

# Contextual Analysis of the Formation of the Tunisian Revolution: In Search of Dignity

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## Abstract

The public considers sociopolitical revolutions and movements as phenomena that occur suddenly and unpredictably. Still, these phenomena carry historical content and stem from sophisticated sociopolitical, cultural, and economic factors in the view of political scientists. Such a view provides the context in which sociopolitical revolutions and movements are analyzed, not in a single cause, but based on a diverse range of factors, to investigate the consequences. In this situation, the factors affecting the formation of sociopolitical phenomena are investigated at the level of structural analysis. The structural look at the factors influencing the formation of sociopolitical revolutions allows the researcher to explain the various fields affecting revolutions, and by examining the role of political agents in the creation of political structures and their impact on structures offers multi-factor analysis.

Therefore, what is essential in this study is to look at those structural factors that have hidden in political, economic, cultural, and even historical contexts. Hence, they need to compare with political agents. Still, the setting for entering such a look gives through a review of historical data that, with a historical sequence resulted in political events that took place in the Tunisian revolution in 2011. The present study aimed to investigate the structures that had an impact on the Jasmine revolution as well as the agency of Tunisian people. Our analysis demonstrates that the Tunisian revolution in 2011 took place based on the interaction of structure and agency. Political, economic, cultural, and religious structures provided the context for the agency of Tunisians. They were searching for dignity that had been ignored during the last decades and resulted in the Jasmine revolution.

**Keywords:** Tunisian revolution, politics, culture, economy, nationalism, Islamism.

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## Introduction

After the end of World War II in 1945, there were gradually independent movements in the Third World that had anti-colonial and nationalist characteristics. “When most Islamic countries came to political independence under the tutelage of European governments, the ideologies of protest and radical reform were shaped by Western democratic, socialist, and Marxist approaches” (Esposito and Wall, 1992: 21). Socialist aspects, regarding the effects of Marxism on these movements, took on in some countries. At first, these movements had a nationalistic side. The Muslim nations or in other words, the Arab Middle East, Since World War II, has gained independence from foreign powers and even in some cases have achieved some degree of national cohesion, in many cases still, the freedom of these countries has been superficial because of economic backwardness and being dependent on Western powers (Enayat, 2001: 222). In fact, since the end of World War II, the process of so-called anti-colonial nationalism has been the last of the social movements for independence in the Arab Middle East. Between the two world wars, Arab nationalism was string thinned by four factors:

- A) Granting sovereignty.
- B) Involvement of the Great Powers.
- C) The third was the extinction of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the mandate system.
- D) Increasing contact of Arab societies with Western thought (Barnet, 1994: 323-324).

In this process, political and social movements formed in Tunisia, known as the French colony. “The new social classes that had educated in France eventually challenged French domination by preparing beliefs and people. Being a protectorate was challenged and defeated in its secular terms; the political and religious elites that once ruled the country were overwhelmed by new French-educated petty-bourgeois men. Habib Bourguiba, who eventually became the president of Tunisia, is the most prominent example among them” (Anderson, 2003). The efforts of the people and political groups in 1956 led to Tunisia's independence, and it joined the rest of the Third World in forming an independent state. This autonomy did not mean that the colonialist ideas banished from all the rulers' minds in the country. The central figure of the official nationalist and secularist ideologies was reflected in the rejection of religion and the marginalization of religious forces. They believed that the separation of religion from the state would lead to its decline into the sphere of individual morality, and the pursuit of some kind of "Etatism" could

control religious attitudes and conflicts. Shireen Hunter describes the situation as:

“This response is based on the belief in the superiority of Western modernity and Westernization as providing an answer to contemporary problems. However, those in non-Western societies attracted to Western modernity have a selective version of its meaning. Some-especially secular intellectuals-emphasize the social dimensions of Westernization, hoping for the liberation of society and freedom from governmental tutelage. Political elites, by contrast, are attracted to such aspects of Western modernity as the focus of power and the creation of effective bureaucracies, modern armies, and functioning economies” (Hunter, 2004: 25).

Therefore, the reforms in this period were mostly non-religious and were based on Western patterns of growth and development, reflected in the reform process in the Ottoman government (Tanzimat), Reza Shah's reform measures in Iran, Habib Bourguiba's in Tunisia, and Egypt's arrangements under Mustafa Kamil Pasha leadership. “This period that took place in various societies in the early years of the 20th century until the early 1970s and was called "The Movement Era" in the Arab world; in an era in which, especially after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, enlightenment education sought to provide a liberal and secularist model of government” (Arkoun, 2004: 3). The ideology of this group of elites was based on Western and positivist Western and nineteenth-century European philosophies. Such concepts influenced it as constitutional government, power restriction, the rule of law, ideologies of nationalism, liberalism, and socialism. “This ideology, to varying degrees, had anti-clerical sentiments and played a major role in spreading the concepts of modern nationalism throughout the Muslim world” (Hunter, 2001: 132-133).

### **1. The Secular-Nationalist Discourse in Tunisia**

The secular-nationalist domination discourse as the central focus of identity formation from 1920 to 1970 moved forces. It reflected deep gaps in Islamic societies in the form of confrontation between secularists and Islamic traditionalists. It is because of religious authorities and clerics perceived the secularist ideology as a value-identity system that offered an alternative to Islamic identity with suspicion and fear. Edward Shills believes: “The first generation of populist political leaders in most of underdeveloped countries was westerners. But the prevailing current tendency to annoy the previous generation forced the next generation of

intellectuals contrary to "Western culture" and allowed indigenous culture and tradition to become more dominant in their minds. Thus, the idea of ancient aboriginal culture sprang up to lead the nation to awaken and self-awareness" (Boroujerdi, 2005: 7).

The secularists were unable to recognize that their efforts to remake and erase the legacy of the past may lead to a change in the written history of the people, but the social behaviors and actions are at the root of the heritage, in forms inherited from the past, it cannot guarantee a change in social behavior, because "legacy is not just one's knowledge of the history of his/her ancestors, rather, it is the individual's commitment to replicating and enhancing past achievements and healing, compensating for past failures" (Safi, 2001: 212-213).

The emergence of new elite in Tunisia was the beginning of a government that lasted for many years. When Habib Bourguiba came to power in 1957, he was seen as a revolutionary leader who could bring about change in the country by dismantling colonial structures over the French. He changed in all political, social, economic, and even cultural spheres, however not only were these changes not in line with the popular independence movement but also it conflicted with the religious identity of the Tunisian people.

Hence, "Tunisia has witnessed a cultural crisis and attempts to F marginalize Islamic identity since the day after independence from France in 1956 until the fall of Ben Ali's government on January 14, 2011. As the leader of Tunisia's independence, Habib Bourguiba introduced secularism from France at all cultural, educational, social, economic, and political levels, and the notion of a modern and civilized government justified his secularist actions" (Masoudnia and Khani, 2012:146). Bourguiba pursued policies based on a view that theorized modernization in the context of secularism and the fight against religion. These policies were followed not only during the reign of Bourguiba but also after him, under Ben Ali's reign. Before Tunisia's independence, the conservative religious elites did not seek to enforce the sharia and the role of religion in politics. Still, after independence, and primarily due to the government's anti-religious policies, it provided the necessary impetus for the religious elite's political activity. The government's anti-Islamic policies that came to power after the independence of this country in 1956 paved the way for the Islamist movement. Tunisia has endured two periods of dictatorship from freedom to the victory of the Jasmine Revolution in 2010.

Islamists have always struggled in these two periods, with the 31-year rule of "Habib Bourguiba" from independence until 1987, and the 23-year government of "Zine El Abidine Ben Ali" until the victory of the Jasmine revolution; Islamists have always tried to fight anti-Islamic policies.

In terms of religion, there was no fundamental difference between Bourguiba and Ben Ali. "Habib Bourguiba explicitly rejected Islam's claims to seize and lead non-religious authority" (Anderson 2003, 171). But anti-religious policies, not only during Bourgeois but followed up after him in the era of Ben Ali. Due to Bourguiba's policy failure in secular renewal and development, after his overthrow, reconciliation between the state and the religious elite was expected, but faithful persistence continued. These policies expanded the activities of Islamists through civic efforts and religious education. In such circumstances, although the state restricted the Islamist activities in the political field, but the exit from the political process made it possible for the Islamists to reinforce the beliefs and nurture of forces that later became politically active, especially within the party of "Ennahda."

## 2. The Emergence of the Discourse of Islamism

Although Tunisian Islamists have involved in the fight against secular rulers in Tunisia, they have fought against the secularists has gradually created a line of distinction between them, and their outlook on the philosophy of Islamic State, duties of Islamic State and their authoritarian policies for the Islamic State have highlighted these lines of distinction. Thus, the Islamic movements in Tunisia comprise a diverse spectrum ranging from Salafist groups to the groups believing in the accommodation of Islam and democracy. Still, the Islamic movements in Tunisia are more closely tied to the name of "Ennahda," which is Tunisia's leading Islamist group. Ennahda knew at the beginning of its activities as "Renaissance Party<sup>1</sup>." It later renamed Ennahda is not the only Islamist group in the country and groups such as the "Al-Islami Party<sup>2</sup>," "Al-Qur'an Preserve Community<sup>3</sup>," "Taleh al-Islamiyah<sup>4</sup>" and "Islamic Jihad<sup>5</sup>" also form other groups that base their movement on

١. حركة الاتجاه الاسلامي

٢. حزب الاسلامي

٣. جمعية حفظ القرآن

٤. طليعة الاسلامية

٥. جهاد اسلامي

Islamism. Ennahda is not only Tunisia's most well-known Islamist group, but unlike other Tunisian groups, it has also under the influence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

As a result, the historical context of Islamic awakening in Tunisia is of importance based on three major themes:

First, Tunisia's political independence from France, rather than leading to the pursuit of nationalist policies based on the religious culture prevailing in its society, led to the reinforcement of religious and cultural elements associated with it. It provided the impetus for the religious elite to emerge from conservatism and enter to the political arena. Second, the formation of political parties and the continuation of modernization policies based on the political structure associated with Ben Ali's era increased the religious elites' sensitivity to politics by trying to strengthen the human body and nurture political forces through religious-political education.

Third, the political-religious elites eventually entered the political arena and, in the face of their rejection by the government, showed themselves in the fight against Ben Ali's government; the result was the imprisonment of leaders of Islamist parties or their lives in exile (such as Rashid al-Ghannushi).

### **3. Political Structure in Tunisia: from Authoritarianism to Pseudo-Democracy**

The political structure, especially at the level of analysis of nation-states, is represented in forms such as the type of government, the constitution, the model of political participation of citizens, the variety of parties and political currents, and political divisions based on issues such as ethnicity and religion. In this context, it is crucial to address the political structure of Tunisia as one of the grounds for the formation of the Islamic Awakening in this country. The political arrangement, on the one hand, as a factor provided the fundamental constraints for political action, has been instrumental in provoking the Islamic awakening in Tunisia. On the other hand, it has confronted the leaders of the Jasmine revolution with its political structure needs a thorough rethinking.

The constitution is the first component upon which a country's political structure is founded. The role of the constitution in a political system is to create a public covenant between the people and the government. That defines the duties of the state towards the citizens and their political participation, but this does not mean that the explicit constitutionality of states' constitutions which respect the rights of

citizens and the creation of modern political institutions in line with democratic doctrines is a guarantee for their practical implementation. The structure of a country may recognize democratic political institutions such as parliament, elections, the media, and socio-political freedoms. Still, the legislative process may be in a way that the constitution merely acts as a guarantor of authoritarian policies. It is something that Bourguiba and Ben Ali, the autocratic rulers of Tunisia, have used since Tunisia's independence. As the constitution adopted on June 1, 1959, which was later amended by Ben Ali on July 12, 1988, the separation of powers, sovereignty, and other administrative requirements recognize as a democratic constitution (Constitution of Tunisia, 2014). Still over time, Bourguiba and Ben Ali have use as a guarantee of the continuity of their rule.

That is why Tunisia's political structure since its independence has also linked with authoritarianism. After Bourguiba took over the presidency, he attempted to form a government based on socialist policies in the economic field. It was on this basis that the Neo- Destour Party, which Bourguiba was also a member of that before Tunisia's independence, played a significant role in consolidating his power. Bourguiba benefited from a modern and non-religious organization, as the neo-nationalist political party, its leader, and its secularist world. On the eve of independence, about 15 percent of Tunisia's population individuals and groups with different tendencies such as unemployed graduates, middle-class farmers, and wealthy business people were the formal members of the Neo-Destour (Anderson, 2003:176-177). Although the pre-independence Neo- Destour party enjoyed diversity of members and, at the same time, unity, it became divided after Bourgeois came to power. Bourguiba was able to make the most of his party's control in advancing his proclamation policies. However, Tunisia's political structure during the Ben Ali era was also a continuation of the Bourgeois era. Political institution's activities illustrated; further, that existed from the time of independence to the end of the Ben Ali era. Institutions that, despite the authoritarian rule of this country, exhibit a form of democracy, but they lack the essential components of democracy.

“In some countries, political parties demonstrably permit to operate, but in very few cases the Opposition Party has the opportunity to succeed in the elections and take over the government. The experience of the 1950 general elections in Turkey, where an opposition party won the election and took over the government, was not repeated in other Islamic

countries. It seems true both in traditional regimes and in more liberal and secular regimes such as the Bourgeois regime in Tunisia. Consequently, in such cases, authoritarian political institutions have been recognized through secularist approaches to politics and modernization” (Esposito and Wall, 1992: 40). In such governments, there are institutions such as elections, parliament, parties, the media, and the press, but they are organized in a way that democratic political action is not possible. A famous example of this kind of issue in Tunisia was the way elections were held in Ben Ali's time; in all of the elections which took place during Ben Ali's tenure, he won the presidency with a majority of more than 90 percent (Enhaili, 2010: 394).

The same thing happened with Parliament. Parties such as Ennahda were not only able to run in the elections, but their supportive parties always won parliamentary seats. “Ben Ali, on the one hand, declared the strong Ennahda party illegal, and then by adopting a relative majority electoral system, instead of the proportional system in 1989, he was able to remove the majority of seats in parliament from that party” (Sardarnia, 2013: 245). Of course, in such a structure, the existence of parliament was not meant to influence the decision-making of the state, but rather to complement the presidential election, which ultimately shaped superficial democracy.

Tunisia's political structure in the era of Bani Ali, however, was in poor condition in terms of political and social freedoms. According to the indicators published by international institutions during the period of Ben Ali, Tunisia was in the worst possible situation in terms of granting political rights to the people (7) and in civil liberties (5)<sup>6</sup>; so, it was considered a non-free country (Harrigan and Tilley, 2011: 33). Although Ben Ali did not believe in the granting of socio-political rights, he had a double ambition regarding the possibility of non-religious associations working to prevent Islamists from progressing in civil society. Women's rights had a special place in implementing this policy. As Eva Bellin points out as an example of this, the Tunisian government in 1989 refused to grant a license to the "Women's Democratic Association" because the government feared the competition between the Women's Democratic Association with the "Women's Organization" that was supported by the government. But the Tunisian government eventually reversed its decision. It allowed the Association of Women

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6. In this spectral indicator number (1) shows the best status and number (7) shows the worst status.



Democrats to begin their work, not because they respected democracy but because the Tunisian government wanted to isolate and counter the Islamists by gaining the support of women's rights advocates (Kazemi and Norton, 2010: 168-169).

There is an essential relationship between the construction of political power and the possibility of the opposition power emergence. The parliamentary system provides the basis for the development of legal opposition. Since the foundation of opposition thought is concerned with the possibility of redistributing political power in society, it is vital to examine the construction of power. The transformation that permits the emergence of legal opposition is a fundamental change in the relationship between political power and its distribution. This change does not necessarily result from the seizure of political power and the turn of the ruling group and the shape of the political system (Bashiriyeh, 2007: 504); so the problem is not just limited to superficial democracy. The political structure in any political system is as a boundary for, legislative action that seeks to use political power to strengthen the state. But for Tunisia, this is related to the personalization of power. That is to say, during the Bourguiba era and Ben Ali, the political structure of Tunisia did not merely serve as a threat to the political action of the opposition. Still, it gave power to the rulers as a personal tool. The personalization of political power in Tunisia had transformed the country's political system into an undemocratic political system that does not tolerate even the political parties in favor.

An example at the beginning of the Bourguiba era, and his treatment towards members of the Neo-Destour Party presented. The personalization of political power in Tunisia is another form of superficial democracy that uses political institutions as a way of strengthening political power based on the personal votes of the President. That is why any election in the time of Habib Bourguiba and Ben Ali would have increased their ability to implement anti-religious and modernization policies.

The personalization of political power is specifically related to the issue of political legitimacy. "Some of the political systems that block the access of new classes to power try to entertain them with promises to develop their political legitimacy. It makes them use the only way to achieve power that is a revolution. Groups forced to use pressure to enter the political process are trying to exaggerate the importance of their political participation" (Ghavam, 2009: 56). It was especially evident during Ben Ali's rule, with his good relations with the heads of Western

governments, especially the United States of America. In fact, according to the government's definition of foreign policy based on strategic relations with the West, it sought to compensate for the decline in political legitimacy resulting from restrictions on Tunisian political space and increased political stability. As Rahnema (Rahnema, 2008) puts it, many analysts have considered the Tunisian popular revolution as a prominent benchmark for the overthrow of other corrupt regimes in the Islamic and Arab worlds. However, as a secular and corrupt government, the Ben Ali regime was heavily supported by the Western world, especially the United States. They saw the Ben Ali regime as a security belt to defeat the Islamists (Ghorbani Sheikhneshin, 2012: 94); Relations with Israel pursued. Although Tunisian-Israeli relations continued during the Ben Ali era, and especially after the Second Intifada, Tunisian-Israeli diplomatic ties were severed by Ben Ali. Still, in the years leading up to the Jasmine Revolution, these relations continued, especially in the economic and tourism spheres. It is important to note that during his rule, Ben Ali had established a balance between the United States of America, Israel and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, to consolidate its domestic position with the support of regional and international governments. However, the Jasmine revolution showed that, despite Ben Ali's expectation, the West and "the United States did not have the resources and capabilities to defend any pro-US Arab regime against the Islamist and nationalist opposition during a revolutionary situation. It is virtually impossible to transform and overthrow a revolutionary process when it begins its strong movement" (Dekmejian, 1988: 263).

As long as the political structure is in line with "Good Governance," the social protest will be reduced. From this point of view, good governance has eight significant characteristics: participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, active, efficient, and having equal rights before the law for all members of society. Good governance assures the community that corruption will be minimized, the views of minorities will take into account, and the voice of vulnerable groups will be heard in decision making. Also, in a country with good governance, the present and future needs of society will be addressed (UNESCAP, 2009). In this respect, it is essential to understand the conditions of Tunisia in the pre-revolutionary period of Jasmin with an authoritarian political structure that was mixed with a manifestation of superficial democracy. Although good governance intertwine with justice, authoritarian political structures achieve a degree of good

governance if desired by the rulers; because the most important distinction between countries derives not from the form of government but the degree of their government. The difference between governments whose policies are based on agreement, social participation, legitimacy, organization, efficiency, and sustainability, and those that lack such qualities, are more important than the difference between democracy and authoritarianism” (Huntington, 2007: 5).

Thus, "Good Governance" in an authoritarian political structure can reduce political and social discontent, strengthen the social base of the rulers, and provide the basis for the continuation of the political structure. At the same time, good governance can also be defined in contrast to "Failed State." According to the Failed State theory, a state that fails to public functions [such as the provision of basic welfare, public education, resolving disputes between individuals and social groups, the distribution of health services] as well as private functions [such as class protection and building a loyal class], while Facing a deficit of legitimacy cannot meet the needs of people (Nasri, 2011: 9).

In such circumstances, the model of governance acted as the agent of the political structure pressures on the popular motives of the Jasmin revolution. In an authoritarian political structure, rulers may perform the welfare function of the state in a manner that provides for part of the public's needs, which can provide a satisfactory basis for the people. But if the authoritarian political structure is accompanied by weak governance, it will exacerbate public discontent with the political system, which is part of the socio-political revolution. Hence, in the case of Tunisia, the authoritarian political structure was coupled with the weak rule of Ben Ali, which resulted in the self-immolation of "Bouazizi" providing the starting point for the Jasmin revolution.

#### **4. Political Economy of Tunisia**

The link between the Jasmine revolution and Tunisia's political economy is clear from the beginning. Bouazizi's self-immolation in protest of the inappropriate business situation in the country not only made his move a symbol of protest in the Arab world but also highlighted the impact of Tunisia's economic structure on the socio-political upheaval in the country. The pursuit of socialist policies, the failure of these policies, and the shift to a free-market economy coupled with a structural adjustment policy have led to the structural formation of the Tunisian economy, which presents many problems. Although a clear example of these

problems appeared in the Bouazizi protest, this example is not all of the involvement of Tunisia's political economy with these problems.

“Despite the huge economic differences between Muslim countries, they are all part of the same system of division of labor under international capitalism. Muslim governments functionally have different economic plans, but they embedded in an international economic system, and there is no separate economic and political division of labor” (Ghorbani Sheikhneshin, 2012: 94). The confrontation of the Middle East governments with economic globalization reduces their efficiency in precisely controlling the political economy of their countries; because, as Ash Amin (Amin, 1997: 128) and David Held (Held 1995, 130-131) point out “economic globalization means that the monetary and fiscal policies of national governments are dominated by the dynamics of international and national markets, to the extent that many of the criteria for independence of national economic policy are now questioned” (Nash, 2009:78). As such, it has had its effects overtime on the governments that formed after independence in Tunisia. The significant impact was that governments in Tunisia failed to adopt economic policies to combat poverty, unemployment, and inflation.

Also, Tunisia has another essential share with the rest of the Arab world, which witnessed popular uprisings in 2011. “The first and foremost point of engagement of these societies in the field of political economy is the importance of income or different rents, which are continually coming into their respective economies. Rent revenues, which are widespread in all countries of the region, have formed special structures in the field of economics and society that can refer to as rentier structures” (Mirtorabi, 2012:167).

In the newly independent countries of the Middle East, especially Tunisia, “when the petty bourgeoisie came to power, at least in theory, it did nothing less than targeting the total transformation of society. In every case, the new leadership has declared its determination for socialism, unity, and independence (to end all forms of dependency). All revolutionary regimes adopted the non-capitalist path of modernization, which meant rejecting capitalist models backed by Western theorists and pursuing a socialist model” (Sharabi, 2006: 204). The pursuit of post-independence socialist policies by Bourguiba led Tunisia's political economy to the focus of industries and the government's widespread presence in the marketplace. “Still, the experience of the planned socialist economy, ended catastrophically because of its negative effects on the national economy, as well as the coalition of some political and

social activists against it after its extension to the agricultural sector, ended in disaster” (Nifar, 2014: 89).

In the political arena of that era, with the decline of Soviet political and economic power, the Third World countries that were affected by it began to question the effectiveness of state-centered economic policies. “The political and economic failure of many regimes in the late 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union created a more open political environment. That not only enabled the extremists to threaten their governments but also provided opportunities for some parties and Islamic organizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s and provided the opportunity to think of political and social alternatives” (Esposito and Wall, 1992: 366). This openness in the economic field provided the basis for the strengthening of the free market economy and a shift towards liberal economic policies.

Since the 1980s, in line with international requirements, several Arab countries have been forced to adopt new economic and social measures and implement projects known as "Opening<sup>7</sup>" and economic liberalization. These included the dismantling of domestic prices, the resetting of foreign exchange rates, and the adoption of new monetary policies, the privatization, and the opening of the country's industrial doors to foreign capitalists. On the other hand, the implementation of economic liberalization policies made it possible for marginalized and opposition groups to express their views. The results of the elections held in Algeria and Egypt were complete to the detriment of the designers of the moderation programs. Therefore, politicians and political rulers again resorted to military forces and suppressed rival groups. In this regard, some scholars consider the failure of national development strategies in post-colonial times and its concomitant with globalization as the leading cause of Islamic awakening in the countries of the region (Drosti, 2001: 132-133).

In Tunisia, this economic policy shift as a structural adjustment policy did not work so well, and the social crises caused by the high prices of commodities and inflation resulting from the recommendations of the IMF and the World Bank, caused widespread discontent among the vulnerable sections and classes of the society. “These discontents sometimes turned into widespread social and violent uprisings that followed the rise in prices for basic commodities such as bread” (Ahmadi, 2011: 148). Although Bourguiba did not expect such reaction

from the public, “with the massive uprisings of January 1984, caused by rising bread prices, things got worse. The regime blamed Islamist groups for violence and ordered the army to control the uprising. In the face of unprecedented public outrage, Habib Bourguiba abolished the rise in bread prices” (Dekmejian, 1988: 115).

Although protests over the rise in bread prices - known as the bread revolution<sup>8</sup>- gradually decreased with the intervention of the army and the cancellation of the increase, moderation policies continued. The response of the military in suppressing the bread revolution is fundamentally different from that of the military establishment in the Jasmin revolution. One of the reasons for the victory of the Jasmine revolution was the lack of military intervention. Ben Ali, in the first three weeks of the protests, tasked the security and intelligence services<sup>9</sup> with suppressing the population, but the suppression of the people and the killing of people on the streets increased the scope and intensity of the demonstrations. As a result, Ben Ali urged the Tunisian army to take the streets to support government institutions and participate in the suppression of the people. Ben Ali helped the protesters win a lot by calling the military to the streets. The Tunisian army did not suppress the protesters, and even in many cases, it played a buffer between the protesters and the security forces and prevented the crackdown on the protesters (Ahmadian, 2010: 11). When the president called on the military to shoot at the protesters, the military not only failed to do the shooting, but also ended up giving Ben Ali a 24-hour ultimatum, so he was forced to flee (Niakoui, 2011:268-269). Thus, although the political economy is an essential factor in the victory of the Jasmin revolution, the role of the army in the fall of Ben Ali cannot be ignored.

However, the reversal in economic policies allowed foreign investors to enter the country and allowed the government to borrow from international banks and the IMF, at the same time, privatization of industries and the strengthening of private ownership were considered as the factors of growth of the middle class. These policies were not merely limited to economic outcomes, and with the strengthening of the bourgeoisie, Tunisian middle-class political claimed to oppose the government expanded. Although the coup of Ben Ali failed to represent these political claims and the authoritarian political structure of his country continued during his tenure, but Tunisia's economic structure

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continued to maintain its capacity to adapt and reinforce the impetus for political action.

Although liberal economic policies have led to economic growth, these problems have also found political contexts; problems increased, especially in the 1980s, with the implementation of structural adjustment policies based on the recommendations of international institutions. Public demonstrations not only in Tunisia but also in other Arab countries stemmed from a system of structural adjustment. “So, along with the escalation of economic and social crises in the Arab world, and the tendency of existing regimes to open up political space and encourage parliamentary competition, peaceful Islamist currents and supporters of participation in the political process declared their readiness to enter the country's political scene and participate in the election campaign” (Ahmadi, 2011: 151). After al-Nahda won 20% of the parliamentary vote in 1989, the Tunisian government banned the party from entering the political process and declared it as an unauthorized party. Its leaders, in particular Rashid al-Ghannouchi, who held a special place among Islam, had to leave the country.

Hence, Tunisia's political economy emerged as a decisive factor in the orientation of political groups in opposition to Ben Ali, which also manifested itself in the form of political protests in the Jasmine revolution. The underlying issue lies in “the disproportionate economic growth resulting from economic liberalization - without adjustments in the political space of society - and the lack of a rational balance in the political and economic sectors” (Arab Ahmadi, 2014: 85). Unbalanced development leads to the inefficiency of the government in simultaneously fulfilling its political and economic characteristics, and the increasing efforts of the society to get out of this inappropriate situation make the change in the political system as a fundamental solution.

What is essential from the point of view of the political economy in this paper is the emphasis on the failure of the Tunisian government in both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali governments to implement the specific function of public welfare. “Economic inequality and the spread of class divisions have been one of the major social-economic challenges in this country. Also, unemployment has been one of the main challenges for the country too. The unemployment rate in Tunisia has fluctuated around 14%” (Niakoui, 2011: 247). In any political system, part of the public dissatisfaction stems from the government's failure to create prosperity and the formation of unfortunate economic situation. In this context,

economic indicators become essential to justify a public opinion. Although economic indicators may conceal part of the problem, they play an essential role in governments' economic policies, both for public satisfaction and for reducing the scope of social protests. According to statistics, the level of reliance on foreign rents in Tunisia is at an average level. But if you look at the view put forward by Petras (Petras, 2011), the monopoly structure and islands of the tourism sector in the country can also be considered rentier structures. The high unemployment rate (at 28 percent for young people) indicates the effects of the rent cycle in this country. "The strong concentration of power in the president's hands and its political dependence on the west can be seen as a sign of frustration with the strategic rent. Its political system lacked a dynastic monarchy, the lack of effective support for the government by traditional religious institutions and the military's impartiality at the time of the protests were instrumental in accelerating the fall of the regime. The regime resorted to widespread repression in the face of the protests, but at the same time, due to the low rental income, it did not have much opportunity to deliver widespread and immediate financial promises to quell the protest fever" (Mirtorabi, 2012: 211). Prior to the Jasmine Revolution, despite the economic problems, the benefits of boosting tourism provided the basis for foreign capital inflows. This had the effect of creating employment and enhancing trade relations with neighboring countries, particularly the business and tourism relations with Israel. At the same time, boosting tourism, while having positive economic impacts on the Tunisian government's rent structures, would lead to the reproduction of political-economic rentals for the authorities.

According to Tunisia's Ministry of Social Affairs, while "the general poverty of Tunisian society in 2010, at the same time as the massive uprising of the Tunisia people, was about 25%, reflecting severe economic deprivation of one-fourth to one-sixth of the population" (Arab Ahmadi, 2014: 86). The rentier structure of tourism, due to its monopolistic character of the islands, merely reinforced the economic interests of the ruling class. As a result, as Michael Ross (Ross, 2011: 90) points out, "the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few has led to a widespread class divide, and the rulers have institutionalized economic corruption in society and created many economic problems" (Haji Yousefi and Shahriar, 2012: 27). Tunisian people choose Collective political action as a solution to the struggle against this class divide, which ultimately led to the victory of Jasmine revolution and the overthrow of the regime.



### 5. Political Culture in Tunisia

The impact of political-economic structures and historical contexts on sociopolitical movements makes sense alongside political activist culture; these issues led to collective political action based on a political objective such as the overthrow of the Tunisian political system in 2011. “In addition to political belief systems that consolidate political priorities and goals, political values, feelings, and information also influence one's political behavior. It can be said that the general political attitudes and orientations of the people are the same as the political culture. The most important aspect of political culture is people's emotional feelings towards the world of politics in which one can understand how much they are committed and loyal to their political regime. Another dimension of the political culture, of course, is the people's evaluation of government performance. On this basis, their interest, or rather their hatred or indifference to the political sphere is determined” (Ghavam, 2009: 159). Political culture acts as a mental element that drives political agents to choose the type, time and extent of protest against the political system, and even the content of the protests are derived from the components that imposed upon them by the framework of the political culture dominating the social world of the actors. Political culture has, therefore, made the mental components of the political behavior of the activists in the Jasmine revolution and much of this political culture is understood in relationship with religion.

“Of course, political culture is not immutable, but general political culture may have undergone major changes, and yet the ruling group's attitude and ideology remain unfit for political development. Without a proper change in the ideology of the ruling parties, especially about political participation, increasing demand for participation leads to tension and disruption” (Bashiriyeh, 2007: 663). It illustrates the situation that led to the tension among the people and the government in Tunisia during the Jasmine Revolution. While the people were demanding their socio-political rights to participate in political power, Ben Ali was thinking of holding on the force. Hence, political tension and strife followed in the streets instead of the formal political process.

“On the scale of North Africa, Tunisia's Islamic tradition is an established urban tradition that emphasizes on forensic legal and textual analysis and is associated with the extensive administrative and commercial life of cities. Religious scholars or elites were scholars, judges, and jurists who described the Shariah as applying to all aspects of

a Muslims' current life. The city of Kairouan<sup>10</sup> was built in the seventh century in northeast Tunisia, is the most important pilgrimage site in North Africa; it is said that seven times the pilgrimage to Kairouan is equal to one pilgrimage to Mecca. It is also the most important institution of Islamic higher education between Egypt and Morocco, the famous Al-Zaytuna Mosque in Tunisia" (Anderson, 2003: 173). The opposition of the rulers with religion and religious practices in both Bourguiba and Ben Ali governments also made the demand for the protection of religion and religious beliefs as one of the main applications of society from the political system. Although Bourguiba and Ben Ali had pursued a policy of tolerance for some years, and in particular at the beginning of his presidency Bourguiba attempted to use religion as a factor in enhancing his political legitimacy, over time, opposition to religion had become a central policy in Tunisia. As in Ben Ali's government, these policies were followed.

"When full political independence was gained after the end of World War II, cultural decolonization was not required. In fact, with independence, an indirect form of cultural colonization began - and because it was indirect, it was somewhat different but more penetrating. The control and domination of this cultural colonialism did not come from direct political or military control. But rather from the influence of a group of new patriarchal elites through their Western teachings, and it came from dominating society through western mass media and the values and desires of the western consumer community" (Sharabi, 2006: 134). At this time, it was religion and religious scholars who called on the country's society to fight Western cultural domination. It was precisely for this reason that Islamic movements such as Ennahda were able to gain political status among the public. "The supporters of these movements were not conservative sections of society but were mostly modern workers and educated people. They did not want to go back to pre-modern conditions, but rather to establish structures that could function within the framework of modern culture in a completely Islamic manner" (Esposito and Wall, 1992: 21).

The test of socialism, nationalism, and secularism, in addition to separating religion and politics pursued antithesis to belief, including Atatürk's Turkey and Reza Shah's Iran had convinced the political culture of the society. Those politics restored and reconstructed in connection with religion in Tunisia. "Political ideologies such as Arab

nationalism and socialism, which had created some form of political legitimacy for regional governments from the 1950s to the late 1960s, lost their legitimization function after the 1967 Arab defeat of Israel. So, the collapse of these "Progressive" political currents in the Middle East paved the way for new legitimization strategies" (Ahmadi, 2011: 147).

Therefore, the political culture that focuses on the role of religion in politics means the increasing part of Islamic movements in Tunisian politics and government. Indeed, Islamists' efforts to foster peaceful political action based on political-religious education have led to the strengthening of civil society. Because "in Tunisia, the structure of the state has been corporatist, as a result, political and civic groups have concentrated their activities around mosques and educational institutions. Following the severe repression of trade unions and opposition groups in the 1980s, the Islamic movement emerged relatively strong. The Tunisian government has dominated civil and professional institutions and has used political bribery to gain loyalty. However, the political weakness of the army and the existence of a relatively broad middle class is a favorable basis for the formation of civil society" (Bashiriyeh, 2007: 576). It was at this point that the Tunisian government's ability to control political action in the public sphere diminished.

On the other hand, the lack of trust between the government and society also played an essential role in raising tensions between them. "The relationship between the culture of social and political institutions is a persuasive one. De Jouvenel argues that community means institutionalizing trust and that the proper function of public authorities is to add mutual trust to the whole of society. On the contrary, the lack of trust in the culture of society provides great obstacles to the creation of public institutions. Those societies failing to create a sustainable and effective government are not also ineffective in building mutual trust among citizens, in fostering national and universal loyalties, and in organizing the skills and talents of their community" (Huntington, 2007: 47). In a state of distrust between government and society, mutual trust between the religious elite and society gradually developed. Although the means of controlling political thought continued in the ideological apparatus of the state, the ideological apparatus lacked the means of communication to control or direct the political culture, The Tunisian government lost the ability to control the political action of citizens because of its lack of ideological connection with the political culture of society during the Jasmine revolution.

In addition to the role of religion in Tunisian society, the strengthening of participatory political culture that was directly related to the part of worship was instrumental in shaping the Jasmine revolution. “Political participation can be defined as the increasing demand for power-sharing and political decision-making by the people, which depends on the functional institutions of the policy-making process. The purpose of the partnership is to enable groups and individuals who were previously ignorant of their issues and inactive” (Ghavam, 2009: 132). Thus, without the incentives for political participation in society, it would not have been possible to form a Jasmin revolution, and these incentives gradually create in the shadow of the efforts of Islamic movements, especially Ennahda. The motivation for political participation in the Jasmine revolution was created through the process of political socialization of the citizens, especially the youth who following the failure of Tunisian society to achieve a government that in addition to their economic needs, recognizes their political will to influence their destiny had turned to political participation based on peaceful political action.

Analyzing the political culture of this country makes sense for two fundamental issues: First, to acknowledge the role of religion in diverting public attention to politics as a solution to the failure of Bourguiba and Ben Ali's governments in various spheres related to the public area (economics, society, and politics). Second, the consolidation of the public will, in the sociopolitical revolution to achieve socio-political rights within a democracy based on the right to self-determination. These two essential elements in the Jasmin revolution acted as guides for activists who, despite their diverse beliefs and affiliations with different political groups, could fight against the political regime together as a whole.

### Conclusion

Tunisian political culture has acted as the Achilles' heel of the structure-agent relationship in the Jasmin revolution. Historical contexts, economic and political structures in Tunisia are factors diminishing the choices available to actors. But in the meantime, religion-influenced political culture has served as a turning point that has enabled citizens to move away from structures and efforts to rebuild them in line with the public will. It is at this point that the process of structuring determines its role. On this basis, Tunisian citizens have become political agents in the Jasmin revolution that have provided the basis for the introduction of

religion into politics and the formation of a democratic government based on public will. In such circumstances, elections and ballot boxes have become the symbol that divides Tunisia's history into the aftermath of the Jasmin revolution and before.

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