YOUNG PEOPLE, VIOLENCE, SCHOOL DROPOUT AND ART IN TUNISIAN WORKING-CLASS NEIGHBOURHOODS

Case study of Ettadhamen, Douar Hicher, Fouchana and Sidi Hassine

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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CONTENT

General introduction

How does violence arise in Tunisia's working-class neighbourhoods? How do young people accommodate to it? What role does it play in the process of socialisation within the family, at school and in public space? How, and why, do young people end up dropping out of school? What are the trajectories that carry young people in this sociocultural environment towards leaving education, and what are the complex factors – subjective and objective, micro and macro – that determine these trajectories? What relationship can sociology identify between the working-class neighbourhood as a space and class identity and youth as a vulnerable age and social field,[1] and school as an institution whose role as a vehicle for youth socialisation has changed?[2] Does this relationship generate violence and lead to young people dropping out of school? Does leaving education lead to violence, or is it the other way around? Or is there a mutual selection effect? What alternative can art offer to violence in this peculiar social space?

This study attempts to give a sociological answer to these and other related questions. It approaches the problem on two levels. It draws on and analyses primary data from the field: young people from working-class areas, both dropouts and those who are still in school, for whom art is a possible alternative to violence – despite violence having been, and still being, a daily experience for them. Here we have put together case studies on some of the country's four most socioeconomically precarious neighbourhoods (Ettadhamen, Douar Hicher, Sidi Hassine and Fouchana), the most exposed to a process of social "relegation".[3] At the same time, it tries to collate a broad range of secondary data. Here we look for previous attempts to answer these questions sociologically, reviewing the most important studies on school dropouts, violence, art and working-class neighbourhoods in Tunisia and elsewhere.

Why is International Alert carrying out this study? This is the latest in a long series of studies on violence, socioeconomic precarity and schools in post-revolutionary Tunisia. Many of the other research projects in this series have been interested in the margins: working-class districts in Tunis and the Tunisian interior. The same goes for International Alert's interest in young Tunisians, who we see not only as an age group but also as social actors with a great capacity for innovation – social actors whose socioeconomic position has been muddied by violence and who often feel directionless and alienated as a result of their economic and political exclusion. This study supplements these older projects.

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1 René, Jean-François, « La jeunesse en mutation. D'un temps social à un espace social précaire. » Sociologie et sociétés, volume 25, numéro 1, (printemps 1993) : p. 153–171.

2 Dubet, François, « Déclin de l'institution et/ou néolibéralisme ? », Éducation et sociétés, vol. 25, no. 1, (2010) : pp. 17-34.

3 This term is explained in the section on the study population.

Why did we choose a qualitative method based on focus groups? We have a deeply held conviction, borne out by experience, that individuals are capable of participating in the production of knowledge about them. We believe that rather than treating the subjects of a study as if they are unaware of the world around them, we should give them the space to express themselves, and that what they say should be key to the study itself and to any proposed diagnosis and treatment of the problems it identifies. All of our work proceeds from this premise.

What is new about this study? First of all, the topic itself. Secondly, the approach, which is rooted in the experience of a social reality characterised by spatial exclusion and socioeconomic precarity. This means that we look at social phenomena from within, proceeding from individuals' perceptions and the meaning they give to their actions and their lives, focusing on individuals' relationships with reality more than on a reality abstracted from their experiences.

Methodology

Our methodology here is based first and foremost on four case studies produced through fieldwork in four working-class districts: Fouchana, Sidi Hassine, Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen. At the same time, it draws on previous attempts to answer the same questions and on relevant theoretical approaches. Using a "comprehension"-based approach,[4] we have attempted to understand the experiences of young people of both sexes and draw out continuities in their lives in working-class neighbourhoods. We wanted to centre their conceptions, their reasons and their explanations of how they end up leaving education and how violence happens, as well as what it means for art to serve as an alternative to violence. For this reason, we chose to use focus groups to collect qualitative data.[5] This meant that groups of subjects could respond to the research questions together, producing a discursive environment that allowed them to influence and be influenced by one another. The result was a veritable mosaic of perceptions bound together by a reality common to all subjects, notwithstanding the differences in their individual trajectories.

In our analysis, we have adopted a "grounded theory" approach.[6] This means rooting the analysis in fieldwork in order to produce a sociological understanding of school drop-out and violence among young people in working-class areas as a social phenomenon, and of the role that art can (or cannot) play in preventing violence. It also means comparing our findings with those of previous research on drop-out, violence and art in working-class areas.

4 Paillé, Pierre. Compréhension / Comprendre », dans : Vocabulaire des histoires de vie et de la recherche biographique, dirigée par Christine Delory-Momberger, (Paris : Éditions Ères, 2019), pp. 53-54.
5 Evans, C, Les groupes de discussion ou focus groups, dans : Mener l'enquête : Guide des études de publics en bibliothèque, éditée par Evans, C, (Paris : Presses de l'enssib, 2011).
6 Paillé, Pierre, Analyse par théorisation ancrée, dans : Vocabulaire des histoires de vie et de la recherche biographique, dirigée par Christine Delory-Momberger, (Paris : Éditions Ères, 2019), pp. 192-193.

This understanding is delimited by the methodological framework that we have chosen, that of the case study.[7] A case study approach does not attempt to offer conclusions that can be generalised across a whole society, or to generate a theoretical framework capable of answering definitively every question that might arise on the subject of the study. Instead, it aims to produce answers that have four important qualities. Firstly, they should be closer to the reality that school dropouts and artists experience in working-class areas. Secondly, they should assume that young people from the poorest parts of society are fully capable of speaking for themselves.[8] Thirdly, they should use their language and does not claim either to give an exhaustive account of the causes of the problem or to provide a silver bullet solution. And finally, by centring the perceptions of the subjects themselves and seeking to understand their subjective experiences by placing them in their objective reality, they should offer an answer to the question: what has happened in working-class areas? How have drop-out, violence and art taken shape on the margins of Tunisian society?

Our fieldwork was conducted with eight focus groups in four working-class neighbourhoods: two per neighbourhood, with one made up of young school drop-outs and the other with young artists. We have drawn on material taken from the focus group discussions throughout this study, making young people's ideas about dropping out, violence, art and their neighbourhoods the foundation of all our conclusions and analyses.

Study population

In order to characterise the population targeted by the study, we will use a two-pronged approach. We will begin by painting a broad picture of the four working-class neighbourhoods in which we conducted our fieldwork. We will then present general profiles of the school dropouts and (non-dropout) artists from each area that participated in our focus groups and then compare and contrast the two groups.

1. The neighbourhoods

By "working-class neighbourhood", we mean a residential area inhabited predominantly by the "popular" classes, which is to say those who neither own the means of production (i.e. workers and unemployed people) nor rule the country (i.e. they do not participate in government). The local term is houma: an area inhabited by the masses.[9] In Jacques Donzelot's conception, a city has three different cultural "gears":[10] "gentrification" of areas by those with economic and (relative) cultural capital; "suburbification" (péri-urbanisation)

7 Hamidi, Camille, De quoi un cas est-il le cas ? Penser les cas limites, Politix, vol. 100, no. 4, (2012) : pp. 85-98.

8 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Les Subalternes peuvent-elles parler ? {Traduction française de Jérôme Vidal}, (Paris : Éditions Amsterdam, 2006).

9 Jaballah, Soufiane. "al-Rab, al-Salafiyya al-'Ilmiyya wa'l-Ultras: Hin Tahki al-Huma al-Sha'biyya", in 'Arajin al-Ghadab: Kitabat Siyasiyya Mujaddada (Tunis: Manshurat Kalimat 'Abira, 2020), pp. 143-155.

10 Donzelot, Jacques. Quand la ville se défait, (Paris : Le Seuil, 2006).

of the middle and upper-middle classes around the edges of the city; and "relegation" of all those who do not belong to the middle or upper classes far from the administrative centre and from government services. If we apply this to the Tunisian context, drawing as well on Bourdieu's different forms of capital, we find that working-class neighbourhoods are the product of the third "gear": a policy of relegation, or exclusion, of those who lack any kind of capital.

Sidi Hassine, Ettadhamen, Fouchana and Douar Hicher are all working-class neighbourhoods in this sense. They are marginalised communities produced by the Tunisian state's policy – pursued since independence – of "relegating" those with less cultural, economic and social capital (the lower-middle and poorer classes) to the urban periphery: an environment in which infrastructure, healthcare provision and housing are all limited, where government institutions provide few social or cultural services, and where crime is rife. With state intervention to organise, to build and to encourage development almost absent, these are very poor areas. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that the state itself has turned these areas into a problem to be dealt with primarily by police action.

We chose these four neighbourhoods not only because they are working-class districts but because, according to the most recent official statistics, they have some of the highest poverty and drop-out rates in the country.[11] Moreover, the newest poverty map produced by the National Institute of Statistics[12] shows a strong link between poverty and drop-out rates across Tunisia: the more impoverished an area, the more likely young people are to drop out of school.

Let us quickly review some of the statistics we have been able to obtain. Of the four areas discussed here, Ettadhamen is the poorest (and the second poorest in Ariana Governorate), with a poverty rate of 12.4% and drop-out rates of 8.2% in secondary education and 0.1% in primary education respectively. Douar Hicher is the second poorest (and is also the second poorest area in Menouba Governorate), with a poverty rate of 10.8% and a drop-out rate of 0.7% in secondary education and 0.1% in primary education.[13] Sidi Hassine comes in third place (and is the third poorest area of the Tunis Governorate), with a poverty rate of 9.4% and a high secondary school drop-out rate of 8.4%, with a lower rate of 0.3% for primary school.[14] Finally, Fouchana is the fourth poorest (and the second poorest in Ben Arous Governorate), with a poverty rate of 7.3% and a drop-out rate beginning at 5.6% in secondary education and settling at 0.1% in primary education.[15]

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11 Statistiques Tunisie, Tunisia poverty map, September 2020, pp. 37-44. Link: http://www.ins.tn/publication/carte-de-la-pauvrete-en-tunisie-septembre-2020
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.

Even if the correlation between poverty and drop-out rates is not automatic or direct, it shows that socioeconomic reality is one determinant of an individual's ability (and that of the school or the family) to make success a possibility, to make violence into a response and a solution to degrading conditions, or to build a specific relationship with reality that art can change.

2. The participants[16]

Gender

64,3%
Male

35,7%
Female

Average age	**%22,28**	
Average age at drop-out	**%17,07**	

Year group on drop-out

Fourth grade (primary)	Seventh grade (middle)	Eighth grade (middle)	Ninth grade (middle)	First grade (secondary)	Second grade (secondary)	Third grade (secondary)	Fourth grade (secondary)
3,50%	17,90%	7,30%	21,40%	3,50%	3,50%	7,20%	35,70%

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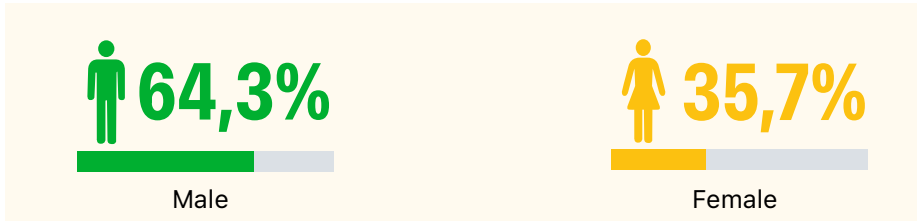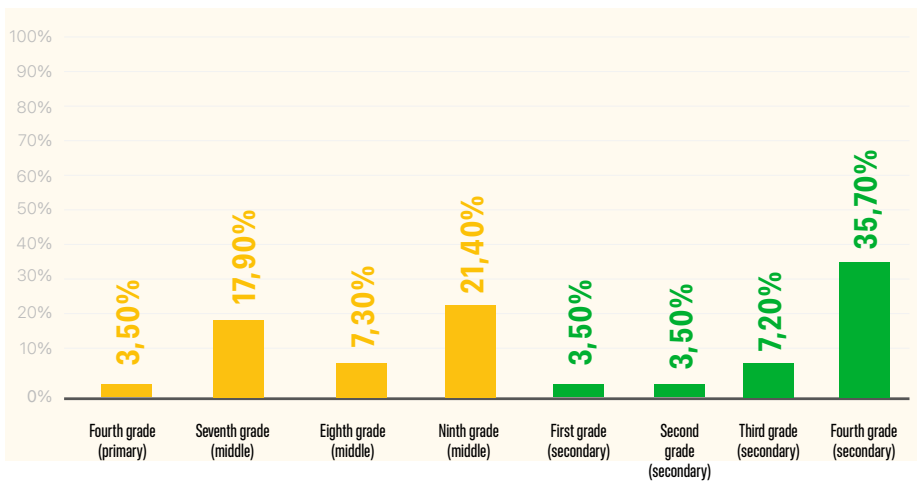
16 Total number of participants in all focus groups: 58.

Economic activity

57,10%	**14,30%**	**28,60%**	**21,50%**
Unemployed	In professional education	Trade or manual worker	Retired

Father's profession[17]

Retired	Day worker	Works abroad
21,50%	**10,80%**	**3,50%**
Businessman	Civil servant	Private sector employee
7,10%	**10,70%**	**39,30%**

Mother's profession

Homemaker	Deceased	Businesswoman	
60,70%	**3,50%**	**7,20%**	
Retired	Private sector employee	Day worker	Unemployed
7,20%	**14,40%**	**3,50%**	**3,50%**

Family size

Two members	Three members	Four members	Five members	Six members	Seven members
7,10%	**10,70%**	**28,60%**	**35,70%**	**14,30%**	**14,30%**

17 Deceased: 7.1%.

Gender

64,3%
Male

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Average age **%22,28**

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18 Deceased: 7.1%.

What do school drop-outs and artists from working-class Tunisian neighbourhoods have in common? In order to answer this question, we will investigate some aspects of objective similarities, drawing out the role played by biographical details of early socialisation – passing through certain institutions, meeting or having certain people within the family – in inclining these young people towards different sources of refuge: becoming a school dropout who engages in no artistic activities, on the one hand, or becoming an artist and not dropping out of school on the other.

When we attempt to identify the most significant factors in dropping out of school or getting involved in artistic activity (particularly alternative artl[19]), we have to remember that we are talking about young drop-outs and young artists in an economically, socially, culturally and sometimes physically precarious environment in which a patriarchal identity is dominant. 'Patriarchal' here is meant not so much as an ideological judgement but as a sociological characterisation of a social space in which beliefs and behaviours based on gender are hegemonic – something more like Bourdieu's "androcentric" spaces than the concept of patriarchy used in feminist studies.[20]

It is worth noting that the two groups are objectively similar in a number of respects, most significantly gender distribution: young women make up one third of both groups and young men two thirds. The average age is around 22 in both groups. With respect to schooling, the artists' educational level is generally higher than that of their counterparts in the drop-outs' group. But there is another point of similarity here in how many individuals in both groups failed to complete the fourth grade of secondary school: 40% of the artists and 35.7% of the dropouts. It is clear that sitting the exams for the secondary school certificate (baccalauréat) represents an obstacle for young people in Tunisia's working-class neighbourhoods – whether it is a hurdle to be crossed or a wall that marks the end of their educational career.[21]

Note as well that the mothers of the young people in both groups are generally uneducated and do not work: many are homemakers, tasked with looking after the home and socialising the children. This may influence their children's ideas on work, family life, the differences between the sexes and gender roles.[22] In terms of economic activity, most of the dropouts are unemployed, while the majority of the artists are in professional training or are working.

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19 "Alternative" art, and particularly alternative music, is an alternative to commercial or mainstream music. It rebels against the demands of music producers and distributors driven by the need to make profits. See: Hisham al-Bustani, "al-Musiqa al-Badila: 'An Ghiyab al-Ru'ya al-Ibda'iyya wa-Falsafat al-Fann", 7iber. Link: ttps://www.7iber.com/culture/alternative-music/

20 Bourdieu, Pierre, « La domination masculine », Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, vol. 84, no. 4, (1990) : pp. 2-31.

21 This conclusion may be explored further in later studies.

22 This is less a judgement or conclusion than an assumption that a later study will be needed to test.

Existing literature

In order to answer our research questions, and before delving into the primary focus group data obtained through our fieldwork, we familiarised ourselves with previous attempts to answer the questions that we were asking, hoping to get a clearer sense of the problem and of what we were looking for. We completed a close review of the most significant academic studies produced by academics working outside universities – that is, at research centres or as part of projects with NGOs and civil society organisations. Drawing on this bibliography, we identified a series of questions. How does violence arise in working-class neighbourhoods? How do young people end up dropping out of school? Is there a relationship between violence, living in a working-class neighbourhood and dropping out? How does art intervene to prevent both drop-out and violence?

The studies that take up these questions can be divided into two main categories. The first category comprises civil society research, which tends to ask "why" or "how" drop-out or violence happens, or "why" young people protest by practising art, by focusing on their own conceptions. These studies do not go beyond these conceptions, whether to ask how the cultural space (the working-class neighbourhood) has influenced them or to compare dropouts with those who have stayed in school, or those who have found an alternative (art, for example) with those who have not.

The second category, meanwhile, is made up of studies conducted by state institutions, which generally focus on how to confront high dropout rates or violence as social problems caused by state policy rather than approaching them as social phenomena.

This is not to deny that these studies have made a major contribution to knowledge and that they have helped us sketch out an initial picture of dropout and dropouts or violence in Tunisia. We mention these limitations only to explain why we have carried out this study: to make clearer its intended purpose and how it asks different questions from older studies, or answers them differently and in a different context.

How can we understand the phenomenon of violence in Tunisia's working-class neighbourhoods specifically? How do young people, of both sexes, accommodate to this phenomenon? How does it contribute to socialisation within the family, at school or in public spaces? What is the relationship between violence and dropping out of school? Can artistic activity serve as an alternative to violence in these neighbourhoods?

In order to answer these questions, we reviewed the most significant Tunisian sociological studies on these problems, particularly those dating from the

post-revolutionary period. We found, first of all, that their most important conclusions supported the premises on which our research questions were based, in particular the strong objective assumption that there is a relationship between dropout and the economic, social, spatial and cultural environment in which the family and the school exist. Secondly, we concluded that the majority of these studies focused on broadly the same premises as ours, but did not pursue the question either of the complex relationship between violence and dropout or of socialisation, life and education in a working-class neighbourhood on the other. Nor was there a general research interest in artistic activity in working-class neighbourhoods as something linked to socialisation in and outside school – that is, as not just a reaction to violence but an attempt to establish an alternative to it. We were asking questions that had not been asked before, which meant that it would be possible to find new answers. Our research problem thus represents part of this broader effort to understand violence in working-class neighbourhoods, beginning from the family and the school.

We will now provide a review of this literature. We will also try to show how we built our own research question on the basis of conclusions whose validity these previous works confirmed – in the sense of showing us that we were right to suggest them – and on the basis of questions that had not been asked and answers that had not been provided in relation to our theme, a gap that this study has attempted to fill.

Premature dropout is one of the biggest dilemmas facing the education system in Tunisia and a sign of the weakness of the state's educational policies. As a result, it has proved fertile ground for research both before and after the revolution. The many academic works available, however, have not pursued the sociological trail into the working-class districts. They have concentrated on whole cities, or on areas in the Tunisian interior, or rural regions, and have not focused on specific marginal areas within cities themselves.

One of these studies, "Dropout and Conceptions of Success and Failure among Young People in Ghardimaou and Fériana", was written by Mohamed Ali Ben Zina for International Alert and published in 2018. It is a general enquiry into education and ideas of academic success and failure among young people aged 15-19 in two border regions, Ghardimaou and Fériana (both close to the border with Algeria).[23] These two regions were chosen because they share two key characteristics. Both of them score badly on indicators of educational achievement and socioeconomic marginalisation: the Kasserine and Jendouba Governorates in which they are located rank 24th and 21st out of 24 on the regional development index, and they have the worst dropout rates in the country, with all the complex and bidirectional links that these phenomena

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23 Ben Zina, Mohamed Ali. "al-Inqita' al-Madrasi wa-Tamathulat al-Ikhfaq wa'l-Nijah lada al-Shabab fi Firyana wa-Ghar al-Dima'", in: Sosiyolojiya al-Hawami-sh fi Tunis: Dirasat fi'l-Manatiq al-Hudidiyya wa'l-Ahya' al-Sha'biyya, Mohamed Ali Ben Zina, Mariam Abdel Baky and Olfa Lamloum ed (Tunis: International Alert and Dar Mohamed Ali al-Hami, 2018).

have with the development and efficiency of education. They also both host a flourishing informal economy connected to Algeria.[24] The study uses a quantitative approach to draw out the effect of parents' educational level and economic activity on dropout rates. It also looks at participants' behaviour within the educational institution and the influence of the social environment on their academic results, their relationship with school and their expectations from education.[25]

This study's findings are important. The conclusions it arrives at based on the ideas of young people in border regions invite us, as researchers interested in the phenomenon of dropout, to produce comparative studies in marginalised areas within the urban periphery and to investigate the influence of this environment on individuals' socialisation and their risk of dropping out of school or of getting involved in violence. It would be particularly useful to adopt a "comprehension"-based approach asking how dropout and violence happen – that is, centring the meaning that the individual gives to their experience and seeking to understand the partial and the subjective.[26]

On a similar subject – violence in the school environment as one of the main reasons for dropout – the 5th compilation of papers by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, The Tunisian Educational System and the Problem of Quality, dedicates a chapter to preventing violence in schools.[27] The study incorporates both a theoretical discussion and quantitative fieldwork based on focus groups held with students to discuss their experiences of violence in schools.[28] Despite its importance, however, this study paid no attention to the relationship between dropout rates and families' socioeconomic position and parents' cultural capital, nor to the relationship between the working class district and the school – not as a space surrounding it that generates violence, but as a social matrix that produces all the different processes of socialisation, within families and schools and beyond them.

Among the studies on the school environment that have been produced by state institutions, meanwhile – the majority of which originate with the Ministry of Education – perhaps the most important is the Strategic Plan for the Education System (2016-2020). This plan was published as part of the reform initiative launched by the then minister Néji Jalloul,[29] who claims that it represents the consensus of education professionals as expressed in the National Dialogue on Reform of the Education System, the recommendations of that Dialogue, and all the various technical and academic works produces to

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Al-Radisi, Mahrez. "al-Jawda al-Tarbawiyya Madkhal li'l-Tawaqqi min al-'Unf al-Madrasi", in: al-Manzuma al-Tarbawiyya al-Tunisiyya wa-Ishkaliyyat al-Jawda, Hasan al-Innabi, volume 5 (Tunis: Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, 2022).
28 Ibid.
29 Al-Mukhattat al-Istratiji al-Qita'i al-Tarbawi 2016-2020, Education Strategic Plan Drafting Committee, Ministry of Education, Tunis, 2016.

assess and improve the quality of education.[30]

This report touched on the question of school dropout. It divided the factors driving young people to leave education prematurely into two categories. The first category, internal factors, comprised the various shortcomings of the education system itself. These are problems that might be addressed or offset through preventive measures or reforms: changes to the disciplinary system or internal school regulations, additional support (pedagogical or financial) for failing students, better pastoral care within schools (for physical and mental health, educational problems and social problems) for students finding learning difficult, and standardised resources for all those responsible for interventions.[31] The second category, on the other hand, comprised all those problems external to the educational system, for which the Plan envisaged a new and holistic strategy.[32] It also suggested some practical solutions, which we will return to in the first section of the analysis.

Despite the value of the solutions that it proposes, however, the Plan suffers from the same problem as the other reports discussed here: it does not investigate, either in its evaluation of the situation or as part of its strategy, the relationship between violence, young people, and cultural-spatial questions as variables that may be determiners of violence in general and schoolroom violence in particular.

All the various studies on violence show that violence against young people in Tunisia – and carried out by young men, specifically – is a serious and frequent threat to their wellbeing. Participants' answers sometimes differ depending on gender and the setting in which the violence takes place. Young men are more likely to be violent, and they are also at greater risk of being hit in any setting except the home, where the chances of young women experiencing this kind of violence are higher. Young men, in general, are exposed to violence in all its forms in the majority of environments. Schools are one of the public spaces in which the phenomenon of violence is at its worst.

These are the findings of International Alert's recent publication Young People and Institutional Violence: An Enquiry Ten Years After the Tunisian Revolution.[33] This study investigates the forms taken by institutional violence in marginalised and socially "relegated" areas in Greater Tunis and the institutionalised systems through which it has operated at various points in time. It marries a quantitative approach with three long essays, attempting to draw out the legitimacy of how the communities of Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen in Tunis are managed, modified, framed and surveilled. In particular, it seeks to understand how men

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30 This project went no further after the ministerial reshuffle.
31 Al-Mukhattat al-Istratiji al-Qita'i al-Tarbawi 2016-2020, ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Catusse, Myriam et Lamloum Olfa, "Coupables/Victimes. Les jeunes face aux violences institutionnelles à Douar Hicher et Ettadhamen", dans :Jeunes et violences institutionnelles. Enquêtes dix ans après la révolution tunisienne, Dirigées par Olfa Lamloum et Myriam Catusse, Tunis, Éditions International Alert et ARAEBSQUES, 2021.

and women characterise and conceptualise the violence they experience: a multifaceted and widespread violence that can take the form of physical and psychological exhaustion or of symbolic, economic and political deprivation – a violence that they practise and which is practised on them. It tries to reorder, measure and understand different types of violence and analyse the part that they play in the formation of young people's relationships with official institutions, with public space, and with their own bodies.

Another study, published in 2020 by the National Youth Observatory in partnership with the UN Population Fund in Tunisia and titled Young People Confront Violence,[34] seeks to establish the scale of violence among young people, identifying vocabulary, consequences, trends and individual and societal drivers, as well as the link between violent extremism and terror.

Also worth mentioning here is the National Youth Survey 2018-2019. This survey was based on a sample of around 10,000 young men and women aged between 15-29 representing every part of the country (urban/central or marginal/working-class), every tendency (intellectual, artistic, political, cultural), every class and every social stratum.[35] Given this general description, it is obvious that the survey did not focus on young people from marginal areas or working-class neighbourhoods, although it was conducted after the Revolution and thus covers the period that we are interested in. Instead, it tried to draw out the "main drivers of violence among young people" in Tunis and the six statistical regions (North East, Centre East, South East, South West, Centre West, North West).[36] It also sought to investigate the phenomenon of youth violence within "educational and opinion-forming spaces" such as schools, identified as the main determiner of success and failure, and families, seen as a source of violence, as well as the role of the media in feeding tribalism and encouraging conflict and violence within the digital space and on the football ground. These works provided a clearer image of young people's collective understanding of the relationship between society, the state and its institutions, but without any clear or sociologically deep attempt to account for or understand these phenomena.

We also attempted to find existing studies on the role of art and its ability to protect the young people of working-class areas from dropping out of school or engaging in violence. We found that academic studies on this topic were very rare indeed. We also noted that the general approach taken in the study of art in working-class areas does not treat violence as a product of the tense and dissonant relationship that young people have with their precarious reality. Nor does it generally see art as an alternative to violence. Instead, it tends to understand young people's artistic expression as political, as a collective act of

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34 National Youth Observatory, al-Shabab fi Muwajahat al-'Unf: al-Marsad al-Watani li'l-Shabab: Nahw Bina' Istratijiyya Wataniyya Hawl al-Shabab wa'l-Silm wa'l-Amn, 2020.
35 National Youth Observatory, Ministry for Young People and Sport, "al-Mulakhkhas al-Tanfidhi li'l-Mash al-Watani Hawl al-Shabab 2018-2019", 2019.
36 Ibid.

protest. In our view, this approach is not wrong, but there are other explanations for artistic activity, including the one that we have tried to bring out here: an attempt by young people to change their relationship with their reality.

In this connection, we note Faten Mubarak and Yassine Ghlalou's important work Youth Expression and Cultural Democracy: A Comparative Study of Street Music since 2011 in Morocco and Tunisia.[37] This study adopts a socio-anthropological approach combining interviews and direct observation. Unlike our work, which concerns itself with all forms of artistic practice irrespective of location, it focuses on artistic practices in public space – more specifically, on the street (graffiti art, street theatre, street music). Nor does it consider the role of art in preventing violence. Instead, it focuses on new forms of youth expression, the backgrounds of participants, and how they interact with public space in Essaouira (Morocco) and Tunis. It seeks to understand the forms of cultural expression adopted by young people and the foundations on which a cultural democracy embodied in public space might be built.[38]

After analysing the results of our fieldwork, and bringing together the insights provided by our focus groups, an empirical comparison between our findings and those of previous studies, and appropriate theoretical responses, we have divided this study up into four parts.

In Part One – titled "Violence and Youth Pride in Working Class Areas" – we draw on the information provided by focus group participants to deconstruct the phenomenon of violence, within and beyond schools, and its various aspects: institutional, economic, social, cultural.

In Part Two – "Neighbourhood, School and Violence: the Unholy Trinity of School Dropout" – we will attempt to use our field data to understand how the school institution interacts with its cultural and social environment and how violence is produced and reproduced by this interaction.

In Part Three – "Young People, Violence and Social Institutions in Working-Class Neighbourhoods: A Critical Reading" – we try to understand how social institutions, official and otherwise, increase young people's vulnerability to violence or help to protect them from it.

Finally, in Part Four – "From Alternative Art to Art as an Alternative: Violence, Art and Young People in Working-Class Areas", we use the empirical data collected via interviews with young artists in the four neighbourhoods to draw out how art changes the relationship of young people in these neighbourhoods with a precarious economic and social reality (i.e. participants' sense of being unsafe in their own neighbourhood).

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37 Mubarak, Faten and Ghlalou, Yassine. Al-Ta'birat al-Shabiyya wa'l-Dimuqratiyya al-Thaqafiyya: Dirasa Muqarana li-Musiqiyyat al-Shari' ba'd 2011 bayn al-Maghrib wa-Tunis (Tunis: Kalimat 'Abira, 2020).
38 Ibid.

VIOLENCE AND YOUTH PRIDE IN WORKING CLASS AREAS

VIOLENCE AND YOUTH PRIDE IN WORKING CLASS AREAS

I. Young people, the neighbourhood, and violence: the vicious circle

1. Young people's conceptions of violence

Sociologists, especially French sociologists, have been trying to understand how youth is changing for more than two decades. Youth is a social age and a complex social phenomenon that differs from context to context and according to historical, political, economic, social and cultural determinants. We no longer talk about "young people" as a monolith or imagine them as homogenous in their social formation, their ideas, or their socioeconomic and sociocultural trajectories. Instead, following Olivier Galland,[39] we now talk about a "crossing" to adulthood, or, in the words of François Réné, about a "precarious social space".[40]

In all societies that have experienced globalisation, this transition to adulthood has been undermined, delayed and stretched out.[41] The first reason for this is an increase in the average age at which young people get married, which is tied in turn to an increase in the age at which they enter the job market and obtain career stability. They are spending longer in education, and it is no longer guaranteed that when they graduate they will move immediately into a workplace. If we look back at the figures for our dropout focus groups, we find that the average age on dropout was 17. Having left education at various points between primary and secondary school (before turning 18), they fell into precarious professions or remained unemployed.[42] These are young people for whom the crossing to adulthood is difficult, even exhausting. They represent a precarious social space in which age, context and socioeconomic conditions come together to produce a collection of individuals belonging to a single social class and age group and experiencing the same cultural environment, all of whom have had to deal with the experience of dropping out of school.

These young people's representations – that is, "the beliefs, knowledge and opinions produced and shared by individuals belonging to the same group with respect to a particular social subject"[43] – are objectively influenced by socioeconomic, cultural and spatial conditions, the variables of age and

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39 Galland, Olivier, Sociologie de la jeunesse, (Paris : Éditions Armand Colin, cinquième Édition, 2011).
40 RENÉ, Jean-François, op. cit.
41 Guibet Lafaye, Caroline, « Anomie, exclusion, désaffiliation : dissolution de la cohésion sociale ou du lien social ? », Pensée plurielle, vol. 29, no. 1, (2012) : pp. 11-35.
42 See the section titled "The participants" in the introductory chapter above.
43 Guimelli, Christian « Les représentations sociales », dans : La pensée sociale. Christian Guimelli éd., (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), pp. 63-78.

educational level, and especially the experience of dropping out of school. Taken as a whole, these conditions determine how these young people see themselves and their community, as well as how they see themselves within this community.

Although the participants in our focus groups – of both sexes, from all four areas and in both types of group – sometimes used different terminology, they all talked about violence in terms of fights arising from, and feeding on, physical and verbal violence (i.e. using deliberately insulting or degrading language). In this conception, violence is primarily physical and verbal. For young women, meanwhile, it is sexual violence, which mainly takes the form of verbal harassment and sometimes physical harassment, although the latter is less frequent and less significant both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In general, it is physical violence that is most common, and it is young men who are the most likely both to use it and to experience it. Sexual violence, meanwhile – especially verbal harassment – is experienced by women and practised by young men.

> **In general, girls get harassment and guys get punched... If you go to a different neighbourhood that isn't yours, it's quite normal to get beaten up and have your money and your stuff stolen.**
> A young dropout from Douar Hicher

This physical violence manifests in fights, particularly in the muggings (braquage) that take place in the context of violence between young men from the same or different working-class neighbourhoods. This context invariably involves frequent incidents of verbal violence that both embody and feed it. It also takes the form of state violence: the violence practised by the police against the young men of working-class neighbourhoods. Violence is thus a complex phenomenon even in the representations of our focus group participants. True, they believe that the most dangerous of the various kinds of violence that have a direct, clear and concrete effect in their day-to-day experience is physical. But they also cite verbal violence in parallel with physical violence. In fact, they say that it is the most common form of violence, and one that they are totally accustomed to – an inseparable part of their way of life.

> **We only know physical and verbal violence... Oh, and there's police violence on the football ground.**
> A young dropout from Douar Hicher

These young men are also quick to mention two kinds of institutional violence that occur with great frequency:

1) Economic and social violence practised by the state or capital: precarious employment and arbitrary behaviour.

2) Violence meted out by the police (or the hakim, "government", as the young people describe it). According to a general consensus among participants, and especially the young men, this violence is found everywhere.

They also allude to bullying, insults, stigma and unfair accusations, whether from other inhabitants of the neighbourhood, in public space, from the police, in the media or on social media. These are forms of violence that occur less frequently, but according to several participants, they have a major impact on mental health and on individuals' self-perception.

> **Even insults are violence. You tell someone where your family is from, they say oh, you're a hick... That's violence... It breaks you down, inside.**
> A young man from the dropout group in Sidi Hassine

Throughout this work, we will be interested in a number of questions. How do young people practise violence? How are they exposed to it? Where are they subjected to violence? By whom? What are the subjective effects of violence and its objective outcomes?

2. Young people's use of violence

According to the majority of our participants, both male and female, violence – whether practised on or by an individual – is primarily male violence. The users of violence are first of all the young men of a working-class neighbourhood who are experiencing a delayed transition to adulthood (both those who are "outsiders" in the sense of deviating from the prevailing norms,[44] and to a lesser degree all other young people, who have grown up with the idea that violence is both a central component of masculinity and also a way of protecting your body and your dignity). They are followed closely by the police, who compete with them in their use of illegal violence. All male participants, without exception, asserted that the police were the biggest users of violence, within and beyond the neighbourhood (in football stadiums, for example), against the people of working class areas in particular. For participants, there is no doubt that the violence that the police mete out is illegal and illegitimate.

> **There's more violence from the police more than from the citizens... You'll be hanging around on some square, and they'll come and start insulting your mum, they'll hit you, they'll tell you to get out of there. And there's a lot of guys with nothing else to do who hang around just waiting for someone to come along so they can harass them...**
> A young man from the dropout group in Sidi Hassine

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44 Howard S. Becker, Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance (New York: Free Press, 1973).

When it came to their own use of violence, young men tended to speak in the past tense, as though it was something that was no longer part of their adult lives, something belonging to their teenage years or the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood – a period which is made much longer by unemployment and a lack of stability in their professional and emotional lives.

> **" I did a lot of violent stuff when I was a kid... I was crazy strong... I'd mess with anyone I didn't like the look of, I'd give them a beating. I had a violent tendency that went away as I got older. "**
> A young man from the dropout group in Douar Hicher

When we analysed the violent practices mentioned by the participants, we found that they were ultimately rooted in gender.

A. Violence as a form of deterrence: the stronger and more violent you are, or the more willing you are to show your physical ability to be violent, the less vulnerable you are to violence.

> **" In the neighbourhood, a guy's got to assert himself, he's got to be violent, he's got to show he's not scared of violence, especially in his early teens. "**
> A young man from the artist group in Douar Hicher

B. Violence in self-defence: this is different from deterrence in that it only comes into play if deterrence has failed. In the face of actual violence, young men respond tit for tat:

> **" I saw the guy who mugged me in Toumi a few weeks later, when I was sitting in the neighbourhood cafe with some of my friends. I grabbed him, I turned him round, I smashed his phone and I did what I wanted to do to him, then I left him. "**
> A young man from the dropout group in Ettadhamen

C. Violence as a way of demonstrating and evoking masculinity, as a sociocultural embodiment of the male body's domination of its environment.

> **" When we were kids, we'd go down to the beach together, as a group of neighbourhood boys. We'd harass people and scrap with kids from other neighbourhoods. "**
> A young man from the dropout group in Ettadhamen

D. Violence as a way of defending your honour.

Insulting someone's mother can easily lead to physical violence, which here serves as a way of defending a man's symbolic capital. In the sociocultural formation of masculinity in working-class areas, mothers are a red line.

> ❝ Once something happened when I was going past the school. There was a kid who insulted my mum. Man, I really beat him up... He went and reported me and the police came and got me. I was detained, but then the kid's family withdrew the complaint and I was released. ❞
> A young man from the dropout group in Sidi Hassine

E. Deviant violence.

This is largely the preserve of young men who have experienced deviant careers and who have been jailed, generally for serious assaults or theft. Women are much less likely to use violence generally than men, but they do make use of verbal violence (much more frequently than physical violence). When they are violent, it is primarily to defend themselves against or deter men, and secondarily against other women in order to assert dominance in personal conflicts.

> ❝ One time, when I was young, still in primary school, my mum sent me shopping. This kid started harassing me, he used a rude word I'd never heard before. I went home and seethed, I got angrier and angrier. I was on my way to give him a beating, but my dad ran into me, he wouldn't let me – he went and beat the kid up himself. ❞
> A young woman from the art group in Sidi Hassine.

Within the family, participants of both sexes describe a relationship of dominance between siblings, with older siblings deploying symbolic violence against their younger brothers and sisters – violence that quickly becomes physical if the younger sibling does not yield to the dominance of the older:

> ❝ I'm violent to my sisters sometimes... But that doesn't count... ❞
> A young woman from the art group in Douar Hicher

3. Young people's experience of violence

Participants of both sexes in all groups and neighbourhoods agreed that they face the most serious physical and verbal violence (in terms of frequency and character) from "deviant" individuals from the same neighbourhood, either in order to steal their money and possessions by trapping them on their own (mugging) or in order to assert dominance in accordance with a specific idea of masculinity. In second place, they cited police violence in public spaces and football stadiums. In both these cases, the victims of the violence are adolescents or those making the transition to adulthood. A third common type of violence was family violence, in particular the physical and verbal violence used by fathers – whether during childhood, where it is considered part of socialisation, or during adolescence, where it is one of the tools used to overcome teenagers' resistance to family control. In parallel to family violence, participants mentioned schoolroom violence, in the form of physical punishment, insults, harassment and stigma. We noticed that family and schoolroom violence often overlap: a child or teenager will be subjected to violence in school, this will have a negative effect on their results, and their father will then punish them with a beating. A child or teenager exposed to violence at home may likewise transfer that violence to the school space, deploying it against their peers, only to be disciplined in turn by school authorities. It is a sort of vicious circle: violence breeding more violence. Problems are dealt with by creating other problems, which we then spend our time trying to solve instead of dealing with the original issue.

For example, a teacher may respond to refusal to do homework (a problem) by using violence. This is intended to discipline the child and facilitate further learning (solution). But this may lead them down the road to educational failure (a new problem). This in turn gives rise to a new violent punishment, this time from the family (solution). This is intended to put the child back on the straight and narrow. But it may lead to the child themselves becoming violent (problem).

Simultaneous exposure to family and schoolroom violence – i.e. to violence from both the major social institutions that are formally and legally responsible for socialising individuals from childhood through adolescence to adulthood – teaches an individual that violence is an acceptable, even a legitimate, form of behaviour. After all, in their experience, both fathers and teachers use violence. Since these figures are the "significative other", to use Luckman and Berger's terminology,[45] a child's window onto society and their guide to its norms, the violence that they practise will seem praiseworthy, even ordinary and necessary in order to belong to society: all of those who exercise authority and symbolic power use violence, and nobody makes any objection.

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45 Berger et Luckman, La construction sociale de la réalité, (Paris : Éditions Armand Colin, 2018).

4. The effects of violence

When discussing the effects of the violence experienced by participants (of both sexes and in both types of group), we were struck by the number of participants that maintained that violence had had no effect on them. Around half of participants agreed with this assertion, with women more likely to say so than men. Six female participants responded with a decisive "no" (i.e. that violence had had no effect on them), while four others described psychological effects (negative memories and feelings of guilt when using violence). Only one participant cited physical injuries resulting from police violence.

One young respondent from the Sidi Hassine dropouts' group told us that he had experienced:

Physical effects from when I was mugged with an iron bar. I had to go to hospital, and you can still see the marks on my body.

We heard many similar responses in the dropout groups in Sidi Hassine, Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen. But Fouchana seems to be an exception. Here, participants in the dropouts' group said that violence had had clear effects on their bodies, their mental wellbeing and even their academic and criminal records.

> "Whenever I'm subject to violence, I get unwell again, mentally. I stew in it, I cry..."
> A young woman from the dropout group in Fouchana

> "They broke my arms, gave me a concussion, and beat me all over my body... There's a psychological effect: anger, a feeling of unfairness... There's even financial losses. How many times have I had to go to hospital and miss out on work?"
> A young man from the dropout group in Fouchana

There is an important point to make here. Since it is exclusively men who are subject to physical violence, (unmarried) female participants did not see it as the main characteristic of their experiences of violence. Instead, their accounts centred on symbolic family violence and verbal violence (from both sexes), in particular verbal (sexual) harassment. But those young men who had experienced violence, in many cases, did not believe that this violence had affected them negatively. This is all about resilience: negative experiences and violence do not necessarily crush individuals or have negative effects – or at least, individuals can get over the effects quite quickly – if they have the

psychological and sociocultural capacity to absorb shocks and turn them into a source of strength. Living through these experiences can leave individuals stronger than they were before.

Those who said that the violence that they had experienced or practised had had a lasting impact on them cited four different effects, in order of frequency:

1. Physical effects resulting from beatings (muggings, fights, police violence)

> ❝Yeah, when I got mugged, it left physical marks. And when the teacher was verbally violent, it left psychological marks. My relationship with my family got very tense.❞
> A young man from the dropout group in Sidi Hassine

2. Exclusion or expulsion from school

> ❝I've been arrested and let go twice – we paid the people who made the complaint money to withdraw it. I got kicked out of three different schools... I've got physical scars...❞
> A young man from the dropout group in Douar Hicher

3. Arrest and the consequences of having a criminal record

> ❝Physical effects from a mugging. And police violence left psychological marks, and made it impossible for me to join the army...❞
> A young man from the dropout group in Sidi Hassine

4. Psychological effects: mental disorders, trauma, complexes that affect individuals' conception of life and their behaviour

> ❝The beating my uncle gave me has stayed with me. I can't forget about it.❞
> A young woman in the focus group on dropout and violence in Douar Hicher

> ❝I've never forgotten the teacher who beat me...❞
> A young woman in the focus group on dropout and violence in Fouchana

> **66 Psychological effects. When I experienced violence, I ended up having a sort of demon inside me that wanted to come out, and I'd be violent... The madness would come out... I wouldn't hit them, but in my mind I'd be getting my revenge. 99**
> A young man in the focus group on dropout and violence in Fouchana

What we found particularly notable here was that the majority of participants – especially male participants, whether they said that being violent had had a lasting effect on them or otherwise – were inured to violence, considering it part and parcel of the hurly-burly of daily life in a working-class neighbourhood.

5. Violent spaces

Participants of both sexes, in both types of group and from all four areas agree that the main theatre of violence, far and away, is public space. In the representation of young people from working-class neighbourhoods, this means "the street". "The street", in this case, is not simply a publicly owned thoroughfare passing through an urban area. It is everything that is not either the "first place" (i.e. the family home), the "second place" (the school), or the "third place" (any other social space after the home or the school).[46] In everyday Tunisian usage, then – and in particular in the conception of our focus group participants – "the street" thus comprises all public space: all thoroughfares, spaces and gathering places that are open to everyone.

At the same time, schools were also mentioned as a particular site of violence (including primary and secondary schools and colleges). This confirms that schools (as well as the family home) play a part in raising young people in working-class districts to be familiar with violence – that is, in their internalisation of violence as a representation of the relationship with authority. It becomes one of the main determinants of their socialisation. All three "places", the "first place" (the home), the "second place" (the school) and the "third place" (everything else), are thus sites of violence.

> **66 Police stations and educational institutions, and then the street. 99**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Sidi Hassine

The workplace, meanwhile, was only mentioned as a site of violence once in all of the focus groups that we held in the four areas. Participants talked most about physical violence, which generally dominated their conception of the phenomenon. They did not discuss economic or social violence in the workplace, even though we had touched on this definition while discussing their representations of violence.

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46 For more on Ray Oldenburg's theory of the "Third Place", see: Burret, Antoine, « Démocratiser les tiers-lieux », Multitudes, vol. 52, no. 1, (2013) : pp. 89-97.

For young men, the most likely places to experience violence, especially physical violence, were football stadiums and police stations.

> **"On the street and at football stadiums... The police have made us hate football here in Tunisia. ""**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Ettadhamen

For young women, public transport was the place where they were most likely to experience violence, particularly physical (sexual) harassment.

6. Entrepreneurs of violence

All of our male participants, in both groups and from all four areas, agreed that the police are the biggest source of violence (female participants were less likely to say this). Policemen are thus major purveyors of violence, "entrepreneurs" of violence. The other major source of violence, coming in second place, are young men from the same neighbourhood. These young men were frequently cited by participants, both male and female, as some of the biggest purveyors of violence in their areas.

> **"The police are the ones who are most likely to be violent... It's not unusual for policemen to insult even old men and women... They don't care. ""**
> A young man from the dropout group in Douar Hicher

This means that for female participants, violence is essentially the preserve of men, irrespective of their professional or spatial identity: young men from the neighbourhood, "deviant" young men, or the police.

> **"The neighbourhood guys are the ones who are most violent. ""**
> A young woman from the dropout group in Ettadhamen

Young men, on the other hand, never attribute violence to women. For them, the main culprit is the police, followed by "deviant" young men from the neighbourhood, the "classic" perpetrators of violence. Third place, meanwhile, is taken by families, specifically fathers' violence towards their children. This type of violence is largely symbolic, psychological and financial. Finally, fourth place is occupied by educational institutions: teachers and other school staff.

There are thus three social institutions – all of them sanctioned and regulated by the law – that use illegitimate violence against those in their care (a captive

public[47]), thereby acting in ways that run entirely contrary to the function that the state has assigned to them: the police, the family, and the education system. The question we have to ask here is whether this behaviour can be attributed simply to individuals belonging to these institutions or whether the problem is systemic and institutional.

In the popular conception, and in reality as well, the Tunisian police have always struggled to draw a clear line between legal and legitimate and illegal and illegitimate violence, whether before or after the Revolution. Despite the democratisation of state and society, the security establishment has remained wedded to securitisation. It gives security priority over rights, whether individual, economic or social. It proceeds on the assumption that the security of the state and its various organs and institutions is more important than the rights of individual citizens or of society, and perhaps in their best interests. Police violence is thus a sort of praxis, performance of a particular role defined by the doctrine, approach and behaviour of the security establishment. It is a role that the state has tasked it with. We allude here to repression as a solution to problems that the state has otherwise not been able to deal with because they are the product of its own policies: unemployment, marginalisation, spatial exclusion and stadium violence.[48]

The same applies to the education system. There is a widespread belief that education is more about instilling discipline than teaching, and discipline itself is associated with a broadly accepted physical violence. As a result, the main function of the education system has long been to discipline individuals and teach them to conform with norms rather than providing them with skills and knowledge. Violent discipline is thus bound up with education, and violence itself is simply a performance of the education system's assigned role: producing obedient citizens.

The family occupies exactly the same position. As Dubet notes, the family is in crisis, like most social institutions.[49] These institutions are increasingly incapable of guaranteeing that its members will obey their will or norms or even respect their existence. They have been disenchanted, in the sense that they have lost its ability to offer something in exchange for discipline and respect. For young people who are unemployed, this means employment after education, support, services, access to the consumer society or help with pursuing their own business projects. These institutions have thus lost their recognition, as a result of their inability to protect children and students or guarantee that they will get through and escape the precarity and uncertainty about the future that they are experiencing.

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47 Lahire, Bernard, La culture des individus. Dissonances culturelles et distinction de soi, (Paris : La Découverte, 2006), p. 553-555

48 For more, see previous studies by International Alert. We have discussed securitised governance of the margins, where the stick of policing has become ever more visible even as the carrot previously offered by the state (welfare provisions) has been largely withdrawn.

49 Dubet, François, op. cit.

7. Outcomes of violence

Does being exposed to violence make young people more vulnerable to risky behaviours (crime, addiction, illegal migration)?

The majority of the responses to this question were dominated by a belief that victims of violence will often become violent themselves, or that they will "deviate" in other ways: become criminals or drug addicts or attempt to migrate to another country illegally.

> **Psychological effects. When I experienced violence, I ended up having a sort of demon inside me that wanted to come out, and I'd be violent... The madness would come out... I wouldn't hit them, but in my mind I'd be getting my revenge.**
> A young man in the focus group on dropout and violence in Fouchana

Careful contextualisation of the responses, however, revealed that just like the question, these responses were multifaceted. Although they generally agreed that that violence has a negative effect on the individual (even if generally at the same time saying they had not experienced violence themselves), participants also maintained that whether someone becomes violent is linked to their socioeconomic position. In fact, many participants were inclined to say that poverty, unemployment and marginalisation are the socioeconomic consequences of violence. This violence is the driver of illegal migration, and a mixture of violence and poverty is the driver of crime. Addiction, on the other hand, they characterise as cutting across social classes and neighbourhoods.

It thus seems that our participants consider these questions to be closely related to an individual's socioeconomic and family position. An individual who has a good job, a decent income and the support of his family may experience violence, but the ground will not be there for them to develop a willingness to use violence, move towards extremism or become a criminal.

> **When you're happy and you've got a dignified life, you're not likely to get involved with that sort of thing... There's no reason to.**
> A young woman from the dropouts' group in Douar Hicher

We also noticed that our participants did not tend to think of illegal migration, commonly referred to as harga, as a crime. It was entirely destigmatised, thought of as a kind of escape from a place in which people like them experience numerous forms of violence, including the socioeconomic.

PART 2

NEIGHBOURHOOD, SCHOOL AND VIOLENCE: THE UNHOLY TRINITY OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

NEIGHBOURHOOD, SCHOOL AND VIOLENCE: THE UNHOLY TRINITY OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

I. Violence in schools: a complex phenomenon

The French sociologist Bernard Lahire has shown that unlike other social institutions, schools constitute a formal, institutionalised system thanks to legal provisions and their power to compel attendance.[50] They possess a "captive public": charges whom they control through legal compulsion and not only their power to convince.[51] In this respect, they are somewhat similar to the institutions of the family and the prison, albeit to different extents. But they are entirely distinct from other social institutions (unions, religious communities, political parties, associations), which rely on a range of strategies to attract (or capture) publics, followers and charges. There exists what Lahire calls a sort of "conditional, magical harmony" between them and their charges (he also uses the term captivité).[52]

This reality is inherently marked by symbolic violence meted out to students, which can be transformed into various other kinds of violence, even institutionalised violence, in circumstances like those we are looking at in this report. The vast majority of our participants, of both sexes, characterised violence as a phenomenon they experienced or witnessed on an almost daily basis in all the various institutions of their neighbourhood – schools, families, police – as well as from their "deviant" neighbours. They maintain that the level of violence is very high and that it has got worse over the last decade, becoming part of the daily routine for students (whether perpetrating or experiencing). In fact, everyone has become inured to it: the institution itself, parents and guardians, the state, public opinion.

According to the qualitative data we collected during our fieldwork, violence in schools is a complex phenomenon. We will try to draw out the particularities of this phenomenon, in the first instance, by pinning down young people's experiences with violence and identifying the "entrepreneurs" who practise it and the spaces in which it takes place.

> **❝It's there from primary school through to college... There's loads of it. And I think it's getting worse.❞**
> A young man from the dropout group in Fouchana

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50 Lahire, Bernard, op. cit., p. 553–555
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.

Violence spills over into schools from outside as often as it is generated inside. Students learn violence at home and then bring it to the schoolyard and then to the classroom. Classroom violence can be taken out onto the schoolyard and beyond, out into the neighbourhood and back to the family home. Sometimes it comes from teachers or administrators, who themselves have brought it from home, from their bank accounts, from the neighbourhood, or from the media or the internet. And sometimes it is generated by the school environment and by the nature of the students.

Schoolroom violence is thus influenced by, and influences, both the immediate and the less immediate environment. It has many subjective and objective dimensions, and requires an analysis that brings together "objectivation", putting violence as an act and a phenomenon in its objective socioeconomic, cultural, spatial and political context, and "subjectivation", understanding the act as a subjective individual trajectory taken by individuals. In what follows, we will try to adopt a sociological approach to the various aspects of this phenomenon.

1. Participants' experiences with violence in school

Participants in all our focus groups indicated that their experiences of violence in the education system were primarily a matter of physical violence, of varying degrees of severity. Verbal violence and insults were experienced from teachers within the classroom, and secondarily from other members of staff, such as the playground overseer or the principal, on the schoolyard. Violence between students, meanwhile, took place on the yard, in changing rooms or in toilets. Finally, they cited violence from young men from the neighbourhood, who harassed students on their way to or back from school.

> **From students to one another, and from guys who aren't studying at the school to start with. And of course, they make the students' lives hell, whether by beating them up or by harassing them.**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Douar Hicher

While almost two thirds of participants, of both sexes, agreed that violence was present in the education system and described their own experiences, more than a third denied that they had ever been exposed to this sort of violence. Their representations and characterisations can be divided into three categories:

a. **No experience whatsoever of violence:** most of those who denied being exposed to violence in school said that they had not experienced it personally at all. This category consisted entirely of women.

b. Had experiences but did not consider them to constitute violence: these participants had experienced violence but did not represent it as such. They characterised the events as a necessary and legitimate part of education. This category consisted entirely of men.

> ❝I was subjected to violence, especially in primary school, but since then I've realised that it was more discipline than it was violence... They don't hit you or scream at you for no reason... And what harm did it do me, at the end of the day? I haven't turned out neurotic or mad... ❞
>
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Fouchana

c. Had perpetrated violence but had not experienced it: it was important to those participants who had been perpetrators of violence in school to deny that they had been subjected to it themselves. This speaks to the point we raised at the beginning of this study: that violence is a deterrence mechanism. Men and women were equally well-represented in this category.

2. Practitioners of violence in school

Participants of both sexes and from all four areas agree that primary school teachers are the main source of violence in schools, closely followed by students themselves as perpetrators of violence against other students, middle school and secondary school teachers, administrative staff (custodians and principals), and finally young men (especially those who have dropped out of school and "deviants") who lie in wait around the school premises. There is barely anyone involved in school life who is not involved in the practice of violence.

> ❝ From students to one another, the administrative staff... and when we were in college, older kids, 25-year-olds sometimes, who spent most of their day hanging around outside harassing people and dealing drugs... ❞
>
> A young woman from the dropouts' group in Ettadhamen

Violence in schools emerges as part of the role assigned to this institution, a specific kind of performance of this role produced by a long-established socioeconomic, political and cultural reality that considers violence to be part of education. But what education are we talking about here? From a very young age through to adolescence and adulthood, children are being educated in violence. This is the diagnosis that we have arrived at over the course of our fieldwork. And it is borne out by a number of other studies on school violence in Tunisia.

In one qualitative study titled Educational Quality as a Way of Preventing Violence in Schools, published as part of a series by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (2022),[53] the sociologist Mahrez al-Radisi held five focus group discussions with students from four different secondary and middle schools. Al-Radisi found evidence of a far-reaching shift within public schools. According to him, schools are erasing students' selfhood, instilling in them a sense of overwhelming failure, valorising high achievement and elitism over educating those students with learning difficulties or behavioural issues, and giving very little regard to their basic functions – particularly valuing students' individuality and personality and developing social skills.[54] He concluded that all this encourages violence in schools.

On the quantitative side of things, meanwhile, the section of the 2018-2019 National Youth Survey dedicated to violence in schools concluded that more than one in ten young people has personally experienced violence or one or more assaults on school premises:[55] around 15% of young men and 7% of young women. 71.5% of incidents in schools and universities involved verbal violence, 64% physical violence and 93.5% school violence.[56] The 2019 Tunisia Violence Report,[57] which records incidents of violence in the education system and divides them into "physical", "educational" and "verbal" categories, found that 54.8% of incidents of physical violence are perpetrated by students, 27.4% by teaching staff and 17.8% by other staff members (custodians, guards).[58] 76.2% of incidents of verbal violence were perpetrated by students and 12.63% by teaching staff. Some 11.73% of all violent incidents originate with non-teaching staff. And 51% of incidents of school violence, whether on or off school premises, were perpetrated by individuals who were neither staff nor students. Finally, 14% of all incidents recorded took place between members of the teaching staff.[59]

3. Sites of violence within schools

According to participants in our dropout groups, the area around school is the most common site of violence, followed by the schoolyard, then the classroom, then toilets and changing rooms. Violence thus occurs everywhere, within and outside the school, in a manner that precisely reflects the perpetrators of this violence.

If we divide the victims and perpetrators of violence along gender lines, we find that in all these spaces young men are more likely both to perpetrate violence and to be on the receiving end of it (primarily from teachers, other students and

53 Al-Radisi, Mahrez. "al-Jawda al-Tarbawiyya Madkhal li'l-Tawaqqi min al-'Unf al-Madrasi", in: al-Manzuma al-Tarbawiyya al-Tunisiyya wa-Ishkaliyyat al-Jawda, Hasan al-Innabi, volume 5 (Tunis: Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, 2022).
54 Ibid.
55 National Youth Observatory, Ministry for Young People and Sport, "al-Mulakhkhas al-Tanfidhi li'l-Mash al-Watani Hawl al-Shabab 2018-2019", 2019.
56 Ibid.
57 Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, al-Taqrir al-Sanawi Hawl Zahirat al-'Unf fi Tunis 2021-2022. Link: https://ftdes.net/ar/rapport-annuel-violences-2021
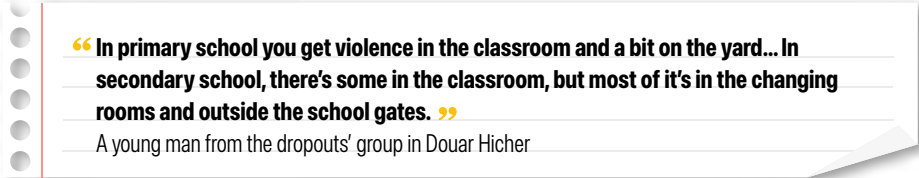58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.

administrative staff). Young women are less likely either to use or to experience violence. As a result, male participants were more likely to cite the schoolroom as a place in which they are subjected to violence than female participants, who focused more on the schoolyard.

In the area around school, students experienced violence from "deviant" neighbourhood teens (criminals and the homeless), who lie in wait outside the school walls. For these young people, the area outside school is a space in which they can exercise the power they derive from their age and their gender – and, in particular, their status as dropouts – which gives them a greater capacity for violence (physically because of the difference in age, but also because of familiarity with violence, the strength of numbers, and symbolic domination according to the principles of masculine representation).

Within the school itself, the schoolyard, changing rooms and toilets are the main sites of student-on-student violence. This kind of violence relies on the same source of power (difference in age, different capacity for violence, strength in numbers) as a means of dominating others and of demonstrating an ability to be a man (despite being so young) among other adult men. Young women are much less likely to perpetrate violence, and when they do, it is generally against other young women in changing rooms or toilets. They avoid using violence against, or being exposed to violence from, young men.

> **" In primary school you get violence in the classroom and a bit on the yard... In secondary school, there's some in the classroom, but most of it's in the changing rooms and outside the school gates. "**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Douar Hicher

Schoolrooms are dominated by a single leading perpetrator of violence: teachers. The main perpetrators in administrative spaces and the schoolyard, meanwhile, are the principal and other members of non-teaching staff. Principals and their assistants use disciplinary violence against those who do not obey the teacher's authority in the classroom and against those who themselves perpetrate violence on the schoolyard or in changing rooms or toilets. The violent teacher's domination of the classroom and its transformation into a site of violence, and the non-teaching staff's domination of the rest of the school space – especially the yard and the administrative offices – and its transformation into a site of violence, are thus both confirmed by other quantitative studies on violence in Tunisian schools. These studies show that school violence is the most common of all kinds of violence, whether between students or, in particular, from educators (in the latter case usually both physical and verbal).[60]

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60 Ibid.

Given that teachers are some of the biggest perpetrators of violence, and the schoolroom is one of the sites where violence is most likely to occur,[61] we cannot hope to understand violence in schools sociologically without first understanding the role of the teacher – that is, maintaining order within the classroom – and the need for order in the classroom if the teacher is going to teach.[62] As Pierre Merle explains,[63] to transfer knowledge to students, a degree of order is needed. When the disorder generated by noise and misbehaviour reaches a certain level, teachers cannot teach. All this implies a certain ordering of priorities on the part of teachers and of state and society: it is more important that children are well-behaved than that they are educated and mentally well. After all, using violence on children does not make them any more likely to learn, and may inflict psychological damage. The central principle of education, then, is not the student as an individual, a human being, or a future citizen. The central principle is instilling discipline, preserving order and teaching individuals to respect it.

4. The causal relationship between violence and dropout among young people in working-class neighbourhoods: A missing piece of the puzzle

a. Dropout

Reasons:

By closely studying participants' profiles, we have identified the following six main reasons for dropout:

- Loss of desire to continue studying. This was the reason most frequently cited by group participants for dropping out, accounting for 17.9% of responses.

- Failure to pass the secondary school exam (the baccalauréat), which also accounted for 17.9% of responses.

- 14.2% of responses blamed socialising with "deviants" or risk-taking behaviour.

- 10.7% of the responses cited difficult social circumstances. This category includes family problems (caring for a family member who is unwell, for example), which accounted for 7.14% of responses.

- 7.1% said that they had left education to take up technical education.

- 7.14% said that they had been expelled.

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61 It is important to note here the steady decline in teachers' working conditions, their purchasing power and their standard of living overall, which has created a difficult working environment, undermined public respect for their work and reduced the middle classes' confidence in schools as a vehicle for social mobility. All of this, in turn, exacerbates the fragility of the symbolic authority that teachers hold over students, breaking their domination of the classroom and leading many to turn to physical and verbal violence as an alternative to symbolic violence.

62 Ben Fredj, Slaheddine, La violence à l'école : Problème disciplinaire ou crise identitaire ? dans : Jeunes, dynamiques identitaires et frontières culturelles, dirigé(e)s par Melliti et Co, (Tunis : Actes du colloque de Hammamet 16-17 février 2007, 2007), 2007, p. 174.

63 Merle, Pierre, « Les deux mondes de la violence scolaire. Statistique ministérielle versus expérience des élèves », Enfances & Psy, vol. 45, no. 4, (2009) : pp. 91-101.

If there is a single common denominator shared by all these reasons (with the exception of failing the baccalauréat), it is first and foremost the inability of both family and school to create or reinforce students' resistance to dropping out. This resistance would require families to provide their children with a basic minimum of socioeconomic security and of support and oversight. It would require schools, too, to prevent violence in its various forms, stigma and "deviance". It would require them to make much more effort to ensure equality of opportunity by reinforcing the cultural capital of those from poor backgrounds (both their economic situation and their cultural knowledge[64]), rather than exacerbating disparities by dealing with students mechanically, treating them as nothing more than statistics and acting as if they are all the same.

Secondly, the state has failed to encourage students to have high aspirations. Because of the failure of the economy and the high level of graduate unemployment, it has not met their expectations. Social mobility has broken down. At the same time, new types of work have emerged: there are old types of work that are more in demand, and new careers have developed thanks to the digital economy and to changes in the material economy. These are jobs that command much better salaries than teaching (the classic career trajectory for those who do well in education) and do not require qualifications (or only require technical training). Young people can look for work in the parallel economy (on the borders or on the streets[65]), set up device maintenance shops, or become rappers, bloggers or video influencers.

All of this means that for many young people, education is no longer a safe or "guaranteed" route to employment. As a result, they no longer see dropping out of school as a failure or disaster, or even as an end point. Instead, they see it as a choice, taken by those who know that they are not academically gifted and who prefer to transition to adulthood early by entering the job market – a job market that is no longer interested in graduates (most of whom are themselves unemployed) or that they believe only employs the most outstanding of graduates in the first place.

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64 A previous International Alert study on dropout and young people's representations of success and failure confirms this finding. A quantitative analysis showed that the dropout rate was closely linked to parents' educational achievements: 0% of participants whose mothers had gone on to higher education had dropped out of school, while 57% of those whose fathers were illiterate had, and 50.9% of those whose fathers had not gone past primary education. The same applied to mothers: 52.1% of those whose mothers were illiterate had dropped out of school, compared to only 20% of those whose mothers had a secondary education.
For more, see: Ben Zina, Mohamed Ali. "al-Inqita' al-Madrasi wa-Tamathulat al-Ikhfaq wa'l-Nijah lada al-Shabab fi Firyana wa-Ghar al-Dima'", in: Sosiyolojiya al-Hawamish fi Tunis: Dirasat fi'l-Manatiq al-Hudidiyya wa'l-Ahya' al-Sha'biyya, Mohamed Ali Ben Zina, Mariam Abdel Baky and Olfa Lamloum ed (Tunis: International Alert and Dar Mohamed Ali al-Hami, 2018).
65 Jaballah, Soufiane. Nahj Isbanya aw Minhaj al-Iqtisad al-Shari'i fi Tunis (Tunis: Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, 2022), pp. 29-42.

Alongside this pragmatic choice, there are those who drop out because of difficult and precarious socioeconomic conditions within the family (poverty, disability, illness, violence) which prevent them from continuing their studies or entering the job market. In these cases, dropping out is not the product of an objective diagnosis of the difficult reality in which an individual lives and an attempt to find solutions. It is simply unavoidable.

This preliminary theoretical reading of the conceptions shared with us by participants who had dropped out of school reminds us of Bourdieu's theory of reproduction, which we lean on heavily in order to understand this particular problem.[66] Most of our dropouts belong to the lower middle class. They live in areas that suffer from spatial exclusion and marginalisation. Their parents have a primary or middle school education, and their professions are not generally the product of academic success but of dropping out of school relatively early themselves.

Our participants are thus heirs to a legacy of dropout – to the money, institutionalised cultural capital (i.e. qualifications reflecting educational level) and social networks. Their families live in precarious economic conditions, in a marginalised and excluded urban space. They lack the cultural capacity to offer their children the same chances of academic success as their peers from the middle and upper-middle classes, whose parents have a much higher income and level of education. As a result, the socialisation that these young people receive within their families (the socialisation of the culturally and materially immiserated) reinforces the socialisation that they receive in school, which in turn fails to increase their chances of academic success – and, in fact, makes it more likely that they will drop out.

Dropout can thus be the product of a family socialisation that encourages dropping out. Young people grow up with the possibility of dropping out from their earliest years. According to Bourdieu, socialisation is a matter of internalising a class position by acquiring cultural capital (i.e. the various kinds of accumulated capital that make up membership of a given class and positioning oneself within it) and adopting a habitus (a way of knowing, thinking, evaluating and acting).[67] The limited or extremely limited cultural capital of our participants in this sense (familial educational level, language knowledge, attending plays or going to the cinema, having books at home, pedagogical support for young people within the household) create a way of thinking and acting within the family that means they socialise their children in a manner that discourages academic success. They create a habitus that does not mesh well with the school habitus – the habitus of the upper-middle and upper classes.

66 Bourdieu, Pierre, Passeron, Jean-Claude, La reproduction : éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement, (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1970).
67 Fournier, Martine, « Les Héritiers », dans : Pierre Bourdieu. Son œuvre, son héritage, édité par Jean-François Dortier, (Paris, Éditions Sciences Humaines, 2008), pp. 19-24.

Of course, there is always an exception that proves the rule. This is a case study of groups of young people from four of the poorest and most spatially excluded neighbourhoods in Tunisia. It is on this basis that we have identified the existence of a socialisation that encourages an "inherited" dropout particular to our cases.[68] This does not mean that all those who come from materially, educationally and culturally poor backgrounds will drop out of school. There are examples of those who have crossed class boundaries and succeeded academically (what Jacquet Chantal calls transclasses).[69]

Tunisian schools are thus dominated (as Jessie Malet puts it) by an educational paradigm that insists on transferring knowledge to students who are expected to assimilate it in only one way, on applying a single set of norms to every student – as though all students have the same capacity for absorption, understanding and learning, the same family history, and the same desires.[70] At the same time, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s there were many teachers from poor backgrounds who had succeeded in using school to improve their class status. Today, the opposite is true. This shows that dropout and the quality of education are closely connected to the political context, the state and the socioeconomic reality, and even to social demography.

School performance and students' capacity for learning – especially with regard to less privileged classes in marginalised neighbourhoods that have only grown more precarious and "relegated" since the millennium[71] – change according to context. But public education, in both form and content, has lost its capacity to act as a vehicle of social mobility for reasons that are particular to it (teachers' limited pedagogical capacity, precarious economic circumstances, students' psychological and social positions, the poor state of school infrastructure itself, as well as broader factors beyond the scope of the education system itself: the economy, high levels of graduate unemployment, austerity, the tight education budget, global and "globalised" economic crises). If the dropouts that we interviewed have inherited a particular culture or spirit reproduced by family, school and neighbourhood, then it is a spirit that does not encourage them to study (particularly if their results are not good or they fail) so much as to drop out of the race early – a race which they cannot hope to win – in favour of an alternative path offering better chances of success.

It is worth noting that middle-class investment in education (in terms of both individuals and of families) remained more or less constant from the early 1990s through to the early years of the new millennium, despite the disillusionment engendered by the high graduate unemployment rate.[72] The sociologist Fathi al-Raqiq attributes this to the state's efforts to make education (especially

68 This point is borne out by the most recent official Poverty Map, which shows a strong link between poverty and dropout in the four neighbourhoods. See the section on the study population above.

69 Chantal, Jacquet, Les transclasses ou la non-reproduction, (Paris : Éditions puf,, 2014).

70 Jessie Malet, Quand l'institution véhicule la violence, Journal des Droits des Jeunes, n° 293, (mars 2010) : p.37.

71 Thin, Daniel, Quartiers populaires : l'école et les familles, (Lyon : Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1998).

72 Al-Raqiq, Fathi. Min Murunat al-'Amal ila Madinat al-Mashari': Muqaraba Sosiyolojiyya (Tunis: Dar Muhammad Ali, 2009), pp. 220-221.

higher education) a mass phenomenon, driven by a modernist ideology that saw democratising education as a way of staving off backwardness and developing a new social legitimacy rooted in a middle class whose members were raised to think of academic achievement as the best path to employment.[73]

Raqiq also offers another explanation borrowed from Mohamed Ali Ben Zina,[74] who in his 2008 doctoral dissertation cites Raymond Boudon's concept of the "minimum effect".[75] Ben Zina tested this thesis himself in 2018 in a study on young people's representations of success and failure.[76] He found that the level of qualification that young people hoped to receive determined their expectations and ambitions: the higher the qualification, the higher the ambition; the lower the qualification, the higher the expectation of failure.[77] Raqiq attributes this choice to parents who, not having completed schooling themselves, push their children to obtain qualifications no matter how devalued they have become as a means of obtaining economic capital (i.e. work).[78] Middle-class families' desire to invest in education is thus an unintended product of the intersection of individual and familial desires and not of structural determinants.[79]

These factors make for a convincing explanation of middle class families' continuing investment in education despite its failure as a vehicle of social mobility. But in that case, how can we explain the lower and lower-middle classes' non-investment in a university education that no longer provides employment? The last part of the question may provide the answer. The modernising policy of democratised mass education – and even continuing family investment in education, understood as an unintended "minimum effect" – are middle-class behaviours. They cannot explain the behaviour of members of the lower and lower-middle classes, who live in a social, cultural and class space that is "relegated" and marginalised by the state: working-class neighbourhoods. This is a space inhabited by families that do not enjoy a basic minimum income or socioeconomic and psychological security. Members of this class are more pragmatic, perhaps even more rational and less given to projecting their own dreams and fantasies onto their children's future.

There is no unintended or minimum effect for these families. They live every day in a constant war for survival, because they do not have a stable income or a permanent contract, decent wages, health insurance or a pension. Living on the margin in both class and spatial terms, they place little value on the state's modernising rhetoric. [it does not guarantee work or qualifications that

73 Ibid.
74 Ben Zina, Mohamed Ali, "Population et Éducation en Tunisie", Faculté des sciences humaines et sociales de Tunis, thèse de doctorat en démographie, Tunis, 2008, p, 117.
75 Boudon, Raymond, « La rationalité ordinaire : colonne vertébrale des sciences sociales », L'Année sociologique, vol. 60, no. 1, (2010) : pp. 19-40.
76 Ben Zina, Mohamed Ali. "al-Inqita' al-Madrasi wa-Tamathulat al-Ikhfaq wa'l-Nijah lada al-Shabab fi Firyana wa-Ghar al-Dima'", in: Sosiyolojiya al-Hawami-sh fi Tunis: Dirasat fi'l-Manatiq al-Hudidiyya wa'l-Ahya' al-Sha'biyya, Mohamed Ali Ben Zina, Mariam Abdel Baky and Olfa Lamloum ed (Tunis: International Alert and Dar Mohamed Ali al-Hami, 2018).
77 Ibid.
78 Al-Raqiq, Fathi. Ibid, pp. 220-221.
79 Al-Raqiq, Fathi. Ibid.

make it easier to differentiate yourself in the job market. As members of the class that has accumulated the least cultural and economic capital, they find little meaning in the symbolism of a university degree that puts no food in their mouths and no money in their pockets.

The high dropout rate within these social classes can thus be attributed to the rational choices made by children and parents who have objectively concluded that it is pointless for them to carry on studying given their limited cultural and economic capital, the huge time commitment involved in education, and the high rate of graduate employment. This is a choice that we can explain by reference to the theory of methodological individualism. Boudon maintains that we can only understand inequality of opportunity in schools if we use a model that conceives of the education system as a system of outcomes branching off from choices.[80] At each turning point, a student decides whether to carry on or abandon their education according to the expected utility of each choice, which relies on three choices: 1) the risk of failure; 2) the economic and psychological cost; 3) the possible benefits of each choice.[81] According to Boudon, students and their families do not evaluate these variables in the same way. For example, a family with a number of graduate members and a family with no qualifications whatsoever will ascribe different values to academic qualifications.[82]

Dropout is a choice that might be characterised, following Marc-Henry Soulet, as "weak acting" (agir faible).[83] An individual, faced with a precarious reality and with only limited options, takes a decision and acts according to their limited capacity to do so. The individual does not, in this case, have total freedom in making their choice. It is a choice constrained by the context in which it is made, the subjective and objective conditions that determine the options available to them in that moment.

5. Social institutions (family and school) and the response to dropout

When we asked participants in the dropouts' group about how the social institutions responsible for their education – the school and the family – reacted to them dropping out, the most frequent response was that while at first families were worried, they quickly came to accept their decision. There are a few reasons we might suggest for this:

❶ Many dropouts start working immediately after leaving education.

❷ The dropout's academic attainment may be low enough that continuing their education will pose problems in itself.

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80 Cayouette-Remblière, Joanie, « Penser les inégalités scolaires : quelques travaux contemporains en sociologie », Idées économiques et sociales, vol. 187, no. 1, (2017): pp. 6-16.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Bessin, Marc, Claire Bidart, et Michel Grossetti, « Introduction générale L'enquête sur les bifurcations : une présentation », dans : Bifurcations. Les sciences sociales face aux ruptures et à l'événement, dirigé par Michel Grossetti, (Paris : La Découverte, 2009), pp. 7-19.

3 There may be economic circumstances (limited family income, an inability to pay the costs of schooling) or social circumstances (the loss or death of a family member, a health problem experienced by the dropout themselves or by a relative).

4 The dropout may have been expelled by the school.

Families are most likely to resist the decision to drop out when their child has failed the secondary school examination (the baccalauréat). This is typically because they believe in their child's ability to bounce back and want them to repeat the year rather than abandoning education entirely.

Families are least likely to fight the decision if their child has been expelled, which in most cases is the result of a young man (the vast majority are young men) using violence, serious violence, against other students or staff. On the one hand, there is not much they can do about the expulsion – that is, they cannot prevent it once it has already happened, meaning that it is the only reason for leaving education that a family cannot resist. At the same time, an expulsion is not usually an isolated incident. It is typically the product of a long-term precarious and disordered family situation in which the student lacks support and often experiences serious violence as part of their upbringing; the product of a social process.

> **❝ I got expelled… Even my family didn't care… ❞**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Douar Hicher

At the same time, a school is a social institution responsible for educating young people in citizenship. It is equipped, by law, with various powers intended to ensure it can educate individuals. It is responsible for whether they succeed or fail. As such, we had expected that by law, and by virtue of its makeup as an institution, it would have mechanisms for preventing dropout or for supporting those who do drop out to return to education. Here, our participants' responses surprised us.

We found that in the majority of cases (those not involving expulsion, which accounted for only 7.14% of dropouts), there was a total absence of official engagement from schools. With the exception of individual efforts by teachers or sometimes other members of staff to convince students to resume their studies, there is no strategy or policy for institutional intervention to prevent dropout. Is the decision to drop out entirely personal, with the school having no role to play, no responsibility in whether it happens or not? Is its role, as provided for by law, simply a matter of overseeing the teaching process and evaluating its results through school report cards? Does dropout simply not

concern schools? Who, then, is actually responsible for this outcome and for dealing with it?

We find the answer to these questions in a section of the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan for the Education Sector, titled Preventing Failure and Dropout.[84] Here, the Ministry of Education admitted that the system had struggled to enforce compulsory education, both in primary schools and especially at the preparatory (middle school) level, and to prevent a steady haemorrhage of students. It attributed this to the limitations of the mechanisms set up to prevent "automatic dropout" of students as a result of difficult socioeconomic circumstances and the lack of coordination between the various intervention bodies tasked with protecting dropouts from the dangers arising from dropout.[85] Conceding that there is no system to curb dropout, it proposed a series of measures (which have not been implemented). All this is an indication of the sheer scale of the problem and the lack of institutional mechanisms for dealing with it.[86]

Throughout this study, we will draw out various answers to these two qualitative and causal questions. How do schools produce dropout just as they produce success? Why do they do so?

6. The relationship between violence and dropout among young people in working-class areas

Does violence within the education system result in dropout? Our findings on this question were surprising: our initial hypotheses did not correspond with the answers given in our focus groups. Although there was no absolute consensus, the majority of our respondents, of both sexes, denied that there was any link between their experiences of violence or the violent environment in school and the decision to drop out. Even those who maintained that there was a relationship characterised it as only one of many possible reasons for dropping out or cited it in the context of expulsion (i.e. that individuals that acted violently might be expelled).

This leads us to the conclusion that dropout is rooted in other factors: inequality of opportunity, whether limited familial cultural capital or in particular difficult socioeconomic circumstances (accommodation, transport, growing up in the neighbourhood), and the individual trajectories taken by people in these circumstances – all of which lead to dropping out. All the subjective and objective conditions conspire to make some individuals much more likely to drop out of school than others, and to make school one reason for their inability to achieve social mobility.

84 Al-Mukhattat al-Istratiji al-Qita'i al-Tarbawi 2016-2020, Education Strategic Plan Drafting Committee, Ministry of Education, Tunis, 2016.
85 Ibid.
86 See: al-Tawsiyat wa'l-Hulul, end of the first section.

It is thus true that violence is a cause of dropout. But this violence is not only physical, but also socioeconomic. It is the violence that students' families are subjected to as members of the lower-middle or lower class living in working-class neighbourhoods, whether by the state (economic marginalisation and spatial exclusion) or by employers (precarious employment and exploitation). It is the violence that produces an inequality of opportunity from a child's earliest years in primary education. The point here is not about cultural capital, but about families' ability to provide clothes and stationery, their ability to provide for their children not only as residents of the household but as students.

7. After dropout

Dropout and violence

Does dropping out of school make young people more vulnerable to, or likely to use, violence?

The answer to this question might seem fairly intuitive: dropping out must surely make you more vulnerable to violence. But when we asked our focus group participants this question, their answers defied our assumptions and even our sociological hypotheses. This can be attributed either to the complexity of the phenomenon of dropout in working-class areas or to the fact that dropouts' own perceptions were governed by different backgrounds and factors.[87]

The participants' responses can be divided into three general categories. The first type did not give a clear "yes" or "no", but instead connected violence (whether perpetrated or experienced) to what dropouts ended up doing after leaving education:

> **Whether you're studying or not, you're exposed to violence... If you're hanging around on the street a lot, it might be true that you get into more fights... And for girls, they end up going out less, their family focuses on them more, they're smothered...**
> A young woman from the dropouts' group in Ettadhamen

The second type of response was a decisive "no". Various young men in the focus groups maintained that dropping out had no effect on whether people were more likely to perpetrate or experience violence.

The third type of response was a decisive "yes". These participants argued that there was a causal relationship between dropping out and young men's use of violence. Those who held this position were all young women talking about their male counterparts.

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87 We may need to further expand this study in future by carrying out biographical interviews with the largest possible number of dropouts, adding additional scope for understanding.

At the same time, both male and female participants agreed that violence after dropping out is linked to the individual's own personality and socialisation and on the other to the objective reality that they experience, particularly the socioeconomic reality:

> **I agree with what's been said... It's all about age, the support you get from your family, and how you're going to use the time that you otherwise would have spent in education.**
> A young woman from the dropouts' group in Douar Hicher

Some participants, meanwhile, argued that schools themselves produce violence (as spaces that socialise young people into violence) and that as a result dropping out would reduce the amount of violence in their lives (experienced or perpetrated), both qualitative and quantitatively. The violence experienced or perpetrated by young people after dropping out of schools is thus closely linked to the support provided by their families.

> **Not always... If they were already exposed to violence, they'll carry on being exposed to violence, it won't change anything. And if they were fine before, there's no reason for them to be exposed to violence after they quit.**
> A young woman from the dropouts' group in Fouchana

Dropping out and "deviant" behaviour

Does dropping out make individuals more likely to engage in "deviant" behaviour? Again, the responses were not what we, as researchers, might have expected. They revealed both a common thread uniting the conceptions of all the participants and differences in the responses given by participants of different genders. These responses ranged from a decisive or conditional "no" (male participants) through to a "yes" that maintained that dropout could be a cause of "deviant" behaviour, especially in young men (from female participants) whose families did not keep a close eye on them (unlike female dropouts, who are subject to greater surveillance from their families).

Participants of both genders agreed that there were other variables influencing the likelihood of "deviant" behaviour. Age on drop-out was one such variable: the younger the individual leaves school, the more likely they are to engage in "deviant" behaviour. But according to participants, this factor is in itself linked to the socioeconomic status of the individual and their family, their family's attitude to dropping out and the support they provide.

> **❝As far as drugs go, whether that means selling them or buying and taking them, it's about poverty and unemployment, not your educational level. ❞**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Sidi Hassine

Most participants also cited the importance of the post-dropout stage – that is, of what dropouts end up doing after leaving school. At the same time, there was a widespread sense that violence is widespread in schools, and that the education system now educates young people in "deviant" behaviour:

> **❝In my experience, addiction's more common in people who are still in school... You should worry about a dropout getting addicted or going off the rails if they've stopped going to school because they're running with a bad crowd and their family's neglected them. ❞**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Sidi Hassine

> **❝ However you put it... What you say might have been true twenty years ago... Now things have changed... The education system these days is a hothouse [of "deviant" behaviour]. ❞**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Douar Hicher

This idea is echoed by other sociological studies which indicate that drug dealers' sphere of activity no longer stops at the school gates.[88] Schools today are not distinct educational or social institutions governed by their own legal framework. The long-term effects of political and socioeconomic crises have made schools in working-class areas into spaces that are neither understood nor well-regulated. In this regulatory vacuum, violence has become a relational paradigm that determines the internal social dynamics of the school space.[89]

"Deviant" behaviour is tied more to absenteeism than to dropping out. Time spent by students away from family authority – when it is assumed that they will be under the authority of their school – is time that students can themselves control, allowing them to return home late. They "go to school" even if they do not study, even if they are absent from school itself. There they join other groups of students and dropouts to consume different kinds of soft drugs: sniffing glue and paint thinner or smoking cannabis and cigarettes.

> **❝Not addiction. Because everything's already there in schools. Leaving might mean getting away from it. ❞**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Fouchana

88 Carra, Cécile, et Daniel Faggianelli, op. cit., 205-225.
89 Ibid.

Maryse Esterle Hedibel, similarly, finds that "deviant" behaviour is a product of staying in school. In fact, she goes further, arguing that breaking with education often encourages breaking "deviant" habits.

> **No, I've been less violent since I got away from that shithole, and since I stopped seeing certain people.**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Douar Hicher

Leaving school and entering the job market can thus provide an opportunity for students with bad grades to escape the directionlessness and meaninglessness that they have experienced, especially if there is a job available that can elevate them from failed student to worker.[90] This change in status will change their own definition of their status. Hedibel also notes, specifically in the French context, that the absence of job opportunities makes this less likely. In this case, unemployment contributes to continuing "deviant" behaviour.[91] In the Tunisian context, however, the nature of a job or how easy it is to come by is not a problem: the purpose of work here is to effect a chance in status, a new beginning, by turning dropout into continuation. The dominance of the parallel economy in Tunisia means that there are more opportunities to make money in working-class districts than in their counterparts in France, where the state controls most aspects of the economy. But the most important factors in the continuation of "deviant" behaviour are still the presence (or absence) of the family, the amount of support they (do not) provide during the transitional period, and the age at which dropout occurs – the earlier, the more likely it is that a young person will end up pursuing a "deviant" path. Being younger does not help dropouts find a kind of work (the ban on child labour, their relative physical and psychological capability, and the way society treats them) that will allow them to avoid alienation, especially given that adolescence makes young people more difficult to deal with, less capable of self-control and more subject to social influences.

The psychological effects of dropping out

Does dropping out of school have a negative effect on young people's mental wellbeing or on their perception of their status?

As with violence and "deviant" behaviour, participants' answers to this question differed along gender lines, but nonetheless shared a common thread in both quantitative and qualitative terms, ranging from a decisive "no" to a "yes".

On the one hand, many male participants maintained that dropping out had had no negative effects whatsoever on their lives. They said that going straight

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90 Malet, Jessie, op.cit
91 Ibid.

into work had protected them from any side effects of leaving education, and argued that it is not dropping out itself that affects individuals' mental health but rather a life characterised by too much free time and inactivity:

> **Why are we looking at it as a bad thing? Dropping out can be the reason you succeed in life... There are lots of people who didn't finish school but are successful in life.**
> A young woman in the dropouts' group in Sidi Hassine

At the same time, many other participants, both men and women, said that dropping out did have negative psychological effects. They attributed this to feelings of regret and anxiety and in particular to stigma from family members and society, which produces psychological harm and a feeling of listlessness and social collapse.

> **Psychologically, yeah, of course. There's pressure from your family and from society after you drop out. And there's this horrible idea that you encounter: quitting school means that you're a moron, a loser.**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Sidi Hassine

YOUNG PEOPLE, VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN WORKING-CLASS NEIGHBOURHOODS A CRITICAL READING

YOUNG PEOPLE, VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN WORKING-CLASS NEIGHBOURHOODS A CRITICAL READING

How is violence practised and confronted in working-class neighbourhoods in Tunisia? Who protects whom? And from whom, and how? In this chapter, based on the responses of participants in our focus groups, we will try to answer all these questions, focusing on how social institutions both formal and informal – the family, the police, religion – help protect young people from violence or play a part in the violence that they experience.

1. The family

Coming up with a sociological definition of the family is famously difficult and complex, to the extent that the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu used to advise researchers to approach it simply as a word, albeit one that seems entirely natural and intuitive to individuals and thus plays a part in how they act in reality.[92]

"Families are obliged to protect their children, and they are still capable of doing so". This conception was strongly present in the answers of participants from both types of group, particularly with respect to families' ability to protect their children from violence.

> **"Of course they protect you by bringing you up, and keeping an eye on you. And they defend you when you're subject to violence in school, and even on the street. "**
> A young man from the dropout group in Douar Hicher

There was no clear overall split in this respect along gender lines, between the different areas, or between the two types of group (dropouts and artists). There were three general trends. Some male participants argued that this protection was "conditional", i.e. that a family can only protect its children if certain conditions are met: a relatively close-knit family group capable of bringing up, supporting and integrating its children. Others maintained that families should only provide protection to children and women; for them, family protection did not extend to adult men, who the family cannot protect. A third group, also largely young men, felt that families do not actually protect their children from violence at all. For these participants, the family is itself a violent institution, and subjects its members to violence and socialises them into it.

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92 Bourdieu, Pierre, « À propos de la famille comme catégorie réalisée », Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, n, 100, (1993), p. 32-36

In spatial terms, there was a marked difference between the artists' group in Sidi Hassine and their counterparts in Ettadhamen. Most participants in Sidi Hassine characterised the family as a violent institution that does not protect its children from violence. Most participants in Ettadhamen, on the other hand, maintained that families do protect individuals, although with the caveat that different families are more or less effective in doing so. This difference is attributable to differences in individuals' personal experiences and biographies. There is no clear link to the regional variable.

> **No, families can't protect young people from violence – families are the ones being violent to them to start with, from a young age.**
> A young man from the artists' group in Sidi Hassine

> **The family is the institution that tries hardest to protect you, whatever the cost, by whatever means…**
> A young man from the artists' group in Ettadhamen

2. The security establishment

The police are a closed social establishment with very little capacity for transparency or openness to the public. This is a product of its basic nature, or more accurately of its institutional instincts.[93] The fundamental problem is a matter of its relationship with society – the fact that it is the armed wing of the state, that it represents the power of the law as it demands the maintenance of public order. Any struggle with the police, whatever form it may take, is dealt with by the police itself and even by the government as an attack on public order and on the political and legal system.[94] In this conception, if the security forces lose their power to control disputes of this kind, the authority of the whole system will crumble.[95] The symbolic violence practised by this institution is thus connected to the practice of physical violence: as soon as it loses its capacity for symbolic violence, it may in turn lose its ability to monopolise the legitimate use of physical violence.

The police – or the hakim ("government") as they are referred to in the popular conception – are more or less the only subject on which opinion in our focus groups was unanimous. Young people think of the security forces as an institution that does not carry out its intended role (administrative services, solving problems etc). In fact, they conceive of it as a tool of extrajudicial violence, a force that metes out illegal and illegitimate violence of various kinds

93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.

to the young men of working-class neighbourhoods wherever and whenever they encounter them.

> " The police ruined my whole life within about 24 hours. I used to play rugby and I needed a passport to go abroad. I took my mum with me to amend my details. They didn't want to accept her amendments, even though we'd brought my dad's death certificate. There was a commotion, I argued with the guy, and I never got a passport. "
>
> A young man from the artists' group in Sidi Hassine

As far as our focus group participants are concerned, the police are an institution that does not carry out its duty to young citizens from working-class neighbourhoods. It does not keep them safe, it does not make them feel safe, and it does not protect them. In fact, young people usually find themselves in need of someone to protect them from the police:

> " Last week, I was just walking along and I got stopped by the police. They asked for my ID card, and I told them I'd forgotten it. They stuck me in the car and took me to the station. They beat me up and then they let me go... They told me it was so I learned my lesson and didn't forget my ID card again... "
>
> A young man from the dropout group in Ettadhamen

Why do young people universally agree that the police is the backbone of an unjust state? There are many answers. One possible answer is given by a study on young cannabis users' relationship to the police in working-class areas.[96] According to this study, the various social phenomena that the state deals with by deploying repressive violence in working-class areas have turned the police into a sort of "buffer" that absorbs the reaction to this policy and directs it away from the real agent.[97] For young people who belong to the lower-middle and lower classes in working-class neighbourhoods, the police is thus the "truncheon of the regime – indeed, it is the regime itself, in its presence everywhere through and for violence".[98] Many young football "ultras" and rappers, and young people from working-class areas in general, smoke cannabis.[99] This provides another reason or justification for their clashes with the police, who under Law 52 are the main agents tasked with arresting and cracking down on drug users. This creates a relationship of mutual loathing, something which is very clear from the songs sung by supporters at football matches or from rap lyrics.[100] The police's frequent clashes with the ultras, most of whom belong to the lower-middle or lower classes,[101] provide another example of this difficult relationship.

96 Jaballah, Soufiane. "al-Zalta fi 'Arajiniha: Riwaya Ukhra 'an al-Sulta fi Tunis", in: 'Arajin al-Ghadab: Kitabat Siyasiyya Mujaddada (Tunis: Manshurat Kalimat 'Abira, 2020), pp. 162-180.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Catusse, Myriam et Lamloum Olfa, "Coupables/Victimes. Les jeunes face aux violences institutionnelles à Douar Hicher et Ettadhamen", dans : Jeunes et violences institutionnelles. Enquêtes dix ans après la révolution tunisienne, Dirigées par Olfa Lamloum et Myriam Catusse, (Tunis, Éditions International Alert et ARAEBSQUES, 2021), p 31-32.

100 Jaballah, Soufiane. Ibid.

101 Jaballah, Soufiane. "al-Rab, al-Salafiyya al-'Ilmiyya wa'l-Ultras: Hin Tahki al-Huma al-Sha'biyya", in 'Arajin al-Ghadab: Kitabat Siyasiyya Mujaddada (Tunis: Manshurat Kalimat 'Abira, 2020), pp. 143-155.

According to our focus group participants, police violence is predominantly directed at men. Their interactions with women are less violent and they perform the role of protector more effectively (a performance which is itself violent, but less so than with young men).

> **"They might protect a few girls. But they treat guys violently... "**
> A young woman from the artists' group in Douar Hicher

This gendered violence may be attributable to a patriarchal way of thinking, deeply rooted anthropologically and inculcated through collective socialisation, which dominates all social institutions from families to schools to the police. This way of thinking treats men's bodies as tools of violence, war and domination, and women's bodies as something to be protected and fought over. We might also attribute it to an anthrocentric culture that legitimates men's dominance, which forms the basis for normalisation of violence against and between men. This is confirmed by our focus groups.

3. Religiosity and wearing hijab

To look at religion as a social institution, i.e. as a collection of norms, values and actions shared by a certain number of individuals, is to attempt sociologically to understand the existence of a relatively fixed way of creating a system recognised and followed by those individuals that belong to it and used to organise their collective lives, which makes them recognise one another.[102]

a. Religiosity

Most participants of both sexes and in all groups characterised religiosity as something that could help prevent and protect from violence. They emphasised, however, that it had to be a moderate religiosity, or else it could lead to greater risk of violence (violent radicalism, for example).

> **"Being religious can keep you on the right path, it can keep you away from violent behaviour and arguments, which definitely reduces the amount of violence... "**
> A young woman from the dropout group in Fouchana

Along the same lines, some participants argued that religiosity – in particular radical, violent religiosity – is a behaviour that, rather than protecting young people in working-class neighbourhoods from violence, actually increases the risk of it. While this conception may be found among young women as

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102 Willaime, Jean-Paul, « Pour une définition sociologique de la religion », dans : Sociologie des religions, édité par Jean-Paul Willaime, (Paris : éd Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), pp. 114-125.

well, it was primarily expressed by young men, who had been exposed to or observed violent assaults by "jihadis" in the period between 2011 and 2013, a time when they had a significant presence in working-class areas (especially in Ettadhamen and Douar Hicher).[103] These participants noted that these "religious extremists" used violence in pursuit of the Qur'anic edict to "enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong", deploying it against young men who smoked cannabis, drank or used language they considered "filthy" or "offensive". They emphasised the difference between religion and religiosity, a distinction that was not rooted in any sophisticated theoretical analysis. These participants maintained that there is a correct and an incorrect Islam, one of which protects people from violence and the other produces it. For them, religion – Islam – is a social phenomenon with an objective existence beyond individuals that is primarily a matter of religiosity (i.e. a subjective relationship with religion). For this reason, it has to be moderate, which determines the form it takes and its effects on the lives of individuals.

> **❝ Different people are different. There are some people who get religion and turn narrow-minded and violent, who like to force their ideas on others, even if that means being violent or killing…. ❞**
> A young woman from the artists' group in Douar Hicher

Sociologically, being religious changes individuals' conceptions of themselves and of others, and may change their socialisation by effecting an essential shift in the principles that produce their behaviour and self-definition. Good and evil, haram and halal, heaven and hell and a whole range of ethical constraints may become central determinants of their rational behaviour in every part of their daily lives.[104] In this way, religiosity intervenes in individuals' relationships with their bodies and with others, in their friendships and their professional, romantic and family relationships. It can take individuals away from violence, addiction and drug consumption (non-radical and non-violent religiosity, at least).

In spatial terms, we found that only in Ettadhamen, participants in all groups and of both sexes had a very positive collective perception of religiosity and its capacity to protect young people. This may be attributable to participants' individual experiences or things they had observed in their environment.[105]

b. The hijab

Does wearing the hijab protect women from violence? Participants had a range of opinions on the hijab and its ability to prevent violence, especially verbal and

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103 Alhaj Salim, Jihad. Al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya fi Tunis: al-Waqi' wa'l-Ma'alat (Tunis: Academia.edu, 2014), pp 248-307.
104 Jaballah, Soufiane, Les résonances fondamentalistes en Tunisie : Cas du Salafisme quiétiste ante et post révolution, Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences humaines de Sfax, 2021.
105 We do not have the scope within this empirically limited work to establish a significant relationship between the religiosity of the neighbourhood and of individuals. This would require a quantitative study based on a much larger sample.

sexual harassment of women. These differences in opinion were not correlated with gender, region or status (dropout or artist) or even with whether the participant themselves wore a hijab. There was no clear majority tendency among the participants: they were clearly and evenly distributed, qualitatively and quantitatively between the two poles. While one group was convinced of the hijab's ability to protect women from sexual harassment (verbal and physical), a form of violence primarily experienced by women (and rooted in gender), the other maintained that wearing a hijab was not necessarily a sign of religiosity, and that harassers do not care whether a woman wears hijab or not.

> **It reduces the level of violence. They respect girls in hijab more.**
> A young man from the artist group in Douar Hicher

> **In my experience, it reduces it a bit, especially verbal and sexual harassment.**
> A young woman (wearing hijab) from the dropout group in Douar Hicher

> **No, it doesn't protect you much. On Facebook and from stuff we hear every day… It doesn't stop anyone…**
> A young woman from the dropout group in Douar Hicher

> **They can't escape it anywhere… whether you're wearing a hijab, a miniskirt or a full niqab, you're vulnerable to violence.**
> A young men from the dropout group in Fouchana

Here we can draw out two conceptions. One imagines a harasser that changes their behaviour depending on the "harassability" of the woman in front of them (whether they wear hijab, how religious they are, their age, etc) in accordance with a cultural position that distinguishes between women it is "permissible" to harass and women who it is not. The other imagines a harasser who never changes their behaviour irrespective of the situation, whoever the victim may be, and who is uninfluenced by any conditions or cultural-religious principle.

Although there was no general consensus or hegemonic point of view, it is possible to identify a predominant conception based on a distinction between wearing hijab and being religious. While the first is simply a matter of wearing a scarf that covers the head/hair without being religious, the second changes

one's appearance, attitude and behaviour: it changes individuals on inside and out. To borrow Saba Mahmood's expression, it produces a "pious subject".[106]

Most responses with respect to religiosity's power to protect individuals from violence were positive, with a general tendency to believe that being religious is a way of preventing violence. According to our participants, the sort of religiosity that changes an individual inside and out is a moderate religiosity that protects them from violence in general and harassment in particular (i.e. sexual violence against women).

4. Confronting violence

In your neighbourhood, how do young people protect themselves from violence in various situations and places?

a. Reaction/confrontation

For our male participants, the answer was crystal clear: "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", that is, young people fight violence with violence, and use violence to deter further violence.

> **These days I don't attack anyone [first]. But when someone tries it on with me, I deal with it myself… If it's the police, there's nothing you can do… You have to wait for the chance to get your own back at the football stadium…**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Douar Hicher

Female participants confirmed that the young men of their neighbourhoods typically used violence to confront and protect themselves from violence. But when asked about their own experiences, they maintained that they neither experienced nor used violence to the same extent as young men, and instead described a strategy of avoidance (ignoring or avoiding problems), dialogue (largely in cases of verbal harassment) or seeking the help of family members or police. This is a preventative solution to the violence widespread in the masculine world of the neighbourhood (the streets, night-time, alleyways, gyms, cafes, public transport).

> **I go and complain to my family or to the police.**
> A young woman from the dropouts' group in Fouchana

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106 Mahmood, Saba, "Politique de la piété. Le féminisme à l'épreuve du renouveau islamique", trad. N. Marzouki, (Paris: La Découverte, 2009 [2005]).

5. Violence and vigour in working-class neighbourhoods

Working-class neighbourhoods constitute a cultural space produced by the state's spatial policies: socioeconomic "relegation", exclusion and marginalisation, stigma, and finally control, surveillance and punishment by the security forces. Any hostile reaction or protest on the part of individuals – whether graffiti, football hooliganism, demonstrations, violence, "deviant" behaviour, crime or selling drugs – is subjected to these disciplinary measures. In this sort of space, violence is necessary, even legitimate, if you are to stay alive. "Staying alive" here means not only avoiding being killed or subjected to serious violence but also fighting off psychological violence in the form of insults and degradation. Violence is thus used as a means of deterrence. Most participants described a world in which only the most violent survive, in which bodily autonomy, safety and respectability can only be secured by violence. Many said that you needed to be armed at all times (with a knife, an iron bar or pepper spray).

> **Some people get by on the fact that their family's well-known in the neighbourhood, or on their own strength... But a lot of people carry weapons...**
> A young woman from the dropouts' group in Fouchana

Alongside its role in self-defence or as a way of embodying the role of "deviant" (lived through various sorts of crime: theft, mugging, etc) in a precarious socioeconomic and cultural reality, violence is a behaviour that makes up for a lack of economic, cultural and social capital. It represents a kind of symbolic capital that is the product not of university degrees, family connections, a bank account or a respectable career, but rather of the physical ability to perpetrate and endure violence, in all its forms, and to cope with its consequences. Violence of this kind wins its perpetrator status, prestige and respectability which can be transformed into material gain, for example by stealing, mugging passers-by or selling drugs.

> **It's simple... Someone hits you, you hit them back. Otherwise other people will think they can hit you too.**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Douar Hicher

> **If you don't hit people, you don't argue, you don't fight back, then they'll eat you alive....**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Ettadhamen

In any hierarchy of perpetrators of violence in working-class neighbourhoods, the police will always come first. In this case, "police" means a young policeman, wearing a uniform and carrying a weapon, protected by the law (other policemen do not care what he does and will not pursue him) and granted impunity by his institution, by law and by the professional solidarity of his union. He is able to perpetrate illegitimate violence with the protection of his institution, his union and his colleagues, or through a symbolic violence that leads his victims to accept this violence as simply part of the rules of the game, or even of the law.

> **The police are the ones who are most likely to be violent… It's not unusual for policemen to insult even old men and women… They don't care.**
> A young man from the dropout group in Douar Hicher

> **There's more violence from the police more than from the citizens… You'll be hanging around on some square, and they'll come and start insulting your mum, they'll hit you, they'll tell you to get out of there. And there's a lot of guys with nothing else to do who hang around just waiting for someone to come along so they can harass them…**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Sidi Hassine

Young "deviant" men are the second biggest source of violence – young men who are experts in turning their bodies into a source of legitimate violence that competes with that of the police, but which is directed at other young people from the same neighbourhood. The status of such individuals rises and falls with their ability to recruit male friends or relatives of the same age and from the same social world, a "gang", in order to increase their chances of dominating.

> **There's the neighbourhood gangs. They got more violent when the police disappeared after the demonstrations when Ahmed Ben Ammar got killed [2021]… And then there's the police.**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Sidi Hassine

In third place, we have young men who are not "deviants", but whose physical strength, personality or charisma allow them to defend themselves and command respect (whether with or without weapons). The status of these individuals likewise rises and falls with their ability to recruit friends, relatives or other peers to serve as a deterrence mechanism and to intervene if problems occur.

Some people get by on the fact that their family's well-known in the neighbourhood, or on their own strength… But a lot of people carry weapons…
A young woman from the dropouts' group in Fouchana

> ❝ **Everyone's different... Some keep themselves to themselves and stay away from other people, stay off the streets... And others go out with an iron bar or pepper spray.**
> A young woman from the dropouts' group in Fouchana

There is a disparity between the conceptions of the two groups, but it is not based on cultural, economic or relational capital but on gender and a particular "performativity"[107] with respect to the role played by young men in working-class neighbourhoods. This performativity – which involves using physical violence, fighting ability, membership of a group capable of perpetrating violence, carrying and using weapons and building a relationship with the police – allows them to accumulate symbolic capital that protects them and makes it possible for them to live in such spaces. It is generated by an ability to spar verbally, an ability to insult others cleverly, which relies itself on the idea of "survival of the fittest". And it is supported by "morphological" capital (a strong physical frame, boldness, impulsiveness) and relational capital (membership of a group of friends, relatives or peers from the same neighbourhood who intervene to protect and support them (no matter who is in the right).

One possible explanation for the existence of these young men – violent and lacking in cultural or economic capital – can be found in the social philosophy of Axel Honneth, in his theory of recognition.[108] For Honneth, the experience of degradation in its three forms (physical violence, violation of an individual's basic rights and negative judgements of an individual's social value, the defining characteristics of young men's lives in working-class neighbourhoods in Tunisia) destroys individuals' identities, undermining the positive image they have formed of themselves in their relationships both with others and with themselves.[109]

The degradation and humiliation (or hugra, in the conception of our participants) to which the identities of young people of lower-status (in terms of economic and cultural capital) in working-class areas are exposed take three main forms. The first is physical violence, while the second involves the violation of their personal rights, and the third is a matter of the negative judgements made of their social value. From their earliest years, young people experience all three forms from parents, teachers, policemen and other citizens, whether at home, in school, in the neighbourhood, on the street, or in the city.

This experience of hugra, based on our participants' responses and on Honneth's insights, is thus a mechanism that threatens to destroy individuals' personal identities. The negative experience of these three forms produces a negative feeling that impacts on the individual subject. They lose faith in

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107 Judith Butler, Trouble dans le genre : Le féminisme et la subversion de l'identité, (Paris : Éditions La Découverte, 2005), pp.248-256
108 Axel Honneth, La lutte pour la reconnaissance, trad. fr. Pierre Rusch,(Paris : Gallimard, Folio-Essais, 2013).
109

and respect for themselves, making their individual identity destructive in itself. The identity that we are referring to here, particularly with respect to those young people who are more economically and culturally impoverished, is both destructive and destroyed. It is an identity that secures recognition of its existence by means of violence.

b. Individual experiences of dealing with violence

The experiences of violence reported by participants in our focus groups differed dramatically based on gender. The dictum repeated by the vast majority of male participants was that "we do not complain and we are not taught to complain. We sort our problems out ourselves". Female participants, on the other hand, were quite happy to complain to the police or ask their family for help.

It is thus clear that young men are socialised to believe in the rule that violence, and the ability to endure violence, are the defining characteristic of a strong, dominant man. For them, complaining to parents, teachers or policemen is a sign of weakness, a contemptible performance of the male role in working-class areas. In the same vein, men do not complain about violence. They get even (using their own body or that of a friend or relative). Otherwise, they will be "dead" symbolically – that is, they will lose their symbolic capital, the only capital they possess in this sort of environment.

> **Most people are violent to protect themselves... There are people who'd go to the police or who try and avoid problems, but they're in the minority.**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Douar Hicher

> **The only thing they can do is defend themselves with their own strength....**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Ettadhamen

> **Nobody would go [to the police]... Either you fight back yourself or you shut up...**
> A young woman from the dropouts' group in Ettadhamen

> **You have to remember something: a guy who doesn't fight back gets called weak and a coward. They don't say the same thing about girls.**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Ettadhamen

There is another side to this differentiation. Families' authority to simultaneously protect and control is limited to their female members. They defend, but also police, their daughters and sisters. The same is not true of young men, who are free of both parental oversight (negative, given the lack of freedom it involves) and protection (positive, since it reduces risk). To benefit from a family's protection, whether physically or even socioeconomically, individuals (young women) must obey the rules. To enjoy their freedom, other individuals (young men) must forgo their family's protection. This explains why young men both perpetrate and experience more violence than young women. In this social environment, families restrict young women's freedom in exchange for a certain amount of protection. At the same time, they grant young men their freedom to act without familial control, but in exchange, they refuse to intervene on their behalf. It is worth noting that so long as they still live under their parents' roof, both male and female children are subjected to the same control, to symbolic and sometimes to physical violence, with differences in its performativity according to gender.

Our conclusions here are borne out by various other studies that have investigated how a culture of violence develops among teenagers and young people, redefining and regulating their relationship with their environment. There is a culture generated by consumption of violent cultural products (violent pictures, videos, films) that can be accessed by broad swathes of society, and which gives violence a symbolic value linked to strength, prestige andintelligence.[110]

c. Group membership and learning to fight

Can joining a group, whatever it may be – a group of friends and peers from the neighbourhood, a firm of football hooligans ("ultras"), an art group, a political party, an intellectual current – help protect young people from violence? Most participants, of both sexes and from all groups, agreed that belonging to a group was not in itself enough to protect young people from violence. They cited two factors that might influence the effect of group membership on violence. The first of these was the nature of the group in question – its way of thinking, its credo, its aims, its ways of operating, how it is organised, and its relationship to state, society and the law:

> ❝Politics can make you more exposed to violence… And being in an Ultras firm means lots of trouble, means having enemies…❞
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Fouchana

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110 A future study may address this same problem by adopting an explanatory approach and a quantitative methodology alongside qualitative interviews with families and students, allowing for more precise and generalisable conclusions than we are able to arrive at within the limited framework of the current qualitative study.

The second factor cited was the nature and character of the individual – why they want to join a group, and what kind of group they join:

> **Of course it has an effect... When a group has aims and values, it puts you on the right track, it benefits you, it keeps you away from trouble... But when the group itself is violent, of course it's not going to protect you. In fact, it's the opposite: it exposes you to more danger.**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Sidi Hassine

At the same time, participants generally agreed that group membership was more likely overall to have a positive effect – that is, reducing the risk of violence and giving young people something to do in their free time:

> **Being a member of a club, distracting yourself with something – it means you're not idle, you're keeping away from [bad] company.**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Sidi Hassine

We also asked participants whether getting better at fighting or working out protected young people from violence. The majority agreed that exercise in the abstract was a positive activity that made people less violent and more self-confident. At the same time, they maintained that working out was not effective as a means of self-defence when exposed to serious violence, particularly from the biggest perpetrators of violence – the police and neighbourhood "deviants". In these cases, a combination of numbers and the kinds of violence employed (knives, truncheons) mean that even a strong body is incapable of defending itself in the majority of cases (unless supported by friends or relatives, for example):

> **Being ripped doesn't always protect you. They take you by surprise or they gang up on you – what can you do? You might feel like you're stronger than normal...**
> A young man from the dropouts' group in Ettadhamen

The young people of working-class districts thus accept these sporting practices, especially strength exercises and bodybuilding, either as a means of deterrence, to scare off potential attackers, or as cultural practices that form a part of a consumerist and exhibitionist masculinity (to attract women, for example).

However, most young people in these neighbourhoods neither "go deviant", commit crimes, or migrate illegally, even after dropping out, despite living in a violent environment. Why? Because environment does not have absolute power over individuals. It is their relationship with that environment that leads

them down their different trajectories. In the fourth chapter below, we will look at one such type of relationship, a relationship that attempts to change reality by interacting with it in a different way: artistic practices.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Ministry of Education

Physical and mental health and social provision:

- Recruiting mental health and social counsellors for secondary schools
- Creating a clinic

• Ministries: Education, Public Works and Housing

Infrastructure and school facilities:

- Providing school transport
- Building a bus stop/school canteen in Douar Hicher
- Repairing classrooms, buildings, gates, windows in schools
- Replacing chairs, tables and sports equipment in schools
- Improving lighting in schools
- Keeping toilets clean in all educational facilities

• Cultural:

- Need to provide a revision room, cultural and science clubs, and organise cultural, scientific and sporting activities

• Pedagogical and pastoral:

- Regular communication with parents and provision for those with learning difficulties

• Recommendations and proposed solutions to reduce the dropout rate

Having looked closely at the Ministry of Education's 2016–2020 Strategic Plan, we believe that the best recommendation we can possibly make is that this plan be implemented properly, rather than remaining a dead letter.

In what follows, we will set out the most significant measures proposed in the Plan that we believe would have a positive effect, however limited, on the dropout rate. First, with respect to reintegration of dropouts from training institutions, the measures that should be taken are as follows:

– Putting in place a regularly updated database of dropouts available to the General Directorate for Information Technology, the General Directorate for Research and Planning, the General Directorate for Primary Education and the General Directorate for Middle and Secondary Education.

– Immediate intervention to reintegrate dropouts, particularly those under the age of 16, in cooperation with the General Directorate for Primary Education, the General Directorate for Middle and Secondary Education, the Regional Commissariats for Education and bodies responsible for social affairs.

– Dealing comprehensively with the reasons for dropout on a case by case basis (poverty, family problems, educational problems), using a network-based approach, through: intervention to settle domestic issues; providing support to the families of dropouts in financial need; addressing behavioural issues incompatible with coexistence in an educational establishment; and providing public transport, school meals, dormitories and extra lessons. This is the task of the General Directorate for Primary Education, the General Directorate for Middle and Secondary Education, the Regional Commissariats for Education, local governments, schools, all relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies, and the general public.

– Focusing on catch-up education. The Plan emphasises the creation of flexible educational pathways for reintegration (trial models already exist under some Regional Commissariats) with the supervision of the Ministry of Education and in partnership with all relevant bodies involved in intervention in the program. This plan concerns the General Directorate for Primary Education, the General Directorate for Middle and Secondary Education, the General Directorate for Legal Affairs and Litigation, the General Directorate for Pedagogical Inspection, the Regional Commissariats, local governments, schools, all relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies, and the general public.

– Creating a multidisciplinary team to operate cohesively in institutions involved with reintegration (psychologists, specialist educators, social counsellors, speech and language therapists, public health doctors). This plan involves the General Directorate for Primary Education, the General Directorate for Middle and Secondary Education, the General Directorate for Legal Affairs and Litigation, the General Directorate for Pedagogical Inspection, the Regional Commissariats, local governments, schools, all relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies, and the general public.

With regard to solutions, we believe that the best solution is to operate outside the traditional bureaucratic framework in which dropout is addressed by a network of disconnected institutions subject to complex procedural constraints. Instead, we think that it would be best to create an independent organisation bringing together experience from all the relevant bodies, allowing

it to centralise its operations. It should enjoy the full range of competencies and appropriate financial resources, allowing it to focus exclusively on the issue of dropout.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE VIOLENCE:

> State research centres and civil society organisations with a research interest

• Developing an academic understanding of the relationship between violence and spatial "relegation", not merely as a problem that must be solved politically, but as a range of social factors generated by state policy – something that is produced by, rather than producing, this reality.

• Developing qualitative and quantitative research, in particular sociological and anthropological research, in order to better understand the role of the police in Tunisia.

• If we consider violence to be a particular relationship with reality, a violent solution to the problem of living in an economically, politically and socially violent reality, then the institutional response should not be limited to confrontation and deterrence via policing. We should move towards a preventive approach based on the two institutions of the family and the school.

> Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture and civil society organisations

• Working with the institutions responsible for raising children – primarily school, families, Culture and Youth Centres, sports teams and civil society organisations – to create a new model of upbringing that tackles, mentally and culturally, the problem of violence among young people.

> Ministry of the Interior

• If the state is unable to improve the socioeconomic and spatial conditions under which young people live, it should at least try and avoid making it worse by adopting a repressive approach based on policing. It should try to change young people's relationship with these conditions from a relationship of discord and hostility to one of positive and pragmatic interaction, making use of all possible means, whether community-oriented, political, media, cultural, artistic or sport-related.

FROM ALTERNATIVE ART TO ART AS AN ALTERNATIVE: VIOLENCE, ART AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WORKING-CLASS AREAS

FROM ALTERNATIVE ART TO ART AS AN ALTERNATIVE: VIOLENCE, ART AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WORKING-CLASS AREAS

How do young people from working-class areas become artists? Why do they choose art, rather than other sociocultural or professional refuges, available in the particular post-revolutionary political, economic and social context after 2011, and especially in working-class neighbourhoods?

We posed this question to young artists, both professional and otherwise, of both sexes, in focus groups carried out in all four of the neighbourhoods targeted by this study (Fouchana, Sidi Hassine, Ettadhamen, Douar Hicher). The answers have formed the basis of our attempts to understand how artistic activity can help change their relationships with the cultural and socioeconomic reality of working-class districts.

I. The sociological features of young people who are active artistically in working-class areas in Tunisia: Who are they?

Who are the young artists active in working-class areas? What are the features that distinguish these individuals and their relationship with a pre-existing social reality – a reality that they cannot change but which, unlike others, they have tried to change their relationship with.

1. General profile of participating artists

Our focus group study included a total of 30 young men and women (9 from Fouchana, 6 from Douar Hicher, 7 from Ettadhamen, 8 from Sidi Hassane). The general profile of the participants was similar in all four areas, even in specifics.[111] Our participants, of both sexes, were mostly from middle class or lower middle class families (children of junior civil servants, private sector labourers, small shopkeepers, taxi drivers) with an average of five members. Similarly, their parents all had a broadly middling educational level. Their own educational and cultural attainment ranged from secondary school (baccalauréat holders) through to those with a degree or who had completed professional training.

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111 See the introduction to this study, which sets out the methodology adopted in this study and provides a description of the study population.

Types of artistic activity that artists took part in

If we divide up our participants by the types of artistic activity that they take part in, we find that theatre is the most common for both sexes, followed by photography and graffiti. Rap is very common in Fouchana, Douar Hicher and Sidi Hassine, while in Ettadhamen, street art (especially graffiti and painting) was more dominant. Many participants were also artistically active in the football sphere; a majority of young participants in Ettadhamen reporting that they were members of an ultras group, and these young people use graffiti to support their teams beyond the bounds of the football ground, a practice known by fans as tifo or dakhla.[112]

Below is a table showing the different types of art practised by our focus group participants across the four areas:

Cinema	Theatre	Playing musical instruments
2 Repetition	14 Repetition	1 Repetition
Scriptwriting	Rap	Animation
1 Repetition	3 Repetition	1 Repetition
Graffiti	Photography	Broadcasting
8 Repetition	2 Repetition	1 Repetition
Fashion design	Video creation	Music (ultras group)
1 Repetition	4 Repetition	4 Repetition
Traditional carpentry and carving	Dance	Painting/drawing
1 Repetition	3 Repetition	3 Repetition

112 Membership of supporters' groups was much more common in Ettadhamen.

Becoming an artist: a collective portrait

Social reality is not an insurmountable force that controls individuals' actions without them having any say in the matter. At the same time, individuals can never be entirely liberated from the influence of social structure, able to freely choose their behaviour simply by giving meaning to their actions or having the will to change their reality. An individual is the product of the interplay of the subjective and the objective, the individual and the collective, the micro and the macro. Their ability to act is determined by their ability to produce a different relationship with the world more than their ability to change the world itself or produce actions unrelated to reality. It is on this basis that we must attempt to understand how young people living in working-class neighbourhoods become artists, the meaning they give to this process, and how they characterise this change in their lives.

The testimony of our participants, of both sexes, suggests that participating in artistic activity relies on the presence of an objectivised and internalised cultural capital comprising, primarily, knowledge and skills.[113] This cultural capital underpinning artistic capacity is accumulated at the classical first moment of socialisation, within the family. However, only some of our participants had such cultural capital. For example, one young man in Douar Hicher told us:

Dad works at weddings, he used to always take me with him. So I fell in love with music. Also, he had a photography studio that closed down when I was a kid, about 7 or 8. When they closed it, they dumped all the cameras at home, and I'd play with them all day long, taking photos… I started rapping when I was 14. My uncle got me into it, he used to play a lot of rap when I was a kid.

But this artistic capacity really developed through time spent in official cultural institutions as a child (public libraries, school theatre/singing/instrumental/ drama/art clubs in primary schools, etc). This means that the presence of state institutions was a factor shared by almost all participants in all four neighbourhoods. Participants from Fouchana, for example, were largely graduates of the local Youth Centre in the neighbourhood:

I started going to the Youth Centre in Mohamedia, and then I went to the one in Fouchana.

When I was six, I started going to the Youth Centre in Fouchana.

I started off with the Youth Centre clubs in Fouchana.

We do scriptwriting and painting classes at the Youth Centre in Fouchana.

Nursery schools also played a role in developing an artistic consciousness in young people in Douar Hicher. Some of the female artists who participated in

113 Pierre, Bourdieu, Les trois états du capital culturel, Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, n°30, (1979).

our focus group told us that:

I started dancing when I was four years old, at nursery school.

I started when I was eight or nine years old, at nursery.

Schools were also significant in developing young people's artistic interests, with school clubs directing their emerging energies and helping to develop them. As some young women from Fouchana told us:

I had no interest in drama. Then one time when I was passing by, the drama teacher called me in and asked me if I wanted to have a go at being in a play. I liked the story and I liked the role.

I started at middle school. I did dance and drama together.

These individuals thus developed a skill and an interest in practising culture as an activity and as a hobby. These experiences helped to create an artistic character in them that ultimately developed, during adolescence and the transition to adulthood (secondary and university education), into mature experience.

II. Artists, working-class neighbourhoods and revolution: alternative art as an alternative form of expression

Young people in what literature, media and even sociologists refer to as the neighbourhoods of the "margin" have adopted a whole range of artistic forms of expression, particularly during and since the events of 2011. This political and social datum revealed, in its origins and its general form, the presence of a rich cultural creativity among young people, which underwent a veritable explosion during this period of sociocultural turmoil. The decision to turn to art, if we are to "objectify" it and look for it beyond the realm of the purely subjective, can only be understood within the context of the "unprecedented explosion" that the Tunisian moment produced.

With the collapse of the "securitisation" regime that had long smothered all forms of political or regime-critical art (or even socially "engaged" art) and all forms of collective political or artistic action in the public sphere, a revolutionary agora was brought into being.[114] This agora provided a whole range of spaces for self-expression and for exercise of the right to free speech in public space. As such, our participants said that what had first made them turn towards art in particular was a desire to "bring about change by taking over public space" (graffiti, street music, street theatre, parkour). This desire was generated by the revolutionary impulse that this generation of young people grew up with, most of whom were still only children when Mohamed Bouazizi killed himself on 17 December 2010. They quickly embraced a revolutionary framing of reality shot through with revolutionary vocabulary (freedom, justice, the right

114 Balzacq, Thierry, « Théories de la sécuritisation, 1989-2018. » Études internationales, volume 49, numéro 1, (2018) : p. 7–24.

to protest) whose echoes are visible in the artistic vernacular they adopt.[115] In their representations and conceptions and the ways they make art, there is a clear political and critical spirit. The dominant narrative in the social time in which they were raised, became teenagers and moved into adulthood was a revolutionary one which presented art as a tool of protest that allowed artists to take over public space in their neighbourhoods and in the city more broadly. Young artists had the freedom, the resources and the opportunities to show their talents without limits or restrictions – as well as a market for what they produced. As a result, the revolutionary context, and public space as it was then, provided a space for socialisation into a particular kind of art: alternative art.

At the same time, at the intersection of the micro (individual nature, leanings, personality) and the macro (the revolutionary context and the cultural, sociopolitical and economic reality) – that is, the so-called "meso" level – we find that it is individuals' relationships with their reality, which arise and develop within the framework of the individuals, organisations and institutions available to act as mediators,[116] that allow us to understand how some young people from working-class neighbourhoods become artists while others do not. Meetings are crucial. Our participants' responses showed that people chose art over alternatives as a result of influences from their social environment. Art was directly or indirectly present in their daily lives. In some cases, a close family member was the bridge into the world of art. One participant had an uncle who was a carpenter, for example, who encouraged his nephew's interest in the trade and directed him towards professional training in traditional carpentry; as a result, the boy discovered his talent for drawing, and ultimately moved into digital art and animation.

According to a purely artistic conception, our participants felt that the artistic process could only be understood as a form of rebellion and barrier-breaking, a desire for self-discovery, an attempt, by adopting particular personal conceptions, opinions and positions, to assert themselves, to find meaning in their own existence, or to leave some evidence that they had once "passed through here" (i.e. their neighbourhood), while bringing about change and establishing an alternative, in particular by creating a means of expression in order to resist. In this sense, artistic activity is a form of resistance of all that is dominant, present, repeated, traditional, a way of creating a space for action beyond official frameworks, beyond the restrictions that power of the majority imposes on cultural practices, beyond its values, norms and laws. Our participants were able to frame reality at particular points in their lives by getting to know friends, schoolmates, neighbourhood peers or people on social media. These individuals helped them adopt a conception of art as an alternative relationship with reality or as alternative art to produce an alternative

115 Jaballah, Soufiane. "al-Hamalat al-Shababiyya fi Tunis: Hamlat Fash Nistannaw Namudhajan", in: Sosiyolojiya al-Ihtijaj wa'l-Tanazzum (Tunis: al-Shabaka al-Badila li'l-Shabab, 2018), pp. 33-63.
116 Fillieule, Olivier, « Carrière militante », Olivier Fillieule éd., Dictionnaire des mouvements sociaux, (Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 2009), pp. 85-94.

reality and make it a possible representation.[117] The particular political, cultural, economic and social context does not inevitably (mechanically, causally) make someone an artist. Nor does having a particular personality, an interest in art and the intellectual capacity to engage necessarily mean that they will become an artist. The two levels must intersect through possible meetings with individuals, groups or social institutions that are artistically active in a material or digital reality. This is what makes individuals capable of changing their relationships with reality in a way that accords with the complex formation of subjective, objective and relational factors.[118]

1. Artistic activity and representations of reality

A methodological look at the focus group results shows us that the type and nature of artistic activity pursued had an effect on our artists' perceptions of art, reality and their relationship with it. Those who practised street art (graffiti, street music), for example, were the most likely to use and to experience violence in all its forms. The space in which they practice their art – public space, whether in the neighbourhood specifically or across the city as a whole – is a violent space for particular groups under particular circumstances and is an incubator for all kinds of violence (physical, sexual, economic) because it embodies various other kinds of violence (in particular state violence).

> **Places where you get a lot of gatherings: stadiums, public transport, post offices, offices...**
> A young man from the artists' group in Sidi Hassine

The "street artists" are more aggressive and often sharper in their reactions than other participants; their voices are louder, their lifestyles and way of thinking, and even their ideas about art, do not comply with the mores of society. They are more liberated with respect to personal freedoms, and they see themselves as free, not obeying any authority no matter its nature.

> **I solve my problems myself... Violence is the only solution...**
> A young graffiti artist from the focus group in Fouchana

Those who pursue their art in closed, private spaces (drama, drawing, dance, singing, playing instruments) are more restrained, more capable of controlling their reactions and absorbing violence directed towards them. The reason for this is that they are less exposed to violence in its various forms since they are

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117 Jaballah, Soufiane. "al-Siyaq al-Thawri, al-Shari' wa'l-Fi'l al-Jama'i fi Tunis: Tashakkul Mu'aqqad li-Taghyirat Siyiasiyya Min Khilal I'adat Isti'ab li-Adawat Ihtijaj Ghayr Qawmiyya" (Beirut: Ma'had al-Asfari li'l-Mujtama' al-Madani wa'l-Muwatana, 2020).
118 Fillieule, Olivier, op, cit., 85-94.

active in spaces off the street, the space in a working-class neighbourhood where entrepreneurs of violence are most present (the police and "deviant" youth from the neighbourhood itself).

> **"Yeah, [art] made me control my reactions and my anger better... I use it to vent all the negative energy and the violent feelings... "**
> A young woman from the focus group in Douar Hicher who practises dance and drama

2. Art in confrontation with the world

Looking at the individual conceptions of each young artist in our focus groups, we find that all of them have their own subjective motives that have made them pursue art as a way of expressing their objective reality and their relationship with this reality. There is a common thread in all these conceptions, however, to the point that they overlap almost perfectly. All of them hope to produce through art a narrative opposed to the policy of hogra, aimed at the "withoutness" of the working-class neighbourhood and its inhabitants.[119] The policy that the government adopts towards them is one of degrading "relegation". As such, they have in common a desire to entrench their own particular discourse, the discourse of the artists of the margin, the discourse of "I".

This discourse of "I" appears in artistic work through a way of producing that freely reflects the inclinations and sociocultural dimensions of that self, in accordance with a subjective vision and an individual understanding of everything that has to do with feelings, desires and demands, in order to ultimately produce an artistic work that resembles it and provides an echo of what they feel, the concerns and problems that they suffer from – without it necessarily having a semiotic dimension that is formally engaged with political or economic causes. Although this commitment may also take shape within the ideology of an individual artist, it remains within the subjective, separated from the other. It is ultimately that individual self that they have formed through an artistic vision, which in turn has formed that self. It likewise appears through some practitioners of rap, which rappers use to express their feelings, positions, and ideas. As one participant from Douar Hicher put it, "I'm the sort of person who doesn't talk to people about my problems... I keep everything bottled up, but then I let it out through writing... When I start writing, I pour out all the stuff that's been stored up, and I feel better." Another rapper from Ettadhamen likewise commented that "I pour out all my anxiety through [rap]".

For young people who drew graffiti on the walls of their own neighbourhoods or elsewhere, graffiti was considered a means of self-expression. One artist in Sidi Hassine made this quite clear when commenting on his relationship with

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119 Hogra is a Tunisian term common in the vocabulary of the lower-middle and poor classes in particular. It expresses a feeling of being humiliated and degraded, whether as state policy or an individual behaviour.

his art: "it's something you can use to express your opinion and get out all the bad and the good you've got inside you".

The discourse of "us", meanwhile, can be understood through the artistic means of production and its content – messages intended to attract the attention of young people in working-class areas to their causes, both as an artistic project and object of artistic production and as a bearer and vehicle of this production, which expresses the difficulties in their lives or the lives of young citizens on the margins who have been excluded by the government from its official programmes.

Young people involved in drama adopt this discourse, using the stage to discuss a range of major social issues. In this context, one participant in Sidi Hassine told us that "we've done a play about terrorism at its height, we've done a play about rape, and another about racial discrimination".

Identification with "our" issues, with the group, appears in particular in participants' membership of Ultras firms, whose message in the football stands expresses the socioeconomic problems, issues and concerns of young people and the public. Young members of Ultras firms have long expressed this position. It appears in the attacks on the government that we see in their artwork, their songs and their poems. They consider the government the main cause of their concerns and problems, whether in the stadium or beyond it. This puts these young people in a state of constant conflict with the police, especially in football stadiums. One participant from Ettadhamen told us that "the police have stopped us from doing our tifos loads of times, or made us change a word or two". Referring to the discrimination that they face because of their spatial affiliations (that is, being from working-class neighbourhoods), he adds that "in stadiums, the police look at your face, they look at your place of residence on your ID card, and you get different treatment… [they don't treat] someone from Ettadhamen the same as someone from El Nacer."

This young citizen, constantly concerned that his life is about to take a turn for the worse because of an intersection of many factors – economic, social, political – represents the masses, besieged by the demands of a market economy that have made his material and social situation more precarious. Their critical artistic discourse is thus an attempt to reduce social differences within cultural and artistic space.

It is possible to understand this discourse that our participants have adopted, characterised by a sense that "we are the artists committed to changing reality", through the lens of class. While members of the bourgeois stratum have opportunities to exhibit their art in specially prepared spaces logistically equipped to welcome other members of their class, young people from the margins insist on their right to create such spaces that preserve their right

to action and to cultural-artistic production using any means available to them, their right to become an active and visible part of the artistic field, recognised by other actors in this field. It is also a search for social visibility, not simply a struggle for rights. It might even be considered a struggle for the right to be – they themselves, their culture, their art – visible,[120] as agents practising art in their own way, their own style, in order to strengthen forms of cultural expression appropriate to their own lived experience, which is at odds with the ideas and policies of the government. They work to circumvent the government, which does not provide them with the space, equipment or support that they need and which they believe treats them with contempt and rejection. In response to these degrading policies, these young artists adopt a message of protest against the lack of formal cultural institutions, against the policy of exclusion, rooted in discrimination, which is pursued against them in working-class areas and in a social space "relegated" by the central state. The discourse they promote is a discourse of "I" or "us", in the sense that in all their cultural representations, they produce a discourse that expresses the general, and in particular the collective and official lack of recognition of their existence as citizens and artists.

3. Art and change: the relationship of young people to reality

The young artists from Fouchana, Sidi Hassine, Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen who we spoke to all consider any kind of artistic activity to be the production of a space in which they can struggle against the reality of marginalisation that they suffer from. In their conception, it is an opportunity to release the negative energy they experience, a source of relief and a way to build their self-confidence. Some of these young people connected the details of their lives with the art they practised. Others saw art as a vehicle for social mobility that might allow artists to achieve financial and material security or a better standard of living. Art can also be a way to get famous or to appear in the media. In reality, artistic activity represents a space for social self-assertion by acquiring internalised cultural capital (the ability to write, sing, dance, draw) that can be transformed into material, relational or symbolic capital that will give them respectability, attractiveness and social status. For example, some of our participants had at one point decided to give up their art but were unable to maintain this break and returned to it after a while. This shows that art, for them, is a lifestyle, a daily life practice they are unable to do without or change.

The forms of artistic practice that our participants practice range from the individual (especially writing, such as scriptwriting or rap) to the collective (especially forms of artistic expression that involve a whole group of young people: drama, music, choral singing). The production of art is divided into two stages. The first stage, inspiration, requires isolation, time spent alone, individual effort. The second stage, execution – the final stage of artistic

120 Tardy, Jean-Noël, « Visibilité, invisibilité. Voir, faire voir, dissimuler », Hypothèses, vol. 10, no. 1, (2007) : pp. 15-24.

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production – involves exhibiting the art, the time and place of the exhibition. As a result, it requires working in a group.

The artistic activity that they engage in allows them to express themselves and to discuss all the issues that they are not normally allowed to talk about, for a range of reasons, including religious and moral ones. For them, art is a matter of free expression of the problems that young people experience. It "frees the tongue from all restrictions" and allows them to say the unsaid, for example by talking about poverty, terrorism, rape and racial discrimination.

Our participants felt that at the moment of its birth and production, art casts off its purely aesthetic or artistic quality, taking on the form of protest art. It is a form of artistic expression and act that reflects and depicts the eloquence of the marginalised, the angry, those who protest against reality and the policy of the regime, or as they call it, the "system" – particularly when this artistic expression, as a tool of discourse about lived social reality, captures their language, their concerns, their problems, and corresponds directly and clearly with the popular demands they adopt. Protest art thus represents to them the ability to express themselves, to manifest their anger, their social dissatisfaction and their frustration with the reality of inequality, marginalisation, social class discrimination in which they live. What they hope to achieve with art, meanwhile, is for it to be a tool to achieve change in this political reality and a means of venting and renewing protest energy.

At the same time, they maintain that as long as art does not appeal to the humanity of a person (the opposite of the discourse that the state has attempted to reinforce in its propaganda materials, through an artistic conception that sees citizens as subordinate to and controlled by it), does not reflect the essence of their existential reality or their value in the material world, and does not give meaning to their dignity, freedom and self-worth, then it becomes clumsy and hollow, with no social function except to entertain and to dilute important and fundamental issues.

> **❝ Art is basically freedom… When it loses its freedom, it loses its value, like we were in the days of Ben Ali. ❞**
> A young man from the artists' group in Fouchana

> **❝ Art is a kind of resistance. There were rappers under Ben Ali who talked about oppression and poverty, they even made fun of Leila Ben Ali… Now as well, rap and graffiti is resistance. ❞**
> A young man from the artists' group in Fouchana

When art reinforces a grim social reality, primarily serving the interests of the dominant political system and its cultural policy that creates for itself a cultural and artistic fig leaf that allows it to push its own discourse, ideas and dogmas through and achieve its own goals, it makes it less effective, and transforms it into tired commercialised nonsense.

At the same time, the big problem, the major obstacle preventing young people from producing art in the way that they want in order to achieve the goals that they have for their artistic careers, is the lack of financial support. Artists in working-class areas suffer from a serious lack of support, whether formal support from the state through youth and cultural institutions or private support from civil society organisations that work in the cultural and artistic spheres. Although some have been provided with support by the Ministry of Culture, this support is neither material nor logistic, and the Ministry has no plan in this respect. According to some participants in our focus groups, on the rare occasions that the Ministry of Culture has provided support, it has been made conditional on the art in question complying with its general cultural policy.

a. Art and working-class neighbourhoods: reality and the relationship with reality

The artists we interviewed in the four neighbourhoods generally agree that working-class neighbourhoods could become a space free of youth violence if some basic conditions were met, including the creation of a state cultural and artistic policy that would support these creative young people by providing logistical support in the form of the various means of artistic production. This is to say that working-class neighbourhoods in the conception of these young people are a popular incubator for artists, and could be a source of support for those who become artists thanks to the principle of solidarity. Some young people from these areas help their artist friends at times when they really need cooperation and solidarity.

According to our participants, families – within the social role that they play in working-class neighbourhoods – try to protect their artist members violence, except in a few exceptional cases in which the family is fragmented or homeless. This familial role takes the form of protecting young people from the violence meted out to them outside the family space, i.e. within the working-class area, by raising them to reject violence and by providing moral support when they are exposed to violence (making a police report, paying for a lawyer or medical treatment), especially in the case of young women. Children and their families have developed a strong relationship of trust which makes violence or experiences of violence the subject of open family discussion. The family, according to our focus group participants, provides a safe space under all but exceptional circumstances.

With respect to the question of how art can change young people's view of reality, most participants said that they were the victims of social, economic and political breakdown produced by a state policy that reduces them to unemployment statistics, to consumers, not producers. They are treated as if they do not contribute to the economy of the country, as if they are all terrorists-in-waiting. In official discourse, they represent nothing but a demographic burden on the state. As a result, they try to use art to change this perspective, this prejudice against them, to prove that they are active subjects in society who are trying to create an aesthetic-artistic alternative with alternative sociocultural messages, that they work through art to improve their social status, which they feel is worse than what they deserve.

These young people's art has contributed greatly to changing their view of reality. They believe that they are only able to change reality if they first work on changing themselves. Artistic activity thus teaches them the values of taking responsibility and willingness to change. It shows them that they must act on their own behalf rather than waiting for the state to do something for them – they are excluded from its visions and have no place in its development plans. Art has helped them to build an awareness of how precarious their position is within an already precarious economic, social and spatial reality. It has helped them be heard outside their own neighbourhoods, in state institutions and in other parts of society, in all forms of media and in international organisations and NGOs. It has allowed them to show publicly that they exist as cultural actors with a vision and a programme built on ideas that aim to achieve peaceful change, reject violence, and create a health space for coexistence.

b. Artists and violence

Young artists believe that art represents a space for getting out negative energy, for developing their ability to master the violent energies inside them and turn them into artistic representations – a means of artistic production. In their conception, art is evidence of culture. A cultured person, in their view, is a sensible person, with the ability to control their reactions. Doing drama, for example, has proven very effective in developing many young people's character, giving them a greater ability to control their emotions. But belonging to an artistic group does not necessarily help to protect them from violence. Many of them have experienced assaults, particularly those who belong to singing groups, because public space is not, in the general imagination, a space for practising art (unlike a choral concert at a church or an orchestral event at a concert hall).

> **When we did the People's University [event] in Sidi Hassine, at first people were welcoming, they were happy. But sometimes people had a problem accepting the art stuff. One time, for example, we put on a film for kids. This group of religious guys turned up, and who could have guessed! They wanted to stop the film from being shown...**
> A young woman from the artists' group in Sidi Hassine

Street theatre is one of the types of art that most commonly involves artists in physical or verbal violence, whether using it themselves or experiencing it. One performance in El-Hraïria, for example, degenerated into violence (physical violence) when a member of the audience attacked the actors, despite the fact that the play was intended to inform the public about their rights in the event of an encounter with the police.

Young people from working-class areas, not only the artists among them, face police violence in stadiums, meted out against the backdrop of the placards they put up on the stands (dakhla, as they are called by football fans). These placards are works of art that football fans use to send messages, whether sociopolitical or purely sport-related, to which the Interior Ministry and the police have long protested and violently reacted.

Families can also sometimes be a space in which violence is meted out to young artistic members. At times, this physical and verbal violence can even involve parents kicking their children out of the home in order to force them to give up their art. Young women are the most at risk in this respect, especially if they are involved in drama. Mothers are generally more accepting than fathers with respect to their children's artistic pursuits.

Family violence, rooted in rejection of children's artistic expression, is the form of direct, physical violence that artists in working-class neighbourhoods are most likely to be exposed to. Many have been assaulted and the tools and devices they use to make their art broken. Some of them have also been kicked out of their homes in order to force them to give up on their cultural and artistic activities, on the pretext that they are interfering with their academic future and that they distract from school. The prevailing conception of art as a career is that it "doesn't give you bread to eat" (maywakkilsh khubz).

c. Art and gender

In working-class areas, gender can determine parents' willingness to accept their children's artistic pursuits. As the first and direct audience of young people's artistic production, they appreciate and welcome art from young men, but are less likely to accept it from young women. Young women are more likely to be subject to verbal violence, and even physical violence, of all kinds. They are also subjected to sexual violence and are more vulnerable to blackmail because they are women.

The first pretext for violence against female artists is their external appearance, in particular what they are wearing. This is rooted in a deep sociocultural tradition that devalues women as social actors.

Male artists whose performance of masculinity does not correspond with the prevailing ideas in working-class areas can also be subjected to bullying and verbal and physical violence. Female artists, meanwhile, are criticised for every aspect of their behaviour (smoking, going out at night, travelling from state to state, wearing short skirts, working in clubs or coffee shops), as though being

an artist justifies generally hostile treatment on the grounds that they have broken a sociocultural norm prevalent in their social environment.

> **"Yeah, girls get more violence… Verbal and symbolic violence. For example, people will tell you it would have been better to stay at home and wash the dishes. Or they'll say wouldn't it have been better for you to read some Qur'an… And when you do an exhibition wearing a short dress, they talk about you, they focus on what you're wearing, not on the harassment…"**
> A young woman from the artists' group in Fouchana

Violence against female artists, that is, motivated by gender, can occur as much within the artistic space (members, colleagues) as outside it. Entering the world of rap, for example – a purely masculine space monopolised by male rappers – is considered an attack on the historical gender norms that regulate this artistic field. It is thus rejected and can be prevented by violence.

> **"For example, in the domain of rap, girls get harassed, because they're entering a men's space wanting to assert themselves… Like it or not, rap is a masculine world. Even in the west, you don't get many female rappers. And even when they do appear, they never stick around for long… Even in drama, they criticise girls and say worse things about them than they do about male actors."**
> A young man from the artists' group in Douar Hicher

Violence may also come from female artists' social environment, in particular the family environment. Families make all sorts of attempts to prevent their female children pursuing art, some of which involve physical or psychological violence. In this context, male artists may also face violence if they attempt to enter an artistic sphere otherwise restricted to women – dance, for example – which is seen as reducing their masculinity. They may be described in terms that reduce their position in the hierarchy of masculinity and thus increase their risk of violence, such as raqqas – an offensive and feminine term for a dancer:

> **"There's more violence from guys most of the time… In dance, both get violence. When a guy dances, they take the piss out of him, they treat him as if he's not a man, they call him a raqqas… It's not as bad in drama."**
> A young man from the artists' group in Douar Hicher

The type of artistic activity also plays a role in determining the sort of violence that young people experience. Young women face more violence than young men, particularly sexual violence, when the art form they have chosen is masculine (rap, graffiti) or street-based (street theatre, street music), i.e. in open spaces. But young men are more likely to experience violence if their chosen art form is practised in a stadium. They are more at risk from police violence than young women, since this is a sphere that remains restricted to men.

Reactions to violence also vary. Young men's reactions are more violent and intense than those of young women, particularly in the case of verbal violence in the street or public space.

> **If you don't fight violence with violence, they make you look weak, you don't get any respect, and then you'll get more violence... If someone attacks you and you don't fight back, someone else will see you and think that he'll have a go, too.**
> A young man from the artists' group in Sidi Hassine

Young women, meanwhile, are calmer in their responses to verbal violence. They generally confront it with complete silence. The inherited social mindset that prevails in working-class areas plays its part in determining the nature and the intensity of the reaction in both cases. While this mentality does not accept young men staying silent in the face of violence, seeing their silence as evidence of a lack of masculinity, young women are not expected to respond at all, and their silence is considered praiseworthy.

> **I think that most of the time the limit for girls is verbal violence or a little tussle with hairpulling and slapping... Their kind of violence isn't as harmful as guys' is.**
> A young woman from the artists' group in Douar Hicher

III. Art as the opposite of violence: belonging, freedom of expression and solidarity

If we compare the profile of a violent young person who belongs to the lower-middle or poor classes, has dropped out of school, is unemployed, lives in a working-class neighbourhood and is involved in no social activities with that of a non-violent young person who, despite belonging to the same class and living in the same neighbourhood, has completed secondary education or is at university and is active in art, we find that there two interrelated factors have made the first violent and the second less so. The first factor is not dropping out of school, while the second is art. Where a young person is continuing their education, enjoys a stable social and legal status, belongs to a tightknit group in which relations are based on mutual recognition, and enjoys all the intellectual and cultural benefits of artistic activity, they are able to control their behaviour and avoid both using and experiencing violence. Young people who experience social "disaffiliation", as Robert Castel describes it[121] – a double disaffiliation, both relational (lack of family support, leaving school) and economic (poverty and unemployment) – are more vulnerable than others to falling into the vicious circle of violence, the only way they have of remaining visible in the space of the working-class neighbourhood.

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121 Castel, Robert, Les métamorphoses de la question sociale, (Paris : Gallimard, 1995).

An individual only becomes capable of opening up to themselves, understanding themselves and knowing what they want and need by building social relationships that in turn produce emotional and psychological balance that form the basis of a relationship of positive mutual recognition between the two parties.[122] For young artists, membership of an art group guaranteed the presence of emotional ties based on friendship, shared interests and camaraderie, and a common vision of reality and the relationship with reality, which produced in turn a mutual vision of themselves as artists. Openness to others and building bridges with others is a basic component in identity formation for young artists in working-class areas, operating through relationships with other subjects that respect them and recognise their existence and their value.

> **I've worked with groups and generally it's an experience that gives you strength, it strengthens your love of art...**
> A young man from the artists' group in Douar Hicher

> **In a group you feel more at ease...**
> A young man from the artists' group in Fouchana

In the course of our conversations, we touched on the meaning of the state putting in place a policy of spatial "relegation" and producing an unjust distribution of wealth, the inability to participate in creating the "popular will" and the lack of protection from state oppression. For both dropouts and artists, the norm is to not enjoy your individual and collective rights, and freedom of expression is the exception, as a right won by the majority after the fall of the Ben Ali regime (constitutionally and legally but not necessarily in practice in reality). This right to self-expression in the public sphere gives young artists, especially in working-class neighbourhoods, the ability to make others aware of their existence, thereby securing recognition.

> **It means I can express myself whenever I want...**
> A young man from the artists' group in Fouchana

> **Art is basically freedom... When it loses its freedom, it loses its value, like we were in the days of Ben Ali.**
> A young man from the artists' group in Fouchana

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122 See Axel Honneth's research on self and recognition cited above.

> **❝It's something you can escape to... it's like a hand reaching out and pulling you out of all the bad stuff... I'm the sort of person who doesn't talk to people about my problems... I keep everything bottled up, but then I let it out through writing... When I start writing, I pour out all the stuff that's been stored up, and I feel better. ❞**
> A young man from the artists' group in Douar Hicher

By being a member of an art group, young artists can also develop a sort of solidarity which at its most basic takes the form of mutual support and recognition, a resonance in ways of thinking and living among a group made up of different selves.

My friend helps me when I'm about to drop [record] a new track, you know... There's moral support from the guys in your neighbourhood, you know, we're all with you.
A young man from the artists' group in Sidi Hassine

Anyone from a poor background who has dropped out of school, is unemployed and lives in a working-class neighbourhood experiences hogra, and this experience can make the most peaceful individual into a violent self if they do not find some sort of solidarity allowing them to join a non-violent group of friends active in a particular sphere. We noticed that those belonging to art groups had benefited from cultural solidarity between those active in art to leave violence behind them, despite the economically, culturally and socially unjust reality of the "relegated" and excluded class space in which they live. This is what Norbert Elias calls violence against the self – metaphorical and positive violence through which the self constrains its impulses and reactions and controls its mechanical responses to stimuli encouraging violence. These young artists practise violence against a violence that seeks to slip out of their control by undergoing a secondary socialisation, a socialisation into art, which reconstitutes their social nature. The objective reality, which exercises political, economic, social and cultural violence against the majority of young people in working-class neighbourhoods, has not changed. But the relationship of some young people with this reality has changed. While this change does not radically or instantly change reality, it does change radically and gradually change their relationship with reality, in particular their understanding of their own position within this reality.[123] Seeing the situation in which you live as unjust and impossible to change justifies taking violent revenge against it. This is not the case for a vision that sees the situation as unjust but maintains that individuals must seek to change it by means that benefit them and do not hurt them or others.

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123 William Isaac Thomas et Florian Znaniecki, Le paysan polonais en Europe et en Amérique. Récit de vie d'un migrant (Chicago 1919)[Traduction de Yves Gaudillat. Préface de Pierre Tripier], « Une sociologie pragmatique », (Paris : 1998, Nathan, coll. « Essais et recherches).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made by participants in our focus groups (in Sidi Hassine, Ettadhamen, Fouchana and Douar Hicher) for protecting people from violence can be summarised as follows:

• Greater media coverage and political interest in young artists in working-class areas, where there is a great creative artistic energy but a real lack of financial support.

• More artistic programmes for working-class neighbourhoods.

• Providing financial support.

• Working to change cultural attitudes that reject art, meaning it is more broadly accepted.

• More space in the media to talk about art in working-class areas. Not only discussing it in the context of national disasters.

• Turning the abandoned changing rooms at the Sidi Hassine Middle School into a cultural space.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Dropping out is tied, on the one hand, to a family's socioeconomic status and to the socialisation of the individual in neighbourhood, and, on the other, to their cultural and educational resources. There is no necessary and causal connection between violence and dropout. Instead, violence is linked to the age at which an individual drops out of school and what they do afterwards. The link is clearer for those who fail at school but continue their education. In this case, dropping out may be one of the factors that cuts off the transformation into a violent person, rather than the other way around.

School, just like the family, has lost its ability to open social doors for individuals, especially teenagers from lower-middle or lower class families who have the least cultural and economic capital. With the state now unable to turn these young people into integrated citizens, other institutions, such as the police, have chosen to deal with the problem (lawbreaking or failure to comply with social norms) by creating another problem (violence), opting for repression as its final solution.

Even if a rule allows for exceptions, it is still a rule. Art, if an individual is still in education or has dropped out relatively late (at the baccalauréat or thereafter), and has received primary socialisation that encourages cultural and artistic activity, it may be a solution to change their disharmonious relationship with a reality of exclusion and precarity into a more positive relationship in which an individual seeks to improve their circumstances and those of their social environment as a whole.

We set these three conclusions out here not only by way of a conclusion, but as the final point of an attempt to establish a new object of research in the sociology of the margin and the associated phenomena, a different solution to the problem of violence and dropout for young people in working-class areas in Tunisia, presenting these answers to questions that are being asked for the first time ever.

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