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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS

**Sub-Saharan Migrants in post-2011 Tunisia: A Cross-Disciplinary  
Study of the Dynamics of Media Representations and Policy Shifts**

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**Sub-Saharan Migrants in post-2011 Tunisia:  
A Cross-Disciplinary Study of the Dynamics of  
Media Representations and Policy Shifts**

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**To Mom...**

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## **Abstract**

The present research is concerned with the representations, counter-representations, and policy-related representations of sub-Saharan migrants in “post-revolution” Tunisia. This encompasses the study of representations in media as vehicles of social, cultural and political expressions. It elaborates on the rhetoric, frames and images built around sub-Saharan migrants in the mainstream and alternative media outlets. The task of scrutinising such representations is crucial to exploring the potential shifts in migratory policies. Such policy shifts enclose laws and regulations pertinent to sub-Saharan migrants’ existence in Tunisia: human trafficking and smuggling as entry mechanisms; discrimination and racism as obstacles to integration and smooth social reception; as well as domestic labour regulations as challenges to full operation and sustainability of the ‘regular’ status. Applying eclectic theoretical resources from Critical Discourse Studies, Theory of Social Representations and Symbolic Interactionism, the dissertation proposes to explore a media corpus collected systematically via a media monitoring software in three languages. Using the Discourse-Historical Approach— as devised by Ruth Wodak (2001)— and delving into the discursive strategies (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009) as well as the quantitative linguistic manifestations of these representations, the analysis draws on the pivotal role of media in reflecting/ deflecting public opinion and social attitudes as well as in shaping the migratory policy, regarding sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia. Hence, the study shows the fluctuations in media’s treatment of sub-Saharan migrants in post-2011 Tunisia— from annihilation and amalgamation to humanization and valuation. Then, it surveys the shifts in migratory policies and confronts them to peaks in media representations and landmarks in media coverage of sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia. This dissertation constitutes an academic track to better understand the dynamics of different intermingling social systems: the media system, social system and political system. More specifically, it contributes to the up-to-date and increasingly heated debate about migration, against a backdrop of rightist and populist approaches to migrant reception and regularisation in both Global North and Global South.

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## **I- Chapter One: Introduction and Background**

### **1. Context of the Study**

(Im)(e)(trans)migration(s) have come to be an undeniable facet of ‘late globalisation’<sup>1</sup> in a world which is more interdependent than ever. Timothy Cresswell made the conspicuous observation that everyone is ‘on the move’ (Cresswell, 2006). Castles, De Haas and Miller (2014) acknowledge that we live in the ‘Age of Migration’ where migration “is a process which affects every dimension of social existence, and which develops its own complex ‘internal’ dynamics” (p. 27). Migration has gained even more academic stamina and has gone more problematic and complex in the last decade. Hundreds of studies are carried out on what has always been conceptualised as destination countries in the North Mediterranean shore, thus contributing to construing the key migratory issues and the corresponding governance and policy options for host societies. However, one of the relatively new areas of research is intercontinental South-South migration, notably in Africa.

The present research is concerned with the representations, counter-representations and policy-related representations of sub-Saharan migrants in “post-revolution” Tunisia. This encompasses the study of representations in media as vehicles of social, cultural and political expressions. It elaborates on the rhetoric, discourse and images built around sub-Saharans migrants in the mainstream and alternative media outlets. The task of scrutinising such representations is primordial to exploring the potential shifts in migratory policies. Such policy shifts enclose laws and regulations pertinent to sub-Saharan migrants’ presence in Tunisia: human trafficking and smuggling as entry mechanisms, discrimination and racism as obstacles to integration and smooth social reception, and domestic labour regulations as challenges to full operation and sustainability of the (ir)regular status.

The dissertation proposes to explore the critical role of media in reflecting/ deflecting public opinion and social attitudes as well as in shaping the migratory policy, regarding sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia. The study shows the fluctuation in media’s treatment of sub-Saharans in post-2011 Tunisia. Then, it will survey the shifts in migratory policies and confront them to peaks in media representations and

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<sup>1</sup> “Late globalisation” coined by literary theorist Moraru (2011) to refer to a stage in the life cycle of globalisation. In this understanding, we are already living the late phases of globalisation. Additionally, cultural theorist Appadurai (1990), recognizes five cross-national interconnecting spheres or ‘scapes’ ethnoscapas, technoscapas, finanscapas, mediascapas, and ideoscapas and therefore provided a first conceptualization of the so-called late globalisation.

landmarks in media coverage of sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia. This dissertation constitutes an academic track to better understand the dynamics of different intermingling social systems: the media system, social system and political system. More specifically, it contributes to the up-to-date and increasingly heated debate about migration, against a backdrop of rightist and populist approaches to migrant reception and regularisation in both Global North and Global South.

This introduction is being drafted in a time of furtive political initiatives to curtail migratory movements using a securitarian and nationalist approach to a humanitarian “problem”. On the one hand, an “infamous” Memorandum of understanding signed in 2023 has sparked much controversy about externalisation of the European border to the Tunisian frontiers. On the other hand, Italy’s PM Giorgia Meloni is visiting Carthage for the fourth time in a year to “plead for a new approach”, and a “vision” of “mutual interest”. The new pragmatic, strategic and utilitarian approach would further centralise migration management and ‘policing’ at Tunisian terrestrial and sea borders. In fact, the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) warned, in a press release<sup>2</sup> (April 16, 2024) that Meloni considers Tunisia a mere “advanced border point, requiring the strengthening of repression to stop migratory flows towards Italy, no matter what the human cost is” and framing it as an “electoral asset in Italy and in Europe to promote the cooperation model with Tunisia in the fight against immigration”, as a success.

Added to this, the European Parliament approved stricter migration rules after years of debate, signalling an overt and direct policy of rejection through the asylum system management. This landmark—EU Asylum and Migration Pact—overhaul of the EU’s regulation aims to decrease irregular migration. The announced aim is an effective management of migration to the bloc by accelerated rejection of invalid applications and more efficient distribution of asylum processing ‘burdens’ among member states.

What does this mean for a country like Tunisia? In fact, under the new system, migrants irregularly entering the EU will swiftly undergo identity and security checks to determine which “lucky” ones must be processed as asylum applicants, and which “unlucky” ones must be deported to their countries of origin

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<sup>2</sup> Statement available at: <https://ftdes.net/giorgia-meloni-en-visite-a-tunis-persona-non-grata/>. It is worth noting that a coalition of Tunisian and Italian organisations signed it, from Italy: Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull’Immigrazione, A Buon Diritto Onlus, Carovane Migranti (Italia), Mai più Lager – No ai CPR, Campagna LasciateCIEntrare, Mem.Med Memoria Mediterranea. This translates a common humanitarian and juridical concern by both Tunisian and Italian civil society.

or *transit*. Here, transit is key to Europe's new regulation as the notion of transit is established to alleviate its burdens and externalise its duties. Hence, not only will North African countries, notably Tunisia, have to receive their irregular migrants but they will also have to accept nationals of other countries who consider the Maghreb as a transit region. This word carries so much potential and possibilities as transit states in North Africa, especially Tunisia, have become the main routes for "fragmented journeys" (Collyer, 2007). The new rules are set to take effect in 2026, and the sub-Saharanans' presence and representation will probably be affected by them. It might further exacerbate the discontent towards sub-Saharanans, after a relatively short truce marked by a breath of freedom and human rights between 2016 and 2019.

To understand the reality of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia, we assess the media (mis)representations of sub-Saharanans towards fathoming their identity, the social and political reception and attitudes *vis-à-vis* them. This will also enable us to evaluate the migration/ labour legislation and policy gaps, in addition to the laws and policies that were instigated by sub-Saharan presence in Tunisia with a view to discussing their overall accommodation dynamics. To this end, this PhD dissertation examines the Tunisian media representations of sub-Saharanans migrants in the period from 2012 and 2020 using a media corpus collected systematically to cover all the period and all pieces about sub-Saharanans. The research follows a three-fold intersecting path, namely representations, counter-representations and policy-related representations, the key aspect of scrutiny being 'sub-Saharan migrants media representations'. The study is therefore cross-disciplinary as it integrates and conciliates the different intermingling disciplines at play here: media studies, critical discourse studies, migration studies, and policy studies. The task of harmonising the different concepts, methods, and approaches of these multiple academic disciplines and systems to address the complex research questions discussed hereinafter is a major challenge, which I hope to have addressed with utmost care and depth.

A cross-disciplinary study of the sub-Saharan migratory phenomenon ought to evidently go beyond the boundaries of a single discipline and seek to draw upon the strengths and insights of different fields to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a subject which has long been either neglected, relegated or tabooed. Long before the historic "xenophobic" speech of President Saied in 2023<sup>3</sup>, the topic

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<sup>3</sup> <https://nawaat.org/2023/03/11/sub-saharans-in-tunisia-the-untruths-expounded-by-president-kais-saied/>

was muffled in official political speech, academia (except for the few academics who specialised in migration) and mainstream media.

## **2. Why Go about it Cross-Disciplinarily?**

### **2.1 Historiographical Account of Sub-Saharan Existence<sup>4</sup> in Tunisia: the ‘Drops’ of Migration**

*“Tunisia is like an island that has been alienated from its Africanness, looking down on it, while looking up to its Mediterranean-ness” Huda Mzioudet, in Daigle (2020)*

In the aftermath of 2011, race and minority questions were not recognized or managed by the official institutions in Tunisia. This implies the absence of any state policy programs or decisions governing the coexistence of the various social, political and cultural aspects of sub-Saharan groups. In fact, Teun Van Dijk, one of the founding academics of Critical Discourse Analysis, asserts that decision-making, especially in interethnic<sup>5</sup> societies, depends on a multitude of factors and interests represented in society and affecting public opinion. He explains that “mass media discourse plays a central role in the discursive, symbolic reproduction of racism by elites” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 6). In fact, “the media largely focus on political discourse on ethnic affairs, while conversely both politicians and the media also use scholarly reports on immigration or minorities to support their views” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 6). Thus, according to Van Dijk’s assumption about the discursive nature of policy making, we argue that public opinion and media representations of issues like sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia and interethnic relations in the Tunisian society have a direct impact on the state policies inter alia migration and reception policies.

This study is based on an eclectic conceptual, methodological and theoretical framework which is partly grounded in the Symbolic Interactionist paradigm as well as the interactionism of system dynamics. It shares the general notion that the meanings are construed socially by different groups when they interact

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<sup>4</sup> I use “existence” here, not presence, in reference to the past and the present rather than the mere *status quo*. Whereas presence is used to talk about the new situation of sub-Saharans in Tunisia in a more dynamic and context-dependent manner, existence refers to the more enduring and broader role of identity overtime, as shaped through accumulated social and historical interactions. In this sense, presence is observable, and existence is measurable and assessable.

<sup>5</sup> Tunisians find much pride in this multiethnicity in their speech about the 3000 years of civilisation and the different ethnic origins of the people having inhabited the country (Arabs, Ottoman, Jews, sub-Saharans, etc.). When it was under French colonisation, its people were referred to as “populations” for their diverse ethnic backgrounds. This background makes of the Tunisian society “a multiethnic complex society” (Dali, 2019, parag.69)

socially. Symbolic interactionism is a theory which explores “shared meanings, orientations, and assumptions form the basic motivations behind people's actions”, and “face-to-face interactions” as generators of “the social world” (Conley, 2013, pp. 31-32). According to Herbert Blumer, one of the founding fathers of Symbolic Interactionism, the “cycle of meaning”, is the principle that people react when faced with the meaning of certain social symbols. Thus, meanings start as distinct and independent; then they are shared by a community or a social group via social interactions<sup>6</sup>.

*Ifriqiya* is the old name for Tunisia and part of Algeria, which was then given to the whole continent. Often understated, Tunisia has long historical relations with the countries and social groups of sub-Saharan Africa. These relations rested upon economy (commercial caravans and slavery), religion (Islamic preaching and Sufi missions) and history (European colonialism). Even though most North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans suffer from the same problems to a large extent (the effects of colonialism, corruption, impoverishment and unemployment), and despite the solidarity that grew between the African national liberation movements, as well as the emigration trends experienced by all the countries of the continent, Tunisians still have a puzzling superiority complex towards the citizens of sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, for most Tunisians, sub-Saharans are exotic creatures that exude clichés and prejudice (Geisser, 2023) and stigmatising discourse (Abdelhamid, 2018). Sub-Saharans are called “les africains” as the expression in French goes. They are *often* associated with the practice of black magic, hysteric dancing, erotic practices, lack of hygiene, and epidemic diseases in the collective imaginary<sup>7</sup>.

Additionally, with the increasing number of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia, black Tunisian citizens have become targets of racial discrimination or condescending treatment, as they are often confounded with migrants. In the aftermath of the 2011 ‘revolution’, “Black Tunisians as well as Sub-Saharan Africans lifted the veil on silent discrimination”. Black activism has found in transitional justice and in media a “platform to highlight the grievances Black Tunisians and Sub-Saharan Africans” (Mzioudet, 2018, p. 4) endure since the “Revolution”. It seems that almost every debate about race, racial injustice and social acceptance in Tunisia brings together black Tunisian citizens and sub-Saharan

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<sup>6</sup> For a thorough description of Symbolic Interactionism and conceptual eclecticism, see previous chapter.

<sup>7</sup> To be accurate, these frames and rhetoric built around them seem to concern sub-Saharans only, not black Tunisians who are exempted from these images (except when they are confused for foreigners). This supposes a certain hierarchy in racism, aggravated by foreignness.

migrants, concomitantly. In the light of the above, it has become clear that any conceptualization of sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia cannot be carried outside the salient issue of race in the Tunisian society.

When Ben Ali's regime 'ended' in January 2011, transitional justice, as a tool for social justice, was the hope for long-forgotten minorities like blacks. The 'Tunisian Revolution' made it possible for social activists to articulate their outcry against the injustices they had suffered under the regimes of Ben Ali and Bourguiba. After the establishment of the Truth and Dignity Commission (*L'Instance Vérité et Dignité*, IVD) in 2013, the Black Tunisian association—Mnemty (Arabic for 'my dream') submitted a file to the IVD, with the aim of exposing the social, cultural and political marginalisation of the black 'lineage'. Saadia Mosbah, the founder and president of Mnemty, asserted the state "promote[s] statistics where blacks represent only five percent in Tunisia", but we do not see this minority present in media and advertisements (marketing), for example. Therefore, the "state must apologise for 170 years of violations so we can address this phenomenon together"<sup>8</sup> (original in Arabic, *my translation*). The words "lineage" and "170 years" are quite striking here as they presuppose that today's black Tunisians are descendants from common ancestors. But who is this ancestry? Houda Mzioudet, a black journalist, academician, and activist argues for "inscribing Black Tunisian heritage in the collective memory" and unearthing the repressed, forgotten, neglected testimonies of Black Tunisians and protests to compensate for "the absence of a historical narrative of the Black presence"<sup>9</sup> in Tunisia.

To delve into the history of black Tunisians, it is worth going back in time. In 1841, the Bey of Tunisia, Ahmed Becha Bey, issued a decree banning slave trade and importation. Then, in the following year, he issued a second decree recognizing that everyone born on Tunisian soil is free and cannot be sold or bought. Finally, in January 1846, slavery and slave trade were completely abolished. Tunisia prides itself of being one of the first countries in the region to abolish slavery, and to precede countries like France, and the United States of America. Most of the country's black population comes from the emancipated populations which were freed 170 years ago. However, their history is never told adequately. Blacks are particularly numerous especially in the south, where slavery prevailed the most and where its influence is still visible. The legacy of slavery and servitude is visible in particular through the stigmatising

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<sup>8</sup> "Armed with the law, Tunisia is fighting a history of racial discrimination", *Al-Arab*, 25/04/2019, <https://shorturl.at/amwQ0>, accessed on 23/05/2022.

<sup>9</sup> Mzioudet, 2018, available at : <https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/38219-mobilizing-for-social-justice-black-tunisian-activism-in-transitional-justice.html>



lexicon used even today. The linguistic references still withhold the confusion between skin colour and enslavement. Blacks are sometimes named “*abīd- abeed*” or “*ṣuṣān(a)-shushen(a)*”, Arabic words that mean slaves, or “*atīg-atiig(s)*” which refers to emancipated slaves. On the other face of the coin, white people are referred to by the term “*ahrar- aḥrār*”: the free ones.

The anachronistic and linguistic confusion does not end there. In some towns, like Djerba, Gabes, Zarzis, and Medenine, the municipalities still issue birth certificates with the mention “*atīg*” to refer to descendants of slaves. In some of these towns racial segregation is still perpetuated, in transport, in marriage or even in death rituals. On Djerba island, “the cemetery of slaves” is the place of burial reserved for black Tunisians. Gosba, in the region of Medenine, south Tunisia, is dubbed the “village of the Blacks”. To understand the situation of black Tunisians, and by inference the social reception of sub-Saharan in Tunisia, it is worth noting that being “black” is not just a question of colour. It is rather an issue of genealogy. In other words, blacks are seen as descendants of the sub-Saharan enslaved populations. In the 19th century, the trans-Saharan slave trade tradition and the Ottoman corsairs’ piracy attacks on European countries brought about 100,000 black African and white European slaves to the then Ottoman-reigned Tunisia. Apart from slavery and piracy, some historical sources invoke the voluntary “mobility” of sub-Saharan Africans to North Africa for trade.

There is no official statistical data about the exact number and origins of blacks in Tunisia because of Habib Bourguiba’s homogenization nationalist policy. In fact, following the steps of his idol, Mustafa Kamal Atatürk, who pleaded for “Turkishness”, Bourguiba sought to “Tunisify” the Independence State. The model he envisioned for Tunisia is one in which “Tunisianness” (Tunisinité) is supremacist. For this reason, any distinctions based on racial, tribal or religious differences were smothered. Bourguiba had a “national project of *Tunisianité* that sought to homogenise the different social segments and instil the common sense of belonging to a Tunisian nation beyond religious or patrilineage affiliations” (Ltifi, 2020). In pre-2011 Tunisia, the issue of minorities was a taboo. The *Bourguibist* postcolonial policies endeavoured to smother group belongings, be it tribal, ethnic or religious, in favour of one “homogenous” and “indivisible” nation<sup>10</sup> (Dali, 2015; Abdelhamid, 2018).

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<sup>10</sup> Indeed, this *Bourguibist* policy can be understandable in the context of the postcolonial global dynamics whereby the creation/ restoration of nation states supposed a unitary or unifying political discourse and national project (Dali, 2015, p. 63).

Despite the lack of statistics based on race, blacks are deemed to represent between 10 and 15% of the population now. And not only did Bourguiba's nationalist policy succeed in smothering their dissident voices, but it has also managed to wipe them out from media and politics. Blacks are even largely under-represented in art (even if the situation has ostensibly improved after the 2011 'revolution'). Black Tunisians are still almost invisible. This begs the question of how to ponder on the sub-Saharan existence in Tunisia if black existence is jeopardised. How can we plead for social and cultural integration of sub-Saharanans if black Tunisians are not accommodated?

In fact, institutional and political deficiencies with respect to the issue of blacks are aggravated by local ignorance or neglect of the historiography of black existence in Tunisia. Against all ready-tailored ideas, 'blackness' in Tunisia is not only due to old slavery and modern immigration. The 'foreignness' of the blacks in the collective Tunisian imagination rests upon the idea that black can only be of sub-Saharan slave origins. The new generation of black activists does not advocate for a sub-Saharan legacy in the local black culture. Neither does it assert a status of cultural anomy of a population which is partly deriving from slave trade. It does not even defend the existence of a hybrid or creolized culture, which might convey deracination (*déracinement* being the word used in French). Indeed, "sub-Saharan Africa, as an assumed "land of origin" does not seem like a tangible territory invoking strong belonging or cultural identification"<sup>11</sup> (Dali, 2015, section 2).

When we attempted to trace the history of black existence in Tunisia, we were faced with the scarcity of sources and documents. Although Tunisia prides itself for being the land of "civilizations" and a roundabout of successive waves of migrations, the history of sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia is not taught in schools. This might be due to an intentional omission from history to curb any black dissent or/and intentional consideration of black presence as insignificant compared to other origins (Arabs, Turks, Moors, etc). The black Tunisians who are predominantly stereotyped as non-Muslim, non-Arab and "uncivilised" were omitted from genealogies and historical accounts in Tunisian society. This alienability was expanded upon in Claude Meillassoux's *Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold* (1991). This might also be owing to the fact that there was not a "wave" of black comers to Tunisia.

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<sup>11</sup> My own translation of the French "L'Afrique subsaharienne, comme « terre originelle » supposée, n'apparaît pas comme un territoire tangible de forte appartenance ou d'identification culturelle".

Rather, today's black population results from minor "drops" of sub-Saharan, starting from the eighteenth century.

Among the few sources which address the question of black history in Tunisia, Richard C. Jankowsky's *Music, Trance, and Alterity in Tunisia* (2010) is a valuable historiographical account. In this book, with the aim of studying the musical and spiritual intersections between sub-Saharan and Arab/Muslim traditions, he explores the paths that brought sub-Saharan slaves in North Africa as trips through the Sahara by spiritual individuals. He argues that musical genres like *Stambeli* and *Bū Sa'diyah* shows are a "regular reminder of the movements of sub-Saharan across the Sahara" (p. 49). These folkloric dances, still practised in many Tunisian towns, are symbolic performances of the sub-Saharan "experience of migration" (p. 49).

*Bū Sa'diyah* (father of *Sa'diyah*) is an emblematic figure in Tunisia. His story is told by grandmothers all the time: the African king, or head of a tribe, whose daughter Sa'diyah was kidnapped and sold into slavery in Tunisia, moves across the Sahara in search of his beloved daughter. In the Tunisian collective imaginary, he is portrayed as that frightening man who wanders around the cities in search of something lost. He was the symbolic "weapon" for all mothers who used his image to frighten their children into napping: go to sleep or Bu Sa'diyya will come after you. *Bū Sa'diyah* decided to disguise himself and roam the streets of the cities in search of his daughter, wearing goat and sheep skins inlaid with shells, and sometimes hiding his face with a colourful mask and a bird's skull or a camel's head over his head. These elements of decorum became the most important components of the *Stambeli* music show afterwards.

His story, however, is a reminder of the suffering of the blacks in North Africa. *Bū Sa'diyah*, with his strange dress, African accent, dances, rituals, and all the ambiguity surrounding him was and still is the meeting point between the African side and the Arab/Tunisian side in the Tunisian imagination and tradition. *Stambeli* is a cultural expression in the form of an artistic outcry in the face of injustice, racism and slavery. *Stambeli* is the voice of the ancient spirits of blacks, defying the pain of the fetters and the whirring of the handcuffs and the whips of the executioner"<sup>12</sup> (Ben Rejeb, 2017). The rattling of iron in the *Stambeli* dance echoes the clanging of the chains of slavery that accompanied the journey of blacks

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<sup>12</sup> Translation mine from Arabic, article available at: <https://shorturl.at/DhwmU>, accessed on 21/5/2024.

and Ethiopians coming from southeast Africa and Lake Chad to the slave markets. They were hammering iron chains and accompanying the beat with murmurs full of pain and anger.

The desire of the blacks of Tunisia for liberation and emancipation made them gather around a good guardian and purify their souls with rhythms that express the journey of their suffering. So, the music of Stambeli (Tunisia), the Diwan and the Gnawa (Algeria and Morocco) came from the shrines and communal houses (Maisons confrériques—the French expression used by Roger Botte, better conveys the meaning of brotherhood), just as the blues and jazz music came from the churches and the vast cotton fields. These communal houses brought together black slaves around community rituals viewed with suspicion by the Islamic religious authorities of the time. They were places of solidarity, where cults and dances of possession were celebrated. They were also sites of identity— native or creolized —since each of these houses bore the name of a sub-Saharan ethnic group. For instance, Sidi Bilal (Blal), the Abyssinian slave of the Prophet and the first muezzin of Islam, was the tutelary figure of these groups and was their “grantor of Islamity”<sup>13</sup> (Botte, 2010, p. 68).

The existence of this creolized music—*Stambeli*—the communal houses and black saints’ shrines in Tunisia is not only due to slavery. In fact, and contrary to the preconceived idea, part of the blacks or “negroes”<sup>14</sup> settled as a result of trade and related purposes. Indeed, caravans crossing the deserts of Africa and the countries of the Maghreb flourished in Tunisia, especially after the official abolition of slavery in 1846. The trans-Saharan slave pathways uncover the Sahara Desert as a bridge “between trade routes, fuelled in part by a succession of African states boasting surplus of gold and slaves for export, put[ting] sub-Saharan and North African into permanent contact with each other” (Jankowsky, 2010, p. 50). According to Baba Majid, a Tunisian Stambeli musician interviewed by Jankowsky, traders brought from sub-Sahara ostrich feathers, gems, and drugs to swap or sell to blacks in Tunisia.

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<sup>13</sup> My translation of “caution d’Islamité, in this metaphorical meaning, the French expression suggested that Sidi Bilal was thought to be the spiritual grantor of the sub-Saharans’ admission into the Islamic community because of his black skin and his emblematic importance as first Muezzin in Islam.

<sup>14</sup> The term, which seems politically incorrect in modern times, basically from a Western post-colonial viewpoint, is used here in its purely scientific meaning. It is worth nothing that the word “negro” is the translation of the Arabic word – Zanj/ Zanji- زنج / زنجي. According to Arab geographers the term is only applied to the people of the eastern coast of Africa and its black residents, and it does not convey any insult or racism, as it is not a racist word, but rather an ethnographic definition term, as neutral as the term Abyssinian- which refers to blacks from Abyssinia. This, among other things, should be an element to be reviewed in terms of de-colonial healing.

One of the conspicuous indicators of the sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia in the past is the existence of many shrines in Tunisia for people who were brought from Bornu and manifested their *bārākā*, i.e. blessings via prodigies. These shrines were built in their commemoration “by 1728 at the latest” (Jankowsky, 2010, p. 83). This challenges the idea of blacks having lived in Tunisia for only 170 years. Richard C. Jankowsky asserts that after 1842, the date of abolition of slavery, some slaves chose to return to their sub-Saharan countries, and the majority remained in Tunisia to be domestic servants.

Sidi Frej, for instance, a famous black saint whose shrine is in Kerkerna, was from Bornu in central Africa, and he was taken into slavery in Tunisia. Other sub-Saharans and even Arab Tunisians recognized his spiritual powers. In the oral narratives of Dar Barnu (*Stambeli* troupe), the beys and the French treated sub-Saharans in Tunis respectfully. Jankowsky admitted that while investigating the sub-Saharan musical tradition in Tunisia, he was told that both regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali “trusted Tunisians of sub-Saharan descent more than they trusted local Arab Tunisians” (Jankowsky, 2010, p. 185). Sidi Frej and Sidi Saad, who were freed slaves of sub-Saharan origin, are some of the most known among the saints. Not only does this account for a long history of sub-Saharan existence in Tunisia, but also to a shift in perspective throughout history begging the question of the crystallisation of racism in modern times as opposed to its quasi absence in the past.

These folkloric references are the cultural reminders and remainders of the existence of sub-Saharan minorities in Tunisia. As I have already explained, while the formal history of sub-Saharan migrations to Tunisia is silenced in Tunisian education programs, there are documents that address *Stambeli* and the blacks’ communal dwellings. In addition to the causes mentioned earlier, Jankowsky explains this lack of historization is due to the absence of a sub-Saharan diaspora per se. In addition, he laments the “the descendants of slaves and other sub-Saharans in Tunisia” who have not “produced a group of outspoken scholars, novelists, etc” (Jankowsky, 2010, p. 43). This might have been true in 2010, but one year after the release of the book, the upheaval 2011 brought to the forefront very influential black activists and writers.

The identitarian campaign, led by the young black generation, in post-2011 Tunisia, demands new socio-political configurations: it is a plea for local belonging with recognition of a distinct black identity. Their discourse is, however, paradoxical as they denounce the absence of black actors in the political scene and at the same time reject any “favouritism” policy or initiative in their benefit. They refuse to be

marginalised and yet want to avoid any “special treatment”. The answer should start by admitting that the blacks of Tunisia are “acculturated” sub-Saharans. This is to say that this post-2011 migratory trend is not a new one; it is the last of a series of micro-migrations of people from sub-Sahara to Tunisia, whether voluntarily (trade caravans and education) or in a forced manner (slavery).

## **2.2. The New Wave of Sub-Saharan Migration: The Second?**

Is the post-2011 sub-Saharan migration wave to Tunisia the second? It might be the second, or the third, or the fourth. The Libyan crisis is the major cause for the sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia in the aftermath of the 2011 political change. Migrants escaping Libya in 2011 were of many nationalities, but the humanitarian crisis affected sub-Saharans from Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Chad, Liberia, and others (as well as Sudanese and Somalians who are *perceived* as sub-Saharans) who worked in Libya on a seasonal or permanent basis. Some of them fled to Tunisia; of those some remained in the Shusha refugee camp while others managed to escape and become ‘undocumented’ migrants. Following the Libyan crisis too, some migrants flew directly from their sub-Saharan countries to Tunisia, as Libya’s border had become porous.

In the light of the above historical overview, I argue that the sub-Saharan migrants, coming especially from Libya in the aftermath of the 2011 conflict, encounter the usual racial, verbal and social segregation endured by the black Tunisian citizens. Both social groups have to be reminded of a long-gone history of slavery. However, unlike black Tunisians, the ‘racial’ vulnerability and frailty of sub-Saharan migrants are further heightened by legal impediments like denying them residence and cultural ones like disowning them from a lineage in a Tunisian society where family ties, fraternity and community are indispensable safety nets. It ensues that this social precariousness magnifies their economic and political vulnerability. These sub-Saharan migrants find themselves bereft of a strong ethnic identity because of their colour and their inability to speak Arabic. Thus, they are further marginalised and prevented from social assimilation and access to services. I also argue that media representations of sub-Saharans sway between misrepresentation and annihilation, thus further participating in marginalising them. In this sense, sub-Saharans' counter-representations in alternative media is a way of resisting such marginalising dynamics.

Three elements have to be considered: (i) the regular/ irregular sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia is not a new phenomenon, (ii) the social reception and integration of sub-Saharan (trans)migrants in

Tunisia goes hand in hand with racial acceptance and reconciliation, and (iii) the modern servitude to which sub-Saharan migrants are subject ensues, even indirectly, from the legacy of black servitude in Tunisian history. For all these considerations, any research on sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia ought to be theoretically eclectic, combining elements from different theoretical backgrounds such as Symbolic Interactionism and Social Representation Theory, along with discourse theories and sociolinguistics. Second, laws and policies ‘emancipating’ sub-Saharans are tightly related to anti-discrimination laws and policies and are directly linked to other resistance social movements in Tunisia post-2011.

### **3. Theoretical Peculiarities of South-South Migration**

#### **3.1 A Decolonial Denouement or “Healing by Unlearning”**

Research on international migration has always fixated on a unique question: what drives migration? In answering this ‘simple’ question, social science researchers resort to an arsenal of theories and paradigms which are mostly implemented by Western theorists, for Western audiences, about migration into Western countries. Gravity models, neoclassical economics, networks and systems, neo-Marxist labour market theory, among others are the major approaches used to address such a multilayered phenomenon. Migration is intricate as any other social phenomenon, and the game-changer in migration research should be *context*. It can be internal or external, intra-continental or extra-continental, forced or voluntary, South-North or vice versa, etc. This heterogeneity of migration dynamics makes it almost impossible to advance one-for-all theories and paradigms. The exorcism of migration theory from these projectionist, myopic and inflexible conceptual ghosts can only be achieved by varying the models and methodologies when analysing a given migration flow or the other. This step, which Hein de Haas dubbed “Conceptual eclecticism” ought to be coupled with another equally important revision: decolonializing migration theory.

There is a consensus among contemporary migration revisionists, like de Haas, Massey, and Castles that old theoretical propositions and the relevant methodological tools are “fragmented”, untestable and non-problem oriented<sup>15</sup>. They are even “colonial” at their roots and in their premises. In

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<sup>15</sup> In the next chapter, these theories will be explored to show their incompatibility with the Tunisian context—because of their colonial optics (i.e., deictic references, designations, patterns and the very language used thereby) among other things. This does not mean that this dissertation will not use Western theories. In fact, decolonial

this research, we do not want to be absorbed in the theoretical postulates and discourses of westernised migration research. Instead, we intend to contest the language of migration theory—the very formulation of the propositions—declining the superiority of some theories and amassing the approaches that better translate the context of South-South migratory phenomena, in this case sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia.

First, we have to start by contesting the discourse of migration theory, i.e. the Western-centric rhetoric. The French colonisation in Tunisia (from 1881 to 1956) imposed new identities and racial hierarchies. At the top of these hierarchies were the pure “whites”, whose origins are European, then the white Tunisians, then the black Tunisians. This racial classification, which is at the root of the sub-Saharan social rejection actually emanates from the French colonial heritage and the accomplice regimes which have perpetuated such racial moulds.

In independent Tunisia, the Bourguiba regime attempted to delete racial ontologies—along with other tribal and religious ones—with the purpose of unifying the people behind one goal: building a nation. It was evidently done at the expense of the racially underpowered minorities: Berbers and Blacks (Abdelhamid, 2016 and 2018). After the independence, France still regarded Tunisia as a “protectorate”, and Tunisians unconsciously ratified this. In academic discourse, all Tunisians coming to France were called “immigrants”, not “emigrants” because the focal point—the inertia centre—should be the western world, the Global North. The Tunisian labour, which was very important and profitable to France, was seen as arriving in France rather than leaving Tunisia. It is even more bewildering when this appellation

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thought does not advocate against using Western theories altogether. Decoloniality- particularly as advanced by Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, and Ramón Grosfoguel- challenges the legacy of European colonialism and the ensuing persistent patterns which continue to shape contemporary knowledge production, i.e., “coloniality of power” (Mignolo, 2007). Mignolo argues that decoloniality is not a political process per se, but an epistemic one, requiring a fundamental rethinking of knowledge, culture, and identity beyond Eurocentric paradigms. However, it is worth noting that decoloniality does not necessarily mean an utter rejection of all Western theories, but a critical *rethinking, repositioning* and *reshuffling* of these theories. Arguing that Western knowledge systems have historically been privileged as universal and applicable to all contexts, thus marginalizing and suppressing non-Western differences, decolonial thinkers seek to challenge this dominance and to delink from it, by valuing of the epistemologies Global South. This decolonial turn can only be achieved through a critical reexamination of Western theories. In this sense, decoloniality implores for deciphering the colonial roots of these theories and how they have been used to legitimize unequal power dynamics, rather than discarding them outright. In addition, decolonial thinking presupposes the incorporation of non-Western perspectives and knowledge systems to create a more pluralistic and eclectic academic landscape and to de-center Western epistemologies.



is adopted by Maghrebi academics who write about immigration and emigration interchangeably, and to the point of adopting the French perspective altogether<sup>16</sup>.

Global South researchers tend to recreate such “colonial” linguistic choices when addressing South-South migrations. Due to a combination of factors, among which the superiority complex towards Black Africa, the post-colonial perpetuation of colonial habits, even the linguistic dependency we still harbour towards the French language, most research on sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia overflows with coloniality. One shall therefore refrain from engaging in such colonial rhetoric, even subconsciously. Toni Morrison, Afro-American novelist, said in her Nobel lecture:

“Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity-driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek — it must be rejected, altered and exposed”.

Accordingly, decolonial endeavours encompass rejecting, or at least exposing and altering the colonial language in academia. Indeed, one cannot be using language to further “estrangle” minorities. We will refer to sub-Saharans in Tunisia by “migrants” or “trans-migrants” (migrants in transit). We shall not use the term “immigrants”. Some would object to this choice and argue that the prefix “imm” is neutral and has a fundamental role in defining the direction of migration from sub-Saharan countries to Tunisia. However, the nomination strategy “sub-Saharan” is sufficient in establishing this fact. Adding the prefix does not have any added value, other than further corroborating the “outsider” status of the migrants. Even though some would say that this is overzealous and pretentious, the subsequent research will prove that a “decolonial” endeavour is not only feasible but necessary.

Furthermore, this study will not seek to establish differences between regular and irregular migrants. We will not further “estrangle” the undocumented migrants, even for “commodity-driven”

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<sup>16</sup> The use of Tunisian “immigrants” (Tunisian already signals the departure point unequivocally) to describe a Tunisian migrating to France or Italy by a Tunisian invokes a certain epistemic confusion as when one is in Tunisia, he would normally refer to Tunisians in France or Italy as emigrants- people who left the homeland, the deictic centre being Tunisia. It is otherwise understandable to use immigrants if the researcher is Western, seeing the migrants as arriving in the West. Notice these conspicuous uses of suffixes in Boubakri, 2011; Ben Khalifa, 2013, etc.

purposes. These classifications are also colonial in the sense that they reproduce the unbalanced neo-colonial relations between the global North and South. Humanitarians, civil society and researchers decry the North's obsession with the notion of illegality, transformed into 'irregularity' to be more politically correct. Hence, we must not use the same derogatory terms when referring to the sub-Saharan migrants most of whom, apropos, start off their journey in Tunisia as regular/ legal/ documented migrants and then sink into irregularity due to the system, policies and labour networks<sup>17</sup>.

All this modern show can be linked to geopolitics and imperial and neocolonial projects. Bordering and the establishment of borders are themselves colonial strategies and post-colonial outcomes. These "global lines and geographical divisions" constituted a pattern for the colonial divides of the globe and the institutionalisation of relations between Europe and its outskirts (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). The modern geography and luminal lines were established in Europe and then throughout the globe, through colonialism, imperialism, and anti-colonial struggles. An Algerian would not be called "irregular" if he came to settle in Tunisia. Prior to French colonisation, a black merchant or slave from Abyssinia would not have been called an irregular or illegal comer. Helen Tiffin (1987) asserts that "it has been the project of post-colonial writing to interrogate European discourse and discursive strategies from its position within and between two worlds". The decolonial discourse of researchers from this 'mid-world' should not stop at "questioning": it should seek to eliminate and eradicate the colonial undertones altogether.

To call sub-Saharans "immigrants" is absurd, since almost all Tunisians (except pure Amazigh maybe) are, in a way, 'immigrants'. The history of the Tunisian nation is a history of immigration. In our discussions, we often refer to our Spanish (Moor) or Arabic, Persian or Turkish origins with so much pride. Tunisian Blacks cannot do that because they were made to believe that their ancestors are inferior. Not only is this outrageous, but it is also historically inaccurate. The Turkish families in Tunisia are also from "slave" descendants. European slaves were brought to Tunisia, by Barbary pirates in raids on ships and on coastal towns from Italy to even the southwest of Britain<sup>18</sup>. It is reported that the late president of Tunisia, Beji Caid Essebsi, for instance, is a descendent of a Sicilian slave who came to be part of the

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<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy that in the fifth chapter these classifications are discussed as used in the media counter-corpus, but not adopted or condoned.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed list of Tunisian raids on European shores and their corresponding dates, consult pages 14-16 from Robert C. Davis's *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800*.

Ottoman ruling class. Many other Turkish families come from enslaved ancestors, but the Tunisian society only keeps the image of the sub-Saharan “slave” in its collective Tunisian imaginary. We have to commence by admitting that Tunisians come from migrant families and that Tunisia is a melting pot, where all many ethnicities coexist (Ltifi, 2020).

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon, asserts that the use of language is primordial to the perpetuation of imperialistic identities, based on divides such as *coloniser* and *colonised*; *slave* and *master*; *evil* and *good*; and *human* and *dehumanised*. The “colonised intellectual” (Fanon, 1963, p. 47) is the more educated members of the native population and are elected to be spokespeople for their colonial views. The settlers had “implanted in the minds of the colonised intellectual that the essential [Western] qualities remain eternal in spite of the blunders” (Fanon, 1963, p. 36). Fanon, himself, being a product of the French school, urges the newly independent peoples to break free from the decadent societies of the West (or East), and take “the road not taken”. For Fanon, the precolonial history of a colonized people as barbaric and “bestial” is written by the colonizer to justify the supremacy of Western white culture. Accordingly, the “colonised intellectual” is required to return to his 'barbaric' culture, to prove its worth in relation to the West, which will turn out to be unfruitful because it would sombre into clichés and further stigma. Eventually, he argues that “colonised intellectuals” shall realise that a “national culture” is not a precolonial history to be recovered, yet it is a product of the present national reality. Hence, this poor intellectual fights for a land, a spot where his national culture can be cultivated, without any colonial hegemony.

Although Fanon’s efforts are recognized as very influential in installing a culture of resistance in post-colonial countries, his insights were short of practicality and clarity. Some thinkers like Mignolo even criticised his inclination for “violence”, “determinism”, and over-generalization in advocating decolonization efforts. Decoloniality, on the other hand, offers more pacific, pragmatic, and agency-centred roles to the modern ex-colonized intellectual in building “global futures” (Mignolo, 2011, p. xiii). It is therefore the role of the intellectual to revolt against colonial rhetoric and moulds. If we acknowledge that, dealing with the new sub-Saharan comers will be easier and less traumatic for the Tunisian society, which is so imbued by a fake complex of superiority, borrowed from the colonial past and post-colonial present.

Decoloniality is a school of thought or an intellectual movement advocating the production of knowledge from a non-Eurocentric standpoint. It aims to shutter this aura of universality and superiority that the West has marketed for the knowledge it produced. Hegemony lies even in the Western imperialist theory which gave rise to gravity models, push-pull, neo-classical approaches, etc. and should be countered by contextualised and “de-westernized” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 27) academic endeavours like ethnic studies, gender studies and discourse studies. One of the characteristics of decolonial alternatives is the unveiling and challenging the “construction, transformation, and sustenance of racism and patriarchy that created the conditions to build and control a structure of knowledge”, having their origin in religion or Reason (Mignolo, 2011, p. xv).

In “(De)Coloniality at Large: Time and the Colonial Difference”, Mignolo asserts that “decolonial scientia” is the stance of people “suffer[ing] the consequence of the colonial wound or... hav[ing] experienced the violence of science and embrace the decolonial option ... to twist the politics of knowledge in which they were educated as modern subjects” (Mignolo, 2020, p. 114). In the global South countries, intellectuals are still copying the rhetoric and policies (policing) of the global North without questioning or seeking to change the *status quo*. Modern academia seems to be reproducing what Sociologist Ramon Grosfoguel (2013) calls “epistemicide,” or the annihilation of knowledge and systems of knowing. As researchers and teachers, we have to consider the colonial history of scientific research and acknowledge that western colonial epistemological projects affect our understanding of migratory trends in the framework of migration studies. We have to admit that sub-Saharan migration to the North of Africa did not begin in the last quarter of the twentieth century, as it is often claimed in migration accounts. The origins of contemporary sub-Saharan migration extend to pre-colonial trade and slave caravans. Resisting the conceptualization of sub-Saharan migration as a “new” migratory phenomenon, aiming at changing the “pure” demographic fabric of the Tunisian society, is a way to contend the deliberate perpetuation of colonial academic discourse in migration studies. From this perspective, “unauthorised” migration from sub-Saharan Africa into the Maghreb, and then to Europe, is an act of resistance against colonial boundaries, laws and classifications.

With an eye to resisting the colonial methods used to study, measure, and examine human behaviour, i.e., migration, we have to humanise sub-Saharan migrants and their historic migratory flows. Instead of investigating the old colonial question of “why do they migrate?” and “What drives them?”, we may investigate their reception and perception dynamics for a thorough ontological and epistemological

understanding of this mobility tradition. We ought to scrutinise the historical relationship sub-Saharanans have with the modern Tunisian population and the migratory practices entertained in the past, to inform the present media presentations of sub-Saharanans without so much adopting a racial binary treatment of the issue.

In order to break away from the Eurocentric discourse on blackness, and within a decolonial research horizon, racialization studies produced by/on the Global South and a decolonial methodology (namely Discourse-Historical Approach) will be used. For this reason, we have tried to address the issue of blackness from an insider point of view, that of Tunisian scholars Afifa Ltifi, Houada Mzioudet, Ines Mrad Dali. Marta Scaglioni, who has also carried out valuable field work in the South of the South (South of Tunisia), commented on the engagement of civil society and media in the everyday reality of racial and social discrimination suffered by black Tunisians and sub-Saharanans. She asserted that their discourse “tends to borrow the concept of human rights and values from the West, and rests ideologically and linguistically on American models...French words— *racisme* —, and on an idea of race which risks conflating Blacks’ categories” (Scaglioni, 2017).

She questioned the very notion of racism and concluded that the concept of race is construed based on other variables like ancestry, Arab ethnocentrism, and policies. This means that the sub-Saharan issue *does* depend on other factors like the history behind them. Whereas one can partially agree with Scaglioni in her linking sub-Saharanans’ contemporary misery to the ancient history of black slave trade, we cannot but disagree with her argument that sub-Saharan marginal status is related to Arab ethnocentricity and Islamic belonging. In fact, we have already explained that slavery in Tunisia is not exclusive to the Black race.

The slavery in pre-colonised Tunisia was multiethnic. [I]t included white enslaved subjects both from the northern Mediterranean shores and Circassia” (Ltifi, 2020) and was not exclusively ‘black’. Subsequently, the “slave” tradition is not the only cause of the stigmatisation of blacks in Tunisia. Furthermore, Scaglioni who attempts to shutter the Eurocentric models of thinking about migration and race indeed resorts to the same clichés and mainstream ideas about sub-Saharanans. In page 12 of her article, she relays some prejudice about the labour of blacks when she states that “some jobs are considered to be for Blacks and Tunisia is no exception. The preparation of weddings, musical performances during the ceremony, working at the hammam (steam-baths of Ottoman origin) and jobs connected to iron and fire

(for example blacksmiths) are the prerogatives of Black Tunisians and of Black Arabs in general (Brunschvig, 1962)”.

These ideas or clichés are not only anachronistic as she is referring to a work written in 1962, but also inaccurate in post-2011 Tunisia. It is yet another indication that even Europeans who opt to adopt new methods and frames of mind when dealing with South-South migration, often fall into the trap of over-generalizations and value judgement. Other than these cultural inaccuracies, the part where she tackles policies and laws was very brief and superfluous. In addition, and like most research carried out in Tunisia on sub-Saharan, the discourse falls into the trap of utter “victimisation” of the migrants—in the absence of any nuanced or contrasted research into the other face of the coin: the humanising and individualising counter-representations.

Not only does this overly “humanistic” Eurocentric rhetoric impede the agency of the migrants, but it also perpetuates the status of “crisis”, borrowed from the European migratory rhetoric. It is indeed fatalist and deterministic, and it perpetuates the vicious circle instead of examining the prospects of change. To say that the sub-Saharan are rejected because they are black, non-Arabs and non-Muslim in a society which is predominantly ‘white’, ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ is to sentence our sub-Saharan guests to a lifetime of suffering. Hence, according to European commentators and researchers, like Sisyphus, sub-Saharan are doomed to be always estranged and stigmatised in Tunisia. All in all, the article is very important in trying to establish the type of relation which exists between sub-Saharan and Tunisian blacks. However, methodological shortcomings arise because of the constricted temporal and spatial scope of the research (the Jeffara region in the South of Tunisia—February to April 2015), the borrowed Eurocentric clichés, and the over-generalized conclusions.

Finally, through a decolonial spirit, we seek a “decolonial healing”, a sort of closure or denouement for sub-Saharan and for Tunisian academia. In the manner suggested by Tabita Rezaire in her essay “Prologue – Decolonial Healing: In Defence of Spiritual Technologies”, decoloniality is not only a manner of regarding certain matters but a “radical” action. It is an appeal to break away from the Western knowledge structure and to “recover from the violence of Western ideology” (Rezaire, 2022, p. xxx).

Decoloniality by unlearning is a step towards emancipation, for Rezaire, as it is a brave journey forward with one's own *modus operandi* — “That's unlearning, and that's healing”<sup>19</sup>.

### **3.2 Cross-Disciplinarity in Migration Studies: *The New Zeitgeist***

Migration is at the core of mankind's history and 'evolution' as well as the advent of civilization, and it has offered affluent exchanges among cultures, languages, economies, and politics. In humanities, there has been a tide of migration studies, which were inspired and influenced by the genuine attempts to philosophise migration (for instance Agamben & Evans-Pritchard, 1994; Agamben, 2017; Arendt, 2017) and to address migration narratives (for example White, 2014). Taking a glance at the novel titles of academic publications about migration, one can inevitably observe the inclination for crossing the borders of disciplines. Accordingly, migration is set to be examined in combinations which are usual or even unusual.

On the one hand, some works expand on migration from the prospects of the components and disciplines which are directly linked to it like development, policies, law, governance, humanitarianism, language, culture, etc. On the other hand, migration research is now concerned with some relatively new perspectives like education, media, translation, etc. This is rather an academic confession that the spirit of the age is that of cross-disciplinarity. Academic and disciplinary Puritanism is a thing of the past, as all social sciences and humanities have come to join efforts for the sole purpose of researching social phenomena in the best possible ways.

This cross-disciplinary experimentation started in Italy for example in 2008, when the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche proposed crossing disciplines in migration research and brought together 20 institutes of the Dipartimento Scienze Umane e Sociali, Patrimonio Culturale. The ongoing project has been implicating historians, sociologists, literature specialists, media experts, political scientists, legal

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<sup>19</sup> Central to Rezaire's decoloniality is the concept of healing, on the spiritual, physical and especially historical level. Connecting this with decolonization, she argues that colonialism has caused deep wounds, not only in terms of land and culture but also in terms of identity and knowledge production. Through her art and practice, she calls for a neo-decolonization of the body and mind by reconnecting with ancient healing practices, particularly from African and indigenous traditions. She sees that overcoming the trauma and legacy of colonialism is contingent on decolonial art and writing as a healing path.

experts, juridical scholars, psychologists, economists, and technology wizards. The leitmotif for such an initiative was that migration research should be broadened beyond the study of the migration dynamics of national or ethnic groups. Migration must be seen as primarily an exchange of knowledge and cultures. The question of social accommodation, as a facet of migration, calls for sociological, legal, political and psychological treatments. Yet, among these opulent cultural experiences, researchers mostly focus on the general relations and conflicts. In this trend, the Migration Project of CNR has been shedding light upon the historical-cultural and linguistic aspects of migrations, thus offering a cross-disciplinary historical and methodological framework for research delving into law, demography, sociology and education.

In the same context, one of the most far-reaching and innovative centres in the migration studies is the International Migration Institute which has published the most valuable revisionist studies in migration, among which Hein de Haas phenomenal working papers about migration theory and tools. The IMI hosted, on October 16-18, 2019, in Amsterdam, an academic colloquium entitled “Renewing Migration Debate: building disciplinary and geographical bridges to explain global migration”. It rounded up some of the most distinguished academics and some early-career migration researchers from around the world, the global North and South. They pondered over the question “How can we use the wealth of existing empirical and theoretical research to advance our generalised understanding of migration?”.

Various themes and statements were discussed critically to stimulate interactive debate about the new scopes of migration studies and all the presentations were published in a Compendium, “**Renewing the Migration Debate: Building disciplinary and geographical bridges to explain global migration**”. The key expression in this publication is “disciplinary bridges”, as it is an underlying revelation that the debate around migration had suffered from disciplinary short-sightedness. This is further testified to by the exponential number of migration studies departments and masters created with cross-disciplinary schemes and scopes, among which the newly born international joint master’s degree offered at The Higher Institute of Humanities of Tunis (ISSHT)<sup>20</sup>. This latter is gaining momentum as it elaborates on culture, anthropology, translation, law, etc. It is the epitome of this emerging consciousness of the cross-

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<sup>20</sup> This international joint master’s degree was the fruit of the Erasmus+ MIGRANTS project bringing together three universities from the North (namely the University of Palermo as the project lead university, University of Granada and University of Westminster) along with three Tunisian universities (namely University Tunis El Manar, University of la Manouba and University of Tunis). This PhD is part of the capacity building component of this original and distinguished program.



disciplinary nature of migration research, in a country that has been attempting to address such problematic issues.

In a globalised era, migrations have increased or have become increasingly discerned and mediatized (and not mediated, as it is an intentional and purposeful act of the media and political discourse). It has therefore become a fundamental area of research for humanities and social sciences. On the one hand, disciplines with macro research orientation such as sociology, geography or even political science have focused their efforts on the study of migration policies, reception and integration issues, the dynamics of exclusion produced by the bordering politics (policing of the sea, economic deals, etc.) and the demographic transformations ensuing from new migration patterns. On the other hand, on the micro-level, linguistic and cultural studies have been examining migration discourses, rhetoric, and communicative strategies which are deployed in the migration processes.

The overlapping of these two levels of study: macro and micro should yield very productive meso-level research of migration. Indeed, this very multi-layering of migration theories and tools is what revisionists, like de Haas, Massey, and Castles, plead for. This hybridization of research theories and methods requires a crossing of disciplines. Admittedly, migration can only be scrutinised cross-disciplinarily if the research proposes to address the phenomenon in an earnest and original manner. Opting for the study of sub-Saharan migration from social, media and political angles falls within this zeitgeist. I will attempt to cross from a humanities background to the study of communication and media, with recourse to discourse analytical tools and theories (CDS<sup>21</sup> and LSI<sup>22</sup>), to finally land in relatively newfangled terrain, that of politics, policies and legislation. **This research, therefore, is a cross-disciplinary study emanating from a decolonial and eclectic understanding of migration, using a Discourse Historical Approach and Symbolic Interactionist Theory, with a view to examining and commenting on the sub-Saharan migration's perception/ reception in post-2011 Tunisia.**

Such an endeavour, although very ambitious, is surrounded by challenges and hazards. The methodological and conceptual risks of being involved in humanities-grounded cross-disciplinary research on migration are non-negligible. Whereas migration has the power to strike the strings of the

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<sup>21</sup> CDS: Critical Discourse Studies

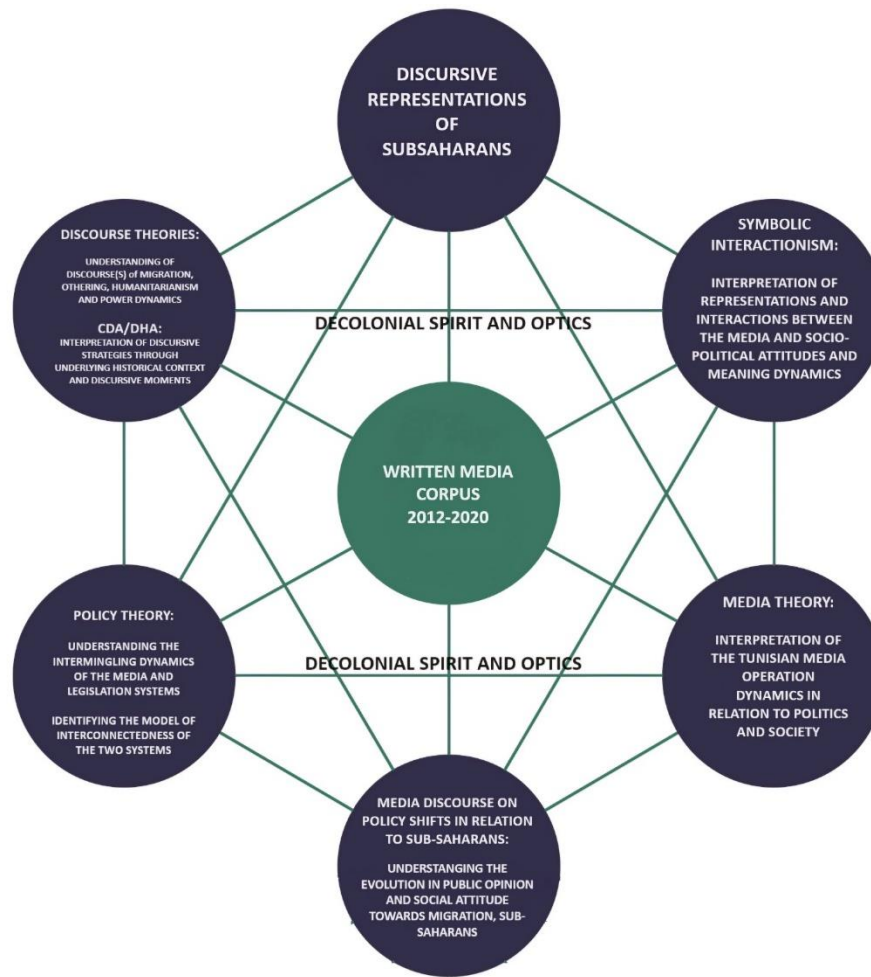
<sup>22</sup> LSI: Language and Social Interaction

disciplines I am touching upon in my research, i.e., sociology, media-studies, political science, cultural studies, policies and legal studies, it will be extremely challenging to systematically analyse the data collected from the media corpus, the expert interviews, and political discourse (in three different languages, and by means of translation) in a unified manner. Riccardo Pozzo (2019, p. 2) comments on this specific challenge as he found it “more interesting to see how to really engage in a dialogue between very different disciplines while avoiding just addressing a societal topic from different angles without creating truly integrated knowledge”. For him, and many other migration contemporary researchers, migration studies should be culturally and academically innovative, involving a coherent system dynamics’ approach.

Yet, the riddle which cross-disciplinary migration research from humanities perspective needs to solve is that of changing the “mindset as regards a culture of inclusion and reflection in target groups active in social infrastructures such as education” (Pozzo, 2019, p. 5). Subsequently, we seek—through this research—to question the collective mind frame about sub-Saharan (trans)migrants in Tunisia, and not to merely study the causes of their migration and how they are received and included/ excluded. This overreaching objective, springs from a conviction in academia’s role in making an impact on societies and politics.

#### **4. Research Questions and Design**

Before proceeding to the detailed design of the research, I start by a summative diagram of all the different intersecting theories and methodologies. The mission of harmonising an eclectic theoretical and methodological model is not straightforward, and it does not come without several challenges. The following diagram attempts to illustrate the workings of this research and approaches to all the four interconnected analysed systems: language-media-policy-society.



**Figure 1: Summative diagram of the interconnected theories and methodologies in this eclectic research model**

#### 4.1 Research Questions and Objectives

This research was undertaken with many questions in mind, almost no answers and very low expectations. In fact, in 2021 when the research initiated, the issue of sub-Saharan migrants was scarcely known or mediated. In the Tunisian academia, it was reserved to specific departments in one or two universities (Sousse is probably the most active in this field). Thus, as much as it appeared daunting, it promised great potential and new horizons. This being stated, this thesis intends to answer the general question of how the sub-Saharan migrants are represented in the Tunisian media, but also to what extent these representations affected public opinion and the policymaking process.

Garelli & Tazzioli (2016) comment on the new “revolutionized space of migration” establishing a connection between the 2011 upheaval which they refer to as “revolution” and migration<sup>23</sup>. The departure of thousands of Tunisians from 2011 on is reckoned as a direct outcome of the freshly acquired political “freedom” of movement (Tazzioli, 2015). The *harraga* trends in the aftermath of 2011 proved to be an act of contestation of mobility restrictions, established by Ben Ali as well as European countries. Garelli & Tazzioli commented on this “revolution and migration nexus” depicting Tunisian *harraga* as “carrying on the Tunisian revolutionary moment abroad” (Garelli, & Tazzioli, 2016, p. 2) and contested it through a rhetoric of “excess” by both migrants heading Europe, migrants in Europe, Tunisian officials, as opposed to the overzealous European support of the “revolution” to keep Tunisians in their country. European garnering democratization in the country was only a way to shield European states from the “excess” and overflow of migrants (as will also be shown in chapter 6 when discussing policy transfer).

Garelli & Tazzioli point to the colonial enthusiastic rhetoric regarding the 2011 upheaval as a “delayed Enlightenment” or a “promising Spring”, which is discontinued by moments of impatience when Tunisians attempted to “burn” the colonial boundaries into Fortress Europe. The writers’ rhetorical questions foreshadow the downfall of such European support as this “revolutionary” discursive moment expired in 2021 and even before. “The historical spectre of a degeneration, whereby a revolution falls out of control and gives rise to unexpected outcomes, is part of European readings of the Arab Uprisings” (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016, p. 3). Against this backdrop, the writers unpack and counter-map the (in)visibility of migration struggles. They discuss notions of recognition, political agency, discipline, and governance in order to decipher this new political- migration map(s) with regard to the Shusha camp refugees who underwent exclusionary practices by the UNHCR, the Tunisian authorities (in the total absence of a refugee status regulation in Tunisia, to this date), and Western countries (since Tunisia is classified as a safe third country). The authors’ scrutiny of the Shusha people “after the camp” in terms of political and juridical visibility, will be complemented by the present study which not only delves into the aftermath of the Shusha camp dismantling but also the social repercussions of (in)visibilising these

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<sup>23</sup> It is interesting how CDA researchers label this discursive moment. Note for instance Wodak & Boukala (2015) referring to this revolution as “clashes in Tunisia in 2011” to describe this historical period preceding the “subsequent arrival of many refugees in Italy”. The choice of words regarding the 2011 “shift” is peculiar as this political moment is exoticized in most writings about the “jasmine revolution” and “Arabic Spring”, yet neutralized when approached from critical discourse, which attempts to analyse the rhetoric without any prejudice or value judgements.

‘subjects’ in the media representations. Like Garelli & Tazzioli, I can see an urgent need in going beyond the migration experiences in the Mediterranean as an “open-air graveyard” and the “deadliest border in the world” (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016, p. 13) and to include the dire conditions of refugees, but also migrants, leading them to take the fatal journey to Europe. However, whereas the authors investigate the governance of such pluralistic migratory movements, I chose to focus on sub-Saharan (regular, irregular (trans)migrants or refugees) and their perception to map both the social attitude and the policy governance of their presence in Tunisia post-2011 throughout the early years of ‘European enthusiasm’ to the later period of ‘impatience’ and apathy.

To this end, this thesis contributes to the ongoing academic conversation on South-South and South-North migration patterns and manifestations from a Symbolic Interactionist (SI), Social Representational (TSR<sup>24</sup>), and Discourse-Historical perspectives (DHA). The studies about sub-Saharan representations started to be in vogue in 2023, after the shift in the political discourse about sub-Saharan existence in Tunisia. Thus, this study prides itself for being avant-gardist and paving the way to more interest in media and migration in academia. This is one of the overarching objectives of this research.

The main goals of this dissertation, though, are (i) making sense of the representation dynamics of sub-Saharan in a corpus of Tunisian media published between 2012 and 2020 (timeline justification in Chapter 3); (ii) tracing the evolution of these representations in the corpus, quantitatively and qualitatively, (iii) dismantling the amalgamating representations of the “other Africans” as well as showcasing the humanising counter-representations of the “sub-Saharan brothers and sisters”, and (iv) studying the sub-Saharan representations in pieces tackling specific policy advents to decipher the role played by this media corpus in changing public opinion and policy with regard to sub-Saharan.

The present doctoral research is based on an eclectic conceptual, methodological and theoretical framework which is partly grounded in the Symbolic Interactionist paradigm. In its first stage, it proposes to delve into the collectivised versus individualised representations of sub-Saharan in the Tunisian media discourse, to detect and comment upon the key discursive strategies used in media to build the symbolic image of this social group. In scrutinising the ways in which media discourse frames the identities and power relations between the sub-Saharan and the Tunisian society, I seek to explore the patterns of media

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<sup>24</sup> TSR, Theory of Social Representations

representation as in the amalgamating narrative about “deviant” and “victim” sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia as of 2012. I explore the structural, thematic, content differences of the media representations of sub-Saharan migration. To tackle the research objectives of the study, I intend to respond to the following research questions:

1. How are sub-Saharan migrants represented in the Tunisian media discourse?
2. How does the broader socio-political context and the evolution of the Tunisian mediascape affect the representations of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisian media?
3. Which rhetoric, frames and stories are predominantly built around sub-Saharan migrants in both mainstream and alternative Tunisian media outlets?
4. How does the mediatized narrative “othering” sub-Saharan migrants feed in the dynamics of collective and amalgamating identity construction of this ethnic group?
5. How do Tunisian journalists and sub-Saharan migrants counter the dominant representations?
6. What are the resistance mechanisms used in the counter-discourse to contest annihilation, misrepresentation and amalgamation?
7. How does the corpus unveil policy tipping moments, and to what extent do the media impact public opinion, legislation and policy?

As far as the academic novelty and significance of this research is concerned, I hinge on this observed lack of research on Tunisian migration media discourse<sup>25</sup> and the absence of studies on sub-Saharan voices in Tunisian media. As will be elaborated in the second chapter, most studies and research carried out on, about, and around sub-Saharan migration/ presence discarded any systematic analysis of their media representation. Present Tunisian studies dealing with issues related to the sub-Saharan migration mostly focus on their migration routes and networks in a broader context of the Libyan war, unrest in sub-Saharan Africa, and the visa exemptions granted by the former President Marzouki. The existing literature, whether by Tunisians or Western, are focused on—not to say are obsessed by—the domestic and international legislation on the status of migrant and refugee populations and the involved security issues.

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<sup>25</sup> This is my humble way of saying that no research has been conducted on the media discourse on sub-Saharan migrants’ between 2011 and 2020 using a systematic analysis. Few attempts were made after the speech of President Saïed, neglecting the fact that the sub-Saharan migrants’ ordeal had been urgent and had required research, before the 2023 speech.

Local and Western academics have been so much involved in the various legal, political—and to a lesser extent social—aspects of sub-Saharan groups in Tunisia, using general concepts of human rights, international protection, and theories of ethnopolitics and multiculturalism. Phenomena of xenophobia/Afrophobia in post-2011 Tunisia have not received significant attention in academic research. Even when alluded to, interethnic issues related to sub-Saharans and the Tunisian society are often explored using content analysis of interviews without resorting to a systematic study of the underlying ideological, historical, or social impact on the media discourse and vice versa. Rather than plain geographical, economic and securitarian accounts of sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia, the analysis of the media discourse as a potent social tool which informs the dynamics of the identity construction is a way to better fathom the diverse “portrayals” of this usually “fused” social group and to derive the most appropriate mechanisms for reception and integration.

Thus, in the present research, media representations are chosen as vehicles as well as loci of social and culture expressions by analysing the rhetoric and images built around sub-Saharan migrants in mainstream, independent and alternative media outlets, as read and shared on electronic platforms. The contrastive analysis ensuing from the analyses of representations and counter-representations should inform the possible areas of conflict and conciliation. Discourse analysis, being relatively recently and rarely used in the study of socio-juridical context in Tunisian academia, will allow for a comprehensive account of the perception of sub-Saharans in the Tunisian society and the role of media representations in forging other economic, social and labour policy.

In this research, five logical steps are followed: data collection, data sorting, data translation, data coding, and data analysis. First, the media corpus was collected using a systematic media monitoring software. I resorted to a systematic search of all media pieces written in Tunisian media, in Arabic, French and English, to trace all the possible discourse(s) around migration and sub-Saharans, be they elitist English-speaking opinion articles or Arabic daily *fait-divers*. In DHA, all sorts of texts and para-texts are of equal importance to the diachronic-historical study. Indeed, Wodak favours historicity, along with linguistics, in any scrutiny of social representations (see Wodak 2009, p. 20). In fact, the systematic media monitoring of all the material published by Tunisian media outlets between 2012 and 2020 allows for more objectivity, distance and validation.

The collected corpus comprises 910 media pieces—with a total of 75,037 words—encompassing the period from 2012 and 2020. The year 2012 signals a beginning of recognition of a new sub-Saharan

migration phenomenon in Tunisian media. After the so-called “Jasmine Revolution”<sup>26</sup>, media attention was focused on the democratic transition. Once the political momentum faded, the media focus shifted to the discussion of social phenomena, be they the old ones like “ḥārgā”<sup>27</sup>, or the ‘new’ ones like sub-Saharan migration. The media monitoring was carried on through a systematic search using the media monitoring software WebRadar.

## 4.2 Rationale of the Research

The issue of migration in Tunisia had been restricted to particular aspects related to Tunisians’ regular and irregular migration to the Global North. At a first level, the studies were usually centred on Tunisians’ migration to the North, without any particular attention to Tunisians’ migratory trends to the Global South-except for some shy attempts at researching the Tunisian migration to Gulf countries, mostly from economic and ethnographic perspectives<sup>28</sup>. The Tunisians’ recent migration choices, i.e. migration to other African countries like Ivory Coast and Senegal for studies and work, are hardly accounted for or studied. It seems the South is disregarded in academic research, probably due to the nature of research in these countries, the lack of funding and projects (unlike EU funded research projects).

The second research gap observed was the study of migrants in Tunisia, whether they come from the Global South or North (the few exceptions are historical/ ethnographic studies of some European communities like the Maltese or Sicilians in Tunisia). Yet, with the increased visibility of the sub-Saharan community from 2016 on, academia started to notice the ‘research potential’. One of the most valuable

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<sup>26</sup> “Jasmine Revolution” is itself a colonial construct which emanated from French journalists and media outlets to further orientalise and exoticize the Southern country. The appellation perfectly rhymes with the “postcard image of a soft and docile Tunisia, widely maintained in France (resumed and perpetuated also by the expression “Jasmine revolution”. Translated from French, article: <https://nawaat.org/2012/01/26/la-nouvelle-croisade-de-caroline-fourest-en-tunisie-2/>

<sup>27</sup> Ḥārgā is the transliteration of Arabic term حرقَة, and ḥarrāga finds its root in the verb “haraqa”, i.e., burn. Ḥārgā, in this sense, is the deliberate act of “burning” borders and identities (may also refer to burning ID documents and thumbprints). One of the first attempts at theorising this migratory trend being Mehdi Mabrouk. (2003) as he delves into of the social context and the imaginary of Tunisian ḥarrāga - i.e. irregular migrants to Italy.

<sup>28</sup> For more information, cf. Boubakri, H. (1985). Modes de gestion et réinvestissements chez les commerçants tunisiens à Paris. *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 1(1), 49-65 ; Chouat, M., & Liteyem, B. (2011). Migrations et asile dans le Sud-Est tunisien. *Mémoire de fin d'étude (en langue arabe), non publié, Université de Sousse.*; Taamallah, K. (1987). L'émigration de la main d'oeuvre tunisienne: situation et problème de retour. *Les cahiers de Tunisie: revue de sciences humaines*, 33(141-142), 132-144; and Kassar, H., & Guérin-Pace, F. (2022). Migrer à l'international: entre réalité et espoir. *Tunisie, l'après 2011: Enquête sur les transformations de la société tunisienne*, 143-156.



studies are Boubakri (2015), Nasraoui (2017), Sedrine (2018), Cassarini (2020). However, not only are these studies not holistic in their account of the sub-Saharanans' reception in Tunisia, but they are also very distanced from media studies, culture studies and discourse analysis, leaving lacunas for the research in these fields.

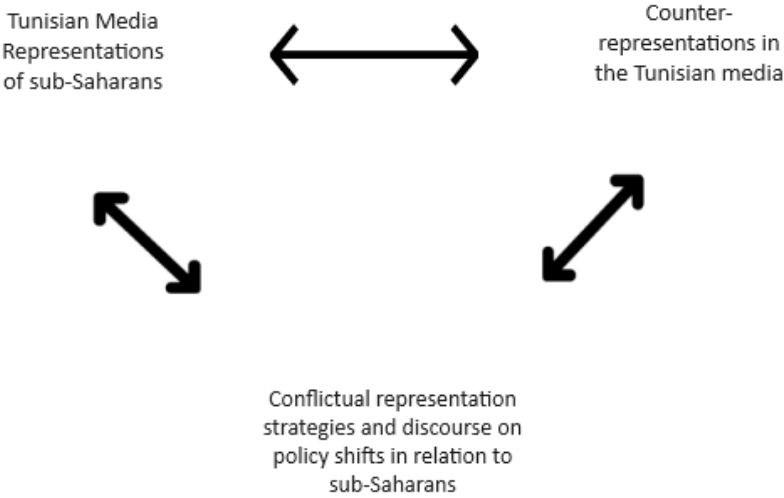
These lacunas are further exacerbated by the mainstream media perceived 'myopia' towards sub-Saharanans back at the time when the research started, and before. From 2011 onwards, the media focused on urgent political issues in Tunisia and relegated the social ones. Sub-Saharanans, being an out-group as it will be proven in Chapter 4, were annihilated and omitted from the media. Being the absent/ present group was even more problematic during the 2020 Coronavirus crisis in Tunisia. In those times, I joined the humanitarian efforts to help the groups most touched by the financial repercussions of the lockdown. Among those groups were sub-Saharanans, who had no structural relief, whether from the Tunisian state or their countries of origin. They were stuck in an impossible trap as they could not move or earn their lives (lockdown and irregular status), or even ask for help through media channels. The only communication channel they had available was social media, and this is how we could reach them.

All these factors—academic and sociopolitical—informed my choice of the subject and motivated my personal and academic endeavours. Hence, the overarching aim of this research is to study the sub-Saharanans 'presence' and 'perception', which proved very optimistic due to the methodological and theoretical bifurcations. In studying the attitude and reception model of a social group, myriad investigation methods and systems might interfere. Hence, the researcher must situate the study into a field pertaining to their expertise—which is language and culture as well as translation in this case. Being a specialist of language and culture, discourse analysis and media seemed the most appropriate apparels to connect the dots. The very nature of this research—study of several migration-related systems and the pertinent dynamics at play—and migration being a complex system itself, made System Dynamics the perfect research scheme for this dissertation.

### **4.3 Research Design and Stages**

Having opted for a complex study of different sociopolitical and cultural aspects of migration, I had to design my research in a way that facilitates smooth cross-movement from one research component to another and vice versa. A common ground is the media corpus, which functions as the analysis platform,

and from which the representations, counter-representations and policy shifts will be extracted, interpreted and connected. To understand the overall design of the thesis, a summative diagram is provided below.



**Figure 2: Overall design of the research components**

As illustrated above, and in order to meet the research objectives and respond to the research questions, the first part of this research will be the discussion and interpretations of the representations of sub-Saharanans in Tunisian media, the second is an identification and analysis of the counter-representations, and the third will focus on the study of these representations in relation to three *discursive moments*<sup>29</sup>—debate and adoption of three crucial laws related to sub-Saharanans namely the anti-trafficking law (2016), anti-racism law (2018) and domestic labour law (2020).

Media being reflective of sociopolitical attitudes can provide us with clues on the perceptions of this community by different audiences (politicians, lawmakers, common citizens, journalists, etc.) and in different times as the data collection extended from 2011 to 2021 (with the final corpus encompassing the media pieces produced from 2012 to 2020). The availability of media data, and the feasibility of systematic quantitative/ qualitative discursive investigation called for Discourse-Historical Approach (hereinafter DHA), eclectically combining elements from CDA and DHA. The mixed and triangulating approach

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<sup>29</sup> Discursive moment in its broad definition is a reference to an event which involves a shift in power, angle, or attitude. These moments mark changes in power dynamics within the discourse itself by bringing about a new topic, reformulating another, changing discourse/ rhetoric or introducing new voices. Discursive moments are significant because they reveal underlying socio-historical structures and ideologies at play. Indeed, in the DHA tradition, these ‘discursive moments’ signal shifts in discursive strategies like nomination, and predication, intensification, but especially in legitimization/ argumentations as will be shown in the last analytical chapter.

adopted in chapters 4 and 5, is coupled with expert interviews in the last chapter to corroborate and confront the findings.

Not only did this method allow for a systematic, representative, and “unselective” collection of data, but it also focused on materials which have the greatest impact on the Tunisian common audience: internet-disseminated media materials, without including social media materials which are prone to excessive manipulation and fake news (emphasised during the interview with *Nawaat* journalist Rihab Boukhayatia). Due to the downgraded interest in the paper versions, the systematic impact on the field of written press is the emergence of electronic newspapers which provide news and analyses for free, at all times. Hence, the Tunisian average reader finds access to these online platforms easier and more convenient and chooses not to buy the same paper version sold at a relatively high price nowadays. Other than information immediacy and affordability, some paper newspapers which resisted on the market, such as *Al Maghreb* and *Al-Sabah*, launched their electronic versions in parallel to gain new readership and retain the old loyal readers. Other newspapers deployed technological tools and efficient digital media, like social media notifications to diversify their outreach.

Against this backdrop, the choice of data is justifiable by the need to analyse the representations of sub-Saharanans as disseminated to a large portion of the Tunisian society. In fact, there is little benefit and utility in studying the discourse of media outlets which do not have a significant number of audiences as the whole point of studying them is to unveil the impact of such representations on the societal reception and the change in attitudes towards sub-Saharanans, as reflected in the media discourse. Other than the analysis of the collected corpus, and as DHA prescribes, a historical, economic and cultural background will be provided throughout the discussion to describe and decipher the changes in discourse. Document analysis as well as expert interviews will be used at the last stage as it requires more triangulated materials for more conclusive findings about the impact of media discourse on migration policy in Tunisia. Each method will be explained in detail in the three analytical chapters.

In this dissertation, the second chapter will be a state-of-the-art exposé of the theories touching upon migration in general and then migration and representations in particular. Such an account is important to understand the rationale behind choosing an eclectic theoretical framework to deal with the representations of sub-Saharanans, rather than one simple theory. The eclectic ‘zeitgeist’ as will be discussed in the first part of the next chapter is crucial to understanding the functioning of this thesis within a border system dynamics’ framework. How is this thesis a work in social system dynamics, will be answered right

from the first chapter but also as the other chapters of the dissertations unfold. The second chapter will also provide an integrated<sup>30</sup> literature review of the studies relevant to representation of migrants in media from CDA and SI perspectives, underlying the scarcity of such research on Global South countries (Seo & Kavakli, 2022).

The third chapter is a detailed methodological account of the peculiar eclectic methodology chosen. CDA and notably DHA require many steps in the process of data collection, syndication, translation and coding. It is a very rich process which requires a separate chapter, which might potentially serve as a guide for aspiring CDS students and researchers. The fourth chapter will focus on the representations of sub-Saharanans in the media corpus collected to quantitatively and qualitatively understand the diachronic evolution and landmark shifts in these intermittent discursive representations, against a tumultuous socio-political context marked by great political transitions and societal upheavals revealing an amalgamating, othering and annihilating treatment of the sub-Saharan question in Tunisia.

Subsequently, the fifth chapter will focus on a sub-corpus extracted from the main corpus, to quantitatively and qualitatively analyse the counter-representations of sub-Saharanans in some media outlets and in different “discursive moments” in an attempt to understand the dynamics governing the media framing of sub-Saharan migration as an advantage/ opportunity, and sub-Saharan migrants as successful, advantageous and equal human beings in contrast to the dominant frames of sub-Saharanans as inferior, dangerous and numerous victims and/ or deviants.

Building on this examined conflict between two discourses on sub-Saharan migrants, one which annihilates and accuses them, and one that “agentivises” and protects them, ‘tipping points’ (Wodak, 2017) in the corpus were identified to inform the analysis conducted in the last chapter: investigation of policy shifts in relation to sub-Saharanans. Three laws out of four were retained to be discussed as case-studies—Organic Law No. 2016-61 on human trafficking and smuggling, Organic Law No. 2018-50 on all forms of discrimination and Organic Law No. 2020-37 on domestic work regulation. The last chapter starts with a statistical overview of the tipping points and discursive moments marking the diachronic

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<sup>30</sup> Review of relevant research will be presented throughout the chapter in an integrated manner, when dealing with theory and background, apart from the last part “State of the Art”.

evolution of the discourse on sub-Saharanans, to decipher any correlation between the socio-political context and the media rhetoric on sub-Saharanans.

Then, it moves to a case-by-case discussion of the abovementioned laws, to scrutinise the relation between the media discourse and the discursive representation of these laws as ‘remedial and compensation actions’ for sub-Saharanans, or as universal requirements for the country to be “really” democratic. In each case, the discourse model on policy implementation proved different ranging from a mere policy reflection or policy transfer to complete advocacy for a specific law.

The conclusion will summarise the findings and emphasise their contribution to the academic and social conversation on sub-Saharan presence in Tunisia. It will also project the results onto the status quo, four years after the research started, and after the 2021 “coup”<sup>31</sup> which changed the political system and social attitudes to sub-Saharanans especially with the new populist political discourse in the country. The concluding remarks will also draw on the limitations and challenges faced especially due to the political transformations in Tunisia throughout the analysis and research period, but also because of the intricate methodology, which opens more horizons and begs too many questions concerning research on migration in the Global South countries.

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<sup>31</sup> The events of July 25, 2021, are called a “coup” by the opponents of Saied and a necessary political change by his proponents as well as a political class which had been warning against the muddled legislative and executive scenes in Tunisia prior to this date. I am inclined to the second opinion, having witnessed the abject management of the Covid crisis by the government and the infamous “quarrels” in the parliament.

## **II- Chapter two: Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

### **1. Theorising Migration: The Perils of Theoretical Exclusivism**

When embarking on migration research, the study of relevant theoretical and conceptual bifurcations and the prolific literature on migration issues is daunting yet fruitful. Indeed, migration is as old as human existence, yet it never ceases to amaze us with its novel manifestations and its entanglement in almost every field of academia and research. Migratory movements have always redounded to shifting economies, changing ideas and shattering boundaries. Added to that, for numerous geo-political and social reasons, migration-related questions are now *in vogue* due to their urgent and evolving nature, resulting in a more cross-disciplinary treatment of migration. This supposes the involvement of many domains and fields of studies in the examination of any migratory trend, ranging from sociology, anthropology, and ethnography, to media, culture studies, political philosophy, literature, linguistics, policy, and systems theory. For this reason, theories on, about and around migration ought to be reviewed to determine their strengths and limitations. Above all, delving into migration, media, and policy theory would enable me to build my own social analytical and theoretical model in a dialogical and critical manner. The task was not simple, yet it was informative, enriching and so rewarding.

#### **1.1 The Functionalist Paradigm**

In social sciences, notably sociology and social anthropology, the functionalist paradigm— or functionalism— regards society as a set of components, i.e., actors, with inherent forces toward equilibrium. In fact, this model of analysis rests upon the assumption that there are functional requirements which should be fulfilled in a society to survive (such as solidarity, control, reproduction, etc.). Finally, in this model, social phenomena are there for a functional purpose. Migration is therefore seen as a propellant of this socio-economic balance, and it is carried out with a view to maintaining social stability.

The functionalist model sees society as a body, an organism, which functions with the synergy of its different organs. This perspective, which originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was led by Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown, and Comte. Functionalist schools of thought are labelled as ‘positivist’ as they believe in an objective social reality, under which behaviour is accounted for in terms of the ‘objective’ influences upon it” (Holmwood, 2005). Accordingly, social behaviour, like migration, should be ‘objectively’ measured by empirical observation; then social laws can be derived therefrom.

Both push-pull and neo-classical migration models are deeply rooted in the functionalist paradigm. The logic behind the theoretical accounting of migration under the functionalist umbrella is that migration naturally occurs between the poorest and wealthiest areas, with little attention to other factors such as personal choices. The functionalist model regards migration as a linear function of income and production differences. This may explain the assumption, and the ensuing policy implications, that fostering economic development in poor countries is efficient to reduce — even prevent — migration.

In reality, migration is not a simple one-way flow and cannot be explained or controlled by objective factors. This is the criticism addressed to functionalist migration theory. Indeed, even though they confirm that ‘opportunity differentials’ are at the root of migration, gravity models cannot account for the “non-random, patterned and geographically clustered nature of real-world migration, with most migration not occurring along the steepest opportunity gradients and where wage convergence often coincides with increasing migration” (De Haas, 2010, p. 1589). Migration is a very textured, layered and complex phenomenon due to the starkly different individual choices and the structural constraints (social classes, market access, power inequalities, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, etc.). For a thorough analysis and critique of the functionalist model of migration, one must examine the two main models of this paradigm: push-pull and neo-classical models.

### **1.1.1 The Pull-Push Model: a “Platitude at Best”<sup>32</sup>**

Although migration, in its basic meaning as changing residence, is believed to have started when *Homo erectus* moved out of Africa, nearly 2 million years ago, the first attempts at theorising migration only came in 1885, strangely enough, when the German-English geographer, Ernest George Ravenstein, wrote his essay “The Laws of Migration”, in which he forged seven postulates of migration. He perceived migration as an economic-driven trend and asserted that it is strongly linked to development. His rules fall under the ‘Gravity’ model developed by geographers from the early twentieth century to forecast migrants’ numbers on the grounds of the distance between origin and destination countries; population sizes and economic premises in destination countries. Ravenstein wrote the article to fit migration into theoretical moulding and to prove that specific migratory processes, worthy of delimiting and studying, were operating indeed.

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<sup>32</sup> Skeldon, R. (1990).

His endeavours, although limited in space (England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland) and in scope (absorption and dispersion trends), do not fall short of novelty. In fact, his seventh rule “Females are more migratory than males”—viewed as a breakthrough—is one of the first attempts at a study of gendered determinants and consequences of migration. Critics of his time denounced him for pinpointing ‘patterns’ of migration rather than identifying “natural laws”. Ravenstein's legacy accounts for as many as eleven original migration laws, as some reviewers suggest. He is credited for the theories which rest on “push” and “pull” factors of migration.

Later, in 1960, Everett S. Lee argued that the decision to migrate is governed by 'plus' and 'minus' factors, obstacles (distance, physical barriers, entry laws, etc.), and personal choices. This underlying idea that migration is a ‘function’ of disequilibrium is the foundation of the ‘push-pull’ models which still dominate much academic thinking about migration. Push-pull models rely on economic, environmental, and demographic factors to explain how migrants are driven out of their original countries and why they are attracted to some destination areas. They rest on the hypothesis that people migrate from the poorest to the wealthiest countries.

This idea can be easily challenged by the new trends in South-South migration. Countries and regions in the less developed world with similar levels of unemployment and poverty produce staggeringly different migration trends. Some are sources of major flows while others do not emit a large number of migrants. In fact, and in total contrast to the truisms advanced by push-pull models, in *African Migration: Trends, Patterns, Drivers* (2016), Marie-Laurence Flahaux and Hein De Haas argue that development has an adverse effect on human mobility. Along with other scholars like Clemens (2014), De Haas (2010), Skeldon (1997), Flahaux and De Haas criticise the old-fashioned push-pull model when dealing with African migration by arguing that “particularly in poor societies, development increases rather than decreases levels of migration” (De Haas & Flahaux, 2016, p. 5). They explain that development tends to increase people’s access to resources, networks, education, media, and infrastructure, which facilitates travel and enables migration. This is further corroborated by the data from the economic and demographic situation of African countries in 2000 (World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2000), where the countries of North Africa are the ones with the highest GDP’s and PPP’s, and yet they are the ones with the highest rates of departing migration. In fact, almost half (43,6 %) of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia are from Ivory coast (Table 1, Nasraoui, 2017), which is discrepant with the fact that among the sending sub-Saharan countries, Côte d’Ivoire has better development indexes (0.538) than Cameroon (0.536) and



Senegal (0.512)<sup>33</sup> (UNDP, countries' profiles, 2020). This clearly empties the push-pull theory of any heuristic or explanatory value and begs for even more puzzling questions as to the motivation of such peculiar intra-African migration patterns.

For instance, in order to analyse sub-Saharan migration to the Maghreb from this very perspective, the causes or factors shall be classified as follows: (i) the push factors are wars and poverty and (ii) the pull factors are less poverty, proximity to Europe, and relative stability. However, this simplistic model fails to explain how sub-Saharans, for instance, are motivated by the security factor to migrate to Libya, where their security was jeopardised in the aftermath of the 2011 conflict. It also fails to explain why people from Congo, for instance, choose Tunisia over Algeria, although the pull factors are more or less the same in both countries. This model, therefore, offers little assistance to policymakers and stakeholders because it cannot provide answers as to the motivation and trends of migration in North-South African migration.

Another shortcoming of the push-pull model is that it does not thoroughly account for the dynamics which combine all the factors causing population movements. It seems that this model highlights every factor related to a certain trend of migration without elaborately building on the whole process. This framework is harshly attacked for having little investigative added value (McDowell and de Haan, 1997). The theory fails to explain why only some sub-Saharans move, compared to the majority who choose to stay. Wittman qualifies all push and pull factors as similar in that they “provide the perception of difference between ‘here’ and ‘there’” (Wittman 1975, p. 23, cited in McDowell and de Haan, 1997). Although all such push areas are subject to the same balance-restoring drives, the theory fails to explore why empirical differences between pull countries exist and persist.

At the individual level, it is unclear why subjects who have the same gain-loss calculations in a sending population have different migratory behaviours. Some leave, but many others do not. Only a minority of highly skilled workers from the Global South actually become migrants, despite all being subjected to the same pressures. The Tunisian Medical Council (CNOM). asserted that in 2023, 1325

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<sup>33</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles>

doctors migrated to Europe. How can push-pull theory account for the limited numbers of migrant doctors compared to the thousands who choose to stay, despite the miserable conditions in public hospitals?

The central difficulty with the push-pull model is that it does not determine the important forces within the changing historical context of migration. For this model, migration occurs in one way, between two distinct, autonomous social entities: a ‘pusher’ which drives out labour and a ‘puller’ which attracts these “expelled” workers. Many questions remain unanswered within this stiff understanding of migration. In the case of sub-Saharanans ‘pushed’ to Tunisia, the reason why they continue to come whereas the country no longer entices/ pulls, i.e., absorb this labour is unknown. In addition, how can we account for the channels linking the sending countries and destination country?

Above all, this mechanistic conception of migration within push-pull models leaves out human agency. The individual motive and personal story are not taken into account, even if these factors have a great impact on the migratory choices of a given population. Even when considered, human agency within the push-pull model is treated as an objective, scientific and “exact” variable, which is absolutely unsound: human motive as a scientific constant is inherently paradoxical. The migrants, writers of their own mobility and ‘decision-makers’ usually have little knowledge about the costs and benefits of migration. For instance, sub-Saharan migrants often act upon a limited or fickle knowledge. In the 2018 report, *Tunisia, Country of Destination and Transit for sub-Saharan African Migrants*<sup>34</sup>, most sub-Saharan respondents stated they were “highly influenced by the information provided to them by members of their social networks”. With regard to educational, labour, quality and affordability of higher education, Tunisia is seen to have a level similar to Europe. Obviously, this is only a matter of perception as most of them find themselves in dire situations due to the false advertising of universities and labour agencies. Migrants fabricate ‘narratives of success’, and in most cases, this leads to disinformation for potential migrants, which affects their agency and motivation.

The idea that development in push countries curbs migration feeds the hypothesis that wealthy societies have lower overall rates of departing migration than poorer societies. Yet, a quick glance at

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<sup>34</sup> Tunisia, Country of Destination and Transit for sub-Saharan African migrants. (2018). [https://www.impact-repository.org/document/reach/386b767f/reach\\_tns\\_report\\_tunisia\\_country\\_of\\_destination\\_and\\_transit\\_december\\_2018\\_fr\\_0.pdf](https://www.impact-repository.org/document/reach/386b767f/reach_tns_report_tunisia_country_of_destination_and_transit_december_2018_fr_0.pdf), accessed on 9/10/2021

global migration patterns seems to defy this hypothesis. Migrants do not necessarily travel from the poor to wealthy countries. In addition, highly developed countries usually witness high immigration coupled with significant emigration and domestic migration trends. However, migration scholars, in demystifying gravity models, fail in conceiving substitute empirical theories on the motives of migration trends. To reject these theories is insufficient to account for migration and its repercussions as people *do* move with the hope of improving their material and family conditions only. Indeed, in addition to this assumption, it is essential to formulate more logical theories capable of comprehending the current migration patterns in the light of the more comprehensive social and economic change processes. In fact, it is puzzling that the present migration dynamics, notably South-South migration, are undertheorized.

### **1.1.2 The Neoclassical Approach**

This approach, like the push-pull model, assumes that labour markets and economies naturally tend towards equilibrium in the long term. Accordingly, trade and migration are balancing elements. However, the neoclassical model reckons migrants are ‘rational’ actors. Migrants move from societies where there is a surplus of labour and where wages are low, to societies where labour force is needed, and wages are relatively high. The decision to migrate is taken by individuals who deem that their future gains, made in the receiving country, will compensate for the costs and risks of mobility. This model, which is primarily economic, builds on principles of utility maximisation, rational choice, and mobility of labour. In Western countries, jobs are abundant, and the labour force is scarce, even if wages are relatively high. Conversely, labour is abundant, and jobs are scarce in the Global South. Thus, the wages are correspondingly low. This is the case in African countries, and this is the motive for the migration flows from North Africa to France in the years 1970s and 1980s. The result is that workers move from low-wage to high-wage economies. Subsequently and in the long run, migration changes the dynamics of supply and demand and is eventually “self-terminated”. Indeed, the French market ended up being fulfilled, and the shortage in low-skilled labour metamorphosed into a surplus, resulting in a change in African migration trends and French labour and migration policies.

Like push-pull models, the neo-classical approaches are criticised for failing to explain migration trends in the poorest countries where the individual choice– or the agency– is challenged by a myriad of governmental, bordering constraints and challenges. Individual choice is better studied in wealthy countries where the individual is free to make his own choices without any external constraints like visa requirements. They may even account for the mobility of the economic elite of under-developed countries

to wealthy and developed countries. These individuals, being part of the cream of society, have access to money and logistics. In fact, Hein De Haas asserts neoclassical models “may hold relatively well to explain migration from high-skilled and wealthy migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa to OECD countries” (De Haas, 2014, p. 14). However, neoclassical approaches cannot account for migration in the global South and cannot explain why and how undocumented African migrants move from their countries to Europe as the personal motivation and the labour poles—the main factors used in neoclassical theory—are pretty much challenged by border, distance and financial restrictions. And yet, undocumented migration is at the heart of the world’s migration “crises”, which calls for more understanding and scrutiny, and subsequently more updated and comprehensive theories.

The neoclassical approach has been broadly criticised within contemporary migration studies. Primarily, this theoretical paradigm is governed by an “internal logic and elegant simplicity” (Malmberg, 1997, p. 29, in King, 2012, p. 14), i.e., it is too superfluous and based on a logic that does not dare to think about the external factors like the human, psychological and sociological ones. Moreover, this approach is deterministic. Building on a set of initial conditions (labour, wage, capital), it aspires to yield the same outcomes in every migratory context, regardless of the country, the era and the geo-political variables. In the eyes of its critics, this approach is inoperable as it does not grasp the nature of migration as ever changing and evolving. According to Arango (2004), the neoclassical theory turns out to be short at explaining why the majority of people choose not to migrate even though the model input (rare jobs, little capital, low wage) forecasts a high volume of migration.

All in all, the neoclassical paradigm falls short of insight in incorporating family factors, social background or even the political situation in a given country. It also neglects any examination of postcolonial contexts which came to historically pair up certain countries together and not others (Tunisia/France, Egypt/ England, etc.). Above all, although it pretends to have its foundations in economics, it does encompass any systemic analysis of the world economic powers and balances in terms of dependency and underdevelopment. In fact, this approach merely states that migration constitutes a necessary step allowing traditional societies (weak productivity and limited use of natural resources) to have access to “modernity” benefits. Put as such, the neoclassical theory is a very reductive and patronising perspective of migration. Migration has always been a source of richness to both the sending and the receiving societies, not simply the last resort for the “poor” and “underdeveloped”.

### 1.1.3 Systems and Networks

Building upon the innovation of the general systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1968) and a relatively flexible scope, the system approach seemed only logical and practical in accounting for migration processes. Indeed, such a model allowed for a more kinetic analysis—beyond the linear and dichotomous treatments of gravity models. This system approach, springing from Mabogunje’s germinal paper on a systems approach to rural-urban migration in West Africa or ‘village migration systems’ (1970) influenced many works in migration theory like Wallerstein with his world systems theory—WST (1979). Mabogunje defined a migration ‘system’ as a set of zones interconnected by means of “feedback mechanisms” (De Haas, 2007, p. 6) i.e., flows and counter flows of people, cultures, services, and goods. Such a migration system allows for further exchange between the places. While Mabogunje explored African migration trends (rural/ urban), Kritiz et al. (1992) extended this to what they call ‘global migration systems’.

The latter rests upon the principle that the intricate links between/ among migrants (contexts in sending country and contexts in host country) suppose that the origin and host countries should be viewed together, in “unity”. Contrary to old-fashioned moulds which regard the global migration in a differential mode — this and that; here and there; us and them— the systems approach pleads for an integral and comprehensive reading of contemporary migration. The migration system is then defined as a group of nations “exchang[ing] relatively large numbers of immigrants with each other” (Kritz, Lim & Zlotnik, 1992, p. 2). In this sense, the systems model emphasises the space/ time of migration with a view to projecting the social and economic outcomes of a given migration on both the origin and the host countries. This is a breakthrough, as old migration models would only explore the development and economic shifts in the sending countries, assuming that migration has a missionary role of developing third-world countries and shifting the equilibrium towards “elevating” these countries.

Another novelty of the system approach is that it views migration as a circular, mutually beneficial, and intertwined system where the impact of change on one component of the system is traceable and visible in the rest of the system’s components (Faist, 1998, p. 193). Therefore, migration systems should be viewed as self-regulating insofar as they are capable of correcting themselves in response to any change in variables and of changing components and balances (such is the case when a new destination is taken in the system when another is saturated or is obstructed). The systems approach was praised for mending for the lacunas of the push-pull and neoclassical approaches. It actually presented a comprehensive study

of migration based on structure and processes. It was welcomed as a possibly more ‘scientific’ method. Although push-pull and neo-classical approaches regard society as a system, an organism with different components acting together, these theories remain at the descriptive level and fail to explain the workings of such systems. Accordingly, these cannot be qualified as system theories.

The old-fashioned condescending vision of origin countries was shattered by the systems model. Added to that, the novelty of the system theory lies in rising above numbers and statistics. Within the systems paradigm, the social structures form an integral part of the analysis of migration. Migration is therefore no longer the subject-matter of geography and economy, but it is also the focus of sociology and social sciences. This is probably one of the first attempts at interdisciplinarity, merging different sciences and disciplines for the study of migration.

As any other theoretical approach, the systems approach was criticised for failing to account for various national and domestic systems. When studying the applicability of the systems’ approach to sub-Saharan migration, many problems arose. The lack of data could hinder the efficiency of systems approach as Mabogunje advocates for data and figures as the sole factors to examine the volumes of exchange from sub-Saharan African and other countries. In addition, Mabogunje’s model supposes the existence of a two-way exchange, which is not the case with the sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia. Finally, this approach neglects the individual and human aspects, which are prerequisites for the study of sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia.

Like the first two functionalist approaches, push-pull and neoclassical models, this approach is often qualified as “mechanistic” and “positivist” (King, 2012, p. 21). The critics of the system's approach demanded a rather different model, i.e., migration networks as ‘[t]he importance of networks for migration can hardly be overstated... [they] rank amongst the most important explanatory factors for migration’ (Arango, 2004, p. 28). Migration networks are groups of interpersonal bonds linking migrants, ex-migrants and non-migrants in networks. These are founded on family ties, friendship and community links. Migration network theory tackles migration as an outcome of the formation of networks facilitating the process by decreasing social, economic, and affective costs of migration.

The network model succeeds in integrating the sociological proportion and clearly enhances the obsolete mechanistic and economistic gravity models, even the system theory. According to Samers,

social networks can account for some migration trends and help us go beyond ‘dualisms’ such as global versus local or macro vs micro, to rather focus analysis on structures and agents (Samers, 2010). Migration links populations from sending and receiving countries in a ‘dynamic’ manner rather than in a one-way pattern. In addition, ‘migration networks’ pretend to help scholars and decision-makers forecast the future migration patterns as the networks tend to recreate the same migration trends over time.

The networks’ approach proposes to fix a major theoretical issue: are the causes of migration the same as the causes of prolonged stay? The initial grounds of migration are often different from the causes for its “perpetuation” and propagation in time and space. For instance, the networks’ approach is very fruitful in dealing with sub-Saharan migration to North Africa. In fact, many reports and surveys stressed the role of “networking” in sustaining sub-Saharan migration trends. In the REACH report (2018), it is stated that main drivers for sub-Saharans’ mobility to Tunisia is the available information networks which convey clear ideas about the living conditions, labour choices, legal repercussions, etc. All these aspects are channelled dynamically among social networks which shape the sub-Saharans’ perception of Tunisia and their decision-making, “even though information shared reportedly often did not correspond to the situation respondents found once in Tunisia” (REACH, 2018, pp. 3,12,20). More strikingly, the interviewed sub-Saharan workers mentioned social networks in Tunisia as “the most important factor for choosing Tunisia over Algeria, Libya or Morocco”. On the other hand, students and graduates highlighted the availability of information on education and visa policy from friends who had previously stayed in Tunisia. The report stressed the role of both local networks and transnational networks in shaping the migratory trends of sub-Saharans -whether to stay in the country or transit from it to Europe (REACH, 2018, p. 12).

A great bulk of migration network literature emphasises the family ties, as social networks, in netting strong migration trends and reproducing them. They converge in the fact that networks are not spontaneous and transient. Accordingly, the networks approach studies the evolution of migration networks throughout time due to the impact of relationships. Members of the networks are identified according to the type of organisation that governs the network and the needs of those network members. The original aspect about networks is its engagement in studying the “dark” networks. For instance, Samers (2010, pp. 87-114) highlights the smuggling and “trafficking networks” as a mid-network between social networks and criminal business. Such networks start off as facilitating systems transporting

migrants across borders. Then, they end up— in the case of trafficking— profiting from them by holding them hostages of debt and sex.

The network model was developed into prolific sub-models. In fact, according to Boyd and Nowak (2012), there are three main types of migrant networks: family and personal networks, labour networks, and “illegal” migrant networks. They also made use of the gender variable, arguing that all networks are highly ‘gendered’ with a very active role of females in organising and supporting personal networks (Boyd & Nowak, 2012, p 86). Another subset of the network models’ approach is the relatively new ‘digital network’ which fits the scope of the “connected migrant” theory (Dimeniseu, 2008) in discussing the correlations of media and migration.

The dominant feature of networks in the migration literature is its positivism: networks are perceived as beneficial in providing information about accommodation, labour, legal support, contacts, etc. Yet, network models can also be reductionist in their treatment of personal trajectories and stories. Like gravity models and systems models, the networks model excludes the individual dimension, which is regarded by all as fickle and inconstant— therefore not worthy of scientific examination. To put it simply, Charles Tilly’s memorable dictum, ‘it is not people who migrate but networks’ (Tilly, 1990, p. 79) is concerning. It begs the question of agency versus structure, again. It seems that for network scholars, migration decisions (who, where, and how long) are not individual decisions; they are rather dictated by family and community— i.e., concomitant conditions that are beyond individual aspirations and choices (Massey et al. 1998, p. 21).

Furthermore, the systems approach is also criticised for its little attention, not to say null attention, to the networks’ dissolution. While migration networks are studied in their formation and perpetuation phases, migration scholars turn a blind eye to the end, death or decay of a given migration network. It fails to explain why some networks are history now, and how some others will vanish in the future.

## **1.2 Historical-Structural Models**

In migration theory, historical-structural models are theoretical models which are relatively inspired by the neo-Marxist political economy. They are half-way between migration theories and theories of capitalism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism, where migration plays a crucial role. They are referred to as “structural” rather than functionalist as they focus on the structuring of the global economy. When



exploring the causes of international migration, the historical-structural approach regards the historical formations of structural forces on a global level (macro-level). As opposed to functionalist models which believe in the inherent tendency towards equilibrium through migration flows, historical-structural models highlight the disequilibrium and unscrupulous abuse of the capitalistic economic politics and power relations<sup>35</sup>.

Although different from the functionalist models in scope and background, historical-structural approaches rest upon a dual and polarised vision of global labour markets. However, and contrary to push-pull, neoclassical, system and network models, power in historical-structural approaches is structured in terms of a heavy demand on cheap and compliant labour. In fact, in the wake of capitalism, advanced industrialised countries featured two parallel labour markets: a primary labour market of secure and well-paid jobs for nationals and a secondary labour market for the low-skilled migrants mainly which is naturally characterised by low-wages, insecurity and petty jobs in factories and services. This is the initial situation, but instead of migration pulling the model toward equilibrium, it further aggravates the differences by making the secondary labour market less and less attractive and less rewarding for nationals (worse wages and conditions). The migrants, being foreigners and sometimes undocumented, accept the deplorable conditions as they have no power to resist and cannot afford unemployment in their host or origin countries. According to this analysis, international labour migration is governed by “pull” factors rather than “push” ones. In his *Birds of Passage: Labor and Industrial Societies*, Michael J. Piore (1979, p. 19) argues that “[i]n orthodox Marxian analysis the central historical process affecting the job structure is the division of labour”.

This concept of division of labour is crucial in the historical trajectory of the capitalist system as per Marxian theory. In fact, production is the decisive factor for human attitudes and behaviour in the Marxian system. The reduction of labour opportunities through labour division leads to the unification of the labour power, and to the “inevitability of revolution” à la Marxian philosophy. Eventually, the migrants who used to accept all the petty jobs and miserable conditions begin to unite and organise to improve their situation and to ask for better jobs— those which are usually given to natives. The result is a conflict which is further heightened by the racial and prejudicial tensions. At the end, the host country, in an

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<sup>35</sup> For further information, cf. 55-56 of Morawska, E (2012).

attempt to contain the conflicts, acts upon its policies to curb migration inflows— often unsuccessfully. Research and observations have shown that whenever governments strive to stop ‘historical’ migration trends, their endeavours yield opposite side effects as “in response to efforts to stop it, the migration goes underground” (Piore, 1979, p. 11). This is a perfect translation of the sub-Saharan migration trend in Tunisia in the aftermath of the 2021 political change, as the cities of El-Amra and Sfax testify to a total metamorphosis of the 2011 migration trend into an underground, reactionary, secretive and hard to ‘contain’ or detect phenomenon.

Studying the theoretical formulations of the historical-structural approaches, one could not but notice that this set of models is the most realistic and practical in the context of modern migration. Furthermore, they partly rhyme with the methodological peculiarities of the Discourse-Historical Approach which is used for the analysis of sub-Saharan migrants’ representations. Whereas archaic functionalist models view migration from above as linear itineraries between areas, the historical-structural approaches examine the social structures and substructures of societies in the light of appropriate historical reading of power. The correlations between the stipulations of Piore and the current situation of sub-Saharans in the Maghreb region are striking.

What started as an involuntary mobility/ transit turned into a permanent situation. In addition, the sub-Saharan migrants, who used to accept petty jobs and meagre wages, have now come to realise that they are a force for social change. Their represented “activism” in media, which shall be reviewed and analysed later on, often conflictual and resistant, is the best example of how they had united and organised to improve their living and work conditions<sup>36</sup>. Nevertheless, as almost every other migration theory, the historical-structural theory is criticised for its broad and sweeping historical generalisations. They regard all types of migrations within the same Marxist or neo-Marxist paradigm.

This is one of the perils of theoretical exclusivism as “being submerged in one or another Marxist interpretation” (Piore, 1979, p. 42). This analysis seems fragmented and defective without some additional elements of analysis, which are not necessarily Marxian. For instance, capitalists or capital countries do not distinguish between members of the working class, whether migrants or natives. They just build on

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<sup>36</sup> It has become obvious that these “resistance” trends are a thing of the past against a backdrop of media annihilation from 2021 on.

exploitation that already exists between the primary and secondary labour markets; their capitalist unfairness is rather migrant-blind to be realistic. The “inevitable” upheaval, to quote Marxists, is therefore the outcome of the labours of migrants and non-migrants. Other than that, there is no assurance that this so-called revolution will result in a more purely capitalist system “in which native labour bore flux and uncertainty” like the fatalistic Marxist model suggests.

Another problem with the historical-structural model, which is fundamental and common with the functionalist approaches, is the view of migrants as passive hostages to a world system/ disposition, rather than agents and masters of their own destiny. All the above discussed models deny the migrants’ agency and focus on structure. Joaquin Arango attacks the historical-structural approach for its treating migrants as “little more than passive pawns in the play of great powers and world processes presided over by the logic of capital accumulation” (Arango 2004, p. 27). He also harshly comments on the “univocal, reductionist interpretations of history in which all countries pass through... as if following a grand script” (Arango 2004, p. 27).

Migration theories are abundant, but one-fits-all models are not efficient in accounting for the recent migration trends in South-South migration. To oppose such reductionist and deterministic theories (whether functional or historical-structural), social scientists advanced theories which could evade the structural phantasm and move beyond it to more personal, individualistic, mundane, down-to-earth experiences of migrants. Sociologists decided to take over the beacon of migration theory and to dedicate their work to the study of the migrants’ agency: experiences, life stories, perceptions and identities, resulting in what came to be known as “the symbolic interactionist” perspective, which will be adopted in the analysis of sub-Saharan migrants’ media representations.

### **1.3 The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective**

In social theory, the advent of symbolic interactionism in the twentieth century is a marking sign of attention to the “human”, rather than functions, structures and systems. In fact, functionalist and historical-structural theorists engaged in the study of the effects of mass migration (because of wars, economic vulnerability, and religious conflicts) on the social structures of host countries, policy and assimilation “rates”. Other sociologists delved into social conflict theories (stemming from a historical-structural perspective) and examined the labour market conflicts in the aftermath of the marketplace competition caused by the heightened conflicts between migrant labour and native workers for

jobs. Symbolic Interactionist sociologists on the other hand—started to examine the symbolism of increased anti-(im)migration rhetoric towards migrants, within the framework of the interaction between the migrants and their host societies.

Symbolic interactionism is a theory which explores “shared meanings, orientations, and assumptions form the basic motivations behind people's actions” (Conley, 2013, p. 31). Herbert Blumer, who coined the term in 1986 and was one of the pioneers of Symbolic Interactionism, built his work upon the “cycle of meaning”, i.e., the principle that people react when faced with the meaning that social symbols have. In this trend, meanings are distinct and independent; then they are shared by a community or a social group, as a result of their interactions. Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis of social interaction was groundbreaking for Symbolic Interactionism. He used the jargon of theatre, based on the assumption that people’s social interactions rest upon “cultural scripts” (Goffman, 1973, pp. 72-74).

Goffman asserts that face-to-face interactions are theatrical performances. Thus, when someone comes in contact with another person “onstage” he attempts to guide the impression the other person will form of him, by “acting”. In return, the first one tries to build a perception of the second one by collecting information. In the “backstage”, however, lurks a hidden and secret space where these two people ‘act’ and get rid of their social “masks”, therefore “performed” identities. This on/out negotiation of identity is fundamental in building the social identities of migrants.

According to Goffman, there is a gap between the identity assigned pursuant to membership recognition (belonging to a social group) and the agency of this member in the workings of that identity. Hence, later in 1986, Goffman further developed his Symbolic Interactionist model and defined stigma and its role in distorting identity giving way to prejudice and stereotypes, which shape our understanding of the migration experience to a great extent. The social constructions of the sub-Saharan as a “thief” “swindler” “magician” are stereotypes built by and for those who think of themselves as morally and socially superior: North-African, “honest” and “white” citizens.

For instance, a sub-Saharan migrant is an “arnaqueur”<sup>37</sup> i.e., ‘hustler’ or ‘swindler’ (as is represented in media, chapter 3) because society acts as if he is and most members of society believe that

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<sup>37</sup> I deliberately used the French word, for it is the word that pops up in many of my discussions about sub-Saharans. It is weirdly enough a common word, used in many conversations in the Facebook group “Jeunes Mamans” when

this is a fact, even if his idea started as an arbitrary creation of their collective imaginary. Accordingly, they act in ways that further materialise and reinforce this collective belief, treating this sub-Saharan as an “arnaqueur” for a fact, pushing him/ her to react and act upon this idea, probably further incarnating it. In fact, Herman and Reynolds (1994) state that within these optics, people actively and dynamically participate in the creation of social reality rather than merely being dragged into the spiral. According to them, migration results in racial competition; and prejudice is to be explained in terms of change in social conditions not life experiences, i.e., a sense of group position which conveys superiority, inherent differences from the other “subordinates”, and a fear that the alter race has plans to steal the privileges of the “dominant race”.

The rise in Islamophobia in the United States, after the attacks on the World Trade Centre, is one of the best examples of Symbolic Interactionist theory in practice. After the 9/11 attacks Arabs, Muslims, and other racial minorities who could be perceived as Arab or Muslim (because of skin colour, dress, or religious appearance) endured a violent backlash since they were presumed to be terrorists with wicked intentions as to American security and culture. From a Symbolic Interactionist perspective, the newly formed physical reaction to Arabs and Muslims emanated from a symbolic and shared meaning resting upon prejudice and stigma. In Goffman’s terms, the onstage performance of the Arab and Muslim migrants was outdone by the collective impression formed by the American society, with an assumption that the “backstage” identity of those migrants contrasts with the “onstage” identity they are striving to convey.

According to Hein de Haas, Transnational, Diaspora, and Creolization theories are classified as SI theories. They are grounded in cross-fertilization between different cultures as they interact. In the creolization theory, society selects certain cultural components from sending cultures and imbues them with new meanings to create totally new forms. Creolization is thus a *hic et nunc* encounter which results in a new harmonious and reconciled cultural crop with a new “creolized” identity and identification. A diasporic encounter, on the other hand, generally yields discomfort with cultural identities in the host societies. Thus, to evade such a conflictual interaction with the new social group, ‘homeland’ or ‘home’ are reconstructed fables, narratives, memories and organisation in small communities. The past and the

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addressing the issue of sub-Saharan domestic workers (nannies). This is also an observation made in *Le Maghreb et les migrations Subsahariennes: Le rôle des associations et des syndicats* (2014 sub-corpus).

sending motherland are the sources of identification. Both forms of symbolic cultural interactions, although divergent, offer possibilities of convergence within the symbolic interactionist model.

This approach seems very appealing for it addresses the individual's experience and pays increased attention to "agency" rather than structure. It also delves into communication and interaction in society to establish new patterns of identification, offering a fresh perspective of social conflicts. However, Symbolic Interactionists are often criticised for having non-scientific research methods. As such, SI cannot be tested scientifically and through quantitative tools only. They are also claimed to have a non-theory rather than a theory. In fact, it is seen as very broad and cannot be used in analysing empirical data or predicting outcomes in social life. Symbolic Interactionism is seen as a framework for more theorization. The SI is instrumental in studying how groups are represented, misrepresented, counter-represented and how they react to these representations through self-representation, resistance, lobbying, and advocacy (Chapter 4, 5 and 6). However, the SI has to be accompanied with other eclectic elements from media theory and Discourse Studies to draw a full ranging image of the systemic interactions between society, media and politics, in the question of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia. (as is represented in media, chapter 3).

#### **1.4 "Conceptual Eclecticism" and the Impossibility of a Migration Theory**

Why do we migrate? How is our migration(s) perceived and represented by other groups? It seems that the social science researchers have been trying to tackle this question for over a century now. The answers to these very questions came from all the fields relevant to migration: economy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, geography or ethnography. Whereas the traditional functionalist school founded its hypotheses on rational migration and the *Homo economicus* who moves from a less favourable milieu to an optimal one, neo-classical approaches, ensuing from Ravenstein's laws, rest upon rationality and utility-maximising. Migration is therefore a mobility which translates discomfort and difficulty in one's home country. The migrant is just reactionary; and migration is a mere equilibrium generator which works to eliminate the geographic and economic differentials. The historical-structural paradigm revolves around 'conflict', stipulating that unequal powers and structural economic differences result in migration from poor areas within a nation and from poor to richer nations.

Our first round-up in migration paradigms has permitted to delineate the major theoretical propositions of these paradigms. The major observation made is the multiple dimensions of the migratory

phenomenon: the why of migration is seldom, if ever, linked to a unique factor like gravity (push-pull model); salary or unemployment (neo-classical theory), conflict and power (historical-structural perspective), relationships and schemes (systems and networks). The SI model seems to offer a better understanding of the migrant's experience and more insight into their agency and deliberate decisions to migrate and perpetuate their stay, and their perception and representation in their new "lands".

Regarding the agency versus structure debate, it has become clear that the volition and capacity to migrate is calibrated by the socio-economic profiles and trajectories of the migrant, his environment, community, information networks, as well as the political contexts in the host country. Thus, it is now inevitable to adopt pluralistic theorization, which is suggested by Douglas S. Massey et al. (1993). Indeed, the principle is to activate many overlapping frameworks from different disciplines to come up with a hypotheses system. Then, Massey et al. suggest pondering upon the different intertwined factors affecting a given migratory movement through empirical investigations. Massey et al. state that instead of adopting one migration theory or another, "we [should] adopt the broader position that causal processes relevant to international migration might operate on multiple levels simultaneously, and that sorting out which of the explanations are useful is an empirical and not only a logical task" (Massey et al., 1993, p. 455).

The different factors involved in any migration trend, they warn, should not be simply aggregated. Rather, contextual combinations should be synthesised to understand migration thoroughly. For example, when dealing with sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia, sub-Saharan students arguably have the intention to migrate, but this intention will only be concretized in the presence of family support systems and information networks. Furthermore, and equally important, it should be inferred that the image that each student forms of his/ her country's economic and political future is a determinant factor in the migratory decision, and in the decision to stay in Tunisia or leave for Europe. I also argue that the media representations of sub-Saharans are a determiner in the perpetuation of the sub-Saharan migratory flow in Tunisia, whether by affecting the migratory policies or the integration prospects of the sub-Saharan community in the host country. Acting upon this argument, many overlapping theoretical contexts have to be activated simultaneously: migration, media, policy, culture, etc.

This theoretical pluralism is the only way to trace the temporal evolution of the migratory trends and their cyclical character. Accordingly, the factors explaining the initial phase of migration might be of neo-classical nature, in their economic—differential claim, but the developed networks thereafter may

substitute the economic variables and ensure the continuation of the phenomenon. Other forgotten or dormant networks might be reactivated to explain the renewal of otherwise old migratory flows. This might explain why some migratory trends disappear and then resurge. For instance, the recent migration tendency from the South of Europe (Spain, Italy, Portugal) to Northern Europe (France and Sweden) because of economic factors (unemployment of the youth), as well as new factors: climate change<sup>38</sup>, is an old/ resurfacing trend that sends us back to similar trends which existed due to the labour policies of the 1960s.

Massey et al.'s call for "theoretical pluralism" is further reiterated by Joaquin Arango (2000) as he asserts that "[a] number of clouds obscure the sky of migration theorising" (Arango, 2009, p. 293). For Arango, theorising migration has resulted in a myriad of mostly unconnected models, concepts and empirical generalisations. Furthermore, all these theoretical frameworks focus exclusively on the question of "why migrants move" and neglect all the other aspects of migration (integration, policy, social change, etc.). This is coherent with what was observed when researching the literature about sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia. Most reports and studies are concerned with the causes of such a migratory trend, and little research has been carried out about the evolution of sub-Saharan migration, media representation of sub-Saharans, the shift of Tunisia from transit to destination country, the networks formed among sub-Saharans in Tunisia and the social change involved, etc (all this will be discussed gradually when analysing the media representations and counter-representations as well as policy representations).

Furthermore, social sciences, especially when studying migration, are faced with the inherent difficulty of studying human behaviour and have to solve the riddle of testability-measurability. The repository of so-called migration theory does not seem to go in line with any coherent measurable methodology. It seems that migration researchers proceed with ad hoc and temporary methods. For this methodological issue, Hein de Haas suggests a "conceptual eclecticism". In his seminal paper "Migration Theory: Quo Vadis?" (2014), de Haas deciphers the causes of the absence of a coherent and empirically testable migration theory. He comments on the "receiving country bias" and the "concomitant ignorance

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<sup>38</sup> Regional Challenges in the Perspective of 2020 – Phase 2: Deepening and Broadening the Analysis, European Commission, Vienna, 2011.



of origin country factors”. Indeed, it is only logical to assume that non-natives cannot understand the migratory experiences of the incoming migrants.

Most migration theories, aforementioned, are focused on the perspective that the North is the destination of the South, in a total neglect of the origin and transit countries. This is probably because of the availability of funding and capacities in these countries (for the concentration of specialised centres and research journals). This bias was further accentuated in South-South migration trends as scholars from the North have proposed themselves as researchers in spite of the double-fold distance which separates them from the receiving and the sending nations. The resulting publications are therefore haughty and generalised perspectives of the migratory phenomenon in a given country or region. It can neither expand on the migrants’ motivation (because one ignores their context of origin) nor on issues of social integration of migrants (because one does not know the host context). However, I shall resort to counter-representations, to study the little voice allocated to migrants to tell us about their personal views and stories without any intervention from myself or any other party, which is one of the benefits of studying media discourse.

The second problem which de Haas addresses is the “dominance of state perspectives”. By this, he means that when examining migration, some researchers uncritically adopt the state’s categorization of migrants into regular/ irregular. This also entails embracing the state’s narrative and policies about migration. For this purpose, and aware of this kind of bias, I shall tackle state policies in the last chapter, not separately from sub-Saharan’s representations, but in close relation—as is the study of overlapping system dynamics. In fact, I shall proceed by the study of media representations and counter-representations of sub-Saharan, then move to the state’s actions and policies as represented and discussed in the same media corpus. This freestyle exercise will enable me to conclude with a critical understanding of the existence, representation and policies relevant to sub-Saharan social reception in Tunisia, prior to 2021.

Moreover, de Haas refers to a problem which is invoked earlier in this theoretical overview, the stark disciplinary and methodological divides and inability to “cross-communicate”. I have already pointed to the fact that the theoretical corpus about migration comes from all different fields of social sciences. Indeed, researchers of one discipline or the other often claim to be the exclusive theorists of migration. However, it has become clear that such an exclusive view of migration is unfruitful practically. One cannot study sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia from a geographic or economic or political perspective

solely. In fact, many disciplinary aspects should be envisaged for a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon. In addition, a mixed-approach method is necessary to bridge the gap between the quantitative (positivist) and the qualitative (interpretative) methods.

Finally, de Haas draws attention to major divides in paradigmatic standpoints in social theory (between functionalism, historical-structuralism and symbolic interactionism) giving way to a blunt partition between the theories and the pertaining empirical work on the experiences of migration. De Haas not only advances a critique of the diverse theoretical divides leading to distortion of results about migrations, but he also suggests a model for studying migration: *conceptual eclecticism*. He reiterates Arango's dictum "Migration is too diverse and multifaceted to be explained by a single theory" (Arango, 2000, p. 283), and admits that a single "all-explaining universal migration theory" shall never exist (De Haas, 2014, p. 6). He argues that the only way for migration research to thrive and develop is by finding concepts and analytical tools which are coherent and which help fill in the lacunas in the existing theory. In fact, combining tools and analyses from different migration theories can help us develop a full understanding of modern migration phenomena.

De Haas proposed to classify the migration "eclectic" concepts into four groups, three of which are the traditional models: functional, historical-structural and symbolic interactionist. The last is what Haas advances as a "hybrid meso" approach. In addition, the validity of one theory or another depends on the specific contexts in which migration takes place, and on the different levels of analysis involved. Apart from the urge for conceptual eclecticism, a theoretical framework for studying migration should necessarily integrate both 'agency' and 'structure' in recognition of the fact that all migrants have the choice, in addition to the external structural constraints. De Haas gives a specific example of how this conceptual eclecticism can work.

In fact, he refers to exploitative migration like the migration from Morocco to Spain, or Mali to Ivory Coast. He states that the legal status constraints enable employers to exploit those "irregular" migrants and pay them meagre wages under horrible work conditions. If we move to a macro-level, this type of exploitative migration can create economic gaps between sending and receiving countries by boosting income growth in destination countries and further concentration of economic activity in the already wealthy receiving countries. This, in turn, will inevitably lead to a more stable labour migration trend from the poor to the rich countries to support this economic growth. The analysis at the micro-level,

however, yields different results. In fact, this migration trend will continue because it helps support family welfare in sending countries. Migrants from those poor countries, like Morocco, help their remaining family members build houses, send their children to college and start their own businesses. Although they seem contradictory, both layers of analysis, macro and micro, are relevant, intelligible and empirically proven.

Social theorists should gain more depth in interpretation and theory if they base their analyses on specific contexts and empirical observations. Migration theories cannot be “true” or “false”, “right” or “wrong”; they are “relevant” or “irrelevant”, “testable” or “untestable”, “representative” or “non-representative” according to the studied type of migration, the pertaining studied aspect and its context. The task of building a migration theory should be “an inherently eclectic affair” (De Haas, 2014, p. 13) where researchers should be open to combining different paradigms to develop a more realistic and pragmatic conceptual framework. Practically speaking, according to de Haas, theories used to study migration and migrants can be ‘mish-mashed’ across five layers of analysis.

First, they can be combined at different levels— macro, micro and meso. Labour migration which fits into the neo-Marxist model (macro historical structuralism) is also rational for migrants and their families (micro postmodern approaches). Second, migration theory can blend elements across different contexts: geographical, regional and national. In fact, whereas neo-classical (functionalism) theory is best suited for migration in the Schengen area (unconstrained, calculated, and driven by cost-risk maximisation), neo-classical theory fails to account for migration from poor countries because of oppression, wars and conflicts. This is why a historical-structural model is more efficient in studying migration from Central Africa or the Horn of Africa to Europe due to either civil war (Sudan), dictatorship (Eretria), Nigeria (the Boko Haram phenomenon), or Burundi (political instability since 2015).

Third, since migration is par excellence socially differentiated, it can be studied across different social groups, classes, ethnicities, even if it concerns migration in the same geographical area, same era or the same nation. Hence, neo-Marxist theories can be better suited to study the migration/ exodus of rural population to urban areas within the same nation (dependency theory) or brain drain from North Africa to Germany and France. On the other hand, neo-classical models work well when scrutinising the migration of upper-class students and relocation of families to more economically thriving countries where they can do better college studies and expand their businesses. One of the relatively new trends being the

migration of Latin American migrant women entrepreneurs or upper-class Tunisian wealthy families to Spain<sup>39</sup>.

Fourth, migration can be researched across time spaces. The motivation and dynamics of migration have changed throughout time. De Haas refers to the “various trajectories and successive stages of migration system formation and decline” (De Haas, 2010, p. 1587). Thus, the social and cultural dynamics governing migration can change over time. In this vein, sub-Saharan migration can be studied in a diachronic way: in the pre/ post-2011 periods as well as post-2021 where the whole socio-political scene witnessed an upheaval touching upon the representation of migrants and migration policy. The latter type has gained more momentum because of the new dynamics of making those sub-Saharans final migrants rather than trans-migrants and making Tunisia a permanent destination country rather than a transit country.

Fifth, migration can be examined from different thematic and disciplinary angles. Researchers are entitled to consider a migratory phenomenon from different angles of analysis. Indeed, migration can be studied as a locomotive for social change from different cultural, economic, demographic, technological perspectives. Added to that, different methodologies and data analyses can be enacted. Any researcher can choose the perspective from which he/ she can address social transformation. In this research, media representation and policy shifts are chosen as the two manifestations of social change ensuing from sub-Saharan presence in Tunisia. Varying the tools (content analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, DHA, argumentation theory, expert interviews) has also become mandatory. This ‘complementarity’ in the deployed approaches and tools can only be generative of fruitful genuine findings about the migratory trend.

In a nutshell, conceptual eclecticism is praised for allowing scholarly liberty and for engraving cross-disciplinarity<sup>40</sup>. If adopted and embraced systematically, this model will allow scholars from different paths of social sciences to work together, freely, towards studying migration and social change. It will also allow for moving across disciplines and moving beyond myopic disciplinary dogma. This

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<sup>39</sup> A conspicuous observation made by my colleagues, sworn translators in Spanish in the last five years, drawing on their work with these potential migrants.

<sup>40</sup> I emphasize cross-disciplinarity in my research, not multi-disciplinarity which often does not allow for a critical dialogue between disciplines, but rather poses on parallel endeavours without any real disciplinary intersection.

model ushers a new era in social science research and might even be applied in broader prospects: between social sciences and humanities. Accordingly, scholars of humanities and social sciences can finally bury the hatchet and focus on more collaborative ways to study social phenomena and teaching them in the new cross-disciplinary department in faculties. The new joint migration master at the ISSHT is the best example on how conceptual eclecticism can practically work to join scholars from different backgrounds and disciplines with a view to scrutinising all dimensions of migration, in a very comprehensive, dialogical, discursive, holistic (as is represented in media, chapter 3) manner.

## **2. Migration and Representation: Media as Culture**

When we refer to globalisation, we mostly invoke the second globalised era. However, some argue that the first globalisation epoch was witnessed from 1500 until around 1800, reaching its pinnacle in the beginning of the twentieth century. Then, the outbreak of the first global war, WWI, disrupted economic cooperation resulted in controls on trade and migration, which quenched globalisation. The second and present wave of globalisation only respawned and reached the climax of its manifestation in the 1990s with the globalisation of market economy and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today, we can safely say that the whole globe is interconnected in a complex web of economic, cultural and communication strings. Both eras implied enormous movements of populations and were characterised by deep and disturbing political, social and economic changes ushered by the advent of novel technologies.

Hence, both having cultural and spatial-temporal ramifications, migration and media are two equally important faces of globalisation. Indeed, migration is usually discussed in the context of cultural diversity with reference to the different forms of media taking the lead in channelling representation and communication. Centring the debate on the pivotal role of media in representing migration and migrants, this research addresses the media's role in creating cultural crisis or bridging cultural divides and (dis)(en)abling intercultural communication in migration-impregnated societies. The power of the media in mobilising host societies and migrant communities is utterly significant for addressing the social reception of sub-Saharanans in Tunisia. Not only does this approach fall within the conceptual eclectic methodology opted for, but it also enables media theorization in its symbolic interactionist model.

### **2.1 Media and migrant representation**

Media and social phenomena are inseparable in a “global village” characterised by the fast and unrestricted ‘migration’ of information and news. Thus, the concept of media representation with respect

to migration and migrants is to reviewed. From the post-WWII waves of migrants to the US and Europe to the images of the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015, “media have helped shape and determine the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of all those involved in contemporary migration processes” (King & Wood, 2002, p. i). Regarding migrants and migration, the media not only cover the issue, but they ‘represent’ it and deliver it to their audience in specific frames and perspectives.

In the last decade, migration-related topics have been occupying a central stage in the public spheres of many countries in the global North and South. They have become the focal point of the discourse of social actors, state representatives, public figures, associations and organisations, academia, experts, migrants themselves in traditional and new media. In media productions, the narrative techniques and storytelling processes allowed for a construction of the migrants with a visible “us”, as opposed to a distinct “them”. From a Symbolic Interactionist perspective, the rhetoric and beliefs around migration can be established as a perceptual and cognitive process whose objective is to convert ‘migrant’ and ‘migration’ into symbolic categories. In social psychology, according to Fischer and Granott (1995), such a process allows for the comprehension of the elements of ordinary life by reframing our own behaviour within social interactions (dynamic development). To the writers, “learning and problem solving are distributed socially” within small communities or social groups. In fact, they reject the idea that “a solitary individual develops along a single linear pathway” (Fischer & Granott, 1995, p. 38). This interaction among members of a given society creates “a developmental web” within which each individual and each ensemble work at a different level of development. It supervenes that the social group grows in nonlinear dynamics. Hence, media— which are means of socialisation and development— are a way for members of a social group to address the new complexities of social through representation.

Be it traditional or new, media should be seen as a mirror of/ for their audiences. For example, the daily news highlights what they have in common with the protagonists and events of the day. This common trait can be history, culture, territory, religion, or race. The mere fact of watching, listening or reading the same information falls under this ‘commonality’<sup>41</sup> . Media content on migration or destined to migrants obeys this simple principle. The migrant archetype is generally embodied by a character that has physical

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<sup>41</sup> The second definition of ‘commonality’ according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary is “possession of common features or attributes”.

features, cultural traditions and religious practices which are quite distinct from those of the domestic group. Indeed, the migrant appears in a way which calls upon a process of linguistic and iconographic construction.

It obeys a method of classification which may differ from country to another (the depiction of a Nigerian migrant in Ivorian media versus Moroccan media) one medium to another (Television, newspapers and social media) and from one period to another (North African migrants in Europe in the seventies versus in the last few years). There is a set of elements which interfere when representing a migrant in the media. The result of migrants' representations are stereotypical moulds which are activated to characterise the (im)migrant. These images or frames such as "unskilled youth", "veiled housewives", "polygamous Muslim", "undocumented African", "illegal sub-Saharan", "Syrian refugee", "drunken Irish", "Mafioso Italian", etc., are activated in the minds of the audience each time migration is invoked. These representations of the migrant are indeed social constructs which are usually different from reality. In commenting on the representation of the Maghrebi migrant in France, for instance, Denise Brahimi (2007) acknowledges the existence of "insufficiencies" or "gaps" (to translate the French expression "insuffisances de cette histoire", not to say absences).

### **2.1.1 The Other/ Migrant in Media Discourse: Theory of Social Representation**

**"[...] a country's stereotypes of immigrants—and by extension, their ethnic and racial groups—are accidents of history." (Sevillano & Fiske, 2013)**

The host societies' generic perceptions are crucial to migrant reception. Irrespective of what the migrants bring with them in terms of traditions, ethnicities, rituals, the host community's attitude towards migration and how they establish and understand this mobility is important in migrants' reception and integration. In fact, communities are pluralistic by nature, due to the existence of different social sub-groups, belongings and identities. Hence, it is not the introduction of the "migrant" group into a community which determines the community's reaction to it, but the tradition and history of this very community in terms of migration and migrant reception.

Intercultural research confirms that the perception of migrants has changed from umbrella-like stereotypes to parcelled stereotypes, which are more of distinct and diverse representations. For instance, Lee and Fiske (2006) carried out research on stereotypes portraying the migrant as "incompetent and untrustworthy". The study focuses on this portrayal using key information about the migrants (e.g.,

nationality, financial situations, etc.). The goal is to detect how the studied group distinguishes between some migrant groups based on intergroup perceptions. The model used (Stereotype Content Model- SCM) predicts that perception is grounded on 'competence' and 'warmth' and is linked to the target group's status and competition within society as they are perceived. Elements like nationality, ethnicity, and class which define immigrants are differentiated by both competence and warmth. Most migrant groups received indecisive stereotypes rather than the uniform stereotype of the generic immigrant. The findings confirm that ambivalent stereotypes reflect target nationality along socioeconomic status.

Volpato and Durante (2008) examined the social classification of migrants in Italy and established that the diverse representations of ethnic groups are governed by the same two aforementioned dimensions: warmth and competence. Instead of a unique and over-generalized type, the new varied representations give way to a plethora of prejudice(s) towards (im)migrants, distinguishing intergroup reactions. What seems to be an important determinant in the social dynamics governing this 'categorization' in communities and in the cultural accommodation is the natives' perception of migrants and migration. The authors suggest resorting to the Theory of Social Representations to address these challenging issues.

The debate about theorising and treating social psychology as a natural science has been ignited and heated for as long as psychology has existed as a distinctive discipline in social science. It seems to be the fate of social sciences to delve into this controversy. The centre of the crisis and "disputes" over the generic classification and the methodological approaches, if any, is everlasting and reflects the very nature and scope of these sciences. The conflictual nature of social psychology which is double fold: individual (psychology) and collective (sociology) makes it quasi-impossible to reconcile the "individualistic social" and the "de-socialized individual".

In 1973, Gergen, K.J et al. argued that "social psychology is primarily an historical inquiry" because contrary to natural science, it examines "non repeatable" and equivocal facts, i.e. the unstable human interactions and behaviours. Hence, knowledge and theory of social theory cannot be studied in the traditional scientific manner because of the limitations of "historical boundaries" (Gergen et al., 1973, p. 310). Almost three decades afterwards, the Social Representations Theory (TSR) in social psychology emerged as a reaction to such dualistic treatments. In an earlier work (1972), Serge Moscovici argued that the subject matter of social psychology should be "the study of all that pertains to ideology and



communication”, not the individual or the social per se. TSR was first introduced by Serge Moscovici in his 2001 seminal work to study how public knowledge is created in the context of social life. In fact, TSR does not merely juxtapose the ‘individual’ and ‘society’ but places them in a dialectic relationship as both are social products and drivers of social change (social norms, values, taboos, etc.). Individuals or social groups reconstitute the reality they are exposed to by attributing a specific meaning and order to the material and social world, thus creating a cognitive and communicative chart according to which they exchange opinions and grasp their individual and group history.

Serge Moscovici (1961) defined the notion of ‘social representations’ as a knowledge of “common sense”, “value systems, ideas and practices” (Moscovici, 1961, p. xiii). It is founded upon images, symbols, and concepts which are socially shared, and which reflect the anchoring of individuals in their environment. SRs are important in structuring our knowledge in a dynamic way which brings together various psycho-social phenomena such as attitudes, opinions, stereotypes, social traditions, and behaviours which are the pillars to our social construction of facts.

Social representations are social processes which allow individuals to perceive a new or unusual thing and familiarise with it then turn it into something seemingly familiar. The whole process is carried out by associating it to images and language that are already known. Once anchored (or stabilised), the change then results in arranging a new meaning. According to the theory of social representations, people can either validate and adopt a social representation or resist it. In case people resist a given social representation, they call for alternative representations which are more suitable to their social position.

Hence, they create many versions of the same reality. In fact, the consensus on which understanding of objects and issues is built relates to “inter-groups dynamics” which reflects the symbolic social positioning of individuals in each social group. Interestingly, social representations echo Umberto Eco’s theory of semiotics: ‘contractual realism’ in which the contract is negotiated between cultural interpretation and the limitations posed by the “continuum” of experience. Commenting on the attempts to decipher the platypus’s generic belonging (is it a mammal or oviparous), Eco asserted that after “eighty-odd years of negotiation [where] the negotiations always revolved around resistances and the grain of the continuum...the decision [was] certainly contractual in nature, to acknowledge that certain features were undeniable, was obligatory” (Eco, 2000, p. 250). In fact, this debate is revealing of the ways a community

makes sense of new objects, as when exposed to a new reality, it delves into a negotiation or re-negotiation of a solution, a compromise.

This definition places ‘social representations’ at both the individual/ micro and group/ macro levels. The negotiation between micro and macro levels is a persistent theme in the modern debate in social sciences. In fact, some aspects of this micro/ macro dialectics we elucidated when discussing the migration theories. The alternative proposed by de Haas is a hybrid meso-level “conceptual eclecticism”. Emanating from belief in such an alternative, social representations, as a theory of the collective and the individual will be used to delve into the media representations and self-representations of migrants.

Indeed, the TSR originated in social psychology but has been used in many other fields of studies like health, environment, politics, and media because of its overreaching applications and its capacity to explain such complex social phenomena in a methodological manner. It has become a very promising method in analysing cognitive constructions like identities, attitudes and stereotypes, and in examining social dynamics like framing, positioning, and anchoring, which are crucial in the content analysis of media content.

In their article, Rochira, Fasanelli and Liguori (2015) assert that “the public perception of populations of the host society” is central to migrant integration. In fact, communities are plural by nature, because of the different social belongings and identities. Social Representations (SRs) is a way of “thinking and producing knowledge that is public, created in the flowing of social life, and interdependent with the particular context of its production” (Rochira, Fasanelli and Liguori, 2015, p. 98). In fact, individuals or groups reconstitute the reality with which they are exposed by attributing a specific meaning to it. SRs are important in structuring our knowledge in a dynamic way which brings together –various psycho-social phenomena such as attitudes, opinions, stereotypes, social traditions, and behaviours which are the pillars to our social construction of facts.

SRs allow individuals to perceive a new or unusual thing— like sub-Saharan migrants— and familiarise with it then turn it into something seemingly familiar. The whole process is carried out by associating it to images and discourses that are already known. Once anchored (or stabilised), the change then results in arranging a new meaning. Functioning within this theoretical framework, the perception of migrants can vary in the same social group according to their social positioning towards an object (which

may account for the divergent representations of the same person or event in relation to sub-Saharanans in our media corpus). Representations can be diverse in terms of the structural linkages that connect the various representational contents into meaningful and consistent constructions.

Prejudice as a negative attitude to migration and migrants is the result of confrontation with cultural diversity and inter-ethnic heterogeneity. Such a negative attitude exists within “sets of compound inter-ethnic social relationships” and is activated by “dynamics of social identification/dis-identification” (p. 99). Prejudice is therefore a temporary reaction “to cope with the social and cultural changes involved in immigration flows” (Castellini, Colombo, Maffei & Montali, 2011). Societies that are socially pluralistic are those which did not impose polemic or problematic dynamics like assimilation where migrants are asked to melt into the group and smother their apparent differences. For this reason, the social groups which embrace social and cultural changes are the ones which are more able to support migrants socially. In contrast, migrants who are not very welcomed would witness the host community’s aggressiveness and exclusion, thus making their intercultural adaptation eventually more difficult. As cliché as it may seem, this proves that diversity is really a source of richness.

Rochira, Fasanelli and Liguori elaborate on the Social Representations Theory to study stereotypes of migrants and the possible variations in their representations which are generated by a small community in a Southern Italian town. Then, they attempt to tackle the question of whether these variations are related to the social positioning of the inhabitants of this community in relation to their original social group and to the newcomers (migrants). The findings are valuable in unveiling that the “level of individual social categorization grows, the more the representational contents increase, the internal structure of the representation becomes multifaceted, and the links of co-occurrences appear marked” (p. 108). Those who are positively engaged in their social group have a representation of the targeted group which conveys sharp involvement in the migrants’ life.

The findings also reveal that ‘exploitation’, ‘poverty’, and ‘hunger’ are central in the configuration of the SRs. It is found that ‘illegal’ work and hunger are the two pillars in the construction of the representation of interconnection between exploitation and poverty. The miserable work conditions and the precarious living situation the migrants endure are the two issues invoked around these representations. In fact, illegal work is concomitant with exploitation and both themes relate to invisibility. On the other hand, hunger sends us to poverty which has an important link to need. In the same trend, ‘workers’ and

'need' are significantly associated with exploitation but also to a lesser extent with 'dirt'. In fact, the significant and the links established in the periphery refer alternatively to the types of 'affect' kindled by migration. For instance, 'loneliness' is associated with exploitation and poverty; 'isolation' and 'hope' are connected to 'exploitation' and 'racism'. 'Despair' and 'discomfort', as a result, are linked to poverty.

Generally speaking, the social representations of the migrants within the different samples are polarized between sympathetic vision of the migrant group which involves concerns for their needs and the affective exhibitions towards the migrant conditions and a "deteriorating image" characterizing the other sub-samples and producing the destructive features revealed by the migrants' presence in the community. The study is valuable in its exploration of (i) the different social sub-categorization of migrants and acknowledging the existence of individual and sub-group nuances in the representations of a given social group, as is the case in the current research of sub-Saharan media representations, and (ii) in establishing a direct link between the social representations of migrants and their degree of social and cultural integration in the host community. However, it seems that there is a missing link as the respondents did not specify how they know the migrants. In other words, the participants in the study are not asked whether they are in direct contact with the migrants or whether the image they have of the migrants is conveyed through media. The authors acknowledge that when measuring Modern Racial Prejudice in the responses of the participants, an item like 'antagonism toward demands' is linked to stances like "immigrants get too little attention in the media" (p. 103). However, they do not elaborate on this promising research lead. The findings seem to neglect the relation between the people and the deciphered representations. TSR can be of great value to media research, and vice versa. SRs offers a new theory-based approach for studying how the media participate in the how people represent the fiery societal and political issues of our times. Media which channels social representations, is also a tool to frame and shape these representations.

This lacuna— i.e., the role of media in SRs— is fortunately explored in many recent migration studies especially in the framework in the recent "refugee crisis" in Europe. The phenomenon of refugees 'fleeing' to Europe in 'great numbers' was framed as a "crisis" by politicians and media. The role of politicians in this framing is flagrant and the 'crisis' rhetoric is very clear in their speech. On the other hand, the role of media discourse should be further scrutinized. In "Constructing Cultural Borders: Depictions of Muslim Refugees in British and German Media" (2017), Tobias Müller recognizes that the recent movement of refugees from Muslim-majority countries to Europe has yielded an almost new

dynamics in the British and German public and political spheres. However, he contends that there is a blurred understanding of how the “refugee crisis” got to be connected to Islam in public discourse.

Thus, this paper proposes to tackle this gap or lack through recourse to the interpretation of migration and Islam in British and German newspapers. It suggests a critical analysis to get hold of the three major patterns that shape the situation into a “securitization” of the refugee issue. What is noteworthy is that the study aims at scrutinizing the construction of Muslim refugees as the culturally inferior ‘other’ to an exclusive “European Christian Culture”. Media discourses certainly have a pivotal role in (re)shaping the attitudes of social groups towards ‘Muslim’ refugees establishing them as “suspect communities” in the UK, in parallel to what happened with Irish communities from the 1970s throughout the 1990. History repeats itself, with different workings.

This paper’s contribution to the present research stems from the scope and methodology— not the themes per se— as it carries out a critical analysis of newspaper articles in order with a view to understanding the framing of refugees in relation to Islam. Unlike much of the recent scholarly research on how social media’s use affects political discourse and behaviour, this very study proposes to study the written formal press. Newspapers are deemed to be traditional forms of political communication, but still have major influence in the political life of contemporary democracies like the UK and Germany. Many of them have established strong ties of identity between the paper and its readership. Online publications of the newspapers’ content made it possible for news to reach a broader audience, even international readers. Despite the increasing influence of digital media, newspapers still hold promising research tracks and are still central in orienting political discourse (Baker et al. 2013, p. 254).

As far as findings are concerned, the analysis of newspapers from the UK and Germany ushered several differences and similarities in British and German media representations. The comparison and contrast reveal that refugees and Islam are more “often discursively linked” (p. 22) in German media. Muller rejects the explanation that such an imbalance with the larger number of refugees coming to Germany is the same. He explains that heated debates on migration before and after the “Brexit” vote qualify the UK to be the locus of more debate on migration. The debate on ‘(im)migration’ in the UK,

however, does not only focus on refugees from the MENA region, but also EU ‘migrant’ labourers’<sup>42</sup> from Eastern Europe, especially Poland. Thus, the link between anti-migrant and anti-Muslim feelings in the UK sounds less “well-established” than in Germany. Another reason for such a fundamental difference is the UK’s longer migration history of people with different beliefs, including Muslims from ex-colonies. Hence, the cultural and religious composition and potential changes in German society is problematized in their media. In addition, “cultural compatibility” of Muslim refugees was only tackled and questioned in German media. The distinction is based on the mediated construction of Europe as “Christian” especially by leading Christian German democratic politicians. These far right and conservative politicians are given more room to convey their views on refugees, whereas the leading Labour politician and a pro-immigration priest from the Church of England were among the people who were granted space to express their opinions about Muslim refugees in the British newspapers.

The analysis of the data, however, did highlight resemblances between the British and German media where in both “Muslim refugees are linked to terrorism on a cognitive and an affective level” (p. 27). The valuable content analysis of media closes on a suggestive note. Indeed, Muller reveals that the media representational frames of refugees as ‘Muslims and dangerous’ has put forward the salient issue of Europe’s ‘identity crisis’ (Olivier Roy’s expression in 2013, pp. 61–65). Muller, in the end, comments on the urge for a better understanding of this ‘crisis’ and its relation to the refugees/ Islam problematization in the German and British public opinion. Policies and politics arising from such intense and problematic “depictions” of Muslim refugees would eventually lead to hazardous effects for both the “new and well-established citizens” of Germany and the UK.

Muller suggests future research focussing on how media “discursive patterns ... translate into changes in public opinion, voting behaviour and legislation targeting both refugees and Muslims” (p. 13). This last sentence encapsulates our objectives in analysing media representations of sub-Saharan in Tunisia as the media analysis is a pretext for the scrutiny of social and political change with regards to the issues of migration and sub-Saharan existence in the 2012-2021 Tunisia. The first part of Muller’s article is very interesting in that it provides fresh methodological prospects for the study of media representation

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<sup>42</sup> Here, one has to stop and ponder about the use of the terms “immigrant” and “migrant” when referring to Arab migrants versus European migrants. It seems Muller has internalized the idea that incomers to the UK and Germany are not “immigrants” if they are European.

of migrants. My concern is that by focussing on newspapers, the research overlooked yet another more powerful tool of migrant representation in our times: digital media. In fact, the answer comes directly from Sajir and Aouragh (2019) who assert that digital media is more captivating and engaging as it plays on affective and emotional “affordance”. They centred their assertion on the incident of the little Syrian boy— Alan Kurdi— and the unprecedented social media activism and mobilisation in the aftermath of the circulation of his photograph on social media. For that, they propose to reflect on the power of social media and review the potential of visual politics. Their endeavours are very fruitful, as the role of digital media shall not be neglected in studying media representations of migrants in any given host country. A comprehensive media corpus ought to include written press but also digital media outlets.

## **2.1.2 Organising Principles in Social Representations**

### **2.1.2.1 Objectification and Anchoring: Communicative Mechanisms**

To be able to position themselves within a representational map and to have their social action properly steered, individuals adjust the social representations according to the positions they occupy in their social context (Doise, 2002). The concepts of *objectification* and *anchoring* are at the core of TSR. Objectification is a process of social formation of a set of symbols (beliefs, norms) which yield a cognitive map shared by a given population. Then, anchoring is the process by which the new objects come to be incorporated in the social cognitive map. Being two fundamental communication instruments— anchoring and objectification— are posited by the theory as conceptual tools in empirical research. In fact, these very two concepts are the tools suggested by Birgitta Höijer (2011) to lead the research in media by means of social representations. TSR and CDA share such concepts as anchoring and positioning. Indeed, van Dijk defines anchoring as the selection of a specific proposition or concept to represent a more complex concept resulting in a framed understanding of how readers receive the broader issue. To van Dijk, Social Representations (SRs) are absorbed in the knowledge system through a symbolic process, “metaphorically described as ‘anchoring’” (van Dijk, 2014, p. 105). Positioning, on the other hand is identity-related and is defined by Fairclough as a process enabling social actors to construct preferred identities and types of involvement for themselves— based on their use of discourse — within discursive formations (Fairclough, 2001, p. 123). This latter view perfectly rhymes with the positioning or role theory in SI (cf. Goffman). In this sense TSR and SI as well as CDA share the basic tenets of social interaction through discourse.

TSR pertains to media and communication research in numerous ways. As a theory of communication, TSR connects the individuals to their societies, the public to their media. It determines the different communicative mechanisms accounting for the representation and communication of ideas to be later turned into a perceived collective perception and rationale. This is at the very core of mediated communication since the media negotiate and tame individual thinking and produce collective knowledge about any object or issue like migrations, migrants, policies and politicians.

New social representations, by means of communication, are formed from old ones by means of anchoring mechanisms like naming, affective anchoring, thematic anchoring, metaphoric anchoring and anchoring via basic antinomies<sup>43</sup>. This ‘cultural assimilation’ allows new social representations to be integrated into the old established ones allowing them to metamorphose into new ones. Gradually they are anchored in the social frames of references. Anchoring, in this sense, supposes that new phenomena are connected to a familiar social context. Hall (2007) invokes anchoring when he says “new, problematic or troubling things”, people or moments which disrupt our understanding of social structures ought to be re-categorised in new contextual repertoires before we can consider them to be meaningful. The most typical process of ‘mapping’ these new items is to place them in already existing “maps of problematic social reality” (Hall, 2007, p. 13). His paradigm of cultural assimilation found in “social representations” an echo; the “mapping” is the anchoring process used by TSR.

*Objectification* is the mechanism by which social actors get acquainted with the new unknown and transform it into something plausible and known with which they can have sensorial experience. Media, being an “extension of our senses” (McLuhan, 1964), is the channel of this experience. It manifests ideas by representing them as concrete and tangible phenomena so that perceptions replace conceptions. For instance, when the media attach specific events, crimes, images of chaos to certain migration flows, the abstract phenomenon is objectified. What was conceptualised as an abstract idea related to statistics and politics comes to be perceived as a threat or a security concern. This down-to-earth example clearly depicts how media can have a very influential role in establishing, gearing and changing their audience’s perceptions by means of objectification and anchoring. Indeed, through objectification, media transfer the

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<sup>43</sup> A discussion of the different types of anchoring in media is provided here: <https://sciendo.com/pdf/10.1515/nor-2017-0109>.



essence of an unintelligible phenomenon, into a matrix of symbols, making it intelligible and incorporating (anchoring) it into the audience's common sense.

In Tunisia, the concept of sub-Saharan migration was at first a 'new' (in an old and forgotten trend which then resurfaced) abstract phenomenon of a humanistic and statistical character (in the aftermath of the Libyan war). Over time, the discourse produced about sub-Saharan migrants in the news and social media made the presence of sub-Saharans a fact which is intelligible to the Tunisian public, even those who have never crossed a sub-Saharan migrant in their life. Surely, this materialised idea of the sub-Saharan migration has been evolving and changing ever since; that is one of the objectives of the study of their media representations. "The different media through which the past gnaws into the present serve as a reservoir of resources to anchor new ideas" (Wagoner, 2015, p. 161). Representations of the past give the social group a clearer present and guide their future.

Wagoner gives the examples of Americans' supporting intervention in Iraq in 1991. At that time in the past, they used to anchor the issue within a cognitive map of World War II rather than a Vietnam war map. The past may be shaped and reshaped, even re-invented to impact the prospects of a social group. This underlies the power of the media in changing the way the past is framed and the future is represented. Throughout history, social groups have attempted to dictate their versions of social representation onto other groups (whether in the context of the same nation or different nations). This symbolic power imbalance resulted in larger groups' hegemony over the public space such as literature, architecture and history (cf. the history of blacks in Tunisia). Accordingly, minorities are usually coerced into disseminating their self-(counter)representations via new alternative and creative channels like street art and digital media. For example, social media endowed the youth with the tools to boost protest in Tunisia before toppling Ben Ali in 2011. The ex-regime prevented them from any space to express their opinions by deleting their voices from official media and censoring YouTube and Dailymotion in Tunisia. Hence, they found a way in social media (Facebook and Twitter) to organise the January 14<sup>th</sup> protests and to plan the activities of the "Leagues of Revolution Protection" afterwards. In doing so, they used alternative media to perpetuate a social representation from the past and shape the present/ future.

The image of Mohamed Bouazizi as a SR of the toppled regime's "brutality" and "tyranny" served as a reminder of the objectives of their activism. The tyranny of Ben Ali's regime, which was murmured, and which was an abstract idea of injustice, could finally be objectified into a symbol, the municipal

official, Faïda Hamdi, and anchored in the collective memory of the Tunisian people. The idea of the oppressed people was objectified in the Bouazizi figure and anchored as a representation of the lost, long gone, victim, “martyr” of the regime’s brutality<sup>44</sup>. The image of Bouazizi was the object of graffiti and made it to the front pages and covers of local and international renowned magazines, but it started as a social representation of tyranny in a country, which was almost unfamiliar to the international audiences. This is again proof that social representations are born (involuntarily) or made (voluntarily), to change, travel, migrate, to shape, to remember, to last or to die at times. They are living collective cognitions. Indeed, ideas and their representations are “integral to the history of human cultures and all public spheres are created in communicative spaces where people exchange views and practices about the world” (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, 2015, p. 163)

The history of human beings is a history of exchange and borrowing. The increasingly pervasive nature of communication media intensifies these cultural borrowings and begs the questions about the manner in which social representations “travel and meet in public spheres” and the processes activated therein. Media systems have distinct sender–receiver mechanisms than the traditional social systems. In researching social representations, the foci are not the different receptions of a single medium or one media event (the news), but the classification of the production and reception dialectics in the different social groups. The medium itself is the “embodied representation”, à la Marshall McLuhan’s “medium is the message”. On the other hand, Bauer (2015), in elaborating on the foundations of social representations and media messages, recognizes that social groups should be regarded as “communication units” engaging in mass media and cultivation strategies, like “agenda setting, framing or spiral of silence” (p. 59-60).

### **2.1.2.2 Framing and Agenda-Setting: Migrants in the Media Discourse**

In the media, framing has a double-fold meaning. First, it underlines the way in which media content is “framed” by journalists within some familiar frame of reference and according to some latent structure of meaning. A second related meaning concerns the effect of framing on the public. The audience

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<sup>44</sup> The words between inverted commas imply that I do not necessarily agree with such classifications as a Tunisian citizen who has, herself, been part of this group of youth using social media to protest Ben Ali’s regime. Many revisions have been made even since, and as an academic and researcher, I shall refrain from any assessment of that historical lapse of time.

is thought to adopt the frames of reference offered by journalists and to see the world in a similar way. This process is related to priming and agenda-setting.

Social representation is a process by which events, ideas, persons, etc. are interpreted, valued and prioritised by means of language, mass media being a vehicle of language. This representation or construction produces a larger web of realities. In this stage, ‘framing’ and ‘schemata’ play a crucial part. Priming is the media’s active role in offering the norms and values by which the audience can assess objects of media content. The term originated, like social representations, from social psychology. Emanating from the socialisation theory, it was later used in political communication and Critical Discourse Studies, along with framing and agenda-setting, to interpret and assess the discourse and performance of political figures.

In times of crisis, nationally or internationally, the media usually have recourse to sources which are biased, to a certain extent, in terms of the *framing* of news and debates. This is especially relevant to the grand wars and hostilities. Media experts and discourse researchers embarked on comparative content analyses where they contrasted the media coverage in the antagonist media outlets. For instance, Mallouli & Sweeney (2019) examined the Framing of North Africans by the American media (print) during Operation Torch in WWII.

It has been a media tradition to frame media content according to the ‘ideological affiliation’, partisanship and economic interest of media owners. What used to be deciphered from underlying framing techniques is now blatantly done as per a flagrant agenda. Indeed, during an election period, the choice of a ‘frame’ is strategic. Each party, and the relevant stakeholders, hoping to induce voters into the interpretation that will best benefit them, will engage in framing, agenda-setting, and a quasi-mediated ‘bludgeoning’. In Africa, Nebojša Vladislavljević and Katrin Voltmer (2017) explored the framing of ‘democratisation’ conflicts in Egyptian, Kenyan, Serbian and South African media. Research in this area is prolific in many languages, and the findings are inspiring and eye-opening.

Media coverage and migration is another interesting field of research for media and discourse analysts. Migrants fleeing the Syrian ‘conflict’ have occupied an important place in the public debate, following the dissemination of the image of the body of a drowned Syrian child, found on the beach of Bodrum in Turkey. Here, the SR of migration, i.e., the body of the dead child, was objectified and

anchored in the audience's mind and experience as a symbol of the suffering of migrants and refugees. The media were the actors in this process of anchoring. Like any controversial issue, the refugee crisis has been framed in different ways according to the different political agendas. By associating an issue with certain elements rather than others, the image of the dead child rather than an image of an adult beggar or a suspected terrorist<sup>45</sup>, each media outlet shapes and frames the reception and interpretation of their audiences. In the long run, such framing is likely to shape public opinion and guide their reaction to the issue of Syrian refugees towards acceptance and empathy or apathy, rejection and antagonism.

In television, for instance, each party proposes an interpretative framework that alters the attribution of responsibility and the solutions to be considered. Iyengar & Page (1991) scrutinised how framing shapes and shifts accountability. They define *framing* as the “subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgement and choice problems” and identify *framing effects* as the “changes in decision outcomes resulting from these alterations” (Iyengar & Page, 1991, p. 11). They demonstrated that significant effects have been established in experimental studies and surveys concerning the effects of the wording of questions to shape response patterns, invoking an experiment by the cognitive psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky showing that when given the choice between “risky prospects”, the respondents' reaction can be changed by simply altering the wording and the terms of these choices.

The example is ironically very telling, as they built their assessment on the hypothesis that the “U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people”. The respondents were asked to choose between two options to combat the disease. The first hypothesised that 200 people could be saved (72% chose this alternative) as opposed to the second program which postulated a one-third probability that 600 will be saved and two-thirds probability that none will be saved (28% chose it). The results were surprisingly and significantly altered when the very wording of the hypotheses was altered. Instead of using “saved”, the hypotheses were formulated as follows: 400 people will die (22% chose it) and one-third probability that no one will die and a two-thirds probability that 600 will die (78% chose it).

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<sup>45</sup> Compare the three images : <https://shorturl.at/IgkYg> (Ilan Kurdi's images)  
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/syrian-misery-visits-turkish-streets-1393892249> (image of Syrian beggar)  
<https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/attentat-dejoue-en-allemande-le-syrien-suspect-s-est-suicide-en-prison-12-10-2016-6199506.php> (translated, Aborted attack in Germany: Syrian suspect committed suicide in prison)

This experiment, which ironically invokes an ‘Asian disease’ like the one we had witnessed in the recent years, reveals that by formulating the hypothesis (Asian as a nomination strategy) and the outcomes of a hypothesis (loss and death rather than gain and rescue), the preferences are re-framed and reversed, although the statistics were identical. The ‘fickleness of the mob’ is yet more dependable on linguistic framing. Such an example primarily proves how the SRs, wording, images and frequency in media coverage can frame and re-frame the audience’s responses to any topic.

More recently, framing has been the focus of media/ discourse studies regarding “cold wars”. There are little unpronounced ‘cold wars’ which are fought in the media between countries and parties for power and insurgency. In Tunisia and the Arab world, some channels were officially or unofficially affiliated with the then ruling party, Ennahda, (pre-2021) and others were antagonistic to it. With the election of the polarising ex-RCD figure, Abir Moussi, as member of the parliament, political analysts started to see a shift in media treatment of Ghannouchi (head of Ennahda party) and Moussi (head of the PDL party)<sup>46</sup>. Some channels like *Zitouna TV* and *Aljazeera*, although they pretend to be unbiased, only cover events relevant to Ennahda ‘triumphs’, ‘sacrifice’ and ‘wisdom’. Moussi’s activities are only covered by foreign TV channels like *Al-Arabia* where she often speaks about the wickedness and the ‘terrorism’ of Ennahda. At this level, things seem ordinary, though not explicable. However, digging deeper, this pronounced media tension between domestic and foreign media outlets is revealing of a more important geo-political “cold war”.

*Al-Arabia*, a news channel based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and operated by MBC media group was waging a proxy war against the Qatari Al Jazeera channel in Tunisia. This antagonism found its origins in the Gulf crisis of June 2017, when the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bahrain, severed their diplomatic ties with Qatar, because of accusations of supporting terrorism (El Ikhwan<sup>47</sup>). Furthermore, the UAE also expelled all Qatari nationals living on their soil and banned its citizens from travelling to Qatar. Ever since, these Gulf regimes projected their ‘war’ into the framing of Ennahda as another Ikhwan party, therefore a terrorist group. Allegations were also made to Moussi as an ally of the UAE in Tunisia. The

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<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting that both antagonistic figures are both incarcerated now, for different national security charges.

<sup>47</sup> Ikhwan, transliterated Iḥwān, is the reference to the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Ikhwan, founded by Ikhwani ideologues, Hasan Al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb.

result was a continuous war waged by Qatar through its Qatari-sympathetic party, Ennahda, and the KSA/ UAE ‘axis of good’ to which Moussi was/ is allegedly an ally.

One simple example of how the framing was carried out was the referential strategies used with Ennahda party. In *Al-Arabia*, the party was referred to as “Ikhwan” (with reference to the supposedly terrorist party toppled by the military in Egypt) or “Ikhwanjiya” (Tunisian derivative from Ikhwan). On the other hand, the party was referred to as “the ruling party”, Ghannouchi referred to as the leading Islamic “intellectual” and “influential politician”. The framing effects can be shown in the Tunisian media audience’s choice of TV channels. Ennahda partisans watch Aljazeera for news, and Moussi fans wait for her appearances on *Al-Arabia* (and the like). The Arab media framing of the political crisis in Tunisia aggravated the polarisation and further divided the Tunisia society between ikhwanjiyya (iḥwānġia, from iḥwān, partisans or people suspected to be partisans of Ennahdha) and “Dsetra” (partisans of Moussi and her pretended allegiance to Bourguiba’s Socialist Destourian Party)<sup>48</sup>.

The study of framing in media elucidates how ‘reality’ is created through communication. Reality should not be regarded as a group of equally significant happenings, but rather a subjective compilation of images, discourses, and frames. An objective interpretation of communication and media content in formal analysis has shown to be very tricky. Semiotic analysis of caricatures, photographs and moving images turned incomplete as Roland Barthes recognized that a photo “is a message without a code; from which proposition an important corollary must immediately be drawn” (1977, p. 14). Films, videos and television material can only be interpreted and decoded for the content makers to consciously utilise symbolic constructions and frames to convey the latent message. Accordingly, television content, for instance, should be interpreted with respect to meaning and framing. Framing, indeed, is linguistic and visual framing. The visual aspect cannot be amputated from the linguistic communication.

Framing and bias are crucial focal points in content analysis of official and digital news. In this context, the question of how news and information are presented or ‘framed’ has attracted much academic attention. Like many other concepts in media studies, Goffman is credited for being the originator of the

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<sup>48</sup> For more information on this topic, see <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/tunisia-battleground-for-the-gulf-media.4019> , <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-uae-libya-ghannouchi-coups-fake-footage-and-proxy-parties-accused-meddling-affairs> , and <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-saudi-arabia-and-uae-want-smear-rached-ghannouchi>

idea that a frame is a prerequisite for the organisation of sketchy elements of information. He defines frames as the schemes governing social events as well as our personal engagement with them (Goffman, 1974, p. 11). He discusses the logic behind frame analysis which is a method of analysing how situations are defined and how alternative experiences like games, movies, dramas are developed. Frame analysis came also to be applied in the study of language, for a systematic sociological study of social experiences. Whether from a social psychology, sociology or Critical Discourse Analysis, frame analysis or the study of framing serves the objective of deciphering the latent messages conveyed by media.

Vague terms such as ‘context’, ‘frame of reference’ or ‘angle’ have been applied in journalistic commentaries. From a journalistic perspective, stories and event coverage come to have meaning only if there is a reference to some particular ‘value’ linking an event to previous comparable ones. In the context of the discourse analysis of media content, some precision is required, especially if the objective is to study the potential effects of the framing. In our analysis, the effects of framing migrations issues and sub-Saharan migrants by Tunisian media shall be studied against the political and social (policy-wise) contexts. In this case, the content frames must be contrasted to the frames of reference in the minds of the Tunisian and sub-Saharan audiences. Robert M. Entman (1993), commenting on the yet recurrent issue of lack of theorization, deemed the claim that “communication lacks disciplinary status” to be “an ostensible” strength rather than a weakness. He suggests, like de Haas, bringing together insights and theories from other disciplines for communication is a must for migration theory to be a “master discipline”. He acknowledged that “framing” is another case study of the problem of “scattered conceptualization”, despite its recurrent use in social sciences and humanities. There is no general framing theory per se, accounting for frames and how they are manifested in a text or how framing influences audience thought and actions. He therefore suggests that communication as a discipline offer a synthesis of the disparate uses of framing and construing a theory out of these uses. For this purpose, he defines framing as a way of describing the “power of a communicating text”, be it a written or an audio-visual text. To him, the analysis of frames deciphers the influence exerted by information, speech, discourse onto consciousness (Entman, 1993, pp. 1-2).

Entman starts by announcing that “[f]raming involves *selection* and *salience*”. Accordingly, it corresponds to a conscious *selection* of some facets of reality to make them *salient*, by promoting a specific problem, causality, and evaluation (echoing DHA’s legitimation, intensification, mitigation strategies for instance). Eventually, a given frame defines issues, pinpoints causality, offers moral judgments and

proposes cures, just like argumentation and topoi in DHA can provide insights about these schemes. Media choices, i.e., precise words or expressions, some given contextual references, the selected pictures or videos, the sources used, the quotations, the examples, referring to a certain source, serve as a tool for all these activities to be carried out.

Entman's conceptualization of framing and frames, *en guise* of scientific theorization, is idealistic. Framing, from the perspective of Entman, is a mechanism by which an exhaustive interpretation of fragmentary items could be reached. In doing so, critics, journalists and commentators are unavoidably driven from 'objectivity' to adopt some unconscious bias. When information arrives to media outlets from any sources, it comes with an intrinsic frame which corresponds to the intents of the source; therefore, it is quasi-impossible for it to be neutral or purely objective. In this sense, framing starts even before the information is broadcast or transmitted to its intended public. In the media, there are chains of framing, which are seldom innocent or impartial.

Entman (2007) himself revised his initial conceptualization of framing towards drawing the line between "distortion bias", i.e., deliberate falsification or omission, 'content bias' where media content often favours one side rather than provide equitable handling from both perspectives of the political issue/conflict, and 'decision-making bias' where the intents and attitudes of the content makers<sup>49</sup> are questioned. He argued that, thanks to this new conceptualization, framing can be incorporated into "a robust, rigorous, theory-driven, and productive research concept" by focusing merely on *content bias* and *decision-making bias* with regards to framing, agenda-setting strategies to "shape and alter audience members' interpretations and preferences through priming" (Entman, 2007, p. 2). In other words, frames – framing— are deployed in media, by media producers to increase the *saliency* or urgency of some issues, and therefore influence their socio-political perception and decisions.

Framing, in Entman's paradigm, is a delineable and straightforward concept used to decipher hidden messages and presuppositions. However, Jenny Kitzinger (2007), the media expert and commentator, contested that the most potent frames are often imperceptible. In fact, if the media treat a problematic issue in a certain manner, then they will produce an alternative narrative, other frames and

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<sup>49</sup> I use content makers and media producers, rather than journalists, because in the new media scene, the real actors are not only journalists but also chronicors, communication managers, marketers, etc. who produce media content as influential as old-fashioned articles and programmes.



treatments, other than the intended first framing. But the frame analysis will mostly focus on the produced framing, rather than the intended one. She enlarges the definition of framing to mean “how we interpret our everyday encounters with the world around us”, “how a picture frames a scene, and how a newspaper frames a story” (Kitzinger, 2007, p. 134). She asserts that any 'representation', whether visual or textual, involves framing. For example, the mere act of taking a picture/ photograph implies the framing of a scene by freezing a moment in time, from a specific perspective, by selecting the focus, deciding on the foreground and background, etc. For her, contrary to Entman, framing overrides bias because framing is at the very grounds of any media content even if it is balanced, objective and unbiased.

For Kitzinger, frames are so “implicit that they seem like common sense” (Kitzinger, 2007, p. 134). To better elucidate her stance, Kitzinger refers to homosexuality in the past, before the gay liberation movement, the debate was framed in terms of two negative poles (see Kahneman & Tversky’s experiment above). The media addressed the questions: are homosexuals sinful or sick? Therefore, should they be punished or treated? The framing was geared towards recognizing homosexuality as “an undesirable aberration” anyway, whereas new frames, resulting from social movements, changes the way this issue is framed into frames of human rights, legal rights, and so forth.

Analyses of media representations of migration have been prolific in recent years. This is applicable to migration since the form of media or news content, the wording, the choice of images could reveal latent and invisible frames, although the ‘bias’ as defined by Entman (2007) is not evident. Indeed, some seemingly unbiased migration reporting might do more harm than good. For instance, ‘contribution narratives’ which highlight the economic, social, or cultural contribution of (im)migration to host societies are “less likely to resonate with audiences and can serve instead to commodify or instrumentalize migrants in public communication, maintaining a divisive “us/them” distinction”<sup>50</sup>.

Such frames will only intensify the gap between the migrants and their host communities, because they are framed as the OTHER, rather than “one of us”. This *xénophobie bienveillante*, i.e., caring xenophobia, framing the media discourse about migration almost everywhere in the world further decreases the chances of media, social and political integration of migrants. Framing migration in terms of seemingly “unbiased” material like data and statistics can alienate people who do not trust figures.

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<sup>50</sup> Seven Key Elements, *On Building Human Rights-based narratives on Migrants and Migration*, UNHCR, 2019.

Indeed, in the field of migration, where data are incomplete, scarce or contested, which is the case in Africa, notably Tunisia., framing migration in terms of figures is an either unfruitful or an adverse endeavour (the second will be proven when analysing the recourse to the topos of numbers in Tunisian media). Thus, the use of such materials should be carried out with the scope of creating common prospects and better policy advocacy.

La Rocca<sup>51</sup> (2017) studied the depiction of migrants in European media as a “humanitarian crisis”, framed in terms of either a positive or negative images of the migrants: “barbaric invaders” or “refugees escaping from war and persecution” (La Rocca, 2017, Parag. 8). In this dualistic framing, the migrant is always “the other”, whether a criminal or a victim. In both frames, the migrant is not a similar human being, as he is either evil by nature or devoid of his agency. Both frames result in the migrant’s not enjoying human rights. This constatation does not depart from the depiction of sub-Saharanans in Tunisian media post-2011 as it will be shown in the fourth chapter where analysing sub-Saharanans as an either “deviant” or “victim” other.

Issues of migration and human rights have become a subject of mediated public debate due to the engagement of supra-national organisations dealing in their issues and ‘causes’ When entering the media agenda, the language used with respect to these issues changes from the political to the affective: “emotional language appears, information is spectacularized” (La Rocca, 2017, Parag 10), and suffering becomes a mere ‘spectacle’. Although these frames may be well-meaning, sympathetic and have a semblance of “care” and “concern” for the migrants, this hyperbole and accentuation of the “discomfort” with migration issues yield a counter-productive framing effect, i.e., a ‘spectacularising’ of the migrants suffering.

In her article, the Italian sociologist, La Rocca, alludes to the role of media in shaping the perceptions of their audience vis-à-vis the “migration crisis”. The study assesses the effects of media’s framing and manufacturing<sup>52</sup> of the ‘crisis’ on the solidarity with/ hostility towards migrants. The

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<sup>51</sup> Citation from online version, available on <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2017.1329003>

<sup>52</sup> In *Policing the Crisis* (1978- I am using the 2017 edition), Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts argue that a simple occurrence and recurrence of a deviant act like “mugging” can be framed in terms of ‘crisis’ creating “moral panic” whereby “weak and confused statistical evidence” may be converted into “massively publicised facts and figures” (p.17). This is a good example of how SRs disseminated by the news may veer into manufacture and

examination of the narration techniques, the images of militarised bordering, and the use of melodramatic tone produces an image of the migrants which is romanticised, idealised, thus “abstracting them from their reality” (La Rocca, 2017, Parag 12). In the second stage of the analysis, they tackle the communication campaigns aimed at fostering the integration of migrants. These campaigns seek to create a social change, by imploring the Italian citizens to accept this change. However, change does not happen easily; it takes a “cognitive analysis” of the individuals. The authors suggest the urge to change the “communicative frame” activated by the stakeholders in order to create a change that is grounded on individual conviction rather than pity. It is noteworthy that these recommendations rhyme with the conclusions drawn in the third analytical chapter where policy shifts projected onto the status quo show that change from above—or top-down change—is rarely efficient especially with regards to outgroups, as it requires a pre-analysis and a “communicative strategy” aimed at convincing society of the sought change rather than invoking their momentary pity or sympathy which disappear the discursive moment fades away.

Regarding the generic classification of migrants arriving to Italy, the different representations mostly rest upon the frames of ‘asylum’, ‘refugees’, ‘undocumented’, and ‘illegal’. Where do we place a migrant in all this? What about the term ‘migrants’ in the basic definition of migration; the migrants who *choose* to leave their own country to return whenever they please? La Rocca and Prosperi (2017) point to the mass media’s omission of this group from their discourse. Refugees and asylum seekers are stateless per se. They remain in a transit state between two citizenships, if the second is ever acquired. They refer to Arendt (1958) commenting the condition of stateless people—having herself been stateless for thirty years. She points to their omission from the media and political spheres just like they are denied access to ‘universal’ rights—having no place in the world and being in a “rightless condition”. This observation is still valid today and is commented upon by Berkeley (2009) who asserts that their “protracted, sometimes decades-long problems are mostly old news, attracting little media interest. There is little sense of urgency, least of all when scarce resources are needed to address more immediate crises.” (p. 10). She concedes that problems were the result of the treatment of stateless people’s dilemma through the “two remedies then known: repatriation and naturalisation”. Surely, the framing of the issue in terms of human rights was

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construction of crisis where there is none. It falls under the scope of media’s endeavours/ action in the “reproduction and transformation” or “orchestration” of public opinions for latent and apparent agendas (p.60).

not envisaged back at the time. This no-frame or absence of negative/ positive frames in media discourse leads us to the next point-, i.e. absencing- silencing- annihilating migrants in the media discourse.

## **2.2 Media and ‘Representation Communities’: “Symbolic Annihilation” and “Spiral of Silence”**

In discourse studies, social groups are approached as ‘discourse communities’ governed by communication systems and schemas (Van Dijk, 2009). These *schemas* involve a circulation of contact within a certain context—such as mass media—through the mechanisms of framing, positioning, and agenda-setting. These mechanisms govern and regulate the process of discourse understanding and interpreting. Hence, encoding and decoding are implemented to send and receive and interpret the media’s latent messages. In studying SRs— media representations being vehicles of such social knowledge—the research is focused on the autonomous reception of information by the audiences, i.e. the decoding, and the active mobilization of messages and images for social projects. It follows that the social representation of certain social groups, like migrants, in the media is at the core of representation, discourse and social change.

The proliferation of social media has led researchers to analyse how new socialisation and representation spaces as ‘representation communities’ are managed (Proulx et al., 2006). In studying these new spaces, it is crucial to investigate the relational dimension, the activities of the media users, and the economic and political impacts of these new mediated practices. The research into this relatively new area has involved axes like new digital media and participatory democracy, participatory web, digital citizenship, the social changes, identity transformation, the relationship between technical devices and their uses and, social media as generators of new ideology. Millerand et al., upon studying the communication mutations generated by web media, concluded these new uses of social web are expressions which refer to digital developments aiming at promoting new social practices.

Although this optimism and positivity regarding the role of new web media are contested by several authors, new media formats remain a space which brings people together to interact and act whereof other media spaces do not allow it. This new media environment pertains to digital media platforms, social network sites (Facebook, LinkedIn) in addition to micro-blogs (Twitter), weblogs, content sharing applications (YouTube) forums (Clubhouse), and any other digital tool used to create and

exchange content in networking. Some sites or applications are specially used by people on the move, like (im)migrants (Diminescu, 2008; Mattelart, 2009).

In analysing the media's role in representation, Symbolic Interactionism (SI) can be very illuminating and explanatory. This theory has been used for over a hundred years as a perspective for analysing communication. With its roots in philosophical pragmatism, sociology, and social psychology, the Symbolic Interactionist model posits the idea that humans attribute meanings to people and events by means of a map of symbols. These symbols are only generated by social interactions which form the basis upon which rests people's representations of self and society.

Symbolic Interactionism is an approach which examines how the social world is constructed and perpetuated by means of interaction between individuals. It is very fruitful in the study of communication because it accounts for the creation of meaning among social groups. It is a theory of society, communication, and language, which are the three cornerstones in the present research of migrations and migrant perception. First, SI explores how meaning is construed and interpreted subjectively between social interlocutors, thus language and discourse. Second, it puts to question and examines the social structures, including institutional structures (meso-level), in addition to the traditional social actors, i.e., individuals and social environments (micro-level), thus socialisation. Third, SI investigates communication and communicative tools as socialisation means and channels of language and discourse.

Symbolic Interactionism can be situated within the interpretive turn in social theory, and it has become influential in numerous theoretical strains such as identity theory, feminist and queer theories, migration theory, etc. The methodological contribution of this paradigm is its focus on 'symbolic' meaning rather than literal and traditional meanings, as these symbolic meanings are derived from symbolic linguistic interactions. This theory has helped media researchers to have a better grasp of the field owing to the primordial role of the media in disseminating shared symbols. Being the Fourth Estate, the media not only propagate these symbols, but they can fabricate their own symbols. Resorting to the SI theory, it is possible to investigate the manner in which media influence a society's collective symbols and how these symbols affect the individual, in his/ her social interactions. Furthermore, this approach emphasizes human *agency*, rather than structures. Even though symbolic interactionists study social institutions as social structures, this structural aspect is merely used as a cloak for the study of the agency of individuals in their symbolic interactions. In addition, the interpretive logic of symbolic interactionism

drives it towards (i) discourse and textual analysis, which is my selected analytical tool in the study of media representation of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia (chapter 4), (ii) performance study and observation, as I will attempt to analyse the media ‘performances’ of sub-Saharan migrants while counter-representing themselves in Tunisian media (chapter 5), and (iii) interaction of media representations, politics and society towards creating social change (or manufacturing a simulacrum of change).

As has already been explained in the second part of the theoretical background (**Theorising Migration: The perils of theoretical exclusivism**), SI has succeeded to provide alternative research paths to social phenomena and helped regain the role of individuals in expressing their own agency and building their own social environment. Social interactionism—viewed as an emancipating perspective recognizing the power of human beings in creating, challenging, and changing social structures—is a revolution against the notion of society as “an objective reality pressing on individuals” (McQuail, 2005, p. 101). Hence, this approach can be inscribed within a more general twist in cultural studies which puts mass media/ communication in the forefront of the research areas.

Within this paradigm, the human is not doomed to succumb to preconfigured social structures; rather he has the possibility to act and the choice to understand, interpret and give meaning to reality as he wishes. These general ideas have been formulated in many ways, according to other theoretical ideas, and represent a major paradigmatic change in the human sciences in the later twentieth century. These new conceptual posits enable the research of migration to break free from theoretical exclusivism, but also deterministic postulates about migrants’ migratory choices and social integration. Indeed, migrants are indeed masters of their destiny, if they adhere to social action and “manumit” themselves from the humanitarian, postcolonial, spectacularising narratives and frames of the sub-Saharan migrant as an ‘other’, ‘deviant’, ‘victim’, or ‘subject’ of spectacle and occasional humanitarian advocacy. This latter perspective of migrants is almost as insulting and dangerous as the crimmigration and securitarian approach: both perspectives alienate the migrant and postpone and preclude his/ her integration into host societies.

### **2.2.1 Symbolic Annihilation**

Within this symbolic interactionist model, “symbolic annihilation” is a term which was first coined by George Gerbner in 1972 to designate the underrepresentation or the absence of any representation of social groups in the media (due to their race, origin, gender, sexual orientation, status, etc). In Gerbner

and Gross (1976), “representation in the fictional world” is linked to “social existence” and its “absence means symbolic annihilation.” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 182). Later, Gaye Tuchman (1978) developed Symbolic Annihilation to encompass even the ‘condemnation’ and or ‘trivialization’ of a certain social group in media (Tuchman, 2000<sup>53</sup>, p. 17). Usually applied to women and sexual minorities, symbolic annihilation describes how inequitable and flawed media coverage results in “social disempowerment”. Eventually, the symbolic absence of these groups in the media can gradually obliterate some and individuals from the public consciousness. In social sciences, symbolic annihilation is understood as a means to perpetuate social inequalities like regionalism and racial segregation.

Loosely, the argument is that by no or little representation of certain individuals belonging to a minority group, the media— as mechanisms of cultural and social representation—are systematically framing messages and images of these groups which symbolically convey latent messages to their audiences about these individuals’ societal status. Like Tuchman, Merskin defined ‘*symbolic annihilation*’ as a “way cultural production and media representations ignore, exclude, marginalise, or trivialise a particular group” (Merskin, 1998, p. 335). Indeed, in a given cultural context, social groups are evaluated and valued by their depiction in media as the audience discovers these groups’ features and ‘symbolic status’ through this media coverage. However, this is a vicious circle since media framing of this annihilated group will further exacerbate their social underrepresentation, leading them to be more annihilated in media as the media tend not to disregard groups with little social value in their news and programs. In the process, the annihilated groups tend to be discarded and disfranchised eventually.

Symbolic annihilation in the media is of great value in research about migration since it can inform of what it means for a migrant to be a member of a socially valued group as opposed to another migrant being a member of a socially voiceless group. The absence of a migrant group in the media of a host community guides the research towards the ways to act to remedy these migrants’ situation. It has been established above that media do impact people’s attitudes and reactions to certain social groups, through framing and agenda-setting, by positioning and anchoring their projected notion of migration as positive or negative.

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<sup>53</sup> The 2000 is used for references.

In investigating media coverage of migration in Tunisia, one may notice what can be labelled as ‘myopia’. This failure to address the issue can be assumed to be an unintentional disregard of the issue or a lack of correct assessment of its urgency. However, with regard to TSR and minorities’ media representation, the concept of “symbolic annihilation” is more relevant and plausible. Indeed, the Tunisian media’s treatment of sub-Saharanans is characterised by a systematic symbolic annihilation rather than a mere ignorance of their presence or problems. Tuchman’s account for the absence of reporting and the undermining of the social role of the annihilated groups perfectly matches the Tunisian media’s treatment of sub-Saharan migrants.

Some echoes of Tuchman’s conceptualization of symbolic annihilation are found in Gayatri Spivak’s subaltern (Spivak, 1988). Both are part of an ‘antagonistic’ rationale where a social ‘actor’, if the agency of this actor is ever agreed on, can be encountered with apathy and omission (symbolic annihilation) or can be dispatched to different and inferior symbolic spaces (Subaltern). The Indian scholar states that subaltern individuals are denied access to power by discarding them from any genuine and non-distorting representation or expression. Both concepts posit on the idea of the deliberate “absenting” of the Other, and both suggest regaining these annihilated or subaltern voices. In ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988) Spivak critiques the view that the marginalised or subaltern subjects are always defined as opposed or different from the social elite (because of their minority race, religion, etc.).

The identity of the subaltern group resides in its difference. If subaltern subjects are not “representable”, notably in media, then they will not be able to “speak” for themselves. Is it hence the role of the intellectual to engage in representation rather than abstain from distorted representation: any representation, even debatable, is better than utter silence about the subaltern. She contends that the subaltern subject is heterogeneous, and not a homogenous group. It is therefore only through the study of the mechanisms of ‘recovery’ of their absent voice that they can come to the surface and recover their deserved place. If not, the subaltern succumbs to displacement and effacement and is doomed to a “spiral of silence.”

### **2.2.2 Migrants in a “Spiral of Silence”**

At the intersection of the study of communication, media studies, political theory, and social science, the theory of Spiral of Silence denotes a social group’s unwillingness to voice their views for fear of being noticed or labelled. The perception that one’s words, image, or opinion are unpopular thwarts



their presence in the public sphere. The concept was first developed by German communication researcher Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in the 1970s to account for the unexpected outcomes of polls in German politics. These revealed that the major parties were equal— in a stark contradiction to the perception of popular opinion which clearly favoured one of the parties. There was a discrepancy between the opinions expressed in the polls and the voting intentions. The interpretation, based on the spiral of silence model, was that fear from isolation pushed the general public to follow the dominant view conveyed by the mass media. The media presented a view in which one party (Social Democrats) is the most popular, whereas it was less supported. In social science, this faulty perception of the genuine public opinion has been labelled a 'pluralistic ignorance'.

Spiral-of-silence theorists contend that the media can even aggravate this silence by creating a hostile climate of opinion. Media framings of debates can also overshadow and suppress the audience's genuine attitudes towards a social issue and inhibit the "minority" dissenting voices. In countries where migration is a subject of debate, the mass media express "dominant opinion together with an increasing lack of interpersonal support for deviant views". The direct impact is producing a spiral of silence, which yields (i) "an increasing number of individuals expressing the dominant opinion" or (ii) "people failing to express deviant ones" (McQuail & Windahl, 1993, p. 117). The concept is not political or media-related per se; it should be treated as a social-psychological phenomenon, within the broader umbrella of social representations, as a state where certain individuals or groups are aware that their presence is under scrutiny and their attitudes frowned upon. In more modern media outlets like Instagram and Facebook, unpopular opinions are usually a magnet for bullying, criticism and cancel culture, resulting in shunned groups absorption into spirals of silence.

When applied to salient social issues, like migration, this phenomenon touches upon the people directly concerned—migrants—but also people who advocate for or against them, depending on the social attitude to migration in a given country. In countries where migration is regarded by public opinion as a negative phenomenon and where it is framed in terms of 'crime', 'job-stealing', 'prostitution', 'pollution', etc., the spiral of silence involves the voices of the migrants and anyone who is willing to defend their presence. Journalists, politicians, activists would therefore abstain from engaging in media debate on the issue for fear of being harassed or ridiculed, even outnumbered on TV sets and roundtables (this could explain the quantitatively less important space left for counter-representations in the corpus).

In fact, the spiral of silence theory was repeatedly used to explore the differences and gaps in public opinion expression in “hostile” social situations, like migration societies. Merged with the situational theory of problem solving, Lee et al.’s (2014) hypothesis that “[t]he more people fear being isolated if they express their opinion in a situation where their opinions are incongruent with others’, the more they are unwilling to express their opinions in public” (Lee et al., 1993, p. 197). Looking into migration as a heated debate, Gearhart and Zhang hypothesised that the salience of an issue serves as an indicator of an individual’s willingness to voice their views or ‘self-censor’. Indeed, issue salience is revelatory of the “hard core” public which is distinguished within the spiral of silence theory (Gearhart & Zhang, 2015). In fact, if a social issue is unimportant, or not very important, to an individual or a group, they are less willing to express opinions, for fear of being secluded, marginalised and therefore further silenced.

### **3. State of the Art: Research on Representation of Sub-Saharanans in the Maghreb and Tunisia**

**“To label someone foreign-born or immigrant not only indicates that person's background but also places him/her in a category” (Strauss, 2017)**

Studies on media representations of migrants from a critical discourse perspective analyse how migrants are depicted—labelled and categorized—in the media. Seo and Kavakli (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of a corpus of articles written on this research topic—namely media representation of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. The analysis shows that this research area has turned out to be very significant since 2010. However, quantitatively, it is demonstrated that the proliferation of research into media representations of migrants has received less attention in countries where the issue was more urgent. The authors also noted a fixation on qualitative rather than quantitative studies. These findings are in line with the research gaps outlined in the introduction as the (i) research on sub-Saharanans in Tunisian media is quasi-absent as elaborated by Seo and Kavali (2022) who underline the “utter lack of research outside the European and North American contexts” (p. 159), (ii) the focus is mostly on qualitative approaches and (iii) longitudinal studies are very scarce. Hence, the present research on sub-Saharanans representations in Tunisian media contributes to the academic conversation Seo and Kavali have investigated and attempts to go into novel areas using a mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative) in a longitudinal manner—tracing the diachronic evolution and fluctuations of such representations.

Embarking on research into media in the Maghreb, more particularly the Tunisian case, the scarcity of articles and studies in this field was the first observation. The tradition of media studies is still very shy, compared to other research fields. What is even more puzzling is that most studies on Maghrebi media have been carried out, very recently, by Western think-tanks and research centres. For instance, the Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb, MECAM, was founded in 2020 and is relevant to Marburg University in Germany. It is a “platform for regional and international scientific exchange in Tunisia based on the central theme ‘Imagining Futures —Dealing with Disparity’”<sup>54</sup>. Besides, the project Digital Publics and Social Transformation in the Maghreb of the Special Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) 1187 “Media of Cooperation” affiliated to the University of Siegen focuses on media practices in Morocco by studying the “emergence of new publics and forms of cooperation within the ongoing social transformation processes of North Africa”<sup>55</sup>.

Research in the media representation of migrants, notably sub-Saharanans is rare, almost non-existent, contra to other extensive research on sub-Saharanans’ entry routes, labour trends, anthropological mapping, reception mechanisms, etc (Mazzella, 2012; Pouessel, 2013, Sedrine, 2018; Geisser 2019, 2023; Nasraoui, 2017; Cassarini, 2020; Romdhani, 2020). Thus, not only are sub-Saharanans symbolically annihilated in Tunisian media, but the media research into the topic is also symbolically annihilated by the academia and media agendas. Now more than ever, the problem will be getting more intricate with the country’s rummage into the political and economic challenges. The sub-Saharanans, who have been systematically and symbolically annihilated in Tunisian media, will be more and more discarded from the public sphere. To counter such a destructive process, researchers, activists, and migrants themselves should engage in an opposing trend: that of resistance to symbolic annihilation. The underrepresentation or quasi absence of portrayal or voice of migrants in media is referred to as ‘*symbolic annihilation*’ by many writers (Yücel, A. 2021, Caswell, M. 2014).

Research papers written about the media treatment of sub-Saharanans in the Maghreb countries, especially Tunisia, are very scarce<sup>56</sup>. In addition, most works about media and sub-Saharanans were carried

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<sup>54</sup> <https://www.uni-marburg.de/en/cnms/research/mecam>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.mediacoop.uni-siegen.de/en/projects/b04/>

<sup>56</sup> Some shy attempts at investigating the representations of sub-Saharanans were made after the notorious statements of President Saïed in 2023, cf. El Ofir & Kour (2024). Yet no research covers the sub-Saharan representations in media, from 2012 to 2020.

out in Morocco or about Morocco. Most of the researchers interested in the topic are francophone, and very few articles were published in English. This research gap can be explained by the political situation in Tunisia. In Tunisia, the media had<sup>57</sup> freedom to cover any topics, but the treatment of migration is “relatively anecdotal” and it generally occurs after a certain event related to migrants. So commented Sana Sboui, an independent journalist, co-founder of the Tunisian web magazine *Inkyfada*, and ex-reporter for the Tunisian *Nawaat*. She adds that she does not happen to know any journalist who regularly investigates racism or inequalities. In Tunisia, great attention is attributed to the ill treatment of the Tunisians abroad whereas the suffering of sub-Saharanans is of little concern<sup>58</sup>.

Against this silence, neglect, or lack of interest in Tunisian media, the Moroccan media have realized that migration is a central stake in the political argumentation and media discourse. In their article, Delescluse and Loum (2020) tackle the media representations of young Africans from a critical perspective. They assert that the most difficult part in analysing the media treatment of migration, beyond the ‘sensational and emotional’ effect which certain media reports seek to produce, is the structuring of the balance of power in the field of international relations on conjunctural events which stir up media clamour rather than critical thinking. To this end, the writers chose a micro-sociological survey of communication practices carried out in Morocco on the youth set “on adventure” and a more holistic critical analysis of the logics of power in the field of international relations, towards understanding the situation of young Africans on migratory routes.

The article commences by a survey of the sub-Saharan migration to Morocco, which is strikingly very similar to that in Tunisia. Indeed, in both countries the journey of sub-Saharan migrants is often associated with a staged migration where the Maghreb countries are usually pedestals to Europe. The writers’ research focuses on Rabat and Casablanca between 2014 and 2018 allowing them to reflect on the living conditions of sub-Saharanans who were voluntarily or involuntarily set on an “adventure”. Adventure migration in West Africa is an old tradition. For Bredeloup (2013), adventure migration is a peculiar form of the migratory experience which rests upon personal ambition and motivation. The

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<sup>57</sup> I use the past tense because this fact has come to be contestable in light of the late incidents of detention and prosecution of “media figures” under decree 54 of 2022, which is said to “stifle freedom of speech” rather than combat cybercrime as its original purpose is, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/19/tunisia-cybercrime-decree-used-against-critics>.

<sup>58</sup> Couverture médiatique de la migration fondée sur le droit international et les données factuelles - guide du journaliste, IOM, 2019 (in English, *Media Coverage of Migration Based on International Law and Factual Data*).

itineraries of these young people who call themselves “adventurers”, or Boza<sup>59</sup> are based on cunning and bravery to circumvent international laws and closed European borders. However, the stay of adventurers in Morocco can be prolonged indefinitely and the wait can turn into a settlement.

These young people who are in prolonged “waiting” in Morocco have a characteristic that drew the writers’ attention: being hyper connected via their Smartphone, to all the spaces crossed. This hyper connection allows them to keep their ties to their countries of origin (Senegal, Ivory Coast and Cameroon for the majority of respondents aged 25 to 35), to the countries they have crossed (for those who have lived in other countries before arriving in Morocco) and finally, to their relatives or comrades who reside in other cities of the Maghreb or in Europe. The writers investigate whether digital media can act as a mitigating factor for the difficulties encountered by these young people and whether the recurring use of media enabling direct interaction fills the emotional void. In the digital age, it is interesting to wonder whether this hyper connectivity makes it more difficult to conceal the difficulties encountered on the journey. In the article, Abdoul— one of the interviewees— is a trader in downtown Rabat. He is constantly in communication with his family in Senegal, “Today, we can be present in different places”, he told the writers during an interview. Facebook is also an incredible vector of information for young sub-Saharan migrants whose projects were often contrasted and confronted with dark images of migrants from La Chapelle or Calais in France. It also allows them to see, disseminate and interact with the content produced by the local media and local community. Digital media have therefore come to allow the sub-Saharan migrants to grasp their perception as ‘comers’ by the ‘locals’.

The images of migration “failures” disseminated on digital media have not deterred sub-Saharan migrants from continuing their journey to Europe. In the age of web 2.0, young connected Sub-Saharan migrants are certainly not after a new El Dorado, but they are claiming the right to move freely, to use the writers’ words, their “droit à la mobilité”, i.e. right to mobility (Delescluse & Loum, 2020). The hypermedia coverage of the violence suffered by young migrants on the way to migration does not discourage them.

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<sup>59</sup> Boza is the equivalent of Arabic *harga*; ‘bozayeur’ is the doer of the action. Both are neologisms used by Sub-Saharan migrants in the Maghreb to refer to their personal adventure as an act of resistance, to their migration as a well-deserved right to mobility. Myriad sub-Saharan groups and pages on social media (TikTok and Facebook) are named “boza free” and function as facilitators of this journey/ network. Cf. Hlioui (2024).

On the contrary, such highly publicised ‘suffering’ reinforces their determination to triumph and regain their rights.

Delescluse & Loum address these salient questions from the angle of a critical analysis of the various uses of these new electronic and media supports. Attention is therefore paid to the socio-economic and cultural contexts, lifestyles and power relations resulting from the use of ICTs and the media reception. The writers propose a critical approach to analysing the uses of ICT in order to distance themselves from “catastrophic” and “blissful optimistic” approaches regarding technologies and migration. The findings of the writers’ field survey, from 2014 to 2017, address these concerns from a critical perspective by demonstrating that the media practices of these young African migrants fit into “diverted” and “circular” migratory trajectories from the country of origin, via the transit countries, and until arrival in the country of destination.

In addition, the article underscores that virtual reality takes precedence over the material conditions, i.e., borders and their securitarian and policing logic. Indeed, this mind-frame reinforces the disconnection of decision-making elites and their policies from these realities. These young people construct an “imaginary” alternative as a result of the eradication of physical borders made possible by the Internet and its uses (billions of messages exchanged instantly via social networks). To the writers, Pierre Lévy's “new Celestial Jerusalem” (2013) is not just an isolated reflection produced by an intellect trapped in a “communicational ideology” which may veer towards a sort of “epistemic dictatorship” (Proulx and Breton, 2002). Indeed, this unfolds in a more mundane and optimistic perception of these young sub-Saharan migrants who seek to forge a parallel destiny using the Internet and its numerous platforms, allowing instantaneous exchange about migrations from the South the North and vice versa. The incomprehension and the disappointment to see the migration routes closed to these new “dreamers” are accentuated when the administrative controls give way to repression and violence whose spectacular character has ended up arousing media curiosity.

The article also alludes to hypermedia coverage of the violence perpetrated against sub-Saharans in Libya which allowed for more freedom of speech on social networks. Videos of testimonies of “Libyan hell survivors” quickly made the “buzz” on the web. Other young Africans seized the opportunity to narrate the racist attacks and treatment they suffered in other countries in the sub-region, particularly in Morocco and Algeria. On the blogosphere, especially on Facebook, youths from African capitals interacted with Afropean diasporas to exchange their experiences and express solidarity. In some videos,

there were young Abidjanis threatening reprisals against “Arabs” and / or Lebanese living in Ivory Coast. Collective mobilizations were also quickly organised. In reaction to the images of the CNN, certain public figures, such as Claudy Siar— who is a radio host known for its program “couleur tropicale” on RFI— called for collective mobilizations in front of the Libyan embassy in Paris. The aim was both to denounce the treatment of young Africans in Libya and to demand their release, but also to evoke the plight of the African continent, the support of European governments for African dictators and the plunder of resources. For the famous activist Kemi Séba, the real enemy is not Libya, but the “criminals of African leaders” who send their youth to death.

These images have also sparked the reflection of African intellectuals on the condition of the black man in the twenty-first century. In a column published in the newspaper *Le Monde* on November 25, 2017, Achille Mbembe and Felwine Sarr reflected upon several outrageous treatments inflicted on black men and women around the world. These events led them to take up the words of Aimé Césaire in affirming that the migrant of black skin has become this “man-famine”, this “man-insult”, this “man torture” whom one can manhandle, beat and kill without having to report or apologize to anyone (Tribune *Le Monde*, November 25, 2017<sup>60</sup>). For these two intellectuals, the indignation and outbursts of solidarity provoked by the media dissemination of CNN images cannot make up for the protection provided to African heads of state who are increasingly retreating from the fight for equality and the concrete application of treaties and conventions on the rights of persons, preferring most often to delegate this work to non-governmental organisations whose relatively light “weight” in the international scene constitutes a handicap in the human rights fight.

In the conclusion, the writers acknowledge that certain media questions may have answers in the accounts obtained from the young, interviewed migrants. However, for them, it is more difficult to “connect” these micro-sociological accounts to a more global and structural critique of the field of international relations. This is where the originality of this contribution lies as it looks at the media representations of sub-Saharan migrants and tries to demonstrate how the consequences of NATO's intervention (fall of the Libyan leader Gaddafi and the social chaos that this has engendered) have made the “path” of sub-Saharan migrants more perilous. In the aftermath of the Libyan war, their dream of a

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<sup>60</sup>Available at : [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/11/25/face-a-l-esclavage-des-noirs-restaurer-la-dignite-doit-devenir-une-passion-africaine\\_5220237\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/11/25/face-a-l-esclavage-des-noirs-restaurer-la-dignite-doit-devenir-une-passion-africaine_5220237_3232.html)

better life in the West has turned into a nightmare, causing the “resurgence” of slavery practices in which they are victims. The media silence about this direct causality between the effects of an intervention and the existence of slavery practices is as striking as the spectacular nature of the reports showing the images of migrants being auctioned off.

Once the sensational and emotional effects produced by these media reports have faded, the most difficult step is how to envisage the effects of a structuring of the balance of power in the field of international relations on events which fuel the media buzz rather than stimulate any comprehensive or holistic critical thinking. The article writers, although they acknowledge the power of media in divulging the atrocities lived by sub-Saharanans and in facilitating the migration processes, confess that there are several neglected media questions (which they raise in the last part of the article – From the Libyan Chaos to the Slave Entrapment of sub-Saharan Migrants: a Series of Neglected Questions in the Media<sup>61</sup>). The article focuses on the political relations and power balance, with a view to underlying the role of media in them. However, the analysis of the media seems crippled and lacks depth and consistency. In fact, there is no systematic analysis of the media treatment of the sub-Saharan migrants. Rather, some references were made to an article written by journalists from sub-Saharan origins in France and to the uses of new media in the migratory experiences of sub-Saharan youth in Morocco.

Whereas the previous article builds on media and migration to tackle questions of international relations and power balance, the next book chapter concerns itself with media representations to comment on the human condition of migrants. In “Sub-Saharan Migrants’ Masculinities: An Intersectional Analysis of Media Representations during the Libyan War 2011”, DeVargas and Donzelli (2014) address the role of the media in conflict situations to foreground the significance of media representations in producing knowledge about conflicts. In fact, this hypothesis was discussed when dealing with social representations and media representations, and the findings of this research fall under the same scope. Indeed, starting from the idea that media can influence the interpretation and framing of conflicts, the Libyan war in 2011 is an interesting case study.

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<sup>61</sup> Translation mine, original in French, ‘Du chaos libyen au piège esclavagiste des migrants subsahariens : une série de questions médiatiquement négligées’.



The authors reflect upon the United Nations (UN) principle of Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) and the conflict's impacts on 'subordinate' populations, whether they are trapped in conflict zones or even attempting to flee across borders. Accordingly, this chapter proposes a perspective of the media representation of 'migrants' in Libya, "discerning the key links between the constructions of their masculinities and the practices of protection for 'people on the move'"(DeVargas & Donzelli, 2014, p. 241). The authors demonstrate that during the first period of the conflict, "sub-Saharan black Africans" were presented in the media as "subjects of adequate protection". The media "invisibilisation" and subordination were framed so as to engrave the idea of the international community as the "legitimate protector of civilians". The authors argue that media representations contribute to aggravating migrants' situation by putting them under a three-fold vulnerability (structural, political, and representational). Such a triple jeopardy restricts the conception and understanding of security to their 'naturalised' victimisation. This research is valuable in its examination of the links between migration, media representations of masculinity, and security.

Like the authors of this chapter, the core concern in my research endeavours is the role and impact of media representations in socially constructing sub-Saharan<sup>62</sup> identities. In this chapter, it is argued that the media coverage reinforces the sub-Saharans' status of "multiple subordinations" and further restricts their access to protection. The goal is therefore to analyse the media's role in implicitly directing and diverting access to protection programs. In this sense, the analysis of media information and the presented collective identities are linked to issues of 'protection' and security. In other words, representational schemes used by the media address particular groups as 'subjects' to be cared for or as people in charge of protecting others. The representational strategies adopted by media in times of conflict namely normalising, categorization, or framing result in assigning roles and 'accountability' to people and topics.

In this valuable research, examining how the media construct sub-Saharan black Africans' 'masculinities' in connection with the Libyan conflict showed that the migrants tend to be treated as a homogeneous group according to their ethnicity and *ad modum* of 'threat', in spite of their different social locations. This compromises their entitlements to security and protection as human beings under international norms. Media and conflict studies have highlighted the risky role and ramifications of media

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<sup>62</sup> It is noteworthy that the authors use the expression "sub-Saharan black Africans" throughout the chapter, which is intriguing as the term "sub-Saharan" itself carries the reference to the colour and origin of this group of people.

representational strategies inter alia categorization and framing in selecting the exposure and characterization of the represented subjects and their relative conditions. Contrary to the first article, which tends towards optimism in stressing the role of media and ICT in reinforcing the agency of the migrants, this article addresses the hazardous impacts of media in undermining migrants' situation and right to protection.

What is interesting in this chapter is the logic behind it. Indeed, to develop their argument, the authors discuss the theoretical posture and its relevance to the representation of sub-Saharan masculinities during the 2011 Libyan conflict. Second, they present the migrants' vulnerability in Libya, demonstrating the systematic discrimination against them. Finally, using Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence' in media representations of sub-Saharans' in the 2011 war in Libya, the study analyses the findings on sub-Saharan migrant masculinities as conveyed in three mainstream online news media: *Al Jazeera*, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*. The authors justify the selection of these three media outlets by their international outreach and their influence in producing a specific understanding of the events during the war. The chapter closes on some reflections on the relevance of analysing the media representation of vulnerable groups. It discusses the role 'symbolic violence' (SI) carried out by the media in framing sub-Saharans as not worthy of protection.

Within the analysis, DeVargas and Donzelli argue that in conflict situations the media use race as a strategy of representation to represent the 'good' and 'bad' players. As has already been elaborated in the second part of this chapter, media framings of certain actors or events in terms of race or origin can either undermine or enhance the visibility of victims. The role of media in prolonging 'stereotypical' images may further compromise the security of vulnerable groups, according to the article. All three analysed mainstream media have a global public and online editions; they are mostly free and accessible. In the analysis, DeVargas and Donzelli selected several news as well as opinion articles dealing with the conflict from February 2011 to October 2011 (date of the death of Gaddafi). The media selected are *The New York Times* (NYT), *The Guardian* (TG), and *Al Jazeera English* (AJ).

The analytical part titled "Symbolic Violence and Media Representations of the Libyan Conflict" is meant to address how the identities of sub-Saharan migrants were constructed within the media. Indeed,

media and discourse representations<sup>63</sup> construe social meaning and social relations, thus put forward bearings (DeVargas & Donzelli, 2014). Media, being enmeshed in the contemporary processes of globalisation, use their discourses and representations to control societal power relations, and divert understanding of international action: media can really condone or support non-intervention or call for action. This perspective of analysis rhymes with CDA in its analysis of representation categories and framing to decipher social roles and perceptions. By representing a social group using certain frames like ‘vulnerable’ or ‘strong’, outgroup or ingroup, criminal or victim, the media assign this group with a label which derives certain social and political repercussions. This is further explained in chapter 4 of this research as the media’s chosen *topoi* and discursive strategies place sub-Saharan migrants in deterministic social moulds like deviants and victims. These moulds will determine the perception of the audience of the sub-Saharan question as threat, danger and burden (chapter 4). In the context of discourse(s) about migrants in the mass media, these are usually discourses of “difference”, antagonism and othering (Titscher, Meyer & Wodak, 2000).

Representation mechanisms used in these media narratives, especially framing and categorising are key elements in explaining how sub-Saharan migrants were approached in the context of the Libyan conflict. The authors suggest that such a media representation of sub-Saharans could account for the media representation of the Libyan war: its causes and factors, as well as solutions to the involved migration crisis. DeVargas and Donzelli opt for an intersectional analysis which allows for an analysis of the positioning and constitution of social subjects and groups through “different and interrelated social discourses and practices” (p. 250). The authors establish a parallelism between social discourse and media discourse, stating that the target of the analysis is the symbolic representations as defined by Bürkner (2012). The merit of intersectional analysis (meso-level) is that it uncovers interdependencies among societal structures (macro-dimension) and identity construction (micro-dimension). In this chapter, intersectional analysis is used to understand how media representations of sub-Saharan migrants during the 2011 Libyan war guided the “why and how” of migrant security within the broad transnational migration governance.

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<sup>63</sup> *Discourse representation* as a term used in DHA, elaborated when addressing post-war anti-Semitism (Wodak et al., 1990). Specific to media text productions, it is used to refer to the “reproduction of utterances of third parties”. By using discourse representation in media, for instance, speakers either align with or “distance”, thus legitimate or delegitimate the “utterances” of others to express their opinions. (Titscher, Meyer & Wodak, 2000, p.239).

DeVargas and Donzelli pay special attention to the intersections, i.e., convergence of the categories of masculinities, race, and class for a thorough understanding of media representations and their impact in the Libyan conflict. The analysis eventually addresses how such representations address migrants' access to security in conflict, by means of categorization strategies. For instance, the authors refer to the use of the term 'mercenaries' in journalists' reports when dealing with sub-Saharanans. In doing so, some media outlets imply that 'these dangerous' subjects need to be controlled and securitized instead of "protected" per se. This categorization of sub-Saharanans profited the rebels' call for foreign intervention. The choice of words, that is framing and categorising, serve latent media goals and cannot go unnoticed. The authors also comment on the use of qualifiers like 'poor' and 'desperately hoping' to reach Europe when describing the condition of sub-Saharanans. They argue that the tacit message is that Europe should limit their arrival to its coasts, since they are so desperate and therefore may be a 'danger' for the locals.

The problem with the analysis is that it sways between accurate examples and other debates about the matter. For instance, after briefly delving into the choice of specific terms and its repercussions on international governance of migration, the authors immediately return to academic debates about media's treatment of the lynching of both sub-Saharan migrants. In doing so, the authors refer to Chatora, 2011; Marshall, 2011; and Forte, 2011a/b. Their argument of media emphasis on the rebels' claims about sub-Saharan mercenaries is built on references to these previous studies, without delving deeper into a textual analysis of the articles chosen. Actually, the words of DeVargas and Donzelli are telling when they say that media "have been seen as reinforcing the urgent claims for external support to the rebellion", "have been thought to support the narrative of a united Arab Libyan people" and "have also been criticised for constructing the fear of an invasion of Europe" (DeVargas & Donzelli, 2014, p. 250). They use the passive to build their own argument instead of owning it. In this part of the chapter, the analysis seems to lack depth, compared to the literature review. There is no systematic textual or intersectional analysis, which begs the questions of whether the findings are those of the authors or meta-findings of previous research.

In the next part, "Visibilising the Role of Media in the Creation of Human Insecurity: Information on the Libyan War 2011", the authors explain the selection of the studied news and opinion articles published by the selected media outlets. The adopted methodology is very sound as the authors set out to examine archives with a view to identifying the news about the Libyan conflict. Then, they chose particular articles in close connection to sub-Saharanans to be analysed. DeVargas and Donzelli opted for a

balanced selection of articles encompassing the research period. In analysing thirty articles, the chapter endeavours to confirm consistency in representing masculinities.

The analysis builds on the main narratives in the selected material by deciphering the assumptions reflected in the way events and people are presented and related to each other. The authors claim they searched for “clues”, “frames” and “categories” to understand how the media channel the security of sub-Saharan migrants in the context of the Libyan conflict. Within the examined media corpus, the main narratives relating to the 2011 Libyan conflict were narrowed down to three: revolution, migration crisis, and humanitarian intervention, (in addition to racism as a cross-sectional theme). DeVargas and Donzelli concluded that all three media offered similar narratives and perspectives with some differences. For instance, *Al Jazeera* was the one medium to offer more information about the complex Libyan society (diverse phenotypes of the population), through the sequence of events presented. On the other hand, *The Guardian* tended to address migrants as victims and security as a moral duty. Finally, *The New York Times* was discerned as “essentializing spaces of Africa, Libya, and Europe” (DeVargas & Donzelli, 2014, p. 251) thus camouflaging the complexities of the situations accounted for.

The analysis then moves to the frequency of recurrence of some sub-themes. For instance, they referred to “revolution” as “stage in a positive and necessary developmental process moving toward Western liberal democracy”. Within this frame of reference (my own description, as the authors do not adopt a pragmatic/ CDA approach), anti-government protesters are described as ‘champions of democracy’ (AJ 2-9- 6; NYT 2-5-9; TG 7-10) as opposed to Gaddafi’s loyalists who are frequently referred to as defeated (AJ 5-6; NYT 1; TG 1-9). Building on that, the authors conclude that the media deploy a teleological argument based on which Libya is perceived as following the Western ideals. The frequency analysis is then summarised in a table (p. 255).

The analysis of the core theme in the chapter “masculinity” only starts on page 255. The authors distinguish different forms of masculinities in media representations according to the social group addressed. In constructing the Western actors as “neutral actor[s]... whose efforts aim at saving lives” (DeVargas & Donzelli, 2014: 256), the media establish a “hegemonic” prototype of masculinity. Indeed, the international community is portrayed as rational, expert, morally strong and determined with heroic, courageous, and generous traits (AJ 1-3-4-7; NYT 10; TG 1-2-7-9). Resulting from that, media representations of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ are used to reproduce dominant social relations and

hierarchies. On the other hand, the “complicit category” of masculinity is identified by the authors as the rebels against Gaddafi.

In this view of antagonistic masculinities, international media constructed images of sub-Saharan migrants as “passive” and “dangerous”, thus engraving the idea of ‘sub-Saharan black Africans’ as dispossessed of the qualities of hegemonic masculinity. They are merely ‘useless’, ‘helpless’, ‘poor’ and ‘desperate’ or ‘irrationally violent’ subjects and ‘brutal’ (DeVargas & Donzelli, 2014, p. 256). This further entrenches the conception of sub-Saharan migrants as subordinate with “marginalised masculinities”. Manhood is built upon not only gender but also the power of class and race. This construction of sub-Saharan migrants within this hierarchy of masculinity, according to DeVargas and Donzelli, normalises ‘victimhood’, thwarts the development of alternative narratives built on the sub-Saharan migrants’ accounts and undermines their need and experiences.

Wrapping up their analysis, the authors assert that media representations of masculinity in all its political hierarchy allowed to frame ‘security’ as per the hegemonic modern Western model with its “liberal democracy, market-based economies, rationality, and expertise” (DeVargas & Donzelli, 2014, p. 257). Applying Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence, DeVargas and Donzelli argue that the banalization of sub-Saharans’ vulnerability and hostility towards them is a form of symbolic violence. Such a violence does not allow for sound reflections on the hegemonic view of security and the ensuing actions undertaken by the international community.

DeVargas and Donzelli’s chapter is valuable in its scope, as it addresses sub-Saharan migration to North Africa and Europe from a fresh perspective, that of “protection” and Western failures. It is also praiseworthy for addressing the operation of international power relations as well as the dynamics of identity and (in)security from the standpoint of the hybridised experiences of sub-Saharans in Libya. The correlation established here is very innovative and eye-opening. It stresses the role of media as political actors in contemporary times, especially in conflict situations. This actually falls within my argument that analysing media representations of sub-Saharans in Tunisia may inform us about their social perception, identity and therefore integration.

The intersections examined in the lives of foreign black sub-Saharan African male migrant workers by DeVargas and Donzelli are, however, very restrictive because they neglect the female migrants. Since only male sub-Saharans’ masculinity is explored in this chapter, then the conclusions about protection and

insecurity do not necessarily respond to the gaps in the sub-Saharan migration research. When referring to the insecurity, the armed attacks, vulnerabilities resulting from the migrants' foreign media representations, attention is only allocated to the opinion formed among foreign decision-makers about the males, not the females. This is certainly a research choice, but in doing so, the authors leave a gap that should be addressed in the future.

The authors claim that they question the possibility of fostering migrants' security through media narratives, because of the emasculated representations that they convey of migrants' identities and needs. However, the sub-Saharan migrants' categorization and framing in media is further entrenched by the scope of the research itself, as it categorises migrants binarily: males as opposed to females, with a total disregard to the female migrants' representation in these media. Categorizations usually come with explanations of past or future actions (Leudar & Nekvapil, 2004). Hence, by excluding the females from such an account of media representations the explanations of future or past actions might be amputated and short of sound and comprehensive logic in addressing the questions of sub-Saharan migration as a whole. It is undeniable that mainstream media representations played a pivotal role in gearing gendered and racial categorizations that compromised social justice, but to stress such moulds and categories further engraves the dominant frames of security and migrants' stereotypes as male and black.

In the DeVargas and Donzelli chapter, the methodology is also idiosyncratic. They claim to base their analysis on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and the theory of intersectionality. However, one does not see how these two axes intersect to produce a sound thread of methodology. This unsettling impression is further aggravated by the absence of one methodological choice guiding the analysis of media corpus. The terminology used, namely categorization and framing, pertain to the expertise of Critical Discourse Analysis, and no systematic CDA analysis is carried out per se. Instead, the authors opted for a frequency analysis, i.e. quantitative research, from which assumptions are formulated and conclusions are established.

In reviewing the literature about the media representations of sub-Saharans in Tunisian, regardless of the methodology, it could be concluded that such studies are rare, not to say quasi absent. Research on the representations of sub-Saharans in Maghreb media is also very scarce and the little academic attention paid to such a track focuses on Morocco, and to a lesser extent Libya. All in all, South-South migration, in its social aspects, is relatively an under-researched field. It is still a fertile land waiting for cultivation. Such endeavours are not only urgent for academic purposes, but also for better understanding and

governance of the phenomenon. The present research in the media representations of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia and their repercussions on migration policy is a step towards understanding this relatively 'new' (or renewed) migration flow and its short/long-term ramifications on the Tunisian society and sub-Saharan migrants themselves.



### III- Chapter Three: Methodological and Terminological Framework

#### 1. Introduction: Terminology Informing the Corpus-based Methodology

##### 1.1 Black Africans, Africans, or Sub-Saharanans?

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, sub-Saharan is a term “of, relating to, or being the part of Africa south of the Sahara”, first known to be used as such since 1899<sup>64</sup>, i.e., during the colonial era and due to imposed divides. However, it is crucial to emphasise the contemporary neutral and purely geographical use of the term which shall be used through the following chapters. Linguistic accuracy is of great importance as such discourse choices can imply a certain position-taking or framing. In this research, we advocate decoloniality—i.e. questioning Eurocentric notions and taking a distance from long accepted colonial jargon—and hence cannot use any terms which might exacerbate colonial stratifications or labelling.

The term “Afrique noire” or “Black Africa” was used by the French, especially, to designate the group of West African colonies. The term “francophone black Africa” is also to be coined by the French. Nowadays, the term is decreasingly used, except in art. In recent studies, the term sub-Saharan Africa is used especially in economic and political research. Furthermore, the term sub-Saharan Africa is used by NGOs for statistical purposes. It has nothing to do with the old colonial term “Black Africa” which is tinged with racism and strong colonial and ethnic connotations.

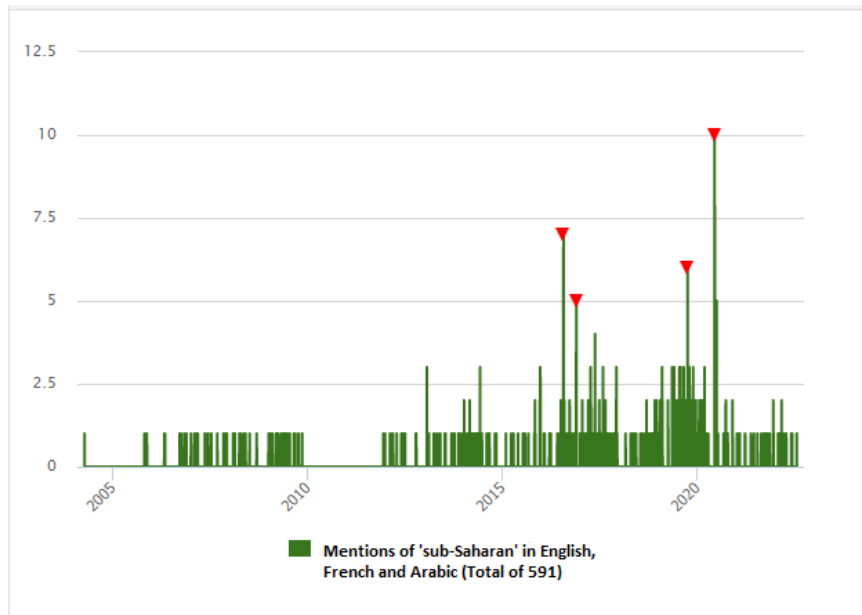
In Tunisian media, the term sub-Saharan is “re-used” relatively recently. When trying to identify the use timeline of the term sub-Saharan versus “African” for reference to people coming from sub-Saharan Africa, it was striking that ‘sub-Saharan’ was used almost 20 years ago as a conventional and customary term in famous newspapers like *le Quotidien* and *La Presse* and even the official news agency TAP<sup>65</sup>. It was notably used when invoking economics, politics, climate and sports issues, and sometimes in articles about the international students in Tunisian Private universities. Then, the use shifted to “Africans” as soon as the Libyan crisis began, to refer to sub-Saharan Africans entering Tunisia as “refugees” in Shusha camp or as “irregular” migrants. Suddenly, the Tunisian media were caught in a new situation where sub-Sahara is not a far-away land, but a new reality in Tunisia. Henceforth, sub-Saharanans

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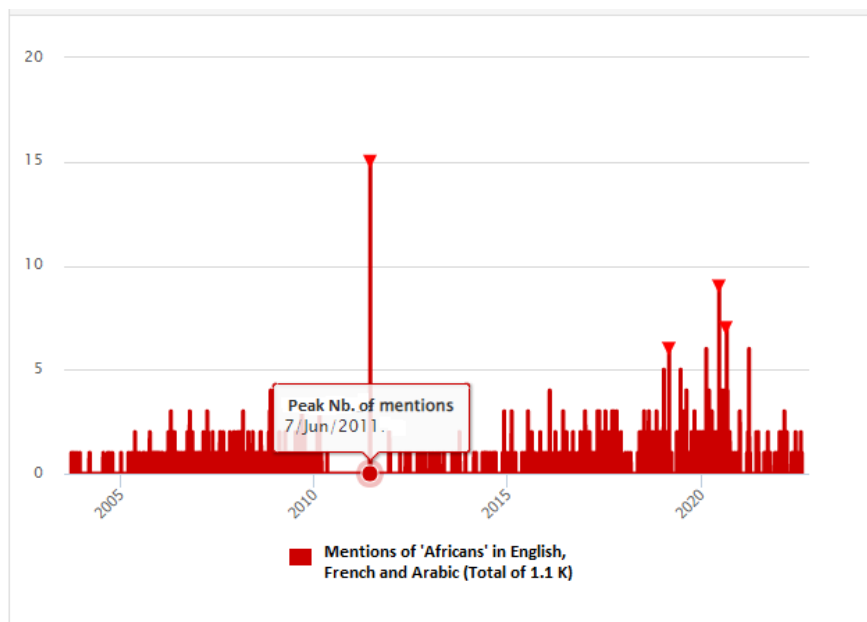
<sup>64</sup> Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Sub-Saharan. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sub-Saharan>

<sup>65</sup> Tunis Afrique Presse, the national press agency of Tunisia.

and non-sub-Saharanans were all put in the same basket and amalgamated as the *others*—“the Africans”. Here is an explorative comparison of the use of the term “sub-Saharan” versus “African”—as a substitute—over a lapse of eighteen years (pre- and post-2011):



**Figure 3: Use of the term ‘sub-Saharan’ in Tunisian media (2004-2022)**



**Figure 4: Use of the term ‘African’ in Tunisian media (2004-2022)**

It seems that the highly controversial and stigmatising term ‘Africans’ referring to sub-Saharanans and sometimes black people from other countries like Sudan and Tunisia was used massively post 2011 as a reaction to the ‘renewed’ encounter with this social group. Later on, (figure 3) they will be referred

to as ‘sub-Saharan’ for political correctness by serious media outlets (this latter use is analysed in chapter 5). This could be also explained by the sensitization work carried out by civil society and the new laws penalising racist discourse passed in 2018 (chapter 6). However, the term ‘Africans’ continues to be used by Tunisian citizens and buzz/ social media, and it is tinged with racism, distancing and Afrophobia.

For such reasons, there will be a systematic use of the designation “sub-Saharan” as it prevents adopting or exacerbating any colonial prejudice. In fact, decoloniality requires us to be flexible and comfortable with using any jargon if it is not used to stress strata, divides and alterity. In addition, when dealing with South-South migration and geopolitical relations, connotations of terms are unpacked from Western supremacy and hegemony to be packed with new meanings, usually neutral, fluid and multiform. Crafting a discourse about ‘sub-Saharan’ which has an identity independent of dominance and oppression is challenging but crucial. In fact, prominent decoloniality figures—Walter Dignolo and Rolando Vazquez—argue (2013) that “decolonial aestheSis” is a way to challenge postmodern aesthetics critically and to bring to the surface “popular practices of re-existence”. Re-existence conveys a process of reinventing existing aesthetics, discourses, and practices for decolonial purposes.

## **1.2 Corpus Timeframe**

With the 2011 upheaval or “clash” (Wodak & Boukala, 2015) in Tunisia expanding as a snowball in the Arab world, Libya transformed into a land of chaos, and the Libyan-based sub-Saharan fled the war to Tunisian borders. In fact, the ‘massive’ entry began at the end of February, when the government began to coercively suppress street demonstrations which threatened the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, like what had happened in Tunisia and Egypt. In just a few days, tens of thousands of foreigners sought to leave the country, which was possible for some as the governments of the industrialised countries that had interests in Libya were able to organise the evacuation of their expatriates by air without delay. Others, from Ghana, Morocco, Egypt, Mali and even Asian countries like Bangladesh—who were supplying the Libyan labour market in large numbers—took the road to Tunisia.

In early March, around 100,000 people had crossed the border before being repatriated, sometimes by the IOM and the UNHCR. A third underprivileged category had no return route. Those had already fled Darfur, Eritrea, Somalia, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia and other countries for security reasons. Thus, they found themselves caught in a dangerous trap in Libya. The army of ‘African’ mercenaries (expression used in Arabic media outlet like Al Arabia and Al Jazeera) built by Gaddafi meant that the many sub-

Saharans working in the country were automatically suspected of belonging to the Gaddafi militia and hence were targets of aggression and assaults.

Those who managed to flee were denied entry at Egyptian borders. Others were not warmly welcomed—to say the least—at the Tunisian border. For the most part, these ‘double’ refugees were still in overcrowded camps in southern Tunisia at the start of the summer of 2011. When international coalition planes began to bomb Tripoli in mid-March 2011, Libyans in turn joined the cohorts of departing “crowds”. IOM acknowledged that almost 346,000 people had left Libya by the end of March, almost double at the end of July. The majority were welcomed in Tunisia.

As of that moment in history, the media coverage of sub-Saharanans started to crystallise in the Tunisian news. Apart from the fact that sub-Saharanans are undeniably part of the social scenery in Tunisia, the “revolution” and the democratic transition allowed for more freedom and space in dealing with controversial issues like migration, racism, ethnicity (black Tunisians as the forgotten social group) in Tunisian media. As put by Boubakri (2013, p. 32), “... the revolution and the major political change which resulted therefrom, notably after the elections of 23 October 2011, allowed to start debates around migration in the public sphere and in the media for the first time”<sup>66</sup>. This relative freedom is nevertheless tainted with prejudice, dissociation, racism and xenophobia especially in non-official media.

The general eclectic conceptual framework I endorse presupposes the use of discourse analysis as a guiding principle for the analysis. I start by elaborating on the central statements of discourse theory concerning the two-way “language game”—played by social groups—whereof social realities and discourse interplay *ad infinitum*. Our social identities are forged and then relentlessly framed, reframed and renegotiated within discursive social interactions. Discourse theory is also designed to divulge ideology as the channel of meanings within a certain discourse and as a tool to impose and enact social relations and identities.

This research aims to scrutinise the patterns of the media coverage of a variety of issues related to sub-Saharan migrants from political, social, and legal scopes by unveiling the media coverage of events

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<sup>66</sup> Translation mine, original in French ...la révolution et le changement politique majeur qui en a résulté, notamment après les élections du 23 octobre 2011, ont permis pour la première fois de placer les débats autour de la migration sur la scène publique et dans les médias”.

involving their migratory narratives, their social and legal struggles for acceptance, status, and rights. Choosing to concentrate on the media representations of sub-Saharanans within a large array of themes and topics underlies the assumption that the general image and perception of a social group is systematically framed by the media over a period. Fairclough argues that the media power is “cumulative”, i.e. it works by hammering a certain positioning, causality, and agency, to situate the reader. “Thus [...] media discourse is able to exercise a pervasive and powerful influence in social reproduction because of the scale of the modern mass media and the extremely high level of exposure of whole populations to a relatively homogeneous output.” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 54). Thus, media representations ought to be explored over a more or less long period of time and in their full and complex layers.

This study, hence, aspires to discuss the ways in which media forges the collective attitudes towards Sub-Saharanans and migration in general. It also aims to decipher the dynamics which carve public perceptions of sub-Saharanans, and the different sub-categories thereof, within the Tunisian society. The study covers the period between 2012 and 2020, from the time of their “exodus”<sup>67</sup> to Tunisia, following the Libyan war, to the times of covid where public opinion shifted focus from their migratory narratives and stories to their presence/ reality as a new social group. The choice of the period is also indicative and telling of my choice to study the impact of sub-Saharanans' media representations on policy and law, which were arguably passed because of such media representations and self-representations.

I systematically examine a comprehensive corpus of media texts from Tunisian mainstream and alternative media outlets. Then, I study the counter-representations in a sub-corpus extracted from the main one, mostly involving alternative media, in a contrastive way. In addition, for the study of the policy impact of mediatized narratives of sub-Saharan migration and integration, the analysis time frame is expanded to include a sample of media texts from the year 2020 (with a view to studying the correlation between the 2020 media coverage and Law No. 2021-37 dated July 16, 2021, regulating domestic work). A longer timeframe for media discourse analysis enables tracking the chronological evolution/ fluctuation of media representations of sub-Saharanans, given the changes in the political, social and legal contexts with the change of the ruling “elite” in 2011, 2014, 2018, 2019, and 2021.

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<sup>67</sup> Word borrowed from an article by UNHCR, <https://m.reliefweb.int/report/399705?lang=ru> without any prejudice whatsoever to the arrival of sub-Saharanans in Tunisia.

## 2. Paving the Way: Critical Discourse Analysis Tools and Concepts

### 2.1 CDA and Media Representations: A Fertile Field of Research

Discourse is central to media; thus, examining and understanding its uses in the discursive construction of meaning has long been an essential interest for media scholars. Indeed, many research schools and traditions have been built around this problematic of media and discourse. The Glasgow University Media Group and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies had a great impact in this context. Starting from the late 1970s, they issued analytical research on the media representations of some social issues. The seminal work of semiotic analysis carried out by Kress and van Leeuwen (1990) treated language and visual communication as well as narrative representations and their role in designing social action and social constructs. It also elaborated on the way media representation frames the position of the viewer and accordingly the various models of reality. In 1991, Roger Fowler, an avant-gardist of the “critical” approach to discourse, explored the language of news in a linguistic manner, tackling issues like transitivity, modality, structure, as well as the then concept *in vogue*, i.e., speech acts.

Writing from the CDA perspective, van Dijk (1988, 1991) and Norman Fairclough (1995) carried out several quasi-systematic examinations of media/ journalistic language use. Van Dijk and Fairclough, through their groundbreaking works, established a research project that is centred on the interrogation of discourse’s role in the (trans)formation of social representations and societal relations. Right from the start, CDA aimed at transcending pure linguistics and text-mania to delve into the broader scope of political, institutional, legal, and sociocultural contexts. In the tradition of media analysis, such an endeavour is particularly rewarding and challenging due to the crisscrossing of several social fields intermingled in a given social phenomenon and its media representation. For instance, when dealing with the media discourse about migration, there ought to be cross-referencing to sociology, law, policy, politics, culture, to mention a few.

Such a research scheme which embraces and encloses all the aspects of a given media text about a specific topic within the wider context of its production, reception and transmission is the proclaimed objective of CDA scholarship. For instance, John E. Richardson, in 2007, proposed a critical discourse analysis approach to analysing newspapers. He focused on war reporting, and examined social and discursive practices (i.e., propaganda, shepherding journalists), manufacturing consent, action and agency,

and the marshalling of morality through the framing of heroes and villains in the reporting of war deaths (pro patria mori). This being established, CDA is valid and adequate for the study of media discourse and its social ramifications. In the context of post-2011 Tunisia—with the advent of various alternative media outlets, the newly acquired freedom of speech and the change in the mainstream media discourse—a systematic and diachronic study of the representations of migrants, namely sub-Saharan migrants, should be a theoretically and methodologically fruitful and genuine endeavour.

## **2.2 Discourse and Representation: the ‘Discursive Strategies’**

In her article, “Media(ted) Discourse and Society” (2008), Anabela Carvalho asserts that journalistic discourse is “the media representation of social issues” and “a function of the discursive construction of events, problems and positions by social actors” (p. 161). Indeed, the discursive strategies utilised by media outlets renders discourse a “time-sensitive” social practice. The media’s representations of social problems and social actors, according to Carvalho, hinge on the media professionals’ penchants and goals. However, such representations do also build on the manners in which other social actors construct themselves and their social problems in manifold discourses.

Discursive strategies are types of discursive handling and twisting of events by social actors, with a view to have a certain effect on the target audience. Media have always been labelled as “manipulative” in the sense of conniving and devious. However, this manipulative aspect does not automatically mean the distortion of reality as advanced by van Dijk (2006) when he treated it “as a form of social power abuse” and a “cognitive mind control” (van Dijk, 2006, p. 359).

Discursive strategies are the missing the link between strategies of the information source<sup>68</sup> and media representations. Discursivity highlights the empowering capacities of discourse with relation to “claims-making”<sup>69</sup>. Indeed, media are an important sphere for claims-making, as the language used therein

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<sup>68</sup> The expression “source strategies” is usually used to refer to strategies used by information sources. Cf. Schlesinger, P. (1990).

<sup>69</sup> In pragmatics, claim-making describes the performative power of words, the idea of performing or expressing a claim that has a consequence on someone’s interests. Claim-making includes two types of actors: a claimant (the speakers, addresser) and an addressee. The two engage in a verbal or physical action (advising, protesting, supplicating, blaming etc.). The notion echoes John Austin’s speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary), whereof ‘Speech is a mode of action, not a countersign of thought’.

usually aims at “demanding”, “showing”, “protesting”, “challenging”, “proving”, “blaming” or even “warning” about an issue or a social group.

The main discursive strategy implemented by a speaker or writer in media (not necessarily the journalist himself) is the deliberate choice of one or many perspectives to ponder over an intricate reality; the act of “framing”. Framing is a process rather than a static or independent model we project over a discourse. In fact, framing is defined as the act of constructing discourse in line with a given angle or opinion. It includes, in media production, “selection” and “composition”. According to Entman (1993), selection follows the principles of inclusion and exclusion of events or points of view. Composition, on the other hand, is the arrangement of these events or points of view in a certain elaborate manner to demonstrate and generate the desired meaning. Framing is not an option or preference in media; it is rather part of the media representation of reality, as it is “inherent to the construction of texts” (Carvalho, 2008, p. 169). In the Discourse-Historical tradition, one of the crucial discursive strategies to scrutinise is “perspectivation” or discourse representation—i.e., framing (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 72). In this sense, framing is “expressing involvement” or “positioning the speaker's point of view” by means of “reporting, description, narration or quotation of (discriminatory) events and utterances” (p. 73). Starting from the postulate, framing is an inevitable operation in media, and frame analysis should therefore focus on the way a media actor frames reality.

The question of representation in media is also linked to other discursive strategies. For instance, *positioning* is a discursive strategy consisting of placing social actors within a certain relations’ network to warrant them some prerogatives or moral/ political superiority in claims-making. It is also relevant to the debates about identity construction, through discourse, in the media. While Carvalho discusses discursive strategies like politicisation and de-politicization, the discursive strategies to be addressed here are the ones which are in a direct connection to representation, according to the Discourse Historical Approach. These were developed and expanded on by Wodak & Meyer (2001). There are numerous discursive strategies which can be eventually discussed depending on the research project and research questions (see table 4.1 “Discursive Strategies”, p. 73 in Wodak & Meyer, 2001, for a summary of these strategies).

Framing, as referred to above, is a fundamental strategy as it is used by media discourse to forge and fabricate liability (not to be taken for their negative connotations, as mentioned above). By framing an event, incident, quote in representing it through media discourse, the media actors have a discretionary



discursive strategy at hand. For frame analysis, the analysis should focus on the media actors' discourse, via primary sources. Yet, such a discursive strategy can also be examined when dealing with other social actors' primary sources (articles, communiqués, written and released by them). If not possible, for instance in the case of sub-Saharanans who do not have their own official media outlets in Tunisia, the analysis will focus on sub-Saharanans indirect self-representations in the counter-discourse by recourse to their interviews, quotes and indirect in Tunisian media sources.

One might argue that such an indirect analysis uses a selected product of the media machine. Nevertheless, interviews and quotes have something to say about the social actors and their voice/resistance. It is a way by which the media themselves fight the subjectivity of their work through triangulation. Indeed, the latter is one of the main principles of DHA, allowing researchers to reduce subjective inclinations by striving to work with a variety of data, sources and methods (Wodak, 2011, p. 65). According to Wodak et al. (1999), triangulation rests upon the analysis of different sets of media samples and data for a more comprehensive picture of media representations and their socio-political-historical context. In the case of this study, triangulation is based on a media corpus, statistics, events, and expert interviews in the last phase.

The aim of my research is to map the discursive strategies used by Tunisian media in representing sub-Saharanans as opposed to the counter-representations in the sub-corpus to examine how each group of social actors is represented (produced, constructed, silenced) or counter-represented (humanized, individualized). In doing so, my final quest lies in defining the relations between the media outlets and social actors (media actors and sub-Saharanans migrants) and fathoming the ways in which Tunisian media outlets channel the strategies of policymakers for an anti-racist, anti-xenophobic activism, if applicable.

### **3. CDA as a Decolonial Method**

In "What Is Critical Discourse Analysis?" Ruth Wodak was interviewed by Gavin Kendall. When inquired about the reason, the gain from and risk in being "critical" in discourse analysis, she replied that the 'criticality' in CDA entails "opening up complexity, challenging reductionism, dogmatism and dichotomies, being self-reflective" and "making opaque structures of power relations and ideologies manifest" (Kendall, 2007, p. 3) rather than being just negative or doubtful. It also means, for Wodak, surpassing the critiqued discourse about a social problem to provide solutions and construct alternatives.

Taking a critical position *par rapport à* some discourses is according to Wodak a source of academic vulnerability: her research centre was closed in 2003 in the Austrian Academy of Sciences, and she was intimidated by some right-wing members of the Academy for her interdisciplinary and critical research. Ruth Wodak confirmed that CDA's originality springs from its focus on identity politics, i.e., social transitions and changes and its incorporating macro social theories in discourse analysis. In a word, CDA is a rebel and subversive methodology, challenging the established institutions and discourses.

CDA, and notably DHA, my chosen methodology, perfectly align with decoloniality which is advocated for in this research and migration research, more generally. Indeed, critical discourse analysts align themselves with the de-colonialist logic which has geared critical theory and cultural studies throughout history. CDA is traced back to Marxism, structuralism and the Frankfurt School's critical theory and praxis, even though post-Marxists and decolonialists proved to have antagonistic standpoints at times. Carvahlo contends that these political schools are "an important backdrop" (Carvahlo, 2008, p. 162) for the progress of research on discourse. Critical discourse Analysis—seen with decolonial optics—is primarily a statement against the historical determinism of colonial-imperial interdependency. *Immo*, CDA poses on the political stance and the methodological praxis of 'interdiscursivity' which calls for adjustment to the social and mental sphere surrounding the analysed text. Interdiscursivity, as an analytical paradigm of CDA, results in "choice making, dynamic negotiation and linguistic adaptation". Fairclough defines interdiscursivity as the relations between different types of discourse(s) such as genres and models. For Michel Foucault (1972) and Per Linell (1998), on the other hand, interdiscursivity reflects *discursive formations*, i.e., links between broad divergent discursive entities, such as natural history and economy. For Foucault, interdiscursivity is not obligatorily linked to ideology; rather it is a conceptual analytical tool to tackle discursive formations. In this manner, CDA is a mapping of interdiscursive configurations, which is incongruent with the colonial hegemonic determinism and practices.

CDA uses interdiscursivity as a survival kit/ strategy to resist hegemony. The techniques used to analyse discourse foreground the subversion of hierarchies. CDA concerns itself with marginal groups, overlooked texts, peripheral actors, and hidden identities with recourse to the resources of interdiscursivity. Through intertextuality/ interdiscursivity, be it diachronic or synchronic, the meaning-making of a chronotropic event is reshaped according to what can be conceived as a decolonial re-reading.

Indeed, CDA is heterodox to the colonial axioms and seeks to counter them. The 'decolonial' critical discourse analysis seeks to rescue 'subalternity' through a political, and interdiscursive process

anchored in social and epistemic re-understanding of discourse and hierarchy. Decoloniality is advanced as an epistemic and political scheme to shutter modern/ colonial systems, including meaning and cultural systems (Mignolo, 2011). It aims to disassemble power relations and knowledge formations which have long fostered the “reproduction of racial, gender and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world” (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 117). According to Ruth Wodak, one of the protagonists of CDA, and her research partner Michael Meyer (2009), “proponents of CDA use discourse analysis to challenge what they regard as undesirable social and political practices” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 2). This insinuates that CDA is a type of scholarly decoloniality and activism.

For Fairclough and Wodak (1997), discourse is deeply rooted into its “contextual interactions” between societal dynamics, identity issues, production mechanisms, cultural values, semiology, and historical conjunctions. Fairclough & Wodak’s paradigm is of great relevance to this research since its foci are communication, media and social change. In *Language and Power*, Fairclough (2014) states that the aim of CDA is the “critique” of established norms and standards (Fairclough, 2014, p. 49) primarily capitalist and colonial “allegiances”. Discourse is by nature socially galvanised; the result thereof is social transformation and activism. In this sense, CDA as a method and decoloniality as an underlying spirit meet to challenge prior hegemonic norms and give space and voice to an analysis which is interdiscursive.

The CDA methodology, as it is built and structured, does not give any priority, antecedence, or prerogative to a unique method; it came to emancipate academia from the tyranny of theoretical exclusivism (see chapter one) and uncompromising methods. Opting for Critical Discourse Analysis, quantitatively and qualitatively, shall allow for a thorough analysis of acts of resistance or activism by sub-Saharan and nationals—those who had long been silenced and placed in subordinate positions because of inherited colonial/ imperial formations. Furthermore, CDA explores the political and legal consequences and entailments of these acts of activism—framed and reframed as reactions to profound and fundamental political, social and racial inequalities. Decolonial optics allow to refresh and replan migration studies, particularly Global South migration trends which do not have to abide by the same rules of the Global North migration theory. The methodological choices therefore contest hegemony via emphasis on individual and collective agency. It is an acknowledgement of this agency and an inauguration of the voice and expression ensuing therefrom.

#### 4. Critical Discourse Analysis: A Dynamic Activation of Multi-Conceptual Systems

Discourse analysis is both a theoretical and methodological framework, widely used to study political discourse, usually to survey conflicts, identities, ideologies, topics of racism, hate speech and discrimination of minority social groups. It seeks to analyse the media discourse and how it constructs and frames public opinion. In this section, some foundations of discourse analysis as well as some sub-disciplines in the discourse analysis field are to be discussed.

##### 4.1 What is Discourse?

The term ‘discourse’, when used in the academic context, conveys linguistic uses, primarily, as well as literary ones. However, it has been increasingly used in interdisciplinary studies of cultural studies, international relations, and political philosophy. To this aim, each discipline built its own definition and conceptual paradigm of ‘discourse’. In the present study, I shall adopt very specific definitions of discourse and pinpoint certain approaches which are founded on discourse as a pivotal conceptual device. All the definitions of discourse are sub-categorized under two major headings: (i) the linguistic character of discourse and (ii) the social interactionist turn in discourse analysis.

Jan Blommaert<sup>70</sup>, advocating a definition of discourse as “meaningful symbolic behaviour” points out that “[d]iscourse is language-in-action, and investigating it requires attention both to language and to action” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 2). He critiques the long tradition of viewing discourse from a purely linguistic perspective and acclaims the modern understanding of discourse, in which “old and well-established concepts and viewpoints from linguistics were traded for more dynamic, flexible, and activity-centred concepts and viewpoints” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 2). Rather than conceiving of discourse as a simple sequence of utterances (Howarth, 2000, p. 7), emphasising the importance of linguistic structures: words, sentences, and texts, as the primary target of analysis, he points out the complexity of discourse and hence the necessity of viewing it in its broader social context. Blommaert views discourse as complex combinations of texts, visuals, and audio, which are treated “as contextualized activities rather than as simple objects” (2005, p. 3).

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<sup>70</sup> Blommaert is professor of African Linguistics and Sociolinguistics at Ghent University. He has undertaken fieldwork in East and Southern Africa, and in 2002--2003 he was awarded the Emile Verhaeren Chair at the Free University of Brussels. He is the author of *State Ideology and Language in Tanzania* (1999), co-author of *Debating Diversity* (1998), editor of *Language Ideological Debates* (1999).

The Blommaertian conception of “discourse” includes the entire “human activity seen in connection with social, cultural, and historical patterns and developments of use” (2005, p. 3). As in the Foucauldian tradition, he understands language as the group of semiotic symbols encompassing even the objects referred to and activities performed within speech as they are the ‘action’ in an elaborate ‘language-in-action’. David Howarth defines discourse as a network of social practices which are dominantly political, as it is built on conflict, antagonisms, and power relations. More importantly, discourse draws political frontiers between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, ‘us’ and ‘others’ (2000, p. 9). Thus, Howarth, in the manner of the CDA school, departs from the reductive linguistic understanding of discourse by stressing its social role and the involved dynamics therein, such as political antagonism and the ensuing construction of social identity.

Ruth Wodak, one of the founding academics of CDA, has a historical approach to discourse. Along with the linguist Martin Reisigl, she tries to establish a ‘theory of discourse’. Her Discourse Historical Approach (DHA)—problem-oriented and interdisciplinary—proposes to trace the development of discourse over a period of time and attempts to couple the discourse theoretical framework with ethnographic studies. Wodak, using DHA, attempted to investigate the antisemitic ‘Feindbild’ (image or concept of the enemy) and its presentation in public discourse during the Austrian presidential campaign of Kurt Waldheim in 1986.

Wodak recognizes that discourse is a package of “simultaneous and sequential, interrelated linguistic acts, which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action” (Meyer 2001, p. 21). In fact, while she agrees that discourse is “anything from a historical monument, a *lieu de mémoire*, a policy, a political strategy, narratives in a restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, to language per se”, she contends that for every application of CDA to be effective, discourse must be delimited. Wodak, like her fellow Critical Discourse Studies scholars, sees discourse, i.e., “language use in speech and writing” as a form of ‘social practice’ (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 3).

If we assume discourse is a social practice, we ought to consider the interplay between a certain event and the social contexts(s) framing it. In this sense, discourse is “socially constitutive” and “socially conditioned” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 6). Wodak deems that discourse shapes the identity of social groups and governs their relationships. Like van Dijk, she believes in its constitutive power, i.e. the sense that it either serves to maintain, reproduce, or change the existing social hierarchy. Attributing this “socially consequential” nature to discourse engenders debates about discourse, power, and ideology.

Discourse, which is a form of social practice, as convened by CDS scholars, is ergo a *discursive practice* (Fairclough, 1992, p. 71). It follows that discourse practices have social effects as they may produce, reproduce, or even change the power relations between social groups (racial, gender or cultural minorities) through their representation and positioning (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258).

In arguing for the discourse's power of change in the public sphere, Wodak distinguishes many discourses like “racist discourse”, “gendered discourse”, “media discourse”, “discourses of the past”, etc. Hence, she expands the definition of discourse to encompass all kinds of registers or styles. She then admits that this broad approach to discourse might be confusing and controversial – which is also the case for many CDA scholars (Blommaert, 2005; Reisigl, 2007; Wodak & de Cillia, 2006). To address this issue, Ruth Wodak highlights the necessity of defining the use of the term “discourse” and its relevance in the used approach.

Unlike Wodak, who has a historical approach to discourse, Blommaert adopts a beyond-history concept of discourse. The importance of this view of discourse as a network of signs and media has crucial ramifications in the way we perceive media discourse. For instance, a typical online piece of news includes a text written in different fonts, sizes and colours which have certain distinguished meanings. The images therein (*inter alia* logos and symbols) are used to structure the media piece. Indeed, the visual cannot be separated from textual in discourse. He uses the example of advertisements, which to him, are different each time they are printed because of their positioning in the medium architecture. The “ingredients” of the advertisement are carefully chosen, but they do not have any meaning on their own. In this trend, ‘discourse’ is the total set of features, not only its form or content, and discourse analysts ought to explore this complex net in its context. The non-linguistic turn in discourse theory is fundamental to modern theories of discourse<sup>71</sup>.

In modern theorization, discourse is seen as interlacing in the social structures. By negotiating social practices, discourse results in either the maintenance of social constructs or in their alteration. As a result, ‘power’ over discourse and its channels is the aim of media stakeholders to ensure a prolonged dominant stance or to renegotiate and challenge the established/ old power relations (Fairclough 1989, p. 37). Norman Fairclough developed a theory of discourse—“Discourse as Social Practice”—built on the

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<sup>71</sup> Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis (MCDA) is another framework (Machin, 2013) used to study textual and visual media representations, and it is mainly qualitative. It is not in use in this research, but it offers genuine tracks to the study of sub-Saharanans’ representations especially in social media (Hlioui, 2024).

dialectics of discourse and society. To him, “linguistic phenomena are social” and “social phenomena are linguistic” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 23). Indeed, discourse is produced to have social influence even when social actors are unaware of their role in maintaining the social relationships they are engaged in. On a different level, the language—since it is always interwoven in social phenomena—is not a mere reflection of social practice (the reflectionist model of language, first advocated then debunked by Ludwig Wittgenstein) but is a mechanism of those very practices. The mere discussion of political discourse is a facet of politics as discourse used in political debates is itself political, and therefore discourse is a tool of social change, struggle, and contest. Yet, Fairclough draws a line between the social and linguistic when he reckons that “language is one strand of the social”, yet “not all social phenomena are linguistic”, even when they “have a substantial, and often underestimated, language element” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 23).

Like Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, explores the process of negotiation of social identities with and in discourse. Fairclough (1989) asserts that one can explain a certain power *status quo* by fathoming the ‘social practices’ of domination behind it. In the same manner, van Dijk seeks—by the scrutiny of discourse—to reveal the ideological impact of discourse. He argues that discourse, communication in general, has a pivotal role “play a special role in such processes of reproduction” of ideology, which in turn is “expressed and reproduced by social and semiotic practices other than those of text and talk” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 191). However, he acknowledges that the power of discourse is limited, and that ideologies are also created and perpetuated using “forms of non-verbal discrimination” and “other semiotic messages (e.g., photographs and movies)” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 92).

Van Dijk debunks the myth of discourse as a “necessary” or a “sufficient medium of reproduction” of ideologies, even if it is somehow important in the “expression and reproduction” of such ideologies (1998, p. 192). Discourse is intertwined in nonverbal interactions, as is the case for media and media production. Thus, power, dominance, inequalities, contest, and conflict are produced and reproduced through discursive or interactionist dynamics. Nevertheless, discourse has a pivotal role in reproducing ideology. As an established ‘social practice’, discourse is more direct than other “semiotic codes” like images, logos, videos, and gestures. The features which distinguish ‘text and talk’ (i.e., discourse) make it possible for social actors to articulate their ideological opinions.

In presenting these definitions of discourse, I only seek to give an overview of the term. These definitions may help us fathom and subsequently describe its nature and principles, as well as pinpoint the basic theoretical foundations for its use in the empirical part of the present study.

## 4.2 Discourse Analysis: The Interplay of CDA and DHA

CDA users and followers view discourse as a set of social practices more comprehensive and broader than just written and spoken texts. To its founding scholars, such as Norman Fairclough, Teun Van Dijk and Ruth Wodak, it refers to an ensemble of linguistic and paralinguistic tools, interfering in and forming the very social practices engaging social actors, to produce, interpret and change meaning. Analysts using CDA methodology often focus on the relationship between discourse and power/ discourse and ideology.

When addressing power in Discourse Studies, poststructuralist discourse analysis brought a perspective on hegemony—or power as a discursive practice. Indeed, it goes beyond the simplistic understanding of power as the capacity to do, direct or influence. The power of discourse lies in its ability to socially constitute and regulate actions by discursively shaping identities and forming subjugation relations between the social actors (Howarth & Torfing 2005, p. 24). Discourse theory schools use predominantly cross-disciplinary approaches which fuse the linguistic and hermeneutical account of discourse with social and political studies. On the broad spectrum, discourse theorists interpret events and practices by scrutinising how political and social actors construct meaning within certain discourses like political discourse, media discourse, institutional discourse, and so on.

Moving into the categories of Discourse Theory, Jacob Torfing attempts to differentiate three schools (Howarth & Torfing, 2005). First, the school of Sociolinguistics is the most linguistic school in CDA as it approaches the analysis of texts from the perspective of linguistics. Sociolinguistics overlooks power relations, ideology and political antagonism and contents itself with the analysis of language use in social exchanges. This approach englobes content and conversation analysis and may be said to be influenced by speech act theory (Searle & Austin). Second, the post-structuralist approach is illustrated by British-based political theorists Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse. Within this trend, discourse encompasses all social phenomena and "is taken to be coterminous with the social" (Howarth & Torfing, 2005, p. 8). This stance reflects, to a certain extent, the views of Jacques Derrida (1978) about dispensing with the idea of transcending structures and structuration to the point of seeing anything as *discourse* (Howarth & Torfing, 2005, p. 8). Meaning becomes infinite and social meaning is therefore anchored in and through discourse. The theory of discourse by Laclau and Mouffe harmonises post-Marxism, post-structuralist and postmodernism. This paradigm analyses social relations within discursive meaning-construction; it studies dominant ideologies and how established social relations and institutions are



approved, as well as the ways in which social identities are produced and reproduced. Lastly, Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the third school among the aforementioned. Adherents to this school conceive of discourse as a set of social practices broader than written and spoken language. CDA owes its prominence to Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun Van Dijk and is greatly inspired by Foucault.

Although the above-mentioned schools seem to have different theoretical standpoints, they do share some postulates about discourse. First, all three approaches seem to diverge from the realist perception of the truth. Within the discursive practice, truth is not what we perceive from existing reality but what we can infer from language. Therefore, truth is bound to a setting, open to interpretation, connected to a discursive system which ‘stipulates’ rules of truth or falsehood. Second, all three schools have ‘relationalist’ understanding of identity, which discards the view of identity as a fixed, permanent, and pre-established (Torfinn, 1999). As a matter of fact, the construction of meaning(s) changes throughout history: meanings are renegotiated with every new or different social interaction or conversation. This stance perfectly rhymes with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Sprachspiel*—language-game theory. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein strives “to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or a form of life” (1963, Parag.23). Therefore, language cannot be reduced to a fixed meaning as ‘meaning-in-use’ evolves to reflect changes of reasoning, place and action, i.e., context.

Among all the above-discussed discourse theories, Critical Discourse Analysis is the primary methodological approach used in the present study as CDA is the most problem-driven methodology. It uses discourse analysis to address and interpret a social ‘problem’ and its manifestations. Howarth & Torfinn (1999) assert that the analytical exercise of CDA consists in examining the fluctuations of meanings as well as their anchoring dynamics. Therefore, CDA—as an analytic methodology rebukes the old prevailing idea that language is a reverential system (based on codes, signs, icons, etc.), thus yielding a more pragmatic and constructive approach to language (i.e., pragmatic turn). Within this framework, discourse plays the key role in the dynamics of signification: knowledge and identity’s production, maintenance, anchoring, and transformation are governed by discourse, within discourse.

The critical analysis of language not only concerns itself with the meaning-as-use of language in different social and historical contexts. Taylor (2001) assumes that language empowers and limits its users’ utterances and actions. Therefore, discourse analysis studies patterns of language and how they constitute social practices. Thus, CDA as established—not exclusively—by Fairclough, van Dijk, Wodak

stems from a need to study conditions (context) and repercussions (power relations, identity formation, inequalities, race struggles, etc.) of social interactions. CDA scholars agree on the double-fold analytical scope of this methodology. Nevertheless, they have different terminological postulates. For instance, the term ‘context’ is used in a slightly different way by Ruth Wodak, who argues that we must abstain from advancing grand, standard and fit-for-all social theories. Instead, with CDA, one ought to develop individual customised conceptual tools aiming at addressing a specific problem. Within CDA, Ruth Wodak’s DHA methodology is mainly focused on political discourse. To Ruth Wodak, five basic research questions need to be advanced when DHA is used (Wodak, 2008, p. 302):

1. How are social groups referred to linguistically?
2. What characteristics (whether positive or negative) are attributed to them?
3. Following which rationale are some people ‘included into or excluded from’ a certain social group?
4. From what perspective is this process carried out?
5. In this process of linguistically representing this group, are the “utterances articulated overtly, (...) intensified or (...) mitigated”?

Maybe one reason why DHA was developed by an Austrian linguist can be traced back to the fact that in the German-speaking academic tradition, research on language and politics has always had a strong historical focus. This has its origins in the 19th century when ‘historism’ became the dominant paradigm in humanities. Therefore, not only historians but also scholars from other classical, humanistic fields tried to use historical approaches in their own disciplines in order to describe the meaning of “specific constellations of institutions and cultural productions” (Oberhuber 2008, p. 272). The aim was to depict the individual characteristics of every event rather than to develop superfluous approaches of analysis. Consequently, there is a focus on the historical roots of their objects of studies (Oberhuber & Krzyzanowski, 2008, p. 272).

At this level, it is crucial to highlight that it is quasi-impossible to delineate *all* the principles and methods of CDA (Cf. Van Dijk, 1995). Nevertheless, any research which is axed on a CDA paradigm must follow some essential standards. As defined by Kress (1990), those standards are further developed by Fairclough & Wodak (1997) who put forth some basic criteria of a CDA project (Cf. Wodak, 2001, p. 5). Then, van Dijk (1995) advanced his stance that Critical research on discourse ought to comply with a set of exigencies for the said research to achieve its research objectives adequately. Building on the twelve basic criteria advanced by van Dijk (1997), we can summarize the basic tenets of CDA as follows: CDA

is centred upon social problems; discursivity of power relations; discourse as social and cultural; discourse as ideological; discourse as historical; the mediated link between discourse and society; interpretative and explanatory analysis; discourse as a form of social action.

Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) conceptualises discourse as a form of social and historical practice. DHA expands on the interdisciplinarity and eclecticism of CDA, due to the very nature of social problems treated within CDA works. Such issues such as migration, racism, etc. are too intricate to be examined and diagnosed from a unique perspective. Thus, to understand and explain the object under investigation, one needs to integrate diverse theories and methods. Hence, DHA derives from the understanding that CDA studies "are multifarious, derived from quite different theoretical backgrounds, oriented towards different data and methodologies" (Wodak, 2001, p. 5).

Historicity is one crucial tenet of DHA which rests upon the fact that discourses cannot be studied without studying their historical contexts (*Cf.* Wodak, 2009, p. 20). Therefore, discourse has synchronic and diachronic relations with all other situations within the same time setting (same or previous period). Wodak contends that "context" is essential for CDA-based research; context encompasses the social, political and ideological, cross-disciplinarily. In her DHA, Wodak (2001) affirms that "identity politics" demands a comprehensive study of the past, present and future situations, i.e., fathoming and scrutinising complex historical dynamics posing on hegemonic narratives and later counter-narratives.

## **5. Methods of Data Collection**

This section includes methods of data collection and of data analysis. In the first part, I elaborate on the methods for collecting data with a comprehensive description of the collected media corpus. The second part focuses on the methods used to analyse the data—essentially CDA and DHA. To the aim of construing the second part—data analysis methods—I introduce the used sub-methods, derived from CDA and DHA which will be used to examine mediatized representations and counter-representations of sub-Saharan and their migratory narratives.

For the purposes of the present study, the data selection of the texts used in the analysis is the main method of data collection. It is a mixed-method integrative approach. Indeed, I intentionally use a primarily qualitative design, mixed with quantitative data provided in a secondary manner. Some numerical and statistical insights as well as media monitoring are most useful in DHA to trace the evolution of the representation of certain social groups or phenomena throughout a relatively long period.

For instance, the CADAAD<sup>72</sup> research community comes from seemingly discrepant disciplines to discuss and reconcile different methodologies and paradigms in order to critically address social issues. Indeed, Weiss and Wodak (2003) assert that “studies in CDA are multifarious, derived from quite different theoretical backgrounds and orientated toward very different data and methodologies” (Weiss & Wodak , 2003, p. 12). Discussing the crisis of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to CDA, Fruttaldo & Cambria (2017) assume that CDA scholars are tempted to “cocoon” themselves in “traditional” methods when dealing with the controversy between CDA and corpus-linguistics. In fact, CDA considers itself rigorously qualitative by nature as the intentions and choices of the CDA researcher are the only guides in selecting and interpreting the data set they embark on its analysis. This makes CDA very subjective as the researcher’s “bias” is embraced to highlight one ideology or the other on purpose. On the other hand, corpus-based approaches adopt more of a balanced approach as they collect their data to test the researchers’ choices and “bias”.

Our intuition as researchers might make us see limitless possibilities of meanings and interpretations derived from the study of a certain discourse (this happens with interpretations of political speech, using semiotics for instance). However, corpus-based analysis helps us draw the recurrent and evolutive patterns of discourse use. A large data corpus—fruit of the researcher’s intuition and purposeful decisions, may also allow us to look at the bigger picture and to reassemble the existing social links and networks while operating. If discourse—which is itself a social practice—is the embodiment of how people reflect on social phenomena and other social groups, it is crucial to trace the patterns of creation of this perception and this “social imaginary” or “collective imaginary” as conveyed by words, signs, pictures, etc. This is the *raison d’être* of a combination of quality and quantity in discourse studies; it is like the duality of reason and passion, but it cannot be seen as dichotomous or antagonistic. The interpretation of the media corpus shall be descriptive and qualitative/ quantitative, for reasons for accuracy, objectivity and *scientificity*.

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<sup>72</sup> The Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines group in the Lancaster University present themselves as an “open community of researchers who are critically engaged with discourse and society. CADAAD promotes inter- and transdisciplinary scholarship addressing a broad range of topics from different perspectives involving critical discourse research”. See <https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/>

## 5.1 Principles of the Media Texts Selection

Teun van Dijk contends that “a complete discourse analysis of a large corpus of text or talk, as we often have in CDA research, is [...] totally out of the question” (van Dijk, in Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 26). Wodak & Meyer (2009)<sup>2</sup> advance that “most of the approaches to CDA do not explicitly explain or recommend data-gathering procedures” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 28). Norman Fairclough proposes a gradual process paving the way to analysis. He adopts, like Wodak, a problem-oriented method, which is also stepwise, starting by an identification and account of the social problem to be studied. In the present research, sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia is the social issue to be explored. For that, the researcher ought to concentrate on a particular social “problem” with a discursive manifestation (the term he chooses might be problematic herein, as it encapsulates the prejudice of migration as a problem rather than a social phenomenon or even a solution).

Once the issue is delineated, the researcher should go outside the text and describe the ‘problem’ as well as its manifestations. Then, he/ she has to pinpoint the dominant linguistic features like styles and genres forming the relevant semiotic expression. Once the discourse features—styles and genres—are identified, the resistance processes contra dominant discourses are explored. All the preparatory stages allow for the material selection as van Dijk advises a (i) structural analysis of the context, then (ii) an interactional analysis highlighting linguistic features such as agency, time, tense, etc.

Once the research questions are advanced, the discourse sources (official media, alternative media, and self-representational media outlets) may be pinpointed. Then, when the research questions and the relevant media corpus are set, the researcher should be able to embark on an open-ended reading to “identify significant debates, controversies, and silences, and possibly suggest specifications and amendments to initial research goals and questions” (Carvalho, 2008, p. 166). Only after a thorough reading on the literature about the research topic can the researcher decide upon the relevant text genres and types (Wodak, 2010, p. 25) for their analysis. CDA should integrate longitudinal analysis across different media; hence, scholars will need to trim or filter their data corpora. The mission of CDA analysts goes beyond collecting representative samples; instead, it is to select ‘stories’ to construe “critical discourse *moments*” (Carvalho, 2008) when observations about a “social issue” seems to vanish, increase, or shift.

The media corpus I collected is a set of texts, extracted from Tunisian media outlets which publish online material (whether exclusively or not). Indeed, the texts explore the issue of migration, racism,

education, investment, etc. to depict the presentations of sub-Saharanans in the post-2011 Tunisian media discourse. For this purpose, the timeline covers the period from 2012 (right after the Libyan crisis and refugee/ migrant “exodus” to Tunisia) to 2020 (the year when covid outbreak and shifted media focus to other urgent issues). The basic analysis units are media texts whose genres range from news and opinion articles to feature stories, etc. from several media types such as newspapers, magazines, radios, social media pages, etc.

In his analysis of the methods that fall under Content Analysis, Ekkehart Krippendorff (2004) includes many interpretivist approaches such as CDA. Due to his epistemological considerations, he explains that texts do not have features which are not dependent on readership as meaning can only be “described” with respect to contexts, discourses or purposes (Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 22-23). To analyse any content—which is a media content herein—Ekkehart Krippendorff asserts that the selection of the corpus has to follow the principles of (i) manageability and (ii) representativity (1980, p. 111). The selection process involves choosing the target sources to make the corpus *manageable*. Such a list of media sources should match the selection criteria and address the research questions for them to be *representative*.

No wonder that the selection process is probably the lengthiest and most intricate. In fact, sampling entails taking arduous, sometimes irreversible, decisions about irrelevant materials if they are not harmonious with the research questions or hypotheses. It is at times painful to remove texts which are very alluring and fascinating if they are not relevant to the research problem. For instance, I removed texts from the magazine *Nawaat* which had fascinating stories, the first “Du Sierra Leone à Tunis: Le périple de Lamin” (28 July, 2022) and “Accès aux soins en Tunisie: Les Migrants marchent ou crèvent” (7 June, 2022) because they do not match the timeframe which I set in the research questions. Another tough decision I had to take was eliminating multiple wonderfully phrased texts because of the lack of representativity of sub-Saharanans in them. These were opinion articles about all sorts of migrants in Tunisia, especially “expats”, usually Europeans. Such articles could corrupt the results and findings by placing the sub-Saharanans in the same ‘otherness’ box as other migrant categories.

## 5.2 Sampling and Coding

### 5.2.1 Sampling in CDA

Sampling, the next logical step following corpus collection, is the process of choosing a “subset” of units from the collected bulk. Sampling techniques can be either random, i.e., every text or media material may be selected, or non-random, i.e., following a premeditated design or planning. Within random sampling techniques, there are several elaborated approaches like *simple random sampling*, the most commonly used; then *systematic random sampling*; *cluster sampling* (sampling several units together for logistic purposes); *stratified sampling* (compartmentalising the samples into categories as per the researcher’s interest and priorities (for instance in longitudinal coding, sampling is carried out by months, then material is resampled randomly from each studied month); *multistage or combination sampling*; *relevance sampling* (choosing every textual unit that may assist the researcher in answering the research questions)<sup>73</sup>.

Sampling techniques may converge or diverge in their properties; however, for every chosen sampling method, the principles of (i) validity, (ii) reliability and (iii) objectivity ought to be complied with. To sample a large bulk of media corpus, encompassing texts with any references whatsoever to sub-Saharan in Tunisia, I adopt *cluster sampling* which is the most convenient technique to study a large corpus of texts covering a relatively long period (nine years). Krippendorff asserts that cluster sampling is most applicable to the research where the aim is not a cataloguing of all the analysis units, but rather a systematic investigation of certain issues or topics (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 117). Within the cluster of texts selected, the researcher then codes and analyses systematically all the units which are relevant to the research question and fit the chosen timeframe.

The analysis conducted in the analytical chapters (chapter 4, 5, and 6) is based on a corpus of media content collected using the WebRadar media monitoring software. This software allows for a real-time systematic retrieval and aggregation of media data from various sources, including newspapers, online news portals, and social media platforms. It has gained the trust of key stakeholders like the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Tunisia, using WebRadar to understand the public opinion “based on well segmented reports and accurate analysis”; the Tunisian Government which chose WebRadar to analyse

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<sup>73</sup> See Krippendorff (2004) for a more elaborate account.

public opinion and look into various changes that have been detected in the political, economic and social domains and mend to them; the World Bank which uses WebRadar to “prepare analytical reports of the Tunisian ecosystem”<sup>74</sup> with a view to capturing the impact of their projects in Tunisia, etc. The key word in almost all these partnerships is “public opinion”, further corroborating our initial argument that media content has a direct impact on public opinion and may also be ‘tampered by’ and ‘worked with’ for a certain agenda or goal.

I opted for this tool to collect my corpus for myriad reasons as it provides computer-assisted corpus analysis features like sentiment analysis—currently in vogue in almost all qualitative analysis in social science, which detects the articles’ tone and the audience's sentiment. This latter functionality allows for measuring the impact of certain media articles and therefore the effect on public opinion, hence policy shifts. Additionally, the software permits real-time content monitoring, thus all media content including the content being published during the first stages of my PhD research could be retrieved and saved. The articles, tweets, posts, etc are fetched and permanently stored. For any diachronic examination of a corpus, non-exclusionary and non-selective data has to be ready at first, and then during analysis, other sub-corpora might arise.

In addition, WeRadar provides the noise removal and extraction functions through Boilerplate removal, named entities extraction, and classification. Boilerplate removal refers to the process of automatically filtering out standardised or repetitive content from media sources, i.e., standardised text that is used repeatedly across multiple articles or publications, often including information about the organisation or author, copyright notices, disclaimers, or other generic statements. While this content may be useful for providing context or legal information, it can also clutter quantitative analysis and skew the results when conducting media monitoring and searching for collocates, for instance. Such functionality in webRadar helps streamline the analysis process by automatically detecting and excluding such repetitive content from the collected media data. By eliminating boilerplate content, researchers can focus

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<sup>74</sup> These are the authenticated partners of the startup. All relevant information about WebRadar is found on <http://webradar.me/>. WebRadar is a cloud-based, big data software solution which helps complete a map of certain sectors or topics of interest. It is developed by a team of global innovators (including Tunisian IT engineers) with a passion for social technology. It has been used worldwide by thousands of users.



more effectively on the substantive information and themes present in the media corpus, leading to more accurate and insightful analysis results.

Then, in webRadar, the “named entities extraction” refers to a feature that automatically identifies and extracts named entities from textual content within the collected media data. Named entities are specific words or phrases that refer to unique entities such as persons, organizations, locations, dates, and other proper nouns. The named entity extraction function in webRadar uses Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques to recognize and classify these entities within the text. By identifying named entities, researchers can gain insights into the key actors, events, locations, and other important entities mentioned in the media content. This functionality allows users to identify key actors by extracting names of individuals or organizations involved in events, discussions, or controversies mentioned in the media. Second, it can track locations by detecting mentions of specific geographical places, enabling analysis of regional trends, events, or developments, deictic tendencies, etc. Third, analysis of dates and timeframes by identifying references to specific dates, time periods, or temporal markers within the media content will help us establish certain peaks, tipping points, anomalies, shifts, etc. all these features allow for a non-systematic, object-oriented search and filtering of results. Indeed, the software eventually enables the researcher to use extracted named entities to search, filter, and categorise media content based on specific criteria or topics of interest, thus enhancing the efficiency and accuracy of media analysis by automatically identifying and categorising important entities within the collected textual data.

The corpus encompasses a diverse range of textual materials, including news articles, opinion pieces, editorials, and multimedia content, providing a comprehensive overview of media representations of migration in Tunisia over the specified time frame. The primary objectives of chapters 4 and 5 are to trace the representations and counter-representations of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisian media. In the last analytical chapter, the aim is to provide a quantitative overview of the media discourse with a view to identifying recurring trends and temporal fluctuations in media coverage of migration-related issues. Furthermore, I aim to explore the relationship between media discourse and key socio-political events, legislative developments, and policy debates pertaining to migration in Tunisia.

In the selection of the specific media outlets to be analysed, I have recourse to the principles of diversity of media types (daily and weekly newspapers, online magazines, social media pages, etc. and not Tweets for instance), language preferences (Arabic, French or English exclusively, although other languages are available) and the variety of audiences (readers of the paper versions, online versions, or of

the social media shared version). All the detected media outlets have an important role in the post-2011 Tunisian media scene. This means that their content is consumed by a large and varied number of users (active and passive audiences/ national and international audiences).

The media corpus on sub-Saharanans over the time lapse between 2012 and 2020 is too large to analyse in its entirety. Hence, I decided to narrow down the media outlets' list. In fact, starting from 36 media (ranging from newspapers to radio forums and social media platforms) selected in the beginning, I decided to work on the 25 most important ones (after analysing the most active sources in mentioning sub-Saharanans) the detailed analysis was limited according to the principle of representativity.

The use of different computer software to search, assort and code the materials may well expedite the operation of qualitative data analysis (for instance in sifting, stratifying, and quantifying the contents). However, the real endeavours in qualitative analysis truly depend on the investigator's vision and decisions. Computer software can just help in organising the media corpus data in the way most suitable for the researcher to carry out the analysis. Hence, too much collected data, in non-compliance with Krippendorff's manageability principle, impedes logical analysis as the researcher cannot and will not handle a large number of texts, words, images, and will fail to 'see the forest for the trees'. The sampling and the analysis of the collected corpus seeks to lay out the discursive dynamics and linguistic features put in construing the representation of sub-Saharanans as social actors. Kress (1990) argues that CDA has a political project. Furthermore, Fairclough (2014) asserts that discourse analysis seeks to change social reality and power relations.

## **5.2.2 The sampling Process**

### **5.2.2.1 Main Corpus**

The sampling techniques selected and implemented ought to be dynamic, flexible and practical, and especially suited for each analytical endeavour<sup>75</sup>. Hence, I manually coded the final syndicated corpus through the office tool OneNote for Windows which is very handy for categorising and coding sub-corpora in a chronological order. Then, in the fifth chapter I further filter the final corpus manually to extract the sub-corpus I analyse quantitatively (through TextStat tools and Excel tools for charts and diagrams) and qualitatively. In the last chapter, I resort to the main-corpus and use WebRadar tools again (like sentiment

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<sup>75</sup> It should be noted that sampling choices are different for each analytical chapter.

analysis, audience reach, etc.) as well as other office tools for figures and quantitative insights and diachronic analysis. The result is an unorthodox mixed methodology, using a corpus which was first collected through systematic monitoring then appropriated and sampled for different research purposes. Thus, one might say the corpus linguistics mingles with DHA principles and CDA tools for a holistic and coherent analysis of the different corpora.

The “Radar” which I called “Sub-Saharan Corpus Monitoring” is established with the WebRadar software—through a careful setup of parameters and filters like language, source, type, etc. It helped me compile all media contents (including news, social media, video subtitles, websites, blogs and forums), with Tunisia as the target source (excluding any foreign source). In doing so I activated systematic search for the following keywords:

Mot clés du radar :

les africains OR subsaharien OR subsahariens OR sub-saharien OR sub-sahariens OR  
 subsaharan OR subsaharans OR sub-saharan OR sub-saharans OR أفارقة OR مهاجرو OR  
 مهاجري

**Subsaharien, subsahariens, sub-saharien, sub-sahariens, subsaharan, subsaharans, sub-saharan, sub-saharans, les africains, أفارقة (afāriqa) مهاجرو (muhājirū) , (muhājirī) مهاجري**

مهاجري, مهاجرو, أفارقة, جنوب الصحراء, i.e., muhajiru/muhajiri (both inflections of migrants in Arabic), afāriqa (Africans), janub assah'râ (Sub-Saharan). The French and English keywords are: sub-Saharan, subsaharien, africain, african, migrant (sufficient for any possible word with the same root like immigrant, emigrant, etc). At this stage, it is worth noting that recourse to both umbrella keywords “sub-Saharan” and “African”, as racist and reductive as it may seem, is justified by the media outlets’ interchangeable use of these two words to refer to what seems to be conceptualised as a homogenous black and foreign ‘crowd’ or ‘mob’. To corroborate and ratify this decision, I conducted a counter-experience. Instead of the generalised terms “Africans” and “sub-Saharan”, I used the sub-Saharan nationalities, Ivory Coast, Cameroun, Guinea,

Senegal, Madagascar, Burundi, Tchad, Mali, and Togo<sup>76</sup>, as keywords. The search, unsurprisingly, yielded a total of 94 pieces.

Evidently, such a corpus cannot be accepted for analysis as it violates the principles of representativeness and balance. The used keywords, instead, prevent the somehow natural inclination for the “cherry-picking” as they yield an objective and extensive set of data which can speak for itself. This allowed me to collect as many data units as possible to filter afterwards. The initial corpus comprised a total of 12,906 mentions—1392 articles—of the aforementioned keywords. Naturally, such an enormous corpus<sup>77</sup> had to be curtailed to fit principles of manageability and representativity. Before sorting it by date, I proceeded to *syndicate* reiterative news. For instance, news like “Douar Hicher: Arrest of three Malians who attempted to defraud a citizen by alleging they could generate foreign currency”<sup>78</sup>, was shared by many media outlets, *Ettounissia* (Arabic), *Shems Fm*, *Akher Khabar*, *Mosaique Fm*, etc. In this case, I keep the first reference to the news and delete the others—only if it is *prorsus eadem*—to avoid skewing the quantitative results.

Hence, I went through all pieces, to eliminate irrelevant (marked as noise) and redundant texts (for example pieces with the same news piece repeated as such, by keeping only the original piece of news). This step is syndication and allows to preserve the original version and eliminate syndicated content. For instance, the article “Tunisia-Breaking news: 20 corpses of sub-Saharanans float in Kerkennah sea” by *Tunisie Numérique*<sup>79</sup> was reappropriated by three other sources. Thus, I had to go over the three pieces and delete them by marking them as noise (a function provided by WebRadar allowing the researcher to delete articles which are not compatible with the corpus) in order to avoid corrupting my quantitative results. Another example is the piece of news posted by the *Kapitalis*, “A Tunisian ship rescued 70 sub-Saharan migrants off the coast of Zarzis and recovered 2 dead bodies”. The news was reshared by new Facebook accounts four times, so the shared pieces had to be crossed out from the corpus to obtain plausible and quasi-uncorrupted results.

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<sup>76</sup> Nationalities were selected for the test as per the statistics published by Nasraoui (2017).

<sup>77</sup> Naturally this initial corpus is acceptable if the analysis is entirely computer-assisted and quantitative without any other sub-analyses based on qualitative and systematic examination of topoi, argumentation, rhetoric, etc.

<sup>78</sup> Arabic news, *Ettounissia*

<sup>79</sup> Retrieved from <https://news-tunisia.tunisienumerique.com/tunisia-breaking-news-20-corpses-of-sub-saharans-floats-in-kerkennah-sea/> within the 2020 sub-corpus.

The triage also included ruling out articles about irrelevant matters like the piece on Russia Today's article of 7 November 2016 "Tunisia: shipping line between Tunisia and sub-Saharan Africa soon". This article had to be ruled out because (i) it was taken from a non-Tunisian media and shared verbatim by Tunisian media (CRCM Tunisia FB account) and (ii) because it does not include migration or immigrants at all. In the same manner, the RT (Russia Today) piece of Tunisian News Agency (TAP) news, "Tunisia: 61% of immigrants from African Sub-Saharan countries consider Tunisians racist, according to a survey consisting in a questionnaire by FTDES which also showed that 51.1% of respondents said they have been subjected to racist practices & hatred by Tunisians" had to be removed because it is redundant. Only the original is preserved for the upcoming analysis.

Another form of 'noise' in the corpus is the type of texts which are about sub-Saharan migrants in other countries but shared or adopted by Tunisian sources. For example, the "Really offensive tone and depictions of sub-Saharan migrants in Algeria in this TSA piece, shameful stuff" about the article "Le retour en force des migrants subsahariens dans les rues d'Alger", published by *TSA Algeria* (March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021) had to be removed even if it were shared and adopted by a Tunisian page.

Another source of corpus corruption—requiring syndication—is the copy-paste mechanism adopted by several non-serious Tunisian media. For instance, an article by the magazine *Réalités*—known for its serious media content—entitled "Tunis: un étudiant subsaharien tue son proche" and published 6 years ago was copied, pasted and re-published entirely by the news website <http://24info.tn/>. For this reason, the copy must be removed and labelled as 'noise'. Duplicates of the same piece of news have to be discarded like "Chebika: Le deuxième subsaharien en fuite arrêté (Vidéos + Photos)" which was originally posted by *Mosaique Fm* and then reproduced by *Buzzcam*.

At times, the article had to be removed because it was duplicated by the same source with minor changes. For instance, *Web Manager Centre* published an article titled "Tunisie: Vingt subsahariens arrêtés à Ben Guerdane" on Nov 11, 2019, then re-issued the same with a slight change/ update in the number—which turned out to be only sixteen on December 5, 2019. In this case, I chose to keep the latest. Often, this duplication happens in two languages, so I keep the original published either in French or Arabic. For instance, the news about the evacuation of the Zarzis Asylum-seekers Centre in 2021 was published in two media outlets in French and Arabic. I made the decision to keep the French version of the source—

*Réalités*—and not the Arabic one—*Mosaique Fm*—since it is more accessible for translation and analysis purposes.

Some other articles had to be discarded because the writers were banned from social media like the video of a Cameroonian protesting in a vile language, posted by a profile which was later suspended<sup>12</sup> (account holder remains anonymous since it is of no use to this research). The same applies for social media content which is relevant, but which contains vile language and words. Some irrelevant subjects I had to rule out regarded articles about economy, technology and football in sub-Saharan Africa such as “Les Africains prennent enfin à bras-le-corps le dossier du diesel toxique” by *African Manager* (December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016).

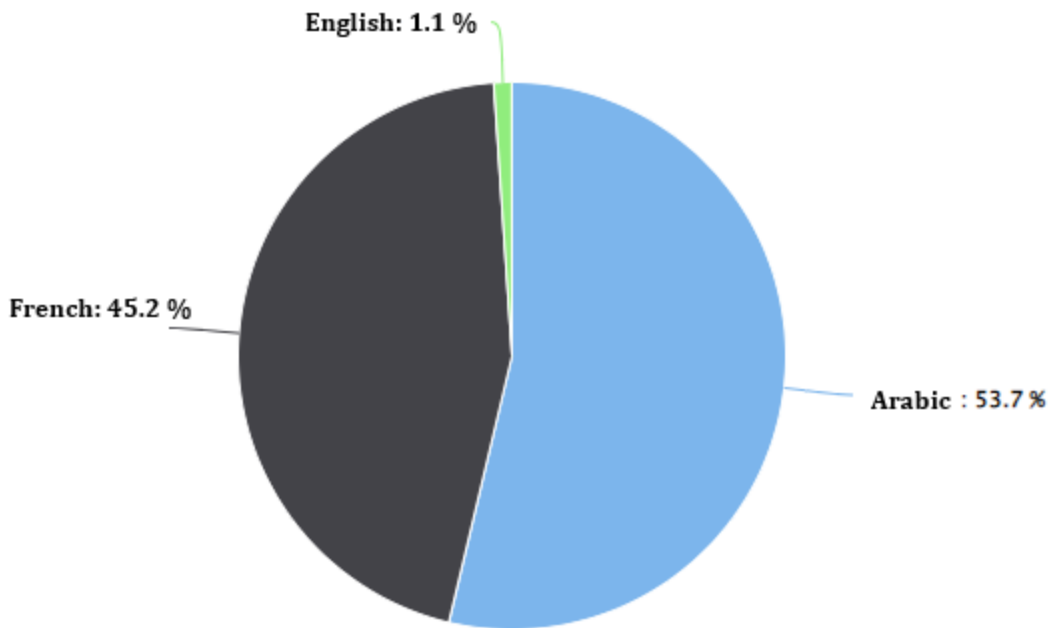
Then, I went through the “sifted” texts to annotate each with descriptive notes (without any details as to its content). This phase includes attributing descriptive notes—broad categories—systematically. Such notes could include, and are not limited to, data format, time frame, etc. These annotations and further details will be explicated thoroughly in the coding process section.

#### **5.2.2.2 Sub(Counter)-Corpus**

For the purposes of the second analytical chapter examination, a process of selective sampling is employed to extract—manually—all the articles with a positive tone. Going through all the yearly sub-corpora, for instance the 2013 sub-corpus or the 2019 sub-corpus, I select and extract the pieces with a positive treatment of the question of sub-Saharanans, implying a counter-representation. The final sub-corpus obtained was also re-sampled, sifted for coherence and to avoid repetitive content analysis. It is then re-coded to be treated as a new corpus, with new coding entries and sub-entries, following the DHA two-level analysis, as will be shown during the analysis.

### **5.3 Translation**

Even though it is all retrieved from Tunisian media sources, the media corpus I chose to work on, is in three different languages. The graph below reflects the ratio of languages represented in the media corpus:



**Figure 5: Language Repartition in the Corpus**

The great bulk of the media material is in Arabic with a percentage of 53.7 %. For the rest—French comes second with 45.2 % and English third with 1.1 %. The statistical data is logical since most media outlets use Arabic (whether standard or dialectal) and French (being the second language spoken in Tunisia due to colonial history). The findings about the English-speaking outlet are revealing of a change, possibly related to the fact that post-2011, private media outlets introduced English in forums and podcasts. English is more appealing to young generations especially in social media.

The translation of the French and Arabic material amounting to 98.9 % of the total corpus is a very crucial task for the coding phase. I went through the material in chronological order translating all texts and meta-texts (everything surrounding the text) in English before I could process and code the material. The translation was carried out during the process of extraction. For each year, a sub-corpus was created by the extraction of all the media pieces corresponding to a one-year time span. Each extracted piece is translated with its contents, author if any, date if available, and source language and then placed in the corresponding sub-corpus.

For translation purposes, I resorted to automatic software, in the first stage. Then, I reviewed the translation, piece by piece, for possible incongruities and errors related to dialectical Arabic use or literal translation problems. Translation from Arabic and French into English is not an easy task due to the existence of cultural and linguistic differences between the target language and source languages. The difficulty arose especially when translating idioms and migration-related jargon that seems to be only used in Tunisia. For instance, the expression “*tasalala ħilsatan*”<sup>80</sup> which literally means snuck in/ infiltrated stealthily, in Arabic. It has become a recurrent expression when reporting news about Tunisian *ħarrāga* or sub-Saharan *ħarrāga*. The decision to either translate the redundancy in the expression or not was not easy. I finally decided to keep the redundant terminology and translated it “infiltrate the .... surreptitiously” or “stealthily” or “furtively” instead of “penetrate” or “sneak in”. One other example of this is the Arabic neologism “*ħarga, ħarrāga*”, used even in courts and lawyers’ defence speeches these days. Some translate it as ‘border runners’ or ‘burners’. I chose border burners while keeping the transliteration of the Arabic—*ħarrāga*—to convey the received idea of the users of such expressions: these migrants burn the border and thus burn their ties with their country of origin. We can also say they burn their previous identity to create a new one.

The translation choices have a significant impact on the analysis, as it will affect the frequency analysis and discursive strategies, especially mitigation and intensification strategies. The use of dictionaries and glossaries was of great help evidently. At times, I was challenged by some typically Arabic expressions and words which have no equivalent in English. Thus, I tried to paraphrase and transliterate the original between brackets because such linguistic units are very important to the forthcoming analysis.

## 5.4 Coding

### 5.4.1 Coding Decisions

Another primordial and yet intricate aspect of discourse analysis is: to code or not to code, that is the question! Some discourse analysis researchers do not resort to coding per se; they base their study solely on exhaustive transcription and memo-writing. In fact, this choice can be deemed as a simplistic mode of coding, to navigate through the analysis afterwards, in the same manner literature scholars would

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<sup>80</sup> Transliteration of the Arabic تسلل خلسة.



analyse a literary corpus for instance. Some discard coding altogether and adopt a phenomenological attitude towards the data, topics and inferred meanings (Cf. Wertz et al., 2011).

Some even see coding as a despicable act which is not only discordant with qualitative research methodologies like narrative analysis, in the case of discourse analysis, but is also seen as an attack against the free interpretivist paradigm in social sciences and humanities. These latter see methods of coding as “altogether mechanistic, futile, purposeless” (Dey, 1999), “a simplistic closed system” and a setback in “post-structural research approaches” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Discarding coding as a methodology for content analysis is, to my mind, extreme and defeatist. One can critique and improve coding methods rather than attack and abandon them completely.

I chose to code my data for objective and subjective reasons. Objectively, coding is a pragmatic method to facilitate the navigation through a large corpus and define topics, sub-topics and historical landmarks in a media corpus which covers nine years and many underlying political and social “transitions” in Tunisia and the Maghreb region. Subjectively, I ought to admit my aspiration to reconcile the scientific and human, the qualitative and quantitative, the technological and non-technological, the tangible and intangible.

Coding is a vast field, so the choice of the coding method(s) most suitable to my study was tricky yet amusing. Coding stages are arguable and controversial. According to Johnny Saldaña<sup>6</sup> (2021), coding is necessary and rewarding in particular qualitative studies. However, he believes one ought to remain “open during initial data collection and review before determining which coding method(s)—if any—will be most appropriate and most likely to yield a substantive analysis” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 145). He uses “pragmatic eclecticism” to designate this stance or attitude to coding methodology. As I explained in my theoretical background and literature review chapter, eclecticism is the *zeitgeist* in theory and methodology. Therefore, it is only logical to adhere to Saldaña’s “eclectic” approach. When using a corpus covering a long period with so many peculiar landmarks, in order to study the dynamics of systems which are perceived as very different and conflicting, namely migration, media, discourse and legislation (policy), one cannot help but adopting a flexible, pragmatic and eclectic coding scheme.

Whereas some researchers believe coding should be preceded by a meticulous reading and scrutiny of the collected data since “the subconscious, not just [the] coding system, develops connections that lead to flashes of insight” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), others advocate just one coding method yet at least two

analytic approaches for every study for better accountable results. In fact, once a researcher decides to adopt coding, particular attention should be paid to the CDA framework supporting it. In fact, when dealing with ‘othering’, for instance, van Dijk’s ideological square is conducive to grasping marginalisation as it is conveyed in a media corpus by examining how this corpus (a) highlights our good features, (b) stresses ‘their’ bad features, (c) mitigates our bad properties, and (d) tones down their good properties (p. 33). Nevertheless, its *closed coding* approach might impede any further investigations into the matter. Indeed, the van Dijk’s ideological square overlooks “the time plane in discourse analysis of journalistic texts” (Carvalho, 2008, p. 163), time plane being the intangible stratum containing all corpus elements having the same age. Such a closed coding approach may also omit the longitudinal analysis of how ‘othering’ evolves in media, and within this square the researcher might fail to identify the very ideology present in media.

Van Dijk’s ideological square may well describe and account for Red Scare or Yellow Peril, in the case of sub-Saharans it can be called “African or Black Raid” (expression often used by Afrophobic Tunisian citizens, in a certain discourse). However, it might not be able to pinpoint a prototypical stereotype for the marginalised group. After all, what is the model stereotype for Asians in American news? Is there one, only one? What is the standard communist stereotype in European media? And how is the model stereotypical sub-Saharan in Tunisian media? No clear answer can be given with recourse to the ideological square only. It goes without saying that media discourses are all ideological, whether blatantly or underlyingly<sup>7</sup>. They do not necessarily share this ideology by expressly attacking the marginalised social group. This would make the CDA researcher’s endeavours fruitless and futile. It is that undercover ideology or superiority and difference that CDA aims to decipher through the study of representation dynamics of the different social groups and subsequently through an open coding which allows for an underlying longitudinal analysis. Instead of closed-model coding methods Chelsea Reynolds, University of Minnesota, USA offers two models for a CDA coding method which researchers can apply on for more comprehensive findings. In the first figure hereafter, she depicts a stepwise model of coding in two phases.

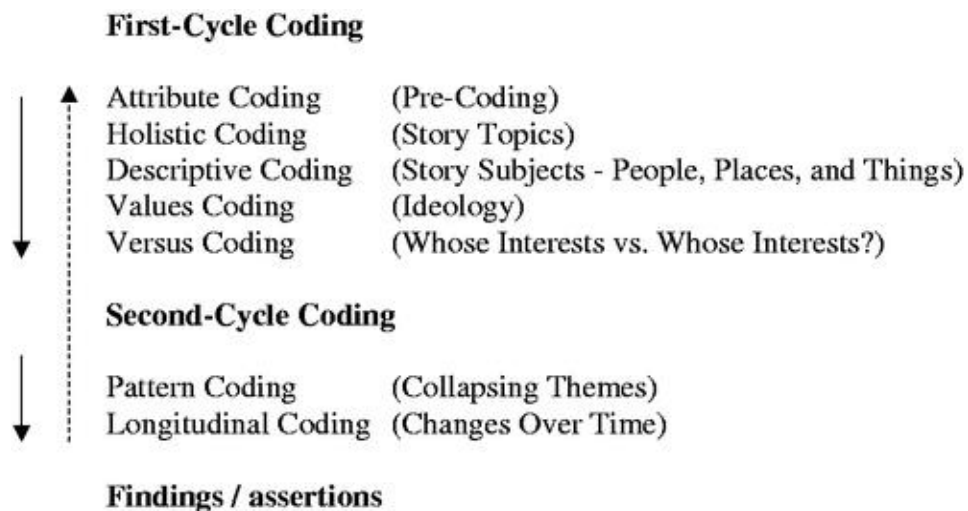


Figure 6: Critical discourse analysis coding for media discourse

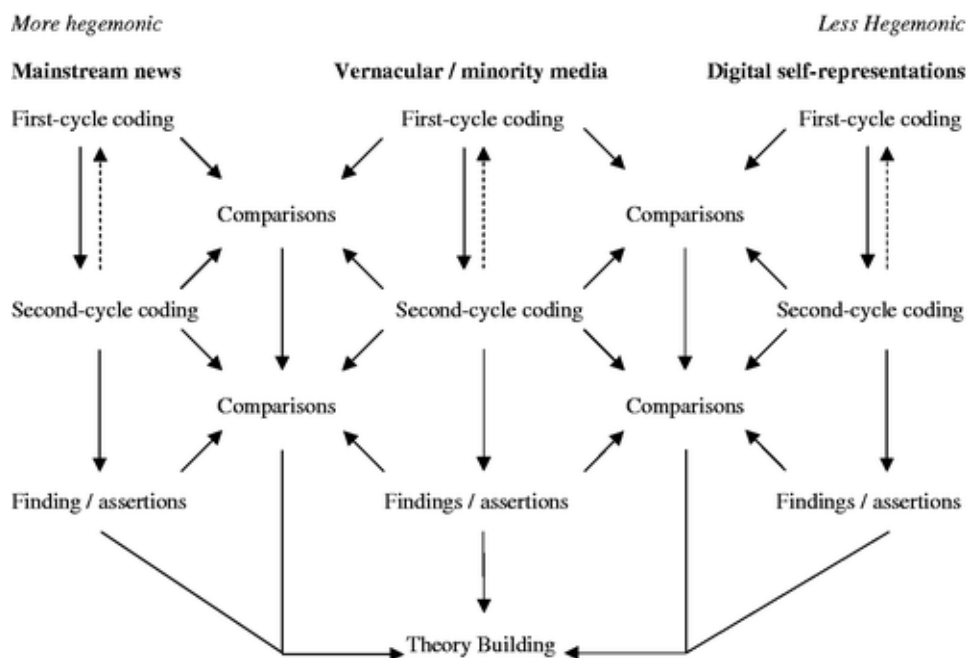


Figure 7: Trans-ideological coding for critical discourse analysis

She builds on a research project carried out at Lancaster University on the discourse about RASIM<sup>81</sup> in British newspapers for ten years. She argues that various (im)migration representations should be contextualised historically (political events marking the ten-year period) while asserting that such discourses are themselves the meaning-constructing contexts for society to perceive immigration. In fact, Reynolds sustains the very interpretive task of linguistics tools like metaphors is dependent on specific social circumstances like the near or far involvement of Britain in regional and international events as well as “the network of discourses” which already “exist in the repertoire of social old knowledge”. British newspapers used several “linguistic strategies” in representing migration because they have different ideological backgrounds indeed. Yet, they all appear to discursively construe the identity of these people as an “actively negative or passively neutral group”.

For the above reasons, the coding model Reynolds recommends for media scholars should be built on a predefined research question, then a categorization of (i) mainstream news sources, (ii) alternative media, and (iii) self-representational media outlets (see figure above). Once the research questions and the media to be investigated are identified, she asserts the researcher should embark on an “open-ended reading” to “help identify significant debates, controversies, and silences, and possibly suggest specifications and amendments to initial research goals and questions” (Carvalho, 2008, p. 166). I adopt and embrace these first steps, yet, after expanding on my research topic and the lacunas in the literature, I will not choose specific genres or typical texts as Wodak (2010, p. 25) advises. Indeed, in my analysis, I believe all national media talking, pointing, interviewing or even mentioning sub-Saharan groups should not be discarded. CDA should involve longitudinal analysis across different media throughout a particular historical period; thus, researchers will need to narrow down their corpus. In my case, this decisional “curtailing” will be based on thematic and pragmatic reasons (see next section). CDA does not study representative samples but chooses contents reflecting “critical discourse moments” during which information about a certain hot issue seems to be increasing or changing (Carvalho, 2008).

#### **5.4.2 Coding Process**

In his coding ‘bible’, Johnny Saldaña (2021) defines a code as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 3). As for coding, Saldaña defines it as “just one way

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<sup>81</sup> Acronym for refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants.

of analysing” (p. 40) these “essence-capturing” units of discourse to fathom and interpret the messages behind them. In CDA, coding involves analysis of media topics, identities, representations and power relations, for analysis, synthesis and quantification of discourse trends<sup>8</sup> (Richardson, 2006). In a 2013 essay, van Dijk implored researchers to “explain by what specific explicit methods” we use in our analyses.

I coded my media corpus using grounded first-cycle and second-cycle coding (as per Saldaña, 2021). This is an open coding approach (as opposed to the discarded closed coding approach, see above). I started by precoding each element of the content (article, news brief, video transcript, etc.) with a general description: type, source, author if mentioned, and date of issuing. The first-cycle analysis is the next step after precoding. At this stage, full reading of the material is required to start annotating the basic invoked themes I detect. These preliminary annotations are referred to as “holistic codes”<sup>9</sup>. When annotating, i.e., carrying out first-cycle coding, I skimmed the materials for four elements:

- (1) The topic(s),
- (2) The object(s) of analysis,
- (3) The source’s positioning: official, mainstream or alternative media
- (4) The type of sentiment towards migrants, especially sub-Saharan: positive vs negative

Once done with first-cycle coding, which is usually tentative, I moved to the second phase: second-cycle coding. In this stage, the researcher uses his “analytic skills [such] as classifying, prioritising, integrating, synthesising, abstracting, conceptualising” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 142). During the second cycle coding, the preliminary holistic codes are collapsed into eclectic codes—sub-topical codes if we may say—like “sub-Saharan as victims”, “sub-Saharan as numbers”, “sub-Saharan as criminals”, “sub-Saharan as successful individuals”, “sub-Saharan and law”, “legal challenges for sub-Saharan”, or “sub-Saharan and gangs”. These second-cycle codes are more thematic and rely intensively on the researcher’s impressions and intentions when rereading the material. For Saldana, “first cycle coding is *analysis*—taking things apart. Second cycle coding is *synthesis*—putting things together into new assemblages of meaning (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, in Saldana, 2021).

Media and media discourse have an unequivocal power as asserted by van Dik when he said, “through access to the mass media, dominant groups also may have access to, and hence partial control over the public at large” (van Dijk, 2013, p. 86). For this reason, working with CDA on a media corpus—

cross-disciplinarily with law/ policy studies—is even more delicate and trickier than other fields of study. In this particular research—a longitudinal comparative examination of discourse—the researcher’s responsibility and burden is threefold: he/ she ought to (i) examine the historical factors behind race and ethnicity choices in a spatiotemporal media discourse (look at First chapter), (ii) associate the analysis with a longitudinal coding (as already explained in my Coding process section), and (iii) take the research further to a trans-ideological analysis. Indeed, mainstream media ideology is usually conceptualised as the epitome of oppression, discrimination and segregation *au fait* (Ono & Pham, 2009). However, one ought to also be able to decipher the antithetical mainstream media messages generated at times to challenge the very dominant discourse of mainstream journalists.

Coding is the most crucial step towards analysing the content in an efficient and methodical manner. For the purpose of this research, coding followed a multilevel pattern of analysis which allows the researcher to transcend linguistic phenomena and engage in the analysis and interpretation of the socio-political context. This approach builds on a basic or *entry level*, the key discourse topics and themes, such as silence, othering, marginalisation, victimisation, criminality, poverty, etc. and an *in-depth level* marking the relevant analytical tools, i.e., in Wodak’s terms “discursive strategies”. Therefore, coding followed the DHA two-level methodology, as described by Krzyzanowski (2010). Hence, I coded the corpus through the cross-referencing of (i) major representational categories, “victims”, “criminals”, “poor”, “students”, “businessmen”, “politicians”, etc; (ii) voice allocation (present or absent, active or passive), and (iii) the relevant linguistic tools and discourse strategies used for each representational category.

According to the DHA tradition, the analysis starts from the media discourse to link it to other data, like the marking of political and social events, statistics, interviews, to corroborate the quantitative and qualitative findings. Therefore, other than the analysis of discursive strategies, I resort to a quantitative analysis, political/ historical background and expert interviews (in the last chapter) to present a comprehensive, thorough and unbiased picture. As part of the coding process, the texts were read and re-read in an attempt to understand the discursive events occurring within the texts and to begin the process of analysing data from a DHA perspective. Each text was scanned for examples of the one of the discourse strategies— nomination, predication, legitimation, intensification, and mitigation— and coded accordingly. Then, sub-codes, which are essentially thematic and relevant to the last chapter about policy and legal shifts, are added (sub-codes like criminality, otherness, victimisation, success, humanization, etc). The

codes and sub-codes are described in depth in Chapters Four and Five along the results and findings' discussion.

## **6. Methods of Data Analysis**

### **6.1 Eclectic Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)**

As already expanded on, CDA is the main methodological framework used in this study. The data collection, coding and interpretation of media contents related to sub-Saharanans in post-2011 Tunisia is carried out following the principles of Critical discourse analysis (CDA) as developed by Teun Van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, and other scholars, among whom especially Ruth Wodak, who is one of the founding scholars of the now institutionally established critical approach to discourse as it is intertwined with discursive social practices. Wodak et al. (2009) assert that CDA has key missions as an interdisciplinary methodology. First, it should detect and interpret the strategies constructed by the power distribution patterns. Second, it should pinpoint key counter strategies of 'dismantlement', resisting and metamorphosis in discourse. Third, it ought to examine the relations between linguistic structures and social discursive practices outlining them. Finally, CDA should scrutinise the links between discursive practices and the existing social structures, political institutions, and eventually policy shifts. For such objectives to be efficiently attained, a diachronic and longitudinal analysis ought to be adopted.

Research cannot claim to have yielded substantial findings or contributions to the field unless it studies the social phenomenon over a relatively lengthy period of time. My choice of the nine-year period, 2012-2020, falls within the scope of DHA. The most noteworthy contribution to the study in discourse over time was carried out by Ruth Wodak and her colleagues. Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) studied the discrimination dynamics and processes and Wodak et al., (1999) examined the formation and transformation of national identity. The "discourse-historical" approach, i.e., DHA, is set to investigate the historical setting of a given discursive event as well as the evolution of discourse throughout time. In fact, little was the discourse of the media scrutinized in depth in this way. Anabela Carvalho (2008) contends that the bulk of studies having as their foci media discourse and representations are more of "snapshots examining some news items in detail but covering a short time span" (p. 164). However, social phenomena usually have a long lifespan, and their media representations are not cyclic or short-lived.

As a matter of fact, fathoming the progress and maturation of social issues like religious extremism, gender or migration as depicted in media is one of the most challenging and rewarding tasks

of researchers in social-related topics. The public treatment of such topics and their meanings goes through stages; any study thereof should start by tackling the circumstances of their emergence in the public debate, going through their political construction as crises or problems, and the strife for answers and solutions, if any. Therefore, the analysis of media(ted) discourses should cover a relatively long period. This entails a great amount of research, sampling, coding, and analysis. Furthermore, any time-sensitive discourse analysis should also start by exploring the social and political contexts, cogitating the events circumventing the examined issue as well as the social context. Time, i.e. a diachronic investigation, is very significant for CDA, yet a synchronic dimension with the contrast of two simultaneous discourses is of the same importance to critical analysis. The historical-diachronic (media representations of sub-Saharanans over nine years) as well as the comparative-synchronic (representations versus counter-representations) axes opted for in my research, are, to my mind, complementary and much needed for a comprehensive understanding of the “sub-Saharan” presence in Tunisia.

### **6.1.1 Text and Context**

CDA delves into social interactions which have a full or partial linguistic manifestation. It perceives or sees oral and written discourse —as a 'social practice'. Assuming discourse is a social practice entails dialectic dynamics between a discursive occurrence and the context shaping it/ shaped by it: “the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s) that frame it” (Wodak, 2011, p. 359). Indeed, discourse is accustomed by the social context, and it constitutes social contexts. It is discourse which partly builds social situations, knowledge, identities, and relations. Discourse is undeniably socially far-reaching; hence, CDA usually associates it to crucial debates on power and ideology. Discursive practices may have massive ideological impacts through the production, reproduction and maintenance of uneven power scales between social groups. It is frequently carried out through tacit methods used to *represent* and position certain groups. It is the mission of CDA to animate and divulge those otherwise previously impenetrable and veiled discourse gesticulations.

In the context of these very specific missions, the Discourse Historical Approach, which was advanced and developed by the Vienna School of Discourse Analysis headed by Ruth Wodak, includes the *historical dimension* of discursive acts, thus “embedding discursive events into historical background” and following the diachronic shifts undergone by discourse throughout a telling period of time. In fact, this approach to discourse analysis coincides with Reynolds' contrastive and transideological coding model because it allows for a discourse analysis that goes beyond linguistic features to track the shifts in



discourses over time. Indeed, my choice of DHA is justified by my impulse to study the Tunisian media discourse over a more or less long period (2012-2020) which is also dotted with crucial political and historical shifts (notably legal landmarks, to be discussed in the third analytical part of this PhD).

Grounded in the hypothesis that discursive practices are intertwined with the social context as this latter fashions and channels them, DHA recognizes discourse as a social practice (Wodak et al. 1999, p. 8). Hereto, the Discourse Historical Approach suggests a full-fledged analysis of the discourse of a particular historical period (when Ruth Wodak first embarked on the DHA<sup>10</sup>, she focused on the four years of the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich) and deep investigation of the historical and political context with respect with discourse: power relations patterns and verbal and non-verbal meaning production. Wodak et al. (2009) highlighted the utility and significance of exploring both the “synchronic and diachronic dimensions” of discourse. On the one hand, synchronic analysis focuses on the ways the same event is reported by different sources, i.e., a contrastive scrutiny of representations of one event by media outlets having divergent ‘ideological’ standpoints or different types (mainstream, official, alternative). On the other hand, diachronic analysis traces the evolution of discursive practice patterns over a period of time.

DHA is distinct, as a type of CDA, in its project to methodically incorporate all the relevant contextual knowledge in the analysis and interpretation of the target text. In fact, the connect-the-dots game of DHA lies in linking the verbal or non-verbal discourse to elements of context in which it is produced, be they the historical events which are occurring, treated or in the making. Only in this way, Wodak asserts, can racist discourses be decoded. She takes the discourse of anti-Semitism during the Waldheim Affair in Austria as an example, and she ascertains that if not for a systematic DHA study, focusing on past events, the “current metaphors and allusions referring to 'the past', Nazism, and anti-Semitism would remain incomprehensible” (Wodak, 2011, p. 359). She thought it of great importance to stress that 'anti-Semitic language behaviour' might refer to explicit (direct calls to kill, attack, chase them) or implicit (jokes and metaphors which, according to the context and participants, can invoke prejudice or racist language towards this social group).

The context of a certain utterance is therefore of paramount importance to examine whether that particular discourse element (an expression, a metaphor, a title, etc) enfolds prejudice or not. This depends, according to Wodak, on the setting (public, private, or media), formality, participants, topic, as well as the presence or absence of the targeted social group. Racist language behaviour may encompass an umbrella

of speech acts<sup>11</sup>, from blunt remarks and straightforward calls for action to simple inferences. Such language behaviour also involves “all levels of language, from text or discourse to the individual word, or even sounds”. In some cases, even the intonation reflects a racist attitude towards a social group (how some Tunisians speak French with a certain intonation mimicking sub-Saharanans, sometimes in a non-offensive manner and sometimes to mock them and show they are inferior). Official prohibition of racist discourse, in a pursuit of racist-free society (note the Anti-racism law passed in Tunisia in 2018 as an important factor in deconstructing the Tunisian context and shift in migratory discourses) had concrete consequences on discourse (which was very short lived).

### 6.1.2 Discursive Strategies and Frame analysis

To illustrate her context-dependent approach, Wodak chooses to analyse many layers of discourse when investigating a discursive moment or phenomenon. In the case of the Waldheim Affair for instance, she investigates primary historical documents, political statements and interviews, newspapers reports, the press releases and documents of the people concerned, and *vox populi* statements. She acknowledges that such multi-layered data collection consumes massive time and energy but “allows the varying perceptions, selections, and distortions of information to be recorded” (p. 361).

The result is very rewarding as the DHA methodology enabled a detailed understanding of the constitution of an anti-Semitic foe – an antagonistic image of the other. Irrespective of the multiple genres investigated (story, newspapers, conversation, etc), the analysis was conducted along three dimensions: (i) the anti-Semitic contents *expressed*; (ii) the *discursive* strategies used; and (iii) *linguistic* manifestations at all the different levels. DHA is therefore based on a content analysis (for instance, stereotyping, rhetoric of racism, etc) through a study of linguistic tools. The link between expression and linguistic manifestation is the discursive move or strategy which Wodak (2015) defines as an intentional elaborate scheme involving discursive practices with a view to fulfilling a specific social or political goal. These include traditional strategies used by literary and linguistic analysts like tropes, verbs and nouns, stereotypes, attributes, collocations, etc. The less frequently used are predication and nomination strategies and topoi/ fallacies as strategic in argumentation and legitimation processes most related to media discourse on social issues like migration and perspectivization of group representations.

Among additional methods of textual analysis in this study, I will use elements of frame analysis as frames are portrayals which are elucidated, *inter alia*, via discursive strategies like topoi. Reviewing

the literature and theory about migration (see previous chapter) divulged the cross-disciplinary nature of this research whose object is embedded in the field of media discourse. Media discourse possesses specific traits making it different from any other discourse types like political discourse or educational discourse. A critical discourse analysis of media content ought to combine the methodological approaches of discourse and media to investigate the impact of media in social and legal transformations. Paul Jalbert makes the crucial comment that analysing media is in no way intended to unveil the special messages that audiences receive; instead, it investigates the latent meanings which are produced through “text organisation” and discusses the interpretations of particular media material (Jalbert 1999, p. 32). Identity construction in/ via media representations may be treated using the methodological tools of media studies coupled to CDA. One of the main concepts of media theory – frames and framing—overlaps with CDA.

This concept accounts for the ways in which media content impacts the social perceptions and opinions of their audiences. On frames and framing, Entman asserts that framing stands for selecting certain features of how we perceive reality and accentuating their salience in discourse so as to highlight a problematic, a given causality, and therefore ‘recommendation’ (Entman, 1993, p. 52). To illustrate his definition, Entman used the ‘cold war’ frame which had been predominantly used in U.S. media. The framing of the U.S-Russia conflict as a ‘cold war’ formulates it as a problem whose source is elsewhere—the communists. This very frame holds a moral and religious judgement (atheistic communist assault on the American capitalist Christian model) and calls for action (U.S. support for antagonists of Soviets). Framing an issue is therefore a way to advocate for or dictate a certain course of action, and the analysis of framing in media discourse is a manner to fathom the legitimation and argumentation schemes used by politicians or social actors to deliver their options to the audience.

## **6.2 Triangulation in DHA: Why and How?**

Ruth Wodak’s understanding of “triangulation” echoes the interdiscursive nature of analysis which DHA advocates. Triangulation is three-fold: data triangulation, theory triangulation and methodology triangulation. As for the first type, data triangulation, I collected a varied corpus involving many sources and types of media content such as news, articles, opinion articles, flash info, statements, communiqués, etc, from diverse outlets, official radios and TV channels, Radios, social media, etc. Theory triangulation, as explained in the first chapter, is the cross-disciplinary and eclectic theoretical background developed to accompany and endorse the findings’ analysis. Finally, grounded in the critical approach, this study adopts methodical triangulation, i.e., the data is analysed using mixed-method quantitative and qualitative tools

as well as analytical tools from CDA, DHA and corpus linguistics in addition to statistical data used as standpoints for the exploration of the dominant representations. This analysis is followed by an in-depth analysis of the sampled media pieces to identify the discursive strategies. Indeed, each approach is helpful to triangulate the findings of the other, with a view to being coherently eclectic.

Both Corpus linguistics and DHA can inform and feed in a research design where the research entries and stages are several but working together towards harmonized findings and interconnected methods. Whereas Corpus Linguistics may “provide a general ‘pattern map’ of the data, mainly in terms of frequencies (e.g., number of texts per period and/or newspaper, number of words in sub-corpora, type/token ratios), DHA informs about “key words/clusters and collocations, as well as their diachronic development” (Baker et al., 2008, p. 295). Not only can this methodological triangulation help corroborate findings and make them solid and valid to a great and incontestable extent, but it also helps discern and locate particular periods and tipping points informing content analysis through purposive text selection. In the same manner, the DHA-aided analysis can reveal discrepant patterns, to be examined through the Corpus Linguistic tools for triangulation and corroboration (first and second analytical chapters).

While many CDA scholars tend to focus on specific genres, like the news, rather than scrutinise the whole ‘context’ of discourses across different settings and genres, which results in a myopic view and an amputated image, DHA scholars prescribe the application of multi-methodological approaches—triangulation—to curtail the shortcomings through an analysis from discursive and socio-cognitive perspectives (Wodak, 2015). According to Wodak, triangulation enables the researcher to reduce overt subjectivity by juggling a variety of data sources, background information and methodologies (Wodak, 2011, p. 65)

In DHA, discourse(s) and representations should not be considered outside of their social production and reception sites. The ‘triangulatory’ requirement in analysis, i.e., a multilevel and mixed-method approach to discourse contexts hinges on “intertextual and interdiscursive relationship...between genres and discourses”, as well as the extralinguistic and sociopolitical background and “institutional frames” with which the discursive practices are intertwined (Wodak, 2001, p. 67). By using methodological triangulation, we can not only gain a deeper understanding of how migrants are represented, but also ensure our findings are more widely applicable to other contexts. This approach will be valuable for any study of discourse and representation. For the purposes of method triangulation, I start by quantitative insights and their interpretations, to move to content analysis. Both analyses are

complementary and crucial to the understanding of sub-Saharan's media representations in the Tunisian context. While DHA suggests triangulatory procedures (for instance coupling quantitative to qualitative data) to ensure corroboration and validation regardless of the theoretical foundation of the research, the DHA's triangulatory approach is mainly theoretical.

Wodak bases the concept of context on three strata: (i) the text, (ii) the intertextual/ interdiscursive relation between discourses and genres and (iii) the paralinguistic, socio-political and juridical or the situational context. All these interconnected strata can only be accounted for and analysed through the systematic use of different theories. Triangulation simply means a "permanent switching between these levels and evaluating the findings from these different perspectives" (Wodak & Meyer, 2011, p. 32) and theories to mitigate the possibility of bias and present a balanced perspective. Methodical triangulation, i.e. the use of multi-methodical designs as well as a variety of empirical data and contextual information, coupled with theoretical triangulation, that is using eclectic elements from Discourse Theory and Symbolic Interactionism as well as media and policy theories, will be adopted throughout the analysis.

The triangulation choices for all three analytical chapters involve (i) a theoretical triangulation of Discourse theory, SI and TSR, media and policy theory, etc., a (ii) methodological triangulation involving a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative analysis using statistics and drawing on relevant graphs. The triangulation of sources is derived from the use of a national media archive, Turess<sup>82</sup>, to inform the search of some concepts and events in the exploration of the socio-political context, in the case where WebRadar tools do not provide exact dates or information.

The fifth chapter departs from the fourth in the use of a concordancing software for a better analysis of frequency (added to the results provided by the WebRadar statistical solutions). The last chapter uses

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<sup>82</sup> This Tunisian news archive website offers a unique news service aggregating news and articles from 45 Tunisian newspapers, categorising them, and then ranking them by importance. Moreover, the news is updated every half hour, so the content changes in real time, on every visit. Its objective and unbiased reporting is based on automatic computer-assisted algorithm-generated monitoring and classifying news and articles. The topics do not reflect any "account of any political or ideological orientation". The difference between Turess- available online and free- and WebRadar- available on purchase of licence- is that Turess has a feature that makes news published on many outlets appear only once on the home page, avoiding the reader syndication efforts (this does not prevent the reader from accessing all the syndicated news by visiting the sub-section pages according to the classification, or the list of newspapers). An important feature in Turess is the search by keyword, which allowed me to access pieces dating even back to 2000, when needed. Available at: <https://www.turess.com/about>

all the above triangulation techniques added to expert interviews which are of paramount importance in this particular analysis of discourse on migration and policy due to the intricate questions it seeks to answer and to the myriad ways one can study the correlations between media discourse on sub-Saharan migrants and the policy shifts/ legitimation strategies.

## IV- Chapter Four: Representations of Sub-Saharanans in Tunisian Media: Silence, Othering, Dehumanisation and Collectivisation

### 1. Quantitative Insights and Interpretations

#### 1.1 Corpus Overview: Media Types, Languages, Tones

As previously mentioned in the methodology chapter, the corpus underwent an intricate filtering process before being treated, translated and coded. The finished corpus comprises 910 media pieces, i.e. 75,037 words. As for language repartition, 9 pieces only are in English, (1.1%) as opposed to 499 in Arabic and 402 in French. Hence, Arabic accounts for 53.7% and French for 45.2% of the total corpus. The prevalence of French—the second language in the country—along with Arabic, in the media corpus dealing with sub-Saharan representations may be explained by the nature of French-speaking media outlets in Tunisia, which are deemed ‘elitist’, engaging in cultural and political debates whereas Arabic sources, addressed to the common citizen, focus on daily and popular topics like price inflation, economic issues, sports, etc. Arabic press (print and online) is accessible to the bulk of Tunisians because of the language affordance.

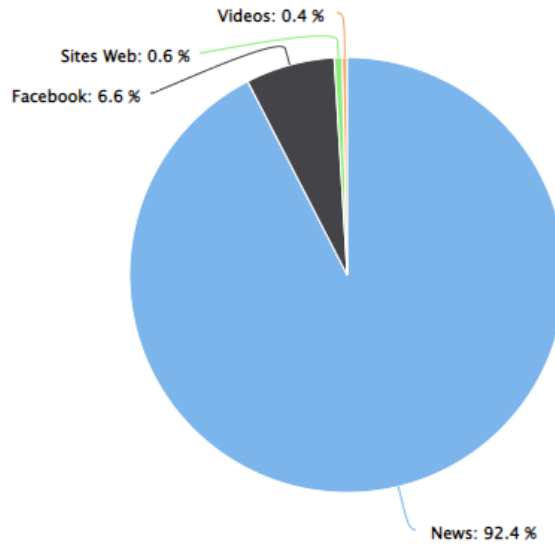
According to a Media Ownership Monitor, conducted on Tunisia in 2016, most Tunisians (91%) listen to the radio in Arabic as opposed to only 10% in French<sup>83</sup>. Moreover, according to estimates of Reporters Without Borders, 76% of Tunisian newspaper consumers read Arabic publications<sup>84</sup>. It is no surprise, then, that French and English-speaking outlets are slightly more elite-focused and pay special attention to a social issue which has long been ignored and neglected—sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia. In the years 2012, 2013 and 2014, the bulk of media pieces discussing migration as a social issue—in relation to racism and history—were written in English and French (in *Kapitalis*, *Nawaat*, *Tunisia Live*, etc.) whereas the Arabic sources simply reported news about “African” migrants and refugees from a humanitarian and securitarian perspective.

Concerning the media types within the corpus, most media pieces come from news reporting (92.4%), then Facebook pages (6.6%), written press websites (0.6%) and videos (0.4%). The bulk of content is therefore ‘serious’ and extracted from newspapers, radios, TV channels, and official Facebook pages of media outlets.

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<sup>83</sup> See <https://tunisia.mom-gmr.org/en/context/media-consumption/> (accessed 25/21/2023)

<sup>84</sup> <https://fanack.com/tunisia/media-in-tunisia/> (accessed 25/01/2023)



**Figure 8: Repartition of sources in the corpus**

Most active sources		
1. Webdo - News	0.16 %	11. Babnet Tunisie - News 0.054 %
2. Web manager center - News	0.14 %	12. Jawhara FM - News 0.054 %
3. African Manager - News	0.12 %	13. Al Chourouk - News 0.051 %
4. Réalités - News	0.12 %	14. Kapitalis - News 0.051 %
5. Mosaïque FM - News	0.11 %	15. Assabah News - News 0.048 %
6. Tuniscopie - News	0.069 %	16. interieurgov - News 0.039 %
7. nessma - News	0.066 %	17. L'Economiste Maghrébin - News 0.039 %
8. Tunisie Numérique - News	0.066 %	18. La Presse - News 0.039 %
9. Akher Khabar Online - News	0.057 %	19. Shems FM - News 0.036 %
10. Leaders - News	0.054 %	20. Business News - News 0.033 %

**Table 1: Most active sources in the media corpus**

The most active sources are news outlets (the first twenty sources) with the online version of Tunis-Hebdo—i.e. *Webdo*—dominating the content. *Tunis-Hebdo* is a weekly newspaper in French issued every Monday since 1973. *Web Manager Centre* is an online newspaper specialised in economics since 2000, like *Business News* (20th) and *l'Economiste Maghrébin* (17th). *Realités* (4th) is an independent weekly



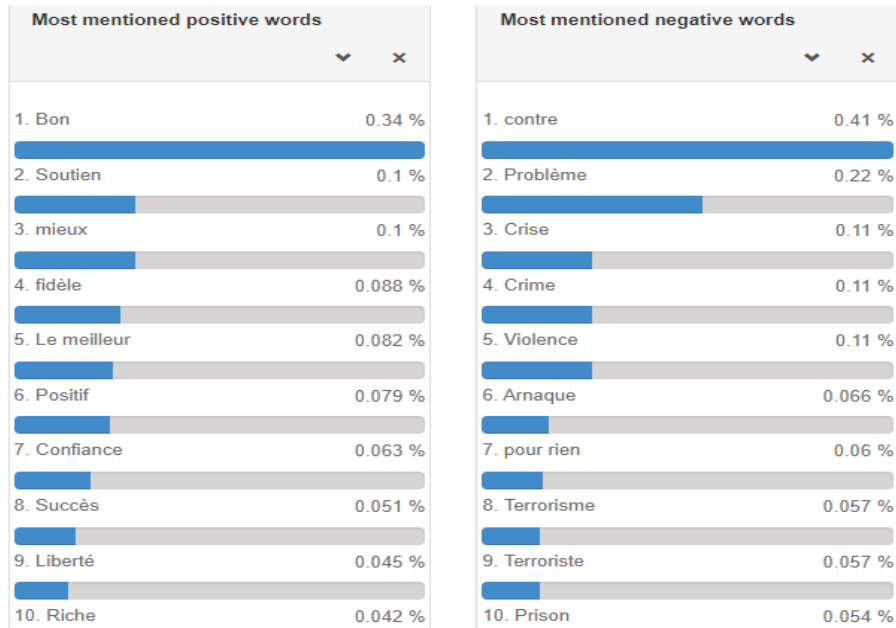
newspaper founded in 1979 by the Maghreb Media group. Its online version started in 2014, and is issued in two versions, Arabic and French.

As for the radios' websites, the top active one is *Mosaique Fm*, which comes as no surprise. In fact, launched in November 2003, *Mosaique Fm* is the first private radio station in the history of Tunisia. Even since its launch, *Mosaique Fm* revolutionised the mediascape in Tunisia and adopted a proximity policy placing it at the core of the regular Tunisian audience in the country. It has also to be outlined that during the expert interviews conducted for the purposes of the third analytical chapter, *Mosaique Fm* was mentioned frequently as an influential and coherent media outlet (by experts Slim, Boubakri, etc.). According to the last report of Kantar Data Institute, dated March 2023, *Mosaique Fm* is the most listened to radio channel.<sup>85</sup> Unsurprisingly too, *Jawhara Fm* (12th) and *Shems Fm* (18th) are respectively the second and third most active radios on the list. Some other radios mentioned in the Kantar report are not included in the corpus because they do not have an active website (like *Radio Sfax*) or they have a different focus —like *Zitouna Fm* whose vocation is mostly religious.

*Al-Sabah News* (18) and *La Presse* (15), both large-circulation daily newspapers, publishing respectively in Arabic and French, come in late ranks. It is justified by the post-2011 transformations in the Tunisian mediascape. With the tide of 'freedoms', after the "revolution", official and traditional media like print newspapers and national TV, lost their monopoly to the new and ICT-adopting media outlets, be they radios and TV channels with interactive websites or online news websites.

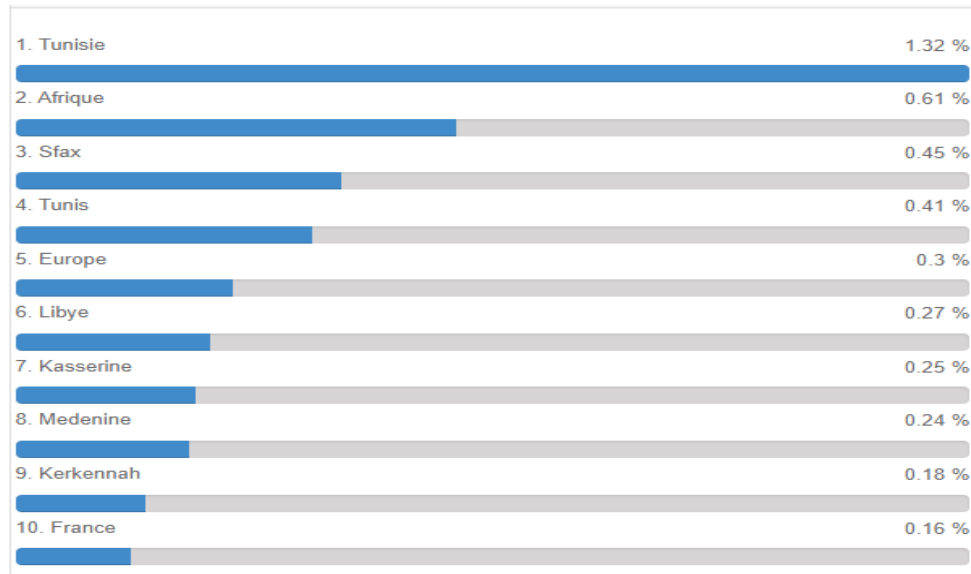
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<sup>85</sup> <https://www.kantar.com/fr/inspirations/publicite-medias-et-rp/2023-africascope-maghreb-2022> (Accessed on 8/2/2023)



**Table 2: Most mentioned positive and negative words in the corpus**

As far as the overall language indicators are concerned, the corpus has a predominantly neutral tone (38.7%) with 36% negative-tone content and 25.3% positive-tone content. The most mentioned negative words pertain to the lexical field of antagonism: against, problem, bad, war, etc. and criminality: crisis, crime, violence, terrorism, prison, etc. This is due to the abundance of news and analyses problematizing sub-Saharan migrants as potential threat or wretched ‘subjects’ to save, as will be shown in the qualitative analysis ahead. Even some of the most positive mentioned words like support and faithful are problematic as they divulge a non-equal, not to say condescending, treatment of sub-Saharans. In attempting to be positive and supportive of sub-Saharans, some articles adopt a haughty vision of this marginalised group. Statistically, the most referred to places in the corpus are the following:



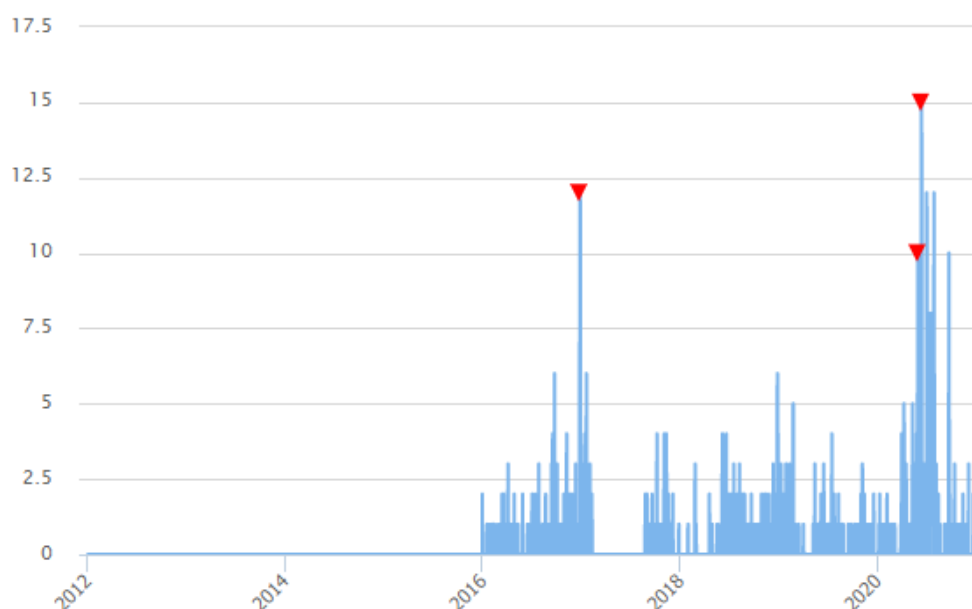
**Table 3: Most mentioned places in the corpus**

The deictic references define the rhetorical space in the media discourse. Local deixis—or place deixis—is the linguistic reflection of the writer’s awareness of his position in space signalling “reference to portions of the unfolding discourse in which the utterance is located” (Levinson, 1985, p. 62). Space anchors, here and there, Tunisia and Africa, Africa and Europe, etc. play a role in constructing rhetorical spaces, and connecting or disconnecting the migrants from their host country. According to Werth’s (1999), spatial references are used to define the ‘situatedness’ of the addresser and addressee in the rhetorical space. Evidently, the most mentioned places are Tunisia and Africa as two opposing poles, in total discrepancy with geography and history. The reiterative use of “Africa” is also indicative of deictic distancing, exerting an epistemic fallacy and essentializing Tunisia as “not-Africa”. This emphasizes the idea that using “Africa” as a monolithic entity creates a false dichotomy, excluding Tunisia from a broader African identity by conceptualising Tunisia as out/ far from/ away/ distinct from Africa.

The other more specific places featuring in the corpus are Tunis, Sfax, Kasserine, Medenine and Kerkennah. These are logically the most mentioned as they are the hotspots where sub-Saharan migrants stay before they attempt to leave for Europe. The existence of Europe and France on the list, respectively 5th and 10th places, is telling of the mental associations and discourse surrounding migration and cultural proximity, suggesting a subconscious bias towards France and Europe despite Tunisia's geographical location. It also reflects virtual links established between sub-Saharan migrants and these two places. Sub-Saharan migrants are usually conceptualised as transit migrants, always on the move towards a European El Dorado. This double-distancing definition of sub-Saharan migrants as—belonging to Africa and heading to Europe—always

leaves them in a shaky spot, an in-between land, which is never going to be theirs. Transit status, whether real or imagined, further exacerbates the instability and vulnerability of migrants, prolongs their waiting, and acquits the host country (North African and European alike) from any liability of receiving and settling them. The media discourse reflects a sociopolitical mindset seeing the sub-Saharanans as liability and burden, not to be addressed.

## 1.2 Diachronic evolution:



**Figure 9: Diachronic evolution of the content volume**

The systematic quantitative monitoring of the corpus reflects two major treatment phases: an initial steady feeble treatment and then intense fluctuant treatment. From 2012 to 2015, the Tunisian media published an average volume of 39 pieces per year; then, from 2016 on, the volume jumped to an average of 106.6 pieces per year. The period of 2015-2016 signalled the first peak in volume. Indeed, this peak is reflective of the intensification of interception operations, which had become newsworthy after 2015, but also to the repetitive “racist” and “xenophobic” attacks against sub-Saharanans and their mediatisation and instrumentation (see last analytical chapter). The media coverage, i.e., news briefings, flash news, and official pages’ communiqués, revolved around the authorities “successful interception” of 75 attempted irregular migration operations in 2015, and 113 in 2016, as opposed to absence of numbers in 2012. In fact, only one article in the 2012 corpus mentions ‘interception’, *Ettounissia*’s article “The Army prevents

hundreds of Africans from Entering the Tunisian Soil”<sup>86</sup> (Arabic). But, even if the article roughly mentions a number, it is worth noting that it only refers to the refugees coming from Libya after war broke out there. Hence, it has nothing to do with the systemic interception and security operations which will be under focus from 2015 on.

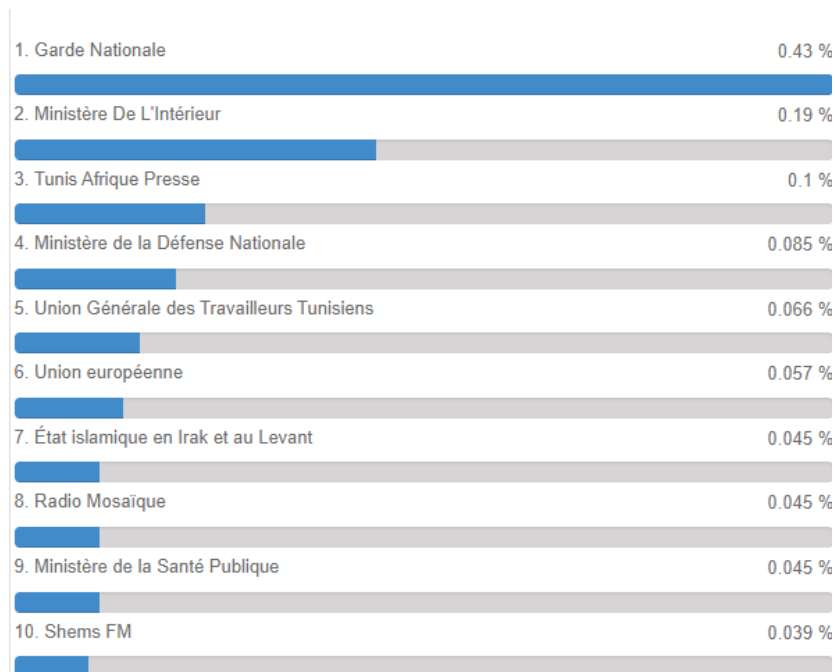
The hypothesis that media treatment of sub-Saharan migrants’ issues saw a significant rise due to the mediatization of interception operations and their framing as ‘success stories’ of the Tunisian state is corroborated by the Italian authorities’ arrest of 541 irregular migrants coming from the Southern Mediterranean shores. The Tunisian media’s emphasis on covering operations of capturing sub-Saharan migrants and celebrating these interceptions in terms of statistical evidence of *hārgā* failures might be driven by a desire to appease external pressure and meet requirements of border externalisation. The 2014 EU-Tunisia Joint Declaration, ostensibly promoting cooperation on movement, could be interpreted as a veiled attempt by the EU to pressure Tunisia into managing migration flows for Europe’s benefit.

Furthermore, from December 2016, we can note a reiterative reference to the incident of 24 December 2016, when three Congolese students were assaulted with a blade in the central area of Le Passage in the capital Tunis. The peak in media volume is explained by the media hype accompanying this “assault” and “racist deed”<sup>87</sup>. This incident seemed to awaken the media to the sub-Saharanans’ presence and suffering in Tunisia. It has also the merit of starting the debate about silenced topics like migration, racism, and xenophobia. Statistically, 272 pieces about sub-Saharanans were published during the years 2016 and 2017 (versus 20 and 21 in 2014 and 2012 respectively). This is mainly reflective of the political conjuncture and social context in the times of production. The first few years after the so-called revolution were tinged with political and social tension, and most media content revolved around what was seen as priority issues—as opposed to the sub-Saharan migration which was not even a fact for some journalists and channels.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ettounissia*, Naziha Touati, “The Army prevents hundreds of Africans from entering Tunisia”, 11/06/2012

<sup>87</sup> *Kapitalis*, Racisme anti-noir: Une communication de crise plutôt efficace, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/12/28/racisme-anti-noir-une-communication-de-crise-plutot-efficace/> and *Shems Fm*, national news of 25/12/2016.



**Table 4: Most mentioned organisms**

Looking at this chart, the most mentioned organisms are security bodies: the first being the body in charge of patrolling, protecting, and securing the coasts, i.e., the National Guard. The second and fourth most mentioned organisations are the Ministries of Interior and Defence, whose different departments are involved in interception of *ḥārgā* and all crimes involving sub-Saharan. The Ministry of Interior had a spokesperson who was very active and present, especially on the radio and national TV. The Ministry also had an official Facebook page, which published the fruit of their “securitarian” endeavours<sup>88</sup>. This is due to the extensive coverage of security actions related to ‘irregular’ migrants. The daily Tunisian news outlets tended to foreground security operations, which is further corroborated by the significant recurrent reference to securitarian actors. Scrutinising the most mentioned organisations and agencies in the media corpus, the securitarian “trend” in media coverage of sub-Saharan existence in Tunisia cannot go unnoticed. As far as the top position of UGTT (General Union of Tunisian Workers) is concerned, the significance is to be studied in close relation to advocacy for regulating domestic work for Tunisians and sub-Saharan alike (see chapter 6).

<sup>88</sup> The Facebook page of the Interior Ministry is still active, but in post-2021 the posts predominantly cover the political activities of the officials. <https://www.facebook.com/ministere.interieur.tunisie>

Along with the media obsession with security stakeholders, reference to ISIS (7th) in media pieces involving sub-Saharans is quite striking<sup>89</sup>. It is telling of a conspiracist attitude towards the migration phenomenon in Tunisia; no wonder that in 2023, the President's discourse and the overall political speech explicitly builds on foreign conspiracy and the "great replacement" theory to frame sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia as threat and danger. In fact, the media's framing of some sub-Saharans in Libya, Algeria and Tunisia as "terrorists" and "mercenaries", echo the latent social perception of the 'other black African' coming all the way from his country to infiltrate this peaceful Northern country and cause havoc, serving foreign sabotaging agendas. These ideas resound through the corpus in pieces tackling the Libyan scene. For instance, in the following excerpt, the testimonies of sub-Saharans corroborate this frame of sub-Saharan-terrorist/ mercenary:

“... affirms a Nigerian aged 17 years, Abdallah Issa Salam. The former regime hired sub-Saharan mercenaries to defend itself during the conflict, black Libyans and Africans are frequently targeted by arbitrary theft and detention, notably perpetrated by armed militias...A great number of whom are hiding.”<sup>90</sup>

Additionally, from 2012 to 2015, the Algerian Intelligence issued several reports warning about the ISIS-affiliated sub-Saharans infiltrating Tunisia. This came against a backdrop of a series of terrorist attacks Tunisia suffered from in the Southern regions of Kasserine and even in the North of the country. We can note the Chaambi operation of June 6, 2013, the Bardo terrorist attack of March 18, 2015, the Sousse attack on tourists of June 26, 2015, and the deadly attack in Tunis on a bus killing 12 presidential guards and wounding 20 others, including four civilians, on November 24, 2015. Added to these terrorist attacks and within this prevailing spirit of fear and danger, news like “Arrest of African Immigrants with Military Training and Links to terrorism Near the Tunisian Borders”<sup>91</sup> contains inflammatory and

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<sup>89</sup> This frame “sub-Saharan/ terrorist” is even more entrenched now in 2024 with Tunisian social media circulating videos of groups of sub-Saharans in the South and in the capital with texts invoking their links to enemy states as well as Boko haram and ISIS. The effect of such a repetitive multimodal frame (with the topos of danger) is more fear and hostility.

<sup>90</sup> Translation mine; the original is “affirme de son côté un mineur nigé-rian de 17 ans, Abdal-lah Issa Salam. Comme l'ancien régime avait fait appel à des mer-ce-naires subsahariens pour le défendre durant le conflit, les Libyens à la peau noire et les Afri-cains sont fré-quem-ment la cible de vols ou de déten-tions arbi-traires, notam-ment per-pé-trés par des milices armées...Un grand nombre d'entre eux se cachent “ published by Tunis Tribune, in March 2012, titled “L'Europe se dote d'un centre de détention en terre Libyenne” including an investigation of the sub-Saharan 'camps' in Libya.

<sup>91</sup> *Akher Khabar Online*, news of 23/12/ 2015.

reactionary rhetoric and further exacerbates the frames of sub-Saharanans as terrorists and mercenaries on a military mission—not in a migratory journey.

Most news and ‘investigations’ about sub-Saharan ‘mercenaries’, ‘terrorists’ and ‘agents’ are related in Arabic-speaking media outlets, such as *Achourouk* (2012), *Al-Sabah* (2012, 2013, 2015), *Shems Fm* (2012), and *Al-Majallah* (2015). In Tunisia, Arabic-speaking daily newspapers and social media target the ordinary Tunisian. Most content in these outlets—and most importantly headlines and subtitles—play on the “buzz” effect with eye-catching photos and bizarre attractive content. They attempt to serve the common Tunisians the news they are expecting and longing for. This might account for the tone repartition in the investigated media corpus.

## **2. Content Analysis of the Corpus**

### **2.1 Sub-Saharanans, the Absent/ Invisible Presence: Voicing and Silencing in Tunisian Media**

**“Whereof One Cannot Speak, One Must Be Silent.”  
Ludwig Wittgenstein**

The quantitative overview of the media corpus shows two grand phases, the first of which was a phase of myopia towards or annihilation/ silencing of the sub-Saharan migrants. In DHA, silence is a deliberate absence or omission of some topics or voices within a discourse. Accordingly, silence is but a strategic choice made by discourse producers—the media stakeholders in this case—to suppress sub-Saharanans’ viewpoints or even narratives about them. Empirical investigation of silence is perplexing because one cannot prove the absence of a presence when media reporting is usually selective and often dyssynchronous with the socio-political events. Indeed, silence is the “non-occurrence[...], which, by definition, [is] rather difficult to observe. After all, it is much easier to study what people *do* discuss than what they *do not* (not to mention the difficulty of telling the difference between simply not talking about something and specifically avoiding it)” (Zerubavel, 2006, p. 13).

A core challenge in analysing media content lies therefore in interpreting the silence of/ about specific social actors. While the absence of something is typically established through a lack of evidence justifying its presence, this can be ambiguous. The absence of representation for a group could indicate deliberate silencing or simply a lack of existing discourse. Therefore, rather than solely relying on ‘evidence of absence’, a more productive strategy involves seeking any evidence that suggests a particular actor is being overlooked, even when alternative sources (such as other discourses, corpora, or citations)



demonstrate their presence in the broader social fabric. The study of sub-Saharanans' 'silence' in Tunisian media can be conducted through deciphering what is not being said as well as understanding the ramifications of this absencing.

On the other hand, silencing is the active choice and process of excluding or marginalising some communities and dampening their voices, stances and discourses, especially within an unstable social or political context. Practically, it involves restricting the ability of certain groups or individuals to participate in discourse and hampering their access to media platforms. Indeed, in the media, silencing can take various forms, including overt censorship or more subtle mechanisms that marginalise certain voices. Both silence and silencing are central to understanding how discourse is operated. By examining what and who is omitted using the Discourse-Historical Approach, one can uncover representational choices and historical processes underlying the communication dynamics. When investigating silence and silencing from a DHA perspective, we may consider questions like:

- What topics or perspectives are noticeably absent from the Tunisian media discourse?
- What historical or political factors are instrumental to the process of silencing?
- Whom does the silencing of voices serve?

Methodologically speaking, from DHA perspective, silence or myopia have different interpretations. Wodak assumes the denial or concealment of the Jewish identity question, leaving room to silence, is a logical outcome in the wake of the 1945 historical moment. For her, the issue was relegated to a secondary place in Austria's official memory (covering the Nazi rule) because of the "reservoir of anti-Semitic prejudices... and commitment to becoming a 'Western democracy'" (Wodak, 2016, p. 353). Ultimately, the Jewish issue was a secondary one, compared to the country's priorities and aspirations. Eventually, this created a new group of 'victims' whereby the Jews were yet another community with an "insignificant place": they were war victims like everyone. Hence, the issue of racism and antisemitism were not addressed and were silenced.

Silence is therefore a matter of choosing to forefront more urgent political and social issues at the detriment of minorities, especially in the times of prominent political shifts. In 2011 Tunisia, the priority was 'social peace' and democracy-building. Silence about the migratory issues (even the issue of Tunisians fleeing to Europe at times) was a logical outcome of the heated debate and controversy about the political system, elections, security problems (snipers' events in 2011), terrorism, sit-ins demanding a

new constitution (Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2), to name a few hot issues. The country was boiling, and the media seemed to follow the pulse of the street where migratory issues and minority groups were not prioritised. The first debates about sub-Saharan arrivals could be traced back to 2012, a year after the “revolution”, effectively because of the securitarian urgency of the topic. The groups entering Shusha camp from Libya were described using words like ‘exodus’ and ‘mass’ to emphasise the alarm and threat associated with their existence. But even then, sub-Saharanans did not occupy a pivotal space in the media discourse, or political speech because they were yet another ‘group of victims’, like all marginalised groups “discovered” in post-2011 Tunisia, in the wake of Ben Ali’s regime toppling.

It was not until 2014, once the new constitution was in place and the social truce seemed possible, that issues of racism against black Tunisians and sub-Saharanans were brought to the public sphere and media (although not in an abundant manner). Such a historical diachronic analysis of the media discourse around migrations and sub-Saharanans representations, following the DHA trend, will allow me to trace the development of these representations and the motives behind the shifts in media discourse treatment of sub-Saharanans from 2011 to 2020.

Ruth Wodak, within the framework of her Historical Discourse Analysis, treated the question of silence in genuine ways. In treating the question of “Discourses of Silence”, she approaches ‘silence’ in many ways. First, silence is the coding of anti-Semitic, and therefore racist, dogma “through insinuations, analogies, and other vague linguistic realisations” (Wodak, 2003, p. 181). Second, she invokes the “silent majority”, i.e., silence of the great bulk of the elite when the question is used for political reasons. Finally, silence is the utter “denial through *justification discourses* that prejudiced utterances could be identified as such accompanied by vehement counterattacks against the elites, media, intellectuals, and laypeople” (Wodak, 2016, p. 356). As cliché as it may seem, history does repeat itself in many different ways and in many other places. The mechanisms of racism and rejection of the other seem to be more or less the same. Silence about the migratory issue and especially the anti-sub-Saharan feelings in Tunisia manifest themselves in these ways too, as will be proven later in the analysis.

Silencing is a meta-discursive move, a discourse choice upon discourse itself. In the media, what is left unsaid, the non-saying itself, is a discursive strategy. Discourse stretches left out or unsaid are framed as things to be said and could be said but prevented from being said through silencing. For instance, taboos, voice suppression and underrepresentation/ non-representation in media discourse are deliberate discursive choices. Unlike silencing which involves the choice of other people, silence is the speaker’s

personal choice—whether coercive or not. Media silencing reflects a social stratification tinged with social and political perceptions of what is acceptable, tolerable, convenient, and timely. Henceforth, silencing as a mediatic strategy offers great prospects for investigating how discursive actions are operated in the social realm as well as media discourse.

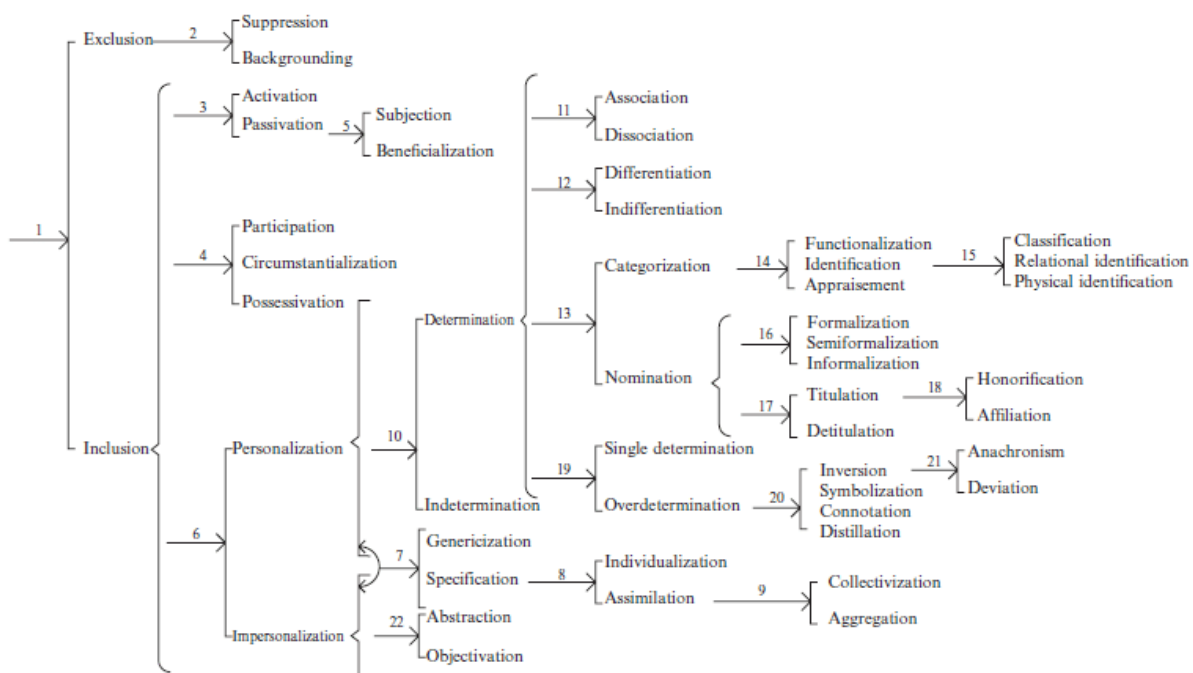
Within the discourse community of Tunisian media, i.e. writers, audience, and objects/ subjects of discourse among whom sub-Saharanans, silencing can produce different forms of silencing: unwanted silencing, acquiesced silencing, or even self-inflicted silencing. Contrary to simplistic understanding, silencing is indeed a way of using language to restrict, undo, or degrade the “other’s” legitimate use of language through diverse discursive strategies. Contrary to the received idea that silencing is mostly coercive, it is a process that functions even better when camouflaged. Indeed, displacing the silenced or the ‘unrepresentable’ through another discourse is more effective than bluntly announcing silence on a subject matter or a social group. This may explain the myopic media treatment of the sub-Saharan issue immediately after the 2011 upheaval and up to 2016—year of the first peak in the media material. This silence disguised as a choice of affordability, priority and even patriotism.

The study of silence and silencing may first start by the observed gaps and lacunas in the diachronic evolution of media discourse. The silencing process itself and the very concealment of the sub-Saharan question in the three first years following the 2011 transition are telling of a deliberate choice to foreground other more salient social and political issues. It could have also stemmed from a lack of understanding of this “new” migratory phenomenon, lack of expertise or lack of courage as the debate would bring about other thorny issues like the everlasting issue of racism against blacks in Tunisia. This begs the question of the arguments or evidence for this media silence/silencing. The analysis of the discourse is therefore primordial as silencing *only* takes place whereof discourse exists. Indeed, silence is only efficient when another discourse is used to background and backstage the silenced material and naturally foreground what is passed as “important” matters and people.

From a DHA perspective, silence, neglect and myopia in media discourse have different interpretations. Wodak (2016) assumes that the silencing or concealment of the minorities’ questions are an outcome of a historical moment. Indeed, she argues that in post-1945 Austria, the ‘Jewish question’ was muffled because of the country’s “commitment to becoming a ‘Western democracy” (p. 353). Accordingly, silence is the choice to forefront urgent political and social issues, to the detriment of minorities, especially at times of prominent political shifts. In 2011 Tunisia, the priority was ‘social peace’

and democracy-building. Then the media focus shifted to identity debates, and heated controversies revolved around secularism and religion in the constitution. Amid these intense debates, and what was conceptualised as the country’s future political system and democratic foundations, the issue of sub-Saharan migrants’ integration or reception in Tunisia seemed unimportant, untimely and futile. Thus, the migratory “question was not so much denied as *concealed*. As a result, there was 'silence'” (Wodak, 2003, p. 353).

In concealing or excluding narratives or relegating them to a secondary position often, as Stuart Hall points out, national politics and media put forward “discourses of national identity as narratives that constitute cultural power” (1996). In fact, media discourses, instead of engaging in *de facto* salient issues, invoke narratives of a unified people, foregrounded along with stories ‘enemies’ striving to disrupt the existing political order. According to Van Leeuwen’s Social Actor Representation’s paradigm, the other face of the coin: exclusion manifests itself first in “suppression” and “backgrounding”.



**Figure 10: Social Actor Network (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 52)**

Van Leeuwen’s social actor analysis (1996) is a representation framework which details how social actors (individuals, groups, organisations, etc.) are depicted in communication and media, *inter alia* texts, images, and visuals. Deeply rooted in CDA and semiotics, Van Leeuwen's theory connects the

representational aspects through linguistic and visual devices such as the use of pronouns (“we” vs “they”), lexical peculiarities, modals (modality of possibility vs obligation), as well as various other grammatical and stylistic choices. His theory echoes positioning in the theory of Social Representations (TRS) as both investigate how representations “position” social actors among themselves and with respect to the broad social context. The study of positioning may inform about social roles, power dynamics, and perception of an ingroup/ outgroup.

Indeed, the few first debates about sub-Saharan arrivals in 2012, a year after the “revolution”, were framed in terms of securitarian/ humanitarian urgency. The sub-Saharan groups entering the Shusha camp from Libya were described using words like “displaced”, “residents” and “refugees”<sup>92</sup> to emphasise the emotional and geographical distance with these new guests. Referring to this media’s choice of ‘transit and dissociation’ lexical field, the few pieces mentioning sub-Saharans can be categorised in three: (i) cultural pieces about Tunisia blacks, talking about their historical sub-Saharan heritage, (ii) pieces about the Shusha camp, refugees coming from Libya, and (iii) sub-Saharans as trade partners or students. Such a discourse silences a great deal of the sub-Saharan presence in Tunisia: the sub-Saharan migrants who live and might stay in Tunisia.

In fact, pieces like “Desperately Looking for Saadia: The Untold Story of Slavery in Tunisia”<sup>93</sup> have the traditional elements of exoticism and subalternity, invoking pseudo-interest and fascination in the sub-Saharan culture, as cultivated by black Tunisians. In times when new sub-Saharans are entering Tunisia, fleeing a war in Libya, their precarious situation does not seem to be a priority for Tunisian media. Instead, a historiographic and ethnographic account of the music brought by the first sub-Saharan “slaves” to Tunisia in the 18th century seems more opportune. The sub-Saharan is therefore represented as an exotic *other* whose accounts are absent and whose voice is silent.

In the Symbolic Interactionist (SI) theory, “symbolic annihilation” as coined by George Gerbner designates the media’s deliberate non-representation or underrepresentation of certain social groups due to their race, origin, gender, class etc. In Gerbner & Gross (1976), representation is linked to “social existence” and its “absence means symbolic annihilation” (p. 182). Later, Gaye Tuchman (2000) built on the concept of Symbolic Annihilation as an intentional erasure and adopted a broader definition

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<sup>92</sup> UN Commissioner Praises Tunisia’s Response to Refugee Crisis, *Tunisia Live*, February 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Published online, respectively on 01/2012 and 09/2012 (*Tunisia Live*)

encompassing even the “condemnation” and/or “trivialization” of a certain social group in the media, resulting in “social disempowerment” (p. 17). Via the symbolic “erasure” (SI) or symbolic “negative perspectivization” (DHA) of these groups, as means of perpetuating social inequalities by no or little representation of a minority group, the media systematically frame these groups as marginal or absent “others” with a “nil” symbolic societal status. Like Tuchman, Merskin defines *Symbolic Annihilation* as a “way cultural production and media representations ignore, exclude, marginalise, or trivialise” a social minority group (Merskin, 1998, p. 335).

The rhetoric and frames of ‘*mass*’, ‘*horde*’ and ‘*exodus*’—as opposed to individual and differentiated frames for the sub-Saharan migrants and their stories—is invoked through the use of expressions like “massive influx of [...] Sub-Saharan African nationals”<sup>94</sup>, “incessant and massive flow of migrants”<sup>95</sup>, “massive influx of refugees”<sup>96</sup>, “fear of mass infiltration across the sea of boats carrying terrorist elements”<sup>97</sup> (the exact same expression ‘fear of mass infiltration across the sea’ is used in “Does the terrorist Adel Al-Ghandari have anything to do with the corpses floating in the El Ktef port in Ben Guerdane?”, by *Tunigazette*). Even if very few pieces between 2012 and 2015 do mention sub-Saharans, they seldom refer to them as individuals worthy of personalised treatment. This helped create a holistic grand narrative of the “black crowd” to the detriment of their individual voices, stories, and routes.

Analysing Symbolic Annihilation in conjunction with discursive strategies within media discourse about migration holds significance as it informs us about migrants belonging to either a socially *valued/ outspoken* or *voiceless* group. Within the framework of DHA, perspectivization as a discursive strategy aims to establish legitimacy as the speaker is the voice owner. Thus, voice allocation is directly linked to action.

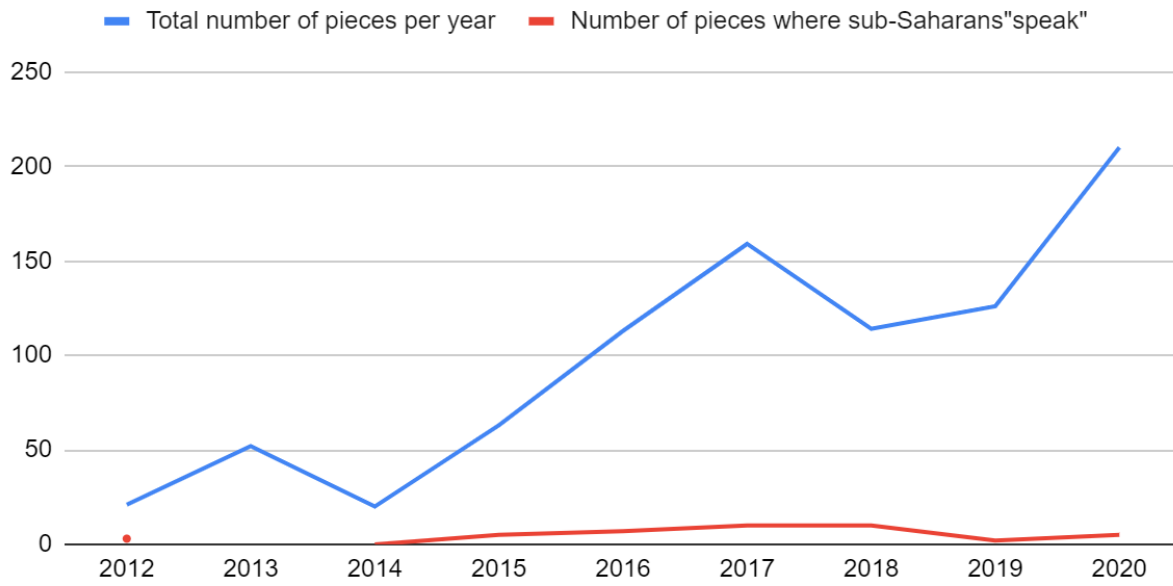
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<sup>94</sup> “UNHCR Complains about Disruption of Activities of Refugee Camp in Southern Tunisia”, *Tunisia Live*, 2012

<sup>95</sup> “Tunisia: 98 migrants rescued off Djerba”, *Al Huffington Post Maghreb*, 17/01/2014.

<sup>96</sup> “Libya: The Islamic State at the gates of Tunisia”, Mon Massir FB Page, February 2015.

<sup>97</sup> “Corpses Found in Ben Guerdane: important developments that reveal the people behind human trafficking and coordination with ISIS”, *Zoom Tunisia*, Arabic, 13/04/2016.



**Figure 11: Voice allocation ratios per year**

In our media corpus, strikingly, only 51 out of the total 910 allocated “voice” to sub-Saharanans. Throughout nine years of monitoring, sub-Saharanans were actually allowed to talk for “themselves” 5.6 % of the time. Most news and stories about sub-Saharanans, i.e., 94.4%, did not include any direct or indirect speech by sub-Saharanans and omitted any form of direct or indirect expression by sub-Saharan migrants, underscoring the limited potential for their active involvement in events and issues directly related to them like education, trade, integration, terrorism allegations and criminality, etc.

In the 2015 sub-corpus, the article “In Tunisia: Three Africans Referred for Fraud” (*Ettounissia*, Arabic) presents the events entirely from the perspective of the prosecution. Phrases like “they confessed” and “using the trick” frame the suspects' actions negatively. Details about the alleged victims and the supposed success of the scam are absent. There is no mention of the suspects' defence or their version of events. The reader cannot ‘listen to’ their side of the story or any mitigating factors they might present. The use of exclamation points stresses their indictment and reinforces the one-sided perspective. The media piece lacks a balanced perspective and excludes any potential defence arguments. Silence therefore manifests itself through this passive “presence” as although sub-Saharanans are presented in the article, they are not given any voice or active role. Rather, they are reduced to a mere tool for media sensationalisation<sup>98</sup>

<sup>98</sup> In media studies, sensationalisation and tabloidization are the two editorial choices or traits of modern commercial media outlets which resort to over-dramatization, sensation, and spectacle to attract and lure audience.

as the article is very long and has a narrative structure of a full-fledged crime fiction (like an Agatha Christie one). This striking feature of the media corpus reflects the media's neglect of the sub-Saharan perspective, unrecognition of this migratory phenomenon, and lack of understanding of the nature of sub-Saharan existence in Tunisia. Regardless of the cause underlying this voice suppression, the outcome is that sub-Saharans are left with a minor possibility of action.

In the context of DHA, the limited or almost nil allocation of voice reveals certain aspects about the media corpus and the representation choices of sub-Saharans. First, when there is little voice allocation to a social group—sub-Saharan migrants in this case—within the media discourse, it suggests media's engaging in further marginalisation or exclusion. This “symbolic annihilation” or erasure is reflected in the choice to represent sub-Saharans inadequately. The scarcity of sub-Saharans voices, mostly statements by the representatives of Association of African Students and Interns in Tunisia<sup>99</sup> (AESAT), clearly reveals a power imbalance within the discourse. Tunisian media and political stakeholders—having the authority to control or shape the discourse—choose to amplify the dominant narratives to the detriment of the sub-Saharans perspectives. Downplaying or suppressing these “unfathomable” others may be due to a simple avoidance of recognizing the “problem” and refusal to deal with it in that specific period, which confirms Wodak's stance on silence and silencing.

Second, the quantitative findings may also account for the media's choice to allocate little voice to sub-Saharans as a deliberate selective portrayal of events or groups. In fact, as will be proven in the last chapter herein, the peaks in voice allocation for the sub-Saharans' issues usually come in times of crises, for instance after the xenophobic attacks following the Tunisia—Guinea football match of 2015, or when three Congolese were stabbed in 2016, or when Falikou Coulibaly (President of AIT) was murdered in Tunisia in 2018. Indeed, the trend of allocating voice to sub-Saharan migrants, in specific moments with a docile rhetoric towards the state, underlies the media's desire to depict them as “grateful and indebted” to Tunisian society, even in times of crisis. This choice of the media can be interpreted within Van Dijk's “pro prototypical” stance (1991) which views refugees as always in dire need of saving by the dominant group.

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<sup>99</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/AESAT.Officielle/> accessed 8/6/2023.



The result is a skewed or incomplete understanding of the subject matter and influence on perception of sub-Saharanans by Tunisian audience. In fact, insufficient voice allocation can influence how audiences perceive certain groups or topics, and if a group is consistently underrepresented or silenced, stereotypes or misunderstandings are likely to be entrenched in the social imaginary. Almost eleven years after the Libyan war and the crystallisation of the sub-Saharan migratory phenomenon in Tunisia, the Tunisian politicians as well as common citizens are still struggling with their status (transit, irregular, documented) reflected in a stark terminological discrepancy in the politicians' discourse (Kais Saied's speech on February 21, 2023, before the national security council) and the ensuing media debates on the clashes in Sfax and on the borders with Libya.

Third, voice allocation is so revealing of a lack of agency on the sub-Saharanans' part. Limited voice allocation conveys a lack of agency or active participation by the muted social group. Other than muffling their voices and marginalising them, this further ensconces the general perception that sub-Saharanans have no or little impact on events or decisions. This is reflected in lexical choices of the media where sub-Saharanans are usually asking for something, demanding, requesting, and beseeching. For instance, in the aforementioned 2012 piece of Tunis Tribune, sub-Saharanans "ask" the authorities to free them so they can work; in 2015, they are "calling on the House of Representatives to enact a law against racism"<sup>100</sup>, ASEAT "calls for caution"<sup>101</sup>, Toussaint Bagula's (AESAT) "cry for help" as he "calls on the authorities to take the issue seriously"<sup>102</sup>, etc. Thus, not only are sub-Saharanans voices muffled, but also geared towards victimisation, passivity, and lack of agency. The outcomes are disempowerment, fake 'inclusion' or voicing, reinforcement of stereotypes of sub-Saharanans as irregular migrants who are incapable of action, and lack of any social or political willingness to collaborate with sub-Saharanans for a comprehensive change.

It is noteworthy that 2014 is a black hole in the media corpus. This year has a total of zero pieces where sub-Saharanans are assigned voice. Out of the total media pieces, only 21 were written in 2014. This can be accounted for by the role of silence in DHA, as Wodak relates some silence of the "large sections of the elites" instrumentalizing discourse "for political reasons" and the "explicit denial through justification discourses that prejudiced utterances could be identified as such" (Wodak, 2011, p. 356).

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<sup>100</sup> *Babnet*, 4 February 2015.

<sup>101</sup> *Mosaique Fm*, 5/2/2015.

<sup>102</sup> *Tunivisions*, French version, 6/2/2015.

Indeed, 2014 was a year of political turmoil in Tunisia, and the migratory question was relegated to a blind spot. The 2014 sub-corpus is mostly made of opinion articles about racism, historiography and ‘*tunisianité*’ (with more incidence of serious—very elitist—media outlets such as *Nawaat*, *Huffington Post Maghreb*, *Inkyfada*, *Kapitalis* and *Business News*). The other pieces were *fait-divers* about sub-Saharanans’ “irregular” entry or exit as well as arrests.

As a matter of fact, in 2014, Tunisia underwent significant political change which marked a pivotal moment in its history. First, the adoption of the 2014 constitution in January marked a crucial step in its ‘transition to democracy’. Second, a new parliament was elected in October 2014; the parliamentary elections were the first opportunity for Tunisians to freely choose their representatives since the ousting of Ben Ali in 2011. Contrary to expectations, the secularist party Nidaa Tounes won the most seats to the detriment of the Islamist party Ennahda. Third, in November 2014, Tunisia held its first free and fair presidential election, and Beji Caid Essebsi, the founder of Nidaa Tounes, won the election and became Tunisia's first democratically elected president. Many observers see this election as the landmark for completion of the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democracy. The presidential elections campaign was so heated and controversial because of the interim president’s running against Caid Essebsi. The media coverage was characterised by mutual accusations and self-advertising, and Marzouki tried to promote himself again as a human rights’ defender rather than politician or ex-president. Out of the 2014 sub-corpus pieces, three tackle Marzouki’s “slip” in his statement when he called Tunisians “ignorant” in relation to racism and sub-Saharanans<sup>103</sup>. The end of 2014 marks the peaceful transition and reconciliation—compared to other countries that experienced the Arab “Spring” uprisings like Libya and Egypt. In fact, the various political parties and civil society factions engaged in dialogue for a peaceful transition and national reconciliation. This ‘successful’ reconciliation would result in the 2015 Nobel Prize awarded to Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet for its role in the peaceful democratic transition in the country.

Overall, 2014 was a turning point for Tunisia’s politics and political stability. Among all these political landmarks, the sub-Saharan question was a secondary one, which justifies the few pieces devoted to security operations against “undocumented” sub-Saharanans and the new trend in speaking about Africa and sub-Saharanans in a positive way, for campaigning purposes (Marzouki’s election campaign and “ode

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<sup>103</sup> For instance, “Marzouki: Tunisians are ignorant and do not realise that they belong to Africa”, *Business News*, French (26/05/2014), “Tunisia: Moncef Marzouki's ode to Africa”, in *Tunisie Numérique*, French (28/05/2014).

to Africa”). The year 2014 was even described as “une année de manoeuvres” (a year of manoeuvres) by *Nawaat* editors (15/01/2015). In fact, apart from the numerous political milestones, 2014 marked the collusion between media and politics. Private TV channels were competing on an ideological level as some were close to the Ennahda movement, such as *Zitouna TV* (owned by Ennahda Shura council member Oussama Ben Salem). In 2014, the *Nessma* channel engaged in a media frenzy which the annals of journalism will state as a textbook example of the connivance of media owners and politicians. *Nawaat* signalled “the danger looming over the audiovisual landscape in Tunisia, following the creation of several 'outlaw media' whose owners are ‘very active businessmen in the political scene’”<sup>104</sup>.

From a broader scope, silencing presupposes that silence will be practised when counter-silencing is possible. Jurgen Habermas, the German philosopher, argues that for silencing to be performed, both the silencer and the target must be participating in the same social and linguistic field. Lynn Thiesmeyer contends that silence “results from an act of language where language is used in order to enable some kinds of expression and to disable others” (2003, p. 11) with a special emphasis on the power of discourse in empowering/ disempowering social actors. Silencing co-exists with the potential for the expression that it seeks to abolish. As such, silencing can undermine the prerequisites of mutual understanding, rational debate and democratic decision-making within the public sphere, as well as monopolise the migration narrative and sub-Saharanans’ storyline.

Indeed, the Tunisian media controlling what and who gets voiced is indicative of narrative control. Those who control the narrative can shape public opinion and adopt “tools by which [they] regain a certain level of control over an authored, distributed text” in order to reframe it as “the struggle for textual and narrative control” (Cover, 2006, p. 154). From a syntactic point of view, sub-Saharanans’ agentivity should also be investigated to see if they are depicted as an active or passive voice. Agentivity is significant in categorising sub-Saharanans’ representations as agents, targets or victims. Indeed, the representation of marginal social groups is usually carried out in a passive way, yet when these outgroups’ role shifts from receivers of action to doers of deviant acts, they are represented as having agency via the use of active voice (Van Dijk 2010, p. 40).

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<sup>104</sup> Translation mine, original in French, *Nawaat* 15/01/2015.

The nine-year monitoring shows that Tunisian media chose to embrace the perspective of authorities rather than the narrative of sub-Saharanans. Indeed, in all media's "newsworthy" pieces about the successful interception operations, sub-Saharanans have no voice, neither active nor passive. They are the absent presence, pivotal characters in the story without any space to talk. Denied from any agency, sub-Saharanans leave the floor to the 'real' agents who are the 'heroic' and 'legitimate' state security officers. For instance, in the 2012 sub-corpus, an article titled "Ambush of the most dangerous African gang with 5 billion counterfeit dollars"<sup>105</sup> expressions like "were arrested", "were referred", "were transferred" are used to highlight the active role of the security and the passive stance of the sub-Saharan gang, which was vanquished by the "brave" security agents. In the 2014 sub-corpus, the article "Four Africans referred to the Criminal Chamber"<sup>106</sup> places the sub-Saharanans in the backstage while foregrounding the security and judiciary active role and agency in protecting the country from a group having the "intention of assaulting others", not even having assaulted others.

In the same trend, in the 2019 and 2020 sub-corpus, news about the "Arrest of Africans" intending to cross the maritime border surreptitiously were related by the official spokesman of the National Guard, Colonel Houssam El-Din El-Jabali, in *Akhbar Online* (17/01/2019), or "9 Africans were arrested for surreptitiously crossing the Libyan-Tunisian border" in *Babnet* (03/2019), "Thursday, 7 Africans were arrested by the National Guard in Ben Gardane" in *Nessma* (01/2020), "9 sub-Saharan Africans... arrested" in *Al-Jourhouria* (01/2020), etc, highlight the efficiency of public-order policing in Tunisia and reinforce the narrative of a country which is master of its destiny, fighting *Don-quixotean* conspiracies and 'absent' or passive intruders—the sub-Saharanans.

Throughout the nine years—object of monitoring—sub-Saharanans' are either silenced or passivized, content-wise and syntax-wise. News about sub-Saharan migrants, entering or leaving Tunisia, portray them as non-agents through the systemised recourse to the passive voice for them (were taken, were arrested, etc) and the active voice for the Tunisian authorities (arrested, thwarted, stopped, succeeded in, etc). Nevertheless, the rule is no longer adhered to and sub-Saharanans' agency is rendered when dealing with deviance and criminality. Indeed, when reporting news about theft, embezzlement, prostitution, drug-dealing, or fraud perpetrated (or even allegedly perpetrated) by sub-Saharanans, the media outlets suddenly

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<sup>105</sup> *Al-Sabah News* (Arabic), 01/12/2012

<sup>106</sup> *Ettounissia*, (Arabic), 22/01/2014

invert their perspective and turn sub-Saharanans into active doers or agents and Tunisians into passive victims of the despicable deeds. In fact, the very first pieces talking about sub-Saharanans and granting them “agency” were published in March 2012 with the “Breaking news” of “Africans” “hijacking of a boat in Zarzis”<sup>107</sup>. These news pieces portrayed the sub-Saharanans who attempted to “hijack” a Tunisian fishing boat as “pirates”. More than that, the story was dramatized and sub-Saharanans’ agency stressed by elements of suspense and exaggerated numbers, “70 illegal immigrants of different African nationalities stormed into the boat” which was “docked”. The interplay of passive-active voice is intentional and serves the journalists’ framing of sub-Saharanans as capable of deviance and incapable of good deeds. “An African sells drugs to Africans only!”, “4 Africans stab a Tunisian “burner” (*harrag*) to death” and “Gabes: 2 Africans arrested for fraud and drug dealing”, such were the headlines in the 2012 and 2013 sub-corpora.

Out of the 51 pieces – that is, 5.6 % of the corpus – where sub-Saharanans do have a voice and do speak about themselves, only half adopts the perspective of sub-Saharanans in an active and positive way. In fact, over nine years, only 26 media pieces give the floor to sub-Saharanans to voice their concerns and opinions. It is, however, noteworthy that frequency of such articles increases in the years when sub-Saharanans were victims of racist or xenophobic attacks (2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018). Hence, this positive and active voice allocation is situational, circumstantial and event driven. These event-centric slots can be traced back to 2015 *ratonnades*<sup>108</sup>, when numerous sub-Saharanans—and even Tunisian blacks—were assaulted following the defeat of the Tunisian national team to Guinea in the CAN eliminations. Sub-Saharan actors and associations took the floor to “call for caution” and “protest racism”<sup>109</sup>.

Toussaint Bagula, President of AESAT was on several media platforms to demand action from the Tunisian authorities. One of the testimonies came from Alassane, a young Ivorian, who said he was “not angry” as he “was supporting the Tunisian team”, but as he left the cafe, “they wanted to rob me. And I'm not even Equatorial Guinean! Would we attack the Italians for a problem with the Finns?!”. The voice of sub-Saharanans, as presented by the media outlet sharing it, is either very serious, firm, and threatening, or very flexible and almost funny in other pieces. All in all, sub-Saharanans got to speak up for themselves and show that racism *does* exist in Tunisia. In the same year, sub-Saharanans were also allocated voice in an

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<sup>107</sup> 2012 sub-corpora: *Al-Machhad*, *Shems Fm* (Arabic) and the Facebook page Tunisie (French), 03/2012.

<sup>108</sup> English word borrowed from French. Originally meant to mean punitive expedition or brutality against Maghrebis, its meaning was extended to mean any socio-racial driven violence.

<sup>109</sup> *Mag14* website, *Réalités*, *Al-Sabah*, *Al-Hassad*, 02/2015

active manner following another racist attack against a Cameroonian student in Laaouina, Tunis, on November 3, 2015. The representatives of the Cameroonian students (AESCT) called for caution and protection. In 2016, the wheel of history turned anew with the violent attack on three Congolese at the Passage on December 24, 2016. Five media pieces allocated a slot for sub-Saharan testimonies and opinions. The Malian Association of Students and Trainees in Tunisia (AMEST) published on December 24 a press release titled “I do not want to die in Tunisia because I am a black foreigner” which was shared and commented upon in Tunisia media<sup>110</sup>.

The voice of sub-Saharans seems to be allocated cyclically but also in an accelerated rhythm. This tailored voice sharing strategy is further corroborated by the 2017 and 2018 sub-corpora which both mark the peak of sub-Saharans’ voice allocation. Indeed, sub-Saharans’ ‘seized the floor’ to protest racism and ingratitude. The voice gets assertive with them expanding on the numbers leaving Tunisia. The topos of numbers is used by the sub-Saharans to threaten and protest, “Six thousand African students leave Tunisia because of insecurity!”<sup>111</sup>. With this event-driven voice allocation, the media discourse power balance seems to shift—even situationally—to an adequate representation of sub-Saharans. In the two aforementioned sub-corpora, the sub-Saharans are given names, and not treated as a mass, mob or crowd. Chris Impoko, Christian Burkasa, Bella Kalenga, David, Christian Burkasa, etc. are the names of sub-Saharans who are ‘invited’ to speak to different media outlets and voice their fears and concerns. Following the sub-Saharan’ life in Tunisia storyline, the monitoring has proven that the treatment is not uniform. This fluctuation in voice allocation is telling of pragmatic and favouritism treatment. Not all sub-Saharans are “inferior” or “Africans”. Sub-Saharan students in Tunisia seem to have an intermediate position, below Tunisian citizens, but above the “African” irregular “invaders” who enter the country to cross to Europe or stay and cause havoc, disease and insecurity<sup>112</sup>.

This assumption is corroborated by the fact that voice is allocated almost exclusively to sub-Saharan students or their representatives (AESAT, AIT, AST, AESCT, etc.). This voice which seems to be granted, almost grudgingly, out of embarrassment, pseudo-empathy or even pragmatism, is

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<sup>110</sup> Voice allocation will be more discussed in depth in the next chapter dealing with counter-representations.

<sup>111</sup> *La Presse*, 01/2017.

<sup>112</sup> This differentiated treatment is also significant in the last analytical chapter where I examine the correlation between media discourse and policy change, as policy shifts usually happen amidst a media bombardment, in number and voice allocation.

nevertheless conveyed in negative contexts and events. Most of the articles including sub-Saharanans' voice in an active way revolve around racist attacks and troubles. However, even the few positive pieces further corroborate the biased treatment of the sub-Saharan question, regular versus irregular seems to be the issue when allocating voice to sub-Saharanans.

The article “An African cultural day in Sfax, in cooperation with the municipality and African students of different nationalities”<sup>113</sup>, has a positive tone. The writer uses a semantic field of solidarity rather than antagonism and conflict. The rhetorical choices of terms like “cooperation” and expressions like “cultural exchange”, “participating African countries”, and “unique African cultural diversity” are conspicuous. The nomination strategy, surprisingly, shifts to adopt positive and individualised nomination strategies such as “students” and “artists”. This piece signals a rather different understanding and perception of sub-Saharanans who attend university i.e. skilled and educated “individuals” who are clearly different from the “crowd” of sub-Saharan migrants who many believe to be undocumented, out of work, and without valuable job qualifications. Such positive and individualising stories involving sub-Saharanans are omitted, which is part of the media perspectivization of the sub-Saharan existence, annihilating sub-Saharan migrants' voices and positioning them as either receivers of correctional action or perpetrators of “illegal” acts.

## **2.2 Sub-Saharanans, the African “Otherness”: Othering in Tunisian Media Discourse**

Symbolic Interactionism's core proposition is that people deal with others based on the meanings they attribute to them. Such meanings are constructed through social interaction. In fact, ideas of sameness and belonging contribute to the construction of the ‘collective self’ i.e., “us,” in the same manner that difference is used to manufacture the “them” as “our recognition of these difference in quality reflects the discrimination we make in our actions towards them” (Bauman & May, 2019, p. 177). In this sense, the ‘other’ is rudimentary as an elementary unit in the construction of self and identity. On this dichotomous perspective of social order, Bauman asserts that differentiating oneself from the ‘other’ “brings into the inner circle of proximity the kind of difference and *otherness* that are anticipated and tolerated only at a distance —where they can be either dismissed as irrelevant or repelled as hostile” (Bauman, 1991, p. 60).

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<sup>113</sup> Journaliste Sfaxien Facebook page, 3/05/2013. The story is about The Association of African Students and Interns in Tunisia, organising a cultural event at the Municipal Theatre in Sfax. Such events happen periodically; however, the coverage in the media is rare.

Through misrepresentation, degradation or annihilation, the “natives” are triggered by “the ascriptive criteria of difference (albeit in a modern, ‘rational’, racist garb), through the medicalization of the otherness” (Bauman, 1991, p. 80)

If silencing and voice suppression in media discourse stem from “symbolic annihilation”, othering finds its roots in Gayatri Spivak’s “subaltern” (1988). Both concepts have an “antagonistic” rationale, where a social “actor” is encountered with apathy and omission: Symbolic Annihilation, or can be dispatched to a different, inferior symbolic space: Subaltern/Otherness. Spivak's concept of “subaltern” and her examination of the representation of marginal(ised) voices in discourse informed how certain outgroups are othered in media narratives. The Indian scholar states that subaltern individuals are denied access to power by discarding them from any genuine and non-distorting representation or expression. The identity of the subaltern group resides in its difference. Thus, it is “non-representable”.

In the analysis of media representations, the concept of Othering owes much to Edward Said’s (1997) discussion of the concept from an *Orientalism* point of view and Stuart Hall’s (1997) use of the concept when examining power, race and class. Hall's encoding-decoding model of communication stresses collective action in meaning building and message crafting. For Hall, encoding/decoding strategies are the way social actors translate a message; therefore, the media shape representations of difference, contributing to the process of othering. ‘Othering’, as a “situatedness” for minorities in media discourses tends to problematize and obscure the presence of these “others” by correlating outgroups to crime. Thus, othering is an outcome of discourses of racism, xenophobia; or even both in the case of sub-Saharanans. Sune Qvotrup Jensen (2011, p. 65) argues that “symbolic degradation”, instead of “symbolic annihilation”, takes place when subordinate groups are relegated and repositioned as “others” in discourse, if they do not slip into a “spiral of silence”. This antagonistic rhetoric or “binarism” inherent in the processing of the Other relationships operates through exclusionary dynamics. Thus, “othering” of the outgroup is a projection of features that are distinct from those of the ingroup. This echoes Fairclough’s discussion of the discourses’ “obfuscation of difference” where a “protagonist-antagonist relation appears to be set up between an unidentified protagonist against a protagonist” (Fairclough, 2004, p. 28).

Conducting an analysis of the use of *nomination* and *predication* in the representations of sub-Saharanans shall allow for a study of their “discursive construction” and their “definition” as migrants (Reisigl & Wodak 2009, p. 95). Within media discourse, the names, nouns and adjectives attributed to migrants can empower or disempower them; they can even (re)negotiate their social status and future



prospects. The nominal associations—that is to say “nomination”—and attributes ascribed to migrants—i.e. “predication”—determine their belonging and membership of the ingroup or outgroup.

The first conspicuous feature of nomination, as already mentioned earlier, is the recurrent and almost systematic use of “African(s)” 1875 times to refer to sub-Saharanans in the media pieces, be them references to “refugees” or “migrants”, “students” or “workers” and “regular” or “undocumented”. Almost 40% of the constituent media pieces use “Africans” exclusively, whereas the rest use either sub-Saharanans or sub-Saharan Africans<sup>114</sup>. Scrutiny of the timeline for the use of the term “sub-Saharan” versus “African” to refer to people coming from sub-Saharan Africa showed that the term “sub-Saharan” was, in fact, used more than 20 years ago as a conventional and customary term in famous newspapers like *le Quotidien* and *La Presse* as well as by the official news agency TAP<sup>115</sup>.

Research of the Tunisian newspapers’ archives, carried out via the research engine Turess, showed that dozens of articles were written in French about the Tunisian-sub-Saharan relations prior to 2011. The term “sub-Saharan” was conspicuously used when dealing with economic, political, climate and sports issues, but especially with regard to the international students in private Tunisian universities. Pre-2011, most international students were sub-Saharan, and were treated as sources of richness and gain. The same research carried out in Arabic yielded strikingly different results. Looking for the keyword ‘āfāriqat janūb al-ṣaḥrā—sub-Saharan Africans yielded 551 results. Out of the 551 Arabic results, none of the 138 published prior to 2011 were relevant. In a nutshell, the archive did not provide any newspaper written in Arabic and speaking about “sub-Saharanans” as such<sup>116</sup>.

Hence, French-speaking newspapers used ‘subsahariens’ rather than Africains in the pre-2011 period. They continue to use the same politically correct attribute. However, when the Libyan crisis began, and with the advent of many media outlets and the prolific media production online, the usage shifted to “Africans” as sub-Saharan Africans came to Tunisia as “refugees” in the Shusha camp, or as “irregular” migrants. 2011 marked the change in perception of sub-Saharanans, both in society and media which have

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<sup>114</sup> This idiosyncratic use of both attributes results mostly from translation of the Arabic expression afāriqat janūb al-saḥrā (Africans of the Sub-Saharan region).

<sup>115</sup> For articles using sub-saharan instead of African, see articles “Sommes-nous racistes ?”, Neila GHARBI, *La Presse* on 01/01/2000, “Des obstacles à surmonter”, by Ferid Tounsi, *La Presse*, 2002, etc.

<sup>116</sup> It is worth noting that the research engine Turess provides the last 25000 latest results, so by searching the keyword African in Arabic and French, there were no results for the years before 2011. The results are already saturated by the 2014-2023 articles.

always showed to be intertwined in terms of representation. With the “mass” of ‘Africans’ “flooding” into the Shusha camp, these were no longer perceived as the ‘sub-Saharan’ businessmen, students, or footballers who come to the country in regular ways to work, do business and benefit ‘us’. They were different people; they were ‘African’ crowds who have no documents, identities or even purposes. Henceforth, sub-Saharans and non-sub-Saharans were amalgamated as the others; “the Africans”.

Tunisian media, in referring to all sub-Saharans as “Africans”, further alienate them symbolically. One might argue that the use of “sub-Saharan Africans” is a more neutral, less othering nomination strategy. But the bombardment of the audience with the Africanness attribute is in itself a strategy engraving even unintentionally the idea of alienation and othering. Repetition generates meaning to what has no meaning. Jacques Derrida asserts that repetition, iteration, and differentiation play a pivotal role in the (de)construction of meaning. In his exploration of “différance”, a term he coined to describe the interplay between difference and deferral in language. Siegfried Jäger and Florentine Maier (2009) advance that a message is reinforced and ingrained through the repetition of statements. Commenting on the powerful effect of discourse, through “recurring contents, symbols and strategies, lead[ing] to the emergence and solidification of ‘knowledge’”. In this sense, a single text is not that significant, rather “the constant repetition of statements” (p. 147). They use Victor Klemperer’s arsenic metaphor to show the powerful effect of serving small doses of lexical items over a long period of time like “continuous administration of small doses of arsenic, which unfold their poisonous effect only over the long term” (p. 147). For them, terms frequency in a corpus is significant and worth signalling and analysing.

In the same trend, Wodak discussed how repetition of certain phrases or concepts allows for an intended message to be internalised by and sedimented in the audience. To her, repetition can also contribute to feeding in in-group and out-group polarising dynamics, by repeatedly using certain language or symbols, to emphasise belonging among ingroup members and alienation among the outgroup members. Repetition is also a normalisation mechanism, making what seems unnatural or illogical eventually normal. When sub-Saharans are consistently referred to as the other ‘Africans’, they are ultimately accepted as such and their African identity devoid of any particular national or racial or linguistic specificity becomes common sense or unquestionable. Such a reiterative discourse choice, on the part of Tunisian media, shapes public opinion as well as policy making. When the media outlets hammer persistently (1875 times) divisive terms, they intensify social divides and create an antagonistic mental “us versus them” map.

Repetition can equally enhance the persuasive and legitimation power of discourse by appealing to emotions and stressing the credibility of authority figures or institutions. Through repetition, language may bolster the perceived legitimacy of social actors like the national guard always on the hunt for “Africans”. In fact, nomination choices in a text, suggesting racial or geographical belonging of a person or a group produce a ‘linguistic’ person or representation. This linguistic representation creates a prototype which is increasingly entrenched in the social imaginary as different, exotic, ‘other’. Nomination strategies are therefore mechanisms that inaugurate and perpetuate the identity of certain groups. Indeed, it is through repetition and citation that these fabricated representations and identities settle and become well-built and unshakable, i.e. anchored (SI).

They even seem to exert an epistemic fallacy by asserting that sub-Saharanans are African as if Tunisians were not. This fallacy stems from racial and social discrimination, and voids sub-Saharanans of distinctive human features, reducing them to “black others”. Severe “othering” in Tunisian media discourse towards sub-Saharan migrants manifests itself in the repetitive news about “Africans” being intercepted and arrested at borders. The media, by bludgeoning readers with news about sub-Saharanans perpetrating crimes or being victims of death/loss at sea, is “othering” them in a multitude of ways. Triandafyllidou and Wodak (2003) argue that identity formation is a double-fold process building on “sameness” and, on the other hand, “otherness”. Setting an antagonist-protagonist opposition, through the referential strategy, “Africans” excludes sub-Saharanans from acquiring a Tunisian identity.

Indeed, social groups seem to exclude “others”, “who/which do not seem to fit certain arbitrary criteria” and who do not fit the “same community” (Wodak & Boukala, 2015, p. 89). In SI, symbols of difference, such as race, are perceived as threats to homogeneity, harmony, and security. Therefore, othering is a discursive strategy used to protect an ingroup and legitimate “correctional” and “securitarian” measures against an outgroup. Othering Theory demonstrates that alienation has ramifications on the social attitudes and behaviours towards migrants (Wodak & Boukala, 2015). It also influences migrants’ future plans and prospects as when confronted with such a marginalising discourse, they tend to act in accordance with how they are expected to be: victims or criminals. If someone is constantly represented as a criminal by the media and society, they are likely to act like one or join a criminal group (Inankul, 2016).

### 2.2.1 Sub-Saharanans: the ‘Deviant’ Others

The headlines in the corpus follow a certain thematic pattern, usually following an event or breaking news. For instance, in the 2012 sub-corpus, the March headlines were “Breaking news: hijacking of a boat by Africans in Zarzis” (*Al Machhad*, Arabic), “National News: the arrest of Africans who hijacked a boat” (*Shems Fm*, Arabic) and “Hijacking of the ‘Lotfi’ fishing boat in territorial waters: African migrants turn into pirates”, “Tunisie Facebook Page” (Arabic). On 17 March 2012, a group of “Africans” hijacked a Tunisian fishing boat, *Lotfi*, and attempted to sail it to Lampedusa. The media pieces elaborated on all the details related to the story, exact time (10.30 pm), boat’s name, places (port of Sfax, Lampedusa, Mahdia port), the protagonists (Tunisian fishers) and kidnappers (“70 illegal immigrants of different African nationalities”), the negotiations, etc. The story was mediated, dramatized, and politicised as local authorities and members of the then Constituent Assembly received the Tunisian fishers like heroes whereas the ‘African criminals’ were arrested. The headlines foregrounded the crime, and through selective emphasis they omitted to mention how the attempt failed, and especially the who and why. The Tunisian media framed “Africans” as ruthless criminals and pirates, hence setting their agenda and prioritising news of sub-Saharanans’ deviance over their individual stories or narratives. Not only do Tunisian media other sub-Saharanans, but they also distance this group socially by depicting and stigmatising them as quasi-criminals. Right from 2012, the media set the mood for the sub-Saharanans’ framing and their social representations as the deviant outgroup.

The diachronic analysis reveals that the media expand and fixate on a wide range of criminal offences with respect to sub-Saharanans. Yet, some crimes feature more frequently than others. Indeed, regarding the subject-matter of the news/stories, fraud and “illegal” sea-crossing are foregrounded. Organised crime is also present, through the recurrent use of “network” (42 times) and “gang” or “group” used interchangeably especially (85 times). The following table summarises the repartition of mediated crimes per type and number in the yearly sub corpora.

Nature of offence	Number of offences’ mentions
Witchcraft, black magic, sorcery	4 (7-2013) 4 (10-2013) 2 (31-2015) 3 (125-2019) 3 (147-2020) 2 (148-2020)

Fraudulent activity: fraud, money counterfeit, embezzlement, etc	2 (18-2012) 7 (18-2012) 12 (2-2013) 2 (40-2013) 2 (41-2013) 3 (37-2013) 3 (33-2013) 1 (20-2013) 10 (7-2013) 5 (15-2014) 15 (31-2015) 2 (78-2016) 4 (74-2016) 5 (59-2016) 4 (58-2016) 2 (57-2016) 1 (51-2016) 11 (15-2016) 1 (12-2016) 4 (146-2017) 3 (145-2017) 4 (144-2017) 1 (142-2017) 2 (140-2017) 2 (139-2017) 2 (129-2017) 3 (66-2017) 1 (13-2017) 3 (81-2018) 4 (39-2018) 1 (38-2018) 3 (9-2018) 2 (2-2019) 4 (125-2019) 2 (116-2019) 2 (111-2019) 2 (97-2019) 3 (61-2019) 2 (44-2019) 2 (33-2019) 1(11-2019) 2 (185-2020) 2 (139-2020) 1 (137-2020) 1 (114-2020) 1 (81-2020) 1 (80-2020) 1 (58-2020) 3 (16-2020)	<b>154</b>
Robbery, burglary, theft	2 (37-2013) 2 (15-2014) 1 (60-2016) 1 (145-2017) 1 (81-2018) 1 (74-2018) 1 (97-2019) 1 (61-2019)	<b>10</b>
Sexual offenses: molestation, rape, and prostitution	4 (10-2013) 2 (52(2013) 2 (7-2014) 5 (4-2016) 2 (13-2019)	<b>15</b>
Violent crimes: hijacking, kidnapping, piracy, and medical team detaining	5 (6-2012) 3 (8-2012) 3 (7-2012) 10 (2-2013) 3 (151-2020)	<b>21</b>
Drugs: narcotics consumption and dealing	2 (18-2012) 2 (52-2013) 2 (19-2013) 2 (2-2017) 2 (33-2018) 4 (34-2019) 3 (33-2019) 2 (40-2019) 3 (44-2019) 4 (201-2020)	<b>26</b>
Illegal entry/illegal departure, smuggling, and trafficking <sup>117</sup>	1 (6-2012) 1 (15-2012) 3 (4-2014) 2 (18-2014) 1 (13-2014) 2 (12-2014) 4 (4-2014)	

<sup>117</sup> The corpus was searched by section, page and year using all the possible keywords relevant to the offence nature. In this case the keywords used are the roots of smuggl(ing), traffick(er), irregular, illegal, clandestine, stealth(ily), surreptitious(ly), infiltrat(e/ing), *hāreg*, secret(ly), cross(ing) (in combination with adverbs of stealth). The results were then sifted to retain the relevant results as some articles elaborate on this ‘offence’ perpetrated by Tunisians rather than sub-Saharan. Some other articles are analysing the phenomenon without casting any accusations.

	<p>2 (54-2015) 2 (44-2015) 2 (41-2015) 2 (38-2015)  2 (30-2015) 2 (28-2015) 2 (22-2015) 3 (19-2015) 3(18-2015)  2 (73-2016) 2 (70-2016) 2 (69-2016) 3 (65-2016) 2 (64-2016)  2 (59-2016) 2 (58-2016) 4 (51-2016) 2 (50-2016) 2 (43-2016)  2 (35-2016) 2(33-2016) 2 (32-2016) 3 (31-2016) 3 (27-2016)  4 (15-2016) 2 (70-2016)  1 (150-2017) 1 (149-2017) 4 (146-2017) 5 (145-2017) 5 (144-2017)  6 (144-2017) 6 (143-2017) 4 (142-2017) 2 (141-2017) 3 (140-2017)  4 (139-2017) 3 (138-2017) 1 (136-2017) 1 (100-2017) 2 (95-2017)  1 (94-2017) 3 (91-2017) 1 (89-2017) 3 (86-2017) 3 (82-2017)  2 (74-2017)2 (66-2017) 2 (63-2017) 4 (59-2017) 2 (55-2017)  2 (54-2017) 3 (53-2017) 3 (49-2017) 3 (48-2017) 3 (47-2017)  2 (47-2017)  2 (41-2017) 2 (35-2017) 4 (31-2017) 4 (30-2017) 4 (29-2017)  2 (27-2017) 4 (26-2017) 2 (25-2017) 2 (23-2017) 2 (19-2017)  2 (13-2017) 3 (6-2017)  3 (93-2018) 3 (91-2018) 3 (90-2018) 2 (86-2018) 4 (85-2018)  2 (79-2018) 2 (76-2018) 5 (74-2018) 2 (72-2018) 3 (70-2018)  6 (67-2018) 2 (65-2018) 2 (62-2018) 1 (60-2018) 2 (35-2018)  3 (33-2018) 2 (29-2018) 2(28-2018) 3 (26-2018) 4 (22-2018)  3 (9-2018)  2 (2-2019) 2 (3-2019) 2 (6-2019) 3 (11-2019) 4 (12-2019) 2 (13-  2019) 3 (14-2019) 5 (18-2019) 6 (20-2019) 3 (22-2019) 5 (33-2019)  1 (37-2019) 1 (38-2019) 3 (41-2019) 3 (46-2019) 3 (48-2019)  4 (49-2019) 3 (58-2019) 3 (59-2019) 5 (63-2019) 2(64-2019)  3 (65-2019) 2 (73-2019) 2 (75-2019) 3 (77-2019) 2(88-2019) 2(94-  2019) 2(105-2019) 5 (108-2019) 5(111-2019) 1(114-2019) 2(115-  2019)  3 (118-2019) 2 (120-2019) 3 (121-2019) 4 (122-2019) 2 (126-2019)  4 (1-2020) 2(6-2020) 3(8-2020) 4(9-2020) 2(10-2020) 6(12-2020)  2 (14-2020) 4(47-2020) 3(50-2020) 3(52-2020) 5(54-2020) 4(55-  2020)  2(58-2020) 5(60-2020) 4(61-2020) 2(64-2020) 5(68-2020) 2(79-  2020) 3(80-2020) 1(81-2020) 2(83-2020) 3(84-2020) 4(85-2020) 2  (92-2020)  2(93-2020) 2(99-2020) 3(101-2020) 3(113-2020) 1(118-2020) 3(119-  2020) 3(121-2020) 2(122-2020) 3(124-2020) 3(132-2020)  3(143-2020) 4 (145-2020) 3(146-2020) 3 (150-2020) 1(171-2020)  2(178-2020) 4(185-2020)</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>484</b></p>
<p>Terrorism, murder, ISIS connections, spying</p>	<p>2 (52-2013) 1 (51-2013) 2(8-2013)  2 (43-2015) 1 (42-2015) 1(20-2015)  5(51-2016) 3(50-2016) 4(46-2016) 1(45-2016) 4(32-2016) 5(31-  2016)  2(30-2016) 8(25-2016) 8(24-2016) 1(23-2016) 2(7-2016)  2 (56-2017) 4(11-2017)  1(76-2018)  2(6-2019) 2(5-2019) 2(21-2019)</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>65</b></p>

Petty crimes: noise, disturbance, alcohol selling and consumption, felonies and misdemeanours like escaping from refugee centres	1 (5-2013) 2(34-2013) 2(14-2014) 2(13-2014) 1(12-2014) 2 (108-2017) 2 (44-2015) 4 (110-2017) 2 (109-2017) 2 (70-2020) 2 (140-2020)	22
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**Table 5: Repartition of offences per type and number of occurrences**

A total of 806 mentions of sub-Saharanans’ offences in a corpus of 910 media pieces is revealing of a certain confirmation bias, especially on the part of Arabic-speaking media outlets. These media are usually catering to the populist biases held by the common Tunisians who believe sub-Saharanans are deviant, aggressive, etc....in a nutshell a criminal bomb ready to detonate and bombard their safe society<sup>118</sup>. These preexisting distorted ideas are therefore further enhanced, entrenched and normalised by the media underrepresentation of positive stories and overrepresentations of negative ones. Arabic-speaking media especially play on the buzz effect and sensational material as they prioritise attention-grabbing stories especially in times of political and social stability. In the 2016 sub-corpus, for instance, the headlines adopted a standard formulation usually revolving around one actor “Africans” and a “crime” apart from place and time indicators. “Ben Arous: 3 Africans arrested for fraud” (*Al-Sabah*, Arabic), “The Capital: 3 Africans in a gang arrested for counterfeiting and smuggling currency” (*Ettounissia*, Arabic), “Arrest of 15 sub-Saharan Africans by the National Guard units” (*Kapitalis*, French) and “Ben Guerdane: 15 Africans attempting to cross the borders stealthily arrested” (*Ettounissia*, Arabic) or threats of terrorism

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<sup>118</sup> There are no available studies on the perception of sub-Saharanans by the public opinion in Tunisia (Arabic, French and English) which is yet another research gap. Nonetheless, the stereotype of sub-Saharanans’ violence and deviance is quite shared by large segments of the Tunisian population. More strikingly, this stereotype is shared and disseminated by the educated elite. A good example is this sociologist and researcher, M. Ben Nsir, who shares on his social media account content, comments and posts about sub-Saharanans’ “criminality”. See <https://www.facebook.com/bennsir.mouad/videos/1424602601668808> and <https://www.facebook.com/reel/308393328273346>. There are also posts (and a considerable number of comments sharing the same opinion) in 2021. The post was apparently deleted but diffused by many pages of Sfax with the account of the sociologist tagged therein. The text of the post is roughly translated as follows: “The Africans in Tunisia.... are a danger to social peace. Why... the great bulk of them are undocumented and unqualified...a good percentage fled criminal convictions in their home countries... These Africans cannot integrate in the Tunisian society, why....they move like hordes, alone. .. the Libyan scenario, as most migrants who were African were behind the chaos of 2011 and the state there chased millions of them... Africans are in every neighbourhood... dozens live in the same house, so here we talks about STDs” (<https://www.facebook.com/Sfaxien.net/photos/a.223218401196453/1850198781831732/?type=3>) and the post of 24 June, “Happening now in Sfax: a violent clash between Africans ends in the murder of a young girl and throwing her body in a well”.

“90 fugitive terrorists languishing on the border plan to infiltrate Tunisia and Algeria” (*Tunigazette*, Arabic) and “A global network of human trafficking recruits Africans for terrorism and espionage” (*Hakaek online*, Arabic) and “Ettadhamen: Arrest of an African network for smuggling” (*Ifm radio*, Arabic). Some of the headlines even present sub-Saharanans as both perpetrators and victims, further incriminating them, “Bardo: A sub-Saharan student fatally stabs his relative” (*Kapitalis*, French).

The above headlines show a fixation on sub-Saharanans’ “deviance” and a reiterative use of the semantic field of crime as well as topoi of threat and danger. Topoi or argumentation schemes and strategies (Krzyżanowski, 2010) are usually resorted to in anti-immigration discourse (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001) in a conditional manner linking the existence of “specific dangers and threats” to the imperative of acting “against them” (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, p. 77). In 2014, the news of 4 irregular ‘Africans’ fleeing the Shusha shelter or reception centre was reported three times, in different sources like *Shems Fm* and *Al-Chourouk*, although it is a minor issue. The exaggeration of the danger of such an incident is stressed by the reporting of actions following their escape “arrest warrants”, “research”, “investigation”, which are worthy of the most dangerous criminals, not of a few people who decided to leave a migrants' reception centre in Shusha to sail to Europe. In the same sub-corpus (2014) the story of the “Africans” who embezzled “half a billion Tunisian Dinars” from a businessman (*Al Jomhouria*, Arabic) is sensational and plays on hyperbole as the mentioned amounts appear colossal to a common reader of these newspapers. The same articles mention “hundreds of millions of dinars” traded daily and openly and links these sub-Saharan gangs to corrupt “accomplices” among security officials. The effect of such an exaggerated discourse of criminality is a feeling of imminent danger lurking the Tunisians with the presence of these sub-Saharanans. For Bauman (1991), the representation of the “unfitting” others, justified by “reference to their own flaws, imperfections and their very ‘otherness’” impedes their ‘acceptance’ as a strategy posing on “recognition of the extant hierarchy” (Bauman, 1991, p. 105).

The concept of “crimmigration”<sup>119</sup> where immigration policies become intertwined with criminal justice, is particularly concerning when examining the treatment of Sub-Saharan migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they are prosecuted and arrested for “Covid-related” crimes, creating double vulnerability in their discursive representation. Articles like “After discovering cases of corona infection among African immigrants” (2020 sub-corpus) highlight this issue. Here, the Kasserine governor's

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<sup>119</sup> For a thorough idea about this recent concept, please see Stumpf, J. (2006) and Kmak, M. (2018).



response of revoking the driver's licence for transporting “infected” sub-Saharan migrants, regardless of their migration status, suggests a conflation of public health concerns with criminal punishment. Similarly, the article “Tunisia: illegal migrants detain a health team”<sup>120</sup> portrays quarantined migrants as criminals committing a three-fold crime—being sub-Saharan ‘irregular’, ‘infected’ and ‘kidnappers’—for detaining a health team who came to take samples for antigenic testing. Despite their objection stemming from anxieties around the testing protocol, they were still portrayed as ‘deviant’ ‘crimmigrants’. These examples showcase how the pandemic has been used to justify a “crimmigration” approach towards Sub-Saharan migrants, potentially exacerbating tensions and hindering genuine public health efforts. Such ‘othering’ and ‘crimmigrating’ rhetoric can fuel xenophobia and undermine social acceptance by building on exaggeration and sensationalization of sub-Saharan-related stories.

This exaggeration is also discernible in the dramatization of “criminality” stories, i.e., mythopoesis, a “mythical mode of social action”<sup>121</sup>. Van Leeuwen introduced mythopoesis, which is a legitimation strategy deployed to build “narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 106). Some media stories about murder, embezzlement and kidnapping involving sub-Saharan suspects, although always presumed to be culprits, pertain to mythopoesis. For instance, *Ettounissia*’s article “In Tataouine: When will he know the truth about the kidnapping and killing of his son?”<sup>122</sup> has all the elements of dramatization like proper names, narration, description, the exact ransom, specific places, etc. The pseudo investigative piece starts on a dark note, with “Through the period of his disappearance, family was contacted daily calling to communicate their conditions and determine the ransom in exchange for their son’s release”. The suspense builds with the development of the protagonist’s profile: a good hard-working son who disappeared overnight. The story builds like a horror account as the father wakes up, searches the place, traces his footprints and finds out the trace disappears on the side of the road; the father goes to the nearest station—Barakat Al-Kilani, and returns to Tataouine to look for him. The local police were informed, and a wide search was prompted with a helicopter, etc. Months afterwards, the father receives a phone call from an “African” number (notice that the two phone numbers are expressly mentioned) requesting a ransom. At the end, the body is

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<sup>120</sup> Article from the 2020 sub-corpus, *Tunisie numérique*, French.

<sup>121</sup> To van Leeuwen, mythopoesis, as a legitimation discursive strategy has recourse to “stories [with] symbolic actions...that can nevertheless represent more than one domain of institutionalised social practice and so provide a ‘mythical mode of social action’” (p. 119).

<sup>122</sup> 14/01/2013.

discovered, and the family's verdict is "Karim was killed by Africans in mysterious circumstances" then buried inside the "fence of an untapped oil well". The story of the ruthless "African" gang and the distraught Tunisian victim and his family contribute to consolidating the myth of other sub-Saharanans as very dangerous and threatening "criminals" who are not only murderers but also members of international organised crime networks.

The representation of sub-Saharanans as a threat or danger, is carried out via the argumentation topoi of danger/threat and authority. By enumerating all the possible crimes and offences involving sub-Saharanans and adding alarmist headlines, the correlation between sub-Saharanans and criminality is anchored as "common-sense". Headlines starting with "Urgent" or "breaking news" enforce the antagonism between "us" as common, normal, safe, innocent Tunisians and "them" as conniving and criminal outsiders.

As observed before, media pieces do not "individualise" the treatment of sub-Saharanans. In fact, seldom do they mention their nationalities when reporting their offences. Most news pieces *assimilate* them into a group rather than individualised social actors. According to van Leeuwen (2008) two major assimilation strategies are used, (i) *aggregation* which is the quantification of groups through statistics and (ii) *collectivisation* reflected in the reference to sub-Saharanans by general plural nouns, "Africans" or "sub-Saharanans". Both collectivisation and aggregation strategies are deployed by the Tunisian media in the above headlines to juxtapose sub-Saharan migrants with terrorism and criminality and foreground danger-related allegations. Amplification and exaggeration, as part of the danger topos appeal to the audience's feelings.

Hyperbole, one of the devices used for the intensification of sub-Saharan criminality, is deployed in expressions like "terrible murder"<sup>123</sup>, "looting and theft are frequent"<sup>124</sup>, "thousands of African students...Ebola virus has spread"<sup>125</sup>, and the "'bomb' of African immigrants"<sup>126</sup>. In all the pieces about

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<sup>123</sup> *Al-Sabah*, news of 17/03/2013.

<sup>124</sup> *Al-Jomhouria*, news of April 2014.

<sup>125</sup> The administrator of the Facebook page strives to link sub-Saharan students to Ebola and prostitution. The whole article (posted in 2015) advocates shunning these students from coming to Tunisia to avoid the spread of Ebola, an "African" virus. The page is named Wikalet Al Estakhbarat El markazia Ettounissia (translated in English 'Tunisian Central Intelligence Agency'). The page, as hundreds of suspicious Facebook accounts, disappeared.

<sup>126</sup> *Akher Khabar*, "Arrested near the Tunisian border: African immigrants with military training and links to terrorism", 23 December 2016.

sub-Saharan “criminality”, the “African others” are problematized as a threat to social peace – being represented as drug dealers, prostitutes, and embezzlers, or an absolute danger as terrorists, ISIS members, mercenaries – using intensification strategies, namely hyperbole.

What is also noticeable about the news concerning sub-Saharans’ breaches and offences is the extensive use of security bodies such as National Guard, customs, police, ‘advanced units’, maritime units, ‘security units’, ‘naval units’, the army, special units, etc. The authority topos is used to further “other” sub-Saharans and legitimate the securitarian and correctional measures against them. In fact, the use of the topos of authority in most news pieces is telling of a choice to perspectivise the sub-Saharan “criminal other” in an antagonistic position, towards society and authorities. To Forchtner and Wodak (2018), the authority topos is “highly credible” as an argumentation device (p. 139). For example, the media tend to give primacy as well as the role of agent to people in positions of power or authority figures such as the police and the Public Prosecutor. Theo Van Leeuwen, as part of his social actor representation paradigm (2008), refers to this strategy as “activation”. A good example is the headlines from the 2017 and 2018 sub-corpora such as “Ras Jedir: Naval Army arrests 6 Africans coming from Libya” (*Mosaique FM*, Arabic) and “No charges in the case have been filed by the District Attorney”. On the other hand, sub-Saharan migrants are “passivated” by relegating them to an object, as in the previous headline, or even when they are the grammatical subject. For instance, “3 Africans arrested for trying to sneak into Tunisia” (*Tunivisions*, Arabic), “4 Africans who crossed the Tunisian-Libyan border arrested” (*National Radio*, Arabic), “Tunisia: 4 Africans arrested for crossing the Tunisian-Libyan maritime border” (*Web Manager Centre*, Arabic) and “Four sub-Saharans arrested for illegally crossing Tunisian-Libyan borders” (*African Manager*, French). In the previous examples, the grammatical assignment of the “Africans” as a subject does not prevent them from being considered as marginal and receivers of action rather than doers.

The use of elements of authority invigorates the speaker’s positive ingroup representation by appealing to legitimate bodies or authorities in a specific manner such as “National Guard Commander”, “Public Prosecution”, “Border patrol of the National Guard”, “Naval Guard units in the port of Al-Ktef”, “official spokesman for the National Guard”, “First Investigating Judge at the court of First Instance of” etc. The extensive and overlapping use of authorities in news pieces about crime involving sub-Saharans contributes to legitimating the relevant ensuing decisions: deportation, detention, or incarceration. The

media discourse accentuates this divide between Tunisian citizens and those “others” who are either “clandestine” insiders or outsiders.

Framing sub-Saharanans as “deviant others” is especially betrayed by the excessive recourse to the topos of numbers. The topos of numbers “may be subsumed under the conclusion rule: if the numbers prove a specific topos, a specific action should be performed” (see Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 79). The topos may pose at least two fallacies, fallacy of the single cause (or causal oversimplification: assuming that there is one cause for one outcome and ignoring the complex web of intertwined causes) and the gambler's fallacy (the erroneous assumption that two separate and independent events can affect the likelihood of a third random event). To assume that the numbers of sub-Saharanans detained for crimes is causal to their innate criminal nature falls under the first fallacy and to use the numbers in conjunction with the offences to assume that crime augmented because of sub-Saharan migrants’ arrival is a gambler’s fallacy on the part of the Tunisian media.

For instance, in its news reporting/stories about sub-Saharanans as “criminals”, *Al- Sabah*, which is a historic and independent daily newspaper launched in 1951, employs specific numbers. In the media pieces under study, we can note the specific use of predicates “number of high-ranking officials” involved with the gang, Africans’ “number is estimated at dozens”, “series of fraudulent operations”<sup>127</sup>. In the same article, the numbers’ topos is also used to convey the gravity of the crime: “African gang in possession of 5 billion counterfeit dollars” and “safe containing counterfeit banknotes... 210,000 dinars”. When covering the successful security operations at the border, readers are confronted with a plethora of numbers, “the number of Africans illegally crossing the border has reached 23”, “Arrest of 4 Africans who crossed the Tunisian-Libyan border”, “5 Africans who slipped from Libyan soil... arrested in Ras Jedir”<sup>128</sup>, “3 Africans crossing the ... borders secretly arrested”<sup>129</sup>, and arrest of a “total of 103 African migrants who illegally crossed the Tunisian border”<sup>130</sup>, to mention but a few.

The topos of numbers justifies a given stance and calls for a specific action to be performed. Ruth Wodak argues that such topoi as danger/threat, numbers and authority are used to “negotiate [...] specific

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<sup>127</sup> “Ambush of an African gang with 5 billion counterfeit dollars”, *Al-Sabah News*, 2012 sub-corpus.

<sup>128</sup> *The National radio*, Arabic, 2017 sub-corpus.

<sup>129</sup> *Nessma Tv*, 2017 sub-corpus.

<sup>130</sup> *Nejma Fm*, 2017 sub-corpus.

agenda” or with a view to “trying to convince an audience of one’s interests, visions or positions” (Wodak 2009, p. 44). It seems that Tunisian media discourse chose to align against a prototype of a ‘criminal other’, who is invading and corrupting the society. It is very interesting to see how such a discourse adopted for years may have resulted in not only the sporadic racist attacks of 2015, 2016 and 2018, but also in a mob backlash culminating in counter-crimes<sup>131</sup>, diffuse xenophobia<sup>132</sup> and an overall insecure ‘transit’ in Tunisia<sup>133</sup>.

### 2.2.2 The ‘Wretched’ Other, a Dehumanising Discourse

In Tunisian media discourse, the sub-Saharan “other” is either a deviant or a victim. Not only are sub-Saharans collectivised and represented, if ever, as a crowd, a mob and a group, but they are also swinging between two extreme stereotypes: the dangerous criminal and the wretched victim. When they were first confronted with the arrival of sub-Saharan refugees and with the humanitarian efforts to manage the Shusha camp, the Tunisian media adopted a binary vision and sub-collectivised them into regular and documented students or irregular undocumented migrants. In the 2013 sub-corpus, almost two years after the outbreak of the Libyan war, the media pieces seem empathetic towards both sub-groups, even if deemed outgroups. They are portrayed as the perpetual victims of “racism, physical and sexual assault, scams”, “victims of children throwing stones at them”, “victims at schools and in the street” and “undesirable” Africans students (*Espace Manager*, September 20, 2013). Coming from “poor countries”, they are victims of blatant marginalisation. “It is a pity”, states the *Nawaat* article, but for whom? The answer is in the article itself as the author reckons that the state would be the real victim if these students gradually flee to Moroccan universities (*Nawaat*, 2013). In another article, they are depicted as victims of “legal gaps”, “miserable conditions” and racism (Tunisiens Libres et Modernes Facebook page, 10/4/2013, French).

During the first phase of the media treatment of sub-Saharans (2012-13), the predication strategy is geared towards victimisation of the sub-Saharans as the attribute “victim” is used 4 times in 2012 (out of 20 pieces) and 15 times in 2013 (in 52 pieces). Two factors can explain this short-lived sympathetic,

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<sup>131</sup><https://www.africanews.com/2023/05/29/tunisia-1-beninese-stabbed-to-death-in-attack-targeting-sub-saharan-migrants/>

<sup>132</sup><https://observers.france24.com/en/africa/20230224-xenophobia-grows-amidst-raids-and-repeated-attacks-on-sub-saharan-africans-in-tunisia>

<sup>133</sup><https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/3/sub-saharan-africans-recount-tunisia-hell-amid-crackdown>

but at times condescending, handling of sub-Saharanans: the absence of a perception of danger and the prioritisation of national political issues (as explained in the section about silence). In the first years following the so-called “Revolution”, the average Tunisian citizen was unaware of the sub-Saharan migration phenomenon in Tunisia. For most Tunisians, the sub-Saharanans were just the few students at private universities and African Bank officials, who were “black others” but respectable rich ‘expatriates’ and were *tolerated* and accepted. Then thousands of sub-Saharanans fled Libya and were “contained” in a camp. Hence, the idea of the sub-Saharanans refugees who were hosted in the Shusha camp, in the extreme South of Tunisia made it geographically reassuring to think of them as “poor” victims who were in Tunisia momentarily before the UNHCR and the state repatriated them. The humanitarian efforts were supported by civil society and a great popular solidarity.

In 2012, according to the UNHCR Global Report 2011<sup>134</sup>, “thousands of people who fled into Tunisia to escape the violence that erupted in Libya...received life-saving assistance from UNHCR that reinforced the Tunisian authorities’ relief efforts at the border... 200,000 third-country nationals transited Tunisia before being evacuated...”. The UNHCR admitted that “the new Tunisian Government’s support for human rights allowed UNHCR to engage in a constructive dialogue about ways to promote a more favourable refugee-protection environment”. In the same trend, Tunisian “budding” civil society showed great potential”. Accordingly, in that period, it seemed that all stakeholders engaged positively in the sub-Saharanans’ relief.

In fact, Antonio Guterres, the UNHCR High Commissioner at the time praised the Tunisian people and government for their remarkable management of the Shusha camp following the “the exodus from Libya”<sup>135</sup> in his multiple visits to the country. He emphasised that did not want “the crisis in Libya to destabilise Tunisia” and warned that “Tunisian generosity... should not be taken for granted”<sup>136</sup>. The testimony of a French doctor who happened to be in Tunisia in March 2011 confirms this solidarity:

“On Tuesday, 1 March, the NGOs had not yet arrived at the scene, but the Tunisian army and people took care of everything. In the city of Zarzis, we saw entire families offering to shelter refugees and offering

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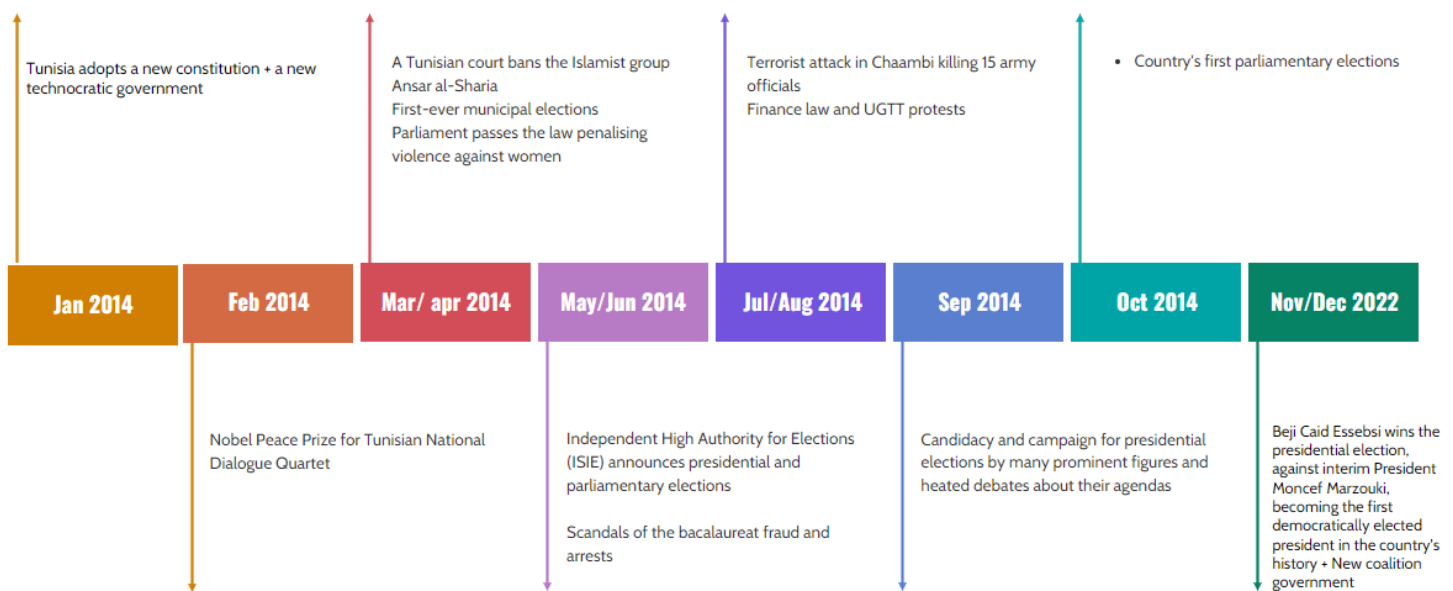
<sup>134</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR Global Report 2011, Tunisia, June 2012, available at: <https://shorturl.at/z1MpG> (accessed 13/08/2023)

<sup>135</sup> It is noteworthy that the exodus metaphor is used by humanitarian and UN agencies, apart from the Tunisian media.

<sup>136</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/libraries/pdf.js/web/viewer.html?file=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.unhcr.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Flegacy-pdf%2F4e0201a09.pdf> (accessed 13/08/2023)

their mattresses and blankets, and we saw men distributing medicines to the needy, and women cooking couscous in giant pots, so that everyone in need in the streets can have some. We saw hotels distributing sandwiches and keeping their doors wide open for refugees. Such an eloquent lesson of solidarity”.<sup>137</sup>

Thus, the change in perception and treatment of sub-Saharanans from 2014 on begs the question. As already established in the previous sections, the year 2014 marked a significant political shift in the country’s history. Hence, what was perceived as minor and secondary issues, like migration, was downgraded and muzzled. Most news of 2014 focused on the political and economic issues and debates. “But the present efforts to fight racial discrimination are often sidelined by issues that are seen as more pressing. When we talk about the racial discrimination we face in our everyday lives, people tell us ‘You want to divide Tunisia,’ as if we were making things up,” said Toure Blamassi, president of AESAT<sup>138</sup>. His view summarises the issue of the media foregrounding/ backgrounding of the sub-Saharanans migration issue as per time and salience.



**Figure 12: Timeline of the significant political events in 2014 Tunisia**

The more serious outlets, publishing opinion articles rather than breaking news and sensational pieces, such as Tunis *Webdo* situated the “relegated” issue of sub-Saharanans within the broader and more complex issue of anti-black racism in Tunisia with an emphasis on the situation of Tunisian blacks. In

<sup>137</sup> Testimony quoted in Mokhtar Khalfaoui’s article in *Al-Chourouk*, 05/06/2011.

<sup>138</sup> “The Denial of Racism: activists call for action on Tunisia's unspoken problem”, *Tunisia Live*, English, 2016 sub-corpus.

March 2014, the newspaper published a piece about a teacher to be prosecuted for a racist comment she made about her pupil, describing her as 'slave', to dwell on the issue of racism in Tunisia. The same piece concluded that this anti-black racism had also targeted sub-Saharanans: "Africans who stay with as part of their university studies or on a work mission are *victims*". This article, along with *Nawaat's* "Tunisia: Denial or trivialization of racism?" (French) expanded on the racist vocabulary used for blacks, Tunisian or sub-Saharanans, resorted to expert interviews, and called for an anti-racism legal framework. Within this same vein, some articles like "Moncef Marzouki's ode to Africa" (*Tunisie Numérique*, French) and "Marzouki: Tunisians are ignorant for not realising they belong to Africa" (*Business News*, French), tackles Marzouki's controversial statement about Tunisians' racism and ignorance. Some argue it is part of his campaign for presidency elections, where he poses his claims to this position on his stance as human rights' activist. In "The Ferryman of Souls", an investigative piece, *Inkyfada* (French) interviews Father Jonathan who speaks about "victims of threats and ill-treatment...these migrants find themselves confined in difficult conditions". The tensions...with the local population and the Tunisian authorities will give rise to clashes and deaths. The frame of "sub-Saharanans as victims" is activated from 2014 on. The victim frame is based on the postulate that sub-Saharan migrants are "wretched victims" who are incapable of altering their situation. Thus, they are marginal, inferior, and incapacitated.

The dominance of the victim-frame in Tunisian media representation of sub-Saharanans migrants serves several purposes. First, victimhood solicits an empathetic response and stresses the need for help. Second, a reiterative use of this frame, coupled with topoi of numbers and burden, exonerates the state from any responsibility towards these "victims" because their victimhood depends on their agency and weighs on the state and citizens. Thus, third, the 'powerless victim' frame aims at positively representing Tunisian authorities and citizens as the charitable souls willing to save these 'victims'. Van Dijk (1991) referred to the 'pro prototypical attitude' which depicts refugees as victims only to portray the white dominant group as the benevolent saviour.

Previous research, using DHA, has proven that migrants are usually framed negatively or positively as victims versus perpetrators or witnesses versus observers (Schiffrin, 2001). Our analysis findings are oddly different from previous research because of the overlapping framing of sub-Saharan migrants as both victims and perpetrators. Rather than being 'agentless' victims, they are masters of their destiny as they write their own story. In fact, they are victims of the host country's unfair policies or xenophobic society, but also victims of their *own* choice and trajectories. This stance is reflected in the



intensification of news and stories about sub-Saharanans' deaths at sea, as well as the extensive use of topos of burdening, numbers, and urgency. In covering the death and loss of sub-Saharanans in *harga* to Europe, "the deadliest destination"<sup>139</sup> media discourse draws an image of sub-Saharanans as uncontrollable disastrous happenings. That explains the recurrent use of topos of danger like "disaster" or "marine catastrophe" or "marine disasters" or "tragic/tragedy". In the 2016 and 2017 sub-corpora, the news about "tragic pictures of a ship sinking while carrying more than 300 illegal immigrants in the Mediterranean" (Tunisian Media Network blog), "Illegal immigration... a renewed cold holocaust: death boats crossing the Mediterranean" (Le Maghreb newspaper), and "The tragic attack on Congolese students" (*Réalités*).

In one of *Mosaique Fm*'s stories in 2017, "Marzoug, a citizen who dignifies the drowned people of Zarzis", Chamseddine Marzoug, a native citizen of Zarzis, ex-fisherman and volunteer of the Red Crescent is portrayed as a "saviour" who volunteers to bury the bodies of migrants found on the coasts of the city. The rhetoric of tragedy is used, along with the victim frame, in "touched by this daily tragedy, Chamseddine Marzoug ... unfortunate migrants who perished at sea before achieving their European dream". The underlying myth of the wretched who die in quest of security and prosperity is a leitmotif in almost all pieces about the "tragic" sinking incidents. The mythopoesis strategy is further dramatized by the ascribed double-victimhood of those sub-Saharan Africans "who have been raped, tortured and mistreated by militias in Libya". The article finishes by asserting that the wretched of the earth "deserve a modicum of dignity, even after their death". Along with the illustrative photo used (a photo of a cemetery with numerous white tombs) mythopoesis of the white benevolent saviour is further entrenched against a myth of a "black victim" who is a victim of his own circumstances and choices.

The year 2018 is a marking one in terms of sinking boat accidents. On June 2, in the late evening, a boat carrying "dozens of illegal migrants" sank off the coast of Kerkennah. the "clandestine" boat was carrying 180 migrants, 80 sub-Saharanans inter alia<sup>140</sup>. In a press release, the UGTT described the sinking as a recurrent "humanitarian disaster... sponsored by lobbies and networks at both regional and international levels" blaming the government for its "spectator" stance and incapability to stop this "human haemorrhage" and "tragedies of desperate youth"<sup>141</sup>. The coverage of the shipwreck was loaded

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<sup>139</sup> "[F]or 'regularised migrants' Europe remains the deadliest destination in the world. In 2015, over one million people reached Europe by sea, while an estimated 3784 people died", in Leurs, K., Prabhakar, M. (2018).

<sup>140</sup> *Webdo* 2018, sub-corpus.

<sup>141</sup> *Gnet* website, 2018 sub-corpus.

with rhetoric of tragedy: “Kerkennah tragedy”, “burial of 20 bodies of Africans, whose identities remain unknown” “Drama of Kerkennah”, “the death toll increases”, “71 drowned dead”<sup>142</sup>. This discursive strategy of *intensification* reflected in word choice pertaining to the ‘catastrophe’ semantic field and the hyperbolic language, coupled with a rhetoric of danger, invokes the burdens of the state not only in preventing these catastrophic happenings, which are out of control, but also in managing the death tolls and human losses. The use of the victim-frame is therefore justified by an inclination to absolve Tunisia from liability towards sub-Saharanans since their victimhood is caused by their choices and external circumstances and since it had been weighing on the state and citizens. In other research about the representations of migrants, especially in the Global North, the same argument is used with a little twist: the argument is these are “victims” but they are a burden to our welfare system<sup>143</sup>.

The topos of burden is particularly used in coverage of operations thwarting ‘harga’ through the rhetoric of disaster combined with a legal/humanitarian discourse. The media coverage of such incidents usually includes reference to humanitarian operations deployed to search for the dead. Red Crescent efforts often include many days of patrols searching the shores and sea, and incessant efforts to bury the dead, which often turn to an impossible mission due to the “burden” of finding an appropriate cemetery for these “wretched”, “unidentifiable” almost non-human “others”, who do not belong to this land.

In 2018, the bulk of the media corpus fixates on the Kerkennah disaster as 14 articles expand on the incident, the discovery, the burial, the investigation and the arrests. The whole event was dramatized as a sensational series, including Tunisian heroes and Sub-Saharan victims. The leitmotif of burden is hidden behind empathy toward “survivors” who are Tunisian (from Gabes, Medenine, Mahdia, Kairouan, Tunis, Hamma, Kasserine, Tataouine) and the other African 4 migrants (no clues about their nationality)<sup>144</sup>. The first piece quotes the statement of the Director-General of the University Hospital Habib Bourguiba of Sfax, Monther Elaabed (medical/ humanitarian perspective). Then, the source of the next article<sup>145</sup> is the National Defence report stating that the authorities recovered “46 bodies” and rescued “dozens” of “illegal migrants”, including 80 sub-Saharanans. The lexicon of ‘load’ and ‘strain’ is stressed

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<sup>142</sup> *Webdo*, 2018 sub-corpus.

<sup>143</sup> For a more thorough idea on such studies, cf. Danaj, Sonila & Wagner, Ines. (2021) and Eberl, J. M., Meltzer, C. E., Heidenreich, T., Herrero, B., Theorin, N., Lind, F., ... & Strömbäck, J. (2018).

<sup>144</sup> *Diwan Fm*, Arabic, 2018 sub-corpus.

<sup>145</sup> *Webdo*, French, 2/6/2018.

in the lengthy account of the rescue and search operations which were carried out throughout the weekend, with “a military plane”.

The successive articles tackling the Kerkennah disaster can also be inscribed in the same trend of burden topos. The use of emotionally charged and evocative words like “distress call” and “scene of the tragedy”<sup>146</sup> uncover a latent sense of urgency. The shipwreck is depicted as a problem wherein certain actors are burdens, and others are victims—yet also responsible. Sub-Saharanans are therefore presented as both victimised and blamed—although the blame is sometimes shifted or juggled between the ‘masses’ of sub-Saharanans and the “smugglers” and “trafficking networks”<sup>147</sup>. The political burden of “clandestine” boats was elaborated in many articles about the Prime Minister, Youssef Chahed, visiting the Kerkennah Island and threatening to “toughen the laws” against “smugglers and migrants”. It is noteworthy that following investigation in the Kerkennah disaster, described as the most “tragic ever recorded since 2011”<sup>148</sup>, the ministry of Interior dismissed ten top-ranking security officials including the District Chief of Kerkennah, Chief of Sfax regional special services, Chiefs of the judiciary police of Kerkennah and Sfax, etc. Only a day afterwards, the Minister of Interior was dismissed by Chahed. The political ramifications of the Kerkennah shipwreck were unprecedented. Moreover, against a backdrop of economic challenges and a lack of financial sustainability, the political and humanitarian repercussions of these disasters further stressed the burden of “illegal” sub-Saharanans.

The topos of numbers in the coverage of the abovementioned shipwreck is also conspicuous. In overlapping and extensive numerical information was presented in all the pertaining pieces: “retrieve 15 new bodies”, “48 dead”, “received 48 remains of the victims”, “14 Africans (8 men and 6 women)”, “46 bodies”, “68 people saved”, “provisional assessment”, “48 bodies”, “undetermined number of missing persons perished”.<sup>149</sup> Much previous research has established that resistance to immigrants was linked to perceptions of migrants’ numbers and feelings of general social unrest (Freeman, Hansen and Leal, 2013, pp. 25 & 64). The same numbers’ trend is adopted in the similar subsequent events to solidify the frame of sub-Saharanans as victims-numbers. This representation of sub-Saharanans migrants as victims-numbers oversimplifies and stereotypes such a complex social issue by reducing the experiences of sub-Saharanans

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<sup>146</sup> *L'économiste Maghrébin*, French, 3/6/2018.

<sup>147</sup> *Webdo*, French, 6/6/2018.

<sup>148</sup> *Leaders*, French, 5/6/2018.

<sup>149</sup> Media coverage of the Kerkennah incident, 2018 sub-corpus.

to victimhood and numbers. DHA emphasises the role of power in discourse, and the use of the victims-numbers frame serves to position immigrants as subjects of external forces such as policies victimising them, thereby potentially obscuring underlying structural issues, and power dynamics.

In 2019, two other “tragic happenings” hit: the Sfax and the Zarzis disasters. First, on 9 May 2019, a “clandestine” boat washed off the coasts of Sfax near the Ashtart oil field, and 70 sub-Saharan migrants perished whereas only 16 were saved by “a Tunisian fishing boat”<sup>150</sup>. What is striking is the personification of the boat in many pieces covering the incident as a “clandestine” and an “immigrant” boat, a predication strategy aiming at the crimmigration of the very simple tools used for migration. The image of the boat being “criminal” and “illegal” is taking the idea of legalisation to extreme and further established the representational category of burden: people and boats are both burdens to “us”.

The authority topos is used extensively to reinforce the mythopoeia of the Tunisian saviour and the sub-Saharan wretched. In the pieces published after the incident, authorities like ‘Ministry of National Defence’, ‘national navy’, ‘unit of the national navy’ dispatched, ‘military ship’, and the ‘official spokesman of the Sfax Courts’, ‘Deputy General Prosecutor of the Court of Appeal’, as well as ‘the judge Mourad Tourki’<sup>151</sup> were quoted. As previously established, the authority topos, especially when coupled with the use of proper names of public figures, is used for legitimation of consequent measure; here appeal to authority serves to construct the mythopoeia of the white Tunisian saviour (authorities, state, and citizens) of the black wretched immigrant.

The victim-and-saviour dichotomy consists in the portrayal of sub-Saharan migrants (notably the dead ones) as victims and of state agencies, citizens and civil society as saviour. This asserts that the victim frame is a common finding in media research about migration. Indeed, the findings show that the journalists’ emphasis on such victimhood is dependent on two main factors: the access they have to the victimised group and the political preferences of their media audiences. Another commonality in studies about media representations of migrants is the “Good Guys vs. Bad Guys frame with one group of

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<sup>150</sup> The first source reporting the news was the Tunis Afrique Presse on the same day, then the news was diffused through the Facebook page JS, Journalistesfaxien (<https://www.facebook.com/journalistesfaxien>) presenting themselves as an electronic newspaper issued by the Sfax Journalism Company. This page is a very active one with regard to sub-Saharan-related stories. It is worth noting that Sfax is a hotspot for sub-Saharan migrants as they choose this city to live for its proximity to exit ports and for the commodity because of pre-existence of sub-Saharan tradition therein.

<sup>151</sup> *Webdo, Radio Nationale, Mosaique Fm, and African Manager*, 2018 sub-corpus.

participants being given favourable treatment over the other” (Huckin, 1997, p. 82). However, who is the good and who is the bad in these stories? The good is obviously the white Tunisian who is striving to patch the gaps and cater for the needs of the dead “victims” despite the limited resources. The bad is the West for his border externalisation measures, visa failures, etc, but also the sub-Saharan who embarks on perilous journeys and ends up dead and burdensome in Tunisia<sup>152</sup>.

Some rhetorical choices are worth analysing when it comes to the burden topos. In the pieces about the Sfax shipwreck, the detailed description of the search operations and the forensics, reinforce the saviour myth as well as legitimate the death/ disappearance and probably future tightened measures against “these victims”. Accounts of how the naval army teams retrieved three bodies of the missing, then two were directed to the forensic medicine department of the Habib Bourguiba University Hospital, then one corpse was directed to the Zarzis Hospital, how the sixteen survivors were sheltered in the Zarzis centre, how the search process took more than three days, all convince the average Tunisian reader that the state is trying its best and that these victims are a very unsuitable burden, and in a way, danger, to the Tunisian social peace. Some pieces even touch upon the intricate and lengthy body search and “the pace of the recovery process”, “48 hours after”, and how easier it would be in “in the coming days when [the bodies] swell and float on the surface of the water,”<sup>153</sup>. The discourse is strikingly dehumanising as the efforts invested do not seek to ‘save’ the living but to ‘retrieve’ the dead; it is almost as if they wanted them to be all dead and easily ‘retrievable’ to be buried and to end the mission ‘successfully’. The numbers topos is also present in a more conspicuous manner: the readers are bombarded by numbers in every news segment written about this shipwreck. The search operations yielded “16 survivors”, “70 migrants drowned”,

In a nutshell, the nine articles covering the Sfax shipwreck use multiple discursive strategies building on the same frames of victims-numbers-burden. The peculiar predication strategy used for “the boat”, protagonist of the incident, serves to construct illegality and risk. The term “clandestine” is anchored in the social imaginary as associated with secrecy and illegality; thus, it frames the act of

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<sup>152</sup> This is not completely flawed or fallacious, as at the roots, African (im)migration patterns are an indirect result of the Western past colonisation of the African states and the present economic, political and military interference in almost all the African countries.

<sup>153</sup> The head of the forensic medicine department at the University Hospital Habib Bourguiba in Sfax. Dr Samir Maatouk, to the correspondent of TAP, quoted in *National Radio News* on 12/5/2019.

migration as stealthy and unauthorised, or even unlawful. This framing fosters the idea that migrants had been engaging in hazardous and potentially deadly activities, hence the perception of migrants as issues to be addressed. The combination of topos of authority, numbers and burden dehumanises the sub-Saharan migrants and reduces them to accidents of secretive activities. Although it is a magnet for public empathy, victimhood becomes a daily tedious mishap and no longer entices the audience—when it is repetitive. Worse, it can produce the counter-effect: having enough of these stories, and wanting different sensational ones, even if it meant pieces about arrests, deportation, and deterrence.

The second 2019 catastrophe was covered using exactly the same mechanisms. On July 4, 2019, off the shore of the serene city of Zarzis, a boat with almost 90 sub-Saharan migrants sank. Using mythopoesis, the *harga* fiasco was reported extensively, yet again, to rebuild a mythopoeia of a heroic state saving the wretched from their self-inflicted destiny. Media discourse on this incident framed “clandestine” migrants as a burden to the central and regional governments. In the articles covering the incident, the topos of burden is employed through the reiterative, chronological, and detailed account of such a disaster from recovery, to transfer to hospital, autopsy, identification/failure of identification, repatriation or return to Zarzis, and burial. In many pieces, for instance the *Babnet* coverage, the use of time references 37 times intensifies the image of this energy-consuming burden. The detailed description of the burial operations is another way to invoke the burdening effect of “the wretched” other. The article mentions many state agencies and stakeholders, like the national guard, Red Crescent, forensic medicine, municipality, governorate, etc., to depict the burden of “illegal” sub-Saharan migration. These “dead secret immigrants”, to quote the Head of the Municipal Council of Zarzis, constitute a “crisis”:

“[...] dealing with the *crisis* of the dead *secret* immigrants was *not an easy* task ...accomplished at the *expense of our daily work...*, *incurred the hardships* of this task years ago, which is *frustrating* and *psychologically challenging*...due to the *horror* of the scenes... However, we will continue to deal with the file of the *dead immigrants*, with our *own* resources, *tirelessly*”<sup>154</sup>. (Translation and emphasis mine)

The pseudo-humanitarian and dehumanising discourse adopted by the Tunisian officials further enhances the chasm between Us/Them, and “others” the sub-Saharans. Mythopoesis is deployed to portray Tunisians as heroes who strive to bury these other “Africans” who are liable for their own death. Attributes such as “clandestine” and “illegal” divulge the media’s stance from these “others” as they are depicted as

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<sup>154</sup> *Babnet*, “The mayor of Zarzis uncovers the clandestine immigrants’ file and calls for not tampering with it”, July 2019.

culprits and perpetrators of “*harga*” crimes, even if they are themselves victims of this inevitable migratory route.

The referential strategy is peculiar as there is an emphasis on death: “dead secret immigrants” and “dead immigrants” as a particularly burdensome issue. The social context confirms this stance from death-burden. In fact, following the multiple tragedies of sub-Saharanans’ sinking while attempting to leave Tunisia, the question of “burial” invoked a heated debate over where and how to bury such “large numbers” of corpses. The historical roots of this debate lie within the taboo story of black Tunisians. In the corpus itself, the article “Racism remains embedded in the social fabric” expands on the racism against the black Tunisian population who is suffering from segregation so much so that in some places like the village of El Mdou, located at eight kilometres from Gabes, the black dead are buried in a separate cemetery<sup>155</sup>. Against this background of segregation and discrimination against some Tunisian blacks in the more conservative and interior regions of the country, the sub-Saharanans could be said to face the same treatment.

Tunisians have very complicated obituary rituals and very strict rules in cemeteries. In some places, there is what we call “*ḥawza*”, i.e., a family plot. These are designated areas of land where individuals of the same, usually prominent family can be buried. Till now, in some places, it is impossible to accommodate any person who does not have the family name in the reserved plot. No wonder that following the Zarzis ordeal, much news about the burial were published. The cause is, however, odd, and it further confirms the interpretation of the Tunisian media representation of sub-Saharanans as “wretched others”. Indeed, in “Gabes municipalities refuse to bury the bodies of African immigrants!”, the writer, appalled, reports how the municipalities of Dekheila-Toujan and Gabes refused to bury the “dozens of bodies of African victims” in its Muslim cemeteries. This decision was announced following “consult[ation] with the citizens”.

No reasons were provided, and all sorts of arguments were advanced to defy Tunisian and international agreements. Eventually, they resorted to the most powerful and populist, yet ambiguous,

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<sup>155</sup> Turess, opinion article by Brahim Oueslati. For a more comprehensive understanding of the overlappings between anti-black racism and mortuary rituals, please consult “Racisme: les Tunisiens noirs, descendants d’esclaves, espèrent plus d’égalité”, Mohamed Berkani: [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/societe-africaine/racisme-les-tunisiens-noirs-descendants-desclaves-esperent-plus-d-egalite\\_3053791.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/societe-africaine/racisme-les-tunisiens-noirs-descendants-desclaves-esperent-plus-d-egalite_3053791.html) (accessed 18/8/2023)

argument: religion. It is said that the conservative citizens of the South were scandalised by the way sub-Saharan migrants were previously buried and how their graves were marked by crosses, and not built like theirs. As a result of the controversy and time constraints, the corpses being kept in the morgue of the Sfax and Gabes hospitals whose capacity is not high, the sub-Saharans' bodies were all buried in a mass grave in Zarzis on July 13. On July 14, almost ten days after the shipwreck, the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) decried the national and regional authorities' reluctance to collect and record the information of deceased immigrants<sup>156</sup>. In this article, the criticism of the dehumanising discourse was carried out through the dramatization of the burial process whereof the bodies were transported in "trucks intended mainly for the transport of waste" because of the municipalities declining "their moral and human responsibility". The articles about the Zarzis tragedy were still published two weeks after the incident, yet the pace became slower as the death toll was decreasing and did not look sensational or newsworthy. For instance, the news of 15 July reported the retrieval of two new bodies without any further details.

The treatment of the "wretched other" as a burden, is added to a manifest use of numbers topos, thus reducing sub-Saharans to numbers weighing on the state and society. Tunisian media bombard their readers with numbers, "61 bodies", "86 migrants", "45 bodies", "burying 74 corpses"; 39 "9 drowned Africans", "86 corpses", "74 of the bodies", 40 etc. There is a quasi-systematic recourse to numbers in news about sub-Saharans' loss, deaths, or arrests. Even as victims, the "wretched others" are put to trial for being "clandestine" and attempting to "illegally" leave the very country which stigmatises them. Tunisia, in this media rhetoric, is a trap where sub-Saharans are double-jeopardised. These "Africans" are prosecuted, even figuratively, for irregular entry, but once they decide to leave and free themselves from this "irregularity", they are prosecuted again, dead, or alive.

### 3. Conclusions

In this chapter, the media representations of sub-Saharans in Tunisia, from 2012 to 2020 are analysed through the lens of the DHA and SI. The objective is to explore the "how" and the "why" of the major representation frames of sub-Saharans in Tunisian media. Certain portrayals beg the question of the motives for media actors' silencing and othering discourse of sub-Saharans, in the light of the political

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<sup>156</sup> *Webdo*, French, 15/7/2019.



agenda and policy shifts in Tunisia. Findings show that the dynamics of representation in the Tunisian mediascape can be explained in light of the fluctuating domestic socio-political and legal context.

It is noteworthy that the findings of this chapter, which is centred on South-South migration dynamics, are consistent with the literature on media representations of migrants and refugees in the Global North. Hence, migrant social reception in the Global South does not seem to diverge from that in the North where antagonism, fear, and difference predominantly govern the discourse on migrants. However, the terminological inaccuracies, the overlapping use of “illegal”, “irregular”, and “clandestine” is telling of an incongruous understanding of the sub-Saharan migratory phenomenon in Tunisia.

We are observing a trend where normal, everyday talk (discourse) is increasingly reflecting divide and fear. People are drawing strong lines between “us” and “them” based on culture, religion, or values. This “othering” happens even when the threats are exaggerated or invented (real and imaginary). Politicians and media outlets are using this cultural fearmongering to their advantage, making it seem impossible to ever truly accept different cultures and viewpoints. As Rheindorf & Wodak (2020) argue, language itself is being used as a tool to control (im)migration, often by stroking cultural anxieties and fears, othering and dichotomies.

Finally, the findings of the present chapter call for a study of the media discourse with regard to sub-Saharanans, especially in the light of the new Organic Law No. 2018-50, dated October 23, 2018, eliminating all forms of racial discrimination (chapter 6). Indeed, Article 3 of the abovementioned law clearly mandates the state to establish policies and strategies to prevent racial discrimination and fight racist stereotypes, notably in education and media, *inter alia*. It may account for the heated national and international debates about the sub-Saharanans’ status in Tunisia in the year 2023 (time of this dissertation write-up), almost a decade after their ‘mass’ arrival. The question of whether they are transit or permanent migrants came to the forefront. As hundreds of sub-Saharanans take the risky Mediterranean route to Sicily, politicians and activists are striving to understand if this is their original plan or a back-up plan after the late events in Sfax and the Sahara. The next step may help formulate an answer to this tricky query.

On the other hand, the 910-piece media corpus predominantly portrays migrants as either criminals or victims, including a few “discrepant” media pieces that present migrants in a positive, humanising and individual way. On the other hand, alternative media outlets, mostly founded after the revolution like *Nawaat*, engaged in what can even be called advocacy for sub-Saharanans. The use of positive adjectives,

active predication, and inclusive language that present migrants as capable individuals contributing to society also shows in some pieces especially in the 2017, 2018 and 2019 sub-corpora.

Contrasted to the negative pieces that stereotype migrants, the linguistic strategies used by the “discrepant” positive pieces adopt narratives which focus on sub-Saharanans’ personal stories and achievements to challenge or subvert the criminal/victim frames. These few pieces, which are less significant ‘quantitatively’, should be scrutinised to understand the agenda behind their non-alignment with the mainstream representations. For this purpose, the counter-representations shall be analysed to see how their story is constructed to evoke empathy and understanding. The media outlets shall be examined for the authors' backgrounds, motivations, and perspectives. These advocates for migrant rights are engaged journalists, migration experts or individuals with human rights’ background.

These pieces can be inscribed within the counter-narratives as they are out of tune with the overall media corpus and challenge the prevailing representations. The result is a disruption of the dominant discourse and an impact on certain audiences, who are deemed to be the ‘elite’ since they have access to political circles and policymakers. The established counter-narratives seem to target certain audiences and specific demographic readership. This begs the question of the relation between these pieces, whose pace seems to be intense in certain historical phases, and the few policy shifts which have direct impact on the sub-Saharanans’ life in Tunisia (like the anti-racism law). Some of these pieces seem to strive to simply raise awareness and provide a more balanced perspective.

Some anomalies in the corpus require further investigation into the counter-representations as well as the socio-legal ramifications of these clashing (self/counter)representations and can help researchers and policymakers acquire knowledge about the media/law system dynamics in Tunisia. Thus, the context in which these out-of-tune pieces were published is crucial to the overall understanding of the diachronic evolution of the media discourse on migration and sub-Saharanans. The events, policy changes, and social movements underlying these pieces could have influenced the different framing of migrants. A comparative analysis will be carried out to compare and contrast the contents, discursive strategies, tones, and style in the positive pieces and the negative ones. The differences in language, narrative, and strategies shall help us identify the legal impact and reception, i.e., were they received by the readers and public positively, neutrally or negatively? Were they adopted and shared? Did these pieces spark reactions or debates? Through investigation of their impact, we can gain insights into the potential effectiveness of countering stereotypes and long-term change (or vice versa). In brief, the next chapter will provide

material to assess whether these discrepant pieces have the potential to shift power dynamics and public perception, as well as influence policy discussions, or even challenge systemic biases (in the last chapter).

## V- Chapter Five: Discourse within Discourse: Counter-Representations of Belonging, Humanisation, and Individualisation

### 1. Introduction

The previously scrutinised media corpus showed a predominantly negative representation frames of sub-Saharan migrants as either a deviant or victim *otherness*. On the one hand, they are silenced and annihilated in media pieces where they could have been attributed voice to comment or even testify on events concerning them, like “irregular” migration shipwrecks. On the other hand, the media representations further alienate them by perspectivizing them as deviant and wicked or victims and inhuman in terms of numbers. However, within this prejudiced and agenda-driven atmosphere, a few media pieces stand out in the sub-corpora. Indeed, some ‘discrepant’ media pieces portray migrants in positive, humanising and individualistic ways.

CDA’s active concern with the correlations between discourse and power stems from a desire to elucidate the obfuscated occurrences of racial discrimination or xenophobia. As Wodak puts it, CDA aims “to demystify discourses by deciphering ideologies” (2001, p. 10). DHA, which draws insights from social theories, contests that dominant discourses are often the only object of investigation. Hence, more recently, Discourse-Historical analysts are adopting other sources of input from interviews, surveys, testimonies, etc. DHA understands discourse as a discursive social practice and the significance of history for the *discursive acts*<sup>157</sup> lies in incorporating all historical elements available as well as primary and secondary sources with which “discursive ‘events’ are embedded” and “explor[ing] the ways in which particular types and genres of discourse are subject to diachronic change” (Wodak, 1999, p. 154). The premises of working out an approach combining all these dynamics: discourse, history, and change, were not thoroughly or extensively investigated, notably in dealing with South-South migration discourse.

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<sup>157</sup> The concept of *discursive acts* builds on philosopher J.L. Austin’s *speech acts* (1962) which attribute an illocutionary force to utterances. Then, the theory was developed by J.R. Searle who devised a system of speech act categorization. The concept finds echoes in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “language-games” which are modes of performative discourse where actions are defined by practice and use. Accordingly, in DHA, discursive acts are the performative aspects of discourse or language as action(s).

## 2. Counter-Discourse and Resistance from Within

### 2.1 Definition and Motive

The present research, notably this chapter, advances a more dynamic and fresh perspective contrasting the main dominant narrative to the less representative discourse of independent and alternative Tunisian media. The conflictual discourse is put to test and examination to show the clash in language, discursive strategies and therefore representations. Instead of one dominant monologue, we may investigate the dialogue where the representations of sub-Saharanans are discursively constructed and negotiated by the interactants: the mainstream media and the ‘rebellious’ independent alternative outlets (some are mainstream but turned pro-sub-Saharanans for specific reasons as is explained in the last analytical chapter); the average indoctrinated citizens and the elitist human rights’ defenders; the nationals and the (trans)migrants, etc.

The importance of the discourse investigated in this chapter springs from its context and potential juridical-political impacts. What some media, journalists, activists involved in the corpus, object of this chapter, attempted to accomplish through the counter-discourse they adopted is challenge the asymmetrical representational map, influence their audience’s understanding of migration and perception of sub-Saharanans with a view construing a reality which they fantasise about and conjure up: a land of freedom and equality for all. The issue of sub-Saharanans’ representations, between the dominant discourse and counter-discourse, can (and should) be reconstructed as a dialogue, a *plurilogue*<sup>158</sup> or a debate wherein the interactants in the debate are antipathetic, empathetic, or even apathetic. The studied representations will therefore be varied depending on the speaker, the audience, and the context. Discourse choices which are ‘hostile’ to sub-Saharanans are not negative per se or always racist since they may reflect a nationalist ideology or a contextual concern. It is this context that causes conflict between social groups.

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<sup>158</sup> The term “*plurilogue*” is used to imply “that there are more than two voices and perspectives simultaneously that are equally legitimate” (Behr & Shani, 2022). Rather than a monologue of one voice, annihilating or othering sub-Saharanans, or a dialogue between this dominant voice and the analyst focusing only on this voice, *plurilogue* stems from a desire to include all the possible perspectives and voices, to the extent possible.

<https://www.e-ir.info/2022/01/05/rethinking-critical-ir-towards-a-plurilogue-of-cosmologies/#:~:text=Plurilogue%20implies%20that%20there%20are,without%20further%20specification%20or%20definition.> (accessed on 22/8/2023)

Critical Discourse Analysis is commonly employed as a method to examine media material from the dominant media outlets. The analysed discourse veers towards the monologue and the analysis successfully illuminates the latent power dynamics behind such a discourse. The studied media discourse is therefore enthymematic, and it is up to the discourse analyst to fill in the blanks with the missing statements. If the media outlets keep referring to sub-Saharanans as “Africans”, “illegal”, “undocumented”, then the underlying statement is “sub-Saharanans do not belong here; they are the others/ outgroup”. Another enthymeme addressed in the previous chapter is, for example, the argument of sub-Saharanans as victims/wretched. The missing statement inferred is “sub-Saharanans are a burden to the state”. The study of predominant representational categories, other deviants/ other victims, of sub-Saharanans in post-2011 Tunisian media is very fruitful in divulging the latent opinions about sub-Saharan migration and other attitudes like racism and Afrophobia.

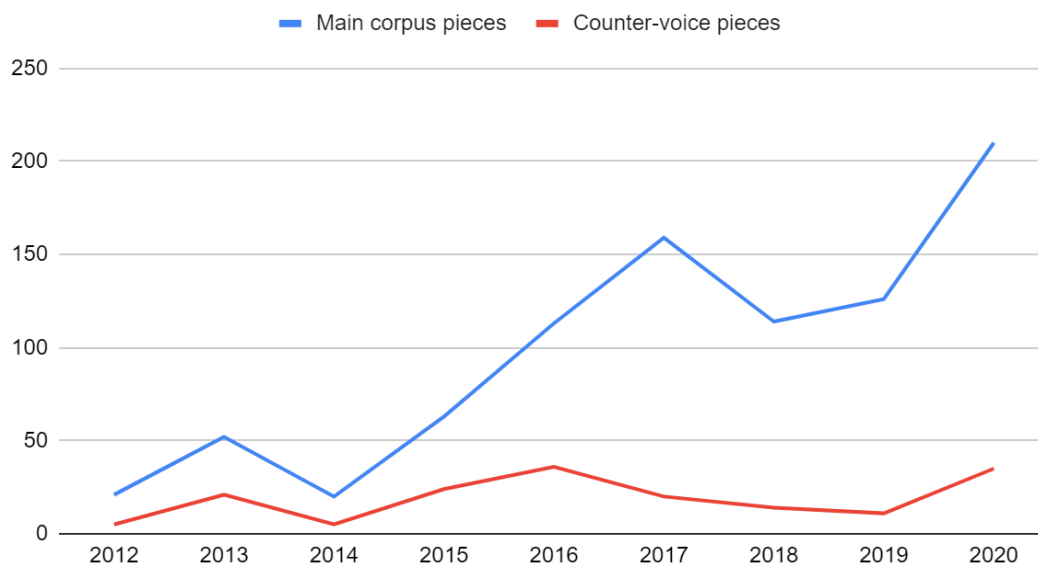
Nevertheless, the counter-discourse of resistance, laying at times beneath or amongst this traditional media discourse is neglected. The statistical imbalance may account for the choice of the most indicative representations. In our case, most pieces *do* “other”, “criminalise” and “victimise” sub-Saharanans, yet undertaking a more balanced insight into the systematically collected corpus may offer a more comprehensive understanding of the media representations of sub-Saharanans in the light of the DHA diachronic analysis. Subsequent to the investigation of the salient patterns in the corpus, this research proposes to examine the quantitatively less important sub-corpus of “positive” media pieces representing sub-Saharanans as ingroup rather than outgroup, giving them voice to represent themselves, and engaging in an advocacy to defend their rights.

Mainstream media, like the official radios and state-run newspapers, present themselves as mouthpieces of both the state and the common Tunisian citizen. Their discourse proved to aim at convincing the audience that their propositions about sub-Saharan migrants are common sense. Yet, what about the other side? What about the ‘young’ media outlets who adopt an alternative view? Shall we neglect them because statistics undermined them? What can we produce by analysing the counter-discourse fostered by these few sources? Can we claim they actively contest the dominant views on sub-Saharanans? Most importantly, can we prove their impact in politics and their role in significant policy shifts?

## 2.2 Description of the Sub-Corpus

In order to investigate the counter-voices within the primary corpus, all 910 pieces were scanned and sifted to collect the ones which have a positive tone, topic, or treatment or in which sub-Saharanans speak for themselves in an active way. The collected corpus comprises 171 media pieces, predominantly in French.

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Total pieces per year</b>	<b>5/21</b>	<b>21/52</b>	<b>5/20</b>	<b>24/63</b>	<b>36/113</b>	<b>20/159</b>	<b>14/114</b>	<b>11/126</b>	<b>35/210</b>



**Figure 13: Evolution of the main corpus versus sub-corpus**

The analysis of the two corpora's evolution is carried out according to three phases: the first encompasses the 2012-2016 period, the second covers 2017-2019, and the third is the year 2020. In the first section of the graph, we can clearly see a positive correlation between the two corpora as they both evolve in the same manner. As from 2017, the two corpora have opposite evolution trajectories, which ends in the end of the year 2019 and leaves room for a synchronic evolution again during 2020. The second period, object of an asynchrony between the main corpus and the sub-corpus is the period which is most characterised by the mediatized assaults on sub-Saharanans as well as 'irregular migration fiascos' and shipwrecks: the 2016 assault on the Congolese students, the 2017 stabbing in Tunis, the murder of Falikou Coulibaly in 2018, and the Kerkennah and Zarzis disasters.

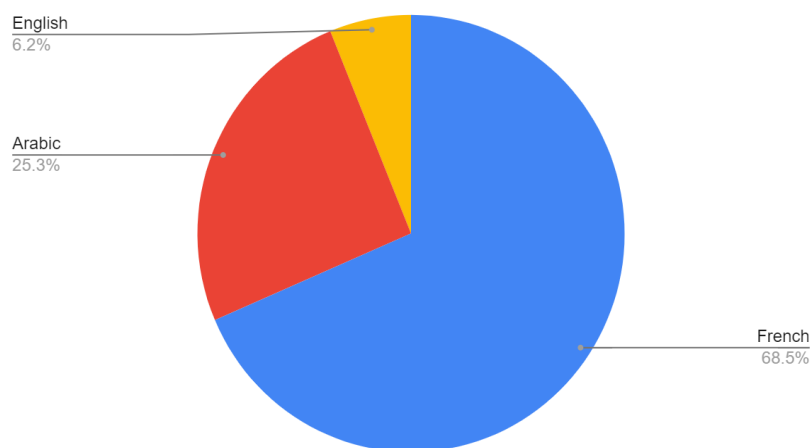
Throughout this second period, the counter-discourse curve seems to lag behind the main discourse curve which is indicative of a negative correlation in the media pieces numbers (our variable here). A lagging counter-discourse curve suggests that when the mainstream media discourse adopts the narrative of the counter-discourse and “defends” sub-Saharan, the stamina of independent/ alternative media sources diminishes and leaves room for the increasing number of pieces produced by official/ traditional media.

Desynchrony between dominant and alternative media curves could suggest differing trends in content creation and distribution. It might indicate that the topic of sub-Saharan migrants presented in mainstream and alternative media are evolving at different rates because of a shift in trends: what used to be trendy and salient was relegated to a second place, by alternative media like *Nawaat*, since the bulk of media outlets are already discussing it. One reason for this ‘truce’ is the debates about and adoption of the anti-racism bill. The issue was not emergent back in 2017, and the stories or narratives which were already discussed in the alternative media finally gained traction in the mainstream media. This lag represents the time it took mainstream media to gain awareness. In 2017, the main corpus was still revolving around ‘irregular’ infiltrations and exit. However, the new elements are articles talking about politicians and parliament members’ debates on racism and the anti-racism bill. Organic Law No. 2018-50 was passed on October 23, 2018, years after it was first appealed for by activists in the media.

### **2.3 Statistical Overview**

The sub-corpus consists of 171 pieces, i.e. 18.8 % of the main corpus. Concerning the languages used, French is the predominant language with 68.5%, then Arabic.





**Figure 14: Language repartition in the counter-discourse corpus**

As already established in the previous chapter, Standard Arabic— *fuṣḥā*— is the official language and the primary language used by the media. Tunisian Arabic, or the dialectal Arabic, in addition to Standard Arabic, is commonly used in daily communication and is often used in media outlets such as television, radio, newspapers, and online platforms. French, on the other hand, is widely used in media and public discourse, especially in print media and higher education. Many media outlets, like radio websites, publish content in both Arabic and French<sup>159</sup> to cater to a bilingual audience, a hybrid identity which has proven to be rich and productive. Wodak et al. (2012), assert that “a continuum of context-dependent multilingual practices [...] characterised by different patterns of language choice” can only be a reflection of “manifest and latent functions” (p. 157).

French is the language of the elite media, and its predominance reveals a specific target audience, an international rather national agenda, a symbolic resistance. Indeed, the target audience of the counter-discourse is not the average Tunisian citizen who might just be looking for daily local and national news, international events, and entertainment content on both the news websites of their FB pages. Rather, French-speaking outlets target the intellectual ‘elite’ under the influence of Western ideologies and a

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<sup>159</sup> In a nutshell, English is the language of an exceptional elite. Only 9 pieces are written in English in this corpus (which is the same number of English pieces in the whole corpus). The appearance of Media ‘pure players’ in English, like *Tunisia Live*, had as an aim to touch upon a readership which is either international or the local audience influenced by the Anglo-Saxon culture.

colonial historical context. According to the report of Laurent Giacobino (2015), in Tunisia a historically Francophone country— news websites in French had been launched in the 2000s to reach a supposedly Francophone digitally literate elite.

Indeed, the significant decline of French use in the education sector and in society resulted in proliferation of information sites in Arabic, whether standard modern or dialectal. Furthermore, the recent linguistic trend is manifested in the common use of *Arabizi*— an informal Arabic transliterated in the Latin alphabet and Arabic numerals, on social media (which we can clearly see in most comments on media pieces). Naturally, French has quickly become rarely used by media outlets because of the new linguistic profile of Tunisians.

Hence, conscious of this linguistic particularity, and in order to reach a wider audience and meet the expectations of a cosmopolitan readership, some Tunisian pure players like *Nawaat* propose articles in Arabic, French or English. According to Rafika Bendermel, two-thirds of the popular sites are in Arabic and a third is in French, yet the little portion of sites in English were beginning to gain ground in post-2011 Tunisia. (Giacobino, 2015).

In addition, many news sites had favoured multilingual strategies to eliminate barriers and democratise the media for all readerships. For example, *Nawaat* mixes French, Arabic and English articles under the same sections, without proposing a translated version for each article per se. Moreover, in 2013, *Mosaique Fm* opted for an editorial line combining French and Arabic according to the preferences noted by each of the audience groups. Thus, cultural, international and unusual events and news are published in French, whereas political news are published in Arabic. French, is therefore, used for specific purposes and with specific readerships to instigate a critical thinking about certain social and political issues and push for action.

“Pure players” are the companies or organisations that operate in the digital realm exclusively; their focus thereof is producing and distributing content through online platforms such as websites and social media. The 2011 ‘revolution’ was the cradle of a real explosion in the sector of pure information players, which have often taken advantage of the inability of traditional media to adapt to the digital innovation in media to draw from the infinite possibilities it offers. Pure players leverage the digital space by exploiting the fast distribution, interactivity, and the wide global audience. Their scope may extend to

a wide range of topics, namely news, investigative journalism, technology, entertainment, etc. These novel entities have emerged as a response to the growth of the internet and the change in consumption patterns and dynamics. In Tunisia, the trend manifests itself in the existence of 180 pure players, including web radios and online magazines like *Web Manager*, *Kapitalis*, and *Nawaat* which has been doing a great work in resisting social misconceptions and political control and pressure.

The most active sources in this sub-corpus are *Web Manager*, *Espace Manager*, *African Manager*, *Kapitalis*, *Webdo*, then *Mosaique* and *Nawaat/ Réalités*. This list sets the tone for the upcoming analysis since at first glance the aforementioned sources are not the most popular in Tunisia. They are rather specialised and peculiar. *Web Manager* Centre presents itself as the first economic information portal in Tunisia, since 2000, under the slogan “Actors of excellence at the service of Tunisia”. This digital outlet is very active, offering economic news and stories in French and Arabic. In the same vein, *African Manager* has the same economic and financial vocation and scope.

*Espace Manager*, *Kapitalis*, and *Webdo* have a more varied scope: political, social and economic, as news and analyses media outlets. As for *Mosaique Fm*, the only radio in the top active sources’ list, it is the first private radio station and attracts the greatest share of listenership, both on the radio and online. Finally, *Nawaat* presents itself as the “pioneer of alternative journalism in Tunisia and the region and provides Tunisia-centred news and analysis” (official website). *Nawaat* has won several journalist awards, the most recent of which are The Digital Power Index (Arab eContent Award, 2012), OpenGovTn Media Award (2012), the Best interactive website award (National Union of Tunisian Journalists, 2015) and the Najiba Hamrouni Maghreb Award for Journalism (2020).

The economic and financial scope of the top active sources reveals a pragmatic understanding of the sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia as it is an opportunity rather than a “threat”. The rhetoric of the conquest of Africa has always been used by Tunisian media and politicians<sup>160</sup>. Amidst all the rhetoric of the ‘other African’, be it deviant or wretched, these outlets were striving to change the picture of sub-Saharanans, give them voice, individualise their stories and defend their rights.

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<sup>160</sup> See <https://www.espacemanager.com/la-tunisie-la-conquete-de-lafrique.html>, and <https://www.espacemanager.com/youssef-chahed-la-conquete-de-lafrique.html>

Other than the formal newspapers, pure players and radios, Facebook is the source of 24 pieces. This comes as no surprise in the aftermath of the 2011 political transition in Tunisia. As stated by Giacobino (2015), Facebook is the most important medium in Tunisia. Making quality information accessible has come to be largely done through social networks. Facebook, notably, was the channel for the 2011 “revolution” debates, campaigns, and videos, and continues to occupy a central place in the Tunisian media scene. It is noteworthy that most official authorities in Tunisia communicate through their official Facebook pages (like the presidency, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defence, etc) or X (ex-twitter) accounts (for example, the Presidency of Government). Accordingly, Facebook is the platform where most interactions happen through posts, comments, and reactions.

### **3. Counter-Representations of Sub-Saharanans: Counter-Frames and Alternative Strategies**

#### **3.1 Belonging and Sameness: “We, Africans!”**

The discourse of the Tunisian media on/ around sub-Saharanans poses various assumptions of black-African ‘alterity’ or ‘otherness’. Othering, which is in phenomenology and psychology another facet of identity formation— self vs other— may veer to an anti-migrant rhetoric. Undergoing a prolonged and successive process of situational (re)defining, threat, burden and othering are co-constructed in discourse, calling into play fears of sub-Saharanans’ demographic ‘invasion’ and economic exhaustion. From a Symbolic Interactionist standpoint, language, being the most important symbolic system, is the mirror of intersubjective interactions with the other, through the socially anchored common sense. In this sense, language is the link between social common sense and institutional behaviour. Berger and Luckmann (1996) advance that reality is socially constructed and for the sustenance of a certain reality, historical development along with a scheme of behaviours and a pattern of actions, have to occur.

A social reality, as per Berger and Luckmann, stems from *habitualization* which is the process of crystallising ideas, habits, and practices, shared by social groups, via historical patterns of behaviours and attitudes. This echoes Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus* which in his own words refers to “a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class” (p. 86). These internalised schemes of perception construe the socially shared worldview and “apperception”. To Mead, a social reality is the collective construction of a set of attitudes and behaviours symbolically internalised, anchored and shared by each member of an ingroup. Once established, this social reality plays the role of moulding social groups and meaning is made

through the collective legitimization shaping symbolic systems. Otherness is closely associated with social change and social reproduction dynamics which are primordial in ensuring social 'survival'. Society, like a living organism, can only survive through social reproduction processes governed by political agendas and modalities.

Social relations between different groups are based on acts and sayings directed towards others who must dialogically receive and respond on account of the symbolically shared meaning. From a linguistic point of view, these shared meanings or social assumptions are the presuppositions. Robert Stalnaker (2002) defines the concept of presuppositions as "what is treated as [...] common knowledge or mutual knowledge" for participants of a linguistic interaction (Stalnaker, 1978, p. 321). Presupposing something is assuming it to be a fact and acting upon it. What is most distinctive about this propositional attitude is that it is a social or public attitude. Stalnaker's stance on presupposition rests upon the general understanding that prior to engaging in any discursive activity, individuals already internalise assumptions about the information and people to be discussed/ represented. These assumptions constitute the shared pool of common beliefs, experiences and meanings, and may lead to the use of discursive strategies such as *collectivization* and *categorisation*. These discursive strategies are evocative of the discursive power of media and media stakeholders.

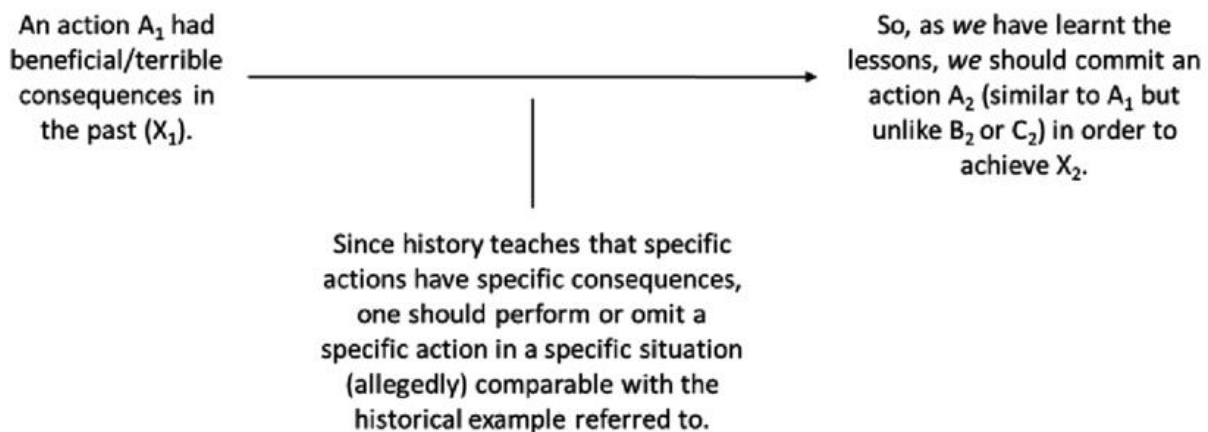
In the counter-discourse, the presupposition seems different. Unlike the clear and tacit labelling of sub-Saharanans as 'others', the labelling strategies herein are varied and rather indicative of belonging and sameness. In the article "Stambeli, a Spiritual Musical Experience of Black Tunisians"<sup>161</sup> the frames activated when referring to sub-Saharanans are those of 'migrant-Muslim', 'former migrant-present black' Tunisians, 'fathers of Tunisian music trends' and precursors of the Sufi tradition of 'stambeli' and 'mouldia'. The article explores sameness in difference based on predication strategies which are positive and connective rather than negative and distancing. Indeed, the predicate "former" is used three times in collocation with 'sub-Saharan slaves' when referring to the ancestors of black Tunisians. Instead of predicating them using the usual "African", the writer reminds the reader that slavery is outdated and anachronistic; it has no place in the present Tunisia. *In lieu* of looking at sub-Saharanans as outsiders and as a threat, the article suggests considering them as cultural mediators between Sub-Saharan African cultures and North African (Tunisian) traditions. Not only has the sub-Saharan heritage brought black and white

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<sup>161</sup> *Tunisia Live*, 01/2012

Tunisians together but also bridged the Muslim-Jewish divide in Tunisia. Oddly, the article draws on the healing effect of Stambeli on Jewish-Tunisian immigrants as performing a dance with the *arīfa*. When asked how he came to embrace the Stambeli – for someone who is not black and claims to be born into an all-white Tunis family – the speaker in the article said smiling “when I was little, I had an illness that my parents did not know an efficient cure for, so they brought me to Sidi Ali Lasmar shrine, and from that day on, I became a part of it. It helped my healing process ever since.”

The use of the topos of history— as part of the argumentation strategies— appeals to the readers’ sense of logic. In elaborating the Discourse Historical Approach, Wodak (2006) argues that all the different types of topoi/ discursive logic are based on the reason-connection-conclusion argumentative scheme. Thus, reference to historical references or narratives aims to (re)construct meaning and legitimate the arguments used to influence public opinion. In this sense, reference to the sub-Saharan heritage in Tunisia is a persuasion strategy as it frames this musical and cultural background positively and perspectivises sub-Saharans as the ‘fathers’, ‘builders’, ‘precursors’ and ‘doers’ rather than ‘receivers’ or passive victims. To Wodak the history argument is as follows: if a historical action is beneficial— i.e., it yielded positive consequences in the past, then we should adopt and adapt the same action in the present to gain the same benefit.



**Figure 15: Topos of History (adapted from Wodak 2015, p. 40, in Wodak, 2017)**

Building on this equation, the authors of this article (along with three other articles using the same argument of sub-Saharans’ impact on the Tunisian cultural heritage) establish a reverse logic. If most media rhetoric revolves around sub-Saharan migration as a historical action  $A^1$  with terrible ramifications, the counter-discourse adopts the same action to establish its beneficial consequences in the past  $X^1$ :

cultural diversity. Indeed, implicitly, the writers are framing the first waves of sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia as a fortunate historical movement rather than a mishap or calamity. The results of such a migratory movement are seen in the rich and diverse religious, musical and cultural pool in Tunisia. Hence, it is only logical to accept the new migratory action A<sup>2</sup> as beneficial in order to attain a similar positive impact X<sup>2</sup>.

Elaborating on lexical cognates as vehicles of linguistic hybridity and sameness, the article establishes linguistic similarities between the Tunisian word *Stambeli* (black Tunisian *sūfi* musical tradition) and *stambeli* which pertain to the musical practices of the tribes of Songhay (Mali) and Hausa (Niger and Nigeria). This piece even establishes a sort of superiority to sub-Saharans as the fathers of Tunisian cult, by referring to Sidi Ali Lasmer, patron-saint of black Tunisians who is originally sub-Saharan. The article shatters the presupposition of Tunisians as superior white beings and sub-Saharans as inferior blacks as it blurs the racial line and establishes religious and cultural connections between the two usually antagonistic groups. It hones on the question of this constructed alterity and unpacks *Africanness* as a sign of sameness and belonging.

In the same trend, the article “Gougou Zarzis: Southern Tunisian Folkloric Dance Anchored in African Traditions”, from *Tunisia Live*, depicts sub-Saharan Africa as a land of civilization and a source of art and culture. The Tunisian band, Gougou Zarzis, draws from sub-Saharan African acrobatic and musical traditions. Another instance is the 2012 article “What Tunisians Could Learn from Sub-Saharan Africa”, *Kapitalis*, (Translated from French), 2012 where the discourse adopted is individualistic and the treatment of the issue testifies to an absence of an ‘All-African’ amalgamation. The article examines anti-black racism in Tunisia, through the counter-lens of sub-Saharan view towards whites. It establishes a contrast between the treatment of blackness in Tunisia and whiteness in sub-Saharan Africa. The writer asserts that although racist, Tunisians are treated with “special marks of friendship and consideration” and that even the joke “Musango” (white) “burst[s] in the other direction from the innocent mouths of children without malice”. In the same article, the writer seeks to shatter the presupposition that Tunisia is a lighthouse towards which sub-Saharan Africa looks up. Rather, he says Tunisians have so many lessons to learn from countries like Rwanda which rose above its past of genocide and chaos and established a strong modern nation where the “flowery sidewalks of Kigali [are] cleaner than those of the chic suburb of La Marsa!”. The satire is directed towards the Tunisians who have so long believed they are cleaner and more developed than “black Africa”. The article, like many others within this sub-corpus, rare as they

are, is a wake-up call for the racism-driven discourse of Tunisians tending towards Afrophobia and “othering”.

A striking feature of this corpus is the absence of collocates referring to the sub-Saharan migrants’ status in terms of legality or regularity<sup>162</sup>. It seems that contrary to the main corpus’ fixation of “legality” and “illegality”, the counter-corpus evades such questions and looks into non-status qualifications. Statistically speaking, the adjective irregular occurs 23 times, yet usually to refer to the irregular situation of sub-Saharan migrants, with the exception of 3 instances where the collocation used is “irregular migrants”. Adjectives such legal (42 times) and illegal (16) are rather used to define the Tunisian framework and the absence of adequate laws. For instance, ‘legal vacuum’ and ‘legally and materially define the status of refugees’ are mentioned by Leila Harzalli<sup>163</sup> to denounce the state’s inertia and myopia as to the penalization of racism.

In the article “Yes! Tunisians are Racist!” (*Al-Sabah*, 2013), it is the sub-Saharans themselves who invoke their “illegal status” and the stance is not adopted by the writer. Another example is the use of ‘illegal’ in a 2016 article<sup>164</sup> to demand the illegalisation of racial discrimination and advocacy for such a law which penalises racism. The same rhetoric is observed in many pieces following the racist attack on three Congolese students in 2016 where activists appealed for a “legal pressure so that the authorities take appropriate measures and exemplary sanctions against the perpetrators of such crimes”<sup>165</sup>. An article of 2019 even attacks and delegitimizes the use of “legal” or “illegal” migration” using the reasoning of second paragraph of Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which clearly states, “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country”.

Nevertheless, some rare pieces seem to have recourse to “illegal” as the term describing the status of sub-Saharan migrants, out of linguistic incongruity and confusion since the pieces themselves have a positive tone and defend the migrants. For example, the article “The Tunisian Association for the Support of Minorities condemns the violence of an Ivorian youth by his employer” (*Annahar News*, 2019, Arabic)

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<sup>162</sup> Following a search for collocates of “migrant” and “regular” “legal” “irregular” “illegal” (number of words between the two terms in the query is 4 before and 4 after).

<sup>163</sup> “Sub-Saharan refugees: Shame on Tunisia!”, by Leila Harzalli Published on April 10, 2013 in French, originally published in Afrik.com but then shared by Tunisian FB page “Tunisiens Libres et Modernes”;

<sup>164</sup> “Denial of Racism: activists call for action on Tunisia’s unspoken problem”, *Tunisia Live*, 2016, English

<sup>165</sup> “Formerly unknown and quite rare in Tunisia, racist attacks are starting to become more frequent”, *Espace Manager*, 2016, French.



expands on the calls of ‘African’ migrants who complain that they are being exploited and defrauded by many of their employers due to their “their illegal presence” and decries the Tunisian “legal system” which facilitates their blackmail and protects the perpetrators of such crimes. It is noteworthy that up to now, 2023, some Arabic-speaking outlets still have problems using the accurate terminology when dealing with migration (both with regard to Tunisians leaving the country and migrants arriving in Tunisia) and tend to use irregular, illegal, clandestine and undocumented in an interchangeable manner, out of unfamiliarity or indifference. In this context, IOM commented on the daily use of the term “illegal” by daily public figures and the press. In its 2018 report<sup>166</sup> it pointed out that many “journalists and official government representatives, think that migrants can be slotted into one of two categories: those who are “legal” and those who are “illegal”. IOM advised against “this false dichotomy” in the media outlets.

### 3.1.1 Nomination and predication

If the main discourse of the Tunisian media proved to be ostracising and othering (see previous chapter), the counter-discourse of the present sub-corpus seems rather welcoming, accepting and befriending. Frequency statistics show an extensive use of terms pertaining to the semantic field of *belonging*, like *belong*, *same*, *alike* and *acceptance* like *welcome*, *accept*, *integrate*, etc. The referential strategies used in the sub-corpus differ considerably from those used in the main corpus. We have previously seen a tendency to amalgamate sub-Saharan migrants through an extensive use of “African” others. However, strikingly, in the sub-corpus, sub-Saharan inflections are mostly used to refer to the groups of migrants originally from sub-Saharan African. Indeed, sub-Saharan (249), Sub-Saharan (69), sub-Saharans (46) represent 0.486 % of the total corpus, i.e. the frequency ratio<sup>167</sup>, in contrast to the nomination strategy “Africans” whose frequency is of 102, yielding a 0.136 ratio. This shift from a *depersonalisation* strategy to *personalisation* signals a change in the *perspectivization* strategy as to sub-Saharans presence in Tunisia. The speakers (whether journalists or interviewees) in the sub-corpus do not position themselves as the distant non-African others or white in-group. Rather, they label the sub-Saharans as such to convey a certain perspective of involvement and belonging. To further personalise the

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<sup>166</sup> Media Coverage of Migration Based on International Law and Evidence: Journalist Guide, IOM Tunisia, retrieved from [https://tunisia.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11056/files/documents/IOM%20Tunisia\\_MEDIA%20COVERAGE%20OF%20MIGRATION\\_Journalist%20Guide.pdf](https://tunisia.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11056/files/documents/IOM%20Tunisia_MEDIA%20COVERAGE%20OF%20MIGRATION_Journalist%20Guide.pdf) (26/12/2023)

<sup>167</sup> In corpus linguistics, the frequency ratio refers to word/total words ratio, i.e., the ratio of occurrence of a certain word within a whole corpus based on its frequency.

sub-Saharan group, individual and national attributes are used as predication strategies. Indeed, there is a recourse to nationalities as membership categories (predicates) as well as proper names as direct nomination references.

<b>Word forms</b>	<b>Number of occurrences</b>
nationalities - nationality - nationals – origin	90
Cameroon - Cameroonian	39
Ivorian	27
Niger	13
Senegal - Senegalese	24
Equatorial - Guinea	41
Mali - Malian	31
Congo - Congolese	55

**Table 6: Frequency of sub-Saharan Nationalities in the sub-corpus**

The extensive use of national origins is reflective of a different understanding of the sub-Saharan presence in Tunisia, based on diversity and humanisation rather than alienation and amalgamation. It is also noteworthy that the predication strategies are in line with the overall positive perspectivization strategy. The noun student(s) is used 543 times, with a frequency ratio of 0.726 %. Coupled with the frequent use of study/ studies (70) and university/universities (72), the discourse seems to highlight the membership category of ‘student’, hence the educated and hard-working individual, rather than that of the generic ‘migrant’. This positive framing which poses on education, knowledge, and personal development imply agency, active engagement and mastery over the migratory experience. These people, individuals, students are not simply “Africans” or migrants who are potentially victims and numbers (cf. previous chapter). The shift in the narrative divulges a resistance to the main discourse on sub-Saharans migrants portraying them as passive recipients of circumstances rather than agents of their own destiny.

Within the board group ‘students’, some personal stories are highlighted in a way to frame the sub-Saharan as human beings with ambitions and prospects. The testimony of F.M.D, a 24-year-old Gabonese student sums it up<sup>168</sup>:

“The difficulties of integration sometimes lie in the ignorance of the other. I find that Tunisians know little about black Africa. My college teacher did not even know the capital of Mali and believed that it was still Moussa Traoré who was in power. In reality, here Africa is the epitome of misery, famine, etc. As a result, we find it difficult to be accepted as an equal”.

In this piece, the sub-Saharan student/ migrant is given a voice, but not any voice. Looking into the identity he is endowed with by the writer, the young student is given specific personal features such as age, nationality and alias. He is framed in a positive individualistic manner and presented as a unique person, a protagonist of the report rather than a sideline or a simple number. The direct speech of F.M.D reflects a certain positive framing too. The words he uses to comment on the Tunisians’ conception of sub-Saharan Africa convey depth and wisdom rather than a reactionary, inflammatory or self-victimising discourse. He uses *mitigation* strategies to avoid dramatization when he says Tunisians “know little” instead of know nothing. The article subverts stereotypical images as the F.M.D gives a specific example of a Tunisian college teacher, normally perceived as an educated academic, who fails to know the slightest information about a sub-Saharan country, Mali. The outcome is a difficulty of acceptance due to misunderstanding as when one thinks the others are only doomed to “misery and famine” he cannot perceive them as “equal”.

This testimony sums up the overall image Tunisians really have about ‘black’ Africa as reflected in yet another piece<sup>169</sup> where Tunisians are reported to adopt Afrophobic statements like “it's not Africa here”. The negative perception of sub-Saharan Africans by the Tunisians seems to be the only common factor between the main corpus and the sub-corpus. The difference lies in the sub-corpus adopting an antagonistic and critical rhetoric towards such perceptions and giving voice to sub-Saharans themselves to debunk the prejudice and stereotypes.

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<sup>168</sup> “Racism in Tunisia: between reality and denial!!” *Espace Manager*, French, 2012

<sup>169</sup> “Assault of sub-Saharan students: The attack on the building in Lafayette is not a first”, *Nawaat*, French, 7/5/2013.

In fact, the pejorative appellations “guīra” or “guīra-guīra” or “kahlūš” adopted by some Tunisians when addressing sub-Saharanans as an onomatopoeia of sub-African tribal dialects and mockery (Pouessel, 2013), thus rejection of this different other, are also present in the sub-corpus. However, here, these are used as examples of racism and Afrophobia in media pieces attacking such behaviours and advocating for a change in the legal framework. The term “guīra /guira” is used 16 times. For instance, in the 2013 media pieces, *Ettounissia* TV report about racism, shot in the Tunisian South is commented upon by an *Espace Manager* article where the testimonies of black Tunisians are corroborated by sub-Saharanans migrants in Tunis. The words used for both in the public space like streets and transportation being degrading and objectifying like “guīra” “guird” (Arabic for monkey). These “contemptuous nicknames” are used by the article to explain the “malaise experienced by black people from sub-Saharan Africa” in Tunisia. One of the interviewees even states that “they (the Tunisians) look at blacks like fairground beasts” and children throw stones at them in working-class neighbourhoods. However, the journalists in this sub-corpus uphold a critical view of these racist stances, mitigate their effect (instead of being cynical and fatalist), and seek to change this perception.

### **3.1.2 Counter-Representations: Argumentation Strategies (topoi) and Perspectivization**

In the DHA, three dimensions have to be taken into account as “constitutive elements of a discourse”, namely (i) macro-topic-relatedness, (ii) pluri-perspectivity and (iii) argumentativity (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 89). To Ruth Wodak, a discourse, such as the media discourse, is far from being “a closed unit”; rather, it is “a dynamic semiotic entity that is open to reinterpretation and continuation” (p. 89). The first element, i.e., macro-topic-relatedness, refers to discourse's inherent connection to its historical, political and cultural background— synchronically and diachronically. Discourse, therefore, should be analysed in close connection to the events occurring in the time of discourse production or before. Building upon this idea, the Discourse-Historical Approach aims to incorporate a rich pool of information concerning the historical origins and the broader socio-political contexts in the analysis of discursive events. Hence, the analysis in this research is always informed by the historical and political context of the sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia.

The second and third elements of the tripartite discursive equation of the DHA, perspectivization and argumentation, shall be analysed in relation to the media representations of sub-Saharanans in the sub-corpus. Perspectivization is how discourse is framed or set, and it divulges the writer’s positioning in terms of involvement or distance, as well as the positive or negative tone. This notion is also an analytical

prerequisite in Symbolic Interactionism. Indeed, the interactionist discursive notion of ‘positioning’ advances that social dynamics are fluid patterns of ‘positioning’ (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). In this logic, positioning refers to perspectivization of the speech actors and their agency. In media discourse, journalists as both speakers, actors and institutions are “effective agents” as they are “creating social structures in accordance with the rules and conventions that have come to them historically, and, for the most part, are immanent in social practice” (Harré, 2002, in Baert, Langenhove & James, 2019, p. 46) and therefore recreating the world. The discursive actions of speech participants can only be understood by the analysis of the editorial choices, storyline, tone, and agency of the people represented, i.e., *positioning*. In fact, positioning oneself, for or against sub-Saharan migrants, empathetically or antagonistically, gives rise to expectations on how to act subsequently. Positioning the speakers, sub-Saharans or Tunisians, in media pieces, as active or passive, should imply rights like the right to free speech and movement. Positioning, or perspectivity, is executed through multiple linguistic devices like direct and indirect speech, quotation, deictics, and particle metaphors.

Perspectivization and argumentation are closely related as the first further explains the second. Argumentation refers to the arguments advanced to persuade the readers of a certain position, whereas perspectivization refers to the perspective from which these arguments are elaborated. In producing discourse, the media argumentation strategies or topoi used are mainly loci of Usefulness/ Advantage, Humanitarianism, Responsibility, Reality, Culture and Law and Right. The latter shall be dealt with in depth in the next chapter as part of the dynamics of policy shifts due to the media discourse.

In discursive representations, an argumentative inference should always be exercised. Indeed, there is typically an “argumentative scenario”, a fine line connecting the dots and presenting an argument to the audience. Such a scenario, in our sub-corpus, rests on counter discursive measures against the Tunisian media dominant discourse and the conceptualisation of migration as a danger or threat, and migrants as others (be it deviants or victims). The counter measures are also topoi (as per Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). While the dominant media discourse utilises the topoi of numbers— to convey victimhood and burden— or the topoi of danger— to depict migrants as a threat— the sub-discourse employs discursive constructions which support pro-migratory standpoints.

The preliminary analysis of the sub-corpus allowed to define several levels of counter-discourse, *inter alia* (i) appeal to history (see previous section), (ii) counter-discursive representation (at the level of nomination and categorization strategies for instance), (iii) variation in voices or discursive voice

management, and (iv) resistance modes (redefining the issue from the perspective of humanity, necessity, moral and ethical evaluation and social action rather than urgency, death tolls and securitarian need).

The resistance argumentation scenario employed rests therefore on the topoi of usefulness and advantage, definition and name-interpretation, humanitarianism, justice, responsibility, law and right, history and culture. The latter was dealt with previously when discussing ‘Belonging and Sameness’, and the topos of ‘law and right’ is to be discussed in the last chapter due to its significance to the correlations between media discourse and policy shifts. Hence, in this section, representation-related topoi will be elaborated on to discuss the discursive representation strategies adopted by the counter-discourse in re-defining the sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia. To proceed logically, this section is organised following the topoi discussed: (1) usefulness and advantage, along with responsibility topoi and (2) definition and name-interpretation, humanitarianism, and justice.

### **3.1.2.1 Sub-Saharanans in Tunisia: Redefining Opportunity and Liability**

In the sub-corpus, speakers appealing to foster sub-Saharanans’ acceptance, encouragement and protection argue that such stances are essential steps to (a) promote socio-economic development and solve employment problems and (b) enrich the social texture. In fact, one of the first articles which attempted to treat the sub-Saharan issue in a holistic manner, bringing together politics, history and economics is the article “Racism in Tunisia: A Cultural Heritage or an Ill-digested Circumstantial Outcome”<sup>170</sup>. The author tackles the historical roots of the rejection or hate feelings towards sub-Saharanans in Tunisia, qualifying the act of attacking many of them after the defeat, on 31 January 2015, of the Tunisian national team against Equatorial Guinea in the quarterfinals of the African Cup of Nations as pure racism. The deep roots of such racism, according to the author, lie in the political leaders’ racist French colonial heritage.

Indeed, Habib Bourguiba made a timid attempt to open up to Africa, especially during the constituent conference of the OAU (Organization of African Unity) in 1963. However, ever since, Tunisia has revered Europe economically and culturally, thus turning its back on Africa, south of the Sahara. The political leaders had done nothing to fight racism against blacks, Tunisian or sub-Saharan, and the schools and media disregarded Tunisia’s Africanness. The outcome was generations far removed from their

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<sup>170</sup> Published by Tounesna News, 2015, in French. It is noteworthy that this source has disappeared.

African membership. The author encourages Tunisia to embrace its African belonging and to accept sub-Saharan existence as an advantageous way to fight the French “colonialist heritage” with its “cortege of racist terms” creating an antagonism between Tunisians and their Africanness. In a way, the article establishes a fine analogy between decoloniality— as a way to fight the remains of colonialism but also to create a non-colonial culture, education and politics— and tolerance with sub-Saharan migrants. This logical link— implicitly established— serves the topos of *usefulness and advantage*.

Such an argumentation thread establishes a productive relationship between sub-Saharan migration to Tunisia and political and cultural development. This usefulness topos is also inferred from the argument of financial advantage, which seems to be reiterated in different media pieces. As a matter of fact, in reference to sub-Saharan students in Tunisia, the recurrent argument is to respect and accept them in order to guarantee they “continue their studies”<sup>171</sup> in Tunisia and benefit the country. This particular argument is usually coupled with the topos of numbers, “about eight thousand young sub-Saharan students study and carry out internships in Tunisia for a period of three to five years and would spend on average ten thousand dinars per year”. Figures are used to establish the usefulness of sub-Saharan students in quantitative terms, as a persuasive way to showcase that the country needs sub-Saharan students and not vice versa. Collocations of the terms ‘economic’, like “considerable economic contribution”, “welcoming migration, meeting the needs of our economy”<sup>172</sup> and “good opportunity for Tunisian universities”<sup>173</sup>, “source of foreign currency in these difficult times”<sup>174</sup>.

The topos of advantage or usefulness underlies a logic of causal argumentation following the condition: if an action is useful, then one should perform it (e.g. usefulness of sub-Saharan students to the private education sector in Tunisia). This topos encompasses many sub-topoi such as the “pro bono publico” topos, i.e., the advantage of all, the “pro bono nobis” topos— to the advantage of “us” and the *pro bono eorum* topos (to the advantage of “them”). If the media discourse builds on an anticipated outcome of a decision to accept and encourage sub-Saharan students and workers alike, it is more likely

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<sup>171</sup> “Racism: The alarm call from the Association of African Students in Tunisia”, *Tunivisions*, 2015.

<sup>172</sup> “African migrants in Tunisia: A productive force that should be structured”, *Gnet*, French, July 2019.

<sup>173</sup> “Campus Tunisia is a good opportunity for Tunisian universities”, *L'économiste maghrébin*, French, 2015.

<sup>174</sup> “Sub-Saharan students deprived of a student visa in Tunisia”, *Web manager* French, September 2020.

that the audience will begin to see the prospects of a positive migratory phenomenon, and political actions may lead to reinforce such a view to reach the foreseen aim.

The sub-corpus conveys a significant trend emerging through both quantitative and qualitative findings. The prominence of words associated with economic opportunity within this corpus suggests a notable narrative shift. The frequency ratio of terms linked to migration's economic prospects, particularly concerning sub-Saharan migrants, stands out conspicuously. Rather than being portrayed primarily as a source of danger or threat, these migrants are depicted as 'opportunities' and 'potential' within the media discourse. This framing reflects a broader societal narrative that emphasises the potential benefits and contributions that sub-Saharan students and workers can offer to Tunisia as a host country. Indeed, the lexical field of economic opportunity involving words "(E)conomic" is used 62 times, "financial" (20 times), "affairs" (15 times), "benefit" (21 times), "business" (10 times), "development" (33 times), "education" (56 times), "opportunity" (23 times), making this field a prominent one within the corpus with a relatively high frequency ratio of 0.294.

The prevalence of the opportunity topos, or as it is labelled in DHA— topos of usefulness— within the discourse surrounding sub-Saharan migrants underscores a nuanced understanding of migration dynamics. The DHA framework elucidates the underlying mechanisms shaping this discourse, revealing how language constructs and reinforces particular narratives. By consistently emphasising the economic potential of these migrants, media outlets contribute to the construction of a discourse that challenges the prevailing stereotype of the sub-Saharan as a source of economic and employment distress, "job thieves", etc. Such a discourse is adopted by the journalists themselves or even relayed through the sub-Saharan voices interviewed in the sub-corpus.

For instance, in the article "Tunisia: Mobilisation for the Malian student Bintou Kone, threatened with expulsion" (30 December 2020), the AESAT being a representative entity of the sub-Saharan community denounces the arbitrariness of administrative measures against sub-Saharans and implicitly warns, "Tunisia cannot aspire to be an essential HUB in Africa for student tourism while maintaining such actions. Tunisia cannot treat students who *come to invest* in Tunisia this way." The same argument is used by Touré Blamassé after the 2013 Lafayette incident, "Today, Morocco is gaining a footing with sub-Saharan students. Italy is *making eyes* at us too". The metaphor of the two countries competing to win the heart of the sub-Saharans contribute to the effect created by the usefulness and advantage topos which is here used by the sub-Saharans themselves as a bargain card, as they know they are an asset to the private



education sector in Tunisia. The resistant media outlets adopt and reiterate this argument out of conviction of its validity and “usefulness”.

This emphasis on economic opportunity not only reframes the perception of sub-Saharan migrants but also suggests a broader societal acknowledgment of their agency and potential to positively impact the host community. Furthermore, the high frequency ratio of words associated with economic opportunity highlights a shift in media attitudes towards migration. Rather than viewing migrants solely through the lens of threat or burden, there is instead a recognition of their potential to enrich the economy and society. By foregrounding the “coordination, solidarity and...win-win partnership”<sup>175</sup>, media narratives choose a more holistic understanding of migration, one that acknowledges the multifaceted contributions of migrants and challenges entrenched prejudice. In doing so, consistently and continuously, they pave the way for more inclusive and empathetic approaches to migration policy and discourse.

With opportunity comes a certain liability. In the sub-corpus, reference to “Tunisia’s responsibility” in the management of migrations underlies a ‘responsibilizing’ argumentation pattern. A logic of responsibility implies that if a social group/ actor is responsible for a certain situation, then that group should act to remedy it (Wodak, 2001, p. 76). This topos can be resorted to in the official discourse when a government holds a certain social group like migrants liable for a situation like unemployment and therefore uses it to justify the dichotomy us/ them and the measures against migrants. Yet inversely, very often, this topos is used to counteract discrimination, mend for a wrongdoing or mistake and lay down obligations. Many recent studies focused on the applications of the responsibility topos in the discourses on migration (notably Wright and Brookes, 2019).

Within discursive constructions, the “usefulness and advantage” as well as “responsibility” topoi are often interrelated. Indeed, usefulness normally highlights the positive impact of a particular social group or political action. By stressing the financial or cultural opportunities associated with sub-Saharans, for example in responding to the labour market needs or boosting the private education sector, there is an automatic reference to the state’s “responsibility” and duties in close connection to migrants’ protection and guidance. The connection between these two topoi often arises in discussions about the obligations of host societies or governments toward migrants. For example, if migrants are depicted as valuable assets

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<sup>175</sup> “Tunis-Ministry of Foreign Affairs: “Bringing new impetus to cooperation between Tunisia and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa”, *African Manager*, French, 2016 sub-corpus.

to the economy, the discourse might imply that it is the responsibility of the host society to furnish them with adequate support, resources, and venues for integration. Consequently, the “usefulness and advantage” topos can be employed to support or bolster arguments concerning the “responsibility topos” establishing a discursive framework that contextualises the treatment of migrants within broader societal duties and ethical considerations.

Against this backdrop, the words responsible/ responsibility are used 27 times, foregrounding the Tunisian state and society towards sub-Saharan. For instance, in the *Al-Sabah News* article of 2013 “Yes! Tunisians are Racist!”, the sub-Saharan interviewed expressed their shock at the typical racist behaviour of the Tunisians. The article poses the argument of Tunisia’s abolishing slavery in as early as 1846 as double edged: being ahead of the times also requires the state and society to align with its spirit. It is incumbent upon the same state which took such an avant-gardist political decision to ensure an equal treatment of the blacks it once emancipated, whether Tunisian or foreign. The fact that racism remains flagrant in Tunisia is the state’s responsibility, and protecting sub-Saharan from acts of racism is also the state and society’s liability. The article even invokes school education’s responsibility in raising awareness and educating people about this behaviour.

Rhyming with this topos, the media published a petition<sup>176</sup> with the aim of “sensitising and making the world, especially us countries of the Maghreb, responsible for the excess, injustice, racism and horrors undergone by the sub-Saharan *brothers* on our territories, which are paradoxically part of their continent: one Africa to all”. The petition decries the Maghreb countries positioning “themselves as veritable *gendarmes* on the Southern border of Europe” and the title is itself invocative of such responsibility in “regularising” the situation of all sub-Saharan living in the Maghreb as a *responsibility* of the intellectuals who must advocate for friendly policies. The 2018 piece by *Inkyfada*, “The fight against racism reaches the parliament” (French), calls for the creation of a commission to propose national policies, strategies and action programs to combat racism. Fighting racism and discrimination against sub-Saharan is not the sole responsibility of civil society but also the state and parliament members. The topos of responsibility

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<sup>176</sup> Article published on the FB page “Association des Libres Penseurs de la Tunisie” (translated in English Association of Tunisia’s Free Thinkers) which was very politically active after the 2011 “revolution” (2013, French).

is correlated with the topos of authority as the MP Jamila Ksiksi, one of the pioneers of the anti-racism law, also stresses the political responsibility in the issue of racism and xenophobia.

In 2019, after the death of a sub-Saharan worker in a farm in Sidi Bouzid and another in Sfax, the Labor Union intervened and attributed responsibility of such violence to the state<sup>177</sup>. Its statement even *intensified* this responsibility by using semantic *intensification* strategies through word choices like ‘inability’ and ‘lack of political will’ to combat the phenomenon. The responsibility of securing the rights of sub-Saharan workers in Tunisia lies with the state, and the UGTT details this responsibility by providing many potential actions to remedy the situation such as “contact points”, “briefing”, “guidance”, “legal assistance”, and “immigration spaces for migrant workers in the regional unions of Tunisia, Sfax, Sousse and Medenine” to “monitor violations”. At the end, the topos of responsibility is reiterated through invocation of *collective responsibility* and *joint responsibility* in regularising the status of irregular residents for a better integration of these workers in the economic market especially with the severe shortage in some labour sectors.

Apart from this overall tendency to allocate responsibility to the state, some media pieces define this responsibility in a specific manner. For example, the 2013 article written by Ikhlas Latif for *Business News* (French), “Blacks are not Tunisians!”:

“They beat me up while insulting me. They asked me to go back to where I come from, the country of the monkeys who eat bananas! I went to the police station to lodge a complaint, yet the *police asked me to go home without taking my complaint into account!*”. This is an alarming situation, especially because several testimonies attest that the *police are responsible or sometimes complicit* in acts of a racist nature.

In this piece racism is treated as both a social and state-induced behaviour as the police, supposed to protect sub-Saharans or at least treat their complaints, is “accessory” to the crime of racism contributing to more impunity. The article itself adopts a critical stance to this situation, and by giving a voice to this sub-Saharan student, it simply seeks to provide a counter-narrative to the narrative of “the state is not racist”. It is true that racism is not institutionalized in Tunisia, but it is embedded in some institutional

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<sup>177</sup> “Violations against foreign workers in Tunisia: The Labor Union intervenes”, *radio Nefzawa news* (Arabic). February 13, 2019, “Statement on securing the rights of African workers in Tunisia” in *Tuniscopes* (Arabic) and a statement (Arabic) published on the UGTT FB page.

practices and attitudes. The article decries such individual incidents and allows the sub-Saharan community to have a safe space to relate the events from their own perspectives— rather than that of the “authorities” as seen in the previous chapter.

In the *Kapitalis* 2014 article “Anti-black racism should not go unpunished” (French), the topos of responsibility is reiterated through direct reference to the police responsibility in the “racketeering and the unforgivable humiliations inflicted on [sub-Saharans] at airports”. The alleged discriminatory treatment of the police is also echoed by the administration’s role in “delays” in residence permits’ renewal and consequently the large sums of fines “for which the administration alone is responsible”. The article plays on the usefulness topos, coupled with the responsibility topos, which are usually interrelated and invokes the paradox of the Tunisian state, which on the one hand does not protect sub-Saharans and on the other hand seeks to benefit from its economic presence in sub-Saharan countries in “the hope of filling the balance gap”.

This two-way argumentation pattern involving the topoi of usefulness and responsibility usually revolves around sub-Saharan students. In the Tunis *Webdo* article “Is Tunisia still a welcoming land for sub-Saharan students?”, the representatives of the sub-Saharan students’ communities link the decline of sub-Saharan students’ numbers in Tunisia after 2011 to not only the social treatment and stereotypes, but also administrative barriers. In this sense, causality is established between ‘advantage’ and ‘responsibility’. “[T]he authorities are responsible” for visa application procedures and the state is responsible for clarifying the laws whose “ambiguous” interpretations allow the mistreatment of sub-Saharans. The correlation of two topoi reflects a utilitarian and pragmatic logic establishing a direct cause-effect between protecting and guiding sub-Saharans and benefiting from their financial *advantage and usefulness*. In advocating for the respect and help of sub-Saharans, this causality frames the migration equation as one of benefit and opportunity rather than loss and burden, as in the main corpus.

The topos of responsibility is also built on the notion of ‘irresponsibility’. In the 2017 article “Tunisia seen by sub-Saharan students!” *Le temps* (French), the president of the AESAT (Association of African Students and Trainees in Tunisia), Mack Arthur Deongane Yopasho expands on the ordeals of residence documents and attributes the responsibility to the authorities who have not amended the 1968 text only to benefit from its vague interpretation in managing the sub-Saharan presence in Tunisia. He also mentions corruption as a direct consequence of such an obsolete text as it allows police officers to ask for exorbitant penalties to issue residence permits. He summarises this stance with the

“irresponsibility” of all stakeholders and their contribution in the deterioration of the sub-Saharan students, trapped in a vicious circle of paperwork and fines.

### **3.1.2.2 Definition and Name-Interpretation, Humanitarianism, and Justice**

The topos of definition or name-interpretation, also referred to as *locus a nominis interpretatione* (Wodak, R., de Cillia, R., Reisigl, M., Liebhart, 2009, p. 41) follows the logic: if an action or a person/ group is designated (as) in a certain way X then this action or person/ group should have the characteristics/ attributes which the literal meaning of this way X conveys. Wodak comments on the use of this topos with reference to migrant workers in Austria as they are labelled “guest workers”. The presupposition is that these migrants are only guests; hence, they shall return to their home countries someday (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 75).

In the main corpus, we have seen that sub-Saharans are called “Africans” to amalgamate and ‘other’ them from their host society. In the sub-corpus, however, the nomination strategies differ in favour of a more individualised and personalised treatment. Proper names such as Coulibaly (11), Jonathan (10), Blamassé (27), Touré (24), Traoré (10), etc are used. Aliases such F.M.D, A.D, T.H. are also used frequently when the articles have testimonies. It is understandable that some sub-Saharans prefer to keep their anonymity when expanding on their migratory trajectory or incidents of racism.

Contrary to the general tendency of the main corpus to amalgamate sub-Saharans when defining them with topoi of numbers and danger or threat. In the sub-corpus, sub-Saharans are designated as ‘migrant workers’ or ‘students’. In the sub-corpus, ‘student(s)’ and ‘trainees’ are mentioned 329 times, with a frequency ratio of 0.439, which is relatively high. This name scheme also builds on the topos of usefulness to elaborate a logic of advantage and opportunity where sub-Saharans are not a threat but a potential.

On the other hand, the sub-Saharan population is in general defined in terms of their migratory experience, a “rather particular migratory experience”<sup>178</sup>, where Tunisia turns into a crossroads for

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<sup>178</sup> “The African and Mediterranean Tunisia: sub-Saharan communities between integration and rejection”, *La Presse*, French, 2020 sub-corpus.

“foreign workers”<sup>179</sup> who are increasingly consolidating their presence with family reunification. Admittedly, the sub-Saharan migratory trend is an “opportunity” for interaction between two cultures, generating interculturality<sup>180</sup>. Defining sub-Saharans in terms of a united in-group members (37 times)<sup>181</sup> or community (39 times) rather than dispersed victims of ‘*hārga*’ or marginalisation is a way of resisting the mainstream media amalgamation and negative perspectivization of the sub-Saharans migrant group. This topos of name-interpretation is also peculiarly used to counter stereotypes about sub-Saharans as deviant and under-skilled out-group members by emphasising their skill and unity. The sub-corpus pieces adopt a rather positive tone/ attitude towards sub-Saharans, and their argumentation scheme draws on fixed categories to represent the whole community via the topos of definition/ topos of name-interpretation. Indeed, in many articles, the speakers are representatives of the whole community, whether it is AESAT<sup>182</sup> (45) or AESCT<sup>183</sup> (10) or any other association gathering sub-Saharan students, trainees or workers. Whenever there is a xenophobic incident or a celebration/ gathering, media outlets turn to the associations representing sub-Saharans in Tunisia, which translates a latent understanding of their unity and solidarity. The media of the sub-corpus understand the sub-Saharan migratory presence as a positive, organised and structured one.

A name-interpretation scheme resting upon defining sub-Saharans as an in-group of cohesive migrant workers, students and trainees further reinforces the appeal to a humane and just treatment of the community. Thus, the topos of definition paves the way to humanitarianism and justice topoi<sup>184</sup>. The humanitarianism topos poses the logic that “if a political action or decision does or does not conform to human rights or humanitarian convictions and values, then one should or should not make it” (Wodak, 2018, p. 27). The topos of humanitarianism is a typical pattern of argumentation which is intensified by

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<sup>179</sup> Foreign/ foreigner are used 90 times. This topos of *definition* rests on an idiosyncratic use of foreign in the Tunisian culture and legal system to refer to migrants. It usually has no negative framing effect as it also includes European migrants, i.e., expats.

<sup>180</sup> “The life of sub-Saharans in Tunis: an experience that does not seem to be too successful” (translated from French), *Femmes et réalités*, French, 2020 sub-corpus.

<sup>181</sup> Frequency of member/ members.

<sup>182</sup> Association des Étudiants et Stagiaires Africains en Tunisie

<sup>183</sup> Association des Étudiants et Stagiaires Camerounais en Tunisie.

<sup>184</sup> A quantitative insight is the frequent recourse to semantic field of law: law (67) - laws (14) - lawyer (12)- legal (49)

recurrence of the topos of justice, i.e., the supposition of equal treatment for all, regardless of their origin or status.

Statistically, the humanitarianism and justice topoi are prevalent in the sub-corpus, signalling a resistance to the main corpus where sub-Saharaners are quasi dehumanised. An overview of frequencies of terms pertaining to humanitarianism and justice is detailed below:

Word	Frequency
(H)/human	108
Humanitarian	10
Equality	10
Integration	41
Justice	19
Openness	10
Opportunity	23
Union	29
Welcome - welcomed – welcoming	34
Partnership	11
Organisation(s)	66
Together	19
Association(s)	172
Right(s)	166
Solidarity	38

**Table 7: Frequency of terms pertaining to humanitarianism and justice in the sub-corpus**

The adjective “human” is repeated 108 times throughout the sub-corpus with a frequency ratio of 0.144. Sentences such as “this group of refugees *claim their human dignity* and therefore refuse the *unfair* integration program that Tunisia will automatically impose on them”; “assert their *human dignity* and therefore refuse the *unjust* integration”; “countless *human rights injustices*” and “is it appropriate for Tunisia, which defends *human rights* to this day and was keen to *spread equality* during the era of the beys, to be seen as “racist”?” and “a number of African students had lodged a grievance with the bodies

concerned with the *human rights' defence*, about what they considered *discriminatory* measures against them by the Tunisian government”<sup>185</sup> establish a direct link between human rights' protection and the fair treatment of sub-Saharanans.

The typical pattern of the humanitarianism argumentation scheme is intensified through articulate, potent and emotionally loaded language. For instance, in the article “Racism in Tunisia: How far can we go with intolerance?” in *Espace Manager*, (French, 2017 sub-corpus), the use of rhetorical questions such as the one in the title, and “Don't all these people who are victims ... have the right to claim their rights in a society that is supposed to give paramount importance to community life, hospitality, and a sense of sharing?” and exclamation “It is time for this situation to end!”. The first device serves the purpose of engaging the audience emotionally, provoking critical thinking, and emphasising the urgency or importance of addressing the issue. Rhetorical questions usually attract the audience by encouraging them to participate in the conversation, mentally. By posing a question without expecting a direct answer, the writer prompts the reader to reflect on the sub-Saharan issue. In this context, rhetorical questions also evoke empathy and compassion by framing humanitarian issues in a personal and relatable way.

For example, rhetorical questions like “Are we racists?” or “Does the Tunisian, who is usually known for tolerance and openness, hide a tendency to reject the other on racial, ethnic or religious grounds?” or “doesn't the constitution enshrine rights, freedoms and equality for all?”<sup>186</sup> appeal to the audience's emotions and moral values, urging them to consider the humans in their otherness. These questions— although they do not require any answer— stimulate the readers' critical thinking by prompting them to reconsider their assumptions or beliefs about the sub-Saharanans. Within the topos of humanitarianism, rhetorical questions can be particularly effective in conveying a sense of urgency and moral obligation.

Another device used by the writer of the *Espace Manager*'s article is parallelism. The writer draws a parallel between the aspiration and the reality, the Tunisia “we promote” and the Tunisia “we live in”:

In a country that has witnessed a **revolution, boasting** of having... **freedom and dignity, tirelessly claiming human rights**, it is **indecent** for us Tunisians to **see such racist acts** being **perpetrated**

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<sup>185</sup> The 2012 sub-corpus.

<sup>186</sup> “An attack on African students brings the issue back to the fore: Are we really racist?”, *Al-Sabah News*, Arabic, 2016 sub-corpus.



today... **Africanity is part of our identity** ... It's time to change the game by accepting our **differences** ....

The article clearly draws a parallel between an ideal and a reality. It contrasts between what the others perceive of Tunisia post-2011, a country that revolted against injustice and tyranny and sought “freedom and dignity, human rights” only to find itself fighting racism and identity crisis. In this sense, “Africanity” is a synonym for human rights for all Africans and an appeal for a ‘universal’ humanitarian treatment of all Africans, Tunisians and sub-Saharan alike. To this end, this appeal is reiterated in many pieces especially during the covid-19 crisis.

“The issue of racism should be addressed at the grassroots, by strengthening the awareness of children and young people about tolerance and openness... Throughout its history, Tunisia has been concerned with recognition of human rights” so were the words of Neziha Labidi, Minister of Women, Family and Children, in a piece titled “Six thousand African students leave Tunisia because of insecurity!”<sup>187</sup> *La Presse News* (French). The topos of humanitarianism is conveyed through the *intensification* of ‘human rights’ and *mitigation* of the crisis, or under-problematization of the issue of racism as she says “nothing should undermine our partnership with African countries. We must be more united to save the future generations”. There is a strife to blur the differences, hence the problem, and appeal to pragmatic thinking. The semantic field of justice and humanitarianism used in the article includes words and expressions like fraternity, solidarity, strengthening, and cultural partnership.

In this particular piece, there is a tendency to operate an elaborate argumentation scheme triangulating the topoi of justice, humanitarianism and usefulness at the same time following the logic of the last sentence “We are very interested in students who have chosen Tunisia to pursue their higher education. They will be the levers of the South-South partnership”. The sentence sums up the argumentative scheme as it clearly states that protecting the human rights of sub-Saharan and ensuring justice to all is the only way to promote the economic interests of the country. The persuasive scheme of this piece builds on the attitude of both the common Tunisians and the officials, as it draws a parallel

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<sup>187</sup> *La Presse*, French, 2016 sub-corpus.

between solving the human rights' ordeal as well as establishing justice on the one hand and ensuring civil peace and economic prosperity on the other<sup>188</sup>.

The topoi of humanitarianism and justice— apart from being used by the journalists and the interviewed officials— are resorted to by the sub-Saharanans themselves. Germaine, a law student and member of the AESAT office confesses<sup>189</sup>:

Tunisians do not respect black skin. For them, as long as you are black, you remain a **sub-human, less than nothing**. Tunisians remain convinced that we live on trees at home. At school, we do not benefit from privileges, even the health insurance which they seem to make us subscribe to at school turns out to be a real **scam!** Even from the point of view of university fees, there is **blatant discrimination**. We pay double what our Tunisian colleagues...which is an **aberration, a scam**, should I say.”

The use of the negative form (do not) and pejorative words (sub-human, scam, discrimination, aberration, etc.) underscores the absence of justice and the need for a more humane treatment. By characterising individuals as “sub-human”, the speaker highlights and resists the dehumanising effect of Afrophobia towards sub-Saharanans migrants. This semantic choice draws attention to the moral outrage and indignation associated with human rights violations. The use of the negative attribute “sub-human”, echoing the discursive representations adopted in the main corpus, contextualises the discourse within the broader historical narratives of oppression and colonialism as it may evoke parallels with the past colonial atrocities and the present systemic injustices, establishing a continuum of humanitarian challenges and flawed power dynamics across time and space. The whole argument of the sub-Saharan student, building on “hate of black skin” has a persuasive effect on the audience by evoking strong emotional reactions and moral condemnation. This discursive scheme unveiling the dominant dehumanising discourse toward sub-Saharanans aims to mobilise support by galvanising a sense of compassion for their community and appealing to the readers’ moral obligation, i.e. topos of justice.

At times, the ‘universality’ and superiority of human rights are invoked in captivating statements like “I don't think there is a right and a bad migration. Migration is a characteristic of human beings. We

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<sup>188</sup> It is noteworthy that *La Presse* is a large-circulation daily newspaper published in French, and it is owned by state-owned company SNIPE. For long before the 2011 revolution, it had echoed the policies of the government. Post-2011, it continued to echo the governmental agendas, and to appeal to the common Tunisian reader with a very high impact due to advertisement and the large number of audiences, digital and print combined.

<sup>189</sup> “Sub-Saharan students in Tunisia complain of persecution and mistreatment”, *Kapitalis* (french), 2013 sub-corpus.

are always on the move. We always go in search of security and peace.”<sup>190</sup> The topos of humanitarianism is conveyed by both the discourse used by Father Jonathan, a Nigerian Christian pastor who lives in Sfax and is head of the Catholic church of Gabes and Sfax. The pastor comments on the humanitarian crisis using an emotionally loaded jargon “threats”, “ill-treatment”, “deaths”, “social violence”, “grave to grave”, “unfair”, “injustices”, etc. The pastor, who is himself a migrant, laments the unfair humanitarian situation of the sub-Saharanans in Tunisia in a way that underlines the urgency of mending the situation. His ‘universal’ understanding of migration builds on the topoi of humanitarianism and justice and calls for a more dignifying treatment of sub-Saharanans through the lens of a moral/ religious authority. His words have more impact as they correlate with authority and religious morality.

Resorting to the religious field when dwelling on humanitarianism and justice is also present in the mediatised official discourse adopted by the Ennahda movement (Islamist party in the Troika government, ‘toppled’ in 2021) published a press release— commented upon in many pieces in the 2015 sub-corpus— wherein it vigorously condemned the physical and verbal violence and the racist discourse targeting sub-Saharanans. It states that “what happened is at odds with the values and spirit of Islam, which is founded on equality, tolerance and honouring the human being without further consideration. Islam prohibits racism”. In “Racism in Tunisia: cultural heritage or ill-digested circumstantial outcome”, (*Tounesna news*, French, 2015 sub-corpus), the religious rhetoric is yet again present in stressing that violence against sub-Saharanans out of racism and xenophobia is “contrary to the teachings of all religions and human values”. The article also revisits the history of blacks in Islam, drawing on the story of “the first official muezzin of the Prophet Mohamed” who was of Ethiopian origin -therefore black. In addition, it invokes the story of the *first migration* in Islam, that of the inhabitants of Mecca leaving for Africa (Abyssinia) as instructed by the prophet, to find flee oppression and find peace and security under the Abyssinian Emperor.

Coupled with a religious rhetoric, the topoi of justice and humanitarianism are further intensified in this piece. The religious rhetoric uses the legitimacy of moral authority, through both the figures of Rached Ghannouchi and Bilel the Muezzin, and invokes the Islamic beliefs about justice, compassion, and the inherent dignity of all human beings. Using the topos of religion usually legitimises a certain action through a spiritual imperative, as it is perceived to be absolute and non-negotiable. It imbues the

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<sup>190</sup> “The ferryman of souls”, *Inkyfada*, French, 2013 sub-corpus.

discourse on racism and xenophobia against sub-Saharanans with a sense of spiritual urgency and moral duty. In retelling the story of the first Islamic migration, using both the topoi of history and religion, the article insinuates that migration is a right and a mission. It also draws to parallelism between the oppression of the first followers of Prophet Muhammed and sub-Saharanans coming to Tunisia to “find peace” and “flee oppression”. This narrative also presupposes a sense of empathy beyond race and collective *responsibility* as a sacred mission. In aligning the struggle against racism with religious/ Islamic narratives of the first migration and liberation, the speaker and the journalist position the fight against racism as a ‘sacred’ endeavour.

Appeal to authority within the humanitarianism topos is also detectable in articles dealing with specific incidents which were widely mediatised in the sub-corpus. In “The Tunisian Association for the Support of Minorities condemns the violence against an Ivorian young man by his employer” (*Annahar news*, Arabic, 2020), it is stated that such “practices” do not align with “the principles of human rights” that Tunisia is committed to. The article calls for adopting migration policies rhyming with the “international standards for the protection of freedoms and human rights”. In the same piece, the association has recourse to the humanitarianism and authority topoi in its appeal to the government and the Assembly of People's Representatives to concentrate on the migration file and deal with it seriously.

Finally, the topoi of justice and humanitarianism in the sub-corpus are also recurrent in pieces about art. In the article “Faces: A short film that tells the story of the suffering of African immigrants in Tunisia”, (*Mediaplus*, Arabic, 2020) the writer comments on a movie describing the ordeals and suffering of stranded sub-Saharan migrants through the story of the Ivorian Ibrahim, the father of a one-month-old baby. The topos of humanitarianism is depicted in “double alienation” and the “migration experience as a human experience”. By portraying Ibrahim and his story, the writer epitomises the human story of the sub-Saharanans and appeals to the reader's emotions and humanity through dramatization and art. The movie is reviewed in three different articles, and the voice of the journalists in all three seems to concur that the ordeals of the protagonist are realistic and depict— to a great extent— the situation of most sub-Saharanans migrating to or through Tunisia.

### **3.2 Individualisation and Positive Representation**

In discussing the humanitarianism and justice topoi, it was inferred that sub-Saharanans’ representations as being equal and worthy of ‘humanization’ and ‘individualisation’ rather than

amalgamation and ‘collectivisation’ (DHA, discursive strategy, see previous chapter) are as discursive resistance strategies. Within the sub-corpus, there is a deliberate effort and choice to portray sub-Saharan individuals as unique and multifaceted rather than as a homogeneous group of ‘deviants’ or ‘victims’. The main corpus signalled an extensive use of topoi like numbers, victimhood, and danger or threat exploiting the same ‘number game’ used by Western media when depicting migration, to draw attention to marginal and collective nature of sub-Saharans and problematise their existence in Tunisia. However, the sub-corpus rather posited a representation scheme built on the topoi of history, humanitarianism, justice, usefulness, to unpack the sub-Saharan migration as a positive and “human” phenomenon.

It is also noteworthy that the sub-corpus gives more voice to sub-Saharans themselves, names them, tells stories about them, and highlights their personal stories, experiences, and achievements, thereby humanising them and challenging stereotypes that might depict them as an entity. Indeed, myriad articles feature individual profiles of sub-Saharan migrants, emphasising their aspirations and contributions to society. In the 2018 “Report<sup>191</sup> from a sub-Saharan Maquis in Tunis: Clandestinity and Human Warmth!”<sup>192</sup>, the *Nawaat* journalist Malek Lakhel delves into the depth of the sub-Saharan community, which had long been perceived as a secret, unknown, ‘dark’ group of people. The report starts with a simple interrogation about the absence of West African restaurants despite the presence of large numbers of sub-Saharans in the capital, and leads to the discovery of a ‘maquis’, metaphorical for a dense space of resistance.

Indeed, ‘maquis’ which the French language adopted from the Corsican word “macchia”, originally designated non-forested and dense Mediterranean woodland formations. Then, the term came to describe tangled and intricate situations. Metaphorically, it is used to usher a refuge from threats, and it even took on the meaning of an outlying place of resistance during the occupation<sup>193</sup>. The metaphor turns into reality as we discover Angèle’s house— in the Laouina neighbourhood in Tunis— which turns into an informal restaurant every evening to accommodate the sub-Saharan community. Eager for

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<sup>191</sup> Article in French ; its original title is “Reportage Dans Un Maquis Subsaharien À Tunis: Clandestinité Et Chaleur Humaine!”

<sup>192</sup> It is noteworthy that the choice of accompanying images serves the purpose of showing the human stories of sub-Saharans; the colours, the dishes, the handwriting and all the choices reflect individual options rather than collectivised representations. Cf. the original article on <https://encr.pw/qUhLg>

<sup>193</sup> For a thorough explanation of the metaphorical use of the term, see <https://shorturl.at/04kXj>

something “like at home” and for a warm setting, this ‘gnādā’ or ‘maquis’ compensates for the estrangement outside. Although clandestine, the house welcomes workers, students and even diplomats who long for typical home food. Here, we do not see the usual reference to sub-Saharan migrants, victims of shipwreck or police brutality; we see all sections of the community including the diplomats which are left out when there are incidents involving “Africans”. The story builds as follows:

Behind thick and purple curtains, there is a living room, where a few regulars have already settled. **Angèle** lists the evening menu, which she has prepared in the afternoon. The prices are not mentioned. However, **Patrick**, who works at the restaurant *Chez Georges*, offering sub-Saharan specialties, points out that “some gnādā make quite significant profit”. **Angèle**, who comes from **Douala**, joined her **husband** who had lived in Tunisia for **7 years**, in 2015. Their **little girl** goes to Tunisian school and speaks both **Tunisian Arabic and French**, so much so that her mother sometimes gets lost. She sublets the rooms on the first floor to sub-Saharan students and lives and cooks on the ground floor. Her dishes are prepared in huge pots, “those are served in celebrations and in funerals” as she says, and dozens of people come to eat at Angèle’s every evening. (Translation mine from French)

The positive perspectivization strategy adopted in this media piece counters the stereotypical imagery as the discursive choices highlight their positive human attributes and achievements. The story of Angèle suddenly divulges the human being behind the usual amalgam: a hard-working, ambitious, successful woman rather than a migrant, a victim or a dead body. Through specific deictic hints, the writer emphasises her own life path, coming from Douala and living in Tunisia for seven years. She is also a mother of a little girl who goes to school and who manage to be well integrated. All the elements of success contribute to the portrait of this individual success story of professional accomplishment and community service. The positive lexicalization strategy of representation is conveyed by the semantic uses of “celebrations”, “warmth”, “warm”, “welcoming”, “friends”, etc.

Mythopoesis as an *argumentum ad exemplum* strategy is deployed here, through the creation of stories that function as justifications for the idea that sub-Saharan migrants can be well integrated and successful in Tunisia, like Angèle. It functions as a counter-strategy to disrupt and destabilise the negative stereotypes and myths surrounding them (cf. Chapter 4- mythopoesis). These ‘myths’ or stories shatter the arguments that sub-Saharan migrants are burdens or threats to social peace. Agency-wise, these elaborate narratives highlight active agency as sub-Saharan migrants are the crafters of their accommodation and success without any real external agents. In the above story the mythopoesis is carried out visually too by using accompanying images portraying the family and their home depicting their integration and success, further corroborating this counter-image and reinforcing positive perspectivization. Storytelling is a very effective and powerful

tool in disseminating a more nuanced understanding of the sub-Saharan migrant experience in Tunisia and challenging dominant stereotypes, especially if coupled with reiteration.

This story also showcases cultural richness within the sub-Saharan community, as it refers to their nationalities— Cameroonian and Ivorian (as opposed to the collectivising attribute African or sub-Saharan)— and to their food heritage and ingredients “plantain bananas, peppers and Maggi cubes”. The use of proper names, places, time indications, coupled with colourful and vivid images in the article, presents a diverse and multifaceted image of the sub-Saharans community which has long been hidden from the Tunisian audience. The peculiar thing about this article is its refutation of the transit hypothesis. While most news reports about sub-Saharans in the main corpus dwell on clandestine movement to Europe as a way to establish Tunisia as a transit country, this one challenges the idea of transit:

Most of the people interviewed **hope to stay** in Tunisia. Fewer and fewer [of them] want to try the adventure to the other side of a sea where they are rejected without remorse. “I’m not going to hide it: at first, I **was only going to go through Tunisia** to France”, Georges confides to us, “after several attempts, I **decided to stay**. Being already a *restaurateur* in the country, the idea came naturally”. He now wants to set an example for young people: “**France is not El Dorado**. And I contribute to lowering the unemployment rate here,” exclaims Georges proudly, who **hopes to open other stores in the city soon and continue to employ both foreigners and Tunisians**. (Translation mine)

The deictic references stand out as the “there” is France and the “here” is Tunisia. “Here” unites Tunisians and sub-Saharans against a further and farther pseudo El Dorado. The antagonism of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is even absent in this article as both Tunisians and sub-Saharans have the same fate. More conspicuously, George, the sub-Saharan migrant is well integrated so much so that he subverts the social hierarchy sustained in the imaginary of the Tunisians and “hopes” to hire Tunisians in his small business. Such media discourse framing the sub-Saharans positively challenges the essentialist representations and narratives that reduce them to a group with a single-dimensional identity. The concept of identity is pivotal in affirming individuality. In the bulk of the mainstream media representations, sub-Saharans are denied an identity or even assigned a one-fits-all identity, that of the other deviant or victim. In the sub-corpus, the individual and positive treatment of sub-Saharans affirm the rich cultural identity and heritage, and celebrate the traditions, customs, and cultural contributions of the sub-Saharan diaspora. Such a choice counters narratives of cultural inferiority or exoticization.

In other articles, such as “African life in Tunis: an experience that does not seem to be too successful” *Femmes et Réalités*, the notion of diaspora is also reiterated, “this diaspora has chosen our

country as a privileged destination...many migrants come from Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Congo and Sudan. Eritrea, Gabon, Somalia, Mali and Nigeria also”. Then the article focuses on Fanta Mamady Chérif, who is 42 years old and from Guinea Conakry. She works as Supply Chain Consultant within the United Nations World Food Program (WFP). She has been in Tunis since January 2020, to reinforce the work of the Tunis office. Fanta confesses that feels good in Tunisia, a country she is visiting for the first time. “Tunisia is a beautiful country, with a high standard of living and competent people. I find Tunisians very welcoming”. The story of Fanta who is a successful woman, maintaining good relations with the Tunisians as well as the sub-Saharan community living in Tunisia is contrasted to that of Maria, 42, Ivorian, housekeeper, resident in Mansoura, a popular district of Ariana. Maria had come three years ago, then her sister Mariem joined her. They both work as housekeepers for 30 dinars a day. They have no friends apart from a neighbour from Senegal with whom they maintain friendships. In their testimony, they reckon that life in Tunis is too complicated and expensive.

The stories, although very different, highlight the human nature of the migration experience. Sub-Saharan migrants come from different backgrounds and have different and individual stories: they are not all housekeepers, nor are they all diplomats. The magazine *Femmes et Réalités* which relates the stories of these sub-Saharan women is the first online platform dedicated exclusively to women. In telling the stories of sub-Saharan women in Tunisia, it acknowledges that they have something to say, other than what mainstream media relate about them. Even though some of the stories are not successful, the mere recounting of the concerns of Maria, Meriem, and the others is an attempt at unveiling the real human stories and shattering the perception that it is one homogeneous crowd of victims or deviants.

The common trait between the above-mentioned articles is recourse to the discursive strategies foregrounding agency and resistance and emphasising the sub-Saharans’ capacity to challenge oppressive structures and assert their existence and dignity. This is further exacerbated by pieces highlighting acts of protest, activism, and collective mobilisation within the sub-Saharan community against discrimination and marginalisation. In 2020, sub-Saharan workers joined the Tunisian trade union, UGTT. The event was mediated as a premiere in the Arab and African countries and sub-Saharan workers who joined the union were depicted as victorious “members” who challenged the imposed hierarchy in the labour market. The mere act of organising with the UGTT is an unprecedented triumph against “racism” and marginalisation (*Mosaique Fm & Al-Charaa Al Magharebi*, 2020 sub-corpus).



The media discourse in the sub-corpus also highlights instances of solidarity and coalition-building among sub-Saharans themselves as well as with the Tunisian society. Through the coverage of collective action, such as sit-ins and protests, aimed at unveiling and combating injustice and inequality, the discourse of the sub-corpus translated a sense of unity and purposefulness within the sub-Saharan community. Indeed, following the death of Falikou Coulibaly, news headlines and reports stressed this sub-Saharan communal solidarity and resistance. For example, *Babnat* coverage, titled “African students stage a vigil to condemn the murder of the head of the Ivorian community” (Arabic) using strong language stressing the strength and resilience of sub-Saharans. “Dozens” sub-Saharans sat in front of the municipal theatre—symbolic place of political and protests and sit-ins after the “revolution”—calling for a serious investigation of the murder and raising slogans such as “No to racism” and “We demand security and protection for African students”. In this piece, we can detect a rather positive representation posing on agency. In fact, in the same piece, the statement of Artur Kassai, representative of the students of the Central African Republic in Tunisia, is quoted, “sub-Saharan students are united by the love of Tunisia, but in return we do not want it to become like European countries that do not accept Africans”<sup>194</sup> calling to end impunity for such crimes. The agency of the sub-Saharan is reflected in the affirmative language, verbs of demand, and the active voice rather than the passive.

The assertive language is reiterated in another article covering the same event, “Sub-Saharans demonstrate in Tunis: ‘Kahlouch and proud’”<sup>195</sup>. The title unveils the resilience of sub-Saharans who are not only demonstrating but also reappropriating the same racist term for black used by Tunisians to self-define. The description of the protest is also telling:

People of Ivorian, Guinean, Nigerian, Cameroonian nationalities... as well as Tunisians took part in this **demonstration** during which the Sub-Saharans **protested** against the racist acts and the insecurity from which they suffer. Tunisian public figures also took part in this **protest movement** such as the president of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, Messaoud Romdhani, journalists and freedom defenders. During this highly covered demonstration, **slogans** were chanted to **denounce** racism as well as acts of racial hatred against sub-Saharans. Some called to end racism and violence, while others **displayed their pride in belonging to this community**... It

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<sup>194</sup> The fact that this parallel is established by the sub-Saharan students representative and quoted/ adopted by the article translates a stance of the Tunisians who do not want their country to turn like European countries in their treatment of migrants as danger and threat. The stance often poses an analogy between the treatment of some European countries like France and Italy of Tunisians and Tunisia’s treatment of sub-Saharans in an attempt to warn against such a pattern.

<sup>195</sup> *Webdo.tn*, French, December 2018.

is worth noting that Tunisians supported this demonstration calling in turn to protect this community and to offer it all the conditions to live in peace in Tunisia. (Translation mine)

The strong stance of the sub-Saharan migrants— with all their different national backgrounds— is yet another proof of the positive representation of the sub-Saharans as a cohesive, united community. This departs from the collectivised representations of the victims in the main corpus where there is no agency or assertive language. The sub-corpus giving voice to the sub-Saharans is an attempt to criticise structural inequality. In fact, while celebrating individual agency and resilience (through words like *slogans, pride, belonging*), the discourse also critiques (*denounce, protest*) the power dynamics that perpetuate inequality and discrimination against sub-Saharans, be they the institutional barriers or the injustices that shape the experiences of sub-Saharan individuals and communities.

The bulk of the news stories<sup>196</sup> in the main corpus are about shipwrecks and deaths — depicting sub-Saharans as numbers and corpses. In the sub-corpus, these stories are built differently as they feature human protagonists with different names, nationalities, genders, and potentials, not reduced to numbers or blurred groups. One of the rare articles tackling the sea tragedies<sup>197</sup> depict the sub-Saharans migrants as 'castaways' and 'survivors', "most of whom are from sub-Saharan Africa (from Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon)". It is noteworthy that the discursive choices differ and depart from the mainstream media choices as sub-Saharans are not reduced to "Africans". There is no over-generalisation or collectivisation as these are people from specific nationalities. Contrary to the recurrent use of the topos of numbers, the predication strategy rests on a realistic and neutral description of sub-Saharans as being cast away and having survived the sea tragedy.

In the sub-corpus, not only are sub-Saharans given voice and agency, but they are also depicted as organised and structured as is the case with the 2013 *Nawaat* article "Assault of sub-Saharan students: 'The attack on the building in Lafayette is not a first'". The "young man" Touré Blamassi, the president of the Association of African Students and Trainees in Tunisia (AESAT) "talks easily" about the "role of youth" and the need for an "African unity". He gets to present AESAT, created in 1993 as a joint attempt

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<sup>196</sup> In journalism, a news story is a way of presentation of news delivered as a narrative account with a news item at the core of the story.

<sup>197</sup> "The paradox of Zarzis: the land of emigrants which is hostile to immigration!" *Kapitalis*, French, 2015 sub-corpus.

by some sub-Saharan students, and the community in a positive way as a group of students and trainees, many of whom are scholarship holders. They wanted to organise a platform for cultural exchange so that they know each other and to make their cultures known to the Tunisian population. The second goal of the association was to defend the rights of African students and trainees in Tunisia and to provide them with assistance if necessary.

The same assertive representation is also conveyed in the *Business News* article “Slim Khalbous receives a delegation of sub-Saharan students” (French, 2016) as a delegation of two of the three Congolese students who were victims of a violent attack on December 24, 2016, the head of the Congolese community in Tunisia, the association of foreign students at Zitouna University, leaders of the Association “Terre d’Asile” and members of the Association of African Students and Trainees in Tunisia (AESAT). Sub-Saharan students voiced their concerns and discussed concrete solutions to be put in place to improve their reception, the formalities related to their academic background and residence permits. The verbs used show an egalitarian representation of sub-Saharans and the rest of the social actors, as they are represented as an active group seeking “change”, “quality” and “rights”.

The artistic mobilisation of the sub-Saharan community is covered in many pieces like “An artistic evening on January 14th Street in the capital to denounce racism” (*Sabra Fm*, Arabic), and “Tunisia sings Africa at Avenue Habib Bourguiba in Tunis” (*La Presse News*, French). A variation on classical demonstrations is established in these pieces as the sub-Saharan migrants are shown to have an artistic approach to mobilisation using ‘music’, ‘chants’, ‘candles’, and ‘painting’. The articles draw on positive stereotyping and framing as sub-Saharans are usually represented as free spirits who love singing, dancing, and partying as is their habit in gnawa and stambeli.

In terms of leadership and economic activity, the article “Young African entrepreneurs are mobilising!” (*African Manager*, French) where the UNIVENTURE program signalled the participation of a dozen sub-Saharan projects from different countries, Morocco, Liberia, Senegal, Ivory Coast, “The First Tunisian of “Night of Ideas”: Thoughts of freedom” (*Kapitalis*, French) with the theme “A common world”, and “Tunisia seen by sub-Saharan students!” (*Le temps*, French) tackling the organisation of the “Tunisian African Empowerment Forum”, in 2017 in Tunis, with the aim of relaunching Tunisia as a destination of choice for sub-Saharans students who praise and salute the initiative. Activating the frame of sub-Saharan hero — or entrepreneur and ‘startupper’ — clearly showcases a representation posing on

individualisation, contra the dominant narratives about poverty, death, marginalisation and victimhood. The significance of these articles lies in their countering the negative frames about sub-Saharanans in Tunisia to give the audience other symbolic categories to absorb and anchor. In fact, the frames and counter-frames used in the media discourse on sub-Saharanans are both activated and anchored. The conflictual frames will give space for thinking about the possibilities of sub-Saharan migration.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The present analysis of the counter-representations of sub-Saharan migrants in the Tunisian media sub-corpus reveals several key insights regarding counter-discourse, resistance, and alternative strategies of belonging. Through the lens of CDA, specifically DHA, a multifaceted approach to representing sub-Saharan migrants could be established. The findings of the two first analytical chapters reveal a conflictual discourse on the sub-Saharan existence characterised by counter-frames and alternative discursive strategies that challenge dominant narratives of othering and amalgamation.

The representative Tunisian media sub-corpus unveils a multi-pronged approach to representing sub-Saharan migrants deploying counter-frames like ‘sub-Saharan businessman’ and ‘sub-Saharan integrated family’. More importantly, the analysis underscores the presence of a counter-discourse and active resistance emanating from the sub-Saharan migrant community itself. This resistance manifests through self-representations and narratives reflecting empowerment, agency, and resilience and permeating the media discourse, portraying sub-Saharan migrants not as passive recipients of racism, inequalities and marginalisation, but as active agents asserting their rights and dignity.

The sub-corpus pieces strategically use counter nomination and predication strategies to dismantle stereotypical portrayals and promote alternative positive perspectives. These counter-representations operate argumentation schemes resting upon *topoi* such as universal justice, historical ties, and humanitarianism to advocate for the recognition and rights of sub-Saharan migrants as equal members of Tunisian society. By humanising sub-Saharanans— who are rather collectivized and amalgamated in the main corpus— and highlighting their diverse experiences as students, domestic workers, entrepreneurs, restaurateurs, etc. as well as respective contributions in their community and society in general, the journalists and speakers in the sub-corpus endeavour to shatter both grand categories and negative stereotypes. The analysis builds on the critical role of individualization and positive representation strategies in shaping the media discourse surrounding sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia and cultivating a

more inclusive, nuanced, multifaceted and empathetic (which poses the genuine non-condescending capacity to position oneself in the sub-Saharanans' circumstances rather than merely victimising them and labelling/ categorizing them as 'wretched' others worthy of charity and salvation) understanding of their migratory experience.

At its core, this chapter underscores the potential influence of what could be perceived as 'minority' and 'resistance' discourse in reshaping social attitudes towards sub-Saharan migrants. Quantitatively less significant than the main corpus, the sub-corpus engages in diverse topoi and argumentation scenarios to resist the dominantly negative social and political representations. By engaging with counter-discourse, such media outlets make use of alternative narratives of belonging. Indeed, the 'clash' in logic between the findings of the two first analytical chapters begs the question of a unique 'migration discourse' in Tunisia since (i) discourse on Tunisian migrants to Europe *seems*<sup>198</sup> divergent from that on sub-Saharanans in Tunisia, and (ii) media representations of sub-Saharanans in Tunisia is discrepant and conflictual as shown by the two corpora and analyses.

Hence, the next logical step is to explore the fascinating tension between these seemingly contradictory portrayals. By delving into the realm of policy shifts, specifically focusing on the anti-trafficking law (2016), anti-racism law (2018), and domestic work regulatory law (2021), the analysis of the discourse surrounding these policy-related changes will help identify potential tipping points and discursive moments of change within the main corpus itself. These moments represent instances where the discourse shifted away from negativity and aligned with the sub-corpus narrative, advocating for sub-Saharan rights through a more positive representation. The goal is to understand how these policy shifts were represented and how they potentially influenced the socio-political attitude and policy-making processes. We will enquire about the (i) possibility of specific discourse(s) serving as catalysts for a more nuanced portrayal and therefore defence of sub-Saharan migrants, (ii) the potential of these legislative changes to genuinely reshape societal attitudes (in contrast to being merely a tactical adaptation), and (iii)

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<sup>198</sup> The word "seems" is employed here on purpose because the findings prove otherwise. In a presentation at Migration Conference, Hamburg 2023, Hlioui (2023) demonstrated that the Tunisian media discourse on both Tunisian *harrāqa* and sub-Saharanans migrants converge and diverge according to the themes tackled. Cf. Hlioui, A. (2023), Tunisian 'Escapees'- Sub-Saharan 'Invaders': Tunisian Media Discourse(s) on Crimmigration", in Proceedings of the Migration Conference, University of Hamburg: IV Migration Governance, 2023(b), Transnational Press, London, p.248.

the dynamics or interplay between policy, public discourse, and the evolving representation of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia.

## VI- Chapter Six: Media, Advocacy and Policymaking

### 1. How Media Discourse Shapes Public Attitude

#### 1.1 'The Power of Discourse' Praxis

CDA, in general, and DHA as a branch of discourse analysis, “provide[ ] a general framework to problem-oriented social research” (Baker et al., 2008, p. 279). Indeed, DHA is employed to examine the use of discourse in the context of any social ‘problem’ such as poverty, abortion, unemployment, racism, sexism, and migration. In this logic, the use of this discourse theory/ methodology combination in social science has a pragmatic aim— divulging the discursive manifestations of a social phenomenon. Norman Fairclough, one of the founding fathers of CDA, reckons that ‘ideological discursive formations’ are incrustated in a social context, dictated by certain social groups and transformed into taken-for-granted statements and ideas. This is a stance he shares with Symbolic Interactionism which reckons that meanings and attitudes are first construed then ‘anchored’ in the social practice as such. Hence, discourse reflects these social dynamics, and it is only through a thorough analysis that we can unveil the latent social dynamics.

The use of SI, as an underlying theoretical framework, stems from belief in the power of social interactions through symbolic channels. Indeed, the Symbolic Interactionist perspective on media acknowledges that media content can impact how people interact and relate to each other. The way media portrays social norms, values, and behaviours can influence individuals' expectations and affect how they engage with others. Through *positioning* and *anchoring*, the media have the capacity of appropriating new social notions and anchoring them in the audience’s imaginary. Not only do they play a crucial role in the socialisation process, as it introduces individuals to cultural values, norms, and expectations, but they also teach individuals how to behave in new social situations. In the case of post-2011 Tunisia, the audiences and the media interacted and discussed new social phenomena or old muffled ones, and it was an opportunity for this symbolic interaction to produce meaningful debates on social issues such as single mothers, inheritance, women’s rights, drugs, migration, etc.

It is safe to say that discourse analysis has a socio-political scope in its attempt to extract social formations and processes. Denuding discursive processes is a dynamic act of resistance to power dynamics. Some discourse analysts even suggest that such an endeavour which does not have as a project to be enmeshed in this socio-political struggle is not a worthy one. Attributing a practical and realistic trait

to CDS, *Language and Power* was a manifesto of ‘radical’ CDA, one that foregrounded “the power behind discourse” as opposed to “power in discourse” and how powerful groups “shape the ‘order of discourse’” as well as public order (Fairclough, 2014, p. 3). This view establishes discourse as a factor of social struggle, thus attributing to CDA the role of “social emancipation”, i.e., enlightening people on the functioning of discourse in hegemony, political manipulation, social conflict, etc. CDA does not only seek to unveil representations or “what is going” in the world, but also how these representations transform and change social practices and stances (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 6).

Tangibly, discourse analysis is not analytical per se, but it is an intrinsically discursive action, especially the analysis of social representations in discourses. Fairclough argues that much research about the representation strategies of a particular social group, such as migrants, does not attempt to discuss the background of those representations, i.e., the “actions and activities” relevant to the discursive representations. Representation is not the aim of discourse production; the purpose is rather to have an impact, i.e. to “function as a part of action” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 15). Fairclough (2014) admits that drawing on the kind of interaction between text and social context is of paramount importance in understanding social change. For him, the link between critique, explanation and action can be practically significant in several ways such as defining “movements for general social change” *inter alia* “change focused upon particular groups of people such as women or immigrants” (Fairclough, 2014, p. 15).

When addressing debates on migration, especially media representations of migration and migrants, discourse analysis can not only bring insights into the normative aspects of such representations, but also an “explanatory critique” of such representation thereof. Fairclough gives the example of how CDA may inform a ‘logic of appearance’, in contrast to an ‘explanatory logic’, thus accounting for migration in terms of labour demands for cheaper labour and reduction of wages, “challenging the absence of explanatory and historical representations in immigration debates”. In light of this understanding, CDA is a starting point for the critique of social reality offering potential action to change it.

In this way, Fairclough refuses to reduce CDA to a mere linguistic analysis toolkit and strongly suggests it should be used as an interdisciplinary method with applicatory prospects in social research<sup>199</sup>.

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<sup>199</sup> This view culminates in his arguing for using CDA as a tool for social research in *Analysing Discourse* (2003).



He states that CDA is “a resource which can contribute to social research and to social change in the direction of greater social justice” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 17).

Ruth Wodak, founder of DHA, also acknowledges that discourse analysis does not concern itself with the examination of linguistic elements but rather the dynamics of social phenomena which are “necessarily complex” (Wodak & Meyer, 2015, p. 2). Unlike Fairclough, Wodak reckons, in CDA, that socio-political ‘problems’ are not always negative or “serious” as the critique in CDA is not necessarily reflective of criticism. In Wodak’s optics, the problem-oriented aspect of CDA is related to the study and challenge of social phenomena as opposed to acceptance and mere description of such phenomena. CDA ought to focus on the “dynamic (socio)-cognitive or interactional moves and strategies” and “functions of (social, cultural, situative, [situated] and cognitive) contexts of language use” (Catalano & Waugh, 2020, p.3). Stated bluntly, Wodak (2014) reiterates that a more elaborate and broader analytic approach is required, and that critical discourse analysis turn out to be inadequate in the absence of an “interdisciplinary” linguistic approach (Wodak, 2014, p. 311).

Discourse is therefore constitutive of and conditioned by society; it is construed by social dynamics and contributes to changing social reality. Power is another concept which lies at the core of CDA, focusing on the discursive strategies of those in power— be they politicians, journalists or public figures— and the ways in which they perpetuate or metamorphose inequalities. Anna Holzscheiter discerns two modes of expressing power in discourse through social interaction, namely the power of discourse, that is, “influence of historically specific meaning structures”, and the power in discourse, i.e., “the power of actors to alter these meaning-structures through communicative actions, individually and collectively” (Holzscheiter, 2010, p. 3). She establishes that through a discourse-analytical toolkit, “transformation of a distinct set of transnational norms” can be made possible. Indeed, discourse-based approaches to the examination of rules and institutions enable to trace the transformations in “global and domestic policymaking” through discourse as a social communication mode (Holzscheiter, 2010, p. 2).

Accordingly, in this study, the analysis of sub-Saharan representations and counter-representations in Tunisian media should lead to a broader investigation of the ramifications of such discursive representation choices on the social acceptance of sub-Saharans in Tunisia. In this sense, the choice of the subject-matter stems from a strive to understand the diachronic evolution of such discourse and its interconnectedness with social reality, especially in relation to the “relapse” of the post-2021 period. Having started with a main corpus, thus a main discourse, we have come to detect a counter-discourse

within the discourse. Delving deeper into the seeming conflict between the two corpora, we could see how they both contribute to shaping the post-2011 media discourse on migration. In this last stage of the analysis, we attempt to recontextualize the media representations of sub-Saharanans in the new context of the post-2011 policy scenery in Tunisia.

## **1.2 Media Discourse Analysis: What for Really? What to do with the Findings?**

Critical discourse studies have been recently used to cross-fertilize new research fields, which were once foreign to discourse studies, like international relations, law and political studies<sup>200</sup>. Political Science and legal studies experts are increasingly inclined to reckon the discursive turn in social sciences. Indeed, the study of discourse is cross-disciplinary by nature, and it has come to enrich these fields with a fresh outlook into the dynamics of social interactions through discursive and argumentative strategies.

Conceptually, in CDS, an empirical event is any observable or tangible incident, activity, or phenomenon that can be analysed through the lens of discourse. This might include various communicative acts or artefacts, *inter alia* speeches, media texts, communiqués, social media posts, political debate, legislative documents, and interviews. Empirical events are put to the test through CDA to understand the dynamics of discourse construction and social negotiation of meanings, power relations, and identities. Analysts examine the linguistic features, rhetorical strategies, and discursive practices employed in these events to uncover the underlying social processes at play. Being the primary data for CDA, empirical events are viewed as phenomena that have “discursive manifestations” across four heuristic levels (i) “the immediate text of the communicative event”, (ii) “the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship” between discourses, contexts and utterances, (iii) “the extra linguistic social and environmental variables and institutional frames”, i.e., physical and facial gestures as well as power and institutional hierarchy and cultural norms, and lastly (iv) the “socio-political and historical context” where the discursive practices are situated (Wodak, 2009b, pp. 38-39).

Against this backdrop, the empirical study will now scrutinise the last level, i.e. the socio-political and historical contexts. At this level, the analysis will be informed by quantitative findings that signal shifts or abnormalities in the diachronic evolution of the corpus. DHA should ideally abide by an eight-

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<sup>200</sup> For instance, Krzyżanowski (2010), Wodak (2011) and Wodak (2018).

step scheme which is automatically and iteratively deployed throughout the analysis<sup>201</sup>. The last step is particularly significant at this stage as it concerns “the practical application of analytical results” in interventions aiming at having impact and changing discourses. DHA therefore is not only inherently problem-oriented as all CDS, but it also is a power of suggestion. It is entangled in every social phenomenon and hence can change how power and meaning dynamics are perceived.

European Studies, for instance, have recently been embracing qualitative and quantitative critical discourse methodologies, away from the old-fashioned content-centred approach. Hutter et al. (2016) analysed media and policy papers with an approach which operationalizes macro-theories along with systematic text and discourse analysis. Indeed, Wodak & Fairclough’s work (2010) on European higher education policies show that the production and perpetuation of discourses of exclusion/ inclusion can be related to the macro-strategies and policies in a systematic manner through a critical discourse examination. Delving into these policy dynamics through discourse, Wodak focuses on the case-study of controversial political discourse about the ‘refugee crisis’.

One of the best examples of the systematic and harmonious studies of discourse and its interplay with social issues and policies is Ruth Wodak’s “Discourse and European integration” (2018) where she applies DHA to the case study of the evolution of political positions about the ‘refugee-crisis’ in Austria over one year. By focussing on legitimation and argumentation, Wodak highlights the myriad ways policy shifts may be legitimated for social acceptability, even in a context of a democratic and human rights-inclined society. A very large corpus tackling ‘the refugee crisis’ shows a prominence of a rhetoric of ‘building a fence/wall’. The diachronic evolution of landmark national and global ‘discursive events’ shows a significant impact on the discourse on national protection: fences and walls. For each event, there is a dominant political statement in the headlines. These statements are reiterative and recurrent through the corpus and over several days.

The DHA allowed therefore for the detection and deciphering of the ‘fences and walls’ rhetoric and the diachronic observable qualitative change in policymaking in Austria from ‘welcoming’ to a ‘exclusionary’. In this case-study, Wodak builds on what she calls “tipping points”— which are quantitatively detectable— like the terrorist attack of November 2015 in Paris, to examine these shifts.

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<sup>201</sup> For more information on the eight-stage program suggested by Reizigl & Wodak, see Reizigl, M. (2017).

Subsequent to these tipping points, the media discourse shifted from acceptance to accusation towards migrants. The impact is not only seen in the shift in social acceptance of refugees but also policy-wise. In fact, the implementation of EU-decided policies was thwarted, and the Balkan route was proposed to close by the Austrian officials.

*Policing the Crisis* (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts, 2017) is a seminal cultural studies project which, at the core, sought to dissect how cultural legitimation works, through media, to manufacture an acceptability for policies in a dialectical way, as well as how policies and laws may foreshadow the potential shifts in the future cultural values and practices. These case-studies are of paramount importance— as much in theory as in praxis— as they allow for the recontextualization of policies (macro level) within the micro level. Discourse analysis is apt to encapsulate political or juridical debate within media discourse and to produce a novel understanding of political dynamics. It has drawn increasing attention to issues of social change and political antagonism, political framing, policy-making processes, and agenda-setting, in close relation to the role of media discourse in politics and executive behaviour.

Such research offers potential to capture discourse empirically through data, materials and toolkits *inter alia* content analysis and computer-assisted content analysis (chapter 4 and 5), to eventually draw on political discourse. These recent findings have undoubtedly shown that discursive practices engender social and political ones and vice versa, hence discourse analysis should also have projections into these socio-political practices. Moreover, Critical discourse endeavours adhere to the constructivist and discourse-oriented understanding that social order is (re)constructed through social communication (and thus symbolic interactionism). Integrating discourse analysis with social science theories enables us to grasp the dynamic construction of sub-Saharan migration. Such cross-disciplinary and eclectic approach systematically deconstructs the workings of Tunisian media— mainstream, independent and alternative outlets— institutions and enhances our understanding of the impact of traditional and social media in their production and reproduction of public sentiments and attitudes, i.e., public opinion.

The interplay between media and policy has long been scrutinised in research. Policy, in the context of discourse studies, comprises policy-making practices and the social legitimation of laws and policies. In the examination of media discourse regarding migration in Tunisia spanning from 2012 to 2020, a significant finding emerged regarding the portrayal of sub-Saharan migrants. The analysis reveals the presence of a dominant corpus within the media landscape that consistently depicted sub-Saharan

migrants through a lens of deviance or victimhood. Concurrently, a sub-corpus emerged, diverging from the predominant narrative by granting agency and humanising these migrants, portraying them from a positive perspective. Besides, a noteworthy quantitative observation emerged from the diachronic evolution of both corpora. Peaks in media discourse activity— or what Wodak (2018) called “tipping points”— coinciding with periods of heightened legislative activity, were detected. Specifically, these peaks aligned with debates surrounding the enactment of laws directly or indirectly impacting sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia. The intertwined nature of media representations and policy-making processes underscore a ‘relation’ of some nature between peaks in media discourse on migration and legislative activity. The media, as a key influencer of public opinion and agenda-setting, plays a crucial role in shaping societal perceptions and attitudes towards migrant populations.

Therefore, understanding the dialectical dynamics between media discourse and legislative action is imperative for comprehensively analysing migratory policies and their impacts. This conspicuous observation led to the quest to conduct in-depth research exploring the possible correlational/ causal mechanisms, if any, underlying the relationship between media representations of migrants and legislative responses. Investigating how media narratives influence policy agendas, shape public discourse, and ultimately inform the formulation and implementation of migratory policies will provide valuable insights for policymakers, advocacy groups, and scholars alike. In addition, examining the effectiveness of legislative measures in addressing the concerns raised in media discourse and promoting the rights and integration of migrant communities is essential for advancing inclusive and equitable migratory policies in Tunisia.

## **2. Tipping Points: Markers and Triggers of Change**

Migration discourse in Tunisia has garnered increasing attention in recent years, reflecting the evolving socio-political landscape and the shifting dynamics of migration flows. The intersection of migration with issues such as human rights, labour, security, and cultural integration has rendered it a focal point of public discourse, policy debates, and legislative agendas. Against this backdrop, understanding the representations of migration/ migrants in media discourse becomes crucial, as it not only reflects societal attitudes and perceptions but also shapes public opinion and informs policy responses.

In the present chapter, the quantitative findings derived from the analysis of the main media corpus are revealed to elucidate the prevailing trends, patterns, and fluctuations in media discourse surrounding migration within the Tunisian context. We start the analysis by the quantitative findings, focusing on key metrics such as frequency of coverage, thematic distribution, and temporal trends. Then, we discuss the legitimation and argumentation used in three different case-studies pertaining to legislation passed because/ for/ in connection with sub-Saharanans. Finally, coupled with expert interviews for guidance, corroboration and triangulation, we discuss the implications of these findings and their significance for grasping the role of media discourse in shaping public perceptions and policy responses to migration in Tunisia.

### 2.1.1 General Key Observations

Upon examination of the corpus KPIs<sup>202</sup>, concurring observations were made. These are prominent findings to study the impact of media discourse on public opinion and/ or policy. In fact, the first general observation regards the repartition of categories reach, i.e., the categories that most reached the audience. Definitely, politics (37.9 %), then economics (17.4 %)— as opposed to art, culture, sports and science— seem to be the chief concern of the audience in reading media pieces about sub-Saharan migrants and migration. The analysis of the media coverage distribution across different categories indicates that within the analysed corpus, the bulk of media coverage reaches audiences through content related to political topics. This finding can provide several insights into media agenda-setting.

Indeed, the high proportion of coverage related to politics suggests that political issues and events are significant drivers of media attention and agenda-setting within the monitored context. Additionally, political discourse dominates the media agenda, influencing public perceptions, discussions, and decision-making processes with a salience of political or policy-related issues and actors. This may reflect the

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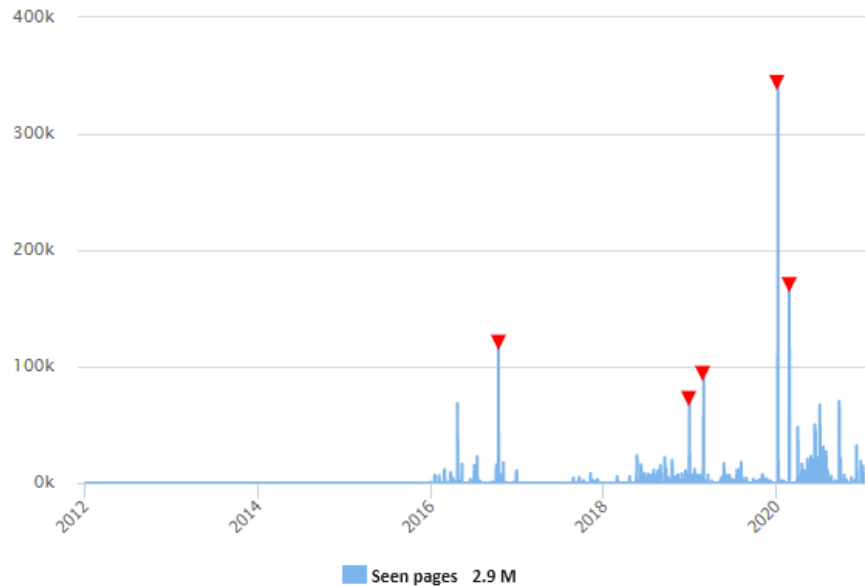
<sup>202</sup> In WebRadar, “KPIs” stands for Key Performance Indicators. These are measurable values that assess the performance and effectiveness of media monitoring and analysis efforts. Some common KPIs include, *media coverage* (total number of media mentions captured within a specific time frame, classified by source, topic, or geographic region), *sentiment analysis*, *share of voice* (proportion of media coverage received by a particular entity or topic reflecting its visibility and influence in the media landscape), *trend analysis* (changes in media coverage and sentiment over time, indicating emerging trends, patterns, or shifts in public perception), *media reach* (potential audience size or exposure generated by media mentions, often measured by factors such as circulation, viewership, or online engagement metrics) and *impact analysis*, the tangible outcomes or effects resulting from media coverage, such as changes in public opinion, policy decisions, brand reputation, or stakeholder behaviour.

ongoing political controversies, and policy debates that attract media attention and public interest. Finally, the prevalence of political content suggests that politics-centred discourse plays a pivotal role in shaping public discourse and engagement within the monitored context. It highlights the importance of political communication and media platforms as channels for conveying information, shaping opinions, and mobilising public engagement in Tunisia post-2011.

The language reach repartition, i.e. the distribution of media content across different languages within the monitored corpus, shows an almost equitable distribution of Arabic (53.7%) and French (45.2%), providing insights into the multilingual coverage. The balanced distribution across the two main languages in Tunisian society (discussed earlier in chapter 4) suggests an inclusive media landscape, catering to all categories of audience. Contrary to expectations, French-speaking outlets are as present as Arabic-speaking outlets, thus the content reaches the common media consumers as well as niche and elite audiences. The impact of any potential public opinion shifts is therefore non-restrictive and is rather systematic and general.

## **2.1 Evolution of the Content Production and Dissemination**

Almost all the diachronic evolution statistics have an identical concentration pattern in common: a sudden increase and stabilisation of numbers of shares, mentions and readings from 2016 to 2020. Indeed, the reach evolution graph— depicting the impact of media coverage over time— typically plots the cumulative reach or engagement metrics (such as the number of mentions, audience impressions, or social media interactions) over sub-Saharan-centred issues from 2012 to 2020. Tracking the growth and fluctuations in media coverage and related audience engagement helps us identify trends, patterns, and key events— ‘tipping points’— that drive changes in media and audience engagement over time. This information is valuable for understanding the dynamics of public discourse, monitoring the impact of some events within the media landscape:

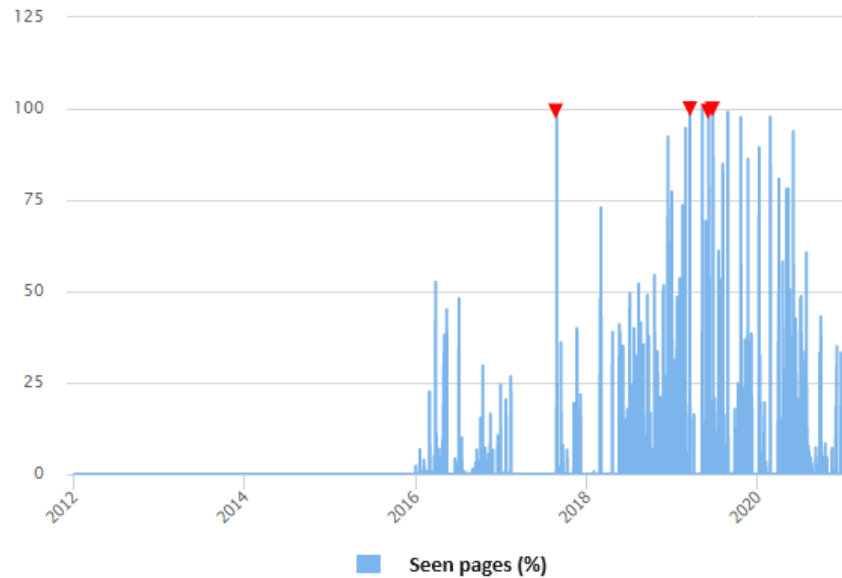


**Figure 16: The reach evolution of the corpus 2012-2020**

It is very clear on the graph that the reach, i.e. number of times the media pieces were read, was very low prior to 2016, then from 2016 on the audience engagement was dynamic and fluctuating with peaks in 2017, 2019, and 2020. Such fluctuations will be further investigated in the next section when dealing with case-studies of the passed laws. Rhyming with this observation, the share of audience evolution over time, i.e. the changing proportion of audience engagement or attention received by the topics over time, shows a quasi-calque of the precedent metric. This metric provides insights into the salience of sub-Saharan migration, and an increase in the share of the audience suggests growing public interest from 2016 on with peaks in 2017 and 2019. Usually, fluctuations are reflected in the audience's engagement with the examined topics. In this optic, the Tunisian audience suddenly became interested in/concerned with sub-Saharan migrants in 2016, although their presence was visible in media from 2012 owing to the Libyan crisis and the Shusha camp dilemma.

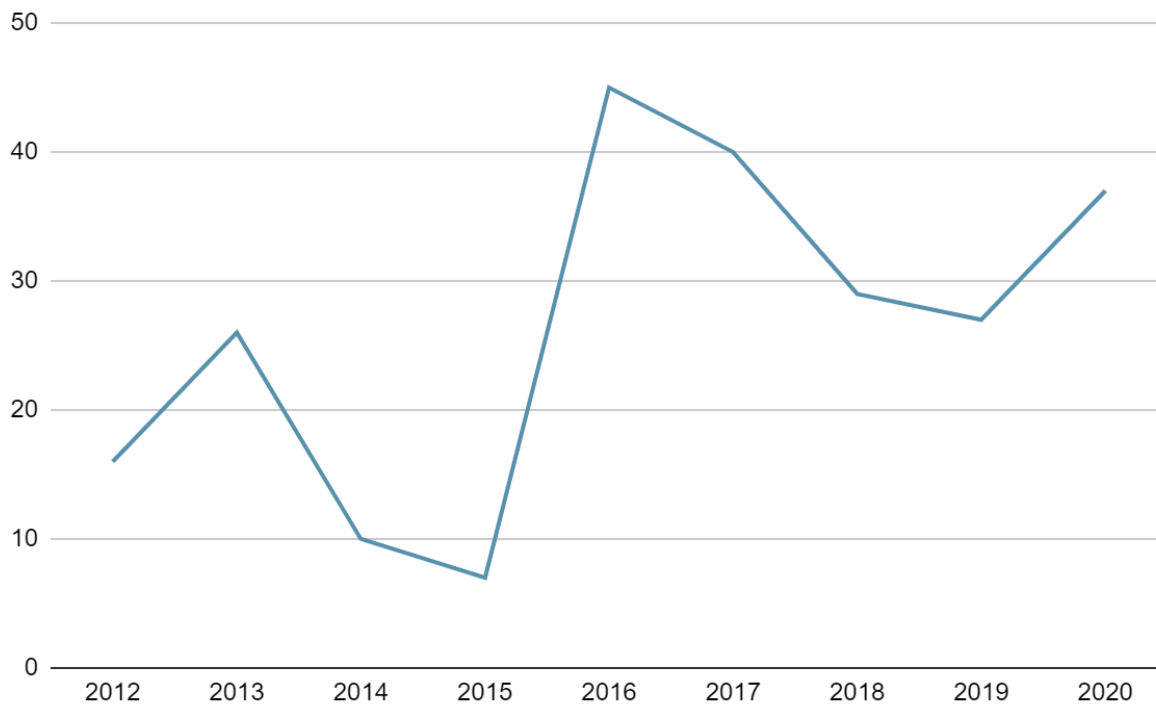
This might be attributed to particular discursive events, like the 2016 incident in Tunis (See chapter 4 and 5) and the murder of the representative of the Ivorian community Falikou Coulibaly in 2018. Yet, this does not explain the peaks in 2017 and 2019. Thus, there must have been other debates around sub-Saharanans which engaged the audience to this point. My hypothesis that these tipping points are related to the aforementioned laws might account for the media debates about these specific policies or legislative moves and heightened public interest or scrutiny, potentially influencing policy decisions and agendas.





**Figure 17: The share of audience evolution 2012-2020**

These findings are further corroborated by the metrics related to the content volume evolution and content share evolution, which reflect a quasi-null share in the years from 2012 to 2016 and an active yet fluctuating share content from 2012 on. In the first half of the year 2017, the absence of content share is clear, yet the share resumes in the second half. The difference however between both metrics, content share and audience reach, lies in the peaks as the audience engagement is highest in the second half of 2017 and the year 2019, whereas the peaks in content share correspond to the second half of 2018 and the beginning of 2019. This difference may be accounted for by the consequential nature of sharing media content, which usually happens after certain material is produced. Hence, the most appealing mediated content appears to be shared a while after its production. The effect is more audience engagement. The social interactions evolution— i.e. the number of interactions with the socially mediated content— witnessed a very clear active engagement in the year 2016 and in the first months of 2017— year of the racist attack on the sub-Saharan students in Tunis and the year during which the anti-trafficking law was adopted (and the anti-racism bill was discussed).



**Figure 18: Evolution of the frequency of the word “law” in the corpus**

Tracing the frequency of the word “law”, owing to the hypothesis that the topos of law is used ostensibly in relation to sub-Saharan in the corpus, the findings are coherent with the quantitative results in Chapter 5. The frequency of “law” matches the overall diachronic evolution of articles per year. The year 2016 marks again the peak of media content, but also peaks of ‘mentions’ related to law. The media content is again shown to follow the rule of sensational and buzz-effect discursive events. The tipping points will be further elaborated on when addressing the case studies.

Qualitatively, the frequent mention of “law” and the recourse to topos of law functions as a recurring argumentative scheme appealing to established legal frameworks and principles to legitimate decisions about migration and can be used to support both pro-migrant and anti-migrant stances depending on the specific legal framework invoked. In some instances, legal frameworks are used to justify calls for stricter border controls, easier “inhumane” deportation measures, or intricate legal pathways to citizenship. In the Tunisian discourse, as will be discussed below, the legitimation strategy is carried out by invoking the law, to legitimate or delegitimize it. The topos of law is not neutral, and its interpretation depends on the specific legal framework, cultural context, and media agenda behind the discourse. It is used to either

push for a legal agenda or justify positions or actions related to a legislation: two positions which may overlap at times as it will be shown in the analysis

### **3. The Case-studies**

The focus in this chapter is on the nature of relationships between media discourse and policymaking regarding the sub-Saharan migratory question in Tunisia. To do that, we attempt to analyse the media production in the periods preceding and following the parliament's adoption of three laws. The key question is whether these relationships are mutually fostering or antagonistic. Another key question concerning the nature of this relation is the matter of correlation and causation: does media discourse push for and cause changes in policymaking or does the media discourse reflect the policy-making process?

Such an endeavour is very intricate for many reasons, the most important of which being the very nature of media and policy dynamics as well as the absence of a systematic measurement or grid to assess such a relation. To attempt to answer these questions, we need to pay close attention to the context and history of media production in Tunisia, to the established formal relationships between the media and legislation institutions, therefore between journalists and politicians, and to media influence post-2011, and most importantly to triangulate the quantitative/ qualitative findings generated with social and historical data and expert interviews in order to identify 'plausible' explanations for the shifts in public opinion and policy.

DHA as an approach encourages triangulation, i.e., by bringing the focus of the discourse analysis beyond text and unpacking the several 'symbolic' meanings expressed by summing them with the 'deleted' or 'relegated' missing socio-historical events. If we start from the basic assumption that public discourse mirrors social change and vice versa (Couldry, 2008, in Viola & Verheul, 2020), without assuming that correlation proves direct causation, we can argue that discourse(s), sociopolitical and historical discursive events, therefore meanings may be scrutinised as a "mutually reinforcing cycle" (Viola & Verheul, 2020, p. 3). in which the representations of social groups and events generate explicit meanings and potentially generate other events, such as legislative ones, which will eventually return to the public discourse sphere to be represented and discussed.

For this triangulation mission, we chose to have recourse to expert interviews involving individuals who possess the relevant specialised knowledge, experiences and/ or expertise. In the context of the study of the potential correlations between Tunisian media representations of sub-Saharan migrants and

particular policy shifts, expert interviews can provide valuable insights from professionals working in fields such as migration governance, journalism, sociology, and politics. Expert interviews offered nuanced perspectives and contextual understanding of the 2012-2020 period as well as critical reflections on the dynamics between media discourse and policy developments.

Hence, we identified relevant target experts, based on their key expertise areas: politics, media and legislation, as the three fields which align with the scope and objectives of this final chapter. Some experts even have overlapping specialties, like journalists working on migration, or MPs having been members in the commission which discussed and reviewed one of the examined laws, or a legal expert who was part of the elaboration of or advocacy for one of the laws. We developed an interview protocol which has two parts: a general one seeking to inquire about the general influence of Tunisian media in the political scene after 2011. The second tackles the laws, object of case-studies hereinafter, and the media debate as well as agenda in close relation to the sub-Saharan question. The interviews are semi-structured, giving more freedom to the respondents but also to the interviewer, to ask open-ended and follow-up questions and clarify or contest some points.

Open-ended questions, unlike yes-no questions, allow experts to elaborate on their experiences, observations, and insights regarding the relationship between media discourse and policy shifts without being restricted to one answer which they do not entirely stand for. Most interviews were carried out online, for convenience reasons. The rest were face-to-face interviews. The interview template was drafted in English, Arabic and French for better accessibility to a wide range of experts, then they were recorded—after tacit consent— and transcribed accurately, then translated, if need be, to be analysed.

To put it in the words of Nick Couldry, “[m]ore crudely: We know media outputs have causal consequences (if they were inconsequential, why would we spend so much time studying them?), but how exactly?” (2008, p. 67). To tend to these queries, we attempt to study the nature of relations between three key laws— or legislation enactments— directly or indirectly related to sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia with the media discourse and sub-Saharan representations. Having noticed a statistical concentration of media items related to sub-Saharan representations in the period 2016-2020, we investigate the laws passed by the Tunisian parliament during— or directly after— this period. The investigation was informed by the contents, as these laws were recurrently mentioned in the corpus. A systematic search of the keyword ‘law’ (in Arabic, French, and English) yielded 66 results, and the search for ‘policy’ in the three corpus languages yielded 43 results. These constitute a rather sound foundation for the assumption that

part of the corpus is oriented towards promoting, advocating for or commenting on certain laws and policies in connection to sub-Saharan existence in Tunisia.

Indeed, Law No.2016-61 on the Prevention of Trafficking, aimed at addressing human trafficking, is a pertinent issue often associated with migrant populations, notably sub-Saharans. Then, Law No.2018-50 penalising racial discrimination, reflects efforts to combat racial discrimination, having affected the sub-Saharan migrant community profusely. Lastly, Law No.2021-37 regulating domestic work, recognizes the presence of migrant domestic workers in Tunisia, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, and aims to establish regulations safeguarding their rights and well-being. The case-studies will be discussed in chronological order, and not in terms of the importance or relevance of findings.

### **3.1 Organic Law No. 2016-61 on the prevention and fight against trafficking in persons<sup>203</sup>**

Part of the Tunisian national policy, this law was adopted on August 3, 2016. It consists of 66 articles covering the prevention as well as prosecution of perpetrators with a view to protecting victims and fighting all forms of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. These two types of organised crime are often confused by non-experts. However, in legal terms and contexts, while human trafficking and migrant smuggling have aspects in common and are sometimes conflated, they are two very distinct crimes and have different implications for the people involved, especially migrants. The Palermo Protocol (2000), i.e. the Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime defines trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”<sup>204</sup> The key component of the crime of trafficking is the notion of exploitation, ranging from sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, modern slavery practices, servitude, and kidnapping to simple fraud, deception, abuse of authority or the vulnerability of persons to exploit them in whatever form.

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<sup>203</sup> The official text of the law is published in Arabic in the official gazette (JORT No. 066 of 12/08/2016). Unofficial French translation is provided on <https://rb.gy/lv17ab>

<sup>204</sup> <https://shorturl.at/ss9xq>

Smuggling, which inherently linked to migrants, is different from trafficking as it does not automatically suppose a kind of exploitation. In fact, migrants are often found to be consenting to smuggling and are willing to participate and pay for it. Additionally, migrants are not always detained or enslaved, or even exploited when they are smuggled. Smuggling is defined in the Additional Protocols to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000)<sup>205</sup>, in the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (Art 3) as “the act of ensuring, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material advantage, the illegal entry into a State Party of a person who is neither a national nor a permanent resident of that State”. It is noteworthy that “illegal” is no longer used and it has come to be replaced by “irregular” in UN texts and institutions<sup>206</sup>. Mr Hassan Boubakri, an interviewed expert, the one with the longest and most interdisciplinary expertise in migration trends of the Maghreb, remembers that this law was passed after an advocacy conducted by different stakeholders and reckons a great role of media in this. He remembers the testimonies received from female sub-Saharanans who were “trafficked” during a workshop on the topic, before the law was passed.

Accordingly, smuggling is a crime against the institutions of a country, whereas trafficking is a crime against human rights. Both are related to migrants, yet trafficking is more serious and life threatening. The International Organization Against Modern Slavery (OICEM) stated that among victims of sexual exploitation, which is the most prevalent type of trafficking, almost 80% (men and women) are migrants. The gravity of the crime of human trafficking lies in the transnational and organised nature of the perpetrators involved.

Although the law itself is very detailed and terminologically accurate, the media discourse about these two crimes divulges certain confusion as journalists seem to conflate them. For instance, in the article “The case of the corpses in Ben Guerdane: the People Responsible for Human Trafficking and Coordinating with ISIS Revealed”<sup>207</sup> (*Zoom Tunisia*, Arabic), trafficking and smuggling are used interchangeably. After the corpses of three Chadian migrants were found in the Ktef port, investigations linked the incident to Libya-based criminal activities. The Boko Haram terrorist organisation is accused of simply supervising “smuggling” and being “active in the human trade market in Libya” although the

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<sup>205</sup> <https://shorturl.at/OnujA>

<sup>206</sup> An accurate exposé of the terminological and legal preference of irregular and undocumented here: [https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/09/TerminologyLeaflet\\_EN\\_PICUM.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/09/TerminologyLeaflet_EN_PICUM.pdf)

<sup>207</sup> 2016 sub-corpus, Arabic.

real crime here is trafficking because of the exploitation qualifying trade with sub-Saharanans in Libya and Tunisia. This confusion is present in other articles covering the same incident.

Apart from covering trafficking-related incidents, some articles even establish the need for a follow-up on the victims of human trafficking, as stipulated in Organic Law No. 2016-61. In the article “Doctors of the World: Some immigrants in Tunisia suffer psychological breakdown and racial discrimination”<sup>208</sup>, the journalist quotes the General Coordinator of *Médecins du Monde* in Tunisia, Leila Karabouj, who contends that issuance of a law criminalizing human trafficking did not hamper the networks “trafficking ...immigrants in Tunisia”, especially women coming from Ivory Coast, as well as young men who are defrauded and deluded with the hope of joining football teams in Tunisia. The suffering of those migrants is further accentuated by the administrative ordeal of establishing their identity and renewing their documents. It seems that the law stops at the crime paving the way to the arrival of sub-Saharanans in Tunisia without any considerations to the aftermath.

All in all, 12 articles in the 2016 sub-corpus elaborate on smuggling and trafficking without any sort of advocacy. It seems that the law had been on the political agenda since 2011, and it was a matter of time before adopting it. The testimony of the expert Ali Mhenni about the parliament dynamics back at the time further corroborates this observation as Mr. Mhenni acknowledges that draft bills submitted are decided upon even before debate and that some laws are “just meant to be adopted”. Cassarini (2022) reckons that programs to combat human trafficking were produced and then mediated in the Tunisian case. According to her, the fight against trafficking in Tunisia was elaborated around a rhetoric of ‘democratic transition’, and a process of ‘policy transfer’. Focusing on what she calls “sub-Saharan and transnational trafficking”, Cassarini establishes that law No. 2016-61 as well as the creation of INLTP (National Body for Combating Trafficking in Persons) in 2017 reflected a strife to stress Tunisia's adherence to the Palermo convention (ratified since 2003) and to the club of democratic states. Vincent Geisser (2019, p. 12) asserts that the unanimous parliamentary vote for the law was due to the impact of local civil society mobilisation(s) and the pressure of the international institutions.

Cassarini deduces that the emergence and construction of the rhetoric of fighting human trafficking in Tunisia is a by-product of policy transfer and a direct result of the endeavours of NGOs. The coordinated

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<sup>208</sup> 2016 sub-corpus, *Mosaique Fm*, Arabic

action of several international organisations, notably IOM, pushed Tunisian institutions to legislate the fight and prevention of human trafficking and put them forward in the political and parliamentary agenda. Hence, the law in question was not advocated for in the media or by the media, as it was set on the agenda through a policy transfer model. Policy transfer, a variation on several overlapping concepts such as policy mobility, policy translation, policy adaptation and policy translation, is an emerging concept in political science and international relations. It refers to a lesson-drawn and action-oriented process (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000) aiming at ‘copying’ a successful policy through the use of its policy-making culture and institutions. It is a process enabling the relaying of policy between autonomous and— in most times— sovereign actors.

A more important recurrence of this law and the topic of migrants trafficking in general is conspicuous in the 2017 sub-corpus, following the promulgation of the law. Several hypotheses can account for this surprising observation, such as the increased awareness associated with a new legislation bringing increased attention to the issue of “irregular” migration and leading to more coverage in the media. Before the law was passed, the topic was not prominent or urgent in public discourse (12 mentions in 2016 and 28 in all the 2012-2016 sub-corpora). Media outlets seem to be reporting on the law's implications for migrants, leading to more mentions. Second, the law might have changed the dynamics of the public conversation around migration, leading to more media attention to it. Reactionary media content is triggered after such a legislative breakthrough leading to more coverage and sparking more controversy, questions and analyses. The third hypothesis, which is more plausible due to the nature of policy transfer models, is the need for mediatization and a media campaign to accompany the implementation, which is usually<sup>209</sup> required by donors (states and NGOs).

Organisation and state programs that provide funds to other states to implement reform provide financial assistance, technical expertise, or other resources to support reforms in areas such as governance, economic development, social welfare, or infrastructure. The aid provided by these donors is typically aimed at promoting policy reform but also social acceptance and awareness raising. Events, debates and conferences are usually held to discuss the results. In the media, politicians, advocacy groups, and stakeholders might be actively discussing the law, its implementation, or its ramifications, which would

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<sup>209</sup> It is noteworthy that IOM provided Tunisian journalists with a guide to migration terminology, where a whole section covers the “abusive forms of migration which are crimes: smuggling and trafficking” (124-155), *cf.* <https://rb.gy/xs8vx1>



be reflected in media reporting. In this context, six articles were devoted to the establishment of the INLTP in the 2017 sub-corpus with a special focus on migrants, fragility, vulnerability and the prospects of this law protecting them. Further corroborating this observation, the expert Achraf Aouadi admitted that “the political correctness” which characterised the media resulted from their work with NGOs. He even pointed to some journalists who were legally hired by civil society to conduct workshops and training, and who ensured adoption of certain causes as a “legally binding” requirement of their contracts with NGOs.

Other than the media attention following the law, we note recurrent mentions of trafficking and Law No.61 in the case of the “Facebook girl” which brought back the issue of migrants smuggling and trafficking to the surface in 2017. This incident of the domestic worker posting a video calling for help after her employer had detained and tortured her in Tunisia stirred controversy and pushed the INLTP to engage in its first follow-up investigation. This explains the media hype and the statistical findings about the anti-trafficking law in 2017. Thus, recurrent use of trafficking and smuggling jargon serves the agenda of legitimation rather than advocacy. The media, against all claims of neutrality and subjectivity in news coverage, always have a chosen “representation” or perspective framing the issue and an underlying agenda. Commenting on the choice of ‘social groups’ to be quoted or cited in migration-related media pieces, Van Leeuwen (2003) asserts that any choice “traces in the text itself” underline the active role of the media. Indeed, “despite the careful stance of neutrality suggested by the way in which most of the representation is attributed to sources other than the writer himself” (p. 69), the mere choice, presence or absence of these sources divulges a certain bias and agenda.

Media are the loci of various legitimation strategies of a decision, position or policy. One significant type of legitimation— legitimation by authority— occurs when the discourse refers to laws or regulations or by involving expertise, be it legal or economic, etc. (Van Leeuwen 2007, p. 94). In Rojo-Martin and Van Dijk (1997) legitimation is conceptualised through the instrumentalization of “a powerful group or institution” like government officials, academia, organisations, etc. in discourse to persuasively or manipulatively disseminate some sort of normative approval for some laws or actions to establish acceptability and show them to align with “the moral order of society” (197).

In practice, the Tunisian media include such direct recourse to authority in elaborating, for instance, on the case of a molested and trafficked sub-Saharan child in the migration hotspot, Sfax. The

news story<sup>210</sup> recounts how the Sfax office of the Child Protection Services received a report from an association working for the defence of children's rights regarding an asylum-seeking sub-Saharan minor (born in 2004) who had arrived in Tunisia via the Algerian border and whose documents were stolen and money embezzled. The child was also sexually abused by a Tunisian man aged 31 in August 2021. The Commissioner of child protection services followed up on the report in accordance with the provisions of articles 237 and subsequent of the Penal Code as well as article 2 of Law No. 2016-61. In fact, he notified the Public Prosecutor of the Sfax court of first instance in charge of prosecution (lawsuit No. 1193/2021 of August 25, 2021). In our corpus, trafficking is mentioned in several articles with a close association to expertise. For instance, in the article “Tunisia: Establishment of the Body for Anti-Trafficking in Persons Authority<sup>211</sup>, the authority legitimation is decipherable through:

...Its aim is to “target networks seeking to exploit children, women and all those who are in a fragile situation, such as migrants” according to a statement by the **Minister of Justice Ghazi Jribi** granted to the **BBC**. This body ensures the prevention and repression of “the recruitment, transport, transfer, hijacking, harbouring or receiving (...) through the use or threat of use of force”.... **Raoudha Laabidi, now president of the INLTP**, pointed out that this new body is all the more important since Tunisia is a transit country for sub-Saharan migrants seeking to cross the Mediterranean. She also insisted on the fact that “Tunisia is particularly concerned because human trafficking is a serious cross-border crime” and that the networks of smugglers take advantage of the failure of the Libyan State to prevent smuggling of migrants resulting in absolute illegality. It should be recalled that the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** had congratulated Tunisia last year for adopting **Law 29/2015**<sup>212</sup> on the fight against and prevention of human trafficking as well as the establishment of the **INLTP** ...”

The legitimation strategies, in this excerpt, are mainly based on two topoi: authority and morality. The authority of the Minister of Justice, the President of the INTLP, and IOM, as the key stakeholders in the policy transfer process, coupled with the use of proper names, the law itself and the INTLP, create a sense of expertise and officiality especially due to their divergent specialties, thus appealing to all types of audience preferences: ordinary, conservative and human rights’ defenders. The effect created is an authority-legitimation of the decision to pass an anti-trafficking law and to create an independent national body to implement the anti-trafficking policy. The mentioned authority and the different viewpoints are

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<sup>210</sup> The article was published in 2021 and does not pertain to the corpus. However, it came up when researching the law and the extensive use of authority in a news story was worth commenting.

<sup>211</sup> 2017 sub-corpus, *Webdo*, French

<sup>212</sup> It is noteworthy that the article uses an erroneous law number to refer to the anti-trafficking law. Instead, law No. 2015-29 concerns combating terrorism and preventing money-laundering and was amended by Basic Law 2019-09 dated 23 January 2019. This further confirms the media’s confusion and lack of education in matters of policy and migration (observation made in previous chapters and in this chapter in section above).

further boosted by the use of morality. The state's humanitarian and legal moral obligation to protect sub-Saharan migrants from "exploitation" and "fragilit" and Tunisia from "networks", "cross-border crime" and "illegality" is invoked to legitimate both decisions related to the migration policy in Tunisia.

The legitimation does not only concern the importance of passing this law, but also its application and applicability. Moral justification and legitimation of the detention as well as prosecution of sub-Saharan migrants occurs through the sporadic use of 'human trafficking' as a punishable crime of an utmost urgency in the Tunisian migratory policy. In the 2017 sub-corpus, we counted 57 uses of the word "trafficking", half were used in articles about incidents related to sub-Saharan migrants' detention and prosecution. For instance, the issue of "an African involved in human trafficking"<sup>213</sup> is of "utmost importance due to its seriousness", explaining why the "Search and Inspection" unit of the National Guard worked to identify and arrest an African who confessed to being an accessory to a "human trafficking"<sup>214</sup> crime. The Public Prosecutor authorised his detention and initiated legal action. All the jargon of the article frames trafficking in terms of 'urgency', 'obligation' and 'duty', hence legitimising the apprehension and prosecution of sub-Saharan migrants involved in smuggling on the basis of "trafficking".

Indeed, moral legitimation blurs the boundaries and limits as it justifies any action— whatever the nature and repercussions thereof— by security and public interest. In addition, legitimation by rationalisation— i.e. reference to the utility of the action— serves the purpose of fostering acceptability of this action. The rhetoric of 'rule of law' is appealed to as a superior value and may result in a further marginalisation, othering and dehumanisation. Whereas the legitimation of Law No. 2016-61 was first built on moral justification of protecting the migrants, then legitimation by *authorization* (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 104), the rhetoric of the media paradoxically shifted to legitimation by utility or *instrumental rationalisation* (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 105) positing on the common sense that trafficking networks are threatening national security. This common sense is reiterated through the association of sub-Saharan presence with the human trafficking crime as in "sub-Saharan migrants who set sail for

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<sup>213</sup> "Arrest of Africans who defrauded Tunisians and Europeans", *Tunivisions*, Arabic, 02/23/2017.

<sup>214</sup> The commodification of the crime is yet again confusing as the description "mediating for the benefit of 14 people of the same nationality to work in a number of agricultural estates and poultry houses in our country in return for receiving varying amounts of money" rather refers to smuggling- which is also punishable under the same law. Yet because of the absence of any evidence of exploitation, the components of the human trafficking crime are absent.

Tunisia do it via networks of human trafficking”<sup>215</sup> or the correlation of trafficking to terrorism as in “no formal migration agreement... recent negotiations prioritise maritime border control and ‘the fight against terrorism, the illegal trafficking of human beings and the issue of Libya’”<sup>216</sup>.

### **3.2 Organic Law No. 2018-50 Eliminating all Forms of Racial Discrimination**

Organic Law No. 2018-50 of October 23, 2018, regarding the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, is deemed to be one of the most glorious and “revolutionary”<sup>217</sup> legislative landmarks in post 2011 Tunisia. Political leaders and civil society activists hailed it as “a turning point in the history of Tunisia, equal to the abolition of slavery” (Attia, 2018). It was considered as the most significant legislative advance and the one which received the most important media coverage, being the subject of numerous public debates in Tunisia.

Tunisia ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 1967. It took the country almost 40 years to fulfil the ensuing obligations therefrom by adopting Law No. 2018-50 eliminating all forms of racial discrimination. This law aims to protect the victims of racial discrimination by setting the prosecution procedures and the penalties incurred by the perpetrators. The importance of this law in the context of the migratory policy lies in how it is drafted and how it was advocated for.

Indeed, in Article 8 thereof, it is stipulated that the sanction of one month to one year of imprisonment and/ or a fine of five hundred to one thousand dinars is doubled if “the victim is vulnerable due to age, disability, apparent pregnancy, immigration or asylum”<sup>218</sup>. The fact of referring to ‘immigration’ in this law is itself a legal breakthrough as legal texts— like the Labor Code— usually refer to them as “foreigners” and not “migrants” in total denial of the presence of migrants in Tunisia. Indeed, no definition of the concept of “migrant” is provided in Tunisian law, which does not recognize a legal status for migrants and does not specifically set forth the protection of migrants’ rights. Migrants are

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<sup>215</sup> “Tunisia: Over 57 cases of child trafficking recorded by IOM in 2016”, *Webdo*, French, 2017 sub-corpus.

<sup>216</sup> “Tunisia follows lead on Europe’s migration strategy”, *Nawaat*, English, 2017 sub-corpus.

<sup>217</sup> <https://rb.gy/y1g5nc> and <https://rb.gy/czk633>

<sup>218</sup> The law is drafted in Arabic, and an unofficial French translation is available here: <https://legislation-securite.tn/latest-laws/loi-organique-n-2018-50-du-23-octobre-2018-relative-a-lelimination-de-toutes-les-formes-de-discrimination-raciale/> . It should be noted that the official website [www.legislation.tn](http://www.legislation.tn) which has the Tunisian juridical database is closed due to “overload” or “maintenance”.

included in the “foreigner” category and the legislation on the “status of foreigners” regulates the entry and stay of migrants as well as prescribes the sanctions applicable in the event of violation of these rules. The democratic transition in Tunisia and the considerable interest in the protection of individual rights had resulted in debates on the protection of the rights of “foreign migrants”<sup>219</sup> and asylum seekers as one of the strategic objectives of the migration management detailed in the National Migratory Strategy 2016-2020<sup>220</sup>.

Law No. 2018-50 specifically acknowledges racism and migration, which had long been ignored or neglected in pre-2011 Tunisia. It was the first of its kind in the MENA region and was celebrated as a long-sought achievement for the black minority in Tunisia. In appearance, this law was a government initiative— appealed for by the late President Béji Caïd Essebsi and the head of government back then Youssef Chahed who ascertained racism was incompatible with Tunisia's “hospitality traditions”, “revolution” and “unity”<sup>221</sup>. Realistically, the law is deemed to be the product of mobilisation of many stakeholders, particularly the associations of sub-Saharan students and organisations of black Tunisians like Mnemty, in a social context marked by rising racial violence and crimes. The “post-revolutionary” climate had fostered debates about anti-black racism which affected both Tunisian nationals and sub-Saharan migrants.

Unlike the first law, which was passed softly and smoothly, this law was the result of a long process of advocacy, but also of “discursive events”. In 2016, almost two years before the law was issued, three Congolese students had been assaulted by a knife in Tunis. The event garnered much media attention and political movement. The parliament discussed the incident, and the Head of the Government met with the victims and issued statements condemning it and calling for a law against racism. The media engaged in a genuine conversation about “racism against sub-Saharans” after decades of myopia and denial. Indeed, the media managed to conquer the public discourses and impose the taboo word ‘racism’. Ruth Wodak

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<sup>219</sup> Idiosyncratic use translating the category of ‘migrants’ which are not Tunisians.

<sup>220</sup> [https://ote.nat.tn/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/SNM\\_FRA\\_FINALE.pdf](https://ote.nat.tn/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/SNM_FRA_FINALE.pdf)

<sup>221</sup> “After the attack on Africans: Youssef Chahed calls for the enactment of a law criminalizing racial discrimination”. *Al-Charaa Al-Magharibi*, Arabic; “After the attack on African students...Chahed calls for the enactment of a law to criminalize racial discrimination”, *Al-Chahed*, Arabic 2016 sub-corpus; “Youssef Chahed: There is no room for racial discrimination after the revolution”, *Shems FM*, Arabic, “Racist crime or news item: how amalgamation does not serve the cause, *Business news*, French, and “An attack on African students brings the issue back to the fore: Are we really racist?, *Al-Sabah News*, Arabic: 2016 sub-corpus.

(2015, p. 30) commented on the ‘unwillingness to integrate’ (Integration Welligkeit) leitmotiv in the “anti-immigration right-wing populism” and its infiltrating public discourse to become “normalised” and signal a shift to extreme right rhetoric in migration-related discourses. The normalisation of notions, whether positive or negative, happens at a symbolic interactionist level through a (de)legitimation process, which eventually seeks to legitimate or delegitimize a policy.

On December 24, 2018, months after the law was passed, Falikou Coulibaly, president of the Association of Ivorians of Tunisia who was stabbed to death in Tunis brought the issue to the surface. Even though the authorities established it as a robbery that went wrong rather than a racist crime, the sub-Saharan community demonstrated across the country. Jamila Ksiksi<sup>222</sup> reckoned that whereas the intentions were criminal, the origin and colour of the victim played a major role in making him a target as “a foreigner, a migrant”. He was “visible because he was black”<sup>223</sup>.

DHA builds on intertextuality as a foundation for any analysis of discourse. This approach came to investigate other types of interconnectedness and posed that “interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts, genres and discourses” should be scrutinised in conjunction with all the surrounding social variables such as the socio-political of the discursive incident— i.e. the “situational frame”— as well as the history of institutions (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 90). Simply put, interdiscursivity is how different discourses are connected to each other— through overlapping, contrast, anachronism or other. Indeed, the ‘discourse of migration’— since discourse is topic-related— reflects different sub-topics or ‘discourses’, such as the discourse on racism, human rights, democratic transition, etc. Discourse is therefore dynamic and fluid; it evolves and amasses other sub-discourses.

Media discussions— reporting, interviews, news, etc.— are deemed to be part of political discourse as they belong to the field of action “formation of public attitudes, opinion and will” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, pp. 90-91). To a great bulk of the Tunisian society, the political sphere is only accessible through media discourse. Hence, the media and politics have intertwined ‘fields of action’. Field of action refers to the social realities framing a discourse, and it is defined by the function of the discursive practices

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<sup>222</sup> Jamila Ksiksi was a Tunisian MP from Ennahda group. Elected to the Assembly of the Representatives of the People in 2014, she became the country's first Black woman MP ever. Additionally, she was a prominent activist in the Tunisian anti-racist movement and fought for the adoption of Law 50. She was on the list of the interviewees for this research, but death chose otherwise as she died in a car accident in December 2022.

<sup>223</sup> A special radio programme about Coulibaly’s death hosting Jamila Ksiksi: <https://rb.gy/dc:gdqy>

(cf. figure 4, in Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 91). Migration discourse can start from one field of action and move to another through dissemination and interaction of discourses. To trace the diachronic evolution of the media attention to this particular law in the corpus, the whole corpus was searched for any references to racism and law. ‘Critical discourse moments’ (Carvalho 2008, p. 15) were identified upon confronting the media pieces with events which marked the political scene at that time such as the Lafayette incident, Coulibaly’s murder, the three Congolese students’ assault, etc. and discursive positions— stances taken by the different stakeholders and expressed in discourse directly and indirectly. The results are detailed below:

Year In corpus	Pieces referring to Law 50	Discursive event	Reference Type	Discursive actor	Argument
2012	2	Foundation of an anti-black racism organisation	Appeal to penalisation of racism  Post-2011 equity for all	ADAM <sup>224</sup>  President of ADAM	- Confusion of Tunisian blacks and sub-Saharanans, so need for better conditions for all blacks  -“Our action...targets foreigners residing in Tunisia, coming from sub-Saharan countries”
2013	4	The Lafayette incident: attack on sub-Saharanans tenants in a building and police taking victim to police station (30 April 2013)	Appeal to sue the state  Advocating for the state mobilisation	Sub-Saharan students  AESAT, Touré Blamassé as representatives of Sub-Saharan students  Yamina Thabet (President of the Tunisian Association for the Support of Minorities)  AESAT	-Reporting to human rights’ organisations and threatening to have recourse to international justice due to government’s failure to sanction racist acts “not punished by law” “No law condemns”: Racism is not penalised, and authorities are reluctant to act when it concerns sub-Saharanans - Civil society initiatives are inefficient We are thousands in this advocacy  -Absence of anti-racism stipulation in the constitution draft - An imperative step: anti-racism law

<sup>224</sup> ADAM or Association for Equality and Development is the first having as an objective to fight for the rights of black Tunisians. After the 2011-revolution, having benefited from the ambiance of freedom and human rights, it was founded by a group of activists to advocate for an anti-discrimination education and legal framework. In 2013, it was dissolved due to internal conflicts.

			Soliciting governmental action		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Penalisation of racism</li> <li>- Reaction of the authorities after the complaints filed with NGOs</li> </ul>
2014	4	<p>Racist attitude of teacher towards a black pupil</p> <p>March for an anti-racism law</p>	Advocacy for a legal framework	<p>Journalists</p> <p>Journalists and activists (Maha Abdelhamid)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognize racism as a crime since both Tunisians “Africans” are victims.</li> <li>- Silence of Tunisian laws, trivialization, denial of racism → parallel between this march and the Paris 1983 march</li> </ul>
2015	4	Racist attacks after Tunisian team defeat in CAN, January	Activist and political mobilisation	<p>Association for the support of Minorities</p> <p>Opposition party CPR calls for legal action</p> <p>Journalists</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Calling upon the assembly to enact a law criminalising such practices.</li> <li>- Deputies must promulgate a law penalising racism, in accordance with the 2014 constitution value system</li> <li>- “blacks are not Tunisians” → confusing demands: protection of all blacks or the Tunisian blacks who are treated like sub-Saharan</li> </ul>
2016	9	<p>International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination</p> <p>Racist attack on 3 Congolese students in Tunis</p>	<p>An anti-racism bill to be unveiled (March)</p> <p>Launch of the Tunisian Movement for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination</p> <p>Call for passing the anti-racist bill</p>	<p>Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, EuroMed Rights, and Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights</p> <p>Mnemy association, AESAT</p> <p>Head of Government, Chahed</p> <p>-Euro-med</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First anti-racism bill presented in a press conference</li> <li>-Obligation to align with values of 2011 transition and ratified international conventions</li> <li>- Calling upon the ministry of education for a comprehensive educational program on racism</li> <li>- Sub-Saharanans suffer more because of their double vulnerability</li> <li>- Political official mobilisation for an institutional, legal, social and cultural strategy against racism</li> <li>- Enactment of the draft bill is a must</li> <li>-Speedy ratification of the</li> </ul>



			Chahed meets with the sub-Saharan victims	Rights +group of civil society organisations  Government and media	Organic Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in Tunisia.  -An “efficient” political and media crisis management of the racist event especially on social media platforms
2017	3	Sit-in of sub-Saharan students in Habib Bourguiba Avenue against racism  A sub-Saharan citizen, N. Nagacy, stabbed in Tunis by 9 people	Call for a change in Tunisian mindset towards blacks  Political and civil society mobilisation	Alternative media outlets: testimonies of sub-Saharans  Public figures and sub-Saharan figures  Journalists	-Ending the denial of racism  -End impunity  -Testimonies of sub-Saharans
2018	5	The parliament deliberates on bill  Anti-racism law passed in October  Murder of Falikou Coulibaly (december)		MPs especially Ksikisi, activists  Sub-Saharan community representatives	- The fight against racism is finally discussed in the Assembly - Legal void should be mended - Detailed debates of the draft in media  - Euphoria for a moment  -The law should be enforced -Tunisian authorities “must put in place all the measures to facilitate the application of the law and to facilitate access to it for all people of colour, whatever their status in Tunisia”.
2019	2	Sporadic racist attacks	Questioning the efficiency of law	Activists	-Debate over the law’s efficiency in fighting racism
2020	3	Sub-Saharan farmer workers killed in Sousse		Sub-Saharan voices + journalists  President of the assembly Ghannouchi +	-The law is not enforced, there is a need for a National Migration Strategy: no law is effective unless a whole migration strategy in implemented - Need for strengthening legislation protecting migrants’ rights + regularisation of their

				FTDES  Journalists, FTDES	status + “activation” of the anti-racism law “Racism as a plague”, no law can fix it -Evaluation: futility of dealing with a social problem from a legislative perspective
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**Table 8: Evolution of the media discourse on Law No. 2018-50 in terms of discursive events, actors, actions and arguments**

The evolution of the media discourse on sub-Saharanans and racism shows a curved attention pattern, following the lifecycle of Law No. 2018-50. In the first phase, the law was just an idea, an object of advocacy for black rights coupled with references to sub-Saharanans as a targeted group. The representations of sub-Saharanans as victims of racism coupled with topos of humanitarianism are instrumentalized by the media to foreground the fight and frame it as universal and useful to all (topos of usefulness and advantage). As Pouessel puts it, “the presence of sub-Saharan populations in Tunisia is proving to be an important contextual element in the Tunisian debate around the management of its own diversity, that is, to say, the propensity of Tunisians to racism towards black populations” (2016, p. 16). Another key term qualifying the media treatment of this law is “remediation”.

Remedial actions and therefore discourses can impact social practices and take precedence in media pieces dealing with a socially deviant behaviour like discrimination, abuse, and racism. In this case, reference to racism is carried out by means of impersonalisation strategies such as abstractions (the problem, the issue, the phenomenon) or spatialisation (Lafayette, Passage incidents) or instrumentalization (the knife, rod), etc. instead of mentioning the perpetrators and naming them— which is default means of representation (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 292). Therefore, the media background the doers and deviant agents and foreground the remedial social actions— which are planned to be institutionalised to counteract this deviancy, i.e. a law penalising racism. Notwithstanding the presence of media pieces examining the deviant behaviour itself by interviewing the victims, they do that with the aim of representing racism as a threat to social order, and therefore all the corpus dealing with “penalisation” focuses on remediation actions.

The first phase of the corpus treatment of the present law could be said to follow the policy transfer model with a spirit of building a democratic and equal-for-all country in compliance with the ratified international conventions. The advocacy proved to be more performative with the sub-Saharan community joining the efforts and invoking international justice and organisations (in 2013) as well as political actors

and journalists/ academics. The second phase started in 2016 when the draft bill for an anti-racism law was submitted by a coalition of NGOs and local associations. Shortly after, three Congolese students were assaulted in downtown Tunis. Parallel dense media coverage was carried out around the demonstrations which were held under the motto ‘I don’t want to die in Tunisia because I’m black’. Throughout the following two years, racist incidents against the sub-Saharan community will make the bill resurge with a mediated debate on the necessity and urgency of adopting such a law. The political mobilisation was not only accompanied by attention from mainstream media, but also prolific articles produced by journalists in alternative media outlets like *Nawaat* and *Tunisia Live*.

At this point, the media did not seem to report the incidents solely, but they had something to say about racism and migration. 2016 and 2017 witnessed many sit-ins, press conferences, and media debates on the issue of racism against blacks, especially black “foreigners”. The year 2018 saw the adoption of the “historic” and “revolutionary” law, after condensed political debates in the media. It should be noted that the role of some figures like Blamassi Touré (AESAT), Maha Abdelhamid (ADAM and then independent activist), Saadia Mosbah (Mnemty association), Jamila Ksiksi (MP from Ennahda) is significant. This phase was marked by a repetitive attendance of these figures in daily radio and TV shows, which was translated in the presence of mini articles in our corpus. The media seemed to align with the anti-racism agenda and to push for it by merely giving voice to the activists behind this advocacy. Hassan Boubakri confirms this assumption in his interview asserting that “thanks to the media, civil society advocated for that law”.... “The role of social media in disseminating the information” about racism and the legal framework was significant”.

The fourth phase was a phase of fading away and questioning. After the euphoria of adopting the first anti-racism law in the Arab world, the situation of the sub-Saharans did not improve, and deathly incidents continued to be reported, which propelled the (i) questioning of the law’s efficiency in fighting a deep-seated attitude of racism, (ii) calling for education on racism and human rights, *inter alia* on media platforms as stakeholders in the advocacy, and (iii) appealing for a holistic migration strategy to fight racism but also regularise and absorb the sub-Saharans in order to curb racist attacks and ensure a better enforcement of law 50.

Through this diachronic timeline, the equal importance allocated to all stakeholders such as activists, politicians and journalists as well as the proliferation of opinion articles and sub-Saharans’

testimonies may testify to the media's agenda: taking part in the advocacy, using the sub-Saharanans' representations and ordeals, pragmatically, to further foster a sense of urgency, and to follow-up on the law after it was adopted. The language repartition of the above detailed 36 media pieces (5 English, 19 French, 12 in Arabic) shows an elitist inclination towards the French and English-reading audiences. Within a top-down approach, the legislative reform starts from the elite— in this case NGOs and officials— then legitimised and engraved by the media for the general audiences to accept and adopt it. In this process, the media play a pivotal role shaping the social context where the policy is developed. The many debates about the wording and sections of the draft bill functioned as educational spaces for the audiences and provided feedback for the policymakers to consider, so will be elaborated in the interview with Houda Slim and Hassan Boubakri.

Considering Law No.2018-50 as a case-study allows us to observe a dynamic and hybrid model of interaction between media discourse and politics (the state, NGOs, UGTT, etc.). The media played the assigned role of “fourth estate” regulating access to their outlets, framing racism as a migration issue *par excellence* and managing the voice(s) in its reporting. Most of the testimonies with sub-Saharanans expressing their views about the Tunisian society are connected to this very law. For the object of this law, ‘outsider’ groups like sub-Saharan students could voice their opinions and a balance was finally struck between the official narrative and the sub-Saharan migrants’ narrative. It does not seem that media discourse was only reflective of the policy here, following and reporting only, but it was rather constitutive in the sense it educated the readership about racism as an infringement of human rights, the suffering of sub-Saharanans as well as Tunisians, and the need for a legal framework to fight it.

The *modus operandi* and impacts of discourse are the ways in which a certain discourse affects a socio-political issue. In this case, the media discourse on sub-Saharan migration, and most importantly on the sub-topic of racism, impacted social understanding of racism and gave more visibility to sub-Saharanans. It also installed new traditions as there was finally a recognition of racism after so many years of denial. It was the media which made this possible through the recurrent reporting of racist incidents, the use of topos of authority in relation to unprecedented mentions of authority, NGOs— national and international— ministries, head of government, president, sub-Saharan representatives and diplomats, etc. The discourse on this law specifically marked the “We are racist”<sup>225</sup> rhetoric, which shifted the debate on

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<sup>225</sup> 2016 sub-corpus and 2018 sub-corpus.

sub-Saharan migration from the ‘legality’ to the ‘humanity’ perspective. The statements of government officials like Youssef Chahed, constituted leitmotifs for the following debates on the need for social dialogue about migration and even culminated in a call for an urgent “national migration strategy” (Ghannouchi in 2020). The ‘Role Model Authority’ (van Leeuwen, 2008) is an argumentation pattern building on role models or opinion leaders, i.e. media figures, activists, experts, star politicians. By representing them as advocates of certain ideas and behaviours, the media legitimate their discourse and legitimise their prescriptions. Sometimes, these media “endorsements” are used to stress the advantages of certain behaviours and patterns.

Wodak and Meyer (2001, p. 66), like Reisigl and Wodak (2009, p. 90) argue that the dialectics of discursive practices— like the written media practices— have an impact on their action field. The ‘discursive effect’ achieved or sought is the link established between the text and its outside context. These effects may be intentional or collateral, resulting from an ensemble of variables *inter alia* the discursive events reported in this corpus. Whereas the media might have set an agenda for this law, the several racist acts which propelled the media discourse were a mere coincidence or media convenience. The plausible “transformation of institutional practices” in such a way that “embodies a certain discourse” as is the case of the media discourse on racism and sub-Saharans, is referred to as the process of discourse institutionalisation (Carvalho, 2008, p. 14). She gives the examples of adoption of the US Patriot Act as a legal instrument resulting from certain threatening and securitarian discourses on terrorism and a long-mediated controversy on policy.

The same process is acknowledged in the case of law No. 2018-50 as the media momentum around these critical discourse moments “forced institutional actors to react” (Natter, 2022, p. 11) and pass the law against racial discrimination. According to SI, the construction of symbols, from material goods or abstract ideas is instrumental to social interaction and therefore self-development. The media, being loci of such a symbol construction, are either instigators or facilitators of this process. In many instances, they have created or propagated social symbols which were later anchored as such. Meanings are therefore negotiated through and by social interaction, *inter alia* media interaction. This renegotiation occurs through an interpretive process which involves the symbolic interaction of individuals (Denzin, 2004). The media are therefore loci of action and interaction “whether in the person, in language, or some other structure or process” (Denzin 2004, p. 81). Following this understanding of the symbolic interactionist role of the media, and the quantitative insights about law 50, one might discuss the hypothesis of media

production constructing the symbol of the sub-Saharan as the ‘target of racism’ and ‘object of legal defence’.

Through the reiteration of articles discussing the incidents of racism targeting sub-Saharans in Tunisia, the symbolic meaning of sub-Saharan as victims of racism had come to be anchored in the audiences’ minds. An immediate link between sub-Saharans and racism was established and therefore led to an association between the need to protect sub-Saharans and the need to penalise racism. The concept of ‘media logic’ in SI refers to the processes engaged by the media production to influence individuals’ perception and interpretation of their social reality. It suggests that the media shapes the way people understand reality by presenting certain chosen narratives and images, hence messages that influence their thoughts and behaviours.

Meyrowitz (1986) discusses how media alters social dynamics by exposing individuals to information which is otherwise unknown and hidden. The many incidents of racism against sub-Saharans could only be anchored through media references to them, throughout ten years or more. The impact of this media logic ranges from mere recognition of racism against this community to advocacy for legal reform and penalisation. Lengel and Newsom (2014) draw on critical emotional events, as occurrences resulting “in a durable transformation of structures” and “transformation of the dynamics of collective action” (pp. 89-90). Yang (2005) argues that “just as critical historical events may transform historical structures, so critical emotional events may transform the dynamics of collective action.” (in Lengel and Newsom, p. 90).

Building on SI principles, particularly Critical Emotional events, Lengel and Ann Newsom establish that the event of the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, catalyst of the Arab Spring, was a key critical emotional event, yet media exacerbated and highlighted it resulting in local, regional and global upheaval. The sensational articles published in the aftermath of the self-immolation in late 2010 such as “In a town at centre of Tunisia uprising, 23 years of repressed emotions burst forth” framed this emotional event and recreated it as an act of resistance which needed support for a “Democratic Revolution in the Middle East”. Analysing the narratives about the life and death of Mohamed Bouazizi who is said to have sparked the whole ‘Arab Spring’, Lengel and Newsom assert that his story “would also remain at the centre of international political consciousness because it was reiterated time and time again through social media” (p. 87). Hence, telling the story, repeating it and ‘anchoring’ it in the imaginary of the

audience are part of a discursive strategy serving the agenda of the media in framing discursive events in a way to achieve particular political goals.

This media logic can also be inscribed in the discursive strategy mythopoesis. In DHA, mythopoesis is a legitimation strategy used *inter alia* in the media discourse as part of the textual and intertextual argumentative scheme. The media discourse uses the functions of (de)legitimation to construe social reality and present socio-political projects. Van Leeuwen (2008) argues that the use of mythopoetic legitimization is carried out through “narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non legitimate actions” (p. 106). In fact, myths are deeply rooted in the meaning construction process since we are exposed to cultural narratives— i.e. belief systems— shaping the way we see and conceive the world. This is a common supposition between SI and CDA as van Leeuwen (2008, p. 108) adopts SI’s take on mythopoesis and how we embrace “the attitudes of the groups to which [we] belong”. In the corpus, the mythopoesis of the sub-Saharan victim/ hero, fighting racial discrimination among other challenges in the hostile host country is developed through the narrative adopted from 2016 to 2018. All the elements of mythopoetic logic are present including fantasy, imagery, emotional content, appeal to quasi-logic and call for action. Van Leeuwen differentiates between ‘moral tales’ and ‘cautionary tales’ in mythopoesis. The storytelling of moral tales has the elements of protagonists engaged in “legitimate social practices or restoring the legitimate order”, living the “trauma of leaving the security” then “negotiating a number of obstacles” to “overcome this trauma and experience a happy ending” (2008, p. 117-18). Hence, the stories of sub-Saharan protagonists, whether referred to as groups or represented as public figures like leaders of sub-Saharan student associations, portrayed as fighting racism and protesting its institutional and social manifestations, striving to restore social order and demanding a law penalising such practices is the moral tale, serve as legitimation strategies to justify the urge of this law. The *cautionary tale* depicting the logical outcomes of not complying with the norms and values of society, overlaps with the *moral tale* as the media pieces engage in stories about the Tunisian actors discriminating against sub-Saharans and getting exposed or tried.

At the heart of these two grand tales, constructing the mythopoesis strategy of the media rhetoric, law 2018-50 is the element of symbolization. Using the scheme adopted by van Leeuwen (see van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 119), we can deduce that the mythopoesis strategy is geared towards “overdetermination” and then “symbolization”. Overdetermination is the representation of social actors “as participating, at the same time, in more than one social practice” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 47). Hence,

sub-Saharanans are represented as ‘migrants’, ‘students’ or ‘workers’ and social justice advocates. Bearing all these overlapping labels, they are ultimately symbolised as “fictional” social actor[s]” standing for “actors or groups in nonfictional social practices” (p. 48). Such an approach builds on a transition from individualised representation— for instance the protagonist of the Lafayette incident<sup>226</sup>— to a collectivised hero figure leading the fight and protesting social practices<sup>227</sup>.

Mythopoesis, being a legitimation discursive strategy, has a purposive use apart from its representational operating. The media discourse, in dealing with the incidents of racism against sub-Saharanans, established a sort of ‘legitimation crisis’. This crisis ushers the absence of confidence in institutions or leadership, as philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1973) defines it. According to him, during a legitimation crisis, structures or institutions do not have the legal or administrative capability to protect the individuals. Hence, “when the crisis is resolved, the trapped subject is liberated” (Habermas, 1973, p. 643). The liberation requires a strategic and utilitarian ‘purposiveness’ filling in the legitimacy void. Organic law No. 2018-50 was the answer to the legitimation processes engaged in by the media outlets in decrying racism and demanding a legal/ political shift. Whether the law was the fruit of indirect endeavours of media figures and journalists or not, the media discourse in the examined corpus undoubtedly built on mythopoesis— among other discursive strategies— to legitimate a law against discrimination and delegitimize the discriminatory practices carried out by some Tunisians. Unlike the first case-study, which was inconclusive and yielded no tangible results of the direct correlation between the media discourse about sub-Saharanans and Law 2016-61, this case study showed a quantitative and qualitative correlation between the discourse about sub-Saharanans and the law, its landmarks, pertinent discursive events and ensuing results notably over the period between 2013-2019.

### **3.3 Organic Law No. 2021-37 Regulating Domestic Work**

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<sup>226</sup> The 2013 sub-corpus: “Assault against sub-Saharan students: The attack on the building in Lafayette is not a first”, *Nawaat*, (French).

<sup>227</sup> 2013 sub-corpus: Tunisia: “No law condemns racial discrimination in Tunisia: Protests of the African Students”, *Web Manager Center* (French), “Are the Tunisians imitating the Europeans?”, *Le Temps* Newspaper (French); 2015 sub-corpus: “Tunisia: An elimination at the origin of several attacks against blacks”, *Realitiés* (French); 2016 sub-corpus: “Tunis: A Tunisian violently attacks three Congolese in the “Passage” with a knife, *Tunisie Numérique* (French), “Racist attack in the metro station: Demonstrations today in Tunis”, *Kapitalis* (French), to state a few.



Organic Law No. 2021-37 was issued on 16 July 2021 after being discussed and adopted by the Assembly of the Representatives of the People on 30 June 2021. It is one of the last laws issued by the previous parliament to be promulgated by the President of the Republic, before he issued an emergency declaration on July 25, suspending the parliament's work and assuming all executive power, seemingly in accordance with Article 80 of the 2014 constitution.

By adopting Law No. 37 in 2021<sup>228</sup>, related to the regulation of domestic work, ensuring the non-discriminatory access to decent work, Tunisia aligned itself to the conventions providing for the respect of human dignity for domestic workers. In its general provisions, it stipulates that the object is regulating domestic work to ensure the right to work without discrimination in accordance with the constitution and ratified international conventions. Thus, this law, like organic Law No. 2016-61, is inscribed within the policy transfer framework. In fact, when a country passes a law in alignment with an international convention it ratified before, this step is often referred to as “domestic implementation” or “domestic incorporation” of international obligations. It signifies the process by which a country translates its international commitments into its national legal framework. It can involve enacting new legislation, amending existing laws, or taking other measures to ensure compliance with the terms of the international convention.

Policy transfer, as defined in 3.1 above, is a process whereby policies from other states or organisations are used to implement “analogous elements in another political setting” (Nordbeck, 2021, p. 394) or what David Dolowitz & David Marsh (2000) coined as “learning from abroad”. The policy transfer framework poses on nine stakeholders, among whom officials, political parties, civil servants, experts, and supranational institutions, which are the most relevant in the Tunisian context. The role of international organisations (IOs) in the transfer process has been underlined in recent policy research owing to their major influence in the dissemination of international policies and programs at the domestic level. These entities have the capacity of meddling with national policy and intervening with policy makers

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<sup>228</sup> A French version of the law was published in the official gazette of Tunisian Republic No. 68 dated 30 July 2021, available at: <https://www.droit-afrique.com/uploads/Tunisie-Loi-2021-37-reglementation-travail-domestique.pdf>

directly, through funding requirements<sup>229</sup> , or indirectly through policy guidance and recommendations. Policy transfer may be carried out either through coercive transfer or as voluntary adoption.

In the case of the present law, the role of two organisations— one local and the other international— was foregrounded by the media corpus. The media pieces relevant to this law highlighted the role of UGTT, Tunisian General Labor Union, and the ILO, International Labour Organization. Since policy transfer occurs in a multi-organisational scene, a policy network is a rudimental piece in the puzzle. Such inter-organisational policy networks are managed by governments and by international organisations. In fact, policy networks— comprising NGOs, government officials and IOs actors— are efficient in implementing policies within the transfer model. Starting from a problem-oriented approach, these stakeholders exchange information and research and discuss the most adequate policy responses.

It should be noted that such a policy network had begun working on this legislation long before it was adopted. For instance, international and national stakeholders, namely the Ministry of Social Affairs, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), along with the social partners, organised in February 2016 a tripartite seminar on “the Protection of the rights of migrant workers: towards the revision and harmonisation of Tunisian laws and regulations with international standards”. This seminar was part of the “IRAM” project, financed by the Directorate of Development and Cooperation of the Swiss Confederation, and implemented by the ILO and the OHCHR. It was an opportunity to advocate for Tunisia's ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and ILO Conventions 97 and 143 on Migrant Workers, and 189 on domestic workers. Interestingly, the seminar hosted the major social partners UGTT and UTICA (Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts), representatives of the people (MPs), academics as well as civil society organisations<sup>230</sup>.

Networks bring together representatives from IOs, state agencies like ministries, trade unions and NGOs, along with the media (Stone, 2001, p .14) in an interdependent manner. The role of media in this policy transfer dynamics is stressed as a “knowledge actor” which can provide services for decision-

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<sup>229</sup> For more information, cf. Stone, D. (2001). Learning lessons, policy transfer and the international diffusion of policy ideas. CSGR Working Paper no. 69/01, Centre for the Study of Globalization and Regionalisation (CSGR), University of Warwick.

<sup>230</sup> 2016 sub-corpus: “Towards the revision of laws and regulations, in accordance with international standards” *Le Temps* Newspaper (French)

makers by disseminating the ideas and information received via ‘outsider strategies’ into media and civil society. The literature on the media and policy dynamics as summarised by Baum and Potter (2008) yielded a wide array of interactions between the media and all other actors such as decision-makers, foreign actors, events, and public opinion. Apart from policy legitimisation (discussed in 3.1 and 3.2), the media is shown to influence public opinion and policymakers and vice versa. All plausible causal links between the media, the public, and decision makers are summarised in Figure 1. “Web of Causal arrows” linking mass media, public opinion, and decision-makers (in Baum & Potter, 2008, p. 41).

The fact that the media is one component of the policy network when we are discussing policy transfer paradigms testifies to a certain role media discourse plays in influencing public opinion which eventually influences decision-making. Hence, even if there is no direct causation to be established between media discourse and policy shifts, correlation between these three and certain events shall be grasped and analysed to make sense of the dynamics of such a network. Starting from the prospects that Organic Law No. 2021-37 was preceded by a policy networking including state agencies, IOS (ILO), local organisations (UGTT) and media as agents of dissemination and legitimisation, the quantitative analysis will start by identifying the importance of this particular law for the sub-Saharan community in Tunisia, then the analysis of media discourse on sub-Saharans with regard to the policy making process of this law.

Firstly, Article 3 of Organic Law No. 37 of 2021 defines a domestic worker as “any natural person whatever their citizenship” engaged on a continuous and habitual basis to do work related to the house or family, supervised by a single employer or multiple employers, against remuneration, whatever is the method of its payment and frequency. Hence, the law covers non-nationals, i.e., migrants. The law primarily focuses on Tunisians and sub-Saharans as they are the primary providers of such work. In fact, according to Nasraoui (2017) “sub-Saharan labour migrants are either hired as domestic workers or footballers”. According to the National Institute of statistics in Tunisia, the majority of the 58,990 foreigners in Tunisia, 36.4% i.e. 21,466, work in the domestic service sector; women are much more hired as domestic workers (28.6%)<sup>231</sup>.

Secondly, Article 8 stipulates that it is prohibited for any employer to confiscate the identity documents of the domestic worker for any reason whatsoever or to require the domestic worker to remain

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<sup>231</sup> <https://inkyfada.com/fr/2022/12/18/chiffres-migrations-tunisie-ins/>

at home or with family members, during periods of leave. This particular article is especially relevant to sub-Saharanans due to the many reported incidents as “not only do they (sub-Saharanans) see their passports confiscated by the ‘host’ families, but they have to work six months without pay to reimburse travel expenses” (Nasraoui, 2017). Moreover, while the conditions of national domestic female workers “remain extremely difficult and precarious, their documents are rarely confiscated” (Geisser, 2019). On the other hand, injustice particularly hits sub-Saharan women who increasingly work as domestic servants in private homes, a phenomenon which has marked Tunisia in recent years.

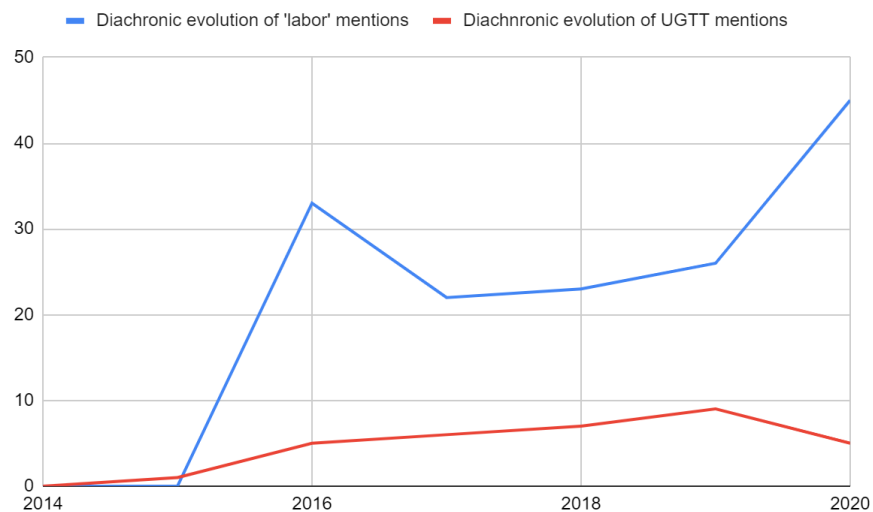
Against this backdrop, the law signals a policy shift in a direct or indirect relation to the sub-Saharan conditions in Tunisia. Advocacy for this law was carried out based on a humanitarian rhetoric, mainly sponsored by some IOs and by the UGTT which at some point had sought to become a political counter-power, comparable to an opposition party, and mediated itself as a precursor of labour migrants protection, meeting with them, and providing them with affiliation cards before the government agencies took the final step towards submitting the domestic workers bill. The media activity of the UGTT seems to have instigated and overdetermined the issue of sub-Saharan domestic workers leading to a state shifting its policy towards regulating the domestic work of sub-Saharanans and Tunisians alike.

To trace the evolution of treatment of this issue in the media, I re-investigate the corpus using key words related to the law: domestic labour, workers, UGTT, and ILO. A frequency test, using TextSTAT, revealed that UGTT is mentioned 33 times, with zero mention in the 2015 sub-corpus and only one mention in 2014. Frequent mentions are observed starting from 2016. This quantitative finding corroborates what has been established before about the years 2014 and 2015, which witnessed a quasi-neglect of the sub-Saharan question because of the political events and changes in the country. ILO is mentioned only 5 times in the 2016 sub-corpus, date of the start of the policy network.

As for the inflections of the seed term ‘labour’ yielding words such as ‘labour’ and ‘labourers’/ ‘labourers’, strikingly there are 33 mentions in 2016, 22 in 2017, 18 in 2018, 22 in 2019 and 41 in 2020. The quasi-absence of any media debates or news about sub-Saharanans’ labour issues in the period 2012-2015 could be explained by the urgent humanitarian situation from 2011 to 2013 and the whirlwind of political developments in 2014 and 2015. Moreover, throughout the period 2012-2015, the media seemed to focus on sub-Saharanans as ‘other’ criminals/ victims through a consistent reporting of *harga* operations and criminal activities. Advocacy for sub-Saharanans’ rights was carried out by sub-Saharan associations

like AESAT and was not well mediated. The turning point in this media treatment was the anti-discrimination advocacy campaign bringing together Tunisians and sub-Saharan (see previous section).

Based on these observations, we can safely say that advocacy for domestic workers, from the optics of media discourse on sub-Saharan, started in 2016. The 2016-2020 phase encapsulates the dynamism and intensity surrounding the domestic labour issue, with a special focus on sub-Saharan being the most vulnerable and exploited category of domestic workers, as explained above. The media discourse in the corpus followed a traditional evolution following the advocacy process, as shown below:



**Figure 19: Evolution of the use of words related to Law No. 37 in the corpus**

Looking into the graph, the frequency pattern of the terms “UGTT” (Tunisian labour union) and “labour” in the media corpus from 2016 to 2020 indicates a notable discursive shift in the discourse surrounding sub-Saharan migrants. This shift suggests that labour-related topics gained increasing media attention and political prominence in public discourse during this period. To understand the context of this discursive shift, we ought to look at the broad socio-political landscape in Tunisia during the specified time frame.

First, following the 2011 transition, it took Tunisia almost four years to establish a stable political system with the promulgation of the 2014 constitution and the election of the president and parliament. From 2016 onwards, the country continued to grapple with the challenges of democratisation, political instability, and economic restructuring, but in a calmer socio-political atmosphere. In the aftermath of 2011, Tunisia's engagement with international organisations, donor countries and institutions, as well as

regional partners, influenced domestic discourse on labour issues and migration governance. The international conventions, and assistance programs— especially under the tutelage of ILO and UN agencies— addressing labour rights, human trafficking, and migrant integration contributed to the framing of media discourse on these topics. Civil society organisations and human rights activism, proliferating under the new free and democratic ambiance of the post-2011, as well independent media outlets like *Nawaat* and *Inkyfada* (*Tunisia Live* to a lesser degree) played an active role in shaping public discourse and advocating for policy reforms during this period. Their efforts to raise awareness, document violations, and amplify marginalised voices could have influenced the narrative surrounding labour rights and migration issues in Tunisia.

In this free and democratic atmosphere, the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) in 2015 could indeed have significant implications for the discursive landscape in Tunisia from 2016 to 2020, granting this already important organisation increased visibility and legitimacy. The Nobel Peace Prize recognition elevated the profile of the UGTT both domestically and internationally. This heightened visibility amplified the Union's influence and credibility as a key actor in Tunisian society, leading to greater attention to labour-related issues in media discourse. Another discursive event contributed to the UGTT empowerment and visibility, explaining the following advocacy for sub-Saharan workers' rights in the media. Indeed, in 2015, RSMMS— Sub-Saharan Mediterranean Migration Trade Union Network — held its first general assembly in Casablanca (August 2015) and the second in Mahdia, Tunisia (October 2015). This network<sup>232</sup> has as main objectives to promote the rights of migrants in the European, Mediterranean and sub-Saharan areas as well as support ratification and application processes of international conventions related to the issue.

All the above social actors dynamically contributed to the intensification of labour-related discourse and advocacy efforts during the subsequent period. Other than its focus on Tunisian workers' rights, the UGTT adopted a pro-migrant discourse appealing to regulation and regularisation of the sub-Saharan workers status. In the 2016 sub-corpus, the UGTT called for the protection of “the rights of migrant workers, whether they are regular or irregular workers in the informal sector or migrant

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<sup>232</sup> For a thorough idea on this network and activities as well as the crucial role of UGTT with it, please see <https://www.rsmms.net/?lang=en>

women”<sup>233</sup>. In 2017, UGTT started to express interest and attention to (im)migration issues, training its personnel in the field<sup>234</sup>. The Sub-Saharan Mediterranean Migration Trade Union Network (RSMMS) to which the Tunisian labour union pertains, organised a training session at on October 8, 2017, for the benefit of the focal points of the RSMMS (12 countries were represented, among which 5 sub-Saharan, namely Benin, Mali, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Niger).

In 2018, UGTT issued multiple statements criticising the state’s handling of irregular sub-Saharans arriving to Tunisian coasts and demanded the authorities that “provide decent accommodation and health conditions”. It also decried the repetitive shipwreck disasters, adopting a divergent rhetoric from the victimising and criminalising official discourse and pointing to networks and lobbies<sup>235</sup>. In its statements, UGTT spokespeople used the expression “human haemorrhage” in reference to *harga* victims from sub-Saharans. In a 2018 press release from its executive office, the trade union addressed *harga* operations involving sub-Saharans as “human trafficking” and lobbies “bargaining with the tragedies of desperate youth”. The discourse of the labour union shows to be consistent as it calls for protection and regulation, then moves to appeal for a different migratory policy altogether.

To testify to this unionist engagement, the 2017 sub-corpus includes five pieces, with different scopes, but all referring to the UGTT’s stance on sub-Saharan migrants and their situation. In two different pieces, the topos of authority is evident through the use of names and positions like Abassi<sup>236</sup> and Taboubi<sup>237</sup>. The topos of authority, as per Wodak, means that if an action is carried out, advocated or praised by “someone in a position of authority, then [it] is legitimate” (Wodak, 2015, p. 11).

This discursive recourse to authority to legitimate the reform of Tunisian “migration policy”, if there is, is developed through a systematic recourse to UGTT via its leaders as in “departing secretary general of the UGTT, Hassine Abassi **vigorously asserted**...that the workers' federation is **totally opposed**

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<sup>233</sup> “Tunisia is called upon to revise its legislation and regulations relating to labour migration”, *Tunisie Tribune* (French).

<sup>234</sup> “Tunis: trade unionists are trained in the field of migration”, 2017 sub-corpus, UGTT official Facebook page.

<sup>235</sup> Another Shipwreck, “a humanitarian disaster sponsored by lobbies” (UGTT), *Gnet* website (French), June 2018

<sup>236</sup> Abassi was the Secretary General of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) from 2011 to 2017. He was also part of the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, which granted the UGTT the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize “for its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia in the wake of the Tunisian Revolution of 2011”.

<sup>237</sup> Secretary-General of the UGTT from 2017 up to the present.

to the forced return of immigrants and **refuses** the opening of detention centres in Tunisia”<sup>238</sup>. The use of strong adverbs reflecting a position of power and assertion like “vigorously” and “totally”, coupled with verbs like “assert”, “oppose” and “refuse”, divulge a discursive strategy of dissension through the topos of authority.

In the same sub-corpus, the same power dynamics are reflected from the title as in “Noureddine Taboubi calls for the development of a unified approach to the migration issue” (*Web manager*, French). Taboubi, who was baptised “the strong man”<sup>239</sup> of the Union, has proved to be an astounding opponent to the head of executive authority in Tunisia. In this article, the choice of words frames him as an authority and his demands as not only legitimate but also obligatory:

Noureddine Taboubi, **underlined** on Friday the **imperative** to adjust migration policies .... The Secretary-General of the trade union centre **called...to** develop a unified approach to the issue of migration. The aim of this approach is to transform this issue from an intriguing problem for decision-makers in host and sending countries into a positive factor contributing to the achievement of stability and realising development goals. Taboubi **underlined**, at the same time, the **importance** of putting in place a new approach and a migration governance plan.... in particular the **imperative** to **re-examine** international conventions on the issue of migration. Taboubi also called, in this regard, for the need...to adopt international conventions relating to migration, including those No. 97 and 143 issued by the International Labor Organization, as well as the UN convention related to.... and to adapt national legislation to the provisions of these conventions.

The use of assertive verbs— “underlie”, “call”, “underline”— shows Taboubi as not only an authority but also an expert, which further legitimates his opinion and position. Moreover, the recurrence of “imperative” and “obligation”— like warning signs— serves as a reminder of the national union’s historic role in Tunisian post-2011 politics<sup>240</sup>. The use of these two nouns repetitively is prescriptive of specific actions and behaviours which UGTT firmly believes in, thereby positioning itself as an authority and an expert dictating norms, setting expectations and defining urgent timelines. The argumentative *mise-en-abyme* scheme, authority within authority, is peculiar too. Not only does the media discourse use the topos of authority to report the UGTT’s stance, but it also quotes Taboubi’s use of the topos of authority

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<sup>238</sup> “Youssef Chahed in Germany: Investment, emigration, terrorism and Libya”, *Leaders*, French

<sup>239</sup> <https://www.businessnews.com.tn/noureddine-taboubi-futur-homme-fort-de-lugtt,519,69872,3>

<sup>240</sup> For more information on this role, please consult: Netterstrøm, K. L. (2016). The Tunisian General Labor Union and the Advent of Democracy. *Middle East Journal*, 70(3), 383–398.



when he mentions ILO and conventions to further legitimate his view. When experts discuss among themselves in the media, they show to be in mastery of their language and knowledge since “their credibility depends on” their discourse. However, when journalists mediate their expert opinions, “the mystique of expertise is considered sufficient proof”. The outcome is usually a “public with a vague and woolly knowledge of these activities and is therefore likely to reify their results beyond the possibility of critique” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 18).

The last part of this excerpt is particularly significant in understanding the role of these actors: UGTT and the media in the legislative process leading to the 2021 domestic work law. It seems that in the reported speech of the UGTT’s Secretary-General, the steps to be taken are already calculated. The ending of the article foreshadows the roadmap to be followed and the reference to Convention No.97 or the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 and Convention No. 143 on Migrant Workers, and is not arbitrary, but very meditated. Indeed, Tunisia has not ratified these two conventions related to labour and migration until now. However, it seems the last “call” of Taboubi was finally exerted in 2021 with the adoption of the domestic labour law as it specifically includes non-nationals, yet another attribute, like ‘foreigner’, used in Tunisian migratory jargon to refer to migrants.

The recognition of UGTT on the domestic and global stages since 2011 and especially with the 2015 Nobel prize, has inspired social movements and activists in Tunisia to pursue their goals and advocacy. This catalysed broader societal discussions on labour rights, social justice, and democratic reforms, shaping the discourse in media coverage and exerting pressure on the Tunisian government to address labour-related issues and prioritise reforms. The policy agendas and legislative initiatives related to labour issues and migration governance were backed by international institutions like ILO through partnerships, exchanges of best practices, and assistance programs aimed at strengthening labour rights and promoting social dialogue such as the PPTD<sup>241</sup>. This international engagement influenced the framing of media discourse on labour issues and migration dynamics as it gave more visibility to irregular migration issues through the labour lens. It also made the issue of irregular domestic work a priority for UGTT which is a very powerful institution in Tunisia, thus prioritising it in the media agenda.

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<sup>241</sup> Programme Pays pour le Travail Décent (PPTD) pour la Tunisie (2017-2022).

Looking into the development of media discourse on sub-Saharanans, in the present corpus, we can assume the advocacy for law No. 2021-37 started in 2017. Unlike the previous case-study which unveiled a bottom-up approach to the anti-racism bill, this one proved to be dissimilar and atypical. To understand this peculiarity, a contrast will be drawn between the law’s parliamentary lifecycle and the media discourse revolving around it. In order to understand the law’s processing in the ARP, and because of the political events of July 25, 2021, resulting in the previous parliament’s suspension and its archives’ ‘deletion’, the one option we have is the Marsad archives<sup>242</sup>.



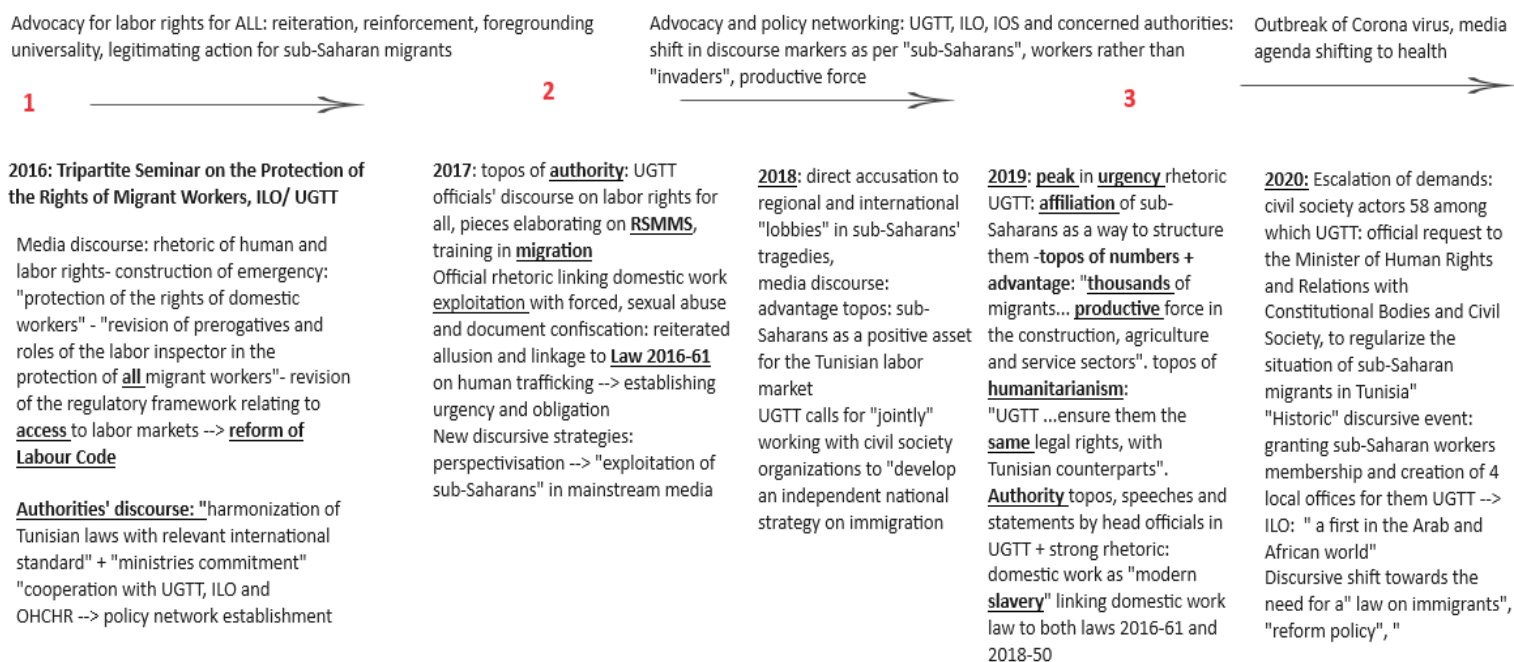
**Figure 20: Lifecycle of Draft bill No.2020-118 relating to domestic work (from Majles Marsad website)**

According to the observatory records, the bill was proposed by the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors (MFFES) on 31/08/2021, reviewed in commission from 14/12/2020 till 11/02/2021, then moved to plenary discussion on 02/03/2021, to be adopted on 30/06/2021. The most conspicuous difference between the bill and the actual law lies in Article No.3. The final version includes “nationals” and “non-nationals” whereas the draft does not have this specification. The addition, in reference to migrants, was therefore the fruit of commission works and an inside work from MPs not the ministry.

On the media corpus, the discursive lifecycle of the law on domestic work is different as it is mostly focused on the three stages of advocacy for the legislation itself, not the contents or votes for the law. In this sense, the media discourse is not merely reflectionist, but rather suggestive. Below is the media corpus logic pertaining to domestic work regulation:

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<sup>242</sup> Marsad Majles (transliteration of Observatory of the Assembly) is a platform designed by Al Bawsala, which is a non-governmental organisation under Tunisian non-profit law, having been a key actor in the post-2011 political scene. The platform’s objective of “is to provide citizens, through the online platform, free and easy access to information related to the political exercise of their elected officials and the drafting of the new constitution”. Through round-the-clock observation of the parliament’s works, the platforms’ analysts/ ‘observers’ draw a detailed account of the debates and votes on legislation.



**Figure 21: Evolution of the media discourse on the domestic work legislation in the corpus**

This last case-study diverges from the two first models observed. It was built in media discourse as an advocacy for a legislation to be passed (like Law No. 2018-50) rather than a legitimation of a passed (such was the case of discourse on law No. 2016-61). However, unlike the 2018 anti-discrimination law, this advocacy did not revolve around “tipping points” and incidents which trigger and condensate the discourse on sub-Saharans toward ostensible legislative purposes. The media discourse proves to be divergent on the different questions related to sub-Saharans— trafficking, racism and exploitation— and the media agenda-setting seems to stem from national salience rather than personal or business interest.

In studying three cases of media discourse(s) about three laws pertaining to migration policy in Tunisia, the findings are different each time. The first was a reiteration of the need to combat human trafficking and the importance of Law 2016-61 fighting trafficking after it was passed; the second built on advocacy against racism owing to many racist incidents against sub-Saharans (assaults and murder) leading to the celebration of the adoption of Law No. 2018-50; and the last centred on mere advocacy for labour rights to all, especially migrants, carried out especially by the UGTT before being halted by corona in 2020. The law was nevertheless adopted subsequent to a governmental draft submitted in 2021. The

media discourse gap in the second part of 2020 is justified by the corona virus salience in political and media discourse.

From a DHA perspective, the findings reveal the dynamic and context-dependent nature of media discourse surrounding migration policy in Tunisia. Each case study illustrates how media representations and narratives are shaped by specific socio-political contexts, highlighting the role of discourse in both reflecting and shaping societal attitudes, norms, and policies. The reiteration of themes such as combating human trafficking, advocating against racism, and promoting labour rights underscores the discursive strategies employed by various actors, including government institutions, civil society organisations, and the media, to advance their respective agendas and influence public opinion. The findings underscore the importance of analysing discourse as a site of contestation and negotiation in a diachronic and interdiscursive manner, as competing interests and agendas always intersect and interact to construct meanings and shape policy outcomes.

Symbolic Interactionism offers further insights into these findings by emphasising the role of political and social symbol-construction meanings, and interactions in shaping social reality. The media discourse surrounding migration policy in Tunisia reflects a complex interplay of symbolic representations and social interactions, wherein media actors negotiate the meaning of migration and sub-Saharanans' identities through (de)legitimation discursive practices. The reiterated themes and attributes of universality, human rights and utility in the media construe symbolic expressions of broader social aspirations and tensions, reflecting the symbolic negotiation of the significance attributed to issues such as human trafficking, racism, and labour rights within the Tunisian society in different times and phases post-2011. Indeed, in the span of ten years, the symbolism of migrants and human rights witnessed so many metamorphoses according to the economic and social salience, as in many stages of the 'democratic transition', the migrants' basic rights were relegated to a secondary topic because of the urgency of other national problems like elections, terrorism and security.

Furthermore, the symbolic salience of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020—the end date for the corpus monitoring process—highlights the way in which external events can shape and disrupt discursive processes, influencing both the content and trajectory of media discourse. In the analysis of the overall quantitative results, the “media gap” observed in the second part of 2020 signals a total shift of media gaze towards the catastrophic repercussions of covid-19 on health facilities, civic peace and the political system altogether. It is worth noting that due to the Covid-19 mismanagement—framed as a political

failure and “political paralysis that had stopped any coherent response to the pandemic”<sup>243</sup>—President Saied invoked emergency powers to dismiss the government and suspend the parliament in a symbolic coup to ‘reset’ the country. The media discourse leading to this self-orchestrated change is a great research track too, as the topoi of numbers and danger/ threat contributed to creating a general atmosphere of discontent and anger legitimating the 2021 forced transition.

Overall, these findings underscore the significance of symbolic interactions in shaping public discourse and policy outcomes, highlighting the need for nuanced analyses that account for the complexities of meaning-making and social interaction in the realm of media and migration policy. Symbolic interactionism stresses the capacity of the media to attribute persuasive meaning to political claims. In fact, the communicative dynamics involving the different stakeholders— media, politicians, organisations, operate to decide upon “salience” which is a pivotal aspect of political communication. Deluca (1999) advances that social movements like minorities’ associations in the Tunisian case can garner interest in marginalised issues into the public debate by staging image events which the media will cover as discursive events. These social movements, although locked out of the political process, find in the media a refuge to lobby and advocate. Fairclough (1995) emphasises the agency of marginalised groups in employing discourse and imagery as tools of resistance, enabling them to contest dominant ideologies and reshape the discursive landscape to reflect their own experiences and perspectives.

Symbolic interactionists study government and power, grounded in the works of Mead and Max Weber to decipher the dynamics governing the interactions between micro-level and macro-level entities. In the context of SI, the meanings of the political institutions and polities emanate from communicative interaction processes rather than being inherent to them. The different constructed symbolic meanings attributed to these can shape political courses of action and social attitudes towards them. Image politics, referring to the symbolic manufacturing of images of figures or institutions in a time where image— i.e. mediated discourse— governs politics: what you see is not necessarily what lies beneath. What the three case-studies reveal about the media discourse on sub-Saharanans can hardly describe the social attitude towards them. This discrepancy probably explains the decline in the humanitarian political discourse on sub-Saharanans and adoption of a new populist/ xenophobic one reflecting the “real” sentiment towards sub-Saharan migration.

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<sup>243</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/07/28/africa/tunisia-saied-economy-covid-19-intl-hnk/index.html>

#### 4. Discussion of Findings: To what Extent do the Media Matter?

The original question of whether the media affect policymaking was reformulated after a thorough analysis of media discourse on sub-Saharanans in relation to legislative shifts, because it has come to be evident that the question is rather open-ended. It should not focus on yes/ no answers and does not discuss veracity of facts or statements. Rather, it requires nuance, focuses on degree and relies much on argumentation. Starting from a written media corpus analysis, we studied the representations of sub-Saharan migrants in the Tunisian media (othering, victimisation, deviancy, amalgamation, etc), then we scrutinised an extracted sub-corpus to analyse the media counter-representations of this social group. The conflict between the two discourses led us to observe some peculiarities and discrepancies, which statistically pointed to discursive historical moments where the media pieces seem condensed. Confronting statistical findings with the contents of the media pieces from the identified periods, we could detect three main policy shifts: Organic Law No. 2016-61 fighting human trafficking and smuggling, Organic Law No. 2018-50 fighting all sorts of discrimination and Law No. 2021-37 regulating domestic work<sup>244</sup>.

The analysis of these three case-studies, discourse-wise, showed divergent results each time. Through a DHA analysis of the discourse surrounding the three laws and confrontation with the socio-political context as well as the intersected genres and texts, we could pinpoint a different media treatment of sub-Saharanans in relation to the laws. In the first case, the law was discussed as a mere advance for marginalised groups (mainly Tunisian *ḥarrāga* and sub-Saharan migrants) and legitimated using authority, security and humanitarian purposes in relation to sub-Saharanans' entry to Tunisia. The second case revealed an advocacy of the media for black rights, built on racist incidents against sub-Saharanans, representing a pretext and an endorsement for the policy on discriminatory and abusive language and action. We could also observe a follow-up of the whole lawmaking process. The third revealed that the media corpus reported the workings of the political elite and policy network in relation to migrant rights

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<sup>244</sup> Another law or *legislative* shift observed is Organic Law No. 2017-58. However, the idea of analysing it as a case-study was abandoned when I consulted the Aswat Nissa association who was one of the stakeholders in the advocacy and who confirmed that the law was inspired and pushed for exclusively for the Tunisian women sake, even if its coverage was at times correlated to sub-Saharan women. Hence, I could not pursue the case-study.

by approaching the law from a policy transfer model involving different stakeholders, mainly the UGTT, ILO and concerned ministries.

To confront such results and corroborate, or refute and challenge them, we interviewed some experts in the field. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of each of the case-studies yielded divergent results each time. For triangulation purposes, we conducted semi-structured interviews (Appendix 1 and 2) with eleven experts (out of 15 solicited experts<sup>245</sup>). The interviews were conducted in English mainly, but also Arabic and French as per the expert's preference. We recorded then translated— when necessary— and transcribed the interviews. Then, we coded and categorised the transcripts according to key (i) **themes** related to the media policy-dynamics, namely media, politics, legislation in Tunisia, then sub-coded them to (ii) **topics** like civil society, advocacy, democracy, policy transfer, reflection, and buzz effect, and finally (iii) **arguments** raised and stances defended by the experts.

Once translated and coded, the transcripts were compared and contrasted to see if there are any convergences or divergences regarding the point of views among the experts. Then, we looked for the reasons behind these divergences (for example a different type of expertise). The last step was corroborating the case-studies' findings against the interviews by identifying how the interview data support or challenge my initial results about the media's role in influencing, advocating or merely reflecting policymaking related to sub-Saharan migration.

The coding and analysis of the expert interviews were informed by guiding questions:

- Does the expert acknowledge a connection between media representations of sub-Saharan migrants and some policy shifts?
- How, according to the experts, does media ownership or political influence affect coverage of migration issues?
- Were there any specific examples mentioned by the experts where the media actively advocated for policy changes related to migration?

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<sup>245</sup> Admittedly, some journalists are very inaccessible and prefer “mediated interviews” rather than “academic” or research-related ones. Some politicians decided to isolate themselves after the 2021 political change whereas others are still very ‘active’ in the opposition and have prolific social media pages, but do not prioritise academic or social research. Finally, some experts in migration are not very cooperative and prefer the migration domain to be their unique “trademark”. This point will be further elaborated in the concluding chapter.

#### 4.1 Post-2011 Tunisia: Media, Policy, and the Struggle for a More Just Society

Following the 2011 “revolution”, Tunisia witnessed a dynamic interplay between media, policy, law, politics, and civil society. Written media, in particular, played a crucial role in shaping public discourse and influencing legislative change. The post-2011 era saw a surge in press freedom, allowing the media to tackle previously sensitive topics like racism, which had long been omitted from public discourse and the media. This was especially used as a starting point by expert Hassan Boubakri<sup>246</sup>, when asked about the effectiveness of Tunisian media in the legislative process post-2011.

Media expert Jazem Halioui<sup>247</sup> also stressed these gains in freedom of press. To Halioui, the post-2011 media landscape in Tunisia was transformative. He himself acknowledges having witnessed “firsthand the increased freedom of the press” and an ability to address previously sensitive topics. To him, this shift has “significantly influenced the legislative environment and responsiveness”. Politician and activist Jaouhara Ettis<sup>248</sup>— ex-member of Parliament— accentuated this role and asserted that being an eyewitness, she saw the crucial role media played and affirmed that “[the media] was the 218th member of the Constituent Assembly”.

This may account for the condensed representation/ coverage of sub-Saharan related incidents in the corpus from 2013 to 2019. Another factor, brought about by the experts, explaining the quantitative conspicuous results about the great number of articles involving sub-Saharan representations and related policy issues, is the emergence of independent and activist media outlets, i.e. alternative media outlets like *Nawaat*, *Inkyfada*, and *Tunisia Live*, fostering critical discussions and advocating for social change, as

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<sup>246</sup> Hassan Boubakri is the expert of migration *par excellence* as a professor, researcher and associate member of IRMC (Institut de Recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain). He has been working on migration since 1986, and authored or co-authored more than twenty studies on Tunisian, Maghrebi and sub-Saharan migration (for a non-exhaustive list of publications: <https://shorturl.at/CJL59> . His expertise covers ir-regularised migrations, asylum and refugees, migratory policies, migration and development & labour. He is a member of many research groups on migration, *cf.* his profile on <https://irmcmaghreb.org/team-details/hassan-boubakri/>

<sup>247</sup> Jazem Halioui, the founder of WebRadar.me, a leading organization specializing in media analysis and monitoring in Tunisia. With a 13-year experience in this field, he is dedicated to providing comprehensive insights into media trends and their impact on various sectors. Mr. Halioui was also an activist and one of the pioneers of the OpenGov initiative in Tunisia.

<sup>248</sup> Jaouhara Ettis was a member of the Constituent Assembly between 2011 and 2014, then a member of the Shura Assembly of Ennahda party, and then a member of the Ennahda Executive Bureau from 2018 to 2020. In 2020, she resigned. Now, she is a university English teacher and an independent political activist, opposing the current regime.



observed Houda Slim<sup>249</sup>, and Jazem Halioui. Halioui speaks out of experience when he states that “having closely observed media dynamics through [his] monitoring services, it is evident that the media plays a pivotal role in shaping the policy-making process”. He also recognized that during his work he observed “media trends that contribute(d) to legislative changes”

More specifically, some of the experts even established numerous instances where media influence has led to legislative changes. According to Halioui, one noteworthy example is the written media coverage of racial discrimination, violence against women, and the regulation of domestic work as “the media [was] instrumental in shaping public discourse and advocating for legal reforms”. This corroborates the analysis of the second case-study— Organic Law No. 2018-50 of October 23, 2018, regarding the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination— where the corpus media rhetoric built on topoi of humanism, authority, religion, advantage and usefulness, with a legitimating strategy posing on mythopoesis and a rhetoric of advocacy. It symbolised the law as a remedial action for all the suffering of the sub-Saharan and black Tunisians. Boubakri also discussed the role of traditional media and social media in mediating the debate about racism and advocating for a law penalising it. In his words the “civil society network benefited from the media...A direct relation between advocacy on social media as well as media and the law’s adoption<sup>250</sup>(*délivrance* like birth)” is evident.

In contrast to this positive and empowering understanding of the post-2011 media scene in Tunisia, some experts raised some concerns about the rebuffed influence of classic media after 2021, which they attributed to factors like the rise of social media, which have come to be the first source of information to most Tunisians (Halioui). Agreeing with Halioui, Rihab Boukhatia<sup>251</sup> commented on the negative role of social media disseminating information without any real journalistic work or filtering, resulting in fake news and superfluous analyses invading the social media and impacting public opinion. Money is another concern in the media discourse. Aouadi emphasised the correlation between money and media in Tunisia

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<sup>249</sup> Houda Slim is Chair of the Arab Women Parliamentarians Network for Equality, Raedat, and an ex-parliamentarian (2014-2019). She is also vice President of the cultural club Ali Belhouene, Vice-President of Club UNESCO Lafayette Tunis. She is a civil society activist, specialized in Gender equity issues.

<sup>250</sup> Boubakri uses the French noun “*délivrance*”/ delivery rather than adoption because he sees it as a moment of birth.

<sup>251</sup> Rihab Boukhatia is a journalist specialising in the issues related to freedoms and rights and societal subjects. She is a jurist (bachelor in legal science, master in general and financial law). She worked as a researcher in civil society on a project involving a coalition of unions LTHD, the think-tank Center for Democratic Transition, called “coalition contre la peine de mort” (translated as coalition against capital punishment).

as the policy agenda is geared by civil society then media, not media per se. In fact, civil society educated the media on topics like racism, labour rights, trafficking, and exploitation. Hence, the media debates occurred in parallel to parliament debates, the parliamentary progressist elite pushed for marginalised social groups like women, migrants, etc, and the media responsiveness created very important moments.

Media is called “the Fourth Estate” as media is thought to independently examine political power and generate public debate (Christians, 2009). In this “Fourth Estate” model, the media and the political are separate systems with no intermingling dynamics. However, the distinction is seldom clear, and the two systems are interdependent. For instance, the ‘mediatisation critique’ refers to the political system’s adapting to media logic and the media’s reclaiming power from the political sphere. Indeed, as invoked by our experts, the commercialisation of media and the various furtive changes in the political scene had led to ‘mediatised politics’ where the political system surrenders its autonomy (*cf.* Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999).

Another criticism is the ‘bubble effect’ which rests on the media and politics being allies— or forming one bubble or the same value system (Nielsen & Kuhn, 2014). This is the critique highlighted by Aouadi and Mhenni claiming that mainstream media is ‘politically correct’ because it is owned by the political elite. With populist movements gaining ground in Tunisia, these criticisms seem valid owing to the growing confusion about the role of the media in relation to politics. The uncertainty is a result of rapid— yet unsteady— and often paradoxical changes in both the media system and the political system.

According to Ms. Slim, the media did not initiate the debates on the studied laws; it was civil society and international NGOs which supported the policy-making process through training and funds. This aligns with the ‘policy transfer’ pattern unveiled in all three case-studies. According to Slim, the media was mostly reactive, without any denigration intended to the efforts invested by few outlets like *Mosaique Fm*. According to her, through debates on these three laws, the media “opened all its platforms for guests and civil society”, “followed closely and exhaustively legislation and politics”, and made “politics accessible for everyone”, using a simple (not elitist) discourse which would reach everyone even stay-at-home women could talk about, understand and participate in legal and political conversations. This is a positive thing the media adhered to and promoted. This same thought is confirmed by Boubakri who believes the media need to be educated and trained on new topics like migration. He himself was a trainer of journalists with the NGOs, and he regrets that the training these journalists received on migration

terminology, history, and variables seems to have vanished, regarding all the hostile and incorrect terminology as well as the biased coverage of sub-Saharan-related news nowadays.

One other concern is media objectivity, which was raised by Achraf Aouadi and Aly Mhenni<sup>252</sup>, as both provided a nuanced image of the post-2011 Tunisian media. Mr Mhenni described the media in Tunisia as the 3.5th estate (not the fourth) as it has always been very dependent on power and its desires. In fact, “the media did not push for policymaking”, without the authority being behind it. He even cites the example of the advocacy campaign “Manich Msameh”<sup>253</sup> (translated I will not forgive) aimed to impede the adoption of a law on economic and financial reconciliation, which did not find much media attention or support because it targeted media owners and advertisers, therefore financial assets of the media. Worse, the media even pushed against the campaign as being adverse to the economic interests of the country.

When asked about Law 2018-50, Mhenni said that the “law was bigger than the media” as the media only mirrored society but hypocritically. From 2011 on, with freedom of expression, the media “discovered” injustice like regionalism and racism, but the media content was hypocritical, denying any racism and ‘promoting’ unity and deletion of problems. When interrupted and asked about alternative media, he acknowledged that outlets like *Nawaat* and *Inkyfada*, had a minimal impact, even though *Nawaat* did a great job with the reconciliation draft bill. The case of *Nawaat* is peculiar as almost all our experts agree upon its importance but diverge on its impact. When asked about this impact, Hassan Boubakri reckoned that it is an elitist outlet as its readership is usually the intellectuals. However, after following-up with a question on who makes the laws, elite or populace, he reverted to acknowledging that the elite in Tunisia has always been behind legislation and policy change. Hence, we can deduce that alternative outlets, regardless of their limited production and readership, have a great impact as they address decision-makers and intellectuals, who are usually the catalysts of change in Tunisia (at least before 2021).

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<sup>252</sup> Aly Mhenni is a researcher and social media analyst. He worked with several civil society associations especially I Watch and Bawsala. He also contributed to drafting many articles, like “Report: Monitoring Tunisia's election campaigns on social media — what the watchdog did not see”.

<sup>253</sup> <https://shorturl.at/bdMY2>

Finally, like Boukhayatia, Mhenni regrets that social media created a sort of echo-chamber<sup>254</sup> environment where Tunisians are trapped in algorithms only reflecting and reinforcing their own attitudes and views. On this specific law, Boukhayatia recognized that the journalists, although required to be neutral and objective, wanted to foster and push for anti-racism law through the choice of words, coverage angle and coverage ratios, which reflected the journalists' commitment to fight social injustice and racism. From those two experts' takes on subjectivity and objectivity, we can assume that the Tunisian media had always had an agenda, whether aligning with the ruling power or against it. In the case of law 2018-50, it seems both agendas coincided to produce a media discourse favourable to the law and hostile to the racist acts against sub-Saharanans.

#### **4.2 Media Discourse on Sub-Saharanans**

Almost all the experts underlined the lack of expertise and resources among journalists, particularly regarding legal issues. This was highlighted as a limitation by journalist Boukhayatia, analyst Mhenni, ex MP Slim, and ex-project manager at Terre d'Asile<sup>255</sup> Hedi Khiari. This latter believes in the important role the media play in shaping social narratives and the policy-making process, despite the scarcity of journalists who possess real expertise or understanding of human rights-related subjects in Tunisia. He emphasised that this lacuna resulted in a media discourse which exacerbated 'othering' and the rhetoric of 'threat' and 'danger' in mainstream media, resulting in the negative social attitude towards migration and sub-Saharanans, today. On the other hand, commenting on this lack of expertise, Aouadi recognized that the media, post-2011, was able to improve and get educated about many issues like racism and xenophobia (mostly Afrophobia). One instance he cited is the sanction against journalist Amine Gara because of racist jokes during his program. The backlash by civil society resulted in his cancellation and 'punishment'.

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<sup>254</sup> In digital media literacy, Echo chambers or filter bubbles are algorithmic patterns which along with personal "tendencies to interact with like-minded others" limit our exposure to other opinions. These can result in polarisation and misinformation and distortion of one's perspective leading to a quasi-impossibility to consider any opposing viewpoints. Echo-chambers are fed by confirmation bias. For a thorough understanding of these media phenomena, cf. Kitchens, B., Johnson, S. L., & Gray, P. (2020). Understanding echo chambers and filter bubbles: The impact of social media on diversification and partisan shifts in news consumption. *MIS quarterly*, 44(4).

<sup>255</sup> At the time I was introduced to Hedi, he was a member of Terre d'Asile Tunisie (having as a mission the legal and social support as well as urgent accommodation services for migrants and refugees, and advocacy and partnerships). Khiari is a communication and NGO projects specialist. He has experience in the fields of international cooperation and humanitarian work, with a focus on migrations and gender-based violence.

Regarding the media discourse on sub-Saharanans, Achraf Aouadi pointed to the media adopting a politically correct discourse related to their causes owing to, among other things, the crucial regulatory role HAICA<sup>256</sup>, and international brands who pay ads on different media (cancellation happens if one of the programs or journalists used a discriminatory rhetoric). Thus, concerning Law 2018-50 and the debate about racism against sub-Saharanans, the agenda was already set, and the stage was ready because of NGOs engagement. Achraf Aouadi commented on the “minimum of decency” of media discourse on sub-Saharanans before populist trends took over the political scene. He stated that the “media had nothing against sub-Saharanans” and that they maintained “a good discourse” about them in the pre-2021 period. Now, “unfortunately the political discourse gave way to a lot of hatred and xenophobia towards sub-Saharanans”.

On this ‘political correctness’ governing the discourse about sub-Saharanans, Boukhatia stated that Media coverage of sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia was often problematic, swaying between a discourse of threat and danger and “fear of being labelled racist”. The lack of nuanced discussions, adequate education on human rights’ regulations, and critical analysis on the topic of sub-Saharan migration resulted in some media outlets adopting a ‘racist’ discourse and contributing to a negative portrayal of sub-Saharanans. This highlights the need for more responsible and informed journalism on migration issues.

From the legal point of view, Amine Jlassi<sup>257</sup> asserted “it [was] rare to open such legal debates in the media” and that when it is done seldom, journalists focus on the social issue and not on the legal aspect. The media addressed the sub-Saharanans’ presence from the perspective of the ensuing conflicts that may arise in the Tunisian society. He joins the experts among journalists and civil society activists in underlining the lack of depth and investigation in dealing with real social problems like racism. Indeed, in the articles on sub-Saharanans and racism, the questions are superfluous and plain, for instance “is there

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<sup>256</sup> The Independent High Commission for Audiovisual Communication established in 2011 pursuant to Decree-law No. 2011-116 relating to freedom of audiovisual communication. It is still playing a major role, even after the 2021 political shift and has issued an alarm call relating to media treatment of migration and sub-Saharanans in media outlets, see “La HAICA appelle les médias audiovisuels à la vigilance face aux discours de haine à l’encontre des migrants”, <https://haica.tn/fr/17655/>

<sup>257</sup> PhD holder in public law, lecturer at the university of Kairouan, and jurist at the Association Tunisienne de Soutien de Minorités (Tunisian Association for the Support of Minorities).

racism in Tunisia?” or “is there violence against women?”. Jlassi points to the vague nature of the tackled questions, and the lack of documentations or statistics leading to simplistic treatment.

One of the most balanced and informed reflections on media discourse on sub-Saharanans is Boubakri's, due to his interest in the topic from 2000 on. He witnessed and examined the media discourse fluctuations for 24 years. Providing a diachronic account of sub-Saharanans' reception, he goes back to the 2003 'tipping point' when the African Development Bank (ADB) was reinstalled in Tunis. The arrival of another category of sub-Saharan 'expats' rather than migrants was met with both curiosity and animosity. On the one hand, the fact that ADB officials and staff were educated and relatively rich— with their luxurious cars and lifestyles— puzzled the Tunisian conception or symbolic categorisation of the sub-Saharan as a “poor average student”. On the other hand, the children of these expats had to join the French school like PMF (the Pierre Mendès France School in Tunis) and the backlash and rejection was massive. There was an outrage and firestorm of “criticism”— a euphemism for Afrophobia— in these places as Tunisian elite of the usually open and nice suburbs did not accept the fact that their children would study with the “kuhleesh- kuḥlīṣ”. The very pejorative and racist word shook me and reminded me that up until 2011 words like that were acceptable when addressing blacks, Tunisian or foreigners, and the topic of racist language was a taboo. He himself had to do “mediation” efforts for these elite parents (who threatened to disenroll their kids as an escalation move) to accept the sub-Saharan pupils in their schools; Boubakri wrote about this in his 2006 co-authored article. He uses this event in an attempt to establish historic continuity (DHA concurs) and to say that if this was the elite's perception of sub-Saharanans, then let alone the common citizen.

Boubakri states that in the aftermath of 2011, the media discourse did not seem hostile as no negative rhetoric was mediated about the sub-Saharanans of the Shusha camp despite the great number of arrivals— almost 700,000. The solidarity shown back then by all the Tunisians organising caravans and providing food, medicine, and assistance was remarkable for 15 days. The media did not use the “danger”, “threat”, “burden” or “invasion” rhetoric. Boubakri said that no one back then even used the expression “they want to colonise us” like it is said now. After this Shusha crisis, though, a very alarming sign showed the true colours of most Tunisians when in 2012, only Libyan families fleeing the war (200,000) were welcomed among families, whereas the few sub-Saharan families were shunned. This only reflected a deeply rooted racism, which could not simply disappear in a wink or by a simple law.

Hence the media discourse between 2012 and 2021 was politically correct but not truthful or reflective of the real public attitude. In the report which built on focus groups conducted with ASF<sup>258</sup> Boubakri interviewed sub-Saharanans who did not seem to denounce systematic racism before 2022. Perceptions have changed from 2023 with the president's speech. This view was reinforced and stressed by expert Hamza Bessioud<sup>259</sup>, who kept reverting to the present situation of the media discourse and representations of sub-Saharanans. He acknowledges that they are tinged with bias, racism and a lack of understanding, "Tunisian media outlets reacted recklessly, confirming and justifying hate speech, which inflamed Tunisian streets in hotspots with many Sub-Saharan migrants, without defining the problem or discussing alternative solutions to protect these migrants".

During the 2012-2021 period, the media was politically correct and respected the law and the regulatory role of HAICA. These achievements did not last, because as Boubakri insisted "What's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh" (translation mine, original is in Arabic and transliterated in Appendix II). The conclusion Mr. Boubakri draws is that the discourse shifts of most mainstream media collapsed under different political contexts, as they were not durable or well founded.

### **4.3 The Symbolic Interaction between Media and Policymaking**

On the three laws studied above, in relation to media discourse on sub-Saharanans, Haifa Zaghouani<sup>260</sup> stated that Law No. 50 of 2018 combating racial discrimination— object of the second case-study— and Law No. 61 of 2016 preventing and fighting human trafficking— object of the first case-study— are instances of legislation that were adopted in Tunisia after a long or intense media debate about the existence or the situation of sub-Saharan Africans in Tunisia. According to her, media representation

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<sup>258</sup> Euro-Med Rights' report on the Mission Tunisia (Tunisia-Libya focus), November 2023.

<sup>259</sup> Bessioud has worked for 12 years with national and international organisations on humanitarian and development projects. He developed and supervised a range of national, regional, and international programs in the fields of migration, security, peace, and emergency assistance. He is an expert in migration and vulnerability, protection, livelihood, and pilot projects. Among these projects is the SAR (Search & Rescue) project where he designed and implemented capacity-building initiatives aimed at upholding the rights of migrants as per the IOM mandate, combating irregular migration, including human trafficking and smuggling, and promoting the rights of potential migrants in vulnerable communities of origin and transit within Libya.

<sup>260</sup> Haifa Zaghouani is a sociologist, holder of a Master's degree in Sociology. She worked closely with sub-Saharan women within advocacy campaigns for women. She currently occupies the position of the Coordinator of the Reception and Support Cell for Women Victims of Violence at the Aswat Nissa Association (Aswat Nissa is the Arabic expression for Women's voices).

of the problem of racism against and trafficking of sub-Saharan Africans in Tunisia led to public pressure. Subsequently, public opinion was geared towards the need to pass new legislation to address such issues more effectively.

She remembers that a number of media outlets focused on “monitoring crimes related to racial discrimination and human trafficking” at the time when these laws were to be proposed or adopted. This confirms our findings about the two laws, and further corroborates the “advocacy” role played by the media in pushing for an anti-racism legislation in Tunisia, owing to the historical discursive moments/incidents of racism against sub-Saharans. Lobbying and advocacy are key words in media and politics dynamics. According to a report of the FTDES, intense lobbying by humanitarian organisations aimed at making sub-Saharan migrants visible after being long silenced and annihilated. The humanitarian actors carried out significant lobbying on the media to impose a new discourse. UN agencies, for instance, offered training workshops for journalists to educate them on human rights, refine their understanding of the various issues relating to migrants, and raise awareness on terminological issues, notably the use of “illegal” vs “irregular” migrants, the distinction between “refugees”, “migrants” and “economic migrants”. It is worth noting that the corpus revealed myriad terminological confusions and conceptual conflation at times.

Within this lobbying/ advocacy spirit, IOM published the “Journalist's Guide to Media Coverage of Migration Based on International Law and Evidence” in July 2019. Additionally, UNHCR launched with the Arab Institute for Human Rights (a major advocator for sub-Saharans right especially after the 2012 Libyan crisis and the Covid crisis) a website targeting journalists who cover issues related to asylum and migration (in 2020), and this training covered 1,150 judges and lawyers, civil society staff and journalists (Rodier & Portevin, 2016). In November 2019, the UNHCR and the Arab Institute for Human Rights organised a seminar entitled “Media and Refugees: Challenges and Best Practices”, one of the objectives thereof was encouraging journalists to “give their voice to refugees”, without inviting any migrant or refugee to ‘speak’ or ‘voice’ their concerns.

Ali Mhenni, who worked within the system itself as he was with Bawsala as a parliamentary observer then part of the I Watch watchdog organisation, remembers how these three laws were debated and passed. The first law, according to Mhenni, was passed smoothly (the word is used by the expert) and did not need advocacy. He assumes that some laws are “meant” to be passed while some others are open



for debate. The 2016 and 2018 laws belong to the first category and were to be passed anyway. This confirms the policy transfer and stakeholders' pressure hypothesis discussed when dealing with the case-studies. As for the third law, Mhenni comments on the surrounding debate and advocacy as Bawsala observers in the parliament worked on summarising and reporting commissions' work. Mhenni, with a 'disillusioned' air- like most youth who worked in civil society and politics after 2011, commented on the parliament's workings saying that some laws were passed only because they were "gorgeous" and "to show the world how Tunisians were democratic". This entailed a sort of hypocrisy on the part of media actors and MPs. The example of the law protecting whistleblowers which was adopted unanimously and yet called "the snitches law" by some MPs from the Nidaa Tounes bloc, testifies to this paradox between convictions and actions.

On Law 2018-50, Mhenni reiterated his belief in the hypocritical spirit having governed the media discourse. The recurrence of racist incidents against sub-Saharanans constituted a chain reaction leading to more coverage of the incidents and the sub-Saharanans conditions and invitation of experts, ending up in the public opinion geared toward calling for a law protecting them from discrimination. He, like Aouadi, stressed the role of money in the media policy agenda. In fact, to Mhenni, the policy agenda was pushed by civil society onto media platforms, not media per se. Educating the media was carried out by civil society.

When asked about the three laws and media discourse on sub-Saharanans, journalist and jurist Boukhayatia brought about the same point about media discussion of the laws as a way to boast about the progressivist and democratic achievements of Tunisia. She also invoked the media's sensationalist approach to these laws and the buzz effect accompanying them. More than a real conviction and commitment, journalists chose these topics like racism and human trafficking incidents to attract more readership, not to convince them of the legitimacy of legislation protecting sub-Saharanans. She asserts she cannot blame some outlets like *Tunisie Numérique* (covered a lot in our analysis) as a prolific media in the sub-Saharanans coverage. Indeed, in this type of journalism, it is usually done through 'desk work', requiring a mini article— contracted piece (no more than three paragraphs)— with alluring titles, without any analysis or in-depth debate, to be circulated on social media.

Answering a follow-up question about the change in media rhetoric regarding sub-Saharanans in times when these three laws were discussed or adopted, Boukhayatia answered that it is mainly due to the

media model in Tunisia resting mainly upon covering *fait-divers* and any controversies for more readership. Reflection is invoked as most mainstream Tunisian media outlets adopt a reflectionist model without any critical distance to or investigation of events.

This having been clarified, Boukhatia acknowledges that in the alternative outlets where she used to write and the current one (*Nawaat*), journalists discussed these laws intensively and repeatedly. *Nawaat* worked on them and followed-up even after their adoption. Great work was carried out, yet no media work matched the civil society's endeavours. Halioui noticed that these topics such as human trafficking and racism raised major public debate and controversies as they still divide public opinion till now. He has nevertheless noticed less debate around Law No. 37 of 2021, which regulates domestic work.

From a politician point of view, Jaouhara Ettis confirmed the media's tacit advocacy against racism and Afrophobia especially in outlets like *Mosaique Fm* (part of our corpus) in programs like *Midi Show* which is still considered as an icon of political programmes and whose anchors and presenters "adopt the idea that they can shape legislation, as the real mission of the media". She particularly remembers the interviews conducted and interventions of MPs and experts on "Midi Show" to push for criminalization of racism especially against sub-Saharan migrants and the legalisation of sub-Saharans' status.

Ettis believes that the media discourse can lead to a certain change in legislation. She says that in the first period of the 2014 constitution drafting, she was a deputy, and she remembers incidents where the media succeeded in transporting debate from their platforms to the parliaments<sup>261</sup>. In the same trend, the 2018 law criminalising racism sparked debate in the government presidency, and the mere sub-Saharan presence in Tunisia was a trigger. When sub-Saharans were attacked, their representatives filed a petition to Jamila Ksiksi, former MP and chair of the general legislation Commission, to mediate between them and the government. The outcome was a heated debate in the media engaging the journalists and the politicians with a converging stance towards penalising discrimination.

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<sup>261</sup> The famous Souad Abderrahim incident when she discussed the single mothers' issue in an interview with *radio Monte Carlo*. Her "condemning" of single mothers sparked a huge controversy which was transferred to the parliament although there was no legislation back at the time concerning single mothers. The media engaged in heated debate because they thought there was something about single mothers on the parliament's agenda, and the parliament engaged in the debate to show to the public opinion the absence of any intention to pass any conservative or regressive/ traditionalist legislation.

At the other hand of the spectrum, former MP Houda Slim negates any role for the media in the policy-making process. She says it was the parliament alone which pushed for change, not the media. The only role the media played was “disseminating the information” and “raising awareness”. This agrees with the three case-studies discussion where the media discourse seemed to disseminate information about the legislation to be passed. Media invited all activists and opened its doors for people to defend the progressivist stance, so it was a medium rather than a locomotive.

Slim, in her capacity as a member of the parliament and internal commissions, participated in the drafting of the two laws (law 2016-61 and 2018-50). She remembers that the political scene was stable, the pressure of civil society and media resulted in unanimous vote for these laws with all their articles. “I contributed to adopting these two laws from within, and it was a very politically animated period, full of constructive debate”. The media contributed and followed but did not ignite the debate.

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1 Migration, Media, Social Representation, and Social Change**

This exploration of Tunisian media representations of sub-Saharan migrants from 2012 to 2020 reveals a complex landscape. While the media can play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and influencing policy change, its effectiveness can be limited by factors like lack of expertise, sensationalised narratives, and political correctness which is not reflective of deep social change. Overall, according to the interviewed experts, responsible and informed journalism is essential for fostering informed public understanding of migration. Furthermore, media professionals require greater training and expertise on human rights and migration issues to be more open and critical about migration. Some experts like Ms. Slim concluded with recommendations like supporting initiatives that promote media literacy and critical thinking skills among the public as well as encourage collaboration between media outlets, civil society, and policymakers to foster constructive dialogue.

Media actively participated in debates surrounding progressivist legislation, particularly on issues like human trafficking, racial discrimination and domestic work in relation to sub-Saharan-related discourse (Slim, Halioui, Boukhayatia). The role of civil society as a key player in pushing for these laws, relegates the role of media to simply acting as a platform for advocacy voices and raising public awareness (Slim, Boukhayatia). This is especially valid for the first law and second law, but not for the third law

where civil society does not seem to be present in the discourse on domestic work. Rather, the key actor was UGTT through the dynamics of policy networking and policy transfer.

The post-2011 Tunisian media's role can be described as both complementary/ complicit with policymaking. Some media outlets aligned with specific political interests whereas independent media served as a watchdog, holding power structures accountable resulting in serious and deep treatment of these laws (Boukhayatia and Ettis). In dealing with the role of media in policy shifts, the type of media and the regional contexts ought to be considered. First, written media proved to be less effective and influential than audio-visual media because of the time constraints of the audience. Our corpus is representative though as it involves written press pieces, but also written capsules from radio and TV programmes diffused on social media.

Hence, the impact on the audience is proven through the number of readers, and social media mentions and shares (see figures in this chapters). Concerning the second criterion, Global South media, especially media in the MENA region are different from those in the Global North due to the quasi-absence of plurality and democracy. Even Though Tunisian media is an exception, which is the fruit of the 2011 'revolution', the media model is rather reflective than a locomotive of change. According to van Dijk (1998), the media exert a powerful influence which can "reflect", "empower" or "enable" the transformation of public opinion and political stances. While "media elites" have the most significant role in igniting or perpetuating discourses through the media they possess and control (Aouadi and Boukhayatia), van Dijk (2000, p. 36) makes the conspicuous remark that the media texts provide valuable insights into the socially-shared knowledge and beliefs of a target readership in order to achieve mutual "intelligibility" between the media consumers and the political elite, notably because of the significant toppling of the traditional "top-down" information flow of information.

The media thus provide a pivotal locus for the examination of social-political shifts in democratic transition cases, even if the role of such media cannot be scientifically discerned in an exact manner. Despite its limitations, the Tunisian written (mostly electronic) media served as a crucial intermediary between citizens and decision-makers, shaping public opinion and influencing policy agendas. (Slim, Halioui). However, the effectiveness of this relationship has diminished in recent years, requiring a re-evaluation of the media's role in a changing political landscape especially in the new discourse about sub-Saharan, which is characterised by threat and danger. Overall, the post-2011 Tunisian experience

showcases the potential and limitations of media in promoting social justice and influencing policy change. While challenges and lacunas persist, the ongoing dialogue between media, civil society, and policymakers is essential for building a more inclusive and equitable society. The expert interviews showcase a multifaceted and inconclusive relationship between media, policy, and social justice issues in Tunisia. While there's disagreement on the extent of the media's current influence, the value of its role in fostering public discourse and amplifying civil society voices is evident.

## **5.2 Studying Discourse to Unveil the Power of Media in Shaping Politics**

This chapter demonstrates the importance of studying discourse, particularly media discourse, to understand the intricate relationship between media, politics and public opinion with regard to thorny social issues like migration. The media play a crucial role in shaping how we perceive political issues and actors, and therefore the study of use of rhetoric, framing, and agenda-setting may pave the way to a deeper understanding of the broad socio-political context of the scrutinised era. In fact, traditional political decision-making arenas are no longer the sole drivers of change. Social interactions and everyday practices are increasingly playing a role (Beck, 1994).

From a CDS perspective, the media have become a central political institution, shaping public discourse and influencing policy decisions through the channelling of underlying ideologies or countering power dynamics (Fairclough 1995, 1998). As established in the second case-study, focusing on mediated discursive events to establish a media discourse based on topoi of humanitarianism and authority as well as other legitimation strategies justifying the adoption of Law 2018-50, political events are often constructed and framed by the media to influence how people understand them. Building on this social constructionist and holistic approach, discourse is construed by social reality and constitutive of social reality. Therefore, the main purpose of the discourse analytical practice is to pinpoint the dynamics of production as well as transformation of social reality by the discursive practices in social institutions like the media (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The media discourse(s) on migration and media coverage of migrant-related discursive moments can shape public opinion on migration by using biased language and framing, potentially normalising right-wing views (Wodak, 2015) or influencing public opinion and policy agendas through agenda-setting and framing (Hjarvard, 1999). Thus, understanding power dynamics by analysing media discourse, using DHA in particular, enables us to uncover hidden power structures and how they influence political

processes and identify the underlying biases and agendas embedded in media narratives and the persuasive tactics used by political actors in media communication.

Policy-wise, Tunisia cannot be said to have a full-fledged migration policy. Prior to 2011, and under the Ben Ali regime, migration-related policies, if any, were primarily a “survival tool, used to gain international support through migration cooperation and to step up population surveillance through border and internal mobility controls” (Natter, 2022). The 2011 ‘democratic transition’ produced a simulacrum of ‘migration policy’ to gain international support and legitimate national political decisions and laws. As has been demonstrated, Organic Law No. 2016-61, Organic Law No. 2018-50 and Law No. 2021-37 were somehow crucial to assure the international community and ensure adherence to international norms, although these policy-shifts were framed as Tunisian initiatives, emerging from domestic security, humanitarian and economic demands.

Media legitimation seems to play in favour of Tunisian migrants to Europe, who are framed as optimistic seeking better lives and suffering from the European unfair restrictive policies (which was not the case during the years 2019-2022). These same media appear to be more confusing and fluctuating when it comes to sub-Saharan migrants. At times, i.e. in most of the corpus, sub-Saharan migrants were represented as a danger, a threat, numbers, outsiders, deviants or victims, whereas other times, especially during debates about some discursive events or migration-related legislation, they were instrumentalised and represented as human assets, advantageous to the labour market, worthy of state protection, etc.

## VII- Concluding Chapter

### 1. Summary of the Analytical Chapters' Findings

#### 1.1 Post-2011 Tunisian Media: Silence, Othering, Dehumanization, and Amalgamation

The nine-year monitoring and subsequent analyses revealed that the Tunisian media silenced the voices of sub-Saharanans. Quantitatively, almost only 5% of the collected corpus allocated “voice” to sub-Saharanans. The data showed minimal direct or indirect intervention from sub-Saharanans in news and stories about them— a deliberate act of cancellation exerted through lack of agency allowing the media to frame the narrative unilaterally. Silencing is, in the sense of DHA, a meta-discursive strategy hiding a discourse by another discourse. Symbolic Interactionist (SI) theory labels this as a “symbolic annihilation” which is a symbolic “erasure” of other marginalised outgroups in discourse.

At times, the media discourse seems not only to silence sub-Saharanans but to cancel them altogether. For instance, the corpus analysis shows that 2014 is a ‘black hole’ in the media with very little content about them, as the political elite was not interested in “secondary” social issues. In fact, the analysis shows that the news and stories about sub-Saharanans are simply suppressed when the country has more important political stakes like elections. Another finding related to the content analysis of the corpus is the argumentation logic adopted by the media in Tunisia. This logic established sub-Saharan migrants as simply “others”, an outgroup of “Africans” with a consistent emphasis on their difference to and discord with the Tunisian society.

This “Symbolic degradation” (Jensen, 2011) takes over “symbolic annihilation” when the subordinate sub-Saharanans are relegated to mere “others” in discourse, thus slipping into a “spiral of silence” (TSR). Tunisian media, in referring to all sub-Saharanans as “Africans” for instance, further alienate them symbolically. Hammering their audience with the ‘Africanness’ attribute is a strategic engraving—intentional or not—of the idea of alienation and othering. Hence, the media, reflecting and feeding in the audience’s imaginary at the same time used a flawed logic and an epistemic fallacy exerting “différance” (Derrida), a sort of existential and geographic distancing based on a superior understanding of ‘whiteness’. This fallacy poses racial and social discrimination and leaves sub-Saharanans representations void of any distinctive human features, reducing them to a “black otherness”. The representation of sub-Saharanans as a ‘collective presence’ helps manufacture an ingroup, “us”, which is recognizable by means of difference. This has always resulted in discrimination.

The reinforced antagonism of “us” vs. “them” is back to the surface now, in 2024, as these concluding remarks are being drafted. Indeed, the journalists and stakeholders establish the same *false dilemma* fallacy when discussing sub-Saharanans (often amalgamated with Sudanese who are Arab and Muslim, because of Afrophobic tendencies). This fallacy leaves the reader with a limited number of options and legitimates their exclusion based on the argument of ‘preserving the security and lives of Tunisians’, as if these were the only options available. Even worse, for years, the media favoured the perspective of authorities, be they the police, ministries or NGOs, rather than the narrative of sub-Saharanans. Throughout the nine-year period under scrutiny, sub-Saharanans have been like an absent presence, imaginary characters in a fairytale where the Tunisians are salubrious and heroic agents fighting an unfathomable ghost wishing to invade the country.

No wonder then that sub-Saharanans have been victims of racist and Afrophobic attacks (as mediated in the corpus in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018). This dual treatment of the media discourse results in two types of representations: either deviancy or victimhood. The media coverage as observed in the corpus fixates on crimes associated with sub-Saharanans, especially irregular entry/ exit, fraud, embezzlement and prostitution. Sensationalist and shocking headlines are coupled with the reiterative lexical use of crime as well as topoi of threat and danger. Agenda-setting often poses an underrepresentation of positive stories and overrepresentations of negative ones. Hence, the Arabic-speaking media especially chose the buzz effect and sensationalism as they prioritised attention-grabbing stories of deviancy, kidnapping, murder, dark trafficking networks, and manufactured stories about “AIDS” and “organ trade”, especially in times of political and social instability.

The concept of “crimmigration”—or when immigration policies become intertwined with criminal justice—is particularly concerning when examining the representation of Sub-Saharan migrants during the debate over the anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling law, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance. It seems sub-Saharanans are constantly prosecuted for the mere act of being “ir-regularised” migrants, but also for any other crime related to their status, which creates a long-lived double vulnerability and double-jeopardy, in the media discourse and therefore in the common Tunisian mind. This crimmigrating discourse poses on the use of the authority topos which invigorates the speaker’s positive ingroup representation by appealing to legitimate bodies or authorities such as “National Guard Commander”, “Public Prosecution”, “Border patrol of the National Guard”, etc.



Deviancy as a frame of representation is also discernible in the dramatization of “criminality” stories through an elaborate mythopoesis. The media outlets seem to engage in an elaborate narrative or myth, entrenching as well as normalising the distorted and negative discourse and stereotypes. The diachronic analysis underlines the foregrounding of news/ stories of fraud and “illegal” sea-crossing, as well as “organised crime” like smuggling and trafficking. Combating such deviancies requires a law; this is one of the ways the sub-Saharanans’ deviant representations framed Organic Law No.2016-61 as an emergency to protect sub-Saharanans from ‘sub-Saharanans’. Again, the Tunisian is represented as a figure of salvation, a saviour, battling a deviant and criminal invader. When they are not deviants, sub-Saharanans are reduced to mere victims.

Framing sub-Saharanans as “wretched others” is especially betrayed by the excessive recourse to the topos of numbers. The topos of numbers follows the rule: if the numbers prove a specific topos, a specific action should be performed (see Reisigl and Wodak 2001, p. 79). Then, numbers of sub-Saharanans drowning in shipwrecks during their journeys to Europe, are used to depict them as helpless victims. This portrayal relieves the state of responsibility and positions Tunisians as saviours. The dominance of the victim-frame in Tunisian media representation of sub-Saharanans migrants serves several purposes among which soliciting an empathetic response, exonerating the state from any responsibility towards these “victims” who suddenly turn to be agents of their victimhood, and finally representing them as a burden to the state and society. It is only logical to see how this discourse continues to be exerted when speaking about the 2024 clashes in the South of the country between nationals and sub-Saharanans who are represented as “poor” and “wretched” creatures trapped in Tunisia with no issue for them or for “us”.

In tackling the dilemma of these “wretched” others, the media cover sea tragedies with an emphasis on humanitarian operations deployed to search for the dead. The national efforts like those of the Red Crescent are reiterated and hyperbolised including detailed description of search patrols and incessant endeavours to bury the dead. The process often seems like an impossible mission and a “burden” because of the quasi-impossibility of finding appropriate graveyards for these black “wretched”, “unidentifiable” and “dehumanised” others, who do not belong to this land. The victim-and-saviour frame is activated again when the white Tunisian is striving to fill in the gaps and cater for the needs of the dead “victims” against all odds despite the limited resources and economic difficulties.

Against this backdrop of antagonising as well as condescending representations of sub-Saharanans as a homogeneous “African”, “deviant” or “victim” *otherness*, some media pieces of the corpus stand out.

In the Tunisian media, what is left unsaid, is usually said otherwise by other actors, counter-representations and opposite frames or discursive strategies.

## **1.2 The Counter-Narratives in the Media Discourse**

The study of a sub-corpus, extracted from the main one, revealed counter-representations of sub-Saharan migrants in some Tunisian media outlets—either independent or/ and alternative—or even the same mainstream outlets in particular events. Key insights regarding counter-discourse, resistance from within journalism, and alternative discursive strategies were divulged in the analysis. Through the lens of DHA, the findings of the fourth chapter revealed a conflictual and paradoxical understanding of the sub-Saharan presence in Tunisia. Counter-frames and alternative topoi were used—in contrast to the fifth chapter frames and topoi—to challenge dominant narratives of othering and amalgamation.

The Tunisian media sub-corpus unveils a multi-pronged approach to representation, deploying peculiar frames like the “sub-Saharan businessman”, “sub-Saharans successful student/ trainee” and “sub-Saharan integrated family”. The analysis underscores a counter-discourse and an active resistance emanating from the sub-Saharan migrant community itself as well as the journalists who opted for this representational approach. This resistance manifests through (i) voice allocation, in contrast to absence of voice in the previous analytical chapter and (ii) self-representations reflecting agency, and resilience permeating the media discourse, and portraying sub-Saharan as active agents defending their rights and dignity.

Along with topoi of justice, history and humanitarianism, the analysis shows different nomination and predication strategies which aim at dismantling and destroying the stereotypical representations as well as advocate for the recognition of sub-Saharan migrants’ rights as an equal ingroup—not an outgroup—of the Tunisian society. The results also illuminate the counter perspectivization strategies of individualization and humanisation. The sub-corpus seems to shatter negative stereotypes and cultivate a more critical, inclusive, and nuanced understanding of the sub-Saharan migration phenomenon.

At its core, this chapter underscores the profound influence of what could be perceived as ‘minority’ discourse in shaping societal perceptions and attitudes towards sub-Saharan migrants. By engaging with counter-discourse, such media outlets adopt resistance strategies, and alternative narratives of belonging, contributing to the construction of more nuanced and multifaceted representations. The

‘clash’ in legitimation and argumentation logic between the two corpora testifies to a peculiar ‘migration discourse’ in Tunisia. According to expert Hassan Boubakri such a peculiarity is totally normal in dealing with social issues like migration. “This is migration, always tricky and contradictory. It is never treated idealistically; and social conflict will always exist”. The two contrasted discourses have always existed about sub-Saharanans, even pre-2011. Then, at times, politicians and leaders legitimise one of the stances.

After drawing the findings of these two first analytical chapters, as discrepant and divergent as they may seem, the next logical step was to explore this ‘wonderous’ tension between two seemingly contradictory representations. Entering the realm of policy shifts and focusing on the anti-trafficking law (2016), anti-racism law (2018), and domestic work regulatory law (2021), the last chapter studies the dynamics of representing and (de)legitimizing these laws as case-studies.

### **1.3 Media discourse on Sub-Saharanans: Mimicking? Advocating? Policymaking?**

Starting from a statistical overview of the main-corpus, potential tipping points are detected, and discursive moments of change are observed. Thus, the policy changes to be studied are identified in 2016-2018-2020. These “peaks” represent discourse moments where focus shifts away from stereotypical representations and aligns with the sub-corpus counter-narrative, in a seeming attempt to lobby and advocate for sub-Saharanans. The goal is to understand how these policy shifts were represented throughout their life cycles and how they potentially influenced the socio-political attitude and policy making processes. The investigation focused on the potential of specific discourse(s) being catalysts for not only legislation adoption per se, but at least a more nuanced portrayal of sub-Saharan migrants. Grasping these shifts means understanding whether they reflect a genuine change in societal attitudes or a mere tactical pragmatic adaptation mechanism to fit the scope of ‘policy transfer’ models and market a democratic and human rights-inspired country.

As far as the first case-study is concerned, i.e. the adoption of and media debate around Organic Law No. 2016-61 on the prevention and fight against trafficking in persons, the media discourse divulged confusion since journalists seem to conflate trafficking and smuggling as they use them interchangeably. Overall, representation of sub-Saharanans as traffickers or smugglers is less important than the representation of sub-Saharanans as victims of those two ‘crimes’. The rhetoric rather adopts the perspective of the authorities and victims. The whole narrative about this law revolves around sub-Saharanans who seem to be *la raison d’être* of this legislation. This is further corroborated by Boubakri who confirms that there

was a “coalition of public opinion” to fight smuggling and trafficking. He also remembers the testimonies of the female sub-Saharan women who were trafficked before arriving in Tunisia. Boubakri even brings about the role of UGTT and its online statements and interactions (which we could not see in the corpus itself).

On the other hand, Camille Cassarini (2022) who worked on “fabrication of trafficking” and “negotiation of protection” reckons that the discourse on “the fight against human trafficking” in Tunisia is a by-product of policy transfer and a direct result of the projected efforts of NGOs. Here we have two optics, the Westerner looking from outside and the national expert who worked with the advocates on this legislation. The conflict is not necessarily puzzling, rather it stems from a miscommunication and “exclusivism” (which we warn against in chapter two). In studying any phenomenon related to migration, one has to explore all points of view and fields. We should be inclined to believe the version which harmonises policy transfer with national advocacy at the same time.

Indeed, the coordinated actions of few NGOs found a favourable terrain in Tunisia where authorities, local civil society and the media put forward an agenda to fight against trafficking and smuggling (even if there were confusion and conflation of two diverse legal concepts). It is true that the corpus itself does not provide instances of ‘advocacy’ in representing sub-Saharan women as being smuggled or trafficked *before* the law was passed. Yet, the corpus shows many instances where the representations of sub-Saharan women trafficked from Libya served as legitimisation strategies for the law, seeking to convince the readership of its significance in a time when the topic was not of great interest to the common readership—rather interested in partisan conflicts and elections in that crucial period<sup>262</sup>. One of the other reasons accounting for the lack of intense debate or representation of trafficked sub-Saharan women and the networks involved is the confidential and secretive nature of these cases. The few mediated cases lacked any details about the people involved or the places, such as the “Facebook girl” (she chose to use social media as a last refuge after being trafficked and detained against her will)<sup>263</sup>. In fact, these cases are so sensitive as they concern vulnerable people like sub-Saharan migrants, but also people who are doubly protected by the law like minors and women. We have to note that in Tunisia, there were instances where the HAICA

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<sup>262</sup> A very good report issued by the ministry of justice with national and international partners investigating the state and progress of lawsuits under this law, 2019 [https://www.justice.gov.tn/fileadmin/medias/pdf/lutte\\_contre\\_la\\_traite\\_des\\_etres\\_humains/lecture\\_des\\_dossiers\\_judiciaires3.pdf](https://www.justice.gov.tn/fileadmin/medias/pdf/lutte_contre_la_traite_des_etres_humains/lecture_des_dossiers_judiciaires3.pdf)

<sup>263</sup> 2017 sub-corpus.

<sup>264</sup> sanctioned and blocked articles, pursuant to Section III: On Publication Ban (Art. 61-63), due to prohibition of publishing anything about the proceedings of lawsuits with children or divulging personal information or any information which might lead to their identification. This could have made such media content punishable if information is shared, and non-appealing if information is withheld. The mainstream media logic poses on publishing pieces which could attract readers and therefore sponsors and advertisers. This is not the case of alternative media outlets like *Nawaat* and *Inkyfada*<sup>265</sup>.

Finally, law 2016-61 is one of the few which are really implemented and cases of sub-Saharanans who are protected under this law are shown in the abovementioned report. Be it media advocacy or mere policy transfer, the mixed model adopted here enabled the adoption of the law, its legitimation in relation to sub-Saharanans in the media, and the follow-up on the work of the INLTP which was established as an outcome of this legislative landmark. Today, INLTP is still functioning and countering the mainstream discourse about sub-Saharan “illegal” entries. Alternative media is adopting counter-representations of sub-Saharanans, debunking the narrative of “invaders” and conspiracy. In the article<sup>266</sup> “Subsahariens en Tunisie: Les contre-vérités de Saïed” (in English “Sub-Saharanans in Tunisia: The Untruths of Saïed”) Boukhayatia mentions the INLTP 2022 report, which was issued after the ‘coup’. In this article, contra any official xenophobic discourse, the journalist adopts the independent body reporting that 54% of the trafficked people are foreign (among those 64% are Ivorians).

Hence, this first law falls within the scope of two overlapping models: advocacy from within and policy transfer with a minor role played by the media before and after its adoption. This is to some extent the same case for the last case-study, Law No.2021-37 regulating domestic work, as the corpus shows the engagement of different stakeholders in a “policy network” aiming at changing the labour legislation to include foreigners and regulate domestic work. The monitoring of media outlets reveal great interest in the ‘advocacy’ efforts, being one component of the policy network. This accounts for the many pieces on the meetings of the stakeholders and their activities in relation to Law No.37. Therefore, the media proved

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<sup>264</sup> <https://haica.tn/fr/decret-loi-n2011-115-du-2-novembre-2011/>

<sup>265</sup> The article <https://inkyfada.com/en/2018/03/13/djibril-cursed-by-borders/> tells the story of Djibril of was trafficked in Libya before arriving to Tunisia (an interesting investigation, which is limited in space as it only tackles the protagonist’s ordeal in Libya).

<sup>266</sup> <https://africa-news-agency.com/subsahariens-en-tunisie-les-contre-verites-de-saied/>

to be part of the dynamics of policy transfer, in this case, since it served as a dissemination channel as was also observed by Boubakri.

As far as legitimation is concerned, the media discourse established the importance of this law for the sub-Saharan community—referred to as ‘non-nationals’ in the law itself. The advocacy rhetoric on this law, within our corpus, was carried through the humanitarian topos (as in analysis of chapter 5), quoting NGOs and the UGTT. Within the corpus, the heightened visibility of the Tunisian General Union, its influence and credibility after being awarded the Nobel Prize, contributed to framing it as the chaperon of the sub-Saharans professional integration and protection. The mediated discursive events involving UGTT gave it power and visibility and supported its advocacy for sub-Saharan workers’ rights under the RSMMS—Sub-Saharan Mediterranean Migration Trade Union Network. The labour union prevailed this humanitarian argumentation as it appointed itself a political counter-power and mediated itself as a precursor of labour migrants protection, meeting with them, accepting them as adherents of the unions, and providing them with affiliation cards. The media coverage—from 2016 on—of the activity of the UGTT seemed to be always coupled with sub-Saharan workers’ news.

In the media corpus, it ensued that *intensification* of labour-related discourse is coupled with a pro-migrant perspective appealing to regulation of work and regularisation of the sub-Saharans status. Many articles covered UGTT’s appealing for the protection of “the rights of migrant workers, whether they are regular or irregular workers in the informal sector or migrant women”<sup>267</sup>. UGTT also paid attention to migrants by training its personnel in the field<sup>268</sup> and issuing numerous communiqués attacking the state’s management of ‘irregular’ sub-Saharans arriving to Tunisian coasts, demanding “decent accommodation and health conditions” (2017 and 2018 sub-corpora). Unionists also decried the shipwreck disasters’ management and adopted the topos of humanitarianism rather than topos of numbers and frames of sub-Saharan-victim or sub-Saharan-wretched<sup>269</sup>.

In relation to this law No. 2021-37, the topos of authority is used to legitimate its adoption and implementation. This discursive recourse to authority to legitimate the reform of Tunisian “migration

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<sup>267</sup> “Tunisia is called upon to revise its legislation and regulations relating to labour migration”, *Tunisie Tribune* (French).

<sup>268</sup> “Tunis: trade unionists are trained in the field of migration”, 2017 sub-corpus, UGTT official page.

<sup>269</sup> Another Shipwreck, “a humanitarian disaster sponsored by lobbies” (UGTT), *Gnet* website (French), June 2018

policy” if there is any, is developed through a systematic recourse to UGTT officials and leaders like Abassi and Taboubi (two secretary Generals of the UGTT) as well as assertive language and adverbs/ verbs/ nouns (imperative, underlined, vigorously, totally, asserted, opposed, refuses) to mediate their serious intents and resist the power dynamics.

The case-study which stands out in the media discourse about sub-Saharanans is the case of Organic Law No. 2018-50 fighting all forms of racial discrimination. Naturally, this law and its representation in the media has been linked to the sub-Saharanans suffering from Afrophobia in Tunisia. Boubakri remembers that it was the fruit of a coalition of civil rights’ activists, with Euro-Med Rights. The Migration and Asylum group he belonged to worked with this coalition. It was “thanks to the media, [that] civil society advocated for that law”. This statement summarises the gist of this particular case-study analysis as the quantitative and qualitative monitoring of all the media discourse accompanying its adoption and discursive moments thereof (table 8) showed a public interest in the law.

The media corpus signalled an end of the tabooism of and myopia in debates on racism. It even shook the public opinion with stories about heinous criminal “discursive events”. Intense coverage as well as interviews and political communiqués— following the 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019 racial crimes against sub-Saharanans— marked the media discourse (black Tunisians seem to be relegated to a second position, not because they do not suffer from racism but because their ordeals are not as grave as sub-Saharanans’). From these discursive moments, the media engaged in a genuine conversation about racism against sub-Saharanans and normalised the term which had long been a taboo.

Wodak (2015) asserts that in DHA optics, once a notion, be it negative or positive, enters public debate through the media, it becomes “normalised” after being symbolically anchored (SI). After a stage of sensitization and normalisation targeting the public opinion’s “field of action” (DHA), the media then engaged in other “fields of action”— that of political advocacy. The monitoring shows that equal importance was allocated to activists, politicians and journalists as well as sub-Saharanans— through their testimonies— signalling a new media agenda: turning these outlets into platforms of advocacy. The sub-Saharanans’ representations as receivers of racist acts further stressed their vulnerability and ordeal to foster a sense of urgency. Hence, the evolution of the media discourse on sub-Saharanans and racism showed a pattern almost matching the lifecycle of Law No. 2018-50.

The topoi of humanitarianism and advantage are deployed by the media to frame the fight against racism as universal. Indeed, “the presence of sub-Saharan populations in Tunisia is proving to be an important contextual element in the Tunisian debate around the management of its own diversity, that is, to say, the propensity of Tunisians to racism towards black populations” (Pouessel, 2016, p. 16). Then, there was a focus on the “remediation” this law can offer, for all the ordeals inflicted upon sub-Saharan migrants. Remedial actions permeated the media discourse in pieces dealing with racism as a social “sickness” and “perverse attitude”. Foregrounding remedial action through advocacy for penalising these acts results in backgrounding or hiding the criminals and deviants.

Whether the voice and stories of sub-Saharans were instrumentalized (in a utilitarian Machiavellian manner) by the media cannot be proven or refuted. What should be retained from the analysis is that the media appropriated the sub-Saharan narrative, which made the discourse more performative with the sub-Saharan community joining the efforts and invoking international justice and organisations, offering concrete alternatives through the topoi of justice and law. The rhetoric heightened during the second phase (2016-2018), which coincided with the actual submission of the draft bill to the parliament by a coalition of civil society. The same year witnessed the heinous attack on three Congolese in the capital. It seems that the discursive moments overlapped and conflated, forming a very suitable environment for a far-reaching advocacy. The demonstrations were covered intensely in parallel, one with the slogan ‘I don’t want to die in Tunisia because I’m black’ was covered more than five times in the same corpus. The year 2018 witnessed the adoption and celebration of the “historic” law, after condensed political debates in the media. It should be noted that the roles of some emblematic figures like Blamassi Touré (AESAT), Maha Abdelhamid (ADAM and then independent activist), Saadia Mosbah (Mnemty association), Jamila Ksiksi (MP from Ennahda) were significant.

Media representations of sub-Saharans in relation to racist acts and to Law No.50, construed and anchored (SI) the symbol of the sub-Saharan as a victim. But this frame sub-Saharan-victim is not the same frame activated in main-corpus representations. The victim in this sense is not just a disfigured one, without a name or a story, but a human who is worthy of legal defence and remedial action. By repeatedly reporting on racist incidents, the media anchored the association between sub-Saharans and the need for legal protection, which functions within a logic and topos of “justice”. Mythopoesis and legitimation as two discursive strategies were deployed through stories portraying sub-Saharans as ‘heroes’ — not as wretched others— fighting discrimination and constructing narratives that garnered support for the anti-



discrimination law, legitimating social change and retribution. This media strategy aimed to overcome a previous deeply rooted failure emanating from a “legitimation crisis” where institutions failed to recognize or protect black Tunisians.

Media can play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy, but its effectiveness is limited by sensationalism, lack of expertise, and superficial “political correctness”. The interviewed media experts emphasised the need for responsible and informed journalism, along with media literacy among the public (Mhenni, Aouadi, Boukhayatia). While the media actively participated in debates on progressive legislation (human trafficking, racial discrimination, domestic work), some experts argue it primarily served as a platform for civil society advocacy. In this sense, policymaking and media are complementary and complicit (Boukhayatia).

Some outlets have always aligned with specific political and economic interests and agendas, while independent and alternative media acted as watchdogs, promoting deeper discussion of these laws. While media elites significantly influenced discourse about sub-Saharanans, in line with what van Dijk argues about the power of media, media texts also reflected existing social knowledge and beliefs to achieve “intelligibility” with the audience. Media serves as a crucial platform for examining social-political shifts in ‘democracies’ (Tunisia was believed to be a democracy from 2011 to 2022). Despite limitations, Tunisian media served as a key intermediary between citizens and decision-makers, shaping public opinion and influencing policy agendas, creating what Boubakri called “une dynamique croisée” or intertwined dynamics founded on interconnectedness and mutual influence between media, policy makers, and civil society. However, the effectiveness of this dynamic is limited in typical times of “crisis” (such as the 2011, 2014 political crises, the 2020 Corona crisis, 2022 and 2023 with the populist trends and crisis-making).

## **2. Implications of the Research: Looking Forward... or Backward?**

This study underlines the importance of studying media discourse and representations of minority social groups to understand the intricate representation and (de)legitimation dynamics across systems. The media play a crucial role in shaping how we perceive political issues and social actors, and therefore the study of rhetoric, discursive strategies, and framing, against a backdrop of Symbolic Interactionism, may pave the way to a deeper understanding of the broad socio-political context of the 2011-2020 Tunisia. In

fact, traditional political decision-making arenas are no longer the sole drivers of change; social interactions and everyday practices are increasingly playing a role (Beck, 1994).

From a DHA perspective, the media have become a central institution, shaping public discourse and influencing policy decisions through channelling underlying ideologies or countering power dynamics. This approach to language sees media discourse as a type of social interaction, reflective of our understanding of the world but how other groups see us. By unveiling representation choices and dynamics in media through the analysis of media discourse, we can uncover the hidden power structures that influence political processes. This analysis allows us to identify biases and agendas embedded in media narratives, and the persuasive tactics used by political actors. Tunisia's approach to migration has historically been about managing international relations and controlling its population, rather than having a comprehensive policy.

After the 2011 “revolution”, policy changes related to migration were primarily aimed at garnering international support and legitimacy for national decisions. This can be seen in laws like the Organic law No. 2016-61 fighting human trafficking and Organic law No. 2018-50 eliminating all forms of racial discrimination, which were presented as domestic initiatives, but were likely also motivated by a desire to adhere to international norms. The findings beg too many questions as to the representation of migrants. Indeed, Tunisian migrants heading to Europe are rather socially framed in a positive way as hopeful individuals seeking better lives<sup>270</sup>, whereas Sub-Saharan migrants are more likely to be represented negatively as threats or victims. Even though both are ‘ir-regularised’, they are perceived and presented divergently. This points to a real lack of understanding of the sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia. Sub-Saharans fail to be seen as individuals seeking better lives, and Tunisians refuse to look behind their faces. All the interviewed experts agreed that only through dialogue can media and policymakers build more inclusive and sustainable institutions in Tunisia.

Indeed, all the legislation which was hailed “revolutionary” did not stand a chance in a populist environment and with the change of political system. Ever since the 2023 speech by Saied, the media seem to have relapsed to a pre-2011 era where racism and negative perspectivization has become tolerable, if

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<sup>270</sup> This is yet another research gap as when attempting to look for research on the representations of Tunisian *harraga* in Tunisian media, none were found. The work conducted is focused on their social media self-representations.

not favourable. The anti-racism law only exists on paper now, as racism still animates most media and public debate. This only proves that policy transfer models cannot succeed in socially infertile lands where the social mentalities and attitude do not align with the sought change. It also unpacks the historical “changes” of 2011, not as a revolution, but as a happening. A revolution is a toppling of the political system, to put in place another. What happened in Tunisia proves that the system is still the same (Boubakri points to the deep state or state-within-the-state). Twelve years after Ben Ali’s toppling, the Kasbah 1, Kasbah 2, the elections, the constitutions (2014 and 2022), etc. the socio-political systems have not changed. The social attitude towards blacks and now sub-Saharanans is still the same at its core: othering, silencing, criminalising.

There shall be no policy shift if there is no shift in attitude through education. Educating all the citizens, media actors, politicians, academics and average common citizens should be the first axis to work on for a real advocacy for equality and human rights. Borrowed models in the media, politics and legislation turned out to be a fiasco in a state where the average Tunisia is still struggling with the basic understanding of “rights” as a universal acquisition for all without any discrimination. It is also my understanding and some of the experts’ that the latest geopolitical changes are proving that we are all walking on a moving ground as human rights seem to cease to exist when interests reign.

Vulnerability is cancelled and unseen when it is not advantageous. To quote Hassan Boubakri, “I reminisce about the achievements of that period 2012-2020, and I regret that we have lost all those. The same media outlets which were correct are now overtly racist...social media is even worse. But this is migration, always tricky and contradictory. It is never treated idealistically, and social conflict will always exist. Saied gave them (the racists) legitimacy through his speech. But again, it was (still is) populist era, with Trump and Bolsonaro...Modi of India is the worst, Hungary, Slovakia .... We live in a global context of xenophobia. The latest outrageous violations of basic human rights and international value crisis” leave us disillusioned but never helpless. “Nous sommes doublement trahis”, i.e. we are doubly betrayed: “by the Western values and by ‘tyranny’ in Tunisia”.

### **3. Limitations and Challenges**

The present research is focused on a pivotal period in the history of Tunisia (2011-2020). The findings, although revealing, might present some limitations. Indeed, using a macro-level mixed-method historical analysis (DHA), integrating the findings in a truly cohesive manner is very challenging.

Furthermore, within the CDA paradigm, the interpretation may be subjective. Indeed, both DHA and CDA involve a degree of subjectivity and bias in interpretation of certain frames and topoi. However, these do not hamper the validation of the findings because of the use of triangulation and mixed method. Another object of contestation may be the corpus size, as some would argue that 910 pieces are too few for the period covered. Nevertheless, this relatively “small” corpus (of 75,037 words) can be perfectly *representative* as argued previously in sampling. Representativity is a prerequisite as it allows capturing the relevant discourse used when covering the media content involving sub-Saharanans in Tunisia through a multi-level analysis as prescribed by DHA. Hence, the corpus includes myriad text types from media (e.g., news articles, editorials, stories, radio briefs, etc) allowing for a representative sampling of the target domain—media discourse. Moreover, the corpus enabled a balanced reflection on and investigation of the linguistic features of the target population using both quantitative (word frequencies, diachronic evolution tracing, etc.) and qualitative (argumentation, framing, etc) insights. Finally, triangulation—carried out through complementary sources and texts—was used to compensate for any lacunas or subjectivity in the analysis and to enrich and contextualize the data within the broad socio-political/ historical settings.

The target domains—media and policy—are also problematic in research because of their constantly evolving nature. By focusing on a specific timeframe (2011-2020) and specific media types, the findings might be arguably limited by the new changes affecting the target domains. In fact, research focused on written media types (newspapers, radio, Facebook pages) might have a limited scope (as it does not include the TV outlets for instance). To mend to this potential risk, I allude to the status quo and compare the findings to the post-2021 media and policy landscapes throughout the analysis, in an attempt to relativise and contextualise the interpretations. However, the latest changes in the media domain begs the question of further research into social media as a source of information and therefore of symbolic interactionism and meaning-construction in post-2021 Tunisia. One must acknowledge the need for further research on contemporary loci of social representations and self-representations, namely TikTok and Facebook (objects of two articles, one published in July 2024 and another to be published in January 2025 by Hlioui, A.).

Apart from the methodology and corpus, the practical implications of the research might be limited by the political and legal reality in the country. The absence of a regulation for refugee status or a national asylum system as well as the shaky political and socio-economic situation give way to limited practical and durable possibilities for the sub-Saharan migrants. Moreover, the absence of a full-fledged migration

policy will continue to hamper any attempts to integrate sub-Saharan “ir-regularized” migrants. This further corroborates the findings about the understanding of the sub-Saharan migratory phenomenon in Tunisia and the perception of sub-Saharans in the Tunisian society. This research stresses the urgency of well-tailored mechanisms as well as the salience of genuine discursive awareness-raising programs, in the light of the failed policy transfer models having shaped the issuance of the three analysed laws, to cater to the sub-Saharans in Tunisia. The same media outlets analysed might have a great role in this, as media programs could present alternative material fostering inclusion and acceptance rather exclusion and othering.

One has also to acknowledge the relevance of broader international geo-political changes and their role in the deterioration of sub-Saharans’ circumstances in Tunisia. The geographical position of Tunisia in North Africa, bordering Algeria and Libya, and having all its coast on the Southern Mediterranean Sea—the deadliest migration route in the whole world—leaves it with very little margin of manoeuvre. The European externalisation policy (discussed in the introduction) is constantly affecting the domestic migration situation in Tunisia. Indeed, the European pressure—especially from Meloni’s Italy along with its allies in the EU—to curb and control migration flows automatically impacts Tunisian policies towards sub-Saharan migrants. Furthermore, the regional instability and the fickle situation on the neighbouring countries’ borders like Libya has increased migration flows through Tunisia, resulting in what is perceived as sub-Saharan “hotspots” straining resources and potentially shaping public opinion towards them. In reality, the latest events in the Sfax and El-Amra regions are arguably directly linked to the advent of many groups of sub-Saharans migrants from Algeria.

Some even argue that the rigid and stiff treatment of sub-Saharans by the Algerian authorities and regime, pushing them into the Tunisian borders, is one of the determining factors in the sub-Saharans’ situation as residents of “no man’s land”, i.e. the desert between the two countries. Since 2008, Algeria has taken a much tougher stance on migration with law 08-11 criminalizing ‘irregular’ migration, making it illegal to enter or leave the country without proper documentation. One common sanction for the captured “undocumented” migrants is being escorted back to the border. This policy and the methods used in these deportations are concerning, yet little mediated or studied<sup>271</sup>, due the nature of the media and

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<sup>271</sup> Cf. Timtaoucine, M. S. (2022). *The Sisyphus Complex of Sub-Saharan Migrants in Algeria* (Doctoral dissertation).

regime in Algeria. Unofficial convoys, known for harsh treatment and dangerous conditions, are often used to transport migrants back to the border, leaving them at remote locations between Algeria and Tunisia or Niger. Trapped between two securitisation systems, i.e. Europe and Algeria, Tunisia takes in the sub-Saharan migrants yet is not allowed to let them leave to their European “El-Dorado”. Added to the global economic and political situation, the Western countries are partly responsible for the situation in the black continent where poverty and instability pushes sub-Saharans to the North then pushes them back in, resulting in an open-sky trap (to which Europe turns a blind ‘humanitarian’ eye).

This research, and beyond its contribution to research on sub-Saharan perception and representation in Tunisia and the ongoing conversation about international migration trends, was faced with many challenges. First, as soon as the research started in 2021, the whole political system was bewildered by the July 25 events. The parliament was dissolved, and an emergency decree was declared. Although this external factor did not impact the choice of the corpus as we had decided to work on the period from 2012 to 2020, the issue of experts’ scarce input soon came to be problematic. Most of the potential experts from the parliament left the country and decided to retreat from the political scene. Others chose other battles, that of fighting Saied for power. Some are in jail facing lifetime sentences for conspiracy allegations.

As far as logistic challenges are concerned, and having worked on expert interviews for months, the process was very draining at times. Indeed, many kept procrastinating (some ex-MPs who—let us face it—prefer radio or TV interviews rather than academic research). Many emails and phone calls to “researchers” in Tunisia remained unanswered, not rejected or declined, but simply ignored. It turned out that like politicians who thrive on power, some ‘researchers’ in law especially prefer that the migration research path remains only their trademark (except for one, Dr Jlassi).

Against all odds, this research is deemed to be a humble attempt to understand the 2012-2020 dynamics, to keep record of media discourse in that pivotal period in Tunisia’s history, to help draw lessons for a genuine and sustainable change in the future, and especially to inform research about the *status quo* of sub-Saharans’ perception and representations in the present day as they are living under precarious circumstances in Tunisia. Maybe it is high time we started asking the accurate and real questions like the reason why Tunisians internalise problematic ties with their Africanness so much that they prefer to die in a risky journey to Europe yet also reject any “African” presence in Tunisia even if it is beneficial and legitimate. What is in their long colonial history that makes them so xenophobic despite

the many migration(s) that Tunisia harboured for hundreds of years and the many ethnicities living together in the country now? How does Tunisia's colonial history influence its approach to migration? What is to happen to sub-Saharanans who are now stuck in an open-sky jail Europe calls transit land? Only future research can cater to these questions. The present study is a humble contribution and a genuine reminder that more urgent research questions are to be tackled.

Thank you.

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## Appendix I

### Semi-Structured Interview Template: English Version

**Background:** This interview is part of the last stage of research conducted by Amal HLIQUI, for her PhD dissertation in system dynamics (Department of Political Science and International Relations, UNIPA). The dissertation is investigating the role of media discourse about sub-Saharan migration (between 2012 and 2020) in policy making and public opinion. The study focuses on media discourse in relation to sub-Saharans, migration, and legislation notably Organic Law No.2016-61 fighting human trafficking, Organic Law 50-2018 penalising racial discrimination, and Law No. 37 of 2021, which regulates domestic work.

#### I- First Part: General

- 1) Thank you for accepting to take part in my study. How would you like to introduce yourself
- 2) What is your opinion about the role of the media in shaping the policy-making process in general?
- 3) Do you believe in the idea that post-2011 media in Tunisia were effective in pushing for legislative change
- 4) If yes, can you please give me some examples

#### II- Second part:

- 5) When you read newspapers (digital or paper versions), or follow TV/ radio programs, do you feel there is a desire to push for a certain law or policy?
- 6) If a relationship exists between media discourse and policymaking, How do you qualify it, for example a simple thematic or temporal correlation, or other?
- 7) Were you witness to legislation which was passed after a long/ heavy media debate about sub-Saharan existence in Tunisia?
- 8) Thank you for clarifying your position on this. I am just wondering whether you have heard of one of the following laws:
  - Organic Law 2016-61 preventing and fighting human trafficking
  - Organic Law 50-2018 penalising racial discrimination
  - Organic law No. 37 of 2021, which regulates domestic work.

If yes, did you follow all the hot debate it caused in the media? How was the debate prior to discussing the law, according to you?

- 9) Do you have anything to add about the discussed issues, media treatment of migration or sub-Saharans, or any related ones?

## Appendix II

### Transcript of a semi-structured interview conducted in Arabic/ French then translated in English Version

**Background:** This interview is part of the last stage of research conducted by Amal HLIQUI, for her PhD dissertation in system dynamics (Department of Political Science and International Relations, UNIPA). The dissertation is investigating the role of media discourse about sub-Saharan migration (between 2012 and 2020) in policy making and public opinion. The study focuses on media discourse in relation to sub-Saharans, migration and legislation notably Organic Law No.2016-61 fighting human trafficking, Organic Law 50-2018 penalising racial discrimination, and Law No. 37 of 2021, which regulates domestic work.

#### I- First Part: General Exploration

##### 1. Thank you for accepting to take part in my study. How would you like to introduce yourself?

This interview is much awaited, sorry for delaying it. I am happy and proud of it so that we can exchange ideas in the appropriate timing required, about all these intricate issues of media and migration and public sphere. There is a piece, and interview, which I shall send you about the geographer's vision to migration since 1982, "How a geographer regards the Migratory question" (2023). I started my career forty years ago, and this piece might illuminate you on how I see and present myself, and the intersections between the different selves. I had been for long a prisoner of the unique knowledge – geography- as I was working on geography and development until the late nineties. Then I coordinated and managed an international interdisciplinary research project around the migratory trends in the Maghreb. One of the first migration projects. It enables me to leave the box of geography to sociology, economics, anthropology, history, etc. My profile as an expert in migration now is the fruit of that interdisciplinary collaboration.

My publications are mostly co-authored with other specialists than geographers. From the 2000, my interest in migration was translated in Tunisian emigrants to Europe but also sub-Saharans who arrived in Tunisia because of political distress. Libya was besieged so it turned into a transit country whereas it was a destination country. Tunisia has always been a transit country.

Our Southern neighbourhood, Europe being the Northern one, made this migration issue intricate and required all other knowledge like anthropology, law, history, geography, etc.

My expertise in migration, I owe it to all these disciplines and people who believed in me including the ERASMUS+ MIGRANTS project team. I am an ongoing learner. For all the above, I present myself as a professor, researcher and expert in migration studies.

##### 2) I really appreciate it. Mr. Boubakri, what is your opinion about the role of the media in shaping the policy-making process in general?

Media and social media are very important in mediating and disseminating all the social and political issues.

##### 3) Do you believe in the idea that post-2011 media in Tunisia were effective in pushing for legislative change?

It is a difficult question because it is controversial, debatable. Before 2011, there was no freedom of speech, and the public sphere was closed. Post-2011, freedom of speech was exploited by the public, media, and politicians. Certainly, political actors used the media to make their points. Civil society too. Media found material which was never available before. Social media too, without any constraints. The third actor is the great public, who profited especially from electronic media. Starting from that period, the social media pages started engaging with politics and commented and rebutted what was said. So, it is a mutual influence.

The elections of 2011 and 2014 were also governed by the media influence, debates, testimonies, and campaigns affecting the public. Imagine, if it were not for the media, Ennahda or Beji Caied Sebsi, could have never made it. Ideology and ideological debates were installed after 2011 because of the media. If you remember in the revolution and after, the political discourse was carried out by the media. 2013 with the murder of the two martyrs, then in 2019... all because of the media which directly influenced politics and the audience. I believe the audience are the most influential actors.

**4) If yes, can you please give me some examples?**

The best example is the 2014 constitution itself. There were three axes which were amended “on the media” and “because of the media”: the definition of a woman – the woman as a complement to man, the universal human rights and values versus Islam-inspired values. I forgot the third.

In these examples, the media campaign affected these articles along with the protests which were also mediatized. The state and the deep state have not been affected though.

**II- Second part:**

**4) When you read newspapers (digital or paper versions), or follow TV/ radio programs, do you feel there is a desire to push for a certain law or policy?**

Agenda is there but only when one has the tools to implement such an agenda. Even the fact of having no agenda is an agenda-setting: argumentation and discourse which follow. Agenda is whenever there is logic and context, like *Zitouna Fm* and *Nessma TV* had an agenda. Others relied on interference. Agenda requires “des reins solides” ( idiom for being solid and having energy and strength when put to the test) to resist like *Nawaat*, NGO radios, *Inkyfada*, etc.

***A: Following up: Do you believe these latter outlets had that power?***

Not sure because they are elitist and exclusively online. Not everyone read them. They provide for the elite so that the elite can move and influence.

***A: Following-up on the answer: And does the elite influence policy-making? Because if they do then these outlets are addressed exactly to whom they should address, no?***

H: (hesitant) then yes, yes, it is the elite who impacts policymaking, so the elitist media have the ‘contre-poids’ and influence.

H: But mind you. The post-2021 events put to question all conclusions we reached.

***A: It does, but in a good way. Any findings here refute some things about media, but they do prove other theses, and provide me with better understanding of the socio-political tissue, like the fact that perceived change was not well founded and the fact that Afrophobic discourse persists is because the marketed “tolerance” is not real and does not reflect a real change in social attitude.***

H: Exactly, I call it the Illusion! We marketed ourselves as a democracy and a land of the free, but “keskeslou yerja3 l’aslou” in Tunisian. Please use it as it is as there is no other equivalent.

**5) If a relationship exists between media discourse and policy-making, how would you qualify it, for instance is it simple thematic or temporal correlation, or other ?**

As I have told you all along the interview: they all affect each other, there is a logic of a cycle or “Dynamique croisée”— intertwined dynamics, between media law and policy making.

**6) Were you witness to legislation which was passed after a long/ heavy media debate about sub-Saharan existence in Tunisia?**

Hesitation...thinking.... okay, let us move to the next question then.

*H: Are we not going to discuss the sub-Saharans?*

*A: Of course, don't worry it is coming. I kept the most relevant topic to the end.*

**7) I am just wondering whether you have heard of one of the following laws:**

- Organic Law No. 2016-61 preventing and fighting human trafficking.
- Organic Law No. 50-2018 penalising all forms of racial discrimination.
- Law No. 37 of 2021 regulating domestic work.

**If yes, did you follow all the hot debate it caused in the media? How was the debate prior to discussing the law, according to you?**

As for the last one, which I know pretty much, I did not follow the debates much, but I know all three. The anti-racism law is the fruit of civil rights' efforts, Euro-Med Rights as I remember since I was back then at the group migration and Asylum. We worked together. Thanks to the media, civil society advocated for that law. The role of social media and online media in disseminating the information about racism and the legal attempts to curtail it is enormous too.

The civil society network benefited from the media. Also, public opinion and society in general. There was a direct relation between advocacy on social media and media and adoption (he uses the French noun *délivrance*, i.e. birth) of this law.

As for the 2016 law, I remember the testimonies of female sub-Saharans who were trafficked. UGTT engaged in this issue, too and published some reports. There was a coalition of public opinion.

The independent radios, daily debates like *Jawhara* and *Mosaïque*, and regional radios which influenced the debate. Any outlet would do that for *audimat* (audience reach and statistics) reasons.

There were all these excerpts from radios: capsules disseminated and influenced the public opinion.

*A: Follow-up on alternative media: capsules from radios and from serious newspapers, right?*

(Even if *Nawaat* is not read a lot, the articles are sometimes shared and re-shared on social media)

*H: Yes, and Daily newspapers just follow the tide, fluctuate according to the events (dance with the wind)*

**8) Do you have anything to add about the discussed issues or any related ones? I personally am curious about your understanding of the media discourse on sub-Saharans especially that you have been researching the matter even before 2011. Can you tell me about the media discourse about sub-Saharans from 2012-2020?**

Oh...In fact, I felt....let me remind you of the whole story...

Before 2011, I remember when sub-Saharans arrived in 2003 (BAD people who were officials, rich and educated), their children had to join the French schools and they were rejected as “black”, the word “*kuhlich*” was used by the ‘elite’ PMF of the suburbs. They were used by some poor or average sub-Saharan students, so these high officials shocked the Tunisians (see my 2006 article).

They needed a “mediation” to accept them !! I myself went there to talk to the parents and teachers (they threatened to disenroll their children from the schools) à Please use the proverb in Arabic because it is telling as it is “*kaskaslou*”

yarjaa lasslou”

Mind you, this is a historic continuity: this was the elite!! Then, 2011, Shusha camp solidarity from all the Tunisians from all states, providing food and medicine, for 15 days Tunisians people and organisations assisted all the migrants.

The media did not signal this in any negative way, 700000 came and no one said they will colonise us !! The threat and danger were not there.

**A: Probably because the media and people knew these sub-Saharanans were “guests” and they would leave one day.**

H: which was true... they were meant to leave....

Then, in 2011/12, Libyan families who fled the war, hundreds almost 200000 welcomed among Tunisian families in the South, YET no one would welcome a black family, not even Sudanese.

I thought it was an alarming signal, a profound sign of discrimination, non-visible non dit against blacks.

For the purposes of a report with the ASF, I interviewed some sub-Saharanans in focus groups, and they did not protest much about racism before 2021, “paisible et accueillant” (compared to after and 2023)

So, there was some neutrality before 2022, the media adopted politically correct sympathetic discourse : even public opinion fed in this discourse of correctness. We conducted lots of training for journalists on migration terminology. I was myself a trainer, we taught them about their history and pain and suffering and other migratory experiences like the Mores, Libyans to Tunisia, 1947 crisis and South Tunisians fled to North. We trained them on thinking of all these variables.

During and after the revolution, there were genuine attempts, for instance to grant sub-Saharanans refugee status and pass home law of asylum right for them.

Racial incidents before 2021 were scarce but then 2023, it is exponential. What happened in 2021 and after proved that we did not change the attitude: media coverage of al Al-Aamra events; the journalists said half-truths (they fled to the olive trees because they were chased out of the city of Sfax, why not say the whole truth? What happened to the training they received? Why this bias and insistence on criminality?

Please Amal, compare to post-2021.

I reminisce about the achievements of that period 2012-2020 and I regret that we have lost all those. The same media outlet which was correct is not overtly racist! Social media is even worse.

This is migration, always tricky and contradictory. It is never treated idealistically, and social conflict will always exist.

Saied gave them legitimacy through his speech. But again, it was/ is populist era, with Trump and Bolsonaro, Modi of India is the worst, also Hungary, Slovakia ... We live in a whole global context of xenophobia.

What is happening in Germany, Europe, USA, and their outrageous violations of basic human rights, against a backdrop of international value crisis is a simple reminder that we “sommés doublements trahis” (we were doubly betrayed), once by the Western preached values and another by the new ‘tyranny’ in Tunisia.

Thank you very much for your input! You gave me great insights and challenging research tracks.

## Appendix III

### Transcript of an interview conducted in English

#### I- First Part: General

**1) Thank you for accepting to take part in my study. How would you like to introduce yourself?**

You are welcome. I was a member of the Constituent Assembly between 2011 and 2014, then a member of the Shura Assembly of Ennahda party, and then a member of the Executive Bureau from 2018 to 2020, when I resigned. Now, I am an English teacher and an independent political activist.

**2) What is your opinion about the role of the media in shaping the policy-making process, in general?**

As an eyewitness, in the time I served in, the media played a crucial role. We can say it was the 218th member of the Constituent Assembly.

**3) Do you believe in the idea that post-2011 media in Tunisia were effective in pushing for legislative change?**

I do remember that discussions on media platforms shaped the constitution of 2014 and many amendments to the first draft following the media debates, especially with regards to the second chapter “Rights and Freedoms”, Article 6: Freedom of conscience. The section about freedom of faith and excommunication (takfir) was eliminated.

**4) If yes, can you please give me some examples?**

Even though I ceased to be an active member of the parliament from 2014 on, as a political actor and active member of the Ennahda party, (leading party in the political sphere), I can say that the media kept this crucial role. For instance, the law on national reconciliation was shaped by the media discourse/ discussions.

On another level, the media even contributed to forming governments. Now, I believe the media have lost this role after July 25th, 2021, as they have no impact on today’s parliament.

#### II- Second part:

**5) When you read Tunisian newspapers (digital or paper versions), or follow TV/ radio programs, do you feel there is a desire to push for a certain law or policy?**

Of course, it is still the case, but I believe that there are many examples. If we look before 2021. I can mention Al-Charaa Al Magharibi which is an activist newspaper—militant journalism not only commercial media outlet—media with ideology and a social vision. I read a lot of articles between 2012 and 2014 during drafting of the constitution, and the debates in the parliament were accompanied with a bombardment of articles about rights, freedoms, decentralisation and local communities.

For example, regarding rights and freedoms, two newspapers were advocating for the liberal ideology in contrast to the outlets close to Nahdha and conservative parties were posting articles about rather conservative visions on the issue. I remember the debate around the cannabis consumption in Tunisia on Midi Show: Haithem Mekki advocated for the depenalization, legalisation and attenuation of the penalty.

**6) Follow-up: Nice, do you particularly remember any debates about or around migration issues?**

Yes, Midi Show, again (icon of radio programmes) and whose anchors and presenters have this idea that they can shape legislation, which I respect because this is the real role of the media. So, I remember the interviews conducted and interventions of the Midi Show presenters pushing for criminalization of Racism especially against immigrants

and legalisation of sub-Saharanans' status.

After 2021, this radio program kept the same editorial line/ line of thought, which I agree with. I believe that sub-Saharanans should be welcome, and we should be sensitive to their suffering because we are a nation of migrants. The schizophrenic attitude: we can migrate while they cannot is racist.

**7) If a relationship exists between media discourse and policy-making, how would you qualify it (for example, thematic or temporal or other)?**

I believe media discourse leads to a certain change in legislation. In the first period of the 2014 constitution drafting, I remember as a deputy we discussed the single mothers' issue. It was not even an issue, but there was an interview with Souad Abderrahim on radio Monte Carlo where she was asked about the issue of single mothers in Tunisia. A huge controversy was sparked and was transported to the parliament although there was no particular legislation back at the time concerning single mothers. The media engaged in heated debate because they thought there was something about single mothers on the parliament's agenda. (Causation??)

The equal inheritance draft bill of the COLIBE committee mandated by Beji Kaied Sebsi was on the political agenda, and media matraquage (hammering, bombardment) followed to urge to pass the law.

Overall, all murder, rape incidents or domestic violence led to tackle the issue of some laws and politicians back at the time would act to amend legislation, law No. 58-2018 is a great example.

**8) Were you witness to legislation which was passed after a long/ heavy media debate about migration or sub-Saharan existence in Tunisia?**

Yes, I remember the 2018 law, and the debate in the government presidency. sub-Saharan existence in Tunisia was a trigger: when sub-Saharanans were attacked, they complained to Jamila Ksiksi to mediate between them and the government. She took the initiative as the head of the committee of general legislation.

**9) Thank you for clarifying your position on this. I am just wondering whether you have heard of one of the following laws:**

If yes, did you follow all the hot debate it caused in the media? How was the debate prior to discussing the law, according to you? ...I know the first and second, but I am not aware of the third. Much debate around them in the media.

**10) Do you have anything to add about the discussed issues or any related ones?**

Good luck with your research. I hope we can find mercy in our hearts, to treat sub-Saharanans just as we want our own youth to be treated in Europe. Rejection is never an answer.

**Thank you very much for your input!**