income in their own home instead of challenging existing cultural conditions in conservative areas:

Tunisian associations that are funded by Europe often work on specific issues, and that’s probably why they get money. Women on the countryside are not so attractive for them and they don’t know how to work there. They must be empowered, but with respect for local mentality. That means that the best is to empower women inside their house. Europeans are not so sensitive to these issues.

On the question of what differentiates Baraka from European NGOs, she answered:

You cannot compare. European NGOs are so structured, and they operate within a complex legal system. In Tunisia, we do not yet have the same experience; the associations are only two-three years old. The differences can be illustrated by a new law, which is only benefiting profitable organizations. In practice associations are still working under the old legislative system. [...] However,

associations made a lot of changes in only two-three years, and will continue to grow stronger.

When asked if she agreed that European NGOs might contribute to the secular-Islamist division when choosing their partners, she rejected the idea of the division itself, and said this point is made bigger than it really is. Also, she said that such divisions are certainly not linked to political parties. In her view freedom of expression and the right to choose is a natural consequence of democracy and will necessarily result in different choices.

## **6.5 Charity and social change**

According to the director of Baraka, this organization has evolved from a charity which only donated resources for schools and children and carried out humanitarian help after disasters, into social development. The director mentioned the importance of helping people to gain access to the market and thus improve people's incomes and create sustainability.<sup>117</sup> She exemplified this with their aim to create stable resources of income and that they support students financially. One main function of TCCC is to build capacities of local organizations in order to build a strong civil society. This was exemplified by the director as arranging trainings for volunteers of their partner organizations and the strengthening of traditional handicraft and textile industry as well as facilitation of export through European organizations. In addition they support projects that develop water sanitation and create jobs locally. Although smaller than the other organizations, Hope for Tomorrow is managing several projects in their neighborhood in Tunis. The center functions as a local resource center for orphans and their families and is responsible for recruiting what they call foster parents who donate money for one child and her/his family on a yearly basis. Education is the main focus of the center, and volunteers are arranging support classes in languages and sciences for children and youth

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<sup>117</sup> It appears doubtful if any of the interviewees define sustainability in accordance with The Brundtland Report, which defines sustainable development as: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." World Commission on Environment and Development, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://www.iisd.org/sd/>.

from 6 to 20. The aim is to help disadvantaged children out of poverty and into a better environment than the neighborhoods in which they live. In addition the center organizes activities for children such as trips, and they provide health care. The center also takes on responsibility to renovate houses in the neighborhood and they give financial help to families to establish small businesses in order for them to support themselves. A priority group for such assistance is widows with children. While talking to a mother of three who was recently widowed, she explained that she always had wanted to work, but never had the skills or opportunity. Now Hope for Tomorrow had provided for the renovation of her house, including the establishment of a small store in her front yard where she will sell groceries. The woman said she received no help from her neighbors, who had become jealous of her after she received help from the organization. However, in her own words, she was thankful that she now was *pushed* to work.

## **PART TWO**

Center for Gender in Development (CGD), Association for Social Inclusion in Tunisia (ASIT) and Creating the Future

### **6.6 Structure, background and mission**

Association for Social Inclusion in Tunisia (ASIT) and Center for Gender in Development (CGD) are the only organizations in this study that were initiated in Tunisia before the 2011 uprising, in 2006 and 1993 respectively. ASIT first existed from 1995 as an NGO with a mission to promote professional business relations between Tunisia and the USA, and it later changed into focusing more on social development. After 2011 it has expanded its work to include poverty reduction, unemployment, women's rights, democracy and strengthening of civil society. The CGD is a research and training center that aims to make links between research and the field through providing local organizations with training as part of capacity building. The organization builds capacities of researchers, policy makers and journalists, and in addition they work

directly with local organizations on poverty reduction. Creating the Future works on providing technical and financial support to organizations, mainly functioning as a donor for smaller organizations working on democracy, human rights and good governance. Part of their work is to provide funds for women that are accepted into ASIT's training programs on entrepreneurship. The NGOs have in common that human rights, and in specific women's rights are central to their work, and they all choose partners that follow these principles. All three organizations cooperate with or receive funds from different UN bodies, the World Bank and European and US governmental institutions. Broadly the organizations' work on social development is identified to be centered on these issues:

- helping women to establish small businesses
- establishing contact with business partners abroad
- training in business management

One of the project coordinators of CGD explained that the center targets and supports more than 300 organizations in the northern, southern and middle part of Tunisia. He explained the criteria that are set for their partners:

When we launch our project we say that we have to work with associations working on the terms of political participation, democracy, citizenship, human rights and of course gender equality.

ASIT main office is situated in a seemingly impoverished neighborhood in Tunis. The office holds about five employees and as of October 2013 also two American students who were doing their internships with the organization. When the topic of Islamic organizations and volunteering was brought up by the interviewer, the president of ASIT explained why the organization is not able to recruit volunteers in the same way as charities:

For the Islamic...you know...it's about giving to the others, and all these nice, religious feelings about giving. It could be attractive. If I wanted to attract volunteers I would do the same. But my work is different. I'm not here to promote awareness about cancer or the issue of violence against women. Because THEN you find. Then people come. [...] But here I'm looking for those who are coming to help the NGO promote something or...about the development process, or about

training, or about advocating. [...] Our mission as an NGO, for me and for those who are like me, it's another level.

## **6.7 Human rights as basis for cooperation**

The director of CGD emphasized that their focus is on women's rights, and that CEDAW is central to their work. For their partner organizations, it is a demand that they are human rights oriented in their work and that they accept equality between men and women. The director explained that she has nothing against working with organizations that have an Islamic vision as long as they implement human rights in their work. She stressed that of the around 300 NGOs that CGD works with, all are working on human rights. At one point the notion of Islamic was discussed:

All these NGOs that I am working with, it is maybe 300. They're working with human rights, but that does not mean that they are not working with an Islamic vision. But I am not able to know if some of them are working for or against Islamic (sic). I don't think that there is a lot that are working on Islamic. And against Islamic. Because I think that the term Islamic is a political term. And I am not working with parties. I am working with NGOs.

She elaborated on the difference:

I am not working with charities, even if they are Jews or Catholics or...I'm working with the institutions that say that they are working for development, the development NGOs. Or human rights NGOs. For me, the concept of Islamic is linked with charity. But, maybe after your study I will know better, because we don't know a lot. Your work could be very good for us, because we don't know a lot about these charity associations.

Several times during the interview the director stressed that CGD does not work with charity organizations, often as a reaction when the notion of charity was brought up by the interviewer. The aspect of sustainability was also held up to be a marker of difference:

We are not working with charity, because charity for us is to help the very, very poor. The others, they have to work. They are not to be helped. They have to be actors and they have to be skilled. Because if you give them, they continue to be in need.

During the second interview with ASIT, the issue of political division was brought up. I asked the project coordinator about his opinion on whether organizations like his own could work to bridge the gap between secularist and Islamist actors in civil society. He answered:

Yes. We just received the confirmation about the first part of the funding from the UNDP for a project called ‘Enough’. This project is about encountering religious extremism. The idea of the project is that we will have debating, workshops and trainings. Human rights trainings and public speaking trainings. However, the people who are targeted will be brought together in the same group; youth, women and community leaders. By community leaders we mean preachers...imams. So we will be bringing these people together. We’re different, yes, but we are living in the same environment, and we have to learn to respect and work with each other.

## **6.8 Gender equality in focus**

As the director pointed out, Center for CGD’s focus is on what they call sustainable development. One such project is about providing women in a village with equipment for production of olive oil, and CGD was at the time of the interview attempting to establish a trade between the producers and a foreign businessman. The director explained what such projects result in:

And now...the women are producing oil, and in two months or one month –I don’t know, they are selling their oil after putting it in bottles and they will be self-reliant. We are just pushing them. They are poor, but they are not as poor as before. And we try to skill them; we don’t give them any dinars.<sup>118</sup> For me this is

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<sup>118</sup> Tunisian dinar is the main currency in Tunisia.

development, but in the same time we try to empower them, because we listen to them, we let them speak, more and more. We expose them to others; we give them the opportunity to come to Tunis, to go to Jordan, to go to other areas, to give them some opportunities. And for us, if we have some money from donors, it's for that. And it's better to give them some opportunities to know and to learn, than to give them money and things through charity.

Both the president and one of the project coordinators of ASIT also highlighted unemployment, women's rights, local entrepreneurs and religious fundamentalism to be important issues to work on all over the country. The president of ASIT explained the importance of local partners in the regions where they want to work:

So, in each region we collaborate with local NGOs. That's how I prefer it. First, you are empowering them. Second, they know the people. They are introduced, they are trusted. They are from there. I don't know better than them what people need there. How I should talk to them, and who we should select. [...] Our role is more to look for the grants, we have the grants. The needs have to be expressed by the locals, and we try to... But there are common needs everywhere.

Another project run by ASIT is about alternative tourism, which is about the construction of a cultural and environmental travel path in two governorates, which promotes what they define as green tourism and in the same time local entrepreneurship and development of cultural and artistic projects along the path. In this way they aim to bring more job opportunities in areas which are not frequently visited by tourists. In addition, ASIT manages programs that aim to promote women entrepreneurship:

We did a business plan on how to create a business center for women, within the NGO. We train trainers within the NGO, who are themselves training the women. We also worked with these centers to develop their services in terms of attracting mentors to the women. Attracting funds to fund the projects of the women they are training. And also include other services like political awareness programs for women, or bringing a psychologist to women, if they are suffering from for example violence, so it becomes more a center for women, as opposed to just women entrepreneurship. So, this is an example of a project, which is built in order to move from the informal to the formal sector. For women who have a



micro-business, who is not registered, who does not pay taxes, who doesn't have any access to social security; we help her to go through all this process, so she can have retirement in the end of the day.

In addition to capacity building of NGOs, ASIT also runs smaller programs where they provide sewing- and literacy training for women in their main office.

## **6.9 Political propaganda versus development for all**

When a program coordinator of CGD told me about his experiences in the field, he stated that the problem with Islamic organizations is that they are affiliated with political parties, using charity for the purpose of collective support:

They are not making difference between persons who are real practitioners of Islam and other ones. So they are helping both groups. For example, if I am not an Islamist and I am not belonging to any Islamist political party, and if I don't have a reference to religion; if I need help, they will help me also. So they are not choosing only, or working with only people who have a political or religious background. But the problem is that when they go to an area to bring help or assistance, they are always using religious references. For example, they are using texts from the Quran. Or they are taking the opportunity to be in close contact with the population, to talk with them about the main mandate of Islam. And also we receive testimonials from the population. They are saying that these persons are in close contact with Islamist parties for example. Because in Tunisia, in the small cities, everyone knows everyone. So, I know exactly what you are doing here for example, and I know exactly... Because they are tribal organizations.

When asked how ASIT differs from Islamic organizations that also work on social development, the president explained how the Islamic generate support for political parties instead of bringing sustainable development:

And sometimes they do the same things as us. We cannot do what they do in terms of distributing money, buying stuff for people... But they do what we do. They provide training and management etcetera. But the difference is that we are

open for everybody, they are not. They are not open for everybody. Or...people are not stupid anyway. But, however, they are there, and their presence does not prohibit us from what we are doing...what we have to do. Maybe they are disturbed more than they are disturbing us. But on the contrary, wherever they are, we should be there. [...] Their role will be crucial during the elections, the next elections. Because what they do, they distribute the money. These are the arms of the Islamist party during the elections. They are everywhere, in each community. It's a machine.

According to the director of Creating the Future, all aid is political. In his view organizations that promote human rights are also political in the sense that they promote political rights. Moreover, aid can be used to pressure governments and to impose the agenda of one country onto another. When it comes to Creating the Future's work they attempt to be neutral in the sense of not giving money to political parties:

We do now in our more than 30 projects have people who have political affiliation with Islamists, or Al-Nahdha, but that's their personal belief. We have people who are of other political affiliation. The most important thing for us is to remain neutral. Even though we are doing a political act that is to...we are working on political development...is to make sure that the money that we are giving to organizations do not go to political parties. Whether directly; that is the government's body, or indirectly; for example you are doing propaganda for them. So, it's a thin line, you have to be careful. And that requires a lot of expertise, not to do any mistakes. However, as for the national organizations, I think it's a mistake not to say that they are political. When you open the first page of the Tunisian law of associations, you have one of the first paragraphs that says: 'national associations have the right to express their political opinions.' So the law...the legislation is giving them the right to...but they say: 'no thanks we don't need it.' So...It's not very wise, especially since no one is apolitical. And, based on my own experience, people who say they are non-political are most probably the most politically biased people that you will come across.

When I brought up the possibility that some organizations, for instance Qatar Charity might also work on social development, his reaction was that such a shift in focus most likely has to do more with a strategic improvement of its public image in Tunisia:

Maybe not everything is true, but there are enough things being said, whether they are true or not, to make it impossible for people who show the Qatari colors. Once these colors are shown it will be difficult. But not everywhere. That's why I think the money goes not exclusively to Islamist charities.

According to the views presented here, charities have a political function as they generate support for Islamist parties. If charities are working on more sustainable projects this is probably a strategy for taking focus away from religious propaganda. While promotion of human rights may be considered political in terms of advancement of political rights, they serve the interest of all, as compared to charities that only serve the interests of political parties.

## **6.10 Summary**

The organizations presented here have been categorized on background of how they present their work on social development in marginalized communities. It appears that the four organizations in the first section are in the process of moving from a humanitarian, charity based focus to more long term development like building infrastructure, schools and small scale entrepreneurships. They still have a charity aspect which can be observed in campaigns during religious holidays and their explicit references to religious values in their information material. However, none of them framed their work as political campaigning during the interviews, and they all claimed that they were not affiliated with any political party. The volunteers I spoke to appeared to be motivated by personal gains like working experience and people's gratitude more than politics. The three last organizations on the other hand, expressed strong concerns that charities are serving Islamist political parties and therefore their work is not compatible with their own projects, and they perceive themselves as more inclusive in terms of having women's rights as basis for social development. Although separated in

categories here, there appears to be similarities in the way that some of the organizations operate in terms of training and support for entrepreneurs. Still, charities are met with suspicion about political bias and affiliated with Islamism, and should be countered with efforts in the advancement of women's rights.

## 7 Analysis

This section will provide an analysis of the findings based on literature and the theoretical framework presented in previous sections. Fraser's notions of recognition, distribution and representation will serve as a starting point for a discussion on how the organizations frame their work. The discussion will then focus on the political dimension; on who is included and excluded in the organizations and how this can be explained in terms of NGOization and objectification. Later we will see how discourses on development that are based on oppositional binaries and stereotypes might contribute to alienation and the lack of awareness of how other actors in development operate within the field of social development.

### 7.1 Redistribution and recognition

The organizations that constitute this study all have projects that focus on bringing change on a grassroots level, whether it is based on distributing materials and services or aiming to train women in their rights and equip them to support themselves. CGD, ASIT and Creating the Future all base their work on women's rights, meaning that their partner organizations need to implement the principle of gender equality in their work. By applying Fraser's three dimensions of justice, CGD, ASIT and Creating the Future can be said to center their work on recognition.<sup>119</sup> This implies that women suffering from poverty are the most vulnerable in society and they need assistance in bettering their situation and to know their rights. As in the example given by CGD's director, one project literally raised some women from the ground through providing them with resources that enabled them to refine their herbs into oils that could be exported. As it appears from the outside, the women were given dignity and their financial situation was improved. CGD and ASIT also give support to small women-run businesses, and they arrange trainings for individuals and organizations in how to run a business, in

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<sup>119</sup> Fraser, "Reframing justice," 5-6.

networking for business women, in language training and in how to participate in elections. Capacity building and training of individuals coincide with the categories that Tadros labels “power to” and “power in”, which are the sort of empowerment projects that most commonly receive donor support in the MENA region.<sup>120</sup> These methods are not based on mass political action, rather in people’s needs for power and the ways to obtain it defined by the organizations. Again, with reference to Fraser, it is possible to apply the concept of redistribution to interpret these strategies for poverty reduction, since supporting communities with resources necessary for business establishment is part of what the organizations do.<sup>121</sup> As has been pointed out earlier, what is most distinctive about Wattaniyya Charity, Baraka, TCCC and Hope for Tomorrow is that part of their focus is on distribution of material goods and in some cases money. Applying Fraser’s categories of justice, their actions of charity can be understood as centered on redistribution, or having an economic character. As the findings show, all the charities have taken a turn towards social development, applying terms such as “empowerment”, “development”, “sustainability” and “capacity building” to describe their will to create jobs locally and to support local economies.

## **7.2 Inclusion and exclusion: managing the poor**

In spite of differences in how the organizations present themselves, there are similarities especially with regards to organizational structure and aspects of what Choudry and Kapoor describe as NGOization.<sup>122</sup> It can be argued that elitization may be a consequence when local initiatives form a base of professionals that design projects in accordance with donors’ policies. What Tadros, Jad, Choudry and Kapoor have suggested is a backside of the process of NGOization is the incapability to mobilize masses of people.<sup>123</sup> According

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<sup>120</sup> Tadros, “Between the Elusive and the Illusionary,” 227-228.

<sup>121</sup> Fraser, “Reframing justice,” 6.

<sup>122</sup> Choudry and Kapoor, introduction, 1-23.

<sup>123</sup> Tadros, “Between the Elusive and the Illusionary,” 227-228. Jad. “The NGO-isation,” 34-42. Choudry and Kapoor, introduction, 5-9.

to Tadros, an active promotion of social mobilization and the building of alliances and coalitions is what constitute a challenge to division of power, which could be translated into Fraser's dimension of political representation.<sup>124</sup> The organizations in this study appear to operate with a development discourse that view the poor as objects that are to be studied, helped and managed in accordance with what Escobar has described.<sup>125</sup> Even the organizations with a charity profile that have large bases of volunteers could be argued to operate with clear distinctions between the poor and the organization. Personal benefits such as professional experience and networks suggest what Clark views as horizontal ties rather than including the poor as peers.<sup>126</sup> The way the volunteers spoke about their involvement in terms of "us" and "the poor" indicates a distinct separation between givers and receivers. As has been pointed out, three of the NGOs did not base their work on volunteers. The director of ASIT stressed that even if they wanted they probably would not have been able to recruit people working for free because the nature of their work is of a different nature – more suitable for professionals than volunteers driven by what she called "nice religious feelings."

So far we have seen that strategies that aim to make people economically independent through buying them equipment, training them in developing their own business, or providing education and language training in marginalized areas can be explained in terms of recognition and redistribution. However, as long as the projects do not go further and the organizations claim to represent the poor instead of supporting grassroots movements that aim for structural change, the political dimension is missing. Moreover, with regards to what Choudry and Kapoor claim to be effects of NGOization, such as the promotion of exclusion rather than inclusion, networking among elites nationally and internationally and professionalization of struggles is not indicative of an integrated struggle against maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation. A consequence might rather be a strengthening of groups that are already well represented in the political

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<sup>124</sup> Tadros, "Between the Elusive," 228.

<sup>125</sup> Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 22-23.

<sup>126</sup> Clark, *Islam, charity and activism*, 3-4.

community in which they operate.<sup>127</sup> In order to discover some of the challenges involved for all organizations working on social development in Tunisia, one should consider that they are operating within a state that can be aligned to what Fraser and Trouillot have formulated as the peripheral state's lack of ability to protect citizens from exploitation due to changes in the global economy and provide economic justice in terms of welfare.<sup>128</sup> Although the organizations frame their work in a way that view poor people as objects rather than including them as peers, projects that involve training and participation in classes might bring new opportunities for people to meet. The outcomes in terms of networking and building of movements as bi-effects of a specific project could be explored through ethnography.

### **7.3 Empowerment without recognition**

Although representatives for CGD, ASIT and Creating the Future had specific ideas about charity and religious content in what was discussed during the interviews as Islamic organizations, I would argue that in fact some of the organizations work in ways that are quite similar in spite of framing their work differently. This can be observed in projects that aim to support small businesses and informal training. Although the other four organizations do not explicitly focus their projects on women, Baraka and TCCC do run projects attempting to empower women, but without challenging norms in their local communities. While Hope for Tomorrow explicitly denied having a gender focus in their work, it turned out that women are a prioritized group when it comes to psychological and material support for establishment of small groceries in the neighborhood. Even if the organizations do not have an explicit strategy for empowerment of women, we could name these approaches as what Tadros defines as “power to” and “power within.”<sup>129</sup> Several of the organizations claimed that their aim was not to challenge norms in the societies they work in. If their function is primarily to fill gaps in social services, or what

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<sup>127</sup> Choudry and Kapoor, introduction, 6.

<sup>128</sup> Fraser, “Reframing justice,” 6. Trouillot, *Global Transformations*, 7-28.

<sup>129</sup> Tadros, “Between the Elusive,” 228.



Trouillot describes as producing state effects in peripheral areas of Tunisia, then cultural adaptation seems to be more appropriate than rights-based development challenging norms.<sup>130</sup> Although they do fit in Wiktorowicz's definition of Islamic movements as mobilizing support for Muslim causes, particularly "collective action rooted in Islamic symbols and identities", they claim to make no distinction between people based on religion.<sup>131</sup> Wattaniyya Charity, Baraka and TCCC also emerged in a context of crisis, in the aftermath of the uprising and with large numbers of refugees from Libya. Having emerged from the most marginalized areas of the South, where they continue to operate, they frame their projects in terms of zakat, kefala, as well as being involved in organizing Quran classes. Such framing and activities might as well be viewed as appropriate strategies to communities where many people are religiously conservative. While the definition as Islamic social movements may be useful to discuss the heterogeneity of movements that implement religion in their projects, it appears less useful with regards to organizational structure and the discourse of development observed among the participants in this study. Wattaniyya Charity, Baraka, TCCC and Hope for Tomorrow all claimed to have taken a shift from charity to development. Rather than defining themselves as in opposition to organizations that frame their work differently, they were open for partnership with what was in the interviews referred to as Western organizations. Here development discourse is coexisting with a religious discourse mostly apparent on their websites, but also in charitable acts of giving on Muslim holidays. This corresponds with what Ibrahim has found as a general trend when she argues that there has been a change in Arab philanthropy from traditional charity towards development with potential for social change.<sup>132</sup> To this could be added what Juul Petersen has pointed out – that although organizations apply religious symbols in their work, it does not necessarily mean that there is something extraordinarily Islamic or ideological about them.<sup>133</sup> Production of rights and empowerment could be further

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<sup>130</sup> Trouillot, *Global Transformations*, 92-94.

<sup>131</sup> Wiktorowicz, introduction, 2.

<sup>132</sup> Ibrahim, introduction, 5, 12.

<sup>133</sup> Juul Petersen, "For humanity," 15.

explored ethnographically and analyzed in terms of what Abu-Lughod calls the social worlds in which they operate.<sup>134</sup>

## 7.4 Markers of difference

The interviews with CGD, ASIT and Creating the Future gave clear indications that they do not see organizations like Wattaniyya Charity, Baraka, TCCC and Hope for Tomorrow as much more than tools for Al-Nahdha, and therefore working against women's rights and empowerment of women. At the same time, Jones and Juul Petersen have found a turn in development literature towards partnerships with what is defined as FBOs. Such organizations are viewed as opportunities to advance human rights in the areas they operate in.<sup>135</sup> However, this approach, which Jones, Juul Petersen and Tadros have described as instrumentalization of religion, is not the same as challenging dualistic thinking about secularism and Islamism.<sup>136</sup> A challenge to dualistic thinking in the Tunisian context, one could argue, would include addressing historical divisions promoted by state secularism, including the governmentalization of women's rights and suppression of religious expressions. Rather than interpreting secularism and women's rights as something universal and as a given, as something that exists in opposition to all forms of political Islam (or what is perceived as such), construction of these concepts should be interpreted in terms of historical and contemporary construction of discourses that surround them. More specifically the concept of women's rights has been used in order to strengthen past regimes rather than addressing the spectrum of limitations for women (and men), such as unemployment, landlessness and the problem that the poorest remain poor. As Kandiyoti has pointed out, the governmentalization of women's rights might contribute to the rise of conservative ideologies.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Abu-Lughod. "The Active Life," 2-5.

<sup>135</sup> Jones and Juul Petersen, "Instrumentalist," 1297.

<sup>136</sup> Jones and Juul Petersen, "Instrumentalist," 1292. Tadros, "Introduction," 1.

<sup>137</sup> Kandiyoti, introduction, 12.

In this case study, whether or not charity and development generate support for conservative movements or parties, what we see is that there is a process of alienation. During interviews with CGD, ASIT and Creating the Future the mention of charity with religious references, volunteering and a connection to Qatar turned out to be perceived as synonymous with Islamism and thus perceived as in opposition to these organizations. Here appears an idea that empowerment, women's rights and (sustainable) development are markers of difference, functioning to categorize oneself in opposition to others that are conservative, politically biased and only use development as a means for promoting ideology rather than contributing to better conditions for the poor in the longer term. What seems to be lost in this process of framing and identification, where women are a central marker of difference, is the ability to discover other processes of empowerment and meanings of women's rights. In this sense, a function of what Cornwall has defined as buzzwords may be to create and maintain differences between actors in development as well as covering up processes of inclusion and exclusion with regards to organizations and the communities they operate in.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Cornwall, "Introductory overview," 2.

## 8 Conclusion

This paper has explored how seven different organizations work on social development in Tunisia. It has highlighted some of their characteristics and the ways they frame their work, which have made it possible to divide them into two groups. Four of the organizations; Wattaniyya Charity, Baraka, TCCC and Hope for Tomorrow are found to center their work on redistribution, which can be observed in actions of charity. CGD, ASIT, and Creating the Future all strongly emphasize that they are not performing charitable work and hold up women's rights as the core of what they do. I have found that although they have an aspect of redistribution, their framing can best be described in terms of recognition. The first four organizations have undergone a shift from charity to social change through activities such as education, business support, as well as benefits for volunteers involved in terms of networks and professional training. Several of them also appeared to have projects directed towards women, although without framing these projects with a language of women's rights or as attempts towards gender equality. Although some projects might be quite similar to each other in content, the framings remain different; something which is most obvious in terms of women's rights. We have seen that the organizations are not addressing political and economic structures that contribute to poverty, formation of elites and objectification of the poor. Social and political divisions have been produced through history and continue to be part of the context in which the organizations operate. This study has outlined some challenges in the way that the organizations frame their work with regards to divisions and inequalities. It has been suggested that if these issues are not addressed by the organizations themselves, there is a risk that they contribute to processes of social and political exclusion rather than inclusion on a community level as well as in the larger society in which they operate in.

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