



## THE ARAB SPRING IN TUNISIA: A LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION?

TUNUS'TA ARAP BAHARI: LİBERAL DEMOKRATİK BİR GEÇİŞ

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### Abstract

The Arab Uprising has risen to the academic arena recently in several aspects. What is happening in that territory calls attention to the structure of the uprising. Tunisia, the first cycle in the Arab Spring, witnesses a short but bloody transition. This transition, which is called the Jasmine Revolution, comes to an end with the surrender of power by the incumbent regime to the opposition without any compromise. These events begin with an economic reasoning but then continue with liberal-democratic demands. In this study, we will first cover Tunisia's political background in search of its democratic heritage. We will then consider such democratic institutions before and during the transitions as elections, freedom of expression, freedom of association and other issues regarding human rights. Finally we will discuss the possibility of democratic consolidation in Tunisia.

**Key Words:** Arab Uprising, Tunisia, Jasmine Revolution, democratic transition, liberal-democracy

### Öz

Arap Uyanışı, son zamanlarda akademik çalışmalara pek çok açıdan konu olmaktadır. Bölgede yaşananlar dikkati, uyanışın yapısına çekmektedir. Arap Baharı'nın ilk halkasını oluşturan Tunus, kısa ancak kanlı bir geçiş sahne olmuştur. Yasemin Devrimi adı verilen bu geçiş, yerleşik iktidarın muhalefete geçişi ile sona ermiştir. Bu olaylar, ekonomik sebeplerle patlak verse de, demokrasi ve insan hakları taleplerini beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu çalışmada, öncelikle demokratik mirasın varlığına ilişkin bilgi edinmek için, Tunus'un siyasi arka planı incelenecek; ardından seçimler, ifade özgürlüğü, örgütlenme özgürlüğü ve diğer insan hakları ile ilgili demokratik kurumlar değerlendirilecektir. Son olarak, tüm gelişmelerin ardından Tunus'ta demokratik konsolidasyonun mümkün olup olmadığı tartışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Arap Uyanışı, Tunus, Yasemin Devrimi, demokratik geçiş, liberal demokrasi

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Having an important place in the history of North Africa, Tunisia opens a new era regarding democratization of the authoritarian regimes with the Jasmine Revolution. Tunisia, the first country confronted with the perplexity of the revolution, succeeds in reaching consensus and executes a new and first democratic election. Although the demands and the street demonstrations have not come to an end yet, the new government has already been established.

In this study, we will first cover the definitions of democracy by several authors and infer the core elements of a liberal democracy. Regarding the special situation of post-colonial Tunisia, we will give a brief history of Tunisia up to the Jasmine Revolution and provide some information about the latest developments in the country to make clear the background for democracy in Tunisia. Then, we will evaluate the uprising as the demand for liberal democracy by examining the type of the revolution, the uprising of the opposition, the institutional design during transition including constitutional arrangement and the elections and the political parties, historical heritage in Tunisia after the revolution, the view of human rights and women, media and finally culture of association and civil society. After discussing the possibility for democratic consolidation, we will conclude with some inferences about the democratization process in Tunisia.

### **1. DEFINITIONS OF DEMOCRACY**

Scholars have already clarified the core characteristics of a democracy by considering the preconditions for democracy, criterion and requirements of democracy, relationship between economics and democracy and the discussions about what a liberal democracy is, in the context of types of democracy.

The key characteristics of a democracy are, freedom to form and join organizations, freedom of expression, the right to vote, eligibility for public office, the right of political leaders to compete for support/votes, alternative sources of information, and free and fair elections (Dahl, 1971). Also in democracies, institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preferences. Therefore a democratic system and a democratic government should respond to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals, as Dahl (1971) states.

These eight conditions may be available in a country but the system may still not be democratic. So we can assume that democratization depends on the preferences of the country

between these criteria. For instance, if the right to oppose and public opposition are developed in a political system, which relies on the highest degree of consent of the participants, democratization as a pathway to polyarchy exists there (Dahl, 1971). In the absence of the right to oppose, the right to participate is marred and public contestation and liberalization suffers. Therefore, "Democracy involves two dimensions: contestation and participation" (Huntington, 1984, p.195).

Rueschemeyer D. *et al.* (1992) deal with the transformative power of democracy and capitalism from a different point of view, finding Dahl's polyarchy formula defective. They argue that the definition of polyarchy turns into taking the consent of the needed majority into account after a while; however, it should have been the maximization of inclusiveness and participation rather than the consent of the majority. Furthermore, even if we need suffrage in order to establish democracy; representative democracy cannot provide active participation on its own. Capitalism and democracy need to exist together because, democracy providing the rule of the many, protects the interests of capital owners. Trying to explain the transformation from the class perspective is complementary to Dahl's formula, democracy first needs an increase in political equality. Democracy is, intrinsically, the state's and the head of the executive's responsibility to parliament and begins with free and fair elections, freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of suffrage (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992).

Democracy is possible only if a fairly strong institutional separation or differentiation from the state apparatus exist. State and necessary institutions for democracy such as suffrage are needed and finally transnational power relations; both within the state and beyond its borders. Moreover, the economic and social condition of the public is often related with the democratic responses. Yet the free market and industrialization strengthens the conscious of the working and middle classes who need democracy in order to voice their demands about being affected by social inequality (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992). Therefore it is possible to infer that the idealizations of democracy by different scholars meet in liberal democracy while completing each other's definitions.

The purpose of liberal democracy is to provide the representation and protection of the different interests. Society is perceived as an aggregation of diverse individuals, groups, autonomous from the state in liberal democracies where the role of the state apparatus is to act as a referee. The political process includes checks and balances to prevent the tyranny of the majority or its representatives or of powerful minorities. Citizen participation is permitted however not encouraged; there is only electoral contestation. In liberal democracies,

individual rights, citizen's rights and political -not social- equality is granted before the law and constitution. Yet, actual and potential problems might be confronted in a liberal democracy such as elite domination on account of unequal distribution of resources (Pinkey, 1994).

In this study we will cover the conditions for democracy and the search to liberal democratic demands in Tunisia, where a transitional process to democratization has begun. Although Tunisia had an authoritarian past of foreign exploitation and nationalist elites to govern Tunisia with controlled democracy (Borowiec, 1998), the country may have started a new wave of democratization.

## **2. TUNISIA AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR DEMOCRACY**

Tunisia has a noteworthy historical background for democracy. The emergence of the authoritarian regimes on the contrary of democratic demands gives important clues about what is going on in this North African country. The political culture of Tunisia is rooted in the colonial experience, beginning with the French invasion of Tunisia in 1881. After which French influence on economic and social life began to be felt.

The first responses to the protectorate were nationalist and modernist movements emerging against Western values whilst supporting equality of pay. The first organized opposition against colonial rule was the Young Tunisians, which was abolished by the protectorate.

However, after several years, Habib Bourguiba was the only one who could reinforce the nationalist struggle against the French Protectorate under the Duster (Constitutional) Party. When Bourguiba called for independence, Duster had dissolved insight and this event gave birth to Neo-Duster in 1934. Finally in 1956, society supported the leadership and Modern Tunisia was established. Bourguiba became the president of the young Tunisian Republic and the new establishing constitution was inured in 1959 (Perkins, 1986).

In spite of efforts at industrialization, the Tunisian economy couldn't progress further after independence. What was important during the Bourguiba period was the position of the Neo Duster Party and Bourguiba's "One Man" position. When he lost the democratic interest within the party by choosing the members loyal to him, the party began integrating with the state apparatus. From that point, unemployed youths and students had little interest in the heroic past of the Neo-Duster but more on "merit" rather than the affiliation of the Party (Derradje, 2011; Perkins, 1986).

In November 1987, the discontent resulted in the coup of Zine El Abidine. As soon as he

became president, he declared that the Tunisians were ready for participation, pluralism and a multiparty system (Angrist, 1999) and also for "the differentiation of the government and politics from other spheres of social life" (Rueschemeyer, et al. 1992, p.41). A National Pact was accepted to promote pluralism in the parliament; and finally in 1994, opposition parties found the possibility to take seats in the parliament under the control of the ruling party (Hoffman, 1994). Transition from a single party regime to a multiparty regime requires a distinction between the ruling party and the state apparatus (Hoffman, 1994; Lijphart, 1999); however, this was not possible even after the Pact and authoritarianism was kept alive in the territory.

People trying to withstand the deteriorating economy and political pressure have exploded since 2011 with huge demonstrations. Although the first protests were over the high rate of unemployment, they were soon directed at political objectives as always happens in such movements (Haggard and Kaufman, 1999). These situations strengthened the opposition. The authoritarian regime wanted to survive, first it allied with the army; but said that they were close to the demonstrators in some regions; then it just withdrew.

Tunisia was ruled by a one party government and authoritarian leaders until the revolution. Pinkey (1994) discusses types of authoritarian regimes and the opportunities for democratic transition. If we examine the classification of Pinkey (1994) as shown in Table 1, we can say that Tunisia after 1970s conforms to personal authoritarianism. Until the Arab Spring, almost nothing had changed. After the riots began, Ben Ali didn't want to surrender immediately. If he left immediately, when the regime changed, authoritarian structure would be left behind. Political polarization existed before the revolts. Even though the protestors came together; this polarization was to show itself again in the transition period, which makes democratization difficult. What makes one hopeful about the future is Ben Ali's resignation after the *Jasmine Revolution*, which began in 2011 as a protest of the economic conditions and the unemployment of the youth and soon converted into liberal political demands. Masses protested against the government, corruption, violation of human rights and the deteriorating economy.

**Table 1:** Types of authoritarian government and the opportunities for democratic transition (Pinkey, 1994, p.119)

Type of authoritarian government	Prospects for transfer of power	Analytical Problems
One party (more extremely)	-	-
Personal	Personal rulers seldom want to surrender power, but have limited lifespan.  They may leave fear viable authoritarian structures behind.	We look at the personal rule, a reflection of a political polarization which might make democratization difficult.

### 3. THE UPRISING AS LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC DEMANDS IN TUNISIA

#### 3.1. The structure of the revolution

The type of a revolution may give some clues to the type of transition, whether the revolution brings a transition or a replacement. Indeed, any demand which turns into a riot for a regime change, inevitably moves from less democracy to more democracy (Huntington, 1984).

The dissent of the Tunisians was rooted in 2008 with unemployment related riots. But the demonstrators were suppressed by the Ben Ali government (Murphy, 2011). After that, one of the most important and effective revolts in Tunisian history was the Sidi Bouzid People's revolt for jobs and bread, called the "Arab Spring" in Western media and the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia. Although Tunisia was full of marginalized people who were unemployed, hungry and hopeless it was no coincidence that Sidi Bouzid was the first to revolt. It had a specific cause, Mohammed Al Bouazizi, who was humiliated and his stall taken by the police while selling fruit and vegetables, set himself on fire. This protest soon became widespread throughout the country by converting into a huge political movement menacing Ben Ali's regime. The answer from the government was bloody. More than fifty people were killed by the police and many of the protestors were arrested. Immediately, Ben Ali tried to calm the protestors down with some quick reforms including some promises about employment, taxes, political parties, a collective forum and promotion of the private media and enunciation of his withdrawal from the next elections (Derradje, 2011).

During some of the demonstrations, Tunisian Army members took the side of the protestors (Derradje, 2011; Murphy, 2011). Thousands of Tunisians organized via social media backed

up by economic associations (UGTT) and other civil society organizations. Huge demonstrations made Ben Ali resign and leave the country.

After Ben Ali's departure, his ministers were forced to resign as the society did not want elites bargaining again for their own interests. Although the power of the administration was transferred to the society, they lacked cooperation (Murphy, 2012). Again economic and political demands went hand in hand, as it was with former riots in Tunisian history. Differently to Pinkey's (1994) estimations, Tunisia rapidly went further into the transition period despite its authoritarian heritage since there was no clash between the opposition, ethnic groups or individuals. An interim government was established which focused on consensus and the shape of future reforms, rejecting authoritarianism. Congruent with Huntington's (1991) transplacement concept in the context of the joint action by the government and the opposition, the public asked for the temporary government to provide stability. So the interim government called for new and democratic elections. When the elections came to an end in October 2011, the hopes for democratization increased. The new parliament stated that they promoted consensus, negotiations and democratic rights rather than bargaining of new elites.

### **3. 2. The Uprising of the opposition**

Since democracy relies on the development of public opposition, it is the first step to forward participation (Dahl, 1971). The culture of the opposition has significant effect on the transition process in Tunisia. The tradition of opposition in modern independent Tunisia can be investigated in two groups: secular opposition tradition and religious opposition tradition.

Secular opposition called the "Young Tunisians," first emerged during the French protectorate as the society and the elites' response to the protectorate. A demand for a party had arrived under the name of "Dustur" with a yearning for the first constitution after the First World War. However, independence was won by the Dustur rooted party, Neo-Dustur, with the help of the second branch of opposition. The second opposition branch could be covered as labor organizations related to Dustur; particularly the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT). This shows that the political demonstrations and economic-labor demonstrations go hand in hand in Tunisia. After the independence, labor organizations became opposed to the ruling Neo-Dustur Party. Many strikes of these organizations were suppressed brutally by the government up until the Jasmine Revolution. So the intersection between economy and politics turned into dissent.

The third branch of the secular opposition is military. The Military can be counted as opposition after the government's bloody policies towards the riots against the regarding deteriorating economy, since they have same background as the rioters, they became the threat of a coup for Bourguiba. Although taking into account the military as opposition is polemical, they were surely under orders from the Bourguiba and pretended to be apolitical. Though, they took close part in the demonstrators in some regions in the Jasmine Revolution.

Finally, one of the strongest opposition branches are the Muslim traditionalists who organized in the 1970s. Ghanouchi constituted the *Mouvement de Tendance Islamique* (MTI) and tried to advance an Islamic way of life among Tunisians. Ghanouchi was imprisoned until 1983 and banned from politics. Although, when a multiparty regime was accepted in 1988 with the National Pact, Ghanouchi established the *An Nahda Party* to legally participate in the system. However, An Nahda's application was rejected (Angrist, 1999). Also the relationship between the Muslim Brothers and these Tunisian Muslim traditionalists has been discussed (Al-Ahram, 2011) as well as the relationship with Salafis who are radical Islamists (Spencer, 2013). They claim that Islam State is a peaceful structure and secularism is an obstacle before the freedom of religion rather than preserving. Some of the Salafis and Al Ansari perceive secularism as a crime committed against Islam. Even moderate Islamist Ghannouchi perceives acts against religion in a criminal frame (Spencer, 2013, para.27).

### **3.3. Institutional design during transition**

Institutional political design includes constitutional structure, perception of human rights, women in society, electoral systems and the experience of the elections, freedom of speech as well as freedom of association; both in political fields and in civil society and the role of a free media (Dahl, 1971; Haggard and Kaufman, 1999; Lijphart, 1999). These affect the establishment of the future democracy. Whilst Dahl's conditions for polyarchy are somehow fulfilled in many countries, these countries may still not be democratic. These representative democracies without democratic content are defined as *delegative democracies* by Guillermo O'Donnell (1996: 34, quoted in Bingol, 2011a). Therefore, we also need to take into account human rights (Hoffman, 1994), historical heritage for democracy, attitude towards women (Bingol, 2011b), preferences of political system, prevailing constitutional process, elections and political parties (Lijphart, 1999; Borowiec, 1998), and civil society (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992), in order to clarify the institutional structure before and during transition.

## **1. Constitutional design**

A constitutional design clarifies the political system preferences of a country, besides attitudes towards human rights, citizenship rights and administrative structures. The administrative preferences draw the framework of the political system. After examining the basic features of the constitutional tradition, it becomes possible to infer where the system evolves; to a democratic system or to a non-democratic one.

First constitutional experience in Tunisia was under the French protectorate, in respect to the protection of the French citizens' property (Perkins, 1986). The second was after independence. The Tunisia Republican Constitution was inured in 1959 and used for fifty three years until the Jasmine Revolution.

In this constitution, there are clear references for a strong government and a weak legislation including weak council organs. Although Tunisia is secular, the state's and the president's religions are mentioned as Islam. The language of the state is Arabic. Legislative power is responsible to the president rather than a sovereign public. What can be regulated by legislative power is listed in the constitution and the red lines of the regime are drawn with article 46: "Emergency powers". Also, the President nominates the government, including the prime minister; and can dismiss the government and can even dissolve the parliament. Apart from the independent judiciary; the constitution distributes political power in favor of the President; the head of the state (UN, 1991). Moreover, Bourguiba was "President for life" until Ben Ali deposed him. There were councils creating a democratic image for the constitution, such as: The Council of the State, The Economic and Social Council but they were far from being effective.

After the first democratic elections held in Tunisia, during the transition period, the public set their new deputies and the new government was established. The process of composing a new constitution has begun. Some political parties are suggesting a presidential system whereas some are insisting on a parliamentary one. This means, the debates are mostly on the distribution of power. What is certain, the public wants to become sovereign.

Another issue discussed is the attitude towards the secularism-Islamism axis. The conservative An Nahda Party, which came first in the elections, proposes a secular state but a constitution including the religion of the state, as it was before (Ulutas and Torlak, 2011), and clarified that the new Tunisia won't be an Islamic State (Le Monde, 2012).

## **2. Elections and political parties**

In the 1959 constitution, one of the requirements of democracy was available (UNPAN, 1991) *fair and free elections*. However, both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes were authoritarian in disguise of "fair and free voting". The results of the elections were not reliable, and most Tunisians gave up voting for this reason.

A Majoritarian elective system was being used in favor of the ruling party Neo-Dustur (Angrist, 1999). This system produced disproportional results for the distribution of the seats in parliament for many years. However, after the Jasmine revolution, things have changed rapidly. The public interest in the voting of October 28 for the constituent assembly was rather high. 90 per cent of the voters went to the polls (Ulutas and Torlak, 2011). The elections were executed under the control of an Election Board, with the observations of many international associations, and governments including the Turkish Foreign Ministry.

Except for the late release of the results, everything went transparently during the elections (Turkish Foreign Ministry, 2011). The results of the elections are as follows: 89 seats for the An Nahda Party, 37 seats for the Congress Party for the Republic, 29 seats for the Demands of the Public Party, 26 seats for the Democratic Forum Party, 20 seats for the Progressive Party and 37 for the other parties and the lists. This proportional result emerged since a proportional electoral system was used without a threshold (Ulutas and Torlak, 2011).

It can be beneficial to deal with the four big political parties briefly:

1. An Nahda Party. Moderate Islamist or central right party, which is organized on the base of the public under the leadership of Ghanouchi. The party promotes a democratic system with a republican regime, and the justice of Islam.
2. Congress Party for the Republic. Secular formation, central leftist party. Promotes the distribution of funds, social justice and independent media reinforcing democracy.
3. Demands of the Public Party. Rooted in An Nahda; but separated in 1992. Promotes a democratic constitution, human rights, and a presidential system.
4. Democratic Forum Party. Social democrat and secular party being a member of Socialist International. Promotes the new regime bringing the ancient regime to an end and supports secularism, equality in administration, citizenship rights, and freedom of the media (Ulutas and Torlak, 2011).

Even if a well executed elections keep being a motivation for democracy, what has happened in the streets recently shows us democracy will not come smoothly. After the opposition

leader, Shukru Belaid of secular and leftist party of the parliament had been assassinated, big protests came around on February 2013. While these protests made the revolutionary eager blaze again, and disturb Ghannouchi and the prime minister Hamadi el Jabali. Resignation of the cabinet was an option just like a newly established technocrate ministers as suggested by Jebali (Spencer, 2013, para.34); however, some who have fear of authoritarian regimes, especially the An Nahda leaders claimed that both may cause another historical iteration (The Telegraph, 2013, para. 5).

### **3.4. Historical heritage for democracy**

The relationship between Islam and democracy has been discussed frequently. Some authors contend that the Islamic point of view cannot be congruent with the Western concepts of democracy, secularism or liberalism. For instance, Huntington claims that Islamic countries do not have the historical and cultural background for democracy (Huntington, 1984). Although Islam focuses on justice mostly in the state apparatus, there is nothing conflicting with democracy. There are empirical supports to falsify these stereotypes like the justice request from subjects and the administrations, and evaluate authoritarianism as the product of colonialism, the centralization of power by authoritarian leaders (Angrist, 1999; Muedini, 2012).

This point of view seems able to explain the Tunisian case, though, society grappled with a leader to get rid of colonial culture. Any time society wants to alter its authority, it grapples with a new leader and with hopes in the territory. However, in the Tunisian case, the hopes of society were crashed by two consecutive authoritarian leaders, who used democracy as a discourse providing legitimacy before the Western eyes. Now, "The hope is that in the states where the citizens successfully removed their leaders from power...they will be able to establish a democracy and elect leaders who will guarantee the human rights of all citizens" (Muedini, 2012, p.17).

### **3.5. Point of view towards human rights**

One of the preconditions and a principle of a democracy is the respect for human rights (Bingöl, 2011b; Hoffman, 1994).

In authoritarian regimes, after independence, more attention is paid to stability rather than democratization. For stability, repression is needed. In order to accommodate repression in Tunisia, Ben Ali especially, expanded the employment of the police force in spite of the high degree of unemployment in other sectors (Borowiec, 1998). This is a common issue in

countries where the control of social life is redundant, when any kind of opposition is perceived as against the state and the regime. Therefore, repression was seen over different ideas as well as human rights violations, such as unlawful arrests, deaths under arrest, torture, no freedom of expression, unemployment, violation of the right to information by having only state channels...

Despite these negatively structured circumstances, civil society studying against human rights violations in Tunisia has found a chance to live. In Tunisian civil society, "...several victims of repression went on to found the Tunisian Human Rights League and the Tunisian branch of Amnesty International" as the only example in the Arab world (Derradje, 2011, p.39). With the help of these associations, Tunisia has recently ratified almost all of the international human rights texts. Though, "...once ratified, at the top of its legal hierarchy; but may be recalled" (Borowiec, 1998, p.65). By way of addition, after September 11<sup>th</sup>, US alliance with the Ben Ali government caused a great pressure over civil society that affected human rights organizations negatively.

### **3.6. Point of view towards women**

Women in independent Tunisia were perceived as a labor force for newly developing Tunisia (Perkins, 1986). Industrialization is reinforced by women workers too. As they entered the market, with the help of internal migration, rural areas enlarged. Therefore Bourguiba promoted secular policies towards women in society including a Western way of dressing.

After the Bourguiba regime, secular women kept giving support to Ben Ali because of their prerogatives recognized by these two former presidents. Since religious opposition strengthened after the Jasmine Revolution, these women are scared of losing their acquisitions regarding secularism. However, the members of the Tunisian Islamist Movement claim that they are considerate to women's rights and within a democratic political system, Ghannouchi's party An Nahda signed "...a shared statement of the principles... and endorsed the liberal Personal Status Code which delivers some of the greatest advances in women's rights in the Arab region" (Murphy, 2011,p. 304). What is more, the studies of the National Union of Tunisian Women cannot be denied as regards to working on improving the status of women and female education (UNFT, para.1-3). The union is a non-governmental organization; established in 1956, however it had political links with Bourguiba. Yet, they had begun criticizing Ben Ali, after the 2007 economic depression. And other civil society organizations studying women's rights were far from being a threat to the Ben Ali government. Whereas women from both conservative and secular facets took part in the

Jasmine Revolution which probably brought more self-confidence to them up to writing the new constitution, trying to expand the rights of the women (Goulding, 2011). They have a great feature for getting organized when a political decision is made without their consent. Though some initiations held by the government while writing the constitution caused legal concerns about gender equality (BBC News Africa, 2012).

### 3.7. Media

In Tunisia, media culture begins in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the opposition culture. The first newspaper published in Tunisia in 1907 under the protectorate was called *Le Tunisien*. In this newspaper, the focus was on equity rather than independence (Perkins, 1986).

After independence; during the Bourguiba government, mass media and every information channel was controlled and owned by the government, as it usually is in authoritarian regimes under the reason of unity (Sadiki, 2002). After the coup in 1987, Ben Ali as he had promised regarding liberal-democratic steps, put forward "Media Reform" in 2003. Despite the inevitable demands for expression, this reform was far from being a step forward in the transition to democracy but it was an *authoritarian upgrading* (Haugbolle and Cavatorta, 2012) rather than providing *alternative sources of information* (Dahl, 1971). The government controls the media resulting in journalists' self-censorship (Hoffman, 1994). The media reform provided an entrance to the media sector, both television and radio, and even including Internet, for private initiators. Although, most of the entrepreneurs were relatives or companions of the President, some channels such as Radio Mosaique, Hannibal TV, Nessma TV managed to reflect civil society and the diversity of the public in inadequate conditions because of the government's red lines.

Furthermore, new channels of information, including the Internet, provided a discussion platform for new subjects for a repressed and conservative public including the taboos of the regime, unemployment, AIDS and sexuality. Therefore, civil society had a chance to share their opinions rapidly. Thereby, television, radio and the Internet could become a major factor for the organized masses during the revolution. For instance; Nessma TV was the first to show the Spring Revolution events (Murphy, 2011), thus this initiation facilitated the masses to rise. To the places where pluralist democracy has already arrived, made people living under authoritarian governments, just like Tunisia, "...more aware of the alternatives available and more impatient to liberalize their own countries" (Pinkey, 1994, p.147) Just as, Fatma Bouvet de la Maisonneuve who is a Tunisian psychiatrist states: "It's no coincidence that the revolution first started in Tunisia, where we have a high level of education, a sizeable middle

class and a greater degree of gender equality...We had all the ingredients of democracy but not democracy itself." (Goulding, 2011, para.16). Now media in Tunisia has more freedom with an incumbent fear of being repressed again by the new government.

### **3.8. Culture of association; civil society**

Civil society exists in Tunisia, differently from other Arab countries whether most of the formations were repressed and pushed underground. However this experience made the opposition diversified. Congruent with the structure of the opposition, civil society has two wings: one is Islamic, the other is secular.

Basically the first legal association is UGTT which has an important role in independent Tunisia's history from its backing the Bourguiba's initiation in 1956. Other secular basic initiations are the Tunisian Human Rights League and the Tunisian branch of Amnesty International, "the first organizations of their kind in the Arab World." (Derradje, 2011, p.39). Also there are effective women's associations, leftist organizations and environmental activists.

Secondly, Islamic associations can be handled parallel to the political opposition wing of Islam apart from *ulama*. The Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) was created by Ghanouchi as mentioned before. The An Nahda Party which is the political branch of MTI constituted by Ghanouchi, remained underground until they were accepted as legal. This caused some Islamic associations to become radical, even sometimes militarily based (Derradje, 2011).

The Spring Revolution realized in 2011, lit by the civil society and the repressed opposition, for so many reasons. Many scholars believe that its civil society, which is the only instance throughout the Arab Countries, helped the downfall of Ben Ali's regime (Derradje, 2011). Also then, they kept being active in political arena having voice about the regulations and constitutional amendments.

### **DOES DEMOCRACY CONSOLIDATE?**

The Jasmine Revolution is an unknown path and just a beginning for the perplexity, which does not seem to be coming to an end in the short term. However, Tunisia has some privileges over the other Arab countries such as acquisitions of women rights, having civil society, high level of education, a big middle class and demands for liberal democracy. Particularly, the middle classes play an ambiguous role in the installation and consolidation of democracy in alliance with the lower and the working classes (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992) in any kind of

revolution as well as constitutional design, historical heritage including human rights and the women rights and civil society.

Dahl's (1971) classification reveals that within a post-colonial country or at least a once lived in dependency just like Tunisia; "The old regime is transformed as a part of the struggle for national independence, in the course of a revolution against the colonial power; the new regime is inaugurated by leaders of a national independence movement, install polyarchy or near-polyarchy during after a successful struggle for national independence" (pp.40-41). Indeed, this classification is not untrue according to the expectations those days. However, near polyarchies turned into authoritarian regimes in a short time. And as those struggles repeated over the next leaders, democratic expectations gave birth to new and transformed authoritarian regimes (Angrist, 1999). When the elites of the independent Tunisia toppled, this process started again.

The society which had developed democratic culture but lacked a democratic system, asked for independence while de-positioning the authoritarianism. Also, democracy could be consolidated only where there were two or more strong competing political parties at least one of which effectively protected dominant class interests or where the party system allowed for direct access of the dominant classes to the state apparatus (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992). And in Tunisia, with more than 100 political parties and a proportional electoral system, it seems the multiparty mentality will keep living.

The political parties which competed for seats during the first democratic elections in Tunisia, gave economic promises regarding a liberal market economy, employment and development. There have been political expectations regarding the deteriorating economy in Tunisia. "Though economic crisis neither necessary nor sufficient to account for authoritarian withdrawal; poor economic performance reduces the bargaining power of authoritarian incumbents and increases the strength of oppositions" (Haggard and Kaufman, 1999, p.77) Therefore former opposition could topple anyone left from the ancient regime and try to attract the masses' attention. Since the economic development during transition produces a phase in a country's history where prevailing political values can shape choices that decisively determine the nation's future evolution (Huntington, 1984).

Whether there is important infrastructure for democracy in Tunisia, which may build a liberal democracy in Tunisia, Tunisia's authoritarian experiences decreases the possibility of democracy to develop (Huntington, 1984). However, this bitter experience may prevent a

reversion too. However the recent protests of the new government and the political unrest show that the both democratic transition and the consolidation will not be evenly.

To conclude, it is possible to claim that what has happened in Tunisia is an initiation of a democratic transition. Historical heritage and high level of attention towards the constitutional design process by the public and civil society, may provide a consolidation in future.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are many definitions of democracy made by the scholars. However, the core elements of a democracy is clarified as follows: freedom of expression, right to vote, eligibility for public office, right of political leaders to compete for vote, alternative sources of information, free and fair elections, institutions for making government policies dependent on votes and other expressions of preferences. In the case of delegative democracies, we take into account the social class relationships in the context of the different ways of life as well as economic conditions.

The less democratic countries, by revolts, try to pass to a more democratic system. However, especially for the North African countries with their colonial and then authoritarian regime experiences, this period is tough. Their undemocratic historical heritages may negatively affect this process.

Tunisia's unemployed and repressed youth started a revolutionary wave throughout North Africa and the Middle East which soon turned into a liberal democratic rise. Tunisian's Jasmine Revolution began bloodily but as soon as Ben Ali left his presidential seat, recovery and democratization period began.

The type of transition gives us some clues for the future structure of the democratization process. During the transition period, the opposition and civil society were repressed, took an important part and gave a form to the institutional political design of Tunisia. In order to analyze the institutional design and practice, we took into account, the constitutional design, elections, historical heritage for democracy, point of view towards human rights, point of view towards women, media, culture of association and civil society in Tunisia.

There are many preconditions for Tunisia's democratization such as acquisition of women's rights, organized civil society through underground or legal associations in many fields, organized masses via the Internet, as the first and only in the Arab world. However it seems to be difficult for a country to replace democracy for an authoritarian heritage. Although the revolution cleaned up the residues of the ancient regime institutionally, we will soon see if the

political culture provides liberal democracy after the instability or not. Indeed, there are many positive indicators such as democratic elections, emphasis on inclusiveness during the formation of the new constitution and the strong women sharing the fronts in the demonstrations.

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