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Marriage Culture in Tunisia: Post-Independence to Post-Revolution Shifts

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Abstract
The Personal Status Code became law in Tunisia in 1956, revolutionizing gender law and relationships. This law, development programs and nationalization pushed by President Habib Bourguiba, and modernization and globalization significantly altered the state of Tunisian marriage and gender relationships. Prior to the Personal Status Code, the basis of marriage in Tunisia was the preservation of family relationships, status, and finances. Throughout the last half century, it has evolved from a family-based endeavor to a partnership between two people, as the individual has simultaneously replaced the family and tribe as the main actor in society. These changes are reflected prominently in the marriages of women which have taken place in the last three generations. This paper focuses on the experiences of three generations of women in the Hidri-Khelifa family—Kheira, the oldest generation, her daughter Radhia, and her granddaughter, Maryam. Their generational experiences and opinions on all aspects of marriage—weddings, divorces, family planning, ideals in a partner, education, among others—are telling of the generational gaps which persist in Tunisian society. Kheira’s traditional and conservative values espouse her generation’s beliefs about the necessity of gender roles; Maryam reflects modern beliefs and actions; Radhia is somewhere in the middle, with modern ideals while the practicalities of her life reflect more traditional understandings of gender relationships within marriage. Their experiences reflect upon the nature of the changes in Tunisian society since independence and are telling of the Tunisian woman’s experience throughout that same time period.
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Mom, Dad, and Nellie—I am eternally grateful for your support of my passions. I’m away from home for long stretches at a time pursuing some occasionally crazy dreams but I will always be thankful for your everlasting love and support.
Introduction

As I conducted my interviews for this research project, I asked Kheira Hidri, one of my primary research subjects, if she had anything additional to add before we concluded the interview. She asked if I am married, and I responded that no, at the age of 20, I consider myself to be too young for that. She looked at me and solemnly wished that I would “soon be married to a good man,” adding that “20 is a good age for marriage and to have children.” Kheira’s perceptions of appropriate marriage reflect upon the experiences of her time, born into an era before extensive women’s rights and modernization in Tunisia.

Throughout three generations Tunisia has undergone significant sociopolitical changes encompassing many aspects of modernity. With Independence in 1956 came new laws, notably the body of legislation which is the Personal Status Code, encouraging and demanding gender equality. In addition, the fledgling Tunisian government’s emphasis of development and nationalism contributed to the new attitudes which many Tunisians exhibited towards gender relationships. Many of these changes are espoused by the women of the Hidri-Khelifa family, the prominent research subjects of this paper, a family based in the suburbs to the west of Tunis, and the shifts in their ideologies regarding marriage and family relationships throughout generations. Kheira, as a member of this family’s oldest generation, represents traditional ideals and practices within her life and marriage. Her daughter Radhia espouses a mix of modern and traditional ideals but the practicalities and realities of her life mean that she finds those modern ideals somewhat in jeopardy. Her experiences within society and marriage often include traditional gender roles while she expresses modern ideologies about marriage and relationships. Maryam both exhibits significant modern ideals and sees them practically throughout her day-to-day life and within her marriage. Generational gaps exist among the Hidri-Khelifa women based on educational experience,
rising social class, and ideologies. The experiences, ideologies, and anecdotes of these three women through marriage exemplify the social changes which have taken place in a modernizing, globalizing Tunisia since Independence.

A growing shift towards modernity in Tunisia has contributed to an increasing change in gender roles. Marriage patterns no longer reflect family needs but rather the needs and desires of the individual and a changing relationship between the individual and society. Changing social and political atmospheres in Tunisia are closely related to patterns, trends, and opinions of marriage on a generational level, and those generational gaps are also telling about general social history of Tunisia. Marriage, as a basic tenet of the human experience, mirrors other elements of social history and thus is a telling picture of the situation of the Tunisian social experience throughout time. This paper’s exploration of the parallel narratives of family history and national social history intends to illuminate the trends of society towards a more modernized, educated, and independent community.

Chapter 1 of this paper will cover the historical background of marriage patterns in Tunisia leading up to the time of Independence. It will discuss the Ottoman and French periods in which patrilineal family connections and endogamous marriage were common. In addition, it will explore the beginnings of changing gender roles with the writings of Tahar Al-Haddad.

Chapter 2 will look at the political and social aspects of marriage in Tunisia, especially focusing on the changes made by Habib Bourguiba and the Personal Status Code. It will also explore social movements such as the Jasmine Revolution and wide-spread social changes such as family planning, divorce, and rising education levels, and will look throughout each of these threads at the Hidri-Khelifa women’s opinions and histories.
Chapter 3 will delve into the family unit of the Hidri-Khelifa women, focusing on their shifting perceptions of how they should interact with one another and with their spouses. It will explore spousal selection, weddings, and post-marriage extended family relationships.

Methodology and Limitations

As the purpose of this paper was to explore the relationship between individual family history and social history on a broader scale, the primary research method I employed for this paper was through in-person interviews conducted on November 13, 2015 near Tunis. For the purposes of this research monograph, in-person interviews were conducted with three generations of the Hidri-Khelifa family of the Tunis, Tunisia area. Primarily consulted were Kheira Hidri, her daughter Radhia Hidri-Khelifa, and her daughter Maryam Khelifa. Also interviewed was Ghaada Khelifa, the younger sister of Maryam. Consent to use names and quotes was obtained verbally on a recording by myself, and extensive typed notes were taken at the time of the interview, also by myself. Interviews were conducted in English and Modern Standard Arabic. One prominent limitation to this project was my language skills, which are unfortunately limited to Modern Standard Arabic and English, eliminating the opportunity to gain nuance from words spoken to me during interviews in French and especially in Tounsi. Of note is that Maryam Khelifa assisted in translation from Tunisian Arabic to English or to Modern Standard Arabic. Potentially this causes bias in that all translations from interviews of Radhia and Kheira were translated by another interviewee, though she was the only person capable of providing such translation at the time.

In addition, secondary research was conducted through the Donald B. Watt SIT Library and the Kenyon College Library and Information Services. The Center for Maghreb Studies in Tunis (CEMAT) was a planned resource for this project but was unfortunately not open when I went to visit. In addition, following the November 24, 2015 terrorist attack on
downtown Tunis, we were advised to avoid the area and thus I was unable to visit CEMAT before the deadline for this independent study project.

Other potential biases in the writing of this paper are personal biases, as I recognize that my own perspective places me as an outsider with only 3 months of experience living in a Tunisian family at the time of writing. In addition, I recognize that my own understanding of the functionality of a family is through the lens of my own family experience. I also recognize that my academic perspectives have been shaped through my past studies of history, modernization, and globalization. As such, to the best of my ability I have been aware of those biases as I wrote this paper.

**Chapter 1: Historical Background**

A main tenet of traditional Tunisian society was the extent of the role which the extended family played in a person’s life. Extremely often, endogamous marriage ensured continuing familial connections. Certain families maintained continuous control over power at local, regional, and national levels through a system of marrying their daughters for political connections. This practice extended from the most powerful Ottoman rulers and promulgated the majority of Tunisian households, leading to vast family networks at all levels of society. French colonizers, who came from their own patriarchal lineages, maintained and extended the patrilineal influences which were prominent on Tunisian society. Extended family networks organized along male lines controlled significant amounts of power until changes were made after independence in 1956.

Family politics were important in Tunisia from the time of the Ottomans, when the concept of the royal family was especially prominent, both in Turkey and more locally among the beys, the extended branches of Turkish rule in Tunisia. Murad Bey, who founded
the Tunisian branch of the Ottoman dynasty and ruled from 1613 until his death in 1631, used a series of marriage alliances to cement his place within Tunisian society and ensure legitimacy despite his status as a former slave from Corsica and a convert to Islam.\footnote{Amy AisenKallander, *Women, Gender, and the Palace Households in Ottoman Tunisia.* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2013), 39.} Muradite power came to an end in 1702, when Ibrahim al-Sharif took power, but Sharif recognized that the best method to ensure peace and to legitimize his rule was through the preservation of marriage ties. As such, he married Mabruka, the daughter of a prominent Tunisian *shaykh* who had also been the wife of the two previous beys.\footnote{Ibid., 40.} Marriage alliances became the bedrock of Ottoman legitimacy in Tunisia. Because Ottoman power was centralized so far away in Anatolia, it was essential for the beys to have established local power backing them up. The *shaykh’s* willingness, for example, to marry his daughter to the beys legitimized their power, and the new dynasty of al-Sharif rode on that same perceived legitimacy by marrying the same woman who had her roots in local religious and Muradite power. In addition, these marriage alliances were economic deals for the beys—women would have owned and inherited property, including “agricultural estates; farms growing olives, grapes, and figs; and residential and commercial properties, including coffee houses, a mill, and a bakery.”\footnote{Ibid., 41.}

Women could therefore be used to transfer goods and properties to their husbands and were as such served as bartering tools for their fathers. Tunisian Ottoman society also politicized divorce, which was used to sever political relationships with fathers-in-law. When ‘Ali Pasha had an argument with his father-in-law, he faked a dispute with his wife, Hafisa, and sent her home to her father’s (his uncle’s) house. As such, that family tie was severed.\footnote{Ibid., 45.} High-status women were proxies for family disputes and their marriages were primarily political and economic in nature.

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The nature of patrilineal rule and patriarchal power evolved further with the beginning of French rule. French colonialism in Tunisia began in about 1881 in the form of a protectorate as the bey cut off his relationship with the Ottomans and began to serve the French. The French came into Tunisia with their own theoretical ideas about patrilineal rule of society, which heightened the power of men within Tunisian society to levels which had previously not existed. The French protectorate portrayed itself as a paternalistic father figure which contained family to the private sphere and even feminized local male political figures. As such, women were doubly subjected by French policies. The French also cut off daughters who had been born through a matrilineal line from the colonial payroll as members of the bey’s family, delegitimizing women’s roles within the government of the protectorate. Another aspect of French colonialism was the continuation of a policy of viewing the state as a familial entity, an idea which was strongly pushed by the beys, especially Ali Bey. French politics within the Tunisian state primarily recognized patrilineal lines and played into the previously existing patriarchal aspects of ruling society.

Marriage also acted as a political tool in ensuring the legitimization of family lines outside of those involved in centralized political power. In provincial areas family ties were particularly important during the several hundred years leading up to independence, especially if those specific families had religious prominence. In the village of SidiAmeur in the Sahel, descendants of the Sufi Saint SidiAmeur had access to more resources than other villagers through the habus, or the “land and property endowed to saints and their religious lodges.” Through their wealth from these resources and by legitimizing themselves through their ancestry to a saint, SidiAmeur’s descendants also increased their political power. A

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5 Kallander, Women, Gender, and the Palace Households in Ottoman Tunisia, 171.
6 Ibid., 168.
7 Ibid., 169.
system of endogamous marriage formed in which descendants of saints would only intermarry with people of similar stature and wealth, and therefore a ruling class descended from holy people formed.\textsuperscript{9} Endogamous marriage ensured the longevity of social class structures.

Before independence from Ottoman and French rule several systems of family dynamics existed in Tunisia which affected a broader tract of society, including those without significant wealth or political power. One such system was classic patriarchy, which is roughly described as the system in which young brides are on the “bottom rung of the gender-age hierarchy, subordinated to both men and older women, primarily their mothers-in-law” and then increase their status within the household by increasing the number of men in the family—through production of sons, they gain status and eventually rule over their own daughters-in-law.\textsuperscript{10} Although many women lived in such a system at some point in their lives, classic patriarchy often was challenged by daughters-in-law and therefore cannot be found applicable to all situations.\textsuperscript{11} In general, however, the principles of the ruling families were applicable to all Tunisians—marriage enabled the cementing of social ties and helped to meet the needs of the family as a whole; people being married often had very little say in choosing their partners:

“The traditional Tunisian family was socially "central" in so far as the greater part of social dynamics were centered on it. Objectively, the major articulations of society were the lineages. The state was formed by one of these lineages, and the group tended to be organized like a family. For the individual, the family was the group to which he owed his life, his identity, and his social legitimacy; it was the outlet for his needs and the mediator, if not the sphere of application, of his values. On the symbolic level, it appeared as the most pregnant model of social relationships; "patriarchalism" thus became a form of social relations going far beyond the domestic institutions from which it derived its name. In this way, when the individual

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 69.
considered the world outside his domestic group, everything referred him back to the family and to his family.”

Before independence, Tunisian society relied broadly on the concept of the family and the tenets of tribalism and classism, to the point in which even governing bodies were organized as such. After independence the massive changes which took place in the restructuring and functionality of marriage were incredibly significant in that they changed the political system on the local and national level as well as significant aspects of social life in Tunisia. Tunisia’s shift from traditional to modern can be viewed through a theoretical lens as well as a practical one. Modernization theory, which was based on the assumption of certain conceptual beliefs such as the idea that tradition evolves into female-inclusive modernity, emerged in the 1950’s as a prominent school of thought. This doctrine included the idea that “modernization would be emancipatory for women as industrialization, technology and modern values would undermine the patriarchy of traditional society giving women increased access to economic resources.” Traditional societies worldwide tend to be “if not strictly patriarchal, at least vigorously male dominated” and “…[contrast] the world of family, mother, and household with the modern world of markets, technology, and science.” Before independence, Tunisia was strongly entrenched in a traditional sphere in which classic patriarchy ruled lives and kept women to a domestic sphere.

Changes to society came slowly before independence, but voices to alter gender roles and existing marriage norms did exist. In 1930, Tahar al-Haddad published a book called Our Women in Sharia and Society, which focused on the need to alter family and personal law,

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15 Quoted by Scott, Gender and Development, 26.
16 Scott, Gender and Development, 32.
rejecting the veil, seclusion of women, and polygyny. Although his book ultimately made him a pariah in his society at his time, he strongly influenced later reforms in family and gender law. Al-Haddad’s book had two primary focuses, to criticize the traditional Islamic legislative *fiqh* rulings, which he saw as frequently unnecessarily opposed to women, and to elevate the social status of women within all aspects of their daily lives, including the abolition of polygamy and legal freedoms akin to those of men, including equal inheritance. He saw the Qur’an’s allotment of higher amounts of inheritance to men as a sign of its time and believed that the spirit of the Qur’an would give equal inheritance to all. Despite vast criticism for his beliefs on women’s equality, Al-Haddad’s work would later be used in a significant way in the drafting of gender equality legislation.

The end of colonialism left Tunisia, as well as other North African states, as a series of fragmented groups stuck together without significant commonalities between them. The prominence of tribalism in Tunisia had not been lessened by colonial rule and thus the inheritors of Tunisian political rule had to learn how to manage a splintered country. Clifford Geertz writes of “primordial attachments,” which draw from the “givens of social existence,” which include “immediate contiguity and kin connection.” These connections, still prominent in Tunisia in 1956, encouraged new president Habib Bourguiba’s efforts to make changes in Tunisian society on a basic level. In addition, new Tunisia faced the problem that industrialization had taken place already, and thus her new government had to encourage a plan of development in tandem with forming a new state and government.

19 Charrad, *States and Women’s Rights*, 17.
the sort of national unity and development which he desired, Bourguiba determined a need to alter society in a more cohesive and nationalistic matter. As such, Tunisia was unique among countries in the Maghreb in that the new government refused to allow the contributions of existing tribal structures to state-building.²² In part, this was because they ran counter to Bourguiba’s plan for development; but also importantly, tribes and religious establishments had primarily supported Bourguiba’s opponent, Ben Youssef, in the fight for power around the time of independence and as such were disenfranchised by the new state.²³

Forces of classic patriarchy, tribalism, and endogamous marriage were prominent in the time before Independence. It would take Habib Bourguiba’s efforts, combined with forces of modernity and shifting social tides, to change the status of women from economic and social currency for their families to independent actors.

Chapter 2: Personal Status Code and Legal Gender Relations

When asked whether they would consider themselves to be conservative or modern, Kheira stated that she considers herself to be conservative, and Radhia and Maryam described themselves as modern.²⁴ Shifts from traditional Tunisian society to a new modernity accompanied the new independent state in a significant way. The new nation of Tunisia, led initially by Bourguiba, had to determine how it would interact with its citizens and the kind of citizenry it wanted to promote. For Bourguiba, unity and development were especially important. In addition to state-run initiatives to develop and modernize, society progressed in a distinctly Tunisian way, developing from a mold of a traditional Tunisian community to a modern one. This modern community, and its microcosm in the family is progressive in its own way, distinct of ideas of progressiveness in Europe and the United States but rather in

²²Ibid., 201.
²³Ibid., 210.
²⁴Kheira Hidri, Radhia Khelifa, Maryam Khelifa, interviews by author, Tunis, November 13, 2015.
the context of a Tunisian past. This new modernity also brought with it significant changes in the relationship between the individual and society, shifting from the focal point being the family structure to a new focal point of the individual. Within the context of marriage, this emphasis transitioned towards the married couple as the nucleus of the relationship from the extended family. Kheira, Radhia, and Maryam represent the social change which was initiated by the Tunisian state and which was prominent in shaping alterations in Tunisian society and are clear examples of changes toward the prominence of the individuals.

One particularly prominent method in which Bourguiba attempted—and succeeded, to a broad extent—in changing society to suit his goals of development and unity was through the Personal Status Code, a series of legal codes intended to abolish polygamy, give equal rights to women and men in the case of divorce, prevent forced marriage of minors, change the legal age of marriage, allow Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men, change inheritance laws to protect the rights of women, give mothers and fathers equal guardian rights, and provide for education for boys and girls. Overall, this law intended to heighten women’s rights in Tunisia, but also Bourguiba saw that it had other possible benefits towards his national program of development. The introduction of the Personal Status Code in 1956 was, for Bourguiba, a way to unite a country which was stratified based on tribal and class-based ties.

Another such way in which Bourguiba promoted the limitation of marriage based on tribe was through discouraging marriage from within the same village. According to Nadia Abu Zahra, he personally encouraged people from wealthier and more influential villages to marry people from their less enfranchised neighbors in order to break down tribal and family ties.

allegiances and therefore to encourage the implementation of his end goal—an identity based entirely on being Tunisian and not based on tribalism.\textsuperscript{26} He said in a speech that:

I heard that, in some villages, people find it distasteful to conclude marriage alliances between villages. This would be the case, for example, between KalaaKebira and KalaaSeghira, Raf-Raf, Msaken. People in these villages, convinced of their own superiority, would see it as condescending to marry someone from a neighboring village… in Monastir, someone does not give his daughter in marriage to…a man from Boudher or Kenius…I urge fathers and mothers to avoid as much possible marriages among people of the same blood…These marriages, which are made with the greedy objective of preserving the patrimony of the kin group from strangers, produce in the long run children who are deformed and retarded. It is necessary to revive the line by marrying outsiders.\textsuperscript{27}

Bourguiba’s words here were likely intended to result in a fear reaction, through which he encouraged his ultimate goal—to eliminate tribal and family ties of marriage. Essentially the Personal Status Code broke down the aforementioned systems of endogamous marriage in which certain people were excluded from political and social power because of their lack of familial connections. It is often written that Bourguiba’s intention in creating the Personal Status Code was to emancipate women, but it appears that that was not his only desire. His ability to control identity through encouraging intermarriage between clans and classes was profound. It is notable that Bourguiba passed the Personal Status Code in 1956—a full three years before the adoption of the Constitution in 1959. Bourguiba’s desire for a unified nationalistic country is emphasized by his early push for the Personal Status Code.\textsuperscript{28}

Encouraging intermarriage between tribes and classes for Bourguiba was a particularly potent way to enhance his ideologies.

In particular, the Personal Status Code’s inclusion of a clause requiring consent encouraged this practice of intermarriage—family heads no longer had the right to force their daughters into politically based marriages—and the inclusions of clauses supporting women’s

\textsuperscript{26} Abu Zahra, “Tunisian Personal Status Code,” 42.
\textsuperscript{27} Charrad, \textit{States and Women’s Rights}, 221.
\textsuperscript{28} Abu Zahra, “Tunisian Personal Status Code,” 42.
rights to divorce at their will and abolishing polygyny.\textsuperscript{29} The Personal Status Code made illegal the practice of accusing a bride of not being a virgin on her wedding night; therefore ensuring her fundamental human rights.\textsuperscript{30} Sons also benefitted from this change in the Personal Status Code; often they had been pushed into marriages with their cousins and now also had the opportunity to reject marriage matches as proposed by their parents.\textsuperscript{31} Personal autonomy as it related to selection of marriage partners was particularly important for Bourguiba, who stated in a speech that:

\begin{quote}
It is inadmissible, I am sorry to say, that parents constrain their son to marry a young woman chosen for their own convenience. We have in this respect strange practices. There are the young women who have been “promised” to a young man for a long time, there are female cousins, the female relatives with various degrees of kinship closeness, a whole series of young women to marry off…Let’s leave the decision to those that the marriage concerns first: the husband and wife to be.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Bourguiba’s emphasis on the importance of personal choice—and his ability to sway people to recognize this—were significantly important in the context of societal change. Although it may be that Bourguiba and his government felt that they had to make changes pushing against the will of the people, the fact that people acquiesced so quickly to new systems of women’s rights and marriage law shows that society had, in fact, progressed since the time of Tahar Al-Haddad, in which he was ostracized from society. Although Bourguiba used force in some cases to implement his new laws, the fact of the matter is that he was able to make certain changes relatively quickly. One such example of this is that the Zaytuna, Tunisia’s center of religious learning, was willing to begrudgingly accept the validity of the

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., 42-43. 
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 49. 
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 48. 
\textsuperscript{32}Charrad, \textit{States and Women’s Rights}, 221.
Personal Status Code despite their strong rejection of Al-Haddad’s work only a quarter century earlier in 1930.33

The feminist aspects of the Personal Status Code can, in a way, be considered to be a part of a de-genderization of Tunisian society. A feminist-led theory of modernity and development, Gender and Development (GAD), is described as follows:

A more detailed examination of the roots of women’s subordination was done through the analysis of the global working of capitalism in combination with patriarchy. Processes linking different parts of the global economy like migration and tourism were examined in gendered terms (Mies, 1986). Analysis at different levels were used requiring an examination of the role played by the sexual division of labor and the links between the spheres of production and reproduction in the subordinate of women (Edholm et al, 1977). In the Third World context, concept of reproduction and domestic labor were observed to take on particular meaning: household is often a productive as well as reproductive unit and peasant households and poor households in urban areas are often producing for subsistence and the market. Greater emphasis was placed on the household, the role of gender relations within it and the link between the household as an economic unit and the global economy.34

Gender and Development theory provides a view of modernity from the lens of women who work externally from the home and therefore no longer views the home or workplace as an inherently gendered space. The Personal Status Code can be seen as a method of degendering society; Bourguiba’s recognition of the necessity of women in the development of the country rewrote the traditional patrilineal narratives and included women in national dialogues and laws. In that sense, the household and women’s experiences became a legitimized sector of Tunisian society on a broad level for the first time.

Despite Bourguiba’s portrayal of himself as the liberator of women—he’s self-designed mausoleum doors proclaim that he was the “the great builder of the new Tunis and the freer of women”35—he was still following to some extent in the footsteps of the Ottomans.
and French in their paternalistic views of marriage and women. His decision to implement feminism was undoubtedly an authoritarian one, and there was no significant women’s movement backing up his decision. One can note with some irony that women had no role in providing for themselves these new freedoms provided by the Personal Status Code.

A particularly important aspect of the Personal Status Code was the introduction of equal divorce. Kheira has a negative view of divorce, and believes that after marriage couples should work through any crises together and find solutions to carry on within the relationship. Radhia sees divorce as a solution, and believes that if the couple is not compatible, divorce is an option. However, she also noted that women in society may face problems of being judged by society, although in her eyes men do not have the same experience after divorce. Radhia differs here from her mother in that she believes that divorce is acceptable in cases of compatibility, but also differs from Maryam, who says that she does not “conceive marriage without love,” and therefore that when there is no love there should be divorce, including if there are children in the relationship. This differs from Radhia’s beliefs about the acceptability of divorce in that Maryam considers that love is the most important part of a marriage, whereas Radhia focuses primarily on compatibility and the eyes of society. Maryam therefore views divorce, as well as marriage, as much more of an experience between two people while Radhia sees the relationship between the couple and society as important. The relationship between the individual and society has changed throughout time, with Maryam’s beliefs evolving from those of her mother and grandmother towards a greater emphasis on individuality.

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36 Kheira Hidri, interview with author, Tunis, November 13, 2015.
37 Radhia Khelifa, interview with author, Tunis, November 13, 2015.
38 Maryam Khelifa, interview with author, Tunis, November 13, 2015.
Another element of Bourguiba-era development came in the form of emphasis on family planning in Tunisia to encourage population control. His development plans centered around the idea of having a limited number of citizens in order to prevent social issues such as lack of healthcare and higher education levels. This population control came through the emphasis of birth control, the legalization of abortion, and other such tactics, and in part contributed to changes in values, norms, and attitudes, including gender and equality concepts.\(^{39}\) Along with Bourguiba’s development plan, increasing modernity also contributed to desires on the behalf of young people to have smaller families.\(^{40}\) Because of these two factors, since the time of Independence, birth control has been widely and increasingly available to Tunisian women. In Tunisia in 1991, 50% of married women used some form of family planning; 21.9% of those had an IUD and 11.5% used oral contraceptives.\(^{41}\) In particular, these figures have been rising since 1978, when the percentage of women who had access to family planning was only 31%; in 2011 it was 62%; in 2015, after the Revolution, it was estimated that 95% of women had access to some form of birth control.\(^{42}\) Results of a 1995 study showed that, as levels of education rose, the number of children born to a woman decreased.\(^{43}\) However, on a certain level, women with all levels of education had access to birth control. All of the Hidri-Khelifa women have used birth control for family planning purposes—Kheira used an IUD and then changed to pills, Radhia uses an IUD, and Maryam uses pills.\(^{44}\) Tunisia in fact is one of the few developing countries in the world where uses of

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\(^{39}\)Hafedh Chekir, “Youth at the Center of Social Change—A New Paradigm,” Lecture, SIT Study Abroad Tunisia, SidiBousaid, Tunisia, October 5, 2015.

\(^{40}\) Camilleri, “Modernity and the Family in Tunisia,” 592.

\(^{41}\) K. Esseghairi; PR. Hinde; JW. McDonald; S. Meddeb, “IUD and pill use dynamics in Tunisia and Morocco.” Presented at the Demographic and Health Surveys World Conference, Washington, D.C., August 5-7, 1991 [28], Abstract.


\(^{44}\)Kheira Hidri, Radhia Khelifa, Maryam Khelifa, interviews, November 13, 2015.

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contraceptives among less-educated women match the rates of use among their more-educated counterparts.\textsuperscript{45}

Another commonly cited aspect of Bourguiba and Ben Ali-era development is the increasingly secular nature of the country. Although Tunisia is undeniably a Muslim country where to this day a moderate Islamist party, Ennahdha, is able to hold a fairly significant portion of the parliament, “most Tunisians feel that their country has achieved what few Arab/Muslim countries have managed to do, namely to create a genuine, authentic modernity that is not a copy of the Occident.”\textsuperscript{46} In fact, many Tunisian Muslims do not see that Islam is at odds with modernity. However, Tunisia as a country itself is primarily secular, and many people choose to practice religion in private rather than in public or official spaces. This has manifested through state actions and through people’s personal choices about their marital institutions. The state often would hold greater control over the conservative than the modern; its intended banning of the hijab from public spaces, which it viewed as inherently traditional, is a prime example of this. Banning the hijab was a symbolic statement taken by the Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Bourguiba’s successor as president) regimes to state that women are modernized and therefore unoppressed.\textsuperscript{47} Only after the Revolution was the hijab allowed back into the public sphere. This aspect of the government’s image of itself—as an inherently modernizing institution—long played into its narratives of secularization and development. In addition, after Bourguiba, people began to view aspects of their personal lives which connected with the state as inherently civil rather than being religion. The growing secularization of Tunisia transitioned from political rhetoric to the way in which people viewed themselves in relation to the state and religion. This secularization is

\textsuperscript{46} Doris Gray, “Tunisia after the Uprising: Islamist and Secular Quests for Women’s Rights,” \textit{Mediterranean Politics} 17, no. 3(2012), 301.
evidenced by the Hidri-Khelifa women’s views on the nature of their marriage. While Kheira’s marriage was religious, Radhia and Maryam had marriages which were entirely civil and did not involve a mosque.48 After the Revolution, both Islamist and secularist groups have emphasized the need to help disadvantaged women to become self-sufficient within their communities.49 As such, there has been an opening of feminist rhetoric to allow Islamist groups to take a seat at the table of feminist organizing. Still, many women view their marriages as civil and not religious.

Another element introduced by the Personal Status Code is equal education. Throughout the years, views of the importance of education have remained roughly the same, though the reasoning behind the necessity has changed along with the actual amount of education which Tunisian women have had. The Hidri-Khelifa women are a prime example of the modifications of women’s education throughout the years. Kheira, who has no education, Radhia, who completed twelfth grade, and Maryam, who is one year from finishing a Ph.D. in Design at Tunisia’s prestigious Manouba University, represent the upward educational mobility of many Tunisian families of their times. Kheira spoke about education in marriage as being important for financial stability, as “the woman and man must finish their education to help each other because life is difficult now…the women must help. In the past the man used to work alone but now it is not financially possible.”50 Maryam’s views differ significantly from Kheira’s, showing a generational gap in beliefs of why education is important. “For me, it’s important to have the same level of education. To have the same ambitions and the same thoughts—to have some harmony in the couple.”51 Maryam’s belief that equality of education is important for equitable marriage is similar to

48Kheira Hidri, Radhia Khelifa, Maryam Khelifa, interviews, November 13, 2015.
50Kheira Hidri, interview, November 13, 2015.
51Maryam Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
her beliefs in the requirement of emotional stability and support as a role of marriage—
harmony is important in marriage for her, and educational harmony is no exception. This
counters her grandmother’s beliefs that education is beneficial for the purposes of financial
gain.

A particularly interesting aspect of the Personal Status Code is its effect on women
based particularly on their educational levels. Mounira Charrad’s interview with Ahmed
Mestiri, the Minister of Justice in 1956, shows the Bourguiba administration’s attitude toward
the Personal Status Code. He stated that “the law was in advance of the society.”52 That being
said, women experienced—and continue to experience—the Personal Status Code in very
different manners based on their levels of education. Radhia and Maryam, both of whom had
experienced fairly significant levels of education, praised the Personal Status Code. Radhia
noted that it has been a source of emancipation for women, encouraging them to participate in
society, to work, and to live their lives freely.53 Maryam described it as “our pride because
the wife has the same rights as the husband; she can even divorce him and that doesn’t exist
in some Arab countries.”54 Her sister Ghaada called it emancipatory.55 However, Kheira was
not familiar with or aware of the Personal Status Code, even after Maryam explained its
tenets for her.56 The Personal Status Code, while technically affecting all Tunisian women, is
not practically accessible by all of them. If women do not know their rights, they cannot
assert them in the face of any discrimination which befalls them. Kheira, who was born in
1939, was 17 years old and recently married at the time the Personal Status Code was
adopted as Tunisian law and therefore should have been the target demographic of the law.

Kheira’s inability to assert her legal rights completely due to her lack of knowledge of those

52 Charrad, States and Women’s Rights, 220.
53 Radhia Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
54 Maryam Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
56 Kheira Hidri, interview, November 13, 2015.
most basic rights points to the idea that, despite Bourguiba’s claims that women were emancipated after the adoption, the Personal Status Code related only to a certain set of elite women. Lack of knowledge of rights easily leads to a violation of those rights. If Kheira, a woman who has lived in Tunisia for all of her life, from the time of independence to the time post-revolution, and yet does not know the details or even of the existence of the law, it is evident that the workings of the law primarily affect more educated women. For those women aware of the law, like Maryam, Ghaada, and Radhia, it is the pride of Tunisia. But this pride does not extend broadly to all women.

Laws such as the Personal Status Code accompanied modernity and the social changes which complement it—the creation of new social classes, including business and professional groups. Part of this manifested in a desire behalf the part of young people to make their own decisions regarding their marriages—as Tunisians modernized, so too they began to want to experience liberty in their daily lives. As Sarah Grosso points out, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the law has impact on society. Women born into this new society after the Personal Status Code’s implementation experienced significant changes from the lives of their mothers and daughters. These changes included educational, intellectual, ideological, environmental, and economic factors. Women with higher rates of education also got married at later ages—this was accompanied by rising levels of education in general. In Tunisia in 1975 11% of marriages involved women ages 15-19 but by 2011 it was only 1%. Women were delaying marriage and therefore devoting more time to engaging with society in different ways under Bourguiba’s new development plan. A distinctly Tunisian form of

modernization was taking place in which certain traditional values remained but gained certain autonomies and freedoms.

In 1969, anthropologist Barbara Larson observed in the Tunisian village of al-Qarya, in western Tunisia near the Algerian border, that “formal organizations of national government…have been implanted in the village and perform the bulk of al-Qarya’s administrative and service functions” but that in general the extended family unit was the most basic and functional part of society. Thus by the late 1960’s Bourguiba’s plan to nationalize had clearly succeeded on a political level. Larson observed that people physically lived near their family members based on patrilineal lines, but also noted that patrilineal kin did not “beyond the range of siblings jointly own or control land or economic resources…solve disputes, arrange marriages, offer hospitality, deliberate on family or village matters, or act as agents of social control” and that

even though the two saints’ shrines in the village are maintained by the saints’ descendants, the latter gain neither substantial wealth nor special esteem as a result. Rather, wealth, status, and esteem rise and fall quite rapidly depending on the merits and luck of individuals, not groups, and accrue to individual households, not to kin groups as a whole.

The differences between Larson’s experiences in al-Qarya and Abu Zahra’s writings about SidiAmeur mentioned in the previous chapter are obvious—political and social activities had been restructured to the extent that even those who used to wield remarkable power in society, including the descendants of the shaykhs, were no longer considered as particularly prominent in society. As such, only a bit more than ten years after the Personal Status Code’s implementation and Bourguiba’s efforts to nationalize and eliminate clanship ties, it is clear that even in the most remote villages these changes had begun to take effect. Marriage was no

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longer an effective tool to harness and control power within Tunisia and therefore had evolved into a much more personalized, independent part of people’s lives.

Reforms came to the Personal Status Code in 1993 by Ben Ali, who changed some of the law to focus more specifically on the married couple rather than extended family. These reforms included the banning of domestic violence and giving mothers significant rights to veto forced marriage of their daughters.63 This continues to represent changes which took place in Tunisian society as it moved in a progressive fashion—laws no longer emphasized the extended families and the married couple took the forefront of society’s structural needs. Laws typically address social needs from their times, and as such it is clear that Ben Ali’s emphasis on changing laws to focus on individual married couples rather than extended family relations is significant. Society had changed to the extent that Ben Ali no longer felt the need to work towards development from the same perspective as Bourguiba did—gone were the days of discouraging endogamous marriage, and instead the marriage between two individuals became the center of conversation. In addition, Ben Ali changed the Personal Status Code in 1998 to assist children born out of wedlock and in 2007 the marriage age was legally set at 18.64 In addition, post-Revolution, the law has been changed to allow women to travel with their children without the permission of their husbands.65

The Jasmine Revolution came in Tunisia in 2011 full of significant hope for changes to be made not only in the political but social spheres. Radhia, however, saw that the Revolution had changed people’s ability to speak in public. Although she saw this as a positive in that people are no longer afraid, she noted that with it came disorder and lack of

64 Grosso, “Extraordinary Ethics,” 22.
respect for women, and that it is now more common for men in the street to jostle or harass women who participate in society. Maryam believes that society has not changed at all since the Revolution, while Kheira sees that society has in fact changed for the better afterwards. This generational disagreement as to the Revolution’s success or failure reflects typical generational gaps in port-revolutionary Tunisian life; youth have continued to be excluded from the political process and politicians are distant from social issues which matter to young people, such as sexuality and marriage. For example, the average age for marriage is over 30 years of age now, and therefore there have been changes in views of sexuality before marriage (70% of young men and 50% of young women are sexually active before marriage). Young people want to discuss sexuality and to challenge taboos yet find themselves up against a wall by older politicians who refuse to have conversations about such things. As such, it is not surprising that Maryam feels pessimistic about changes which have happened while her grandmother and mother have a slightly more positive spin on its effects. All three women agreed that the state of marriage, especially in a legal sense, has not changed in Tunisia since the Revolution. This is largely due to the nature of realities about the Personal Status Code, namely that it is “a product of the historical compromise between ‘traditionalist’ and ‘modernist’ visions” and that it has become so integrated into the Tunisian mindset so as to feel, to many people, like an extension of the Constitution, especially by women. So, although society and gender relations have changed, but aside from a few small adjustments to the Code under Ben Ali, the political and legal aspects of marriage have remained unaltered.

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66 Radhia Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
67 Maryam Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
68 Kheira Hidri, interview, November 13, 2015.
70 Mohamed Kerrou (sociologist, Carnegie Middle East Center), email message to the author, December 2, 2015.
From the days of Radhia’s youth to the days of Maryam’s, Tunisian society as a whole has evolved, accompanied by politics, from a fairly traditional society to a modern one. These transitions, represented by state-led initiatives like the Personal Status Code and social movements like rising levels of women’s education, have significantly changed the face of marriage in Tunisia. In general, younger generations have more education, more knowledge of their rights, and are delaying marriage. Yet the Revolution, a youth-led movement, has in effect failed the young people of Tunisia, who feel like they have been let down and left behind in the process. Youth are changing their own patterns, becoming more open to newer ideas about gender, sexuality, and marriage, and yet they are feeling stifled and left behind in the political sphere. Tunisia is at a crossroads in which its youth perceive a generational gap between themselves and their parents. This crossroads extends beyond the political and social spheres and into the world of the family.

Chapter 3: Marriage, Gender, and the Family

Bourguiba’s efforts to develop the country by decreasing the importance of clan and extended family ties significantly contributed to a growth in individual decision-making on the behalf of young women in Tunisia. Relationships between the individual and society have changed significantly—choice of spouses, intra-marriage decision-making, extended family relationships, and gender roles within marriage have shifted towards giving more privileges and power to the young women. Changing gender norms in Tunisia have significantly altered the ways in which Tunisians interact with one another and this is reflected throughout changing marriage patterns of the last half-century. In particular, marriage has transitioned from being a decision made by families to preserve their financial and social statuses to a commitment between two people for personal reasons. This is applicable to a variety of
important moments within marriage, from the decision to become engaged to the wedding and life as a married couple. Throughout three generations, the Hidri-Khelifa women have epitomized the transitions from traditional to modern, with Kheira’s beliefs and life firmly entrenched in what she describes as conservative, with Radhia’s beliefs in the modern sphere but some of the practicalities of her life remaining traditional, and with Maryam fully embracing a Tunisian modernity. In a sense, the Tunisian family’s changes over the last half-century are a microcosm of the modifications which permeated Tunisian society as a whole.

When it came time to choose a husband, Kheira, Radhia, and Maryam employed very different strategies. Kheira had known her husband, Mohammed Salah, since she was six years old. He was her paternal cousin who, after the death of his parents, had come to live with her family. Her father, who was dying, approached her in 1955 when she was 16 and asked if she would like to marry her cousin. She responded in the affirmative and that was the final decision—there were no further courtship rituals. Kheira mentioned that, for the time, the fact that she had met her husband before marriage was atypical, and that the only reason she had known him beforehand was their family ties and that they had lived together for some time. At the same time, her two sisters married two of her husband’s brothers. Ultimately, Kheira’s family chose her husband for her and her two sisters for entirely economic reasons—as her father was dying, she needed to be attached to a man who could support her.71 Kheira’s choice in a husband represents a model in which her family made decisions for her, from a particularly economic standpoint.

In a completely different method of choosing a spouse, Radhia met her husband, Yusuf, while they were both working as teachers in the same school. She began courting him, going on dates (such as for coffee), but problems arose when her father did not want her to go

71Kheira Hidri, interview, November 13, 2015.
out with him because he was “scared that he would lose her”, and so she continued to see him in secret. As such, she decided to marry him because of this—once her engagement was announced, her parents became more comfortable with the relationship and any issues with her relationship with her family were solved. Ultimately, Radhia’s decision of whom to marry was her choice, and she stated that her parents were “not involved” in choosing her husband. That being said, Radhia was influenced by growing rifts in her family and thus made the choice to transition from dating to marriage because of her family. It is clear that Radhia made her own decision to pursue a relationship with Yusuf but also the influence of her parents influenced her choice to become engaged.

Maryam’s decision to marry her husband was entirely personal. She and her husband, Sefwan, dated for four years before becoming engaged, and had a two year engagement before their wedding. During part of their relationship, Sefwan was living in Monastir while Maryam lived in the Tunis area. However, they would travel to visit each other and engaged what Maryam described as typical dating activities, including swimming, drinking coffee, attending the cinema, and visiting local destinations such as SidiBou Said and La Marsa. Another interesting layer of her relationship with her husband is that it kindled over social media in a time in which social media was becoming particularly prominent within Tunisia. In 2011, 42% of Tunisians were on Facebook for a total of 4.6 million, and 62% of those were youth. Sefwan was Maryam’s childhood friend until the ages of five and six, but she moved from Monastir and did not see him for 15 years. He contacted her on Facebook and the relationship evolved in person from there. When asked why she decided to marry him, Maryam said “I love him, simply.” Maryam described her decision to marry Sefwan as

72Radhia Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
“totally [her] choice” but mentioned that her family was supportive. However, Maryam also made it very clear that she only would marry after she was sure that her own ambitions would not be stifled through marriage. She took at least two years to decide to marry Sefwan because, as she says

> When I was a child, I didn’t want to get married. I wanted to be independent and free of any responsibility but when I met him my view changed. Here in Tunisia the woman has responsibility in the house—she cleans, she cooks, she does everything, that’s why I didn’t want to commit. My husband is different, he is not this kind of man and that’s why I accepted to marry him….It took time to believe that he is different.\(^{74}\)

Maryam’s determination to wait to marry until she was sure that she would be able to continue living her life as she chooses is an indicator of her break from traditional ideals of the marriage and family. Her decision was, as she described it, based entirely on the ideals of love and not out of desire to fulfil certain socially prescribed gender roles, such as to support herself economically as her grandmother did or to validate her relationship with Sefwan, as her mother had to do in order to maintain a good relationship with her parents. However, there still were some economic concerns in Maryam’s decision to get married. Although she waited to be sure that she would be able to continue living her own life as she chose, they decided not to become engaged for two additional years in order to wait until Sefwan had found a stable job.\(^{75}\) That being said, this is a different sort of economic concern from those experienced by her grandmother, who had to marry immediately for economic reasons—Maryam and Sefwan chose to wait to marry. It is of note that both Maryam and her mother describe themselves as “modern” women while they have distinctly different views of the necessity of and reasons for marriage. The differences between each woman’s method of choosing her spouse reflect changing patterns within society as a whole, as were previously discussed. Tunisian society transitioned throughout the Bourguiba and Ben Ali periods

\(^{74}\)Maryam Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.

\(^{75}\)Maryam Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
towards allotting women independence in choosing their partners and, with that, towards lessening the family’s role in choosing spouses. Kheira’s economically-based marriage was organized by her father, Radhia made her own choice but also respected the wishes of her family, and Maryam made a choice which was not only independent but was based on a determination to be able to continue living her own life as an individual within her marriage.

Following selection of the spouse, Tunisian wedding ceremonies have altered significantly throughout time along with the marriages they begin. Kheira was not present at the religious aspect of her wedding ceremony, but, described her marriage as follows:

I went from my family’s house to my husband’s house. Someone put me on his shoulder and carried me there from my house to his house. There were no cars in those days. That was all of the ceremony. The marriage in that time—the father of the husband sees a woman, goes to her father, says that he likes her daughter for his son. Then they do al-Fatiha and then they are married. It’s different from the marriage in our time now. The husband did not see the bride before the marriage, though it was different in my case because he was my cousin and we knew each other.\(^{76}\)

Radhia’s small ceremony did not include certain traditional aspects, including the henna party. Instead she had a small, European-style wedding in which she did not wear traditional clothing but opted for a white dress, and did not include a dowry of any kind.\(^{77}\) (See Appendix A). Maryam described that each night of a typical Tunisian wedding has its own taqoos, or traditions. Typically, a Tunisian wedding has several days’ worth of celebrations, including the henna nights, which last for three nights to make the lines dark. The traditional wedding ceremony itself consists of the joining of the bride and groom and a presentation of golden jewelry. Maryam wanted her wedding to be more simple, and so she only had three ceremonies—her henna night (although she only had one night rather than the typical three), her husband’s ceremony, and the one in which they came together and were officially married by the state. Her henna party was much more traditional, while her ceremony was

\(^{76}\)Kheria Hidri, interview, November 13, 2015.

\(^{77}\)Radhia Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
distinctly modern and included certain European-style components, such as tossing the bouquet (See Appendices B-F). Marriage ceremonies have simultaneously shifted from traditional—in that they are prominently a religious endeavor with fanfare depending on the economic status of the family—to modern—in which they are large, elaborate affairs which last several nights and incorporate globalized elements.

After independence, Tunisian households also saw a shift in post-wedding marital relationships and a change of gender roles within the family and household. This is evidenced by anecdotes from the Hidri-Khelifa women. Throughout the years, a transition has occurred in which equality within the family has increased significantly. Kheira, who has three sons and two daughters (one of whom is Radhia), lives in a very traditional manner. Maryam described her grandmother’s role within her household as one firmly embedded in traditional gender roles: “she’s old but she does everything in the house—she cooks, cleans, everything. And my uncle’s wife had a baby two weeks ago and she’s taking care of the baby and the wife.” Radhia also mentioned that her father, Kheira’s husband, was the only one in the family who spent money on the household regardless of who earned it. Tunisian women historically did not spend money but this has changed in recent years, and now it is common for women to spend money rather than just their husbands, a result of increased consumerism and also of changing gender roles within the family. Kheira continues to live in a household which emphasizes the importance of traditional, patriarchal gender roles, as are emphasized by the aforementioned Gender and Development theory.

In general, Radhia was more comfortable discussing her ideologies and beliefs about marriage and gender roles than talking about the specifics of her life, but she made several

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78 Maryam Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
79 Maryam Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
80 Radhia Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
81 Grosso, “Extraordinary Ethics,” 104.
comments about the nature of her role within the household which, combined with observations made about family life at the time of the interview, were telling of discord between her ideals and the practicalities of her life. Radhia and Yusuf have three daughters, Maryam (28), Azza, (26), and Ghaada (22). Radhia spoke about her ideals of how women and men should interact after marriage, saying that “parents should work together.” However, a follow-up question wondering whether she and her husband shared the responsibilities of running a household and raising three daughters elicited the response “chweyachweya,” or “a little bit,” a subtle implication that she did not feel that she and her husband equally shared amounts of household work. When asked about the state of life for women in Tunisia in general, Radhia responded with the following:

“In Tunis, the men don’t respect the women. They don’t respect that she is participating with them in everything—that she helps them in spending money and they have to help spending money. This is mostly in public, but also within my own life. They don’t respect that it’s a choice of the women to help them, but see that it’s her duty to do the work outside and in the home.”

Radhia’s experiences of gender roles have molded her life so that she feels that she has to complete the same amount of work outside of the home as men, but then to have significantly more work inside the home. These responses, along with observations of family life in Radhia’s home, contribute to the idea that the practicalities of her life do not match her ideologies about gender relationships within marriage. After I completed my interviews with Maryam and Radhia, I remained in the house for some time and made the following observations about family life. After my initial arrival, Yusuf welcomed me into the house. After the completion of the interviews, I sat in the living room to take down notes. I observed that Yusuf was in a sitting room watching television while Radhia and Maryam went to the

82Radhia Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
83Radhia Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
84Ibid.
kitchen and then emerged to serve me coffee, juice, and dates. They then went upstairs, and Radhia returned after a few minutes to watch television with Yusuf. After some time, Yusuf rose and asked me if I needed anything, and I requested to be shown the bathroom. Although he was already standing and had been the one to ask me if I needed anything and Radhia was seated and watching television, he asked her to take me upstairs to show me to the bathroom. While Radhia spoke in idealistic terms about husbands and wives performing equivalent work within the family, the circumstances of her life and the nature of her position within her household mean that she ultimately performs more work within the context of the home.

Radhia’s experiences fit in with criticism of neoliberal theory; one of its basic tenets is that modernity has de-gendered the workplace and it is often viewed as a theory which supports concepts of equality. Debnarayan Sarkar criticizes this theory because it “has been constructed on an equality impoverished view of women’s lives; it has defined women’s economic agency as equivalent to that of men, ignoring their greater embeddedness in familial and domestic responsibilities.”

Although Radhia has found a space for herself in the workforce, as a teacher who in fact holds the same job as her husband, she has greater responsibilities in the home.

Radhia’s experience is supported by writings by Hafidha Chekir, Tunisian feminist and founder of the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Democrates (ATFD), which was one of the only independent women’s associations in Tunisia until the Revolution. She wrote in 1996 of the need to continue making structural and societal changes within Tunisia. Despite the Personal Status Code, she saw a continuing need for the promotion of egalitarianism through an “approach [which] should be developed which would change the authority of the father to the authority of the parents, and the paternal responsibility of a parental

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Both women who were married during Ben Ali’s rule and activists during the same period saw that on a societal level there was a crisis in which women were still subjected to traditional gender roles within the home. Likewise, Sarah Grosso’s anthropological research from late Ben Ali-era Tunisia found that middle-ages housewives noted that society expected them to engage with their families as homemakers.

Maryam was much more willing to discuss the specific details of gender roles within her marriage, which can be interpreted as such that she perceives less discord between her ideals and the specific details of her life. Maryam noted that she sometimes does more household work, but that is because Sefwan, who is a customs officer, often works at the time when cooking needs to be done. If Sefwan is not working, they cook together, and he usually washes the dishes after dinner. Maryam also noted that, because she is still working on her Ph.D., she has a more flexible schedule and thus does household work. Overall though, Maryam feels that she does a fair amount of household work. In addition, Maryam noted that at this point Sefwan pays for most of their household needs, but that she knows that will change once she completes her studies and then they will pay for everything together. As such, since Radhia’s marriage and HafidhaChekir’s writings about the necessity of gender role change, certain changes have been made to the structure of the millennial family. Maryam’s relationship with her husband reflects the drive she had in the time before she was married—her basic instincts in her relationship are to ensure that she will not lose her own autonomy and this includes being drawn into performing all of the household work.

Along with the nationwide pattern of changing marital relationships came alterations in extended family relationships post-marriage. The importance of the family in an

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87 Grosso, “Extraordinary Ethics,” 98.
88 Maryam Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
individual’s life has changed in meaning throughout several generations. After her marriage, Kheira did not see her parents again. Her father passed away shortly after her wedding and her mother remarried, and she mentioned that she thought that “it was better not to have them in my life anymore.” Her husband had no family except for his brothers, and her family was not involved, so she and her husband essentially formed an entirely new family unit. However, Kheira did mention that her sister remained in her life as a babysitter when she began working. Larson’s research from the 1960’s shows a similar phenomenon in which women lose involvement with their families—she found that families in Tunisia were much more likely to interact with people on the father’s side than on the mother’s side. Kheira’s mother’s remarriage meant that she had been absorbed into a new patrilineal family just as Kheira and her sisters had been. Despite being a parent to her daughters, Kheira’s mother’s duty was to her new family. A change came later, represented by Radhia’s relationship with her family post-marriage which remained fairly steady. When her children were young, her mother watched them while she would work. In addition, she mentioned that her mother has remained a source of personal support for her—if she has problems with her husband, she speaks with her mother about them and receives advice about what to do. Maryam has remained close with her parents but ensures that her life is separate from theirs. She predicts that, if she has children, she will use her parents for babysitting as she would feel most comfortable leaving her children with either her parents or Sefwan’s. And at the time of the interview, Maryam was staying with her parents because her husband had an engagement with work for that time, and she “was afraid to spend nights alone” in their home. That being said, Maryam and Sefwan have made sure to ensure their privacy is kept within their marriage. Sefwan’s parents live in Monastir, and they go to visit them twice a month but

89 Kheira Hidri, interview, November 13, 2015.
91 Radhia Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
ensure their own personal space by staying in a separate studio apartment from his parents and making plans to go out as a couple. This increasing pattern of autonomy leads to more power and control within the relationship and family for women in Tunisia.\(^92\)

The mother-daughter relationship has evolved with time as an extension of changing values and norms. As generations progressed in time and level of education, images of an ideal mate for a daughter changed from describing a man who could be present for physical needs to emotional needs. Kheira in particular was more likely to look for a man able to physically care for her daughter, whereas Radhia and Maryam leaned towards describing emotionally supportive and affectionate men. Kheira’s primary concerns when picking a potential husband for her daughters were that he be “financially secure, [have] a house.” When pushed by Maryam, Kheira added that she would hope that he be “a good man who takes care of her.”\(^93\) In a shift from her mother’s economically-based concerns, Radhia said that she hoped her daughters would marry men who are “level-headed, not violent, and affectionate.”\(^94\) Maryam responded in a somewhat similar-vein, describing an ideal husband for a hypothetical daughter as “loving, attentive, sensitive, protective, and affectionate,” noting that she sees those qualities in her husband and that she would want her daughter to marry for the same reasons she married—love.\(^95\) For Kheira’s father and Kheira herself, economics were prominently important in desires for choosing a husband and for Radhia and Maryam, they were not. Women who have experienced higher levels of education are more likely to be able to get a well-paying career or make money on her own, and these experiences of self-sufficiency lead to beliefs that a daughter should not need to focus on economic concerns in her choice of a spouse. In addition, this shows a shift in gender roles in

\(^{92}\) Latrielle and Verdon, “Wives against mothers,” 78.

\(^{93}\) Kheira Hidri, interview, November 13, 2015.

\(^{94}\) Radhia Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.

\(^{95}\) Maryam Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.
Tunisia—younger generations have more education and are thus more likely to be economically capable of caring for themselves.

When asked about generational differences in views of marriage specifically within the context of their family, each woman saw some sort of gaps. Kheira spoke of seeing that there have been changes in the context of the wedding ceremony itself as well as the structures of choosing a spouse. In particular, a woman is now able to meet her husband prior to the ceremony—before, sometimes the man wouldn’t see his wife until after the ceremony had been completed, and she mentioned that the couple could potentially find each other “blind or paralyzed”. Radhia perceived that she views marriage differently from her mother and daughter for several reasons, entirely based on generational gaps—Kheira is older and therefore has older ideas, including about gender roles within the family—Kheira’s husband is the only one to spend money in the household—while Maryam has “young ideas” about the nature of relationships. Maryam herself noted that generational gaps about opinions on marriage exist between herself and her mother because women of her own generation are more likely to make their own choices about marriage whereas women of older generations were more likely to have the involvement of their families in that decision.

Generational differences as they relate to family dynamics are prominent in the Hidri-Khelifa family. Although Kheira did not have a significant amount of extended family, her life decisions continue to be strongly based on the needs of the family she does have. Radhia’s life decisions reflect respect of the family and traditional gender roles although her ideologies differ. Maryam was quick to emphasize that for her, individual choice was most important. Kheira, Radhia, and Maryam represent significant trends between generations in

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96 Kheira Hidri, interview, November 13, 2015.  
97 Radhia Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.  
98 Maryam Khelifa, interview, November 13, 2015.  

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Tunisia—increasing amounts of independence, less family control over a woman’s decision, and new desires in a partner. These elements are reflected both in how people actually choose partners and how they would want their daughters to choose their husbands. In all, these trends show changing gender relationships between husbands and wives and among the family. Generational gaps, as discussed in the previous chapter, are also relevant in exploring intra-family relationships, shaping opinions about how marriage should manifest.

**Conclusion**

Habib Bourguiba’s Personal Status Code sparked a bevy of changes in Tunisian law, particularly as relating to intergender relationships and marriage law. Along with other modernizing factors, the Personal Status Code also altered part of the makeup of Tunisian society. The Hidri-Khelifa women’s example displays the vast transitions which have taken place over the last sixty years. Kheira’s lack of knowledge of the Personal Status Code, her neutrality towards its ideas, and her decision to follow the traditions of her family can be seen as a representation of the patriarchal society from which she comes. It also make a bold statement about the nature of the Personal Status Code—it is beloved and honored by some while other women, like Kheira, cannot reap the benefits of its existence. Kheira’s beliefs are distinctly different from those of Radhia or Maryam, who were raised in a more modern and less patriarchal society. Tunisian lives, exemplified by the example of these women, have moved away from traditional patterns of relating with society—rather than through the family, people are independent actors participating in their communities. In particular, women are more active participants in choosing their own paths, ensuring that their relationships with their parents and spouses allow for flexibility for individual choice. Economic and educational transitions in Tunisia have contributed to this atmosphere of increasing individual choice; as educational levels rise, so too does socioeconomic class and
also awareness about events and laws which affect the individual. The end of endogamous marriage and shifting gender roles contributed to the creation of new social classes and social mobility, and women have continued to rise through the Tunisian educational system rapidly.

And yet despite the broad evolution and modernization of society since Independence, Tunisia faces a new problem—bridging the generational gaps addressed in this paper to wholly incorporate young ideas and actions into the fold of today’s Tunisian politics and society. Youth feel shut out of government, and even after their Revolution in 2011 are often forced to submit to what they view as older ideas. As Tunisia moves forward into an increasingly globalized world, it is vital that youth, and women in particular, are continually drawn into the fold and that their ideas about life are accepted as part of Tunisian identity. Young women are making remarkable headway in independent choices about their lives, and encouraging their presence in debates about Tunisian society can only be beneficial to the nation.
Appendices

Appendix A

Radhia’s wedding

Appendix B

99 All Appendices courtesy of Maryam Khelifa
Maryam’s henna party

Appendix C

Tossing the bouquet at Maryam’s wedding

Appendix D
Appendix E
Appendix F
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