University of Nevada, Reno

The Tunisian Revolution as a Catalyst to the Arab Spring:
A Case Study of Revolution in North Africa and the Middle East

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Abstract

This thesis research project is an attempt to understand the nature, sources, dynamics, and contradictions of the Tunisian Revolution of 2010-11. Contained within the thesis are seven chapters, each outlining political, economic, cultural, and social phenomena that precipitated the Revolution, as well as the dynamics following the Revolution. Chapter 1 provides a discussion of various competing theoretical perspectives on social movements, introduces the methodological approach and sources of data utilized in this thesis, and sets the stage for the study of the Tunisian Revolution by exploring its unique characteristics as a case study of revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East that came to be known as the Arab Spring. Chapter 2 discusses the impact of both domestic and international economic structures and conditions that were in place in the decades leading to the Revolution. Chapter 3 analyzes the political institutions and paradigms enforced by the authoritarian government in Tunisia which led to social instability and civil strife. Chapter 4 demonstrates how various segments of the population, including women, youth, and workers oppressed through mechanisms that deprived certain regions in Tunisia of economic gain during the Ben Ali regime came together to ignite the Tunisian Revolution. Chapter 5 analyzes the cultural and social tools that were made available through various media forms that facilitated the Revolution. Chapter 6 takes a look at the obstacles and challenges that Tunisia still faces after the Revolution. Finally, Chapter 7 draws some conclusions regarding the Tunisian Revolution and provides some directions for future research. Together, these seven chapters provide a case study of the Tunisian Revolution by analyzing political,
economic, social, and cultural dynamics and structures that led to large-scale institutional and societal transformations.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Mr. President, your people are dead
Many, today, on garbage fed
As you can obviously see what’s going on nationwide,
Miseries everywhere and people find nowhere to sleep
I speak on behalf of those who were wronged and ground under feet”
-El General- *Rais Lebled*

These lyrics from “Rais Lebled” would become the anthem of the Tunisian Revolution and with this anthem the people of Tunisia would shake the Arab world by instituting a democratically motivated revolution against their government in a country in North Africa that few had heard about much less seen it as a catalyst to the revolutions that swept across North Africa and the Middle East that swept dictators from power who were entrenched in the corrupt political systems over decades – a popular movement aimed at freedom, democracy, and human rights that became known as the Arab Spring, inspiring and empowering millions across a territory known for its cultural and religious conservatism that surprised some and shocked others throughout the world. The lyricist and performer of the above lyrics is El General, imprisoned on January 6, 2011 by the Tunisian internal security forces—just eight days before the President that imprisoned him would himself be exiled from the country (Miller, 2013). He would become a leader of the Tunisian revolution and his raps would become the voice the revolution (Darwish and el-Zible, 2018). The Tunisian revolution would bleed further into the Arab world, often invoking similar sentiments as the ones implored by El General in his raps, which would become the calls and chants of the Arab Spring.
By addressing certain social, economic, and political phenomena that occurred during the Tunisian Revolution and then aptly applying them to other revolutionary preconditions that were contingent within either Libya or Egypt, we can therefore work towards clarifying the cohesive nature of the Arab Spring and attempt to study it as a singular movement. Overall, the Arab Spring because of its transnational and global similarities to Egypt and Libya, should be seen as part of a broader movement, but each revolution works to critique the idea that revolutions are watershed moments that reflect the ideals of the Revolution. By contrasting these two ideals I hope to explain why Tunisia is on such a unique trajectory of development and how it can also be put into a larger political context with other Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries.

The Arab spring is perhaps one of the most important landmark events to take place within the Muslim world at the outset of the 21st century (Siala, 2013). We have found that by outlining the revolutionary patterns and trends that would lead to civil war in Libya, military authoritarianism in Egypt, and a new constitution in Tunisia, the Arab Spring has changed political realities for the Arab world--at least for now. Although, the three countries just mentioned experienced regime changes, the Arab spring would affect multiple countries most commonly through extended protest that would lead to a relative sense of tumult for each respective country. The Arab Spring would manifest itself in Yemen; civil uprisings in Bahrain and Syria; major protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Oman; and minor protests in Lebanon, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Western Sahara (Marzouki, 2013). The striking contrast and shifts in power across all of the countries that felt the pulses of the Arab Spring created different revolutionary trajectories for each country involved, but the effect it had was most
profound in Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia. By focusing on these three countries, scholars have discovered similarities and differences between each of the three respective countries. The comparisons and contrasts created by Arab Spring scholars have contributed a great deal of scholarship that sheds light on multiple disciplines. The social, political, cultural, and economic ramifications of the changes in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia adequately demonstrate how socio-political movements come to be and how they function. By further analyzing these relationships between social and political patterns, we are able to obtain knowledge on how both macro and micro structures (and institutions) create the circumstances for nationwide movements to emerge.

By taking a closer look at the revolutionary trajectory of the Tunisian Revolution within the context of a broader Arab movement, my research develops the idea that the Arab Spring was a wider regional movement. This means that both different and similar trends appeared in Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia, as well as various other states that have experienced the effects of the Arab Spring. Thru searching for the similarities in these three countries, we can more broadly apply them to other social movements. The primary idea propounded here is that the events leading to the revolutions across all three countries are similar, but the aftermath as well as consequences of each movement led to different outcomes for each of these countries.

The overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi and Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak can be compared to circumstances that were brought upon Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali and his family. The rampant corruption or cronyism that plagued each regime would prove to be a revolutionary flashpoints for criticism. Eventually, in Ben Ali’s Tunisia, his relatives would become known as the “Mafia Family” (Gana, 2014), due to their constant
usurpation of private and public institutions. The young people that centered themselves at the forefront of each of the three movements would become a hallmark of each revolution. Meanwhile, the usage of social media that became so pivotal to the Egyptian and Libyan movements can be compared to the importance of Facebook as an organizing tool in Tunisia. I also find that the introduction of Al-Jazeera across the Arab world would provide an alternative to state owned TV stations. By taking these revolutions case by case, I believe we would be able to fully develop a comprehensive analysis of the Arab Spring. However, creating a comprehensive analysis of all three would take a considerable amount of time and effort. This is why I have decided to focus primarily on the Tunisian Revolution.

For a variety of reasons, the Tunisian Revolution stands alone because: (1) it is the only Arab Spring revolution that has seen constant progression following the fall of its dictator; (2) it has established a multiparty system after the revolution; (3) Tunisia stands in a special place in the Arab world due to its closeness to the West through its exalted neoliberal policies; and finally (4) the uniqueness of its revolutionary vanguard. These four reasons place Tunisia in a special area for revolutionary and social movement literature. Still, Tunisia’s specific political developments warrant a separate and more focused research that explores the narratives and realities of the revolution through Tunisian eyes. In combining models of case-specific analysis, while attempting to continue trans-Arab narratives, such as the Arab Spring, this thesis will clarify the events of the Tunisian revolution of 2010-11.
Tunisia as a Case Study

Decades of authoritarian rule, neglect of human and civil rights, introduction of new and expanded media (cellphones, satellites, etc.), neoliberal restructuring, and failing job markets accumulated precipitating an animosity amongst the poor (unemployed), conservative Islamic community, youth, women, workers, and various marginalized segments in each society. Although, every country that experienced the Arab spring now has its own set of political realities, the idea of a pan-Arab movement where “Arab democracy” has become the center focus for many scholars studying the Arab Spring has proliferated the literature surrounding the Arab Spring (Gause, 2011). Conversely, others find that the unique circumstances and results for each movement, within each individual country warrants separate analyses that would put each uprising in its own of circumstances. By contrasting these two perspectives, while at the same time taking a closer look at the internal policies, class structure, as well as both internal and external economic structures of Tunisia, I will try to explain the dynamics of the Tunisian Revolution. In doing so, I will take up Tunisia as a case study of the revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa that came to be known as the Arab Spring.

This thesis examines the Tunisian events that led to the revolution, the segments of the population that took part in it, more specifically the social forces that were directly impacted by it and were sympathetic to it, and finally analyzing the outcome of Revolution in the period following December 2010. Additionally, the thesis focuses on developing an historical analysis going back to the Independence movement and the autocratic rule of Habib Bourguiba thus demonstrating how the political and economic
structures created since independence would eventually precipitate the banishment of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in 2010.

Most of this analysis will rely on a critique of neocolonialism and third world development models. Furthermore, I will assess the nature of the revolution following Ben Ali’s escape from Tunisia, by analyzing the move towards the creation of the 2014 Constitution; and finally finishing in 2018 where various Tunisian citizens still have many questions and concerns about the present state of Tunisian political, economic, social, and cultural institutions. Ultimately, this perspective raises the question of the usefulness of revolutions in a global and transnational context, in particular, the response to global capital’s hegemony. By outlining how both forms of hegemony can put in place the mechanisms for revolution, while at the same time stymying political, social, and economic progress, the Tunisian case is able to explain how these conditions work together. Furthermore, the unfortunate possibility of revolutionary disillusionment will be addressed in post-revolutionary analysis. By combining these elements I hope to capture certain narratives or realities of revolution that can be applicable to the study of revolutions or social movement literature, while providing clarification of the Arab Spring as a pan-Arab movement (Gause, 2011). Moving forward, I will outline theories that have all worked to contribute to my understanding of the Tunisian revolution.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

The primary theoretical perspective that will guide the understanding of this thesis will be the theoretical paradigm of Collaborative Revolutionisms. This concept created
by Nouri Gana to understand the Tunisian Revolution describes why the various actors were moved to create a coalition in which they would ultimately overthrow a dictator in Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, while at the same time attempting to ensure the survival of democratic institutions by creating the 2014 constitution. Collaborative Revolutionisms is defined as a “grass roots, non-collective that combines with other Revolutionary actors to overthrow a regime or government” (Gana, 2014). It is able to exist alongside two already well established theories derived from Marxist and social movement literature.

The social movement theory of resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) explains how the groups were able to pull together resources through collective action in order to provide the resources necessary to oust Ben Ali. This will be outlined primarily by the coalitions and partnerships created by various segments of the population. For example, secular and non-secular, liberal and conservative, youth and worker, and other groups that pulled resources together in order to topple Ben Ali were all important alliances that fostered the accumulation of resources. In addition to resource management theory, the neo-Marxist critique of globalization and the class nature of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Western geopolitical interest (in Tunisia’s case the interplay of French and United States global plans) helps to explain the structures and conditions that created the ripeness for revolution in December 2010 (Kallander, 2013).

By shedding light on these two theories, in conjunction with the overarching theoretical paradigm of Collaborative Revolutionisms, this thesis will explain how political, social, cultural, and economic conditions (domestic as well as international) beginning at the outset of Tunisia’s independence from France in 1956, would eventually create the conditions for Revolution in late 2010 and onward into 2011 (Hamed, 2012).
A large body of literature on the Tunisian revolution focuses on revealing the various narratives and discourse that were (and are) still prevalent when interpreting and understanding the Tunisian Revolution. Most of these narratives seem to capture a neo-Marxist critique of neoliberal policies advanced by the World Bank and Internal Monetary Fund that structure modern states in the non-Western sphere. These impositions often exacerbate class divisions within the developing world. Many of the narratives analyzed come from the Tunisian youth, unemployed, workers (particularly in the Southern and interior regions), university graduates, and women. Almost all were quick to criticize the close Tunisian-Western ties as well as the Tunisian economy becoming the prime example of a “modern North African capitalist society” (Cassarino, 1999), the intense capital extraction, and rampant cronyism encouraged by pro-capitalist policies led to the class antagonisms that erupted in revolution by uniting various segments of the Tunisian middle and lower classes. These divisions manifested themselves in the disparity between the coast and the interior regions. The intense class divisions would come to a head in December 2010 when Muhammed Bouazizi would light himself on fire after an altercation with the internal security police and the confiscation of his food stand, when he failed to pay a tax or have enough money to bribe a police woman. We must also understand that these initial class ruptures and clashes would force the fragile Tunisian middle class to become aware of the stark inequalities in Tunisia. The Tunisian middle class will be further examined in the Tunisian Revolution section of this thesis, where it will be shown that, increasingly the coastal elites found opposition from other professional segments of society, such as the Tunisian lawyers’
association and union leaders. This would give the revolution a sense of middle and lower class solidarity, particularly in the Tunisian capital, Tunis.

The importance of the Tunisian workers’ union, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), would signify another important Marxist tenet for revolution, the importance of labor as revolutionary actors and facilitators. Coupling these experiences with an historical, political, and economic analysis that looks closely at the relationship between Tunisian leaders and the West, it becomes easy to examine them by using neo-Marxist models for understanding the divisions within Tunisian society. The economic and class analysis that comes with neo-Marxist critiques helps to outline how material conditions can create revolutionary classes.

When searching through social movement literature one finds that resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) works to help us understand how various separate actors across Tunisia became a unified revolutionary coalition with similar goals. The various resources used to overthrow the largest internal security force in the region and therefore subsequent security state, exemplifies how various political, economic, cultural, and social resources were used to overthrow Ben Ali. By combining various marginalized groups, the Tunisian protest movements were able to combine their various and sparse resources in order to intimidate Ben Ali’s security forces as well as create an impactful movement. For example having youth organizers use the UGTT’s meeting halls enabled substantial space and momentum for revolutionary planning. Furthermore, the alliance between the left and right mainly manifested with the coalition between the Congress for the Peoples Republic and Enhadda provided substantial
political resources to help create the coalition government, following the expulsion of the ruling party, the Democratic Constitution Rally (Latif, 2011).

Resource mobilization theory dictates that without similar groups coalescing, a social movement may not have the impact it wishes, but the Tunisian Revolution was able to achieve this successfully by pulling together various groups across class, regional, and generational gaps. This is best exemplified through the relationship between the coastal cities of the Sahel, particularly in major cities like Tunis, and the interior region like Sidi Bouazid where Mouhammed Bouazizi sparked the movement. Resource mobilization theory helps us understand how through material conditions social movements can pull together various resources from groups that have similar objectives in order to create substantial social change (McCarthy and Zald, 1977), in this case it was a nationwide revolution.

To conclude the theoretical section, at the heart of this analysis lies the question of the usefulness of social revolutions and the extent to which socio-politically oriented revolutions can become disillusioned by its participants. By creating an analysis of the Tunisian Revolution we can look forward to what makes a modern revolution and how we can apply the model outlined by the Tunisian revolution to other cases in the era of U.S. geopolitical hegemony, particularly in the Arab world. Given the fact that Tunisia stands alone as the only “successful” revolution that stemmed from the uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East it warrants close methodical study. In this thesis I will outline these realities and seek answers regarding revolutions in the postmodern era in the Middle-East and North African regions (MENA) by closely analyzing the 2010-2011 Tunisian Revolution.
Methodology and Sources of Data

The primary form of research methodology that will be adopted in this thesis is a case-study of the Tunisian Revolution (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016; Gerring 2017). In this case-study, I have reviewed secondary material to gain a better understanding of the nature, causes, and consequences of the Tunisian Revolution. Through a close analysis of scholarly articles, books, interviews, survey results, and other narrative-based information, I have gained a collection of findings on the Tunisian Revolution. In doing so, I hope to adequately outline the phenomena that precipitated the revolution as well as its consequences. At the heart of this methodological approach is an overview of the political, economic, social, and cultural critiques of Tunisian society prior to the Revolution. These critiques come from both international and domestic sources. Within these strains of literature and research, one gains both a micro and macro level analysis that would assist us in delineating the nature, dynamics, and trajectory of the Tunisian Revolution (Yin, 2017).

In this thesis, one will find both micro and macro sociological structures outlined and examined. This is done primarily because I have looked at both the domestic and international literature. Much of the international literature stems from French outlets, the surrounding North African countries, Islamic scholars from other Muslim nations, and the United States. Looking at both the international literature and the domestic literature has allowed me to create a juxtaposition between running narratives about the Tunisian Revolution. This has also allowed me to adequately evaluate an international bias, as for example when narratives of political Islam were found in the literature (e.g., often French
and U.S. sources would not report the fears that were held by some Tunisian citizens about the increasing influence of Islam). Finally, my analysis of Tunisia’s political economy further enabled me to understand the political and economic structures that have affected Tunisian society.

By reviewing secondary sources that have examined World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and European Union reports containing time-series data, I was able to understand how the international structures affected Tunisian society (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016). For example, we find that Tunisia is fully integrated into the global economy and its neoliberal capitalist structures. Furthermore, from these international sources an understanding of Tunisia in geopolitical arenas was also fleshed out—particularly, how French and U.S. hegemony have affected Tunisian political structures (Mabrouk, 2011). The international literature has better lent me a lens into the political and economic structures that have precipitated the Tunisian Revolution. This has also allowed me to better understand the economic and political realities that have unfolded in the aftermath of Revolution.

In complimenting my macro level analysis, I also looked at the domestic literature. What this enabled me to do was properly to frame my thesis through the perspective of Tunisian citizens. Furthermore, through survey data provided by the Arab Barometer, I was able to understand the major concerns of Tunisians before and after the Revolution (Gerring, 2017). This allowed me to further focus my thesis on problems that were of great concern to a large segment of the Tunisian population. Most of the domestic literature came from prominent Tunisian scholars, such as Nouri Gana, as well as Tunisian institutional sources, such as the University of Tunis. By dissecting various
trends in Tunisian society, I was better able to grasp the social, cultural, and political
trends that have shaped Tunisia over the past several decades.

The socio-cultural interactions that I examined through the literature and the
media enabled me to better understand societal institutions, such as Islam, which have
pervasive influence on social relations. Through analyzing the domestic literature by
Tunisian scholars, I have gained an invaluable insight into the Tunisian Revolution. This
insight came mainly from the observation of the socio-cultural environment, including
language, music, art, and other forms of communication that played an important role in
the Revolution (Hostrup Haugbolle, 2013). For example, the prominence of Tunisian art
forms, such as rap and film, allowed me to widen my analysis of the impact of
authoritarian rule prior to the Revolution (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016). Similarly, the
domestic literature enabled me to gain a better understanding of the role of Islam in
Tunisian society (Hidde Donker, 2013). Islam has served as a political tool and became a
primary motivating force for certain segments of Tunisian society during the Revolution.
By reading narratives from both conservative and liberal sources of Tunisian Islam, I was
able to delve further into marginalized segments of society and how the police state under
autocratic rule has demeaned human and civil rights in Tunisia.

My analysis has allowed me to understand the cultural, social, economic, and
political structures and institutions to guide the noticeable patterns and trends before as
well as after the Revolution. By carefully reviewing the literature that either critiqued or
reported on these patterns and trends, I was able to develop a comprehensive analysis of
the Tunisian Revolution (Gerring, 2017; Yin, 2017). Moreover, I examined both
international and domestic literature in order to control for biases and better frame and
widen my analysis of social, political, cultural, and economic structures through a Tunisian perspective. The international literature allowed me to better understand broader political and economic institutions, while the domestic literature enabled me to understand internal political dynamics. The juxtaposition and confluence of the domestic and international literature enabled me to gain a broader understanding of the Tunisian Revolution through a close methodical case-study (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016; Yin, 2017).

**The Tunisian Revolution**

Jasmine; it often overtakes any wall or tree that it wraps its vines around. The beautiful, but small flowers that bud from the vine often illicit a perfect fractal of flowery beauty. Using colors or flowers to code Revolutions has become commonplace throughout the literature on revolutions, and the Tunisian Revolution being called the Jasmine Revolution continues this tradition. Jasmine is a focal point of Tunisian dating culture and has been the national flower for centuries, but another aspect of the Jasmine flower lends itself to describing a revolution, the flower’s tenacity to cover any surface it encounters and its ability to constantly grow. The imagery brought forth by the Jasmine flower and its significance to the Tunisian Revolution provides a good picture of the Tunisian Revolution, while providing the correct amount of symbolism to categorize the uniqueness of the revolution (Hawkins, 2010). The term, the Jasmine Revolution is not the only name given to the Tunisian Revolution. The Facebook Revolution and the Revolution for Freedom and Dignity were also coined by both the international and Tunisian communities alike. All three of these names help explain certain aspects of the
Tunisian Revolution, and by delving further into the events, players, and structural change that characterizes the revolution, we will be able to outline and explain the circumstances before and after December 2010.

Boasting some of the Arab world’s highest levels of economic growth, education, and comprehensive women’s rights, Tunisia represents a modern state in the Maghreb region of Africa (Kuhlow, 2013). The Maghreb is a historically constructed region that includes Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia due to their geographic proximity and shared colonial histories. Additionally, the former Ottoman Empire also managed and once controlled the region and often treated each country as the same. The Tunisian political economy has been able to position itself in a unique place within the Muslim, global, and European spheres of influence. This is mostly due to its prime location along the North African coast.

Tunisia became an official French colony on May 12, 1881 after General Forgemol de Bostquénard was able to capture the city of Tunis and forge a treaty with the former occupying forces (Ottoman Empire). This event is significant in Tunisian history because it would prove the point that Tunisia would forever be interlinked within the French sphere of influence and the broader Western European world. Hence, Tunisia would serve as a powerbroker in the region for French interest, often times contrasting with Italian held Libya. After gaining independence from France in 1956 and an eventual “medical coup” in 1986, when the former ruler was dying and his successor used that as an excuse to take over the government, the Tunisian state was able to chart its own course of development and modernization. The “medical coup” that brought Ben Ali to power established decades-long authoritarian rule that would make Tunisia into a haven for
private investment as well as a breeding ground for rampant cronyism that often times followed the Washington Consensus (Cassarino, 1999). The restructuring of the economy through the 1990s along with neoliberal economic policies pushed Tunisia towards increasing class polarization and to becoming a country that was dominated by a select few elites.

After careful research and formulation I have outlined four major narratives created by the Tunisian Revolution. The first of these is the effect of neoliberal policy on young people, particularly University graduates and the poor from the interior of Tunisia. This was primarily manifested into the lack of substantial job creation for secondary educated people. By also taking into account the plight of both secular and non-secular Tunisian women, I will combine a class and feminist analysis. In doing so, I will explore how workers, women, and the youth became the revolutionary vanguard. The second of these narratives is the authoritarian rule set in place by the Ben Ali regime, creating a political atmosphere for opposition forces to come together to oust him (Hamrouni, 2011). Thirdly, the question of what the role of Islam should be in the creation of new institutions became a huge debate across the country. Finally, one finds that the control and use of media as a tool for mobilizing became central to the revolution. I am not discounting other important factors that helped propel revolutionary goals; but instead, I intend to organize these factors into loose narratives that enable us to trace the Revolution and its consequences. Combining this with an overview of both domestic and international institutions that also precipitated the revolution, one is able to gain a better picture of the important actors before and after the Revolution. The instrumentality of both regional and coastal workers should be underscored and organizations such as the
Tunisian National Bar Association, and the General Labor Union of Tunisia (UGTT),
proved to be instrumental in organizing demonstrations, but by deepening my analysis to
understand which groups were most affected by the revolution and which segments
started and became the Revolutionary vanguard motivates me to unearth more deeply
ingrained social inequalities within Tunisia (Dahi, 2011).

This analysis will also be carried into the years following the Revolution to gauge
the impact of the movement. A prime example of this would be to look at which
segments of the population had the highest levels of unemployment. Also, by taking into
count new economic, cultural, social, and political patterns following the banishment of
Ben Ali, I will paint a picture of post-revolutionary Tunisia and the obstacles that are still
faced by the people of Tunisia (Marcusa, 2014). Through combining these narratives one
is able to construct the reasoning and timeline of the Revolution and the societal
ramification left during the thermidor of the Tunisian Revolution (Gray, 2012).
Chapter 2

Neoliberalism and the Tunisian Economy

Historically Tunisia has been a country of various cultural influences, thus giving it an international flavor, and with the French incursions beginning in the 19th century it would find itself being pulled into the rapidly globalized world. What this has done is to allow both international and domestic economic influences and factors to weave together in order to create political, social, and economic realities. Perhaps, the best example of this was, “the first major event, which took place on May 22, was a demonstration in Tunis in front of the Ministry of Technologies and Communication coordinated in concert with demonstrations among the Tunisian diaspora in major global cities such as Paris, Montreal, Bonn, and New York” (Kahlaoui, 2013: 151). In this chapter I will examine the international and domestic economic structures that precipitated the Revolution in 2010. In order to fully understand the various classes and factions within those classes among the Tunisian population, a brief overview of its economic structure as well as the international and domestic conditions that created these structures is necessary.

Tunisia’s International Economic Relations

The Tunisian export economy is centered on agriculture, particularly wheat (OECD, 2010), but sources of hydrocarbon and phosphate have created mining-rich areas in the interior. It is no wonder that the central issues raised in both the 1986 coup and the 2010 revolution were about rising bread prices and extremely expensive wheat prices for
farmers. “Protests in the south and southwest were triggered in part by IMF-inspired austerity measures that would reduce subsidies and double the price of bread” (Kallander, 2014: 107). This explains that the agricultural make-up of the south and interior were heavily affected by structural adjustment programs. The other important economic development in Tunisia is the creation of coastal cities that prioritize both the construction and tourism industry. The reality that mining, construction, tourism, and agricultural development all constitute primary economic industries in Tunisia, adequately reflects its economic development since the time of independence.

Even though the Tunisian population successfully rebelled against France in the late 1950’s, the Tunisian economy to this day has kept a close relationship with France. Along with France, Italy has also developed a historically significant relationship with Tunisia, which has made both France and Italy the primary importers of Tunisian products, and Tunisia has become a haven for imports from France and Italy. Figure 2.1 demonstrates the breakdown of exports and imports since 1970.

This has been the case since the creation of the Tunisian state. The special relationship with Europe, and eventually the United States, would ripen the conditions for Tunisia as a prime candidate for liberalizing and privatizing initiatives supported by international capital throughout its history. Beyond this special economic relationship, both Italy and France have become havens for Tunisian immigration to these countries.

Throughout France’s colonial and postcolonial control of Tunisia a significant number of French bureaucrats would become a part of its colonial government, thus ensuring French dominance and the prevalence of the French language. This legacy has left much of the government and business to be conducted in French to this day. The
trend would shift dramatically as many more Tunisians started to immigrate increasingly
to France and Italy in the 1980s and afterwards. Table 2.1 documents the number of
Tunisians living in other countries.

**Figure 2.1: Tunisia: Evolution of Imports, Exports, and Trade Openness, 1970-2012**

![Figure 2.1](image)


**Table 2.1: Tunisian Migrant Population in Other Countries, 2002 and 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Residence</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>Share of Tunisian Migrant Population (%)</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>Share of Tunisian Migrant Population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European countries</td>
<td>668,000</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1,032,000</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>480,000</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>669,000</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>189,000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>46,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>87,000</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maghreb countries</td>
<td>71,000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>92,000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>54,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>69,000</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab countries</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>64,000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>19,000</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>23,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>794,000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,223,000</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Migration Policy Center (MPC).
This migration of Tunisians was mainly because of a drain of well-paying jobs in Tunisia (EU-Tunisian Associative Agreement). France accounts for most Tunisians residing outside of Tunisia (Migration Policy Institution, 2017). A large portion of this population works as nannies or household workers (New York Times, 2013). This has led to a large amount of money transfers back to Tunisia from Tunisians working in France and elsewhere.

Another aspect of the Tunisian migration debacle is the increasing immigration through Tunisia (Migration Policy Center, 2017). Tunisia has become a jumping off point for many African refugees, particularly those from Libya escaping the Civil War in that country. The scantily made boats that are used to transport thousands of refugees across the Mediterranean has created a humanitarian crisis. These migrations have increasingly become scrutinized, given the rising number of immigrants entering Europe as well as the growing number of lives lost in crossing the Mediterranean. These migrations happen due to the structural adjustment programs that have left few good jobs in Tunisia, and with capital flight so has worker flight affected Tunisian markets. As outlined above, this is primarily due to the neocolonial relationship that exist between Tunisia and France. In order to fully understand this relationship, a brief historical account of the French presence in the area following its loss of official rule during the Independence movement is needed.

To begin with, we must understand that Habib Bourguiba’s Tunisia (in Western eyes) was meant to be a Western Francocentric society that helped propel the West’s liberal ideals in the face of the Soviet Union’s growing communist persuasion in the Arab
world. Habib Bourguiba was a leading revolutionary since the 1930s, part of the creation of the first Tunisian national parties and leadership. Bourguiba did not represent any radical left or right faction and was brought to power to negotiate a French withdrawal starting in 1954. This helped exalt Bourguiba in the national spotlight and also show to the French that he was willing to work with them. From the outset of the regime, Bourguiba was focused on closely aligning himself with French economic interests. This was perhaps best exemplified by Prime Minister and later President Charles De Gaulle’s plan to counteract American hegemony in the region, thus fostering close political and economic ties to former colonies such as Tunisia (Amy Aisen Kallander, 2014). Bourguiba’s regime would come to its final days after the 1985 IMF structural adjustment program that inflated bread prices in the country over 100% overnight (World Bank, 1986). The result of this was a rupture in social relations between various segments of Tunisian society. Beyond the autocratic ways of Bourguiba and his need for absolute power, we are able to discern that these external economic forces that make up the global order pushed the hand of the Tunisian citizenry to eventually oust Bourguiba as he lay failing to even keep his own life.

The Structural adjustment program introduced in 1986 in conjunction with the World Bank loans taken in the same year, set Tunisia on a course for a neoliberal economy that was fostered by rigid political structures along with an openness to transnational corporations. Eventually, “the IFIs stood by while their own neoliberal projects were converted into cash generators for the corrupt regime and Family elites” (Murphy, 2014). The restructured economy hurt the lower and middle class, only to help propel the capital accumulation by the elite. The WB and IMF sponsors backed it with
some $800 million in loans and guarantees (Murphy, 2014). With Ben Ali’s “Medical Coup” being finalized in 1987, he implemented a plan of import-substitution for the Tunisian economy. This economic plan showed its ineptness by forcing the Ben Ali regime to continually borrow from the World Bank. During the 1990, Tunisia further aligned its interest and policies towards European favoritism. The culmination of this favoritism resulted into the final 1998 European-Tunisian associated agreement (EU-Tunisia Associative Agreement). This was a Tunisian supervised, European Union funded program that opened up more Tunisian markets to privatization and reduced tariff barriers to historic lows (EU-Tunisian Associative Agreement). These “captains” of business created a Tunisian economy where over 60% of the market was privatized (EU). Ben Ali’s “development plans” that were instituted at the beginning of his regime continually moved the economy away from the publically oriented plans of the Bourguiba regime. One finds that by the 7th and 8th development plans that took place in early 2002, these measures only further privatized and liberalized the Tunisian economy. Most of these programs were framed by the regime as programs that would “provide financial and technical support for the upgrading of industrial firms to improve their international competitiveness through enhanced quality” (Murphy, 2014). Almost immediately, the effects of the structural adjustments leading into the new millennium were poorly implemented and Tunisian workers began to feel the pinch as more skilled jobs went to European markets and the Tunisian people were left with more temporary jobs, such as construction in the coastal regions (the Sahel).
Tunisia’s Domestic Economy

The tourism industry soon became a focal point for people living along the coast, which experienced higher levels of development than in the interior region. The massive hotels and real estate industry was able to create many jobs, but the jobs were temporary and retained little benefits. This strain created depreciating incentives for Tunisian workers to join these new jobs that lacked basic health and social benefits. By doing so, the Tunisian economy was soon faced with a growing labor force, but with little or no jobs to provide for the booming population. This would inevitably strain the Tunisian economy and create an atmosphere for dissent, manifesting itself in the form of stark class divisions. The policies created through the EU-Tunisian Associative Agreement ultimately left Tunisian workers disillusioned with the neoliberal market as well as foreign influence because these policies did not create the jobs that were promised. Thus, as shown below in Figure 2.2, the unemployment rate remained high from 2007 to 2017, averaging between 12 and 15 percent, peaking around 18 percent during the two years following the revolution (2011-12).

Another aspect of the neoliberal policies that captured Tunisian society was the consistent liberalization of the banking system. The effects of this program would lead to the further monopolization of the banking system by the Arab Tunisia Banking Group as well as other banks. With the increasing deregulation beginning in 2005 and onward, the liberalization of the banking system eventually created some of the lowest levels of regulation throughout the entire Arab world (World Bank, 2010). Eventually, the
The liberalization of banks would decrease the amount of small loans, thus effecting small businesses (liberalization of the banking sector) while increasing the amount of off-shore accounts. The increase in the amount of foreign capital in Tunisian banks was a direct result of the low levels of regulation and willingness of the pre-revolutionary government to align itself with the neoliberal policies that worked to entice foreign capital (particularly capital coming from France and other EU countries). With the saturation of foreign capital few lower local elites or business owners were able to create any substantial Tunisian industry and instead the Tunisian markets were dependent upon foreign industry and these industries often failed to adequately satiate the Tunisian labor market. Liberalizing the banks and an increase in capital flight out of Tunisia into the pockets of TNCs would imbalance and affect Tunisian markets in a detrimental way. The liberalization of the banking system would represent a trend within Tunisian society of constantly going along with or agreeing with Western standards set by the World Bank,
EU, WTO, Washington Consensus, and in this case the French standard which are represented by pro-French policies that hurt the Tunisian economy and its working class. This domestic analysis exposes the shortcomings of the Tunisian economy, but in doing so we must understand that these shortcomings were never reported or have been adequately addressed by these same international organizations.

Figure 2.3: Map of Tunisia: Poverty Rate by Region and Centers of the Revolution

The IMF’s and WB’s analysis of the Tunisian economy leading up to the 2010 overthrow of Ben Ali was drastically flawed. What is found is that, leading through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, almost every yearly or special report that included an analysis of the Tunisian economy often touted its increasing success and exemplary model for MENA countries. By the early 2000s, reports of rampant cronyism by independent international organizations started to appear in the international development literature and reports. A World Bank Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) Report in 2004 “reiterated … a significant proportion of the population was clustered above, but close to the poverty line, with poverty in rural areas sitting at twice the national average” (World Bank, 2004). Figure 2.3 shows a map of Tunisia identifying regions that were especially deprived leading into the revolution. The figure also allows one to see the regionalization process and its class effects.

Neoliberalism, Cronyism, and Corruption

The World Bank’s 2009 Country Partnership Strategy Report noted that “there exist a business environment in most MENA countries, including Tunisia, that is perceived to be based on privilege and unequal application of the rules of the game has resulted in less competition. In Tunisia, this environment has constrained the creation of jobs and is the likely reason why private domestic investment has remained intractably low” (World Bank, 2009). This proves the detriment to the Tunisian economy that cronyism was able to have. Estimates of the Ben Ali clan and allies aka the “Family” (Gana, 2014) wealth ranges from “7 billion” to “15 billion” by 2010 (Murphy, 2014). The
uneasy knowledge of Tunisian cronyism came to light by reading Robert F. Godec’s 2010 report of Tunisia that reported that the largest problem in Tunisia was in fact the cronyism at the top levels of the Ali regime (U.S. Embassy Cables). This was also exposed by a WikiLeaks document in 2010 that exposed actual figures of wealth and how wealth was stolen from industries by the Ben Ali clan (Murphy, 2014). Despite these few international warnings of the deteriorating situation in Tunisia, “by focusing on national pictures and macroeconomic data, they missed the details of how those challenges were translating in the everyday lives of Tunisians themselves” (Murphy, 2014). What the misreporting of the World Bank and slight recognition of cronyism did, was to become the catalyst for the unsettling and hyper-exploitation of the Tunisian people.

Ben Ali’s wife and her family became prime targets for the Revolution to accuse of cronyism. Ben Ali and his wife’s extended families would become known as “the family” throughout Tunisian Revolutionary discourses. The Ben Ali “family” were given both political and economic positions. What was found at the outset of the Revolution was that over 25% of the private economy was held by the Ben Ali family or relatives of the family. This cronyism had become commonplace within the Tunisian elite by the turn of the century and would become a key point for the Revolution to oust the Ben Ali clan. The level of corruption was high in regards to the concerns of the Tunisian population at the start of the Revolution (Arab Barometer, 2011), but we find that the legalization of corrupt contracts would leave Tunisia with an ongoing problem of crony capitalism. Most of the development along the coast was a result of this. Constant economic restructuring led by Western powers, particularly the EU, left Tunisia with a government that was structured to favor a small elite, most of whom were related to Ben Ali and his
clan. Overall, the cronyism that became contingent of the Ben Ali regime would create increasing levels of inequality that widened after the 1998 restructuring of the economy (EU-Tunisia Associative Agreement). In 2006 and 2007, continued neoliberal restructuring would accelerate this process of swelling inequality, putting more money in the pockets of a small elite, thus further increasing inequality in the country (World Bank, 2008). By paring these economic structures with their political counterparts we are able to further understand how neoliberal policies that reinforce political authoritarianism can create the conditions for dissent.
Chapter 3

The Politics of Revolution

Beyond the economic restructuring that created the material conditions that caused the revolution, we find that political opponents representing secular, liberal, and Islamist parties were able to create a coalition, beginning with the unity conferences that had taken place during the early 2000s. They were an example of the political organization necessary for the Tunisian Revolution. These conferences were a response to the extreme oppression that had been a result of both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes. Both regimes suppressed political dissent and the conferences were a catharsis of the invisibility of political dissent from Tunisian history. Most of these dissenting views came from either labor or Islamic sectors that were rarely allowed into the political arena. Through the development of a police state insulated by a large and loyal security forces the Tunisian government was able to suppress political dissent. The Tunisian state was an autocratic political machine that was wielded by few elites to maintain their own power. This was made possible by domestic crackdowns on dissent as well as international complacency toward an emerging authoritarianism. Backed by French political support, World Bank funding, and United States arms, the Tunisian state ruled through its security/surveillance apparatus.

Tunisia is a special place where one can find both traditional Islamic pulses and strains of Western liberalism. Even though these two entities represent dichotomous views on various topics through the oppression of the state, leaders of both camps were
able to frame their issues as repulsions of state sponsored repression. This would link the
two groups that were constantly pitted against each other under the Bourguiba and Ben
Ali regimes. This repression was made possible by both U.S. and French foreign policies
that worked to supply both regimes with plenty of monetary, political, and military
support.

**Global Political and Military Entanglements**

United States global hegemony following World War II pushed it into a position
where it was now dealing with every country across the globe and this forced it to create
regional and culturally specific policies. The relationship between Tunisia and the United
States has been based on loose commitments created by the United States to ensure
regional stability and a steady flow of American arms into the Tunisian military and
security forces. The best example of this comes from Bourguiba’s visit to the U.S. in
1956 where he petitioned the United States to help the Tunisian independence movement,
but the United States deferred to its NATO ally, France, and supported French hegemony
in the region (Rejeb, 2010: 82). This would be the foundation of the Tunisian-US
relationship. This foundation was created out of the idea that the French would be the
primary broker and go-between with the Tunisian government. Moreover, we find that
the United States often worked off of a stability policy. The policy was originally focused
on stability against communism and now it has been transformed into the stability of
economic activity for transnational capital. Tunisia has proved itself to be an ardent anti-
communist state that provided a steady stream of capitalist ideology throughout the Arab
world. This positioned Tunisia in the favor of the United States, but U.S. policymakers never considered Tunisia as an important ally.

The major event that pulled U.S. interest into Tunisia was in 1981 when a group of “Tunisian dissidents” made an armed attack at a shopping mall in Southern Tunisia (Rejeb, 2010: 84). This was one of the first terrorist attacks that would bring more US interest into Tunisia. What this did was push “U.S. military sales to Tunisia up from 18.8 million in 1981 to 125 million in 1982” (Rejeb, 2010: 84). This was the beginning of a massive arms sales program to Tunisia, as shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Tunisia: Arms Imports Under Bourguiba and Ben Ali

![Graph showing arms imports under Bourguiba and Ben Ali](image)

Source: Stockholm Peace Research Institute, *Arms Transfers Database*.

These arms were used to suppress all political dissidents in the country, most importantly those inspired by Islamic influences. The trend created in 1982 would become the hallmark of the US-Tunisian relationship for subsequent decades. What this
did was fuel the authoritarian power of the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes. The arms sold by the United States often ended up in the hands of the security forces of Ben Ali’s dictatorship. The U.S. policy of stability focused on installing whatever government provides stability for transnational capital to easily penetrate Tunisian markets. This did not last into the early 2000’s, when in 2005, and finally becoming official U.S. policy during the Obama years, the United States as stated by Condoleezza Rice in 2005 that, “For sixty years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region, here in the Middle East, and we achieved neither. Now, we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspiration of all people” (Rejeb, 2010: 87). Hilary Clinton’s and Barak Obama’s praise of the protests and movements during the Arab Spring demarcated a complete shift in policy and outlook for most MENA countries: “the U.S. government’s new engagement will strive to accommodate change in the Arab Spring countries only to the extent that change does not threaten its core interest” (Rejeb, 2010: 93). This quote encapsulates U.S. policy towards the region during the Arab Spring. The United States has become the arms dealer for most of the world, and with Tunisia this is no different. Through both arms support and political legitimization of authoritarian regimes U.S. policy towards Tunisia precipitated the Revolution in 2010. The sale of arms, combined with French monetary support for international funding, worked to increase the despotic nature of the Tunisian state.

With U.S. arms support and French international support. I will demonstrate how France’s Tunisian foreign policy and relationship hastened the Revolution. The French worked to propagate the Tunisian myth, and the former Minister of the Interior and businessman Charles Pasqua’s declaration of the “Tunisian miracle” would be the key
factor for continued French support of the small country. “As they privileged narrow
definitions of national security and domestic interest,” writes Kallander, “French
presidents consistently sidelined ideals of democracy promotion, respect for human
rights, and the importance of the rule of law” (Kallander, 2014: 119). In the international
arena France was a supporter of the Tunisian state. This helped Tunisia garner more
international aid and legitimacy, but it came at a price. This price was that Tunisia would
have to remain in similar conditions that it was in as a colony. For example, “France
funded and facilitated Tunisian access to development loans and financial assistance via
supranational bodies such as the IMF, the WB, and the EU, while Tunisia was a loyal ally
and cheap source of labor” (Kallander, 2014: 103). A primary example of this
relationship created between French capital and Tunisian labor is “An economic crisis in
1973 coincided with attempts at restricting non-European immigration and contributed to
the popular correlation between immigrant labor and national unemployment”
(Kallander, 2014: 117). This movement would create a growing disdain for immigrants in
French society, and with the rise of power of the National Front in France (a right-wing
political party), in the mid-1970s and early 1980s, we have seen a rise in xenophobic
policy that worked to restrict Tunisian immigrants in France.

As mentioned earlier, Tunisia’s tourist economy was a primary focus of
development, and positioned Tunisia as a prime vacation destination for the French elite,
often taking residence in the Palace at Carthage in Tunis and other Coastal palaces.
Charles Pasqua would garner a close relationship with Ben Ali and we find that Pasqua’s
son Pierre was a part of the inner circle of the Tunisian elites. This readily exemplifies
the close relationship between Tunisian and French elites as well as the corroboration of both to ensure class and colonial relations in the country.

The other price of international support was that Tunisia would harbor the same sentiments held by French society about Islam and its place in society. This created the continual atmosphere for political, economic, cultural, and social marginalization of Islam in Tunisia. Most of this suppression revolved around the questions of terrorism and Islamic radicalization. We find that in 1990 and 1992 “…approximately 8,000 suspects were tried in military courts and subjected to torture” (Kallander, 2014: 109). What this conveys is that if Tunisia is tough on Islamic dissidents then the French will continue to support Tunisia in international organizations. The ideology promoted by France in Tunisia would then be supported by the United States to suppress Islamic dissidents. Besides these geopolitical maneuverings, domestic political developments in Tunisia also help us understand the political origins of the Tunisian revolution.

Background to the Rise of Social Movements in Tunisia

To fully understand Tunisia’s contentious history with Islamic and liberal political forces, we must start with the independence movement. During this period various powerful movements came together to oust French rule. One of these keys elements that would prove useful in 1986 and 2010 was making Islam and its moral standards revolutionary foundations. We must understand that like most religions across the world, Islam already has institutional access which allows it to have space for meetings (often at mosques) as well as platforms to spread its message as “…appeal to Islamic ideals proved
an effective tool for the mobilization of popular opinion on those occasions when political forces allowed Muslim leaders latitude to promote their views” (Perkins, 2012: 59). Tunisian rulers themselves were supposed to model Muslim men that were faithful and proper observers of Islam. For example, Habib Bourguiba would call a Jihad on the French during the 1950s and give himself the title of the savior of Islam in order to prove his closeness to Islam.

The politicization of Islam has deep roots in Tunisian society, but the creation of Islamic political parties in the future would only be a political tool that was used to gain supporters. This was only a ploy used by Bouguiba, who himself held much animosity toward Islam to gain power for himself. By further looking at the early history of Tunisia, we are able to understand how political Islam would become oppressed by the Tunisian state.

Perhaps the most significant Revolutionary besides Bourguiba was his secretary-general of Neo-Destour, Salah Ben Youssef. Youssef had close ties with the Islamic community and was able to draw more traditionally minded individuals into the struggle against the French colonizers. Beginning in 1960 with the move away from the celebration of Ramadan, Bouguiba began to increasingly distance himself as an Islamic leader and one that would champion Islamic values. Youssef would eventually be assassinated by Bourguiba in 1961 after Bourguiba realized that Islamic forces represented a challenge to his power as well as in compliance with French standards of modernization. From this point forward Bourguiba was “…determined to keep Islamic institutions subordinate to the state” (Gana, 2014). Another result of this was the University of Tunis’s absorption of Zitouna, an Islamic based university that strove to
instill Islamic ideals and teachings for the Tunisian population. With the introduction of
the Personal Status Code, Bourguiba was able to position himself as a progressive
modernizer that fell perfectly in line with Western standards and pushed him further
away from conservative values. This Personal Status Code (PSC) focused on both civil
and human rights, particularly those for Tunisian women. Granted the PSC enabled
Tunisian women to gain substantial rights in the Muslim world, but eventually the PSC
would become Bourguiba’s weapon to limit Islamic expression or dissent. What
Bourguiba was able to do in his first decade of rule was to consolidate power not for one
side or for one party, but for himself, which often came at the expense of more traditional
or Islamic portions of the society. This would only work to further politicize and incite
Islamic worshipers leading towards the creation of the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) in the late 1970s.

The MTI would be born of the suppression of the Bourguiba regime and would be
used by Ben Ali as political tool to represent himself as an Islamic leader at the time of
the coup. But shortly after, Ali would banish its leaders including Rached Ghannouchi.
At the outset of his regime, “Ben Ali unveiled this “National Pact” on the first
anniversary of his accession to office. The document acknowledged the centrality of the
Arab-Islamic heritage of Tunisia, which many citizens believed had been deliberately

Bourguiba often championed himself as the progressive and liberal leader that
Tunisia would need in order to advance in the modern world, but we find that Bourguiba
suppressed all dissent no matter if it came from conservative or liberal forces.
Bourguiba’s suppression of the UGTT in the late 1970s would eventually infuriate the
masses even more, leading to his coup as well as cripple the UGTT as a significant powerbroker in the country. This development of the suppression of both MTI and UGTT marks the end of the Bouguiba regime and the beginning of the Ben Ali regime.

**Authoritarianism, Political Repression, and Revolution**

At the outset of the coup in 1986 the Ben Ali government started to consolidate power, and the two opposition leaders and parties were sent into exile. These two groups were the Congress for the Republic, which represent a more liberal and secular view, and Enhadda which took the platform of being a democratic Islamist party. Enhadda represents a wide spectrum of political Islam (ranging from Salafist to liberal). The Congress for the Republic is led by Marcef Marzouki, who at the outset of the Revolution became the temporary President of Tunisia until 2014. Enhadda is led by Rached Ghannouchi, who worked to formulate the party in the early 1980s and became the leading figure in the party following the banishment of Ben Ali. The foundational shift that started to occur was a shift in the weakening of the dogmatism of the parties. This allowed for these two groups to work closer together. The change in the Islamist group Enhadda was the move closer to a stress on democracy, and the secularist group (CPR) slowly realized that the Ben Ali regime and party, the Democratic Constitution Rally (RCD), would not be the socially progressive way forward. The cooperation between these two groups would provide the political backbone for resistance. After the conclusion of the revolution these two parties remained at the center of the formation of
the Tunisian government and would prove quintessential for the writing of the new Constitution in 2014.

On the other side of the political spectrum we find that the Ben Ali regime lent itself to its own destruction through authoritarian and politically repressive programs: “it was always a given that the regime party, the RCD, was going to win the elections, and while it was not clear by how large of a margin, it was certain that it was going to be considerable indeed” (Storm, 2012: 276). The structuring of the RCD (Ben Ali’s party) itself put the party at the center of political coalitions by giving it consolatory powers (Campante and Davin, 2012). What these consolatory powers endowed the RCD with was the ability to negotiate and broker deals with smaller, less powerful political parties, therefore endowing it with supremacy of mediation. All of the elections held during the Ben Ali regime were undemocratic and perfectly exemplified the authoritarian nature of the RCD. “In the first contest, the Constitutional Democratic Rally won almost 80 percent of the popular vote and swept all of the parliamentary seats” and in the “1999 elections, Ben Ali officially won 99.44 percent of the vote” (Perkins, 2012: 70, 73).

Within the RCD itself, extreme loyalty and the repression of dissent was also apparent. The Cabash demonstrations that took place from January until March 2011 were led by former RCD members who broke party lines earlier. This political group was able to provide the post-revolutionary government with bureaucrats, but also the criticism of former RCD members has provided Tunisians with hotly contested debate about political inclusion. The structure of the RCD reflects the structure of government.

Like most constitutional democracies, Tunisia has a legislative, executive, and legislative branch. What the reality of the Tunisian government structure is that the
legislative power is usurped by party loyalty and ultimately loyalty to Ben Ali. The legislative branch has been zapped of its powers and increasingly downsized during the Ben Ali regime. Through constitutional amendments Ben Ali positioned the executive branch to be maintained as the arbiter of government decisions. Through powers given to him through the expansion of the security state Ben Ali was able to define what was dangerous dissent and what was pardonable. For example, no security force members who tortured political prisoners saw trial or any type of reprimand. Furthermore, Ben Ali was able to frame discussions about dangerous political dissent through state controlled media that through amendments were required to report government biased articles and findings. Coupling this with the fact that Ben Ali through constitutional provisions could jail or keep anybody he please, the Tunisian government structure sufficiently reflected authoritarian organization. Given that Ben Ali was an autocrat who disallowed any political, cultural, economic, or social dissent a large security force was built to enforce his rule.

Perhaps, one of the primary sources of power and ability to suppress opposition was created by the internal security forces. These forces were used as Ben Ali’s personal hand of oppression (Gana, 2014), as these groups would often silence political or media dissent frequently by jailing political dissidents (Graduate Organization of Tunisia, 2015) or opposition journalists. We find that “…an alarmingly large number of Tunisian citizens had friends or family member who had suffered indignities for the beliefs, with many having had accumulated painful experiences in Ben Ali’s jails” (Perkins, 2012, 72). This enabled the internal security forces to become a powerful tool for the Ben Ali regime. What this did in converse was leave the military in a weakened and excluded
position. This is why at the outset of the revolution the attention was not focused on the military and the endorsement by the military of the Revolution in January 2011 wasn’t an incredibly significant development. The anti-terrorist act of 2003 enabled the Ben Ali regime to better repress certain segments of the population, by using the guise of mass surveillance to monitor opposition groups or journalist. In an interview with UGTT leaders in April 2011 they are quoted as saying that they are still, “talking in code” to stay safe from harm (Hamrouni, 2011). The fact that leaders within the UGTT had to develop a coded talk reflects the repressive nature of the Ben Ali regime. Increasing funding after the 2003 anti-terrorist act allowed the security forces to swell up to over 130,000 by 2010 (Angrist, 2013).

Fueled by arms from the United States, the Tunisian security forces were able to maintain fear among the Tunisian population. Even though the internal security forces were used as a tool of political repression for the Ben Ali regime, the continued suppression of journalists and dissenting thought was pushed to fore at the beginning of the revolution, and the jailing of numerous journalists only increased the criticism aimed at the Ben Ali regime (Gana, 2013). Also, at the beginning of the revolution it was the reports on social media of security forces killing protestors that sparked the nationwide movement. With the creation of a large security force, Ben Ali enabled himself to rule through fear, but it was this fear and oppression that would bring about revolutionary groups. The remnants of these security forces would pose future problems following the Revolution (Gana, 2013). Ultimately, the restructuring of the Tunisian political institutions would force Ben Ali and his government out of the country.
Through understanding how the political institutions were created and their functions during the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes, we are able to understand the autocratic nature of both regimes. The normalization of cronyism and the authoritarian nature of Ben Ali’s regime provided revolutionary flashpoints that combined with the economic structures to bring about a revolutionary political coalition. The eventual Troika created after the RCD lost power would be formed by the oppressed of the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes, most importantly labor and Islamic sectors. Furthermore, the geopolitical interests of France and the United States would further legitimize the despotic rule of both Bourguiba and Ben Ali. This legitimation by both, funding these regimes monetarily and militarily, also perpetuated the downfall of the Ben Ali regime because the rulers were often more concerned with international appeasement as well as personal accumulation. By combining the international and domestic narrative of political structures and parties, we are able to understand how through suppression the political trends for revolution can be created. The political and economic structures would directly affect certain segments of the population that resulted in an intense social response to continued economic and political disenfranchisement.
What we find following the events of December 17, 2010, where a young fruit vendor by the name of Mouhammed Bouazizi lit himself on fire in protest, is that the economic structuring of the late 1990s and early 2000s would create stark class divisions that would have immense social ramifications that angered not only the ultra-marginalized but the “floating middle class” (World Bank, 2009) as well as the upper-middle class made up of Union and Lawyer elites that had institutional access: “as the social movement grew in numbers and power, it became more diverse in composition” (Zemni, 2014: 132). This enabled the creation of cross-class alliances. These class alliances ranged from the middle class along the coast to the poor and unemployed of the southern and interior regions. This alliance also manifested itself with an unlikely partnership between the youth of Tunisia and institutionally embedded National Lawyers Association and General Labor Union of Tunisia. We find that each sector that marched together (from the poorest region of Sidi Bouizid) where Bouazizi was from, to the rich capital city of Tunis on Bourguiba Avenue) each sector of the population that came together to oust Ben Ali, contributed to make the movement a national one. This fact further demonstrates the usefulness of collaborative revolutionisms and resource mobilization as theoretical paradigms that can help explain the events of the Tunisian Revolution.

If it weren’t for (often poor) young people like Bouazizi who staged protests and fought in the streets in the late weeks of December 2010 the Revolution would not have
been able to gain any media or news traction. This would have left the oppressed in a continued state of invisibleness. Often times, working in concert with strong institutional players, like the Tunisian Lawyer’s Association and the General Labor Union of Tunisia, the young were able to utilize institutional spaces and national organizations that enabled nationwide protest, boycotts, and strikes. As the first weeks of January brought in the New Year, Tunisian workers, youth, and legislative professionals were all engaged in resistance to the Ben Ali regime. This included protests led by UGTT during the day, mostly based around non-violent demonstrations. These protests took place in concert with nighttime clashes staged by Tunisian youth who would riot and confront the police. The harmony created in these daytime and nighttime actions enabled the movement to work twenty-four hours a day to resist Ben Ali and his security forces. What these alliances also represent are processes of state-sponsored coastalization and regionalization.

**Regional Demography of the Tunisian Revolution: Rural and Urban**

The Tunisian Revolution “spiraled toward the capital from the rural, finding common cause with repressed labor” (Anderson, 2011). Most of the youth in Tunisia that actively strove to overthrow the government were from the interior region. This quote also outlines another important aspect that helps us develop a class analysis of Tunisia. At the heart of this analysis is the “coastalization process” (Anderson, 2011), which is a state sponsored program, that works to develop the coastal regions because of their prime economic locations. Tunisia would through historical and current socio-economic
measures become “… two Tunisias: one, the Tunisia of power, money, comfort and ‘development,’ which covers the coastal areas, particularly the capital city and its upper-class suburbs, and the Sahel (including the Gulf of Nabeul, Sousse and Monastir) and, second, the marginalized, poor, submissive and dependent Tunisia (of the south, the center and the west)” (Ayeb, 2011: 470). The coastalization process has its roots dating back hundreds of years to the Hussein Dynasty (1770-1880). In the Hussein era, coastalization meant that certain areas conducive for agriculture were developed near the coast. This enabled the dynasty to quickly export foodstuffs across the Mediterranean. The process of “coastalization,” primarily demarcates an architectural and economic modernization process where coastal industries are prioritized and cities are built, both of these are intended to be signs of modernization. The regional variation between the interior and the coast created by an economic favoritism that worked to focus only on the coastal regions which would lead to coastal capital accumulation over the centuries, thus creating the bleak contrast that exists today. The process of coastalization would manifest itself into the modern industry of tourism.

Boasting some of the region’s most beautiful beaches and cheap currency, tourism has brought many Europeans across the Mediterranean to the Tunisian shores. However, we must understand that tourism is heavily developed by neocolonial relations that perpetuate unfavorable circumstances for the host country. A part of this neocolonial process is the commodification of indigenous resources and culture. This process is manifested in tourism industries. By also looking through a historical lens, we find that the French occupation and neocolonial markets have created ports along the coast for the easy transfer of capital. Also, the old French colonial elite often dwelled along the coast,
and often times trying to push forward Western ideas of modernization through urbanization.

We find that the regionalization of Tunisia also exposes class disparities that became increasingly profound at the outset of the protests in December 2010. By taking a quick look at how the regionalization process has affected Gasfa, an interior region. In the years leading up to 2010, the region had become highly politicized, due to the neglect of both private and public enterprises. By understanding the economic structure of regions like Gasfa I will demonstrate the contrast between economic priority given to the coastal region and the lack of prioritization in the interior.

The Gafsa protests in 2008 were only a precursor to the widespread demonstrations and protests that would take place throughout the interior region beginning in 2010. They readily demonstrate the growing numbers of unemployed, discontent, and politicized masses in the interior region. Gasfa is known as a prime mining town and the local phosphate mines have provided work for the local population since independence. In 2007, the mining company, Compagnie des phosphates de Gafsa (the largest in the country) announced that they would be greatly reducing the number of workers that the mine employed by the hundreds (Compagnie des phosphates de Gafsa, 2006). This limiting of future employees exemplifies the faltering of Tunisian job markets to create enough jobs for Tunisian workers. Furthermore, this reality exemplifies the increasing unemployment that the region was facing in the years leading up to the revolution. This unemployment would create an unsettled and disgruntled populace within the region. The coastal, Southern, and interior regions all experienced a certain level of development that had its roots in the long colonial history and relationship with
external forces. These forces resulted in the regionalization of development that disadvantaged certain areas and prioritized others.

One of the primary narratives we can follow to trace the coastalization and regionalization process is modernization and how both Bourguiba and Ben Ali focused on the development of the infrastructure along the coast without consideration of needs of the interior. Both men attempted to appeal to Western elites by boasting large metropolitan centers that mimicked the cities of Europe and North America. We find that a majority of the Tunisian elites associated with the Ali regime were living along the coast and supported by industries operating along the coast. The negligence of the Ali regime to its citizens in the interior further perpetuated class and coastal differences that would be at the heart of the revolution. By discussing the regionalization process I am creating a geographic dimension to my analysis, and in doing so I am able to reinforce the narrative that the neoliberal policies that favored the coastal region created an underclass in the interior regions. We find that “to prove that the spatial, economic, social and political marginalization of one part of the country and society in favor of another was the direct cause of the revolutionary process that ended the mafia dictatorship of Ben Ali-Trabelsi” (Ayeb, 2011: 467). These projects of modernization greatly disadvantaged Tunisians living in the southern and interior region. As basic commodities began to rise in 2008 in conjunction with the worldwide economic crisis, these regions were hit even harder than their northern or eastern counterparts. Even though it was necessary for a cross-regional coalition to make the Tunisian Revolution a national event, the prioritization of the coastal region created class conflict in the interior.
Youth and the Tunisian Revolution

This conflict was primarily manifested into protest (often non-violent) held by the youth of Tunisia. To answer the question as to why these conflicts were created, we must take a look at the dynamics of the young population (15-28) in Tunisia. Beyond accessing more formal organizations, the “Youth bulge” (Bessinger, 2015) that took place in Tunisia would have large ramifications. The “bulge” would create Revolutionary actors by not only providing soldiers for protest, but forcing the government to continually have substantial job creation. This constant pressure from the youth would eventually help rupture Tunisian society. Given the fact that over 40-45% of the youth were unemployed (World Bank, 2010) at the time of the revolution and that Bouazizi was a 26 year old, the core of the revolution increasingly became young unemployed persons, but the cross-class character brought all types of participants to the revolution.

“Unemployment was officially recognized as having reached 14.2 percent in 2008, with the greatest burden falling on young people and among them on new graduates” (Murphy, 2014). Alarming rates of young university graduate students were increasingly entering the ranks of the unemployed in the years leading up to 2010 (UDU). This reflected the overall faltering of the economy to adequately provide jobs for the population. Furthermore, we found that at the time of the revolution beginning in 2010 the level of unemployment for university graduates was a high as 50% in the interior (UDU). The regional variation outlined earlier was also apparent within the university educated population (the graduates from the interior had higher levels of unemployment versus their coastal counterparts). The question begs to be answered as to what
institutional structures led to this high level of unemployment? We understand that the vacillating neoliberal policies structured the economy in a way that created temporary jobs and failed to adequately create enough jobs for Tunisia’s youth (Campante and Chor, 2012). The inability of the Tunisian economy to create jobs presented massive problems for young people, but by delving deeper we also find that the Tunisian educational system wasn’t properly training young Tunisians for the job market. Likewise, the Tunisian economy failed to created jobs that required the highly specialized skills retained during university education.

The primary structural change that created this problem was the educational system’s modification in emphasis toward tests or abstract knowledge and away from vocational or job training (Siala, 2013). The primary initiative that pushed this forward was a restructuring of the educational system beginning in the early 2000s (Siala, 2013). One of these new programs for college students was the SIVP internship program. This program was meant to train students in future career fields, but data from 2011 show that this program was not bringing the results at levels of success that it had promised, as measured by college graduates entering fields that they had interned for (SIVP, 2015). The result of this shift was a poorly trained young population that had many skills, but had failed to have the necessary training to gain access to entry-level jobs. Thus, in addition to the neoliberal economic re-structuring, and the failure of the Tunisian education system to effectively train their young population, the conditions for young people coming through the educational system were ill-equipped for economic sustainability. This analysis of the change in the emphasis in the educational system
beginning in 2000 helps to explain why young people with skills were finding themselves increasingly marginalized leading up to the 2010 Revolution.

The youth in Tunisia that decided to protest the Ben Ali regime would also provide the numbers necessary to create a nationwide movement. It was the youth who would inspire various sectors of Tunisia society to come together to protest the Ben Ali regime. Without the street battles waged by the youth in December 2010 the movement would have died before any upper class organizations like the Tunisian National Bar Association, the UGTT, and various other organizations or groups that hold power in Tunisia could have coalesced around similar Revolutionary ideals. The youth also provides a perfect example of the cross-class coalition.

University graduates quickly positioned themselves at the forefront of the Revolution by using their institutional and media savvy. These graduates more than likely came from a more privileged background, but the poor youth who hadn’t recently graduated from universities in Tunisia represented one of the highest unemployed segments of the population. Together, these youth found common cause in the reprehensible treatment of young people by the Ben Ali regime. Left with little occupational ways forward, most youth would have to resort to food or clothing vendors. By not having sufficient funds to obtain a permit, most did the work without one, and would bribe the security forces when necessary. What this resulted in was the mass jailing of Tunisian youth who failed to carry a permit as a vendor. The human rights abuses in the jails and the jailing process would give Tunisian youth an insight into the working of the regime. This helped place them at the forefront of the Revolution. Without the youth of Tunisia the Tunisian Revolution would not have taken place. At the same
time, without the help of the middle class professionals, represented by members of both the Tunisian National Labor Union (UGTT) and the National Lawyers Association, the youth would not have been able to penetrate national institutional spaces, thus preventing the movement from national reach.

### The Role of Labor Unions in the Tunisian Revolution

The UGTT was a significant revolutionary actor and helped provide organizational as well as national solidarity through its national networks. Perhaps the best example of this was when, “pressed by its grass-roots organizations, the UGTT declared general strikes in three regions that had a decisive impact, forcing President Ben Ali to flee the country” (International Trades Union Congress, 2012). As Sami Zemni points out “… the role of the workers’ movement in the popular uprisings and reframing it in a politicized and historicized account that goes beyond the simple dichotomy of ‘the people versus the dictator’ and delves into class conflict” brings up the class dimension of the Tunisian Revolution (Zemni, 2014: 142). The class struggle waged by workers through their union organizations and the long history of the UGTT since its inception in the late 1930s sheds light on what role the unions would play in the Revolution.

The UGTT was originally formed to combat worker repression by the French colonial bourgeoisie and provided a necessary ally for Bourguiba. The labor leader Farhat Hached effectively organized workers leading up to independence, but was ordered by Habib Bourguiba to be assassinated almost a decade before full independence would be realized. This paralyzed the Union and left it in a state of disarray, often failing to elect
leaders that could fight the Bourguiba and Islamic political sectors for the remainder of its history. Moreover, “The UGTT’s independence has always been relative, oscillating between periods of alliance and estrangement with the regime” (Tensing, 2011). This also made the UGTT complicit with the Bourguiba regime.

While Bourguiba would often use the Union as a political counter to anti-state movements, continued worker suppression and economic downturn further invigorated the UGTT: “strikes started as early as 1973 but became widespread from 1976 onwards” (Allal, 2016). During this time Bourguiba used state-sponsored suppression to once and for all ensure that the UGTT would never be a thorn in his side. He did this by jailing UGTT leaders and replaced them with less radical proxies. Furthermore, Bourguiba beefed up the use of the security forces and deployed them across the nation in order to ensure the suppression of protest or strikes coordinated by the UGTT. What this did was manifested into a twofold reality; it created a more radical youth section of the workers movement and more or less crippled the UGTT at the outset of the Ben Ali regime.

During the Ben Ali regime the UGTT began a process of decentralization and started to become a government proxy that did little to challenge the continuing economic deprivation under Ben Ali with complete disregard for worker’s rights. The process of decentralization enabled regional offices of the union to begin to act on their own, as the union’s weak national leadership prompted regional leaders of the UGTT to work in more concentrated areas, thus enabling them to focus on regional disparities and causes to be championed. This is why one cannot point to the UGTT as being the spark or harbinger for Revolution in Tunisia. However, once the opportunity arose to rid itself of the cronyism of Ben Ali, they were ready to become a part of the revolutionary vanguard,
and the structures that were created before independence were once again revived in the name of the Revolution.

Although, the UGTT had become complacent during the rule of Ben Ali and was seen as a partner to the regime, once mass protest of young people started breaking out, the UGTT soon pledged its resources to the Revolutionary cause. By providing spaces (union meeting rooms, town halls, etc…) to angry youths to meet, various plans of action were laid out. What this also did was make the UGTT labor halls and meeting places primary targets for Ben Ali’s security forces, thus further politicizing and inciting the workers and UGTT leaders towards outright revolt. The UGTT was able to provide the organizational networks as well as a national institutional outreach that was able to bring various regions of Tunisia into the Revolutionary fold. “As Tunisia moved from the period of revolutionary harmony in which UGTT played host and facilitator to both a political and ideological phase, characterized by the multiplicity of parties and the polarization of public opinion, UGTT was challenged to keep its engagement in politics without falling under the control of a particular party or indeed turning into one” (UGTT Website, 2018). This neutrality of the UGTT was another key component that helped establish the cross-class networks that were fostered by the UGTT. We must understand that without the organizational mechanisms that were already in place due to the power of the UGTT, the revolutionary actors would have had a harder time creating concrete demands and making these demands a reality.

Given the fact that the Tunisian revolution was based on a cross-class coalition of forces, we find that the make-up of the revolutionary actors consisted of various sectors of the Tunisian population. The labor unions, disillusioned coastal workers, the youth
(aged 15-29), and the poor within the interior region made up the bulk of the revolutionary coalition. The constant endorsement or alliance of various groups helped propel Revolutionary demands forward. For example, the endorsement of the Tunisian Bar Association and other Tunisian lawyer groups worked to give the Revolution legal legitimacy (by having hundreds of lawyers at its disposal), but also helping push its legal demands into mainstream institutions. The National Bar Association and the legal community had often been at odds with the Ben Ali regime since the early 2000s when Ben Ali started overhauling the justice system. One of the primary legal concerns that arose during the Ben Ali era was the continual exemption for term limits for Ben Ali. Having the endorsement and backing of the UGTT and the Tunisian Bar Association promptly exemplifies the cross-class nature of the revolution as well as the revolution’s ability to penetrate more mainstream organizations. Understanding the class nature of the Tunisian Revolution is important in understanding the groups involved with revolutionary action. But a purely class analysis would lose focus on other Tunisian national narratives such as the role of women.

The Role of Women in the Tunisian Revolution

As mentioned earlier, Tunisia boasts the highest level of female empowerment across the Muslim world. Since its independence movement, both Habib Bourguiba and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali championed themselves as protector of women’s rights. Bourguiba gave himself the title of *mohair al-mara’a*, the liberator of women (Marks, 2014: 231). What this did was, “characterize the Tunisian state’s relations to women’s
rights over the past sixty years: the drive to monopolize control of women’s rights – a trend often termed “state feminism” (Marks, 2014: 231). For example, in 1973 women were given the right to abortion. In addition to creating the Personal Status Code (PSC), which enacted a law code that would deal with women’s rights, the state promoted the PSC as the mover and shaker of women’s rights. By navigating through the Code, women would eventually gain various marriage and mobility rights. Given that, we can find substantial progress in women’s rights in Tunisia, but also know about the horrendous human rights abuses during Tunisian history, where the empowerment of women was used to cover up the massive violation of human rights abuses during both regimes: “Instrumentalizing women’s rights in service of political ends has been a hallmark of modern Tunisian power politics” (Marks, 2014: 226). During the Bourguiba regime substantial women’s rights were gained and seemed to be a major focus of the government, but moving forward into Ben Ali regime, we find that the rights granted to women were insubstantial and minimal at best. However, this did not stop Ben Ali from claiming that Tunisia was a modern state that cared for all of its citizens, including women.

The reality of the Ben Ali regime was that the creation of a police state made it hard to demarcate any real civil rights progression, given that any right that was given to women could easily be taken back, if the state believed that the women’s family or she, herself, were a threat to the state. This created a paradox where women did indeed gain substantial rights such as the right to property after divorce, but that land could be taken away if the woman was seen as a political dissident. For example, the fact that Leila Trabelsi (Ben Ali’s wife), “became the face of Tunisian feminism” (Marks, 2014:232) is
prime example of the paradoxical nature of state sponsored feminism during the Ben Ali regime, while Trabelsi was rampantly stealing money from the country, as other more deprived women were struggling to make ends meet. She used her own success as a model for other Tunisian women. This only highlighted intense class differences between various women in Tunisia.

To better understand the development of women’s roles in Tunisia, we must flesh out how both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes developed their narratives of women’s liberation. The Tunisian state developed a unique interpretation of Sharia Law, Ijthad. Ijthad, “is a feminist interpretation of Sharia Law that borders on the radical” (Moghissi, 1999). This interpretation positioned female activists and scholars at the center of the revolution because before the revolution they were able to access knowledge and secure entry into institutions at higher rates than any other Muslim majority country. By creating various narratives, women writers during the revolution were able to write substantial literature on the nature of the revolution (Mamelouk, 2015).

Primarily, university educated women were able to develop what was described by Amel Mokhtar and Ben Mahmoud as “political hyperconsciousness,” which was advanced by female graduates because of their intense institutional knowledge that had been reinforced by revolutionary and feminist discourse. Furthermore, throughout this development Tunisian women were able to help produce revolutionary literature. The primary form of literature either came through fictional autobiographical work, where women were able to retell the landmark events and demonstrations that led to the ousting of Ben Ali. These autobiographical works help immensely to understand the idealism held within the Revolution and the empowerment felt by women in the uprising. Blogs
owned by both men and women provided another major source for Tunisia’s women to
display revolutionary fever or be highlighted as revolutionary heroes. In a study done by
Donnalyn Pommper we were able to glean that women were represented as “agentic
actors” and “patriotic heroes” in various blog posts (Pommper, 2014). This may have
helped contribute to the importance of alternative media sources as points of inspiration
for Tunisian women. What these women represented was an educated class of Tunisians
that saw little market viability, but gained the ability to retain political consciousness that
then turned that into political action. Strikingly, what has been found from data collected
in the years leading up to the Revolution was that university educated women living in
the interior experienced higher levels of unemployment (UDU website, 2018). This fact
outlines the reason as to why women, particularly university-educated women, were able
to position themselves at the forefront of the revolution (Douja, 2015).

By highlighting the plight of women and particularly females from the Tunisian
interior who were college graduates, we are able to understand why the various actors
were able to find common cause in the oppressive measures of the Ben Ali regime.
Together with the general youth, the Tunisian labor union (UGTT), National bar
association, women were able to coordinate and organize a nationwide revolution. These
revolutionary actors were created from their squalid or depressed material conditions.
What these groups managed to do is to utilize the developing media sources as their own
material tools for resistance.
Chapter 5
Media as a Tool for Revolution

The media influences of the Revolution cannot be overlooked and if it weren’t for the introduction of new TV stations, legalization of satellite dishes, proliferation of Al Jazeera, the explosion of cell phone usage, and initially poorly regulated social media sites, all at about the same time (during the late 1990s and early 2000s), the revolution of Freedom and Dignity would not have been able to become a national movement. Together these media sources would create “the media ensemble; this notion better describes this body of different kinds of media including the printed press, radio, television, cellphones, and wireless internet which had developed over decades and enabled Tunisians to communicate and disseminate information both face to face and using a mix of media and communication technologies” (Haugbolle, 2014: 169). Still, the social nature of the Tunisian revolution and the importance of social media organizing became an important tool for the Revolution. Coupling the usefulness of social media with the expansion of media sources and technology, the Tunisian population was able to initiate a massive social movement.

What various sources on the importance of media during the Tunisian revolution reveal is the omnipotence of language. One finds that, “After being a pragmatic weapon that toppled the dictator, language was the site and object of a discourse on identity as the Constituent Assembly elections neared” (Jerad, 2015: 3). This social movement would
eventually become a nationwide revolution based on linguistic forms manifested into various forms of media.

**Language, Culture, and Mass Communication**

In order to understand the influence of media, graffiti, film, music, and other forms of culture, an overview of the linguistic structures and influences of Tunisian society is warranted. Language was a primary tool used by Tunisians to oust Ben Ali. To begin, we must understand that three primary forms of language exist in Tunisia -- French, Arabic (Fusha), and Tunisian Arabic (Derja). Each is spoken by a specific group in Tunisian society. French is often spoken by the economic elite and was banished for official government language by Marcef Marzouki after the revolution. This was meant to oust any colonial influence that remained from France. Fusha was then prioritized by Marzouki, and after the revolution it would become the working language for the government. We must understand that Fusha is primarily spoken by the indigenous and primarily coastal Muslim elites. This ensures class dominance in the state. The paradoxical nature of this move is the idea that it was Derja which became the revolutionary language, which is reflected in social media posts, blogs, rap music, graffiti, and other media forms led by middle and lower class Tunisians.

By understanding the breakdown of the three primary language forms used in Tunisia, one is better able to expand their class understanding of the revolution. Thus by looking over how both colonial and class influences have shaped Tunisian narratives, we can see how they have become apparent in slogans for the revolution (Figure 5.1).
Slogans used by Tunisians would reverberate across the various social media platforms, word of mouth, at protests (and riots), as well as graffiti on walls across Tunis. Towards the end of the revolution, the phrase, “game over”, would become the calling card for the movement (Figure 5.2). Furthermore, outside the presidential palace of Ben Ali in the week leading up to his banishment on the 14th of January, one could hear, “Al-tashghil istihqaqya ’isabat al-surraq!” (Employment is a right, you gang of thieves!) (Jerad, 2015: 5). This chant exemplifies the restrictive labor markets as well as the protestors’ views of the corrupt regime.

Figure 5.1: Picture of YouTube, Twitter, Nawaat (blog site), and Facebook

Source: Multiple Social Media Websites on the Internet.

The slogan “game over” and the chant “Employment is a right, you gang of thieves” both represent cathartic moments for the vocalization of fears and worries during the Ben Ali regime. These vocalizations were important for the movement to make
demands as well as let the regime know its grievances. As important as these two phrases were, the words dignity and freedom would become the hallmarks for the revolution, and the self-immolation by Bouazizi was seen as the first act of “dignity” and “freedom.”

Becoming the primary name of the revolution for many Tunisians, the words dignity and freedom were the rights deprived by the Ben Ali regime, including the failure of human dignity when it came to human or civil rights and the lack of freedom, primarily in access to the media or the freedom of speech. Together these two words would become important rallying points of criticism of the regime as well as points of convergence where Tunisians could voice similar sentiments. The use of slogans and phrases enabled the Tunisian masses to vocalize their grievances, while creating rallying points for them to take action.

Figure 5.2: Game Over: Protestors Proclaim Victory of the Revolution

Source: Facebook on the Internet.
Propaganda: The Dark Side of State-Controlled Media

To preface the phenomena that I will outline in the coming paragraphs, we must understand that throughout the bulk of its experience as a country, Tunisia has had one state sponsored TV station and one state sponsored radio station. Together these two media outlets would become places where state propaganda could proliferate and dominate national conversations.

During the Bourguiba regime, the state media was used to exalt Bourguiba as the savior of the country and the supreme leader, while, at the same time his regime was cracking down on political opposition. Ben Ali followed the same path throughout the 1990s while only minimally extending media rights and media freedoms. The introduction of Al Jazeera in 1996 provided Tunisia with its first international news source that wasn’t coming from the Western World and which specialized on Muslim and Arab issues. Additionally, since 2003 the United States also pressured the Ali regime to further open up and liberalize the media (Haugbolle, 2014: 162). The increasing introduction of foreign news created a freer media and led to greater demands for a free press and media.

The Liberalization of Mass Media

During the Ben Ali regime, the Higher Council on Communications was formed as a media-focused government program. This came after the introduction of the internet in 1991, which made Tunisia the first mostly Muslim country with internet access. With
the creation of the Higher Council on Communication, “a number of local radio stations, the internet, and the use of satellite dishes were launched, all of which enabled the Tunisian population to begin to experience higher levels of media access and consumption (Haugbolle, 2014: 162).

The Publicnet was a program created in 1996, which created public spaces for computers that had access to the internet (Haugbolle, 2014). Availability of these computers was limited, but the program was directed toward the youth of Tunisia. The development of media and internet skills during the early 2000s, allowed Tunisian youth to later take advantage of social media sites. However, the development of the Publicnet and its youth outreach programs must be analyzed through a class lens by understanding that most of these media sources were often available only to the middle or upper class. The Publicnet spaces did not appear as much in rural, interior, or southern regions and were maintained primarily in cities along the coast. Home internet sources were also increasingly installed in the early 2000s. This allowed the private surfing of the internet as well as a source of privilege for the middle and upper class who could afford the internet modem, wiring, and services. Development of the internet in the early 2000s marked an important turning point. This development was not without criticism, and by taking a closer look at the class nature of media consumption, one can gain further insight into Tunisian society.

The class nature of media consumption became even more prevalent when the new media outlets, particularly the new TV and radio stations, that were headed by members of the Ben Ali clan: “… in 2010, the two radio stations -- Shems FM, launched by Ben Ali’s daughter Cyrine and Express FM, financed by Belhassan Trabelsi -- were
set up” (Haugbolle, 2014: 166). This media set up was another Ben Ali disguise for the international community. Tunisia was seen as a growing liberal media state internationally, but under the covers the media proliferation was another scheme for “the family” to accumulate more capital and maintain ideological hegemony through pro-Ben Ali propaganda.

Belhassan Trabelsi (the brother of Leila Trabelsi-Ali, Ben Ali’s wife) controlled another media source, Radio Mosaique, a radio station that quickly became popular for its discussion and on-air debates about national issues. By further expanding media sources, the Ben Ali regime was able to continue its narrative as a modern Arab country that shared Western values. But when taking a closer look at the situation, we find that this media expansion was another ploy by “the family” to gain more power. This power was soon confronted by broad segments of the population when the introduction of non-traditional media sources were partnered and influenced by social media.

**The Rise of Social Media and the “Facebook Revolution”**

Becoming known as the “Facebook Revolution” in some circles (Reported in ABC newscast of January 16, 2011), Facebook became a cross-regional communication tool as well as a way to report what was happening in each region throughout the country. This reporting primarily came from cell phones, which enabled everyday citizens to become reporters by taking videos or pictures and then posting them to social media or blogger websites. Thus some have argued that “social networks and social capital ‘materialized in the streets’ through the use of cellphones and Twitter” (Haugolle, 2014:
An important fact that must be emphasized is that the multiple internet shutdowns by the Ben Ali regime in December 2010 and January 2011 only worked to further inspire calls for revolutionary and peaceful overthrow of the regime (Pommper, 2011).

Tunisia has experienced media suppression throughout its history, often through the jailing of political dissidents or the tarnishing of news sources. It ranked third on a worldwide scale of internet restriction in 2007 (Greenber, 2007). Due to the fact that one-third of Tunisians were internet users before the revolution and Facebook was not initially blocked by the government, the various revolutionary actors were able to use social media as a way to organize their movement. Combined with the fact that 3G had become available in 2010 we can easily see the link between the two as primary factors that created a media buzz surrounding the protests, strikes, and clashes with the police around Tunisia.

**Figure 5.3: Street Graffiti in Tunis Thanking Facebook**

![Street Graffiti in Tunis Thanking Facebook](source.png)

**Source:** Facebook on the Internet.
“One of the recent developments of the Tunisian media landscape,” writes Haugbolle, “is the introduction in 2010 of wireless internet and new providers of cell phone services” (Haugbolle, 2014: 161). The fact that in 2010, the largest cellphone provider Orascom had “5.7 million subscribers,” the reach of cellphones was increasing within Tunisia in the months leading up to the events in Sidi Bouzid. The hashtag #SidiBouzid would become the hallmark hashtag that called attention to protest and revolutionary movements in the weeks leading up to the ousting of Ben Ali.

Perhaps, the most important image of the revolution came from the photo of Ben Ali standing over Mouhammed Bouazizi’s hospital bed (Figure 5.4). This photo exemplified the forces of contention that would soon turn a sacrifice of personal nature on the part of Bouazizi into a nationwide protest movement that culminated in a revolution that toppled the Ben Ali dictatorship. Thus, Facebook and other media soon became a reporting tool that was used by the people to document the brutality of the Ben Ali regime in the wake of the revolution.

Figure 5.4: Picture of Ben Ali at Bouazizi Hospital Bed

Source: Cable News Network (CNN).
Moreover, the blogging website Nawaat soon became filled with revolutionary discourse. The crackdown on revolutionary dissent from social media sites that would eventually ensue would come to be known as the “Days of Fear” (Douja, 2015). “The heavy escalation of censorship from early 2010, targeting a wide range of blogs that were not necessarily very politically active as well as certain video-sharing websites, sparked an increasingly wider desire not only to strengthen cyberresistance but also to move the battle to the streets from May 2010 onward” (Kahlaoui, 2014: 150). The program called smartfilter was used by the Ben Ali regime in order to restrict certain websites as well as dissenting twitter, facebook, or blogging sites. Lasting until the removal of Ben Ali from office on the 14th of January the “Days of fear” accounts for the half-month long crackdown on political dissent and the disappearance of many Tunisian revolutionaries (Douja, 2015). Perhaps the most important event that outlines the crackdown on the Revolution leading up to January 14th was the sniper shootings of protesters from the 8th until the 12th of January. This happened in Tunis where the revolution eventually became focused due to reporting done by witnesses of the events. These shootings signaled that the Ben Ali regime was willing to do anything to break down resistance.

Film, Music, and Rap in the Service of Revolution

The resistance that was upheld during the dark days of January and for decades in the shadow of two authoritarian regimes, would find its meaning in other artistic mediums that through the power of allegory and satire were able to create critiques of despotic regimes and the social effects that it can have on a population. Tunisian cinema
started to mature in the early 1970s through the 1990s. The explosion of film created serious cultural trends for Tunisia. In the films of the early 1970s a catharsis and critique of colonial rule and the neocolonial policies that still plagued the country became constant motifs for most the cinema created during the era. Furthermore, movies like *Persepolis, Man of Ashes* (1986) *The Silences of the Palace* (1994), *Halfouine: Boy of Terraces* (1990), *Essaida* (1996), and *The TV’s coming* (2006), forced its viewers to specifically address questions of Islam, sexuality, oppression, neocolonial relations with the French and the wider Western world, political authoritarianism, and finally economic deprivation (Gana, 2014). All of these would become themes during the 2010-2011 Tunisian Revolution.

In the *Silence of the Palace* a harsh critique of neocolonial relations and realities that face the Tunisian poor, particularly women, are the same exact realities the colonized Tunisians faced in the first half of the 20th century. Likewise, *Silences* outlines the question of women’s sexuality and liberation. This, of course, being a popular topic in Tunisian society, would help foster national dialogue about women’s rights and the influence of Islam in the country. “*Silences* delivers a lasting lesson that the Tunisians who hurried to the streets to break the wall of fear and the media wall of silence and protest against corruption, cronyism, and the travesty of human rights know very well: silence about (sexual or political) abuse does not help overcome it” (Gana, 2014: 188). As demonstrated in *Silences*, Tunisian film often used indirect criticisms in order to critique the social, cultural, political, and economic realities of authoritarian rule.

Beyond film and music, rap would also become a revolutionary tool that hashed out harsh criticisms of the Ben Ali regime. Mizwid had been the popular national musical
medium for decades, by having dances that mimicked everyday work of the masses and lyrics that didn’t contain metaphorical, but instead, direct meaning, Mizwid was the popular musical form throughout the Bourguiba regime and the early Ben Ali regime. This melted with the times in which it was created, but a more abstract musical form would fit the harsh oppression of the Ben Ali regime. Soon a new form of musical medium had emerged on the scene -- rap music and hip-hop. With its Western and American influences, rap was catapulted into Tunisian music with a rapid fervor. In the rap fervor we would find that, “Unlike Mizwid, which foregrounded dance over lyrics (especially in the R’boukh version), the intensely content-based form of Tunisian rap music made it immediately emendable to transparent, straightforward, and dense yet unequivocal articulations of popular sentiments and sociopolitical grievances as well as of transformative feasible, and perfectible futures” (Gana, 2014: 196). This process would politicize rap and become a bastion for critique of police brutality and the oppression felt at the hand of the Ben Ali regime. In 2005 an explosion of Tunisian rap had taken ahold of the country and most importantly young Tunisians: “…Ferid El Extranjero (aka Delahoja), an original member of Filozof, released a damning song titled ‘3bed Fi Terkind’ (‘People in a Prison Corner’), which exposed police brutality, the use of torture, and the overall ruthlessness of Ben Ali’s criminal regime” (Gana, 2014: 197). Rappers like Delahoja would help to create a voice for the oppressed in Tunisia, but none would become the voice of the Revolution and Ben Ali opposition like El General. El General’s outspoken lyrics and song “Rais Lebled” gave a voice to the Revolution and a great lens in which to view the struggle of the Tunisian masses.
The Tunisian Revolution will be remembered for various trends and patterns. But most importantly for Tunisian citizens it was the first articulation of decades of intense social, political, and economic repression. These articulations came across through various media, social, and political platforms. Together, these would combine to become the voice of the revolution. As pictured below, El General was a single voice that spoke for thousands. In this picture we find El General in a back alley in everyday clothes, but in those clothes we observe a statement against fascist authoritarianism. The paradox and harmony created in this image reflects the Tunisian Revolution as spoken by El General, a movement led by everyday people, wearing everyday clothes, but with a strong message against fascism and authoritarian rule.

**Figure 5.5: Picture of El General with Swastika Crossed-out T-shirt**

![Image of El General](www.thespin.com)

By combing the social and cultural media realities of Tunisia, we are able to understand the undercurrents that led to the Revolution. Without the critiques coming
from both cinematic and musical sources, the masses wouldn’t have had an outlet to express fears that came from autocratic rule. Also, by analyzing the growing media structures and need for media liberalization, we are able to understand how revolutionaries were able to communicate and report events from May 2010 through 2014. Without these cultural and social platforms the masses’ calls for change and overthrow of the Ben Ali regime would have fallen on deaf ears. The importance of Tunisian Rap and Film and the proliferation of media sources or access enables us to understand how a Revolution has technological, social, and cultural undercurrents that aligned with political and economic trends. Together, these platforms enabled the usage of language to become a political tool for the Revolution. The use of various words, forms, and phrases gave the Tunisian citizenry a voice that had been suppressed by the autocratic measures of the Ben Ali dictatorship. As best vocalized at the end of the Revolution, the “game” was “over” for the Ben Ali regime because the people had found their voice.
Chapter 6

Post-Revolution Considerations

“The power and promise of what happened in Tunisia was and remains overwhelming to this day: an entire people marching united, civilly, and non-violently, calling proudly and loudly with one voice, “Ben Ali, out” before they delivered the final knockout - “Game over.”

-Nouri Gana

The period immediately following the Revolution has left many question for Tunisian citizens and scholars alike. Questions about the success of the Revolution have sprung from various sources. “Apart from its inability to fulfill much of the economic and social promises of the revolution and of its electoral campaign, the governing Troika’s gravest mistake is its inability to introduce institutional reforms, to effect transitional justice, to bring old regime figures to justice, to pen up the archives, and to fight corruption” (Gana, 2013: 293). These criticisms outlined in the above quote by Nouri Gana, a prominent Tunisian scholar out of UCLA, properly addresses the major issues related to the Revolution. Most importantly, it shows how social, economic, political, and cultural outcomes of policies of the previous regime work to undermine the new historical trends and patterns created by the revolution. “Misunderstandings, prejudices, and justified outrage stem from a long period of repression and corrupted favoritism institutionalized under the old regime” (Marks, 2013: 243). In order to ensure the success of the revolution and the progress of Tunisian society, the new Tunisian government must address the institutional challenges and combat the forces that stand on the path of
Revolutionary change. Furthermore, we have found that these criticisms have gained more traction, given the fact that both Libya’s and Egypt’s revolutions have drawn some intense criticism. The military dictatorship in Egypt represents how the old guard can create a counter-revolution, therefore reversing the progressive mechanisms put in place by the revolutionary vanguard. Secondly, in the case of Libya, the Civil War has shattered the functioning of the state. Neither of these cases have come close to the Tunisian example. What this does is place Tunisia in a highlighted spot where the goals of the revolution are placed on a pedestal of sorts, because the further democratization of Tunisia represents a true spring in the Arab world.

Pathways Forward with the Tunisian Revolution

By analyzing pathways forward past economic stagnation and political authoritarianism, while at the same time properly addressing cultural and social exclusion, the Tunisian case can remain an example of a successful Arab uprising. Coupling this with the recognition of the economic, cultural, political, and social realities of the oppressed, Tunisia will be able to move forward towards a thriving democracy. To be certain, the Tunisian people, “used their newfound rights, most notably the freedoms of speech and assembly,” in order to put forth revolutionary ideals. This statement recognizes the struggle of the Tunisian people, but in saying this, we as a global community must understand that the months and subsequent years following the banishment of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali will prove whether the Revolution that took place in 2010 and 2011 will become an example for other democratic Arab states across North
Africa and the Middle East. The purpose of this chapter is to reflect whether the revolution has been successful and how Tunisia can become a model for other liberal Arab democracies in the future, as well as how democratic institutions can be created through revolutionary reforms. In the paragraphs that follow, I will explore pathways forward and examine what has actually happened in the months and years following the banishment of Ben Ali in Tunisia. In doing so, I will focus on institutional and structural challenges facing Tunisia in the post-revolution period. Most importantly, I will strive to provide revolutionary narratives that were discussed in the previous chapters, such as the rise of new political parties, youth politics, expansion of the media, rights of women, economic restructuring, and how to adequately address the major problems facing Tunisia after the revolution, including the role of conservative political Islam.

Many Tunisians, Muslim scholars, and others sympathetic to the Revolution of Freedom and Justice have formulated many paths forward for Tunisians. Some of the suggestions strive to further democratize the Tunisian institutions, and not only in the political realm. For example, the continued expansion of a spectrum free media that allows for the creation of independent regional radio and TV stations that can better service the interior population is one suggestion that moves to help Tunisians. By understanding that the new-found freedom of expression and rights to media gained during the Revolution must be put at the forefront of reform movements, during the post-revolutionary period, Tunisian society must continue to experiment and recognize their rights. Another way Tunisia could gain access to a more accessible and equitable media would be by ousting old regime members out of TV, internet, and radio mediums. Granted that some have been thrown out of their positions, some Ben Ali oligarchs still
remain in keys positions in powerful media outlets. By doing this, Tunisia would be able to adequately redistribute these resources to other lower level elites of the revolutionary vanguard as well as provide a more democratized non-state-biased view of news. The further expansion of media and a redistribution of media sources provides a way forward past the old regime’s politically motivated media infrastructure. By further liberalizing media sources, Tunisia can continue its media diversification based on new models.

Geopolicity estimates that the Tunisian Revolution cost the country somewhere around $2.03 billion (Geopolicity, 2013). This raises the question of what is the impact and result of the Revolution and how Tunisians can begin to build their society anew. This is the question that has plagued many Tunisians. In the remainder of this Chapter, I will cover various critiques of the Revolution, while attempting to report how Tunisia is experimenting with democracy and the building of democratic institutions. In these critiques I will follow up on my economic and political analysis of the Revolution, while continuing my discussion of political parties, youth, women, Islamic (liberal and conservative), and other sectors of Tunisian society.

**Challenges to the Tunisian Revolution: Persistent Inequalities**

The World Bank group found that in 2014 much of the plight of the Tunisian people had not been raised and some of the squalid conditions and concerns that spurred the revolution were still apparent across the country. Most notably, regional differences between the interior and coastal regions persist, where interior workers are still experiencing lower wages, higher levels of unemployment, and fewer options for
economic mobility (World Bank, 2014). By positing that interior workers and the poor were centered at the core of the Revolution and that if conditions haven’t gotten better can easily show us how incremental revolutions are and how changes in conditions can take time.

Analyzing data from the World Bank, OEC, and Arab Barometer from 2016 allows us to gain better insight into what the Revolution has brought for Tunisians. Many attitudes towards revolution have shifted and ideas about democracy may be holding strong, but beliefs about the contradictory nature of democracy and capitalist development is becoming more apparent to the Tunisian population seven years after the Tunisian Revolution. Additionally, we find that economic concerns remain at the top of priorities for Tunisians (Arab Barometer, 2016). This could exemplify the reality of Revolutions by outlining that sacrifices are made in the economic realm and the further establishment of strong democratic institutions are more difficult to accomplish. In the previous surveys and more recent World Bank data we can see that the economic woes and structures of Tunisia have continued to be the same as before the revolution. This may be the case because of the fact that the neoliberal transnational capitalist structures of Tunisia still remain in place. Coupling this with the fact that some of the major industries still lie in the hands of the old guard and with people who were in power during the Ben Ali regime, we can see where an economic overhaul is still necessary in Tunisia in order to restructure markets and ensure a more equal distribution of wealth. These critiques hit at the heart of many economic questions that still plague Tunisian society. In spite of these critiques, the development of various political trends have provided hope for the maturation of democratic institutions.
The creation of new political parties, an emphasis on civil participation, and the 2014 Constitution have all worked to become a part of the new order. In establishing a multiparty parliamentary system the Tunisian government has attempted to create a mechanism that ensures the old guard will not gain power again. What we have found after the revolution is that, “As the months passed, it became very clear that this was not simply a case of secularist vs. Islamist, or those supporting parliamentarism vs. those in favor of presidentialism. This battle had to do with ideology, and political maturity” (Strom, 2013: 271). Moving into the October 23rd 2011 elections, over 100 parties had registered. The strengthening of political parties has provided a progressive pathway forward for most Tunisians: “Parties are, on the one hand, the articulators and aggregators of interest, the formulators of public policy, as well as the main vehicles of citizen integration and mobilization. On the other hand, parties recruit political leaders, they organize parliament and the government, and they nominate candidates to public office” (Mair, 2002). Although 47 percent of the eligible voters did not register in the 2011 elections, voter participation rate has increased in subsequent years. These two problems could be solved by “Reducing the size of the party system, for instance by designing an election code with a sizeable national electoral magnitude in the range of 3 to 5, would be one way of combatting the current depolitization of the electorate, partly due to a less crowded party landscape.” (Strom, 2013: 284). Another intense criticism stemming from the 2011 election is that “the Tunisian parties that presented candidates in the 2011 election – and succeeded in having one or more of these elected – were all so-called personalistic parties, that is, political parties which were hardly anything more than personal vehicles for the party leader to amass further power, wealth, and prestige”
The CPR and Enhadda would garner the most votes in the 2011 election, but the newly constituted RCD called the Popular Petition (PP) would not be far behind (the PP is nothing more than a vestige of the Ben Ali party). This signaled to Tunisian society that the old guard still held power. This, coupled with the assassination of Chokri Balaid on February 6, 2013, the run-up to the finalization of the Constitution provided a few trembles throughout Tunisia.

Chokri Baliad was the leader of the Movement des Patriotes Democrates, a party that was legalized in 2011 and shared socialist and radical liberal sympathies. Not similar to the CPR, MPD was a minor political power broker and Balaid’s assassination would be contextualized by another ongoing scandal in the wake of the assassination. In response to the assassination of Balaid, then Prime Minister Jebali attempted to reshuffle his cabinet. This reshuffling amounted to nothing more than a personal power grab. The reshuffling then faced intense backlash when the CPR made a “threat to withdraw its cabinet ministers and resign from the governing coalition should Jebali fail to reach an agreement on key political and economic issues as well as deliver the promised cabinet reshuffle originally schedule for January 14, 2013” (Storm, 2013: 281). Jebali’s ploy was stopped and on the 19th of February, he stepped down and the power of the Troika and coalition government passed its first test of nepotism and singular party domination: “the near political deadlock within the governing Troika, the CPR’s threat to leave the coalition, the prime minister tying his continuation in the job to having his own ideas pushed through – all of those incidents came across very badly to the electorate as they bore witness of political immaturity, personalistics politics, and petty power struggles that did not have the interest of the Tunisian democratization process at heart…” (Storm,
2013: 283). In mentioning the development and importance of political parties an analysis of Enhadda is necessary.

**In the Shadow of Political Islam**

Given the fact that Enhadda makes Tunisia deal with the question of Islamic inclusion it is also the largest power broker and political machine in Tunisia. As mentioned in the *Politics of Revolution* by Nouri Gana, the politicization of Islam through the suppression of Islamic ideals and values in Tunisian society worked to help make political Islam a powerful broker leading to the Revolution. The Islamist party Ennahada won eighty-nine seats in the October election. This would constitute the largest number of seats held by any party. This increased the question of political inclusion, and Tunisia was forced to reconcile its Islamic roots and the achievements gained by political Islam during the revolution. The following statement by Monica Marks best exemplifies why Islam became a political agent: “Used to a privileged status under the old regime and traditional recipients of Western support, these associations are now faced with a radically altered paradigm of state-society relations: the same religiously conservative, Islamist individuals who were persecuted under Ben Ali have now taken key leadership posts, and women’s rights groups must function in the absence of an authoritarian figure committed to bulwarking a secular feminist agenda” (Marks, 2013: 243). This immediately gave rise to fears that Tunisia would become an Islamic State and begin a process of state sponsored Islamiticization. By closely analyzing the claims of double speak by opponents of Ennahada and how Ennahada actually acted during the lead up to
the 2011 elections and 2014 Constitution, we can easily find that these fears are unwarranted.

Ennahada has shown the world that democratic ideals and Islamic ideals can coexist and even feed off of one another. We can find this to be true mainly because of writings and political philosophy of Rachid Ghannouchi: “Ghannouchi’s theory of the compatibility of Islam and democracy has evolved around three related arguments: a postcolonial critique of the secularist ruling elite, a denunciation of the state hegemony over religion, and a call for the reenactment of cultural authenticity” (Marzouki, 2013: 209). What this does is reposition the argument away from liberal vs conservative forces and instead positions the argument as the state vs the oppressed in the neocolonial state: “After the independence, this westernized elite began oppressing the Tunisian people, in a way that mirrored French colonial rule” (Marzouki, 2013: 209). While in exile, in France, Ghannouchi wrote extensively on the relationship between state and religion. Furthermore, Ghannouchi was able to articulate a mutually beneficial relationship between piety and civility. Ghannouchi and his party Enhadda have consistently pushed democratic and civil ideals before Islamic ones: “He does, however, advocate for the nurturing and development of a lively religious life within civil society: the society is all the more religious than the state is civic” (Marzouki, 2013: 210). No more is there a better example of Enhanada’s commitment to Civil law than the Sharia Law dispute leading up to the 2014 Constitution.

We must understand that Ennahada like most political parties contain both a conservative and radical faction, within the conservative faction of Ennahada we find stringent Islamicists that wanted to implement certain aspects of Sharia Law into the
2014 Constitution. “Not only is Ennahada ideologically divided between a radical trend (led by Sadok Shourrou) and a pragmatic one (led by Rachid Ghannouchi and Meherzia Labidi); it is also divided on strategy” (Marzouki, 2013: 218). Habib Kehder, an Ennahada member, advocated for Sharia Law and promised the citizens that it would play a major role in the Constitution’s creation. After much debate and criticism, Ennahada dropped the provisions and Kehder was pushed out of the political foray. As mentioned, the revolution exalted Islamic sentiments across the country, and this would not always manifest itself in peaceful or democratic action, but instead into violent action.

“Following the revolution, the emergence of both Ennahada as the principal political party and the rise of Salafism put to rest the mythology of laicité [secularism], therefore reaffirming the necessity for Tunisian society to reconcile its effective social and political pluralism not only with the categories of Western modernization, but also with its Muslim-Arab identity” (Meron and Cavatorta, 2013: 254). The Salafist group in Tunisia represents an “ultra-conservative” Islamic group that sprung to prominence during 2011 and since have been at the center of much anti-Western rhetoric as well as how radicalism can penetrate revolutionary movements. The Salafists provide a new challenge of Islamic inclusion as well as competition between secular and non-secular forces for domination of the Tunisian state in the post-revolution transition. Moreover, the Salafists represent a need for the Tunisian political system to attempt to include once excluded groups. This opening up will provide for political inclusion and more than likely help to bring the conservative and poor young peoples into the political fold. Often at odds with liberal Arab feminist views, the Salafist conservative faction is often compared to the vocal female leaders who have championed female rights. This posturing
of female vs. Islamist rights and traditions is only a reflection of the past regime and society: “Used to a privileged status under the old regime and traditional recipients of Western support, these associations are now faced with a radically altered paradigm of state-society relations: the same religiously conservative, Islamist individuals who were persecuted under Ben Ali have now taken key leadership posts, and women’s rights groups must function in the absence of an authoritarian figure committed to bulwarking a secular feminist agenda” (Marks, 2013: 243). Overall, the rise of Salafist factions may indicate that “the incompetence of an Islamist government might be the price that emerging Arab democracies have to pay (at least for a while) in order to persuade Islamists (including Salafist) of the validity of democracy” (Gana, 2013: 297). Outside of political Islam and its Salafist translations, one finds that while recognizing the women of the Islamic faith, the Islamic forces also retained intense grievance against the Ben Ali regime. The plight of liberal and progressive women have also been highlighted by a general concern about the future of women’s civil rights.

**Threats to Women’s Rights**

By discussing the realities faced by Tunisian women following the Revolution, we can find pathways forward towards a more inclusive Tunisian society. The female revolutionary vanguard, following the revolution, has felt mixed feelings, due to the lack of results from revolutionary demands. We find that a growing disillusionment has begun to fester due to the fact that the goals set forth during the revolution have either gone by the wayside or have yet to be realized. One of the central problems for secular women is
the increasing influence of non-secular Islamic groups. This has primarily manifested itself in questioning the wording of article 28 in the 2014 Constitution. The wording in the previous constitution was that “women and men are equal under the law” (Tunisian Constitution 1956). As certain conservative Enhadda leaders have stated (following the revolution) that they would like to change the wording to “men and women have complementary roles under the law” (Mamelouk, 2015). This could lead to the disenfranchisement of a women’s ability to exercise control over institutions or certain civil rights, such as marriage rights. This is one of many problems facing secular Tunisian women who are used to the standard set by Ijthad. To throw caution to the wind we must understand that, “forty-two out of the forty-nine women elected to the 217-member Constituent Assembly represented Ennahada” (Marks, 2013: 225). This more properly outlines the majority of Enhanada’s position on the inclusion of women into politics.

The rights given in the familial realm and economic realm were faltering during the years leading to the Revolution, but we have found that after the revolution, little to no civil rights have been gained by the female population. This has resulted in Tunisian women increasingly voicing their opinions through mainstream institutions in order to gain more access to political opportunities. One of these has been a demand for more access to government positions. Overall, by following the narrative set by Tunisian women we are able to determine the level of success of the Tunisian Revolution and determine what have been some of the achievements, but we also find a growing disillusionment with democratic institutions when it comes to economic growth is raising concerns amongst many women in Tunisia (Arab Barometer, 2016). After the
Revolution, we must still properly address the question of “unmarried women and their children remain in a state of non-recognition under Tunisian law. Mothers whose babies are born out of wedlock face extreme difficulties registering their children for government services and not eligible for state-provided forms of special assistance (Marks, 2013: 240). This quote outlines the biggest obstacle facing women after the revolution.

By combining the dialectics of both secular and non-secular women we can find a cross interest dialogue that leads to a legitimate way forwards for Tunisian society, which creates a society of inclusion. The report from the NDI in 2012 adequately raises concern about the progress of female rights in Tunisian society. “According to a 2012 NDI report, harassment of women, by police and civilian alike, seems to have increased since the revolution” (Marks, 2013: 245). This society of inclusion still remains a dream, due to the continued presence of old regime members that maintain power.

**Obstacles Ahead for the Tunisian Revolution**

Various political groups question what to do with the hierarchal and repressive institution of the internal security forces. This has led to further questions about how to integrate former RCD into the new government. We know that laws enacted in 2015 reflected a standpoint of forgiveness to past RCD members by allowing most former RCD members to run for political positions (Angrist, 2013). For example, the new party Nidaa Tounes represents a political party that is sympathetic to former RCD members.
The forgiving or reconciliation of old regime interest and powers has plagued the new government and with the formation and legitimization of the Political Petition, questions about how to deal with the old guard has increased in Tunisia. This along with old regime figureheads framing their stories as innocent or unknowing has provided Tunisia with special questions about inclusion and reconciliation. For example, “Leila Ben Ali wrote a memoir, cleaning her records and claiming innocence” (Gana, 2013: 294). Leila’s memoir exemplifies that grasp that the old regime still has on Tunisian society. Nidaa Tounes, the Call of Tunisia Party movement is a “hub” for former RCD members and since 2012 has gained significant political traction. The creation of Nidaa Tounes outlines “The problem with a so-called government of technocrats and independents is that it is very hard, if not impossible, to come up with national figures, who are genuinely independent and neutral in a profoundly polarized political milieu” (Gana, 2013: 295). So this requires the need to draw from former political figureheads as sources of power.

By creating a revolution, Tunisian society must then deal with the fallout and creation of a new state. This has provided many challenges and obstacles. Most importantly how does the new Troika deal with past regime dichotomies and oppressive institutions? Many pathways forward, often including liberalization, Islamic, or democratization measures, have been realized in Tunisian institutions. From the expansion of media to the importance of the multiparty system, Tunisia will be working with various methods of political, social, cultural, and economic models that can provide the revolutionary change promised during the period 2011 through 2014. The post-revolutionary analysis helps this thesis to become more focused, while continuing
narratives and structures commented on in the previous chapters. Still, it is apparent that
as the only successful uprising during the Arab Spring, it has many impediments to deal
with in order for the revolution to succeed.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

The Tunisian Revolution is credited as the trigger that ignited the Arab world into revolution across North Africa and the Middle East that came to be known as the Arab Spring. This thesis has taken up the case of the Tunisian Revolution that set the stage for other similar revolution across the region that brought down authoritarian leaders who ruled over these societies for decades.

For this thesis, I have conducted an in-depth study of the origins, dynamics, and consequences of the Tunisian Revolution as a case study of revolution in the twenty-first century. By studying the historical and structural conditions that precipitated the Tunisian Revolution, scholars will be better able to understand the dynamics of other revolutions across the Arab world. I have shown that neoliberal restructuring of Tunisian society, as part of the process of capitalist globalization beginning in the late 1990s, led to a polarized society that brought together a coalition of social forces to overthrow the corrupt Ben Ali dictatorship.

Such an analysis would allow us to reflect on similar conditions that could lead to resistance in other countries. Young female university graduates from the interior seemed to have positioned themselves as one of the linking narratives throughout the revolution. Additionally, we find that the use of social media as an organizing tool, often used by these university graduates, made social media a prime revolutionary tool. The question of Islam within Tunisian society also presents another dilemma that Tunisia must deal with,
contrasting secular and religious ideas. By examining the political and economic structures that impacted certain social groups in Tunisia, we could see how these structures propelled the Tunisian people to utilize both material and nonmaterial resources to create as well as win a protracted struggle against an embedded corrupt dictatorship. Finally, the reworking of its institutions through democratic reforms created the conditions for Tunisia to remove itself from the state repression of the Ben Ali regime. Tunisian society can create new boundaries that will disallow one group to gain total power over the others, thus laying the groundwork for the creation of democratic institutions.

Future Research

This thesis has attempted to encapsulate an historical and sociological analysis of the social, cultural, economic, and political institutions of Tunisia through a case study method. By taking into account existing conditions in Tunisia, I have attempted to demonstrate why the Tunisian Revolution occurred and what will be its post-revolution trajectory after the ousting of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali from power. In so doing, this thesis has left certain areas open for future research as well as research in areas already outlined that would require further attention.

In presenting this case-study, I have limited the scope of my study of the Arab Spring to Tunisia. Even though the Arab Spring started in Tunisia and the Tunisian Revolution constituted the only successful revolution in the region, without an adequate analysis of Libya and Egypt a comprehensive study of the Arab Spring cannot be undertaken. In this context, in order to fully understand the relative success of the
Tunisian revolution, a comparative analysis of the uprisings in Egypt and Libya is imperative. Moreover, a comparative analysis of these uprisings would clarify the cohesive nature of the Arab Spring, as this would enable scholars to create parameters and indicators for revolutions in other Arab countries. Such comparative analysis would certainly be a monumental undertaking.

Another important aspect of this thesis that can be more broadly applied to other revolutions, is the introspection of media, and particularly social media. By taking a closer look at the impact of social and other media forms during the Tunisian revolution one could begin to construct a theoretical framework of social networks that can create revolutionary change. One could also look at the level of technological development and a level of media savvy that leads to an information society. This would lead to hypotheses about the usefulness of social media as a tool for social movements to succeed. The media aspect of the Tunisian revolution is a new phenomenon and can lead to an abundance of literature on the importance of social media strategizing during modern, twenty-first century revolutions.

Additionally, I find that young female college graduates from the interior who participated in the Revolution need to be paid closer attention. Through my research, I was able to identify this group of people as one of the most important groups who took part in the revolution. Through a survey of this group of citizens, scholars could gain important knowledge of socio-economic, political, and ideological characteristics of movement participants. Given the fact that these women were, as a group, among the highest level of unemployed, who subsequently became activists during the revolution, a
close study of this group would allow scholars to address issues that predicated the 2010-2011 Revolution.

In short, this research could be further extended by looking closer to young college female graduates from the interior, the usefulness of social media as a revolutionary tool, and expanding the analysis to other countries that participated in the Arab Spring. These three aspects are important for future research because there is currently little written on these topics, and the Tunisian case could shed an immense light on the already existing literature. Furthermore, by taking Tunisia and placing it into a comparative analysis would enable one to better gauge the success of the revolution as well as allowing these phenomena to be compared to future social or revolutionary movements.

**Final Thoughts**

In the previous six chapters I have outlined how unique cultural, social, economic, and political factors created a revolutionary movement in Tunisia. The beginning trajectory of political authoritarianism and neoliberal economic policies created the conditions for the revolution. Combining both internal and international structures that increased the marginalization of workers, women, youth, college graduates, the interior population, and others, these groups of people experiencing decades of oppressive policies found common voice and staged the Tunisian Revolution.

The incompetence of international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and the misreporting of Tunisian socio-economic development made the revolution seem as if it was a surprise, when it was not. Coupling
this with French support and meddling, Tunisia on a global scale seemed as if it were an exception amongst the other Middle Eastern and North African countries (MENA) but was slowly slipping into revolutionary tumult. Furthermore, arms support and sales from the United States helped to ensure regional capitalist expansion, which allowed French TNCs to easily penetrate the low trade barrier coastal cities of Tunisia. The relationship between the U.S, France, and Tunisia perfectly outlines a model for developing nations with heavy Muslim majorities. A Western nation, in this case France, will support the country on a global scale, ensuring foreign aid to the country. This aid then comes with the guarantee of low trade barriers. The low trade barriers then result in constant economic disenfranchisement of the indigenous population that is kept oppressed through a police state that is supported by American weapons.

The political and economic structures as well as institutions that precipitated the material conditions for revolution, would incite a collaboration of various groups to overthrow the Ben Ali regime, thus resulting in a more democratically structured society. By having the youth, women, labor, lawyers, and others combined together to create revolutionary trends and patterns. These patterns would come in conflict with old trends, represented by the old regime. By properly subduing the old regime and creating new institutional models that focus on democracy, civil and human rights, in conjunction with an emphasis on inclusion, the Tunisian revolution can rest and accept its fate. The case-specific analysis presented in this thesis could be used by both Tunisian and global purveyors equally in understanding how the revolution came about, who were the revolutionary vanguard, and what were the implications of the movement. Tunisian
society has changed, but the obstacles that remain are important and must be a priority for the people to overcome in the period ahead.
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