**Cover Letter**

My motivation to submit a book proposal is sparked by the academic excellence of your publishing program and the wide array of book series and publication formats. This said, I find some of your thematic book series in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences particularly appealing. As I will demonstrate more amply in my book prospectus, I see this proposal as a valuable contribution to your academic program. The book project which is an English translation of my dissertation defended in May 2021 fits in beautifully with your publications in subject areas such as Global Studies and Middle East Studies, but (to some extent) also Radical Geography, Sociology and Anthropology or Comparative Social Sciences.

As a postdoctoral researcher specialized in the North African region (especially in Morocco and Tunisia), I engage with perspectives across disciplinary, cultural, and geographic boundaries. Throughout my graduate and postgraduate career, respectively in the fields of Middle Eastern Studies and Globalization Studies, I have been involved in several international collaborative research projects. After having completed my master‘s degree with distinction, I joined the PhD program ‘Critical junctures of Globalization‘ and became a research fellow with the Centre for Area Studies at Leipzig University. Ever since, I have contributed to international conference panels and worked in several publication projects. For this reason, I am familiar with the editorial process for different publication formats such as monographs, edited volumes, journal articles, blogs and podcasts. As junior fellow with the interdisciplinary fellow group “Inequality and Mobility” at the MECAM in Tunis, I contributed to different formats for collaborative work, co-organized a public book launch and conducted cutting-edge research toward an academic post-doc career or a career in non-governmental and development organizations.

In terms of my future research and career prospects, I also see potential for a more longstanding collaborative partnership in publishing. I would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet you and discuss my book proposal with you in person. Thank you for your time and consideration of this proposal, and I am looking forward to hearing back from you.

Best regards,

Johannes Frische

**Academic Biography**

Dr. Johannes Frische is a postdoctoral researcher from Leipzig University with a background in Middle Eastern Studies, History and Religious Studies. During his graduate studies, he specialized in human geography of the MENA region. After having earned his master‘s degree in 2011, Johannes joined the PhD program ‘Critical junctures of Globalization‘ and became a research fellow at Leipzig University. In this position, he conducted investigative field research in Tunisia in the years 2012-13 while exchanging with Tunisian scholars and civil society practitioners. Focusing on North Africa (especially Tunisia and Morocco), his research interests include development and globalization studies, urban sociology, youth studies and migration. Moreover, he has gained broad ranging experiences in international research collaboration. Between 2015 and 2017, Johannes worked as a regional program coordinator for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Rabat/Morocco from where he coordinated a network of politically or civically engaged young professionals in the MENA region. As a fellow with the IFG ‘Inequality and Mobility”, he builds on his previous research on youth and the urban question in Tunisia while exploring the impact of COVID-19 crisis on mobility and urban development.

**Publications**

With Breuer, I.; Gertel, J.; Kreuer, D.: Landwirtschaftliche Existenzsicherung am Limit? in: Gertel, J. & Breuer, I. (Hrsg.): *Alltagsmobilitäten*, *Marokkanische Lebenswelten im Aufbruch*, Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld 2011

Transformar políticas de informalidad urbana: el caso de la transición tunecina / Transforming Politics of Urban Informality: Revision of a concept and a case study of Tunisia’s transition. In: *Revista CIDOB d’afers internationals*, no. 104 (2013)

Urbane Jugendliche in Tunesien – zwischem prekärem Alltag und kollektiver Mobilisierung. In: Gertel, J.; Ouaissa, R. (eds.): *Urbane Jugendbewegungen: Widerstand und* *Umbrüche in der arabischen Welt.* Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014

*“*Gettingby” atthe urbanperiphery: Everyday struggles ofinformal merchants in Tunisia*. Middle East – Topics and Arguments* 5: 65–76 (2015)

Y a-t-il une jeunesse urbaine ? Une réflexion sur « le fait urbain » et la catégorie des jeunes citadins marginalisés dans le contexte maghrébin *insaniyat (Insaniyat* / إنسانيات), no. 91: 109–124 (2021)

*Urbane Ungleichheit, Informalität und Prekarität in Tunesien. Zwischen Teilhabe und Ausgrenzung*, Frank & Timme Verlag, Berlin 2022.

**Book Prospectus**

**Working title:** Youth between Participation and Exclusion: Urban Inequality, Informality and Precarity in Tunisia

**Brief Description**

After the revolution in Tunisia, economic problems overshadow ongoing political and social changes. Longstanding disparities between different regions as well as inequalities between and within cities have further exacerbated. Youth remain mostly excluded from political decision-making and economic opportunity. Against this backdrop, the book investigates everyday struggles for economic survival that take place in a setting shaped by structural unemployment, informality and precarity.

Grounded in unique fieldwork material and comprehensive survey data, the book provides a compelling account of everyday strategies in formal and informal sectors geared toward coping with economic insecurity. Looking at the particular case of the suburban, low-income area Ettadhamen on the north-western periphery of the Greater Tunis region, it carefully retraces historical roots of territorial disparities, socio-spatial segregation, economic relegation, and social marginalization. The longstanding consequences of urban inequalities are felt until today. While socio-spatial exclusion denies youths the right to take part in "the total cityscape", they also remain excluded from the formal labor market and secure employment. A gripping close-up on young people’s life situations unsettles any understanding of youth as a linear transitional phase. Instead, their situations reveal precarity and uncertainty, as they experience a continuum between participation and exclusion. Despite the diversity of life situations, youth sharing conditions beyond their making can be regarded as members of a generation in the broader sense without representing a common generational consciousness.

Straddling the divides between different disciplines such as sociology, urban studies, development studies, youth studies and Middle East and North African Studies, the book offers unique analytical insights across a wide range of empirical data and other primary and secondary sources. While interdisciplinary perspectives are crucial for informing the debate on the political economy of youth, the fieldwork approach lays out a multilevel analysis, embedding life situations in a broader context of post-uprising Tunisia and complicating mainstream assumptions about unemployment and inactivity. In theoretical terms, the book bridges the debate over informality and precarity from both a global perspective (across the North-South divide) and from a local perspective (the urban periphery). The readers will gain intellectual stimulus for challenging established borders in critical thought and theory.

The book speaks to audiences across borders and disciplines. It addresses both specialized scholars, students of all levels and the wider public interested in this topic. Navigating complex debates and controversies in clear and accessible language, it serves as an informative introductory text for undergraduate and graduate courses in fields such as Middle Eastern and North African Studies, Sociology, Global and International Studies, Human Geography, Anthropology, Urban Studies, Development Studies. Last but not least, the book is captivating to read: the reader will find fabulous ethnographic accounts shedding light on the central research question as well as core issues and concepts in novel, unexpected ways.

**Introduction and Chapter Outlines**

The Introduction leads into the central theme of the book. In time of political repression, getting a job with the police was the only hope for numerous unemployed spending their time in coffee places. While unemployment has for several decades been a very visible phenomenon in Tunisia, the underlying problems and strategies to overcome them are often insufficiently known. Getting a casual job, launching a small business, migrating abroad: there are manifold ways of coping with insecurity. In a context that is characterized by structural unemployment informality and precarity, access to the labor market is often limited to precarious employment. Facing this predicament, young people depend on socio-institutional resources that provide a cushion against insecurity. The introduction discusses how informality and precarity emerged as prevalent research topics in the context of globalization: the informalization and precaritization of employment in the Global North as well as new forms of precariousness in the Global South. In Tunisia, flexibilization and precaritization of employment can be considered as consequences of the debt crisis and structural adjustment programs introduced in 1986. These reforms came along with a restructuring of the public sector and the Tunisian welfare regime. In the context of liberalization and privatization individual strategies to overcome unemployment and precariousness increasingly fell in line with policies of the Tunisian government, that relied on market-oriented approaches for addressing the social question. In accordance with the principle of 'self-help' the focus of state employment policy shifted to income-generating activities and self-employment. After the political uprising of 2011 microfinance organizations gained considerable momentum when the state-led promotion of microentrepreneurship brought about a new microcredit boom. The introduction further proposes that the root causes of urban inequality have had longstanding effects on urban development processes and the ensuing local implications for the right to the city. In the Greater Tunis area, sociospatial polarization is particularly pronounced in the urban periphery where it becomes visible in the contrast between large-scale urban projects and informal settlements. Due to multidimensional forms of exclusion, youth in disadvantaged urban areas must rely on their own networks and strategies. However, their individual agency is by and large determined by structural conditions on the labor market, the socio-institutional environment for income generating activities and the socio-spatial context of local living conditions.

Chapter 2 provides a state of the art by discussing theoretical debates in urban studies, development studies and the sociology of labor. The debates refer to implications of urban inequality in the Global North and the Global South. These have gained prominence due to a profound transformation of cities since the turn of the millennium. Engaging with urban studies, I draw on concepts for practices of spatial production introduced by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre such as socially produced space, the right to the city and everyday life. The micro-perspective shifts the attention to dynamics that have shaped urban spaces over time: asymmetrical consequences of central state interventions, economic liberalization and privatization on the one hand, livelihood strategies, spatial mobilities and access to local resources on the other hand. In this context, concepts of the informal sector, informalization and urban informality as well as precarity and precaritization are discussed in more detail. I then reflect upon how they flow into analytical perspectives for investigating everyday living and working conditions of youth in urban spaces in the North African context, in this case Tunisia.

Chapter 3 analyses uneven development processes in their spatial and economic dimensions. The focus lies on disparities between different regions that have emerged throughout a long-lasting urbanization process. Internal and transnational migration as well as the expansion of the informal sector, the parallel economy and cross-border trade underline the effects of marginalization after decades of systematic neglect of interior regions. Sociospatial inequality is also discussed by looking at the Greater Tunis area where fragmentation, segregation, and polarization reinforce and reproduce already existing urban divisions. Certain trends of urban development that become visible within the urban periphery (urban megaprojects and informal settlements) as well as in the center of Tunis (markets and street economies) are discussed as cases in point.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 represent the empirical cornerstone of this book. To this end, chapter 4 starts with an introduction of the research field by looking at the suburban area Ettadhamen in the periphery of Grater Tunis. The history of this urban space as described here encompasses its emergence and spatial expansion through the spreading of informal settlements as well as the significance of a local economy and the role of informal networks. The introduction of the research field further extends to social dynamics such as transnational migration and ongoing forms of mobilization and protests. These insights into the research field from the early years of Tunisia’s democratic transition provide a starting point for discussing sociological and ethnographic methods that inform the access to the field and provide empirical ground for engaging with analytical perspectives on core issues of urban inequality.

Chapter 5 analyses how individual life situations become affected by unemployment, informal and precarious work. Based on qualitative semi-structured interviews that I conducted during research visits in 2012 and 2013, the case studies are divided into different categories: joblessness, work as a casual laborer, wage labor, working in the family business, and self-employment. These categorizations are meant to delineate different employment situations. Behind such categories, however, lies the overarching problem of uncertain transitions: from attending school to starting work life, from living with the family of origin to gaining household independence. The only way youth and young adults can build a solid basis to cushion themselves against insecurity is if they manage to stabilize their income or their employment situation. In a situation of socio-spatial seclusion, residents of marginalized neighborhoods depend on finding employment beyond the neighborhood unless they eke out a living through income opportunities in the proximity-based local economy. On a segmented labor market, informal and precarious work substitutes for a lack of decent work among underqualified young people, school dropouts and even young graduates with a school-leaving certificate or vocational training degree. Informal and precarious work may provide a complementary source of income when wage labor and alternative income strategies are combined.

Chapter 6 shows the living conditions and prospects of Tunisian young people under the impact of precariousness and uncertainty. Based on a comprehensive data set (a nationwide sample of 1,000 young people in the age range between 16 and 30 years), the chapter identifies structural trends in the life situations of young people between the ages of 16 and 30, especially with regards to their economic situation. It then asks how precariousness in their life situation impacts on their transition phases. In this context I position and discuss relevant debates in critical youth research. The discussion further extends to the prospects young people anticipate in the face of precariousness and uncertainty, and then interrogates exclusion as a generational dynamic. The category of youth will thus be critically examined based on qualitative research results, which I compare with more comprehensive quantitative findings.

The conclusion epitomizes the empirical implications of core issues and concepts such as informality and precarity discussed throughout the book. Reiterating the central research problem, it makes a case for understanding youth as a precarious life situation in a context of deeply entrenched inequalities. This argument is complemented by a broader analysis situating Tunisian youth against a background of structural and socio-spatial exclusion. Finally, the conclusion offers a global outlook on youth in times of unemployment and recession from a political economy perspective.

**Market Considerations**

The book is a great read for scholars, graduate students and undergraduate students who specialize in Middle East and North African Studies and engage in interdisciplinary research across disciplines such as Sociology, Geography, Urban Studies, Development Studies. It may also appeal to a wider audience interested in contemporary issues in North Africa, the legacy of the Arab Spring and perspectives on youth.

1. Scholars and experts in the field

My book fits in with and builds on strands of literature and publications by renowned scholars in the field. It comes out of a continuous professional engagement with scholarly productions in the Middle Eastern/North African context and my participation in international research collaboration between German universities and think tanks on the one hand as well as universities and research institutes in the MENA region on the other hand. A particularly prestigious project I worked on as a research fellow was a large-scale survey on youth in the MENA region conducted under the auspices of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. The book partly derives from data collected during this survey and takes up the debates opened up in widely received publications by some of the members of the scientific committee, who were involved in this ambitious project. In addition, I have previously published in edited volumes and peer-edited journals authored by leading professors in the field. I am confident that the book will find an interested anglophone readership in countries across Europe, the Mediterranean and the MENA region but may also spark interest among the academic community in the United States.

1. Graduate and undergraduate students

The book is accessible and concise. This makes it an excellent option for BA and MA courses. Each chapter stands as a self-contained unit, which allows for selectively reading parts of the book and learning about, for example, theory and positions in the literature (chapter 2) or the fieldwork context (chapter 4). Due to its interdisciplinary design, the book can be adapted to curricula in Middle Eastern Studies, Global Studies, Sociology, Political Science, Development Studies, Geography, Urban Studies and Anthropology.

**Comparable/Competing Materials**

The book will compete with publications on (1) youth in Tunisia, youth in the MENA region and other world regions (2) Tunisia’s political transition (3) urban transformation (4) unemployment, informality and precarious employment. Until now, these publications are to large extent peer-edited articles in journals and edited volumes or reports and extended studies by international organizations. There are, however, a few monographs that are comparable to my approach and compete with it in the market. The state-of-the-art clearly demonstrates that my book fits in with critical debates in some remarkable publications. Within the wide area of social science literature, it specifically speaks to issues that the competing materials raise, albeit from a different angle and in other geographical contexts.

1. Monographs on youth in Tunisia and in other world regions

Honwana, Alcinda. 2013. *Youth and Revolution in Tunisia*, London: Zed Books.

Sika, Nadine. 2017. *Youth Activism and Contentious Politics in Egypt. Dynamics of Continuity and Change.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Farrugia, David. 2022. *Youth, Work and the Post-Fordist Self.* Bristol: Bristol University Press.

As these three books demonstrate, the topic of youth in Tunisia or global youth is usually addressed from a particular angle. *Youth and Revolution* *in Tunisia* offers a broad appreciation of young people’s role in the Tunisian revolution. Drawing on testimonies and first-hand fieldwork, it lays out how youth are marginalized in manifold ways. Sika’s monograph investigates impetus to political protest in the wake of the Arab uprising and mobilization by unemployed graduates. While her methodological approach to studying youth in the context of the Arab Spring is somewhat comparable (combination of quantitative data and qualitative, semi-structured interviews), my book has a different focus as it sheds light on root causes explaining the exclusion of urban youth in Tunisia, such as joblessness and precarity. In a similar vein, Farrugia’s book explores the formation of young people as workers within the post-Fordist work ethic (of postindustrial societies). My book resonates with his critique of the youth transition approach, but I also argue that there is a need to nuance the premises of the political economy of youth perspective.

1. Monographs on Tunisia’s transition

Santini, Ruth Hanau. 2018. *Limited Statehood in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia: Citizenship, Economy, Security*. Cham: Palgrave Pivot.

Pontiggia, Stefano. 2021. *Revolutionary Tunisia: Inequality, Marginality, and Power.* Lanham: Lexington Books.

These titles are important to mention because they point to recent trends in social science research on Tunisia and bring in novel approaches from disciplines such as political sciences and anthropology. While *Limited Statehood in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia* is a lucid analysis of statehood in relation to citizenship, the informal economy and the security sector, *Revolutionary Tunisia* examines the interior regions as a militant basis long before the Tunisian uprising. Addressing the marginality debate, he elucidates how the functioning of state institutions implies the unequal integration of territories and people. My book focuses on the urban periphery in the Greater Tunis region but also takes into consideration the impact of state formation, disparities and root causes of protest in the country’s interior. Positioned between urban studies, sociology and development geography, it challenges narratives of division and sheds lights on interdependencies between coastal regions and the interior as well as cities and their hinterland.

1. Monographs on Urban Transformation in North Africa

Bogaert, Koenraad: *Globalized Authoritarianism: Megaprojects, Slums and Class Relations in Urban Morocco.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2018.

Strava, Cristiana: *Precarious Modernities: Assembling State, Space and Society on the Urban Margins in Morocco.* London: Zed Books Ltd. 2023.

*Globalized Authoritarianism* offers a multiscalar analysis of urban mega-projects and slum upgrading programs as complex processes of placemaking in the context of political change. While my book addresses the emergence of disparities as well as inter-intra-urban inequalities from a similar perspective, this is merely the context for an a more finegrained analysis of everyday conditions of urban residents and their struggles for economic participation. In that way, it resembles the community-focus of *Precarious Modernities* which provides an ethnographic account of modernization in Casablanca’s margins. The interdisciplinary nature of my book hence allows for bridging different ways of knowing ‘the urban’ while insisting on the centrality of everyday processes.

**Apparatus/Illustrative Materials**

The approximative total word count of the German manuscript is 110.000, including bibliography (no appendices). The bibliography includes 363 references cited in the main text (in approximately 8.000 words). Footnotes are approximately 6.000 words. The manuscript will contain 3 tables and 5 graphs, maps and 4 images. I took all the photographs included in the text. Maps are referenced.

**Status of the Work**

The full manuscript will be ready for review by July 2023. The book has been published in German with Frank & Timme Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur. The manuscript is a translation of the original manuscript. As of April 2023, half of the manuscript is translated into English and copy-edited by me. I will nevertheless seek expert feedback for the entire or part of the manuscript from colleagues to double-check the content of each chapter, finetune style and refine argumentation.

**Possible Reviewers**

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