

DE-MARGINALISATION IN THE WAKE OF THE 2011 ARAB UPRISINGS:
DEMOCRATIC AND ISLAMIST NARRATIVES IN TUNISIA AND THE PROSPECTS
FOR EURO-MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONS

by

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Dedication

To all those who militate for social solidarity, openness and pluralism.

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Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Abbreviations.....	viii
Abstract.....	ix
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Review of Literature.....	8
2.1 Introduction.....	8
2.2 Debunking essentialism - culture as analytical tool for transforming conflict.....	10
2.3 The universalist/relativist dichotomy.....	18
2.4 The democratic problematique.....	23
2.5 Constructing the "other" - Islamist presuppositions of democracy.....	29
2.6 Key historical landmarks shaping contemporary Arab views of democracy.....	35
2.7 Islam meets western philosophy: from Al-Farabi to Khayr al-Din.....	37
2.8 Arab notions of democracy in the 20th Century.....	39
2.9 Conclusion: Towards a post-2011 mapping of the territory.....	44
3. Tunisia and the 2011 Arab Uprisings.....	47
3.1 Introduction.....	47
3.2 'The strange return Habib Bourguiba'	59
3.2.1 Habib Bourguiba - construction of a myth.....	61
3.2.2 Bourguiba and the making of identity.....	66
3.2.3 Bourguibism in today's public sphere.....	68
3.3 The Tunisian Constitution: Reframing the code for freedom and justice.....	74
3.3.1 The emerging conflict on the role of religion in society.....	74
3.3.2 Violence as the limit of freedom of expression.....	81
3.3.3 'Tunisians aspire for a profound democratic demand'	86
3.4 'The Sixth Caliphate'	89
3.4.1 The resurgence of Islamism in post-revolutionary Tunisia.....	90
3.4.2 The mainstreaming of El-Nahdah and the rift within Islamism.....	95
3.5 The Code of Personal Status.....	99
3.5.1 Islamists versus women in Tunisian feminist discourses.....	103
3.5.2 'The real battle starts now!'	108
3.6 Conclusion.....	110
4. The democratising Maghreb and the prospects for Euro-Mediterranean Relations	113
4.1 Introduction - EU Responses to the 2011 Arab Uprisings.....	113
4.2 Stability over democracy in North-South relations.....	117
4.3 'Essentialism' in the EU's Mediterranean policies.....	121
4.4 Eliciting a new policy based on solidarity.....	128
4.5 From words to deeds: the EU's main challenge on Tunisia.....	135
4.6 Conclusion.....	139
5. Conclusion.....	142
References.....	148

List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1: The political landscape in Tunisia.....	57-58
Table 2: Financial support for Tunisia since the 2011 revolution.....	134

List of Figures

Figure	Page
Figure 1.....	52
Figure 2.....	73
Figure 3.....	75
Figure 4.....	77
Figure 5.....	89

List of Abbreviations

AME – Arab Middle East

ATFD – *Association tunisiennes des femmes démocrates* [Tunisian Association of Democratic Women]

CAR – Conflict Analysis and Resolution

CSP – *Code du statut personnel* [Personal status code]

EC – European Commission

EED – European Endowment of Democracy

EMP – Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

ENP – European Neighbourhood Policy

EP – European Parliament

ESS – European Security Strategy

EU – European Union

IR – International Relations

LTDH - *Ligue tunisienne de Droites de l'Homme* [Tunisian Human Rights League]

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

TCA – Tunisian Constituent Assembly

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

Abstract

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The 2011 “Arab Spring” which started in Tunisia and spread to the rest of North Africa and the Arab Middle East has opened a potentially democratic space, triggering what this work calls the process of ‘de-marginalisation’. In the wake of the historic uprisings formerly marginalised groups – unemployed youths, women, students, workers and Islamists – find themselves negotiating their fate in the new space which has opened up.

Embarking on a fieldwork research in Tunisia, this thesis employs a nuanced theory of culture to unpack emerging narratives. It does so by decoding four salient symbols and metaphors which strike a chord in Tunisians: Habib Bourguiba, the Constitution, the ‘Sixth Caliphate’ and the Personal Status Code. Through a textual analysis, this work uncovers how solidarity, exclusion, humanisation, de-humanisation, tolerance and justice function in Tunisian society. The conflicts surrounding these symbols articulate citizens’ demands for a profound democratic sharing of the civil space amid fresh fears about a looming radicalisation of society.

By examining how the 2011 events have challenged analytical assumptions on a “backward” culture in the region this thesis identifies the articulation of such ideas in European Union policy towards its southern neighbourhood, namely the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Denouncing the EU’s tacit support to the fallen regimes, the ethos of de-marginalisation calls for EU policy which supports political reform through solidarity and rapprochement. In practice, the democratisation process in Tunisia needs buttressing through financial aid coupled with conditionality so that Tunisia may sustain its democratising momentum.

1. Introduction

The toppling, in 2011, of decades-old authoritarian regimes in the southern Mediterranean by mass popular uprisings, commonly known as the 'Arab Spring', has livened up a fresh discussion on democratisation in the Middle East and North Africa. In December 2010 an innocuous protest which started off in Sidi Bouzid, a small forsaken village in the heart of Tunisia, quickly turned into a nationwide protest. By January 14, 2011, Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, then Tunisia's strongman president and longtime dictator, was gone for good. In a veritable domino effect, from Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Jordan and Bahrain, Arabs from all walks of life took to the streets calling a stop to oppression and crying out for freedom and dignity.

What was happening looked quite incredible to outsiders. Tunisia, for example, had been considered one of the more stable states in the region with its relative economic prosperity, its electoralism and trade links with Europe. What many had not realised was that beneath the apparent calm frustration and anger had been bubbling. For the few who had cared to look beyond the whitewashed façade put up by the ruling regime, political repression and the lack of democratic openness had been evident. Behind the positive economic indicators lay the stark reality that an intricate web of cronyism was stopping economic benefits from trickling down to all strata of society.

A few analysts – among whom were the authors of the United Nations Development Programme Arab Human Development reports – had provided a stark picture and warned that social conflict could erupt already in the early 2000s. But the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings was still marked by an overwhelming element of surprise. Political analysts, journalists and politicians spoke of the uprisings in terms of “unpredictability”. Why was this so? Why had policy-makers from outside the region failed to pick up the signs which had been there for all to see?

The discourse on “unpredictability” was an eye-opener; it revealed ingrained assumptions that the region had been considered an exception to democratisation due to some kind of backwardness, a kind of stagnant culture that was resistant to democratic openness. Motivated by concerns over security European policy-makers, for example, bought into the story that repression and marginalisation were necessary evils in Arab societies and that only authoritarianism could guarantee stability. Over the previous decade or so, Europe’s fears from Islamist-inspired terrorism had become an important bargaining chip for dictators to buy the European Union’s silence on the need for political reform.

Another aspect of the “surprise” element linked with the Arab revolutions was their popular nature. The Tunisian regime’s fall had been brought about by public protest and not by some kind of elite-engineered chess game. Those calling on Ben Ali to leave were not powerful elites. Instead, they belonged to the margins of society, those for whom the political and civil space had been out of bounds: unemployed youths, women, workers, artists, professionals, students and Islamists. They were the same groups which scholar Larbi Sadiki’s work *The Search for Arab Democracy* (2004) had called “marginalised publics”. (p. 7)

The discourses of unpredictability and surprise have prompted this research to look at the present struggle involving those on the margins of Tunisian society; those social actors who have created an opening for themselves through the revolution and are seeking to secure their participation, to emancipate and *de-marginalise* themselves. As the umbrella subject of this work, de-marginalisation is defined as the process with which formerly marginalised publics are seeking to access the civil space in the wake of the revolution.

De-marginalisation is a framework of analysis which seeks to listen to the “unfamiliar voices”, to use Alvaro de Vasconcelos's expression, of those social groups. It is interested in their narratives to map out the emerging political and social landscapes, in the knowledge that not a single truth, but various versions of it, are available. With this in mind, this research embarks on a cultural inquiry borrowing a nuanced notion of culture (Avruch 2003, 2006, 2008). De-marginalisation partakes of the belief that culture provides the framework for people to understand the world around them. “Such a concept of culture is focused closely on the understanding of the world by historically situated individuals, and the images, encodements, schemas and symbols - passed down from generations past (‘tradition’ or ‘custom’) or formulated by individuals or their contemporaries in the crucible of immediate lived experience and exigency - with which they make meaning, reason, feel, and act”. (Avruch 2008, p. 250).

In the following chapter, the case will be made for the usefulness of the nuanced notion of culture as an analytical tool in the specific context under review. The narratives of democracy in Tunisia can indeed emerge through the unpacking of cultural symbols, an exercise which will help map the emerging territory. To provide

a theoretical background for the research, Chapter 2 looks at the concept of democracy and its universal appeal, delving into how democratisation functions as an ethos of anti-foundationalism as a paradigm that challenges the basis of knowledge grounded in certainty. While foundationalism is the realm of dogma – which includes ethnocentrism and fixed power relations, anti-foundationalism stands for dynamic contestation and opposes fixity and singularity. From anti-foundationalism flows the idea, for example, that political structures should guard against any political actor or ideology claiming a monopoly on power relations in the civil sphere (Alexander 2008).

In order to illuminate how Arab democratic narratives have been shaped by interaction with Europeans, Chapter 2 looks at common views held by Islamists by tracing how Western ideas on democracy and government have been adopted and adapted by various Arab thinkers through time. Significant among the underlying assumptions shared by Arabs is the importance of Islam as a point of reference. Islam has been, and remains, an important frame of reference for many Arabs in the region. Till today, there exists a strong Islamist narrative which cannot be discounted. Reviewed literature traces an Islamist counter-discourse of resistance which has emerged out of Islamist-Arab relations with "the West". This counter-discourse has been formed mostly through colonialism and neo-colonialism, in which Arabs have often been the underdogs. In terms of the anti-foundationalist paradigm, the danger with the Islamist counter-discourse today lies in its potential to deny a share of public space to other identities that form part of increasingly cosmopolitan Arab societies.

Besides Islam, the literature points to other important landmarks in the Arabo-Islamist tradition, namely the nineteenth century ferment for political reform known as the Arab Renaissance, the decolonisation process of the twentieth century and a series of political events which happened over the past 30 years, including a drive towards liberalisation, the fall of the Soviet Union and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. It is important to understand how these landmarks function as reference points in the Arab-Muslim world today.

Having outlined the theoretical background, this work moves on to identify and deconstruct a number of symbols in post-revolutionary Tunisia to find out what kind of democracy is emerging in this Maghreb country. While it does not purport to be all-exhaustive, this approach deems specificity to be a crucial aspect of inquiry. It is by looking at the specific that certain generalisations on the democratisation process can be drawn. Chapter 3 draws on fieldwork research in Tunisia carried out by the author in the spring of 2012. The inquiry examines text including written material such as newspapers, magazines and books, as well as face-to-face interviews with Tunisian journalists, academics, bloggers, human rights activists, workers, elected Members of the National Assembly, politicians from across the spectrum, and Islamists¹.

Text functions as a code which can be cracked to elicit knowledge on how Tunisians look at solidarity and exclusion, justice and impunity, dignity and shame. Text can also illuminate how different groups are claiming their newly-won space and how they are looking to safeguard it. In this way, Chapter 3 will analyse the

¹ The sources used for this work have been predominantly in French, a widely-spoken language by Tunisians. Some Arabic sources have also been used. When quoted, these primary sources have been translated into English as accurately as possible.

emerging political structures and the extent to which these will be capable to safeguard the democratic space. For this purpose, four main symbols will be used to uncover how individuals perceive, interpret, and act in their world: the persona of Habib Bourguiba, the symbol of the Tunisian Constitution, the metaphor of the 'Sixth Caliphate' and the Tunisian *Code du statut personnel* [Code of Personal Status]. Textual analysis will be informed by insights recorded by the author during participant observation undertaken between April 2 and 15, 2012.

Having looked at emerging narratives, Chapter 4 will discuss the democratisation process in Tunisia in terms of its relationship with the European Union (EU). It is argued that safeguarding Tunisia's open space requires assistance from the EU, especially in terms of addressing the economic and structural problems which were at the heart of the revolution. The 2011 revolution has uncovered serious flaws in the EU's relations with its southern neighbours. This has come by way of policies, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy, which emphasise stability at the expense of democracy-promotion.

Since the revolution, there has been a new impetus towards aiding Tunisia to encourage democratic openness in the belief that this would re-launch a new era of Euro-Mediterranean relations. This has included a number of financial programmes launched over the past year to help Tunisia regain economic momentum. Most notably, the EU has promised to make Tunisia a "privileged partner", a policy which is believed to offer hope to Tunisians while encouraging other democratising Mediterranean countries to follow suit. There remains, however, a large obstacle which is slowing down this process on the EU's side: implementation. Chapter 4

argues that tension is still high in Tunisia because of a rising disillusionment that the revolution has not delivered on its promises and that it is vital for the EU to deliver on its promises quickly. Notwithstanding the EU's internal problems that are halting the process, failure to act is likely to lead to a radicalisation of Tunisian society which would give rise to new forms of marginalisation.

2. Review of Literature

The modern Arab Middle East is currently the scene of a multiplicity of identity articulations, counter-articulations and disarticulations that the homogenising and hegemonising practices of the past and the present are ill-equipped to manage and resolve intelligently and tolerantly. – Larbi Sadiki, *The Search for Arab Democracy* (2004, p. 75)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter makes the case that a cultural approach is useful to map the emerging narratives of democracy in Tunisia following the 2011 revolutions. The premise is based on a “nuanced” notion of culture employed to unpack the symbols and schemas through which social and political realities are perceived by conflict actors. To interpret the events that are unfolding in Tunisia in this way is to part company with the old analytical paradigm which holds fixed presuppositions on the Arab Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and on the people living there; it means accepting that different versions of truth are available, and that all views can inform inquiry. This is the cornerstone of the thesis of de-marginalisation. It is from narratives that were recorded and interpreted through fieldwork that conclusions on the democratisation process in Tunisia will be drawn.

The 2011 Arab revolutions have brought to the fore once again the discussion on democratisation in the MENA region, opening up a decades-long debate on whether democracy can successfully take root in the Arab world. By examining this discussion, this chapter will point to the misconception that democracy is fixed, and will argue that “democracy” is itself a contested concept. Although it was born in

“the West”, democracy has a widespread appeal around the world because it represents “an open space” and an “ethos of contestation”. Beyond democratic structures such as the holding of elections and the institutional setup which gives a country its “democratic” credentials, democracy’s “content” will be adapted to specific realities and will be necessarily shaped by culture.

Setting a backdrop for fieldwork research in Tunisia, this chapter highlights conceptions of democracy by Arabs through the ages as well as contemporary views. These include, among others, the important relationship between religion and politics. The literature clearly points to Islam being a constant point of reference in this respect. A trend clearly emerges when looking at this theme: that political reform in North Africa and the Arab Middle East frequently coincides with a wave of Islamic revival where religion is employed as a narrative of resistance. Arab conceptions of "self", as expressed in works authored by philosophers and reformers from Al-Farabi to Khayr al-Din, have often been constructed in relation to the European “other”. The assymetric relation between European colonisers (and neo-colonisers) and colonised Arabs has shaped contemporary conceptions of democracy. The concept of democracy today carries baggage which should not be discounted in analysis.

Theoretically, the chapter will briefly look at the meaning of democracy as an ethos that challenges the status quo and opens up the space for contestation. It is democracy's capability to shake up society's power structures that gives it a wide appeal. It follows that democratisation is not the process of imposing fixed and universally-valid norms about polity and society. Rather, it subscribes to the paradigm of anti-foundationalism, where norms of political practice are not imposed from the above but are born out of contingency and culture. In practice,

democratisation is about creating and consolidating those political structures which ensure that no idea or political actor can ever hijack the open space.

2.2 Debunking essentialism – ‘Culture’ as analytical tool for transforming conflict

As an increasingly important tool employed by conflict analysts and resolvers, the concept of culture has occupied many a scholarly enterprise in the past two decades or so. The importance of culture in conflict analysis and resolution (CAR) was highlighted as the field moved away from traditional international relations with state actors as the main protagonists. According to Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2011, p. 322) the influx of anthropological ideas into the field had sharpened awareness of the cultural question.

But beyond the theoretical realm, it was the practical issues facing CAR that drew attention to the culture question, as were the problems related to conflict prevention strategies applied within countries, as well as across boundaries. Such were the questions on why contemporary wars became increasingly characterised by violent non-state actors who seemed progressively engaged in senseless and endless violent behaviour. According to Edward Azar’s theory of protracted social conflict, which emphasised that the sources of conflict lay within rather than between states, conflict actors in places such as Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Cyprus, Israel and South Africa struggled for basic needs such as security, recognition and acceptance, and fair access to political institutions. “Traditional preoccupation with relations between states was seen to have obscured a proper understanding of these dynamics”. (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2011, p. 99). This shift, occurring at the end of the Cold War, saw the conceptual dominance

of the state as the main actor in international relations being challenged (Avruch 2008, p. 240).

According to Azar, these new types of conflicts revolved around communal identity (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2011, p. 100), clearly pointing to issues of ethnic and cultural factors in protracted violent conflicts. Were these behaviours in contemporary conflicts “senseless and irrational convulsion of violence, expressions of ancient hatreds and regressions to tribal war and neo-medieval warlords?” Or were there more systematic explanations, “as those writing from radical political economy, anthropological and political science perspectives suggest?” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2011, p. 151)

It became gradually evident that variables such as social structure and organisation, religion, identity and gender had an important role to play in analysing contemporary conflict. It was realised that such factors strongly come into play when reconciliation and justice were tackled in the aftermath of violence. (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2011, p. 333). Yet to what level are cultural factors important? To what extent is violence rooted in culture? And is it the case that certain societal structures, or cultures, are more prone to violence than others?

A whole array of views emerge to tackle this last question. Anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942) was among the first to refute the idea that human instincts to violence are biologically determined. In *The Culture of Conflict (1993)* Marc Howard Ross identified the causes of violence “in the organizational structures and psycho-cultural dispositions of particular societies” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2011, p. 333). The primordialism argument was also floated. According to this view, factors like ethnic loyalty tapped “some fundamental biological drives, such as

defense of kin and territoriality” (One such view is expressed by Harold Isaacs in *Idols of the Tribe* (1975)). This argument, in turn, was contradicted by Stuart J. Kaufman in *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (2001). Pushing his symbolic politics approach to ethnic war², Kaufman points to the cultural factors at play by stating that “history and kinship ties are usually fictitious, while most national identities are new” (Kaufman, 2001, p. 23). On national identity, for example, Kaufman argues that “it can hardly be ‘primordial’ if it is new; and it cannot be genetic if its members are not related” (Kaufman, 2001, p. 23).

Pioneering works which brought in the concept of culture as an analytical tool in conflict resolution were by scholars Kevin Avruch and Peter W. Black with their seminal papers *A generic theory of conflict resolution: a critique* (1987) and *The culture question and conflict resolution* (1991), in which they were critical of a conflict resolution approach that was blind to cultural factors. The first paper was a criticism of the theory of basic human needs famously developed by John W. Burton (1915-2010). They object, among others, to the logic underlying Burton’s theory which implies that basic needs seemingly arise from “a compound of geneticism, sociobiology and stimulus-response behaviorism”. (Avruch & Black, 1987, p. 91) They do give Burton his due for contributing to the field of CAR (Burton moves away from viewing conflict as merely arising from the scarcity of material needs. Rather, his basic human needs refers to deeper, non-material needs, such as the need for recognition, the need for security and the need for distributive justice). But Avruch and Black are highly critical of a theory which they deem flawed as it pushes an

² Kaufman’s core assumption is that people make political choices, including the decision to wage war, based on emotion and in response to symbols. He states that “if emotional appeals to ethnic themes are simultaneously appeals to ideas that lead one to blame another group, those appeals are apt simultaneously to arouse feelings of anger and aggression most likely to motivate people to want to fight” (Kaufman, 2001, p. 29).

“arbitrary and empirically sterile listing of innate human needs” (1987, p. 95). They propose, instead, an alternative framework focusing on “human culture”, a concept they would develop in their second seminal paper. Here, the authors push for a “culture-as-consciousness” approach when tackling the question of culture in conflict analysis and resolution, a perspective “organized around the understanding that humans use locally recieved or constructed common sense to percieve, interpret, evaluate, and act on and in both external and internal reality” (Avruch & Black, 1991, p. 31). From this approach flow questions concerning how parties look at conflict, how they narrate it. Avruch (2003, p. 140) states that “understanding the concept of culture is a crucial prerequisite for effective conflict analysis and resolution”. Across his work, Avruch distils the definition of “culture” – a word carrying a variety of meanings in everyday language – by building on other complex definitions such as that of Schwartz (Avruch, 2003, p.142). He expresses preference for “symbolic or cognitivist understandings of the idea: that culture provides for individuals cognitive and affective (emotional) frameworks, embodied in such representations as symbols, metaphors, schemas, or images, with which individuals perceive, interpret, and then act in, social worlds”. (Avruch, 2006, p. 101)

A good way to understand the implications of this definition is by way of looking at its opposite. Avruch criticises a concept of culture that is essentialised and totalised, one "that is reified and stripped of internal complexity or sociological diversity, removed from time (history) or projected backward into some unchanging (and usually dangerous or savage or unevolved) primordial past." (Avruch, 2008, p. 242). He is highly critical of a certain kind of social and cultural analysis that continues to feed stereotypes by glossing over specificity instead of employing empirical inquiry to draw its conclusions.

As this thesis will demonstrate in the next chapters, examples of such flawed analytical frameworks abound, especially in the context of the Arab Middle East and North Africa. This thesis will show that much analysis on the Arab Middle East in general, and on Tunisia in particular, suffers from a kind of analytical sclerosis because it is based on assumptions of some kind of stagnant, backward culture that is said to make up the Arab World. Despite being exposed by epic works like Edward Said's *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978) such ideas are still ingrained into much scholarly work and policy documents on the Arab Middle East, and continue to influence analysis and policy today.

In this respect, this work argues that a nuanced concept of culture is necessary to map out the emerging terror in a democratising Arab world. It is through an analysis of evolving narratives that the burgeoning political reality can start to be mapped. And it is on the basis of those narratives that policy should be formulated. A blindness to the concept of culture as it has been qualified above would defy the very purpose of such an undertaking.

Avruch's nuanced theory of culture again comes in handy: "Such a concept of culture is focused closely on the understanding of the world by historically situated individuals, and the images, encodements, schemas and symbols - passed down from generations past ('tradition' or 'custom') or formulated by individuals or their contemporaries in the crucible of immediate lived experience and exigency - with which they make meaning, reason, feel, and act" (2008, p. 250). It is a notion of culture to which ideas of social transformation are intrinsic and which orients analysis towards "complexity and dynamism as inherent social qualities" rather than refer to "mostly static and monolithic social entities, like civilisations". This definition

of culture allows analysts to understand how actors in conflict interpret the world through the “images, encodements, schemas, and metaphors” (Avruch, 2003, p. 150).

As outlined above, Avruch (2008) argues for the employment of a theory of culture which is more attentive to history and ethnography, in other words, to context. Avruch’s theory of culture debunks the ideology which looks at culture as a “stable, homogenous, undifferentiated, enduring, essential and totalising” entity, and which is exemplified in the clash of civilisations theory of Samuel P. Huntington. In *The Clash of Civilisations? (1993)* Huntington writes that future global conflict would occur along “cultural” fault lines of “seven or eight major civilisations”, namely Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and “possibly” African civilisation (Huntington, 1993, p. 25). Huntington’s theory has drawn much criticism as much as it has gained popularity in certain policy circles. From the perspective of culture as the concept has been defined above, the flaws in Huntington’s theory are self-evident given his homogenising categorisations and his placing of highly diverse populations into civilisation units. Conceptually, the theory’s flaws lie in its ethnocentrism such as his assumption that Western civilisation, which is unique and superior, is pitted against “the Rest”. This assumption is not an invention of Huntington and articulates widely held presuppositions which the 2011 events have exposed. A more detailed discussion on this will be undertaken when this paper analyses European responses to the Arab uprisings (see Chapter 4). The point to be made here on the clash of civilisations is that no new knowledge can be elicited from a theory that glosses over specificity. It may well serve neo-realist ideology but is ill-suited for this kind of cultural inquiry.

In contrast, Avruch's notion of culture includes the idea of social transformation. "Ideas of timelessness and centuries-spanning stability [implied in Huntington's "civilisations"] cannot be sustained in a definition of culture that requires it to be responsive and adaptive to its environment and constituted by the cumulative social practice of situated individuals" (Avruch, 2008, p. 250). When one speaks of social groups, one needs to keep in mind that these are made up of individuals living in specific time and place, and who are endowed with free will. Therefore, Avruch argues, it is impossible to think of people as social robots "all subscribing to the same creed, value sets, or morality, all moving along the same behavioral assembly lines".

Since people are bearers of multiple identities, and groups are made up of socially diverse individuals in potentially changing social systems, culture can not simply be a label with which one names particular ethnic, religious or national groups. Analysts need to look at conflicts that are inside cultures while being alert that various versions of the truth may be available. Finally, Avruch says, this notion enables one to view culture as "providing the social and cognitive contexts for behavior, but drains it of the 'necessity' also to be causal. This means that we ought no longer to think of culture – cultural differences, to be precise – as the main causes of social conflict. Culture does not cause conflict. It is, however, the lens through which the causes of conflict are ultimately refracted" (Avruch, 2008, p. 250).

One hopes it is sufficiently clear by now that this interpretative framework is deemed the most useful for the purpose of analysing democratic narratives in Tunisia in the wake of the 2011 Arab uprisings. Indeed, to interpret the events which unfolded in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and the like, it is imperative to look

at specificity. This work's underlying presupposition is that only once such an inquiry into particularity has taken place can conclusions be drawn and new insights elicited. Once that has happened, some generalisations which interpret the changes happening on the southern and eastern shore of the Mediterranean may be drawn; and then too, only to a certain extent. An analytical framework which short-circuits specific inquiry and draws on a priori generalisations would start off on the wrong footing and fall into the trap of regurgitating expired knowledge.

This kind of approach inspires the work of Tunisian scholar Larbi Sadiki. In *The Search for Arab Democracy (2004)*, he comes to virtually the same conclusions as Avruch on the kind of inquiry that needs to take off, even if both authors take different trajectories and ground their research in different fields. The former's research on the democratisation in the Arab Middle East context leads him to conclude that what it means to be Arab and/or Muslim is a contested concept in itself. He argues that at this historical moment identity is defined by a context which is highly diverse. The world today has made social and political contexts so dynamic that one speaks of "hyphenated identities". Sadiki argues that:

Muslims and democrats are increasingly being turned into hybrid citizens who defy precise or simple definition. They are protean with multiple layers of identity or containing sub-identities within them. To describe them as hyphenated citizens in a globalising world is no exaggeration. Muslims can be Arab, African, Asian, European or American, practising and non-practising, educated and lay, political and non-political, and belong to a wide range of socio-economic strata. [...] Similarly, democrats are hyphenated citizens of the world, belonging to a multitude of backgrounds, classes, ethnic groups, nationalities, politics, and faiths (theistic and nontheistic). This illustrates

strongly how Democracy, like Islam, is being increasingly problematised in relation to time and place. (Sadiki, 2004, p. 381).

In such a multi-faceted, globalising and increasingly cosmopolitan world, this notion rings so true, and clearly explains why analysts cannot but look at specificity if they are to identify patterns of social and political interaction. Seen through this light, the notion of culture in the clash of civilisations theory looks banal at best, deceptive at worst. Yet the relativistic approach being advocated here is not without its analytical difficulties, especially when one comes to drawing generalisations which need to inform policy. For, how is one supposed to draw universalist conclusions when looking at the particular? In practice, how could a cacophony of individual narratives and counternarratives inform a policy which addresses the needs of all citizens? How can a specific inquiry on Tunisia elucidate debate on the broader North African and Middle Eastern democratisation process? To ask the question from the opposite direction, how can universalist principles, such as democracy, be applied to particular contexts? The next section will seek to address this dilemma.

2.3 The universalist/relativist dichotomy

Discussing scholarly works that looked at the issue of democracy in an Arab Middle East setting, Sadiki (2004) writes that ethnocentrism and cultural determination had characterised anthropological and ethnographic works since the eighteenth century, eventually ceding to cultural relativism which goes beyond assumptions of a “civilised” European model as opposed to a “barbaric” Orient. (Sadiki, 2004, p. 325). The argument being followed here is that a relativist approach is indeed necessary to answer what kind of democracy is emerging in the

democratising Arab world and how the Arab notions of democracy differ from those of Europeans. But cultural relativism itself carries an inherent contradiction; In studying the political outcome of particular cultures (attitudes, values and feelings expressed in symbols, schemas and metaphors), the paradigm of political culture has won itself some claims to universalism.

“This is a move away from turning the experiences and values of Europeans and Americans into explanatory universals. On the other hand, by essentialising ‘civic culture’ and ‘democracy’ to be the norms of the ‘good polity’ which represent some ‘high point’ in Western political development and social organisation and assumed to be worthy of universalisation, political culture is inescapably particularistic and ethnocentric”. (Sadiki, 2004, p. 328)

In practical terms, the difficulty is two-pronged. On one side is the cultural relativism's difficulty with drawing generalisations on good polity; on the other, is the virtual impossibility of applying universalist principles such as democracy and human rights to particular context. For, should one expect democracy – a concept that emerged in Hellenic Greece – to be applicable to the Arab Middle East? Or is democracy a characteristic of the particularity of “Western” political culture which is therefore not applicable to a non-European or non-Enlightenment epistemological setting? Sadiki argues that “interpretations of the absence or presence of democratic rule in exclusively and culturally relative terms verge on ethnocentrism, racism and a form of intellectual ‘apartheid’.” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 329) Again, culture itself is a site of contestation.

Sadiki tackles this question by saying that elements that favour democratic rule exist in varying degrees in all political cultures. Both theoretically or empirically,

one could put democracy to the test of universality by looking at its appeal or rejection in other non-European and non-Enlightenment contexts. Democracy has successfully taken root in non-European contexts like Japan, for example. And in the context of the Arab Middle East the concept of Islamic *shūrā* (consultation) underlies the basic idea of the desirability of good government while “Islam and Islamic theology present [Islamists] with many potentialities for realising legal and just rule” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 331). What seems to be at issue, however, is not whether democracy has some kind of universal appeal. Rather, it is the attempt to impose a “fixed” understanding and practice of democracy that is the problem. That fixity is the logical outcome of the presupposition that democracy and human rights require a Western-style political culture that is “superior” to any other.

A new framework of analysis which goes beyond questioning why certain cultures seem “irreconcilable” with democracy or human rights is required. One needs to take a step back and ask: What democracy? Which culture? The approach taken by Avruch with regard to human rights might indicate the way. In the context of human rights and their universal application, Avruch (2006, p. 111) refers to the debate which posits the belief that human rights were constructed in one particular culture or civilisation (the “West”) against the argument – often expounded by human rights activists – that such rights are grounded in “natural law” and are somewhat “pre-cultural”. The first argument – a relativist one – seems to weaken human rights. Grounding human rights in a specific culture seems to divest them of the universal appeal and provide ammunition to those dictatorial regimes, for example, which claim that their notion of human rights is different and that international criticism of their human rights record is unjust (Avruch, 2003, p. 140). This discussion has been taken up before by scholars such as Adamantia Pollis and

Peter Schwab in their work *Human Rights: A Western Construct with Limited Applicability* (1979), which was done in the context of challenging the prevailing view as to the universality of the Western liberal concept of individual rights (Pollis, 1996, pp. 316-344). On the other pole is the universalist argument which grounds rights in “natural law” and implies that human rights were “just there” waiting to be uncovered. Through the ages, arguments on rights being grounded in nature have been advanced to varying degrees by key philosophers from St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) to John Locke (1632-1704). The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself is based on the premise that human rights originate in human nature (O. Grech, personal communication, March 26 to April 18, 2012)³. If human rights are pre-cultural, then, why did their articulation happen so late in human history and why did they originate in “the West”?

Looking at the argument developed by Avruch, one could easily substitute the words “human rights” with “democracy” and the dilemma posited would still apply. Avruch argues that the flaw lies in the “inadequate” conception of culture that underpins them: “It assumes culture’s utter coherence, homogeneity, and stability; its totalizing effects on the behavior of individuals; and its essentialized, hermetic imperviousness to environment and change. This is the culturalism of romantic nationalism, framed now as anticolonial struggle, or in defense of sovereignty, and put in the service of an anti-human rights discourse” (Avruch, 2006, p. 114).

Avruch’s definition of culture is relativistic in the sense that it is “epistemologically hostile to absolutes – *but not to potential, constructed universals.*” (emphasis in original text). Secondly, the definition denies “coherent

³ For a detailed discussion on this issue see William Sweet’s *Philosophical Theory and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (2003).

holism of any cultural tradition in favour of more open, fragmentary, and contested traditions". Third, "it is a conception of culture that holds that no one 'culture' speaks with a single and uncontested voice, nor can any one individual or entity, including the state, speak in one voice on behalf of the culture" (Avruch, 2006, p. 114).

On the field, this kind of cultural analysis sees human rights and democracy being actively constructed in the course of ongoing political action. It is because cultures are open-ended and in flux that change is possible, and it is the application of human rights and democracy in a variety of contexts that constructs a global discourse on their universality.

Sadiki makes the case that conceptions of democracy in the Arab Middle East need to be necessarily grounded in indigenous culture. "Non-European cultures and non-Enlightenment epistemologies cannot be expected not to ground their interpretations of democracy in their heritages. In a multicultural world democracy will not be able to satisfy the needs of diverse peoples nor meet their aspirations unless it is adapted when adopted," writes Sadiki (2004, p. 331).

So, if the kind of democracy that is taking shape in the MENA region is different from the European and Enlightenment epistemologies, what kind of democracy can it be? A reply to that question necessitates looking at the schemas and symbols through which democracy is, and indeed has been, narrated. This leads to the democratic problematique which has occupied many scholars, historians and philosophers through time. First, it is important to look at the notion of democracy and its underlying presuppositions if one is to gain insight into the question. Then, one can move onto looking at the schemas and symbols which form

part of the so-called the Arabo-Islamic worldview where that democracy is meant to operate. How that differs from the European and American conceptions will be helpful to understand both the differences as well as those elements which are in common. The following section in this chapter will look at these specific points.

2.4 The democratic problematic

As a highly complex concept which carries multiple layers of meaning, democracy is not uncontested. Indeed, quite the opposite is true. In *The Theory of Democracy Revisited (1987)*, political scientist Giovanni Sartori elucidates the levels of complexity of the meanings of democracy as he revisits ideas on democracy as they have been developed through time. Presenting an exhaustive theoretical map of how democracy has developed as a concept is beyond the scope of this work. What will be highlighted, however, are some key presuppositions underlying the idea of democracy today.

It is pertinent to mention at this stage that discourses such as feminism, postmodernism, global solidarism and reformism, and multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism have radicalised the democratic debate today. This not only shows that democracy is up for grabs, but shows that established systems, even those assumed to be democratic, are being constantly put to the test:

Feminism jostles with androcentric politics; postmodernism joins the issue with fixity and with post-Enlightenment rationality; global solidarism and globally radical reformism interrogate state-centrism and territorial political cartographies; and multi-culturalism targets ethnocentrism. Democratisation of democracy is at the core of each one of these four discourses. They all,

directly and indirectly, and in varying degrees, open up ways for reimagining political community, space and identity (Sadiki, 2004, p. 19).

Such discourses bring to the fore myriad questions which have to do with representation, political participation, equality, rights and global governance among others. Democracy itself is a concept in flux. Indeed, what should be kept in front of analysts' eyes is the ever-changing hues colouring the democracy debate when the concept is contemplated in an Arab Middle East cultural setting.

Despite these contestations, the global appeal of democracy has been linked to an ethos of inclusiveness which is inherently pluralistic and versatile. According to Sadiki, it is the affirmation of such an ethos that is likely to motivate democrats from non-Western cultures to put stock in democracy. In this respect, democracy comes to be understood as a "defoundationalising ethos" (Sadiki, 2004, p. 12). In his essay *How far can Free Government travel? (1995)*, Sartori discusses the "traveling issues" faced when discussing whether democracy can be "exported to any place" (p. 101). He argues that freedom from tyranny – what he calls "demo-protection" and by which he means the implementation of popular rule – is the only element of liberal democracy that can be exported. "This is the global or universal element, the one that can be exported anywhere and implanted in any kind of soil," Sartori writes, adding that demo-protection is concerned with form: the structural and legal means of limiting and controlling the exercise of power, and thus of keeping arbitrary and absolute power at bay." (Sartori, 1995, p. 102). It is as if to say that the only 'fixity' should be the maintenance of that ethos of contestation which ensures that the open space for the manifestation of identities remains such. Sartori goes on to explain that unlike form, what is decided (content, or what he labels "demo-power")

belongs to the arena of contingency and that cultural factors are likely to engender a great deal of variance in the particular decisions that are made.

Sadiki writes that just as democracy today differs from the version put in place by its Greek inventors, “it cannot be expected to travel from its Western milieu, where it has been refigured, to an Arabo-Islamic milieu unedited” (2004, p. 35). Sadiki is intent to radically change the way in which the debate of “exporting democracy” is viewed by shifting the epistemological perspective and questioning knowledge-power relations as they are manifest in relations between “the West” and “the Arab Middle East”⁴. He argues that in this historical moment when “interrogation of Enlightenment discourses have opened up the momentous space for contestation”, there is no room for prescription when one engages in cross-cultural debates on state-societal relations; the only certainty is that there is no place for dogmatism. Sadiki pits foundationalism against anti-foundationalism, embarking on a course that carries important implications for the overall discussion of this thesis.

Following postmodernist thinking, scholars like Michael J. Shapiro (1992) have challenged, among others, the interpretative method of traditional political philosophy. Sadiki cites French philosopher Jacques Derrida to argue that postmodernism, where knowledge is “centreless, undetermined, non-linear, discontinuous, and open to variable interpretations,” has destabilised the old paradigm of foundationalism, a category in which he groups “Platonism, Descartes’ rationalism, positivism or sciencism – [and which] grounds knowledge in universally

⁴ Admittedly, notions like “the West” and “the Arab Middle East” are themselves generalising categorisations that fall into the trap of essentialisation and totalisation that this chapter is arguing against. As analytical units, the notions are facile and do not do justice to the highly variegated cultural contexts they purport to represent. At this stage, however, they are being employed to facilitate the discussion on democracy and its various conceptions.

valid, certain, non-referential, self-evident, self-validating and fixed sets of principles or assumptions” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 56). Whereas in postmodernism knowledge and knowledge-making are deemed to be always laden with value and are never neutral, empiricism defined prejudice-free methods for validating scientific knowledge. (Sadiki, 2004, p. 145). A ramification of paradigms like positivism is the widespread idea that modern science is the sole arbiter of truth, and that employing the scientific method holds the key to accessing a kind of knowledge that exists objectively and detached from the observer. In international relations scholarship, for example, the influence of positivism can be seen in the ontological assumptions that underlie traditional international relations. According to Felipe Klauser Dornelles' *From Disparate Critiques to a Coherent Theory of Global Politics (2002)*, the problem with this approach is that it relies “solely on empirically observable ‘facts’ and precludes the possibility of analyzing ‘unobservables’ such as cross-border structures that are socially created” (p. 3).

In this sense, anti-foundationalism challenges the very basis of knowledge that is grounded in certainty. In the realm of anti-foundationalism, on the other hand, “knowledge is relative, referential and, subsequently, non-fixed. [...] Knowledge is authorised in reference to time, space, language and culture” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 56).

Viewed in this way, the utility of the foundationalism/anti-foundationalism distinction becomes evident in the context of the cultural inquiry which is looking at narratives of democracy. In practice, the two realms have very distinct manifestations; both serve very different political ends. If in the former, knowledge is dogmatic – foundationalism “in its Western contexts, has racist, ethnocentric, sexist and, generally, exclusivist connotations” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 56) - the practice of anti-

foundationalism, in the tradition of philosophers like Dewey, Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Rorty, implies the opposite. Instead of a position of certainty, “it declares a position of opposition to the claims of fixity, singularity and self-evidence of the kinds of foundational truths democracy is founded on” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 61). Because it embodies plurality and diversity of ideas, anti-foundationalism rejects “Western self-appointment as the legitimate source of norms of political practice” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 62). The implications of such a paradigm shift are significant. In terms of democratisation in the Arab Middle East, foundationalism meant that Arabs viewed democracy as a system which is born of a particularistic reality of a largely alien culture, and which has been essentially imposed from above. In the legacy of colonialism such a system has been characterised by a specific power relationship that emerges from the same mind-frame which perceived one side as inherently superior and the other as inherently inferior.

Anti-foundationalism calls for a new ethos which is intrinsically suspicious of fixed power relations. It is a paradigm which gives birth to a political structure that ensures that no idea, no political actor, can monopolise power. Such a refashioning and rethinking of democracy would rescue democracy from being reduced to routinisation. In *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections Without Democracy* (2011), Sadiki writes that the Arab Middle East is “awash in *electoralism*” and what he calls “*electoral fetishism*” (emphasis in original text). “Procedural democracy cannot, in the absence of supporting values and institutions, be expected to deliver more than a minimalist democracy” (Sadiki, 2011, p. 132).

Throughout the MENA region, examples abound of states which claim to be democratic simply because they hold elections periodically and have instituted

parliaments that rubber-stamp legislation. And yet, not only do those with the firm grip on power not leave any room for diversity of opinion or plurality; they even justify oppression in the service of that foundationalist agenda which sustains them. Tunisia under Ben Ali, as shall be discussed in Chapter 3, exemplified this situation.

Being expressed as it is in Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism, foundationalism consequentially cements democracy in its grand narrative. From this grand narrative flow the misconceptions on the readings of Islam and its history. "The library of ahistorical scholarship that reduces Islam to an essence of sorts or to a totalitarian order has grown exponentially. But the pessimistic forecasting of a climate of inhospitality by Islam to democracy not only ignores history, but also misreads democracy." (Sadiki, 2004, p. 71).

As this work will show later on, essentialism is not only expressed in scholarship but is rife in language and images used in mainstream journalistic works and the mass media which covered, for example, the electoral outcome of post-revolution elections in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya held in 2011 and 2012. Most works, including by Arabs themselves, express in no uncertain terms an a priori suspicion of aspiring Islamist parties or governments. Their work clearly expresses Orientalist (Said, 1978) assumptions which portray democratising Arab societies in terms of their backwardness as opposed to the advanced status of European societies. In terms of Jeffrey C. Alexander's "binary discourse", (2008, pp. 56-59) language used in these narratives implies that Arabs are "passive and dependent, irrational and hysterical, excitable, passionate, unrealistic, or mad, [and] they cannot be allowed the freedom that democracy allows". Given these traits, they are likely to form anticivil relations based on greed, deceit, self-interest and deference, and will

“naturally create institutions that are arbitrary rather than rule-regulated, that emphasize brute power rather than law and hierarchy rather than equality”.

“Despite quantitative and qualitative accomplishments in Western scholarship on the society, history and civilisation of the Arab Middle East, many studies remain trapped within an ethnocentric and foundationalist discourse which takes the supremacy of Western models and cultures for granted, and assumes their yardsticks to be universally normative.” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 141).

The following section will delve into notions of Islam and democracy as these intersect in discourses through time. In doing so, conceptions of the “West” and “Democracy” by Arabs, whose counter-narratives also often fall into the trap of essentialism, will be looked at more closely. This, one hopes, will inform the present inquiry on the kind of societal power relations that are emerging in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings in Tunisia, as well as the assumptions that have shaped relations between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean.

2.5 Constructing the “other”: Islamist presuppositions of democracy

Drawing on interviews with Islamists from Egypt’s Muslim Brethren, the Al-Nahdah Party of Tunisia (which was still exiled at the time), the Islamic Action Front (Jordan’s Muslim Brethren’s political arm) and Sudan’s Islamic National Front, Sadiki (2004) makes a number of observations on the meaning of the term “Islamists” and in turn lists a number of common features shared by “most if not all” of them. These include the tendency to stress a moral/ethical approach to polity, society and economy; the tendency to stress the relevance of Islam, Islamic scriptures and otherworldly perspectives to expound an alternative worldview for Muslims and non-

Muslims, in order to develop a framework for understanding human existence and for engineering visions and actions for political, social and economic correctness; Islamists also believe in the righteousness of their programme for an Islamic-based order and that this can address the ills of secular and relativistic modern culture. Rejecting privatisation of religion, secularisation of knowledge and of life, and moral relativism, “Islamists tend to have strong commitment to helping enact their models of political Islam which are rooted in a common memory, shaped, on the one hand, by success of the Medinese example of seventh-century AD and, on the other, by colonial and post-colonial setbacks” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 100). Without purporting to be exhaustive, these characteristics aid analysis because they bring to the fore how Islam and Islamic history illuminate the Islamists’ conceptions of self. As shall be demonstrated, such conceptions of self have been constructed in terms of specific historical references which include interaction with Europeans in an often asymmetric power relation. Islamist ideas on democracy, therefore, are not free of essentialist “Occidentalist” views. Islamists engage in their own essentialisations as many Orientalists do (Sadiki, 2004, p. 96).

Citing Nikki R. Keddie’s *An Islamic Response to Imperialism (1968)* and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod’s *Arab Rediscovery of Europe: Study in Cultural Encounter (1963)*, Sadiki sees a pattern among Arab writers encountering Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While some encountered Europeans when travelling to European cities, many came to know European ways as a result of colonialism: through military campaigns, missionaries, school teachers and administrators. Despite reactions ranging from outright fascination to outright rejection of Western technologies, for example, the underlying assumption traceable in all written works of the time was of a European culture marked by progress, and

therefore superiority, with respect to the Arab way of life. The first differences emerge. In the nineteenth century, Arab writers describe European society as “utilitarian and lacking the spirituality inherent in Islam”. There was no question that Europe was seen superior from technological, scientific, institutional and philosophical perspectives. Still, these achievements were less valuable than the spirituality of Islam (Sadiki, 2004, p. 102). As differences began to emerge, so started various propositions for reform by Arab thinkers such as Al-Afghani (1839-1897) and Khayr al-Din (1822-1890), who start to articulate the place of religion in polity and society. Al-Afghani saw religion’s utility in facilitating acceptance of reforming ideas by the masses, holding that “the ultimate aim was the secularisation of Muslim society in the same way that Christian society has been secularised”. Khayr al-Din, on the other hand, saw European civilisation as the emulation of Islamic civilisation at the height of its wealth and military power, and insisted that emulation of Europe in the Arab-Islamic world had to be in accordance with the *shari’ah*, Islamic law. Critical of Muslim philosophy as having taken on Greek concepts unquestioningly, Al-Afghani argued that the problems of ignorance in Muslim society had to be combated by taking on European rationalism. Through these renderings, just as the “West” had Orientalised the “East” by defining it exotic, seductive, magical and “other”, the “East” had Occidentalised the “West” essentialising it as secular, materialistic and mechanistic. In all these ideas and contestations, the constant point of reference is religion: “In this regard, one striking continuity from Al-Afghani to the more recent Islamic ideologues is the selective nature of discourse whereby Western political freedom, justice and institutions are cast as Islamic or read in Islam, even if with qualifications”. Undoubtedly Islam remains a constant point of reference today.

According to Sadiki, the encounter with the “West” and the “modern” has been “almost invariably violent, engendered, at the conscious level, [as] intellectual-ideological cultural shock, and at the not so conscious level, a psychological-emotional impact”, a shock-impact which still reverberates today (Sadiki, 2004, p. 111). It is this turbulent encounter that has juxtaposed “self” and “other” dynamics in how the encounter has played out. It is no surprise, therefore, that the terrain under review is played out at the level of cultural symbols that signify a struggle in the power-knowledge relationship as this is played out in Islamist-Arab relations with the “West”. The pattern has been constant and has shaped the way in which Islamists see themselves today. Sadiki lucidly ropes in how this dynamic plays out in the construction of identity. Inwardly and through religion, by modelling their lives on the so-called *al-salaf al-saalih* (righteous forebears), Islamists seek “to apply religion to the horizontal dimensions of life”. Outwardly, symbols like the beard, the veil and the traditional Islamic garb are the manifestation of a rejection of *taghrib* (Westernisation), of ‘commodification of life’, of ‘Pierre Cardin’ consumerism and materialism, and of ‘Coca Cola’ accultural culture”. Accordingly, Occidental modes of discourse on the “West” and on democracy, “must be understood as counter-discourses of resistance” (p. 117). Besides narrating how the relationship with the “West” is viewed by Islamists, that discourse is shaping and reshaping “truth” and “reality”, and re-shaping societal relations in due course.

From a pragmatic viewpoint, the Islamist narrative of resistance had sought to counter the dominant discourse associated with subjugating European colonial powers. In the post-colonial period, the Western influence did not diminish; rather, the narrative remained useful to resist oppressive regimes serving foreign influences, globalisation and United States hegemony. The Islamist narrative, which values

communitarism and spiritualism as inherent in Islamic identity, also came in handy to reject materialism and individualism identified in the “other”. “Through their counter-discourses of resistance, Islamists from Iran to Sudan have been aiming at breaking down the dominant forms of knowledge in order to change the existing power relations of domination, locally, regionally and globally” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 120).

More recently, perhaps, what has made the Islamist counter-discourse so relevant was the marginalisation and purposeful suppression of Islamists by dictatorial governments in the Arab Middle East and North Africa. It will be interesting to see how the de-marginalisation of the Islamist narrative that followed the 2011 uprisings (upon the holding of free elections, Islamist parties have won popular mandates at the polls in both Tunisia and Egypt) will change that discourse. This work takes up this discussion again through its inquiry of emerging narratives in Tunisia in the wake of the 2011 revolution (See chapter 3).

The Islamist counter-discourse of resistance is not without its dangers. Identity formation’s emphasis on contrast “coupled with the homogenisation of identity and culture as in some Islamist counter-discourses, has the potential of denying a share in public or opposition space for other identities, both individual and collective. This negation spells danger for the future of the democratic project in the AME” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 122). In his analysis of Islamist counter-discourses, Sadiki identifies a failure on behalf of some Islamists to recognise the “plurality of cultural frames of reference available for Arabo-Islamic postcolonial identity” (p. 126). The flaw is in the search of some kind of fixed Arab-Islamic identity which is quarantined from the rest of the world, and which is bound to intensify rather than defuse tension. At a time characterised by cultural transnationalism and global solidarity, it is not quite

possible for an identity to quarantine itself, Sadiki says, especially with reference to technology: "It is untenable for any identity to borrow Western technology and fully quarantine itself from cultural influences from Europe or North America" (p. 127). The assertion carries serious weight with the benefit of hindsight, especially when considering the influence of information and communication technology and the space it opened up for narratives of resistance during the 2011 uprisings. In the latter context, the street became a symbol of pluralist resistance where the Islamist narrative was just one of many voices.

From his interviews with leading Islamists, Sadiki elicits various assumptions which form the basis of Islamist narratives, and states that through their Occidental mode of discourse, Islamists tend to establish a kind of hegemony similar to what Westerners realised in terms of knowledge-making about the Orient. One difference is vital, however. Whereas European Orientalism was a result of offensiveness, Islamist Occidentalism was formed in retreat. At the time that they are interviewed by Sadiki, the Islamists are underground, jailed, in opposition or exiled. This is relevant when one discusses the notions of democracy and how these are formed in Islamists' minds. In the realm of morality Sadiki identifies a few examples which most Islamists he interviewed employed to demonstrate difference between Western democracy and democracy as conceived by Islamists (2004, p. 134). Among these are the granting of rights to gay and lesbian groups in society or in armed forces, an issue which is seen as countering what is permitted by *Allah* (God). Secondly, Islamists cannot separate democracy from the West's colonial past, as well as its hegemonistic and expansionist tendencies. Thirdly, Islamists associate democracy's imbalance with its materialism, which translates not only into insatiable

greed on an individual level, but also in terms of the use of financial means to gain access to political power (p. 136).

Whether under colonial powers or under oppressive authoritarian regimes, Arabs' ideas on democracy became articulated in a discourse against oppression based on *al-'adl* (justice) and *hurriyah* (freedom), two elements which are "associates of democracy" (Sadiki, 2004, p. 200).

2.6 Key historical landmarks shaping contemporary Arab views on democracy

Sadiki identifies four important historical landmarks for Arabs which, he says, form part of the symbols and schemas mentioned earlier in this work. The first was the advent of Islam in Mecca and Medina in the seventh century AD, followed by the nineteenth century political ferment referred to as *'l-nahdah* or Renaissance (not to be confused with the homonymous Tunisian Islamist party). The third landmark was the decolonisation process in the twentieth century while the fourth and final landmark was a combination of events that happened in the 1980s and 1990s including a drive towards Arab political liberalisation, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the dissolution of the Soviet Union (pp. 200-208). The first landmark, the advent of Islam, symbolises for many Arabs the rise of humanism and is a revolution against *al-jahiliyyah*, or the 'age of pagan ignorance'. Islam is seen as having ended female infanticide, ended slavery and introduced rights for women to inherit (Sadiki, 2004, p. 200), (Hourani, 1991, pp. 7-21). The second landmark, spanning from Napoleon's invasion of Egypt till the beginning of World War II, is characterised by a drive for reform spurred by comparison with Europe's advancement in the arts, science, technology and warfare (Sadiki, 2004, p. 202): "Al-nahdah's relevance for political

reform is embodied in a number of developments regarding the earliest experiments with constitutional and representative government, innovations in political vocabulary, and the influx of nationalist ideas”.

According to Sadiki (2004, p. 203) Tunisia at the time of Ahmed Bey and later Khayr al-Din was a prime example of such a drive for reform which emulates European political ways and institutions. Despite the limited effect of such reforms, this period is featured in Tunisian historical accounts as a distinctly positive one. In *Histoire de la Tunisie: Les Grandes Dates De La Préhistoire à la Révolution (2011)*, Habib Boularés discusses this era in his chapter “Ahmed Bey et le Rêve de Modernité” (Ahmed Bey and the rise of modernity) and recalls Ahmed Bey’s achievement in terms of the setting up of a military academy, economic reforms including the setting up of Tunisian monopolies in the production of soap, salt, tobacco and leather as a way to lessen economic dependency on the Ottoman empire (p. 434). Boularés highlights Bey’s abolition of slavery as well as his treatment by the French as an “independent sovereign” during his visit to Paris in 1846. Discussing this Arab renaissance period, Sadiki (2004, p. 205) quotes Ami Ayalon who lists a number of political concepts which were adapted to Arabic at the time. Among them are *dimuqratiyyah* (democracy) and *barlaman* (parliament). Decolonisation, the third landmark in Arab history according to Sadiki, “raised expectations of greater popular sovereignty” through the political events of the twentieth century. The fourth landmark – covering events of the 1980s and 1990s, raised hopes for a new era of renewal based on human rights and democratisation (Sadiki, 2004, p. 208). It brought about, among others, a renewed debate on the role of ‘civil society’ in the context of Arab democratisation (Sadiki, 2011, p. 32), even though the concept of civil society does not have the same meaning as it does in the

European tradition. The characteristics of this final “landmark” include the failures of polity which, despite instituting electoral practices across many Arab states, fell short of bringing about the desired change. It will be the object of the latter section of this chapter to discuss in some detail this more recent historical trajectory so as to understand the context preceeding the 2011 uprisings. But before embarking on that, it is pertinent to trace a few notions of democracy in Arab epistemology and how these have been constructed beyond the later European influences.

2.7 Islam meets Western philosophy: from Al-Farabi to Khayr al-Din

Quoting Netton (1992), Rosenthal (1969), Strauss (1977) and Umar (1992), Sadiki (2004, pp. 208-209) refers to Arab philisopher Al-Farabi (870-950AD) whose concept of *al-madinatu 'l-jama'iyyah*, or “virtuous city” builds on Greek-Hellenistic philosophy. Al-Farabi and the Arab philisophers he influenced, must have been familiar with Greek concepts, including democracy. They discussed divine revelation and reasoning, bringing in comparisons between concepts such as Plato’s philosopher-king and the Islamic concept of ruler prophet or leader (*ra'is*). “Influenced by Plato and Aristotle before them, Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, hierarchised society and knowledge by making philosophy an elite vocation, the bastion of those who have a superior intellect, and religion a public one, for those lacking in philosophical rationality and wisdom” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 210). Not only had Hellenic concepts, including democracy, penetrated the Arab world to be “preserved and transmitted”; they had been “recast in an unmistakably Islamic framework. This happened by way of according a great deal of importance to divinity” (p. 211), “making no separation between this life and the hereafter, between God and man, or religion and politics”. In Al-Farabi’s virtuous

city there is a shift from Plato's ideal city as expressed in *The Republic*. "The teleological attainment of perfection, which in its Platonic sense resides in a philosophical kingdom, would be incomplete for Al-Farabi without a philosopher-Imam or philosopher-prophet as the source of both intellectual power (e.g. speculative wisdom) and political/temporal/practical power (e.g. practical wisdom)". (Sadiki, 2004, p. 211). Al-Farabi finds imperfections in his virtuous city as he measures it against the Islamic yardstick of what is virtuous and perfect. Like Aristotle, Al-Farabi sees the pursuit of happiness as an intrinsically human endeavour and human association as an indispensable vehicle for that happiness (Sadiki, 2004, p. 212). From this flows his criticism of the virtuous city's incapacity of reaching "supreme happiness" (p. 214). Although the virtuous city is the least imperfect among cities, its earthly materialism contradicts Islam's spiritualism as perfection can only be attained in God (p. 216). This and other notions, such as the Qur'anic notion of "the righteous people", are in agreement with the virtuous city (p. 216). Overall, Al-Farabi is among the first to try to reconcile Islamic concepts with Western philosophy.

Sadiki argues that attempts at syncretism by Al-Farabi and others constructed "a polity that is loyal to the Arabo-Islamic heritage, morality and identity and yet bold enough to tap into the Western tradition of political philosophy and practical instrumentality to forge an ethic of government for achieving human and Islamic felicity" (Sadiki, 2004, p. 218).

The yardstick of Islamic ways appears in reform projects proposed by more recent thinkers such as al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), Khayr al-Din (1822-1890) and al-Kawakibi (1849-1902), whose concepts of reform are motivated by comparison with

European progress but have a strong Islamic flavour (Sadiki, 2004, p. 218). Al-Kawakibi is critical of secularists and detractors of Islam and rejects the Western suggestion that political despotism stems from religious despotism (p.221). “He denies that such a proposition is applicable to Islam, and retorts by asserting that religious reform effects political reform.” Khayr al-Din associates the heights of the Muslim *ummah* (community) with adherence to the straight path of Islam (p.221). Concerning political reform, all three reformers speak of good government as the ultimate end of reform, and state that good government must conform with the *shari’ah* (Sadiki, 2004, p.222). Their ideas of rulership, the public interest, as well as the contours of authority are framed through an Islamic framework (p.224). All three reformers stand for incremental reform, advocate peaceful change and express preference against a one-man rule.

2.8 Arab notions of democracy in the twentieth century

The views expressed by these early thinkers on societal relations in the Arab Middle East and North Africa precede today’s highly-variegated landscape where the notion of democracy has been articulated even by way of its absence. In their paper *Democratization and Islam (1991)*, John L. Esposito and James P. Piscatori state that “whether the word democracy is used or not, almost all Muslims today react to it as one of the universal conditions of the modern world. To this extent, it has become part of Muslim political thought and discourse.” (Esposito and Piscatori, 1991, p. 440). On similar lines, Sadiki (2004, p. 229) argues that though democracy is generally lacking in the Arab World, it is seen to have the capability to solve problems like war, disunity, developmental problems, dependence and corruption.

Still, from Nasser's bread democracy⁵ to Al-Qadhafi's Third Universal Theory as expounded in The Green Book, via Hasan II of Morocco's "vision of a crossbred democracy as an amalgam of paternalism, autocracy and pluralism", the "inputs of Arab leaders on democracy have mostly been grand proclamations, few of which have been put into practice" (Sadiki, 2004, p. 230).

Democracy is also refracted through the spectacles of religionists who stand for an Islamic state and whose relation to democracy can be divided between rejectionist and adaptationist. While "the former deny democratic principles and Islamic tenets to be compatible", the latter "refer to Islam as being democratic, and/or see some grounds for reconciliation between the two" (Sadiki, 2004, p. 238). Rejectionists such as Abd al-Qadir Zallum argues that popular sovereignty and separation of politics and religion as in democracy is anti-Islamic. This line of reasoning attributes moral decay to democracy's personal freedom. Rejectionists formulate their opposition to democracy in terms of its association with the "liberal ethos" which permits "enrichment through colonisation, exploitation of other peoples' resources, speculation, interest, gambling, the making and selling of wine, and through prostitution and *harām* [defined as all that is forbidden or unlawful by way of a direct Qur'anic text]" (Sadiki, 2004, p. 239). Esposito and Piscatori identify this viewpoint as having emerged in the Iran of the Constitutional Movement of 1905-1911.

⁵ In his paper *Popular Uprisings and Arab Democratisation*, Sadiki (2000) borrows the term *dimuqratiyyat al-khubz* (democracy of bread), coined by Professor Ahmad Shalabi of Cairo University. The expression is used to describe how post-independence Arab rulers have been "paid political deference by their peoples in return for the provision of publicly subsidized services-education, health care, and a state commitment to secure employment" (p. 79). The point made by Sadiki is that "Arab authoritarianism had reproduced itself not by relying solely on brute force, but also by relying on 'elements of negotiation and accommodation'."

Shaykh Fadlallah Nuri, during debates over the formulation of the constitution, argued that one key democratic idea, the equality of all citizens, is "impossible" in Islam. Unavoidable and insurmountable inequalities exist, such as between believers and unbelievers, rich and poor, husband and wife, the healthy and ill, and the learned jurist and his followers. Neither is it possible for there to be a legislative body; 'Islam does not have any shortcomings that require completion'. (p. 435)

Adaptationalist views suggest Islam and democracy have many foundations in agreement. Finding no contradiction between democracy and the *shari'ah* are Khalid Muhammad Khalid, Fahmi al-Shannawi (who sees a form of popular sovereignty in Islam) and Malik Bin Nabi (Sadiki, 2004, pp. 243-245). Khalid Muhammad Khalid states that Islam is the pristine source of democracy, defining democracy as a political system establishing state-society relations on the basis of freedom and justice. The fact that the Qur'an does not forbid parliaments, the free press or political parties is sufficient justification for borrowing this concept, according to Khalid Muhammad Khalid, who sees no point in opposing it simply because it is an alien concept. Bin Nabi formulates a conception of democracy in terms of the democratic person who must be liberated from submission and domination. Esposito and Piscatori (1991) refer to the same brand of adaptationalist view which envisions Islam as inherently democratic not only because of the Qur'anic principle of *shūra* (consultation), but also because of the concepts of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *ijma'* (consensus) (p. 434). Such an interpretation, they state, has served its political purposes in Syria, for example, where the Muslim Brethren opposing the regime of Hafiz al-Assad, found it useful to make *shūra* a central concept of its political platform (Esposito and Piscatori, p. 434).

Discussing the variety of Islamist thinking on the relationship between Islam and democracy, Esposito and Piscatori (1991) mention Sayyid Qutb, a Muslim Brotherhood radical theoretician who was executed by the Egyptian government in 1966, and who stated that popular sovereignty was a usurpation of God's sovereignty. Qutb was to be considered a martyr of Islamic revival, having had an impact on the thinking of radical groups in the 1970s and 1980s (p. 435). There were others, like Ali Benhadj, from Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front that contested and won the 1991 elections, who argued that "the very concept of majority rule is objectionable since issues of rights and justice cannot be quantified; the greater number of votes does not translate into the greater moral position" (Esposito and Piscatori, 1991, p. 436). Another alternative was that of theo-democracy, proposed by Abul A'la Mawdudi, founder of the Pakistan-based Jamaat-i Islami, who "holds that Islam constitutes its own form of democracy," one which is "conceived as a limited form of popular sovereignty, restricted and directed by God's law" (p. 436). This thinking, argue Esposito and Piscatori, is reflected in the current Iranian constitution which makes reference to both divine and popular sovereignty.

Esposito and Piscatori mention Tunisia's el-Nahdah as an Islamist party committed to pluralist policies reflecting the thinking of its leaders, Rachid Ghannouchi and Abdelfattah Mourou.

Al-Nahda's leaders have combined the criteria of Islam with that of democracy to criticize the Tunisian government and serve as a platform in al-Nahda's appeal for popular support. For Ghannouchi, democracy, popular sovereignty, and the role of the state – 'the state is not something from God but from the people.... The state has to serve the benefit of the Muslims' – multiparty elections, and constitutional law are all part of a 'new Islamic thinking' whose

roots and legitimacy are found in a fresh interpretation or reinterpretation of Islamic sources. Mourou has argued that 'laws come from God, but sovereignty is that of the people.' He draws a distinction between the general principles of the Qur'an, which, like the great principles enunciated in the preamble of a secular constitution, are enduring, and human legislation within the limits set by these principles. That legislation, in an Islamic state as in a secular state, is the responsibility of the people. (1991, p. 437)

Finally, there are the so-called Arab secularists (*al-'almaniyyun al-'Arab*) who advocate for the separation of religion and politics as a pre-requisite for democracy. The latter are associated with a limiting of the rulers' powers (as advocated by Fu'ad Siraj al-Din, then President of the Wafd Party in Egypt), a form of government that is not open to manipulation (according to 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jasim, former member of the Kuwaiti National Assembly) and a system pertinent for the consciousness of the working class (according to Muhammad Ibrahim Naqd, a Sudanese socialist) (Sadiki, 2004, p. 247).

In accordance with Esposito and Piscatori (1991), Sadiki (2004) opines that a large segment of the Arab intelligentsia today promotes the idea of political democracy as a prerequisite for any reform (p. 251). He argues that since the debate on the viability of Arab democracy coincides with Islamic revivalism today, the division between secularists and religionists is bound to become more pronounced, given that

various Arab narratives of democracy share the characteristics of being quasi-'grand narratives' that over the past forty years have been implicated in doing a great deal of oppressing. From this perspective, these narratives continue to

be locked into an imagining of politics that is teleological in its ideals and hegemonic and homogenising in its praxis. (2004, p.251).

The challenge facing Arab democrats today is to open spaces in which power is neither fixed nor singular.

2.9 Conclusion: Towards a post-2011 mapping of the territory

The above discussion on notions of democracy in the Arab Middle East and North Africa is a backdrop for the specific context under review: Tunisia in the wake of the revolution which deposed Ben Ali's regime in 2011. Making the case for a cultural approach to map the emerging narratives of democracy, this chapter has reviewed the nuanced notion of culture and explained its usefulness as an analytical tool to unpack the schemas through which social and political realities are perceived by conflict actors.

The idea of culture as a static concept has been refuted for a relativistic approach which sees democracy as being actively constructed in ongoing political action. As a framework through which conflict actors perceive reality and construct their own version of truth, culture can illuminate the multiplicity of hues, colours and contrasts of the bigger picture.

Turning to the concept of democracy and its universal appeal, this chapter has looked at how democratisation functions as an ethos of anti-foundationalism. Its appeal lies in its suspicion of fixed power relations. Rather than being an alien concept imposed from without, anti-foundationalist democracy is a paradigm which gives birth to indigenous political structures that ensure that no idea, no political actor, can monopolise power.

By looking at some common views held by Islamists, the latter sections of this chapter have illustrated how democratic narratives through the ages have been shaped by Arabs' interaction with Europeans. The Islamist narrative has often served as counter-discourses of resistance given the asymmetric relationship with European influences. Still, various attempts have been made by Arabs to syncretise Western ideas with their own heritage, especially when it came to ideas on good government, democracy, justice and freedom. The wide spectrum of views ranges from the Islamist thinking which rejects democracy as outright anti-Islamic to those who see in Islam the pristine source of democracy. Then again, one finds a growing section of Arabs who advocate for a complete separation between religion and state affairs.

Born of specific social and political contexts, this panoply of narratives points to some of the most important symbols and schemas in the Arabo-Islamic world today. It is these narratives and their underlying assumptions that shape the way in which social and political conflict is perceived. As Jillian Schwedler (2011) argues in her paper on studying religious practices and meanings labelled as political Islam, one needs to ask:

What political work do Islamic symbols and rhetoric do? Why do ostensibly secular regimes utilize narratives of piety? How do the politics of religion and piety play out in highly localized bases: in neighborhoods, within families, across the geography of a single city, at the nexus of kinship relations and state modes of exercising power, between the personal and the social? (p. 137)

With this in mind, Chapter 3 will delve into the core of this research: mapping the landscape in Tunisia to understand what kind of democracy is emerging

following the 2011 revolution. Among the key questions to be asked are: is the revolution leading to an open and free society? And to what extent does the Tunisian scenario reflect a pattern in the wider Arab Middle East context? This will be done by unpacking emerging narratives elicited, among others, from field research conducted by the author in the spring of 2012.

3. Tunisia and the 2011 Arab uprisings

From Tunisia in North Africa to the Occupy Wall Street in the United States, actors consecrate their causes and validate their prejudices with the rhetoric of liberty. This tendency constitutes the major political challenge of our time, to find a way to blend the complex array of lived political experiences into a common language of civil and democratic cooperation that avoids the destructive urge to eliminate the other. This effort is inherently wrapped up in communicative practices that in various ways channel the energies of social solidarity, human need, and the civil power that comes with it. (Simmons, 2012, p. 166)

3.1 Introduction

In October 2011, Tunisia held the first free elections in its history, electing a national constituent assembly entrusted with the redrafting the country's constitution (International Crisis Group, 2012). Just a year earlier, hardly anyone would have thought that the ensuing unrest would turn into nationwide popular uprising by the end of the year, and would lead to the toppling of a decades' old dictatorship.

The October 2011 elections were not the first elections to take place in Tunisia. Indeed, boasting the Muslim world's first constitution dating back to 1860 under Muhammad Bey (Sadiki, 2011, p. 63), Tunisia has a history of electoralism in which citizens were called to elect their president, their legislative assembly, as well as their municipalities. Over a span of sixty years, Tunisia held elections since 1959 – three years after gaining independence from France – then in 1981 and 1989.

When he ousted former President Habib Bourguiba in a bloodless coup in 1987, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, who was Prime Minister at the time, signalled commitment towards multipartyism and constitutional change. Both the initial outlook and the rhetoric were positive. The country was embarking on a number of legal reforms including changing the constitution to remove the life tenure of the president, increase parliament's authority and reducing the prime minister's powers. New laws on political parties lifted restrictions on parties in opposition, others sought to reform the press code and others yet stressed commitment to human rights through the release of political prisoners and by allowing political exiles to return (Sadiki, 2011, p. 112). Ben Ali won presidentials for the first time in 1989, and went on to be re-elected four more times after that, in 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009. (Sadiki, 2011, p.100; BBC News 2012).

Today, Tunisians remember his regime for authoritarianism, cronyism, marginalisation and oppression, not for democratic openness. What had been a promise to break with Bourguiba's Tunisia which "rationalised the discarding of viable identities: religious, tribal and democratic" in the name of a state hegemony, quickly turned into "a continuity of exclusivity and singularity" under Ben Ali (Powell & Sadiki, 2010, p. 117).

The protesters who took to the streets in December 2010, initially in the poorest regions, decried their poverty and lack of opportunities. The violent police crackdown on them brought more protesters to the street, hardened them and shifted the narrative of protest. Those who held up placards on Avenue Habib Bourguiba in Tunis, the capital city, and those who clandestinely mobilised unrest in the smaller cities and rural areas through internet blogs, facebook and twitter, decried the lack of political rights and civil liberties.

A look at the thousands of pictures and videos of the Tunisian uprising - mostly shot with amateur cameras and mobile phones during 29 days of protests, tell a story of a nation that had had enough. The pictures are testimony to the fact that protesters did not belong to one specific social group. Instead they came from all walks of life. Besides hailing images of Mohammed Bouazzizi, the most famous martyr of the revolution⁶, mothers held up posters of dissenting sons whom the regime had executed or imprisoned, youngsters called for dignity and reclaimed the right to work and study. Under fire from live rounds and tear gas, protesters held Tunisian flags and addressed their leader: “*Dégage! Dégage! Irhal! Irhal!*” (Leave! Leave!). The slogans of the revolution, chronicled in a publication entitled *Dégage: La révolution tunisienne (2011)* edited by Viviane Bettaïeb, tell of how the public space had been hijacked by the President and his family, notably his wife, Leila Trabelsi, and her relatives.

“*La Tunisie est un peuple, pas un gouvernement!*”, read a placard in the coastal city of Sousse on December 29, 2010 (translated as ‘Tunisia is a people, not a government’). In Tunis, on January 3, 2011, one of the placard addressing the President’s wife read: “*Leila la coiffeuse, tu voles l’argent des orphelins*” (translated: ‘Leila the hairdresser, you steal the money of orphans’).

The protests, articulated in terms of “*Emploi, Liberté, Dignité, Citoyenneté*” [Jobs, Freedom, Dignity, Citizenship] told of a sense of solidarity involving people from different walks of life. The street seemed to have united Tunisians. In Tunis, on

⁶ In December 2010, Muhammad Bouazizi, a 26-year-old fruit vendor from the village of Sidi Bouzid, central Tunisia, died after setting himself on fire in protest against being humiliated by police and government officers. Bouazizi’s death sparked off a wave of nationwide protests that brought down the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia.

January 3, 2011, lawyers cried: *“L’avocat et le chômeur ensemble pour la révolution”* (‘the lawyer and the unemployed together for the revolution’). A slogan sported at Bouazizi’s funeral read *“N’abandonnons pas, ne nous vendons pas, le sang de Mohamed Bouazizi ne sera pas perdu”* (‘Let us not give up, let us not sell ourselves, the blood of Mohamed Bouazizi will not be lost’). Another placard seen at a protest in Tunis on December 28, 2010 read: *“Citoyens rejoins-nous contre la répression et l’humiliation”* – ‘Citizens let us unite against repression and humiliation’ (Bettaïeb, 2011, pp. 126-139).

Tunisians had finally stood up to be counted and made their voice heard in a way they had never done before, at least not in such big numbers and in such a concerted effort. The first in a wave of uprisings in the MENA region, the Tunisian revolution drew attention to the fact that many analysts had taken this country’s apparent stability at face value never to realise that Tunisia was a pressure cooker with no valve. The “unexpectedness” of the uprisings, both in Tunisia and in the other Arab countries where widespread protests ensued, was articulated in reports and scholarly articles as a kind of “intellectual complacency” whereby the Arab world had been regarded as an exception in the vast process of democratisation that had spread around the world in the previous forty years (De Vasconcelos, 2012, p. 7). The uprisings had shaken key analytical presuppositions on the region in both academia and diplomatic circles, revealing that assumptions on the region being an exception to democratisation due to some kind of “stagnant culture” (Avruch, 2008, p. 242) had been flawed. Attention had fallen, all the way, on the elites and their interests, at the expense of heeding the views of those who were finally speaking out. This is what caught this researcher’s attention. Defiant Tunisians were telling their stories of freedom and of justice through protest, by way of their placards, on

internet blogs and social media. People were telling a very different story to the one previously known, a story of how Tunisia's democratic space had been hijacked and closed to those who had no access to the corridors of power despite its relative economic advancement and its holding of regular elections. Youth, activists, women, students, members of the professions, workers, academics, Islamists – Sadiki's "marginalised publics" (2004, p. 7) – had finally defied curfews and risked their lives to force their way onto Habib Bourguiba Avenue to claim back that public space.

Unlike in the other Arab countries to where the uprisings had spread in the early days of 2011⁷, in Tunisia, on the face of it, change was rapid. With Ben Ali gone and three interim governments succeeding one other, elections were promised, planned and held within months. This researcher's suspicion was, though, that the issues which had emerged during the revolution would not go away that quickly. After the elections, with a democratically elected multi-party assembly drafting a new constitution the debate on the checks and balances of the power structures that would avoid usurpation by any single party in the future ensued. But beyond technicalities, an old conflict seemed to have re-emerged. "Most attention to post-revolutionary Tunisia has focused on the domestic tussle over the role of religion in state and society and on the economic malaise that lay at the root of its uprising," wrote Alex Warren (2012) in *Foreign Policy*.

⁷ The dust had hardly settled in Tunisia when much international attention had shifted onto Cairo's Tahrir Square. Cued by the Tunisians, there too, millions of Egyptian protesters were calling on their authoritarian president, Hosni Mubarak, to go. The protests quickly spread to Libya, Yemen, Syria, Jordan and Bahrain, setting a trend across the Arab world but taking a life of their own in each country.

Proof that emotions still ran high is what would be witnessed on April 9, 2012, when a peaceful protest on Habib Bourguiba Avenue, in downtown Tunis, led to fresh tussles with the police. The feast marking the bloody crackdown by the French military against Tunisian citizens which happened in April 9, 1938, took on new meaning as peaceful protesters, including politicians and journalists, were attacked by police truncheons and tear gas. The following day, *Le Temps* newspaper's lead story was entitled: "La mémoire des martyrs souillée" (The memory of the martyrs defiled). On top of the large heading *Le Temps* placed not only a picture of the violent clashes of the day before, but also a picture of the 1938 anti-colonial protest, to signify that the new government was treating citizens exactly like the French had done.



Figure 1: The violent police crackdown on a peaceful protest on April 9, 2012, taints the memory of martyrs who had fallen resisting the French 74 years earlier. Comparing the police's reaction with that of the French colonisers, *Le Temps* newspaper frames the clashes as a new form of oppression.

This, and other moments of tension that ensued, beg the question on what kind of democracy is emerging in post-revolutionary Tunisia. Have Tunisia's diverse identities gained equal access to the newly-won space? Or is there the risk that one group or the other claim that space all for itself? Are the emerging structures satiating the thirst for freedom and justice and access to the decision-making process?

Such questions motivated the undersigned to look at the narratives being constructed in the wake of the revolution. A fieldwork inquiry grounded in the notion of culture discussed in the previous chapter was deemed important to understand how the emerging political structures would ensure that the democratic space remains open. How will the newly-gained freedom be safeguarded and how will justice be delivered in Tunisian society? How do Tunisians understand solidarity and where do they see their country moving towards in the future? As was discussed at length in Chapter 2, this approach seeks, as much as possible, to go beyond "essentialising". Instead, it looks at the frameworks (symbols, metaphors, schemas, or images) with which individuals perceive, interpret, and then act in their world. One feels it is important for any cultural analysis to look at specificity before it can analyse and generalise.

The following pages draw on empirical research carried out by the author in the spring of 2012, a period marked by a mixture of enthusiasm and caution about the emerging political and social order. As the violent clashes in Tunis on 6 April 2012 show, tension in Tunisian society is still high. Yet the situation is stable enough to record emerging narratives, elicit patterns and draw a few conclusions. To this end, four symbols which are deemed to capture the principal narratives emerging in Tunisian society will be analysed.

The first symbol to be looked at is Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia's first President after Independence. It is not the mere fact that he belongs to Tunisia's recent past that makes Bourguiba an important symbol to look at and deconstruct. Twelve years after his death and 24 years since he was forcibly removed, Bourguiba's persona, his thinking and his policies, still cast their shadow on all Tunisians, whether these happen to love him or loath him. Bourguiba's image today is a standard borne by those Tunisians who consider their secularism, their European education and their ties to French culture and values as vital for their country's progress and for the maintenance of democratic openness. But the contradiction lies in his legacy of authoritarianism and oppression, as the reaction he evokes in many Tunisian Islamists demonstrates.

Secondly, this work will consider the Tunisian Constitution as symbol. The re-drafting of the Constitution, which is the main task of the constituent assembly until the next elections, has been the site of contestation on a number of fronts. The virulent conflict on whether Islamic shari'ah should become the basis of the Tunisian constitution is the main issue at stake, but not the only one at that. This constitution is taken to symbolise how pluralism and solidarity should function in society. Ensuring that the emerging political and administrative structures are free and just is perhaps the most important issue facing Tunisian society today. In a sense, therefore, this symbol is the crux of this research.

Linked with some of the issues brought up by the debate surrounding the constitution is the third symbol: 'The Sixth Caliphate'. This metaphor emerged after Hamadi Jebali, secretary-general of the Islamist party El-Nahdah and currently Tunisia's prime minister, reportedly told a rally in the city of Sousse: "My brothers, you are at a historic moment in a new cycle of civilisation, God willing. We are in

sixth caliphate, God willing.” (Mitchell, 2011, November 16). An apparent slip of the tongue, the metaphor provoked disdain and a bitter reaction from secularists. Despite El-Nahdah being a self-professed moderate Islamist party, Jebali’s words were deemed to betray a political vision advocated by groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (The Liberation party), an international Islamic organisation which professes as its main goal the unification of all Muslims in an Islamic state, or caliphate, ruled by Islamic law. The metaphor of ‘the Sixth Caliphate’ will be employed here to underline an emerging conflict within Islamists. As El-Nahdah strives to project its image of a moderate Islamist party, it has to take stock of (and seek not to upset) those Islamists whose vision of society is in cahoots with the modernising elements of Tunisian society.

The fourth and last symbol, which crystallises the issue of women in society, is the Tunisian *Code du Statut Personnel* [Personal Status Code], hereinafter referred to also as CSP. Instituted by Bourguiba and reinforced by Ben Ali, the Personal Status Code is a series of laws aimed at establishing equality between women and men. Through the code, Bourguiba abolished polygamy and established the principle that both spouses need to grant their consent for a marriage to be legal. The code, which came into effect in 1957, forcibly supplanted religious courts with secular ones, soon after banning the wearing of the veil in schools. Successive laws granted women the right to engage in employment and use contraceptives. Often clad in ambiguity, the code has been a constant point of contention between conservatives calling for changes to be made to the code, and modernists hailing it as an anchor of Tunisia’s progressive orientation. That debate resurfaces in the wake of the revolution with women’s rights and freedom under the spotlight.

These symbols will be deconstructed using text, including written material where these narratives are told (newspapers, magazines and books). Face-to-face interviews carried out on the field between April 2 and 15, 2012 will also be used as text. These include formal interviews with the main protagonists of the debate under review: journalists, academics, bloggers, human rights activists, workers, elected Members of the National Assembly, politicians from across the spectrum, and Islamists. This inquiry does not purport to be all-exhaustive. Its aim is to highlight the most important narratives outlined above. For this purpose, insights based on first-hand observation and informal conversations with Tunisians during the fieldwork will also be used.

Table 1: The political landscape in Tunisia

On October 23, 2011, an election to choose Tunisia's Constituent Assembly (TCA) was held. The 217 MPs elected in the country's first free election since 1956 were tasked mainly with redrafting the Tunisian constitution. The following political landscape emerged:

El-Nahdah

- 37 per cent of votes in election, 89 seats in TCA

The largest and most organised party, centre-right and moderately Islamist. Its platform includes economic liberalism, as well as allowing Islam to have a greater presence in public life. Its leader Rachid Ghannouchi, who returned from exile after Ben Ali was deposed, did not run in the election saying that he had no ambitions to be in government. Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali comes from El-Nahdah.

Congress for the Republic (CPR)

- 8.7 per cent in elections, 29 seats in TCA

Centered around secularism and intellectual freedom. Led by Moncef Marzouki, human rights activist and doctor, jailed under Ben Ali. Marzouki is currently the President of the Republic.

Popular Petition for Freedom, Justice and Development (Al Aridha)

- 6.7 per cent, 26 seats

Led by Mohamed Hechmi Hamdi, political writer and media entrepreneur, Al Aridha is a populist party which formed after the 2011 revolution.

Democractic Forum for Labour and Liberties (Ettakatol)

- 7 per cent, 20 seats

Led by Mustafa Ben Jafaar, President of TCA since November 2011, Ettakatol is a secular social democratic party, supported by social media activists and grassroots volunteers. Ben Jafaar was President Movement of Socialist Democrats sitting in opposition under the ousted regime.

Progressive Democratic Party (PDP)

- 3.9 per cent, 16 seats

Secular, socially liberal, and economically centrist party with leanings towards a mixed economy. Like Ennahda, it receives significant funding and has been able to run a nationwide campaign. Supported by the business community. Its leader is Maya Jribi, an outspoken feminist and political activist who started out in the student unions.

The Initiative (Moubadara) parties

- 3.1 per cent of vote in elections, 5 seats collectively in TCA

Came out of the dissolved and banned Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) and represent key figures of the ousted Ben Ali regime. So is Al-Watan party.

Table 1(continued)

Democratic Modernist Pole

– 2.8 per cent, 5 seats in TCA

The Democratic Modernist Pole is a coalition led by the Ettajdid Movement, which is primarily focused on implementing political change. Strongly anti-Islamist, its support for the coalition has dwindled due to infighting and an increase in support for other secular parties.

Afek Tounes

– 1.9 per cent, 4 seats in TCA

Liberal center-right party with focus on secularism and civil liberties.

Tunisian Workers' Communist Party

1.57 per cent, 3 seats in TCA

Largest of a number of communist parties with limited support yet well organised and were expected to win more seats. Most far-left parties's ideology is centered around human rights and globalisation.

Government Coalition

The government coalition consists of the so-called "Troika": El-Nahdah, the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (Ettakatol). According to a political agreement, El-Nahdah controls the government under the premiership of Hamadi Jebali while the other two parties got to appoint the President of the Republic (Moncef Marzouki from the CPR) and the President of the Constituent Assembly (Ettakatol's Mustapha Ben Jafaar).

New political landscape

In 2012, **two new political poles** were established in a bid to unify a number of small parties and stand up to El-Nahdah.

Hizb al-Jomhuri (Republican Party) was established in April 2012 and brought together a coalition of several centrist and left-wing parties including the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), AFEK Tounes (Tunisian Aspiration), Al Arida, Al Karama, the Bledi Movement, the Social Democratic Party for Justice and various independents.

Another pole, the **Nida Tounes** Party (Call of Tunisia) was established in June 2012 by former prime minister Béji Caïd Essebi.

(Hakala & Ghanmi 2012); (Gamha 2011)

3.2 'The strange return of Habib Bourguiba'

Dans la compétition des légitimités qui, aujourd'hui, s'emballe, Bourguiba semble toujours avoir une longueur d'avance, son souvenir sert même d'étalon pour mesurer la stature de ses contemporains, de ses prédécesseurs et de ses successeurs. C'est cet usage finalement politique de Bourguiba, jusque dans sa passivité, qui arrache le personnage au sol prosaïque de l'histoire comme s'il appartenait à un autre Tunisie, à une Tunisie fictive. – Abdessamed (2012, p. 41).

[In the competition for legitimacies which is heating up today, Bourguiba always seems a step ahead; his memory is the standard against which the stature of his contemporaries, his predecessors and his successors is measured. It is this ultimately political usage of Bourguiba, even in his passivity, which uproots the character from the proverbial ground of history that makes it seem like he belonged to another Tunisia, a fictitious Tunisia.]

On March 24, 2012, the *Association nationale pour la pensée bourguibienne* (National Association for Bourguibian thought) met in the city of Monastir to “offer a credible alternative to politics and to make power alternation possible”. *Le Maghreb* magazine reported in its March 31, 2012 issue that thousands of young people, men and women from centrist, liberal and leftist political tendencies had responded to the appeal made by Béji Caïd Essebsi, a Bourguiba-era minister who also led an interim government in the aftermath of the revolution, to come together and “reflect about the country’s future”. Next to a feature recording the event, the publication carried a large picture of several politicians, including Béji Caïd Essebsi, surrounding Bourguiba’s tomb in prayer, inside the mausoleum of Monastir.

Commenting on the event, Kefteji, a blog, called it “The strange return of Habib Bourguiba to Tunisia”. According to the blog the reformation of Destourian parties was being called as an effort to provide a unified political front which would

“return the country to what [had been] described as the path it departed from under Ben Ali, and the equally fatal path of the Islamists.”

Kefteji captures the essence of how the return to Bourguibism is an exciting prospect for many Tunisians, but simultaneously spells the first step toward authoritarianism for others.

You don't have to go far in Tunisia to find people who love Habib Bourguiba. A populist and a nationalist, Tunisia's first leader after independence modernized the country. Many Tunisians, particularly those born before independence, see Bourguiba not only as a force for good, but as a true leader of Tunisians – he is their Papa. And while many of his supporters will decry his authoritarianism, they also applaud what they saw was a relatively uncorrupt individual who only wanted the best for his country. These people often also supported Ben Ali, at least up until the point that his nepotism and kleptocratic ways became known. During the uprising last year, they didn't want an overthrow of the system, just a cleaning up.

Detractors of Bourguisme tell a very different story. They see Bourguiba as a meglomaniac who denied human rights and set the stage for Ben Ali. To Ennahdha supporters, Bourguiba relentlessly pursued, persecuted, and imprisoned them. But not only that – Bourguiba reviled Islamists. When asked what separated him from an Islamist, Bourguiba replied: 'Fourteen centuries'. (Kefteji, 2012)

Revered or loathed, Bourguiba's persona still stirs emotions and makes headlines in Tunisia, a country he built in his image. “Almost half of the population

knows Bourguiba only from history books – many of which are being rewritten as we speak. Whether the reconstitution of his party and his ideas will take hold is far from certain,” Kefteji adds.

3.2.1 Habib Bourguiba - construction of a myth

Born in 1903, Habib Bourguiba governed Tunisia for 31 years. Since becoming the first President of the Republic upon the abolishing of the monarchy in 1957, he is deemed to have left an indelible mark on his country mainly through the political milestones of Independence and his project to modernise (some would argue Europeanise) Tunisia. But the influence of the Monastir-born and Paris-trained lawyer started way before he became President. Bourguiba entered politics in a colonised Tunisia. Before him the way towards nationalism was shown by Abdelaziz Thaâlbi, leader of the Hizb al-Destouri (Constitutional Party). Historian Kmar Bendana (2012b) writes that Bourguiba hit the ground running in an anti-colonial campaign started by Thaâlbi who, on Bourguiba’s return from France in 1927, was not in Tunisia having fled a violent repression in the early 1920s.

Bourguiba founded L’Action Tunisienne newspaper in 1932 and joined the executive commission of the Destour a year later, taking his struggle a step further as one of the leaders campaigning against the interment of naturalised French Muslims in Muslim cemeteries. The discussion of how Islam becomes a narrative of anti-colonial struggle is articulated by Norma Salem (1984) in her book *Habib Bourguiba: Islam and the creation of Tunisia*. In 1931, the Mufti of Bizerte held that French naturalised Muslims should not be buried in Muslim cemeteries. The issue would rise to such large proportions that mass protests were mobilised and the issue occupied much space in the nationalist press, coming to symbolise “the crux

of the Tunisian nationalist movement” (p. 82). On April 14, 1933, for example, a mass spontaneous demonstration in Tunis erupted as “people refused to pray behind those imâms who had been passive towards the issue of naturalization” (Salem, 1984, p. 87). Despite his views on Islam, which would be reflected in his later policies, Bourguiba rode this wave. In the midst of these uprisals, as editor of L’Action Tunisienne, he was invited to meet the Bey to express “the people’s discontent” (Salem, 1984, p. 88).

The point on how Islam served as a narrative of anti-colonialism is important to understand how Bourguiba’s eventual break with the Destour Party would seek to reframe the nationalist struggle, breaking with the concept of ethnicity harboured by the founder of the Hizb-al Destouri. Bourguiba would relegate Islam as a narrative of protest, framing the anti-colonial struggle in terms of secular, territorial nationality.

The earlier anti-French ethnic activism and “the narrative supporting it resonated with traditionalism, grounding identity in a naturalised imaging of Tunisian-ness in Arabo-Islamic terms” (Powel & Sadiki, 2010, p. 112). But with the nascent Hizb al-Destouri al-Jadeed (Neo-Constitutional Party), “territorially orientated identity” became the salient narrative while “ethnoreligiousness was relegated to secondary status”.

In the tumultuous years which followed, Bourguiba would be at the forefront of nationalist demonstrations and campaigns of civil disobedience. Following a bloody demonstration on April 9, 1938, Bourguiba is imprisoned with 12 other party members, but he is never tried. Bendana (2012b, p. 60) writes that it is these years of imprisonment (Bourguiba would remain in detention until 1943) that gave birth to the expression “Combattant Suprême” (Supreme Warrior), a label Bourguiba would

carry all his life. Bendana (2012b, p. 60) concludes: “After having created the events and the political splits which made him leader, [Bourguiba] moved to another time, [a period] in which to harvest an imaginary victory and shape the narrative of a single hero”.

After securing Tunisia’s independence and becoming President, Bourguiba would embark on a road to modernise the Tunisian state. In doing so, he sought a form of Tunisian-ness which hegemonised society. “The state’s insistence on social cohesion in the name of territorial identity went further than closing space for viable identities [...] [The] hegemonising and homogenising character of the state meant banning rival centres of power.” (Powel & Sadiki, 2010, p. 114). His secular political predilections would lead him to purge his party from his one-time comrade and rival nationalist leader Salah Ben Youssef.

Sharing Bourguiba’s vision to modernise Tunisia on the western model, Ben Youssef clad his modernist thinking in Islamic imagery relating to the Qur’an and the Sunna. Returning from exile in 1955, Ben Youssef fell out with Bourguiba over negotiations with France for Tunisia to gain autonomy before becoming independent. Removed from his post of general secretary and expelled from the party, Ben Youssef rallied numerous sympathisers. The years which followed saw violent battles between rival factions. A real purge of Youssefists ensued. Ben Youssef, who would eventually leave Tunisia, declared in 1957 that the time had come to rid the country of Bourguiba’s tyranny, and that to oppose Bourguiba is to fight for God.

Framing his opposition to Bourguiba in religious terms, Ben Youssef said Bourguiba befriended infidels and was their instrument. It was the duty of people to

raise their voices and to use violence if necessary, especially if the despotic and atheist government deprived them from means to express themselves democratically and in a peaceful way. Bourguiba concluded that Ben Youssef had a plot, backed by Egypt, to assassinate him. In August 1961, Ben Youssef was himself assassinated in his hotel room in Frankfurt, Germany, where he had gone for treatment (Abdelhak, 2012, p. 65). In 1973, Bourguiba would recount “in the detail” Ben Youssef’s assassination, feeling the need to clarify on another occasion that he had “not ordered the assassination of anybody”.

Habib Kazdaghli (2012) writes that after independence, the Communists were the only party in opposition as the old Destour Party effectively ceased to exist, by which time Bourguiba’s Neo-Destour dominated social life. The Communist Party’s activities were eventually banned in 1963, a decision which Bourguiba justified on grounds of security.

This was the same kind of closure which made Bourguiba an enemy of Islamists. Powel and Sadiki (2010, p. 26) argue that Bourguiba was the symbol of the Francophile brand of ‘enlightenment-rationality’ and ‘laicism’ that not only made his political struggle a unique one in the Arab world, but earned him condemnation from prominent Islamic authorities of the twentieth century for being an apostate. They cite as an example Bourguiba’s known stands vis-à-vis the veil and the fasting of the Muslim month of Ramadan, and which “offended a wide cross-opinion, both popular and scholarly”.

Oussema Abbes (2012, p. 52) says that Islamists like El-Nahdah traditionally considered Bourguiba’s modernisation project as an occidentalisation project forced upon Tunisia in the same fashion of Attaturk’s imposed reform in Turkey. The

Personal Status Code, which will be discussed separately in this paper, was deemed the Horse of Troy in the house of Islam which would ruin the family, and therefore society. El-Nahdah's ideology called for a defiance towards Bourguibism given the whole history of oppression which the years of Bourguiba's authoritarianism evoke in many Tunisian Islamists. Today,

the reality is always complex within [El-Nahdah], because the ultra-conservative old guard is always waiting for the hour of revenge. This position was made clear by Moncef Ben Salem, currently Minister for Higher Education, during an event in support of a sit-in against the government of Béji Caïd Essebsi, in a video which is circulating on YouTube; [Ben Salem] clearly considers Bourguiba as a Zionist in the pockets of the West, an enemy of the Arabic and Muslim identity of this country. (p. 52)

But some beg to differ. Abdelmajid Charfi, an Islamologue, writes that Islamists' recriminations towards Bourguiba aren't but a sign of ignorance of the needs of this time and the geostrategic conditions of Tunisia. Charfi (2012, p.102) seeks to justify Bourguiba's suppression of the Zeitouna university, for example, in terms of the latter having been instrumentalised by Ben Youssef in his attempt to undermine Bourguiba's rule. He adds that the Zeitouna had been a failed system of archaic teaching anyways, so much so that some venerable sheiks of the institution had themselves sent their sons to other universities because they knew that the Zeitouna's teaching did not correspond to the country's new conditions. Charfi also justifies Bourguiba's suppression of the Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, in terms of the country's need to be economically efficient as Tunisia could not afford to stop for a whole month. "If he was effectively the enemy of a frozen Islam inherited from years of decadence, history will show that he is a great reformer for

the benefit of a religion that is open to progress and uninhibited vis-à-vis its past,” Charfi concludes (2012, p. 103).

What Charfi’s analysis discounts is that the Islamist accusation towards Bourguiba belongs to a counter-narrative of resistance. Zyed Krichen, editor of *Le Maghreb* magazine, says that after the 1956 independence which “modernised society in a hard and brutal manner”, it was the Francophile elites who controlled political, economic, cultural and symbolic power. “It was that elite which was Occidentalised, bilingual, and which formed part of the coastal life of city’s bourgeoisie – that was in power in 1956” (Z. Krichen, personal communication, April 6, 2012). This elite, in turn, marginalised the Islamist elite on the pretext of language (French versus Arabic) and in terms of religion (laicism versus Islam). As a result, Islamists today still refuse to recognise themselves in the cultural norms of the Francophone elite of the time. Indeed, their identity is articulated in opposition to the Bourguiba project and all it represents.

3.2.2 Bourguiba and the making of identity

Writing in *Le Maghreb* magazine, Hichem Abdessamed (2012), a historian, says that Bourguiba today is part of a fictitious identity which was constructed in part thanks to Bourguiba’s own efforts to “turn his egocentric memory into the central archive of our contemporary political history” (p. 41). Abdessamed calls Bourguiba’s official biography, chronicled by Mohamed Sayah (1986), “*la privatisation de la mémoire nationale*” (the privatisation of national memory). “In this assisted solipsism, there is neither background nor scenery or props; just the naked and demiurgic word of a head, the omnipotent and omniscient discourse of the

liberator. Failing to write his own narrative, Bourguiba is the veritable author of a national novel narrated in the first person” (p. 41).

Abdessamed delves into other historical works which discuss Bourguiba’s legacy. Three “Bourguibas” emerge: the first corpus of historical works relates to the memory of his political companions of the 1930s, the second relating to the stories surrounding the fight for Tunisian independence while the third is made up of memoirs by Bourguiba’s old ministers. Abdessamed states that the economy of these corpuses of texts is not so much the construction of a counter-narrative by their authors. Rather, they are a narrative about the emancipatory virtues of a political movement which reneged on its promises, and about the paradoxical destiny of the “father of the nation”.

What emerges from these chronicles is an abundance of details on a project with a constantly shifting modernist horizon and in which democracy was constantly being stolen. The chronicles on Bourguiba also reflect a constant and general inclination towards subverting the national narrative as the battle of a single man (Abdessamed, 2012, p. 43). “The man was complex and his reign on souls exerts itself beyond his death; his memory unfolds on two levels: the partial validation of the glory of a great man (the *zaim* instead of a demi-God) and the remembrance of the ‘truth’ of State he wanted to impose” (Abdessamed, 2012, p. 44).

Kmar Bendana's (2012) explanation for the return of Bourguiba in the post-revolutionary period is an interesting one in terms of the analytical purpose of this paper. He says that exaltation of Bourguiba as a kind of “lost father”, juxtaposed with hatred towards Ben Ali, can be explained as signalling the country’s thirst for a nobler conception of politics in the aftermath of the revolution. It reflects a need to

modify “the origins of a state [which has been] soiled by usurpers”. This interest in Bourguiba, he says, “can be equally read as an emotional counterpoint in this legal and political stage [...] of this transition towards an existence which we hope will be more democratic than under the previous regimes”.

Bendana (2012, p. 46) reads Bourguiba as a symbol of solidarity between generations. He says that encountering the life of this hero in the manufacturing of national sentiment in Tunisia brings together the older generation, which knew him as a leader, and the younger generations which grew up under Ben Ali. The return of Bourguiba, purged of his excesses and faults, helps Tunisians cope with an uncertain future.

At a point of uncertainty, therefore, Bourguiba becomes a symbol of that national pride which Ben Ali’s regime had shattered. Among the contradictory signals which mark this phase of transition is that Tunisians seek refuge in the memory of a man “who gave so much to contemporary Tunisia” and who is “a necessary viaticum for the pursuit of a path that one senses is long and uncertain”. (Bendana, 2012, p. 47)

3.2.3 Bourguibism in today's public sphere

The questions to ask at this stage are about the political fashion in which Bourguibism lives on and how Bourguiba’s legacy frames the current political configuration in Tunisia. According to Slim Laghmani, Professor at the Faculty of Legal, Political and Social Sciences at the University of Tunis, the political configuration in Tunisia will consolidate itself in three main poles: the Islamists, the Modernists and the Bourguibists. “Among the Bourguibists are people who formed

part of the RCD party [Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally]. These are people who were honest and who were not associated with corruption or repression" (personal communication, April 10, 2012).

But what is Bourguibism anyway? Looking at Bourguiba's policies throughout the six decades of his political life, Carl Brown (2001) articulates it in this way: "Bourguibism as described and as implemented by the man himself is so surprisingly simple that one might be tempted to dismiss it as no more than just good political common sense. That would be a mistake. It is in fact uncommon good sense presented with deceptive simplicity and clarity." (Brown, 2001, p. 52). Brown goes on to elicit a list of principles which make up the Bourguibist political platform, including avoiding self-deception, having clear long-term goals but trying to achieve them in stages and being tactically flexible. Yet the Bourguibism denoted by the current attempt to bring together a coalition of small opposition parties under one pole in Tunisia has a different kind of meaning. According to Oussema Abbes (2012, p. 51), the political label "Bourguiba" seems overexploited given the large number of Bourguibist parties and their modest score in the last election. "But the reality is different because, faced with the difficulties of the current government to solve socio-economic problems, and faced by the excesses of Salafists, of civil society, of unions and of the parties in opposition, the Tunisian can easily resort to the nostalgia of a strong state which places the common well-being over individualities, a state which provides simple solutions without promising neither heaven nor hell. Bourguibism is a simple political reference point for the Tunisian but its main inconvenience is its heavy history".

Essebsi's attempts to regroup Bourguibist parties into a larger opposition continued after the March rally in Monastir. On June 16, 2012, he announced the

formation of *Nida' Tounes* (Call of Tunisia) a movement aimed at uniting scattered parties which take their inspiration from Bourguiba and his policies (www.tunisialive.net). Ajmi (2012) reported Essebsi emphasising that the initiative was open "to all of Tunisian society's social currents, with specific reference given to members of the former ruling RCD party." The initiative sparked off a debate on political participation after Fethi Ayadi, head of El-Nahdah's executive bureau, dismissed the movement as irrelevant and suggested that a law be passed to bar anyone previously affiliated with Ben Ali's RCD from running for elections for at least five years. Ayadi's view is shared by Mohamed Zmem, from the Tunisian Communist Workers Party (POCT), who sees Essebsi as trying to polish his image and give former members of the RCD the possibility to become politically active again.

The same news source quoted Mouldi Fehem, a member of the opposition affiliated with the Republican Party, saying that everyone has the right to participate in politics. Fehem opined that nobody should be excluded and that transitional justice must be applied so that those who are really corrupt may be punished. Essebsi's initiative was also welcomed by Salma Bakkar, a member of Tunisia's Constituent Assembly belonging to the left-progressive PDM party.

Indeed, Essebsi's project carries essential contradictions. While serving the political end to rally potential voters who are nostalgic about the glorious past and unhappy with the current government, his Bourguiba narrative is bound to provoke criticism based on the heaviness which the historic persona represents. Interviewed in *La Presse* on March 28, 2012, El-Nahdah Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali said when asked what he thought about Essebsi's new movement:

We are modest and you [Essebsi] should be too. Please do not present yourself as the leader which Tunisia has lost, and do not try to breathe into a dead corpse. We are modest but we are not weak. We do not accept being ordered around. We accepted it neither from Bourguiba nor from Ben Ali. So Mr Essebsi should know the limits of his role. Tunisia needs a strong opposition and I don't like disequilibrium of forces. So we are not afraid of coalitions and alliances. That is democracy. (Dami & Ouerghi. 2012, p. 7)

As the strong point of the movement, Essebsi's Bourguiba narrative is also the movement's Achilles' heel. The problem with reinventing Bourguiba is that his project was conceived in a context of denial of difference, not of solidarity. It is understandable, therefore, that politicians looking to access the political sphere under his banner are bound to raise eyebrows.

At the same time, Ayadi's proposal to close off the political space has more than a hint of irony, not just because it is an obvious payback for oppression suffered by El-Nahdah under the former regimes. In contemplating the possibility of closing off the political sphere to Essebsi and his movement, Ayadi's negative reaction shows that Islamist identity till today is constructed in relation to an omnipresent "other": Habib Bourguiba and his legacy. Ayadi is applying the same anti-democratic pragmatism which ensured that Bourguiba would retain power till he was a sick and senile old man.

Divisive as he may be, Bourguiba still occupies a prominent symbolic place in post-revolutionary politics in Tunisia. The cult of his personality lives on, not only in street names and bronze statues around the country. This "father-of-the-nation" seems like a constant, irreplaceable figure in the Tunisian collective imaginary which

is employed according to need. He is invented and re-invented; he appears and disappears in the oscillation of forgetfulness and remembrance which Tunisian society engages in constantly to explain its “fate”. In the current political scenario where Tunisians are busy constructing a new image of “self”, Bourguiba is useful as a symbol for this Arab nation which seeks to distinguish itself from fellow Arab states in terms of its proximity to Europe. Inasmuch as some of his landmark policies, such as the Personal Status Code, have been accepted by Islamists like El-Nahdah and look like they are there to stay, Bourguiba has been highly successful in transforming Tunisian society forever. He is, in this sense, a unifying figure.

As has been argued, Bourguiba is also a symbol of difference for the secularist sections of Tunisian society in view of the rise of Islamism and its radicalisation in Tunisian society. In this respect, he is bound to remain a symbol of division. There is one thing which may set Bourguiba apart from all Tunisians: his homogenising and hegemonising tendencies, and therefore his anti-democratic practices. The secularist project started by Bourguiba and exhausted by Ben Ali created “a straightjacket of national unity” which historically compromised pluralism and plurality (Powel & Sadiki, p. 107). As an undesirable trajectory of their history never to be pursued again, the despotism and lack of openness which Bourguiba personifies could serve as the ultimate “other” which unites Tunisian society.



Figure 2: Political map of Tunisia (www.ezilon.com)

3.3 The Tunisian Constitution: reframing the code for freedom and justice

I see a particular democracy [emerging in Tunisia]. It will be a kind of democracy which will be more 'ruralised', meaning that it will take into account the aspirations of the rural parts of Tunisia. And it will be a democracy characterised by 'roughness', in the sense that it will be respectful to public freedom but will have some difficulty with regard to individual freedom. I think this mixture will make up the democracy we are heading towards. (Z. Krichen, personal communication, April 6, 2012).

3.3.1 The emerging conflict on the role of religion in society

The underlying theme of this work, de-marginalisation, is best understood in terms of the various groups which are looking to secure a share of Tunisia's social and political space today. The overthrow of the Ben Ali regime in 2011 and the subsequent elections have not only brought to power El-Nahdah, a formerly marginalised Islamist party, and numerous parties which lay on the periphery of politics. The revolution has plunged those occupying the margins of society into the centre of the political space in many senses. One of these is through a newly-found concept of citizenship which demands that the state protects the newly won freedom. Another sense is the need to restore the justice system.

Interviewed for this work, Haythem El Mekki, a blogger, put it in the following way: "As a citizen I demand progress on regional economic development and the removal of laws which suppress freedom. I also expect the people who were involved in killing to be brought to justice along with those who plundered this country's resources". It is the state's duty, argues El Mekki, to guarantee the freedoms that have been won and to bring about gender equality (H. El Mekki, personal communication, April 12, 2012).



Figure 3: Freedom of expression has been one of the Tunisian revolution's immediate and tangible gains. (personal photography, April 5, 2012).

Zyed Krichen editor of Le Maghreb magazine, captures the idea by stating that the Tunisian revolution was “a revolution of the margins, both sociologically and culturally. [It] is a new sharing. Symbolically, it is a radical break with the old system, but it is a new sharing with the establishment; not just the political establishment

but also the economic, cultural and artistic ones” (personal communication, April 6, 2012).

If democracy is an open space, then democratic structures should ensure that that space is accessible to all. It is this kind of debate, centered on the meaning of solidarity, which has accompanied the drafting of the new constitution entrusted to the elected constituent assembly. The Constitution works as a symbol of the checks and balances in the power structures and how these will avoid that any single party usurps power in the future.

That debate has involved a great deal of tension, especially with the spotlight falling on the tussle regarding the role of religion in society (Warren, 2012). On March 26, 2012, El-Nahdah announced that the Tunisian constitution would not cite Islamic shari’ah (Fahim, 2012). In doing so, Tunisia’s leading party showed it had an attentive ear to concerns being expressed both within the country and without. But the decision by the moderate Islamist party irked ultra-conservative Salafists who had rallied to demand the application of Islamic law in the country.



Figure 4: Tunisian Salafists rally to demand the application of Islamic Law (*source: ANSA news agency*)

The issue concerned the first article of the 1959 Bourguiba constitution which, by political consensus, would feature in the post-revolutionary text unedited and would read: “Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state. Its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic and its type of government is the Republic”. What was deemed to be a win for secularists who were keen to maintain a separation between state and religion, was simultaneously considered a defeat by staunch Islamists who became impatient that Islam would continue to be attacked in the new era, as had happened under Bourguiba and Ben Ali.

El-Nahdah’s decision to retain the first article without any change, announced by its leader Rachid Ghannouchi, meant that Tunisia was closing the possibility to base its constitution on the shari’ah. But why was it such a big issue in a country which was predominantly Muslim anyways? The issue was discussed with

Ameer Larayedh, director of El-Nahdah's political bureau, who addressed the emerging conflict by saying the call to base the Constitution on the shari'ah reflected the fact that people wanted reassurances of the place of Islam in society: "Before, the government forcefully persecuted religious people. As far as El-Nahdah, we will make it a point that there are no problems of ideology and no conflict in society. Our concern is for the Tunisian people to be united and live in harmony. The mere existence of differences should not lead to conflict. We need a kind of consensus which takes into consideration, on the one hand, the ambitions of the elite and, on the other, public opinion in general. [The constitution] should accommodate these needs while partaking of the international experience on human rights. It must be compatible with Arab-Muslim identity [of Tunisia]. We have seen that the first article of the constitution can respond well to all these objectives". Larayedh does not see an identity-based conflict emerging in Tunisia and insists it is the regime which created a myth about such a conflict.

Yet despite his efforts to play down the conflict, Larayedh's own words tell of a 'confrontation versus consensus' narrative. The same could be said for the reaction of Mustapha Ben Jaâfar, President of the Tunisian Constituent Assembly and leader of Ettakatol. In an interview in La Presse newspaper on March 30, 2012, Ben Jaâfar welcomed Ennahda's move saying he was not surprised with the decision given the way in which Tunisians have been "inspired by a continuous search for consensus". The emphasis laid on a search for consensus itself betrays an underlying message that consensus is lacking. Interestingly, Ben Jaâfar is questioned by the journalist on whether he thought that a danger existed given that reconciliation between parties so far had been based on the premise of the "enemy of my enemy is my friend", and whether that would undermine substantive

democracy in the long-run. Ben Jaâfar conceded that such a danger exists. Framing it using an example of a country at war, he says that such a creed would achieve a level of unity if there was a common “external” enemy to be fought. In that case, it would be clear why Tunisians should congregate in order to fight the foreign aggressor. Yet in this case, there was no external enemy to congregating against, and therefore a democratic system based on that premise would not last very long (Gharbi 2012).

Journalist Soufiane Ben Farhat (2012, p. 5) is more cynical. In *La Presse de Tunisie*, he writes that retaining Article 1 had been the umpteenth instance in which El-Nahdah had had to forcibly reach out to other parties given the electoral result that had not given it an absolute majority. When it came to the shari’ah issue, El-Nahdah’s executive had to take a vote before announcing its decision. The result, 53 votes in favour and 13 against, revealed an emerging split within the party, writes Ben Farhat. He concedes that El-Nahdah had shown “that it can have an attentive ear to the pulse of the forces of the country”. Still, Ben Farhat reads the Salafist movements’ public demonstrations as El-Nahdah’s way of flying a kite before deciding to renouncing to its shari’ah project “out of desperation or fatigue”.

Columnist Khaled Guezmir (2012, March 28) opines that the statements made by Ghannouchi and other El-Nahda exponents to justify their decision on the shari’ah addressed not so much Tunisian society in general but were more aimed at appeasing their own supporters.

Many Tunisians do not recognise themselves in this ‘religious conflict’ which seems to be cropping up in this country. The revolution was about freedom and dignity and therefore, the main objective should be to build, like in the

West, a democratic and social state where political alternation is the most important factor as, without it, democracy will not be possible and the return to the totalitarianism of the old regime remains possible. (p. 3)

Guezmir sees the religious debate as a distraction from issues of social justice and regional development which, he says, El-Nahdah will pay for in the next election. Expressing this same thought is a Member of Parliament from Afek Tunis, Samira Merai Friyah, who says the revolution was never about religion but about the “real social and political problems” (S.Merai Friyah, personal communication, April 7, 2012).

Distraction or otherwise, the religious issue is plunged into the midst of public debate due to a series of public manifestations by Salafists in March 2012 which precede Ghannouchi's announcement on Article 1 of the constitution. On March 7, a group of Salafists stage a sit-in at the Law faculty of the Manouba university and replace the Tunisian flag with their black standard. Khaoula Rachidi, a young student who moves to stop the Salafists from removing the Tunisian flag, is assaulted. On March 16, Salafists rally in front of the Constituent Assembly building in Bardo and claim that the new Tunisian constitution should be based on the shari'ah. On March 25, which happens to be international theatre day, Salafists manifesting on Habib Bourguiba Avenue assail theatre people and artists gathered in front of the national theatre. During the same event, Habib Boussarsar, a preacher who is also an employee of the ministry for religious affairs, calls for the death of former prime minister Béji Caïd Essebsi. As a result, three lawyers, Abdessatar Messaoudi, Mekki Jaziri and Abdelaziz Kefi file a judicial complaint against the preacher. Boussarsar toned down his statement later saying he did not mean to call for Essebsi's death literally, but only in the sense of “political” death. In *Le Temps* on

March 29, Ahmed Nemlaghi addresses the issue of justice and says Boussarsar's statement should not go unpunished: "What will happen with the complaint against Habib Boussarsar?" Nemlaghi says for those who witnessed the event it was clear that Boussarsar meant the physical death of Essebsi and not death in the political sense, highlighting the added gravity of the call to violence being made by a public servant.

What seems to be at issue is that several violent acts by Salafists have gone unpunished. One Tunisian citizen who did not wish to be named said there was a difference between the way the government treated Islamists and the way it treated the rest. "Just look at the reaction of the police when Islamists climbed the clock tower [in Habib Bourguiba Avenue], removed the Tunisian flag at the Manouba University and replaced them with their black flag. The authorities did not stop them, because they are afraid. Then look what happened to demonstrators on April 9" (personal conversation, April 12, 2012).

3.3.2 Violence as the limit of freedom of expression

The Constitutional debate on the role of religion is also about the issue of freedom of expression and its limits. Reacting to the Salafist demonstrations, Hatem M'Rad opines in an article on April 2, 2012 in *La Presse de Tunisie* that it was fine for Salafists to express themselves on a political or ideological level as this was part of the democratic game. "They have a right to express themselves, they can wear their beard and their Afghan garbs, even if these are not part of our tradition. What is problematic, however, is what some of their supporters seek to impose with violence".

El Mekki, the blogger, has a more visceral reaction: “They are the inferior race of Tunisia; Salafists are the Zionists of the Arab world.” He adds that there is “no shred of evidence” that Islamists had participated in the street protests which overthrew Ben Ali. “Go and look at the pictures and you will not see a single slogan of theirs. The revolution was about poverty and unemployment, not about Islam,” El Mekki says (H. El Mekki, personal conversation, April 12, 2012). To interpret what El Mekki says would be to conclude that Salafists are seen attempting to hijack the revolution.

Slim Laghmani, Professor at the faculty of law at the University of Tunis says although Salafists have the right to express themselves, they need to know the limit of freedom of expression, “which is violence”. The principle applicable to everyone, Laghmani says, is that “incitement to violence or hatred should never be permitted, not even at the level of political discourse. It is not acceptable to call for the killing of Jews, to call for the death of Essebsi, and to assault journalists and politicians. [...] Everyone has the right to their utopias, but not to incite violence” (S. Laghmani, personal communication, April 10, 2012).

Zyed Krichen, himself victim of an assault by a group of Salafists along with Professor Hamadi Redissi, says that despite the recent events, he is not too afraid of the Salafist phenomenon. “The revolution has shown that Tunisians are attached to a form of Tunisian-ness. They are attached to a social way of life. If you walk on the streets you will see that there is a particular lifestyle in this place. It is not theoretical, it is concrete. [Being here] is like being in the French region of Provence in the 1960s and 1970s. Probably Tunisians today live like the people of Marseille in the 1960s. There is some social conservativeness, some machism, but at the same time Tunisians value the nuclear family. It is a form of temperance, of moderation. And

people cherish this. [...] Society in general is pious, but it does not want Qur'anic law in the constitution" (Z. Krichen, personal conversation, April 6, 2012).

If solidarity is the narrative of de-marginalisation, a reading which splits Tunisian society along the lines of religion spells a new form of marginalisation. So does the tendency, outlined by Abdelhamid Gmati in his column on *La Presse* on March 11, 2012, of Tunisians to look for scapegoats when things go wrong. Unlike what happened in other revolutions, the Tunisian revolution was not characterised by witch hunts. Yet, Gmati says, political discourse was rife with statements which sought to blame certain groups for certain problems. He mentions as an example the claim made by some government members that their inability to execute certain reforms boiled down to civil servants who refuse to obey orders. Therefore, according to government exponents who Gmati does not name, there was a need to "purify" the public administration from such people. Defending civil servants, Gmati says it was thanks to hundreds of thousands of civil servants that the state services had not siezed despite the collateral effects of the revolution: "Wages, pensions and social benefits were distributed normally. Water and electricity were not interrupted, public and private transport were assured. Apart from the odd strike, ports and airports continued to give a service and enterprises worked normally. [...] Is it this administration that we need to 'purify'?" Other tendencies of marginalisation, Gmati says, include the discomfort expressed by some regarding Tunisian Jews.

The latter example is interesting not so much because it brings out the issue of minorities, in this case Tunisian Jews. It is the way Gmati argues against marginalisation that is of special interest for the purpose of this work, precisely because he employs a technique to dismantle the dehumanising narratives which hints that Tunisian Jews are some kind of enemy of the revolution. He does this by

mentioning names of known and respected members of the community who are Jews but who have contributed a lot to Tunisia. "One needs to understand what people like Georges Adda, Simone Lellouche or Gilbert Naccache (not to mention others) have endured in the prisons and under torture, in the name of freedom. Tunisian Jews are part of the revolution and have participated in the elections for the Constituent Assembly, both as voters and as candidates," writes Gmati. By personalising the issue, Gmati manages to deconstruct the unnamed scapegoat in a way that his readers can empathise with the victims. The "other" is no longer an unnamed abstraction but a known member of the community for whom the label of a "good Tunisian citizen" is fitting. In the way they are portrayed by Gmati, the Tunisian Jews in question are no longer devious people who can be marginalised but human beings who have suffered at the hands of the regime and who deserve respect. The same goes for the civil servants who kept the country going despite the turmoil of revolution.

To understand this dynamic of humanisation, it is necessary to understand that Tunisian society functions along a network of kinship and friendship ties, much like other Mediterranean societies. This author got a glimpse of its mechanics through participant observation undertaken in Tunisia in the spring of 2012. During the brief period spent carrying out fieldwork, the warm hospitality of Tunisians was striking. Yet, it was the infrastructure of that hospitality that is most interesting as it elucidates how Gmati's written piece is meant to tap the humanising element in his readers. Tunisian hospitality and solidarity, in fact, functions by way of that network of kinship and friendship ties. For an outsider like the undersigned, for example, winning over the trust of a member of the community provided access to that

member's network. Simply put, Tunisians trust you – and *humanise* you – if they know you, or if they know that a person who they know, trusts you.

The tendency to look for scapegoats is the opposite. Scapegoats need to be a faceless and dehumanised "other", with generic labels like "public servants", "Islamists" or "Jews" if they are to be effective. They are not thought of in terms of individuals or human beings who have fathers, mothers, brothers, school friends or second cousins. Instead, they are contrasted with a homogenous, dominant and artificial narrative of Tunisian-ness. As Gmati hints, however, that narrative will work only until the humanising narrative kicks in. It is the humanising narrative that sparked off the revolution in Tunisia. The humanising narrative is the opposite of the tendency which breeds paranoia and motivates autocrats to "purge" any form of dissent, whether the threat is real or perceived. The de-humanising narrative is also what makes some of the new ministers turn their subordinates into scapegoats. What is ironic is that most of those in control are the same individuals who the previous regime had de-humanised and marginalised. In this respect, Ameer Larayedh's words have a specific resonance: "The truth is that dictatorship is bound to bring out the worst in society. When the human being loses liberty, he starts to be guided by his animal instinct in his everyday life" (A. Larayedh, personal communication, April 4, 2012).

The humanising narrative is linked with another discourse surrounding the drafting of the Constitution: that of tolerance. Tunisian identity is seen as dynamic and partaking of the universal values of tolerance, and "where the approach should be guided by respect towards the individual and towards specific groups". Citing France as an example of where a political debate on identity has failed, Saïd Aloui (La presse, March 19, 2012, p. 5) advocates that a political debate which focusses

on issues of identity or religion carries serious risks because it is bound to lead to a resurgence of xenophobia and exclusion. “The Tunisia which we envision – with its ancestral tradition as a land of welcome, of asylum and of hospitality – should, in more than one way, give the pleasing vision of a refuge, not a sanctuary. The message for posterity which should guide the Tunisian constitution for all Tunisians and for all peoples is that of hope; the same hope which spread around the world after the revolution”.

3.3.3 ‘Tunisians aspire for a profound democratic demand’

The narratives of solidarity, freedom and justice emerging from the discussion on the re-drafting of the constitution are reframing the meaning of one of the most powerful symbols of Tunisian identity. It is clear that the debate is changing the protagonists themselves. Interviewed by the author, El-Nahdah’s Ameer Larayedh says that since the early 1980s, El-Nahdah has been finding synergies between pluralism, democracy and the respect for the right of different opinions, “as well as the model of the civil state of liberties and freedom, and their views and vision about Islam.” He adds that this vision is based on two concepts: citizenship and freedom. On citizenship he articulates a distinction between private (religious or ideological) belief and public behaviour, and qualifies both in the following manner: “We cannot build a civil state of freedom, democracy and rights if everything is not related to, or is centred around, citizens. When we talk of citizenship, we speak about equality of rights and obligations. I want to insist that the obligations or duties are only civil obligation and that religious obligations are a personal issue for every individual, depending on his/her own ideology. But individual obligations towards

the society or the state are civil obligations where all citizens are equal” (personal communication, April 4, 2012).

Freedom, according to Larayedh, is the top right of all other rights: “It is true that freedom is a right among other rights: freedom of speech, of demonstration, freedom to travel, freedom to live... from my point of view, freedom is the centre of rights. If the person is not free, he loses all other rights. With no freedom, the government can perhaps provide the individual with food and shelter, but humans will have no dignity.”

Whichever viewpoint one takes, the Constitution is deemed to be the basis that will secure the democratic openness that Tunisian society has won through the revolution. This is the narrative that unifies the different factions of society and is the common goal which all parties wish to achieve. It is no surprise that the debate has been so heated. With their vivid memories of a regime that used the country’s legal architecture to suppress freedom, Tunisians – whether religionists or secularists – fear that history may repeat itself and want to prevent that from happening at all costs. This explains why the re-drafting of the constitution is such an important issue. It will determine the strength of the democratic architecture which will sustain that openness.

In terms of prospects for reconciliation and social transformation, the vibrant debate on what constitutes Tunisian identity augers well despite divisions which exist. By coming together to re-draft their constitution – a powerful symbol of their culture – most Tunisians seem aware that unless their efforts are directed towards ensuring pluralism and plurality, their system would remain inculcated in the shackling narrative that unity can be achieved at the cost of one identity suppressing

another, or that it could only be achieved if all identities are supplanted by an artificial construct imposed from above.

Zyed Krichen sees another level of marginalisation emerging in the current political configuration:

It is not the people who revolted against Ben Ali that are in power today. The revolution was neither led by the Islamists, nor by the party of the President of the Republic, the CPR, nor by the Ettakatol, from where the President of the National Assembly hails. It was a mixture of youths from all the regions of the country, of all social origins together; it was the people from the poorest spheres of society who were suffering the most. And therefore if we go beyond political contingency, it seems to me there is a long process in operation, and a new demand for a new sharing – political, material, symbolic. (personal communication, April 6, 2012)

He says the aspiration for sharing is a profound democratic demand in the Tunisian revolution:

The demand is not articulated in terms of human rights [or in terms] of elections, but in terms of sharing; in the sense that power should be disseminated into society and should be shared by the whole of society. Therefore it is a strong democratic aspiration. (Z. Krichen, personal communication, April 6, 2012)

3.4 'The Sixth Caliphate'

The rise of Islamism in Tunisia in the aftermath of the revolution is evident in terms of politics, as witnessed in El-Nahdah's electoral success in the October 2011 election. On the level of popular culture, the revolution has meant that Tunisian Muslims manifest their beliefs publicly and without fear of persecution. It is thanks to the freedom acquired through the revolution that Muslim women can wear *hijabs* and *niqabs* in public and walk on the main streets of Tunis without being stopped by police and quizzed. Since the fall of the regime, it is not uncommon for Muslim men to wear beards and traditional Islamic garbs. On Friday afternoon, the sight of an Al-Fateh Mosque so full that people have to follow prayers from the street was not a common one to behold before the revolution.



Figure 5: The Al-Fateh Mosque, Tunis, on a Friday. People praying outside a full mosque, just feet away from the tram lines, was not a sight to behold before the revolution (personal photography, April 6, 2012).

This public manifestation of Tunisia's Arabo-Islamic identity in the wake of the revolution – including wearing veils, beards and praying in public – is a means for many Tunisians to deliberately manifest not just what unites them with fellow Muslims, but what they feel draws them apart from fellow Tunisians. The question which immediately crops up is: why, beyond being an obvious reaction to the oppressive recent past, is such a mark of difference important?

The question has to do with the emergence of Islamism as a political and cultural narrative. As has been discussed in some detail in Chapter 2, Islamism as a phenomenon shares some common traits such as its tendency to stress a moral approach to polity, society and economy, its stress on the relevance of Islam, Islamic scriptures and otherworldly perspectives and its rejection of the privatisation of religion, secularisation of knowledge and of life, and of moral relativism. But there is a great deal of discord among Islamists themselves regarding the application of Islamic ways in society and polity, as the debate around the first Article of the Tunisian Constitution has shown.

3.4.1 The resurgence of Islamism in post-revolutionary Tunisia

As “moderate” Islamists who have honed their message to the tune of the 21st Century, El-Nahdah are running into discord with those who think that Tunisian society should have a much stronger Islamic flavour. However, as the emerging narratives show, there is no clear green line. What makes the conflict map all the more intricate is that the discord is manifesting itself within El-Nahdah’s own ranks, as it is among Salafist groups. The metaphor of the ‘The Sixth Caliphate’, which

stands here for the emerging conflict within the Islamist pole on how to approach politics and culture, was coined inadvertently by Hamadi Jebali, secretary-general of the Islamist party El-Nahdah and currently Tunisia's prime minister.

For El-Nahdah, the problem is that while it strives to project its moderate image to make sure it remains part of the democratic game in Tunisia, its modernising vision does not conform with the staunch views of some of its more conservative grassroots. According to Laghmani, "at the grassroots level, it is difficult to distinguish the militant people of El-Nahdah from the Salafist militants. They are obviously the same people".

The first public manifestations of a rift appeared when Ali Larayedh, Tunisian Minister of the Interior and one of the leaders of El-Nahdah, gave an interview to French newspaper *Le Monde* on March 17, 2012. Larayedh, whose words were quickly echoed across the Tunisian press, expressed his concern at the rise of religious extremism in Tunisia. "Not all Salafists resort to violence but the social model which they advocate constitutes a danger. This approach, this narrow view, has a problem with the past, a problem with modernity, and always risks to end up in war." Larayedh points out that Jihadist Salafists, who resort to violence, are especially dangerous and adds that "no country is immune" to this phenomenon. The implication is that Jihadist Salafists belong to some kind of global organisation and that the phenomenon is not indigenous to Tunisia. "Today this is the greatest threat to Tunisia and I know that I need to lead a struggle," Larayedh tells *Le Monde*, adding that the government was prepared to use force to face up to the excesses of Salafists. "We are prepared to act with all the necessary rigour and firmness with regard to Salafists who use violence; [we shall do this] through intelligence [and] arrests, in order to uncover the links with external groups in neighbouring countries

and even countries which lie further away.” Larayedh says the Salafists were unwilling to give up weapons in their possession, and that a confrontation was inevitable.

The conflict with Salafists deepened after El-Nahdah announced its position on the shari’ah in the Tunisian constitution, a decision which clearly upset Salafist movements. Sheikh Abou Mondher Chenguiti, member of the legal commission of the Forum of Shari’ah supporters (Moultaka Ansar Achariâ), a group which brings together Jihadist Salafists, denied the Islamic character of El-Nahdah: “It has become a secular party clad in Islamic clothing”. (Khefifi, 2012, p. 2)

Salafists are generally classified in two main groupings: the Quietist, or Scientific Salafists, and the Jihadist Salafists. A non-violent current, the former preach against innovations in religion which have no justification in the Qur’an and the Sunna and believe in the restoration of Islam in its pure form. In addition, Jihadist Salafists advocate armed struggle against non-believers inside and outside the country.

The Tunisian press reported that El-Nahdah leader Rachid Ghannouchi had met with Béchir Belhassen, one of the leaders of the Quietist Salafists in a bid to heal the rupture. Belhassen is reported to have said he was saddened by El-Nahdah’s decision. Still, he concended that “it is perhaps too early to apply the shari’ah. People suffer from religious illiteracy”. Khefifi (2012, p. 2) takes this as a hint that El-Nahdah could still count on the support of Quietist Salafists in the next elections.

But the rupture with Jihadist Salafists seems less prone to heal. Seïf Allah Ben Hassine, alias Abou Yadh, one of the leaders of the Jihadists, reacted vehemently to

Larayedh's interview to Le Monde: "Your declaration about Salafists spells the end of your political career. You should take responsibility for a *fitnah* (schism) which could burst soon". Ben Hassine, whose group organised a pro-shari'ah march in Tunis on March 25, 2012 (when a tussle with theatre people along Habib Bourguiba Avenue erupted), said in an interview with Le Temps newspaper (Ben Gamra, 2012, p. 2), that El-Nahdah had clearly made its choice for secularism and against Islam and the shari'ah.

"We do not preach violence," he says in the interview, adding that Tunisia was not a land of *jihad* but a land of religious preaching. Rejecting Larayedh's words, Ben Hassine says the portrayal of Salafists as violent was a false allegation perpetrated by the media:

We do not need any rebranding because our image is not tarnished in the eyes of those who take the trouble to get to know us in order to avoid prejudices. It is easy to accuse people but the most difficult thing is to understand them and to know them. We do not want but the best for our country and our co-nationals. We have never said Tunisians were unbelievers. (Ben Gamra, 2012, p. 2)

Ben Hassine adds that the Salafist scarecrow was being brandished to scare Tunisian people. "The detractors of El-Nahdah use Jihadist Salafists to discredit us with their real and potential electorate," he says (Ben Gamra, 2012, p. 2). Provokingly, Ben Hassine adds: "I am flabberghasted to see El-Nahdah [...] renouncings its principles in such a surprising way."

The narrative of the Quietist Salafists reads the revolution as a kind of deviance from the "ways of Allah" and of the Prophet Muhammad. Clad in a white

long ghalabiya and sporting a beard, Ahmed Ben Mahmoud, 23, is among a group of Quietest Salafists gathered outside the Al-Fateh Mosque in the heart of Tunis from where they sell copies of the Qur'an, oils, herbs and soaps prepared in the "proper" Islamic way. Ben Mahmoud is forthcoming and accepts to be interviewed, even if he emphasises that he would not like to be photographed. He mentions that on his facebook profile, which he jots down on a piece of paper in a way that we could keep in touch, he does not have his own face as his profile picture. Instead, he uploaded a picture with Arabic calligraphy which reads: 'Ana Salafi' ('I am a Salafist')

"Protesting in the streets is not the Sunna way," he explains. "You cannot just change the President and bring about change in the country; you need to change people. If people are good, Allah will give us a good President". Ben Mahmoud explains that being a Salafist means living according to the ways of the *al-salaf al-saalih*, namely the first three generations of pious Muslims during and after the revelation of the Qur'an: the *Sahabah* (companions) of the Prophet, the *Taabi'een* (followers) and the *Taabi Taabi'een* (followers of the followers).

He expresses his disinterest in politics in that it does not tally with the Salafist model of change. The Prophet had taught Muslims the way of changing people's characters through peaceful and fraternal interaction and respect. "Going out in the street crying 'freedom' and 'democracy' is not the Islamic way. If I want change, I start by changing myself, then my family and after my close friends. I don't care about who is the president. I care about how I live, because I will meet Allah face-to-face and he will ask me how I spent my time in the world. Then he will ask me how I treated my wife and whether I took care of my children, because I am responsible for my family" (M.Ben Mahmoud, personal communication, April 6, 2012)

He says the religious groups who are staging street protests are not real Salafists.

They are another group, those who are behaving like Osama Bin Laden. That is not Salafist. The media calls them Jihadist Salafists, but they are not real Salafists. Al-Salaf is not a political party. It is about modelling your life on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. These people are adding to religion things which are not part of pure Islam. I follow the Qur'an and the Sunna with the teachings of Muhammad, peace be upon him, not Rachid Ghannouchi or the *Ikhwan* [Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood],

Ben Mahmoud says, insisting that El-Nahdah does not follow the Islamic way.

What ensued was an exchange between Ben Mahmoud and an interlocutor who was helping with interpretation. A Tunisian and declared El-Nahdah supporter, the interlocutor asked the Salafist what he thought about the shari'ah issue in the constitution. Ben Mahmoud replied that shari'ah was the goal of every Muslim, but the problem was that politics was not the way to achieve it. "Yes, but meanwhile, who will govern this country?," asked the interpreter, to which the Salafist replied: "I don't care. It's not my problem. My problem is how I live my life."

3.4.2 The mainstreaming of El-Nahdah and the rift within Islamism

Understanding this fundamental difference in approach among Islamists is relevant for the whole of Tunisian society and even for outsiders, not just for Islamists. For it is clear that despite the public wrestle between El-Nahdah and the Salafists, the liberal press still needs convincing that El-Nahdah has parted company

with 'the Sixth Caliphate'. Tunisian secularists are looking for clear answers which, they say, have not been forthcoming.

El-Nahdah's relationship with the Salafists is interesting because it is read in terms of what secular Tunisians see as El-Nahdah's secretive and deceitful characteristics. Writing in *Tunisia Hebdo* (April 2-8, 2012) Abbès Ben Mahjouba (2012, p. 10) writes that although El-Nahdah seems to have broken with "its clemency towards a group which uses violence to reach its goals", it is unclear whether the party in government has really broken with fundamentalism. "Declarations are fine, but it is how [El-Nahdah] will act which counts. Ambiguous language needs to be replaced by transparency. The struggle against infamy, intolerance and barbarism, and its capability to absorb the wave of Salafism, are the yardsticks against which Rachid Ghannouchi's party will be judged," writes Ben Mahjouba. In the same vein, M'hamed Ben Youssef (*Tunis Hebdo* 12-18 March, 2012, p. 1) writes that El-Nahdah's tolerance of "bearded extremists" can be read in no other way but as "connivance" with Salafists.

Interviewed in *Réalités* news magazine (March 8-4, 2012), former member of the *Congrès Pour La Republique* (CPR) and writer Néziha Réjiba, alias Om Zied, says that although there are many democrats within the ranks of El-Nahdah,

there are people who say they are democrats but who then invoke the sixth caliphate, like Hamadi Jebali, and those who say they want to cover legs and arms, like Sadok Chourou; some even call on their youths on facebook to 'fight unbelievers'. (Turki, 2012, p. 11)

Zyed Krichen argues on similar lines. "We believe that movements and people can change. It does not mean that because you have a specific history you cannot

evolve. If we are really democratic, we need to think that this is possible. But the evolution has to be real, not tactical,” he says. For El-Nahdah, says Krichen, this evolution has occurred in political discourse but not “in the way they think”.

If they become the equivalent of Christian Democrats in Europe, or even like the Turkish AKP, there will be no problem. [...] ‘Now that you have the responsibility of power you need to have the courage to move on. Tell us, clearly that you are no longer in the perspective of the Islamic state. And don’t come tell us that Islam is democratic and not contradictory’. It is fine to harbour Muslim religious sentiments and values but not to translate them into politics. (Z. Krichen, personal communication, April 6, 2012)

Linked to this point is El-Nahdah and its concern with projecting an image to the “other”, whether in Tunisian society and whether in Europe. Perhaps that would explain Ali Larayedh’s intention behind the Le Monde interview. The minister may be projecting an image of control to address a French and European audience which he needs on his side. (How the revolution has changed relations with Europe will be discussed in Chapter 4). But, according to Krichen, El-Nahdah’s image problem hides what is seen as a deeper one: that of not having broken with its past.

Here lies the ambiguity. It is a movement which wants to open up to the future without breaking off with its past. Just to give you an example from the European political scene, it is bit like a party with the ambition of bringing together in a single party Nazi fascists and centre-right Christian Democrats. There is no party like that. (Z. Krichen, personal communication, April 6, 2012).

Krichen says El-Nahdah does not want to confront the Salafists. It hopes that a party of Salafists could be its companion for the road, if not integrated completely

within the movement. “Being in power, however, El-Nahdah had to choose. We have an example with the Shari’ah. When you choose, you decide. The signs of a new conflict and a new war between the form of Islamism in power, El-Nahda, and Jihadism, is clear.”

With the Quietist Salafists, El-Nahdah’s relationship is more ambiguous, Krichen says. “The general strategy of El-Nahdah is not to make enemies. The strategy is to integrate them gradually into the political process. Because El-Nahda sees in the Salafism of today its own birth 40 years ago.”

And yet, Krichen sees a profound, irreconcilable difference between the origins of El-Nahdah and today’s Salafist movements.

Today’s Wahhabi Salifism is a different movement from that of the Muslim Brethren. Even if at a certain point there is a lot of agreement between the two, it refers to traditions which are politically, intellectually and historically different. I foresee that the Salafists would organise themselves soon so that we will have a Salafist party in Tunisia. They already have some legal institutions, and are present around the mosques on a daily basis. And therefore they perceive themselves as different from El-Nahdah. They have neither the same leaders, nor the same thinking, nor the same points of reference. (Z. Krichen, personal communication, April 6, 2012)

In conclusion, the metaphor of the Sixth Caliphate, with its undercurrents and the emerging conflict within the Islamist pole in Tunisia is important to understand other emerging conflicts in society, especially the fight for human rights and the discussion about women in society. The latter is one of the most emotionally-engaging subjects which is at the heart of political debate in Tunisia today. The

relevant narratives on women will be unpacked in the next section using the Personal Status Code as symbol.

3.5 The *Code du statut personnel*

The rise of Islamism discussed in the previous section has plunged the debate on women into the heart of the political arena in Tunisia. Women's rights are highly emotional and engaging not only in light of a level of uncertainty on how the status of women will feature in the new constitution but also because it is the arena on which the struggle for other human rights is fought.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the *Code du Statut Personnel* (CSP) as a symbol represents an emancipatory project which introduced in Tunisia a number of rights for women way before any other Arab country. The code, introduced in 1957 and gradually refined, granted Tunisian women a number of rights which have now become the standard against which progress is measured. It is no surprise, therefore, that the CSP becomes the battlecry of women's organisations such as the *Association tunisiennes des femmes démocrates* [Tunisian Association of Democratic Women] (ATFD) in their struggle against a current which looks at women in a different light.

Looking at the CSP's emergence in Tunisia, Sana Ben Achour (2012, p. 91) writes that

if the CSP surprises all its environments for its suddenness, it is its 'feminism' that shocks or pleases most. The measures it advocates – the prohibition of polygamy and its penal sanctions, the abolition of forced marriage (*jeb*) and its replacement with the consent of both spouses, the replacement of the

unilateral and discretionary repudiation by the husband with judicial divorce, the setting of a minimum marriage age [and] its silence on faith impediments after or at marriage – bring to an end a regime of Muslim rights [of] the tribunals of the shari'ah, the Majless or their Diwan, and propel the Tunisian family into a new social adventure. These profound innovations are presented as the result of an *ijtihad*, an effort of legislative adaptations coming from the core of Islam. (p. 91)

It is in this sense that the CSP is being used as a symbol of feminine discourse in post-revolutionary Tunisia. It is a narrative that indicates that Tunisian society is being gripped by a growing anxiety and fear related to women's rights, and which are linked to the role of women as viewed by the Islamist pole. Those fears have been fuelled by a few reported incidents in which women were the protagonists of the larger conflict between religionists and secularists. It is pertinent to recount a couple of them here precisely because they fall within the bigger tapestry which is being woven in Tunisia.

The first story, which unfolded at the Faculty of Letters, Arts and Humanities at Manouba University, quickly made it to the national headlines. In November 2011, a group of Salafists staged a sit-in at the faculty claiming to defend the right of female students to wear the *niqab*⁸ during exams. They asked for prayer rooms to be created inside the faculty and called for gender separation in classrooms. Courses and exams were suspended as a result of the sit-in which turned violent when the dean of the faculty was assaulted and prevented from getting to his office.

⁸ The *niqab* is the full face covering worn by some Muslim women.

Weeks later, with the intruders forcibly removed and the classes resumed, young bearded men returned to the university to defend their companions when a professor prevented a female student from entering a classroom wearing the *niqab*. Mohamed Bakhti, a student, was taken in front of the university's disciplinary council accused of physical and moral aggression and of having turned his classroom into a space for prayer. Denying the last accusation, a defiant Bakhti insisted that Muslim girls had a right to wear the *niqab*. He added that this was a struggle and that the students concerned would continue to follow the courses until they obtain their diplomas. The stakes were upped when the Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research, Moncef Ben Salem, accused the Dean of the Faculty, Habib Kazdaghli, of conspiracy and of having put together the necessary pieces to make an issue out of the *niqab*. (Meftah, 2012, pp. 44-45)

The Minister said the events at the university were the result of a political game. He is quoted accusing the dean of being a left-wing sympathiser who was using the university to carry out his political programme. The Minister defended the students saying they had been prevented from passing their exams simply because of what they were wearing and branded the sit-ins at the university as “civilised”. Conspicuous by its absence was his unwillingness to condemn violence against the university staff and the violation of the university space.

“How can we believe that teachers at the Faculty of Letters of the Manouba refuse entry to courses and to exams to a female student who covers her face because they are politically motivated?” Kadzaghli retorted. Defending the university, he says the issue has more to do with a new manipulation game in the guise of religious freedom. (Meftah, 2012, p. 45)

In the absence of a government reaction, the *Ligue tunisienne de Droites de l'Homme* [Tunisian Human Rights League] (LTDH) alluded to the events at La Manouba and condemned the use of violence to justify opinions or beliefs. It said Members of the Constituent Assembly should defend the university, ensure its independence as well as stop all that could impair educational institutions which, it said, were part of the main gains that Tunisian society has made through its modernity.

If this first story requires some levels of interpretation for the underlying assumptions about the feminist ethos to emerge, the story which follows is a blatant example of chauvenistic practice. *Réalités* news magazine reports the story of Iqbal Gharbi, a university professor and head of the department of Islamic civilisation at the Zitouna University. Nominated in November 2011 by the government to the post of judicial administrator at the Radio Zitouna, Professor Gharbi was never able to take up her function. The media reported that an organisation called *Al Amr Bil Maârouf Wa Nahy ala Al Monkar* (The Scheduling of the Virtue and of the Prevention of Vice), led by a certain Adel Almi, prevented Gharbi from entering her office, placing “moral and physical” pressure on her not to take up her post. The pretext was her “incompetence” and her liberal interpretation of Islam which accepts women who do not wear a veil. The organisation managed to put pressure on the government, among others with the support of a number of employees in the radio through the interruption of programming and by pressuring journalists. The result was that on February 11, Gharbi’s place was taken by Rached Tabbekh, a doctor of Islamic sciences who runs a religious radio programme. The Gharbi affair raised eyebrows in the liberal press which asked why the government had given in to pressure. The matter was referred to the court of first instance in Tunis, which ruled

on February 9, 2012 that Gharbi should be reinstated as the radio's administrator. But the court's decision was ignored, even if numerous organisations, such as the *Instance National pour la Reforme de l'Information et de la Communication* branded the affair "a total submission to illegal interventions led by parties which are external to the public media, and which constitutes a dangerous and unacceptable precedent". (Blaise, 2012, p. 48).

3.5.1 Islamists versus women in Tunisian feminist discourses

It is this kind of fundamentalism which instils fear on the changing role of women in Tunisian society and which motivates militants like Néziha Réjiba, alias Om Zeid, a former member of the Congr s pour la Republique (CPR) and writer. Interviewed in R alit s news magazine, she says:

I see certain women chatter their teeth out of fear of fundamentalism. I think it is not opportune to face a threat, if such a threat exists, with fear. We need to face these extremists with confidence and our aptitude to block their way. We need to show that these acquis are not negotiable. (Turki 2012, p. 13)

R jibi says Tunisia has a tradition of female emancipation. She says the CSP was a present by Bourguiba,

not an undeserved one because we always deserve to be free and worthy. But this gift was given to the woman without her having had to make any efforts. As a result, the protection of women, as goes also for the protection of Tunisia, were ensured by way of 'Ben Ali's truncheons'. Today, the time has come for us to roll up our sleeves and defend our rights, in order to claim this gift. We are in for a hard time, but let's remain positive. Women are present

everywhere. The moment that the CSP is under threat by some retrograde change, we shall set an appointment next to the clock in Habib Bourguiba Avenue to put the pendulum back in its place. (p. 13)

One organisation which fights for women's rights in Tunisia, the seat of which was visited by the author, is the *Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates* (ATFD). Born as a study group looking at female issues in the late 1970s, the organisation runs the slogan "Women march on for equality, citizenship and dignity" which is visible on all their information brochures. Besides advocating women's rights with the government and the Constituent Assembly, and militating against gender discrimination, the ATFD runs centres where victims of domestic violence are welcomed and guided, and also runs a documentation and research centre on women's rights. In the aftermath of the revolution, it has opened new centres away from Tunis and recruited more volunteers to assist women across the country.

According to their president, Ahlem Belhadj, the revolution has enabled the ATFD to take its advocacy to the regions of Tunisia. Yet, its work on the ground remains difficult because the presence of its volunteers among the families of martyrs in certain villages is not tolerated by certain political groups.

She said in an interview (Blaise, 2012b, p. 20) that in Kasbah or Mahdia, for example, "numerous organisations with plenty of financial means are also present on the ground [but] their discourse contains dangerous ideas. Groups of Salafist creed are spreading ideas which go against women's rights as they are obliging women to stay at home for example". Belhadj addressed the issue of the veil and said that plenty of women at ATFD's events wear veils.

As ATFD, we stand for individual freedoms, but as feminists, we believe that the veil is a way in which to subjugate women. As for the *niqab*, the ideology which sustains it goes back to a means to control and to reify the woman's body in a way as to look at her just as a sexual object. Before the revolution, we had studied the phenomenon of veiled women in Tunisia. We are aware of the plurality of factors which exist behind the veil, as some women see it as a sign of liberation. [...] We respect all women but we are not for the *niqab* and it is difficult for us to say that we accept a women wearing a *niqab* in our ranks, but we are ready to talk about it. (Blaise, 2012b, p. 20).

She says the issue should be debated, especially with regard to what it is that motivates Tunisian women, who have lived in a country with progressive laws, to choose to wear the *niqab*.

Belhadj sees women's rights under threat saying the situation is difficult because the revolution is not over yet.

We have acquired freedom of speech and we can draw attention in case we encounter a violation of women's rights. The threats are present in the backward language which is emerging: [on] customary marriage, single mothers, excision, the female body and women's right to work. The issue of women's rights has never been discussed so much. But we can hope for a certain progress. We will not compromise on anything. (p. 20)

According to Nadia Hakimi, from ATFD, the CSP is what distinguishes Tunisia from other Arab-Muslim states. "There are people who would like to see it revoked. It is a discourse which is emerging, with some men who say it's over for women, because the CSP is against the shari'ah," she says, adding that:

The Code is the everyday life of Tunisian women, so revoking it would spell the end of the way of life we know. I am part of the CSP generation, who was born with the CSP. I cannot think that the future generations may not be able to make use of it, and cannot make use of it, as we have. The problem with Islamists is that their social programme is so different from what we know. It is an antagonistic social project. For the ATFD the question of women's rights is a cross-cutting issue and the defense of women's rights is a priority. (N. Hakimi, personal communication, April 11, 2012).

The fears expressed above regarding women's rights can be summed up in an anecdote which relates to the issue of excision that cropped up in February 2012 when Wajdi Ghanim, an Egyptian Islamic preacher who is known for his extremist propaganda on satellite television, and who is admired by the fringes of Islamic fundamentalism, was invited by, officially at least, associations of Islamist tendencies in Tunisia. On February 12, 2012, at the dome of El Menzah (a sport paladium) in Mahdia, Ghenim addressed a 7,000-strong crowd of followers encouraging the practice of female circumcision, a form of genital mutilation which is practised in some sub-saharan regions. Ghanim's statement in Tunisia is evidenced on Youtube in a streaming:

Circumcision is a duty. It is indisputable. Excision is an honour for women. It is comparable to what our brothers who are doctors call 'plastic surgery' in their jargon. In other words, female excision is plastic surgery. There is an excision called 'honoration'. Our Lord told the woman: 'excise, but without exaggeration'. And the health minister dares to contradict: 'No excision!' Who is he, the sheikh, to speak about religion? (www.youtube.com).

Another video streamed on Youtube showed Tunisians protesting outside the venue where the preacher was addressing his followers. Visibly outraged, a veiled woman who was interviewed on camera stated:

Today, I felt like a stranger in my own country. This was a spectacle that I never imagined I would ever witness in my entire life. I cried for our mosques, for our men and for our girls. Who are these charlatans? What Islam are they preaching? What do they want for us? Are these black flags our people's flags? Wake up! Government, people, get out of your lethargy! You're being screwed! You're becoming like Afghanistan and like Iran! You're in the abyss! Today I cry for Mahdia with blood tears [...] because this is the reign of darkness. There is darkness in their hearts! Goodbye Tunisia! Woe Tunisia, Woe! (www.youtube.com).

Referring to the same event, a reader's letter printed in *Tunis Hebdo* (March 19-25, p. 11) and signed by Larbi Zarrouk from Bizerte writes:

Let us engrave in gold letters in our hearts and in our memories the following axiom: 'The female in the home and in society is the centre of life'. In a Tunisia which is emancipated, humanist, tolerant and humane, only to speak of a barbaric practice like excision is incomprehensible, criminal and inhumane. To accept that a crazy imam dares to come to the dome of El Menzah [...] and to allow this guru to spit his venom is the expression of the meanest chauvenism and a chronic mental drift. That is the height of savagery and of derision and one can never, under no circumstances, justify it with the ridiculous and insolent excuse of freedom of expression. (Zarrouk, 2012, p. 11)

On its part, El-Nahdah has sought to frame women's rights within its revolutionary narrative by stressing that women were at the forefront of protests in the 2011 revolt against Ben Ali. It has sought to emphasise the important role of women by placing among its ranks female politicians like Meherzia Laabidi, currently vice-president of the Tunisian parliament. She is quoted speaking at a conference on the role of women in the revolution held in Tunis on March 3, 2012, saying that the changes facing Arab societies after the revolution are the result of a new socio-economic reality determined by progress, a kind of progress which has benefited women. At the same conference, journalists quizzed Rachid Ghannouchi about the CSP and how this is viewed by the Islamists in government. Samah Meftah (2012b, p. 15) writes that Ghannouchi was brief and concise. However, he insisted on the fact that the woman would not be deprived of anything of what she had won and that the CSP never contradicted the values of Islam, Meftah writes.

3.5.2 'The real battle starts now!'

But it is not the patriarchal reassurances of Rachid Ghannouchi that Tunisian women's organisations and militant feminists are after. The conflict surrounding women's rights continues to be etched in the exercise to draft the new constitution as the Islamist party in power walks the proverbial tightrope, egged on by its fundamentalist factions on one side and opposed by militant secularists on the other. On August 13, 2012 – the anniversary of the introduction of the Personal Status Code - thousands of Tunisian women marched on the streets of downtown Tunis sporting placards and Tunisian flags. Women also protested in Sfax and other cities. This time, the issue at stake was an article in the draft constitution that evokes

women's "complementarity" to men rather than the equality of the sexes enshrined in the CSP.

On August 1, 2012, the constitutional committee on "rights and freedoms" adopted, by 12 votes to 9 and one abstention, a draft for article 28 of the Constitution stipulating that "the state should assure the protection of the woman, of her rights, according to the principle of complementarity with the man within the family and as man's associate in the development of the homeland". Although Article 22, which was adopted by the same commission, specifies that citizens are equal in their rights and their freedom and in front of the law, without any sort of discrimination, the point on "complementarity" became an issue as it was deemed a regression from the CSP (Sellami 2012) (Lakdar 2012).

The various reactions recorded by journalists from Le Temps newspaper during the protest march tell of a society which is determined to safeguard the space it has opened for itself. "Today, it is with bitterness that we are celebrating our national day against all odds. These women of the Constituent [Assembly] who want to reduce us to being 'complementary' were not with us on the streets in the revolution," says a 38-year-old woman named Ms Saloua. A 50-year-old woman named Karima is quoted saying:

I was brought up free and I want my daughter and granddaughter to be free too. This article 28 is a shame for Tunisian history. The revolution did not happen so that we would re-open these acquis but for the sake of social equality, to fight unemployment and to live in dignity! These members of the assembly should stop creating creating false problems. My message: We are

going to keep our arms high, young and not so young. The real battle starts now! (Lakdar 2012)

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has looked in detail at the principal narratives emerging in Tunisia in the wake of the 2011 revolutions. Data gathered during fieldwork research was analysed in terms of four key symbols: Habib Bourguiba, the Constitution, the Sixth Caliphate and the *Code du statut personnel*.

The first symbol, Bourguiba, is about Tunisia's collective imaginary. A character whose influence on Tunisian society is evident today, Bourguiba is being reinvented as the narrative of a social project which is looking to oppose the rising Islamist narrative. In a context where Tunisians are busy constructing a new idea of Tunisian-ness, the cult of the "Combatant Suprême" and "father-of-the-nation" is at once the standard borne by those who would like to maintain Tunisia's progressive legacy and the ultimate "other" for those who read Bourguiba's secularist social project as an externally-imposed project.

An analysis of the Constitution, the second symbol under review in this chapter, has revealed the important debate on how the the social and political space – democracy – can be accessed by all groups in society without any single group usurping power. The Constitution represents the legal architecture which will enshrine that open space of contestation by ensuring that no party is ever able to hijack the public sphere. The symbol of the re-drafted Constitution, especially the first article that will be retained from the old Bourguiba constitution of 1959, evokes a heated debate about the relationship between religion and the state. In announcing its intention to keep the article intact, the ruling El-Nahdah party put

paid to speculation that the new Tunisian architecture would be based on the shari'ah. In this respect, the political debate around the constitution underscores a 'consensus versus confrontation' narrative in the context of tolerance. If exclusion functions through apportioning blame onto a de-humanised, fictitious "other", texts under review tell of a concept of solidarity which operates via rapprochement and humanisation. Tunisians are keen to ensure that the Constitution protects what they have acquired by the revolution. Anything short of that would be seen as a great loss.

The third symbol, the metaphor of the Sixth Caliphate, has been unpacked in terms of the rise of Islamism. As has been demonstrated, Islamists are far from being a homogenous group. The ensuing struggle between moderates and fundamentalists within the Islamist pole is not unfolding along a clear demarcation line. The rift has to do with the social model that should be adopted in Tunisia. The debate spills over into the rest of Tunisian society precisely because it is not clear as to the social model that will prevail. Questions remain on whether moderates like El-Nahdah will live up to their promise of building on the progressive political heritage which is dear to many Tunisians, or whether they will cave in to pressures to do away with certain rights. In this respect, one needs to highlight the importance of Rachid Ghannouchi's leadership as a force that gels all of El-Nahdah's factions while keeping its radical elements at bay.

The rise of Islamism is instilling anxiety in the secular elements of Tunisian society as the latter fear that civil rights may be eaten away in the medium- and long-term, if not immediately. This is especially so in view of certain Islamist currents which are not indigenous to Tunisia, but are being imported from other Arab-Muslim states. One example is the social model that would see Tunisian women lose most

of the progressive heritage that has been built over the past 60 years. It is in this sense that the CSP, employed in this chapter as a symbol of women's struggle in Tunisia, becomes an important factor. Militant women's organisations and politicians are on the lookout for the propagation of extremist elements, especially in the rural and peripheral areas of Tunisia where, due to a lack of education and economic opportunity, people are more prone to such influences. It would be ironic indeed if poverty and the lack of economic opportunity – the driving forces of the 2011 revolution – turn the margins of Tunisian society into a fertile ground for fundamentalism and social regression. The thesis of de-marginalisation calls for a rapid and determined response by the government to tackle poverty and unemployment. But it cannot go it alone and will require external assistance.

It will be the object of the following chapter to look at how the European Union, Tunisia's longtime partner, can contribute to the process. It will be argued that Tunisia's infant democracy needs assistance if it is to grow into a healthy and mature open space. Mobilising the EU's financial programmes and engaging in dialogue with the government, the Tunisian parliament and civil society is in the interest of both Tunisians and Europeans.

4. The democratising Maghreb and the prospects for Euro-Mediterranean relations

The essential challenge facing the European Union is to define a coherent policy to support democratic processes in the Arab World. One would think this would be easy given that Europe's states are democratic; but, paradoxically, this is not the case. Old prejudices explain why some European politicians supported authoritarian regimes until the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak. (De Vasconcelos, 2012, p. 111)

4.1 Introduction - EU responses to the 2011 Arab Uprisings

At the time of writing, tension in Tunisia is still high. In the more deprived areas of the country disillusionment with the revolution is kicking in given that the economic situation is still dire. The fact that political parties promised to deliver hundreds of thousand of jobs has definitely raised expectations. In its electoral manifesto, for example, El-Nahdah stated that the goal of its development model was to create 590,000 new jobs to reduce unemployment to 8.5 per cent by 2016 (Ennahda, 2011, p. 19). According to the World Bank, unemployment in Tunisia in 2011 was 18.9 per cent. (World Bank 2012) El-Nahdah also pledged to create economic growth to the level of an average 7 per cent per annum between 2012 and 2016. It's a tall order given the negative growth of minus 1.8 per cent registered in 2011. The purpose here is not to point fingers to the government for unkept promises. Recriminations apart, the World Bank makes it clear that "support from the international community will be needed to finance the programs aimed at ensuring [that] social and economic challenges do not overwhelm the political process. This would allow Tunisia vital breathing space until its anticipated recovery

in 2014, when the growth rates required to satisfy popular aspirations are expected to return in the wake of a broader international recovery.” (World Bank 2012).

The World Bank’s assessment reflects what is happening on the ground. *Le Temps* newspaper reported on August 10, 2012, that in the village of Sidi Bouzid, one of the places where the uprising against Ben Ali had started, dozens of protesters had taken to the streets. In sporadic violent tussles with police all over the country, protesters have been getting more and more uneasy about the slow pace of economic and social progress. Towards the end of July 2012, in Sidi Bouzid itself, protesters are reported to have attacked the government’s seat with burning tyres to protest that they not had not received their salary on time. On July 25, 2012, President Moncef Marzouki warned the Constituent Assembly in a formal address that people could revolt again if the hopes of the revolution are not met, and added that people would not accept a façade democracy which may push to a new revolution. “What is the value of a democracy which does not feed famished stomachs?” he asked (AFP, 2012, July 25).

Tunisia is not in a position to go it alone at this difficult moment and relies on Europe for financial help. As Tunisia’s main trading partner, accounting for 66.9 per cent of imports and 74.1 per cent of exports in 2010 (European Commission 2012) the European Union has an obligation to help if it is really means what it says on wanting to help Tunisia achieve what Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, termed “deep democracy” (Ashton 2011). Although some help has been forthcoming since mid-2011, notably through the setting up of a joint task force and the approval of EUR27 million in financial programmes by the European Commission, the pledge to make Tunisia a privileged partner of the EU is still in the pipeline.

This chapter argues that the European Union must act speedily and convincingly and must not drag its feet if it is to walk the walk on Tunisian democracy. For decades, EU policy on Tunisia has been wrapped in a wider Mediterranean policy which underscored the need for stability and security to the detriment of democracy promotion. Analyses of EU dealings with the southern shore of the Mediterranean show that democracy promotion was gradually elbowed out by concerns for security and stability. The latter became the underlying concerns which motivated the EU to tacitly or overtly support the authoritarian regimes of Mubarak, Ghaddafi, Ben Ali and others.

Analysts like Alvaro de Vasconcelos (2012) have said that Europe's response to the changes in 2011 had been "lukewarm" considering the historic importance of the event. According to De Vasconcelos,

it is Europe's difficulty with Islam that explains the hesitation and ambiguity – and even hostility – towards the democratic wave in North Africa. These difficulties are not new, and have been at the heart of the debate about the Mediterranean and relations between Europe and Muslim-majority countries for the past two decades, reflecting doubts about the impact on European interests in the region and the rise of power of Islamist forces (unknown and unfamiliar). (p. 20)

This point goes back to the debate on essentialism which was discussed in detail in Chapter 2. The assumption of Arab exceptionalism (Khader, 2011, p. 17) to the wave of democratisation in the world flows directly from this thinking and explains why the 2011 revolutions took Europe "by surprise".

The overarching thesis of de-marginalisation argues that a change of outlook is required; one which replaces the EU's security obsession with real solidarity. It will be argued in the following pages that effective EU policy on Tunisia needs to combine a regional approach (in the wider Mediterranean policy context) with a decisive approach tailored to Tunisia's specific needs. It is this kind of tailored approach that will serve as the proverbial carrot that rewards a country which is determined to achieve progress based on democracy, and possibly motivate others to follow suit.

Conversations the author has had with Tunisian officials reveal that the country takes pride in having sparked off the Arab revolutions. Tunisians see themselves as leading other Arab countries by example and hope to be hailed as an example to be followed. According to EU officials, the Tunisian government is lobbying hard with Brussels for assistance (personal communication). It is up to the EU to act. Europe's credibility as a hallmark of democracy requires it to respond decisively, notwithstanding its own economic ills. Denying cooperation with Tunisia because an Islamist party is in power would be read as the EU's preference to deal with authoritarian regimes. In the spirit of the anti-foundationalist approach advocated in previous chapters, the thrust of this chapter is that the shortcomings of previous policies such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) need to be reviewed in terms of an overarching spirit of solidarity, not of closure. This entails that policy is informed by rapprochement and serious engagement that goes beyond fear-fed prejudices, not just on the level of government but also through the engagement of civil society.

This chapter starts by tracing the democracy versus security dilemma underlying EU policies on Tunisia over recent decades, compared to the EU's

response following the 2011 uprisings. It will make the case that a policy shift is required; inaction is not an option for the EU.

4.2 Stability over democracy in North-South relations

Perhaps the most striking element in the immediate reaction to the 2011 Arab revolutions was the ‘surprise’ element. Both the mainstream media and political analysts expressed surprise and pointed to the suddenness and unexpectedness of the uprisings. Very few analysts had contemplated a scenario where a regime that appeared so much in control of its country would collapse on itself. Among those that arguably came closest to predicting what could happen were the authors of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Arab Human Development reports. Six years before the Tunisian uprisings, the 2004 report, which discussed freedom, had stated that

if the repressive situation in Arab countries today continues, intensified societal conflict is likely to follow. In the absence of peaceful and effective means to address injustice and achieve political alternation, some might be tempted to embrace violent protest, with the risk of internal disorder. This could lead to chaotic upheavals that might force a transfer of power in Arab countries, but such a transfer could well involve armed violence and human losses that, however small, would be unacceptable. Nor would a transfer through violence guarantee that successor government regimes would be any more desirable. (UNDP, 2005, p. 25)

The 2005 Arab Human Development Report built on this and linked the frustration registered in the region with the wider global context, warning “that continued occupations and the failure to reform global governance in order to provide security

and help achieve prosperity for all may push the region further towards extremism and violent protest” (UNDP, 2006, p. 4).

Though they did not “predict” the Arab uprisings as such, analysts had already highlighted the problems which existed. In his paper *Maghreb: vaincre la peur de la démocratie*, Luís Martinez (2009) had identified a number of challenges in the Maghreb region such as youth unemployment and the lack of democratic opening. Martinez (p. 11) articulates how the European Union's approach towards the regimes in the Maghreb was one of "self-censorship" when it came to an engagement on topics such as the respect for human and civil rights, the democratic deficit, rigged elections and corruption.

Pierre Vimont (2012, p. 7) says the unexpectedness of the uprisings boiled down to “general attitude in intellectual milieus that Arab countries were fundamentally resistant to the idea of democracy”. It was as though the Arab world was as an exception in the vast process of democratisation that had spread around the world in the past forty years. As the previous chapters have shown, the failure of democracy in Tunisia is not cultural in origin. The author subscribes to the reasoning proposed by the Arab Human Development Report which states that failure lay in the convergence of political, social and economic structures that suppressed or eliminated organised social and political actors capable of turning the crisis to their advantage. But there were also a number of region-specific factors which contributed to this state of affairs, among which are the strategic interests of Europe and the United States (UNDP, 2005, pp. 17-18).

The surprise element therefore resulted from the combination of a certain analytical sclerosis based on assumptions of a “stagnant culture” in the Arab world

and a level of political convenience. De Vasconcelos (2012, p. 83) writes that in the case of Tunisia, for example,

Ben Ali's regime clung to power for over two decades thanks to a combination of moderate economic success and the stability argument, whereby the regime portrayed itself as the sole guarantor of security and a peacefully society, untainted by the horrors of neighbouring Algeria in the 1990s. This 'peace' was achieved through fierce repression of the meekest signs of opposition. Tunisia was conspicuous among its Maghreb neighbours for the total absence of even a vague semblance of press freedom. (p. 83)

In other words, it was convenient for the EU to have regimes of the likes of Ben Ali and Mubarak as these ensured stability. Today, this attitude is not only present in policy circles in Europe. It is inferred and even explicitly expressed in mainstream media reporting of the Arab uprisings and their aftermath. Roula Khalaf, for example, Middle East correspondent of the Financial Times, writes that after the 2011 revolutions clear lines between Islamists and liberals have been drawn and that conflict would emerge, whether that conflict was over the drafting of new constitutions or whether it had to do with the long term project of promoting a greater Islamisation of society. (Khalaf, 2012, p. 15). The analysis is not off the mark, but the language used smacks of Orientalism:

The forceful return of political Islam has been a disappointment to liberal Arabs and to westerners who had hoped, though never quite believed, that the more secular elements of society that raised their voice during the uprisings would form strong and coherent political blocs during political transitions.

Indeed, the inquiry carried out for this work shows that the situation is not as simplistic and clear cut. In this case, the media seems to have been caught in a discourse which continues to cement old prejudices, even if unknowingly. Calleya (2011) argues that the negative image given by the media in the West amplifies the idea that the MENA region remains a source of instability. In a way, there is a kind of positive feedback because the narrative proposed by the media itself “amplifies” that instability.

Haythem El Mekki, a blogger interviewed for this work, noticed that a number of French journalists who had interviewed him shared similar assumptions:

They come to interview me and ask me whether I’m afraid of the rise of Islamists in Tunisia. When I say ‘no’ they get upset, because they say that they have no story. Unfortunately, many have no in-depth understanding of the issues. They are happy if they get a pre-cooked message which they can put across to their audiences. (H. El Mekki, personal communication, April 12, 2012)

As has been amply demonstrated, the kind of thinking reflected by the journalists is not new. It managed to penetrate - and was sustained by - European policy on the Mediterranean which prioritised stability over everything else. Reflecting an ideology that looks at culture as totalising and essentialist, Europeans generally bought into the narrative of the regimes that democracy in North Africa and the Middle East was not in Europe’s interest because it would destabilise the region to the the detriment of trade and security. Opening up was seen as a threat in the greater narrative of securitisation which took over in the late 1990s but especially more so in the aftermath of the September 11, 2011 terrorist attacks. Unfortunately,

these circumstances combined with the policies adopted have contributed to the penetration into mainstream policy of Huntingtonian legacy and its assumptions (Calleya, 2011).

4.3 'Essentialism' in the EU's Mediterranean policies

In their analysis of EU policies on Tunisia, Powel and Sadiki (2010, p. 101) say that while policy texts had been skimpy on references to 'democracy', more recent EU policy discourse had substituted the word 'democracy' with 'better governance'. This had happened in an internal European Commission review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. In a more recent *Country Strategy Paper* for Tunisia, all calls for democratisation had been dropped, despite the Commission's recognition that "progress on political aspects such as freedom of expression or association has been very low."

EU policy on Tunisia needs to be looked at in the wider policy context of the EU's democracy promotion instruments – notably the Euro Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the later European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) – in which Tunisia is considered alongside other Middle East and North African Countries. This is an important point because it reflects an EU policy trend to combine relations with neighbouring countries as part of a regional policy framework.

The first association agreement with Tunisia, mainly dealing with access to the European Market, was signed in the late 1950s. But it was the 1995 Barcelona Declaration that would put democracy promotion onto the agenda of EU-Mediterranean relations. The language of the Barcelona declaration itself spells solidarity as it acknowledges common challenges and calls for the establishment of a

“multilateral and lasting framework of relations based on a spirit of partnership, with due regard for the characteristics, values and distinguishing features peculiar to each of the participants” (Barcelona Declaration 1995). There was a generally positive and enthusiastic approach to the EMP by countries sitting around the table. Democracy “was established as one of the core norms upon which future EU-Mediterranean relations would be conducted” (Powel and Sadiki (2010, p. 35). Calleya (2005, pp. 1- 7) argues that with its three core pillars of a political and security partnership, an economic and financial partnership and a partnership in social, cultural and human affairs, the EMP was the most important regional process in the Mediterranean at the time.

Launched in November 1995, the Euro-Med Partnership looked promising. Yet by the time individual association agreements between the EU and partner countries came to be signed and implemented, the Barcelona Process was overtaken by events which placed security concerns above all else. This was reflected in the scant language on democracy promotion in the association agreement which the EU signed with all partner countries, including Tunisia. By the time these association agreements came into force, the Euro-Med region had experienced a number of violent incidents including the Al-Aqsa Intifada, a number of Islamist-related terrorist attacks, September 11, 2001 attacks and the US “war on terror”, an environment what gave rise to the obsession with securitisation.

Martinez (2009, p. 11) states that at the basis of the EMP lay the idea to reject all forms of conditionality because it would have been suicidal to encourage regimes to democratise when they lacked the tools to make democracy work. “Eighteen years after the Partnership was launched, the limits of this approach are evident,” Martinez says, concluding that leaving political issues out did not lead to economic prosperity

in the region. Instead, the approach gave rise to an obsession with security emanating from the threat of Islamist terrorism.

Powel and Sadiki (2010, p. 36) state that in Tunisia's Association Agreement within the EMP framework, specific commitments to democracy-promotion were difficult to locate. "In fact, the word 'democracy' is entirely absent from the document, as is any reference to 'political reform' of any sort". Still, they argue, having been signed in 1995 and implemented in 1998, the EU-Tunisia agreement was finalised before any of the major upheavals affecting the Mediterranean. Quoting Adrian Mac Liman, Powel and Sadiki underline that the Tunisian government had been the only Arab partner to express enthusiasm on the EMP's emphasis on democracy and human rights. So why was democracy promotion not properly articulated in the agreement? "Considered together, these factors suggest that security concerns were either already in existence in Tunisia, or that democracy promotion was not considered a priority amongst those who developed the text of the Association Agreement" (Powel and Sadiki, 2010, p. 38).

With the European Neighbourhood Policy, which represented the EU's efforts to address a changing Mediterranean scenario including the its own enlargement in 2004, the EU makes it immediately clear that it understood the problems with political reform issues in the EMP approach. According to Martinez (2009, p. 15) the ENP had been conceived as an alternative that could be offered to the EU's neighbours who could not be promised EU Membership. The latter had been deemed the most effective EU foreign policy instrument to bring about reform in would-be Member States. The ENP would be an agreement just short of EU Membership and would motivate countries to reform themselves almost as much as EU Membership. In the ENP, references to democracy featured in more prominent

and clear ways in the texts, such as the increased participation in political life by all sections of society, developing the role of civil society, the establishment of exchange programmes between Members of Parliament and support for political parties. But the references to security were equally prominent, particularly on combating terrorism and preventing conflict. Perhaps the problem with the ENP was that the majority of its proposals tended “to focus EU engagement on Tunisia’s ruling elite” (Powel and Sadiki, p. 42), while somewhat ignoring those sections of Tunisian society that were marginalised by the regimes. In the Tunisian case, the policy did seek to target civil society organisations, but the state’s system of sanctioning certain organisations and declaring others to be illegal denied many organisations of effective participation in EU programmes under the ENP. For, unless a non-government organisation was registered with the Tunisian Ministry of the Interior, it was next to impossible for it to operate (Powel and Sadiki, 2010, p. 72).

According to a European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) poll conducted among experts on the ENP in April 2011, the policy’s emphasis on political reform, conditionality and differentiation had been positive. However, the experts opined that “the EU’s capacity to foster democratic reform processes has largely been dependent on the political will of the ruling elites in the partner countries, [and] whose main interest is staying in power” (Fischer, 2011, p. 2).

European engagement under the EMP and ENP had mainly focused on the political establishment in neighbouring countries, an approach which proved to be a double-edged sword in Tunisia. While the country was very receptive to EU policy because European norms had been incorporated in Tunisian society over the past two centuries by reformers such as Khayr al-Din, Bourguiba and Ben Ali, those same

norms served to split Tunisian society. As has been discussed in Chapter 3, proximity with Europe played into the hands of the ruling elite under Bourguiba. The elite's francophone ways and its mission to 'civilise' the rest of Tunisian society through the adoption of pro-European norms, excluded everything else as 'uncivilised'. With Ben Ali, this approach would become crystallised in his identification of his political party, the RCD, with the EU as a way to internationalise the legitimacy of his regime (Powel and Sadiki, 2010, p. 67). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that those elites engaged by Europe knew exactly what democracy was about but were yet to be convinced about the value of democracy in Tunisia. The bottom line was that they had no intention of changing the status quo as democracy promotion would have challenged the ruling party and would have endangered their own political and economic positions.

Powel and Sadiki argue that in Tunisia the EU had sinned by omission. Save from criticism coming from the European Parliament, the Union had been silent on the regime's treatment of civil society and human rights. As Martinez (2009) demonstrates, the problems were not unknown. It was not the first time, for example, that the Tunisian regime had threatened to sever ties with some EU Member States if their representatives continued to meet with opposition or human rights activists (Powel & Sadiki, 2010, p. 77). In calling for steps to involve non-governmental organisations in the southern Mediterranean, Calleya (2005, p. 103) rhetorically asks: "Should the EU turn a blind eye to regimes whose respect for human rights and democratic principles are widely criticised throughout the Mediterranean?"

Despite the obvious "façade democracy" (Sadiki 2002a), the EU had failed to use its economic leverage to encourage reform, for example through conditionality

clauses in the agreements signed with the Tunisian government (Powel and Sadiki, 2010, p. 69). The promotion of economic liberalisation, long seen as *the* way for democracy to take root, had worked to an extent in Eastern Europe because it coincided with the opening up of democratic institutions. In the Maghreb, instead, liberalisation had clearly nurtured the cronyism culture promoted by the regimes. Rather than opening the country's economy and dismantling the state's control over citizens' economic activity, economic liberalisation in Tunisia has instead turned into a tightly controlled and measured process which produced an economy increasingly by crony capitalism (Powel and Sadiki, 2010, p. 70). Systemic corruption and cronyism had stifled competition and deterred foreign direct investment further compounding the country's economic problems. Till today, many Tunisians recall the economic usurpation by the Ben Ali and Trabelsi families before the 2011 revolution with utter disgust. Many mention how cronies of the regime controlled key sectors of the economy through façade companies and made it impossible for competitors to start up a business unless they gave up a stake of their venture (personal communication, April 2012).

The prevalence of the narrative of security, which is linked with the argument of essentialism put forward in Chapter 2, is also evident in the European Security Strategy (ESS) which came into effect in December 2003. Like the ENP, the ESS tackles the Mediterranean in terms of threats to security including migration flows, the spread of terrorism and trafficking in humans, drugs and arms. This is linked with the converging interest of the former Tunisian regime and the EU to frame political Islamism as a common security threat. Both the European Security Strategy, and the European Union Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism identify religiously inspired terrorism as one of the EU's principal security

threats. According to Powel and Sadiki (2010, p. 96), “by constructing Islamist movements as such, the Union excludes them from any form of cooperation within its policies in the Mediterranean”.

The obsession with securitisation has indeed weakened the EU’s position in many ways, so it will take some hard work for the Union to convince Tunisians about its good intentions. This is because, even after the revolution, the same security rationale underlined the approach adopted by certain EU Member States. Spurned by the uncertainty that followed the uprisings, several thousand migrants landed on the Italian island of Lampedusa in July 2011. Italy, Malta, France and Germany responded with a call for the possible re-introduction of border controls within the Schengen area (De Vasconcelos, 2012, p. 44). It was an expression of reverse solidarity.

Soler i Lecha and Viilup concur with the above analysis and state that EU policies seem unable to deal with the change in the Southern Mediterranean: “The new political situation in the Southern neighbourhood has revealed a number of uncomfortable truths, including the EU’s shady dealings with the authoritarian regimes and the prioritization of stability (which is understood as status quo) over political change. Most importantly, however, we are observing a failure of the EU policy to bring about change in its neighbourhood and the inadequacy of its tools to favour political, social and institutional reforms.” (2011, p. 43)

The same authors list four aspects where they claim the European Neighbourhood Policy needs revision: priorities, incentives, differentiation and conditionality. They say that the joint communication by Štefan Fühle, Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy and Catherine Ashton, the High

Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Forces of March 8, 2011 was a step in this direction. (High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011, March 8). The document focuses on how to build a new 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity', emphasising that this partnership would not be offered to all countries but to those which make substantive process in the democratic path. A more tailor-made approach would be adopted by the EU, which would seek deeper economic integration, broader market access and closer political cooperation.

4.4 Eliciting a new policy based of solidarity

In line with the rationale proposed by this work, the challenge for the EU is not simply to patch up old policies but to posit the relationship in a new way. The thesis of de-marginalisation argues that a change of outlook is needed, one which replaces the EU's security obsession with solidarity. EU policy needs to combine a regional approach to the Mediterranean which is simultaneously specific and tailored to the needs of countries. Policy needs to be drawn up on the basis of information gathered on the field. From a methodological viewpoint, the EU needs to draw on all the expertise it can muster from its officials on the ground as well as on ethnographic research worth its salt. Calleya (2011) states that in order to sustain the current wave of political reform over the long-term, the EU should launch a Mediterranean policy which "must be formulated after listening carefully and understanding clearly the aspirations of the people in different countries that have risked everything to have a better future".

The EU needs to act before the momentum is lost. In this regard, the declaration made by Bernardino León, EU Special Representative for the Southern

Mediterranean Region, is encouraging. On August 23, 2011, during his second visit to Tunisia since being appointed, León said “Europe cannot miss this historic moment.” Asked if Europe's economic ills would slow the process, he said that “at the moment, nothing is a bigger priority than the success of the democratic transition in Tunisia.” (Tlili 2011, August 23). During the same visit, León announced the setting up of a joint task force to “better understand and identify the challenges and needs of Tunisia in its democratic transition process”. The Task Force met in Brussels in September 2011, co-chaired in Brussels by EU High Representative Ashton and (then) Tunisian Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi. It is meant to establish a line of support to Tunisia to the tune of four billion euros between 2011 and 2013. It was resolved that negotiations would continue with the democratically elected government of El-Nahdah after the October 2011 elections (Tunisia-EU Task Force 2011).

During a visit to Brussels in February 2012 by a Tunisian government delegation led by Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, the European Commission promised to give Tunisia a privileged partnership status through which it would enable the Maghreb country to “gradually intergrate into the European single market” (European Commission, 2012, February 2). In the joint declaration, the European Commission was keen to highlight its support for Tunisia’s democratisation process. Among other measures, it was agreed that the two sides would start negotiating a *‘partenariat privilégié’* (privileged partnership) with the objective to come to an accord before 2012 is over. In the first semester of 2012, negotiations would also move onto the progressive trade liberalisation of agricultural products, processed agricultural products and fisheries. At the time of writing, there

have been few developments. The author is reliably informed that the Tunisian government is still busy lobbying EU officials.

That the pace was slow is confirmed by a European Parliament study published in June 2012. The report states no date had been set for a second taskforce, the key tool in the EU's privileged partnership with Tunisia, although a second meeting had initially been planned for the first six months of 2012.

Despite the establishment of close relations, such as the joint statement on a privileged partnership adopted during the Tunisian Prime Minister's visit to the European institutions in February 2012, including in particular the decision to restart various negotiations, sectoral negotiations have been progressing slowly. Agricultural negotiations have not been reopened (although they are nearing completion), nor have the negotiations on the liberalisation of services. A tentative agreement on opening negotiations on the Agreement of Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA) was reached in March 2012 but has not been finalised. The first stage of negotiations for a deep free trade agreement took place in March 2012. [...] Work on recovering stolen goods is progressing, as are negotiations on a mobility, security and migration partnership. This last aspect has already been the subject of a positive exchange between the Commission services and the Tunisian Government and could lead to an agreement with the signing of the joint political statement at the end of June. (Hakala and Ghanmi, 2012, p. 12)

The European Parliament study calls on the EU to strengthen its support for political reforms in Tunisia, encourage the Tunisian authorities to make the most of the expertise of certain Member States with regard to the reform of the security sector,

speed up the negotiation process for additional agreements to strengthen the economy and consolidate relations between Tunisia and the European Union, as well as to contribute to strengthening national debate in order to help Tunisians overcome the excessive bipolarisation which is disrupting the work of the National Constituent Assembly.

Engagement is not only necessary. The EU's credibility requires it to respond effectively. "I would argue that the most important issue on the EU's foreign policy agenda is how to contribute to a fully free, democratic and peaceful Arab world," writes De Vasconcelos (2012, p. 108). This would be done, he argues, through a new strategy which gains a better understanding of the Islamist forces which have been regarded with suspicion. "First and foremost, it is essential for the EU to gain a better understanding of Islamist forces, understand how their political trajectories have been shaped by authoritarian and sometimes democratic institutions and processes, and how they may evolve in the future. This will provide a sound basis to judge the prospects for democracy in the region (2012, p. 108).

The example put forward by De Vasconcelos is in unison with the trajectory which this thesis has tried to plot. Effective policy must unpack narratives and listen to "unfamiliar voices" if it is to come up with innovative policies which overcome old prejudices.

Listing his own ingredients for an EU strategy in the wake of the 2011 uprisings, De Vasconcelos says Europe should first of all recognise that it has not always supported Arab democratic aspirations. Second, it must act as a force of reconciliation between Islamic democratic forces and secular groups. Third, it should provide economic and social support, starting with Tunisia (2012, p. 112).

Denying Tunisians cooperation simply on the basis of their Islamist government would be read as the EU's preference to deal with authoritarian regimes.

From a geo-political perspective, in a "post-Western world", where European and Western predominance in the world is subsiding (De Vasconcelos, 2012, p. 101), there will be a growing presence of some of the emerging powers – China, India and Brazil – trying to play a greater role in the "post-Western Middle East" in view of securing their economic interests. Even if merely from an egoistic perspective, therefore, the EU needs to wake up to the fact that its absence from the region means that it will be completely overtaken.

Besides the long-term goals, the EU needs to implement a number of short-term measures targeting those countries that express determination to embark on reform. In this respect, Calleya (2011) lists a number of practical recommendations which include entering into quasi-permanent dialogue with the partner countries and a hefty investment in education and training programmes in the country as well as by offering scholarships under its Erasmus Mundi Programme. The EU ought to conclude negotiations for the lifting of trade barriers on agricultural products, offer support to those countries interested in solar-energy cooperation and grant visas to business people, researchers and scientists to encourage exchange (Calleya 2011).

In this author's view, one major obstacle stands in the EU's way, and that is the current tendency for the European Union to become increasingly inward-looking. It is evident that internal problems such as the economic, financial and Euro crises have brought back a strong element of inter-governmentalism to the detriment of the

“community” method⁹. This trend has been vehemently opposed by the European Parliament and the Commission. In various speeches, including in his address to the College of Commissioners on April 24, 2012, the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, has defended of the community method with determination (European Parliament, 2012, April 25).

More recently, a row erupted in Brussels when EU governments tried to exclude the European Parliament and the Commission from decision-making on a revision of the mechanism of the Schengen area, a system which enables border-free travel within 25 European states. (Vogel 2012, June 7). A meeting of the 27 EU justice and interior ministers on June 7, 2012 “decided to empower Schengen states to restore frontier checks temporarily in the event of surges of illegal immigrants” (BBC News, 2012, June 14).

Lanon (2011) argues that it is necessary for the EU to return to the Community method if it is to effectively assist its southern neighbours “in technical assistance for the training of civil society [...] as well as in the area of judicial reform” (p. 54).

⁹ The “community method” refers to the EU's decision-making process wherein “the Commission makes a proposal to the Council and Parliament who then debate it, propose amendments and eventually adopt it as EU law” (European Commission, www.europa.eu). As opposed to inter-governmentalism, the Community method underscores a democratic balance through the institutional setup which includes both governments and Members of the European Parliament directly elected by citizens. The process involves wide consultation with representatives of civil society and regional authorities sitting on the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions respectively.

Table 2: Financial Support for Tunisia since the 2011 revolution

Global Financing

Global financial support for Tunisia has doubled since the revolution and is set to reach EUR 400 million for 2011–13. The amount of financial support reached EUR 180 million for the year 2011/12. It could reach EUR 125 million in 2012.

In 2012, the priority areas of activity are:

- support for disadvantaged areas (both rural and urban) and healthcare (EUR 30 million);
- economic recovery (EUR 68 million);
- support for civil society and judicial reform (EUR 27 million).

EIB Financing

The ceiling for European Investment Bank (EIB) funding was increased to EUR 1 billion in 2011. Loan agreements worth EUR 311 million were approved in 2011 (funding increased to EUR 216 million). For 2012, there could be EUR 500–700 million (for energy, education, healthcare, the environment, new credit lines for SMEs).

EBRD Financing

There is an agreement with the Board of Directors of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development on the use of cooperation funds dating from 17 January 2012. Since then, the Bank has approved five technical cooperation projects worth EUR 860 000 but the funds have not yet been released for legal reasons. The Bank is currently defining its investment strategy (credit lines for SMEs, agri-food chain, innovation and risks in the banking sector, renewable energy and energy efficiency), decentralisation and municipal services. The lack of a guaranteed budget for micro-projects and small businesses could reduce the EBRD's scope in Tunisia.

(Hakala & Ghanmi, 2012, pp. 10-11)

4.5 From words to deeds: the EU's main challenge on Tunisia

The European Union's response to the Arab Uprisings is outlined in two documents. The first was a Joint Communication published by Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative and the European Commission on March 8, 2011 called 'A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean'. The second document, published on May 25, 2011 on 'a new response to a changing Neighbourhood', further elaborated the approach in the first document.

The new approach is encouraging. This time round, democracy does not simply feature as a passing reference but is one of the cornerstones of the policy documents. These embody the combination of a multilateral approach, offering support to all the Southern neighbours that are able and willing to embark on reform, while spelling out that a differentiated approach must be adopted so that the EU is able to react to the specificities of each country. On this point, the first joint communication spells out that the new approach "represents a fundamental step change in the EU's relationship with those partners that commit themselves to specific, measurable reforms. It is an incentive-based approach based on more differentiation and dubbed "more for more", which refers to the belief that those countries that go further and faster with reforms will be able to count on greater support from the EU. Support will be reallocated or refocused for those who stall or retrench on agreed reform plans". (High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2011, March 8, p. 5).

While inferring admission of failure on the part of previous policies, the new EU text shows that there is an intention to respond to changing circumstances. The same document outlines a three-tier approach, namely democratic transformation

and institution building, a stronger partnership with people and sustainable and inclusive growth and economic development.

The documents also seem to address the shortcomings of previous documents in promising to support judicial and constitutional reform, expand support to civil society organisations aimed at developing their advocacy capacity and increase their ability to monitor reform. The Commission would also work towards enhanced mobility of people between the EU and partner countries, in particular students, researchers and business people.

In the second document, ‘a new response to a changing Neighbourhood’, democracy also features prominently. It is stated that the new approach was aimed at supporting progress towards “deep democracy”, a concept on which Ashton lays emphasis in other public fora. While the document acknowledges that the trajectory towards a “functioning democracy” based on “respect for human rights and the rule of law” would vary from one country to another, countries would be required to pledge a strong and lasting commitment towards reforms, including holding free and fair elections, ensuring freedom of association, expression and assembly, upholding the rule of law, fighting against corruption and reforms of the law enforcement sector and democratic control over the armed forces (High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2011, May 25).

To support political actors such as political parties and non-registered NGOs and trade unions, the second document calls the establishment of a “European Endowment of Democracy”, which would “seek to bring greater influence and consistency to the efforts of the EU, its Member States and several of the large European political foundations that are already active in this field”. The brainchild of

the 2011 Polish Presidency of the EU, the European Endowment for Democracy is modeled on the US National Endowment for Democracy. It was given the green light by the European Council in June 2012. An EED would finance pro-democracy and social movements, young leaders, media and foundations in neighbouring countries through grants. While the EED is not meant to substitute other funding, its advantage as an instrument would be that funds can be made available quickly and flexibly to target those fighting for democracy. Youngs and Brudzinska (2012, p. 6) call for the quick implementation of the EED, stating that “extended delay to the EED will further dent the EU’s already battered normative credentials in many regions of the world.”

Indeed, while the joint communications reflect a positive direction which the EU would like to take, it is in translating principles into action that the main challenge lies. This argument is made by Fischer (2011, p. 3) in discussing the main challenges for the ENP. When it comes to the issue of mobility, for example, the EU is still to create a mechanism to facilitate the movement of seasonal workers to the European Union. Although the documents promote visa facilitation and mobility as an incentive for democratisation through instruments such as student exchanges, anti-immigration rhetoric and policies in many European countries point to the opposite direction. It is no surprise, therefore, that the joint communication “calls on the co-legislators to adopt rapidly the Directives on third country seasonal workers and intra-corporate transferees, which will also contribute to enhance mobility to the EU” (High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2011, March 8, p. 7).

The same goes for funding. Despite the good will expressed by the joint communications, it will be up to the European Council to approve additional lending

by the European Investment Bank and the extension of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development operations.

The policies reveal a change of heart on the European Union's side to a large extent. But words need to be sustained by implementation if the momentum is to be maintained. Only this will give a clear signal and provide hope to Tunisians.

The other side of this argument is that European policymakers following Tunisia have started to express concern that the momentum for change is not being sustained. Discussing the political events surrounding the drafting of the new constitution, Simon Busuttil, a Maltese Member of the European Parliament, says that despite the progress achieved since the 2011 uprisings,

reform is still shaky and the battle for human rights is going to remain of crucial importance in the years to come. This is a crucial point on which the EU should condition its support to Tunisia and to other Arab countries.

True, it cannot tell them what to do and it should not be patronising. It is up to them to decide. But it should certainly condition its support, especially financial support paid from our taxes, on what they should do. And after all, ultimately, human rights and tolerance are not just European values. They are universal. (Busuttil, 2012 August 22, p. 8)

Clearly, Europe cannot force Tunisia's hand. The outcome of that would defy the very purpose of openness and possibly produce results similar to the disastrous outcome of America's experiment with forced democracy in Iraq. So it is also up to Tunisia to persist and be steadfast in its commitment to reform.

To help keep Tunisia en route, the EU could wield the stick, besides the proverbial carrot, by linking financial aid to specific conditions on reforms in the context of democratisation and human rights.

Conditionality, worded in a very specific manner helps so that no side reneges on its commitment. While motivating the receiving country to keep its promises on reform, conditionality would simultaneously help the EU sell to its own citizens the idea that financial aid to a neighbouring country is in Europe's long-term interest. As articulated by Busuttil above, at a time when Europeans are being asked to bear the brunt of austerity due to internal economic problems, conditionality in financial aid to neighbours would go some way to satisfy taxpayers' concerns that their hard-earned savings are being spent on a good cause.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted that Tunisia relies on the European Union to move forward in the democratic transition that started off in the 2011 revolutions. Tunisia is seeking assistance and it is up to Europe to move forward in a decisive and speedy manner. The risk that the Tunisian democratic project falters exists given the rising disillusionment among the population emanating mainly from the persistent socio-economic problems.

The first part of this chapter discussed how EU policies involving Tunisia over the past decades have placed emphasis on stability and security to the detriment of democracy promotion. A trend can be seen in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the European Security Strategy whereby policy largely targeted the elites of society who were unable or unwilling to bring about any change. The EU's obsession with security and stability coincided with the interests of the regimes in the southern shore of the Mediterranean, including

Tunisia, whose message was that substituting authoritarianism with democracy would give rise to extremists who would threaten European interests.

If incentives for political reform failed, economic liberalisation not only did not open up society but consolidated a culture of cronyism which stifled the economy and cemented the hold of the ruling elites on the country's assets to the detriment of economic growth and competition.

The thesis of de-marginalisation proposed here calls for a change in outlook and argues that EU policies favouring democratisation should be based on solidarity. In the long run, the EU's approach not to oppose authoritarianism has dented its credibility.

An analysis of previous policies suggests that the EU's regional approach to the Mediterranean has its advantages, but a specific approach is needed to tailor assistance to a country's specific needs and to reward countries which would have made inroads in democratisation and reform over other where reform would have slowed down or stalled. In this regard, the joint communications published by the High Representative and the European Commission are encouraging. So is the pledge to make Tunisia a privileged partner of the EU with the possibility of offering funding to assist democratisation and possibly providing access to the EU single market. This would motivate Tunisia to move towards a stronger democracy and make it possible to engage with various levels of society, not just the government.

Yet the EU's main challenge lies in implementing these policies in a speedy and effective manner. Delays will not only dent its credibility. They are likely to feed disillusionment with the revolution and contribute to the rise of extremism. The EU economic and financial crises has brought about rifts within the Union. Member

States, especially those called to implement austerity measures, have become increasingly inward-looking while there has been a return to intergovernmentalism to the detriment of the Community method. This trend needs to be reversed if the EU is to effectively assist in the Arab democratisation process.

In order to ensure that Tunisia implements the needed reforms, it will be necessary for the EU to tie financial aid with conditionality. This will go some way to satisfy hard-pressed European taxpayers that their money is not being misspent.

5. Conclusion

The current historical situation has potentialities for supporting co-learning, sharing and dialogism. It is the way forward for defeating opprobrium, extremism, othering, worlding and essentialising. Humanity has entered a stage of “liminality”, to use Homi Bhabha’s concept. Liminality is Janus-faced: a blend of “self” and “other”; and an interface of “here” and “there”. (Sadiki, 2004, p. 398).

The trajectory of de-marginalisation which has been taken by this work has painted impressions of the kind of democracy that is emerging in Tunisia in the wake of the 2011 uprisings. As one of the many possible renderings of the story of democratisation in Tunisia, the previous chapters have sought to unpack and articulate the highly-dynamic scenario in which Tunisian society continues to imagine itself in the present and future.

To look for narratives of democracy, this work has employed a cultural inquiry based on a nuanced notion of culture which, like a prism, has been used to refract the spectrum of messages emanating from the beam which Tunisia's historic undertaking has given off. This method is deemed to be a most efficient tool to make heads or tails of otherwise unintelligible codes. The exercise itself has tested the worth of a notion of culture that can be employed as a Rosetta Stone to decipher the discussion on the social and political values of a specific society. As a relativist notion of culture which looks at a specific context, it has helped this work reject essentialist notions on Tunisia and the democratisation process it is undergoing. There may be other ways which others have embarked on and which could elicit equally useful information. With its relativistic approach and its respect

towards multiple narratives, however, this framework is preferred as one of the most democratic. In view of the foundationalist/anti-foundationalist discussion taken up in Chapter 2, this work has sought to place the review in a historical context so as to break with analysis which is dogmatic and ethnocentric, steering away from assumptions which portray Arab societies as backward and stagnant, and Arabs as outright stupid. If anything, the cultural review undertaken in Tunisia has proven the opposite, namely that different societies have progressed at varied paces not because of some kind of innate “cultural” differences but because of contingency: geographic, historic and political. To claim the opposite would be to misread history and to serve a blinkered and long-discredited worldview.

Literature on the encounter between ideas on democracy and the Arab Middle East has pointed at Islam as an important reference point and frame. Formed in contexts of colonialism and neo-colonialism, notions of democracy in the Arabo-Islamist world have been shaped by an often confrontational and violent encounter with European powers. As much as European discourses on the Arab Middle East has been characterised by Orientalism, so have Arabo-Islamic discourses been clad in Occidentalism. It is no wonder, therefore, that Islam has often served as a counter-discourse of resistance which sought to encode in religion a rejection of *taghrib* (Westernisation). Still, Arabs and Islamists through the ages have seen value in Western ideas of good government, democracy, justice and freedom. This explains the various attempts made to syncretise these European notions with Islam.

How the notions of justice, freedom, solidarity and exclusion function in Tunisian society today has been examined in Chapter 3 under four principal symbols: Habib Bourguiba, the Tunisian constitution, the Sixth Caliphate and the *Code du Statut Personnel*. By deconstructing these symbols using text - which included both printed material as well as data gathered by the author during

fieldwork - this work has looked in detail at the narratives which emerge around these four symbols. Like other Mediterranean figures of his time, Habib Bourguiba is a giant who still casts his shadow on Tunisian society, even on those who hated him. Bourguiba today is being reinvented as a social project that is looking to safeguard Tunisia's modernising project. The second symbol which was examined, the Constitution, uncovers the tension between solidarity and exclusion in Tunisian society. The drafting of the constitution is seen as the architecture of Tunisia's democratic future. Thirdly, this work has dwelt on the metaphor of the Sixth Caliphate to bring out the struggle within the Islamist pole. The outcome of this internal struggle is important for Tunisia not merely because many Tunisians are Muslims. The outcome of the fight between moderates and fundamentalists will determine whether the emerging social model in Tunisia will be based on Tunisia's progressive heritage or whether it will break away from the gains which Tunisia has made over the past 60 years. Finally, the *Code du Statut Personnel*, which symbolises these gains, has been employed to unpack the struggle surrounding women's rights in Tunisia. Women's rights are important because they serve as indicators for other rights in society, not just women's. On this front too, the progressive elements of Tunisian society are bracing for a confrontation with those cladding the revolutionary narrative in extremist ideas.

The de-marginalisation trajectory does not stop here. Tunisians continue to negotiate what they won through the revolution, that 'profound democratic demand' that is articulated in terms of sharing. In their process of negotiations, which oscillates from civilised public debate to occasional bouts of violence, Tunisians articulate their notions of solidarity, tolerance and humanisation.

What is fascinating about this story is the way in which democracy is grounding itself in a new context where the actors are steadfast in their mission to

maintain “indeterminacy of power” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 392) by way of the emerging political and institutional architecture including the parliament and the justice system. This is what the whole debate surrounding the constitution (discussed in Chapter 3) was about. It also explains the emerging conflict surrounding the role of religion in society as expressed in the symbols of the Sixth Caliphate and the CSP. In line with the nuanced theory of culture, this inquiry has evidenced democracy as being constructed in the course of ongoing political action.

Tunisians are indeed aspiring to a new meaning of Tunisian-*ness* that infers inclusion rather than exclusion and humanisation over de-humanisation. That concept is not theoretical but a very practical one grounded in the intricate social network of hospitality which Tunisians deem to be an important mark of their national identity. That social web guards against attempts at de-humanisation which are expressed in the temptation to look for scapegoats. There is a particular openness in society, a kind of live-and-let-live credo which is capable to resist foundationalism and maintain the ethos of anti-foundationalism. The other, darker side, is the tendency to exclude groups or individuals by way of de-facing and scapegoating them.

One phenomenon that this inquiry has picked up is the articulation of the revolution in terms of religion. The Islamist narrative is an important one in Tunisia, as reflected by the institutional role which the first free elections have delivered to El-Nahdah. As it navigates the waters from the helmsman’s seat, the Islamist party finds itself negotiating the demands of democracy while withstanding pressures, even from within its own ranks, to fashion more of its policies on Islamic shari’ah. This is linked with the fear, shared by many secular Tunisians, of an ensuing radicalisation of society. While the outward manifestation of religion is part of

freedom of expression and should be safeguarded, fundamentalism is anathema to democratisation because it seeks to close, not to open, the space for contestation. The problem with fundamentalism is its blinkered worldview that serves hegemonising ideologies and in doing so, oppresses lives. It is not dissimilar from the Western discourse on “civilisations” for, in closing themselves off to the possibility of change, both homogenising discourses are intolerant towards the “other” viewing, as they both do, competition in the political and civil sphere as a zero-sum game.

For Tunisian secularists, grounding the social struggle in religious terms is a usurpation of the revolution which was not about religion, but about poverty and the lack of opportunity. For many Islamists, on the other hand, the outward manifestation of their beliefs is simply a way of enjoying their newly won freedoms. In many ways, revolutionary narratives are being fashioned and re-fashioned according to political contingency.

The risk of a new form of marginalisation exists because the poorest spheres of society who revolted against Ben Ali feel they are being left behind and hardly partake of the sharing they aspired for. Disillusionment is growing because the revolution so far has not managed to deliver on its promises. There is a real risk that if the political system fails to deliver, a struggle that vests itself in fundamentalism might take off. The propagation of extremism in the poorer areas of Tunisia has already been reported by women’s organisations and activists who fear that the lack of opportunity is increasingly shifting the narrative of the revolution in this direction.

It is clear that the Tunisian government must be vigilant and must remain committed to the reforms it has embarked on so as to prevent a backlash that will tie its hands. As this work has shown, Tunisians aspire for a fair, open and just society based on rights. It is the responsibility of the state institutions, especially the

elected assembly and the government, to make this happen if Tunisia is to sustain the thrust.

This is Europe's call as much as it is the Tunisian government's challenge. The thesis of de-marginalisation calls for practical solidarity to be expressed in a determined response to tackle poverty and unemployment. Tunisia at the moment does not have the financial means to go it alone and requires assistance from the European Union. Aware of its past mistakes in dealing with its southern neighbours, the EU should mobilise its financial programmes and engage in dialogue with the government, the Tunisian parliament and civil society.

A change in outlook is called for so that EU policies favouring democratisation should be based on solidarity. The argument put forward in the previous chapters points to the risk that the Tunisian democratic project falters. So the EU must redraft its policies to provide a motivation for Tunisians to seek prosperity in democratic openness. At the same time, the EU must look for efficient ways to implement its policies to assist in Tunisia's democratisation process if it intends to look after its own credibility.

Besides the proverbial carrot, the EU must wield the stick by linking financial aid to specific conditions on reforms, specifically in the context of democratisation and human rights. It is to the advantage of both sides if conditionality is worded in a very specific manner in legally binding agreements. This would prevent one side or another to renege on its promises. The purpose of conditionality is twofold. On the one hand, it motivates the receiving country to keep its promises on reform. On the other, at a time when Europeans are being asked to bear the brunt of austerity measures, conditionality will go some way to satisfy European taxpayers' concerns that their hard-earned savings are being spent on a good cause.

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Curriculum Vitae

Massimo R. Farrugia received his Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Studies from the University of Malta in 2002. He went on to read for a Diploma in Arabic between 2006 and 2008. Starting his career in newspaper journalism The Malta Independent on Sunday and The Times of Malta, he became an official at the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Communications in 2007. After finishing his International Master of Arts in Conflict Resolution and Mediterranean Security in 2012 - a George Mason University/University of Malta collaborative degree - he took up a new position at the European Parliament's Liaison Office with the US Congress, Washington DC.