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# Life at the Margins: Regional Inequality in Tunisia and International Migration

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**Thesis**

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**Life at the Margins: Regional Inequality and International Migration in Tunisia**

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## Dedication

To my father, Adel Belhadj, whom I lost too soon and whose soul has constantly been present in this journey and the ones before. I hope he is proud.

To my mother, Neila El Cadhi, every milestone is hers.

To all souls lost at sea.

To undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, people on the move, and every person struggling for a decent living.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In October 2022, clashes broke out between the Tunisian Police and the inhabitants of Jarjis, a town in southeast Tunisia. On the 20th of September, a boat carrying eighteen migrants – seventeen locals of Jarjis – drowned at sea. The locals have been protesting, demanding the state search for and rescue the missing migrants. The state remained inactive, and the bodies were found by local fishermen, following which clashes broke out, and a general strike in Jarjis was observed. Jarjis is home to many emigrants in France and a hotspot for irregular departures from Tunisia. After the 2011 revolution, among the more than 20,000 irregular migrants intercepted in Lampedusa, Italy, four thousand were originally from Jarjis (Ben Amor 2014). While levels of irregular migration decreased during COVID-19, it has recently surged back to levels not witnessed since the revolution. Between January and September 2022, 23,000 irregular migrants were intercepted by border security, and 14,000 successfully reached their destination (Finan 2022). As a result of the political and economic conditions, the number of Tunisians irregularly emigrating to Europe has significantly increased. The profile of irregular migrants has also expanded to include families and single mothers with their infants.

Tunisia's social, political, and economic situation since the Arab Spring has been steadily deteriorating. While there was the hope of change in the years following the revolution, which could explain the decrease in emigration during that period compared to 2011, the resurfacing of old regime practices gradually contributed to waves of departures. The "Annual Report on Irregular Migration – Tunisia 2021," published by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES 2022), described the decade following the revolution as the "decade of successive terrors" (2). The country has gone through terrorist attacks, COVID-19, a flailing democracy, and endless protests and demonstrations. According to the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics

(NIS), as of October 2022, unemployment stands at 15.3 per cent, rising to 30 per cent among higher education graduates, and inflation is at 9.2 per cent (ibid). During his fieldwork in Tunisia in the summer of 2021, Ben Jannet (2021) found that the overall dissatisfaction reached 82 per cent with the social situation, 84 with the political situation, and 92 per cent with the economic and health status in Tunisia (10). These numbers reflect the Tunisian state's crisis, as felt by its population and the growing mistrust in public institutions and services.

Emigration, as Boubakri (2021) argues: "is not immune to this general context of crisis, disenchantment, and frustration, hence, the explosion of irregular migration and the bleeding of skills" (39). Over the past couple of years, the multiple crises have increased Tunisian emigration[1], looking for their livelihoods elsewhere. More than 65,000 Tunisians irregularly crossed the Mediterranean to Italy between 2010 and 2020, 43 per cent in 2011 alone (ibid). Between January 2020 and mid-December 2021, two-thirds of the 35,000 irregular migrants intercepted by Tunisian forces were Tunisians. According to the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) "flow monitoring data," more than 16 700 Tunisians arrived in Europe between January and October 2022. The number of those leaving through regular channels has also increased, with more than 22,000 engineers emigrating between 2011 and 2017 (Abderrahim et al., 2021). According to the Tunisian National Migration Survey (HIMS 2021), between 2015 and 2022, 39,000 engineers and 3,300 doctors left the country (20). In an interview with Khadija Finan (2022), Hassan Boubakri indicates that more than 100,000 engineers, doctors, and university graduates left the country between 2010 and 2020. Emigration is embedded in the social context in which it operates.

[1] According to the report by the FTDES "this decade of successive terrors has produced a national reservoir of irregular migrants that is open to receive thousands of the unemployed, impoverished, and marginalized" (7)

Migrants “do not make decisions outside social pressures, hierarchies, and emotions” (Palmary 96). While the crisis is nationally felt, it is acute in some regions more than others.

In the third quarter of 2021, the national unemployment rate stood at 18.1 per cent. Over the same period, the highest unemployment rates were in Tunisia's western and southern regions, ranging between 22.5 per cent to 33 per cent (FTDES 2022). These rates are four to fourteen points higher than the national average. The northeast and the center-east unemployment rates were below the national average, ranging between 10.8 per cent to 16.1 per cent (ibid). According to the “Map of Poverty” report issued in 2020, while poverty is “very low” on the privileged coast and north, it is concentrated in the western and southern regions of Tunisia, with the poorest households having the lowest literacy rate, highest school dropouts, and shortest years of education (Dhraief et al. 25). Different pressures and hierarchies produce different categories of migrants. Salhi Sghaier (2017) historicizes the rise of regional "underdevelopment" in Tunisia in his book *Internal Colonization and Unequal Development*. He contends that decades of uneven development that have constantly benefitted the northern and coastal regions have led to poverty in the western and southern regions.

In Tunisia, some regions have significantly higher levels of poverty than others. The lack of public investment has created a climate where opportunities do not thrive. According to De Haas (2021): human "capabilities are dependent upon positive and negative liberties" (17); hence, it could be argued that regional underdevelopment has constrained the capabilities of its populations. Access to quality education and decent employment are vital determinants of human capabilities. The populations of the marginalized regions are characterized by a low level of positive liberty (freedom to take control of one's life, such as having the necessary financial and human capital) and a low level of negative liberty (freedom from constraints shown here by the structural barriers

of regional inequality). The degree of positive liberty one can achieve is impacted by negative liberty. For example, human capital is constrained by educational quality and achievement inequality, which reduces one's chances of progress and advancement. The options people have or "perceive they have," as well as the cultural and socioeconomic resources and capital they can access, are constrained by regional underdevelopment. Migration, as “contingent upon people’s capabilities and aspirations" (ibid), is undeniably impacted and differently undertaken across regions.

The research idea is based on Tunisia’s first census of International Migration (HIMS 2021). The issue of regional inequality was very evident in the HIMS. People from marginalized areas are less likely to migrate and express less desire/aspirations of migration. What the HIMS does not offer, however, is an analysis of why this is the case.

The practice of mobility in Tunisia is under-researched (Glenda and Taziolli 2016). Despite the importance of migration, theoretical analysis of the phenomenon has been scarce. Many have focused on the “explosion” of irregular migration following the 2011 revolution and the “massive” waves of brain drain. While this has been explained by the reduced border security, lack of opportunities, and deteriorating socio-economic conditions (David and Marouani 2017; Boubakri 2021; FTDES 2022; HIMS 2021; Ben Jannet 2022), the different categories of migrants were left unquestioned. We tend to speak of “Tunisian migration,” which obliterates the various types of mobility found in different regions. While studies (e.g., Joyce 2013; Bechir 2018; Jmaii 2018; Meddeb 2020;) have analyzed the relationship between the 2011 revolution and the longstanding underdevelopment of specific regions, it is difficult to find similar explorations of the relationship between regional inequality and international migration.

When regional mobility is researched, the focus is placed on internal migration (Belhadi 2001; Ben Amor 2014) without questioning why specific regions are home to a reserve of internal migrants while international migration (to Europe) is the privilege of the north and coast. In other studies, the pattern of southern and western mobility toward Libya is identified (Boubakri 2013; M'charek 2020). As Bylander (2017) argued in the case of Cambodia and Van Hear (2004) in the cases of Sri Lanka and Somaliland, class and background create a "hierarchy" of mobility and destinations. The marginalized migrate toward closer, less regulated, and cheaper destinations. This could explain the "choice" of internal mobility and emigration to Libya in the Tunisian case. Nevertheless, while migration to Europe before the revolution was undertaken by people from the northern and coastal regions (Castles 1986; Bel-Air 2016), many from the interior and southern regions embarked on European shores in 2011. Not many have researched this diversification of migrants' regions of origin and its causes. If such research was undertaken, this diversification was *simply noted*. It was rarely, however, historicized and conceptualized within theoretical migration frameworks and the dim reality of regional inequality in Tunisia.

Even less research – to my present knowledge – has examined the question of Tunisian migration by putting the structures at home and abroad under analytical lenses together. In other words, by investigating the link between the causes and consequences of migration in Tunisia and destination countries. For social and demographic factors, there is a demand for different types of migrants (low and highly skilled) (Castles 2015). Specific types of migrants fill different sectorial demands. While the demand for "low-skilled labor" is rarely officially recognized, there is a focus on attracting highly skilled migrants (ibid). How does this impact migration from Tunisia? Which Tunisians are more likely to be found in the low-skilled categories? which Tunisians are more

likely to constitute Tunisia's brain drain? And does this categorization preserve or reduce the inequalities produced at home?

**Research Objectives:**

This thesis, then, aims at contributing to the literature on inequality and migration by examining the case of Tunisia and promoting a theoretical analysis of the issue. It examines how regional inequality might shape and influence migration. It looks into poverty in Tunisia and examines how this poverty is geographically distributed. This thesis explores the relationship between regional inequality and international migration to Europe and investigates how different migrant profiles and experiences are influenced by the area they come from. Through questioning the link between regional inequality and migration, this thesis analyses how regional disparities and geography might shape and influence the opportunities and outcomes of migration. It explores the probabilities of the perpetuation of inequality throughout the migration experience. In other words, it aims at finding whether inequalities produced at home are strengthened or loosened by migration to Europe. This thesis attempts to link migrants' regions of origin, journeys, and the situation in their destination country. The experience on both sides of the Mediterranean is traced to achieve this. Due to European policies and structures, such as the focus on highly skilled migration and its segmented employment market, the inequality between the two groups is assumed to be sustained. The thesis then investigates how such policies and structures categorize migrants and privilege one group over another in enabling regular migration and employment. This categorization, however, starts at home. The research will explore the complex interplay between migrants, their regions of origin, immigration policies, and the labor market in the destination country.

**Conceptual Framework:**

Drawing on De Haas's (2021) argument on migration as a function of people's aspirations and capabilities, this research examines how regional inequality in Tunisia – affecting both aspirations and capabilities – impacts and shapes the opportunities and outcomes of migration. Building on De Haas's migration typology, this research will argue that people from marginalized regions undertake "precarious migration." For this group of migrants, precarity is employed to explain not only their migration but also their employment and livelihood conditions at home. Those from developed regions undertake "free" or "improvement" migration. In a further step, the research examines how these different migrant categories perpetuate beyond the Tunisian borders: observing their continuity through European structural conditions. Because of the focus on attracting highly skilled migrants and the segmented labor market, the inequality between the two groups is assumed to be sustained as they leave, arrive, and work on adverse terms. Hence, the concept of precarity, characterized by inequality, insecurity, and uncertainty, re-emerges to explain the situation of Tunisian migrants from marginalized regions in their destination country. The focus will be on France, the primary destination of Tunisian migrants.

**Research Questions**

To examine the relationship, the following research questions were asked:

- What is the relationship between regional inequality in Tunisia and International Migration to Europe?

**Sub-questions:**

1. What is poverty, and how is it geographically distributed in Tunisia?

2. How is regional inequality manifested in Tunisia? And are migrant profiles contingent upon their regions of origin?
3. What is the relationship between regional inequality and migratory decisions, opportunities, and outcome?
    - Decision: whether one migrates
    - Opportunities: access to regular migration channel
    - Outcome: regular employment and status in Europe
4. Is there a relationship between regional inequality and the regularity/irregularity of migration from Tunisia?
5. What Tunisian regions are more likely to produce the highly skilled migrants that Europe seeks? And what regions are more likely to produce the "low-skilled" migrants?
6. What is the relationship between the European employment market structure and emigration from Tunisia?
7. How can precarity be used to understand the migration experience of Tunisians to Europe?

**Hypothesis:**

The core argument of this thesis is that the power dynamics that regional inequality produces between members of different regions continue through the migration experience in Europe. It is assumed that when migrants come from marginalized and disadvantaged regions, they are more likely to migrate irregularly and be employed in the secondary sector or occupations in the informal economy. On the other hand, when migrants come from privileged regions, they are more likely to migrate regularly and be employed in primary sector occupations with better terms and conditions of employment. The outcome is a perpetuation of inequality between the former and latter migrants.

**Methodology:**

Given the geographical scattering of the target population, primary research was considered been time-consuming and costly. Field research would have had to be conducted in Tunisia and the destination country. In Tunisia, a regional representation of migrants is crucial. Besides the difficulties of travel arrangements to Europe, locating regular and irregular migrants would have been challenging. Hence, this research drew on secondary research constituted of a combination between academic sources and existing reports and surveys.

I employed a comparative framework to analyze the different categories of migrants produced by different macro-structures, primarily regional inequality in Tunisia and the employment market in France. I relied on an interdisciplinary body of literature – drawing from migration studies, labor economics, geography, and sociology – to theorize and evaluate the impact of regional inequality on access to migratory opportunities and the outcomes of the migration experience. Scholarly sources set the theoretical foundations of the research and offered empirical evidence from their context. The aim was to examine how theories on migration, inequality, labor market segmentation, and precarity can explain the relationship between regional inequality and migration.

National and regional reports and surveys offered data that was analyzed and interpreted. This research drew on surveys in Tunisia (such as HIMS, the Map of Poverty in Tunisia, and others), reports by bodies such as the European Commission, and surveys from France, such as the recently published survey by Pôle Emploi (2022), the French recruitment and employment agency, on labor needs and shortages. The content analysis of these different data sets examined the relationship between their variables and findings.

For example, surveys on the labor shortage in France – which reveal an acute shortage in the labor-intensive sector – and its national laws on attracting Highly-skilled migrants were analyzed within the framework of the dual labor market theory and existing research. The latter highlights the close relationship between irregular status and labor-intensive employment in the "secondary sector." On the other hand, highly skilled migrants are more likely to be in the primary sector. Here the picture is complemented by research on poverty and inequality in Tunisia. Such studies revealed the different levels of education and human capital. Hence, they showed the regions of origin of the workers who are more likely to be found in the secondary sectors and those with higher chances of undertaking highly skilled migration and ending up in the primary sector.

In this sense, the thesis adopted comparative lenses to distinguish between two groups of potential migrants in Tunisia. Those who come from marginalized regions and those who come from affluent areas of the country. It traced their different situations at home, different means of migration, and their different employment situations in France.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this thesis lay in its dependence on secondary data as a tool for answering the research questions. Despite the existence of different explanations and several indicators, research on inequality would be more reflective of human voices and stories if the subjective experiences of those individuals were present. While interviews and focus groups could allow for such a reflection, content analysis and desk research could not. As mentioned above, however, secondary research was deemed more achievable because of the geographical distribution of the target population and the time and financial challenges of conducting fieldwork in Europe.

If the same research is pursued in the future, primary research could be conducted. For example, some highly skilled labor migration schemes in Tunisia are the result of projects of

cooperation with destination countries primarily managed by the Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation (TATC). The identification, selection, and placement of Tunisian workers are made according to the demands of partner countries. These international opportunities are primarily available online on the TATC website. It isn't easy to find the regional backgrounds of those recruited online. Hence, semi-structured interviews with TATC staff might clarify the profiles of those recruited and their geographical distribution.

Furthermore, research in France could focus on the department of Seine-Saint-Denis, where both irregular migrants and highly skilled Tunisian migrant doctors are found. Additionally, instead of travelling to France, the issue could be solved by expanding the research population in Tunisia. For example, with the findings on current Tunisian immigrants through desk research, returnees and potential migrants from different regions could be interviewed. Nevertheless, this would require substantial financial investment to facilitate access to migrants across Tunisian regions.

Another limitation is the substance of this thesis. Given the complexity and "multi-layeredness" of poverty, inequality, and migration, some critical findings, and understandings of the three phenomena might be missed. Regarding the scope of the thesis, the aim is not to essentialize specific categories of migrants. The purpose is to identify patterns and mechanisms of differentiation and division and to unpack how structures play a categorizing role in limiting and constraining the movement of some while facilitating the mobility of others.

## Chapter II: Poverty and Migration: A Literature Review

### Cumulative Causation and the Migration Networks Theory

The migration Networks and Cumulative Causation theories argue that once the migration is initiated by "pioneer migrants," it induces changes in the community that make migration a self-sustaining and self-perpetuating process (Massey et al. 1993). Although migration is initially selective in terms of human and socioeconomic resources, as networks grow, migration becomes more accessible to all societal groups since both the costs and risks have diminished as a result of the established and existing network (448). The importance of networks, or social capital, suggests that the possibility of migration to those with no access to a network is curtailed. Whether migration is possible and successful if undertaken depends on their well-establishment. For example, relying on social networks is important in Tunisian emigration. The Tunisian International Migration Survey (HIMS) tells us that 61 per cent of current Tunisian migrants have family or friends in the destination country. Eighty per cent of these currently rely on network help; 63 per cent for accommodation, 34 for a visa or work permits, 32 per cent for travel fees, and 31 per cent show a complete dependency (25). Established networks play an essential role in migratory decisions and opportunities. Van De Hear relies on the work of Bourdieu (1986) to evoke the idea of social capital in facilitating movement. Defined as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network (Bourdieu 1986 248-249), the possession of a social circle abroad facilitates and sometimes initiates movement. Nevertheless, while social capital is essential, its economic counterpart remains a more powerful prerequisite (ibid). Hence, there is a theoretical and empirical acknowledgement that socio-economic backgrounds determine migration, at least in the "pioneer" or initial phase.

**Relative Deprivation**

De Haas (2020) argues, "migrants predominantly come from relatively better-off sections of origin populations […] as the poor do not have the means to assume the risks and costs" (5). While wealth might not be the *sole* determinant of migration, it remains a vital precondition. Given the unequal access to resources, migration could raise the levels of inequality. This is because migration was accessible to those who could afford it and, as a result, *now* hold higher income levels. Such a change in income distribution creates a feeling of "relative deprivation," which induces further migration (Massey et al., 1993 451). Relative deprivation, according to Atkinson (2019), arises from the fact that the "poverty status (of a household) is related to the prevailing living standards in the society" (53). Once members of a relatively better-off household migrate and reap its benefits, others from the same community feel "relatively deprived" and develop the incentive to migrate. Several empirical studies show migration is a reaction to relative deprivation rather than absolute poverty (Quinn 2006). Feeling deprived in comparison to others *pushes* people to migrate. The theory of relative deprivation is, to an extent, connected to the view on migration and perception.

**Perceptions and the recreation of migratory success**

Another factor shaping the decision to migrate is the perception of others' successful migration experiences and the destination country itself. Indeed, the perception that migration creates economic opportunity has been enough, in many instances, to drive migration (Palmary 97). This is because community members perceive migrant households as being "better off." Lipton (1980) argues that perceptions of inequality within communities can contribute to increased migration. In Tunisia, the idea of migration, especially to wealthier countries, is associated with economic and social success. Ben Jannet (2021) finds that 30 per cent of aspiring migrants stated:

"concurrence among relatives and the reproduction of successful migration stories" (14) as their reason for migration. The stories of successful migration and its financial appeal contribute to the aspirations of leaving home. Nevertheless, the specific conditions of prospective migrants impact their migration capabilities. In research conducted by Oded Stark and J. Edward Taylor (1989), the authors find that households at an extremely low-income level cannot migrate, regardless of their feeling of relative deprivation. If conditions are too severe, one might not be capable of migrating.

**Multidimensional Poverty and Migration**

In traditional economics, income, unemployment, and wage determinants are used to assess poverty (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 312). However, the views and analyses of poverty have changed to take non-financial factors like access to nutrition, quality education, and decent housing into account. Poverty can be seen not only in terms of financial capabilities or income, but also in terms of one's ability to access resources and capital (Kothari 2002). Uma Kothari looks at the financial and non-financial aspects affecting and shaping migrants' decisions. She contends that several types of social exclusion have an impact on these decisions. This exclusion may be implied by the restricted or uneven access to and control over resources and capital in a particular community or society. These include economic resources, geography, cultural capital, social capital, and political capital (12). This perspective beyond financial capabilities is reflected in the concept of "multidimensional poverty" (Alkire&Foster 2011), which considers the several dimensions in which one is considered poor and how these dimensions reinforce each other, intersect, and create "joint deprivations" (Nogales&Oldiges 2020 5)[2]. Looking beyond absolute poverty – poverty

[2] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone," 2016, 2, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/ files/2016_human_development_report.pdf

below a predetermined threshold for accessing minimum survival necessities (Rohwerder 2016) – this approach examines *how* people are poor, stressing the numerous deprivations they face and experience.

In examining the importance of social capital, Van Hear (2004) argues that to migrate, one must possess capital "in various combinations" (6). One person could have an extensive social network but limited economic or financial capital. Only those who hold a specific portion of capital in particular composition or proportion can undertake movement" (ibid). Based on the capital and resources that one can mobilize and control, a "hierarchy of destinations" is constructed (ibid 12). Van Hear looks into two case studies: Sri Lanka and Somaliland. He finds that in both, substantial investment is needed for migration to take place. Similarly, in both cases, there are different categories of mobility. First, migration for work in the Middle East is exercised by the poorer – though not the most impoverished – rural and urban households. Second, "asylum migration" to Europe and Canada, which is the "preserve of the well-to-do Tamils" (9). Third, migration for professional and educational purposes requires large investment and capital and is pursued by well-to-do families (8-11). The resources that could facilitate one's movement are comprised of a web of interconnected capital that can be unevenly accessible to the population. As was mentioned on the previous page, inaccessibility to resources and capital translates into social exclusion (Kothari 2002). The latter constrains "human capabilities," which are defined as "people's abilities to lead lives they have reasons to value and to improve the substantive choices they have" (Sen 1999 cited in De Haas 2021 20). One could be poor in different intersecting ways; economically, socially, and politically. Their poverty level impacts their migration capabilities and aspirations.

**The Capabilities and Aspirations approach**

Wanting to migrate and being able to do so are different yet, interwoven dynamics. De Haas (2021) expands on the work by Sen (1999) and Berlin (1969) to argue that migration is "a function of aspirations and capabilities to migrate" in which "migration aspirations are a function of people's general life aspirations and perceived geographical opportunity structures" and "capabilities are contingent on positive and negative liberties" (17). Access to health services, quality education, nutrition, employment, and dignified work are all critical determinants of human capabilities (ibid). Negative liberty refers to freedom *from* external constraints, structures, and obstacles that hinder one from achieving what one wants, such as political oppression, migration control policies, and regional underdevelopment. Positive liberty is the freedom "to," as it refers to the ability to take control of one's life "such as having the necessary financial and human capital and resources to migrate" (24). Negative liberty deprivation impacts positive liberty. For example, the state's insufficient investment in one region's educational infrastructure affects the residents' educational attainment and quality. Their education and skills could further impact their migration aspirations and capabilities. Better education, among other factors, increases people's ability to migrate over large distances (De Haas 2007). The same factors also increase awareness of opportunities elsewhere, raising people's "aspirations" to migrate if local options do not match life aspirations (ibid). Hence, "to migrate, people need the human, financial, and social resources as well as the aspiration to do so" (832). Institutions such as markets, class, and networks […] all sustain inequalities and social hierarchies and "constrain the opportunities that people have or perceive they have and the social, economic, and cultural resources they can access" (De Haas 2021 14). Depending on people's level of access, their liberties or freedoms can be constrained or strengthened. Migration depends on people's capabilities and aspirations, which also depend on

their negative and positive liberties. Both are determined by people's access to different resources and capital (social, financial, political) and the larger structure in which they live. There is no doubt that migration is costly, and that price is multidimensional as it comprises multiple forms of capital. Nevertheless, while it is a reality for many – as shown by Stark and Edward Taylor (1989) – mobility and immobility are not always predetermined by limited capital.

**Poverty and Irregular Migration**

The financial cost of migration does not always deter people from migrating; it sometimes just changes their destination and type of migration. Carling (2002) argues that money is not the sole obstacle, as many migrants borrow money to migrate. He finds that the main barriers to migration are directly or indirectly related to the migration policies of developed countries (26). He finds that many migrants risk becoming "involuntarily immobile" because of border control policies and geography restricting their mobility. The same argument is presented by Van hear (2014), who argues that the poor are much less well-placed to negotiate the assemblage of obstacles to mobility erected by the global north (30). Developing countries tend to have more porous borders and consecrate fewer funds to border control, which makes their frontiers more easily crossed. Similar to Van Hear's (2004) research on Sri Lanka and Somaliland and working on emigration from Cambodia, Bylander (2017) argues that the notion that the poorest do not migrate stems from an academic bias that solely considers South-North mobility. According to her research, the poorest migrate to Thailand, which shares a border with Cambodia. This decision is made based on a number of considerations, including proximity, a long history of migration to Thailand (which emphasizes the value of established networks), and affordable mobility costs. On the other hand, the better-off individuals migrate to Malaysia. The author notes that migration to Malaysia is much more regulated, which makes it more expensive and accessible to those who can

afford it. The direction of migrants' flows reveals forms of inequality in the capital and resources that people mobilize in their migration projects. This research finds that the impact of poverty on migration can be in terms of destination, route, and the channels undertaken, that is, irregular or regular migration. It suggests that migration is not exclusively the "privilege of the relatively wealthy" (Bakewell 1350). Yet, regular migration might be.

While migration costs might not limit movement altogether, they might significantly impact its nature and channel. Securitized borders and lengthy and costly visa processes are structures, among others, which constrain a group's movement while facilitating or *at least* not interfering with another's. It is worth stating that barriers to migration include physical barriers (such as border security) and informational obstacles. Access to information, whether through networks or on an individual basis, is also a form of capital that is not evenly distributed. As discussed above, the factors that might facilitate movement by raising people's capabilities, such as access to quality education, also increase knowledge or awareness of opportunities elsewhere. Barriers to movement, therefore, could be physical and informational. For example, regular migration opportunities (study abroad opportunities, work, fellowships, or scholarships) are often posted online. The internet facilitates access to information, but the internet is not accessible to everyone. De Haas (2021) finds that regular migration is accessible to the well-off, while others remain stuck in immobility or are relegated to exploitative forms of – often undocumented – migration (7). Different poverty levels, therefore, lead to different migratory outcomes.

**Poverty and the categorization of migrants**

Looking at migration as a function of people's capabilities and aspirations, De Haas (2021) argues that the validity of a theoretical understanding of migration is contingent upon the specific context and conditions under which migration occurs as well as the class and social groups

concerned (9). He develops "a four-pronged typology of migration categories […] under different contextual configurations of high and low positive and negative liberty (28). "Precarious migrants" are one category among the four. Precarious migration takes place under "highly constrained (structural) conditions" such as inequality and migration policies to people who are deprived of their "positive liberties" such as access to financial and human resources and capital. Such constraints, he argues, "reduce the agency of migrants and make them more vulnerable to exploitation […] and often frustrate their attempts to achieve upward socio-economic mobility through study and work" (28). Here and as previously stated, it is important to note that while this thesis is focused on those who do migrate, some of those who could potentially constitute "precarious migrants" do not and cannot leave. These are categorized as either "involuntary immobile" (Carling 2002; De Haas 2021) or "acquiescently immobile" (Schewel 2020 335). The former are those who wish to but cannot migrate due to lack of resources and capital. The latter are those who are "neither willing nor able to migrate" (De Haas 23). Other categories of migration that De Haas suggests are "improvement migration" and "free migration" (27). Characterized by low positive liberty and high negative liberty, improvement migration occurs through recruitments, networks, or merging and combining family resources. On the other hand, "free migration" is characterized by high negative and positive liberties. It is an unrestrained movement between and in wealthy countries or by affluent people, skilled workers, or "lifestyle" migrants" (ibid). Therefore, different levels of capabilities and liberties produce various categories of migrants.

Migration theories offer different but complementary understandings of the relationship between poverty and migration, allowing space for observations regarding this relationship. First, financial capabilities drive and facilitate migration. As shown by the preceding section, it is hard to think of migration without considering the costs involved. Notwithstanding the potential

academic bias – the focus on South-North corridors – migration does require several forms of capital that initiate and facilitate it. For example, when financial capabilities are unavailable, the networks established by pioneer migrants might fill this gap by reducing the risks and costs of migration. The feeling of relative deprivation – as opposed to absolute poverty – and the perception of successful migration and the potential personal recreation of that success also constitute essential drivers of migration. While social networks, relative deprivation, and perceptions either facilitate or evoke the feeling of wanting to migrate, financial capital is a crucial prerequisite. As poverty is multidimensional, the assemblage of monetary and non-monetary capital is key to migratory decisions and capabilities. The decision to migrate and undertaking migration are functions of capabilities and aspirations. Both are impacted by people's level of positive and negative liberties— whether structural or individual, freedom from constraints affects the freedom *to* realize one's migration aspirations. Depending on the level of both types of freedoms, various categories of migrants emerge. All forms of resources, capital, and freedoms are unequally accessible throughout different regions, countries, and communities. This unequal access and its impact allow the space for a categorization and reflection on migration from various contexts and backgrounds.

## Chapter 3 Regional Inequality in Tunisia:

### Inequality: a brief literature review

People's access to economic, social, and cultural resources shapes their ability to move, the type of movement, and its outcome. This access, however, is not equally distributed. Rohweder, B. (2016) defines inequality as the "disparities and discrepancies in areas such as social identity, income, education, health, nutrition, space, politics, outcomes and opportunities" (4). All the impacts mentioned above of poverty on migration differ depending on one's *poverty level* and

position in relation to others. Bastia and Skeldon (2020) argue that: "while poverty focuses on who is *defined* as poor, inequality reflects who has historically benefitted from forms of economic development and questions the relationship between these groups and unequal outcomes" (8). Similarly, arguing for a "relational approach to durable poverty and inequality," Mosse (2010) – building on the work of Charles Tilly (1998) – argues that poverty must be looked at as "the consequence of historically developed economic and political relations, and inequality as an effect of social relations and categorizations" (1157). He looks at the causes of poverty and the social mechanisms through which poverty persists, differentiates between people, and creates unequal categories. Inequality is rooted in older social structures. While indicators tell us *how* people are poor, a relational approach explains *why* certain groups of people are poorer than others and *how* their positions compare to one another's. One group's power and status do not emerge out of thin air but rather from deliberate practices. Inequality is relational in that it manifests in discrepancies between different groups of people and the denial of equal enjoyment of rights that leads to unequal outcomes and opportunities. In *Categorically Unequal*, Douglas Massey analyzes how the US political and cultural system perpetuates inequalities between different population groups. He also builds on Tilley's work and borrows the concept of "categorical inequality," which he explains as:

> "What results whenever those in power enact policies and practices to give certain groups more access to markets than others; offer competitive advantages to certain classes of people within markets; protect certain groups from market failures more often than others; invest more in the human capital of certain groups than others, and systematically channel social and cultural capital to specific categories of people (23).

The "categorically unequal" comprises a group of people whose inequality is a product of enacted policies and practices. The latter makes them disadvantaged compared to another group whose

advantaged position is a product of the same policies and procedures. Looking at Tunisia, we find this process and these social mechanisms present.

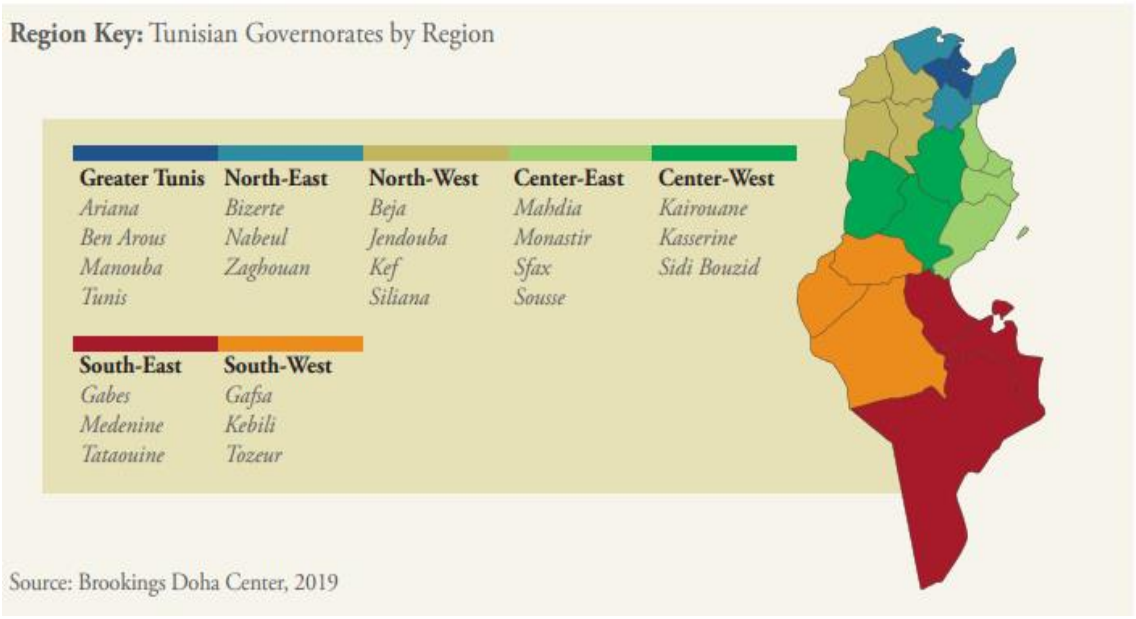
**Inequality in Tunisia**

In his book entitled *Internal Colonization and Unequal Development: The Archeology of Marginalization' in Tunisia*, Salhi Sghaier (2017) argues that poverty in the Western and Southern parts of Tunisia results from their deliberate regional marginalization and decades of unequal development that consistently favored the northern and coastal areas of the country. While acknowledging and analyzing this reality, Larbi Sadiki (2019) also sheds light on rural-urban inequalities throughout the country and argues that "the development problematic in Tunisia, while especially acute in deprived regions, remains a nationwide problem" (8). Here, it is essential to note that most rural areas in Tunisia are found in the "marginalized regions," with Tunis and Monastir, for example, considered fully urbanized. As Belhadi (2011) argues: "the map of urbanization rates clearly shows the east-west divide […] the distribution of towns and cities shows the divide between the coastal areas and the interior and the concentration of towns and cities on the eastern littoral" (5). Hence, it could be argued that the rural-urban inequalities reflect the economic center-periphery divide.

Poverty in Tunisia is profoundly more pronounced in some regions compared to others. This unequal regional development emerged from a historically maintained process that systematically privileged the north and the coast over Tunisia's western and interior parts. It is worth noting that among what is classified here as the "marginalized" regions in Tunisia, there are different development levels. In other words, some areas are more deprived than others. For example, while the southeast is less developed than the capital, it remains in a better position than

the southwest, center-west, and northwest. In the southeast itself, different areas are in a more favorable situation than others. While both the Island of Djerba and Tataouine are in the southeast, for example, Djerba is in a better position than Tataouine, one of the country's poorest areas. Nonetheless, the classification of regions in this thesis is similar to Hamza Meddeb's (2017), which divides Tunisia into two parts: an "economic center" and an "economic periphery." The center comprises ten coastal governorates, starting from Sfax to Bizerte. On the other hand, the periphery consists of all the remaining fourteen governorates. Therefore, regional inequality in this thesis refers to the disparity between Greater Tunis, North-East, Center-East, and the remaining governorates (north-west, center-west, south-west, and south-east), as portrayed in figure 1.

Figure 1: Tunisian Governorates by Region. Source: Larbi Sadiki (2019).




Many studies (e.g., Joyce 2013; Bechir 2018; Jmaii 2018; Meddeb 2020;) have shown that the 2011 revolution in Tunisia originates from the longstanding underdevelopment and marginalization of the interior and southern regions. Everything started after all, from sidi Bouzid – center west. Since the 1956 independence, successive governments have consistently maintained the interests of Tunisia's coast while overlooking the southern and interior regions.[3] Tunisia's development pattern is based on ninety per cent of investments in coastal cities and ten per cent in the rest of the country (Bechir 2018 69). It is worth mentioning that there is a close relationship between the conditions in marginalized regions and successive protests. In fact, "the political and economic geography of the country shows that the map of socio-economic disparities is overlaid on the "map of protests'" (Allal 2012 824). Tunisia's marginalized areas were the source of multiple social movements that have, in part, led to the 2011 "Jasmine Revolution": 2008 in Gafsa (southwest), 2010 in Ben Guerdane (southeast), and December 2010 in Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine,

[3] While most studies cover the post-independence era; other studies investigate the colonial legacy of regional underdevelopment in Tunisia. Salhi Sghaier even traces its origin back to the 14th century, but Tunisia's historical "development of underdevelopment" deserves a paper on its own.

and Tala in the center-west. These movements revealed Tunisia's regional disparities and the economic and social marginalization of large populations who did not benefit from the social protection system due to their exclusion from employment in formal sector activities and local projects. They were mostly led by youth devoid of socio-economic and political capital. They were also primarily the unemployed and those working in highly vulnerable conditions, such as the precarious workers in subcontracting companies in the phosphate industry, smugglers of Ben Guerdane, daily agricultural workers in the center-west, and precarious graduates who found no other alternative to filling the call centers of the big cities (ibid). The regional inequality in Tunisia is striking and one that has been historically maintained. The development approach since the presidency of Bourguiba has "kept most infrastructure investment cordoned off in coastal regions […] and left more remote parts as little more than sources of inexpensive workers and raw materials for the coastal regions to exploit" (Meddeb 2020 2). The idea that underdeveloped regions are a source of cheap labor for the more privileged coast is also examined by Salhi Sghaier, who has long argued that the deliberate marginalization of the interior and southern parts of the country was to keep an available supply of a cheap labor force.

It is telling that more than seventy-five per cent of "barn workers" come from marginalized governorates (center west, southwest, and northwest). This type of work emerged in Tunisia after independence in the framework of development projects undertaken by the state to absorb many unemployed with little to no educational background or training (Al Badawi et al., 2020). Most of these projects were in the agriculture and construction sectors. In the 1980s, poverty and unemployment rates were considerably high, especially among the youth. Hence, the mechanisms and policies of barn work expanded to include university graduates. In the 1990s, the state continued to recruit highly skilled and low-skilled employees (ibid). After the 2011 revolution,

thousands of the unemployed were also recruited, especially in the regions where social protests were prevalent, to absorb anger and frustration over unemployment and difficult living conditions. Their jobs include farming and agriculture, administration, cleaning, and security. Despite being employed as part of government and state-run projects, they are theoretically under the Tunisian Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment, the rights of these workers are violated (ibid). They do not enjoy social and health coverage since 2012, receive low wages, and work long hours with limited leaves (ibid). These workers, who continue to struggle and mobilize until today, are not recognized by the general statute for public servants and receive no social insurance or coverage. Even though they theoretically belong to the public sector, they are not entitled to their privileges. The barn workers are considered one of the most vulnerable social groups in Tunisia at the wage level, receiving around TND 270 – 330, with frequent payment delays. Although barn labor was initially established to employ a low-skilled workforce, statistics show that approximately 5 per cent of the barn workers are university graduates (Okkez 2016). As mentioned, targeting this category was the inevitable result of the lack of other alternatives and the failure to create employment opportunities. The percentage of university graduates involved in "barn labor" from the interior regions is also higher than in the rest of the states, reaching about 7 per cent in Sidi Bouzid (ibid). The "economic periphery" as a source of a cheap labor force for the "economic center" can be observed through the long history of traditional internal migration in Tunisia. The disadvantaged regions, whether the south, center west, or the northwest, all share a long history of internal migration toward the "north," the coastal areas, and primarily the capital.

**A History of Internal Migration**

While the thesis is concerned with international migration, it also primarily investigates regional inequality in Tunisia and mobility. The discussion on internal mobility is essential as it

highlights the geographical disparities as most movement is primarily channeled toward the northern and coastal regions. This traditional emigration resulted from the demographic pressures on a fragile environment characterized by poverty, unemployment, and a volatile environment in a primarily agrarian community (Belhadi 2001 4). Internal migration from Jarjis, for example, home to many migrants in France and a hotspot for irregular departures from Tunisia – resulted from a pressuring imbalance between the population needs and the resources available. The agricultural nature of the economy in the farms of Jarjis and the south was insufficient to satisfy the locals' needs. Tunis, the Capital, attracted migration waves of male and low-skilled workers looking for employment (Ben Amor 2014). Here, it is essential to note that when international migration became more accessible, the pioneer emigrants (toward France and Libya) from Jarjis were those who were already settled in the capital (ibid). This first group of people would create a sizable network for future Jarjisian migrants to join. It is important to note that their international mobility became more accessible once they moved to the capital, where they worked and ensured the financial means to emigrate. After the 2011 revolution, among the 22,000 irregular migrants intercepted, four thousand were originally from Jarjis (ibid). This is in line with theoretical expectations: those who settled in the capital and managed to increase their financial capital were the first to migrate. Once the network was established, migration for others from the community became more affordable.

Similarly, the northwest and center-west regions are also home to many internal migrants. Women migrants from the northwest migrate toward the capital to work as domestic workers (Belhadi 2001). The challenges of agricultural work, like in the south, motivated movement from the west toward the littoral regions. The imbalance between labor supply and demand, both qualitatively and quantitatively, has generated persistent and increasingly high unemployment and

a reserve of barn workers. Another reason for this traditional path of internal migration was the significant disparities between regions regarding the quality of education and the available opportunities post-graduation. There were no jobs available for the type of diploma received. Hence, many had to look elsewhere in the capital or the big cities. Many graduates look for a career in the town where they were formed; this is the case for the capital, which hosts most of the schools and job opportunities, followed by Sfax and Sousse (Ben Amor 2014).

Older studies indicate that between 2009 - 2014, the only states with a positive net migration rate were those on the coastal side of the country (Tunis, Sousse, Monastir, and Sfax) (INS 2017). In terms of internal movement, these are the same states with a positive rate between 1999 and 2004, which signifies that migration flows have historically remained primarily oriented toward the coast. As for the western and southern parts of the country, a negative net migration rate is another common characteristic. The capital and center East are characterized by highly dynamic migration flows and high entry and exit levels. On the other hand, the northwest and center-west have extremely high exit rates: sixty thousand in the northwest and sixty-five thousand in the center-west, while the entrance is around twenty thousand in both. An important size of those leaving the northwest is heading toward the capital and the northeast. Comparably, exit flows from the southeast and southwest are also primarily heading to Tunis and the centereast. In contrast, departures from the center east are located within the region, 37.4 per cent, followed by 29 per cent toward Tunis (ibid).

While neither the space nor the main topic allows for a more in-depth discussion on the genealogy of inequality in Tunisia, it is essential to keep in mind that at least a part of the problem is rooted in a long historical process of regional underdevelopment. In some of the most resource-rich areas of the country, successive governments have failed to guarantee decent living conditions.

This has divided Tunisia into an economic center (ten governorates) and an economic periphery (fourteen governorates). The latter has historically been "no more" than a source of a (cheap) workforce and natural resources to exploit by the more affluent center. The lack of options and alternatives in the regions of origin has created unified – across areas – internal movements toward the economic center. Reflecting on the theoretical definitions of inequality provided in the introduction of this section, regional inequality in Tunisia reveals essential information on who "has historically benefitted from specific forms of economic development and who did not" and who, as a result, emerges as the "categorically unequal" population in Tunisia. The latest crises in Tunisia and regional underdevelopment continue to accentuate inequalities and the generalization of mistrust in the capacity of governments to guarantee decent living conditions. The report "Carte de la Pauvreté en Tunisie," or the "Map of Poverty in Tunisia," published in September 2020 by the National Institute of Statistics (INS) and the World Bank, highlights the close relationship between many socio-economic and educational factors, and the evolution of precariousness in the most affected areas, namely the north-west, center-west, and south regions. A relationship that persists over the years and aggravates these regions' vulnerabilities.

**Precarity in Tunisia:**

What the barn labor and the involvement of the populations in different forms of unstable work reveal – as previously shown by the map of social protests driven by informal workers, smugglers, and precarious graduate students in call centers – is the characterization of a large segment of the populations of marginalized regions by "precarity." According to Judith Revel (2022), precarity refers to a particular form of labor exploitation and, at the same time, an existential state or a "condition of existence." People are exploited to perform cheap and unstable labor with limited to no social protection, based on which a precarious and insecure existence is

formed. According to Guy Standing (2011), precarity is a term used to describe workers who lack the basic securities of the mid-20th century period, such as guaranteed employment, upward mobility, opportunities for training, protection against dismissal, income security, and union representation. The concept is mainly associated with informal, uncertain, and insecure employment[4], as "precious work goes hand in hand with precarious livelihood" (Paret Marcel and Shannon Gleeson 2016 279). According to Guy Standing (2015), the precariat symbolizes the transition from "citizens to denizens" (89). The latter is a roman concept that refers to outsiders who had been granted a limited range of rights (ibid). It is a "class" that is both de jure and de facto deprived of its rights. One that is "disciplined to perform unstable labor" and all its subsequent insecurity and instability. It is noteworthy that Guy Standing divides the precariat into different groups, including workers who have "fallen" out of social security and students with high levels of education who live in frustration due to the chasm between what "they were promised" and what "they endure" without a "clear sense of the future" (88-89). To highlight the unpredictability and uncertainty of the future, Guy Standing refers to the latter group as having "lottery tickets" (ibid) or their diplomas. While a diploma or little schooling in the past may lead to salaried work, the situation is different today. Precarity, although primarily related to employment, is a general state of instability and unpredictability or a "condition of existence." These precariat groups could be found in Tunisia's marginalized areas. As stated, the marginalized regions have been limited to providing cheap labor to the coast and the north, creating a reservoir of barn laborers without social security. Furthermore, despite their high-level education, university graduates from marginalized regions comprise an increasingly growing portion of barn workers, occupy the call centers, and face poverty and limited employment opportunities in their regions of origin. In other words,

[4] Bourdieu (1998) precarious work is the predominant mode of livelihood in the late 20th century.

despite what their "lottery ticket" promised, their "chance" of social mobility is minimal due to regional inequality. Moreover, the populations of marginalized regions are disadvantaged on multiple fronts. What follows is a section presenting more recent indicators of regional inequality in Tunisia, focusing on education and investment in the human capital of the marginalized areas.

**Regional Inequality in Tunisia: Indicators**

Boubakri (2021) indicates that the Regional Development Indicators (RDIs) of the coastal regions are twice those of the interior and southern parts (38). Unemployment in marginalized areas ranges from 20 to 42 per cent, compared to 6 to 11 per cent on the coast (Dhraief et al. 2020 25). As for poverty, it ranges from 26 to 53 per cent in the interior areas (West) compared to a range of 0.2 per cent to 16 per cent on the coast (ibid 26). While poverty is “very low” on the privileged coast and north, it is concentrated in the marginalized regions in Tunisia, with the poorest households having the lowest literacy rate, highest school dropouts, and shortest years of education (ibid). Furthermore, a fifth of what is paid in Sousse on vocational training is spent in Kairouan. The poorest governorates are also the most deprived of access to digital goods and services such as television, computer, radio, and internet connection (ibid 30). Indeed, similar regional inequalities are reflected on all levels: health services, infrastructure and development, water, electricity, access to the internet, and educational quality and attainment.

The figures and statistics indicate that public expenditure per student is lower in the marginalized regions compared to the coast and north. For example, it amounted to TND 33 in Kairouan, and TND 35 in Sidi Bouzid compared to TND 108 and 134 in Sousse and Tunis, respectively (Lakhel 2018). A student costs twice as expensive – to the state – in Tunis than in interior areas. According to the Ministry of Higher education statistics, most of the thirteen Tunisian universities are located on the littorals. As for research labs, 174 are found in Greater

Tunis, seventy-six in Sfax, thirty-seven in Monastir, and nineteen in Sousse. On the other hand, eleven are in Gabes, one in Kairaouen, and zero in Gafsa (ibid). Regarding the presence of engineering and sciences professors in Gabes, Gafsa, Kairouan, and Jandouba, the percentage is much lower than on the coast. It ranges from one to four per cent compared to ten to thirty-five per cent on the coast.

As shown in figure 2, the success rate for the baccalaureate exam in 2022 considerably varied by region. We find the more affluent coast to have more success rate than the marginalized regions. According to a study by the National Institute of Statistics (INS 2021), high school students' enrollment percentage does not reflect *drastic* regional disparities. Still, it remains more elevated in the coastal areas. It ranges from 45 per cent in the center-west to 66 per cent in the northwest, compared to a range of 51 in the centereast to 74.8 per cent in Greater Tunis. Assuming the accuracy and validity of these statistics, the close rates of high school enrollment coupled with much lower chances of obtaining the national baccalaureate could be explained by the disparities in the quality of education offered. Indeed, Sghaier Salhi (2017) argues that the quality of education has hindered the chances of social success of those from marginalized regions in Tunisia. One's background is a significant driver of inequality in attaining higher education. Another study by the NIS (2017) indicates that the lowest proportions of people with a higher education level are recorded in the northwest region and the centerwest, particularly in the governorates of Kairouan and Kasserine, where this proportion does not exceed 7 per cent. The governorates whose proportions exceed the national average are located in Grand-Tunis and the center-east of the country (4). Other figures reveal spatial disparities; the percentage of high school dropouts is around 1.7 per cent in Ariana, a delegation of greater Tunis, compared to 14.1 per cent in Kasserine. Similarly, the percentage is about 11.8 in Kairouan and 12.1 in Sidi Bouzid. The highest

illiteracy rate is 40.3 per cent in Kasserine and 43.6 per cent in Kairouan (Kalboussi 2019). For those aged 10 to 19, the highest illiteracy rate is found in the same regions and Jandouba, compared to the rest of the country.

Figure 2, Students who obtained their Baccalaureate in 2022 by region. Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2022.

| Delegation | Percentage of Students who obtained their Baccalaureate in 2020 |
|---|---|
| **Sfax** | 61% |
| **Monastir** | 55% |
| **Sousse** | 53% |
| **Mahdia** | 51.2% |
| **Greater Tunis** | 50.1% |
| **Gabes** | 49.5% |
| **Médenine** | 48.4% |
| **Tataouine** | 36.4% |
| **Kebili** | 34.4% |
| **Sidi Bouzid** | 30.1% |
| **Jandouba** | 29.5% |
| **Gafsa** | 26.2% |
| **Kasserine** | 23.7% |

Another important indicator is the map of bilingualism in the country, especially French-speaking skills. “French-language education seemed more urban, more feminized, and rather widespread in wealthy circles” (Bendana and Mazzella 2011 198). At the educational and demographic level, French is more spoken and mastered by the coastal and greater Tunis populations. “Indeed, the use and mastery of French in Tunisia corresponds to geographical and social disparities” (Touati 2011 12). Geographical disparities correspond to the usual division of the country: south vs north and interior vs coastal areas. Social disparities are evident in terms of social class. Fluency in the French language is specific to the higher-middle and wealthy classes. Several teachers noted the relationship between social class and proficiency in French, who find that the higher one is on the social scale, the more fluent they are in French and the better their pronunciation (ibid 13). The map of French proficiency reveals important information on socioeconomic and geographical backgrounds. It does not only reflect educational inequalities but also inequality in linguistic capital. As part of human capital, linguistic capital is vital in Tunisia, given that French is the working language in most institutions. It is also essential in migration opportunities, allowing access to socioeconomic opportunities such as better integration, finding jobs, better wages, and building connections. In fact, according to a French National Institute of Statistics research (Nagui et al., 2016), immigrants who came to France to further their education had a more advanced command of the language upon arrival. Immigrants who did not speak French had more difficulties finding their first employment. Furthermore, language proficiency heavily influences the likelihood of being inactive or unemployed. Nevertheless, immigrants with a poor command of French rely on their social network to find employment. The perception of being overqualified or holding a professional position that does not match one's qualifications is widespread among highly skilled migrants who do not speak French well. Moreover, immigrants

with high language proficiency make 15 per cent more money than those with low proficiency. When speaking the language well, one tends to value their degrees and experience on par with non-immigrants.

The lack or absence of state investment in the interior and southern part of the country has created an environment where opportunities do not thrive, hence, the constant social unrest and internal migration toward a more affluent environment. Seeing "capabilities as contingent upon positive and negative liberties" (De Haas 2021 7), it could be argued that regional underdevelopment has limited the capabilities of its populations. Access to health services, quality education, and employment are all vital determinants of human capabilities. A low level of negative liberty (freedom *from* constraints portrayed here by the structural hurdles of regional inequality) and a low level of positive liberty (freedom *to* take control of one's life, such as having the necessary financial and human capital) are what characterize the populations of the marginalized regions. As previously acknowledged, low negative liberty impacts the level of positive liberty one could attain. Inequality in educational quality and attainment, for example, limits one's chances of progress and constrains human capital. Regional inequality creates and maintains the disparities and discrepancies between Tunisia's northern and coastal zones and the southern and interior zones. It denies the opportunities people have or "perceive they have" and the cultural and socio-economic resources and capital they can access. Migration is undeniably impacted as it is "contingent upon people's capabilities and aspirations," which depend on their level of negative and positive freedoms.

**Regional Inequality and Migration:**

**Contextualizing Tunisian migration:**

According to the 2014 census (INS 2017), the drivers of migration were, primarily, employment (73 per cent), followed by education (14 per cent), and marriage (around 10 per cent). As indicated by other studies (David and Marouani 2017; HIMS 2021; FTDES 2022), the same drivers of migration persisted across the years with a relativity similar classification. Most migrants were between 15 and 30 years old, representing around seventy-three per cent of all emigrants. Forty per cent were high school graduates, almost thirty per cent only had primary education, and twenty-four per cent were university graduates. Tunisian migrants abroad remain concentrated in Europe, home to around eighty-four per cent, most of which are found in France. The latter is home to fifty-four per cent of all Tunisian migrants in Europe, followed by Italy and Germany. The number of Tunisian migrants in France has not stopped increasing since 2002. By 2011, 46 per cent of migrants were employed, 3,4 were unemployed, and slightly more than twenty per cent were high school (15 per cent) and university (5.7 per cent) students.

Bringing the literature on poverty, migration, and inequality together, it is assumed that regional inequality translates into an "inequality of opportunities," which refers to "differences in people's background or circumstances that condition what they can achieve" (Rohwerder 4). The opportunities for migration of people from marginalized regions are more constrained and limited than those from Tunisia's most privileged areas. As argued by Van Hear (2004), Doreen Massey (1993) employs the concept of the "power geometry of time-space compression" to signal this geographical "stretching-out" of social ties, particularly those involving mobility. She argues:

> "For different social groups and different individuals, are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the

> issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about *power in relation to the flows and the movement*. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it" (61).

In this sense, the inequality between the two groups could be seen as "stretching out" to encompass regional inequality in Tunisia and unequal migration opportunities. Based on the discussion in the "poverty and migration" section, three main assumptions remain to be tested in the Tunisian context. Because of limited financial and human capital, people from marginalized regions in Tunisia:

A. Are less likely to migrate
B. Migrate to closer destinations – south-south migration: more porous borders and fewer financial prerequisites
C. If they do emigrate, they are more likely to undertake irregular migration channels

Regarding assumptions (A): Tunisians from marginalized regions migrate less than their counterparts and express less desire or "aspirations" to migrate. According to the 2014 national census (INS 2017), most interior regions had a migrant stock of between 500 to 1000 emigrants, with Tozeur registering around one hundred. According to Tunisia's HIMS (2021)[5], more than seventy per cent of current Tunisian migrants come from the more developed regions of Greater Tunis and the Center East, while around ten per cent come from marginalized areas such as the Northwest, Center West, and Southwest. The same regional division applies to returnees and

[5] northeast (26.4%), greater Tunis (26.2%) and the center east (24.4%).

potential migrants (HIMS 2021; Ben Jannet 2021). Current Tunisian migrants are also significantly highly skilled, with more than 47 per cent holding higher education. Similar to the return profile in 2021, the 2014 national census registered a return of around thirty thousand between 2009 and 2014. Half of them were returning from either France or Italy. Almost seventy per cent have settled in coastal areas, whereas the interior regions registered a return of less than five per cent. People from marginalized areas tend to emigrate less. As discussed in the poverty and migration literature section, financial capabilities determine migration. To migrate, people must be capable of assuming the monetary costs and risks involved. If migration is sought by Tunisia's marginalized, these potential migrants encounter more challenges in pursuing regular channels of emigration (HIMS 2021). Indeed, migration costs do not always deter people from migrating; they make them change their destinations or routes.

In terms of destination and in line with the assumption (B), while this thesis focuses on international migration to Europe, some regional patterns of international movements are worth noting. Whereas movement toward Europe hailed from Tunisia's urban and coastal areas (Castles 1986 764), Tunisian immigrants in Libya mostly come from the poorer and regionally marginalized states. According to Bel-Air (2016), Tunisian emigrants to Libya mostly came from the west-central regions, such as Sidi Bouzid, Gafsa, and Kasserine. In 2010, Libya was the third largest destination for Tunisian immigrants (Boubakri 2021 40), and 67 per cent of all Tunisian migrants detained by the Libyan authorities hailed from Tunisia's Center and South (Sadiki 2014). It is interesting to note that the word "El Harga" –literally means the burning – which signifies either the burning of official documentation or the burning of borders, was initially used to describe the irregular crossings of migration to Libya, not Europe. "A few decades ago, half of the southern people could be found in Libya […] Southern Tunisian men burned the Tunisian–Libyan border

in the hope of finding jobs in prosperous Libya[6] (M'charek 2020 419). The 2011 events profoundly reduced the number of Tunisians working there. With Libya's "unavailability," a segment of these migrants re-directed toward Europe as 65,335 Tunisians crossed the Mediterranean to Italy between 2010 and 2020, 43 per cent of which were in 2011 alone (Boubakri 2021). These patterns resonate with the findings of Bylander: the less privileged choose closer destinations.

Regarding the route taken, there is a close relationship between one's socioeconomic background and irregular migration. The report by Herbert (2022) finds that "most irregular migrants come from economically marginalized families, often with limited education and few job prospects" (9). As indicated by Bylander (2017), Van Hear (2004;2014), and De Haas (2007;2021) regular migration is more expensive, hence, inaccessible to those who cannot afford it. Because of structural inequality, those coming from marginalized regions are more likely to undertake irregular channels. The paper by David and Marouani (2017) notes that irregular immigration has increased after the Tunisian revolution due to the lack of border control. It is worth stating that according to research by Abderrahim et al. (2021), the annual average of irregular Tunisian migrants arriving on the shores of Italy was around 1,700 during the 2000 – 2010 decade (17).[7] In 2011, the numbers reached 28,000 irregular Tunisian migrants, an incredible increase from the previous decade's annual average. Interestingly, the rise in irregular migration was parallel to the

[6] When oil was discovered in Libya in 1957, its economy boomed, and the demand for labor became steady and constant until the regime fell in 2011. Between 1973 and 1987, the political relations between Tunisia and Libya were unstable: ranging from extreme friendship to extreme tensions. This created highly securitized borders under the direct control of the military. These border policies and the Tunisian workers' hesitance to obtain a passport (due to its high costs or fear of military conscription) led to irregular migration, or El Harga. In 1988, the ousted Tunisian president Ben Ali and his Libyan counterpart Qaddafi reopened their countries' shared border for mobility and trade. As a result, it became easier to cross the borders regularly with an identity document, not a passport, and irregular migration was no longer an "option." (M'charek 2020; Meddeb 2020)

[7] 1,600 in 2009, 652 in 2010, and 27,982 in 2011. An increase of 4 192 per cent, according to Frontex Annual Risk analysis 2012 report

increased diversification of migrants' regional backgrounds and the rise in the number of migrants from rural areas (from around twenty per cent before the revolution to almost fifty per cent after) (David and Marouani 2017 6). Here, it should be recalled that the Tunisian rural-urban divide reflects the center-periphery division. This diversification shows that many who were unable to migrate before the revolution, when border security was more solid and possibly the only avenue for leaving was through the regular channels, were able to do so because of the reduced security and more permeable borders. Post-2011 migrants were also slightly older and less educated than pre-2011 emigrants. The governorates that had their share of migrants' rise were representative of marginalized regions, as shown in figure 3. What is also interesting is the fact that "the vulnerability of migrants in the domestic labor market before emigration is even more striking when we look at the subsample of those who have left after the revolution, of which ninety-one per cent were irregular or informal workers (ibid 22). The employment of those who left after the revolution was much less stable and much more precarious than those who emigrated before. Therefore, Tunisian migrants after the 2011 revolution – compared to those who left before – were more precarious in Tunisia, represent greater regional and rural diversity, and were less educated. The link between regional diversity, low human capital, and irregular migration is clear.

| Delegation | % Of migrants before 2011 | % Of migrants after 2011 |
|---|---|---|
| **Kairouan** | **1%** | **6%** |
| **Sidi Bouzid** | **2%** | **9%** |
| **Gabes** | **4%** | **9%** |
| **Kebili** | **Less than 1%** | **4%** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Greater Tunis** | **33%** | **21.5%** |
| **Sousse** | **1.8%** | **2%** |
| **Monastir** | **2%** | **6%** |
| **Sfax** | **5%** | **6.1%** |

Figure 3: Percentage of Migrants before and after the 2011 Revolution/delegation. Source: David and Marouani, 2017, 7.

Between 2018 and 2022, a project funded by the European Union and the French Agency for Development, titled "Local Migration Management in Four Tunisian Governorates," mapped the migration profiles of four regions in Tunisia. The project was implemented by Mercy Corps and Grdr Migration - Citizenship – Development in Tunisia. The aim was to "contribute to developing effective local migration management mechanisms through facilitating the socioeconomic integration of the local populations." The four regions covered are Sbeitla in Kasserine (central west), Ain Drahem in Jandouba (Northwest), Beni Khedache in Médenine (southeast), and Greater Tunis. The findings of the project found significant theoretical resonance. Before jumping into individual migration profiles, it is worth noting that migration in Tunisia's northwestern region is relatively substantial. However, internal migration is much more prevalent than international migration.

**a. Ain Drahem, Jandouba:**

Over the 2009-2014 period, Ain Drahem hosted over 400 000 inhabitants. Around 0.57 per cent were international migrants residing abroad, and 4 per cent were internal migrants. There were about 3042 internal migrants and ninety-two international migrants. Given the geographical closeness to Algeria and the visa-free mobility between the two countries, many regularly cross

the borders from both sides. Nevertheless, mobility to Algeria is classified as pendulum migration; people do not settle there. Hence, it is not captured in the statistics of international migration in Tunisia, unlike migration to Europe. Of the 0.57 international migrants, 87 per cent left for Europe, and 50 per cent went to France. It is worth noting, however, that 75 per cent of these departures originate in urban settings; hence, most international migrants from Ain Drahem come from the wealthier families of Ain Drahem.

**b. Sbeitla, Kasserine**

Like Ain Drahem, most movement is channeled internally toward other governorates (2473 internal migrants versus 411 international migrants). The main driver of internal migration is job hunting (31 per cent), followed by family reunification (28 per cent) and marriage (21 per cent). For males, job haunting stands at the top of the list and drives 41 per cent of movement (21 per cent for females). For females, the main driver of internal migration is family reunification (34 per cent) and marriage (27 per cent). Also similar to Ain Drahem, many cross the borders to Algeria, and Algerians themselves have a history of settlement in Sbeitla. Another common characteristic is the fact that international migration is much less widespread. International migration is male-dominated, and its main driver is job haunting (over 90 per cent). Before the 2011 revolution, many international emigrants had undertaken what the project called "discovery migration," which is similar to what De Hass terms "improvement migration" to better one's socioeconomic and living conditions. Graduates and experts settled in other governorates, Europe, and the Gulf countries. After the 2011 revolution, "waves of irregular migration have exploded." Many have taken the route of irregular emigration through Italy or Morocco to Spain to settle next in France, Germany, Belgium, or Switzerland.

**c. Beni Khedache, Médenine:**

Like Sbeitla and Ain Drahem, internal migration is much more prevalent: 2246 internal migrants vs 323 international migrants. For both types of movement, the main driver is job haunting. International migration was "traditionally anchored in Libya." Like in Sbeitla, many redirected toward France following the 2011 revolutions in Tunisia and Libya. This is similar to what has been argued before: the tension in Libya, coupled with more porous borders toward Europe, has opened irregular channels for this group of migrants.

As argued, the individual profiles of these three regions reflect common characteristics with theoretical resonance:

- Most migrants move internally looking for jobs in the more prosperous Tunisian coast and north
- International mobility was mostly channeled toward bordering countries (Algeria and Libya)
- After the 2011 revolution, many redirected irregularly toward Europe.

While irregular migration from Tunisia usually takes the Central Mediterranean route (with more than 12 000 arrivals between January and August 2022), a new route for irregular Tunisian migrants has emerged. A study that covers the area of Tataouine, located in the south of Tunisia, indicates that around 12,000 migrants (Mohamed Najib Boutaleb cited in Chibani 2022) from the region have taken this route from January until August 2022, the number given by Frontex is 5 777, over the same period. Through the Western Balkan route, migrants fly from Tunisia to Turkey, then to Serbia (was visa-free for Tunisians) to reach Hungary and, finally, the Austrian-Hungarian border. It is important to note that this has changed due to the rise in irregular entries and pressure from various European Union members. As of November 20$^{th}$ 2022, Tunisians need a visa to enter Serbia, the final European country they could travel to without one (Pesavento

2022). Tataouine, like other non-coastal regions in Tunisia, has a long migration history toward the capital and Libya. Many used to work in Libya, but with the war and geopolitical tension, different routes and destinations were taken. Emigration from Tataouine has been explained by the historical marginalization and underdevelopment of the region. Despite being resource rich, Tataouine remains one of the poorest regions in Tunisia, with unemployment reaching more than 30 per cent. The same rationale explains the recent surge in irregular departures toward Europe. Tataouine is famous for the 2017 Kamour social movement. The movement's name is attributed to the Kamour pump and valve station for oil extraction, where the famous sit-in occurred. The latter was primarily motivated by persistent unemployment and demanded state development and investment efforts, requesting that 20 per cent of oil and gas revenues be invested in Tataouine (Cherif 2017). While the sit-in ended in June 2017 with the government accepting the main demands of the protestors, it did not follow through with the agreement (ibid). Achref Chibani (2022) believes that the wave of migration through Serbia is strongly associated with the failure to implement the Kamour Agreement, which would have had a positive impact on reducing unemployment. Chibani added that most young people in the region feel hopeless at the incapability of successive governments to uphold their commitments to local development, hence, their decision to migrate. Like migration from Jarjis, the west, and southern parts of the country, the imbalance between labor supply and demand has generated persistent and increasingly high unemployment. Coupled with the lack or absence of state investment, this has created an environment in which opportunities do not flourish, hence, constant social unrest and looking for opportunities elsewhere, whether internally – as discussed in a preceding section – or externally.

**Avenues for regular migration in Tunisia:**

Regular avenues for migration could comprise many barriers to mobility for many groups of people. Some means for regular migration include the obtainment of an employment contract abroad. Without a well-established social network or the possibility to access the information or platforms on which these opportunities are available, such avenues are not accessible to everyone. According to Kriaa et al. (2013), this (regular) labor migration is a result of the various projects and programs of cooperation with destination countries primarily managed by the *Agence Tunisienne de Cooperation Technique* or the Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation (TATC). Established in April 1972, the TATC is a public institution created to implement the state's policy in terms of technical cooperation. It also conducts development programs and projects within a bilateral or triangular cooperation framework. The TATC identifies, selects, and places highly skilled Tunisian workers according to the needs and demands of partner countries and regional and international organizations. The Ministry of vocational training and employment has also signed various accords and conventions with different destination countries (ibid). Tunisian specialists and experts have witnessed a 10 per cent increase from 2011 to 2012 (ibid). Most of these experts and specialists are found in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and 10 per cent were in Europe, France, Italy, Belgium, and the UK. These international recruitment opportunities are primarily available online on the TATC website. According to the August 2021 report, the total number of experts working abroad amounts to 20,627 (ATCT La Coopération Technique au 31 août 2021). Between January and April 2022, the agency successfully ensured the recruitment of 973 Tunisians. The health sector took precedence with the recruitment of 431 medical and paramedical executives, representing 44 per cent of the total placements, followed by the engineering sector with 248 recruited, then the education sector with eighty-seven recruited. Arab

countries, mainly the GCC, are the first destination countries with 396 recruitments, followed by Europe with 366 recruitments. Regarding individual countries, Canada ranks first and recruits 133 paramedics, secondary education, and IT experts. Germany recruited 131, particularly in the paramedical field, and France recruited 126, mainly in IT and specialized medicine. In 2012, the sectorial placements of these experts did not differ much as they were primarily concentrated in the health sector (642 recruited) and higher education (436) in Europe (Kriaa et al. 2013).

It was, unfortunately, difficult to find the regional backgrounds of those recruited by the TATC. However, based on the information available, we could make some inferences about the profile of Tunisians who could benefit from its services. To sign up, for example, one has to be a Tunisian national and has successfully passed the baccalaureate exam or have a Certificate of professional competence with a minimum of 2 years of documented professional experience (TATC website). While the Baccalaureate certificate, or high school diploma, is the minimum requirement, the primarily demanding sectors necessitate higher education. Based on the previously discussed, we know that marginalized regions are the most deprived of secondary and tertiary education.

Furthermore, to be able to sign up for TATC services, computer and internet access are needed. Hence, the interior regions of Tunisia are also at a disadvantage on this front. They are equally at a disadvantage in terms of access to information regarding this service in the first place. I have only learned about this channel for regular migration when conducting research for this thesis. Additionally, according to the April 2022 monthly report of the TATC, advertising its recruitment opportunities - following which the 973 recruitments were achieved - was done through virtual recruitments and face-to-face interviews on the premises of the TATC, which is

based in Tunis, the capital. Therefore, lack of access to the internet and money might constitute an obstacle.

Public official channels for international recruitment are not the only avenue for regular labor migration. Produced by Amira Souilem (2022), the European public service channel, Arte TV, released in September 2022 a report/documentary entitled "The big exodus of Tunisian doctors." The documentary follows a young Tunisian doctor, Ferdaws Abdelhamid, originally from Sousse, who tells the story of her decision to migrate to France. The documentary also follows Dr Mathias Wargon, head of the emergency department, which states that emergency medicine in France struggles to recruit national doctors to work in Saint-Denis (04:55). The latter is not "the most attractive." Hence, foreign doctors come to do the work their French counterparts do not want to do. If the foreign doctors disappear, so will the sector, he adds (05:05). The documentary also mentions that recruitment is done via word of mouth and social circles. The recruited doctors bring their cohort graduates, friends, and those they know. Sometimes, a simple e-mail to Dr Wargon was enough to get Tunisian doctors to Saint-Denis, France (08:36).

The report also sheds light on the struggles of the doctor abroad, such as getting paid less than a French doctor, as long as the skills and knowledge "equivalence" exam was not taken. Upon receiving her first cheque, Dr Abdelhamid called her mother, saying, "mom, I am poor," (17:16) as she only received EUR 865 (initially, around EUR 1359 but more an amount is directly deducted for university housing) a pay that will at least double or triple once she successfully passes her skills recognition or equivalence exam. As Dr Wagon mentions, most students who undergo medical training in Tunisia come from middle or high-income families and environments (19:02). Similarly, a graduate thesis published by Dr. Dami Hana (2020) studying the intentions of emigration among student anesthetist doctors in Tunisia found that 92.7 per cent of participants in

her research come from urban areas (9). As previously mentioned, most rural areas in Tunisia are located in the "marginalized regions." Tunisia's four medicine universities are in Sfax, Sousse, Monastir, and Tunis. After students get their baccalaureate, those originally from the four regions are given priority acceptance and admission. The documentary, therefore, reveals information regarding the financial, regional, and educational backgrounds of Tunisian doctors abroad and the importance of social networks in securing employment. Furthermore, obtaining a visa, another avenue for regular migration entails proof of sufficient financial funds. Research conducted by Reach and Mercy Corps in Tunisia (2018) found that many who have decided to undertake the irregular route had applied for visas, and their applications were rejected due to financial reasons. Jelassi Hechmi et al. (2020) argue that the introduction and implementation of the Schengen system in Europe have contributed to the proliferation of irregular migration (5). As regular migration channels become narrower and costlier, Tunisians resort to irregular channels by overstaying their visas or entering irregularly.

Compared to the wealthier coast and north, marginalized regions in Tunisia are characterized by higher poverty, higher unemployment rates, and lower educational levels. They are home to the largest share of informal (inexpensive) workers in the domestic labor market, who have historically migrated toward the northern and coastal areas to improve their situation. Most of their international migrants, representing the minority out of the total national migrant stock, have traditionally moved toward Libya, the closest route to take. With this route becoming increasingly unavailable and Tunisia's border control and security becoming less secured, many of them re-directed their movement toward Europe, as shown by the increased diversification of migrants' regional backgrounds after the revolution. The irony of regional inequality in Tunisia is that it simultaneously "pushes" people out or try to opt-out while at the same time constraining their

movement. Structural inequality, such as regional underdevelopment and marginalization, influence migrants' capabilities to migrate and their possible and available channels. As Van Hear (2014) argued, migration and its outcomes are "shaped by the resources that potential migrants can muster, and the capacity to mobilize such resources is largely determined by socio-economic class or background" (100). One's region of origin, when characterized by longstanding inequality, might have a determining impact on migration opportunities and outcomes.

Having looked at the inequality between the marginalized and affluent regions and the initial profiles of migrants based on their regional origin, the thesis will examine how this inequality might impact the migration experience and persist throughout its different stages. People from more affluent regions with more and easier access to resources are more likely to have better opportunities for migration. These opportunities encompass access to regular migration and higher chances of formal employment. In contrast, the populations of the less developed regions have more limited access to mobility and regular channels. Hence, they are more likely to pursue irregular migration and end up in informal and low-paying jobs. Regional inequality, therefore, translates into an "inequality of opportunities." These opportunities are not only shaped by the situation at home but also by policies and structures in European destination countries, which contribute to the marginalization of the already-marginalized segments of Tunisian society. While the following section will highlight similar structures and policies across the European Union (EU) member states, the thesis primarily focuses on France, the leading destination of Tunisian migrants.

## Chapter 4: European Migration Policies and Labor Market Structure:

### Highly Skilled Migration

The focus on Highly Skilled Migration (HSM), or "human capital," has been the subject of many migration research topics, from access to entry to integration and citizenship studies. For example, discussing immigration policies in Germany and Canada, Antje Ellerman (2020) argues that the focus on high-skilled regular immigration is reflective of a focus on "human capital" in which: "economic attributes such as skills serve as markers of social status" (2518). Class and human capital are essential filtration axes of who belongs and who does not. Similarly, Yasemin Soysal (2012) argues when analyzing integration programs in Europe: "... the thrust is on individual immigrants' capacities […] to take part productively in the institutions offered in the system [...] residency is earned based on who can contribute and be productive" (11). Access to entry and residency is contingent upon migrants demonstrated social and economic integration capacity. Attracting highly skilled migrants is supposed to create harmony between the receiving state's needs and migrants as economic actors. The focus on high skills quantifies individuals' economic value and regulates mobility based on those skills. If met, entry is allowed through regular channels. In this sense, highly skilled migration policies and structures create a hierarchy of value and production and assign economic and moral worth to different migrants based on that value. De Haas (2021) looks at structures as: "patterns – or regularities and repetitions in social relations (that) simultaneously constrain the migration of particular social groups while facilitating the migration of others." He argues that states and their policies have "a strong structuring effect on migration," which translate into their facilitation, primarily through recruitment, of the movement of some people while concurrently deterring the action of others (26). The opportunity for emigration depends upon diverse variables such as one's class, skills, and nationality. In this

regard, the focus on highly skilled migration and HSM policies are examined as *structures* that constrain the mobility of some and facilitate the mobility of others. These entry conditions are set and determined by the receiving state, but they are produced in the country of origin (access to education, language skills, and highly skilled qualifications). High-skilled migrants possess what has been termed "transnational cultural capital" (Weiß Anja and Samuel Mensah 2011). They hold a transferrable skill set that extends beyond the borders of their nation-state, such as IT experience or graduate diplomas that function as a "laissez-passer" (ibid) within the global employment markets. States have leaned toward lessening the obstacles to free mobility for these sought-after migrants (ibid 216). As countries have moved toward establishing avenues and policies to attract and recruit highly skilled migrants, movement is relatively easier for those with high skills and qualifications.

Stephen Castles (2015) traces the historical development of global labor markets that led to the emergence of the focus on HSM. A new post-industrial labor market emerged between the 1970s and the 2008 Global Economic Crisis (GEC) (Castles 2015 54-55). Industrial production was partly outsourced and relocated to developing countries during this period. The logic was that globalization and the movement toward a post-industrial economy would eliminate the need for low-skilled labor migration. Hence, a new emphasis on HSM emerged (ibid). On the other hand, there was a "zero-immigration policy" for manual or low-skilled workers. However, the idea that manual labor would no longer be needed was "quite mistaken" (ibid). Post-industrial economies needed low-skilled laborers, such as construction, catering, domestic care workers, cleaners, gardeners, and so on, to service the elites (Saskia Sassan 1988 cited in Castles 2015). The local or national workforce did not provide these workers for demographic and social reasons. Demographic reasons included lower fertility and population growth rates, while social reasons

included the rejection of the local workforce to perform low-skilled jobs. States were unwilling to acknowledge the continuing need for low-skilled workers; hence, migrant workers were recruited through special temporary labor arrangements, free mobility within the EU, or irregular migration (Castles et al. 2012). Outsourcing did not eliminate the need for workers in sectors that were not easily mechanized. A dual labor market emerged, which "created situations in which highly remunerated professional employment coexisted with growing low-skilled employment in underground industries" (Castles 2015 58-59). Because of the segmented labor market in most European countries, this preference and official demand for HSM exists, in tension, with an officially unrecognized need for low-skilled migrants. Rubery Jill and Agnieszka Piasna (2017) define labor market segmentation as the "employment of workers on different conditions and terms that are not mainly or fully explained by their productivity; it is rather the outcome of wider institutional and macroeconomic contexts" (44). Highly skilled migration Policies such as the point system, EU blue card, and the talent passport in France actively differentiate between workers in a context where work, at all levels, is needed.

Policies targeting and facilitating highly skilled migration include the Point-based system, the EU blue card, and the French Talent Passport. Czaika and Parsons (2016) study the impact of the Global Economic Crisis on the in-flows of highly skilled migrants to OECD countries. The authors highlight the development of the points-based system (PBS) through which "human capital is assessed on an individual basis […] in which applicants are awarded points based upon their qualifications, age, work experience, language skills and earning potential" (11). The PBS system is like the Blue Card System in EU countries, which targets "migrants who possess higher education qualifications or who have three years of professional experience" (Dommernick et al., 2009 7). A similar target and policy are found in the French law of March 7th, 2016. The *passport*

*talent* is a residence permit that could be valid for up to four years. It gives potential migrants the right to be accompanied by their family members, who will have the right to residency and professional activity. The talent passport aims at "strengthening France's attractiveness for international talent […] and is intended for foreign nationals who are likely to contribute to French competitiveness and influence." It has primarily three objectives: "to better welcome and integrate *those who have the right to settle in France*; to attract a mobility of *excellence, knowledge, and expertise*; and to fight more effectively against irregular migration." Regarding the third objective, the law aims at, among other points, "strengthening the effectiveness of house arrest as a prerequisite for the removal of foreigners in an irregular situation." As for the categories of potential migrants, the law targets:

- The qualified or highly qualified employees
- Potential migrants who are in the process of establishing a national or an international reputation in the scientific, scholarly, artistic, academic, educational, or sports fields
- Artists or authors of literary or artistic work
- The self-employed: who plan to establish or acquire a business in France with a minimum investment of EUR 300 000; or inventing an economic and innovative project that can be recognized by a public body (Talents Internationaux et Attractivité Économique)

These selection criteria, among others, can only be fulfilled by a particular socioeconomic class. The French passport talent, like the PBS and the Blue card, emphasizes human capital and financial capital as prerequisites for entry and settlement. In a policy recommendation paper published by the French Council of Economic Analysis (CEA) titled "Skilled Immigration: a visa for growth," the authors recommend reforming the current talent passport system by identifying the obstacles – such as the recognition of diplomas – and setting up grants to target countries with

a surplus of young graduates (Auriol and Rapoport 2021 11). The authors also argue in favor of a system modeled on the "points systems" that has proven to be inducive to economic growth in Canada. The authors recommend the system to be:

> "Modulated according to qualitative and quantitative targets, weight the human capital of immigration candidates and their partners, such as education, experience, language skills, and origin, as well as their capacity for social integration, based on their social skills" (Auriol and Rapoport 1).

As embedded within this structure, migration is "a modality of human and economic resource transfer" (Delgado Wise 2015 35). Migrants and potential migrants are seen in their potential productive and economic worth. To be allowed in, one must demonstrate skills and preparedness for productivity and active participation. While policies might apply to all migrants, their impact is likely to differ based on the migrants' social position and the inequalities associated with it (Palmary 100). In this regard, the focus on HSM places those who come from regions with poor access to education, poor access to information (recruitment opportunities), lower language skills, and higher poverty and unemployment rates at a disadvantage. Regular migration channels are more limited for those who do not check those characteristics. Yet, the mobility of low-skilled workers, or those whose backgrounds limit them to low-skilled work, continues. As previously discussed, the official demand for HSM exists in tension – because of the segmented employment market – with an unofficial demand for low-skilled labor. Reich et al. (1973) argue that the segmentation surfaced when the "homogenization of the workforce conflicted with the needs of employers in monopoly capitalism." The shift toward a service-based economy emphasized the need for highly skilled workers without acknowledging the continued need for low-skilled labor.

Hence, corporations created an internal bifurcated market and assigned particular groups depending on gender and race to the secondary market (ibid).

**A segmented labor market**

According to many studies largely built on Piore's "dual labor market" theory (1979), migration is a function of existing permanent demand for foreign labor due to the economic and market structure in receiving countries. In *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies (1979),* Piore argues that migration flows between underdeveloped and developed regions must be seen in terms of the employment opportunity structures in developed countries and the incentives of migrant workers compared to the motives of national workers. The structure which he discusses is a dual structure of the labor market. The attraction and integration of migrants into the labor market are primarily influenced by the segmentation or the bifurcation of the labor market. In dual economies, the capital-intensive primary sector co-exists with a labor-intensive secondary industry. Besides the demographic factors – such as the ageing population in Europe – the secondary sector is shunned by the "native" workforce for different reasons, such as low status and low pay. When employers cannot meet the demand for low-skilled labor by the local population, they turn to hiring documented and undocumented migrants who "accept" difficult working conditions and poor pay. Foreign workers accept such jobs as they do not share the low-status concern, their position being defined back home. According to Massey et al. (1993), the capital-intensive primary sector necessitates a fixed and stable permanent portion of demand. Capital is a "fixed factor of production." It is not only composed of equipment but also highly skilled workers. Such workers are "expensive" to let go of due to the various training they have undergone and their specialized mastery of capital (machines, equipment). On the other hand, the secondary sector is a "variable factor of production" that can be let go of when demand is lower

(441-442). When demand increases, this portion is supplied by foreign workers who remain replaceable and more profitable.

This labor market segmentation and the "polarization of skills and income" (European Commission 2019 17) is recognized in official European Commission reports as a perpetual feature of different EU countries' markets (European Commission 2012; 2016; 2019). In France, the duality of labor is marked by a duality of work contracts. While permanent contracts characterize high-skilled employment, temporary contracts are given to low-skilled sectors. Berson (2017) argues that there is a dependency (in France) on flexible work manifesting in the growing issuance of temporary contracts or "Contrat à durée déterminée" (CDD) that targets the less qualified and immigrants. Temporary contracts make their holders more vulnerable, as they usually offer "low pay, inadequate training, and a greater difficulty of obtaining permanent contracts" (ibid). Similarly, Doeringer and Piore (1971) argued that:

> "While the primary market is characterized by high wages, employment stability, good working conditions, and chances of advancement, the secondary labor market has "marginal benefits and low wages, poor working conditions, high labor turnover, arbitrary supervision, and little chance of advancement" (cited in Vlandas 2017 4-5).

In 2007, Castles (2015) found that migrants were more likely to be temporary workers in all European countries. Any contract's mere existence is a "privilege" broadly not accessible to undocumented migrants.

While a dual labor market segmentation refers to the existence of different sub-employment markets within a larger (national) market, the lines on which this segmentation is drawn have been differently defined. For instance, in the example given above, the segmentation is visible through the existence of two different types of contracts, different job characteristics and

benefits, and different working conditions. Others have argued that the stratification can be along the nature of work and size of the enterprise or company rather than the type of contract. For instance, Bluestone (1970) argues for a tripartite division of the economy. According to him, the characteristic of the enterprise draw divisions in the labor market. He distinguished between a center economy, composed of big firms and enterprises that are concentrated in the automobile, Aerospatiale, or the petroleum industry; a periphery economy which groups the activities of agriculture, retail, industry, and services; and the irregular or informal economy which include informal or clandestine activities. Tim Vlandas (2017) argues that labor market segmentation in France resulted from employers' pushback against labor reforms advocated by worker's unions. Building on Piore's work, Vlandas argues that "the arrival of labor market segmentation appears to be principally linked to employers' responses to pushes by the labor movements for reforms and lower uncertainty." The union of workers pushed for several labor reforms in the 1960s – les Accords de Grenelle" – to restrict dismissals and allow for a more significant role of workers' unions and representatives (5). Employers responded to these new rules by redirecting some of their activities to more flexible settings, such as enterprises with less than fifty employees, where legislation did not apply, or where union organizations were less powerful (ibid). Hence, after the 1968 event, "the secondary sector restored the flexibility which the reforms in the primary sector removed'' (ibid). Therefore, while the primary sector ceded to labor movement regulations and reforms, the secondary sector did not. The size of companies and the type of work found in the secondary industry are characterized by seasonality and fluctuations as well as low-profit margins, which makes profitability only possible by "squeezing in labor costs" (Anna Triandafyllidou and Laura Bartolini 2020 151). Hence, the flexibility of workers – easier dismissal, lower wages,

lack of union representation or protection – is crucial to the survival of labor-intensive enterprises or work.

To summarize, the division line(s) of labor market segmentation include the following:

- Human or cultural capital of workers (highly skilled vs low-skilled)
- Type of contract provided (permanent, temporary, flexible, or no contract)
- The sector of activity (primary or secondary sector or core, periphery, and informal sectors)
- The size of the enterprise
- The characteristics of employment (chances of advancement, stable income, working conditions)

Highly skilled migrants are likelier to be on the "positive" end of the above classification. For example, they are more likely to be employed in the primary sector, with permanent contracts, more benefits, and work security. On the other hand, low-skilled migrants are more likely to be found on the precarious end: difficult working conditions, unstable work, income, low wages. As previously discussed, Guy Standing (2011) argues that precarity describes workers who lack basic securities such as "guaranteed employment, upward mobility, opportunities for training, protection against dismissal, income security, and union representation." Employment in the labor-intensive or informal sector is more likely to reflect the conditions mentioned above than employment in the primary sector. Delgado Wise (2015) and Castles (2015) argue that the precarity of migrants is associated with the segmented nature of the labor market in developed societies, which employ "mechanisms of differentiation that lead to inequality among working people" (Castles 63). Low-skilled migrants are more likely to be found in low-skilled sectors in precarious environments. In migration studies, precarity is increasingly used to emphasize the vulnerabilities associated with irregularity and deportability, pushing people into the informal economy and precarious work.

According to Guy Standing (2015), migrants and ethnic minorities are another, and the largest, category of the "precariat." He argues that today's precariat, while a heterogeneous class, is primarily constituted by "misnamed illegals" (93). A substantial portion of the expanding social category whose experience in the employment market can be described as precarious comprise migrants, especially irregular migrants.

In the same policy paper recommending adopting a point-based system in France, the authors argue that low-skilled migrant workers fill the roles deserted by the native workforce. The authors point out that the employment of low-skilled migrant workers is linked to the economic cycle: a higher rate during growth and easier dismissal during a recession. They offer a "great source of flexibility to enterprises," as they are the "first to lose their jobs in periods of recession," a *quality* that "actually cushioned the impact of the 2008 crisis on the native workforce […] and constitute a buffer zone against economic shocks" (Auriol and Rapoport 2021 6-7). The flexibility of foreign workers: uncertainty, unstable work, and unstable living conditions for thousands of individuals and households is not even problematized in a policy paper produced by the French Council of Economic Analysis. It is instead presented as "a benefit of migration" (ibid). It is not only the shunning of labor-intensive work by the native labor force or the shortage in the domestic workforce that makes the demand for low-skilled migrant workers perpetual. Instead, the disposability of migrant workers, their cost-effective advantage, and the need to reduce "unitary labor costs and increase flexibility (Sassen-Koob 1978 516–518) make such a demand constant. The flexible and cheap labor that European economies need is facilitated by undeclared work. Immigrants – and even more so, undocumented immigrants – provide one of the primary sources of labor in secondary and informal economies. However, it is worth noting that regular and irregular migrants work in the same sectors (Baldwin-Edwards and Arango 1999). The informal

economy includes documented migrants, undocumented migrants, and national/local citizens. Nevertheless, compared to documented migrants and national populations, undocumented migrants occupy a fringe position in social hierarchies. Thus, they are more flexible, given the absence of their legal status, and provide better candidates to meet this demand. Their irregular status makes them more likely to accept difficult employment conditions and lower pay (Reyneri, 1998). A migrant that has just arrived with limited access to a network is more likely to accept work with low or no pay, long working hours, and no contract. Migrants, especially undocumented migrants, are likelier to be victims of workplace abuse and less likely to contest violations (Bernhardt et al., 2009). Workers' immigrant status (or lack of status) and marginal positions in social hierarchies make them particularly vulnerable and profitable to employers.

The economy's structure and the labor market in post-industrial economies have been crucial in attracting irregular migrants. "Irregular migration is functional to labor market conditions […] states support the interest of unscrupulous employers and create segmentation hierarchies in the labor market that are functional to national economies" (Triandafyllidou and Bartolini 2020 14). Irregularity makes migrants more disposable and flexible, hence, more cost-effective and favored employees in the secondary sectors. In France, despite the existence of laws[8] that protect workers in irregular situations and governmental process for inspection, exploitation by employers are recurrent. In June 2022, the French public agency SOLI DEO, responsible for constructing and renovating the athlete's village infrastructure for the 2024 Olympics, came under attack for employing irregular migrants under challenging conditions. The agency denounced the allegations claiming that a sub-contracting company was responsible for recruiting the workers. The proliferation of irregular employment is so deeply entrenched that it has escaped the

[8] Loi du 17 octobre 1981 - 16 juin 2011 https://www.cairn.info/revue-plein-droit-2012-3-page-I.html

monitoring and detection by a significant public agency. It is possible, however, that undocumented work is detected but left unquestioned, given its high profitability. By not officially recognizing the actual demand for workers in different labor market sectors, states and employers contribute to and sustain employment in these sectors and, consequently, the attraction of irregular migrants to them. Structural determinants primarily drive irregular migration. In dual economies, there is a built-in necessity for foreign and cheap labor in secondary sectors, whose existence is vital, hence sustained by the countries of destination. Looking at the current demand for work in the French market, we notice that most shortages are found in the "secondary sector," known to attract migrants and undocumented migrants.

**The labor market in France:**

The French recruitment and employment agency, Pole Emploi, published the yearly study on French labor force needs at the end of 2021. The study highlights essential findings regarding the need for more labor force, the difficulties of recruitment and its causes, and the sectors that are suffering the most from either a shortage of labor force or the lack of the needed skills. The research indicates that more than 3 million vacancies are expected in 2022. Most of these are in the industry, retail, catering, tourism, construction, agriculture, transportation, and care work. Together, these sectors comprise 58 per cent of the needed work in 2022. One out of three, primarily small-scale enterprises, are actively recruiting. As previously discussed, these sectors, as well as the type of enterprises that are looking for workers, are more likely to employ irregular migrants. The reasons behind the hardship of recruitment also reflect some theoretical undertones.

The Pole Emploi study shows that out of the companies interviewed, 86 per cent explained the difficulties in terms of the insufficiency of the number of applicants; 71 per cent stated a lack of desired profiles, 33 noted that the local population does not apply because of the perceived bad

working environment, 23 pointed out that the poor "social image" of the job deters people from applying, and 17 per cent stated the unattractive salaries offered. Other research tackling the issue of recruitment difficulties tries to answer the same question. One is produced by France Strategie (2022), an organization that works under the prime minister, and the other is by Dares (2022), the statistical research department under the French Ministry of Labor. The first obstacle to hiring is the difficult working conditions. This is especially true in sectors known for their physical and time-high demands, such as the agriculture and the food industry, hotel, transportation, and domestic/care work. The physical aspect that discourages workers from applying is carrying heavy loads, redundant work, uncomfortable posture, and exposure to dangerous chemicals. Other psychosocial/emotional risks include working in high-stress areas or dealing with emotionally demanding situations. Furthermore, time constraints such as unpredictable and changing working hours, night shifts, and no rest on weekends are another push factor in these sectors. Other reasons, as France Strategy shows, are related to the employer/company itself, such as the management of human resources, the attractiveness of the size and location of the company, and its brand image. Like the French doctors refusing to work in Saint-Denis, the social image, working conditions, and benefits offered by the jobs play an important role in deterring the national labor force.

In line with the dual labor market theory, Cessac (2022) states that despite unemployment, certain functions, however essential, no longer attract the French national population. Because of the "precarity" of these jobs and their "social devaluation." Regardless of how essential they are, the local population does not look at them. The need for workers is linked to the population's ageing and the national population's rising aspirations. This growth results in the decline of the availability of "low skilled" workers" (ibid). Migrants, as Cessac (2022) and previous literature highlight, remain "overrepresented in these sectors." Amid all these severe shortages, the French

state is still reluctant to officially recognize and create avenues for regular migration for these sectors. Besides scattered calls here and there that infrequently materialize, there is no strenuous effort to recruit foreign "low-skilled workers" in industries shunned by the native workforce. "This gap between labor market needs and recruitment schemes is reflective of what Cessac describes as the "hypocrisy" of the French State, as "while one in two enterprises suffer from labor shortages, migrants struggle to issue or renew their work permits, and only 12 per cent of visas are given for economic reasons." It is worth emphasizing that most shortages identified by the surveys are those that are known for attracting and employing migrants and undocumented migrants.

**Tunisian Immigrants in the French Labor Market**

In 2021, Tunisians comprised 4.5 per cent of France's immigrant population (INSEE 2021). Their unemployment rate percentage stood at 14.9 per cent, double the national unemployment rate. The five main sectors they occupy are primarily found in the labor-intensive sector and include:

1. Construction
2. Individual and community service (care work, gardening, cleaning, domestic care, hairdressers)
3. Transportation, logistics, and tourism
4. Hospitality, catering, food
5. Retail

These sectors and occupations are among the lowest-paid work in France. According to ITG, "the leading wage portage group in France," (ITG) based on the 2019 survey of the French National Institute, the lowest-paid occupations are maternity assistance, domestic care, hairdressing, hospitality and catering, and individual and community service (between EUR 1000 and 1250).

On the other hand, doctors and commercial executives are the highest paid (between EUR 2900 and 3200). We find engineering and executive positions in the middle, receiving double the salaries of lowest-paid occupations (between EUR 2600 and 2900).

Furthermore, the European Network Migration Report (2017) finds that labor-intensive and "low-skilled" sectors are at the highest risk of irregular employment (3-4). These sectors are catering and tourism, construction, agriculture, retail, domestic care, manufacturing, and transport. When looking at the data gathered by the HIMS, Ben Jannet (2021), and the French national institute of statistics (INSEE), we find that Tunisian immigrants are predominantly found in the same sectors. While the HIMS does not connect employment sectors to regularity, it tells us that only 23.8 per cent of Tunisian migrants had an employment contract in 2020. Furthermore, existing research highlights the close relationship between irregular migration and irregular employment (Schierup et al., 2015; EMN, 2017; De Haas, 2018). Those more likely to be found in such sectors are "low-skilled." Analyzing Tunisia's migration profile, Bel-Air argues: "the development of labor-intensive activities attracted these (Tunisian) low-skilled laborers to Italy" (8). As previously shown, this sectorial placement of Tunisian migrants still applies today. The author also finds that 76 per cent of employed Tunisian migrants in Italy were in the three lowest categories of occupations, and only 7 per cent were in highly skilled positions. By contrast, most Tunisians in Canada were found in highly skilled professions. They can be found in all categories in France: 39 per cent are in the top three and the three lowest-skilled types. Which Tunisians are more likely to constitute the 39 per cent found in the top three sectors/industries, and which are more likely to constitute the 39 per cent found in the three lowest-skilled jobs?

Reflecting on what has been discussed in the preceding section, some thoughts could be drawn about the potential impact of regional inequality on Tunisian migration. For example, De

Haas (2018) argues: “workers in the primary labor market are positively selected based on human capital, but also often through regular legal status” (27). Reflecting on this statement on Tunisian regional inequality, we find that Tunisians from marginalized areas are disadvantaged in terms of human capital (education and skills) and opportunities for regular migration, hence, “legal” status. In other words, Tunisians from marginalized regions are more likely to end up in the secondary sector with irregular, informal, and low-paying work. Tunisians from privileged socio-economic backgrounds, with access to quality and higher education and easier access to migration information and opportunities, are more likely to end up in regular situations within the “primary” sector. On the other hand, the marginalized are more likely to end up in the “labor-intensive” sector. Here, the picture is complemented by different surveys and academic work, such as the map of poverty in Tunisia and the work of Sghaier Salhi and others, which reveal the regions from which these “unskilled migrants” are more likely to come. Looking at the map of remittances in Tunisia might also indicate the region of origin of Tunisian migrants abroad and the geographical inequality of remittances’ distribution. The report by Kriaa et al. (2013), an analysis of the regular labor mobility within the ministerial and TATC agreements framework, found that remittances are much higher in the coastal governorates, unlike the interior governorates of the country. “This situation is valid in 2011 as in 2006” (43). The center and northwest register rates lower than the national average (ibid). Assuming that migrants are more likely to remit to their families or close ones in their regions of origin, it could be inferred that the geography of remittances reflects the geography of migrants’ origins and offers an indication of the different financial situations or capabilities of Tunisian migrants abroad.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion, Precarity, and Perpetual Inequality:

The thesis' main findings suggest that (a) Tunisians from marginalized regions in Tunisia are more likely to undertake precarious migration, (b) their precarity is likely to perpetuate throughout their experience in the host employment market, and (c) this is conditioned by structural inequality in Tunisia and the policies and structure in the destination country. The table below traces and summarizes the different experiences of people from Tunisia's "periphery" and "center," from their circumstances in Tunisia, their migration pathways, and to their possibilities and chances in the employment market of France.

| Situation, Experience, Opportunities | Potential Migrants from marginalized regions in Tunisia | Potential Migrants from advantaged regions in Tunisia |
|---|---|---|
| **Situation at home** | • Higher poverty rates,<br>• higher unemployment rates,<br>• lower educational quality,<br>• lower access to education and information,<br>• lower language skills,<br>• lower educational attainment<br>⇨ Lower financial capabilities<br>⇨ Lower human capital<br>⇨ Lower social capital<br>⇨ Higher structural barriers<br>**Precarity: uncertainty, unstable employment, unstable living** | • Lower poverty rate,<br>• lower unemployment rate,<br>• higher educational quality,<br>• more access to education and information,<br>• higher language skills,<br>• more educational attainment,<br>• more access to public institutions<br>⇨ Higher financial capital<br>⇨ Higher human capital<br>⇨ Higher social capital<br>⇨ Less structural barriers |
| **Traditional migration path** | • History of internal migration toward the north and coastal areas<br>• history of migration to neighboring Libya and Algeria | • International migration to Europe |
| **Migration channels opportunities** | • Less likely to migrate<br>• Fewer chances of matching the "highly skilled migrant profile."<br>• Limited access to information regarding regular migration opportunities<br>• More limited resources to mobilize for regular migration<br><br>**Precarious migration: highly constrained structural conditions/ positive liberty deprivation: access to financial and human capital and resources** | More likely to migrate<br>More chances of matching the profile of the highly skilled migrant.<br>More access to information, services, and institutions regarding regular migration opportunities<br>• More resources to mobilize<br><br>**"Improvement migration" (through recruitment, networks, or merging and combining family resources) or "free migration (by affluent people or skilled workers)** |
| **The outcome of migration: the employment market in the host country** | More likely to fulfil the demand for informal, labor-intensive, and secondary-sector employment<br>Lowest wages and employment insecurity<br>Lower remittances<br>**Precarity: flexible workforce: uncertainty, unstable work and living, vulnerability to dismissal** | • More likely to be employed within the primary sector: doctors, engineers, IT experts, professors…<br>• Higher wages and employment security<br>• Higher remittances |
| **Chances of social mobility** | • Limited in Tunisia and France<br>**Perpetual Precarity**<br><br>**Perpetual Inequality** | • Higher in Tunisia and France<br>**Perpetuated advantaged position** |

This thesis explored the relationship between regional inequality in Tunisia and international migration to France. It investigated how different migrant profiles and experiences are influenced and shaped by the region they come from. It looked into Tunisia's poverty and examined how it is geographically distributed. Poverty as it manifests in terms of financial capabilities and also through access to resources and capital. People's access to economic, social, and cultural resources shapes their ability to move, their migration method, their ability to secure employment, and the type of work they are more likely to obtain. Because of regional inequality in Tunisia, the burden of poverty is not equally distributed. Hence this access – to social and economic capital and subsequent migration opportunities – is geographically unequally spread. Based on the discussion and findings above, the thesis found that the Tunisian southern and interior regions are disadvantaged on multiple fronts. With a focus on education and human capital inequalities, we find that the populations of the interior and southern regions are much more disadvantaged in terms of:

- Education: lower access, lower quality, low attainment, and educational success
- Employment: higher unemployment and higher informal – precarious – employment
- Higher poverty rates
- Lower access to opportunities and information
- Overall lower chances of social mobility in Tunisia

It was found that people from disadvantaged regions are less likely to migrate, have a history of internal migration toward the more affluent north and coast, a history of international migration to neighboring Libya (lower costs and risks), and are more likely to pursue irregular migration to Europe. This was evidenced through the literature review and the parallel post-revolution increase in irregular migration and diversification of regional profiles. On the other hand, migrants from

affluent regions are more likely to constitute Tunisia's "brain drain." Indeed, most migrants come from the littoral and northern regions, have a history of regular migration to Europe, and are generally better equipped to provide the highly skilled migrants Europe and France seek.

Based on the theoretical migration categories developed by Haas, migrants from privileged regions are more likely to undertake "improvement migration" or "free migration." Characterized by low positive liberty and high negative liberty, improvement migration occurs through recruitment, networks, or merging and combining family resources. "Free migration" is characterized by high negative and positive liberties. It is an unrestrained movement between and in wealthy countries or by affluent people, skilled workers, or "lifestyle" migrants. Coming from more affluent regions, these migrants have access to better educational quality, more access to information and opportunities regarding regular migration, advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and a more desired profile from the perspective of the destination country. On the other hand, the migrants from marginalized Tunisian areas undertake what is classified as "precarious migration" characterized by high structural constraints and low human and financial capabilities. Migrants' regions of origin shape their different experiences. For this group of migrants, precarity is not only used to describe their migration but also their employment and livelihood conditions at home.

As shown, the regions from which these migrants originate have long constituted a source of cheap labour to the coast and north, producing a reservoir of barn workers devoid of social security and university graduates who endure poverty and a lack of job opportunities. As previously discussed, precarity is mainly associated with informal and insecure employment and livelihoods. This concept characterizes Tunisian migrants from the Western and Southern parts of Tunisia. They are precarious at home due to the different grievances and deprivations inflicted by

regional inequality. Unequal access to quality education and limited financial capital restrict their chances of becoming candidates for highly skilled migration opportunities, which limits their options for formal employment and status.

The core argument of this thesis is that precarity at home is associated with and sustained through a precarious status in Europe. The socio-economic backgrounds of migrants shape the pattern and outcome of their migration. While the categorization by Hass mainly describes the conditions under which migration takes place, it also sheds light on the structural conditions that influence the movement. In this regard, this thesis tried to follow the same approach by contextualizing migration within the structure of regional inequality in Tunisia. In a further step, the thesis attempted to see how these different categories perpetuate beyond the Tunisian national borders: examining their continuity through the migration pathways undertaken and the structural conditions in France. Analyzing how this inequality might impact and persist in the migration experience, it was argued that regional inequality "stretches out" and translates into an "inequality of opportunities." These opportunities involve access to regular migration and higher chances of formal and primary-sector-employment.

The continual unofficial demand for low-skilled laborers coexisting with an increasing focus on attracting highly skilled migrants maintain the categorization produced at home. By facilitating some people's mobility while constraining others', immigration policies in a dual employment market contribute to the marginalization of the already-marginalized segments of Tunisian society. In addition to policies, the segmented employment market provides a remarkably obvious site where the continual differentiation of migrants plays out as it defines the quality of access to the host country and ensuing socioeconomic mobility. In other words, it establishes the opportunities and outcomes of the migration experiences. For some, it is regular primary-sector

employment, hence, more benefits and chances of social mobility. For others, it is unstable secondary-sector employment characterized by precarity. Hence, the concept re-emerges to describe the situation of the migrants from marginalized Tunisian regions in France. Arguing that these different outcomes are shaped and influenced by regional inequality in Tunisia, the employment market is a site where that inequality is reproduced and potentially maintained. Hence, the precarity of migrants from marginalized areas in Tunisia tends to persist across the various migration stages.

The idea of the title: "life at the margins," describes the perpetual precarity of migrants from marginalized regions in Tunisia: 1) Pre-migration precarity at home (due to many dispossessions, financial and employment instability, lack of opportunities, uncertainty); 2) irregular migration; and 3) employment status abroad. Precarity is an essential analytical concept that explains the relationship between regional inequality and international migration to Europe. It connects the micro-level conditions to the national and international macro-structures. The idea of perpetual inequality, or "durable disadvantage," describes the disadvantaged position, both in Tunisia and France, of marginalized migrants in relation to migrants from coastal areas, with more "positive freedoms" and chances of accessing regular migration and regular employment. Tunisia's "categorically unequal" remain unequal throughout their migration experience. In this sense, migration's impact on inequality concerns the effects of migration on the position of *being unequal* or relational inequality. Suppose a migrant from Tunis and another from Kasserine (the latter being unequal given their region) migrate to Europe. Their migration is more likely to keep them unequal and sustain their power differentials. The migrant from Tunis will retain their position of power or advantage over the migrant from Kasserine, who is more likely to end up in informal and low-paying jobs. Power differential transnationally extends beyond the borders of Tunisia. The

relational inequality between the two groups is more likely to be sustained as they leave, arrive, and work on adverse terms. Regional inequality in Tunisia and French policies have created and maintained two groups of migrants.

As a final point and reiterating what has been mentioned as a "limitation" of this thesis, the agency of migrants is largely absent in a discussion centered on structures both at home and abroad. Categorizing migrants itself induces the absence of their agency and obliterates the different experiences of various individuals undertaking migration. It clusters all irregular migrants or all highly skilled migrants together without acknowledging the different stories of each. After all, some highly skilled migrants come from marginalized areas. They had to navigate structures, gather resources, and endure challenges to reach their goals and destination. While human mobility is subject to different forms of power and limitations - as this thesis also argued - the focus on structure obliterates migrants' actual movement. Despite the securitization of borders, for example, migration still occurs. Migrants adapt to the newly erected institutions and policies, finding their way around closed routes and visa rejections. In other words, while border and migration management often disrupt migrants' journeys and livelihoods, the policies fall short because of the fractures between policing practices, the diversity of migrants and migration flows they seek to manage, and the constant demand for migrant labor. For example, the emergence of the new Western Balkan Route for Tunisian migrants could be seen as migrants' response and interaction with the securitization of the central Mediterranean route. In other words, a site where migrants exercise agency and navigate structures. On the other side, the recent announcement by Serbia to impose visa requirements on Tunisians can be seen as a response to these growing and diversified migration routes. By situating management policies within migrants' practices, we uncover the relationship between control processes and mobility strategies. Differently stated, while structures

govern migrants, their agency allows them to navigate those structures and influence them. While the space does not allow for a more thorough reflection, this point is important to emphasize. The aim of the thesis is not to essentialize specific categories of migrants. The purpose was to identify broad patterns and mechanisms of differentiation and division between migrants and to unpack how structures play a (transnationally) categorizing role in limiting and constraining the movement of some while facilitating the mobility of others.

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