

TUNISIA

A NASCENT DEMOCRACY UNDER SIEGE

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We work with grassroots activists, media, policy experts and government officials throughout Europe to identify constructive approaches to addressing these challenges. Our goal is to ensure that the universal values of the Enlightenment –religious tolerance, political pluralism, individual liberty and government by democracy – remain the core foundation of Europe's prosperity and welfare, and the basis on which diverse cultures and opinions can interact peacefully.

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The Counter Extremism Project (CEP) is a not-for-profit, non-partisan, international policy organization formed to address the threat from extremist ideology. It does so by pressuring financial support networks, countering the narrative of extremists and their online recruitment, and advocating for effective laws, policies and regulations.

CEP uses its research and analytical expertise to build a global movement against the threat to pluralism, peace and tolerance posed by extremism of all types. In the United States, CEP is based in New York City with a team in Washington, D.C.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



At the end of 2010, Tunisia witnessed the beginning of what would become known as the Arab Spring and spread to Egypt, Syria, and other Arab countries. Intellectuals, activists, and ordinary citizens—mainly young people—asking for real, not superficial, change soon joined the protests that would involve individuals at all levels, in both urban and rural areas. Islamists, however, were apparently absent from this movement due to Ben Ali's harsh crackdown on their number, which had forced their leaders to leave the country, silencing their sympathisers on the ground.

Ben Ali's departure on 14 January 2011 left a political and social vacuum that had to be filled as soon as possible. Events unfolded rapidly, and, on 3 March 2011, elections were announced for the Constituent Assembly; to be held on 23 October.

Following years of dictatorship and no chance of plurality, Tunisia's first democratic elections fielded 11,686 candidates and 1,517 party lists. Unusually, after decades of a secular state promoting a reformed version of Islam—the prime example of which was the 1956 Code of Personal Status—the main topic during the 2011 electoral campaign was the role of Islam and secularism in political and social life.

The Ennahdha party, led by Rached Ghannouchi and ideologically linked to the global Muslim Brotherhood, emerged as a key actor in the electoral campaign. Organised, structured, and with no direct links with the Egyptian Brotherhood, the party was recognised by Western media and institutions as the main opposition and a moderate Islamist party. Though it had not been active on the ground for years, Ennahdha won the first democratic elections with a relative majority of 41.7 per cent, securing ninety of the 217 parliamentary seats and winning in all electoral districts.

Ennahdha's victory also confirmed that previous Tunisian secular opposition would still have to remain as the main opposition of the newly elected majority and that it would play a fundamental, although indirect, role in the immediate post-revolution future as well.

The Tunisian transition to democracy, with its inclusion of Islamists who were strongly supported by other internal actors, has often been described as an exception that relied on three main factors:

- Tunisia's cultural and historical background, including more than half a century of secularism, and respect for a Tunisian tradition of Islamic reform, which strongly influenced the way the transition was handled and partially succeeded;

- The Ennahdha Party, which, after being included in the political arena, pragmatically decided to accept the challenge of the democratic experiment;
- Civil society, which played a key role in limiting the Islamist agenda.

After Mohammed Morsi's ousting, Rached Ghannouchi described the failure of the Egyptian experience as "a fruit of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's naiveté." However, since then, Ennahdha has issued statements condemning the "barefaced coup" and "the arrests of leaders of the Freedom and Justice Party and the Muslim Brotherhood", arguing that "the coup will damage democracy" and denouncing "the participation of Muslim and Christian religious authorities in the coup". On 26 December 2013, in another statement, Ennahdha criticised the Egyptian government for designating the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation, describing the decision as the act of "a subversive government and a further act of rage against a political faction loyal to democracy and to peace."

If 14 January 2011 marked the end of Ben Ali's regime, then 9 January 2014, thanks to Ennahdha's pragmatism, was a turning point in the history and evolution of Tunisia's transition to democracy. The "spontaneous" resignation of the head of government, Ali Larayedh, who was linked to Ennahdha, represented political Islam's compromise in order to prevent a repeat of the Egyptian scenario.

In the meantime, the debate about a new constitution and a strong civil society had obliged Ennahdha to abandon its dream of Islamizing the new Tunisian Fundamental Pact. Ennahdha's main proposals, which lack any direct reference to Shari'a law or the "complementarity" between men and women, highlight the strong internal debate that has been developing in Tunisia since 2011 and the important role played by the Tunisian exception and its origins during the transitional period. At the same time, they indicate that Ennahdha "has worked – sometimes by strategic choice, sometimes as a result of immense pressure from political opposition and secular civil society – to remain a relevant and viable political player."

The new Tunisian Constitution was the result of a constructive, and sometimes heated, debate among different players in Tunisian social and political life. Specific actors and factors have contributed to the illusion of a Tunisian exception, as have the results of the first parliamentary elections in October 2014, which confirmed the possibility of a democratic alternative for the country.

During the electoral campaign, Ennahdha entered a new phase and altered its approach, portraying their failure in government as a mark of responsibility and focusing their political messages on the subjects of economic growth and fight against terrorism. Meanwhile, Ghannouchi's new watchwords became *tawafuq* (consensus) and *wahda wataniyya* (national unity), laying the ground for the post-electoral period and the formation of new alliances.

Ennahdha came second with sixty-nine seats, losing to the secular coalition party, Nidaa Tounes, which won eighty-five of the 217 seats. The conciliatory style of the electoral campaign and the near-immediate concession to their adversary seemed to mark the shift of Ghannouchi's movement from militant, anti-establishment Islamism to accepting fully parliamentary democracy and its rules.

All the aforementioned events and phases appeared to confirm the Tunisian exception and that the country's transition was on the right path.

However, the enduring economic problems, as well as the spread of terrorism and radicalisation in the country, would cause the Tunisian model to falter. Following the Hammam Sousse terrorist attack on 26 June 2015—the country's forty-seventh attack since the beginning of the uprising—Tunisia has been forced to rethink the last four and a half years and to evaluate seriously its transition to democracy.

Thanks to its strong civil society, to a tradition of reformed Islam, to more than half a century of "Islamic secularism", to its smaller population and the highest literacy rates in the region, Tunisia seemed bound for a better, more democratic future. Yet it was forced to face the reality of terrorism, the consequence not only of the presence of a radical ideology on the ground or of terror organisations in and around its borders—namely in Libya—but also of the continuing economic and social problems that spawned the Arab Spring. Neither the unemployment nor disaffection of young people has diminished, thus leaving fertile ground for radical ideologies and calls for justice and freedom to grow.

A recent poll of Tunisians aged 18–30, published in April 2015, confirmed their main concerns as: the fight against terrorism (27%), price increases (21%), unemployment (18%), and the need for economic recovery (10%).

On 21 June 2015, Mohamed Haddad, history of comparative religion professor at the University of Tunis, published a prophetic op-ed in the international Arabic daily *Al Hayat*, in which he stressed that "Tunisia is going through a critical moment" and that the tourist season would be disastrous because of terrorism. He also emphasised that the crisis was not just limited to the economy, but that it also extended to politics, as the institutions of the Second Republic were paralyzed and the new Constitution was just a piece of paper.

Haddad wondered how the Tunisian people could nurture and assimilate democracy, while living in a state of political instability and economic insecurity, without even basic social services, and while thousands of young people chose to join jihadist movements or to emigrate clandestinely on the ships of death. A few days after the publication of Haddad's op-ed came the attack in Hammam Sousse, vindicating the Tunisian academic.

This terrorist attack is the reason behind PM Habib Essid's 27 June announcement of twelve urgent measures, all of which have been heavily criticised. In addition to the urgent measures, Essid announced the closure of seventy mosques that were not under the control of the Ministry

of Religious Affairs; the dissolution of all political parties and organisations that do not respect the new Tunisian Constitution; the transformation of all areas with a jihadi presence into closed, controlled military zones; and the beginning of a national dialogue on combatting terrorism. A new Anti-Terrorism Law came into force on 25 July.

The question is whether the aforementioned measures will suffice in Tunisia: a small country sandwiched between Libya and Algeria, crippled by an economic crisis; populated by disillusioned young people who can envision no future for themselves; a country whose government voted, in February 2011, for a prisoner amnesty that freed not only Ben Ali's opponents, but also prisoners with links to terror organisations; a country that, in July 2012, recognised the pan-Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir; a country in which Ghannouchi, when Ennahdha was in power, appeased young Salafis, inviting them "to be patient", to "create TV channels, radio stations, schools and universities", to "instil in the people the spirit of Islam", and "spread a global awareness of Islam"; a country from which 3,000 young people have left for Syria. It is obvious from all the above that Tunisia will seriously have to tackle the issue of radicalisation and develop strategies and tactics to combat it at both the ideological and security levels.

The new Tunisian anti-terrorism law does not appear to be the solution, as it deals more with punishment and repression than with the prevention of radicalisation. The definition of a terror organisation is linked only to terror attacks perpetrated and does not deal at all with the conservative and radical preaching and ideology that often remain in the background. The new law represents a short-term strategy and policy and is insufficient to counter the threat of terrorism in the country.

Yet some actors in the Tunisian exception have decided to map out a long-term strategy aimed at deradicalising Tunisian youth. On 12 August this year, a group of Tunisian intellectuals, led by Habib Kazdaghli, dean of Manouba University in Tunis, and the academician and activist Raja Benslama, organised the Conference of Tunisian Intellectuals Against Terrorism. The objective of the conference was to formulate suggestions, promote activities, and engage and motivate young Tunisians in the building of their country.

The idea for the conference came from the organisers' awareness of the absence of an integral cultural policy to counter terrorism as an ideology and of the need to fill this gap.

The most important idea underlying the conference was that radical ideology is one of the main causes of terrorism. Both the manifesto and the report issued on the eve of the meeting stated that "Islamist terrorism draws the main part of its vision from the principles and concepts of the Salafist, Wahhabi Islamic tradition, as well as from the political ideologies that inspire them, particularly that of the Muslim Brotherhood"; and that "terrorism is not a genuine Tunisian phenomenon. It crosses borders and constitutes a link in the regional terrorism chain, as well as in the East and in the West. It feeds off networks in which complex and multiple geopolitical, ideological, economic, and military interests merge."

This important initiative confirms the Tunisian exception and that Tunisia retains its identity and its uniqueness.

In conclusion, the Tunisian model may well survive if the country embraces a positive attitude and constructive self-criticism, policies to solve the economic crisis and empower young people, and an ideology-free approach. It would also be useful to undertake a re-examination of Tunisia's past, which, although inhabited by the ghosts of its totalitarian regimes, contains the foundations - in its society, women's associations and intellectual and religious traditions - that have controlled political Islam, despite failing to prevent the spread of jihadi ideology and terrorism.

At the same time, Tunisians should examine why the inclusion of Ennahdha at the political level did not help to prevent radicalisation. It seems that Ennahdha did not sufficiently engage in an intra-Islamic debate to prevent many young Tunisians from embracing jihadism, and that is a subject that should be included in the national debate and on which Ennahdha in particular should reflect.

The Tunisian model can only be saved through the empowerment of the factors and actors of the Tunisian exception. Tunisian institutions, politicians, intellectuals, and citizens should treasure their traditions, instead of labelling the past regime "extremist secularism" or "something to be erased". Equally, they should empower the brilliant and brave young people who started the revolution and broke the wall of fear forever.

The complementarity of the conference manifesto, issued in August 2015, and the anti-terror law's short-term strategy is a step in the right direction. It also confirms that Tunisians are determined to salvage the Jasmine Revolution and that its main actors are willing to support all the factors of the Tunisian exception in doing so.

INTRODUCTION



2010

REVOLUTIONARY

DOMINO EFFECT

INTRODUCTION

2010 REVOLUTIONARY DOMINO EFFECT



On 17 December 2010 in Sidi Bouzid, a rural town in central Tunisia, twenty-seven-year-old fruit vendor Mohammed Bouazizi immolated himself out of desperation over the confiscation of his produce. Nobody could imagine that this singular act of protest would be the catalyst for an uprising, sparking demonstrations and riots throughout the country. Yet it was, and it led not only to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's resignation, after twenty-three years in power, but it also drove other citizens in the region, namely in Egypt and Syria, to follow the Tunisian example and overcome the fear of their authoritarian rulers.

► DRIVERS, ACTORS, AND PHASES OF THE TUNISIAN UPHEAVAL

The Tunisian revolution was not organised at all; it was spontaneous and a natural consequence of the deep resentment growing among Tunisians in general, and among educated, but unemployed, young Tunisians in particular. Its two main drivers were:

- The high unemployment levels among young educated Tunisians, and
- The lack of freedom of expression, which included restrictions on internet and social media use that suffocated the Tunisian youth.

Soon, intellectuals, activists, and ordinary citizens—mainly young people—asking for real, not superficial, change joined the protests that would involve citizens at all levels, in both in urban and rural areas. Islamists, however, were apparently absent from this movement due to Ben Ali's harsh crackdown on them, which had forced their leaders to leave the country and had silenced their sympathisers on the ground.

The aforementioned drivers influenced the evolution and the distinct phases of the Tunisian upheaval:

Phase 1: Protests looked like a mainly apolitical social movement, simply demanding that the government provide more “jobs, dignity, and freedom”. As Tunisian journalist Taoufik Ben Brik highlighted, the youth demonstrating in the streets did not belong “to parties, trade unions, or specific civic associations”; they simply identified with Bouazizi’s fate;

Phase 2: The government responded with repression, and the demonstrators’ motto became “against Ben Ali”, but demonstrators remained otherwise apolitical;

Phase 3: After the president’s disappointing speech on 10 January 2011, their refrain changed to “Ben Ali out!”¹;

Phase 4: Five days later, after Ben Ali left the country, the chants turned to “RCD (Constitutional Democratic Rally party) out of the country”; at which point new players entered the post-revolutionary political arena.

These different phases showed the rising intensity of protests and an increased focus on goals that could be summed up in the expression “Dégage!” (“Clear off!”). This became the demonstrators’ refrain and hinted at the departure of Ben Ali and the end of the old regime structure.

► POLITICAL VACUUM AFTER THE UPHEAVAL

Ben Ali’s departure on 14 January 2011 left a political and social vacuum that had to be filled in the quickest way. As Tunisian politician Latifa Lakhdar explained, “one of the special features of the Tunisian revolution, a feature on which the historians should reflect, is that it took place notwithstanding the absence of real leadership and without the support of an executive group. Its spontaneous aspect, unexpected (above all, in the timing) was on the one hand, amazing and admirable, and on the other, misleading and uncontrollable”.²

Two possible scenarios emerged:

- The high unemployment levels among young educated Tunisians, and

¹ Ben Ali 2011.

² El Mouwaten 2011.

- An Iraqi scenario, in which all representatives of the old regime were expelled, creating yet another dangerous political vacuum that would have caused further chaos and instability;
- A South African scenario, which would have led to the choice of a charismatic leader, such as Mandela; however Tunisia had no such a person.

Tunisia managed to avoid both of these, and instead created a valid alternative that led to the immediate reconstitution of the government and institutions. Tunisia chose a challenging scenario in total awareness of its peculiarity.

The immediate aftermath of the revolution required urgent measures, resulting in the declaration of a state of emergency and the confirmation, by the Constitutional Court, of Fouad Mebazaa as acting president. A caretaker coalition government was also formed, which included members of the RCD taking positions in key ministries, along with other opposition figures, and elections were scheduled to take place within sixty days.

However, five, newly-appointed non-RCD ministers resigned almost immediately, and daily street protests continued in Tunis and other towns around the country. Protesters demanded that the new government have no RCD members and that the RCD itself be disbanded.

On 17 January, Prime Minister Ghannouchi appointed Yadh Ben Achour president of Tunisia's Higher Political Reform Commission, the institution charged with overseeing constitutional reform in the post-Ben Ali era and with deciding the rules that would govern future elections. An eminent scholar, Ben Achour came from one of the country's most distinguished families of scholars, and both his father and grandfather had been Grand Muftis of Tunisia.

Ten days later, the prime minister removed all former RCD members from government—except for himself—and on 6 February, the new interior minister suspended all RCD party activities for security reasons. Following further public protests, Ghannouchi himself resigned on 27 February and Béji Caïd Essebsi became prime minister.

On 1 March, Ennahdha was legalised, following a decision by the Tunisian transitional government to recognise all previously banned political parties and offering a possible amnesty for all political prisoners. In response to protesters' demands, the RCD was dissolved on 9 March 2011.

Events evolved quickly and, on 3 March 2011, elections were announced for the Constituent Assembly and scheduled for 23 October. Following years of dictatorship and no chance of plurality, Tunisia's first democratic elections fielded 11,686 candidates and 1,517 party lists. Unusually, after decades of a secular state promoting a reformed version of Islam—the prime example of which was the 1956 Code of Personal Status—the main topic during the 2011 electoral campaign was the role of Islam and secularism in political and social life. Ennahdha

emerged as a key actor of the electoral campaign: organised, and with no direct links with the Egyptian Brotherhood, the party was recognised by Western media and institutions as the main opposition and a moderate Islamist party.

Though it had not been active on the ground for years, Ennahdha won the first democratic elections with a relative majority of 41.7 per cent, securing ninety of the 217 parliamentary seats and winning in all electoral districts. Unlike in Egypt, the result could not be attributed only to relentless social protests on the ground, but rather, as Tarek Masoud pointed out in his book *Counting Islam*, to Ennahdha's ability to reach primarily economy-minded voters.³ Ideology mattered less than a candidate's or party's ability to commit credibly to serving voters. This strategy was later confirmed by Rached Ghannouchi, Ennahdha leader, in a *New York Times* op-ed about the 26 October 2014 presidential elections, which was published on 19 November 2014: "They [the elections] were an opportunity to address issues of unemployment, more inclusive economic growth, security, regional development and income inequality – in other words the bread-and-butter issues that matter to ordinary Tunisians".⁴

On top of this, however, were two other indirect factors that contributed to political Islam's victory: the network of Tunisian mosques played a role in helping Ennahdha to spread their message; and the disorganisation and inability to build a strong, united bloc of secular, leftist, and other former opposition parties.

The first electoral results also showed that those who had been expected to be the main players in the transition—women, the young, educated middle class, and former opposition groups that had remained in Tunisia and had taken to the streets—were not the winners of this first democratic exercise. However, their role would be most important and relevant for the future success of the Tunisian transition to democracy, as they would become the bulwarks against the advancement of Islamists in the country.

Ennahdha's victory also confirmed that previous Tunisian secular opposition would still have to remain as the main opposition of the newly elected majority and that it would play a fundamental, although indirect, role in the immediate post-revolution future as well.

³ Masoud 2014.

⁴ Ghannouchi 2014.



CHAPTER 1

THE TUNISIAN EXCEPTION

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In the aftermath of the 2010 popular uprising, Tunisia has often been described as an exception, particularly compared with Egypt, whose transition required the intervention of the army in 2013 to oust Mohammed Morsi, the first post-revolution president and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, following a popular petition launched by the Tamarod movement.

FACTORS IN THE TUNISIAN EXCEPTION

The Tunisian exception relied on three main factors:

- The high unemployment levels among young educated Tunisians, and
- Tunisia's cultural and historical background, including more than half a century of secularism, and respect for a Tunisian tradition of Islamic reform, which strongly influenced the way the transition was handled and partially succeeded;
- The Ennahdha Party, which, after being included in the political arena, pragmatically decided to accept the democratic challenge;
- Civil society, which that played a key role in limiting the Islamist agenda.

Yet the historian and anthropologist Emmanuel Todd described the Tunisian exception as the merging of three other key factors, which are complementary and do not exclude the aforementioned ones:

- A high literacy rate (for the period 2000–2004, 94,3% of young people aged 15–24 were able to read and write)
- A low fertility rate (two children per woman in 2005)

- A decreasing rate of endogamy, which is marriage within a specific tribe or between members of the same family.⁵

Both sets of these political, social, and economic factors strongly contributed to the initial success of the Tunisian post-revolution experience. Tunisia's small population—almost 11 million inhabitants versus more than 70 million in Egypt—can also be considered a helpful factor, which enabled easier control (also from a security perspective) of its delicate transition to democracy.

▀ THE NEED FOR A RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP

The transition from authoritarian regime to democracy, however, has never been an easy task, and it has always represented a country's most vulnerable period. For such a transition to succeed, it demands many prerequisites, the first of which is a comprehensive and responsible definition of "citizenship", which, in turn, transforms democracy from mere democratic elections to the full awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities.

The lack of such a fundamental background was confirmed during a meeting that took place in Paris on 10 February 2011, between Selim Jeddi, Habib Sayah, and other young Tunisians who had founded the website El Mouwaten ("The Citizen") immediately after the revolution, with the specific aim of helping their country, but mainly their peers, from abroad.⁶

Jeddi and Sayah highlighted that "the fall of the dictatorship marked the advent of full citizenship in Tunisia. The Tunisians regained their freedom and their dignity. Nevertheless, this emancipation is still fragile. We must therefore enhance the political culture and civic consciousness in Tunisia to ensure that this freedom can be fully utilised." The El Mouwaten initiative represented part of the effort to open an area of debate that had been off limits in their country before the revolution.

When asked about the main problems faced in the post-Ben Ali era, Tunisians responded that "they still have to learn what it means to be free", and pointed out that, for instance, journalists in their country should be taught to think and write in a new way. After years of being limited and censored, they had to learn how to use their own initiative. El Mouwaten's proposals partially echoed nineteenth century Tunisian intellectual and politician Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, who, in his treatise *The Surest Path to Knowledge Concerning the Condition of Countries*, noted a substantial difference between the Islamic and European understanding of freedom. He explained that in Europe this implied "freedom of expression, press and thought", but he also

⁵ Todd as quoted in Kasmi 2014, p. 84.

⁶ Interviews held in Paris in February 2011. The website has not been updated since 2012, but it is still available here: www.elmouwaten.com.

pointed out a deeper problem regarding the psychological wellbeing of people who had been deprived of freedom for long time.⁷

On El Mouwaten's website, its founders defined their main aims as follows:

"To defend freedom of expression, media independence and free access to all sources of information without restriction. To defend freedom of conscience and promote the model of a tolerant and open society. To promote an independent judiciary in the context of a strict separation of powers. To defend and expand women's freedoms. To replace the values of meritocracy at the center of Tunisian society while struggling against social injustice and corruption."

A survey of young Tunisians, taken between 11–24 March 2011, confirmed uncertainties about the future, as those questioned highlighted the difficulties in the transition and expressed their lack of trust in institutions and politicians.⁸ They had created the revolution from nothing and had managed to get rid of Ben Ali, but they still had to put their future and trust in the hands of the political actors in charge, most of whom were not of the same generation.

Nonetheless, they hoped that the new era would bring more equality and justice, and less corruption and unemployment. The lack of a true change and the disappointment in the government for not dealing with corruption and unemployment would be the main factors in the spread of various forms of resistance among young Tunisians.

► POLITICAL ISLAM: EGYPTIAN FAILURE VS. TUNISIAN SUCCESS

It was the Tunisian cultural and social background, the uniqueness and pragmatism of Tunisian political Islam, and the lack of political culture and consciousness that would influence the evolution and the destiny of the Jasmine Revolution and curb local Islamism.

Tunisian Mohammed Haddad, professor of comparative theology at the University of Manouba, has proposed removing the Muslim Brotherhood and the like from under the umbrella of "moderate Islamism" and categorizing it instead as "pragmatic Islamism". This definition would be indicative of a form of Islamism that has gone a step further, distancing itself from radical thinkers and including parts of the reformist tradition in its narrative.

Another fundamental difference between Egypt and Tunisia is that, while in Egypt Muslim Brotherhood members and sympathisers took part in the demonstrations against Hosni Mubarak, who had officially banned the group, but had allowed it to be active in society and politics, in Tunisia Ennahdha Party leaders were in exile and, apart from some "invisible" sympathisers, played no active role in the uprising. Ennahdha's leaders returned to their

⁷ Khayr al-Din 1967, p. 160ff..

⁸ National Democratic Institute 2011.

homeland within two weeks of Ben Ali's departure. However, on the Friday preceding their arrival, the management of Tunisian mosques had already passed from the former regime's imam to the imam connected to the Muslim Brotherhood.

After Mohammed Morsi's ouster, Rached Ghannouchi described the failure of the Egyptian experience as "a fruit of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's naiveté."⁹ However, since then, Ennahdha has issued statements strongly condemning the "barefaced coup", "the arrests of leaders of the Freedom and Justice Party and the Muslim Brotherhood", arguing that "the coup will damage democracy" and denouncing "the participation of Muslim and Christian religious authorities to the coup".¹⁰ On 26 December 2013, in another statement, Ennahdha criticised the Egyptian government for designating the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation, describing the decision as the act of "a subversive government and a further act of rage against a political faction loyal to democracy and to peace."¹¹

Besides this, the disappointing political experience of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood would affect future decisions by and strategies of the Ennahdha leadership. However, Ennahdha's pragmatism is also due to international factors. Indeed, the banning of the Brotherhood and arrest of most of its key leaders in Egypt has turned Ghannouchi into the movement's political and theological figurehead, and Ennahdha in the only political party with connections to the global Muslim Brotherhood that is recognised and accepted at the international level.

This is the reason why if 14 January 2011 marked the end of Ben Ali's regime, then 9 January 2014, thanks to Ennahdha's pragmatism, was a turning point in the history and evolution of Tunisia's transition to democracy. The "spontaneous" resignation of the head of government, Ali Larayedh, who was linked to Ennahdha, represented political Islam's compromise in order to prevent a repeat of the Egyptian scenario, which had as a consequence not only the ban of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also its inclusion in the list of terror organisations in Egypt and in the United Arab Emirates.

As will be demonstrated in chapter 2, the publication by the Constituent Assembly of the amendments to the new Constitution already hinted at Ennahdha's possible tactical "yielding". A number of measures—no direct reference to Shari'a law; no trace of the "basic principles of the Shari'a" as proposed by Ennahdha; Article 2 stating that "Tunisia is a civilian country based on citizenship, the will of the people, and the rule of law"; the approval of Article 45 regarding equality between men and women—all confirmed on the one hand, the Islamists' failure to promote their religious views at the political level, and, on the other hand, their ability to compromise.

On 10 January 2014 the Washington Post Editorial Board published an op-ed entitled "Tunisia's democratic compromises should serve as a regional model." The article highlighted the fact

⁹ Al Arabiya 2014.

¹⁰ Ennahdha 2013.

¹¹ Ibid.

that, unlike the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which after winning the first elections saw its president ousted in July 2013, Ennahdha's prime minister, instead of engaging in a useless arguments with secular parties, "stepped down to make way for a technocratic administration that will govern until elections."¹²

Ennahdha's strategy in Tunisia has been to secure—at least at the political level—the Tunisian transition, and Ghannouchi's pragmatism managed to avoid—at least temporarily—both his party's and his country's political collapse. This was also due to the fact, as will be shown in the next chapter, that Ennahdha and its leader have been able, over the years, to adapt their form of Islamism to the requirements of Tunisian politics and circumstances. They have done so by formulating a new language and a new message in order to sound more familiar and less "Islamic" to Western audiences, and to convince their internal audience of the party's apparent distancing from the Egyptian Brotherhood and of its commitment to democracy, justice, and Tunisia's future. However, as we will see later, this approach was not sufficient to stop the rise of terrorism and radicalisation among young Tunisians.

¹² Washington Post 2014.

CHAPTER 2



TUNISIAN ISLAM VS. TUNISIAN ISLAMISM

CHAPTER 2

TUNISIAN ISLAM VS. TUNISIAN ISLAMISM



Over the last two centuries, Tunisia has been shaping a reformed and modern interpretation of Islam. Situated in the Maghreb region, far from both Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Tunisia has been the birthplace of many intellectuals, theologians, and politicians who, in different ways, have formulated a particular interpretation of Islam, which is the natural product of the history and society of the home of the Jasmine Revolution.

► TUNISIAN ISLAM

In 1867, the diplomat and statesman Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi wrote *The Surest Path to Knowledge Concerning the Condition of Countries*, a fundamental essay in which he demonstrated that the state advances when ruled by justice, but declines when justice is absent. However, the key objective of the book was to show that Islam, at one point in time, had initiated many great scientific and technical achievements from which Europe later borrowed. For the same reason, he argued, no harm would come of Muslims judiciously borrowing from European ideas and models. He attempted to convince Muslims to accept necessary new reforms by showing that such a course was consistent with, not in contradiction of, Islam.

► TUNISIAN ISLAM AND THE 1956 CODE OF PERSONAL STATUS

Less than a century later, in 1929, Tahar Haddad published the essay *Our Woman in Law and Society*, in which he stated that universal education was fundamental to the advancement of his country; he encouraged all women not only to attend school, but also to participate more broadly in society. Haddad's work relied on an open interpretation of Islam that would provide the solid background of the Tunisian Code of Personal Status (CPS) issued in August 1956 by Habib Bourguiba.¹³

¹³ Haddad 1930.

This document still represents a landmark in Tunisian society and a unique occurrence in the Islamic world. In the name of a reformed and modern interpretation of Islam, the CPS banned polygamy and allowed women to petition for divorce.

Other notable articles were: Article 3, stating that "marriage is obtained only through the consent of both spouses", therefore requiring the presence of the bride at the drafting of the marriage contract and the consent of the woman to the union; Article 5, establishing the minimum age of a spouse at 18 years; Article 18, bravely forbidding one of the foundations of Islamic family law, namely polygamy: "Polygamy is prohibited. [...] Incurs the same penalties anyone having married outside of the forms [of marriage] determined by law No. 57-3 of 1 August 1957, which regulates civil status, who commits to a new union while continuing life in common with the first spouse." Even traditional Islamic law divorce, through unilateral—male—repudiation, became bilateral, applying to both spouses. If Article 29 is a definition of the term, Article 30 specifies "divorce can only take place before a court of law", and Article 31 reiterates that "The court grants the divorce: 1. In case of mutual consent between spouses; 2. At the request of one of the spouses on the grounds of harm suffered; 3. At the request of either the husband or wife."

The document once again mentions men and women equally. An equality that is also emphasised in Article 23 on the rights and responsibilities of spouses within a marriage:

"Each spouse should treat the other with kindness, live on good terms with each other, and avoid causing the other harm. The couple must fulfill conjugal duties in accordance with traditions and customs. In family matters they cooperate in the raising of children, as well as in managing their affairs, including education, travel, and financial support. The husband, as head of the family, must provide for the needs of the wife and children in accordance with his means [...] The woman should contribute to household expenses if she has the means."¹⁴

The confirmation of the CPS's adhesion to Islam, namely to the unambiguous verses of Qur'an, comes from the fact that women inherit half the amount that men do, and that a Tunisian woman cannot marry a Christian man (this is not openly mentioned in the CPS, but it is specified in two internal administrative documents).

The importance of the document and its relevance to Tunisian women is confirmed by the fact that, even during Ben Ali's rule, legislative reforms have continued. The following amendments to the Code of Personal Status have been approved: providing women with permission to institute legal proceedings in their own name; affirming the principle of equality and partnership between spouses, provided both parties cooperate in managing the family's affairs; preventing manipulation of divorce proceedings by a husband; allowing spouses to agree to a joint property regime; and granting women the right to give their family name to a child born of an unknown father, as well as the opportunity for gene-testing to prove parenthood. Even the Tunisian Penal

¹⁴ Tunisian Code of Personal Status 1956

Code has been reformed and now imposes heavy penalties for murdering a woman for adultery. There was progressive development of the national machinery, a sign of which was the reconstitution, in 1999, of the Ministry for Women and Family Affairs into a full ministry and the doubling of the ministry's budget since 1994. All this happened in the name of and in total respect of Islam.¹⁵

The Tunisian school, founded by Khayr al-Din and Haddad, formed the background of the code, and it is a school of thought that has been followed for years by intellectuals and academics who have been promoting human rights in Islam and combatting all radicalisation in their country.¹⁶ Among them, feature outstanding names such as Mohammed Charfi, Yadh Ben Achour, and Mohammed Talbi, all of whose writings have—directly and indirectly—built the cultural foundations for many Tunisians and remain one of the main antidotes to the country's radicalisation.

▶ TUNISIAN ISLAMISM

Another player in the Tunisian exception is the Ennahdha party, which has links to the global Muslim Brotherhood, but seems more pragmatic and democratic than its Egyptian counterpart. But can Ennahdha be considered a Tunisian, and moderate version, of Islamism? What is the relationship between Ennahdha, Tunisian Islam, and global Islamism? These are the crucial questions that have to be answered in order to assess the role of Tunisian political Islam in the post-revolution period.

A partial answer comes from Azzam Tamimi's book about Rached Ghannouchi. Here, Tamimi highlights the influence of Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, on the founder of the Ennahdha movement, namely in the "admonition to his followers that they should always bear in mind that they had two fundamental goals. The first goal is 'to free the Islamic homeland from all foreign influence'. The second goal is 'to establish an Islamic state that acts according to the precepts of Islam, applies its social code, advocates its principles, and propagates its mission to all of mankind'.¹⁷

Ghannouchi, according to Tamimi, was also attracted by "al-Banna's reminder to his followers that these symptoms and phenomena were not exclusive to Egypt; they could be observed in many other Islamic countries. Wherever they were [...] members of the Ikhwan should endeavor to reform education, to fight poverty, ignorance, disease, and crime, and to create an exemplary society deserving to be associated with the Islamic sharia."¹⁸

¹⁵ Ghorbal 2012, pp. 16–21.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 55–66.

¹⁷ Tamimi 2001, p. 38.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

Tamimi points out that Ghannouchi soon understood that there was also a Tunisian Islamic legacy that he had to take into account and that included Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi. Ghannouchi's assessment was that al-Tunisi's was "an Islamic project aimed at learning and borrowing from Western civilisation without conceding the country's Arab-Islamic identity."¹⁹

Along with his pragmatism and adaptability, Ghannouchi's awareness of the Brotherhood's ideological heritage and of the Tunisian legacy spawned a highly flexible and adaptable movement. Another layer, which is fundamental to understanding the contemporary Ennahdha party, is the influence of Ghannouchi's exile in the United Kingdom (1989–2011). There, he wrote his fundamental essay *Public Liberties in the Islamic State*²⁰ in which he outlines his ideas of freedom and democracy based on Islamic principles. His critique of Western democracy is very blunt:

"A society run by a Western democratic system of government is shattered and confused. Greed, deception and brutality prevail in the absence of the influence of an absolute value that transcends the will of man."

"Some of the oldest democracies, such as Britain and France, had ministries for the colonies. The same democracies, in which homosexuality, fornication, gambling, abortion, and birth control have been legalised, impose unfair conditions on weaker nations and show no sympathy whatsoever despite the miserable conditions endured by them."

At the same time, Ghannouchi states that the Western model "is still a thousand times better than despotism that is grinding the masses in some of the Arab countries where the State has been turned into a highly sophisticated machine of repression."²¹ This statement is confirmed by his critique of the secular experience in the Islamic world:

"The Islamic State's function is to accomplish Islam's objective of creating a 'community' that dedicates itself for the establishment of good and justice and for combating evil and oppression. [...] it was Western colonisers who used force to replace shariah law by Western law in the Lausanne treaty. This was only possible with the collaboration of an elite, including people like Bourguiba and Ataturk, that viewed Islam just as a secular Christian would view his religion, considering it to be an obstacle that hinders progress and development."²²

So, in his eyes, colonisation and secular rulers were responsible for the Tunisian deterioration and for growing injustice.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 40.

²⁰ Ghannouchi 1993.

²¹ Tamimi 2001, p. 87ff.

²² Tamimi 2003, p. 94.

Ghannouchi's view of Bourguiba and Ben Ali's Tunisia is critical and does not recognise the presence and importance of Tunisian reformed Islam, at least during Bourguiba's rule. He defines their approach as "secular extremism", employing the same expression used by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, which he recently used to define as one the root causes of radicalisation in the country.

As far as the relationship with global Islamism, although Ghannouchi and Ennahdha have managed to be perceived as separate from the Muslim Brotherhood, their links with its global organisation are evident and undeniable.²³ Ghannouchi is a member of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), and is the Assistant Secretary-General of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS). Both institutions are headed by Qaradawi, the Muslim Brotherhood's main theologian and scholar, and the man whom Ghannouchi welcomed in Tunisia after the revolution, along with other members of the global movement like Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

▶ TUNISIAN ISLAMISM AFTER 2010

As soon as the political parties ideologically affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood entered the political arena after 2010, first in Tunisia, later in Egypt, they essentially changed their language into a more westernised one, deleting for instance any direct reference to Islam and replacing it with the words "freedom", "justice", and "development". These were to be understood as an Islamic code, as was the case with the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt.

In Tunisia, Ennahdha had to find a balance between fighting the previous "secular extremism" and wanting to bring back direct references to Islam. The task was more difficult than in Egypt because past Tunisian regimes had harshly repressed radical Islamists, while promoting a strong civil society composed of many associations, which, although under tight control and severe restrictions, had been working on the ground.²⁴

As already mentioned, Ennahdha managed to present itself as an independent and separate entity from the Egyptian Brotherhood and to attract sympathies and allies at all levels of Tunisian society.

On 27 October 2011, many Western media outlets announced the Ennahdha victory as "the victory of moderate Islamism."²⁵ Western enthusiasm, however, was at odds with the Arab media's disappointment and questions.

A day later, in the international Arab newspaper Al Hayat, Raghida Dergham wrote an op-ed entitled "The West is hijacking Arab revolutions to the benefit of Islamists". It began with the following statement: "While the West speaks of the necessity of accepting the results of the

²³ Ferjani 1991, pp. 197–251.

²⁴ Redissi 2012, pp. 111–126.

²⁵ von Rohr 2011.

democratic process, in terms of Islamists coming to power in the Arab region, there are increased suspicions regarding the goals pursued by the West in its new policy of rapprochement with the Islamist movement, in what is a striking effort at undermining modern, secular and liberal movements." As for Tunisia, Dergham pointed out that "The followers of the Ennahdha in Tunisia are wrapping their message with moderation as they prepare to hijack the democracy that Tunisia's youth dream of, while being met by applause and encouragement from the West in the name of the 'fairness' of the electoral process."²⁶

Yet Rached Ghannouchi, since his return from exile and throughout the electoral campaign, had tempered his message and had assured Tunisians that he did not want a theocratic state, despite having in the past praised the Iranian revolution. He had spoken of his respect for the rights acquired by Tunisian women in the past, of using Turkey as a model, not Egypt, and it was clear from all writings that he would propose a new, modern, pragmatic version of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology to be applied to the Tunisian exception.

However, although Ghannouchi's background is multifaceted, its most important aspect is the legacy of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology, the contemporary ideological and theological mentor of which is Yusuf Qaradawi.

In 2001, Qaradawi, in his *Extremist secularism defying Islam: The model of Turkey and Tunisia* harshly criticised and condemned pre-revolutionary Tunisia from an Islamic perspective:

"The Tunisian model [of secularism] is the worst and most disgraceful, and does not correspond to the disbelief of Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab, but to that of Abdullah son of Sallul, who is the head of the hypocrites, because in the [Tunisian] Constitution article says that 'the official state religion is Islam', but the articles to follow denied at every turn that statement."²⁷

In the same volume, Qaradawi did not spare the Tunisian Code of Personal Status. He wrote:

"This law is in contrast with the Noble Koran that includes polygamy among its precepts [...] it is astonishing that the Code forbids polygamy, and does not allow it under any circumstance [...] this same Code allows and does not condemn adultery."²⁸

As already mentioned, the Tunisian upheaval was exempt from any Islamist influence or ideology on the ground. However, in January 2011 during his program on Al Jazeera, Qaradawi urged Tunisians to revolt, and, in May 2011, after Mubarak's ouster in Egypt, he stated that "at present the Arab peoples are doing the best jihad." With few exceptions, Ennahdha's Islamic terminology has been coated in a modern and westernised language, but Qaradawi's statements and beliefs will always be a fundamental background of its narrative.

²⁶ Dergham 2011.

²⁷ Qaradawi 2001, p. 121.

²⁸ Qaradawi 2001, p. 125.

In 2004, Tunisian intellectual Raja Benslama explained the aforementioned approach and adjustment:

"Despite the failure of the idea of the existence of the Islamic state, it does not necessarily mean that the latter, or rather some of them, have adapted to the new reality; a reality that lives a global action against terrorism; a reality of democratisation; a reality that opens to a global legislation and cosmopolitanism. An analysis of discourses produced by these movements confirms a review process that has led to new contents. First of all, they are eliminating sacred elements, pillars of the political vision of their founders, including the dream of the Caliphate, the idea of God's rule, the obligation for women to be only mothers, while some movements are introducing the concepts of democracy and human rights."²⁹

This is what happened in Tunisia and Egypt on the eve of the first post-revolution elections. The keyword of Islamist parties was "freedom", but with an Islamic meaning. The revolutionary youths in Tunisia and in Egypt clamoured for freedom; Copts called for freedom; the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood added the word to their slogan. However, these groups were demanding three completely different forms of freedom. The youth of the Tunisian revolution wanted freedom over tyranny and despotism (primarily freedom of expression); Copts wanted freedom of worship and equality as citizens; to the Muslim Brotherhood freedom means freedom from oppressors and it is limited by Allah's limits. Consequently, from a certain point of view, freedom, as conceived by the Muslim Brotherhood, could be close to the same freedom sought by protesters in Avenue Bourguiba in Tunis and Tahrir Square in Cairo.

Future events and political debates would further expose some ambiguities and highlight some discrepancies in Ennahdha's narrative.

▶ TUNISIAN ISLAM VS. ISLAMISM DURING THE DEBATE AROUND THE NEW CONSTITUTION

During the drafting of the new Tunisian Constitution, very clear differences emerged about how to define the role of religion and women in society. Ennahdha, which had a majority in the Constituent Assembly, had the opportunity and the power to promote its views in favour of a more fundamentally Islamic text. However, the Tunisian exception, strengthened by a society where secularism existed side-by-side with Islam, forced Ennahdha to step back and accept the country's solid and deeply-rooted background of secularism and Tunisian Islam.

In March 2012, Ennahdha announced that it would not support replacing existing law with Shari'a and that it would maintain the secular nature of the state.³⁰

²⁹ Benslama 2004.

³⁰ Reuters 2012, and Marks 2014, p. 20ff.

Already in October 2011, in an interview with the Turkish newspaper *Today's Zaman*, Ghannouchi had stated:

“Ennahdha has always maintained that it is not for a theocratic state and that it rejects the imposition of any beliefs or lifestyle on the people, whether under the name of liberalism or Islam. It has always struggled for a society where the freedoms of belief, conscience and choice are guaranteed and protected. Tunisia’s Arab-Islamic identity is a matter of national consensus as expressed in the Tunisian Constitution. However, neither the state nor anyone else has [the] right to monopolise the interpretation of Islam or impose any particular understanding on people or restrict their life choices because we do not have a church in Islam. Freedom is a principal value for us, and there should be no fear that we would violate it.”³¹

Ghannouchi’s statements meant that Article 1 of the 1956 Constitution would remain unchanged in the new fundamental law. Article 1 reads: “Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state, its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic and it is a republic.”

Welcomed by both secular parties and the West, Ennahdha’s stance on the issue was criticised by Salafis—the hardline Islamists—who wanted a full implementation of Shari’a law. This was the first sign of deep disagreements within the Islamic bloc, with Salafis finding it difficult to accept Ennahdha’s moderation and gradualism in implementing Shari’a and in imposing a more conservative version of Islam on all aspects of life and law. While Ennahdha clearly understood the background and the society with which it had to deal, Salafis did not, nor did they accept the “middle ground” that as always been a pillar of Muslim Brotherhood ideology.

Ghannouchi repeated many times that his party would not use the law to impose religion, pointing out that there would not be any attempt to “introduce ambiguous definitions into the Constitution with the risk of dividing people”. At the same time, he underlined that “many Tunisians do not have a clear image of sharia, and erroneous practices in certain countries have aroused fear.”

However, the debate about the role that Islamic law should play in the new Constitution and its end result pushed Shari’a go out through the door, only for it to return through the window.

The Constituent Declaration (*Bayan al-ta’sisi*) of 6 June 1981 by the Islamic Tendency Movement (*Harakat al-ittijah al-islami*), which in 1989 would change its name to Ennahdha, stated that it was primarily seeking to revive the Islamic personality of Tunisia in order to regain its position as an important base of Islamic civilisation in Africa, and to put an end to the vassalage and westernisation of the country.

It also declared that the main aim would be to renew Islamic thought to reflect the constant and eternal principles of Islam (*usul al-islam al-thabita*) and the requirements of modern life, and to purify that thought from both the residues of the ages of decline and the effects of

³¹ Ghannouchi 2011.

westernisation. The declaration argued that people should regain their right to self-determination, and that economic life should be rebuilt on human foundations. The movement aimed to contribute to the revival of an Islamic civil and political entity on local, North African, Arab, and global levels, “in order to save our peoples and mankind as a whole from mental loss, social injustice and international hegemony”.

The movement’s declaration did not explicitly call for either the establishment of an Islamic state/caliphate or for the implementation of Shari’a.

In order to achieve those objectives, the same document stated that the movement would breathe life back into mosques as centers of worship and of inclusive popular mobilisation; it would encourage intellectual and cultural movements and support the Arabisation of educational and administrative systems. They rejected violence as a means to change, as well as the despotism that leads to violence, and they would strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and cooperation with all Muslims, and assist liberation movements world- wide.³²

On 4 June 2012, more than thirty years after the Constituent Declaration of the Islamic Tendency Movement, the Ennahdha party managed to insert its core contents into the preamble of Tunisia’s new Constitution’s. Though it made no direct reference to Shari’a law, its similarities to the original declaration were striking.

The preamble read as follows:

“In the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate. We, the deputies of the Tunisian People, members of the National Constituent Assembly, elected through the merits of the Revolution of dignity, freedom, and justice, With pride for our people’s struggle, and in response to the aims of the revolution — which was the culmination of the battle for liberation from colonialism and tyranny, and which accomplished a victory for the will for freedom — and out of loyalty to the martyrs and to the sacrifices of successive generations, and for the sake of a final break from oppression and corruption, Founded on the constant fundamentals of Islam and its open and moderate aims, and on the lofty and humanistic values inspired by the civilizational accomplishments of the Tunisian People, which are the fruit of consecutive stages of [the Tunisian people’s] history, and from their reformist movement based on the fundamentals of their Arab-Muslim identity, and from universal civilizational accomplishments, and adhering to their [the Tunisian People’s] national achievements, for the sake of building a participatory, democratic, republican system, comprised of a civil state based on institutions, and where the power of the people would be realised on the basis of a peaceful alternation of power, and on the principle of a separation and balance of power, and with the right to govern founded on plurality, administrative neutrality, enlightened governance, and free elections, which are the key elements of political debate, where power would be based on the respect of human rights, the supremacy of the law, the independence of the Judiciary, and on justice and equality in rights and responsibilities among

³² Ghannouchi 2011, p. 259ff.

all citizens, and among all groups and regions, in harmony with the environment, with a care that guarantees to future generations the continuation of a secure life for a better future, building upon Mankind's status as a dignified being, in harmony with cultural and civilizational affiliation with the umma, starting from national unity based on citizenry, fraternity, and societal solidarity, and working to establish Maghreb unity as a step toward achieving Arab unity, and toward the integration of Muslim peoples, in cooperation with the peoples of the world, and to serve justice for all those oppressed, and to grant individuals the right to determine their fates, and for the movements for rightful liberation, at the forefront of which is the liberation of Palestine, Supporting the People's will to be creators of their own history, striving for innovation, while remaining open to cultural contributions, on the basis of peace and human solidarity, and on the sovereignty of national decree. We, in the name of the people, and with the blessing of God, draft this Constitution."³³

Despite numerous similarities to the 1981 document—such as references to the end of tyranny and colonisation; to Arab unity; to the brotherhood and cooperation among Muslims; to supporting movements of rightful liberation—there is no mention of Shari'a.

The original declaration refers to “constant and eternal principles of Islam” (*usul al-islam al-thabita*), while in the preamble this becomes “the constant fundamentals of Islam” (*thawabit al-islam*). Islamic law distinguishes between the constants, matters that are fixed of religion (*thawabit*), and matters that are subject to interpretation (*mutaghayyirat*). In March 2006, during the program *Sharia and Life* on Al Jazeera, Yusuf al-Qaradawi gave a clear explanation of the term *thawabit*:

“The religious constants (*thawabit*) are matters that are proved through definitive and unambiguous texts and unanimously approved by Muslims and inherited unanimously and agreed through general consensus such as fundamental beliefs of faith in God, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and acts of worship such prayer, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage, peremptory taboos such as blood and meat of pork, alcohol, adultery, as well as other things, such as moral values and virtues sent through the Messenger, unambiguous laws concerning buying and selling, marriage, divorce, inheritance and things.”

The constant fundamentals of Islam mentioned in the Tunisian Constitution are the pillars of Shari'a that no Islamist party can ignore. Ghannouchi himself confirmed this on 3 June 2012 during a conference entitled “Consensus in the political thought and practice of the Ennahdha movement”. Answering a question about the death penalty he said that “the revolution has rendered the state to the people and therefore to Islam, which had been marginalised in the name of modernisation.” Yet he noted that his party was working “to implement a modern Tunisian society, but following the path of Islam”, and added that “the abolition of the death

³³ Tunisia's Constitution of 2014, preamble.

penalty is contrary to the precepts of Islamic sharia", meaning that it is contrary to one of the constants of Islam.³⁴

Another example of how Tunisian political Islam was contained by civil society is shown in the debate about women and their position in the new Constitution. On 1 August 2012, the Commission on Rights and Freedoms of the Constituent Assembly—with Ennahdha deputies having nine out of the twelve votes—approved Article 28 of the new Constitution.

The article read: "The State guarantees the protection of women's rights, it consolidates their [past] gains, considering women as fundamental partners to men in nation-building and who carry out complementary roles within the family".

That version had prevailed over a previous draft, which stated: "The State guarantees women's rights and their gains in all sectors. It is forbidden to issue laws that could endanger them in any way. The State must fight against any form of discrimination, physical and psychological violence against women."

Equality between men and women (*musawa*) was replaced by "complementarity" (*takamul*) and raised the possibility for further revisions of the Code of Personal Status in the name of Islam. Although the word *muwatinun* (citizens), stated early in the Constitution, makes all Tunisians—men and women—equal in the eyes of the law, Article 28 reintroduces women's complimentary to men.

As a reaction to this, on 13 August, which is Tunisian Women's Day, men and women took to the streets of Tunis to demonstrate against the complementarity article. Slogans and placards clearly hinted at the Tunisian tradition and its interpretation of Islam: "We are not daughters of the Saudis; we are daughters of Tahar Haddad"; "We are equal, not complementary"; "We want Article 28 to be abolished"; "Neither men nor women, only citizens." These slogans also highlighted the refusal of any kind of imported interpretation of Islam, whether it was the Saudi one or the radical one of the Muslim Brotherhood coming from Egypt.³⁵

At the same time, another battle was being waged in Manouba University by Tunisian university professor Amel Grami. She was opposing a Salafist "sit-in" and associated demonstrations against dean Habib Kazdaghli's decision to implement the university's statute and impose a ban on fully veiled female students. Regarding the protests over Article 28, Grami wrote:

"Who supports the complementarity denies the condition of Tunisians, ignores the daily efforts along the road of life. Who today denies women their rights and demands to replace the tradition to fundamental human rights ignores history, the history of Tunisian women activists [...] those who now want a woman to be a symbol of virtue, honour and Arab and Islamic identity and the custodian of cultural heritage becoming a 'mother of', a 'wife of', a 'daughter of' ignores that Tunisian women wanted to be citizens, to be allies in the construction of the united and one

³⁴ BusinessNews 2012.

³⁵ Kasmi 2015.

Second Republic in the name of freedoms, rights to achieve equality before the law without any discrimination, to establish freedom of thought, expression and faith."³⁶

Grami's words are an excellent example of the feelings that have permeated Tunisian society in general, and women's organisations in particular, since 1 August, and which resulted in the 13 August demonstration, igniting a heated debate between Ennahdha and Tunisian advocates of equality between the sexes.

On 13 August, Rached Ghannouchi issued a statement about Tunisian women in which he tried to clarify his movement's position on the issue:

"With regard specifically to the woman, the movement published in the mid-eighties an important text entitled *The woman between the Qur'an and the reality of Muslims*, which was an explicit invitation to the participation of women in political and social activity, as well as confirming the official position [of the movement] on the Code of Personal Status since July 1988, and considering it an example of progress within the process of interpretation within Islam. Since then the position has remained unchanged without any ambiguity."³⁷

The text is an essay by Ghannouchi that was reprinted in 2000 by the Maghreb Center for Research and Translation in London.³⁸ His 2012 statement implies respect for and acceptance of the content of the 1956 Code, however the contents of his earlier essay clearly went in the opposite direction.

A specific chapter of the Code carries a very explicit title: "The destruction of the family in Tunisia and the Code of Personal Status."³⁹

From the beginning, Ghannouchi expressed many reservations about this chapter at both theological and ideological levels.

On page 101 of his essay, and contradicting what he had stated recently in the press, he wrote: "The social condition that emerges from local and temporal context of this Code is not governed, in general, by the values and laws of Islam, although some external aspects can be attributed to Islam." On the following page he downplayed Bourguiba's role: "It is certain that the Code of Personal Status has protected the woman from such oppression [...] nevertheless the achievement of education [by women] was not due to Bourguiba, but it is a general achievement of women in the Arab-Muslim world". This contradicts the assertions of scholar Mounira Charrad who said that "the Code of Personal Status was not a State response to

³⁶ Grami 2012.

³⁷ Ennahdha 2012.

³⁸ Ghannouchi 2000.

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 99-114.

pressure from a movement of women mass protest"⁴⁰, implying that it was almost imposed in order to improve the societal condition of Tunisian women.

Ghannouchi also underlined that the code was a way of spreading Western values and criticizing anything of Islamic and Arab heritage, and that “the great aspiration was push women in every sector of society in order to show that we did believe in the equality between man and woman. Woman was pushed into the police creating many problems, in the army, women became drivers of buses and planes [...] all this to demonstrate that our regime was really civilised... and that the Tunisian woman was free!”⁴¹ Ghannouchi’s view of the Code was made very clear when he criticised it for being “dangerous” and “against the intellectual, cultural and legal heritage” of Tunisia, and for being a clear influence of the “Western wave”.⁴² In the subsequent pages, the leader of Ennahdha explained the Islamic idea of complementarity and the idea of Islamic authority (*qawwama*) of men upon women, which was expressed in the original draft article 28 of the new Tunisian Constitution and promoted by his movement.⁴³ Although at the end of the chapter, Ghannouchi encourages the participation of women into political life, it was clear that women’s activism should be understood in an Islamic framework, which was not the one presented in Bourguiba’s code.

The following—courtesy of the Italian edition of the Qur’an and convert Hamza Roberto Piccardo’s explanation of Surah II, 228—is how complementarity should be understood in an Islamic context:

"They have rights equivalent to their duties, according to good habits, but men have more responsibility. [...] This verse may give rise to misunderstandings, because it might give the impression that enshrines a disparity between the rights of men and women. [...] It is therefore a relative superiority in certain fields [...] but it has to be understood in terms of the intrinsic value of being male and female, and never to be discharged in the direction of a hateful domain or blind imposition. [...] The physiological and psychological differences between male and female should, in respect of their diversity, create a harmonious development of the family and society. Male sensibility is mostly exterior, projected in a field outside the family that tends to become public and political. The female one is mostly interior, attentive to itself, aiming at the protection of the acquired or the acquisition of simple means of sustenance and security [...] Within the family the respect of the Law and the Tradition of Allah means to avoid creating situations that require an affirmation of power that mortifies the complementarity of spouses. [...] Being different and complementary also implies the assumption by man of the lead, which exercised in the right way, does not undervalue the female, but completes her."

To return to the Tunisian debate, further demonstrations and the strong anchor of local tradition finally lead to the disappearance of the earlier Article 28 and to the implementation of Article 21,

⁴⁰ Chaddad 2001, p. 219.

⁴¹ Ghannouchi 2000, p. 103.

⁴² Ibid, p. 104.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 112.

which read: “All citizens, male and female, have equal rights and duties, and are equal before the law without any discrimination”.

The aforementioned examples confirm the internal debate that has existed since the inception of the upheaval in Tunisia and the important role played by Tunisia’s political and religious tradition during the transitional period. At the same time, they highlight that Ennahdha “has worked – sometimes by strategic choice, sometimes as a result of immense pressure from political opposition and secular civil society – to keep itself a relevant and viable political player.”⁴⁴

ISLAMISM VS. SECULAR CIVIL SOCIETY

Another aspect relevant to post-revolution Tunisia was the clash between Islamism/Salafism and secular civil society. It highlighted the difficult position in which political Islam found itself, coping with two opposing views of life and religion, as well as its inability to contain radical ideology and sometimes the tendencies inside Ennahdha itself.

The first example of this dates to a few months after the revolution. Nadia El-Fani’s documentary *Ni Allah Ni maître* [Neither Allah nor Master], denouncing Islamic extremism and defending secularism, was screened at the Cannes Film Festival on 18 May 2011. Yet it would soon become one of the first victims of censorship in Tunisia in the name of Islam. El-Fani was criticised and attacked because she was an avowed atheist and because her documentary was seen to have insulted Islam.

On 26 June 2011, hundreds of Islamic extremists blocked the entrance to the AfricArt Cinema at the documentary’s screening in Tunis. The demonstrators’ chants were unequivocal: “Tunisia is an Islamic state” and “Allahu Akbar”. An invitation by the event organisers to protesters to view the film before judging it was rejected out of hand.

On top of this, Tunisian police advised against the screening, and they intervened late and indecisively when an attack took place. Thirty Salafis arrested during the riots were soon released, while Nadia El-Fani had to appear in court.

In a statement on 8 July 2011, the Tunisian Ministry of Culture, led by Beschaouch Ezzeddine, stated that, “the film did not receive any state subsidy, either before or after the Jasmine Revolution”. The ministry document also highlighted the importance of “verifying any information before spreading it to avoid provoking or disturbing public opinion.” Meanwhile, El-Fani opted, in a decision bordering self-censorship, to change the film’s title from *Ni Allah Ni maître* to the less controversial, but more ironic, *Laïcité, Inch’Allah* (Secularism, Allah willing).

⁴⁴ Marks 2014, p. 22.

The events surrounding filmmaker Nadia El-Fani highlighted new challenges for the Tunisian transition. Before the Jasmine Revolution, while Ben Ali had oppressed his opponents regardless of their political or ideological views, Tunisia had never seen condemnations or attacks for blasphemy or apostasy.

However, the true fracture in the history of post-revolutionary Tunisia was the assassination of left-wing activist and lawyer Chokri Belaïd on 6 February 2013.

Belaïd was a thorny person, not just from a political point of view, but also from a religious point of view due to his critical position on radical Islam. In the period that followed the Jasmine Revolution, as a lawyer, he had taken on some of the most pressing cases, such as the defence of Nessma TV executives accused of airing the "blasphemous" cartoon Persepolis, and the defense of Habib Khazdaghli, the dean of the University of Manouba, charged with preventing fully-veiled female students from attending classes or exams.

Belaïd's murder was a tragic event aimed at disrupting the Tunisian political horizon and destroying the already unstable balance between Ennahdha and the opposition. It was also evidence of Ennahdha's failure to contain radical Islam, resulting in a rise of terrorism in the country.

As Tunisian writer Amal Mousa commented:

"Belaïd's assassination, the subsequent assassination of Mohamed Brahmi and the killing of Tunisian soldiers over the past year, all bear the hallmarks of Takfirist Jihadism. Therefore, it is this ideology, not to mention the Takfirist sleeper cells that adhere to it, which is responsible for Ennahda's collapse. Groups like this remain active in Tunisia, despite the success of some security operations against them. In many ways, this Salafist Takfirist ideology represents the main opponent of the Ennahda Movement and its political activities. All that Ennahdha's political opposition did was increase the pressure on the Islamist group, socially and politically, in order to expose the fact that it did not know how to deal with the emerging Takfirist and jihadist phenomenon in Tunisia."⁴⁵

Belaïd's assassination represented the first and unheeded warning of the rise of radicalisation inside Tunisian society.

2014 TUNISIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

The new Tunisian Constitution can be considered the result of a constructive and, sometimes very heated, debate among different players in Tunisian social and political life. Specific players and factors have contributed to illusion of a Tunisian exception, as have the results of the first

⁴⁵ Mousa 2014.

parliamentary elections in October 2014, which confirmed the possibility of a democratic alternative for the country.

During the electoral campaign, Ennahdha entered a new phase and altered its approach, portraying their failure in government as a mark of responsibility and focusing their political messages on the subjects of economic growth and fight against terrorism. Meanwhile, Ghannouchi's new watchwords became *tawafuq* (consensus) and *wahda wataniyya* (national unity), laying the ground for the post-electoral period and the formation of new alliances.

Ennahdha came second with sixty-nine seats, losing to the secular coalition party, Nidaa Tounes, which won eighty-five of the 217 seats. The conciliatory style of the electoral campaign and the near-immediate concession to their adversary seemed to mark the shift of Ghannouchi's movement from militant and anti-establishment Islamism to fully accepting of parliamentary democracy and its rules.

However, immediately after the announcement of the results, Rached Ghannouchi declared in front of his supporters:

"This is a clear conquest. As it says in the Qur'an: 'Indeed, We have given you a clear conquest, that Allah may forgive for you what preceded of your sin and what will follow and complete His favour upon you and guide you to a straight path and Allah may aid you with a mighty victory.' This is a clear victory, a clear conquest. All praise be to Allah.

"Why did I quote these verses from Sura Al-Fath? It is because they are relevant to this occasion. These verses were conveyed to the Prophet Muhammad, while he was on the outskirts of Mecca, in a place called Hdaybiyyah. His companions tried to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, but the [locals] prevented this. This led to the signing of an agreement known as 'the Treaty of Hdaybiyyah'. This agreement was rejected by some of the more zealous companions, such as Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, who said: 'This agreement is unbalanced, because it gives rights to the others at the expense of our rights.' But it did not take long for everybody to realise that when the Prophet Muhammad had agreed not to enter Mecca that year, but rather to postpone it to the following year – this was, in fact, a clear conquest. At first, they said: "What kind of conquest is this? We did not get what we came for." But later it became evident that the conquest in question was that the Hdaybiyyah Treaty brought freedom to the Arabian Peninsula, spread Islam, and eventually led to the conquest of Mecca.

"What has just happened in our country will be a conquest, Allah willing."⁴⁶

This statement, although it could be considered as a way to mitigate the consequences of the electoral defeat among its followers, confirmed Ennahdha's solid Islamic background and the fact that, although Ghannouchi's and Ennahdha language at the international level sounds

⁴⁶ Ghannouchi 2014.

westernised and devoid of any Islamic reference, when addressing its internal supporters the language turns into a more markedly Islamic and strong one.

Ghannouchi's statement confirmed that Tunisian political Islam had accepted a democratic alternative and that it understood that Ennahdha needed further changes in order to become more visibly modern and open, both inside and outside the country. This strategy is very similar to the one Ghannouchi proposed in 1993, referring to the participation of Muslims in non-Islamic governments:

"It is incumbent upon the community of the faithful to avoid passivism and isolationism. Every Muslim has a responsibility toward the task of establishing the Islamic government [...] power-sharing in a Muslim or a non-Muslim environment becomes a necessity in order to lay the foundations of the social order [...] such a process of power-sharing may also aim to achieve a national or humanistic interest such as independence, development, social solidarity, civil liberties, human rights, political pluralism, independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press, liberty for mosques and Islamic activities."⁴⁷ He concluded by saying that "the real problem lies in convincing the 'other', that is the ruling regimes, of the principle of the people's sovereignty and the right of Islamists – just like political groups – to form political parties, engage in political activities or share power through democratic means."⁴⁸

The situation in post-revolution Tunisia is very similar to this description; Ennahdha has decided to be active, to integrate in the political sphere, and, in this way, to adapt to a situation that, due to its "exceptions", cannot be described as "purely Islamic".

This is the reason why, since the 2014 elections, Ghannouchi and Ennahdha have been promoting a new image that corresponds to new goals and new strategies, both at internal and international levels. For instance, on 18 September 2014, the Ennahdha Party signed a contract with PR firm Burson-Marsteller to improve the image of Tunisian Islamists and their leader.⁴⁹ The official aim of the relationship is to "provide the Ennahdha Party support on media and stakeholder outreach in advance of upcoming elections". However, the signature of the contract marked the beginning of a new phase for Ennahdha's image, not only in Tunisia, but also—especially—in the US and in Europe.

Since then, Ghannouchi and his party have been trying to present themselves as "democratic Islamists" who have erased their past and their ideological background and are unrelated to either the "conservative" Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood or to radical Islamists.

Although Ghannouchi never cut his ties with either Yusuf al-Qaradawi or other leaders of the global Muslim Brotherhood, he has been focusing on more activities on the ground with the help of the youth sections of his party. He has also appointed as the party's new spokesperson Osama al-Saghir, a young MP who was a political refugee in Italy and initially elected by

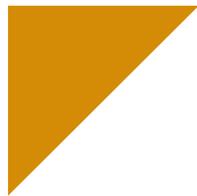
⁴⁷ Ghannouchi 1993, p. 92.

⁴⁸ Ghannouchi 1993, p. 95.

⁴⁹ Torossian 2014.

Tunisians abroad to represent them in the new parliament. Ghannouchi has supported veiled and non-veiled female candidates, has launched a new personal website to promote his new vision, which, like it or not, is less Tunisian, less Islamic and more westernised.

CHAPTER 3



THE TUNISIAN MODEL FALTERS

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The Tunisian model has faltered. Following the Hammam Sousse terrorist attack on 26 June 2015—the country's forty-seventh attack since the beginning of the upheaval—Tunisia has been forced to rethink the last four and a half years and to seriously weigh its transition to democracy.

THE 2015 TERROR ATTACKS

Thanks to its strong civil society, to a foundation of reformed Islam, to more than half a century of "Islamic secularism", to its smaller population, and to the highest literacy rates in the region, Tunisia seemed bound for a better and a more democratic future. Yet it was forced to face the reality of terrorism, the consequence not only of the presence of a radical ideology on the ground or of terror organisations in and around its borders—namely in Libya—but also of the continuing economic and social problems that spawned the Arab Spring. Neither the unemployment nor the disaffection of young people have diminished, thus leaving fertile ground for radical ideologies and calls for justice and freedom to grow.

A recent poll of Tunisians aged 18–30, published in April 2015, confirmed their main concerns as: the fight against terrorism (27%), price increases (21%), unemployment (18%), and economic recovery (10%).

The attack at the Bardo Museum on 18 March 2015 had already reminded Tunisian citizens and their government that the issues of jihadism and radicalisation were no longer solely a concern to southern and rural areas of the country, or the border area with Libya, but that it could strike anywhere, included in the heart of its capital. It became clear that jihadism had implemented the perfect strategy of striking terror into the heart of Tunisian institutions and citizens and landing a huge blow on the Tunisian economy, which is based mainly on tourism.

The 2015 terrorist attacks also reminded people that at least three thousand Tunisians had left their homeland and to fight in Syria and Iraq; some of them had returned disappointed, but others had returned to fight the "unbelievers"—Muslims and non-Muslims—at home, as required by the "Islamic State". After the Bardo attack, Tunisian Interior Minister Najem Gharsalli claimed that his government had prevented some 12,490 nationals from "leaving Tunisian territory to combat zones" in Iraq, Libya, and Syria in the last two years. It was

therefore clear that, though they had succeeded in preventing people from leaving the country, they had not prevented radicalisation and social rebellion at home.

▀ RADICALISATION OF TUNISIAN ISLAM

The radicalisation of young people is a phenomenon on which Tunisian authorities, and international institutions, should reflect, and against which they should take preventive, even if late, measures.

If, in the days of Ben Ali, Mohammed Bouazizi had shown his anger by immolating himself, it is because that was the only way he could protest in a totalitarian regime. Today, Bouazizi could have chosen another way, namely to embrace the ideology of a strong organisation that promises honour, money, and apparent justice: jihadism.

The figures given by Gharsalli confirm that a successful transition to democracy requires not only fair elections and responsible political actors, but also successful social and economic policies, the lack of which is a key factor in radicalisation. Other useful measures would be modern and inclusive Islamic preaching, which would prevent the fascination with jihad “in the name of Allah”, and, last but not least, a training program in responsible citizenship, which would lessen the call of a global citizenship in the ideal *Ummah*.

The country’s economy plays a major role here as well. Many young Tunisians have been working for the last five years without any salary; others have considered their civic engagement valuable work experience, which could help them in a more inclusive job market in the near future. Radicalisation also grows from a widespread feeling of abandonment, through which many—not just the most economically marginalised in society—experience the state, and from an overriding sense of economic inequality in many neighborhoods, towns, and areas that still lack even basic amenities.

However, jihadi ideology has gone a step further and has not only attracted disadvantaged people, a fact illustrated by the famous Tunisian rapper Emino announcing he had joined “Islamic State” and inviting young compatriots to follow his example.

In order to confront radicalisation, Tunisia will have to work on different areas that might appear unrelated, but actually are connected. These must be dealt with to create a new and positive social climate. On 21 June 2015, Mohamed Haddad, history of comparative religion professor at the University of Tunis, published a prophetic op-ed in the international Arabic daily *Al Hayat*, in which he stressed that “Tunisia is going through a critical moment” and that the tourist season would be disastrous because of terrorism. He also emphasised that the crisis was not just limited to the economy, but that it also extended to politics, as the institutions of the Second Republic were paralyzed and the new Constitution was just a piece of paper.

Haddad also pointed out the paralysis of Tunisian political parties, denouncing the divisions within Nidaa Tounes, the winning party of the last election, because it is a coalition party, and also claiming that the “only real supporter of Nidaa Tounes seems to be Rached Ghannouchi”. Last, but not least, Haddad wondered how the Tunisian people could nurture and assimilate democracy, while living in a state of political instability and economic insecurity, without even basic social services, and while thousands of young people chose to join jihadist projects or to emigrate clandestinely on the ships of death. A few days after the publication of Haddad’s op-ed came the attack in Hammam Sousse, vindicating the Tunisian academic.⁵⁰

This terrorist attack is the reason behind PM Habib Essid’s 27 June announcement of twelve urgent measures, all of which have been heavily criticised. In addition to the urgent measures, Essid announced the following: the closure of seventy mosques that were not under the control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs; the dissolution of all political parties and organisations that do not respect the new Tunisian Constitution; the transformation of all areas with a jihadi presence into closed, controlled military zones; and the beginning of a national dialogue on combatting terrorism. A new Anti-Terrorism Law came into force on 25 July.

The question is whether the aforementioned measures will suffice in Tunisia: a small country sandwiched between Libya and Algeria and crippled by an economic crisis; a country populated by disillusioned young people who can envision no future for themselves; a country whose government voted, in February 2011, for a prisoner amnesty that freed not only Ben Ali’s opponents, but also prisoners with links to terror organisations; a country that, in July 2012, recognised the pan-Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir; a country in which Ghannouchi, when Ennahdha was in power, appeased young Salafis, inviting them “to be patient”, to “create TV channels, radio stations, schools and universities”, to “instil in the people the spirit of Islam”, and “spread a global awareness of Islam”; a country from which 3,000 young people have left for Syria. It is obvious from all the above that Tunisia will seriously have to tackle the issue of radicalisation and develop strategies and tactics to combat it at both the ideological and security levels.

On 21 June, Mohamed Haddad had warned against “the collapse of the Tunisian model, a collapse that would force us to rethink democracy in the Arab world”.⁵¹ The attack in Hammam Sousse has certainly cracked the clay pot of Tunisian democracy and disturbed the fragile balance at social and political levels. However, Tunisia should not and cannot return to a totalitarian regime, but it should immediately reflect on and decide which path to take.

⁵⁰ Haddad 2015.

⁵¹ Haddad 2015.

► DERADICALISATION: AGGRESSION AND/OR PREVENTION?

Unfortunately, the new Tunisian anti-terrorism law does not appear to be the solution, as it deals more with punishment and repression than with the prevention of radicalisation. The definition of a terror organisation is linked only to terror attacks perpetrated and does not deal at all with the conservative and radical preaching and ideology that often remain in the background. The new law represents a short-term strategy and policy, but it seems insufficient to counter the threat of terrorism in the country.

On 20 July 2015 British Prime Minister David Cameron—during a speech on extremism given at Ninestiles school in Birmingham—pointed out that radicalisation is a complex phenomenon, composed of many layers and factors:

“You don’t have to support violence to subscribe to certain intolerant ideas which create a climate in which extremists can flourish. Ideas which are hostile to basic liberal values such as democracy, freedom and sexual equality. Ideas which actively promote discrimination, sectarianism and segregation. Ideas – like those of the despicable far right – which privilege one identity to the detriment of the rights and freedoms of others.”

Cameron also pointed to the reasons why young people are attracted to jihadi ideology:

“One – like any extreme doctrine, it can seem energizing, especially to young people. [...] Two – you don’t have to believe in barbaric violence to be drawn to the ideology. No-one becomes a terrorist from a standing start. It starts with a process of radicalisation. When you look in detail at the backgrounds of those convicted of terrorist offences, it is clear that many of them were first influenced by what some would call non-violent extremists. [...] Three: the adherents of this ideology are overpowering other voices within Muslim debate, especially those trying to challenge it. There are so many strong, positive Muslim voices that are being drowned out. [...] Four: there is also the question of identity. For all our successes as multi-racial, multi-faith democracy, we have to confront a tragic truth that there are people born and raised in this country who don’t really identify with Britain – and who feel little or no attachment to other people here”.⁵²

Most of these factors could apply to Tunisia or any country dealing with radicalisation. Prevention and counter-narratives are a fundamental part of the deradicalisation process that is crucial in any anti-terrorism strategy. Therefore long-term policies should always be set alongside short-term ones. Yet, at present, the Tunisian government and policy makers seem focused on immediate actions and results, despite the fact that developing an alternative narrative would be easier there than in other Middle Eastern countries or even in the West. As already mentioned in chapter 2, a reformed and modern Islam is part of Tunisia’s DNA.

⁵² Cameron 2015.

Cameron's words recall statements by Mohammed Charfi, former Tunisian Minister of Education, who, in his seminal essay *Islam et liberté* [Islam and Liberty], denounced that "observers call a 'moderate' Islamist the person who, with Westerners, uses a reasonable language and who does not choose an openly violent action. However, even though his style is calm and the rejection of violence seems sincere, since the movement is always linked to sharia and the sacralisation of history, his moderation remains provisional and indicates a strategy of waiting, because the ingredients of radicalisation have not disappeared."⁵³ He explained that radical Islam has different visions, but the same final aim, and that radical ideology has to be contained in all its aspects from the more moderate to the more violent.

Charfi's ideas are the indirect background to the initiative by a group of Tunisian intellectuals, led by Habib Kazdaghli, dean of Manouba University, and academician and activist Raja Benslama, who organised the Conference of Tunisian Intellectuals Against Terrorism on 12 August 2015. The objective of the conference was to formulate suggestions, to promote activities, and to engage and motivate young Tunisians in the building of their country.

The idea for the conference came from the organisers' awareness of the absence of an integral cultural policy to counter terrorism as an ideology and as a transnational utopia. The organisers hoped that their contributions would fill this gap and that left by the new anti-terror law:

"We are neither security experts, nor military strategists. Our contribution can only be located at the level of ideas. We can only be fighters through culture. Moreover, terrorism flourishes on the ruins of our culture and invades the gaps created by the failures of our educational system. The deep crisis in our society has helped the spread of evil that threatens our security. As intellectuals and as thinkers, we must assume our responsibilities now, in our own way, in this war waged by the security organs of the state."⁵⁴

The gathering was a first important step towards a major and active engagement of the Tunisian intelligentsia, which has often been accused of hiding in its ivory tower, but which is an important part of the strong society that created the Tunisian exception.

The conference was the result of a debate that had been on-going since the last terror attacks in Tunisia. It offered both a responsible stand against terrorism and a platform for intellectuals who have been fighting both the old regime and radical Islam, and who are aware of their weaknesses as politicians, but also of their strength as internationally-recognised thinkers and scholars.

The most important idea underlying the conference was that radical ideology is one of the main causes of terrorism. Both the manifesto and the report issued on the eve of the meeting stated that "Islamist terrorism draws the main part of its vision from the principles and concepts of the Salafist, Wahhabi Islamic tradition, as well as from the political ideologies that inspire them,

⁵³ Charfi 2000, p.196 ff.

⁵⁴ Arteche 2015.

particularly that of the Muslim Brotherhood”; and that “terrorism is not a genuine Tunisian phenomenon. It crosses borders and constitutes a link in the regional terrorism chain, as well as in the East and in the West. It feeds off networks in which complex and multiple geopolitical, ideological, economic, and military interests merge.”⁵⁵

The report also highlighted the pivotal role of education in countering radicalisation: “It is a collective, long-term task that must tap other experiences to enrich future reforms; instil a new way to consider knowledge; adapt to new forms of knowledge, taking into account the expectations of the younger generations, and investing in the Internet in a more informed and sustained manner. Intellectual capital exists (namely research on the history of Islam, among others); social demand requires further outreach. Beyond the renewal of methods and material resources, the issue of educators is pivotal to the concerns expressed by all contributors. Mediation is at the heart of transmission”.

Attended by more than 1,000 people, the conference may represent the missing long-term strategy against terrorism. But, most of all, it shows that citizens, activists, and intellectuals can and want to play a role in rescuing the Tunisian exception.

⁵⁵ For the complete text of both the manifesto and the report, please see appendices 1 and 2.



CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS



The fight against terrorism and the challenge of respecting democracy, hard won in 2011, have become the real challenges facing Tunisia. Tunisian society and authorities at all levels have no choice other than to engage and promote synergies between and among all the groups that created its past and recent history, one where secularism, Tunisian Islam and Islamic reform are all represented.

The recent initiative of Tunisian intellectuals confirms the Tunisian exception; that the country retains its identity and uniqueness and that civil society wants to engage in order to preserve this. Indeed intellectuals have decided to come down from their ivory towers and be active participants in creating change. The struggle of the intellectuals is aimed at educating and empowering the population towards preserving the country's future.

The Tunisian model may well survive if it embraces a positive attitude, engages in constructive self-criticism, adopts policies to address the economic crisis and supports an ideology-free approach towards governing society in general.

Also useful would be a re-examination of Tunisia's past, which, though inhabited by the ghosts of its totalitarian regimes, contains the foundations - in its society, women's associations, intellectual and religious traditions - that have leveraged political Islam, despite failing to prevent the spread of jihadi ideology and terrorism.

At the same time, Tunisians should examine why the inclusion of Ennahdha at the political level has not helped to prevent radicalisation. It seems that Ennahdha did not sufficiently engage in an intra-Islamic debate to prevent many young Tunisians from embracing jihadism and that is a subject that should be included in the national debate and on which Ennahdha, in particular, should reflect and admit past mistakes, looking to more effective cooperation with all levels of society.

The unique Tunisian model can only be saved through the empowerment of the factors and actors of the Tunisian exception. Tunisian institutions, politicians, intellectuals, and citizens should treasure their traditions, instead of labelling the past regime "extremist secularism" or "something to be erased". Equally, they should empower the brilliant and brave young people who started the revolution and broke the wall of fear forever.

The complementarity of the conference manifesto, issued in August 2015, and the anti-terror law's short-term strategy is a step in the right direction. It also confirms that Tunisians are determined to salvage the Jasmine Revolution and that its main players are willing to support all the factors of the Tunisian exception in so doing.

It goes without saying that the economic crisis, the fight against corruption in the country, the leverage of foreign involvement at the financial and/or political levels are key to safeguarding Tunisian democracy and preventing the spread of radicalisation in the birthplace of many Islamic reformists; this, arguably, is the best internal antidote to terrorism.



APPENDIX 1

MANIFESTO:
TUNISIAN
INTELLECTUALS
AGAINST
TERRORISM

APPENDIX 1

MANIFESTO: TUNISIAN INTELLECTUALS AGAINST TERRORISM

For the last four years, our society has suffered deadly terrorist attacks of Islamic origin, organised and supported by local, regional and international networks. There are dozens of victims of terrorism, among them politicians, military and internal security forces, as well as foreign and Tunisian civilians.

Terrorism aims to undermine civil peace, social cohesion, state security and the economy of the country. It mainly recruits among the most vulnerable communities of youngsters, disseminates hatred of the Other, and trivialises violence.

Aware of the necessity to mobilise all the forces in civil society and the state, as well as and all political stakeholders, we—men and women, academics, cultural actors and creators— assembled in this congress against terrorism and for the defence of the civil and democratic state, adopt this current manifesto.

Terrorism is a global phenomenon, the outcome of an ideology that introduces itself to the world as a way of being, of thinking and of acting, and which uses material means and a propaganda based on an intensive and abusive use of new communication technologies. To neutralise it and eradicate its roots from society, terrorism, and all of its consequences, must be better targeted.

The savage acts of terrorism that we are suffering are the ideological manifestation of a violent minority, which has a literal and extremist interpretation of religion and its founding texts. This ideology particularly alienates women, whose liberation is the main driver of modernity in our society.

Islamist terrorism draws the main part of its vision from the principles and concepts of the Salafist, Wahhabi Islamic tradition, as well as from the political ideologies that inspire them, particularly that of the “Muslim Brotherhood”. Terrorism is not a genuine Tunisian phenomenon. It crosses borders and constitutes a link in the regional terrorism chain, as well as in the East and in the West. It feeds off networks in which complex and multiple geopolitical, ideological, economic, and military interests merge.

Enemy of modernity and of our plural and ancient heritage, and at war with our civilian and democratic republic, terrorism becomes part of globalised capitalism. Yet, at the same time, in the name of politically and ideologically constructed identities, it rejects the universal.

Social, cultural and economic divisions inside the country and around the world cause dissenting young people to believe that terrorism could be a positive alternative, and they create the illusion that this "jihadism" is a "legitimate" and "just" response to injustices in the world.

Consequently, in order to defeat terrorism, we must build a project for the future that can convince the young that it is possible to act, to express oneself and to blossom with society—not against it—and in an organised and peaceful way, without violence and self-exclusion.

It falls to the state, to economic, social and cultural institutions, to civil society, to the youth, as well as to us intellectuals of all philosophical, artistic and religious orientations to think and act differently in order to recreate a shared social pact, made of mutual values and commitments and capable of restoring the civic pact, which has been dangerously altered.

This new social pact is based on:

A constitutional state, which defends itself and its society; which upholds the rule of law and judicial autonomy; and which brings an end to destruction and self-destruction.

A renewed social project, based on the universal principles of equality between men and women, individual freedom and freedom of thought guaranteed by the Constitution.

A revision of the relationship between the state and religion, with a view to: establishing a clear separation between the political and the religious and between the public and private spheres; and to reviewing the statutes of institutions in charge of religious affairs, to ensure their neutrality and protect against ideological manipulation.

Teachers and an educational system that are innovative and self-critical; schools that educate, preach coexistence, and cultivate and liberate people's abilities.

A university for citizens, open to the world, to the renewal of knowledge, and to the strengthening of critical thought, and which enjoys academic freedom and has the means to guarantee the quality of teaching.

A closer cultural policy that puts art and cultural heritage at the service of society and its development.

A social policy that combats inequality and offers opportunities to benefit all regions, the young, and all social groups.

A much larger number of media spaces aimed at sensitizing public opinion to the risks of identity isolationism and to reductive and dogmatic concepts of religion and history. The ultimate objective should be to guard society against these dangers.

Aware of our responsibilities, and keen to contribute democratically to measures that will establish the bases for a profound reform of our society, we, signatories of the manifesto, hereby declare that we remain permanently mobilised as a collective for action and proposals to combat terrorism, and for a democratic transition that ensures liberty, justice, and peace for all our countrymen and women.

Tunis, 12 August 2015

APPENDIX 2



GENERAL REPORT: FOR AN ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY AND ACTION

APPENDIX 2

GENERAL REPORT: FOR AN ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY AND ACTION

Tunisian intellectuals have meddled in public life in dispersed ranks, in differing and individual ways. Prior to 2011, action was taken along professional distribution (lawyers, academics, etc.) or within the framework of trade union mobilisation. After 2011, the interventions by intellectuals were to be felt within the fabric of the whole civil society, which itself flourished at a time when free speech blossomed and new avenues opened up for action.

Even though the Tunisian political situation had led to two election rounds in 2011 and 2014, and a constitution was finally drafted in January 2014 and based on consensus, one cannot overlook the number of deaths in Tunisia since December 2010. An official report dated May 2012 reports 338 dead and 2,174 wounded. Since then, over two hundred dead and as many injured further burdened the scene, targeting politicians, the military, law enforcement officers, civilians and tourists. New forms of violence are now part and parcel of the breaking news in the country. The situation is serious and cannot be solved by means of security measures alone. We are swept away by recurring, stunning ground swells that reveal the capacity of Tunisian society to sow such deadly seeds. The number of young people enrolled in the wars on Syria and Libya is alarming; danger is looming ahead. Intellectuals had to mobilise and pay the necessary attention to such a dramatic phenomenon.

In July two preparatory meetings were held that decided to convene this conference, to the organisation of which contributed several groups and very many efforts were dedicated. Meetings and debates took place in Kélibia, Nabeul, Sidi Abdallah, Marsa, Sousse, Sfax, Tozeur, etc., testifying to the shared concerns among more and more involved intellectuals. The group in charge of preparing this Conference received thirty-four texts by intellectuals from all walks of life, dealing with findings, proposing surveys and investigations, recommending solutions. The shock wave is momentous and the ensuing spontaneous, collective answer is a unanimous statement of responsibility, a call to work together with a view to understanding and stemming out the ills befalling us, hampering the progress of Tunisia towards a more democratic future and taking away the lives of hundreds of our young men and women.

The 12 August 2015 Conference is an important step in raising awareness among Tunisian intellectuals as to the need to work together, pool their ideas, writings and know-how in order to ward off the culture of terrorism; the need for them to pull down the walls and partitions, the lazy

habits and the narrow specialties that separate us. Our objective should be to face the looming danger and the new, shared sense of urgency must lead us to re-examine the elements underlying this culture of death and find the solutions that would shake off the inertia of our institutions, disclose our inner void and dispel the death-ridden subjugation clouding the minds of our youth.

OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS IN USE: BETWEEN PROJECTIONS AND FANTASIES

Speaking of Islamist terrorism does not mean that terrorism is inherent in Islam or is peculiar to Islam. A backward religious ideology, shrouded in modern political covers, is over-reading into Koranic verses in order to justify murder. To understand the genesis of the phenomenon, one must pay heed to two pitfalls: essentialism and denial. No religion is intrinsically terroristic, neither Islam nor any other creed for that matter: returning to the Koranic texts, to the life and sayings (*Hadith*) of the Prophet Mohammed or to the corpus of jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) discloses no organic link with a form of terrorism that uses texts out of their context. Denial can lead one to overlook the fact that terrorism feeds on delusions of an interpretation which seeks justifications in, and references to, the Koran. The term "Islamic terrorism" does not infer that Islam is terroristic in nature but that the phenomenon is built around a mythology and a fantasy conception of Islam.

From a theoretical point of view, the genesis of terrorism is part of the desire to obliterate the existence of the Other, to infringe on their physical integrity, using all means. This is what Fethi Benslama refers to as the cruelty that makes hatred beget infringement and destroy the body of the Other. This provision is different from religious extremism, intolerance and dogmatism, because such passion does not result in the material, corporeal obliteration of the Other, or that which is different. Terrorism trespasses the rules of legitimate violence (the exclusive appendage of the State or of religion), its manifestations (natural or legal) and victims (civilians or fighters).

The credo of the Muslim Brotherhood, of Wahhabi, Salafi jihadism is the founding trinity of globalised Islamic terrorism. Its attractiveness stems from the combination of three phenomena that strongly affect an untrained collective imagination: religion, ideology and utopia. Religion is thus transmuted into a political ideology aiming at changing the Arab and Muslim societies through eventual, if necessary, violence.

The "theoretical" apparatus of the doctrine is built on de-contextualisation and anachronism (implementation of rules issued against non-Muslims at some time in history), on the absence of interpretative effort and exegesis (*ijtihad*), on exclusion and on the possibility of non-existence for humanity. The main concepts underlying this ideology are: *at-takfir* (accusation of apostasy), *al-jihad* (holy struggle) and *al-khilafa* (caliphate)...

The practice of *takfir* implies that our era is a new Jahiliyyah and that Muslims have gone astray. This accounts for the fact that the victims of jihadist movements are mainly Muslims and that the eradication operations take place mainly in Muslim countries. Similarly, the concept of jihad is taken out of its historical and philological context. Apart from the fact that jihad cannot be applicable in the land of Islam, it is conditioned by rules that limit it as response to aggression. The notion of *khilafa* is subject to the same anachronistic *bricolage* and a fantasised projection of an expectation, regardless of the needs of spirituality and governance concerning Muslims today.

All such notions re-emerged in 2011, after an upsurge of violence and a form of attractiveness that requires followers to return to the objective conditions that explain the qualitative passage to violence. Tunisia has shifted into this situation because of cultural, political, and economic factors that account for the production and spread of terrorist culture.

WHERE THE CULTURE OF TERRORISM IS MADE AND REPRODUCED

Such ideology, based on violence, exclusion and the denial of history, succeeds in attracting Tunisian youth because of favourable conditions and the operational processes of many institutions. Out of laxity or opportunism, after the State lost its authority, a number of hotbeds have constituted grey areas within which a culture that feeds on terrorism is built and disseminated. Since 2011 have been developing in education, via associations and the media, and mainly on the Web, learning methods of destruction, along with the flourishing of radical ideas.

So-called Islamic schools are operating in an illegal and anarchic way. They have mushroomed under the guise of associations. No accurate figure is known but we hear of 700 *kuttab* (Koranic schools), though about two hundred such schools were dismantled. The main emphasis in those schools is gender-segregation and the compulsion for little girls to wear the *hijab* (veil). Singing, dancing and games are banned. Any image or any artistic representation of any animated being is deemed *haram* (illicit). What do we know of their curricular content? Have we conducted any survey on the teaching staff? What has been done for the defence of the rights of children?

By virtue of Decree No. 88 dated 24 September 2011, a thousand religious associations have come into being. They use modern means (YouTube channels, "Islamic telescope", etc.), organise open "universities", halal and unisex trips, and cater for kindergartens where girls and boys are separated. They are being inventoried but their funding is still through legal, traceable channels.

A religious and scholastic education, denying the course of history and differences, mainly focused on sex-segregation, is provided in State institutions. In addition to the Zitouna mosque,

religious education is provided in three institutions that give their recipients (approximately 675 students, with a majority of girls) the seal of Scientific Authority: the University of Zitouna (with 100 foreign grantees), the Sharia Higher Institute and the Higher Institute for Islamic civilisation. In spite of the 1992 reform that instituted the study of comparative religion, the teaching of humanities and social sciences, foreign languages and human rights, the teaching curricula have continuously turned their backs to critical thinking and the knowledge of other cultures. This university is supported by various trainings in the mosques and by the imams, away from any State control. Prayers and sermons are disseminating a culture of division (between salvaged penitents and disobedient and lost unbelievers) and takfir, practices of denunciation and anathema: they have no hesitation whatsoever in naming people, targeting them as objects of revenge. Religious discourse is built on violence and the hate of the Other. Laws exist; they only need to be enforced.

Gyms in which martial arts are practiced have turned into spaces where jihadists are recruited and trained. Drills there supplement the activities of certain mosques where combat sports and violence are openly taught, when they used to be the prerogative of the Ministry of the Interior.

The on-going events are forcing media discourses into a more or less voluntary apology of, somewhat straightforward justification of, terrorism. Under the guise of, or rather thanks to, the liberation of speech, a new habit is taking over: allowing anyone to vent their opinion. Owing to a lack of means, general knowledge and critical training, the media are unprepared for deconstructing discourse, accounting for certain action without falling prey to the fascination of violence. The result is that the media narratives, coupled with the flow of images in social networks, lead to the glorification of, or at least trivialisation, terrorism.

It is on the Internet that one can notice the most effective dissemination of a conjunction of misguided religious discourse and practical learning fostering the development of terrorism. Ninety percent of terrorist practitioners, trainers and disciples operate through the Web, as is shown by the findings of a survey conducted by the Ministry of the Interior in 2014. In a situation of isolation and absence of dreams and hope among the young, electronic networks fill in a relational void, provide benchmarks, give one the illusion of belonging in alternative communities that make up for the surfers' inadequacy to cope with reality. One should bear in mind the importance of sexual frustration as the genesis of violence, such as erupting on the Internet. Virtual space abandoned by the intellectuals is over-invested by a culture that is disseminating, via analysis tools, application directives, more or less encrypted messages, a negative apology, buttressed up with means of communication and effective pedagogy.

CALLS AND ACTIONS

Armed with such new awareness, what can intellectuals, artists, creators, scientists, teachers, journalists, cultural operators, physicians, lawyers, civil society activists, officials in the

administration and ministries, active or retired citizens do, in order to fight, each in his or her way, with their own means, against the culture of terrorism?

First unite, join forces and skills, pool materials, intellectual and moral resources to counter the phenomenon. The four weeks dedicated to the preparation of this Conference spelled out goodwill, generated encounters, brought to the fore new opinions, promoted new voices. All participants do share a common desire: to re-energise education, at all levels, from early childhood to university. They are aware that it is a collective, long-term task that must tap into other experiences to enrich future reforms; instil a new way to consider knowledge; adapt to new forms of knowledge, taking into account the expectations of the younger generations and investing in the Internet in a more informed and sustained manner. Intellectual capital exists (namely research on the history of Islam, among others); social demand requires further outreach. Beyond the renewal of methods and material resources, the issue of educators is pivotal to the concerns expressed by all contributors. Mediation is at the heart of transmission. Whether in educational institutions, or in cultural centers, or the Internet, trainers are essential for the desired revitalisation that should put children, pupils, students, and the public at large, at the heart of the benefits of culture. The main course is to make intellectual and artistic production, local and global, available in all regions and milieus.

ACTING IN THE FIELD OF STUDIES AND SURVEYS

All contributors have emphasised the need to set up research teams on the phenomenon of terrorism, its ways and effects on Tunisian society. Humanities could provide answers, tools and methods for investigations and research combining the academic findings and the efforts of the media and streamline into the associative fabric, so as to generalise the benefits of culture and knowledge over all categories of the population. The current historical moment implies a reconciliation of all actors of civil society, a convergence of actions, to better understand the intersection of factors that account for the success of terrorism and the means that allowed it to develop in the Tunisian context. Social order, economic logic, psychological and cultural drives, sexual wretchedness, political history are as many entries to be invested, in a systematic and coordinated manner, so as to bring down taboos, the walls of ignorance, design new interdisciplinary approaches to shed light on possible action.

Taking note of the social, geographic and intergenerational divides that hamper the way forward of the country, intellectuals are aware that the language of nostalgia maintains a separation from the younger generations. Some colleagues have highlighted the importance of establishing with the young a shared and sustained exploration of the theme of "Terrorism", of the ideas the phenomenon triggers in them, the solutions they envisage. Concrete programs must be launched on the Internet to examine, bring down the barriers separating the fields of experience, and bring together the different artistic expressions and skills. Another relay move towards the young can be built through weekly clubs, at the national level, in intermediate and

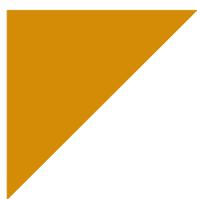
high schools, faculties and higher institutes, with a varied program based on books, films, events or any other artistic field, with a view to establishing frameworks for debate and exchange with the youth. Citizenship-based tourism, sports, university, etc., are all projects to be articulated and implemented, after consultation with, and taking into account the experiences of, the youth and their expectations. The most important issue is that intellectuals must seek pragmatic solutions and make available their experience, in the service of the country and its youth.

CONCLUSION

Owing to the urgency of the situation, reacting as citizens and seeking concrete responses to the current situation, such is the rationale behind the on-going mobilisation that must be sustained through operational committees and concrete projects.

“Artistic channelling of the energy of the young”, these words by a young man enrolled in, then defected from, jihadism points to the way to follow. Mentoring the youth through art and culture, being active on the Net, sharing ideas and projects, and working together to understand and fight terrorism: this is what this Conference is here for, an opportunity to state that Tunisian intellectuals are ready to shoulder their responsibilities in the face of the threats of terrorist culture.

(Translated by Hechmi Trabelsi)



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