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Tunisian Islamism beyond Democratization

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On 17 December of 2010, a young fruit seller set himself on fire in front of the Sidi Bouzid governorate's building in protest against what he saw as police harassment. To the general surprise, Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation triggered a widespread uprising across the country, which, within a few weeks, led to the overthrow of the long-serving president Ben Ali (14 January 2011). After the fall of the 'dictator', the political process of transformation began apace. Between January and February, a popular movement called the Casbah (I and II)[1] placed the interim government led by Mohammed Ghannouchi under such pressure until a completely new government was formed and a new assembly created, replacing the parliament elected under Ben Ali. From March to October 2011, the political landscape began to take shape. For most of the political parties and civil society organizations, including the powerful trade union (*Union Generale de Travailleurs Tunisiens* - UGTT), revolution meant the final phase and accomplishment of the

[1]A general consensus was found once the RCD (the former party in power) was outlawed, a new assembly formed and a government under the leadership of Beji Caied Essebsi appointed with the mission of drafting a new electoral law and bringing the country to elections for the Cosntitutional Assembly.

political liberalization Ben Ali had promised in November 1987 when he came on power. It was the beginning of a transitional process to liberal democracy.

After the elections of October 2011, the transition became instable, as a consequence both of the electoral success of the Islamist party al-Nahda and the rise of a radical Salafist movement in the streets of the country. The nationalist and left wing opposition questioned in fact the very legitimacy of the Nahda-led government. In 2013 episodes of street violence and the political assassinations of two left wing members of parliament further detsabilised the political scene. In July of the same year, the Egyptian military overthrew the elected Islamist president Mursi with the support of large sectors of the population. The following month, the Nahda party, fearing the same outcome in Tunisia, cut off its links with the Salafists and declared Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST), the most important and embattled salafi group in the country, a terrorist organization, leading to its disbandment. With Nahda now firmly in the democratising camp, the new constitution was finally approved on January 2014 and the period of contention and constitutional transition came to an end with new parliamentary and presidential elections held according to the new rules.The anti-Islamist bloc came out on top in both percentage of votes and seats[2] (Stepan, 2016).

This period of change between 2011 and 2014 is the object of analysis of this research. Tunisia is here taken as a case study to illustrate and critically engage with the larger debates in the area studies of the Middle East and North Africa studies (MENA region) on the evolution of the paradigms of democratization and authoritarianism and to suggest how to go beyond them. This period of regime change, labelled 'Arab spring' or 'Arab uprisings', has renewed academic debates on the 'politics' in the region. After more than two decades of discussions on institutional politics focusing on state apparatuses, authoritarian power, ruling elites and traditional opposition forces, the re-politicization of the Arab scene brought back social actors (previously considered as passive or non-influential) to academic

[2] Bourguibists together with liberal and left wing parties. The parliamentary election was held on 26 October 2014. The presidential election was first held on 23 November 2014; as none of the candidate won an absolute majority, a second round took place on 21 December.

attention (Pace and Cavatorta, 2012). This research goes in the direction of re-discovering politics in neglected spaces. While the actors considered are primarily Islamists, the place of the politics analysed is that public space where non-official actors engage in general. This period of contention and institutional re-building in Tunisia is one in which social groups arrive on the public scene and struggle for power and inclusion. This research, analysing Islamist movements at the time of regime change in Tunisia, asks the question of how to analyse correctly the political changes in the region and how to explain the 'Islamization' of politics in an open liberalised political space. Before going into the details of the academic debate and propositions of the thesis, however, some theoretical observations are necessary.

First, the dissertation analyses the period from 2011 to 2014 as a period of democracy building. It considers however democratization in a rather different way from the traditional use in democratization studies. This brunch of political studies developed after the 1991 disintegration of the Communist block. Focusing on those countries 'in transition', they elaborated paradigms of political transformation that had as assumption the evolution of the political international system from authoritarian to liberal democratic. In my case, democratization means the inclusion of organized social groups into the public arena. As I will better develop later, democratization is better understood as a historical process of accomplishment of the national Tunisian project that accepts the social and political plurality of the nation-state. I see the most recent political transformation as one in which old historical mechanisms function again after being 'liberated' from an oppressive regime.

Second, in order for this process to be accomplished, the inclusion of Islamist movements is necessary. Islamist movements in fact should be considered as a consequence and part of the process of nation building.

Third, Islamist groups (salafist jihadi included), should be looked at as social-political actors. This is a logical development of the second premise, as Islamists movements play a key role in building the nation because they represent specific social groups.

The research follows the evolution of the various Islamist movements (radical and institutional) for the period covered. The reason to focus on Islamists, and

specifically on Salafist-jihadis, is that they are the most significant social and political actor in terms of novelty and ability to bring new social groups on the post-revolutionnary scene. In order to understand social change in the country, Islamist movements have to be the focal point of study, without however falling into the trap of essentialism.This complex phenomenon in fact be placed into its context. A horizontal, sociological type of observation was necessary to analyse the social dynamics Islamist movements emerge from, accompanied by a vertical historical line to link the present to the historical path.

The dissertation is divided in four sections. In the first, the path of nation building until the present is described as a period of struggle between social groups that define and perform the struggle through the elaboration of the two encompassing ideological frames: nationalism and Islamism. In the second and third section, the period after the toppling of Ben Ali until the approval of the new constitutional text is examined in detail. In particular, the conflictual and radical stand of Salafist-jihadis and the way they reacted to the process of democracy building are anlysed. The fourth part looks at the constitutional deal as a political synthesis of the conflict between the two main traditional blocs, represented by Nahda and Nida Tunis respectively. Salafists are kept out of this ‘deal’ in order to stabilise the system, but leaving them out also creates the premises for renewed future tensions.

The political process summarised above must not be considered teleological, as the natural accomplishment of an inevitable process of democratization; but rather as one of building the polity in a set historical and geographical community. The question whether democracy is or is not the inevitable outcome of regime change or nation-building is beyond the scope of this research. The theoretical framework applied is intended to show the tensions inherent in building the polity and its location in the space in which specific social actors intervene. Employing nationalism and Islamism as the ideological frames of this conflicting process of nation building is at the core of this approach to understand political dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa.

The academic debate and the research question

Between the 1980s and the 2000s, two academic debates characterised the Middle Eastern studies literature: the first focused on democratization and authoritarianism, the second on the evolution of Islamist movements.

Starting from O'Donnel, Schmitter and Whitehead's book on transition to democracy (1987), followed by Huntington's study of the third wave of democratization (1991), political science debates on the region focused intensely on processes of democratization and their notable absence. The transformation of the global political order towards democracy after 1989, led political scientists to consider it as generalized and generalizable. Such an optimistic viewpoint was summarized in Fukuyama's pivotal book "The end of history and the last man" (Fukuyama, 1992)[3]. Fukuyama saw the inevitable triumph of liberal democracy as the 'end of history'. He postulated that liberal-democracy was the winning ideology as system of government after the defeat of the monarchical, fascist and communist systems. He proposed that liberal democracy could be "the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution and the final form of human government" (Ibidem., p. 1). The Middle East and North Africa witnessed a period of political liberalization in the 1980s. Academics of comparative politics and specialists of the region began thus to see the Arab world as a region in which theoretical models of democratization could be tested. Democratization studies in the region was born as a response to the flaws of modernization theories, increasingly interpreted as a justification of authoritarian regimes for the sake of industrialization and development. Because the Arab regimes appeared, after the 1970s, as stable authoritarian political systems, a discussion began on wheter to consider any relation between democracy and value-system. Should democratic values be the necessary premise for democratic evolution? One

[3] Which found inspiration in the Hegelian reading of history proposed by the French Hegelian philosopher A. Kojève, (1980).

original theory that denies this link is the theory of the *rentier state*[4].This theory postulates that democracy and accountability depend on taxation. The failure of democracy to take hold in the region is due indeed to the lack of taxation accountability. States that obtain their revenues from external rents (oil, international aid, royalties on military bases, remittances) would not ask citizens to provide the financial means for its existence and functioning. To the contrary, the resources available from the rent economy would give the state the means for patronage as a tool of governance and domination.The validity of this argument stemmed from the coincidence between the stability of regimes and the oil boom of the 1970s. The theory equally postulates that a decrease in rents places the stability of the political system at risk. From the 1980s onwards, coinciding with the fall in oil prices, regimes were put under pressure and social unrest exploded almost everywhere, [5] suggesting that the democracy of the bread that rentier economies provided would be replaced with the democracy of the vote (Sadiki, 1997). The rise of mass mobilization led to liberalising concessions on the part of the regimes. Such concessions seemed to be the means the regimes used in order to negotiate with the social demands that could not be satisfied any longer with the distribution of rent. A more radical and straightforward confutation of any relation between values and democracy came from Ghassan Salamé. The Lebanese author stressed that democracy is the outcome of a stalemate between conflicting parties not necessarily committed to democracy (Salamé, 1994). The political struggle that occurred during the period of political liberalization saw the emergence of two main broad political factions: the old heirs of nationalist ideologies and Islamists (of various persuasions), both not necessarily intrinsically democratic. The compromise between non-democratic actors did not occur however in the 1990s as one might have expected. The Algerian Islamic Front (FIS), for example, was poised to reach power through free elections in 1991, but a military coup prevented this from occurring in the name

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[4]Maybe the most significant contribution Arab studies made to the general comparative politics literature.

[5] See in particular the so-called bred revolts in Morocco (1981), Tunisia (1983), Egypt (1987) and Jordan (1989).

of defending democracy, insofar as Islamism in power was seen as inherently authoritarian (Sadiki, 1997b). In short, the nationalists, in power through the coup, emphasised that Islamists once in power would not respect the rules of democracy. This Algerian scenario influenced politics throughout the region in subsequent years. The result was an increasing authoritarian re-organization of the old regimes. Just like in Algeria, in the 1990s, the fight against Islamists in Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, and Yemen, justified political measures that brought those countries in a situation in which free political expression became nearly non-existant. As we will see, the Salamé argument would eventually be proven correct in the case of Tunisia in the 2010s.

The 1990s bucked therefore the liberalizing trend of the late 1980s and all of the so-called transitions to democracy turned out to be processes of "upgraded authoritarianism" (Heydemann, 2007). The first wave of political liberalization in the 1980s had been an important moment of political participation and contention (Waterbury, 1994), but it ended in the early 1990s with the reaffirmation of authoritarianism, although in a different guise (Albrecht and Schlumberger, 2004). This first attempt at breaking the monolithic power system inherited from the independence movements highlighted two new political factors that would have a lasting effect on the politics of the region: the emergence of masses participating in politics and their 'Islamization' (Addi, 1991).

The rise of political Islam as a potent force emerging from processes of liberalization caused for long time a political and academic issue, centring on the compatibility-incompatibility argument between liberal democracy and Islamism (H. Goddard, 2002; Esposito and Voll, 1996; Lewis, 1991). If political participation and contention meant Islamisation of the public space, should those dynamics let be expressed overtly or repressed (paradoxically) in the name of democracy? Inside and outside the region, most of the political elite and international western policy makers concluded that Islamism should be stopped. In Tunisia, part of the political secular elite, that first struggled against the regime for political space, backed afterword the crackdown against Islamists (Murphy, 1997; Perkins, 2014). In the academic community, the debate turned on the argument of an alleged Arab/Islamic

exceptionalism. The main argument was the incompatibility of the Arab and Islamic political tradition with western-style liberal democracy (Gran, 1998). Some considered Arab political thought and practices embedded into "Oriental despotism", "Sultanism", "Patriarchalism" (Lewis, 1993; Bromley, 1997) while others argued that Islam was the main obstacle.The incompatibility between Islam and democracy is allegedly that between Islam and secularism, believed to be the premise for democracy (Lewis, 2002; Zakaria, 2004; Kedourie, 1992; Pipes,1996; Lakoff, 2004).This debate was however quickly set aside and overcome thanks to comparative works that highlighted examples of Muslim countries (such as Indonesia and Turkey) where Islamist parties gained power within democratic rules (Stepan and Robertson, 2003). In addition, the second half of the 1990s witnessed the political integration of Islamist parties in the parliamentary life of several Arab countries, including Jordan (Schwedler, 2006), Morocco (Wegner, 2011) and Yemen (Durac, 2011). All this indicated that authoritarianism and its survival mechanisms were the problem and not Islam.

The democratization and Islamist studies literatures focused therefore increasingly on the authoritarian features of Arab regimes. Democratization studies, in particular, had proven to be too optimistic (Albert and Shlumberg, 2004; Anderson, 2006; Hinnebusch, 2006; Schlumberger, 2007). The political changes the Arab regimes went through did not necessarily take a democratic direction. As most famously stated in the classic Tomaso de Lampedusa's book 'The Leopard' (2002), things may change just to make sure that nothing will really change. The type and degree of change of Arab regimes proved that the political situation in the Arab region was not static, but that the dynamics of change were not simply a transition from an authoritarian to a democratic system. This approach has been accused of being teleological and influenced by other countries' experiences (Schlumberger, 2000). As a reaction to this democracy-spotting (Anderson, 2006), a rich literature on Arab authoritarian regimes and their ability to be so resilient flourished throughout the 2000s. It was at times called 'post-democratization' debate (Valbjorn, 2012) because the term captured both the fact that Arab societies were changing and not moving necesserely in the direction of liberal-democracy.

The state apparatus and the dynamics of upgraded authoritarianism came to the fore in academic studies. This new debate assumed the tone of an opposition against the neo-liberal ideological underpinnings of the democratization debate and the undisputed American hegemony in the world. In France, two leading specialists on Tunisia, Camau and Geisser (2003), proposed a specific version of the debate on authoritarianism, followed later on by Béatrice Hibou (2006), another French specialist on Tunisia. The latter took the 'authoritarianism' category to its extreme, arguing that the Ben Ali's regime was a power system based on considerable consensus in society. This post-structuralist trend, very influential in France and in continental Europe at the time, informed the theoretical assumptions of both books.[6]

While discussions on the persistence of Arab authoritarianism dominated the academic debate in the 2000s and overcame the rather dogmatic democratization studies tradition, by the end of the decade, the Arab uprisings seemed to contradict it (Pace and Cavatorta, 2012). The Arab 'revolutions' caught by surprise not only Arab leaders and international political practitioners, but the academic world as well (Gause, 2011). Implicit in the debate on upgraded authoritarianism as in democratization studies was the idea that political apathy characterised Arab societies, which were incapable of mobilizing against their regimes (Valbjorn, 2015: p. 221).Valbjorn, among others, pointed out that the academic and political debate had been too regime-centred and that what was occurring in wider society, or 'below the radar' (Lust, 2011), was left understudied. The Arab uprising contradicted the assumption of political apathy and showed, to the contrary, that society played an important role in change, highlighting at the very least the shortcomings of both democratization and authoritarianism paradigms.

In parallel to this inter-paradigm debate, another important issue had developed, coming to the forefront of academic and political preoccupations: the rise of Islamist movements. Studies on Islamism developed along three main trends of

[6] By post-structuralist I refer to that intellectual trend influenced by French authors such as Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida. It is generally considered a post-Marxist tendency that reacts to all of the 1970s structuralism and functionalist trends. This philosophical school influenced Political Science especially in what is the discussion about power.

research and overlapped with the general discussion on the nature of the political systems and the location of politics in the MENA region (Volpi, 2009). The first trend studied Islamist parties in the context of the moderation through inclusion/exclusion approach. Schwedler (2006; 2007), most famously, compared Islamists parties in Yemen and Jordan, where the political system opened for limited electoral participation, to countries like Tunisia and Syria, where even limited toleration did not exist. Schwedler and other scholars, including Browers and Kurzman(2004), Clark (2006) and Wegner and Pellicer (2009), demonstrated that where opportunities were provided, Islamist parties would accept to play the game of procedural democracy.

The second trend employed social movement theory to study Islamism. In particular, Hafez (2003) and Wiktorovicz (2004) provided important contributions. These two authors opened a fruitful field of research, showing the political rationale of Islamist movements and parties in pursuing their actions. The importance of applying a social movement approach to Islamist studies was two-fold: on one side it allowed an analysis of Islamist movements in which the ideological Islamic factor was played down to focus on constraints and opportunities (as well as organisational structures);on the other,it looked beyond institutional politics like social activism, political violence and street politics.

The third trend is the so-called post-Islamism debate. Bayat and Roy were the initiators of this trend. It should be underlined that their field of expertise was non-Arab Muslim countries. This is an important aspect to underline because the Asian Muslim area was influenced by different developments, primarily the setting up of the Islamic Republic in Iran.Bayat, an Iranian scholar himself, coined the expression post-Islamism to frame the reformist Islamic trend in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1996; 2013). Olivier Roy, made first a theoretical confutation, arguing the failure of Islamic thought as a whole (1994); then, developed a holistic theory of the Islamist movement on an international scale (2004). For him post-Islamism is the age that acknowledges the inconsistencies of the Islamic project of an Islamic State as a political alternative to the nation-state inherited by the post-colonial nationalist movements. Since the collective myth ("utopia") of the Islamic state failed, it would

be surpassed by individualistic Islamist attitudes and practices such as dress code or pop/consumeristic behaviour instead of political expression (Haenni, 2005). Both authors agree that this process would lead to a secularisation of Muslim countries. For Olivier Roy, the Christian reformed movements in the USA provides a template for Islamism (O.Roy, 2004; p.181-4), while for both authors the Iranian reformist movement within the Islamic republic is already evidence of such tendency. The idea is that once Islam is in power, it stops talking about religion and is secularised through the mundane preoccupations of politics. The same argument has been provided to explain the behaviour and political choices of Islamist parties such as the AKP in Turkey, or the Justice and Development parties in Egypt and Morocco (Zemni, 2013) once they entered government coalitions[7].

Studies on Islamism, just like the democratization and post-democratization ones, came under considerable scrutiny after the 2011 uprisings. While the ‘revolutions’ did not have Islamist references, they developed very soon into widespread Islamist politicization. The post-Islamist debate, especially in its most radical conclusions such as the end of any Islamist credible political offer on the Arab institutional scene, faced a very different reality. As soon as authoritarian systems collapsed, old and new Islamist movements emerged, showing that the time for post-Islamism was still far into the future. The argument of the secularisation of politics in the Arab world through the normalization of Islamist parties was not completely erroneous because the post-Islamist analysis had been derived from countries, such as Iran, Jordan and Morocco, where political space for the development of Islamist parties did indeed push those parties towards a process of institutionalization. The flaw of this argument, however, as post uprising politics shows, was in the fact that in the majority of the Arab world, non-coopted Islamist parties were either outright forbidden (Tunisia, Libya, and Syria) or strongly limited (Algeria and Egypt). Even in those countries, like Yemen, Morocco and Jordan, where a greater degree of tolerance existed, Islamist parties were co-opted and had lost some of their credibility, liberating therefore a potential space that more

[7] The same argument is applicable to the case the Islamist party Nahda in Tunisia during anf after its experience in government (2011-2014).

opposition-minded Islamists could fill. Post 2011 politics in countries where the uprisings were successful and where the revolts degenerated into a civil war showed that traditional Islamist parties of the MB family were the most powerful and organized political force and that they were sufficiently mature to become leading actors in the processes of change taking place, particularly in processes of democratization. In addition, a new radical generation of Islamists had developed under the label of Salafists (Cavatorta and Merone, 2016).

An entire new field of research opened up for researchers working on the region after 2011 because society was more complex and dynamic than previsouly thought and because the Islamist camp showed much more heterogeneity, complexity and ideological vivacity than believed until then. If Arab societies were well alive and ready to be mobilized, Islamist ideologies (moderate and radical – to crudely simplify) were again able to 'frame' new generations and new social groups demanding participation and needing representation.

After the upheavals of 2011, the area studies literature began debating critically previous scientific assumptions (Kurzman, 2012; Gause, 2011; Volpi, 2013; Goodwin, 2011; Bayat, 2013), taking this opportunity to re-establish itself (Valbjorn, 2015, pag 225). Two possible strategies were considered.The first one was updating the old paradigms in light of the Arab uprisings. A good example is the renewed debate between upgrading authoritarianism (Heydemann and Leenders, 2014; Brownlee, 2012; Hudson, 2014) and renewed interest on democratization (Stepan and Linz, 2013) and transitology within the frame of a fourth wave of democratization (Cilento, 2014). These tendencies found justification in the development of the political situation in the post uprising political arenas with one trend or the other having more consensus according to events on the ground. While the enthusiasm for a fourth wave of democratization was indeed justified in the early days of the uprisings, neo-authoritarian subsequent political developments provided more arguments to the ones who were favourable to interpret Arab politics through the revival of the upgrading authoritarianism approach.

The second strategy included those who believed in the necessity to move beyond the conflcit between the two paradigms and found more useful to combine

both in order to highlight the complexity of the phenomena at hand.This new approach did conceive the change in Arab politics, but without a pre-determined outcome (Valbjorn, 2012). Among those who argued strongly in favour of a mixed theoretical approach is Hudson. For Hudson, the two paradigms have merits but the uprisings undermined aspects of both. Therefore, we should turn away from this polarity and look for new tools to understand the new reality of the region. He highlights three areas: a) the Middle East regional system and its influence on the Arab Spring; b) social movements and civil society, and; c) the control capabilities and bureaucratic structures in addition to elite-relations (Hudson, 2014).

Beyond these two strategies of coming out of the theoretical dead end, a third way developed, which is the one in which this research situates itself. In the already cited article 'Reflections on self-reflections –On framing the analytical implications of the Arab uprisings for the study of Arab politics', Valbjorn, by classifying the different trends within the area Studies identifies LisaAnderson 2006 article 'Searching where the light shines', as the symbol of a third way approach. According to the author, Anderson is part of a radical sub-current of post-democratization studies that criticizes both democratization and authoritarian resilience (Valbjorn, 2015; 228-229). According to Anderson, both trends of studies are the product of American provincialism which looks at institutions typical of liberal democracy such as parties and institutions and applies its analytical tools to a region where a different context exists. This leaves us, according to the author, with an incomplete if not distorted understanding of where to look for the keys to political dynamics in a place like the Arab world.

"Questions related to nation-building and identity formation, insurrection, sectarian and tribal politics, the resilience of monarchies, the dynamics of rentiers states, the role of the military in politics, the politics of informal economies, and transnational networks were dimensions of political life that might be not directly related to authoritarianism/democratization but were of crucial importance to Arab politics. A

focus on this would contribute to re-making political science into a "genuine science of politics".[8]

This approach asks whether it is time to go beyond the prevalent 'democratization and authoritarianism paradogma' (Valbjorn and Bank, 2010) and make studies of Arab politics into a genuine science of politics instead of being reduced mainly to topics of democratization and authoritarian resilience. To understand what is actually happening in the region, it is not only necessary to understand the dynamics of authoritarianism, but also what in fact is going on at the societal level. This requires that the post-democratization tradition begins a dialogue with more society-centric traditions and integrate their insights about social movements and political different traditions. Going beyond the democratization vs authoritarianism debate, this dissertation is a contribution for a new foundation of political science on the MENA region through an examination of social structures, the complex level of political participation and the strategic places where politics is done.

Going beyond the authoritarianism vs democratization debate led many specialists to employ old analytical tools whose background is the question on where politics is really to be located. The assumption of the Arab population as being politically passive was contradicted with the popular uprisings and politics was to be looked for in street protests, social movements, Salafists and other forms of mobilization previously considered not inherently political-institutional. The state-society relation is the main focus of my research, which aims to fills this gap in the literature on this specific aspect. As it will be further explained later in this chapter, the peculiarity of my research is in that it went to look for this locus of the 'political' beyond the official scene of institutional politics and proposes to use updated classic analytical tools, such as social class and nation-building, to examine and categorize the findings of the empirical work.

This study addresses then the question of where politics in Arab countries is and what is the role of Islamist movements in it through the case study of Tunisia

[8] Quoted in Valbjorn, pag . 228

during the process of social and political change in the period 2011-2014. The relevant analytical elements are:

1/ The process of political change cannot be considered separately from the process of formation of social groups.

2/ This process of change is conflictual and produces an ideological framing whose Islamism(s), in its moderate (Nahda) or radical (Salafist-jihadis) strands, is an important key factor.

3/ This process of change is a social and historical one and tends towards the inclusion of social groups and their political organization into shared national institutions. The inclusive nature of such institutions depends on the outcome of the conflict. I agree with Rustow (1970) and Salamé (1994), that a democratic outcome is more likely in a situation of stalemate of the struggle.

4/ The analytical frame in which the conflictual and historical process of institutional inclusion of social groups is synthetized is the nation-building category.

Understanding Islamism with Gramsci[9]

This research deals with the nature of Political Islam and analyses it in the broader context of political change, as witnessed in Tunisia between 2011 and 2014. The analysis of the Islamist phenomenon during a period of radical change and political transformation highlights its role in the region as a mobilizing ideology for different social groups. Following the social movement theory approach[10], I consider Islamism as an ideology and Islamist parties and movements as revolutionary political actors intent on providing a social (and political) consciousness to the constituency they refer to.They also offer an all-encompassing alternative worldview that aims attaking power and building a new society. The development of the two main Tunisian Islamist movements - Nahdha and Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST) - is placed in a larger sociological and historical perspective. They are considered in this

[9]For the analysis and references of the Gramscian text, I refer to the 2003 version of the classic: Antonio Gramsci. Selections from the prison Notebook edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (first print in 1971). From now on, I quote Gramsci, 2003.

[10] For a discussion on the social movement scholl applied to Islamist politics, see the section 1.

research as political agents of social actors that carry out, through Islamism, a social struggle with the national elites (or broader social groups) for the conquest of power and for integration into the polity. In this perspective, the paradigm of democratization is employed as an inclusive concept that implies the process of building up the political community within the imagined ethos of the nation (B. Anderson, 2004*)*

The role Islamist movements play in the second half of the 20th century and early 21st is comparable to the one socialists and communists played in Europe a century earlier. While different in content - the two ideologies are indeed very different[11] -, they are similar in that they both introduce the masses into politics (social and political awareness) and leadto revolutionary or integrationist strategies.Their political structure and agency are also very similar. Both were born as revolutionary movements that addressed political and social exclusion.Both set up revolutionary organisations with a dedicated leadership and a small party vanguard. Both, finally, under pressure from the surrounding political system, developed strategies that led to splits. In both cases, the point of divergence was the attitude toward repressive political systems and the issue of time and opportunity for revolution rather than reformist and integrationist strategies. Just like some socialist revolutionary movements in the 1970s degenerated into terrorist groups (Red Brigades in Italy and Bader Meinhofin Germany) violently confronting the state (Della Porta, 2006), during radical phases of confrontation between the state and Islamists in the Arab world, some among them degenerated into guerrilla groups dedicated to terrorist activities (Hafez, 2003). In other cases, the revolution triumphed, like in Iran, Sudan and Afghanistan (Islamist), Russia, China and Cuba (communist); in many other contexts, former revolutionary groups integrated parliamentary systems and accepted liberal democracy. In most cases, the development of such movements went hand in hand with the accomplishment of nation building and the consolidation of an inclusive political community, in the

[11] Both ideologies are against the liberal system. The communist ideology however bases its critic on a socio-economic analysis of the capitalistic mode of production while Islamism is a communitarian ideology whose critic is identity and ethics centered.

sense that the inclusion of Islamist political parties or groups was in parallel with political liberalization and democratization.

Tunisia provides a good example of almost all these cases described above at different stages in its history. We have here a mass Islamist movement that after years of struggle and repression accepted liberal democracy and exploited the process of regime change to impose itself as a democratic and institutional player. We also have the development of a revolutionary Salafist movement that develops in part in consequence to the moderation of the main historical Islamist party and in part to the changing political dynamics. During the transitional period, opportunities are provided for a revolutionary social movement like Ansar al-Sharia. The repressive reaction of the state escalated tensions within the Salafist leadership until some leaders opted for a strategy of confrontation with the state (*jihad)*.This parallel between the history of Europe and that, more recentely of the Arab world, helps to highlighten the way using Marxian categories is not in contradiction with its application to political movements of different tradition.

Antonio Gramsci became internationally known at the beginning of the 1980s thanks to two academic trends known as cultural studies and subaltern studies (Chaturvedi, 2012; Nelson,Treichler, and Grossberg, 1992). The Italian author came to play a considerable intellectual role at a time when classical Marxism was being questioned and the traditional Marxist left weakened. To many intellectuals and practitioners Antonio Gramsci looked useful to overcome some of the structural rigidity of traditional Marxist interpretations (P.Anderson, 1976). His attention to the superstructure was particulary significant. In the aftermath of the consolidation in power of the fascist party in Italy, he analysed the defeat of the Italian communist party in the 1920s in terms of absence of 'hegemony'. Following the example of the successful Leninist revolution in Russia, he emphasised the proactive role of political human agency against the deterministic Marxism of the Second International parties (Gramsci and Capriooglio, 1980)[12]. Inspired by Lenin, he used many of his concepts

[12] In an article published in the socialist review *L'Avanti* in 24 November 1917, Gramsci analysed the success of the Bolschevikh revolution as the victory of political subjectivy, in polemics with the deterministic economicism of the socialist party than drawing from Marx's capital was arguing that

and tried to follow his political strategy; however, he went beyond their classical understanding, charging those categories with new and innovative applications. A good example is given by the most famous of the gramscians' concepts, that of 'hegemony'. During the process of the long Russian revolution (1905-17), hegemony was intended to define the strategy a proletarian party should adopt in relation to the peasants' class. Lenin proposed a front between the peasants and the proletariat, with the communist party playing the hegemonic revolutionary role. Starting from the same standpoint of a hegemonic strategy to be played by the Italian communist party toward the peasants in the South of Italy, Gramsci developed a concept much larger than its original Leninist one. He stated that hegemony is a strategu to be considered as part of a state-society relation. Political society is properly of the state and its locus is the repressive apparatus (domination with force); civil society is instead the locus of the hegemonic struggle, which is the struggle for consensus around dominant ideas. Gramsci, following Machiavelli, saw power as a two-headed centaur, exerting power through a mix of violence and consensus (Gramsci, 2003; 169-70)[13]. A ruling class that holds the repressive apparatus of the state and, most importantly, gains consensus in civil society, is hegemonic. Civil society becomes therefore the new battlefield of the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic political struggle.

By going beyond the traditional Marxist approach, the Italian thinker developed a new field of analysis useful for future social science. The Birmingham school of cultural studies in the 1960s, for example, studied the cultural influence and domination the power system exerted over subaltern social groups. Following this trend, an entire field of studies developed within the Anglosaxon Marxist tradition, called at times 'cultural Marxism'. The hegemonic role of the dominant discourse and ideology became to be recognized in the first place as the origin of the

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revolution will come out of the contradiction of the capitalistic economic system. See: https://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/1917/12/revolution-against-capital.htm

[13] In this text, I will refer to the classical 1971's English translation of Gramsci notebooks, edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. In Italian is avalaible the most authoritative critical edition edited by the Istituto Gramsci (1971). In the last years, Columbiua Universisty (2011) has edited a critical edition of Gramsci works.

power system and not the economic domination of the capitalist class as classical Marxism recognised (Dworkin, 1997).

The most innovative way to use Gramscian categories came from the Indian tradition of Subaltern Studies. Beginning as an editorial collective in 1982 with Ranajit Guha, this intellectual trend was initially influenced by the English school of historians - E.P. Thompson, Cristopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, Eric Hobsbawn – who in the 1960s had started the so-called "history from below". Historians such as Hobsbawn, for example, talked in Gramscian style of a "history of subaltern classes" when analysing British peasant society (Hobsbawn, 1971)[14]. The inspiration for these works was the famous analysis of Gramsci's reading of the Italian *Risorgimento* - the Italian national movement of unification and independence - (Gramsci, 2003; p52-120). By analisyng Italian history in a comparative perspective with the German and French ones, Gramsci argued that Cavour's liberal party was able to gain hegemony within the Italian nationalist movement[15]. Gramsci scolded Mazzini's Republican Party (*partito d'azione*) for its inability to bring the popular masses (the subalterns) within its party in order to form a 'historical bloc' (*blocco storico*), which would have the double aim of directing the peasants into the national building project on one side, and being hegemonic against Cavour's strategy of unifying the southern landlords to the northern industrialists, on the other (Ibidem; p.57-80). His analysis of the subalterns acquired considerable importance when elaborated in the contexts of a revolutionary strategy for the party. Gramsci imagined, in fact, this party as being the leading political party of an inclusion strategy of the Italian popular masses (Ibidem; p.80). The revolutionary party must look for political hegemony, merging into (or entering in alliance) with popular classes. In other words, the historical role of this party is to be 'organic' to lower social classes, becoming its tool for emancipation (Ib; p. 147-157). The Communist party, like a modern Machiavellian Prince, is a subjective, volontaristic political player that merges into popular classes

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[14] The term 'subalterns' is one of the most successful Gramsciancategory. It had a rapid success in the British humanities school in the 1960s, thanks to the Hobsbawn pivotal works

[15] Camillo Benso, count of Cavour (1810-61) was the Italian prime minister that leaded successfully the Piedmont-Sardinia kingdom to head the process of Italian unification.

and through its intellectuals (organic intellectuals) make the subaltern classes aware of their own historical role of emancipation for the whole of society. The relation between the party and the subaltern groups had to be total, 'organic', emancipatory and not simply instrumental for achieving political power.

The crucial point of the alienation of the nationalist elites *vis a vis* the masses, and the failure of the nationalist movement for independence in integrating the larger nation into an inclusive national ethos inspired the academic revolution in Asian studies led by the Indian scholars Sarkar and Ranajit Guha. The former published in 1968 "the thought of Gramsci"[16], a book in which tries to think of Gramscian categories as being applicable in the context of colonial and post-colonial India. His student and follower, Guha, founded the historical project of subaltern studies at the beginning of the 1980s (Brennan, 2001). The concept of the 'subaltern' appeared to be useful in those countries of the 'South' where classical Weberian and Marxian categories of social class could not be applied easily. The Gramscian subalterns (the exploited and marginalized groups) had the same subjectivity and potential political agency Marxists traditionally attributed to the working class[17].

The Indian school, in contrast to the British tradition, emphasized the category of "subaltern" as a new paradigm to make sense of the separation between a colonial (and post-colonial) elite and the masses (S. Sarkar, 1984; R. Guha and J. Scott, 1999) and not only as a tool of contestation of the old colonial historiography. According to the first generation of subaltern scholars, post-colonial societies were split in two: the nationalist elites and wider 'traditional' society. The former employed the language and ideology of the colonial power and perpetuated a system of domination similar to the colonial one.[18] The latter had different forms of

[16] Quoted in RK Thapa (2011).
[17] Without any Gramscian influence but with the same analytical and political preoccupations, Franz Fanon applied the category of the wretch of the hearth (*damné de la terre*) to those in colonial societies oppressed by the colonial system. Franz Fanon became much cited in post-colonial studies until he reached in France a young Iranian student and political activist, Ali Shariati, which referring himself to the Caribbean political analyst, applied the same concept into Koranic language.
[18] Later on, when the so called second generation of subualtern studies merged into the post-structuralist debate in US, more focused on "discourse", "Subalterns" became a category to show how the nationalist official tale had been constructed within a frame whose the larger part of the population was excluded from (Spivak, 1988) .

contention and agency, such as religion. One of the scope of such new theoretical approach was to give equally dignity to such political and social phenomena (R. Guha,, 1982; p 4; Chattopadhyay and Bhaskar Sarkar, 2005).

In the Arab world, Gramsci began to enjoy a degree of popularity from the 1970s onwards in both communist and Islamist circles (Manduchi, 1999). The perpetual solitude of the intellectual *vis à vis* the masses and the hegemonic role of authoritarian regimes were the context from which reflections on Gramsci's categories emerged. Those using Gramsci accused the Arab intellectual to be detached from the masses and complacent to power. Gramsci had theorised the concept of 'organic intellectual' in opposition to the traditional one. The former had to be the agent of an effective, revolutionary and emancipatory strategy that included the subaltern groups. The Communist Party, for Gramsci, had to provide this type of intellectual, who would work together with militants and members for the awareness and emancipation of the masses. In the 1970s, some left wing Arab intellectuals accused leftist parties of being detached from ordinary people (T. Labib, 1994) and used the Gramscian frame for a fierce critique[19]. This trend, however, never became influential nor developed particular innovative analyses, with the exception of the Algerian writer Abdelkader Jaghloul, who argued that Islamists instead of the left, in the Arab world, were really 'marching' the masses into politics[20].

Although the category of subalterns and Subaltern studies in general never developed autonomously in the MENA region, as it had happened in Latin America (Mallon, 1994), the book of the Franco-Algerian author Frantz Fanon "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961) is worth mentioning[21]. Anticipating in a way subaltern studies, Fanon identified the Algerian masses, engaged at that time in a bloody liberation struggle, as a political subject that was building its own historical subjectivity in opposition to the colonizer through armed struggle. It is not a coincidence that Fanon had some influence on the Iranian intellectual Ali Shariati, who proposed in the

[19] In Tunisia in 2008, Ettajdid, the heir of the historical Comunist Party organized a special seminar titled "Gramsci, la culture et les intellectuels". See: http://ettajdid.org/spip.php?article120

[20] Quoted in LabibTahar and Brondino Michele (1994). For the role of Islamist thought and strategy as 'organic intellectuals' see also Rupe Simms (2002).

[21] For an attempt to a subulterns historiography in the middle East see : Cronin (2008).

1970s the fusion between Fanon'sanalysis of the wretched of the earth and Islamic categories. In the Koranic language of the Iranian intellectual, the exploited and the exploiter dialectic became that of the *mustakhbarin* and the *mustadaafi*n (Shariati, 1980; Abrahamian, 1982).

Gramsci theoretical framework has been used in the region to study political Islam as well[22], with a particular attention for the concepts of passive revolution and counter-hegemonic strategy. Asef Bayat and Hazem Kandil have analysed the case of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and their strategy of Islamization of society between the 1980s and the 2000s as a counter hegemonic strategy. For Bayat, as for Kandil, the Muslim Brotherhood, facing a political deadlock, chose to apply a counter hegemonic strategy in the manner of the Gramscian battle for conquering civil society. This strategy, however, failed in the sense that the MB never reached political power (at least before 2011 when the authors were writing) despite conquering significant social influence. The state reacted to this strategy and accepted many of the demands coming from Islamist actors in terms of further implementation of religion in the public sphere.Absorbing the request of Islamization of the political system allowed the regime to change some policies and continue its rule. In short, it reacted to the Muslim counter hegemonic strategy in terms of what Gramsci called a'passive revolution' (Bayat, 2007; Kandil, 2011). In this respect, this concept highlights the rulers' strategy of making concessions without ceeding power and altering the balance between ruled and rulers. While Bayat wanted to compare the Iranian Islamic Republic, where a revolution occurred without a strong Islamic movement, with the Egyptian case, where a strong Islamist movement was not able to make a revolution, Kandil wanted to point out the shortcomings of the Gramscian strategy of the 'war of position'. Following his analysis on hegemony, Gramsci in fact had elaborated a new revolutionary strategy for the party, which had to be able to be strategic and adapt to political circumstances. Just like the MB, the communist

[22] The first to write anything in Tunisia about Gramsci at the beginning of the 1980s was a Nahda activist, according to Ajmi Lourimi, historical leader of this party. The author is today a professor in the USA. Contacted, he confirms the existence of an article, whose copy is however not findable today.

party in Italy in the 1920s, under strong pressure from the repressive apparatus, had to be able to distinguish between the moment for direct confrontation with the state (war of manoeuvre) from the one for a counter-hegemonic strategy (indirect confrontation), which had to be played in the realm of civil society (war of position). Kandil's article scrutinises the MB counter hegemonic strategy of conquering all the positions in the 'battlefield of civil society'. The author's final conclusion is that a successful penetration of the social system (education, associations, Ngos, and professional unions) was not sufficient to take power because the authoritarian reaction was more effective.

The most accurate and articulated application of the Gramscian frame to Islamist movements comes, however, from Thomas J. Butko in his 2004 seminal article 'Revelation or Revolution: a Gramscian approach to the rise of political Islam'. He analyses Islamist ideology with the comparison of the Gramscian theory of revolution and the Islamist one through the lens of the three most authoritative Islamist authors in Islamist political thought: Mawdudi, al-Benna and Sayyed al-Qotb. Butko highlights that Islamist parties have a clear political agency behind the cover of religious discourse and that they aim to conquer power – from which they feel they have been excluded - in order to create a fundamentally new social order (Butko, 2004: 60). Islamist political thought has a complete political toolbox similar to the one Marxists use. By comparing those concepts with the Gramscian ones he outlines consistentely the political meaning of Islamist actions but also the 'innovation' provided by such theoricians of Islamism by actualising into an Islamic frame political contemporary concept such as leadership, vanguard, ideology and revolutionary strategy.

After 2011 and the Arab Spring, there was a new wave of analyses that used Gramscian paradigms (Brustier, 2017). Most of those articles viewed the Arab revolutions as a new international trend. For a left wing approach to the Arab Revolutions, in particular the Egyptian one, Brecht de Smet's book "Gramsci on Tahrir: revolution and counter-revolution in Egypt", by developing the gramscian category of Caesarism (in order to explain the neo-authoritarian outcome of the Tahrir revolution), is probably the most original (De Smet, 2016). For a Gramscian

approach to Islamist studies is instead to be pointed out Gillian Kennedy's "From independence to revolution: Egypt's Islamist and the contest for power". Gillian Kennedy's work applies the category of cultural hegemony as previousely done by Bayat and Kandil. She focuses however on the 'progressive' Islamists that she opposes to the 'radical' and 'conservative' (G. Kennedy, 2017). De Smet and Kennedy both look at the historical evolution of the Egyptian power system as a passive revolution.

The philosophy of praxis[23]

Before going into the detail of the research project, in this section I will briefely deal with philosophical Marxism, which underpins the methodology of this research[24].While I am not dealing with socialist or working class movements nor with the neoliberal capitalist mode of production, Marxian sociological categories nonetheless inform this research. In particular, I chose to use the Gramscian method of analysis to understand the political change that unfolded in Tunisia during the historical events of 2011-2014. While in Tunisia the communist party is not a major political actor, I consider the Gramscian method useful and applicable for Islamist movements. In order to justify more convincingly such an approach, I discuss the peculiar Italian Marxist philosophical tradition and clarify afterward some of the key political sociological patterns used in this dissertation.

What I call in this section 'Italian Marxism' refers to that specific tradition of Marxism that developed in Italy between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Gramsci himself in 'Prison Notebooks' brings out the idea of a specific Italian Marxist tradition (Gramsci, 2003: 378-472). By introducing this point, Gramsci places himself in that debate brought about by the Idealist Italian tradition, in particular Croce and Gentile, that reduced Marxism historical materialism into a purely historiographic method (Croce, 1922; Gentile, 1897; 1899). In that particular

[23] 'Philosophy of praxis' is the expression Gramsci uses in the Notebooks to define Marxism; it is also an expression that he uses to define a specific Marxian philosophy.
[24]For a further understanding of the method and epistemology, see section 7 of this introduction.

historical period between the two centuries, a neo-idealist[25] wave invaded Italian and European culture. Both Croce and Gentile, influenced by Labriola's work on historical materialism (Labriola, 2013; Dainotto, 2008)[26], began their career against Labriola's Marxism. Labriola was himself a particular kind of Marxist. In open dispute with the Marxism of the second international, he dismissed the approach of these Marxists that read history as a deterministic succession of stages and refused philosophical materialism when reduced to an economicist dimension. Silvano Spaventa, a prominent Italian Hegelian, had influenced Labriola when the latter was a student at the University of Naples; in Labriola's vision of historical materialism, the dialectic nature subject/object was the key. He borrowed from German Idealism (and the young Marx) the power of subjectivity and human agency as a factor of transformation. Finally, according to Labriola, Marxism was not a closed system of explanation rather a philosophical and analytical tool of critique.

Gramsci's "philosophy of the praxis" was indeed part of an intellectual project of renovation of Marxism, inspired directly by the founder of Italian Marxism: Antonio Labriola. Gramsci's originality was to apply a methodology of analysis to the Italian situation trough which he developed a larger intellectual project that used Marxism as a complex and rich analytical toolbox. First, he privileged the national dimension as a frame to understand the horizon of social and historical change. Second, he analysed the history of Italian unification and nation building - *Risorgimento* - as a struggle between social groups. Third, he was interested in the way religion, culture (*folklore*) and common sense (the 'philosophy of the common people') influenced the way people acted individually and collectively (Gramsci, 2003:p.326).

The nature and methodology of the philosophy of the praxis led Gramsci to explore areas outside the traditional Marxist frame. The Gramscian approach that I

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[25] By neo-Idealism, it is meant a new trend of interpretation of Hegelian philosophy. In Italy Croce and Gentile were the the most important representative. In particular, Croce becomes an intellectual of international fame (Gramsci, 2033:p.5-23). Gramsci engages directly with Croce, hegelism, storicism in the Notebooks (Gramsci, 2003:p. 381-419)

[26] Antonio Labriola published several publication in which he proposed its own understanding of Marxism. In particular, he proposed a philosophical reading of Marx that he called the philosophy of praxis, based on a neo-idealistic reading of historical materialism's Marxian theory.

adopt to understand Islamism and social change in Tunisia, is indeed a methodology that allows the use of Marxian categories in order to better explain the nature of social and political change (and its own specific ideological models) in a country that is neither Marx's industrial society not contemporary Europe.

As in Gramsci, the historical process is understood in this research as a dialectical movement in which factors of change (structure) and continuity (agency) influence each other. The worldview of people is considered essential to understand the ideological framing of the conflict.The main assumption behind this study is that that material life (not only economics) has a strong influence on the way individuals and social groups build up their consciousness of the world. Religion, in this case Islam, is the way people look at the world, in which a general abstract belief is accompanied by a series of practical attitudes and moral codes. In this sense religion is an ideology, and as long as no other secular political ideology can be sufficiently 'national'[27], it can undestundable be the tool in which social contradictions and conflicts are better expressed. Islamism is in this sense a transformative ideology because it takes the philosophical language of the official ulemas to ordinary people joining high and low culture. This union is necessary for democratic modern politics.

The use of Marxian categories in this research is essentially analytical. In particular, I'm interested in: 1/highlighting the tension the struggle social groups produce in the process of building a political national community; 2/ the way those groups become aware of their social being; 3/ how they build up ideologies in order to actively participate to the transformation of their social being.

In the next three sections of this chapter, I go through the way I apply the Gramscian method to the research. If I insist on the Gramscian method, here, is because what I take from Gramsci is first of all his methodology. Just like the Italy's Gramsci, Tunisia is a quite young country, living a step of an historical process of nation-building not yet accomplished and whose social classes are less defined by an

[27] Gramsci uses the term national in the sense of 'popular'. For him the Italian Risorgimento project was not national because masses did not participate to it (Gramsci, Il materialism storico, 1977; 231). He also talks about 'national-popular' when refering to a cultural expression which is not reflecting the popular concerns.

industrial economic system than a contradictory process of modernization.The 2011-2014 period of dramatic political transformation highlights some shortcomings of this process. First, I explain the process of nation-building as one of struggle between social groups that fight for being included into the political scene. By social groups, I distinguish two historical middle classes (or petty bourgeoisie) that developed out of the education modern system and popular ones that entered into the public space in particular junctures of political crisis. Just like the Italian Risorgimento, this process is dealt by ruling elites that are detached by popular masses. If, on one side, the desturian party, is a mass movement, it instrumentilizes the popular classes for its political goals, keeping them away from political participation. In the 1970s and 1980s the contradictions of the system produced social unrest and campaign for political liberalization. I call this process 'democratization', but it implies the Gramscian idea of passive revolution because the change is never complete, but rather the result of the absorption of elites.

The process of political inclusion is one of class struggle. I compare Islamists movements to the Gramscian modern prince. Although I distinguish the Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhoods family with the contemporary Salafists, I argue that the way Islamists in general make politics (i.e. merging into social groups) is comparable to the way the organic Gramscian party was supposed to. The most important focus of the research is on the Salafist radical public of Tunisian urban areas. While studying this process, my theoretical preoccupation was to define those groups as conflicting social classes. Because not immediately related to the Marxian mode of production, the Gramscian category of subultern was indeed useful. In particular the way it was developed by the Subultern Study school I described above. In order to describe the salafist social constituency I use in my own category, the *muhammishun*, but I have in mind the Gramscian paradigm.

Finally, I argue in a more typicall Marxist scheme the issue of the nation as an ideological discourse of the new ruling class, the one that gained from the new political order. The constitutional deal, I argue, is the symbol of the new middle class deal, represented by Nida Tunis and Nahda. This is reflected by the constitutional preamble that reflects the new political and cultural order. This political deal

produces a new version of *Tunisianité,* which is the way the ruling elites historically framed the idea of the Tunisian nation.

Democratization as a passive revolution

Central to the understanding of Tunisia in this research is the concept of democratization. I conceive democratization[28] in this research as an inclusive historical path of nation building. The issue is how inclusive this process really is and how social groups are integrated into it. The way Gramscy dealt with the process of Italian unification (*Risorgimento*) inspired this research. As a conseguence, in the second chapter (after this introduction) the Tunisian case study is introduced through a critical analysis of three key moments of crisis in Tunisian contemporary history. First, the Ben Youssef/ Bourguiba struggle at the onset of independence; second, the social crisis of the 1980s accompanied by the first attempt of political liberalisation; third, the post-2011 period of contention and constitutional transition. By going through this crucial political junctures (Hogan and Doyle, 2007), the second chapter highlights both the path dependency of the most recent political transformations and the ambiguity of such long process of transformation. Those historical dynamics are useful to better understand the mechanisms of the democratic institutional building since 2011.The argument is that such periods of transformations determine change and continuity in the power structure as much as inclusion of new political actors and exclusion of others.This process is what otherwise Gramsci calls "passive revolution"[29].

[28] The relation-ship between Gramscian thought and democracy has inspired a vast debate within the Gramscian studies. Broadely speaking, the debate is split in between those who see Gramscian approach as a 'Leninism for the West' (Galli della Loggia 1977: 69; Salvadori 1977: 40-41) and those who hold the concept of radical democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Giuseppe Vacca, 1999).

[29] For the use of passive revolution in post-arab spring politics see: Brecht de Smet, Gramsci on Tahrir: Revolution and counter-revolution in Egypt (2015). More broadely, there is a recent

The first crisis began during the two years of struggle (1954-56) between combatants (*fellaghas*) and French troops and between Bourguiba and Ben Youssef. Ben Youssef had been the secretary general of the neo-Destour during Bourguiba's exile at the beginning of the 1950s. Then it was his turn to leave the country for Egypt, and when he returned in 1955, he found the *fait accompli* concerning the agreement of autonomy that Bourguiba agreed upon with the French authority (Ladhari Noe, 1956). The disagreement on the way to lead the struggle against the colonizer became a head-on confrontation between the two leaders until the Sfax congress of the neo-Destour, held in November of the same year, excluded Ben Youssef from the party (Toumi, 1989). This struggle for the leadership deepened existing cleavages in the country. With the assassination of Ben Youssef on 12 August 1961, an authoritarian method of government was inaugurated and characterised Bourguiba's time in power (1956-87) (Camau and Geisser, 2003).

While described often as a political struggle for power between the two most important representatives of the national movement (Vandewalle, 1980), it was much more than that. First, with the partial exception of the"Jellaza uprising" of 1911[30] , the national movement was mostly the political activism of its leaders : Farhat Hached, HabibThameur, and Tlili (Mahjoubi, 1982; Camau, 1978; Rivlin, 1952) with no major popular mobilization until the 1940s. Second, its ideology had never been clearly elaborated beyond the necessity of complete national independence. The Bourguiba/Ben Youssef conflict showed the contradictions within the national movement. The Fellagha, the pro-Ben Youssef movement of armed resistance, saw the rural population of the centre and south as the protagonists of the anti-colonial struggle (Nouschi, 1990): the Youssefist struggle against Bourguiba gave an ideological tune to the confrontation, making divisions within the nationalist movement clear for the first time. Behind Bourguiba were the trade union and the

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development of Gramscian categories of passive revolution in the study of IR. See for example A.D. Morton (2007).

[30] A tramway accident that killed a Tunisian pedestrian was the spark of the events that led to the killings of several demonstrators. This event happened against the background of the debate on wheter Muslim Tunisian, naturalized French citizen, should be buried in Muslim cemeteries (TawfiqAyadi, 1989).

new middle classes of the coastal regions; behind Ben Youssef a traditional trading middle class (often from the south), the old tribal sector of the south and central regions, and a section of the zeitunian elite (the traditional religious education system of the country). The violent end of this conflict, whose outcome was Ben Youssef's assassination and the repression of his constituency, gave the birth to the authoritarian Tunisian system (Camau-Geisser, 2003). This conflict left the possibility of the emergence of socio-political pluralism out of the nation-building process. The political system Bourguiba imposed after independence was based on a social constituency that emerged victorious from the struggle for independence[31].

The second crisis occurred in the 1980s. It was over a decade of social contention and political struggle (1978-1992). It began with the 1978 uprising[32] and ended up with the crackdown of Islamists in the period between 1990-92. During this second crisis, the country experienced two, partially free, elections in 1981 and in 1989; a major uprising in 1984 (bread riots); and a *coup d'état* in 1987. A critical historical analysis of this period has not been conducted yet[33], it is indeed a key critical historical period for two reasons. First, it signals the end of the deal between the liberal bourgeoisie and the ruling classes and the subsequent crisis of legitimacy within the same nationalist middle class. Second, it sees the coming on the political scene of the popular masses and their Islamization. It is in this critical period that the contradictions of the national project – hidden until then - emerged. By the time the Burguiba system began to show the first cracks in the late 1970s, the country's political landscape had changed. On the one side, Islamists had built a coherent ideological alternative to Bourguibism (Burgat and Duwall, 1993.); on the other, the liberal elites left the nationalist bloc and focused their political struggle on democratization (Ayari, 2009). In 1981, the liberal MDS party ran in the first semi-

[31] The Bourguibian system, moreover, gained legitimization through the accomplishment of independence, at that point backed by French, who were afraid of losing an ally through whom they could maintain a degree of influence on the country (H. Bourguiba, 1954)

[32] In parallel with the lobbying of liberal circles (in 1977 Human Rights League is founded), a completely new cycle of contestation emerged. After the riots of 1978, in part as a consequence of the clash between the UGTT (the General Worker Union) of HabibAchour and the Destour party, Bourguiba held partially free elections. The elections were rigged and the Islamist party, which had made an official request for legalization, was denied the license.

[33] See however the pivotal sociological works of the Tunisian sociologist Abdelkader Zghal.

pluralistic elections (the Islamist party was not permitted to run), while the 1984 bread revolt signalled the beginning of widespread dissatisfaction and social unrest (Seddon, 1986: 2). By 1986-7, political contention developed in parallel with a process of Islamization of public spaces, especially in the poor suburbs of the largeand middle towns[34] . Ben Ali's *coup d'état* prevented a major confrontation between the regime and the Islamists (Chouikha and Gobe, 2015: 48) while using the discourse of political liberalisation in favour of the liberal elite that had split from the Destour in opposition to the authoritarian degeneration of the late Bourguiba period.

The third and last moment of crisis is the 2011 uprising and the constitutional process that followed. The constitutional dynamics of this period (2011-2014) are the continuation of the 1980s political liberalization described above. As Ben Romdhane argues, the political Tunisian elite had struggled for democratization since the 1970s (Ben Romdhane, 2011) and the Tunisian revolution was nothing but the continuation of a long struggle for its accomplishment; a further step in the process of democratization and inclusion (Stepan, 2012; J. Kinsman, 2011; Boose, 2012). In other words, the constitutional consensus was a new middle class compromise that accomplished a process of political emancipation that started from independence. While the liberal middle classes could partially participate in the 1980s through the experience of the liberal destourians, Islamists emerged as an acceptable political actor only after 2011, with Nahda being one of the bargainer of the 'pacted transition' (D.A.Rustow, 1970). Before getting into a deal, however, the polarization Islamists vs nationalists of Bourguibian inclination shaped the post-revolutionary political conflict. In this sense the creation of Nida Tunis, a new party of former destourians, and its victory in the 2014-15 elections, proved the resilience of a specific political and social bloc. The novelty, however, was that Nahda was allowed to run for political elections, becaming the main competitor and second parliamentary group[35].This process is what can be defined as the historical middle class compromise because along excluded social class that Nahda represented

[34] Ghozzi, a historical Nahda member, Interview with the author. January 2017 (skype conversation)

[35] By the time I write at the end of 2016, Nahda became again the main parliamentary force, becouse of the split within the Bourguibian and modernist camp.

politically was finally integrated into national institutions. The compromise, however, implies inclusion and exclusion at the same time. Just like Rostow and Di Palma argued for transitions in Latin America, the bargaining is possible and successful thanks to the exclusion of the radicals (D.A. Rustow, 1970; G. Di Palma, 1990). The process of integration into the nation (the democratic political space of participation) is therefore not completely accomplished because large social groups, engaged in contentious politics during and after the uprising, do not find institutional representation and pay the price of the compromise. Ansar al-Sharia, the radical Salafist group did represent these groups in the political juncture 2011/13, but in a way that was not acceptable to the new democratic regime. Exclusion from the insitutions and from the 'nation' is the outcome of their challenge.

After the analysis of the three major political crises and transformations of modern Tunisia, the overall conclusion is that a long process of political awareness began since the national struggle against the French until the constitutional deal of 2014. In this sense, the proper democratization process of 2011/2014 can be thought of as inclusiveness. The three crises described above led to a political evolution whose outcome - the inclusiveness of previously marginalised social and political actors - is less the product of a conversion to 'democratic' values than the synthesis of a social struggle (Salame, 1994).

While I use democratization in the sense of a long historical path toward an inclusive nation-building process, I consider Islamists as the main social and political actor through which new social groups come into the public scene. I argue, in other words, that Islamist movements and parties are the political instrument that channelling the social contestation into a political project that demands institutional inclusiveness. In the next section, I examine the role of Islamists in shaping social participation, pointing out the differences between Nahda main stream Islamism and Ansar al-Sharia Salafism. In so doing, I will use the Gramscian category of 'modern Prince', arguing that the Islamist movement as a whole in Tunisia played the same role that Gramsci established for the Italian Communist Party.

The Islamist modern prince

The main argument of this section and one of the key theoretical underpinnings of this research is that Islamism is a legitimate political expression of social groups and therefore an inevitable component for an inclusive process of democratization. Because Islamism is one of the ideological tool through which social groups participate politically, democratization implies a certain degree of "Islamization". Islamism, however, is only a general category, that does not explain the different ways in which it can be translated. In other words, Islamism is multifaceted; the development of social Islamist movements in the last 50 years (in Tunisia as elsewhere) featured different political trends, schematically identifiable as moderate, radicals and revolutionaries.

My thesis argues that a sociological approach to Islamism can help to understand how different social groups appropriate different features of Islamism.The following sections will illustrate how it happens and how Islamist movements succeed in merging into social groups. In the first part, I highlighten the role of the petty bourgeoisie and its coming forward as a social and political force through an Islamist political framing. In the second part, I emphasize the role of the *Jamaa* (Islamic community or society) in forming social class awareness. In applying this argument to Salafists, and based on the findings of the fieldwork, it is argued that Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia represented the way in which a disenfranchised social class framed its social contention through a political Islamic project.

The Islamic middle class

Several works have shown how the Muslim Brotherhood is a political and social phenomenon of the religious middle classes (J.A.Clark, 2004; Fahmy, 1998; Rinaldo, 2008; Gumuscu, 2010). Middle classes however were not all 'Islamic' and the same definition of what is a 'new middle classe' may vary. Lisa Anderson, for example, uses the term "new middle classes" to define the educated petty bourgeoisie that emerged from the process of colonization and that stood for a nationalist

ideological frame very similar to the ideas and political concepts of western countries (L. Anderson, 2014). 'Middle classes' or 'new middle classes' is a loose sociological category that applies to rising social groups, different from traditional ones, that become dominant and impose their political domination through the elaboration of ideological frames. That frame was, at the beginning of the process of nation building and until the 1970s, nationalism. With the exception of Egypt, where a large Islamic *jamaa* emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, and was eventually crushed by the Nasser regime (Mitchell, 1993), in the Maghreb countries an autonomous Islamist expression of the middle classes did not appear until the 1970s. Before then, the Islamic trend was 'hidden' within the larger nationalist ideology of the years of national struggle. In Tunisia, in particular, Islamism and Arab nationalism were fused within the Youssefist political tendency until a specific Islamist party emerged in the 1970s (Entelis, 1974)[36].

In the 1970s, coinciding with the post-independence social and economic crisis, nationalism began to be challenged, and the opposition to the regime adopted new ideological repertoires, Islamism being the most influential. After independence, in fact, society developed a more complex structure (education and urbanization played an important role); a new petty bourgeoisie came on the scene and began opposing the social and political domination of the social group that held the reins of the political system. Islamism became the ideological frame of this contestation, and the opposition to the hegemonic apparatus (Althusser, 1976) was framed through cultural and religious values.

In Tunisia, the evidence of the emergence of an Islamic public anchored in the lower middle classes has been highlighted in the pioneering work of the Tunisian sociologist Elbaki Hermassi (1984)[37].The Islamic movement developed as an

[36] In Morocco, for example, the Istiqlal party of Al Fassi emerged as an independent movement only after the socialist split (J. Benomar, 1988). In Algeria, the different trends co-existed within the same nationalist party (FLN), and the dominance of one trend over the other was only determined by the leadership of the moment (Mortimer, 1996).

[37]Sociological works on Islamists are very rare. I like to highlight however a turnaround in the sociological Tunisian school that makes reference to the Elbeki Hermassis's pioneer study on the Tunisian Islamist movement in the 1980s. One of is most interesting follower today is the young

intellectual and political movement rooted in secondary schools and universities. As Hermassi reveals, however, these new Islamist intellectuals had a social background that linked them very closely to the working class.This is probably why the Islamic movement was able to be successful among those strata of the population[38], by the time widespread popular contestation exploded in the streets of the country in the 1980s. Islamist intellectuals and militants were better placed to be 'organic' than the other opposition political groups. The Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI, later Nahda) represented the political party that was able to frame this petty bourgeoisie's demands into a coherent political project. Until the clash with the Ben Ali's regime at the beginning of the 1990s, it played the role of the leading opposition movement rooted in the radical masses, mostly a disenfranchised public rising from the margins of urban areas.

During the 1990s, Nahda disappeared from the scene and the Islamic public began to change. In her study of Islamic associations in Egypt and Jordan, Clark 'discovered' a 'new' 'new' middle class (Clerk, 2004), composed of an economic counter-elite, able to provide financial resources, symbolic social status (showing off a puritan but clear status of social success) and cultural self-consciousness (not necessarily political)[39]. It was no longer the traditional and insular *Ikhwani* petty bourgeoisie. This new Islamic constituency was composed of social entrepreneurs with international connections and social and economic resources.

As a conseguence of the policy of political normalization that lasted for 20 years in Tunisia, this change was not clear until 2011. Although a general process of individualized piety could be perceived in Tunisia before the uprising (Cavatorta and Haugbølle, 2012), it was only after the revolution that a large Islamic public sphere emerged, similar to the one Clark described in Egypt and Jordan. The general call for political and social participation that came after 2011 from all sectors of society was

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scholar Jihad Bel Haj.In particular see his work on the Salafi movement in Douwar Hisher, a Tunis suburb (manuscript, 2016).

[38]On the social and political uprising of the 1980s see the previous section.

[39]Proved in her work on Islamic activism in Egypt and Jordan, Islamism or Islamic values could be at the base of active engagement in civil society. She noticed as well that most of those Islamic social entrepreneurs constituted a web of relation-ships, whose aim was more social prestige and economic success than a direct political project.

translated in practice through Islamic values for many citizens (see chapter 3). The mobilization of charitable activities became the first indication of such a phenomenon and developed into a sophisticated and complex web of connections and resources: something similar to a 'new Islamic civil society' (Merone and Soli, 2013)[40].

This active engagement in the public sphere after the 2011 uprising has taken different 'Islamic' forms. Some of those who newly engaged in civil society were often not politicized and their engagement stopped with the ethical imperative of 'helping the others'. For others, like old Nahda militants, social engagement comes as a consequence and evolution of their previous engagement. Since the 2012 IXth congress, in fact, the traditional Tunisian Islamist party had begun to separate the *dawa* mission of the party (preaching or engaging in social activities) from the strictly political activities (ICG, 2012), which implied for militants a choice between engaged social work or institutionalized politics[41]. A third faction of newly engaged Islamists was more radical and committed to a new Islamist political project that, as its Nahda predecessor in the 1970s, thought of Islamic engagement as a total-itarian (*shumuli*) revolutionary worldview.

This general Islamic engagement was initially channelled in the first free and fair elections of October 2011 towards the only credible Islamist party on the scene: Nahda. Since then though the Islamist Tunisian landscape developed into different trends. Freedom of speech and post-revolutionary mobilization showed how varied Islamic and Islamist political and social engagement could be. Fieldwork for this dissertation suggests that the different trends of Islamist activism depended in large part on the social and material conditions of the people mobilized. While the middle classes relied on the traditional Nahda party or looked for a form of pietistic and political Salafism (Wiktorowicz, 2006), a new salafi-jihadi political project emerged on the scene, gaining support among the disenfranchised and poorer masses that had

[40] See also the chapter 3of this dissertation.
[41] The process of separation of Dawa from politics has been finally completed in the May 2016 Xth congress.

been disappointed with and left out of the moderation process of the traditional Islamist party.

The muhammishun as a social class and the Jamaa as class consciousness

Until 2011 Nahda was the only Islamist party. After the mobilization of 2010-13, the Islamist landscape became diversified and a new salafi radical organization emerged as its main competitor.

The differentiation of Islamism in moderates (Muslim Brotherhood) and radicals (Salafists) emerged in other countries in the 1980s and 1990s. In Tunisia, Islamism had the opportunity to develop into the public arena only after 2011. The salafists, as they appeared into the experience of Ansar al-Sharia, are the expression of a radical, 'revolutionary' social movement that not only monopolized the contention dynamics during the period 2011-13, but also played the role of the 'modern prince' for the marginalized social classes that did not recognise themselves in the political project Nahda offered. The latter had played this role in the 1980s, when it attempted to be a 'directive' party allied with popular, Islamized masses that confronted the regime. During the post revolutionary period, however, the traditional Islamist party renounced its transformative role and 'dropped' working class neighbourhoods and radical socio-economic demands, leaving the space for a new Islamic *jamaa* to develop.In the following section the dynamics of formation of a salafist *jamaa* (Islamic society), as emerging from the fieldwork conducted in Tunisia, are examined[42]. Although ideological differences do exist with its MB precedessors, particularly when it comes to force Koranic categories on political radicalism[43], the development of a salafist jamaa described below is not different from that of any other Islamist group in its infancy.

The path of becoming a *jamaa* begins through both an individual and a collective move. The person 're-discovering' religion is usually young and goes through a process of 'objectification' of being Muslim: it is a first step towards

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[42]See also chapter 3 of the dissertation.

[43] Radical Salafism is more influenced by Wahhabist literature compared to the MB.

consciousness that passes toward Islamic consciousness[44].This moment of awareness corresponds to one's 'rebirth'. He (or she) will see him (her)self as someone who is realizing what living is for. He (or she) will see him(her)self as newly aware of the duties he(she) has in life towards him(her)self and the rest of the community. Becoming and practising 'being Muslim' means to have a permanent inner drive toward the fulfilment of religious duties. In these circomstances, Islam plays the role of activating an individual demanding of engagement. Religion comes therefore to the reborn Muslim as something that cannot just be 'lived' as repetitive practices the worship requires.This personal activation of a positive Islamic drive leads to a transition from individual to social behaviour. The personal duty to improve oneself becomes, within an Islamist mindset, an obligation or a duty to change society. In this case, the personal quest for a 'true' Islam, encountering collective duties and action (under certain conditions of social mobilization) may become a social and political project. Becoming a jamaa produces a separation with the rest of society. In a period of Islamic revivalism and contention, the jamaa becomes that religious frame providing the sense of this separation.

This 'new Muslim' takes the first step towards Islamic consciousness usually through Internet forums, scholarly literature or satellite TV programs. Although he (she) speaks to some of his (her) peers, this first step is above all a moment of subjectivity. The path that leads from individual to collective consciousness is the one that brings the individual to the group, thus triggering the process of creation of the *Jamaa*. Becoming a *Jamaa* means to identify the self with a larger group, that, in its proper religious and social meaning, will become a'special group'[45]. This stage of development of the salafist group is one of social empowerment. The group takes consciousness of itself by defining the 'borders' with all the ones outside of it.

This process of group formation was clear in Tunisia in 2011-13. When Islamic revivalism came on the scene, it was obvious that the way it was translated from individual to collective, from purely pious to activist, depended on the social

[44]It is generally understood, especially in a period of Islamic revival in society, that being a good person (and a responsible member of the community) is being a good Muslim.
[45]*Al-Farqa al-Najia*in Salafistvocabulary.

context it was embedded into. When this process of Islamization came on the scene in the social space of urban or sub-urban lower classes areas of the country, the youth joined the *jamaa* because it gave them a special identity (already implicit in their social space), providing them with a further feeling of belonging to a group whose social and material position was a radical one.To use Marxian language, the social group 'in itself' was already there, in the social environment of the 'neighborhood.' Through the process of becoming a jamaa, it realized its own existence and interests; it became a social group 'for itself'[46]. Most of the youth that joined the *Jamaa* lived in a shared social system of relations and in very similar material and social conditions. This social group, otherwise defined as *awled al-houma* (the youth of the zone, a social definer of the group in itself), became a *Jamaa* in so far as adopted or was provided with an ideology (Salafist Islam in its jihadi or revolutionary tendency) that transformed social frustration into a socio-political struggle against the rest of society, perceived as oppressive. In joining the *jamaa* the individual understood that his (her) social marginality was not something to be ashamed of. On the contrary, belonging to a group helped the individual understand his(her) role in society and empower him(her) towards social action. The Islamic definition of the social 'border', implicit in the idea of jamaa or (special group), makes sense in so far as it already exists in practice; shaping this border is the way the struggle is defined. In salafist/religious terms, the first individual stage is that of 'purification' (*tasfia*) and education (*tarbia*) around the idea of the oneneness of God (*wahadat allah*). The second is that of *wala wa al baraa* (obedience and distinctiveness), through which the 'special group' emphasises its loyalty to the religion (and the group) and its mistrust of all outside of it.

The development from individually re-born Muslim to a collectively engaged one passes through social action.The moment of 'praxis' is explicit with the activity

[46] The use of Marxian categories in this specific context may be confusing. The Marxist tradition would argue that class-consciousness regards the awareness of the relation of explotation into a capitalistic mode of production. This is not the case in the specific example of the *jamaa*. I volontarly use this category however, because the process of conscience is originally an Hegelian pattern of understanding the historical process; mankind become aware of its subjectivity through a dialectical praxis in which the contradiction (or the conflict) is the moment of consciousness.

called ‘commanding good and forbidding wrong’. While it may seem odd to consider this kind of activity as one of social engagement and militantism, the *amr bil maaruf* and *nahi an al munker* did historically provide an instrument in Islamic communities to be socially and politically engaged. By taking on their shoulders the responsibility to reprimand someone that is not fulfilling his(her)religious duties, the group or individual that performs it is stressing that Islam requires the responsibility (and duty) of each Muslim toward the entire community. This practice furthermore has political implications because it gives power to those who perform it to criticize the status quo and the ruling class (Cook, 2003; Meijer, 2009).

In the case of Tunisia, salafist groups sprang up spontaneously and independently throughout the country. As connections were built through social networks (youtube and FB pages), small local groups came to perceive themselves as a jamaa distinct and opposed to those outside of it. The autonomous process of group formation to the local level of the neighbourhood gave to the Salafism process the material shape of a social group that was evolving into a political project of opposition and transformation of society based on social conflict: the religious/salafi process of Jamaa formation masked one of social class.

The Salafist constituency in Tunisia is composed of a leadership of lower petty bourgeoisie within a large urban *lumpenproletariat*. A common ideology (*manhaj*) and approach characterized the activism and organization of the local salafist groups. Ansar al-Sharia was the political religious group able to frame and provide a structure to this social *mouvance* during the post-revolutionary period between 2011 and 2013. In participating into the process of contention and becoming a social movement, Ansar al-Sharia offered successfully to the Jamaa an organisation with a political project. At this political juncture, AST played the role of a modern prince. It is the final stage of a process of awareness that from the individual moves to the group until the creation of an organization that transforms religious/social awareness into a project of political transformation.

Tunisianité as a conflicting frame of the nation

After defining democratization as a historical process of nation building, greater consideration for what it means to be a 'nation' (and in the specific the Tunisian nation) is necessary in order to argue that *tunisianité* is its ideological framing. Following the theorization of nation building as a democratization process is the idea of nation as a bargained (political) space of inclusion into the national community. Political participation is what defines inclusion. Those who control the political system - the ruling elites - control ideology and hold the monopoly of the definition of what the nation is. The definition of being Tunisian depends on the ethics and ideology of the political elites who control power. When a new political order is established as the consequence of a new political bargain, the official rhetoric about the nation is adjusted. National rhetoric expresses itself in public statements or written documents, as in the case of the constitutional preamble.It appears as a process of political legitimization of the ruling classes in front of a national audience. The degree of acceptance of this 'discourse' depends however on the degree of representativeness of the ruling classes (Zemni, 2016).

The terminology used in Tunisia to define the nation's status is *Tunisianité*. This term, which means 'Tunisianess' in French (being Tunisian as something that defines the national personality in addition toother traditional distinctive elements of identity such as being Arab or Muslim), has been historically reformulated several times, as Hibou's work (20090) highlights. It has been, and some argues still is (Marzouki and Meddeb, 2016), an ideological tool of justification for the authoritarian political system established at independence (Camau/Geisser, 2003). The fact that this definition of being Tunisian changes with time demonstrates that the definition of national identity, and indeed the definition of the Nation itself, is an ideological construct the dominant elite builds. Consequently, the argument of being 'Tunisian', or the tunisianess of the nation, can be subjected to discussions once a new political deal is struck. One way to examine the changing discourse on *Tunisianité* is the analysis of the constitutional text. For this purpose, a specific reading of the national charter of 1988 had already been done (Anderson, 1991; Hibou, 2009). The focus in this section is therefore on the preamble of the 2014

Constitution, which symbolizes the middle class deal underpinning the new republican compromise around the newly established institutions.

This compromise was the outcome of the struggle between the two main political and cultural trends on the scene after 2011: Islamist and nationalist/Bourguibist.Two parties, Nahda and Nidaa Tunis, dominated the political scene during the constitutional period. From an ideological point of view, Nidaa Tunis recalls the modernist heritage of Tunisia inspired by 'Bourguibism'; it was born, in fact, in 2012, as a reaction to the Islamist predominance in the first phase of the constitutional transition. Nahda had re-emerged instead as an organized political party after 20 years in the doldrums. After significant social tensions and ideological polarization, the 'conflict' ended with a historical agreement.

This "historical compromise" takes a political-judicial shape through the approval of the new constitution anda new pact of citizenship. The discussion over the basic issues and 'shared values' of the nation was stated in the preamble of the Constitution after debated and controversial discussions (Bendana, 2015, p. 8/174). Once approved, it came to represent the agreed ideology of the nation, underpinned by the new definition of being Tunisian (*Tunisianité)*. The following paragraph well represents the political compromise described above.

Expressing our people's commitment to the teachings of Islam and its open and moderate objectives, to sublime human values and the principles of universal human rights, inspired by our civilizational heritage accumulated over successive epochs of our history, and from our enlightened reformist movements that are based on the foundations of our Arab-Islamic identity and on the achievements ofhuman civilization, and adhering to the national gains achieved by our people.[47]

The preamble points out how the nation is rooted in the reformist movement, which is that trend in contemporary Tunisian history to build and modernize the nation-state. The link between being Tunisian and "reformism" is one of the most

[47](Tunisian Constitution, translated in English by Yasmin foundation, pdf available at: http://www.jasminefoundation.org/doc/unofficial_english_translation_of_tunisian_constitution_final_ed.pdf

critically discussed in the academic debate on Tunisianité. This debate was particularly vibrant in francophone political science circles, both in France and among the Tunisian elite. In a 2003 book, Camau and Geisser argued that Tunisianité is the ideological discourse of a specific Tunisian authoritarian "syndrome" the ruling elite perpetuates. Béatrice Hibou, in an influential 2006 book, and building on the work of Camau and Geisser, emphasised that there was a degree of acceptance of authoritarianism on the part of many ordinary Tunisians, especially the middle classes. In 2014, she came back again to this idea, insisting on Tunisianité as a key ideological tool to understand the ruling class justification of their power system (Hibou, 2014).

While reformism is traditionally a heritage Bourguibists advocate, during the two years of constitutional discussions, Islamists developed their own particular 'reformism/tunisianité' narrative. On this specific point, the harshness of the discussion in the constituent assembly proved how the theoretical definition of Tunisianess was a critical political one. The discourse reflected the identitarian underpinning of a deeper political and social struggle, where the Tunisian reformism had been used as a repressive tool for justifying crushing Islamism (or any altenative political and cultural expression). Several topical moments characterized the constitutional debate; the most critical one was the struggle over Article 1, in which the very definition of being Tunisian was formulated, and its specific relation to Islam set out (Feuer, 2012: p. 5). The agreement on Article 1 wasgoing to be the premise for the ideological formulation of *Tunisianité* in the preamble[48].According to

[48]This article has been key since the first Bourguibian constitution. It declares: "Tunisia is a free, independent, sovereign state; its religion is Islam, its language Arabic, and its system is republican". The definition of Islam as the religion of the state was considered from all analysts as the perfect juridical 'cunningness' Bourguiba found to secularize the state without taking Islam completely out (MH Chérif, 1994; L.Hajj, 2011; M.Kerrou, 1998). Jurists, however, in answering to particular issues raised by the application of law in sectors of not clear definition tended to interpret this article differently, making the reference to Islamic laws a constitutional constrain. For this reason, the most secular groups tried to obtain its revision in the new constitutional draft. Islamists, on their side, thought to modify it in the opposite sense, highlighting more explicity the reference to Islam. Thus, this article became the major point of struggle. The mediation was found in deciding tokeep it as it already was; in this sense this compromise was the key to open up the door to a shared vision of the 'nation' that was the premise for drafting the preamble itself.

the text, its origins are to be found in the cultural heritage (*civilisationnel*) of the nation. This heritage is a shared one, "the teaching of Islam and the Arab-Islamic identity of the nation" being part of it. These principles become part of the new concept of reformism, which found its historical roots in the "enlightened reformist movement".

After the approval of the constitution and the end of the political struggle with a mutually satisfactory compromise, both the Islamists of Nahda and the Bourguibians of Nida Tunis claimed this reformism as part of their own tradition. As a consequence of the constitutional ethos of compromise, however, both sides made the effort to get closer to the perspective of the opposite side. BejiCaiedEssebsi, the leader of Nidaa Tunis, claimed its direct connection to the history and ideology of what he calls Bourguibism (Wolf, 2014), but specified in several public statements that this heritage was never meant to be against Islam[49]. The intellectual elites of the Islamist movement, for its part, re-elaborated the myth of reformism through Islamist lenses, arguing that the first historical attempt of modernization in Tunisia was in fact Islamic. In this respect, the Islamic genealogy of the historical reformist movement was now linking together Abdelaziz Thaalbi (the founder of the nationalist movement before Bourguiba) to Mohammed Tahar Ben Achour (the leader of the zeitunian religious reformist movement) all the way toNahda itself. New Islamic intellectuals, such as Sami Brahami and Noureddine al-Khadmi, charismatic leaders such as Abdelfetteh Mourou and Ghannouchi himself, triggered a debate within the Islamist trend about this reformist heritage[50]. The Islamic reformist heritage would be, according to this reading, the Zeytunian reformist movement of the beginning of the 20th century; its father and symbolic figure, Mohammed Tahar Ben Achour. This intellectual/ religious trend (which is part of the more general reformist movement at the beginning of the 20th century) revived in Tunisia an old medieval theological discipline, the *Maqasid*, which had never been developed after

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[49]For instance, continuous religious references characterised his 2014 presidential campaign, re-adapting an old Bourguibian strategy of using religion as a tool to legitimize his power *vis à vis* the masses.

[50]In part linking it to the intellectual debate within the movement during the 1980s followed by the split of the so-called progressive Islamic trend (Jorchi, 2015).

the Andalusian savant al Shatibi had proposed it in the 14th century.The claim of this prestigious lineage, rooted in the reformist movement, and linked to charismatic figures in the national movement, gave Nahda a reformist legitimization without be forced to drop its main ideological tenet about the Arab and Islamic heritage of the country. The reference to Ben Achour (and the entire reformist Zeytouna tradition) reconciles the Tunisian Islamist project with the reformist policies formely identified with Bourguibism and attunes it to the modernist project based on *Tunisianité*, giving to it an Islamic connotation.

Thus, the new ideological definition on the nation (tunisianité) is in tune with the perceptions of the social constituencies the two major political blocks in power represent. In this sense, tunisianité has partially expanded from its original constituency, which was mainly 'modernist' and anti-Islamist. This enlargement constitutes a step forward towards a shared national ideology of being Tunisian.

Discussing Methodology

This research is the outcome of three years of fieldwork from 2011 to 2014. In this section, I will first explain the methodological approach that guided it, developing the notion of positionality *vis à vis* the object of research. In the second part, I will illustrate how I dealt with the two periods of research: fieldwork and analysis of the data. The first period is divided in three phases during which I developed the choices related to my fieldwork according to the evolution of a volatile political situation that characterises processes of regime change. The second period was the time of critical scrutiny and theoretical development over the empirical material.

Qualitative vs quantitative

The choice of methodology in a research project is a function of the author's epistemological approach. An introductory section on methodology should therefore justify the methodological choices and show awareness of the existing debates. Since the beginning of the developement of social sciences as a separate scientific field at the end of the 19th century, the debate centered on which approach would be better

suited for the understanding of reality, each implying a different epistemological frame. The discussion was first raised by Dilthey (1977) who, reacting to the positivist attempt at framing social sciences along the methodological lines of the hard ones (Compte and Durkheim), proposed an interpretativistic alternative in which, he argued, objectivity was an impossible target for disciplines dealing with human beings. As a consequence of this discussion, the academic debate on methodology split in two camps: those who supported a quantitative approach, considered ‘objective’ and built on the neutrality of the observer from the phenomenon observed, and those, following Dilthey methodology, applying a qualitative one (Benton, 2014). While these two positions are still visible today, the radical positions of those supporting one option over the other have been replaced by pragmatism (Tashakkori&Teddle, 2003), which is a compromise between the two. Max Weber was the first one to look for a conciliatory position. Weber argued that if it is not possible to demonstrate (even with qualitative methods) the objectivity of human behaviour outside the subjectivity of the inquirer, this should not be a justification for a priori excluding the possibility of truth. Notwhitstanding the ambiguity of the epistemological nature of the scientific truth, the researcher should try to reach a position as close as possible to a neutral one[51]. Later on in the 20th century, the matter was transferred from an issue of reciprocal de-legitimazation between the two sides to one of pragmatism, where the search for the more suitable instruments of investigation was at stake. The epistemological issue became secondary and its direct link with the methodological approach was downplayed (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). For Roberts (2002) the point is the reliability of each method for the proper research project.The perspective should be that the choice of the method to apply for the research would depend on the specific questions the research is asking.While the positivist approach believes that the real world is out there, independently from our subjectivity (observation and technical tools of investigation can produce knowledge of it), the interpretativistic approach, drawing from Kantian criticism, believes that what we can know is only the phenomena; i.e.

[51]The ideal types were the Weberian solution (Weber, 1978).

the appearence of the real world (Eisener, 1993; Philips, 1993). The real world, in itself, cannot be known. According to Roberts (2002: 13) however, employing qualitative methods does not automatically imply the renunciation to objective knowledge. Objectivity can be obtained with qualitative methods through the application of a procedural type of objectivity, making the research design explicit and allowing full inspection of the choice of method. In this case, objectivity is the aim to be reached by the research process through a critical subjective approach; this particular subjectivity is defined by Kvale as 'intersubjectivity' which is that space of 'truth' achieved through the interview. According to this conception, reality does not exist outside our own interaction with it.Subjective is, according to this approach, a 'dialogical' conception of truth and the interview a negotiated space of meaning between the interviewer and the interviewed (Kvale, 2006).

This research employs a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative research is preferred to the quantitative in most researches on the MENA region for several reasons (Pellicer et al., 2015). The first is the difficulty quantitative research finds in countries whose regimes are mostly authoritarian. In these contexts, the data are scarce or not credible (Clark, J., 2006).The second is the scarcity of reliable surveys and opinion polls. Even where such instruments developed over the last few years, serious problems arise in terms of the credibility of such data coming from a population that is often extremely skeptical and suspicions of state institutions. Tunisia after the Arab uprisings is an exception in many respects and it is improving both in official data collection and reliability. However, at the time of my research and specifically on the topic examined, it was not the case yet. First, my research was conducted in a turbulent and volatile period of regime change when available data were scarce and the statistical apparatus of the old regime was under severe criticism (Hibou and Meddeb, 2011). Second, the core topic of the research - the study of the salafi-jihadi movement - made it impossible to have any data or even previous references in the scholarly literature. The issue was new, and because of its 'threatening' and 'ideological' nature, it was even more difficult to have any neutral interpretation and explanation of it from within the country.

The task of this research was to understand the social milieu this phenomenon was imbricated in and the interpretation Salafist players had of themselves as a transformative political/social/religious actor. The interpretative nature of my task led me to the only methodological choice available, namely participant observation and an analytical interpretation of social actors' narratives. Going beyond the traditional struggle between quantitative versus qualitative approaches, the academic debate on methodology in political science and specifically in Middle East area studies assumes by this time that the choice of methodology depends on the purpose of the research. Michael Quinn Patton (2002: 264) explains how 'the classic qualitative-quantitative debate has been largely resolved with the recognition that a variety of methodological approaches are needed and credible, and that the challenge is appropriately matching methods to questions rather than adhering to some narrow methodological orthodoxy.'

Tunisia was a difficult country to study before the revolution. Moreover, the societal space this research investigated is still largely understudied. In this sense, this research is a mapping study of an empty space of research that only observant participation and open-ended interviews could help filling.

Interviews, positionality and ethics

Interviews are a key component of this research for a number of reasons, the most important of which is the scarcity of alternative sources. When the field investigated is a poorly studied one, interviews can reveal insights that open sources and other second hand resources do not provide. In this case, the direct communication with the actors is the only instrument of knowledge available. In Tunisia, where political Islam in general has been an off-limit topic for decades, no much literature on MB Islamists existed and none at all when it came to Salafists.

Interviewing in itself is however not sufficient and can be a problematic tool if not accompanied by a serious critical approach. Interviewing, both elite and non-elite social actors, has in fact shortcomings. The most important obstacles to the collection of data and the comprehension of the reality during the fieldwork into a qualitative type of methodology is the crossing of what Erving Goffman refers to as

‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’ (1990). Each interviewee in fact tends to present the reality according to the position in which he/she sees the researcher. In most of the cases, the former will judge the researcher as an outsider, and the telling of the story will be inevitably selected and presented in a way that makes it impossible to test. The interviewer and the interviewee are separated by an ‘invisible line’, which can be crossed only with a long and deep observant participation. As Brian Moeran (2007: 14) puts it, ‘once you have crossed the invisible line separating front stage from back stage, things are never again the same as they were before. You, too, like your informant, can play both games according to context and social role. Your informants realise that you have learned the rules and know the difference between front and back stage games; as a result, they stop pretending when in your presence and allow themselves to be seen as they are. The knowledge of the context and the familiarity with social implicit truths make the contact with the informant and the dialogue on the reality he lives in deeper and, in a certain sense, more ‘true’.This kind of observant participation requires two specific conditions in order to be achieved. The first is the time spent in the field and the second is the reseracher’s own positionality.

The ethnographic way of staying in the field has few formal rules and depends in large part on the experience and personal attitude (personality) of the researcher. This method, originally applied in antrophology, has since been used and ackowledged by the rest of the social sciences (Swartz, Turner, Tuden, 1979). The advantage of the method becomes clear when the researcher is exploring a new reality (object of research), about which neither previous literature exists or formal recorded material is available. The choice of this method in my case is indeed the consequence of the type and scope of the research and the type of knowledge the research aims to achieve. It appeared evident to me that this method was going to be the only real credible one for my own case study. The literature on the ethnographic methodological approach is not clear-cut about the sufficient time for a fieldwork of this type to be credible. The schedule time varies from a minimum of six month to one year. My particular situation as an insider/outsider allowed me a much longer stay, as I will later describe.

The second question that arises is the positionality of the reseracher vis-à-vis his/her object of analysis. If there are doubts on the validity of the data gathered through the interviewing method, the same can be said of the ethnographic method of observant participation. As a human being studying other human beings, the issue of the truth is much more complex than for any kind of natural scientist studying natural objects. The object of the research is human beings, which are not static and unchangeable. The interaction between the researcher and his object of study triggers a dynamic in which, both the studier and the studied change in the process (Mullings, 1999), probably never reaching an 'objective' and 'definitive' truth. Interviewing or meeting people implies the participation of the researcher. By positionality, I mean therefore that variety of roles and positions in the research site each researcher finds him/herself in (Kingston, 2017). The positionality of the researcher does create several types of reactions (repulsion, sympathy, expectations, censures, information not shared) and can be depending in different degree to the social position the research occupies himself/herself, especially when the society studied is not the one the researcher belongs to.

Does the researcher born in the society he is studying have greater legitimate tools to understand it because he is perceived as an 'insider' or, instead, as argued by Herod, this idea is just a myth, and whatever origin the researcher has, he is always an outsider vis à vis the object studied? The "research process is a social one in which both interviewer and interviewee participate in knowledge creation and, consequently, although the 'outsider' and the 'insider' may shape this process in different ways, it make little sense to assume that one version of this knowledge is necesserely truer in some absolute and objective sense" (Herold 1999,p. 314).

The position I was in with respect to the object of research was quite atypical and deserves to be further detailed. I lived in Tunisia for 12 years (from 2003 to 2015) and merged deeply in society, having married a Tunisian woman and being embedded in a complex set of local social relations. In this respect, I considered myself an 'insider'. While I developed a sense of understanding of the world I was in like an insider, I kept, at the same time, an outsider's perspective because my background and basic cultural references are in Italy, the country where I grew up. I

brought my ‘external world’ into the new one that had become my own universe: thus I felt as much an ‘insider’ as an ‘outsider’.I agree to some extent with Herold’s statement that it is not necesserely your position as an insider that gives the researcher the ‘monopoly’ of the understanding of that society. As such, the process of research is always that of an exchange between yourself and the other. We could say that both being part of that society and external to it, vis-à-vis the object of the research, we are all the time in a dialectical position.More than that, I am convinced that being too much of an insider can bring problems and inconveniencies when it comes to research work. In the case of my study, for example, a major inconvenience of being ‘a total insider’ was the passionate involvement in a dramatic process of societal transformation, which can be a negative factor for understanding ongoing events. Moreover, being part of the society does never prevent the researcher from being an insider as well as an outsider. Societies are diverse and the researcher can only belong to a certain social group or live in a physical certain space. The level of education, life experience and/or the type of belief (religious or cultural or communitarian) are factors of differentiation that influence the way the allegedely internal observer may be perceived (as external to sectors of what is, nominally, his own society). This is particularly dramatic in post-colonial societies, in which the differences between the educated and uneducated, urban middle classes and lower classes (urban or rural) is usually significant. These differences are marked in Tunisia very dramatically by the use of the language. French may be a sufficient or sometimes more suitable mean of communication with some categories of bourgeois or middle class people while Arabic is preferable with Islamists and even compulsory with most Salafists (or more broadly with popular strata).

I advocate for my self the position of insider/outsider because of the particular condition I found myself in before and during the fieldwork. I could take advantage of my two-fold position: as an insider, I felt the force of the transformation process; as an outsider, I had enough distance to understand the social and political implications of the Islamist/Salafist movement without being involved into the existential struggle that its rise implied among genuine insiders. Because of the rise of Salafism in particular, the country has lived a dramatic split. In this kind of

situation it is difficult to analyse such a phenomenon while you are a Muslim and a citizen yourself (your own personal destiny is at stake). I make my arguments without introducing moral judgments while penetrating the social actor mind-set, applying analytical categories through a methodological interpretative approach (M.Weber, 1978)[52].

Not only had my double nature of insider/outsider influenced fieldwork, but the particular social context I was living in as well. My Tunisian family comes from an environment in which the myth of Tunisia as a modern, European/type country, happily moving towards European standards of modernity, was only an irony of the regime's propaganda. They come from a small town in the Bizerte governorate where, very typycally, the young generation of the 1990s and 2000s worked for foreign offshore companies or, mostly, tried to emigrate to Europe.[53] In this milieu, the social structure is divided between a narrow stratum of petty bourgeoisie (civil servants, schoolteachers, lawyers or doctors) and the rest of the population. The latter is composed by a large young population divided between girls, looking mostly for marriage as the more practical way for social and material emancipation, and men (supposed to provide this emancipation for their family and their future bride), frustrated with poor working conditions or unemployment.

The sensibility I developed toward this social environment was coupled with the personal material situation I found myself in during my life in Tunisia. This particular situation made me feel sympathetic to the lower income strata of the population, as I could understand proprely the feeling of material and psychological despair that many young people felt toward their country and the political/hierarchical structure of that society. The difference between me and the people I ended up studying was, however, not only the resources that I still had because of my status as Italian, but my cultural background. This space between the material critical situation a person is in a given society and its coherent intellectual frame of understanding it is provided by what we can call 'cultural references'. When I saw many of the young people of this social stratum making sense of their

[52]For a further insight on Weber interpretative method see : F. Ringer (2002) and I.B. Turner (2002).
[53]The late generation was going to France the new one in Italy.

social position through the lens of Islam, I was able to distinguish between the background of social anxiety and political frustration and the culturalist/religious repertoire in which it was framed. Although I am not a Muslim, I developed a degree of ‘sympathy’ for the frustration of this sector of the population, which allowed me to grasp the social and political significance behind the rise of the radical Salafist movement.

It should be added, that my experience of ‘staying in society’ was to be tested in the different situations during the fieldwork. Due to the focus of my reserarch, it was obviousely not the same to interview a journalist, an official cadre of a political party or an informal social actor (a Nahda, a secular, or a salafi-jihadi activist). While for the first category of people I was more tipycally confronted with the type of problems already illustrated in the section on the elite interview method; for people such as salafi youth, the most important factor of ‘expertise’ was the ‘management of the social and cultural situation’ and the empathy established with the informants (Ramaioli, 2017).

This kind of particular fieldwork and my positionality toward it raised several ethical issues as well. Observant participation implies a high level of penetration, if not identification, with the group of people object of study. This particular position may become difficult to sustain on the long term. ‘Hanguing around' with the jihadists of the neighbourhood is not neutral. First, to have a degree of participation you should define exactely your role and identity. Each position that you take may have consequences on others. The first time I was introduced to the group of Ansar al-Sharia of *Jamaa al-nour* in Douaw Hisher, for example, I risked putting myself and my young informant in danger. While my facilitator declared that I was a Muslim, allowing young Salafists to become more open towards me, I had to make them aware instead that it was a misunderstanding and that my position was not of a new convert. For several weeks after this ‘incident’, I was told to watch out and the family of the person who helped me, allegedely was called in for clarifications. Another example had to do with my main Salafist interlocutor in the neighbourhood. When the situation in 2013 precipiteted toward a more securitarian/repressive environment, Salafistswere observed much more closely and police informants came

back in the neighborhoods. This had as a conseguence that my Salafist friend, because of its spending time with me, was suspected to have a link with ‘foreigneirs’, bringing his case to possible judiciary consequences. As the prove that we were observed, I was called in the same period by the responsible of the anti-terrorism special forces to come to relate about my presence in the neighbourhood.

When staying for longtime in the field, sharing part of the experience with the same people you are supposed to study, at a certain point choices have to be made as to how much and how far is your participation going to. What is the information you are collecting all about? How much are they really useful for your purpose? In this sense, your role can have an impact on people’s life and your staying in the field can have implications much behind the purpose of the research. To avoid a confusion of roles, I tried therefore to apply a ‘double time’ approach. In the first stage, I put myself in the position of the neophyte joining a new group and showing interest and participating in all he is hearing and learning. In the second stage, I tried to be like the decanted activist that comes out from its first enthusiastic participation in the group and begins questioning all he/she has learned. Being an insider though keeping an outsider standpoint is the position I tried to keep in my fieldwork. I acknowledge however that a perfect situation of neutrality is impossible and that the human relations I had with the people I met during the long fieldwork changed me. The person that I am today is not the same that I was when I first started this research.

The practice of the research

The research is divided in two stages: the fieldwork proper (the fieldwork itself is divided in three sub-periods) and the analytical scrutiny. The first period is one of intense participation in the object of study, while the second is the moment of distance and analytical reflection of the empirical findings.

First stage: three phases of fieldwork

When the uprising broke out, I was immediately ‘in the field’. While my current PhD project had not been even thought about, I tried my best to participate in those historical moments. I was in Tunis, the capital city, and had to wait until the

last few days (11-14 January) before the fall of Ben Ali to be able to 'see' and 'participate' in the revolution. What impressed me the most about the last days of upheaval in the capital city was not the famous 14 January demonstration in front of the Interior Ministry, but the sudden and violent attacks of youngsters against police stations and other symbols of private and public property (municipality buildings, banks, post offices, supermarkets). The night of the 13th January, (when Ben Ali pronounced a conciliatory speech broadsted on TV) I crossed several areas of the city by car and noticed that the 'revolutionary front' was split in two. The bourgeois neighbourhood of Nasser, for example, was full of cars and people on the street chanting about the new hope of change while the working-class areas of the rest of the Ariana district was full of disappointed youngsters in the streets with sticks and stones in their hands ready to flood the main avenue of the capital (Avenue Bourguiba) the following day. During the days and months before the constitutional elections of October 2011, I participated in all the major demonstrations and political events in Tunis. I also visited several times the region of Sidi Bouzid, looking for the 'revolutionary cradle' and its political and social main actors. While I was not officially engaged in PhD research, I met during this time many of the leading revolutionary figures. In Sidi Bouzid, I was 'guided' by a historical left wing activist engaged in organizing a network of associations, especially in the city of Menzel Bouzaiaene. I also met at this time a group of young people from Hay Ennour, the marginalized area of Sidi Bouzid where the famous Bouazizi came from. In Tunis, I met and discussed with most of the bloggers, considered at that time as the heroes of the revolt[54]. In the spring of 2011, I met Francesco Cavatorta, the person who hired me to participate in a research programme on Political Islam funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

The second part of the fieldwork is the period during which I 'professionalized' my approach to fieldwork research and refined my theoretical interests. During this phase, I narrowed down my approach and applied the method of writing a journal article (or chapter) each time I felt one specific topic was taking

[54] Among the most famous ones: Kalloutcha, Aziz Amamy, Ayary, Sofiène Chourabi, Lina ben Mehenni.

shape while doing fieldwork. The articles published in this period are included in the body of the dissertation and have to be considered as the elaboration of specific topics examined during fieldwork. Writing while doing research gave to my findings a form of open laboratory in which the main arguments come back repeatedly to be each time specified, or re-analysed in a more reflective perspective. While for example in the articles of the first period I was more concerned about the involvement of Islamist movements in the process of democracy-building, at the end of my research work I discussed the broader articulations of the different Islamist movements - Nahda party and Ansar al-Sharia - within the frame of the constitutional compromise. In the period between late 2011 until mid- 2013 I observed the growing jihadi movement and got close to some of the leaders of the new salafi jihadi strand of Ansar al-Sharia.

The growing attention I gave to this phenomenon was the consequence of its success. While the political institutional process of the post-uprising period became focused on the constitutional debates and monopolised by political parties with an older generation of politicians at the helm, the working-class neighbourhoods of almost all middle and large urban areas of the country were organizing an alternative project. This movement was a consequence of the 'Islamization' of the social space. Following this phenomenon was the most natural consequence of my observant participation approach. During this phase, I also elaborated my PhD proposal, an ethnographic study of a group of young people who socialised during the revolution and had gone on to found a local section of Ansar al-sharia. I met for this purpose young jihadis (simple activists or leaders) and had more systematic discussions with them. I already had some experience with youth becoming jihadis in the region of Bizerte (Menzel Bourguiba and al-Aliya), but during this phase of systematic work I focused rather on Tunis metropolitan area. I visited El Omrane el Aliya, Hay el Khadra and Douar Hisher. The latter, in particular, became the area on which I focused increasingly because I met a young AST leader who became my conduit into the world of the young Ansar al-Sharia *jamaa*. This research project failed however because of the beginning of the violent escalation between the jihadi group and the

state until the outlawing of the group in 2013. The security situation did not permit the continuation of the project.

Due to security concerns and the development of political events on the national stage, with the highest level of polarization in society and the final deal between moderate Islamists and secular-nationalists, it became more useful for me to put the salafi-jihadi phenomenon into its context. This context was the normalization of political and social contention on one side and the accomplishment of the constitutional phase, on the other. The agreement on the constitutional draft came because of a historical compromise between political enemies. The rethoric and language of this agreement was clearly expressed in the preamble of the constitution that emphasised the signification of the nation, called otherwise tunisianité (tunisianess). This national ethos has culturalist-ideological underpinning, but it also hid a political struggle between two solid social groups, as I demonstrate in the research. With this idea in mind, I spent the last period of fieldwork (2013-14) travelling around the Southern regions of the country. I followed the electoral parliamentary campaign in Sfax in 2014 and witnessed the tension between two different middle classes and Nahda's attempt to provide a counter-hegemonic strategy against the return of old nationalistic forces (chapter 4). I also spent some time in the regions further south (Medenine and Douz gouvernatorates) where I interviewed a number of political entrepreneurs, mainly from Nahda and CPR, to verify how much of a specific pan-arabist/Islamist feeling was shared by the historical heritage of the Youssefist movement.

Second stage: Critical scrutiny and theoretical development

In the final stage of the research, after the long period of field research, I spent one year to reflect on the material I had gathered and the theoretical intuitions I had along the process of data collection. While in the more methodologically sound approaches, it is suggested that fieldwork should be researching data confirming the hypothesis generated through theoretical elaborations (Flick, 2009), I was at the beginning more influenced by the field experience than any previous theoretical framing. The practical and the theoretical interrogated each other. For that, my

procedure is best defined as an open and evolving laboratory of thought. Nevertheless, I had to leave the country and cut any connection to it for a while in order to better make sense of all my data and experience. I consecrated this period of research entirely to the intellectual development of the intuitions I had on the ground during the previous years. The final approval of the constitutional in 2014/15 gave to the period I studied an 'official' closure.

Plan of the research and case study

This research is a case study whose generalizations wish to contribute to the field of the Arab politics and Islamist studies. The usefulness of case studies as part of the qualitative methodology has been largely debated in the literature: in particular, the case-study approach has been critized because allegedely does not lead to any discovery that may provide useful information for the same class of phenomena under examination (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994). "General, theoretical knowledge is considered more valuable than concrete, practical one" (B. Flyvberg, 2006: p.66). The critics stress the idea that it is not possible to generalize based on a single case, thus not contributing to scientific advancement. While the shortcoming of the choice of a single case may be a sound argument, I argue however that the advantage of this approach is bigger than its defaults. The examination and in depth analysis of a single case can be much better suitable to produce knowledge, becouse closer to the reality. While the risk of staying on a level of not generalizable 'narrative' do exist, the coherence of the choice of the case and a correct relation to a general debate can overcome this risk.

Another important critic addressed to the case study methodology is the reseacher's biasis. It is argued that case study suffers from the problem of bias as the researcher may be involved personally in the case under examination and the evidence gathered as a consequence not objective. While there is little doubt that the social sciences in general suffer from the problem of bias, as I already explained in the previous section, it may not be true that the case study is particularly predisposed for it. The element of arbitrary subjectivism will be significant in the choice of categories and for a quantitative and structural investigation as well (Flyberg, 2006:

ibidem, p. 83). This type of research remains, to the author's point of view, very relevant not simply because it can be highly informative, but also because there are criteria of scientific rigour that can be applied to ensure that the examination respects the standards the discipline sets itself.

All of what has been discussed previously in this introduction chapter is contingent on making an informed selection about the case study itself. Nevertheless, what are the reasons to choose Tunisia for this project? Tunisia between 2011 and 2014 provided a very interesting case of regime change and post-revolutionary mobilization. The fact that the contention politics was translated into Islamic activism provided a further interest for a case study on Islamist polity.

The dissertation is a collect of journal articles published between 2012 and 2016. It is divided in 4 chapters (besides introduction and conclusion) that correspond to 4 different stages as to 4 different thematics. In the second chapter, I argue that the present situation of bipolarization and political development of the Tunsia after the 2011 Ben Ali topple down is the result of an historical struggle for the inclusion into the national politics. This conflict is framed ideologically, between nationalists and Islamists, and reflect a class struggle between social groups that strive for political and social inclusion. In the third chapter, I explain the emergence of an Islamic constituency and the research deals with the evolution of Nahda and its ideological underpinning. In the forth chapter, I deal with the radical Salafist movement of Ansar al-Sharia: the Salafist project emerges as a social movement that represent the *laissés pour compte* of the post revolutionary politics. The chapter 5 correspond to the last period of the transition. After Nahda accepted the constitutional compromise with its nationalist rival, he must deal with the persistence of what the Islamist camp calls the 'deep state'. The persistence of strong levearage of the old nationalist bloc on the apparatuses of the state posit an issue of survival for Islamists. In addition, the critical experience of government is under scrutiny. In this chapter, by following the Nahda campaign for legislative elections of 2014 in Sfax, the thesis highlightens the attempt of Nahda of building a counter-hegemonic strategy throught the alliance with the local Islamic social constituency and part of the economic sector.

This research fills a gap in literature on Islamism and salafism in Tunisia. Most of the publications on Islamism in Tunisia refers to the 1980s politic[55]. Concerning Salafism, I provide a completely novel study. By providing a detailed case of a salafi-jihadi movement this research has an important add value in that it gives a unique case of close observation of the birth and development of a salafi-jihadi movement. The way the research approaches this study provides an example of how an Islamic *jamaa* develops, and how its emergence encroaches with social and political contention. The period of post-revolutionnary poitics in Tunisia also provides a case usefull as an example for the larger regime change debate.

Data

Geographical division

a. Governatorates

Governorate	**N. Interviews**
Ariana	11
DouarHisher (Mannouba)	25
Ben Guardene	7
Bizerte	5
Douz	6
Hamma (Gabes)	4
Kasserine	6
Medenine/Jerba	12
Sfax	14
SidiBouzid	11

[55]I like to highliten however, the next publication of Rory McCarthy study on the Nahda leadership in Soussa. The author spent one year, interviewed many of the local leaders, and through their witnessing, reviewed all the history of the movement.

Tunis/Ben Arous	72
Tot.	**173**

b. Macro-regions

Macro areas	**Interviews**
South (Sfax-Medenine-Gabes-Douz)	43
Center (Kasserine-SidiBouzid)	17
North (Tunis-Ben Arous-Mannouba-Bizerte)	113
Tot	**173**

Disaggregate for categories

a. Islamist/salafistdivision

Affiliation	**Number**
Nahda (militant and cadres)	35
Salafists (militants and cadres)	15
Jihadis (militants and cadres)	30
Islamic associations	20
Tot.	**100**

b. Islamists' influence area cadres and militants

Affiliation	**Number**
CPR	5
WAFA	5
Leagues	1
HT	5

Tot	16

c. Non Islamists militants and cadre

Affiliation	**Number**
Al-Jumhuri (ex PDP)	4
Ex RCD/Nidaa Tunis	6
Ettakattol	1
Watad	6
Comunist Party	3
Modernists/Qotb	5
Tot	**25**

d. Intellectuals (journalists and experts)

Intellectuals (journalists/experts)	**Number**
Islamists	9
Non-Islamists	5
Tot	**14**

Others

Others	**Numbers**
Security experts and personnel	5
Young unemployed	7
Rappers	6
Tot	**18**

Chapter 2 Nationalism and Islamism behind the Tunisian liberal compromise

Introduction

In this chapter, I employ historical sociology to account for the Tunisian institutional compromise of 2014, sealed with the approval of the Constitution. I argue that the relative success and the democratic outcome of the political transformation following the fall down of the Ben Ali's regime must be explained within the frame of a historical struggle between social groups. The two main contenders - nationalists and Islamists - represent two social middle classes that emerged during the process of nation building. Both classes enter into the political arena to impose their ideological view on the polity of the nation. This process of building a political community is made through a social struggle that produces ideological representation. In contemporary times, the national movement was the first moment during which a consensual ideology was produced and framed the political battle for independence. It was however a large frame within which different trends co-existed. The post-independence state saw one specific trend emerge from within the nationalist ideology and impose its hegemony: Bourguibism (from the name of the leader of the nationalist movement). This hegemony was the consequence of the Bourguiba's political victory over the other strong leader of the national movement, Salah Ben Youssef. The latter's ideology, based on pan-Arabism and Islamism, opposed to Bourguiba an alternative vision of the national project. These two different ideological strands created a split within the nationalist camp that reflected different social and geographical cleavages. In addition to the traditional commercial petty bourgeoisie of the south of the country, the Youssefist camp gathered behind it the nationalist Zeitounian clerics and the southern tribal groups that had participated in the armed resistance against France; the Bourguibian camp was instead backed from the trade union and the emergent middle class issued by the French system of education. Bourguiba was able to impose his hegemony because of the legitimacy he gained in the nationalistic struggle. This dominance of the political system from an ideological point of view did not go uncontested and a

first opposition movement developed from within the Destour (the historical nationalistic party) in the 1970s. A liberal trend emerged under the leadership of Ahmed Mestiri and early human rights activists. This political trend represented sociologically the old 'medina' bourgeoisie that, after being allied with Bourguiba, complained about the lack of democratization of the political system. Until then, however, political participation was the monopoly of social or intellectual elites (mostly as a product of the development of universities). The entrance in the political field of larger social groups came only in the 1980s following the demise of the implicit social contract between citizens and the post-independent state. The Islamic trend developed during those years. Rachid Ghannouchi, the charismatic leader of the first Islamic movement, was born in a region in the south of the country, where Youssefism had been very strong. The Islamist party represented in general a social and geographic constituency close to that of the Youssefist movement and Islamism played as the ideological frame within which new emerging middle classes came into the scene. Symbolic and political references to Islam had been marginalised under the Bourguibian/ modernist ideology and this is one of the reasons why a counter-ideology that had to express a firm opposition against the ruling class of the independence generation appeared through Islam and its cultural references.

The 2011-14 period of contention represented a third moment in the historical process of confrontation between those different constituencies. In the 1980s, the clash between the two sides ended only when the stronger of the two contenders - the nationalist state - prevailed. After 2011, the struggle began again; this time however, the two competitors came to a deal. The different outcome of the recent post-revolutionary contention, compared to the one of the 1980s, is certainly due to the historical experience of the political actors; the conflicting parties understood that the more convenient solution to this struggle was democratic institutional building.

The reason for this long-term conflict can be explained with the development of mass politics. This process developed in parallel with the emergence of new social groups and elites. By the 1980s however, larger frustrated social groups occupied the public space and became the strike force of the Islamist movement. The success of the Islamist ideology and the irruption on the scene of popular marginalized social

groups scared the traditional middle classes, the faithful constituency of the nationalist block.

A middle class historically marginalized from power composed the first Islamist generation, represented by Nahda. When widespread discontent with the Tunisian regime took the shape of rioting masses in the 1980s, the Islamist movement reached the disenfranchised areas of the country and played the role of bridge between those masses and politics. In the post 2011 period, Nahda decided to 'drop' the popular masses and agreed to a liberal-democratic compromise with the nationalist camp. This move left a political gap of representation – political and ideological - in large working class areas of the country. While Nahda was busy in stabilizing the country and compromising with the nationalists, a new generation of radical Islamists took over. During the 2 years after 2011, radical Islamists gained strength in the urban areas of the country where most of the disenfranchised population was leaving. The rioting masses were transformed once again into radical Islamists. This led to the institutional inclusion of Nahda and the exclusion of the radicals.

Enduring class struggle in Tunisia: the fight for identity beyond political Islam[56]

Following the fall of Ben Ali, Tunisia has been undergoing a difficult democratic transition[57]. The final outcome of this process might not he the liberal-democratic system that many external observers wished for, although the approval of a new constitution in early 2014 suggests that this outcome might not be as far-fetched as it first seemed. Whatever the ultimate institutional outcome, the fall of the regime opened up spaces for the participation of citizens, political parties, civil society groups and social movements to mobilise and advance their visions of the

[56] Published. Ref: Merone, F. (2015). Enduring class struggle in Tunisia: the fight for identity beyond political Islam. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *42*(1), 74-87.

[57] Alfred Stepan, 'Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations', *Journal of Democracy,* 23(2) (2012), pp. 89-103.

future. The country moved rapidly towards a new political and social framework in which freedom of expression, in sharp contrast with the past, is an untouchable hallmark.

This change into a 'democracy' is however less than coherent and different outcomes to the 2011 revolution are still possible[58].Similarly to the other countries that witnessed revolutionary changes, different political and social trends have appeared in Tunisia, often contradicting one another. From a regional perspective, there are a number of elements that stand out. The emergence of Islamist parties as the leading actors in the region has led to the creation of a coalition of differentpolitical and social forces to oppose them, some of which are still linked to the power structures of the authoritarian past, as the Egyptian case highlights. The persistence and even deepening of the economic crisis, together with the absence of immediate material benefits for large strata of the population, has led the parties now in power to be accused of incompetence and unaccountability, which is a point that also Hanieh makes in his contribution to this special issue[59]. A sort of longing for the relative economic stability of the pre-revolutionary period has also re-emerged. This occurs at a time of high volatility with members of the former ruling elite attempting to come back on the scene, claiming to be the only individuals capable of dealing with the inefficacious squabbling between the new political contenders. As mentioned earlier, the Egyptian case is the most extreme example of this dynamic, with the return of the military as ultimate decision-maker in the political struggle, but the Eibyan case also points to the messiness of post-authoritarian politics and the longing for a degree of stability and security. Thus, while much has certainly

[58] Nouri Gana (ed.). *The Making of the Tunisian Revolution: Contexts, Architects, Prospects* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

[59] Emma Murphy, 'The Tunisian Uprising and the Precarious Path to Democracy', *Mediterranean Politics,* 16(2) (2011), pp. 299-305. See also: Adam Hanieh, 'Shifting Priorities or Business as Usual? Continuity and Change in the post-2011 IMF and World Bank Engagement with Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 42(1) (2015).

changed following the fall of Mubarak, Ben Ali and other dictators in the region, there are also a number of continuities that affect states and politics."[60]

Tunisia has much in common with these regional transitional trends, demonstrating both change from and continuity with its past. This article makes a fundamental claim from which an analysis of both change and continuity derives. It suggests that the process of regime change with the institutionalisation of the Islamist party Al-Nahda is the outcome of a long nation-building process and that it might not as revolutionary as it first seemed. While the revolution gave the opportunity to a conservative middle class to be included within the structures of power through its political representative, Al-Nahda, marking a change with the past, this has come at the price of the continuing neglect of Tunisia's disenfranchised, who remain excluded from power-sharing dynamics in continuity with the past.

At the beginning of the 1980s, two broad different trends occupied the scene of the opposition camp in Tunisia: Islamist and liberal. Their ideological disputes and confrontations emerged in the context of the political struggle for democratisation, but the two camps did not manage to cooperate successfully to provide a viable alternative to the regime in place. By the end of the 1980s, the conflict between the two became in fact so intense that the self-defined secular liberal parties largely stood with the regime against the Islamists[61]. This confrontation between Islamists and liberals does not simply have an ideological dimension; it also coincided with a social class conflict. Different social classes in Tunisia have been struggling since independence to be included in the process of state building. In the nationbuilding process, class struggle does not only produce the domination of one class over another[62]. The dominant class also develops a national narrative for its own purposes,

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[60] Goldberg Ellis, 'Mubarakism without Mubarak', *Foreign Affairs,* Eebruary 11, 2011 (http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67416/ellis-goldberg/mubarakism-without-mubarak, accessed September 18, 2014).

[61] Rikke Hostrup Haugbplle and Erancesco Cavatorta, 'Will the Real Tunisian Opposition Please Stand Up? Opposition Coordination Eailures under Authoritarian Constraints', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 38 (3) (2011), p. 335.

[62]I refer here to Antonio Gramsci's classical theory of hegemony, which examines how the dominant class builds an ideological apparatus in order to establish and strengthen its hegemony through

in order to secure its hegemony, engendering dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. In Tunisia, the modern nation state was huilt on the basic principle of modernisation. In order to realise it, the national leadership needed a unifying ideology in which national belonging was translated into a myth based on national identity, the *tunisianité.* Inclusion into the national ethos was and still is the condition for the success of the process of democratisation. Thus, the conflicting dynamics that emerged after regime change in 2011 must be explained as a process in which the new and old powers struggle one against the other; the new emerging powers fight to be included, the older ones to exclude the former. In short, the heirs of Bourguibian nationalism, allied with liberal and left-wing parties, have used the ideological tool of 'modernity' to exclude since at least the 1970s the 'new kids on the block'—the Islamists—from shaping the national narrative and ethos of the modern Tunisian state, labelling them as 'backward.' However, through both electoral legitimacy and political moderation[63], the Islamists have now entered the political system and in some ways accepted the concept of *tunisianité,* signalling a rupture with the past and striking an uneasy compromise with sectors of the secular left.

The process of radicalisation of the disenfranchised youth, on the contrary, is part of the struggle of marginalised social classes to be included in the 'Nation'[64]. Their exclusion from the nation-building process and institutions of governance, and particularly from the benefits of the economy, is the most powerful indicator of what has not changed in Tunisia. Thus, change and continuity can be explained in the

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ideology. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere. Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura,* Voi. II (Torino: Einaudi, 1948-1951), p. 9.

[63] AlayaAIIani, 'The Islamists in Tunisia between Confrontation and Participation: 1980-2008', *The Journal of North African Studies,* 14(2) (2009), pp. 257-272; Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, 'Moderation through Exclusion? The Journey of the Tunisian Ennahda from Eundamentalist to Conservative Party', *Democratization,* 20(5) (2013), pp. 857-875.

[64] Despite more recent findings on the middle class leaning towards radical Islamism, previous studies point to the connection between on the one side Salafism and radical Islamic movements and, on the other side, social exclusion and disenfranchised social groups. Gilles Kepel *{Le prophète et Pharaon. Les mouvements islamistes dans I'Egypte contemporaine* (Paris: La Découverte, 1984) explains, for example, how the emergence of radical Islamic movements in the 1970s was the effect of rural migration towards the city and consequent social exclusion. Patrick Haenni, *L'ordre des Caids: conjurer la dissidence urbaine au Caire* (Paris: Karthala, 2005) also reaches similar conclusions after his ethnographic research in one poor neighbourhood of Cairo. Por the case of Algeria, see Louis Martinez, *The Algerian civil war, 1990-98* (Chicago: Columbia University Press, 2000).

framework of a transitional process whereby new and old actors are trying to find a deal to live with each other in a democratic country, where one can legitimately take part without annihilating the other.

The notions of change and continuity are deployed to examine the Tunisian transition at both elite and grassroots levels. In the first part of the article, I follow the evolution of the inclusion/exclusion dynamic focusing on the middle class and its transformations throughout Tunisian history since independence. In the second part, I focus on Ansar al-Sharia, a radical Salafi movement that emerged in the aftermath of the Jasmine revolution. I propose that the conservative Islamist- leaning middle-class is keener on compromise and accepts continuity with the past for the sake of inclusion, whereas AST can be seen as a social movement working towards the mobilisation of the disenfranchised for radical change.

Inclusion in and Exclusion from the Process of Institution-building

Since the January 14th revolution, political elites struggled to find a constitutional solution to the vacuum of power caused by the departure of the president. A newly appointed government, which drew legal legitimacy from what has been defined as the 'general consensus'[65] elaborated a new institutional plan. Under the pressure of the revolutionary street, the old constitution, the ruling party—the RCD—and the department of the political police were dissolved. The same revolutionary movement provided, in exchange, the necessary legitimacy for the transitional government to accomplish the mission of leading the country towards the foundational democratic election of the Constituent Assembly (CA).In parallel to the government, a representative Assembly for the realisation of the goals of the revolution (ISROR, its French acronym) was formed including a large spectrum of political views, guaranteeing a degree of pluralism in the process. Although the

[65] The 'general consensus' was the expression deployed by Tunisian jurists to legally justify the new government and the new assembly's mandates, which lasted longer than the two months provided for in the constitution.

attempt at framing regime change as a democratic process was not new in Tunisia[66], this time a genuine democratic praxis was developed. In fact, through the first transparent elections in the country's history, the election of the CA was the evidence of a radical change in the traditional process of Tunisia's state building. As a nation-state, Tunisia was born out of independence from France in 1956; the idea of nation was the ideological underpinning of the nationalist movement. Similar to other countries of the region, nationalism was the outcome of the liberation struggle against the coloniser. Those involved in the process of nationbuilding after independence came from the middle class and the French education system, which provided them with the ideological tools to build the new state. Chief among the dominant ideals this middle class held was modernity, understood as the overcoming of both economic and social underdevelopment, which was believed to be the product of backward institutions and social habits such as religious faith[67]. This new middle class constituted the backbone of the bureaucracy in independent Tunisia and utilised nationalism and a progressive idea of modernisation to legitimise the institutions of the state[68].Bourguiba framed this drive towards modernisation through the marginalisation of Islam, relegating it to the private sphere, and through the injection of secular practices and Western- oriented economic and social institutions into the public sphere. Despite its authoritarian nature, which characterised Ben Ali's time as well, many secular- modernist Tunisians shared the goal of developmental modernisation and felt that Islamism was an obstacle to it. In reality, the generation that struggled for independence against France was split in two factions, both of which were nevertheless committed to the idea and goal of modernisation. One

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[66] Lisa Anderson, 'Political Pacts, Liberalism, and Democracy: The Tunisian national pact of 1988', *Government and Opposition,* 26(2) (1991), pp. 244-260.

[67] Emma Murphy, *Economic and Political Change in Tunisia: From Bourguiba to Ben Ali* (London: Paigrave Macmillan, 1999).

[68] James Bill, 'Class Analysis and the Dialectics of Modernization in the Middle East', *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 3(4) (1972), pp. 417-434; Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Emma Murphy, 'Transformation of the Corporatist State in the Middle East', *Third World Quarterly,* 17(4) (1996), pp. 753-772. See also Michael Ay ari. *S'engager en regime autoritaire: Gauchistes et Islamistes dans la Tunisie indépendante* (Thèse de Doctorat, Université Paul Cézanne Aix-Marseille III, 2009).

faction was led by Bourghiba and the other by Salah Ben Youssef[69]. The Bourghibian faction prevailed in this internal struggle and isolated its adversary. The visions these factions had for Tunisia's future, however, had different cultural underpinnings, with Bourguiba's faction looking to Atatiirk's model and being influenced by French rationalism, whereas the Youssefist faction was aligned with pan-Arabism and looked at the experience of Nasser. After independence, Bourguiba got rid of Ben Youssef and the so-called 'Zeitunian heritage'[70],because it was in conflict with Bourguiba's radically secular vision of modernisation. In fact, the Zeitunian sheikhs were considered the highest representatives of the old social order and as such they were perceived to be against modernisation. It followed that the part of the middle class aligned with Ben Youssef was marginalised from enjoying the spoils of power[71]. The transitional process of 2011 has included contestation of the Bourguibian conception of *tunisianité*[72],with the old Islamic/pan-Arabic ethos resurfacing and finding new legitimacy thanks to the arrival of AI-Nahda to power.

Thus, while the social and political modernist-nationalist bloc[73] seemed to be the real loser of the transitional process, the traditionally excluded Islamists became the largest political movement in the country. Partially reprising Ben Youssef's nationalist discourse and agenda, they demanded a more democratic process of institution-building through Al-Nahda and, in part, the Congress for the Republic Party[74].Thus, it seemed that the post 2011 democratisation process finally included those social groups previously excluded.

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[69] Kenneth Perkins, *A History ofModern Tunisia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 249.

[70] Interestingly enough, after the 2011 revolution, this representation changed and today the Zeitunian tradition is regarded as the first reformist movement of Tunisia. Malika Zeghal, 'Competing Ways of Life: Islamism, Secularism, and Public Order in the Tunisian Transition', *Constellations,* 20(2) (2013), pp. 254-274.

[71] Francesco Cavatorta and Rikke Haugbplle, 'The End of Authoritarian Rule and the Mythology of Tunisia Under Ben Ali', *Mediterranean Politics,* 17(2) (2012), pp. 179-195.

[72] Larbi Sadiki, 'The Search for Citizenship in Bin Ah's Tunisia: Democracy versus Unity', *Political Studies* 50 (3) (2002), pp. 497-513.

[73]I refer here to those people who took advantage from inclusion in the colonial system and were able to better interpret the need of modernisation as an essential aspect of the anti-colonial struggle.

[74] The party was founded in Paris in 2001 by the human rights activist Moncef Marzouki, who is today the President of the Republic. This party was the backbone of the political alliance that supported the Al-Nahda-led government.

The conflict between the nationalist middle-class (over-represented in the bureaucratic and repressive apparatuses, and enjoying an enormous ideological prestige) and the Islamic conservative middle class was the main obstacle to democratisation and inclusive state-building in post-independence Tunisia. The 2011 revolution permitted a sort of reconciliation between these two ideologically different middle classes. It is the compromise between them that drives the Tunisian transition today. This compromise constitutes a genuine change with respect to the past because there is agreement, albeit implicit and at times contested, that the Islamist ethos has to be integrated and has to contribute to the new democratic Tunisia.

The delicate balance between these two opposite forces—Islamic and secular— is in many ways the factor determining the balance between change and continuity in post-revolution Tunisia. One the one hand, there is continuity in the sense that despite pluralism, or possibly because of it, the struggle between Islamism and the French-inspired modernism with its emphasis on *laicité* is still very much present, as the debates around contested issues like individual freedoms show. On the other hand, there is also significant rupture with the past because traditional Islamism has become multifaceted and diverse, and the effort that Al-Nahda and the modernists are making to find a compromise to secure Tunisia's democratic future is challenged by other powerful, more radical Islamist forces. These groups are not only challenging the contents of the compromise between Al-Nahda and the modernists. Crucially, they are by implication challenging the *middle-class compromise* upon which the new Tunisia is being constructed. This has resulted in the re-emergence of old repressive practices, representing continuity with the past, when it comes to dealing with challengers who claim that they are not included in this revised concept of *tunisianité* and are therefore excluded from both its material and identity benefits.

The 'Deep State' and the Institutional Democratic Praxis

In post-Ben All's Tunisia, institution-building began with the experience of the Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution. It was the first time in Tunisian

history that councils were gathering and discussing freely and democratically[75]. In addition to political representatives, human rights groups, feminist organisations and the bar association also participated, along with young bloggers and representatives from the 'remote' regions of inner Tunisia[76].After the October 2011 elections, the ANC (the constitutional assembly) became the real arena of political conflict. In this phase of the process, and for the first time in the history of the country, all different cultural and political traditions gathered and debated foundational issues[77].

However, the institutional process of change engendered by the 2011 uprising was limited to a specific social class: the middle class. In part this reflects how negotiated political transitions work: dealing with rules and procedural mechanisms first to the detriment of regulating and solving economic and social conflicts. It would be impossible to deal with social conflicts in a democratising country, when the institutions of the state need to be rebuilt amidst great volatility; they are left for later, once the political system is stable. This type of transitions favours democratic liberty over wealth redistribution, with the middle class being both the protagonist and the beneficiary of it[78]. In Tunisia, the majority of the population was sidelined by this process, partly because material preoccupations were prioritised over debates about institutions and procedural mechanisms, and partly because the process itself failed to include them by focusing emphatically on identity and rules rather than economics. The revolutionary process expressed the frustration of both a new generation and a marginalised social class that remained on the margins of the institutional process of democratic transition. Most of those involved in Tunisia's

[75] Sami Zemni, 'The Extraordinary Politics of the Tunisian Revolution: The Process of Constitution Making', *Mediterranean Politics* (2014. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.eom/doi/abs/10.1080/13629395.2013. 874108#.VCmdGPldWpA

[76] Representatives from the regions of the interior were invited because of the important role they played during the uprising and because they represent the socio-economic divide existing in the country. Such developmental divide has been recognised as one of the main sources of social injustice.

[77] Rym Abidi, vice-president of a network of development associations, interview with the author, Tunis September 29, 2013.

[78] As also noted by Giuseppe di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

negotiated transition[79] either belong to an older generation or represented, like Al-Nahda, those who wanted to compromise in order to be integrated into the national project. The collaboration between the liberals who opposed Ben Ali's authoritarianism but not his secular modernisation project, and the Islamists started in the mid 2000s, when Al-Nahda's moderation process intensified[80]. The institution-building process in post-revolutionary transition has created the conditions for such a process of collaboration and compromise to be completed. Al-Nahda has become a conservative moderate party inspired by Islamic values[81], shedding its radicalism.

However, the uprising activated a new social subject, largely composed of radical, young disenfranchised people. The definition of this revolutionary subject as a specific political actor is problematic. In the aftermath of the fall of Ben Ali, debates about who would deserve the title of 'revolutionary subject' heated up. While it was agreed that society as a whole adhered to the revolutionary outcome, there was little doubt that the 'youth', or 'the revolting generation', was the protagonist of the uprising. More specifically, it was so for those who were in the streets during the uprising clashing with police. In fact, through physical confrontation with the security apparatus, they were the ones responsible for the collapse of Ben All's regime[82]. This specific group did not have a political or ideological frame of action, but was motivated by frustration. When the transition went on into the 'normality' phase, they were unable to find a party representing their interests, and in general they refused to engage in the institutional process[83]. Though they have not organised into a party or a formal movement, this group of marginalised youth continued to exist on the public scene and the revolutionary

[79] Gianluca Parolin, 'Constitutions against Revolutions: Political Participation in North Africa', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 42(1) (2015).
[80]Allani, 'The Islamists in Tunisia between Confrontation and Participation', cit.
[81] Luca Ozzano, 'The Many Laces of the Political God: A Typology of Religiously Oriented Parties', *Democratization,* 20(5) (2013), pp. 807-830.
[82] Amin Allal, 'Avant on tenait le mur, maintenant on tieni le quartieri'. *Politique Africaine* 1 (2011), pp. 53-67; Paola Rivetti, 'The Journey of Protests in the Mediterranean and Beyond: A Discussion About and For Social Movements', *Jadaliyya,* July 27, 2013, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/13051/the-journey-of-protests-in-the-mediterranean-and-b (accessed August 27, 2014).
[83] From now onwards, the article contains observations and statements resulting from my ethnographic fieldwork.

success they obtained provided them with enough confidence to think they could challenge the system. Thus, this new subject is composed of the revolutionary and marginalised youth that, in the post-revolutionary context, holds the rest of society accountable for not sharing the material and, equally important, identity and intangible benefits of the revolution. This new subject can be subsumed under the label of a type of activism that many Tunisians did not even suspect could develop locally, namely jihadi Salafism[84].

Despite representing a rupture with the past, the emergence of jihadi Salafism also highlights a point of continuity with pre 2011 Tunisia, in particular for the way in which those who dissent from the content and buzzwords of the mainstream, national project are treated by authorities. After the revolution, the middle-class compromise between former rivals on what modernisation and democracy mean for Tunisia, was under threat from those who dissent on the content and forms of such a political project. As before the revolution, the reaction of the establishment has been political marginalisation and repression.

One example is representative of this repressive praxis. At the end of August 2013, the Interior Minister declared Ansar al-Sharia (AST, the jihadi Salafi group) a terrorist organisation[85], highlighting a number of practical and symbolic continuities with Ben Ali's regime. First, the Interior Minister referred to the antiterrorism legislation, an instrument that had been prominent in 'legalising' Ben Ali's repression against the Islamists and, more generally, political opponents. Second, the whole scene reminded many of a similar press conference held in 1992, when representatives of the security apparatus showed evidences of Al- Nahda's involvement in terrorist activities and outlawed it. The labelling of AST as a terrorist organisation resulted in a ban on its public activities and made its membership

[84] Fabio Merone, 'Salafism in Tunisia: An Interview with a Member of Ansar al-Sharia', *Jadaliyya,* April 11, 2013. http://www.jadaliyya.eom/pages/index/l 1166/salafism-in-tunisia_an-interview-with-a-member-of- (accessed August 27, 2014).

[85] Perrine Massy, 'Ali Laàrayedh: 'Nous avons décidé de classer Ansar al-Charia comme une organisation terroriste', *Nawaa/Politics,* August 27, 2013. http://nawaat.org/portail/2013/08/27/ali-laarayedh-nous-avons-decide-de-classer-ansar-al-charia-comme-une-organisation-terroriste/ (accessed August 27, 2014).

illegal[86]. Symbolically, the old bureaucracy was 'showing off' and taking revenge on the protagonists of the revolutionary change.

The Same Old Story: Pragmatic Islamists and the Modern Middle Class versus a New Mobilisation

As described in the previous section, street mobilisation demonstrates that elements of change and continuity overlap, as Paola Rivetti suggests in the introduction to this special issue[87].The demand for democracy is nothing new in Tunisia's history, as the tentative democratic process of late 1980s demonstrates[88]. The liberals were part of the generation and social class that shared the ethos of the Bourghibian national project based on *tunisianité,* and had benefited from independence. Later, this group was joined by the old Marxist-Leninist generation, converted now to liberal-democracy. Until 2011, political struggles took place within the same social class and did not entail any deviation from the 'modernisation project', as inspired by rationalism and secularism with an emphasis on Tunisia being different from the rest of the Arab world. Ben Ali came to power in 1987 promising that the process of nation state-building would not derail from such developmental modernity, including democratisation and the protection of liberties. Therefore, the process seemed to evolve towards its 'natural' outcome: the consolidation of a democratic system based on a deal reconciling the two opposite parties within the same social class, sharing a similar vision of the world. Ben Ali's objective was to formalise a democratic social contract, a goal which had been frustrated in the past by Bourguiba's autocratic resilience.

The apparently linear evolution of this middle-class reconciliation was interrupted by the Islamists. They emerged as a major political force in the

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[86] Perrine Massy, 'Ali Laàrayedh', cit.
[87] Paola Rivetti, 'Continuity and Change Before and After the Uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco: Regime Reconfiguration and Policy-making in North Africa', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 42(1) (2015).
[88] Lisa Anderson, 'Political Pacts, Liberalism, and Democracy', cit.

moderately free elections of 1989, but the regime, refusing to grant them political legitimacy, decided to repress them with the backing of the majority of the other political groupings. The marginalisation of the Islamists was framed as 'a struggle for civilisation'; the Islamists became the obstacle to the evolution of the modern state and the deployment of any means against them was justifiable. More than two decades later, Al-Nahda's big opportunity arose in the context of the revolutionary process of 2011, which was followed by a transparent electoral process and the formation of a new government with the party at its helm.

Doubtless, the victory of Al-Nahda constitutes a change, but not a fundamental one. It also represents the accomplishment of a long-term political process, as the party members had already internalised the concept of *tunisianité.* When the Nahdaouis came to power, they were representatives of an old generation with little to no radical strength[89]. By the time it won the elections, Al-Nahda was no longer representing either the rebellious, revolutionary young generation or the project of establishing an Islamic state. Indeed, the moderate Islamic party represents a conservative social middle class that has always been keen to support and assimilate to the national project in exchange for material benefits and some references to their Islamic, conservative values. Of course, from an institutional point of view, Al-Nahda's electoral victory represents a big shift in the balance of power within the national political elite. However, socially it was not the real novelty. As mentioned earlier, the actual change is that the uprising allowed for the mobilisation of new and rebellious street actors that stand out as new social and political subjects.

The revolutionary process was the consequence of a deep split within society along a social class divide[90], and the generational cleavage overlapped with it to a

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[89] According to Zied Krishen, chief editor of the daily newspaper *al-Maghreb,* 'the revolution saved Nahda from a sure political death' (Interview with the author, Tunis, Winter 2012); Graham Usher, 'The Reawakening of Nahda in Tunisia', *MERIP online,* April 30, 2011. http://www.merip.org/mero/mero0430117utm_ source=twitterfeed&utm_medium = twitter (accessed August 28, 2014).

[90] Although bloggers constituted a challenge to the regime and their actions came to international attention, the 'real revolution was in the streets while we were behind the screen of a PC' (interview with the author, Sofiene Bel Haj, Tunis, Spring 2011). While most of the people that took part in the clashes overwhelmingly represented the lower strata of the society, the urban middle/high class participated in different types of mobilisation. They did not share either political sensibility or

significant extent. More than suffering from the absence of democracy, young people from lower social classes suffered from what can be described as social exclusion. Although they emerged as a visible actor during and after the uprising, this disenfranchised youth has however been present on the public scene for a decade, thanks to its role in contesting the regime. Under Ben Ali's rule, these youngsters were known by the security apparatus for clashing with police during football matches[91], and it is no coincidence that the first songs of freedom, defiant of the regime, were shouted without fear in stadiums[92]. These young people expressed their rejection of the system by rioting with the police when the circumstances made it possible or by escaping from the country, dreaming of the European Eldorado. When they talked about freedom, they did not think of freedom of elections or multi-party politics, but the freedom to realise their dreams that sometimes are as simple as to have enough money to get married[93]. Most of their hatred was directed against the police because it represents both repression and corruption at the same time. Policemen or RCD's local patrons were present in their lives as living symbols of what kept the repressive system working and of corruption. It should not be a surprise that this cohort of young people was not really interested in the establishment of a democratic system after the revolution. Neither were they interested in the strengthening of a democratic, gradual integration of the moderate Islamic party Al-Nahda into the institution-building process, as the party did not interpret or represent their radicalism. In addition, they were not interested in the dehate about *tunisianité,* with its corollary of the reification of tolerance and pluralism as characteristics inextricably linked to what it means to be Tunisian. Most

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material concerns. These key differences emerged after the fall of the regime, when limitations to the establishment of a cohesive and unique revolutionary front became evident. See also Rivetti, 'The Journey of Protests in the Mediterranean and Beyond', cit.

[91] Larissa Chomiak and John Entelis, 'The Making of North Africa's Intifadas', *Middle East Report,* 259 (2012), pp. 8-15.

[92] Revolutionary and revolting artistic expressions, such as rap and break dance, or the organised presence of football fans in stadiums seem to be the typical 'venues' for the disenfranchised youth to express frustration and unhappiness with the status quo.

[93] Wassim, a young man from Khetmine, Bizerte province, an area where emigration to Italy has been very strong in the last decade. Interview with the author, Khetmine, November 2010.

of them found a way to express their political and anti-system radicalism in the *salafist mouvance.*

This radicalisation and class divide are not new in Tunisia, because the processes of nation and state building themselves entail class struggle. Each period of transformation in the recent history of the country has corresponded to attempts on the part of a specific social class to enter the political game in order to share the national contract and, at least partially, power. This was the case for the Intifada of 1983, the so called 'bread revolt', when 'for the first time lower classes entered national history'[94]. This same tumultuous group was in the background during the last period of Bourghiba's rule and in the early 1990s, when the clash between the Islamists and the state took place. It did not mature, though, as a social movement until the opening up of the public sphere after the fall of Ben Ali. The success of the uprising, symbolised by the collapse of the dictatorship, and the emergence of a new Islamic paradigm after the revolution, gave them the chance to become a social and political movement.

If we look at post-revolutionary social and generational cleavages, there is little doubt that so far the transitional institutional process has failed in integrating this disenfranchised social group. The ones that took over the political scene belong to a different generation (the one of the 1980s) and to a different social class, representing in some ways a factor of continuity with the past. The basic political request of the middle class in power today was democracy and not material benefits, which, comparatively speaking, they never genuinely lacked[95]. As explained above, in the context of Tunisian modern history, they represent a generation who has been waiting for decades to join in the process of building the modern Tunisian nation-state. In order to do so, they learned that there is nothing better than democracy. This

[94]This is according to Heithem Chabouni, former member of the Communist party, today Nidaa party. Interview with the author, Tunis Spring 2011.

[95] During the 1990s and 2000s, there was a consensus on the fact that the growth of the middle class was one of the outcomes of the economic growth. However, this was only partially true and lasted only until 2008, when the international financial crisis began to impact on Tunisia too.

belief is shared by liberals, leftists and moderate Islamists alike[96]. Because of the failure of this democratic-oriented process in the 1980s, the country suffered from two decades of frozen social and political activities. The revolution made it possible for these actors to return to the scene and resume their roles, while others were left behind. Once again, it is worth highlighting that there is nothing odd about the Tunisian transition insofar as the requirements of 'crafting democracy' demand that social conflicts are frozen in favour of an almost exclusive focus on mechanisms and procedures to ensure liberty, as Gianluca Parolin also makes clear in his contribution to this special issue.

Those who participated and still participate in street politics and those who took the power after Ben Ali's departure are not the same. They do not share any common ground socially, geographically or generationally. The low electoral turnout at the October 2011 election suggests that the youth and a significant part of the society were at least sceptical of the liberal democratic process, largely unknown to them. Indeed, in parallel with the institutional process, another social dynamic developed to 'include' a chunk of this socially marginalised youth. A large and spontaneous process of Islamisation of society, which had already begun to he evident in the later years of Ben All's regime[97], emerged from below. If different degrees of Islamic belonging fitted different social groups, the one that best interpreted and represented the antagonism and the radicalism of disenfranchised youth was Jihadism. Jihadism is not representative of a social class in the Marxist sense, and this youth cannot be equated with working class either because it does not have an organised political relevance, but is an expression of subalternity and alienation[98].

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[96] This became evident in 2005, when modernist. Leftist and Islamist groups came together to form the Democratic Front. They shared a common interest in a democratic reform of the system.

[97] Rikke Haugb0lIe and Lrancesco Cavatorta, 'Beyond Ghannouchi: Islamism and Social Change in Tunisia', *Middle East Report,* 262 (2012), pp. 20-25.

[98]I refere here to Spivak's conceptualisation of subalternity, see Gayatri Chakravortty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Rosalind C. Morris (ed.). *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 21-77.

Ansar al-Sharia as the Expression of a New Social Movement

Ansar al-Sharia (AST) is the new youth social movement that emerged from the revolutionary process[99]. It inherited, from the past decade, the 'mythological' enterprise of Al-Qaeda's *mujahedeen,* but it adapted it to the new liberal and democratic scenario of post-Ben Ali Tunisia. As surprising as it may be, the jihadi movement is not a novelty in Tunisia. Even though the dictatorship had been particularly repressive of Islamic radicalism, a new generation of Islamists resurfaced in Tunisia since the beginning of the 2000s[100]. Despite the lack of awareness of its existence among ordinary Tunisians, who discovered their own radical Islamists after the revolution, jihadism was a form of identity for the latest generation of the revolting youth. As argued by Stefano Torelli et al., the events of Soliman in 2007 were a powerful reminder of this[101]. A group of jihadist coming from Algeria penetrated into Tunisia and got logistic support from a relatively large network of people in Sidi Bouzid, Sousse and Tunis. Even more significant was the participation of an important group of Tunisians in the international jihadi movement. Many of them were imprisoned under the anti-terrorism law of 2003, which was supported by the US administration and swiftly adopted by Ben All's regime. AST originated from Tunisian detention centres as a project incubated over a long period of time[102]. It indeed represented a factor of continuity with a struggle that part of the Tunisian youth had consciously undertaken for over a decade. However, despite its earlier existence, this jihadi project was transformed by the unexpected uprising in 2011.

[99] Anne Wolf, 'An Islamist 'Renaissance'? Religion and Politics in Post-revolutionary Tunisia', *The Journal of North African Studies,* 18(4) (2013), pp. 560-573.
[100] Daveed Garteistein-Ross, *Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia's long game,* ICCT Research paper, 2013. http://www.icct. nl/download/file/Gartenstein-Ross-Ansar-al-Sharia-Tunisia's-Long-Game-May-2013.pdf (accessed August 28, 2014).
[101] Stefano Torelli, Fabio Merone and Francesco Cavatorta, 'Salafism in Tunisia: Challenges and Opportunities *lor DcmocrdAizdAioN, Middle East Policy,* 19(4) (2012), pp. 140-154.
[102] Hassen Breik, responsible for Dawa in Ansar Al-Sharia. Interview with the author, Yasminette October 10, 2012.

Thus, a completely new Islamic radical project was founded, rooted in *dawa* (call) instead of *qital* (fight)[103].

The large Islamic wave that came out from the post-revolutionary process was an explosion that hurst out as a consequence of the long-standing repression of all forms of organised Islamism, whether political or not. Islamism was the expression of this disenfranchised youth that appeared in the aftermath of the revolution, which had succeed in revolting and toppling down Ben Ali hut failed to turn its radicalism into a political project. During the first two years of the transition and until the attack on the American Embassy in Septemher 2012, the control of the state was rather weak, and this exposed lower-class neighhourhoods to a new type of socialisation that empowered Salafi youth[104]. Further frustrated hy the lack of material henefits deriving from the revolution they contributed to bring about, this youth found a strong spiritual motivation in Salafist militancy. The territorial identity of Salafists is rooted in neighbourhoods, where a strong degree of solidarity between them and the inhabitants is detectable, despite the fact that groups of radical Salafists may interfere with the private life of the people and with their traditional creed[105]. This identity overlap between the Salafists and the people from lower class neighbourhoods is further strengthened by the repression the central state is carrying out against Salafism. This was the case for the Minister of Interior's campaign against AST, a move that motivated the supporters of a big soccer team to declare

[103] See: Merone, 'Interview with Hassen Ben Brik: Islamic state but not through violence... for now', September 24, 2012, in Italian (http://nena-news.globalist.it/Detail_News_Display7ID—35486&typeb — 0&24-09-2012- Intervista-Hassan-Ben-Brik-Stato-islamico-non-con-la-forza-per-ora-, accessed August 28, 2014). In this interview, Hassein Breik, AST's person in charge for Dawa, expresses this idea very clearly.

[104] I have witnessed this process myself since 2011 during my heldwork. This is especially true in the outskirts of Tunis, in areas such as Dahwar Hisher, Ettadhamen, Ibn Khaldoun, El Kram, and Yasminette, or in other cities such as Sousse, Menzel Bourghiba, Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine, and Keirouan.

[105] The most disturbing practice of these groups of puritans is the so-called vigilantism or, in theological terms, the 'amr *bil maarufwa annahi an al-munkef* ('bidding the good and forbidding the evil'). In the aftermath of the revolution, actions such as disturbing theatre representations or punishing particular behaviours in the neighbourhood, created a wide discontent among the population. After a debate over the opportunity of encouraging or discouraging such activities, the leaders of AST forbade the Salati youth to commit such actions.

their support for AST with a statement[106], despite the apparent contradiction between soccer fans and Salafists' expected behaviour. More than religious group, AST was in this case perceived as a movement representing the youth coming from a specific, lower-class socio-economic background[107]. This young generation of Tunisians is looking for instruments of political expression, yet avoiding all institutional and conventional ones: 'civil society' associations and mainstream political parties are indeed perceived as too distant.

Then, it appears rather indisputable that AST was the group that most benefitted from this activism, which is and remains outside of an institutional framework. Indeed, most of the AST members have that same social background: they do not speak in the name of the disenfranchised, they are part of them[108].The daily practices of social life in the neighbourhoods, which generally are male-dominated and gender segregated spaces, made it easier for these young activists to accept

AST's ideological framework. The AST movement sublimates the strong masculine relationships typical of those social spaces, and charges them with further spiritual value. The mosque comes to replicate the social function of the *cafés* in these working class neighbourhoods[109]. The male groups of young people hanging around for hours in the neighbourhoods were transformed into *the jamaa,* explicitly referring to the first pious Muslim community. Such identification with a 'special group' of elected individuals allowed these young men to finally overcome the

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[106] Les supporteurs de l'EST et du CA au congrès de Ansar al-Charia, *Direct Info,* May 16, 2013. http://directinfo. webmanagercenter.com/2013/05/16/les-supporters-de-lest-et-du-ca-au-congres-dansar-al-chariaa/ (accessed August 28, 2014).

[107] See Mosaiquefm 'Ansar al Sharia prevoit des confrontations avec la police avec le support des supporteurs de football'. May 16, 2013, in Arabic. http://goo.gl/Nx5ePt (accessed August 28, 2014).

[108] There is an on-going debate on whether the AST represents a specific social class or not. Although the AST members I met during my fieldwork do not generally recognise a specific social class background and dislike the term *muhammishun* (which is utilised to as a pejorative by the rest of society), there is no doubt that most of them come from specifically poor urban areas. Of course, as the Jihadi Salati trend is an ideological one, virtually anyone could adopt it regardless of social class belonging. In fact, we are not using this category as a deterministic one. Attempts to reach more educated and middle class constituencies are strategically advanced by AST. However, the fact that it has been isolated after the crackdown, with no support by any other class but constituencies from lower class neighbourhoods, strongly suggests that up to now, AST's interclass reach is weak.

[109] Spending time in the cafés with friends is a widespread social activity in these neighbourhoods.

enormous social complex they suffer from vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie, which had treated them as backwards and failed men[110].

While this process of Salafisation contains elements of change and continuity, the reaction of the state and political elite to it has to be fully ascribed to the category of the continuity with the past. When Ali Laraayedh (the then-Prime Minister and one of the most prominent leaders of Al-Nahda) declared AST a terrorist organisation, there was concern but not surprise. Indeed, since the demonstration in front of the American Embassy that degenerated into the assault on 15 September 2012[111], security preoccupations have been prioritised over freedom of expression. One of the consequences of the unique climate of freedom that Tunisia had experienced for one and a half year following the fall of Ben Ali, was the strengthening of the tension between the people’s right to freely express their political and religious beliefs, and the institutions’ duty of safeguarding the general public interests. The jihadist phenomenon, because of the genuine security concerns it created, was considered the perfect scapegoat, providing the old authoritarian apparatus with an opportunity to return to the scene and take action. Although Tunisia seems today more mature for a democratic evolution, there is still the temptation, as occurred 20 years ago, to order the security apparatus to manage the social and political conflict. Change and continuity are the two key elements that explain these two co-existing tendencies towards, on the one side, open debate and, on the other side, repression, both of which have interfered in the ongoing transitional process.

Conclusion

The Tunisian democratic transition that began in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising is another step of a long process of state building. The main actors of this process represent those political and social groups that emerged from the 1980s and

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[110] Interview with a leader of Ansar al-Sharia, Tunis. Because he is under surveillance from the security forces, I cannot state either his name or the place of the interview.

[111] Sandro Luty, ‘Un an après I’attaque de I’ambassade des Etas Unis à Tunis, les doutent subsistent’, *Huffington Post Maghreb,* September 14, 2013. http://www.huffpostmaghreb.eom/2013/09/14/attaque-ambassade-etats- unis-tunis_n_3926696.html (accessed August 28, 2014).

struggled to participate in the management of national institutions, namely the liberals and the Islamists. Nevertheless, as this article argues, further fragmentation has taken place and new social actors emerged in the aftermath of the revolution, along with the unfolding of the institution-building process. Indeed, the main contention of this article is that behind the political struggle there is class struggle. Sharing the ideology of *tunisianité,* the official national rhetoric invented by Bourguiba, implies accepting cultural references typical of a new middle class that appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century. *Tunisianité* was the mantra of Tunisian nationalism, and it was understood as a positive identity factor that pushed the middle class to assume the leadership of the nation-huilding process. This leadership had historically been the outcome of a political conflict, symbolised by the two characters of the liberation movement, Bourghiba and Ben Youssef.

The post-revolutionary process is also one of 'street politics,' in the sense of the participation of social movements not conventionally organised into civil society associations or political parties. Once again, we see factors of continuity and change overlapping. The concept of street politics is useful to explain the emergence of the Jihadi Salafist movement, which appeared during the transitional period as a new social and political actor. It represents a completely new generation that has little to no relation with the Islamic movement represented by today's moderate, Nahdaoui middle class. However, jihadism and radical Islamism represent in today's Tunisia those disenfranchised social classes that find themselves at the bottom of the social ladder. AST is also the largest social and youth movement on the national scene. It represents a factor of continuity in modern Tunisian history, as it is the heir of radical Islamism, which was already present and repressed under Ben All's rule, but it also represents a rupture with this radical tradition. Thanks to the 2011 uprising, it had the opportunity to organise into a proper movement, occupying most of the public space in working class neighbourhoods of Tunisian biggest cities.

The nation-building process is the general framework in which factors associated with change and continuity take on an explanatory value in understanding the Tunisian transition. Ultimately, Tunisia's transitional process will only be accomplished when all social classes will find a way to express themselves without

being perceived as threatening to the society and the state. This is not only a power struggle but also a process of class inclusion and exclusion.

Post-scriptum

The main interest of this research is the evolution of the Islamist phenomenon. Nahda is the historical Islamist party in Tunisia. Although repressed in the 1990s, it emerged in the aftermath of the revolution as the main political player. In the next section, I deal with Nahda and its political evolution in the period of constitutional building. Two main theoretical debates characterize the discussion of Islamism: moderation through inclusion/exclusion and post-Islamism. The previous section framed the historical context and explained the origin of the conflictual nature of the opposition between nationalists and Islamists. In the next section, we will see how the debates on post-Islamism and moderation through inclusion can be used to understand the evolution of Nahda.

Chapter 3. The emergence of an Islamic Public and the reborn of Nahdha party

Introduction

This chapter deals with the rise of an Islamic public sphere in the period between 2011 and 2013 and the evolution of its main political reference, the Islamist Nahda party. One day before Ben Ali escaped from the country, there was apparently no such Islamic public. Few months later, the Nahda leadership, emerging from the interior of the country or returning from exile, reshaped thepolitical organization of the party and won the constitutional election with an impressive score (October 2011). The successful experience of free elections and the development into a party that fully participated in the government of the country with secular parties challenged and stimulated the traditional academic debate over Islamist parties. In the first article presented here, I explain the evolution of the Islamic party from fundamentalist to conservative through the lens of the 'moderation through exclusion' paradigm. In the second, I pay more attention to the ideological underpinnings of the Islamists' evolution and discuss the academic debate on 'post-Islamism'.

In the first section, I argue that Nahda went through a process of moderation since its inception and that this was the consequence of exclusion. While the typical debate of the moderation through exclusion/inclusion regards the moderation process as a reaction to political exclusion (or inclusion), I argue that exclusion and inclusion can be also the result of social acceptance or refusal of the political and militant group. This means that if on one side the Islamist party gained in popularity, on the other some of its radical practices and views, as a certain style of *dawa*, have been perceived by broader society as strange, unusual and, crucially, unsuited. This is part of the explanation of why popular masses failed to rise in their support when the Ben Ali regime crushed them.

The second section discusses post-Islamism. In the 1990s two prominent authors, Asef Bayat and Olivier Roy, initiated an academic debate on the fate of Islamism. Bayat believed that the Islamist trend had abandoned the 'revolutionary' idea of the Islamic state. This author noticed that Islamist parties were increasingly

adapting to parliamentary politics. Olivier Roy was instead sharper in his analysis. After having critically scrutinised the Islamist ideology, he concluded that Islamism failed and that it was never a credible political alternative. This idea was consistent with what was occurring on the ground in the 1990s and 2000s, when Islamist parties were weakened by the repressive action of Arab regimes.

The coming back in force of Islamist parties after the ‘Arab spring’ proved that this theory, at least in Roy’s version, was inaccurate. Islamists disappeared because of political repression. When given political opportunities, they were in fact still able to represent a large constituency (a social block). In the case of Nahda, I show how post-Islamism may be a potentially useful interpretative tool to consider that Islamism evolves and adapts to the changing political circumstances. I argue that Islamist ideology has evolved and not disappeared. I show, for example, how the Islamic state as a political objective has not disappeared but rather changed of perspective and content. In the new democratic perspective, the Nahda leadership assumed that the principles of the Islamic state are guaranteed by the new constitutional and institutional system.

A new intellectual trend developed, within and outside the Islamist movement, justifying the aims of an Islamic society through an interpretative reading of the juridical Islamic sources, called “*Maqasid*”. The new Islamist theology/ideology meets therefore with the old Tunisian reformist tradition through the mediation of the Zeitounian cleric Mohammed Tahar ben Achour, the first to reactivate in contemporary history the studies of this branch of religious studies. The revival of this prestigious reformist figure is very important because it is the main venue for Islamists to connect with the reformist tradition of the country. Ben Achour comes from an Islamic tradition but that of the reformist trend that is accepted and partly vindicated by the country’s modernist tradition.

Moderation through exclusion? The journey of Tunisian Ennahdha from fundamentalist to conservative party” [112]

On 23 October 2011, the Tunisian Islamist party Ennahda (Renaissance Party) completed a most remarkable comeback on the country’s political scene. After having been banned and heavily repressed for three decades with its leaders and cadres either in exile, in prison, or marginalized in society, the party was legalized on 1 March 2011 following the fall of the dictatorship and proceeded to win the first and free elections the country ever held with an impressive score, taking 89 seats out of 217 in the Constituent Assembly.(1) The victory, or at least the size of it, was a surprise for many Tunisians and for the international community. After the elecctions Ennahda went on to form a three-party coalition government with two centre-left parties whose ideological references are far removed from its own, highlighting what Ozzano, in his contribution to the special issue, considers an important trait of conservative parties.(2) Both the party’s electoral victory and its decision to form cross-ideological alliances should not be interpreted as surprises. A closer analysis reveals in fact that Ennahda has gone through a profound ideological transformation over its forty-year history that no longer makes it anti-democratic; quite the opposite.(3) These moderate stances might not be genuine or fully internalized and are certainly not accepted in many left-wing and secular circles: in particular after the assassination of the left-wing leader Chokri Belaid in February 2013, when Ennahda was accused of betraying the revolution and working for the construction of an authoritarian theocracy.4 However, what Ennahda has done over the last few years strongly indicates change. In any case, and despite what a number of Tunisian commentators argue when pointing at “its double-speak”,(5) Ennahda can be said to have become what Luca Ozzano categorizes in his framing contribution to this special issue as a conservative party.(6)

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[112] Published. Ref.: Cavatorta, F., & Merone, F. (2013). Moderation through exclusion? The journey of the Tunisian Ennahda from fundamentalist to conservative party. *Democratization*, *20*(5), 857-875. This article is a two-handed work. Based on my fieldwork, we shared the theoretical reflections and the writing.

In his contribution, Ozzano also claims the categories of religiously oriented parties that he proposes are far from being watertight: parties therefore can move back and forth through these different categories. Accounting for the possibility of change and explaining how this comes about is an important part of the story of many such parties in the Arab world, where the liberalizing trends following the Arab Spring are affording them the opportunity to win power through the ballot box.(7) Focusing on the case of the Islamist Ennahda, this article examines the mechanisms that explain how a religiously oriented party "travels" from one category to another and the influence this has on the democratization of Tunisia. Specifically, it analyses the very dramatic change that Ennahda made from fundamentalist to conservative party during its existence. From being an anti-democratic and illiberal movement with a tawhid-based (principle of unity) vision of politics and society determined to impose religious law over democratic electoral decisions in the 1970s, it has travelled towards the acceptance of the procedural mechanisms of democracy in the context of a pluralistic vision of society by the late 1980s. The literature on Islamist parties and extremist parties more broadly defines this shift as moderation, whereby the term is synonymous with acceptance of the triptych of democracy – mechanisms to select governing elites, fundamental liberal rights, and market economy. The principal variable to explain this shift can be resumed in "moderation through inclusion", whereby the progressive inclusion of radical and anti-systemic parties into the political system forces them to "compromise" with their original extreme views in order to be able to compete in a pluralistic environment where shared rules have to be designed and where the constraints of participation inevitably force a review of strict ideological positions to attain at least some of the political goals the party has.(8) In authoritarian settings this is accompanied by the realization that cross-ideological alliances with other opposition parties are also necessary to defeat incumbents.

What is interesting in the case of Ennahda, contrary for instance to the full or partial inclusion of Islamist parties elsewhere,(9) is that inclusion into the political system never really occurred and acceptance of the party from large sectors of Tunisian society materialized very slowly. Thus, moderation through inclusion does

not really explain the very significant change in Ennahda's ideological and political positions and this speaks to the take on moderation that Christophe Jaffrelot has in his article in this special issue.(10) It follows that a different explanation is required and the article explores what can be labelled "moderation through exclusion". For the majority of the literature exclusion is synonymous with the repressive violence that the state perpetrates against opposition political movements and strictness of rules imposed on those wishing to be involved in the political system.(11) The Tunisian case certainly reflects this type of exclusion against Ennahda – and its previous incarnations as Jamaa and Mouvement Tendence Islamique (MTI). In the early 1990s the state heavily repressed Islamism in the name of safeguarding the country from an obscurantiste ideology and then from 2001 onwards repression was conducted in the name of fighting terrorism. However exclusion can be also defined more broadly to include the social rejection of political projects that are perceived to be alien to mainstream society, which can reinforce and to a certain extent underpin and legitimize state's repression. The hypothesis here is that the harsh repression against the party at the hands of the state, the imprisonment or exile of its leaders and cadres together with the strong rejection the party faced in large sectors of Tunisian society for quite some time made it possible and necessary for Ennahda to entirely re-elaborate how political Islam could contribute to the developmental trajectory of the country. From this re-elaboration flows the acceptance of the dominant discourse of democracy, liberalism, and market economy without which the party would not have been able to find much space in Tunisia. Ultimately it is about maintaining religious values simply as references and not as guiding principles of public policy-making, as Olivier Roy also recently pointed out.(12) Building on this thesis of "moderation through exclusion", the article offers an analysis of the intellectual-ideological introspection that Ennahda went through to be able to find acceptance in the institutional game and, crucially, in wider society. This analysis is based on the examination of the scholarly literature on the party and interviews with many of its leaders.

While it is always difficult to derive generalizations from a single case, the journey of Ennahda can point to significant trends within political Islam and its party

expressions at a time when processes of democratization are taking place in the Arab world, albeit amidst considerable difficulties. The linkage between the religiosity of political actors and democratization is usually problematic because such actors are often perceived to be inimical to many fundamental liberal rights and because of their ideological rigidity. The case of Ennahda provides evidence that this might not necessarily always be the case and that democratization can benefit from the positive input of religiously oriented parties.

Ennahda ... in moderation

In post-revolutionary Tunisia, Ennahda plays a central role in the process of democratization having committed its considerable resources to the construction of a new plural democratic political system that would respect civil liberties and human rights.(13) This political positioning of Ennahda has come under criticism from some sectors of secular civil and political societies such as women's rights organizations, parties of the extreme left and the new political formation of Bourguibist inspiration Nida Tounes that perceive in the embracing of democracy on the part of Ennahda some sort of ruse to obtain uncontested power and then proceed to implement the construction of an exclusionary religion-based state.(14) In many ways contemporary criticism of and accusations against Ennahda resemble the traditional ones that secular Arabs, or seculars tout court as the introduction to the special issue makes clear, held against Islamist parties since their inception, although in the Tunisian case this criticism is no longer as widespread as it was in the past, as the alliance between Islamists and secular and socialist figures such as Moncef Marzouki and Mustapha Ben Jaafer indicates. In any case, this normative view opens an endless and rather trite debate about the genuine commitment of Islamist parties when it comes to the procedures of democracy and human rights.(15) This article does not intend to second-guess Ennahda and its actions, preferring instead to focus on its political praxis. Much like in Alaya Allani's work on Ennahda, there is the acceptance that the party has come a long way since its foundation in terms of its attitude towards the fundamental principles of electoral democracy and basic human rights.(16)

When one attempts to trace the political positions of the party over time with respect to the institutional system, economic choices, and social set-up, what emerges suggests a profound shift towards moderation. When looking at Ennahda, its political trajectory is inevitably intertwined with Ghannouchi's intellectual history and the way in which his understanding of the role of Islamism in politics evolved.(17) Thus, there is no doubt that the party is very much influenced by the development of Ghannouchi's political thinking. However, it would be erroneous to conflate the trajectory of the party entirely with Ghannounchi because other leaders such Abdelfattah Mourou or Mohammed Khouja have also been important activists and thinkers. The outcome of the development of Ghannouchi's thinking, together with the internal debate between different factions within the party – such as the moderate wing of Mourou or the more radical one linked to Salafism that Khouja (the current leader of the Salafist party Front of Reform) embodied – has been one of increasing moderation. There are a number of aspects that seem to confirm such moderation.

First, on the issue of the nature of the Tunisian state, there has been a seachange in the Islamist movement's position since the 1970s. Under the influence of the more militant ideology of the Muslim Brothers of the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the movement Rachid Ghannouchi(18) led subscribed to the creation of an Islamic state whereby the application of sharia law for the whole society reflected the unitary vision embodied in the principle of tawhid. In this vision, there is a perfect and unquestioned overlap between the state and religion. This principle of unity influenced a Manichean view of society and politics whereby "belief" should replace "unbelief": this simple shift would eventually heal all the social and political conflicts in society.

By the early 1980s Ghannouchi had begun to think about the nature of the state in a different manner and the party progressively abandoned this vision. This did not occur seamlesly, as the party went through a significant split in the late 1980s, when a radical fringe left Ennahda to remain on a more uncompromising position related to the necessity of building an Islamic state. The party has arrived at a point where it currently supports the creation of a "civil" state (dawla madaniyya), openly subscribing to the idea that references to religion are purely identity-based and not

sources for public policy-making.(19) Thus, in the debate over the drafting of the post-revolutionary Tunisian constitution, the party has been able to compromise with the secular sectors of society on a provision that reflects this principle. This has a practical impact on the strategy of alliances that Ennahda undertakes with some secular parties, refusing implicitly to be the sole representative of the people by virtue of its religious references.(20) In addition, party leaders emphasize that subscription to democratic procedures and values characterizes the party internally as well. Ali Larayedh, member of the Executive Committee of the party and now Prime Minister, stated that democratic decision-making informs the party at all levels.(21) This issue of internal democracy is obviously disputed and might not correspond to the reality, but what is interesting to note is that prominent Ennahda leaders feel they have to employ pro-democracy rhetoric to appear as legitimate interlocutors. This profoundly contrasts with Tunisian Salafists for instance, who instead have no qualms about condemning liberal-democracy.(22)

Second, on the issues of fundamental human rights and equality we also witness a profound shift from the early 1970s onwards. This is the continuation of the re-elaboration of the principle of tawhid in so far as imposition of mores of behaviour is justified within the framework of that principle, but once this is transformed into support for a civil state, a different understanding of human rights flows. This is most notable on women's rights and, specifically in the case of Tunisia, on the egalitarian Personal Status Code introduced by Bourguiba in 1956. Despite the virulent opposition that Ennahda still engenders in secular feminist movements such as Femmes Democrates because of its conservative positions on gender relations, the party claims that it fully accepted the liberal Personal Status Code in the 1980s. As mentioned, this does not mean that the party has abandoned its socially conservative views about the role of women in society and about gender relations more generally, which should be centred on the absolute primary role of the family in society. Of course, such acceptance might have been purely instrumental and tactical in order to benefit from the inclusion into the very brief liberalizing period of late 1980s, but the point is that Ennahda did not go back on it when repression hit the movement and when a more radical attitude could have been

expected given that there were no benefits to be gained by this position of tactical moderation.

Third, and in line with other Islamist movements, Ennahda started off with little interest for economic matters to develop a critical attitude towards capitalism, particularly in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution through the influence of Ali Shariati, as recognized by Ghannouchi himself.(23) Ill at ease with socialism as well, the party searched for a third way between the market economy of the imperialist West and the command economy of socialist countries. However, it can be argued that the critique of capitalism dominated the economic agenda of the party during the 1970s and 1980s. Thanks to the intellectual input of the Iranian revolution in 1979, the leadership was able to make the connection between the promotion of the material interests of the disenfranchized and religious principles, proposing the establishment of an economic model that would eliminate the shortcomings – read profound inequalities – of the capitalist system. While the party maintains in some ways that this third way is still potentially pursuable,(24) it is quite evident that it has moved significantly towards the acceptance of a market economy integrated into the global neoliberal system as the only way for Tunisia to develop. There has been for instance no real debate about the free trade agreement that links Tunisia so closely to the European economies and even though the party seeks to attract more Gulf investment into the country, the neoliberal logic is the same given that the Gulf economies are fully part of the process of neoliberal globalization. It is revelatory that today the constituency of reference of Ennahda is largely composed of merchants, traders, and business people rather than the fully disenfranchized (mouhammishin) who find instead representation in the extra-institutional Salafist movements or in marginal leftist groups.(25)

Finally, the anti-imperialist dimension of Islamism has been over time considerably diluted. Although there is nominal support for the Palestinians as there was indignation for the 1991 and 2003 invasions of Iraq and therefore a degree of anti-Americanism, these attitudes are widely shared among Tunisian political parties of all ideological persuasions. Currently, the party displays a significant degree of pragmatism on foreign policy matters and has for instance acceded to American

demands for a crackdown of Salafist activism in the aftermath of the attack on the US embassy in Tunis in September 2012. Ghannouchi and other leaders have been very reassuring with the United States and the European Union about their intentions on foreign policy matters when it comes to US and European interests in the region. There is a sense that the policies Tunisia pursued in this respect under Ben Ali will not be much altered.(26)

As one can therefore note, the journey towards moderation the party has travelled since the 1970s until its arrival in power in 2011 has been quite a long one. It is a journey towards moderation in so far as it accepts the dominant values and discourses that the majority of the international community subscribes to. Thus, following the two dimensions that Ozzano offers to categorize religiously oriented parties, Ennahda, certainly under the impulse of its leader, changed both ideologically and practically. The question though remains as to what made the party undertake this journey.

The inclusion-moderation hypothesis

Islamist parties have been central to academic and policy debates of Arab politics since their forceful emergence in the 1970s. More specifically their presence has affected debates about democratization and authoritarian resilience in the region. More often than not the religious orientation of such parties was held to be an insurmountable obstacle to the demise of authoritarian rule, preventing processes of tentative democratization from succeeding.27 In the 2000s, the debate on Islamist parties changed because it became noticeable that, increasingly, a number of such movements had begun to adopt and subscribe to the language of democracy and human rights, taking part in participatory politics whenever the opportunity arose.(28) Over time and despite the scepticism surrounding them both domestically and internationally, a number of them progressively shifted their most radical positions in order to be able to construct cross-ideological agreements with non-Islamist opposition forces with a view to becoming an alternative bloc to the ruling coalition.(29) Crucially, they also tended to accept invitations to participate in regime-sponsored initiatives of limited political openings despite the realization that

such openings would not lead to policy-making power. The literature examining these shifts follows largely the incipit of Olivier Roy's 1992 work in which he pointed to the failure of political Islam as an ideological project alternative to the dominant values of liberal-democracy, suggesting implicitly that Islamism would have to find and elaborate new categories of thinking and action if it wished to remain a relevant political actor.(30)

Given that the dominant international discourse of political legitimization since the end of the 1980s across the globe rested on the three pillars of representative democracy, liberal human rights, and market economy, many Islamist parties began to utilize such categories, although through an indigenous re-elaboration based on the scriptures and interpretations of Islam. While this was occurring, a narrative developed through which mainstream Islamist parties began to be examined according to the notion of progressive moderation(31) with a focus on the different ways in which such moderation was understood.(32) This followed the findings of the inclusion-moderation theory as applied in Europe to extreme left-wing parties and religious parties in the aftermath of World War II. Post-World War II societies in Western Europe were more inclusive than the authoritarian regimes in which Islamist parties operated, but Arab regimes have been experimenting with liberalization for quite some time and therefore the literature has attempted to use the hypothesis of moderation through inclusion in such contexts as well. The principal idea of this line of inquiry is derived from the assumption that increased political participation in consensual institutions, whether with the regime or with other opposition parties, leads to the moderation of the Islamist position regarding the nature of the state and the extent of liberal rights. Thus, through continued interaction with other political actors, Islamists learn to moderate and they are socialized into the mechanisms of compromise and bargaining, the very foundation of the liberal-democratic game.(33) Within this larger literature, two types of studies can be distinguished. On the one hand, we have analyses explaining the "progressive moderation" of specific Islamist parties such as the Turkish Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) or the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development (PJD). They have come to embody the very notion of political moderation and acceptance of

democracy and human rights together with a market-oriented stance on economic matters and a pragmatic one on sensitive strategic issues of importance for the West.(34) On the other hand, there are studies that highlight the similarities of the Islamist journey towards moderation with the one that other extremist radical anti-systemic parties travelled in the past, such as the communist parties of Western Europe.(35)

The moderation through inclusion thesis has a number of advantages. First, it contributes to providing the theoretical tools necessary to explain the choice of moderation that many Islamist parties did indeed make given that inclusion and cross-ideological alliances have been a trait of Arab politics in a number of countries over recent years. There are a number of cases where progressive inclusion, no matter how stop-start and limited in nature, did indeed allow Islamist parties to come to accept ideological compromises and endorse pragmatism in order to participate, at times marginally and at others more substantively, in political life. Second, it has the merit of challenging, from a policy-making perspective, the validity of the choice of relentless repression of political expressions based on religious prescriptions. Finally, it has the benefit of "normalizing" Islamist parties and their attitudes on a range of issues because it provides a parallel with other contexts and ideologies that demonstrate how the Arab world might not be so "exceptional" in terms of its apparently culture-specific rejection of democracy and human rights.

However, the "moderation through inclusion" thesis has a significant shortcoming, which undermines in part its applicability and validity across all cases. Crucially, there is very little thinking about the possibility that exclusion might have led anti-systemic parties to revise their ideological tenets and political strategies towards moderation in cases where there was no inclusion to speak of. There is a rather widespread assumption that repression of anti-systemic views provokes further radicalization and ultimately anti-systemic violence as a reaction. A number of studies highlight how it is the violent repression of the state that is responsible for radicalization, which, in turn, prevents not only moderation but also democratic political change.36 However there is, at least in theory, the possibility that the vast majority of those who are repressed and rejected in large sectors of society might end

up critically revisiting their activism. Thus, rather than opting for radicalization, they might instead choose to re-formulate the ideological tenets and strategies that brought about repression and social rejection to moderate their stances and demands. While this might certainly not hold true for the whole of the movement or party being targeted for repression – with the outcome of creating splits – it might be true for a sufficient number of leaders and cadres to see that their radicalism has failed to make headway, leading them to think about ideological and concrete changes. It is this aspect of moderation through exclusion that the following section explores, with a focus on the Tunisian case. It is always problematic to generalize from one case study, but the conditions that led to the moderation in the Tunisian case can potentially be present in other Arab societies.

The case of Ennahda is interesting precisely because the dominant narrative of moderation through inclusion does not apply given the almost relentless state repression and widespread social rejection it faced over the last four decades. Despite exclusion, the party has certainly moderated more than sufficiently for key actors on both the Tunisian and international stages to deserve to be treated as possibly the most moderate and pragmatic Islamist party in the Arab world.(37)

Ennahda's long march

As mentioned earlier, a number of cases such as the Turkish AKP or the Moroccan PJD or the Yemeni Islah confirm the validity of the moderation by inclusion thesis whereby there is a strict correlation between the progressive institutionalization of Islamist parties and their acceptance of democratic constraints. The Tunisian case offers a rather different perspective on the mechanisms of moderation. Having established that the Islamist movement in Tunisia came a long way, inclusion and progressive institutionalization in the political system cannot be said to have been the principal explanatory variables; quite the opposite is true. In fact the Tunisian specificity is that the Islamist movement faced a double exclusion: from the state and from large sectors of Tunisian society. It is at this juncture where the novelty of this analysis resides in so far as we tease out the meaning of exclusion to make it a more fluid concept than simply state-led repression. On the one hand was the traditional

type of exclusion linked to state repression and specifically the outright refusal to integrate any religious movement into the political system. This type of exclusion was quite relentless throughout the dictatorships of both Bourguiba and Ben Ali, although there were a couple of very small openings during the 1980s.38 This exclusion brought down significant violence on the Islamist movement with its leaders and ordinary members periodically arrested, imprisoned for long periods, or exiled. On the other hand there is the exclusion of the Islamists coming from society, particularly in the 1970s, 1980s and, although less intense, into the 1990s. Tunisian understanding and practice of Islam was certainly a value of reference for many ordinary citizens, but they perceived it quite apolitically. It follows that the politicization of religion that Islamists brought to the fore was largely alien to their political and social vision and struggles. Rachid Ghannouchi also recognizes this when he talks about the place that Islamism had in Tunisia in the 1970s: "Islamist militants felt a sense of alienation from wider society"(39) because they sensed rejection and not only because they were dissatisfied with the place of religion in Tunisia.

The analysis of the evolution of the Tunisian Islamist movement from fundamentalist to conservative has to take into account both types of exclusion as explanatory mechanisms for the re-elaboration of the theoretical and ideological underpinnings of the Islamist project in the country, away from the rigidity of an Islamic state imposed from the top to the acceptance of a plural civil state. What we have is a dialectic mechanism whereby the movement initially – and the structured party later – has to change from within because of the conditioning from without. In some ways the mechanisms of exclusion catalyzed some of the internal ideological debates that were naturally occurring in a heterogeneous movement. Particularly, the focus should be on the impact of the mainstream ideological and cultural vision of society, referring to the understanding and acceptance of categories of modernity embedded in the Tunisian national consciousness. These are embodied in a tradition of tolerance and religious reformism of the scholars of the Zitouna. In short, according to Sami Brahim, a leading Islamic intellectual,(40) Tunisia is characterized by the predominance of what he calls "an implicit social consensus", whereby

extremisms, including religious ones, are largely rejected in society. This means that forms of social organization that do not fall within this consensus remain marginal and minoritarian. Brahim gives the example of polygamy, a practice perceived to be illiberal and anti-women, to illustrate this point in the sense that Tunisian society has integrated, across its social milieux, the refusal of such practice, although this is permitted in the literalist understanding of the scriptures. This refusal generates a political consensus that includes the vast majority of Islamism. The main argument is really about Tunisian society as a natural limit to extremism, which is a point that comes across in discussions with younger members of Ennahda as well. For instance, they do not genuinely understand radical Salafist literalist positions and perceive them as alien.(41)

If one traces the history of the movement back to its early jamaa stage and its later incarnation as a political party, it is possible to detect change towards moderation not as the product of inclusion but of conflict with a society that used to reject Islamism and embraced it only when it became fully “Tunisian”. The first real encounter with wider Tunisian society and its attitudes took place on university campuses in the 1970s. Until then the jamaa was concerned with the organization of discussion “circles” (halaqat) in mosques and schools where a type of Islamism anchored in the readings and experiences of the Qutb-inspired Egyptian Brotherhood dominated. Within this context, there were in the jamaa simplistic beliefs and assumptions of how Islam could be politically activated in society, according to Ghannouchi.(42) The categories through which they operated had to do with the conflict between “belief” and “un-belief” that they perceived in Tunisian society. Once Islamist students began to be active on university campuses, they realized quite quickly that the left dominated the political scene and that, more broadly, social mores were heavily secularized. Islamism was therefore seen as somewhat alien among the activist youth and in both working-class and bourgeois circles, not because the religious practices were alien to ordinary Tunisians, but because the problems and issues that society faced as a whole could not be solved and even conceived of in the simplistic categories of belief and unbelief. In addition, all this was occurring at a time when the Bourguibist secular political project was the state’s

ideology, which the Islamists were also up against. Among Islamist students, there was the sudden realization that they had very little or nothing to contribute to the national debate about the direction Tunisia should take economically, socially, and politically, because for a long time the categories used for such debate were framed through secular ideologies. This came as a shock to many of them and in this phase it is important to underline that their lack of success and sense of alienation were not the product of repressive exclusion, because state authorities were actually quite tolerant of their activism on campuses; it came about because of societal exclusion. The socialist and Marxist left occupied almost entirely the public space in universities – and was able to mobilize the youth because it seemed to be the only political project alternative to Bourguiba's. It was, however, just as secular as Bourguibism. Islamist students on campuses had intense debates with leftist students, which the left won hands down in so far as it became the protagonist of the 1978 general strike on the part of the trade union 'Union Generale Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT) against Bourguiba.(43) This was a turning point for the Islamists because they were faced with the irrelevance of their categories among those who opposed the regime in place. While they still thought in terms of belief and unbelief, society was either on a leftist revolutionary path or behind the secular Bourguiba. Thus, Islamists had to decide whether they wanted to go back to their discussion circles and become marginalized or change direction to be appealing to the politicized masses entering the scene against the regime.(44) In short, the limits of social representation of the Jamaa at this stage lay with the inability to offer a political programme that addressed the social issues at the core of the 1978 strike and the bread riots of 1984, although the movement did grow somewhat during this period of social tensions. What is interesting to note is that large sectors of the trade union UGTT still today have a very difficult time reconciling with Ennahda, although their ranks also include many Ennahda members and sympathizers.(45)

Taking different paths

From the crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the movement evolved in three

different directions. First, a group of liberal Islamists such as Ennafeir and el Jorchi began working for a cultural reform within Islam and subscribed to the idea of referring to a specific Tunisian Islam based on the traditional reformism of the Zitouna, which would be by its very nature closer to Tunisian society. Second, a group of radicals such as Mohammed Ali Hurath and Mohammed Khouja left and began to pursue either a dawa-inspired activism in society or armed violence. Finally, the larger group, which is usually identified with Rachid Ghannouchi and Abdelfattah Mourou, went on to form a political party in order to measure the appeal of a renewed Islamist project in a competitive political environment. It isthus that the MTI came about on 6 June 1981. What is interesting in this respect is the mechanism that drove the creation of the party and this has to do with the explicit admission that the previous theoretical categories borrowed from the experiences of the rest of the Arab world did not apply to Tunisian society, which had gone through a radically different process of socio-economic, historical, and intellectual development. Ghannouchi and Mourou recognized that one size did not fit all. As also recognized from within Ennahda today, the acceptance of the challenge of institutional politics as a mechanism to respond to the demands of the masses through categories they could easily recognize was the product of a theoretical re-elaboration that brought into Tunisian Islamism some of the concepts of the Iranian revolution. Unlike what critics of the party usually point to,the most important import from Iran is not the idea of the theocratic state, but the conflict between mustadaafeen (the disenfranchized) and mustaqhbareen (the arrogant). It is not so much the work of Khomeini that makes a difference for Ghannouchi and the leadership, but the analysis of Ali Shariati on class.(46) They discover that the notions of disenfranchized and privileged can have a religious connotation and this is sufficient to include them in a new theoretical repositioning of the party that corresponds better to the demands of anti-Bourguiba Tunisian society for class representation in politics, particularly at a time when the left was slightly beginning to wane through the massive repression of the state and the broader loss of appeal of socialism. In the words of Ghannouchi, “the movement took a step towards society and society took a step towards the movement” because the religious connotations of the two categories

of mustadaafeen and mustaqhbareen are reassuring for those conservative sectors of society that need political ideals to be embedded into religion. In addition to this, the Islamists were examining with interest the “success” of the Mestiri-led Mouvement Democratique Socialiste (MDS) as the largest opposition party in the country because it forced them to be confronted with the “liberal” idea of democratic mechanisms in so far as the MDS criticized one-party rule in the name of the inherent pluralism in Tunisian society.(47) All these re-elaborations are obviously not only the direct outcome of external conditions because exclusion from society is not occurring in a vacuum: in the movement itself there was already a debate taking place about the nature of its political and social engagement through the categories of Islam. In some ways rejection serves the purpose of catalyzing debate and is at the root of the splits highlighted earlier.

This phase of exclusion continued in the early 1980s and this time it was a much more traditional form of exclusion through state repression and violence that targeted not only the radical and a small armed faction that had broken with the MTI, but also the MTI itself. Thus, the gains in society that the movement had made through the incorporation of new theoretical categories and the decision to form a political party seeking institutionalization were offset by repression. Superficially, it may appear that the repressive campaign and the imprisonment of the leadership pushed the party towards greater moderation. It is for instance in jail in the early 1980s that Rachid Ghannouchi produced the theoretical work that is now the pillar of the attitudes and policy positions of the party with respect to public freedoms in the direction of cementing democracy as the only viable political system. The repressive campaign in and of itself did not, however, directly influence the theoretical reflection and production of Ghannouchi. Such reflection for instance was not shared by all Tunisian Islamists, indicating that other Islamists equally repressed still subscribed to a different ideological framework. Nevertheless, Ghannouchi’s intellectual work still constituted a significant development because it would inform and constrain the actions of militants from this point onwards, as such reflection would be increasingly discussed and eventually accepted from within. It should also be highlighted that according to Ghannouchi himself repression was a problematic

interruption in what was a natural progression towards the acceptance of democratic procedures and basic human rights.48 In short, it is not jail that makes Islamists more moderate, but the realization that, with or without imprisonment, they had to confront a society that was still not at ease with the Manichean views that Islamists had in the 1970s and early 1980s. As Ghannouchi argues when talking to his own constituency to convince them of the necessity of a transformation within the frame of religion: “religion prospers within democracy; it is within dictatorship that it fades. Look at what happens to Muslims: they escape dictatorships in the Muslim world to look for freedom in established democracies. As Mawdudi and Qutb said, Islam is in its essence a revolution of liberation for mankind from slavery and constraints (within the limits God Imposed) ... It is both spiritual and social freedom”.(49)

After a brief democratic opening in the late 1980s under the premiership of Mzali, who seemed to accept the commitment of the MTI to pluralism, a new repressive campaign began under then Minister of Interior Ben Ali.(50) Once the latter became president in 1987 he launched a political pact that would introduce political pluralism in Tunisia and the MTI changed its name in order to take part in the construction of what they believed was going to be a new Tunisia and genuinely demonstrate its commitment to the civil nature of the state given that they dropped a clear reference to religion when the party became Ennahda.(51) Ennahda was not officially recognized as a political party, but its candidates were allowed to run as independents. However a number of factors, both domestic – the better than expected results of Ennahda – and international – the civil war in Algeria – prevented the consolidation of the Tunisian process of liberalization and a new repressive campaign against Islamists began in earnest in order to avoid an Algerian scenario of violence.

Once again, this rupture is decisive for the journey of the party towards moderation because it will engender an internal debate about the necessity of building bridges with ideological rivals in opposition that were shunning Ennahda. Once again it is exclusion broadly conceived that is the explanatory mechanism. In addition to the repressive policies aimed at the annihilation of the movement, it should be underlined that the secular sector of society, represented by secular

political parties and civil society groups, compounded the harsh exclusionary policies of the state against the Islamists. Secular parties and social movements were far from convinced of Ennahda's self-representation as moderate and democratic. There are solid reasons for this new social impetus against Ennahda that concerned this sector of society. First, it should be admitted that the progressive, moderate, and democratic theoretical elaborations of the leadership had a difficult time filtering down to an Islamist popular base that was incensed by repression and radicalized by international events such as the Algerian civil war or the attack against Iraq. It is clear that the process of internal change of the party towards the acceptance of democracy, women's rights, and pluralism that found its most significant expression in the signature of the national pact of 1988 had a difficult time imposing itself on the Islamist popular base. Second, the internal split within the party, symbolized in the isolation of the moderate and rather liberal co-founder Mourou, seemed to suggest that a more radical anti-systemic attitude was winning out internally, with an ambiguous attitude towards political violence emerging. Finally, the popular gains that the Islamist movement had made throughout the 1980s after their first rupture with their jamaa past had forced Tunisian secular parties to come to terms with the popularity of doing politics through religion. This turned them against any expression of political religiosity, whether moderate or radical, because this would fundamentally alter the secular nature of the state.

With this in mind, many secular Tunisians remained silent if not supportive of the exclusion of Ennahda throughout more than a decade. The tacit consensus for repression on the part of secular society is more significant for the second phase of theoretical re-elaboration of the party after 1991 than imprisonment or exile. For quite some time this secular fight on two fronts – against the regime and against Islamists – was a trait of most Arab societies(52) but it often ended with an uneasy support for authoritarian incumbents.(53) In any case, the isolation of the 1990s pushed the party even more in the direction of what were quickly becoming the only internationally legitimate pillars to operate on the political scene: democracy, human rights, and the market. It was only the common destiny of repression(54) that developed during the later years of the Ben Ali era between all genuine opposition

mplayers that permitted the creation of a united front against the regime that includes Ennahda. It was figures such as human rights activist and leader of the secular party Congress for the Republic Marzouki who moved first, suggesting that democracy in Tunisia would come only through an agreement with Ennahda and not against it. The progressive exclusionary repressive policies against all forms of dissent and the absence of public freedoms during the Ben Ali era pushed the party to accept at all levels the necessity of democracy and allow it to strategically form alliances with equally repressed secular political forces in the name of change. Crucial in all of this was the "final submission" to the idea that social pluralism needs to be accommodated. As Riadh Chaibi, member of the Ennahda national assembly, argued in 2011: "we are not a dogmatic party, we are a pragmatic party. We realise that Tunisia is a plural country and Europe is very close to us not only geographically. Tunisian society is similar in many ways to European societies and this is a given and we do not want to change that".(55) The necessity for democracy finally found its highest coordination point in the 18 October 2005 Collectif, which can be considered the moment when Ennahda no longer faced widespread rejection from the political and social representatives of many sectors of Tunisian society; moderation is recognized as having been attained.

Conclusion

The 2011 power-sharing agreement with two centre-left parties to guide Tunisia to multi-party democracy and the recognition of the pluralism of Tunisian society seemed the obvious destination of the Islamist party Ennahda, which has moved away progressively from its anti-democratic and illiberal position to become a much more traditional religiously oriented political party. Much of the literature on Islamist parties that has gone through a similar transformation explains this shift over time with the moderation through inclusion thesis. This does not apply to the Tunisian case because in a strict institutional sense, the Islamist movement was never genuinely afforded the possibility to participate in the political system and cross-ideological cooperation never occurred before the mid to late 2000s. Its moderation therefore needs to be accounted for differently and "moderation through exclusion"

can provide an answer. The reference here is not only to the state's repression of the movement through imprisonment and exile, although this occurred on a large scale. The reference is more to a sort of societal rejection whereby the specificities of Tunisian socio-political development meant that the Islamist movement had to go through a profound re-elaboration of its initial political categories in order not to be perceived as alien and irrelevant. In particular, it had to come to terms with an implicit social consensus shaped by Bourguibism and a tradition of Islamic reformism.

The Tunisian Islamist movement developed from the early 1970s as a critical reflection of Western modernity according to the model that Bourguiba, strictly following the secular tradition of France, imposed on the country.(56) This widespread and thorough critique of what was at the root of the Tunisian nationalist sentiment and ideology became progressively less central and by the late 2000s there was an almost complete turnaround of judgement on it, which is explicit in the documents of the ninth congress of the party held in the summer of 2012. This does not imply that Bourguibism is judged positively but there is recognition that the process of construction of a moderate, nationalist, open, and Muslim Tunisia is possible because its source is a tradition of religious reformism that comes from the experience of the Zitouna and that is specifically Tunisian. The fundamentalist vision of Islam that the party had in the 1970s progressively disappeared because society rejected it and this exclusion forced the party to re-elaborate the way in which it wished to engage it. Over time the scale of rejection in society decreased and the party made significant inroads, but in order to do so it had to accept stances and attitudes that comforted the nationalist self-image of Tunisians, a "country that is both Muslim and open by virtue of its history and its geography".(57) The necessity to engage for instance with the vast politicized sectors of a unionized workforce that began to appear within the party in the late 1970s and early 1980s required the party to construct new categories of thinking and to abandon simplistic sloganeering. The realization that Tunisia has a multi-layered identity and expresses a high degree of social pluralism also affected the party and provoked an internal debate as to how better take that factor into account.

The concept of exclusion carried also a narrower connotation: state violence.There is no doubt that the experience of jail and exile had an impact on the members and activists of the party and profoundly informed the views of many of them who come into contact with leftist prisoners or with freer European societies. From a general point of view, exclusion as repression simply slowed the process of introspection that the party went through in light of societal exclusion. One of the principal characteristics of the Tunisian transition to democracy is that it links the political and ideological debate about the nature of the state and state-society relations to what it was in the late 1980s and even earlier to the struggle for independence. It is this inevitable mutual recognition and its institutionalization on the part of Islamists and seculars of the plural moderate Muslim nature of Tunisian society that will make or break Tunisian democratization.

Notes

1. Churchill, “Tunisia’s Electoral Lesson.”

2. Hostrup Haugbølle and Cavatorta, “Beyond Ghannouchi.”

3. Lynch, “Tunisia’s New al-Nahda.”

4. La Jeune Afrique, no. 2719, 17 –23 February 2013.

5. Dahmani, “Tunisie, la laicite´ en danger.”

6. Ozzano, “The Many Faces.”

7. Hamid, “The Rise of the Islamists.”

8. Clark, “The Conditions of Islamist Moderation”; Schwedler, “Can Islamists Become Moderates?”

9. For example, see the cases of Morocco since the late 1990s, Jordan since the early 1990s, Yemen since reunification and Algeria since the mid-1990s. This partly applies to Egypt as well where the Muslim Brotherhood was allowed at times to participate in controlled elections.

10. Jaffrelot, “Refining the Moderation Thesis.”

11. Hafez, Why Muslims Rebel; Hamid, “The Islamist Response.”

12. Roy, “Les Islamistes.”

13. Stepan, “Tunisia’s Transition.”

14. See for instance the interview with Mohammed Talbi, “Ennahda est un cancer.”

15. Masoud, “Are they Democrats?”

16. Allani, “The Islamists in Tunisia.”

17. Tamimi, Rachid Ghannouchi.

18. Rachid Ghannouchi is the current president of the party and its long-time leader. He was among the founding members and he is also recognized for his scholarly work on the relationship between Islam and democracy.

19. For a discussion on this issue see Kramer, “Islamist Notions.”

20. Hostrup Haugbølle and Cavatorta, “Will the Real Tunisian Opposition Please Stand Up?”

21. Interview with authors, Tunis, October 2011.

22. Torelli, Merone, and Cavatorta, “Salafism in Tunisia.”

23. Authors’ interview with Rachid Ghannouchi, 30 October 2012.

24. Kausch, “Islamist-led Foreign Policies.”

25. Merone and Cavatorta, “Salafist Mouvance and Sheikh-ism.”

26. For a discussion of the relations between the West and Tunisia under Ben Ali, see Durac and Cavatorta, “Strengthening Authoritarian Rule.”

27. See, for instance, Mortimer, “Islamists, Soldiers and Democrats.”

28. Browers, Political Ideology; Cavatorta, “Civil Society.”

29. Browers, “Origins and Architects”; Clark, “Threats, Structures and Resources”; Abdelrahman, “With the Islamists?”

30. Roy, The Failure of Political Islam.

31. Schwedler, Faith in Moderation.

32. Clark, “The Conditions of Islamist Moderation.”

33. Wegner and Pellicer, “Left-Islamist Opposition Cooperation”; Ryan, “Political Opposition.”

34. Gurses, “Islamists, Democracy and Turkey”; Wegner, Islamist Opposition.

35. Karakaya and Yildirim, “Islamist Moderation.”

36. Hafez, “From Marginalisation to Massacres”; Hafez, Why Muslims Rebel; Hamid, “The Islamist Response.”

37. Torelli, “The ‘AKP Model’.”

38. Alexander, Tunisia.

39. Interview with authors, Tunis, 30 October 2012.

40. Interview with authors, Tunis, 29 October 2012.

41. Interview with Aymen Brayek, Ennahda student coordinator at Zitouna University, Tunis, 31 October 2012.

42. Authors’ interview with Rachid Ghannouchi, 30 October 2012.

43. Ibid.

44. On the relationship between workers and Islamists see Alexander, “Opportunities,
Organization and Ideas.”

45. Yousfi, “Ce syndicat.”

46. Authors’ interview with Rachid Ghannouchi, 30 October 2012.

47. Penner Angrist, “Parties, Parliament.”

48. Interview with authors, Tunis, 30 October 2012.

49. Rachid Ghannouchi, interview in Arabic with Al Jazeera in the context of the programme “Sharia and Life.” Posted on 5 February 2012 and available on YouTube at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWLkfAR6xiY.

50. Murphy, Economic and Political Change in Tunisia.

51. Anderson, “Political Pacts.”

52. Ottaway and Hamzawy, “Fighting on Two Fronts.”

53. Cook, “The Right Way”; Kraetzschmar, “Mapping Opposition Cooperation in the Arab World.”

54. Beau and Tuquoi, Notre Ami.

55. Interview with authors, Tunis, October 2011.

56. Alexander, Tunisia.

57. Authors’ interview with Rachid Ghannouchi, 30 October 2012.

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Post-Islamism, ideological evolution and ‘la tunisianité’ of the Tunisian Islamist party al-Nahda”[113]

The electoral victories of the Tunisian, Egyptian and Moroccan Islamist parties following the Arab uprisings, together with the central role they played in Libya and Yemen, have placed once again Political Islam at the centre of the scholarly and policy-making debate (1) For some time before the uprisings, increasing neglect of Islamist parties and movements and how they changed characterized the scholarship on the Arab world, although there were very notable exceptions to the trend(2) This widespread neglect had two reasons. First, the thesis of ‘upgraded authoritarianism’ began to dominate studies of Arab politics and society.(3) The dominant research questions were how authoritarian Arab regimes managed to remain in power in the age of globalized democracy and what were the specific mechanisms allowing them to survive in the face of widespread popularillegitimacy. Answers to these questions, however important they were, monopolized much of the attention of scholars of the region, shifting the focus away from opposition actors and the ideological and organizational changes they might have gone through. Second, the thesis of post-Islamism, which finds its roots in the works of Asef Bay at and Olivier Roy, hecame the theoretical framework through which Islamist politics and activism were being reinterpreted away from more traditional studies of political parties and associations with political goals.”(4) The main research questions dealt with the different articulations of Islamism present in society and how they differed from traditional state- centred Islamism focused on the creation of an Islamic state and adherence to *sharia* law.

These two strands of research have greatly contrihuted to the understanding of Arab politics and societies, but they have both come under criticism since the Arab Awakening. The paradigm of ‘upgrading authoritarianism’ has been accused of

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implicitly suggesting that authoritarian rule in the region would not be challenged in a meaningful way for a long time and the uprisings suggested instead that there was no validity in such a thesis given the rapidity and intensity of the revolts. The reality might yet turn out to support the thesis of enduring authoritarianism, but there is no doubt that its credibility has suffered considerably.(5) The post-Islamism thesis suffered initially a similar fate because the main beneficiaries of the uprisings, where they succeeded, have been Islamist parties of the *Ikhwani* tradition, seemingly demonstrating that Islamism was far from finished and, crucially, far from being articulated in many different ways; the Tunisian *al- Nahda* received 37% of the votes cast and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood 37.5%. Thus, Islamist party politics was alive and well. The electoral results and the arrival in power of the Islamists have generated a considerable amount of scholarship questioning previous knowledge of and assumptions about Islamism,(6) with the post-Islamism thesis becoming a target of scholarly criticism.

More broadly, the success of Islamist parties and their centrality in the construction of new political arrangements has led to a collective effort to try to rethink Islamist politics.(7) This article is part of that intellectual effort, and through a critical re-examination of the thesis of post-Islamism it attempts to explain the internal mechanisms through which Islamist parties have dealt with the ideological challenges of participating in pluralistic politics. Specifically, we use the case of the Tunisian *al-Nahda* to discuss how the experience of transitional politics, with its inevitable corollary of compromise and coalition-making, shaped the internal ideological debates of the party and how, in turn, such debates have influenced the party's strategy. In practical terms, these internal discussions led *al- Nahda* to adopt a strategic behaviour that resulted in the party signing up to a constitution that does not create an Islamic state in the traditional sense and that does not include any reference to *sharia* law. The contention here is that this should not be interpreted necessarily as a failure of Islamism, as Roy would, for instance, suggest. Rather, it would point to the changing nature of ideologies and ideological commitments,(8) which in turn spark disagreements and debates within parties and movements, further opening up the space of Islamism. As the articlehighlights, the changing ideological

references of *al-Nahda* in Tunisia have served to underpin the progressive transformation of the party and at the same time have contributed to the rise of competing forms of political Islam. In particular, there seems to he a renewed focus within Islamism on the differences between those who have a national focus and those who have a much more pronounced internationalist one.

Post-Islamism and its validity

The post-Islamism thesis was put forth as an answer to the changes in Islamist politics and activism that occurred in the 1990s. It is a theoretical framework that finds its origins principally in the works of Bayat, who coined the term Post-Islamism, and Roy. There are two different, but interrelated, conceptualizations of post-Islamism. In the first conceptualization, post-Islamism postulates that the political experience of Islamism—as a coherent and absolute ideological project to take over state power and transform both politics and society through religion-inspired reforms—had run its course. Thus, in Browers understanding of Roy's work, 'Islamism had failed, both intellectually and politically'(9). This had two consequences. On the one hand, Islamism retreated into new articulations of Islamist politics away from the fixation with state power and towards private expressions of religiosity, as for instance through economic success in a market economy.(10) On the other, it dispersed in society as a 'non-movement', a non- traditional understanding of popular mobilization against authoritarianism, whereby individual piety stood as an expression of political dissent against the authorities(11). The second conceptualization of post-Islamism does not see Islamism as a total failure, but argues that the mid 1990s represented the end of the 'mythical revolutionary phase' of Islamism—the arrival of Khatami in power in Iran is the paradigmatic example of the loss of revolutionary drive—and began a move towards reformism and compromise with ordinary politics and, crucially, politicking. For Bayat, post-Islamism 'is an attempt to turn the underlying principles of Islamism on its head by

emphasising rights instead of duties, plurality in place of a singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scriptures, and the future instead of the past'(12).

The validity of post-Islamism has been called into question on two specific points. First, far from being politically exhausted, Islamist parties proved throughout the 2000s that their electoral appeal was still powerful and that political power was still the goal despite the necessity to tread carefully in the face of state repression(13).Repression and strong constraints in electoral rules did not prevent the Egyptian Muslim Brothers from performing well in the 2005 legislative elections. The Moroccan Party for Justice and Development also performed well throughout the late 1990s and 2000s and could have done even better in terms of seats if the party had not decided to run candidates in a limited number of constituencies in order not to appear threatening to the monarchy(14).

A similar scenario could be applied to the Kingdom of Jordan. In fully liberalized political systems Islamist parties of *Ikhwani* persuasion came to power with rather large majorities, as the cases of the Turkish Justice and Development party and the Palestinian Hamas proved. It should also he underlined that the Yemeni *Islah* party was a memher of the ruling coalition for a number of years on the hack of its electoral strength. Elsewhere in the Arab world—Libya, Algeria, Syria and Tunisia—only repression seemed to be able to keep Islamists out of political power. Finally, even the Lebanese *Hizbullah* progressively improved its electoral results and acquired greater prestige. In this respect, therefore, it seemed that Roy's death knell of Islamism had been very premature.

Second, the Arab Awakening clearly demonstrated that Islamist parties were the real protagonists of political life and that the assumptions behind the notion of the influence of 'non-movements' might have been exaggerated. Once political liberalization occurred, the real actors on the scene were the political parties with an *Ikhwani* tradition, soon followed in a number of countries by increasingly politicized Salafis. Islamist parties moved quickly and efficiently to fill the institutional gap and organized extremely successful electoral campaigns. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and *al-Nahda* in Tunisia in particular mobilized members, sympathizers and voters according to the traditional arsenal of political parties: putting in place clear

structures across the country, planning the media campaign, selecting candidates and focusing on the development of a political manifesto.

It follows from the two previous points that the very idea of post-lslamism had lost most of its appeal and its validity and usefulness began to be questioned. However, this criticism of the post-lslamist thesis should not detract from a crucial insight that the paradigm provided, namely that over time Islamist parties have abandoned many of their core demands and that, particularly after the Arab Spring, they have come to terms with the requirements and necessity of compromise in a pluralistic political environment. In the past, the classic dilemma of what would Islamist parties do in an open political system had remained largely theoretical, but following the 2011 uprisings scholars and policy-makers have had the opportunity to test their assumptions. Rather than continuing to subscribe to the ideological absolutism of ‘Islam is the solution’, Islamist parties have had to work towards the discovery of a much more pragmatic manner of conducting politics. While Roy might have been too quick and too definitive in dismissing the entire Islamist political project as a failure, the progressive reformist *élan* that has characterized Islamism for at least two decades and that is embodied in the second conceptualization of post-lslamism is a very useful device for understanding the evolutionary process of Political Islam. Far from being simply instrumental or hostage to the ‘moderation through inclusion’ theory,(15) which places all of its emphasis on the notion of contingent pragmatism, there is a process of fundamental ideological revision at work within large sectors of *Ikhwani* Islamism. It is, for instance, not a coincidence that *Ikhwani* reformism occurs at the same time when the banner of genuine ‘Islamism’ is picked up by an increasingly politicized Salafism.(16)Thus, the evolution of *Ikhwani* reformism is a dialectic conversation between praxis and ideological innovations, which mutually influence each other depending largely on national contexts.

al-Nahda’s ideological evolution

The political moderation of the Tunisian Islamist party *al-Nahda* has been one of the most hotly debated topics in both academic and policy-making circles since the legalization of the party in March 2011 following the collapse of the authoritarian regime.(17) In the context of the discussions held over the role *al-Nahda* would play in the Tunisian democratic transition, moderation was equated with the acceptance of democratic mechanisms, the respect for fundamental liberties and for the personal status legislation and, crucially in the Tunisian environment, the absolute formal support for the creation of a genuinely civil state. For some authors, the party led by Rachid Ghannounchi, a prominent Islamist thinker and intellectual in his own right, had already significantly moderated well before the Arab uprisings when very few believed it possible for the party ever to come to power.(18) Thus, despite a degree of both domestic and international scepticism, it was not entirely surprising that the party displayed a strong willingness to compromise and accept consensual solutions distant from its original Islamist ideological tenets. The time *al-Nahda* spent in government and in the Constitutional Assembly since its victory in the October 2011 elections has often been controversial and at times outright confrontational against secular political parties and movements, but, ultimately, it has led to the fruitful conclusion of the first phase of the Tunisian transition.

Despite the successful score in the election, the party went through a difficult process of political legitimization. As had happened at the end of 1989, when a tentative process of liberalization occurred under the watch of the newly installed president Ben Ali, the political success of Islamists was extremely problematic. The 1989 partial electoral victory suggested that the party represented a large and significant sector of society, but its good performance at the polls frightened both the secular camp and the regime. It was almost inevitable that a crackdown would take place and it duly did, with the authoritarian state repressing all forms of political Islam and eventually widening its repressive measures to the liberal and secular sectors of society who had tacitly supported the political elimination of Islamists.(19) The 2011 elections and the show of electoral strength of *al-Nahda* generated similar fears, but the absence of authoritarian constraints allowed for party politics and state-society relations to be conducted in a much freer political environment, leading

certainly to confrontations and moments of crisis—notably after the assassinations of two prominent left-wing politicians in 2013—^but, ultimately, to the inclusion and legitimization of the Islamists in national politics and institutions.(20) The new Constitution, approved in January 2014, signals the successful conclusion of the first phase of the Tunisian democratic process and the success is in large part due to the fact that *al-Nahda* has given up on its core Islamist principles and accepted the liberal-democratic game and rules. Party officials refer to the period between October 2011 and the summer of 2013 as the time when the party exercised its 'national responsibility'. Not only did the party privilege coalition politics and accepted leaving power in the name of the national interest to allow for the formation of a technocratic national unity government, but it also accepted the notion of a civil state and the inclusion of freedom of conscience in the Constitution. If one adds that the party did not question the validity of the personal status code that protects women's rights and accepted that references to *sharia* would not appear in the final constitutional text, it emerges quite clearly that there does not seem to he much that is Islamist in the Islamist party. It would thus appear that Roy's point about the political and ideological failure of Islamism is correct in so far as there is an Islamist party in Tunisia today only in name and not in practice, because it has simply accepted the political categories of liberal-democracy. If the measuring stick is the idealized Islamic state of the 1970s, there is little doubt that Roy's point should be taken on board because it seems to point correctly to the intellectual poverty and the political naiveté of an ideological project based on religion-inspired understandings of state-making and institutions-making. In short, while religious categories might have been useful to construct a populist political project while in opposition, they now revealed their uselessness and lack of broad appeal when an Islamist party is confronted with the harsher realities of everyday politicking and compromising in a pluralistic environment.

However, it would be too simplistic to argue that the Islamism *al-Nahda* in Tunisia subscribes to is simply now an empty shell and that the party has very little to do with Islamism. Such an interpretation closes the door firmly on the notion of ideological evolution, which, if carried out through proper criteria and references,

can ensure that a degree of ideological coherence with an early Islamist project can remain.(21) Ideologies are not fixed and constantly interact with the political and social environment within which they are produced and reproduced, suggesting that dogmatic and static adherence is often an exception. If one takes post- Islamism to mean reformism and not failure, it permits one to take seriously and examine critically the ideological positions and declarations of members of *al-Nahda* regarding the concrete political choices they made and the ideological context within which they were made. What is innovative here is to place ideology and ideological claims—and their evolution—at the centre of the analysis of the Tunisian Islamist movement to explain its development rather than fully subscribing to the influence of political pragmatism for the sake of obtaining or remaining in office. It is obviously important to underline institutional and political constraints as well the instrumentality of the specific policy choices and behaviour that have characterized at times *al-Nahda" s* political action since the revolution, but such choices do not occur in an ideological vacuum. There is a conversation taking place where political constraints dictated by the reality within which one operates influence the ideological positions and evolution of the party, but the degree of acceptance of such reality is due to the outcome of an internal ideological debate. This discussion renders in turn such choices possible and plausible in the context of a self-image and self-representation of the party as an Islamist one.

When one examines the discourse of the leadership of the party, it emerges that the Islamist references remain strong and intact even though critics, particularly within the Salali galaxy that has emerged as a powerful social force in the country (22) claim that there is little that is 'Islamic' left in *al-Nahda.* For instance Ghannouchi claimed that giving up on a reference to *sharia* in the constitution does not determine the degree of 'Islamism' of the party because the mission of an Islamist party today is to realize the broader objectives of *sharia,* which are, fundamentally, justice and liberty. He continues his argument by stating that in other Arab countries there are references to *sharia* in the constitution and in legislation, but in such countries Islam is not fully realized because there is neither justice nor liberty. In Ghannouchi's view, Tunisia today is much more of a genuine Islamic

state—it fulfils the promise of justice and liberty—than Arab autocracies where rhetorical commitment to *sharia* is in fact rendered void by the absence of both justice and liberty (23). Statements such as this would be easy to dismiss as purely instrumental, self-serving and designed to appease party members still linked to an Islamist ideal that the party incarnated for a long time. Salali critics of the party claim indeed that *al-Nahda* has sold out Islamism.(24) However, this can and should be seen as the philosophical outcome of a complex process of ideological revision and soul-searching that uses religious categories and intellectuals to legitimize the evolutionary process. In turn, as mentioned earlier, such a process influences daily politicking and is influenced by it. The question thus arises as to how *al-Nahda* evolved ideologically towards what can be labelled Islamist reformism.

Historically speaking, two coexisting ideological trends can be found in the Tunisian Islamic party: *Ikhwani* and *Tunisian.* They are not typical party factions, but they are two different understandings of the way in which Islamism can and should contribute to the creation of a new Islamic society. They are different in so far as the intellectual sources of inspiration for political action rest on interpretations and discourses that, particularly at crucial moments of crisis when a bold decision needs to be made, can come into conflict with each other. In some ways, these divisions affect all Islamist parties across the region, including the Muslim Brotherhood(25) and the *Front Islamique du Salut* (Islamic Salvation Front) of the early 1990s in Algeria, with its *djazairi* (Algerian) nationalist soul imbued with local sociopolitical practices and its more international one linked to the rigidity of the project of the absolute Islamic state.(26) In its early stages, the Islamist movement in Tunisia was largely *Ikhwani* since the group's members were in profound admiration of the international Muslim Brotherhood and its main scholars.(27) In fact, at the time, in one way or another all Islamists across the region were fascinated with the intellectual work of Ikhwani scholars, and most notably Sayyid Qutb, although Tunisian Islamists did not formally and entirely subscribe to his views.(28) Qutb is central because in his attempt to modernize Islamism he becomes the symbolic figure of what can be termed an *Ikhwani* sentiment. He had analysed society as being an unjust one; in religious terms, a society of *'jahilyya'* (pre-Islamic ignorance).(29) In his thinking, the *jamaa*

(group) had the mission of bringing society back on the truth path of Islam. The modernity of Qutb took the language of the Koran, so familiar to all Muslims, to interpret the frustration of all Muslims, not only Egyptians, against the post-colonial Arab state. Thus, the state and the ruling elites became the *taghout* (apostate) and the Muslims backing them were reduced to the status of unbelievers, leading to the inevitability of *jihad* to reconstruct society.(30) Qutb's analysis and solutions for the ills of Egyptian society applied more broadly to all Arab states and therefore being *Ikhwani* largely meant being linked to a transnational political project, with an international ideology based on the notion of one Islamic *ummah.* In this context, national differences, and therefore the entity nation-state, are simply contingent historical products that can and should be reversed at some stage in favour of a political project that will eventually lead to the creation of a single political authority; a pan-lslamic state where *sharia* reigns. This does not suggest that there was a clear political programme destined to fulfil what clearly remained an aspiration, but it indicates a fundamentally rigid application of the requirements of an Islamic state for all Arab countries without much regard for the national political, social and, crucially, religious environment. This is not to suggest that Qutb can stand in for all *Ikhwani* because the influence al-Banna or Hudaybi had on the ideological development of the Brotherhood has been extremely significant. The scholarly efforts that Hudaybi made to tone down Qutb's radicalism should be specifically underlined as the subsequent attempts to make the Brotherhood a national Egyptian political actor.(31) All this notwithstanding, the fascination that Qutb exercised across the region should not be underestimated also because al-Banna himself did not have much sympathy for what can be referred to as narrow nationalism(32). In any case, for many young Islamist activists of the 1970s, Qutb's ideas were broadly equated with *Ikhwanism.* Thus, its main tenets were therefore adopted across the region, including Tunisia. The problem is that such a process of *Ikhwanization* led to a certain extent to the marginalization of more locally based interpretations of what it meant to be an Islamist in a specific national context, and to what kind of reading religious precepts should be subjected, when employed for political mobilization. In Tunisia, the most prominent figure of the 'Tunisian' strand

was Kami da Enneifer, born in a family of traditional 'Zeitounian sheikhs'—linked to the Zeitouna mosque and centre of religious learning—who raised the question of Tunisian specificity already in the 1970s in a rich debate largely documented.(33) He eventually left the Islamist movement, but the question remained as to what kind of Islamism the movement first and the party later would subscribe. Over time, political necessities, rejection from large sectors of Tunisian society and new cultural influences redirected the party away from Qutb's *Ikhwani* strand and towards the Tunisian one: the *tunisianité* that, paradoxically, Bourguiba, the traditional enemy of Islamism in the country, had been building since decolonization. The *tunisianité* of the Islamists, however, differs from the modernist, nationalist and Western-looking one that Bourguiba promoted because in accepting pluralism and modernity Islamism finds its roots in the religious tradition of the country and not in what it believes are Erench-imported notions. Thus, what emerges is that there is no need to rely on foreign models to have a workable modernity; it can be done because the seeds of such pluralistic modernity—with the inevitably democratic political system that comes with it— were sown by Islamist intellectuals even before the Erench arrived with their 'civilising mission'. In a sense, the evolution of the party's discourse into a national shared narrative with religious undertones becomes the condition for the success in integrating the national political scene. *al-Nahda'*s Islamists in Tunisia have come to accept the idea of a Tunisian sense of belonging to a nation that cannot he easily replaced with a transnational project based solely on the *ummah,* as the multiple identities of many ordinary Tunisians have to be accommodated. In short, the internal ideological revisions have led the party today to embrace what can be termed Tunisian reformism.

The most important figure of Tunisian reformism is Mohammed Tahar Ben Achour, who developed the Islamic science of *Makasid(34).* This particular discipline aims at interpreting Islamic law away from its traditional normative rigidity and, with its emphasis on literalism, towards a more flexible understanding where the broader objectives of Islam have to be the guiding principles. The most significant objectives are justice and liberty, which are precisely what Ghannouchi argued in his statements about the achievements of the party in the post-Ben Ali

transitional phase.(35) The 'opposition' between the *Ikhwani* political thinking and the specific Tunisian one linked to North African intellectual production emerges quite clearly in the public rhetoric of the party, which promotes it, for instance, through its social media.(36) This development in thinking is not unique to Ghannouchi, but what is relevant is the insistence of the fundamental importance of the *Makasid* in the Maghrebi tradition as an anchor to a tradition that 'nationalizes' Tunisian Islamism, as the ideological programme of the party also indicates.(37) The role of Tahar Ben Achour's thinking on the *Makasid* fits in with the work of the most famous of the rationalists of the historical movement of Islamic renaissance, Mohamed Abdou. The Egyptian writer, more than his successor and pupil Rachid Ridha, was interested in a revolution of mentalities or a cultural renewing of the Islamic world. He thought that the Islamic civilization had proved historically its willingness to be open to 'contamination' and its ability in making use of *aql* (rationality). He opposed rationality to the dominant trend of adapting the social and political life to *naql,* the passive repetition of what jurists *(fakih)* had applied as solution of the daily problems. In some ways, there is an explicit critique of a juridical tradition that had 'suffocated' Islamic reformist thought until it was no longer capable to innovate and struggled in finding new solutions for its historical evolution *(ijtihad).* It is in a sense going back to Islamic history and reopening the theological discussion. The relation between *aql* and *naql* was the core question of an older philosophical and theological debate. For Sami Braham, a prominent Tunisian Islamist intellectual, 'we need to reopen that discussion', in order to look very seriously for an 'Islamic reformation' in some ways inspired by the European protestant one.(38) Reprising Tahar Ben Achour in such terms allows *al-Nahda* to be part of a historical conversation that takes place within Islamism and does so through the categories of religion, suggesting therefore that post-Islamism should be seen as evolution, not failure. Of course there is a self-serving dimension to this intellectual rediscovery because it is instrumental in supporting a political strategy with which many in the party disagree. In addition, large sectors of secular Tunisian society do not believe that this process of rediscovery is genuine or that it makes any difference to what they perceive as the attempt by *al-Nahda* to Islamize both the institutions of

government and society as whole. There is an element of truth in this and the fear of Islamist doublespeak is genuine, hut it should also he admitted that the concrete actions *al-Nahda* has taken since the fall of the regime support the party's claim that their conversion to pluralistic politics and their commitment to the construction of a civil democratic state is real. For example, they had stated before the October 2011 elections they would seek a coalition government irrespective of the results. The party also argued that references to *sharia* in the constitution would not be sought. Finally, the party stated they would not have a presidential candidate in the 2014 elections so to avoid a potential monopoly on both the legislative— should they win parliamentary elections—and the executive branches, which would set off problematic confrontations with other political movements and with the international community. In all of these instances, declarations were followed through.

From all of this, it follows that the renewed interest and centrality for the Islamist movement in Tunisia in Tahar Ben Achour have also significant implications for the development of the so-called Islamic democracy, because it allows for the 'application' of *sharia,* which is compulsory for each Muslim, in a philosophical and moral manner in so far as it rhymes with the highest Islamic principles of justice and liberty. For Ghannouchi, this is the basis for accepting democratic mechanisms and liberal freedoms as essentially Islamic. In a sense, the freedom of man is due not to natural rights, as in the western tradition, but to rights given to men from revelation.(39)

Finally, there is a level of symbolic strength in the reference to Tahar Ben Achour in so far as it links his work to a Tunisian specificity, which is part of a larger Maghrebi one. Tahar Ben Achour re-stimulated an intellectual tradition coming from the historical Andalusian experience, which is a *sui generis* Islamic one. Shatibi, the father of *Makasid* in its modern sense, was an Andalus. Ibn Khaldoun, the first Muslim intellectual to talk about the Islamic world as a historical and sociological process, was born in Algeria and studied in Tunisia at the Zeituna mosque. Last but not least is the reference to the work of Malek Bennabi, a thinker considered by Ghannouchi 'the modern Ibn Khaldoun(40). Bennabi is an Algerian scholar who rose to prominence in the middle of the 20th century for his writings on colonialism,

Islam, democracy and pluralism. While he can be considered an Islamist, he very early on adopted a positive view of democracy. His interest was not necessarily in the procedures and mechanisms of democratic government, but in the fact that democracy was a state of mind and a national spirit that needed to be developed because respect for the plurality of society was intrinsic to Islam. Crucial to his fame was also the polemic against Qutb, and this is where the rediscovery of Bennabi provides the theological framework necessary to place significant distance between the political project of Qutb, and by implication of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the one *al-Nahda* sustains in Tunisia. While Bennabi admired Qutb's moral stance against authoritarianism and defended his right to voice his radical opinions on political change, he profoundly disagreed with his interpretation of the state of the modern Arab world. According to Bennabi, more democracy and more pluralism weremuch more necessary than a simple call to implement *sharia* law, and he effectively reversed their order of importance. Bennahi's views were not very popular among Islamists across the Arab world who, at the time, had no time for a positive take on democratic government, although his work on—and against—colonialism remained important for all Islamists. The diatribe between Qutb and Bennabi has been quite influential in North African intellectual circles and in many ways Ghannouchi and *al-Nahda* have referred back to Bennabi's work to argue that democracy and pluralism are necessary and functional to the defence and promotion of Islam and the Arab-Muslim identity(41). Bennabi's work has of course to be seen in a wider context where other scholars close to the 'Andalusian' experience are mobilized to support the uniqueness of the Tunisian Islamist experience, which becomes one that was always characterized by tolerance for plural identities.(42)

In conclusion, when the Qutb-inspired *Ikhwani* strand proved to be too inflexible and inefficient for the Tunisian Islamist movement, a process of rediscovery of more local sources of ideological commitment to Islamism was initiated. When this process begins, the project of Islamism inevitably changes and acquires the flexibility necessary to both justify and validate political choices that in an *Ikhwani* context would have been much more problematic. As prominent *al- Nahda* member of parliament, Salma Sarsout, put it, the approval of the constitution was explained

by the leadership according to the application of the principles of *makasid.* According to her, the opportunity to initiate a debate within the party on how to be Islamic today implied a new ideological outlook."(43) This suggests that the decision made to approve the constitution was not simply a pragmatic one dictated by external constraints, but the product of a longer-running engagement with the ideological underpinnings of a renewed Islamism strongly contaminated by references to the specificity of *tunisianité* and, to a lesser degree, Maghrebi intellectual heritage. It follows that it should no longer be surprising to external observers of the Islamic party to discover that the *nahdhouis* are today reasonably at ease with Bourguiba's modernist heritage, which was based on a similar recuperation of indigenous sources of legitimation for his nationalist secular project. Within this ideological framework, Bourguiba is not the initiator of Tunisian modernity and reformism which he captured with the term *tunisianité,* but only its secular interpreter.(44) Other more valid interpretations are not only possible but also necessary, particularly if they are more pluralistic, democratic and attuned to what ordinary Tunisians want.

Beyond the experience of al-Nahda

The case of the ideological evolution of the Tunisian *al-Nahda* embodies a form of political Islam that has not failed. On the contrary, it seems to demonstrate the richness of the categories and interpretation of religious sources that can be recuperated and discussed in order to implement a political project that can still be labelled Islamic. One needs not to be a supporter of the social conservatism or economic liberalism that the party stands for to recognize that it has made an effort over time to remain faithful to the goal of creating an Islamic state while coming to terms with the social and political pluralism that Tunisia always exhihited. In terms of the wider dehate about the thesis of post-lslamism, the case of *al- Nahda* can shed some light on broader directions and trajectories of political Islam, which remains a useful category to describe and analyse the phenomenon of political engagement through religious references.

The rethinking of Islamist politics on the part of mainstream Islamist parties not only has had a tremendous influence on their ideology and the flexibility through which they have mediated different national realities, but also has strengthened the

idea that politics can and should be conducted through religious categories. This renewed strength is also the outcome of the re-positioning of mainstream Islamist parties and their shift to a different religious scholarship. It follows that this ideological evolution has left a significant space open to new political 'entrepreneurs', which have entered the scene by claiming to be the genuine representatives of Islamism. At a time when Brotherhood-inspired Islamist parties have demonstrated sufficient ideological flexibility to adapt to the changed political circumstances, Salafism has emerged as a potent ideological alternative. This suggests that the category of Islamism still holds considerable importance. Specifically, it can be argued that the ideological evolution of Islamists has generated a backlash in Islamist circles in so far as such evolution, paradoxically, has also been interpreted as the failure or, worse, the betrayal of the original goals of Islamism: the creation of the Islamic state and the imposition of *sharia.* While the Tunisian *al-Nahda* still claims to be an Islamic party that has been able to fulfil the Islamic project by subscribing to a political system that enshrines liberty and justice, other actors, notably Salafi parties and movements, have come on the scene claiming that 'liberty and justice' in the context *al-Nahda* employs them are a travesty. This confrontation of course does not concern only *al-Nahda* and Tunisia, but is a much more widespread phenomenon that can be seen at work in Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria. In Egypt, for instance, the formation of the Salafi *al-Nour* party has challenged the political and ideological primacy of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Yemen also, a new Salafi party, *al-Rashad,* has come on the political scene to compete not only against more secular parties, but also against the Brotherhood-inspired *Islah* party. However, what is interesting to note is that such confrontation does not spring only from the traditional rivalry between political Islamists and Salafis regarding the concept of *hizbya* or divisions of the community through party politics. Traditionally, Salafis had been greatly opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood because it had decided to enter politics, abandoning therefore the primacy of doctrinal concerns. In some contexts, this is still valid, particularly where Salafis refuse to enter the political system and play the institutional game of party politics. However, and this is the interesting development, there is an increasing politicization of Salafism with a

number of Salafi parties and movements appearing on the scene and claiming political representation. This moves the rivalry with Brotherhood-inspired parties away from doctrinal debates and towards the political level, which is one to which Salafis are not used.

The proto-politicization of Salafism" (45) demonstrates both the importance of ideology and the continued relevance of post-Islamism as a category to analyse the evolution and changes within political Islam. Once Salafi parties enter politics they do not do so on doctrinal grounds, but on political-ideological ones. In ideological terms, the main difference between Salafi parties and Islamist ones today is based on the conceptualization of the Islamic state. For the classic Islamic vision, the state should be forced to impose religion-inspired rules and legislation for the community in the name of the defence of the *ummah.* Once again, we find here an ideal of transcendence of the entity nation-state in favour of a transnational political project. It is about all Muslims being under the same political authority, which is religiously legitimated. In turn, this political order must be the guarantor of the application of *sharia* under which all Muslims can fulfil their lives as genuine believers. In many ways, thus, there is a contradiction with the requirements necessary today for living in a modern liberal state. Islamist parties like *al-Nahda* have been able to go beyond this classic vision not by subscribing to liberal-democratic norms and to human rights as natural rights, but by offering an ideological evolution that permits them to talk about citizenship, liberty and democracy within an Islamic framework. The imposition of *sharia* becomes problematic not because it is illiberal, but because, on religious grounds, it fails to ensure what the genuine objectives of Islam are, namely justice and liberty for all.

The proto-politicization of Salafis, as the new classic Islamists, further highlights how the category of post-Islamism as ideological evolution is both useful and necessary because all sorts of different strands are 'moving' and shifting their ideological pillars to respond to the challenges of the Arab Awakening. In this context, it might be interesting to examine the broad world of Islamism on a continuum, whereby politicized Salafis represent the classical political vision of the

Islamic state, parties like *al-Nahda* represent the furthest point of ideological evolution towards a coincidence between liberal-democracy and Islamism, and parties such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood stuck somewhere in the middle, pulled on the one side towards the embrace with pluralistic democracy and on the other towards a renewed commitment to the classic Islamic state with its *sharia* corollary.

Conclusion

To a certain extent, it is rather sterile to once again talk about the failure or the end of Islamism. The dislodging of the Muslim Brotherhood from power through a military coup should not suggest that Islamism in Egypt is a spent force. Conversely, the ideological evolution of the Tunisian *al-Nahda* and its support for a constitutional document that does not include references to *sharia* and that does not go in the direction of building a classic Islamic state should also not be interpreted as an inevitable surrender to liberal-democracy. What emerges from these experiences is that religious references, however, interrogated by political actors, remain central to Arab politics.One aspect of the notion of post-Islamism seemed to indicate that such religious references were either pointless or would he hent so out of their real meaning as to become irrelevant for politics. Another aspect of post-Islamism suggested, however, the possibility and the potential for ideological evolution and it is this second aspect that has forcefully emerged when rethinking Islamist politics. Through an in-depth analysis of the case of *al-Nahda,* it emerges quite strongly that the ideological debates that had been taking place within the party contributed to shape the political responses that were given to the challenges of the Tunisian transition. In fact, *al-Nahda* has demonstrated to some, notably Salafi scholars and activists such a high degree of flexibility and pragmatism to suggest that the party is no longer Islamist. At a closer analysis, this proves to be a rather misguided interpretation in so far as the ideological debate is what enabled the party to adapt to changed circumstances and still remain plausibly Islamic. Ghannouchi's view that Tunisia is now an Islamic state because it guarantees liberty and justice—the

fundamental social goals of Islam—might therefore not be a simple rhetorical device to convince a constituency that feels the party has abandoned the genuine striving for the creation of an Islamic state. Rather, it can be interpreted as the product of an important evolution that has taken place through the rethinking of religious categories and that is based on a solid and long tradition of Islamist engagement in politics with a particular focus on the scholarship of the Maghreb.

The rediscovery of such scholarship with an 'Andalusian' heritage is important in a context where the Tunisian experience is increasingly looked at as a model of inspiration for the successful inclusion of an Islamist party in a pluralistic political system. According to Heydemann, the Tunisian experience is likely to be the only case of successful transition to democracy in the aftermath of the Arab Awakening"(46) and for Stepan this is due to the 'twin tolerations' between Islamists and seculars."(47) It is for this very reason that political actors across the region are looking at Tunisia as a model to be inspired from to solve the political impasse a beleaguered Arab world is experiencing. This is not only true in terms of the practicalities of the Tunisian transition such as the creation of a constituent assembly or the national pact to solve the crisis that hit the country in late 2013. It is also true in terms of the ideological evolution of *al-Nahda* because integrating an Islamist party, today as in the past, represents the greatest challenge to a stable plural political system. In relation to this, it might be interesting to note that since the arrival of modern political Islam on the scene, all the most relevant scholarship about the relationship between religion and politics tended to travel from the Machrek westward towards the Maghreb. The focus on the Tunisian experience might lead to a reversal of direction whereby the Maghrebi scholarship of the Algerian Bennabi, the Tunisian Ben Achour or the Moroccan Abdessalam Tassine might finally be having a potent influence on the rest of the Arab world. Ideology and ideological evolutions are an important aspect of how political parties and social movements think about their role in society and in the political system of which they are part. At this crucial stage in the history of the Arab world, the innovations that seem to be successful in coupling Islamism with a modern nation-state that is truly post-colonial and pluralistic are coming from the Maghreh.

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44. *Interview with the authors, Hammam Linf, 4 April 2014.*

45. *Ben Aissa Dalmi, long-time member of Nahda, interview with the authors. Ras Jebal (Bizerte), 11 July 2013.*

46. *R. Meijer, 'Conclusion', in F. Cavatorta and F. Merone (Eds)* Salafism after the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power *(London: Hurst, 2015).*

47. *S. Heydemann, 'Syria and the future of authoritarianism'.* Journal of Democracy, *24(4) (2013), pp. 59-73.*

48. *A. Stepan, 'Tunisia's transition and the twin tolerations'.* Journal of Democracy, *23(2) (2012), pp. 89-103.*

Post-scriptum

In the previous chapter, I considered Nahda in the context of the political evolution Tunisia went through after 2011. The historical Islamist party came back on the scene after 20 years of exile and political repression. Contrary to what many analysts thought, it became the most important and best organized political party in the country. In particular, one trend of the post-Islamism debate, represented by Olivier Roy, argued that Islamism had failed and the Islamic identity had developed solely into an individualistic (pietistic and consumerist) behaviour. As the case of Nahda shows, Islamism is however still an important ideological frame of mobilization. To be sure, post-Islamism did not get it all wrong, especially when looking at Islamism from the standpoint of Asef Bayat. The Iranian author stressed that post-Islamism explains the transformation of Islamism from holistic and totalitarian to pragmatic and 'politicking'. The case of Nahda proves how this evolution can take place. The case of Tunisian Islamism, however, is not only about the evolution of Nahda into a moderate and democratic party. The development of the *Ikhwani* party in fact has an influence on the evolution of the entire Islamist scene;new radical Islamist forces (Salafists) emerge in fact as a consequence of its moderation. I analyse in the next chapter the rise and fall of *Ansar al-Sharia*, which presented itself to the broader Islamist constituency as a new credible and genuine Islamist project.

Chapter 4. Rise and fall of the salafi-jihadi movement of Ansar al-sharia Tunisia

Introduction

The main topic of this chapter is the evolution of the radical Islamist movement in Tunisia. The democratization process, based on institutions and constitution building, did not provide an answer to the popular and widespread expectations for socio-economic change. The process of contention and political liberalization left open the field to the ideological frame of new political and social actors. This process occurred in parallel with a dynamic of 'Islamization'. A new Islamist scene took shape in the aftermath of the fall of the regime and the new generation of Islamists was different from the previous and had become ideologically mature in the 2000s. In Tunisia, salafi-jihadists appeared on the scene for the first time in 2007. The police discovered a group of jihadists in Soliman (a town 50 km away from Tunis), allegedly preparing an attack against the state. In the aftermath of this operation, the regime triggered a campaign of repression, throwing in jail many new young radical Islamists known to the police. These youngsters, called afterwards the 'Soliman generation', provided the bulk of the salafi-jihadi movement in the period 2011-13. In the particular context of political liberalization, a new salafi-jihadi group, *Ansar al-Sharia* (AST), saw the light of day and occupied the scene of radical Islamism. I studied this movement in detail and argue that it was a unique case of evolution of a jihadi movement into a non-violent social movement. This approach raises the question of how much a free political environment can ease the integration into institutionalized politics of such a radical movement. I argue that Salafists played the role of the 'scapegoat' of the political transition. If the successful exit of the democratic transition implied the 'historical compromise' between nationalists and Islamists of old generation, it was necessary for Nahda to cut off all links – political and ideological - with radical Salafists.

This period of contention (2011-2013) highlights how the new born Tunisian salafi-jihadi movement was able to practice 'politics from below' better than any

other political or social movement, establishing hegemony among the lower urban social classes. The more the official ‘politics’ was institutionalized after the Ben Ali’s fall, the more AST’s project became legitimate in the eyes of a disenfranchised and radicalized public.

The political scene of the country became very tense in 2013. Two assassinations of left wing leaders created a climate of confrontation. The polarization Islamists vs anti-Islamists framed the struggle. AST was finally outlawed in August 2013, opening the path to the institutional inclusion of Nahda and the exclusion of the new radicals. AST was a perfect case of a jihadi movement that was able, by the time the political landscape opened, to display the traits of a social movement. I further analyse the structural political dynamics that influenced the development of the movement in relation to the broader evolution of the international jihadi movement. Those among the Salafist militants who chose the military action in response to the governmental crackdown, felt that their action was legitimized by the brutal repression of the state. They believed they could raise support in their social ‘constituency’ for an armed uprising. Violence, however, led to a political deadlock. The violent confrontation pushed jihadis from being socially based to apocalyptic radicalism. Whether AST was a credible political project for the disenfranchised Tunisian masses or not, I show how salafi-jihadis may act (just like other Islamists trends) as social movements that re-act to the opportunities and constraints of the political context.

Between social contention and *takfir*ism*:* the evolution of the Salafi-jihadi movement in Tunisia[114]

In 2011, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) experienced a number of uprisings that led to processes of political liberalization. After two years of' ‘democratisation'(Stepan & Linz, 2013), these processes, at least in the short term, ended either with the re-legitimization of neo-authoritarian regimes or dissolved into civil strife.The notable exception isTunisia. Rather than being an absolute novelty, the events of the early 2010s have parallels in what occurred in the region in the 1980s. In fact, the political and institutional dynamics unleashed in 2011 seem to have, as an overarching trait, the crackdown on Islamist movements following liberalization. Islamist movements, then and now, had become the main opposition groups and beneficiaries of political openings, representing the challenge of new social actors against the system in place. This article analyses the ideological and organizational developments of a particular Islamist family, the Salafist-Jihadi movement, in a context of political liberalization. The case of Tunisia is employed to provide the empirical data for such an analysis.

The rise of Salafism in all of its forms and its interactions with a liberalized institutional environment is a recent phenomenon compared to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB)'s historical development since its foundation in Egypt in 1928. Today the MB family (the original party and its offshoots) is still central, but there is a greater multiplicity of Islamist movements, and the MB parties no longer enjoy exclusivity. In fact, their strategy of political inclusion (Schwedler, 2007) following the 2011 uprisings and their participation in democratically elected governments (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen) has led to a loss of supportfrom more radical constituencies. Emerging Salafist groups filled the political space MB parties left in

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the 2011-13 and became protagonists in the process of contention for social and political power. Salafists themselves also range from pietistic and in favour of the status quo to 'politicos'to revolutionaries (Wiktorowicz, 2006; Amgar, 2011), rendering even more complex the field of political Islam. This article focuses on a specific trend, the Salafi-Jihadis (Heghammer, 2006) and analyses groups belonging to it. That is, the representatives of a radical Islamist constituency left without political representation (Cavatorta & Merone, 2015). While Islamists and Salafists are usually considered separately, the former linked to the MB tradition and the latter to the Wahhabi influence (Guazzone, 2014); in this research, the jihadi movement is considered as a political actor participating in a process of social or political contention, representing therefore a new generation of radical Islamists. Although the international jihadi movement is known for its violent actions and apocalyptic discourses, it has evolved since its beginnings in the 1980s (Moubayed, 2015).The experiences of the countries that went through political transformations between 2011 and 2013 saw the emergence of a new jihadi trend as a potent political and social force. While terrorist tendencies and an exclusive apocalyptic worldview are still part of the jihadi representation of the struggle (jihad), there is a new trend pushing jihadi groups to transform into social and political movements. Specifically, we have two different types of jihadi 'practices': one identified with the Islamic State (IS) and the other with different groups such as Ansar al-Sharia in Libya and Tunisia and Jabahat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham in Syria.

This article deals with the issue of whether jihadi groups should be considered as Islamist groups, distinct from mainstream ones in their radicalism and revolutionary stance, or merely as theologian apocalyptic groups whose aim is to accelerate the ineluctable clash between the true believers and the rest of the world (unbelievers or apostates). Based on a social movement approach (Hafez, 2003; Wicktorovitz, 2006), the argument is that the Jihadi movement represents today a radical Islamist constituency that is emerging as a political actor - not simply a mindlessly violent one - in the wake of the MB's attempt to compete democratically.

This jihadi movement took part in open liberalized spaces of contention for the first time after 2011, varying its actions from Dowo to armed struggle and from consensus-based activism to exclusive and tokfiri practices.

For the purpose of this analysis, the general jihadi movement is discussed within two frames: 'social movement' and ‘takfiri’.This distinction describes two different Salafi-jihadi developments. In the first, the Salafi-jihadi movement participates in a process of contention and tends to represent a social base seeking political legitimisation and a degree of acceptance. In this case, the Salati group (jamaa) becomes similar to the other lslamist jamaat (plural of jamaa) or jamaia (association), in the sense that the chosen group (al-taifa al-mansura) evolves into an organization that is active in civil society through charity and religious teaching. In the second case, the jihadis create exclusive and uncompromising groups that accentuate an apocalyptic vision of the world, which they divide in true Muslims (the Salafi-jihadis) and unbelievers (Koffar).The distinction offered here is only methodological (ideal-types) and aspects of one trend can be recognized in the other and vice versa.

The implication of this distinction is significant. The institutionalization of some jihadi group depends on several factors, in which the ideological frame, the social praxis and the political opportunities all play a role. This article deals with the evolution of the jihadi movement through the example of Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST) and the political opportunity of institutionalization of this Salafi-jihadi movement in the specific context of political liberalization in Tunisia. In order to establish the connection between the two phenomena, Hafez's (2003) use of the political process approach is promising. In the first part of the article, the ideological frame of theTunisian jihadi group and its practice as a social movement are analysed. In the second part, the evolution of the movement in the context of the dramatic political transformation Tunisia went through in the period between 2011 and 2013 is explained. The evolution of the movement appears to be influenced by both theory and praxis: while the structural ideational repertoire frames the social and practical

activity of the movement (praxis), the ideological justification of action will evolve according to the reaction of the public to their activities. The evolution and pressures/ opportunities of the general political context moreover determine the strategic choices of the leadership. After the political crackdown of 2013, few resources and opportunities were available for the movement at the national level. The combination of state repression and failed strategic choices made the space of contention move from the local to the regional and from political-institutional to confrontational-violent. The move towards the international political space became a more decisive factor because domestically there was no space left to compete politically. In this case, the regional political dynamics played a role in the development of the situation in so far as the national jihadi project proposed by Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia lost credibility and the Islamic State internationalist perspective has become progressively more attractive. The loss of open spaces of contention and social/political activity meant that the jihadi groups became more exclusive and self-referential; their actions were no longer linked to a social group and became the monopoly of the exclusive chosen ones. In short, domestic repression provoked the internationalization of jihadism and the development of a takfiri-minded jihad.

Ideology: political or takfirist?

The institutionalization of the Salafi-jihadi movement may seem a contradiction in terms and most of the literature in fact deals with this Salati trend as being overwhelmingly related to political violence and terrorism (Burke, 2004; Cragin, 2007; Gerges, 2009), although some exceptions, dealing with the social, political and historical context in which they develop, do exist (Cook, 2005; Meijer, 2006). Salafi-Jihadism appears often as a purely violent movement based on intolerance and an apocalyptic vision of the world, according to which Islam should prevail over all. Contrary to this traditional outlook, the argument here is that not all jihadis are alike and under certain political conditions they can evolve into a social movement. Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST) provides a good example of such a social Salafi-Jihadi movement capable of potentially evolving into an institutionalized organization within a plural political context.

Findings from fieldwork highlight how one of the most recurrent points in the discourse of activists was that 'AST (was) a new jihadi project different from any other before' (Interviews with AST leaders and ordinary activists, Tunis, 2012). When the movement first emerged in 2011, AST was suspected to be an offshoot of an al-Qaeda linked group that had appeared during the same period in Yemen. In reality, not only did AST leaders wanted to distance themselves from the Yemeni label, but they also insisted that theirs was a 'properly Tunisian' experience, taking place in an unprecedented context of freedom. While this alleged 'new project'was nothing but the formation of a group in a typical Islamist jomoo form similar to the one at the roots of the Muslim Brotherhood (Haqqani & Fradkin, 2008), the project's interesting and novel aspect was that it was evolving within the Salafi-jihadi frame. AST Islamist militants were 'jihadi' because they adopted the jihadi symbols, references (including Osama Bin Laden) and literature (notably the work of Abu Qottada al-Falistini and Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi). Thus, they considered themselves as part of the international jihadi movement. In terms of novelty, the starting point of the theoretical argument of AST leaders was the originality of Tunisia as a country and the Tunisian revolution as a political experience. This originality led to the adaptation of the jihadi experiment to the specific Tunisian social and political context and the development of a loose jomoo into a political organization that challenged the social and political space to other actors. It is interesting to note that a similar rhetoric appeared in the language of Ansar ol-Shorio Libya, which considered its activism as an extension of theTunisian experience (Salafi-jihadi activists, interview with the author, Tunis, Autumn 2012). For political organization, it must not be understood as a political party {hizb) but rather an association (jamaia). Politics (siyasa) still has a negative connotation for jihadis and the praxis they refer to is geared towards the realization of an Islamic state; AST militants are not concerned with the constitutional process and consider democracy Kafer (unbelief). The Islamic state, however, should be established through peaceful means and through the training of a new leadership that would draft the programme for ruling in the future (Merone, 2012).

In the period between 2011 and 2012, a large but unstructured Islamized public was already hegemonic in certain areas of the country. AST was only a small group when its leaders decided to set up informal local cells and encourage discussions among Salafis about the idea of creating an organization. Through a participatory process, the Jamaa discussed this 'new project' that the leadership proposed. Discussion groups were created in every area where a Salati cell was locally rooted, and Skype conferences were sometimes held with international jihadi sheikhs giving their opinions. The most important debate was about the choice of Ansar al-sharia as the name of the group and whether this new organization would divide the jamaa, distinguishing between insiders and outsiders. The two important sheikhs intervening in the debate were the Egyptian London-based cleric Hani Sibay and the Moroccan cleric Omar Hadushi (Ayari and Merone, 2014). The main idea behind the transformation of the Jamaa into a more typical political project was that Tunisia was a 'land of dawa': jihad as qital (fight) was not to be considered as a tool per se, but only something to be activated in specific circumstances, notably in a defensive situation (Badran, local AST leader, interview with the author, December 2012, Douar Hisher).The'normalisation'of the jihad category made the Salafi-Jihadi movement more similar to mainstream MB-linked Islamist movements in their early days, when their priorities were the spiritual empowerment of the individual and active preaching in society (Mitchell, 1993). As a consequence of this new repertoire and organizational tools, the AST leadership established separate working groups (departments) with the purpose of elaborating a social, political and economic programme for the Islamic state to come. This intention was publically proclaimed at their annual rallies. The way to bring it about had to be a consensus-building process through dawa and proactive social activism. With an attitude similar to the ikhwani, they believed that'once people will be with us, the Islamic State will be demanded spontaneously'(Hassen Breik, AST leader, interview with the author, September 2012, Yasminette).

Although the public declarations of AST leaders were consistent with this idea, the majority of Tunisian social and political actors did not accept these arguments easily, as the Salafi-Jihadi ideology is particularly rigid, illiberal and

violence-prone. Some problematic ideological categories legitimately worried political and social opponents. The first one is the concept of takfir, which has been declared unconstitutional in the new Tunisian constitution approved in 2014. Declaring a Muslim a non-believer (or apostate or hypocrite) has been a historically important and controversial issue in the Muslim world, having given birth in the first century of Islam to the kharijite sect (Kenney, 2006). Under certain political conditions it can be used as a political/revolutionary tool against an unjust ruler because it implies the right of opposition (or revolt). Under other conditions, however, especially when the Salafi Jamaa develops a sect-minded behaviour, it can be used as a blind ideological justification of the conflict between a small group of people and the rest of society or the world. In the latter case, the concept of kafer can be expanded indefinitely. As in the 1980s in Egypt (Malthaner, 2012) or in Algeria in the 1990s (Labat, 2009), the anathema of being kafer was extended to almost all of society, guilty of not rising up against the tyrant {Taghut) (Hafez, 2003). The fear of this occurring in post-revolutionaryTunisia existed.

The second concept that led the Salafi-Jihadi ideology in Tunisia to be seen as dangerous is the wala wa al-bara. This is the idea, usually applied in Wahhabi Salafism, that Muslims should be faithful to God and Islam (walaa) and stay away from everything else, be it a non-Muslim or a hypocrite (baraa). In the Salafi-Jihadi innovation of this concept, famously interpreted by its major living theorist Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, al wala wa al bara should be applied not only toward individuals or groups but also to state institutions when they are kofer (Wagemakers, 2009). The wala wa al bara principle, within certain limits, can have a positive conceptualization for social struggle, through which the individual empowers his social action. Pushed to its extreme, though, especially in a context of political isolation and repression, this may bring Salati groups to emphasize sectarian tendencies.

The ideas of takfir, taghout and wala wa al bara were all present in the literature and rhetoric of the Salafi-Jihadi movement in Tunisia, and shaped to an extent the political and social activism of Salati militants. However, there was a considerable gap between the concepts and extent to which they were applied in

reality, as the actual political actions of the militants and leaders seemed to respond to the pragmatic concerns of operating in a liberal environment rather than to fixed ideological categories. AST was successful in proposing a political project able to adapt to the specificTunisian post-revolutionary period. In doing so, the concept of the state as taghout was toned down and adapted according to the level of confrontation with the state, and it was never in any case used against other sections of society, although the security services and the police were often labelled taghout. Concerning the wala wa al- bara's principle, it was not applied rigidly when the movement began building a social movement, although it had an important role in giving the Salafist group a sense of belonging and awareness, especially in the first stage of empowerment of local cells. According to Hassen Breik (Dawa officer for AST) AST want(ed) to show Tunisians that we are a normal group, not threatening society. That is why, for example, I decided to participate in TV programs'. The specific objective of speaking on television was to reach the wider public with the aim of normalizing the image of the movement as a new legitimate actor. The wala wa al-bara, if applied in its proper and limited understanding, means to keep at a distance all those who do not belong to the elected group {el farqa al-najia). AST aimed instead to acquire people's consensus for the achievement of their political goals.

All this does not mean that more radical elements were absent in the larger jihadi constituency. In fact, they emerged clearly after the ban of AST in the summer of 2013. The killing of foreign tourists at the Bardo museum (March 2015) and the tourist resort of Sousse (July 2015) were a giant step towards an apocalyptic vision of good versus evil that justified the political strategy of reacting to the Tunisian state's crackdown through a religious ideological frame within which innocent European and Christians became legitimate targets (France 24, 2015).

Social movement or criminal jihadi?

While social movement theory has been already applied to mainstream Islamist movements (Wiktorowicz 2004), it has not been widely employed to examine jihadi

movements.This depends in parton the way jihadism has been conceived of until now, being strongly influenced by the story of Al-Qaeda. The argument here is that 5alafi-Jihadi movements can potentially evolve into'legitimate'political actors and that they may be considered in some cases (like AST in Tunisia) more similar to a radical socially oriented Islamist movement than a 'terrorist' organization. In Tunisia, 5alafi-Jihadism is the result of the arrival on the political scene of a generation politically forged in revolution. The social constituency of the movement is largely represented by an urban proletarian mass (Lamloum, 2015), suggesting engagement for social radicalism rather than terrorist violence. As argued elsewhere (Merone, 2015), AST represented in fact the attempt of a marginal social class to organize a political voice. The following section examines how AST was successful in proposing its political project and flirted with ideas and practices rarely associated with Salafi-jihadism.

The Tunisian 5alafi-Jihadi movement, which took centre stage on the public scene in Tunisia between 2011 and 2013, was a phenomenon rooted in specific areas of the country: the poorer suburbs of large and middle-sized cities. Historically speaking, the process of urbanization of the twentieth century was accomplished in different stages, leading each time to social and political transformations (Anderson, 2014). In Tunisia, by the late 1970s, rural masses had already moved to the richest coastal regions (Sfax, Sousse, Bizerte and Tunis), becoming large urban masses.The management of large, populated urban belts around the historical traditional perimeter of those cities had been a considerable political preoccupation for the Ben Ali regime in the 1990s because of the potential of unrest that could be generated there (Ben Romdhane, 2011). Ben Ali himself had already experienced how social contention could result in Islamization in the 1989 parliamentary elections when Nahda did particularly well in the poorer urban belts. When the uprising began in late 2010, it was indeed not particularly surprising that it originated in the most disenfranchised areas of the country (the interior regions and the urban belt of these big cities). As had been the case in the 1980s, a 'rioting' and 'revolutionary'class emerged from the uprising. After the breakdown of the regime, the process of'democra- tisation'opened up new political spaces and new opportunities were

created for alternative social movements. After a few months, the revolutionary process adopted Islamist undertones of contestation.

The first Salafis who appeared in Tunisian working-class neighbourhoods were young Islamists imprisoned during the 2000s. Although a small number of charismatic leaders whose credibility came from previous experiences of jihad abroad or from their prison records imposed themselves at the beginning of the transition, young and new militants came to play a significant role (Merone & Cavatorta, 2013). Salafi-jihadi literature linked to jihadi web-forums (most famously jihad wa tawhid) had circulated in Tunisia during the previous decade, and many had developed a sense of belonging, through their own individual paths, to a larger umma (Dhia, young Salafis, interview with the author, Tunis, September 2012).

The success in the integration of many new young militants in the organization was due to two factors. First, Salafis belonged to the same urban space of their activism, sharing the same social conditions of their potential public thereby facilitating recruitment. Second, the process of participating in the movement's activities was largely based on self-empowerment and engagement without any vertical structure. The egalitarian spirit, together with the feeling of empowerment and belonging to a special group, offset the sense of social frustration that this youth felt towards the rest of society (Haj Ben Salem, 2015). Recruiting new members occurred typically through 'commanding good and forbidding wrong'activities. This Islamist principle is based on the idea that is the duty of each Muslim as an individual to act for the good of the Islamist society (Cook, 2005). As Meijer (2006) convincingly argued, it is in fact through the personal duty of forbidding wrong and commanding good to fellow Muslims that the new'reformed'individual feels his engagement in civil life. 'Newly-lslamized' individuals start their activity following a group in dawa missions (preaching) around the neighbourhood. Dawa activities can take place anywhere; one can approach someone on the street perceived as'doing wrong'and suggest ways to correct his or her behaviour or simply go to a café or public space and start preaching. In contexts of social marginalization, where Salafis have had the most success, this Islamist empowerment for many young Tunisians

was often hugely appealing and filled the absence of other forms of social and political engagement.

The distance between a normal process of social engagement through religious activities and violent ones for controlling social space may be slight, however, particularly when the Jamaa is also composed of former thugs from marginalized urban areas who founds in Salafism opportunities not necessarily related to spiritual growth nor altruistic social activism. In that case, the Salati group can take the form of a purely violent gang employing the pretence of religion for its actions. Ln Tunisia, for example, during this period of open contention (2011 -13), violent actions with a Salafi-jihadi tinge occurred and at times it was genuine criminal activity taking place underthe cover of the Salafist movement. For instance, punishments (hudud) were implemented to punish people who persisted in 'doing wrong', such as selling or consuming alcohol or being extremely provocative such as swearing against the prophet or the religion (Gartenstein- Ross, 2013). These types of actions generally led to a loss of support for Salafi- Jihadis.The ambiguity of this social practice as much as the development of the AST political project made the Salati leaders aware of the political implications of the correct application of theological/theoretical principles. As Abu el Muwahid, a young leader stated in repeating Abu Ayad's famous statement,'we want to reach the hearts of people, not hurt them' (Interview, with the author, Douar Hisher, January 2012). Because AST was moving toward a strategy of popular legitimization, spontaneous and 'criminal'actions such as the ones highlighted above undermined social support for the movement and were condemned by the leadership. However, in a contest of fierce confrontation with the state and under harsh repression, extreme and takfiri justifications are brought forth to support violent actions. This indicates that the environment surrounding Salafi- Jihadism matters because the activities of the group are modulated according to it rather than adhering strictly to rigid ideological tenants. In a liberalized environment where there is'free'competition for hearts and minds, mindless violence (even if ostensibly committed to forbid evil) might have negative repercussions for the group in terms of support. Conversely, in an environment where such competition does not exist because the state or because other

social/political actors prevent it, the employment ofviolence to forbid evil is much more readily justified, as it does not undermine potential support.

It is for this reason that in the newly liberalized Tunisian environment AST was particularly concerned with social and welfare activities. According to their Facebook (FB) pages, which Zelin (2012) monitored extensively, the more state propaganda depicted the group as violent and takfiri, the more AST emphasized dawa and social activities, suggesting that the group was particularly sensitive to public legitimization. AST strongly focused on social activities like free medical care, donations for specific religious celebrations and, occasionally, welfare provision for the poor in targeted campaigns.

The coexistence between charitable activities and violent social control remained nevertheless an enduring contradiction within the Salafi-Jihadi movement. While it took considerable steps to normalize its social and political action, as suggested in their public statements and propaganda, it did not sufficiently distance itself from the more disturbing actions of social control.

Political transformation

In an October 2015 interview, Seif Eddine Arrais, official AST spokesperson, compared the political path of Ansar al-Sharia to the one Nahda, the moderate Tunisian Islamist political party, walked at the beginning of the 1990s (Andalou Post, 2015). He meant that AST, like its Ikhwani predecessor 20 years earlier, underwent a process of transformation during a period of political change. Just like the older generation of Islamists, violent actions were committed without the approval of the movement's leaders. Moreover, the movement found itself squeezed between the state's crackdown and radicals within its own constituency. In this sense, Arrais was stating once again that the AST political project was a peaceful one whose increasing moderation was undermined by both the state crackdown and an extremist element from within. This declaration may seem surprising if we look at AST as a typical jihadi movement. As we have seen in the previous sections, jihadi theory and praxis is revolutionary in theological and political terms and can be lived

in its daily practices either through takfirism or through the traditional means of social activism.The previous sections postulated thus that a Salafi-Jihadi movement does not necessarily operate through indiscriminate violence, but can evolve into a more traditional Islamist jamaa. Seif Eddin Arrais's declaration implicitly confirmed that the latter development was the objective of the AST leadership. Rachid Ghannouchi indeed had seen something of the early Nahda days in AST when he admitted, in reference to the behaviour of Salafis early on in the transitional period, that'they remind him of his youth' (Kapitalis, 2013).

Ansar al-Sharia had declared its existence at a public event in Soukra, a suburb of Tunis in April 2011 (Huffington Post, 2013). By 2012, with Nahda in government, AST had succeeded in mobilizing segments of social groups, mainly disenfranchised youth, who did not recognize the legitimacy, validity and ends of the electoral process. Unknown to the larger public, a process of consultation had been going on within the Salafi-Jihadi family to discuss AST's alternative political project, which had finally gained the approval of the majority of activists (Ayari & Merone, 2014).The project included the structuration of local groups {makteb al-dawa), providing therefore formal discussion settings for Salafi youths across different neighbourhoods.The'AST'project was discussed among activists and at least one of the most respected Salafi-Jihadi scholars, sheikh Khatib Idrissi, had opposed it as a bidaa (blameable innovation) (Interview with Abu Abdallah Attunsi, prominent jihadi sheikh, Sidi Bousid, October 2012). In spite of Idrissi's opposition, the project of formally setting up an association signalled the evolution of the movement into a more typical Islamist organization. It was also a process of leadership formation, as a number of young people came to prominence through spontaneous activism in their neighbourhoods.The evolution of the political project was to be presented to the widerTunisian public in annual rallies. After the first founding congress of Soukra in 2011, a second successful one was organized in Keirouan in 2012 (Al-Arabiyya, 2012). The police did not allow, however, the planned third rally of May 2013 to take place, thus escalating repressive measures against AST, which led to the group's ban in August of the same year.

As mentioned, though not all the members of theTunisian jihadi movement were comfortable with what can be termed an embryonic moderation process. After AST was criminalized in August 2013, in particular, terrorist actions with a clear tokfiri tone took place and seemed to suggest that the choice of violence had been presentali along for the movement.The work of Hafez (2003) suggests that this might not be entirely true, as resorting to violence is often the response to repression, indicating that the political environment therefore is crucial when it comes to making decisions about the appropriate methods for achieving political goals. In any case, the path that seemed to lead to some sort of political and social inclusion of Salafi-Jihadis in the liberal and democratic structures of post-revolutionaryTunisia was closed in summer 2013, when the organization was officially banned. In order to explain the reasons that led to this outcome, it is necessary to examine the conflicting actions of the different actors on the political scene because they provide a test for Hafez's argument. This analysis has important consequences as to how scholars and policy makers look at Salafi- Jihadi groups because the context and the actors surrounding them can have a profound impact on the direction of their political behaviour and ideological developments (Cavatorta, 2015).

After the fall of the Ben Ali regime, Tunisia has gone through a quasi-exemplary transition process (Stepan, 2012) that ended with a constitutional consensus. The new constitution was approved almost unanimously in January 2014 with the support of the two major cultural and political blocs: Islamist and nationalist-secular. However, turmoil and volatility characterized the transitional period leading up to this constitutional consensus and polarization between secular and Islamist forces reached its peak between 2011 and 2013. After the overthrow of the regime, the transition process took two different intertwined directions. On the one hand, classic party politics took centre-stage according to traditional expectations of the democratization literature. On the other hand, contention in the social sphere occurred through street politics. In both realms, the Islamist and Salati ideological banners were present and active. With an Islamist party in power and a radical and anti-systemic Salafi/jihadi movement on the streets, the traditional secular bloc,

which later unified its forces into the new Nidaa Tunis party, reacted to what it perceived to be an Islamist take over of political institutions and society. Nahda was put under pressure, forcing the party to cede power and support a technocratic government, while Ansar al-Sharia was declared a terrorist organization and was banned in August 2013 with the approval of Nahda.

The political and organizational development of AST-its success and limitations-can be explained through its relation with the moderate Islamist party and its ideological stance towards state institutions and democracy. In February 2013, the first of two political assassinations of left-wing leaders was committed at a time of intense political polarization, when the Nahda party had begun to be harshly criticized by the anti-Islamist frontfor its performance in government and its tolerance of the spread of the Salati ideology in the country. After the assassination, left-wing parties tried to turn the march of solidarity organized for the funeral into an anti-Nahda uprising (Independent, 2013). The Nahdawi leadership denounced it as an attempted coup d'étot and, in many neighbourhoods, local committees 'to protect the revolution' were organized against this perceived threat. There was indeed a dynamic of increasing confrontation within society, now clearly split in two camps.The tension increased further also because of the first terrorist attacks on the Tunisian military in the Chaamby mountains in March-April 2013. In July 2013, a second assassination of a prominent left-wing figure took place and almost at the same time the overthrow of the Islamist president in Egypt occurred. All this created a very tense political atmosphere that endangered the success of the transition to democracy, now caught between domestic volatility and a deteriorating international situation.

Between February and August 2013, as the political confrontation developed into a fierce polarization and anti-lslamistforces gained ground with the support of the repressive apparatus of the state, AST's strategy was to push its reformist/ Islamist 'cousin'; which had committed to democratic institutional politics, into a revolutionary political front of resistance, the so-called Islamic front (YouTube, 2013). Nahda, however, challenged AST's strategy because it wanted to ensure the success of the transition, the only way in which the party would be able to survive an

inevitable backlash of the security apparatus and the international community to the formation of an Islamic Front. Moreover, the older generation of Nahdawis had travelled too long on the road of political and ideological moderation to sacrifice it for an uncertain and destabilizing alliance with AST (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013). Thus, the Nahdawi Minister of Interior ordered the ban of the AST annual rally in Keirouan. The argument Nahda and the state apparatus employed to forbid the rally was framed in 'democratic' language. If AST wanted to organize a rally in Keirouan, it had to request official authorization from the Interior Minister just as any other association or party would (Al Jazeera, 2013). The Salati organization was asked to conform to the rules of democratic institutions. This move pushed AST to make clear its political position on the most controversial ideological issue: the recognition of the state-Taghut. While AST leaders tried to overcome the obstacle by presenting the request to hold the rally through an association close to them (Mohammed Khlif, prominent jihadi sheikh, interview with the author, Kairouan, September 2013), the process of moderation was still ongoing and had not yet been finalized. This led Saif Eddine Arrais during a press conference, to reassure its constituency that the Jamaa would ask permission for dawa from nobody but God (Al-Akhbar English, 2013). In other words, the movement was still in a period of evolution (and ideological confusion) during which it was willing to push towards legitimization into a political pluralist context, but at the same time, it was still speaking to its constituency within a 'Salafi/revolutionary' framework that included takfiri references. This double dynamic shows how the movement was pulled toward two different potential outcomes. The political process and its opportunities were creating this tension. If the movement had not had the chance to prove itself in an open liberal space, it would have never experienced the evolution into an association similar to the more traditional ikhwani ones in their early days. It was an absolutely unique experience for a jihadi movement that was to be repeated in different contexts, including Libya (Ansar al-Sharia Libya) and Syria (Jabahat al-Nusra and Ahar al-Sham), proving the multifaceted nature of the jihadi movement.

The failure of the Islamic front project occurred when the Nahda-led government outlawed AST with the approval of the same security forces that had for

years repressed all Islamist activism in the country. For AST it was a political failure, because it found itself alone in a confrontation with the state, caught between institutionalization and revolution.The organization disappeared, the political project dissolved and a numberof activists from the salati Jamaa turned to a sectarian strategy of struggle against the koffar (unbelievers). The 2013 crisis determined as much the success of the constitutional deal (and the full inclusion of the moderate Islamist party in democratic practices) as the failure of the Salati movement to find a place in post-revolutionary Tunisia.The loss of a free domestic space of contention opened up the country to the influence of the international jihadi movement. By that time, between 2013 and 2014, the regional political situation had changed and local Salati movements reactivated their regional connections, switching from being a social movement to a tokfiri and global one.

Domestic versus regional dynamics and the Tunisian Salafi- Jihadism

In the period of post-revolutionary contention (2011 -13), violent actions were mostly linked to the jihadization of previously criminal gangs and the product of the mantra of'commanding good and forbidding wrong'. After the legal ban of AST, however, and the beginning of a harsh campaign of eradication of the movement (World Report, 2015), violence became a political tool of confrontation with the state. A new religious jihadi frame appeared and two new actors monopolized the scene: Okba Ibn Nefaa (and its offshoots) domestically and the Islamic State (IS) transnationally. Even though this development is largely the consequence of domestic political events, regional dynamics became increasingly crucial, in particular because of the growing importance of the proclamation of a global Islamist Caliphate (Al-Akhbar English, 2013).The Arab uprisings of 2011 had opened up new spaces of contention and new political opportunities for social Islamist actors. As spaces closed in Arab national politics, the international dimension took centre stage. This shows how the jihadi movement, although full of apocalyptic language and a Manichean vision of the world, reacts to political realities on the ground, and primarily the political opportunities in the domestic landscape. When the political

terrain of contention shrinks or disappears, the struggle becomes international and the enemy is placed in a universal dimension. Domestic tyrants and western backers are all listed into the same category of 'enemy of Islam' and the confrontation tends to become apocalyptic.

The dialectic between domestic and international factors is never completely absent. The jihadi community perceives itself as being unique and transnational, even though it tends to operate domestically. In Tunisia, both domestic and regional dynamics existed from the beginning, but the importance of one factor over the other depended on local and international political developments. The AST leader, Abu Ayadh, expressed several times this double nature of the movement. He said that AST was ideologically part of the international jihadi movement, but politically and organizationally specifically Tunisian and autonomous (Merone, 2013). The jihadi movement was at the beginning quite a loose movement within which two different souls coexisted. The assassinations of the two leftist leaders, for example, were committed by a small group of jihadi militants isolated from the mainstream of the social movement process that AST had begun. This small group wanted the destabilization of the state in application of the jihadi/anarchical theory of the 'management of savagery', according to which in a period of revolutionary transformation the generalized chaos will favour an Islamist coup and the taking over of the power by the Islamist vanguard (Merone, 2015).

The overlapping of internal and external factors was more evident in the evolution of Okba Ibn Nefaa (hereafter Okba).It was a small jihadi group operated on the border between Algeria and Tunisia. As an offshoot of al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQMI), it had a role in smuggling arms and mujahedeen in the 2012 jihadi struggle for theTouareg Azawad Republic in Mali. The group had little or nothing to do with the Tunisian Salati movement until AST was declared a terrorist organization. Following the crackdown on the group, it offered itself as the vanguard for resistance against the state. Okba's offer was attractive for those who had always been sceptical of the political path and for those who were left disappointed with its failure. Thus, violence became for them the only available course of action.

Another regional factor that influenced the development of the Tunisian Salafi-jihadi movement was the Libyan crisis and in particular its increasing importance in the strategy of the Islamic State. Libya became not only the nearest place to go to join other mujahedeens, but also a safe haven to plan attacks back in Tunisia. As the political and social space of contention had been completely eliminated by the end of 2013 in Tunisia, jihadi militants found themselves targeted by the violent reaction of the state security apparatus. Three different options presented themselves. First, accept the crackdown passively, hoping for a long-term political solution and some sort of return to activism in more stable times. This was the choice of the more important AST leaders such as Saiffedine Arrais, Sami Essid and Hassen el Breik. Second, leave for international jihad or asylum {hijra) in Libya or Syria. Abu Ayadh, the former leader of AST, went to Libya while another prominent leader, Kamel Zarrouk, chose Syria. Third, undertake more direct action against the Tunisian state. Two types of militants made the third choice.There are the more resistance-minded militants, who acted as a guerrilla group and joined Okbo, and more martyrdom-minded ones, who acted according to the strategy of the Libya-based Islamic State. The first type of militants targeted theTunisian military, while the others undertook martyrdom operations against foreign tourists inTunisia (the Bardo and Sousse attacks in 2015).

Between 2011 and 2012, the democratic rhetoric had prevailed among Arab public opinions and political actors. By 2013, the polarization between an Islamist camp and a secular/nationalist one characterized the political debate, infusing it with tension. Like inTunisia, the situation in Syria, Libya and Egypt had turned into a confrontation between opposing segments of the political landscape. Each country evolved according to its specific political context, but everywhere the logic of mutual elimination seemed to prevail. The Syrian/Iraqi civil war provided an opportunity for a new jihadi organization to experiment with state building (Mecham, 2015). As political opportunities disappeared domestically in Tunisia, the Islamic State building process in Syria and Iraq became an obvious destination for many Tunisian jihadis. The AST experience had failed, and some of its militants found it almost logical to'emigrate'to Syria or Iraq. Before the political process of institutionalization of AST

ended, the group's leader Abu Ayadh had discouraged Tunisian militants from going to international jihadi battlefields, but once the domestic crackdown began each militant chose his own path.This was officially the declaration of failure of the'new jihadi' project, i.e. the transformation into a regular Islamist jamaa (YouTube, 2014). As Tunisian jihadis failed in building asocial movement that would be accepted by state institutions, they developed a more apocalyptic idea of jihad in which the spirit of sacrifice for religion is emphasized and martyrdom operations are left as the only option. Politics is transformed into a militaristic campaign against undefined enemies of Islam. IS claimed responsibility for operations in Tunis and Sousse and justified them in the name of the struggle against the state-taghut, identifying the tourists as'Christian crusaders'. The general frame of the justification for the attacks claimed that the operations were carried out to defend the umma, which was under attack by a Christian-Jewish alliance backed by apostate {murtaddin) accomplices.

Conclusion

The article analysed the evolution of the international Salafi-jihadi movement through the lens of the particular experience of Ansar al-Sharia, theTunisian jihadi organization that emerged during the political transformation of 2011 -13.

The empirics-based and innovative argument is that a Salafi-jihadi movement can potentially develop into an Islamist jomoo similar to the one of the Ikhwoni movement in its early days and therefore follow a process of political institution-alization. Even though the salafi ideology stresses specific theoretical aspects such as walaa wa al-baraa that are'new'compared to the old Muslim Brotherhood's tradition, others such as 'commanding good and forbidding wrong'orthe relationship to dowo and politics are more comparable. The aim of this article, however, is not to show the similarity between the MB and the Salafis. The category of jihad is in fact a tool Salafi-Jihadis exploit in order to develop an anti-systemic stance. Salafi-Jihadis translate their repertoire of contention into theologically pure categories. On the one hand, they react against the perceived Westernization of society and state; on the other hand, they fight against the perceived injustice of the political and social

system. The Salafi-Jihadi movement, as all Islamist movements, does not have a social class reading of the world, but its egalitarian ethos and revolutionary political stance can attract popular masses that feel excluded socially or politically.

In the Tunisian case, just like in Libya and Syria, different types ofjihadism emerged during the Arab uprisings. On one side, we have a social jihadi movement capable of'representing'specific areas of the country, where social problems and exclusion are key issues. On the other, a more radical type ofjihadism stresses uncompromising theological/ideological stances. For the latter, martyrdom and an apocalyptic vision of the world prevail.

This article employed a methodological distinction between the two types of jihadi movements, putting the first into the category of social movement and the second in the'takfiri'one.The use of the term takfiri is not completely satisfactory, but it can be useful for methodological purposes because in the common political language of the Arab word it identifies a specific theological attitude in which each contender is an 'evil' enemy to eliminate whatever the political situation.

Applying the political process approach suggested by Hafez (2003) to the Ansar al-ShariaTunisia case, this article shows howthe development of the jihadi movement in one sense or another depends on the political context and the interactions between social and political actors. Takf rist aspects of the ideology can be adapted to more social movement-minded activism if political spaces are provided. On the contrary, when the action of the state is limited to repression and no space is left for the evolution of both Salafi-jihadi theory and praxis, the Salafi-jihadi militant becomes a martyr.

TheTunisian jihadi experience shows also the overlapping of domestic political dynamics with regional and international ones.Thus, the evolution into an international type of jihad depends on the failure of political inclusion of Salafi-Jihadism at the national/local level in its social movement form. The international struggle for jihad is more takfiri-minded than the national one, because for the latter political non-violent contention is more important to pursue if some space of freedom exists. Once the Salafi-Jihadi organization acts within an open political polity, it is forced to consider the reactions of a larger public that it had not

previously considered. This consensus-seeking dynamic leads the movement to iron out its more uncompromising ideological tenets. When the struggle is de-coupled from the original national space, the international jihad tends to accentuate apocalyptic features.

AST leaders presented the Salafi-Jihadi Tunisian project as novelty. This meant in practice that jihadis were not irrational actors bent on war for the sake of conflict. The theoretical and practical evolution of thejihadi movement within the new opportunities the political liberalization of the 2011 -12 created were a test for the radical Islamist movement to come on the scene in different Arab countries and prove able to occupy the political space left behind by the moderation of the Ikhwani movement.

In conclusion, the Salati movement, in all its different trends, represents the new generation of Islamist actors. Political inclusion implies today a degree of acceptance of a multifaceted Islamist landscape. As with the Muslim Brotherhoods during the past 20 years, their inclusion in the political arena is a challenge that Arab countries must overcome if they truly want to succeed in their path towards democracy.

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Post-scriptum

AST represented an important moment of revolutionary mobilization in post-2011 politics. Islamism evolved; a new radical organization emerged in addition to the traditional Nahda party and acquired considerable space and support for radical politics in the urban and semi-urban working class neighbourhoods. The democratic compromise, which is also a compromise between middle classes, imposed the normalization of contentious politics. This new phase influenced the landscape of Islamism in general. The Nahda leadership imposed a moderate turn to its constituency and gained consensus in the 'democratic' camp as a legitimate actor to deal with. Radical Salafists were in the meantime outlawed and the politics of contention silenced. This new situation produced not only the constitutional deal, but also an ideological consensus. I explain in the next chapter how this ideological consensus acquired the language of *Tunisianité*. However, during the electoral campaign of 2014 Nahda tried a counter-hegemonic strategy. I therefore analyse Nahda's electoral campaign in the city of Sfax, suggesting that the Islamist party tried to gain consensus among local economic elites by presenting itself as the party of the traditional marginalized middle and upper classes. Geographic resentment and religious piety are the backdrop of this strategy.

Chapter 5. Nahdha party and the strategy of counter-hegemony

Introduction

The last chapter is based on a fieldwork conducted in the autumn of 2014 in the city of Sfax, during the legislative campaign. Nahda was by that time losing support while feeling the hostility of what they called 'the deep state'. The 2014 campaign was based consequently on a counter hegemonic strategy. In particular, Nahda tried to convince the traditional Sfaxian middle class to back the party for the sake of a new political front against the old economic oligarchy linked to the previous regime and to its current representatives.

Sfax had been the economic centre of Tunisia from the 1960s/70s, but it was traditionally marginalized by the regionalist policy of the post-independence elite. It is also a city famous for the ethical and puritanical 'spirit of capitalism' of its entrepreneurs. After the revolution, a new Islamic constituency emerged in the city. It was indeed the place where Nahda could try a new strategy to counter the old nationalist elites on the base of a new Islamic alternative, credible to new middle classes with an important economic leverage.

The problem of Nahda was however not only to convince new rising middle classes of the credibility of its project for the country. After 2 years of government, complaints grew within its constituency as well. The leadership was under scrutiny because of the poor results of its government in terms of social change and transitional justice. In particular, the party lost its capacity to link its politics to the social movements. The city of Sfax was a key place where an important Islamic social movement developed. While most of the urban working class areas of the country followed the experience of *Ansar al-Sharia*, in Sfax there was a large Islamic constituency that, although distant from the radical Salafists (mainly because of the issue of violence), did not entirely trust Nahda, which, in their eyes, had compromised too much for the sake of government.

Sfax was indeed a privileged place where monitoring the strategy of Nahda at this juncture of political change and the evolution of the Islamist landscape after 2 years of turmoil.

The new Islamic middle class[115]

During the 2014 legislative elections, the two main political contenders, the nationalist, Bourguiba-inspired[1] Nida Tunis (Tunisian Call) and the Islamist al-Nahda fielded two businessmen as the heads of their list in Sfax, the second largest city in Tunisia. Mohammed Frikha is the first entrepreneur to have launched a privately owned Tunisian airline, Syphax, while Moncef Sellemi is the founder and President of Holding One Tech, the second private exporter in Tunisia. He is also well known for having been the Chairman of the local football team CSS. Frikha decided to run as an independent candidate heading al-Nahda's list, while Mr Sellemi ran with Nida Tunis. It is not a coincidence that two important economic personalities of the city, and the country, decided to run for the two main parties. First of all, there is a struggle for political hegemony that goes through the "taking over" of the economic sector of society. Second, and most important for the scope of this article, this hegemonic struggle finds a special playing field in Sfax and in its middle class social milieu.

Although the electoral success of al-Nahda and Congrès pour la République (CPR) in 2011 led to the formation of a coalition government (together with Ettakatol), the outcome was not sufficient for the Islamic party to be accepted by the

[115] Published. Ref: Merone, F., & De Facci, D. (2015). The new Islamic middle class and the struggle for hegemony in Tunisia. *AFRICHE E ORIENTI*, (1-2), 56-69. The authors shared the fieldwork and the theoretical frame. However, I wrote most of the article. De Facci focused in particular on the experience of the Islamic associations in Sfax.

traditional elite of the country, which began denouncing in dramatic and exaggerated terms the Islamization of the country. In order to present itself as a valid political alternative, al-Nahda needs to gain a wider political hegemony, in the sense Gramsci understood the term.[2] We thus consider the hegemony of the old elites to be the result of the strength of its ideological discourse based over a historical social bloc (Gramsci 1971: 12). The Bourguibian nationalist party Neo-Destour[3] interpreted the nation-state project as based on the idea of modernization, and, as a consequence, the Islamists are rejected as anti-modern by the dominant middle class (Hermassi 1994).[4] In order to reverse this image, al-Nahda needs to propose a new model for the middle class through which a different image of social success and modernity can be presented as a clear alternative. In our case study of Sfax, we show the emergence of a new Islamic constituency that takes the form of a new civil society. Most of the new social entrepreneurs are Islamic, in the sense that their social and individual behaviour is influenced by religious references, but not all are identifiable automatically with the traditional al-Nahda project. Since the scope of this article is limited to the counter-hegemonic strategy of the traditional Islamic political actor al-Nahda, we will focus on the emergence of what we call a “new middle class”, whose political allegiance became the centre of the Islamic counter-hegemonic strategy.

Hegemony and the Islamic middle class

The process of nation-building in Tunisia has produced an inclusion/exclusion dynamic of social groups. Independence and the institution-building path[5] of the modern state created a new category of people occupying state institutions (e.g. civil servants, teachers, etc.). This shaping of social groups is a consequence of a unique modernization process, developed according to different cleavages (Anderson 2014). In particular we distinguish between two "middle classes": the first became the base of the Bourguibian ideological process of nation building; the second, identified politically in the Youssefist movement and mainly located in the south and in the immigrant neighbourhoods of the northern cities, developed a sense of frustration and exclusion.[6] The first group had its references in the Western Enlightenment-based idea of modernity, while the second referred to a modernity oriented by and

interpreted through traditional cultural and religious values. The Youssefist movement is that political trend that developed between the end of the anti-colonial struggle and the beginning of independence in opposition to the hegemony Bourguiba imposed in the Destourian party. Salah Ben Youssef was an important leader of the nationalist movement that interpreted a different vision of the national idea, more oriented on Islam and pan-Arabist references. Zeitunians were those intellectuals and clerics that stood in defence of the traditional Arab system of education based on the mosque/university Zeituna. They became allies of Ben Youssef in the struggle against Bourguiba that saw them as an archaic system to be erased in order to impose a modernist vision of the nation. The Youssefist movement dispersed after Bourguiba had imposed its authority. In the seventies the Islamist movement emerged as inheriting the old social cleavages that were translated into a renewed political struggle. Today, two conflicting social groups with different ideological representations are still struggling to conquer the state and claim the right to impose their vision of society (Merone 2015).

This article focuses on the strategy al-Nahda is putting in place after its leadership understood that the battle for the realization of an Islamic program, having abandoned the revolutionary vision of the Islamic state (Cavatorta, Merone 2013), cannot be only a matter of electoral success.[7] During the political crisis between July and December 2013, as a consequence of the Egyptian coup against the Muslim Brothers and a second political assassination in Tunisia, the opposition retired from the assembly and asked for a new government. Within the Islamic party, this new political dynamic started off a debate on whether they should resign and support a technocratic government or insist on claiming the respect of electoral legitimacy. Ghannouchi argued that the party should read this particular political juncture as strategic: for this reason the political choices should take into account the benefit of long term democratic institutionalization instead of merely partisan and electoral calculation. Nahda's experience in power (November 2011- January 2014) with a heterogeneous governmental coalition during a process of democratization, has transformed the party into a much more pragmatic actor with a new vision of the "political" (Guazzone 2013). Analysing their own experience in government, Nahda

activists and cadres expressed both frustration and self-criticism for having underestimated the difficulties of the practical side of governing.[8] Beyond the traditional hostility of the economic and bureaucratic apparatus of the state, the party did not achieve the objective of setting itself up as a new ruling class. During the 2014 electoral campaign, the party tried to offer a different image of itself,[9] emphasizing in public speeches that Nahda is the party to trust and to which Tunisians should entrust their future, because it had been responsible and pragmatic[10] during the turbulent transition period. In other words, it looks as if Nahda widened its electoral constituency and increased its attention towards a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and socially conservative middle class that is rather competing for power and inclusion instead of trying to overthrow it. Being the traditional middle-class acquired to the nationalistic, Bourguibian ideology, for Nahda it was a matter of establishing a pact with a new, emerging middle class that is closer to its vision of the world and frustrated by its historical exclusion from genuine political and economic power.

There has been a long discussion over middle classes in the Middle East, ever since the article by Martin Lipset *Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy* (1959), which analysed the relationship between democracy and development.[11] Dating back from Aristotle, the argument goes that the making of democracy is more difficult where a large income gap exists between the masses and the elites. This argument holds that the middle class represents the main agent for democratic change. This debate played a role in particular in transitology.[12] The middle class became synonymous of civil society, studied as in the social science tradition dating back from Tocqueville. Our use of “middle class” or “new middle class” draws from Janine Clarck’s pivotal study on Islamic middle classes and associative system (Clarck 2004). Clarck considers the Islamic associative system within the frame of social movements’ theory. She argues that those social institutions have to be considered as organizations within a larger social movement (Clarck 2004: 21). As such, she highlights the horizontal networking between people of the same social group constituting a "new middle class". The concept of new middle class refers to the development of the country’s

social structure. Following Clarck's analysis, this new middle class is "new" because of its emergence in the process of modernization and education. Examples are professionals like lawyers, engineers, doctors. In our case study however, we further develop the idea of novelty, because this social class seems to be "new" even within the same Islamic constituency. The old Nahda generation was in fact belonging to what Clark herself calls «*petite bourgoisie*» (Clarck 2004: 9). This new middle class is more successful economically, self-confident and less politicized. This diversified Islamic constituency clearly manifested itself in the social context of the Islamic activism in Sfax.

We chose to analyse a specific case, the city of Sfax, in order to show how the social and political dynamics of this strategy are put in place on the ground. The choice of the city derives from two considerations. First, since independence, Sfax has been marginalized from the central power in Tunis and for that reason it has maintained a feeling of frustration *vis à vis* the traditional power group. As the *de facto* capital of the south, it is seen as the symbol of the political and economic discrimination of the southern part of the country. Second, because of its economic strength, its social conservatism and the sense of marginalization felt by its inhabitants, it has been considered by the Nahda leadership as a laboratory for the consolidation of a counter-hegemonic strategy based on the deal between the party and the large Islamic constituency that appeared after the revolution. In Sfax, the Islamic party is trying to convince the new Islamic middle class to back the Nahdaoui political project as an alternative counter-power to oppose to the traditional elite, linked ideologically and socially to Nida Tunis. In this respect, the Nahdaoui leaders are thinking of the Turkish model, and consider themselves like the AKP and the Sfaxian region as a counterpart to Anatolia,[13] hoping to become a leader in economic and political success.[14] This research is based on the authors' personal fieldwork[15] and supported by the existing literature.[16]

Nahdha and the struggle for hegemony

The three years of the Tunisian democratic transition (2011-14) mark the change from an authoritarian regime to a liberal-democratic one. This was not an easily pre-

determined outcome in the region, especially since the countries of the region had already missed the so-called third wave of democratization (Huntington 1993) that began in the 1970s. The main issue in the democratization debate in the region revolves around Islamism and the capacity of these countries to absorb democratic liberal principles into the Islamic cultural and social background (Ozzano, Cavatorta 2013). This is why one important point of interest in analysing the transitional process in Tunisia is the evolution of Islamism in general and its most important representative, the Ikhwani-inspired Nahda party. The approach we apply here considers the integration of the Islamist party into the constitutional political landscape as depending on its capacity not only to win electoral victories, but also to adapt to the official discourse of the nation, until then monopolised by a traditional nationalist-Bourguibian elite. We define this process as a struggle for hegemony.

In looking at the practical political experience of Nahda since the fall of the regime in 2011 to its defeat in the 2014 elections,[17] it is possible to divide this period in three phases: the first starts from the arrival to power and the Ninth, mainly celebrative, Party Congress (2012); the second, the tensions and conflicts while in government (2012-13); and, the third, Nahda's resignation from the government and partial defeat in the legislative election of 2014, which was the end point of a long path of ideological evolution.

The party had already changed considerably during the long years of repression under Bourguiba and Ben Ali, though, since 2009, all its leaders had been freed from prison. Since 2000, the local leadership was active in human rights organizations, sharing with most of the opposition a common negative judgement of the regime and the aspiration to freedom. When the 2011 revolution allowed the leaders who lived abroad to come home, their political experiences were significantly different. Since the 1991 crackdown, the party was no longer a homogeneous group, but they found a way to muddle through and proved to have a solid basis of support, imposing the party as an efficient machine for campaigning and running the country. As said by the party activists in those days of rapid change, the praxis counted more than any theory.[18] However, the transformation of the party remained incomplete, and the 2011 electoral victory was only able to hide it for a short while. A key

question remained: to what degree are we preachers and/or politicians?[19] The 2012 Ninth Congress, when the party was already in power, tried to handle the issue, but the importance of the historical moment made the leaders decide not to push the party into divisive issues,[20] such as it had been historically the debate about splitting the party in two different components, Dawa association and political party, such as the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Although such split did not happen, in practice, party militants and party officials started to engage in two different ways, some choosing associative activities and others focusing on politics, especially since Nahda was now a ruling party. The exercise of power created practical consequences. On one side, in fact, the party became just like any other political party that had to deal with economic and social issues, linked to the governing functions and meeting the expectation of the people. On the other hand, to be Islamic meant to carry a revolutionary idea of transforming society that was still inspiring part of the Islamic public and preachers. The conflict over articles 1 and 45 of the constitution was an example of this struggle,[21] as much as issues such as transitional justice and the political future of former regime leaders.[22] For Nahda, a hard trade-off meant postponing the original and inspirational Islamic project of transforming society, thereby deceiving some within its own traditional constituency, so as to enlarge its acceptance within society.

Since October 2012, pressure from the opposition parties became stronger. They complained that the legitimacy of the government had been eroded after the end of the formal one-year mandate.[23] Within society, polarization grew stronger, especially for fear of the "Islamization of the revolution" due to the public presence of radical Salafist movements;[24] a general feeling of insecurity spread across the country, adding to a deepening social and economic crisis. Nahda and its partners defended the constitutional and electoral legitimacy of their government until August 2013 when they finally agreed to form a quartet composed of national forces which formed a new technocratic government.[25]

The Nahda-lead government finally resigned on January 2014[26] and a period of self-criticism started within the party.[27] The party members' analysis of the situation brought two aspects to light. First, they mainly blamed themselves for their

failure to govern effectively and provide concrete responses to the social and economic needs of the people.[28] Secondly, they expressed resentment *vis-à-vis* external factors, and in particular the role of the so-called "deep state".[29] By "deep state", in Islamist mindset is intended an immaterial, hegemonic corpus within the state apparatus, but also a political and social elite that controls, for example, the media system. This is very close to the analysis Gramsci made for explaining the historical defeat of communists when the fascist party took power in Italy without any popular opposition.[30] The deep state was and still is an important part of the political vision the Islamic constituency has of the situation in Tunisia during the transitional period.

After Nahda's resignation from government, its leadership decided, contrary to what the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt did, to change their strategy and tried to persuade the Tunisian public that they left power in the name of the broader national interest rather than the narrower party's one. As Nahda leaders repeated during the 2014 legislative electoral rallies: «Nahda is the only responsible party in the nation, willing to stabilize the political situation and put the country back on track».[31] The traditional elite demonstrated very little support for the Islamic party and Nida Tunis, the political party opposed to Nahda, was busy re-shaping the traditional social front against Islamists. Nahda, however, had another card to play: in a similar move to what the AKP did in Turkey, it envisaged a strategy of co-optation of members of the a new emerging middle class, frustrated by the old and corrupt economic elite and the kind of crony capitalism that had dominated under the last years of Ben Ali. This social group, ethically Islamic and economically dynamic, could represent the starting point of a counter-hegemonic strategy to oppose to the resilience of the traditional, nationalist elites.

Sfaxian capitalism as an alternative

When referring to capitalism in Tunisia it is imperative to discuss Sfax (and Sfaxians) insofar as the city is unique due to its particular model of development (Zghal 1992). Isolated from its hinterland for centuries because of the threatening presence of Bedouins and nomads on the plains outside the city, its commercial

growth came from the sea.[32] The expansion outside the city walls began under the French colonization; the people of Sfax came to a deal with the French colonizers, because their campaign of pacification against tribal warriors was seen as a chance. Having liberated the plains from the Bedouin threat, the French protectorate reorganized the land system by encouraging an agrarian expansion: together with the French farmers, a Sfaxian entrepreneurial class emerged.[33] From the 1970s on, Sfaxian capitalism developed: important entrepreneurial families emerged by this time, mostly in the construction sector, tourism, and different industrial specializations.[34] This economic success story stands in contrast to the city's low level of infrastructure, which contributed to Sfaxian inhabitants' perception of marginalization when compared to the rest of the country, especially Tunis and Sousse. In particular, during the Ben Ali era (1987-2011), Sousse had a disproportionate number of public investments, further fuelling regionalist discontent.[35] This situation developed into a sentiment of political antagonism against the centralistic patronage system of power. The symbol of this conflict between a dynamic and laborious bourgeoisie and a corrupted power system was the story of BIAT, the first Tunisian private bank, founded by Moalla, a Sfaxian entrepreneur who was forced to step down from his firm after having dared to resist pressure from Ben Ali's family.[36]

However, not all of the Sfaxian entrepreneurial class was independent and not all demonstrated the same integrity. Part of it in fact rather happily dealt with the corrupt power structures in place, taking advantage of the patronage system, just like the vast majority of the broader national business class.[37] This narrative was particularly prominent within the Islamic public, traditionally antagonist to the old regime. According to this version, the entrepreneurial Sfaxian elite was divided between a corrupt segment, not seriously engaged in business and focused on its own interests, and a more dynamic one committed to ethical and traditional values, rooted in the identity of the city and interested in working both for their own business and the welfare of the community;[38] the latter being historically marginalized and in search of further influence in the decision-making process. This narrative of the economic elite was revived by Nahda during the 2014 legislative and presidential

campaigns and led to the formation of an electoral and political strategy that saw the famous entrepreneur of Syphax, Mr Frikha heading the party's list in the constituency of Sfax.

A new Islamic constituency

Al-Nahda's political, counter hegemonic-strategy in Sfax is relevant because of the city's strong Arab and Islamic orientation[i] and its importance as the "capital of the south" and possibly the country's economic capital. Sfax represents both a different social and geographical Tunisia and a different model of economic success, the ideal place for an Islamic counter-hegemonic strategy. This strategy, however, could not work without a strong and dynamic middle class to support its social legitimization. Sfax proved to be a privileged space of expression of this new Islamic constituency. Although Nahda's success represented, in a sense, one way of assimilating this traditional social group into the nation-state, a feeling of frustration remained. The westernized middle class of Tunis and Sousse and the economic elite continued to despise the Islamic public, exemplified by this Sfaxian bourgeoisie, even after the transition, considering it "backward" and incapable of producing an effective ruling class.

A new Islamic constituency appeared after the revolution, with no sense of inferiority, and partially crowned by economic success. This new class expressed itself with different social and cultural codes, liberated from the constraints of the former regime. This public was not automatically assimilated to the old Islamic generation directly linked to Nahda, but it became a natural potential Islamic constituency for the traditional Islamic party, especially since the political landscape lacked an alternative Islamic political project.[39] The new Islamic sphere (Hohendahl, Russian 1974) emerged in the form of associations, radio and TV outlets: a new type of "modern" preachers, entrepreneurs interested in developing the ethical Islamic codes, and a new lobby demanding the opportunity to put forth an Islamic model of development.[40] We call this large public a "new Islamic middle class" in the sense that it is different from the traditional Nahda constituency, largely the product of an excluded educated social group emerged in the process of modernization of the

country but excluded from power (Merone 2014) and more interested to social and economic affirmation than in the achievement of a specifically political project (Haenni 2005; Rougier 2008). This is the kind of social and economic contest that constitutes in Sfax the base of the Nahda strategy of counter-hegemony.

There exists thus a network of people connecting with each other and acting with a similar social behaviour and a common vision of the public space.[41] Their social activity is intertwined with an economic one, where success appears to be an important part of their value system.[42] For example, the Islamic Economy Association organizes special meeting for researchers and businessmen interested in knowing more about the Islamic economic system.[43] The Tunisian Association for *Zakat* (legal alms), instead, plays an important social role for people interested in the precise calculation of the *zakat*. The members of those two associations are independent professionals, university professors, bankers, entrepreneurs, students, sheikhs, ideological activists, and politicians. These actors come from a similar social and economic environment[44] and their social activities are located in the centre of a large network of people interested in improving their economic opportunities. For example, students of Islamic subjects are interested in the job market, while professionals and investors want to take advantage of the Islamic economic opportunities and networking.

This large public is an example of the Islamic constituency that emerged after the 2011 revolution. They do not necessarily strive for the same type of political representation, but share a common way of representing themselves in the public space, either sharing economic interests or cultural and religious references (Solie 2014). It is normal that the political attention of Nahda leaders, especially local ones, is focused on this large public; it is both a natural electoral constituency and a social and cultural counterforce - helping the party in presenting itself as a credible ruling class, able to help Sfax and the South to improve its status. The larger national context and the model of reference for Nahda is Turkey. The similarity with the situation in Turkey is often underlined by current and former Nahda militants in Sfax. What they point at is not only the obstacle represented by a westernized elite linked to the state's apparatus, but an hegemonic struggle that only can be achieved

through a progressive and moderate action of penetrating the institutions and gaining consensus in key sectors of society.[45] In order to achieve this strategic objective, only a dynamic business class able to support an economic take-off, can provide strength to the Islamist party and its political project. The famous Anatolian middle class, characterized by a dynamic spirit of enterprise and a conservative Islamic social behaviour seems to be very similar to what is characteristic of Sfax and its economic and social uniqueness.[46] The importance of the economic and financial Islamic associations, in particular the collection of *zakat* and the development of the Islamic bank system,[47] seems to confirm the comparison of the Sfaxian milieu with the Anatolian one, at least in the eyes of the Nahda leadership. An array of economic actors may be attracted by this model, which perfectly espouses the Sfaxian work ethic, while the political project of Nahda may be considered an alternative to the old elite power system that is re-emerging and backing Nida Tunis.[48]

Conclusion

The 2014 legislative and presidential elections showed that Nahda has lost some of the appeal it had at the beginning of the democratization process. Although it managed to hold on to most of its constituency obtaining 32% of votes compared to 37% in 2011, it has lost a good part of the fluctuating voters. This is in part natural because any transition implies quite typically a return of old forces. It may be argued as well that the party lost its appeal because once tested in power it showed its limitations, especially in responding to practical material issues. The Islamic leadership, and its allies such as CPR presidential candidate Marzouki, underlines however that this is not enough to explain the changing political landscape. The Islamic party still has, for them, a specific problem in sharing with other national forces the "right to govern", pointing out the necessity of a counter-hegemonic strategy.

In this article, we gave an example of how Nahda reacted to what it perceives as a hegemonic weakness. The case study of Sfax was in particular intended to highlight what Nahda considered a key tool in their counter-hegemonic strategy. For them it had to come from a new entrepreneurial class able to propose a national

strategy of economic growth, far from the traditional "corrupt" business-class. The confrontation between businessmen in the two Sfaxian electoral districts, running for Nahda and Nida, made clear this reading of the political landscape.

After having accepted to resign from government, the party's strategy has changed and, keeping in mind the successful model of the AKP in Turkey, has started building a counter-hegemonic project. The city of Sfax has become the centre of a new middle-class, which is dynamic, ethically Islamic, and frustrated because traditionally marginalized from the mechanism of power influence. Using a Gramscian approach, this article shows how gaining power is not only a matter of elections, but, more broadly, a process of constructing hegemony. The Islamic Tunisian Nahda party has understood that and tried to set about doing just that.

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Notes

(1) The Bourguibian ideological trend is the one which refers to the national modernist project of the independence identified with the personality of Bourguiba, the independence hero and the first President of the new state.

(2) For a Gramscian reading of the Ikhwani movement see Campanini, Mezram (2010).

(3) The neo-Destour was the party founded by Bourguiba and the younger nationalist generation in 1934, in opposition to the "old" Destour party. In 1964, after opting for a socialist program the party was called PSD (Socialist Destourian Party) until it was dissolved in 1987 by the new President Ben Ali, that in this way wanted to mark an opposition with the past.

(4)Hermassi proposes a political and sociological explanation to the birth and rise of the Islamic movement in relation to the development of the nation-state.

(5)Pierson (Pierson 2000) defines path dependence a «social process grounded in a dynamic of "increasing returns"». «Path dependent arguments based on positive feedback suggest that not only "big" events have big consequences; little ones that happen at the right time can have major consequences as well».

(6)According to Camau and Geisser: «le youssefisme est devenu le paradigme de l'opposition pour tous ceux qui ne se satisfaisaient pas de la victoire de Bourguiba et de la mainmise de ses affidés. Il a symbolisé une fracture pérenne entre outsiders et insiders d'une polité tenue pour illégitime» (Camau, Geisser 2003: 144).

(7)Salma Sarsut, Nahda's PM, *interview with authors*. Hammam Lif, 4/4/2014.

(8)Mohammed Rachid, historic leader in Kasserine, 11 June 2014 and Salma Sarsut, Nahda MP, Hammam Lif 4 June 2014 among others. *Personal interviews with the authors*.

(9)In the electoral leaflets distributed during the campaign, the party has placed faces of "normal people", representing all strata of society, on the first page.

(10)We attended two Nahda electoral rallies in Manouba, in the north, and in Djerba, in the south. In the first one, Lotfi Zitouni, an important national leader, gave the speech; in the second Rached Ghannouchi, the President of the party, himself gave the speech. In both speeches the main discourse of the campaign was based on presenting Nahda as the responsible party to trust, in order both to maintain democratic country and to start a new period of economic growth.

(11)On the same topic see also the pivotal study by Rueshemeyer D., E.H. Stephens and J.D. Stephens (1992) *Capitalist, Development and Democracy* and O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986).

(12)For a good synthetic overview on the transitology debate and its future perspective see Schmitter P.C. (2013) *Reflections on "Transitology" - Before and After*.

(13) For a reference to an historical critical overview of the use of "civil society" as a paradigm in political science see Fooley, Edwards (1998).

(14)On the phenomenon of the Anatolian Tigers see: Demir, Acar, Toprak (2004) and Hosgör (2011). For the links between the AKP and the bourgeois, financial Islamic constituency see: Gumuscu, Sert (2009).

(15)The Nahda hegemonic strategy as being inspired from the AKP's experience has been indirectly unveiled during the fieldwork. In particular, during the interview with Lubna Moalla, human rights activist and close to the local party in Sfax. *Interview with the authors*, Sfax, 23 September 2014. For a comparative study between the AKP's model and the experience of Nahda in Tunisia see: Torelli (2012).

(16)This article is part of a larger study on the Tunisian transition that both the authors are pursuing for their PhD dissertations. For this specific topic, fieldwork in Sfax was conducted from 17 to 25 September 2014.

(17) The main reference for the historical importance of the Sfaxian entrepreneurial class see: Denieuil (1992).

(18) For an analysis of the experience of government of Nahda party see: Guazzone (2013).

(19) Ziyed, Youssef, Hissam, Nahda militants of the youth section of the party, interview with the authors, Tunis, 15 November 2012.

(20) As a proof of such debate within Islamist trends, see also: S. Lacroix, *Sheikhs and Politicians: Inside the New Egyptian Salafism*, Policy briefing, Brooking Doha Center, June 2012: http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2012/6/07-egyptian-salafism-lacroix/stephane-lacroix-policy-briefing-english.pdf.

(21)*9th Conference: Ghannouchi Remains Leader as Ennahda Denies Any Conflict Within the Movement*, in «Nawaat» (on-line), 18 July 2012: http://nawaat.org/portail/2012/07/18/ninth-conference-ghannouchi-remains-leader-as-ennahda-denies-any-conflict-within-the-movement.

(22)The article 1 of the constitution states that Tunisia is a sovereign nation and that Islam is its religion. It was for many Islamist too general concerning the relationship between the nation and their religion. As for article 45, regarding gender equality, Nahda introduced an amendment considering equality between men and women linked to complementarity, which stirred a polarizing debate.

(23) For the evolution of Nahda in relation to the constitutional debate see: M.L. Marks, *Convince, Coerce, or Compromise? Ennahda Approach to Tunisia's Constitution*, Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper, February 2014: http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2014/02/10%20ennahda%20tunisia%20constitution%20marks/ennahda%20approach%20tunisia%20constitution%20english.pdf.

(24) E. Auffray, *L'ivresse du pouvoir a saisi Ennahda*, in «Libération» (on-line), 9 October 2012: http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2012/10/09/l-ivresse-du-pouvoir-a-saisi-ennahda_852088.

(25)For a general overview of the evolution of the emergence of Salafism in Tunisia during the transitional process see: Torelli, Merone, Cavatorta (2012).

(26)M. Teyeb, *The winners and the losers in Tunisia's political dialogue*, in «Middle East Monitor» (on-line), 20 December 2013: https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/africa/8904-the-winners-and-the-losers-in-tunisias-political-dialogue.html.

(27)I. Mandraud, *Ennahda quitte le gouvernement en Tunisie*, in «Le Monde» (on-line), 10 January 2014:

http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/01/10/ennahda-quitte-le-gouvernement-en-tunisie_4345920_3210.html.

(28) Salma Sarsut, Nahda PM, *interview with authors*. Hammam Linf, 4 April 2014.

(29) Mihammed Rachid, historical Nahda militant and member of the Majlis Shoura, Kasserine, 11 June 2014.

(30) Militants would argue that the party didn't have the chance to run the country because of the resilience on the "deep state". *Interview with militants*, Tunis, October 2014.

(31)Fascism as Passive Revolution (Gramsci 1971: 118-120).

(32) This discourse was repeated clearly during the two electoral rallies that we attended in October 2014 during fieldwork. At the first of these meetings (Manouba) was Lotfi Zeitouna, prominent national leader, and the second in Jerba (Medenine) Rached Ghannouchi, the President of the party.

(33) The history of the city is commercial and mostly linked to the Mediterranean trade network, linking the city to Alexandria in Egypt much more easily than with Tunis, the capital of the country. The families of big traders used to send their children to Egypt in order to run the family shops and study at the same time. The city acquired historically a cultural identity closer to the Middle East than the other Sahelian cities of Tunisia, Sousse and Tunis (Denieuil 1992).

(34) This period for the Sfaxian new elite is comparable to the period of the land enclosure in XVI century in England. A very unique circumstance was exploited until economic activity transferred from trade to agriculture, especially olive trees plantations, began in the period, consisting historically in the capitalistic original accumulation. By the beginning of the 1970s, the Sfaxian businessmen were prepared for leading the new era of capitalism building inaugurated by Minister Hedi Nouira. Symbolically, the first industrial zone in the country was developed in Sfax. Interview with Tarek Chaabouni, Sfaxian entrepreneur, 5 November 2014, Tunis.

(35) The most famous one is the Pauline group of Abdelwahab Ben Ayed. Other examples include Chakira and Coficab of Mr. Hichem Elloumi and Mr Lotfi Addennadher, former president of the Sfaxian football team (CSS) that diversified its activities in construction and the food industry.

(36) *Sfax, interdite de développement?*, «Leaders» (on-line), 6 July 2011: http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/sfax-interdite-de-developpement. Ben Ali and his family are from the region of Sousse. For more details on the marginality of Sfax compared to Tunis and Sousse see: Zghal (1992) and B'chir (1994).

(37) This event is interpreted both as the will of the power to prevent an important private business from becoming too important and an opportunity to teach a lesson to the Sfaxian network that the central government suspected as having a strategy to emancipate themselves from the political system. See: Hibou (2008).

(38) The history of the Sfaxian capitalism is not lacking in success stories of large entrepreneurial groups developing in the patronage system of the power, the most notably the Poulina group, the biggest private enterprise in Tunisia. Even the exodus to Tunis of hundreds of Sfaxian entrepreneurs since the 1970s shows the difficulties Sfaxians faced in operating in their own birth town as well as a strategy of proximity to the power centres. There is indeed a gap in the Sfaxian business environment between those that took advantage of the regime and others, new entrepreneurs and the marginalized. See: Nabli (2008).

(39) «We have two types of businessmen here in Sfax: on one hand, the founders of the Sfaxian economy, who work according to moral principles and clean economic activities; on the other hand the ones that merged into the Ben Ali system together with the Trabelsi mafia». Interview with Loubna, lawyer and Nahda activist. Sfax, 23 September 2014.

(40) It is mainly based on a traditional conservative model of social life, typically organized on the big family religious' values (Denieuil 1992; B'chir 1994). Having a strong religious feeling doesn't mean to be immediately elected as an Islamist. Any political project though should pay attention to the importance of certain values especially for the importance they have in social behaviour.

(41) For the evolution of Islamism in Tunisia during the transition see: F. Merone, F. Volpi, "T*rajectories of Tunisian Islam*", in E. Stein, F. Volpi, F. Merone, K. Alfasi, L. Alles (eds.)*, Islamism and the Arab Uprisings,* CASAW-AHRC People Power and State Power Network, June 2014: http://www.casaw.ac.uk/wp-

content/uploads/2014/04/Islamism-and-the-Arab-Uprising-June-2014-Ewan-Stein-Report.pdf.

(42) See: Ben Néfissa (2011) and *Rapport de diagnostic sur la société civile tunisienne*, "UE", 15 March 2012: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/tunisia/documents/projets/rapportdiagnostic_stecivile_mars2012_fr.pdf

(43) In our fieldwork in Sfax we met two associations in particular, the Islamic Economic Association and the Tunisian Association for Zakat.

(44) Some of the people we met expressed clearly that their view of economic success was not to be detached by an Islamic behaviour, mainly linked to specific religious precepts. «God loves who can support the community. That is a move for the believer who looks for God's approbation in it economic activity», interview with Ahmed, 16 September 2014, Sfax; «Work's value in Islam is superior to the cult's practice. This Islamic spirit is supporting the economic Sfaxian success. The Islamic movement renews this spirit», interview with Habib, 17 September 2014, Sfax.

(45) For three years, it has organized an International Forum of Islamic Financing in Sfax and it has promoted the first master sin Islamic Finance in the country at the University of Sfax.

(46) Ridha, founder of one of the associations, is a professor for the new Islamic finance master (he is also one of the master's creators). Oussama, Sfax's Zeitouna bank director: he also teaches in the master courses. Mohamed, accountant, helps for the *zakat* calculation in collaboration with Habib, expert in religious science, who is the guarantee for the conformity of the calculation to the Islamic jurisprudence. Habib is entrepreneur, an important association activist and one of the leaders of the Nahda local section.

(47) The Moroccan Justice and Development Party (PjD) is also referred to as an Islamist party. In this chapter however we make specific reference to the relationship between an entrepreneurial middle class and the Islamist political project, which is typical of the Turkish case.

(48) Interview with Loubna, lawyer and Nahda activist, 23 September 2014, Sfax.

(49) The phenomenon of the Islamic finance system was a widespread trend since the 1980s. In Tunisia a limited access was allowed to the Saudi bank Baraka and a new brand Tunisian bank was created in 2009. It lasts limited though until the fall of the regime in 2011, when a new enthusiasm gained the spirits of Islamic economic and financial cadres.

(50) The emergence of a party such as Nidaa Tunis is considered to be by a part of society as the party under which the old interests are reorganizing themselves.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Political studies on the MENA region have been largely focusing for the last 20 years on the structures of the state and its political apparatus[116]. This was because after the so called third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991), world politics seemed to the eyes of political scientists moving towards a gradual process of adaptation of the world system to the democratic liberal model of politics (Fukuyama, 1989). The shortcomings of this approach became apparent to the academic community working on the Middle East and North Africa once the first attempts at 'democratization' failed and the political structure of the countries in the region remained stable, notwithstanding some cosmetic change of controlled multiparty politics and façade liberal reforms. As a result of the failure of democratic transitions, democratization studies were accused of being teleological because each political change was studied as one from an authoritarian to a democratic system. As a number of authors subsequently demonstrated (Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004; Hinnebusch 2006; Schlumberger 2007), political change could go otherwise into a direction from authoritarianism to authoritarianism, although of a different type.

If democratization studies had been too optimistic in interpreting processes of political change, studies of authoritarian resilience were instead too pessimistic, paying attention to 'stable' macro political structures and neglecting to a large extent what was occurring in society 'under the radar' (Lust 2012). The result was an overwhelming focus on the structure of governing in a authoritarian environment, the strategies of ruling elites to remain in power (Heydemann 2007) as well on state apparatuses such as the military and security services (Bellin 2004). The uprising of 2010/11 came as a surprise both to the political and academic community. This is why many started to raise the question: "what went wrong"? Why wasn't the scientific community able to foresee the events, not either to understand that changes could come from societal movements?

Self-reflection on how to conceptualise political change (or lack thereof) in the MENA led to different 'adjustments'. The most convincing approach is that of

[116]See Introduction.

the so-called 'paradogma', which is supposed to have a balanced approach between the two traditional paradigms of democratization and authoritarian resilience (Valbjørn, 2012; 2015). Another trend took Lisa Anderson's 2005 critical article "Where the sun shines" to plead in favour of an approach that went back to state society relations and that would be able to go to find out what is 'below the radar' (Pace and Cavatorta, 2012).

Following this call for bottom up analysis of societal change, this research applied a method of research borrowed by anthropology to explain and analyse the changes coming from places rarely studied in the past. To do so, it was necessary to employ an ethnographic approach, based on long and patient observant participation. As I have already explained, the topic of the study as much as the epistemology underpinning it implied the choice of a methodological approach similar to an anthropological work. It follows that fieldwork was long and 'participative' and unfolded along a specific period of change in Tunisia from 2011 to 2014. It is the experience and witnessing of this historical moment that shaped the rationale, direction and outcome of this dissertation.

After the first period of enthusiasm for a new democratic 'spring' in the region, conflict and authoritarian resilience came back on the scene. In a way, it was a repetition of the same dynamics of late 1980s and early 1990s, when the first cycle of attempts at democratization and authoritarian responses unfolded. Even the steps of political change seemed very similar. First, popular enthusiasm and political liberalization shook the authoritarian ruling elites; second, political struggle and societal polarization occurred in the 'free-market' of ideas and contending visions of society; third, authoritarian re-legitimazation through (popular/populist) calls for the strong man rang out to quell the 'chaos' of democratic politics. The similarity of the events of 2011-14 with those of the 1980s neglects however the fact that this time change was the outcome of popular uprisings and the degree of democratization was deeper than ever in the past. Thus, the political outcome itself was not the exact repetition of the history. While in Egypt a neo-authoritarian regime emerged, it is not a given that it will take the same shape as the previous one; the civil war in Syria will probably not lead the country back to same pre-2011 political and socio-economic

set-up. The most significant difference with the past though comes from the political evolution of Tunisia. In this North African country complete regime change did succeed. While in Egypt the first stage of political liberalization ended in a military coup and in Libya and Yemen evolved into an open civil conflict, in Tunisia there was a constitutional bargaining and the setting up of liberal-democratic institutions.

The central aim of this thesis was delving into the social space where politics took place in a country in transition and to, more specifically, examine Islamic politics and its evolution in a period of regime change and contention. The dynamics of change in particular brought my attention to the longer historical process. While the literature analysed post-revolutionary politics through the framework of traditional democratization (Stepan 2012; Murphy 2012), I tried to make sense of such a period as that of inclusion and exclusion of social groups. The constitutional period from 2011 to 2014 was characterized by a process of democratic building and its defining trait was the inclusion of the historical Islamist party Nahda. I explained the inclusion of Nahda as the product of an historical political bargain, but I also argue that this bargain had as a consequence the exclusion of the new emergent radical Islamists, represented by Ansar al-Sharia. Salafists represented new social groups - the marginalized urban masses - which did not find a place in the new democratic scenario. Democratization appeared indeed, within this frame, as a long historical process of change and continuity: change, because the two Tunisian historical ideological families (and their social constituencies) came to a democratic agreement, continuity because of the exclusion of the (Islamist) most radical groups.

In this respect, the historical dynamics of change developed since independence within the frame of a national political community embedded in the institutions of the nation-state. I argued in this research that the dialectic between social groups in the fight for power during the process of nation-building was expressed by ideologies - nationalism and Islamism - that shaped the form and language of the conflict. Although referring to different ideologies, due to different social and economic conditions such as the lack of industrialization, the conflicts and dynamics of change in the region are comparable to the ones that occurred in Europe in the XIX and XX centuries. This implies, methodologically, that democratization is

to be conceptualised as a struggle between social groups for the inclusion in the national political community rather than as the simple setting up of procedural mechanisms to elect those who will govern. The main purpose of this research was to show how social groups shape their struggle and how change comes as a overcoming of the oppositions through the analysis of a particular period of contention.

The use of a Gramscian approach in the context of Islamist studies offered the theoretical tools to understand this form of political change. Islamism, in this research, is conceptualised as the ideology of excluded social groups. As Marx and Engels observed for the history of Europe, large moments of change are characterised by the intellectual leadership of the bourgeoisie (or the petty bourgeoisie as in the case of the French revolution) and the factual struggle of larger popular strata (peasants or urban). When it comes to the post uprising period, the bourgeoisie can bargain with the upper classes for a new pacted regime, as long as its interests are guaranteed[117]. In Tunisia (as in the rest of the region) there is not the same type of social structure than in XIX century Europe; the process of nation-building and 'democratization' however goes through similar obstacles. Islamism is the modern ideology that provided the shape of the struggle of new social groups. The Muslim Brotherhood represented for decades part of the emerging middle classes, a product of the modern education system. Radical salafists represent today (or try to) popular (mostly urban) social groups that make sense of their collective reality though mass political organization according to religious injunctions and frames. While the conflict in Europe emerged as one about economic resources, in the region it manifests itself as an identity conflict. The obsession of the relation to the '*turath*' (the traditional heritage) is the marking point of each political and intellectual discussion in the Arab world (Campanini, 2005); and even in post-revolutionary politics, the national debate did not include economic issues. The shape and rhetoric of the conflict are indeed not marked by an economic analysis of class struggle, as it was the case in Marxist ideologies, but rather a communitarian/culturalist one.

[117]They share with those same classes the fear of popular mobilization. See K. Marx, the Eighteen Brumaire (1977).

In the second chapter of the dissertation, I set the historical frame of the process of change and continuity. I went through three topical moments of crisis in contemporary Tunisia history and highlighted how these key junctures produced factors of inclusion and exclusion. In chapter 3, I went through the rise of Nahda as key actor of political change. I dealt with the academic debate on how and why the Islamist party changed. In particular, I discussed the moderation through inclusion hypothesis and the post-Islamism thesis. Through the example of Nahda, I argued that moderation is the outcome of a process of exclusion, but not in the traditional sense of the exclusion caused by the repressive apparatus. It is a moderation, rather, that is a political process of understanding the limits the social space imposes in terms of acceptable policies and ideological references. The evolution of Islamism in Tunisia proved as well that the failure of political Islam that authors such as Roy predicted in the early 1990s is still a long way to come. Post-Islamism, in the version Bayat set forth, was however useful in showing the evolution of Islamism into a democratic liberal/conservative type of politics. In chapter 4, I focused on the Salafi-Jihadi group Ansar al-sharia. In this chapter, I used the literature on social movements to show how radical Salafism is the ideology of the new radicals filling up the empty space on the political spectrum created by Nahda's moderation process. I described in details the process of developing of an Islamic *jamaa* and its capacity to integrate young people from marginalised urban areas into a process of political engagement (even though within a theological mind-set).

Finally, in chapter 5 I go through the bargaining between Nahda and the nationalist block and the construction of a new shared ideological concept of *Tunisianité*. The constitutional draft in particular revealed the contents of a new political agreement based on a new negotiated and now shared definition of the national community. *Tunisianité* is an old concept elaborated at the independence by Bourguiba. This idea implied a nationalistic, modernist idea of the nation, based on the French Enlightenment. In the past decade, Tunisianité was a concept often used against Islamists, considered backward and opposed to modernity. In the post-revolutionary political democratic bargaining a new inclusive definition of the nation was at stake. Nahda strove for the inclusion of Islam and Islamic history in the

preamble of the constitution. The concept of Islam used however is not the same to the one employed in the past. The Nahda's leadership claimed a progressive conception of Islam, supposedly being the backbone of a modern nation able to evolve within its own tradition without borrowing from outside political conceptions.

How much will this ideological configuration definetely shape the politics in contemporary Arab countries is not clear for now. In Islamist politics, integration into political participation implies some degree of secularisation and Nahda accepted this. There is no doubt though that a salafist-jihadi politics is in many ways theological up to the point to transform its praxis into an 'apocalyptic' and Manichean struggle between the good and the evil, which does not sit well with secularisation. This evolution of Islamist politics into secularization depends however, as showed by the Tunisian case, by opportunities for political participation. I argued in this dissertation that democratization is a factor of inclusion and political transformation. The opening of free political participation gives the chance to further development of the political landscape and the articulation of the Islamist political spectrum in particular. Some general trends are already clear by now: parties of the MB ideological family developed as moderate parties (inspired by Islam in the same way Catholic parties are in the European tradition) while a large Salafist camp takes the political space left empty by this moderations process. Salafists however are also divided along different line, from political conservatives keen to support authoritarian regimes to political radicals and 'revolutionary' questioning authority and favourable to armed struggle. This thesis, by providing the example of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia, argued that political opportunities lead to the evolution of jihadism into a revolutionary movement less apocalyptic minded and closer to an European vision of 'radical politics'. However, when such opportunities are closed off, the apocalyptic mind-set returns.

This research demonstrated that political inclusion is the key point of the accomplishment of the process of nation building. In this respect the several political crises of post-independence politics is to be read as the continuation of de-colonisation. The quest for identity, the issue of modernization and the struggle for citizenship (implicit in the political struggle) are part of a process of liberation. The

conflict among different social groups could be in the middle/long term ‘normalized’ when it comes to political inclusion. It would eventually evolve according to the Tunisian model of a pacted democracy (although revolutionary outcomes of different type cannot be completely excluded). Once integrated into an institutional liberal politics, Islamism could lose its original transformative force and be reduced to a conservative democratic party (as again the example of Tunisian Nahda shows). Just like communism in the western world was almost completely absorbed by liberal democracy, it could be that Islamists will follow the same path. However, socialist and workers organizations not only were changed by the democratic liberal system, but they changed it as well. We cannot exclude therefore that this process of ‘normalization’ of the Islamic polity would in the middle term transform the political system; not into Islamic states, however, but in different models of democracy.

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