

### The Role of Civil Society in the Tunisian Transformation Process

Rothers, Simon

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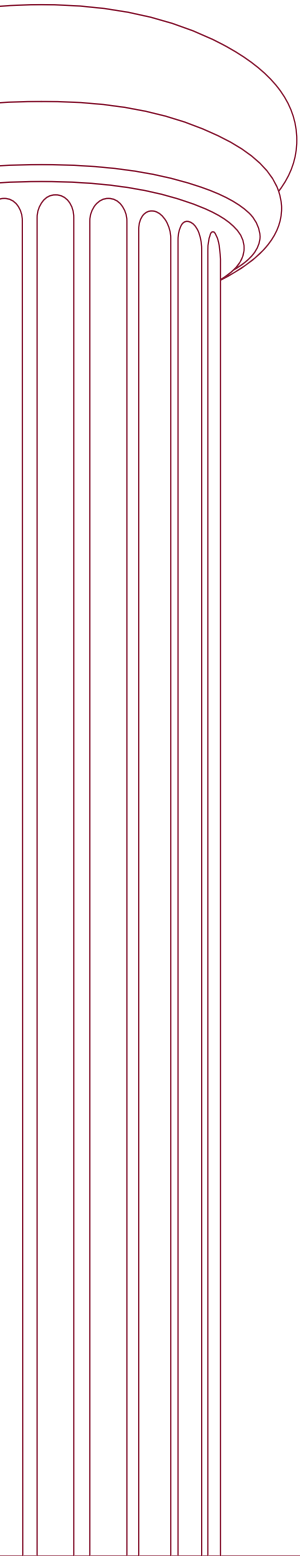
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Simon Rothers

**The Role of Civil Society in the  
Tunisian Transformation Process**

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## The Autor

**Simon Rothers** studied Political Science and Sociology in Berlin, Toulouse, Gießen and Madrid. Since 2018, he has been a lecturer and doctoral candidate at the Justus-Liebig-University and the International Graduate Center for the Study of Culture (GCSC) in Gießen. His research focuses on concepts and theories of civil society, social movements, authoritarianism and political culture. He has also been an active member of the Maecenata Forschungscollgium since October 2017

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E-Mail: [mi@maecenata.eu](mailto:mi@maecenata.eu)

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## **Abstract**

Political transformation scholars identified a new object of research through the course of the so-called “Arab Spring” that began in 2010 - the democratization of Arab countries. However, Tunisia is the only country in which the transformation process resulted in a democratic political system with constitutional rights and free elections, achievements that remain to this day. This paper investigates the importance and role of civil society during the transformation process in Tunisia. Theoretically, this paper integrates a participative framework of civil society with a three-stage-model of democratic transformation, inspired by French philosopher Montesquieu. In the descriptive empirical section, events are summarized that took place between 2000 and 2017. In the subsequent sections, the paper frames events from this period in a historical and sociological context: from the Ottomans until the authoritarian ruler Ben Ali, thereby drawing special attention to the unique evolution of Tunisia’s civil society. The third empirical section investigates the powerful role of the civil society organization and national trade union center *Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens* (UGTT). Through an interpretive case study, this master thesis demonstrates UGTT’s important role throughout the democratic transformation process in Tunisia.

**Keywords:** Civil Society, Arab Spring, Tunisia, Transformation, UGTT, labor union

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## 1. Introduction

The events that occurred across the Middle East and North Africa during the last days of 2010 and the beginning of 2011 are widely known as the Arab Spring. Mass protests erupted throughout a majority of the Arab countries in these regions, as well as in other parts of the world. The countries Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and further eastward in Syria and the Gulf states, experienced a turmoil that addressed the predominantly authoritarian rulers. Many citizens of these countries desired to have a life of dignity, with good living and working conditions. This desire led to citizens demanding increased political rights.

Yet, the euphoria that many Arab countries experienced throughout this period has completely disappeared today. In Syria, the protests sparked a civil war, divided global powers and provoked the fleeing of millions of refugees – all of which is still ongoing. In Libya, the dictator Muammar Al Gathafi, who held office for more than four decades was ousted and his removal led to chaos and a conflict that has since only worsened. Due to a French-led aerial warfare intervention, Libya declined to the extent that many consider it a “failed state.” The authoritarian rulers in Morocco and Jordan, who witnessed their once formerly stable monarchies in danger, reacted with partial contention of the demands through reforms that helped thereby to silence the wishes from citizens for a true democracy. A further example of the backlash against the democratic demands from citizens in the Arab world took place in Egypt, where the military took power after the organized political branch of the Muslim Brotherhood won the first democratic elections. Countries with oil-rich rent economies, such as Algeria and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, never really lost their primarily totalitarian control over their territory. When examining the outcomes of the Arab Spring, are these the only countries left to consider? No. Almost like in a popular French comic, where one indomitable village never surrenders to the Romans, we find a metaphorical village like this in the Arab world as well - Tunisia.

When approaching the case of Tunisia from a social sciences perspective, many distinctive features begin to surface. First, the country’s long history as an intersection of travel has resulted in an ethnically diverse country. The second feature is the reformist position within the Ottoman regime and the relatively peaceful colonial period and struggle for independence from France. Finally, Tunisia’s political history of Arab socialist rule as an independent country, although authoritarian. Tunisia is the only Arab country that has managed to the present day to experience a process of democratic transformation and establish democratic institutions and legal principles.

When probing for the reasons behind Tunisia’s success, what comes to light? From an international relations theory perspective, one might assume that the revolution began due to the inter-linkage between Tunisia and secular Europe, particularly France. However,

the official stance of European countries implies that they have supported the authoritarian ruler for decades. One could also try to employ a rationalist-materialist approach and assume that the success of capitalism in Tunisia provoked a bourgeois revolution and was thus successful. One could also credit this success to the creation of a strong entrepreneurial middle-class that adopted liberal economic principles and as a side effect, spurred democratic development. Yet, unemployment levels in Tunisia have been high for decades and many scholars have considerable problems identifying a viable western-style middle-class and economy within the country. In the end, the most promising factor accounting for the success of the Tunisian Revolution is found in Tunisian society itself, more precisely its civil society. Mass mobilizations and never-resting engagement from all levels of society pushed the transformation process forward, even at times when efforts seemed to have arrived at a dead end.

While further examining Tunisia's transformation, one particular news announcement caught my attention: In 2015, the Norwegian Nobel Committee for the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to a quartet of Tunisian associations. The four associations played an active role in the development of a democratic constitution and sustaining deliberations amid the unstable years of the democratization process in 2013 and 2014. When researching the history of the four associations, a singular association stood out: the *Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens* (UGTT). UGTT is a national trade union center founded during the period of French colonial rule that acts as a representative voice for addressing the social demands of working-class citizens. The association has since grown to become the largest and most powerful civil society association in the country. After researching the involvement of the four Tunisian civil society associations in the transformation process, it became apparent that they played a key role in overcoming the authoritarian system of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. In particular, the four associations succeeded in the creation of something new - something democratic. After making this connection, I found myself asking:

**How did civil society, and specifically UGTT, influence the democratic transformation process in Tunisia?**

This is the main research question that reflects my research interests. Therefore, this master thesis intends to answer the above research question and analyze the processes of transformation towards democracy and civil society in Tunisia.

Section two introduces the theoretical framework in order to better assess the main research question. This section addresses the questions: what is civil society and where is this knowledge located in the history of political thought? The third section provides an overview of past transformation research methods and answers the question: what is



transformation? This section introduces a Three-Step-Model that is used later in the paper as a tool to analyze democratic transformation. Three hypotheses derived from the theoretical assumptions further guide the paper into the empirical section. After clarifying the methodological aspects, the fourth section discusses the paper's empirical research and consists of three parts: (1) a descriptive overview of the revolutionary processes; (2) a historical and sociological analysis of Tunisian society and civil society; and (3) a case study of UGTT and test of the three hypotheses developed in the second section. In addition, the transformation processes thoroughly investigated in this paper are addressed in the theoretical section and divided into three stages that occurred between 2000 and 2017. In order to understand the transformation developments better, it is sometimes necessary to go further back in the history of Tunisia. The final section of the paper will conclude the findings, elaborate on lessons learned, and examine the prospects for further research on democracy in Tunisia.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The main concept and analytical approach in the following theoretical framework is the idea of civil society. Analytically, this section explains how the construction of civil society influenced the democratic transformation process in Tunisia. Civil society is a broad concept with a long history in political thought. Due to this, the first part of this section clarifies and defines the concept of civil society used in this paper. Once determined, the consecutive sections aim to develop an analytical model that applies civil society concepts to the process of state transformation and is used in order to derive three hypotheses. This paper's empirical research interest is the national trade union center, *Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens* (UGTT) and will serve as the primary focus for the case study analysis due to UGTT's high degree of organization and long history in independent Tunisia. The case study demonstrates the importance of civil society in the Tunisian transformation process.

The limitations and problems researchers face when investigating transformation phenomena using current theoretical models are best demonstrated in the following quote from one of the most important studies in the field of political transformation research: "Transition toward democracy is by no means a linear or a rational process" (O'Donnell et al. 1986: 72). Backlashes can always occur while on the way to democracy, as the process is highly contingent and influenced by cultural and historical factors. Transformation does not necessarily mean transformation towards democracy; it can also be vice versa. However, in the remainder of this paper, a transformation is referred to as being a process towards democracy. It will be interesting to see whether a possible "fifth democratization wave" (Leggewie 2011) provokes a revival of civil society theories in transformation research. It is

worth mentioning that the concept of civil society in political comparative research is a bit outdated and took its peak in the 1990s after the last wave of democratization (the fourth) in the post-communist realm, together with the end of the debate on communitarianism<sup>1</sup>. During this peak, researchers utilized various models that often relied on economic factors and modernization (Lipset 1970) or political culture (Almond & Verba 1963). These approaches continue to dominate the discussion on transformation. Yet, the most popular theory of democratization, the modernization thesis (Lipset 1970), is only partially helpful when analyzing Arab countries. Hafez (2009) points out that the Arab states are, to a high degree, rent based economies, a concept explained in the empirical section. Parting from this assumption, Ouaisa (2013) draws a pessimistic picture concerning the modernization potential of the Arab middle class. Some literature views “European style” middle-class as a prerequisite for the existence of civil society. Yet, in Tunisia, this is not the case due to it being a country with a strong and fluid civil society with few similarities to the European middle class. As a result, this paper intends to evaluate democratization perspectives that do not fit the requirements of modernization theory (Lipset 1970) as a necessary condition.

## 2.1 Civil Society in Philosophy and the History of Political Thought

Civil society is a concept with a long tradition in western political thought. The Canadian philosopher Taylor (1993: 132) distinguishes between two different theoretical strands. On the one hand, the “Locke Strand” also known as the “Liberal Tradition,” and on the other hand the “Montesquieu Strand” that can also be called the “Participation Strand.” These two traditions have commonalities but also deep differences in regards to what is considered civil society.

Most importantly, for all concepts of civil society, is the idea that society and the political system (*polity*) are not the same (Taylor 1993: 127f). This idea strongly articulates Hegel’s approach (a representative of the Montesquieu Strand), which distinguishes key differences between civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) and political society (*politische Gesellschaft*) (Hegel 1955). Hegel’s concept of civil society is very broad (including i.e. police), hails from historical developments, and reflects a “system of needs” of the people (Taylor 1993: 117f). In order to explain the findings of this paper, it is important to examine the historical development of civil society in Tunisia.

The first concept to emerge is the liberal tradition and its origins are traced predominantly back to John Locke (Taylor 1993: 133ff). This tradition claims that an

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<sup>1</sup> Against the liberal Theory of Justice by John Rawls (1971), scholars like Walzer, Sandel, Bellah and Taylor developed the political model of communitarianism. The discussion about it was mainly during the 1980s and 1990s.

independent sphere exists between the individual and the state. The main task of this sphere is to protect the liberal freedoms of each individual from the state. According to contractual political theory, the state only administers in the name of its citizens. This is especially evident in private property, where the autonomy of the individual and, in general, the economic sphere is under protection and kept out of reach of the polity. This sphere features an “identity” of its own and can potentially be out full reach from politics (Taylor 1993: 133).

The liberal concept of civil society brings together the ideas of the “public sphere,” as well as differences from the “private sphere.” The political space is not only part of the public sphere, but also a component of the civil society “public sphere.” In other words, they go hand in hand. “Public opinion” is a category that generates itself beyond the political sphere and includes press, books, public readings, demonstrations, etc. The concept of “public opinion” and particularly its need to be freely articulated does not fit well with authoritarian governments. Furthermore, the existence of “public opinion” is considered a necessity for a consensual and democratic society. “Economy” and “public” and “public opinion” are crucial for this first concept.

The society is also civil insofar as it is the antithesis to a militaristic society. This exemplifies the classical liberal idea of trade instead of war. However, this tradition presents the implicit danger that civil society could adopt an anti-state stance and become influential to the degree that it grows hostile and obstructs state action. This includes an economy that could marginalize the political sphere and lead to “privatism” - a model favored in libertarian and neo-liberal thinking.

The Montesquieu Strand (Taylor 1993: 142) developed due to dissatisfaction with the strong “economic bias” of the Locke tradition. For Montesquieu, there are ‘corps intermédiaires’ whom he considers associations of a political character that formulate particular interests and guarantee diversity. Sequentially, Alexis de Tocqueville is the next political theorist to elaborate and contribute the most important developments to this strand in his study, *De la démocratie en Amérique* (Tocqueville [1835] 2012). In his research, Tocqueville describes how the phenomenon of people gathering to form associations in the United States of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the various Protestant denominations, works as a “school for democracy.” According to Tocqueville, these intermediary associations are one of the main reasons for the sustainable character of democracy in the United States. The difference in the liberal concept is evident inasmuch that these associations do not follow a defensive force. Rather than focus on what Isaiah Berlin calls “negative freedom,” they focus instead on “positive freedom” (Berlin 2016), such as the opportunities, citizens have to express their will. These intermediary associations can be of economic nature, yet neither

Montesquieu nor Tocqueville emphasizes the economic aspect. Moreover, associations can be non-political and still strengthen democratic education.

Critical Theory scientists and Jürgen Habermas were the last researchers to contribute to the Montesquieu Stand during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Cohen & Arato 1992; Habermas 1992). In their contributions, civil society is considered a “pre-political” space that collects interests such as those from disadvantaged parts of the population. It is also a participative approach but ridden with more prerequisites (*voraussetzungsvoller*) than Tocqueville’s theory. Habermas criticizes both liberal-economic and systems theory approaches to civil society for two reasons (Habermas 1992: 401ff). (1) The pure focus on rationalist assumptions; and (2) its inability to explain social change due to the claimed non-interdependence between the various functional systems. Habermas also identifies a set of associations, interest groups, and cultural institutions that “form opinion” (*sie sind meinungsbildend*) (Ibid: 431) by reducing complexity and linking single persons through these groups to the “political public space” (*politische Öffentlichkeit*).

In order to obtain a high level of public discussion, the political public space needs to be free of power or at least very little (*nicht vermachtet*). This is one key feature of an ideal civil society. Habermas defines civil society as an entity that consists of “[...] More or less spontaneously emerged associations, organizations and movements altogether that reflect the resonance that can be found in the private parts of individuals, pick them up, condensate, and amplify them towards the public political space” (Habermas 1992: 443). Cohen & Arato state, “The issue of the relationship between civil and political society is connected to the question of the locus of democratization” (Cohen & Arato 1992: 80). According to their definition, civil society includes the following components: (1) *plurality* that guarantees a variety of forms of life; (2) *publicity* - which are institutions of culture and communications; (3) *privacy* - a domain of individual self-development and moral choice; and (4) *legality* - structures of general laws and basic rights needed to demarcate plurality, privacy and publicity from at least the state and, by trend, the economy. This definition stresses the notion that “[...] together these structures secure the institutional existence of a modern, differentiated civil society” (Cohen & Arato 1992: 346). Civil society organizes problem-solving discourses and what is interesting about Habermas and Critical Theory scholars, is their assumption that a discourse should be organized in a power-free space (*nicht vermachtet*) and therefore articulate the interests of (in the best case) all individuals in society.

## **2.2 Defining and Delimiting Civil Society: Which Concept Should be used?**

The previous two concepts (Tocqueville and Critical Theory) imply a strong normative stance that claims civil society positively affects democratization and goes hand in hand with the tradition of Montesquieu. Despite the positive perception of civil society in this tradition, it must be emphasized that a civil society organization is not necessarily progressive or even democratic. This master thesis agrees with Demirovic and other theorists that civil society in an associative sense is present in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes (i.e. fascist, communist) in so far that they organize the consensus (Demirovic 1991: 42). However, this phenomenon should not be called civil society (Zivilgesellschaft; société civile) because civil society in authoritarian countries relies heavily on repressive mechanisms such as secret services. Therefore, authoritarian countries cannot fulfill one major characteristic (mentioned in 2.3) of civil society - the non-violent character.

This paper generally follows Lauth & Merkel (1997b) in assuming a combination of Tocquevillean and critical theory (e.g. Cohen & Arato 1992) approaches. This combination is categorized under the Montesquieu strand as the analytical approach. Thus, my understanding of civil society is clearly normative and participative. This paper demonstrates that in most cases civil society, according to its framework, has a positive impact on democratization. Therefore, the concepts of “social movements,” “political culture” and “social capital” are introduced later in the paper. Once the concepts and features of civil society are examined, their frameworks will be applied to theories of transformation research. Specifically, this paper introduces the “factor civil society” into one of the most important schemes of transformation research - a Three-Step-Model of transition towards democracy.

## **2.3 Why Civil Society is per se democratic: Three Notions**

In western research, civil society is linked to the idea of “social movements.” This includes not only organizations that evolved from the worker’s movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as trade unions but also NGOs that developed because of the New Social Movements of the 1970s. The first notion stresses that social movements evolve out of a societal necessity and involves non-congruence between changing societal conditions and the reality of legal conventions, including polity. In this approach, it is crucial that civil society organizations are non-violent and tolerant of other actors (Lauth & Merkel 1997b: 17). This necessity connects closely with the concept of “civil disobedience” (Habermas 1992: 462) and is understood as the assertiveness and self-confidence of civil society. Constitutions are works in progress and civil disobedience derives its legitimacy from the ongoing necessity to reform constitutions and to legally bridge the gap between *Faktizität* and *Geltung* (ibid: 464ff) - the gap between legal norms and its actual political reality. This legitimacy is crucial for the

self-understanding of civil society during the transformation process and non-violence is a reliable indicator of a civil society's democratic character. There is a "[...] nexus of civil society as a movement and as an institution" (Cohen & Arato 1992: 74) which means civil society stands somewhere between social movements and (political) institutions. However, this paper does not critically examine this nexus since social movement research from Europe cannot be compared one-to-one to an Arab country.

The second notion is "political culture." Lauth & Merkel (1997b) emphasize that civil society and political culture cannot be compared because civil society lies on an inferior level of analysis. Rather, civil society is connected to the concept of "civic culture." This is the variation of a political culture that Almond & Verba (1963) attribute to democratic societies. Thus, when reviewing research on political culture, it is found that civic culture, also referred to as a participative culture, is comparable to a strong civil society. This is the second argument for civil society being per definition democratic.

The last notion is "social capital" and introduced by Robert Putnam in his study "Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy" (Putnam et al. 1994: 167ff)<sup>2</sup>. His argumentation parts from game theory and the dilemma of collective action by asserting that social capital does not belong to someone but rather it is an attribute of social groups. Trust, for example, is a form of social capital and enables trustworthy (civil society) groups to have a stronger position in the negotiation process of societal questions. In this sense, it is essential that social capital facilitates cooperation. Hence, social capital is a means of social integration and a general tool against disintegration in favor of an interconnected society. Due to civil society's capability to give a voice to societal necessities, it is an integral part and fosters cooperation through social capital. In short, social capital is a strengthening factor for democratization.

## **2.4 The Role of Civil Society in the Transformation Process – The Three-Step Model**

In the following section, the main theoretical model is presented with the introduction of the concept of civil society as a model of democratic transformation. Despite cultural differences in the democratization process and different characteristics of the waves of democratization during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is one general model that classifies this process logically and temporally into three stages: (1) liberalization, (2) democratization and (3) consolidation. Figure 1 shows the three stages as classified by Merkel (2010, 2015) and

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<sup>2</sup> There is a large variety of social capital concepts. Bourdieu (1983) also largely worked on social capital in the frame of his capital theory. Though very influential and interesting, his theory is more micro- and less corporation-centered. Thus, we will not consider his approach here.

empirically used by O'Donnell et al. (1986). It is important to note that civil society assumes a different role in each stage of the transformation process (Lauth & Merkel 1997a).

	<b>Transformation</b>		
Stage	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Merkel 2010: 93ff	End of the autocratic system	Institutionalization of democracy	Consolidation of democracy
O'Donnell et al. 1986	Liberalization	Democratization	Consolidation
Lauth & Merkel 1997a	Strategic Civil Society	Constructive Civil Society	Reflexive Civil Society
	<b>Role of Civil Society</b>		

Figure 1: Own graph according to Merkel 2010: 95; Lauth & Merkel 1997a; O'Donnell et al. 1986

Although the stages of transformation may overlap, what is most important is how the stages are temporally defined. O'Donnell et al. (1986) define transition as the “[...] interval between one political regime and another [nota bene: regime, not government; SR].” The transition process is predominantly characterized by high instability given that during this stage “the rules of the political game are not defined” (O'Donnell et al. 1986: 6).

A major difference between a transition to democracy compared to a transition to an authoritarian (not totalitarian) regime is that the first requires mass mobilization. In most cases, a popular movement that upsurges against the ruling autocratic incumbents is evident. The same process vice versa towards an authoritarian system does not often contain this element. On the contrary, a strong conspiracy element is often observable, such as an overthrow by the military. In their study, O'Donnell et al. (1986) identify the behavior of the military as crucial. This paper does not focus on this aspect much because, in the case of Tunisia, the military sided quickly with the insurgents and did not take a leading role in defending the authoritarian or promoting the democratic system. Related to this is the inevitable discussion between reformation and revolution, which raises the question of whether the Tunisian situation is a revolution or merely a reformation? The literature on civil society differentiates between the two forms and often distinguishes between a regime change (revolution) and its lighter version, a policy change (reformation). In my opinion, the Tunisian transformation process can be framed as a revolution or at least as containing elements of a revolution. At the same time, if a revolution implies the overthrow of all former

ruling institutions, the approach of this paper would not make sense. In most cases, there is some continuity to the political system, even within its institutions and even if only civil society institutions. This phenomenon is observed in almost all transformations towards democracy.

#### **2.4.1 The Problem of the Inductive Character of Transformation Research and Implications for the Tunisian Case**

Political transformation is a relatively young field of investigation. Moreover, its theoretical framework evolved through empirical research conducted on the “waves of democratization” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. O'Donnell et al. state, “Transition in regime type implies movement from something toward something else” (1986: 65). It is often forgotten that transformation can also occur the other way around through a transformation towards an authoritarian state.

In this section, a recent theoretical concept is applied that builds upon experiences within European, Latin American countries and Japan. If the concept applies to countries of the MENA region, also known as the countries of the Arab Spring, is uncertain. In this regard, the Euro-centricity of existing research is evident. Criticism of Euro-centricity is often found in the standard literature on transformation research (Ekiert 2015: 198). The events that occurred in Arab countries starting in 2010-2011 are viewed as a new challenge to political transformation research. This is due to the unique characteristics of these countries only partially comparable to the democratization waves during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lauth & Merkel differentiate the effects that civil society in the course of democratization has according to its “character” (1997b: 22). What is meant by character and how can the character of the Tunisian civil society be framed analytically? The later sections of the paper pay special attention to the specific cultural circumstances of Tunisia. According to the findings of this master thesis, we will see if we have to claim a revision of theoretical models when applying them to a MENA country.

#### **2.4.2 First Stage: The End of the Authoritarian Regime (liberalization)**

In this stage, the authoritarian regime attempts to contain the mistrust and dissatisfaction of the people by increasing the number of civil rights. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between *democratization* and *liberalization*. O'Donnell et al. (1986) eliminate these terms completely in this stage, attributing the latter to the first stage. In this context, liberalization is policy oriented and this stage is characterized by the addition of liberal rights and human rights. Polity-oriented *democratization* is the key notion for the second stage and denotes the rights and obligations of the citizens before the new democratic institutions. Authoritarian regimes set out to use liberalization in order to increase their legitimacy. Furthermore, the initiation of this process can have internal and external



causes. These causes can be key events such as the death of a leader, a defeat during the course of a war or the loss of external support (as the case in authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe). Moreover, it contains a paradox: a crisis of legitimacy due to efficiency or a crisis of legitimacy due to *inefficiency*. This is due to the notion that if an authoritarian ruler admits certain rights to a developing middle-class that evolves out of economic efficiency gains, it will threaten their rule. At the same time, inefficiency can threaten an authoritarian ruler's position due to a discontent with the people (Merkel 2010: 98ff). The previously mentioned modernization thesis (Lipset 1970) assumes that liberalization can but does not automatically mean an economic liberalization. However, as explained the focus of this paper does not rely on this thesis. The breakdown of the authoritarian regime marks the end of stage one.

### **Strategic Civil Society**

During this stage, civil society is termed "strategic" and it is important that organizations of civil society within an autocratic system exist during this stage. Yet, organizations often follow a different logic than in a democracy due to the potential repression of the incumbents. Merkel (2015: 450) views civil society as being in a more powerful position if the organizations are organized across cleavages. This idea goes back to Tocqueville, who claims that membership in civil society institutions connects and integrates people into a network. Overall, the quality of civil society under authoritarian rule and the predispositions for democracy that already exist must be further investigated. Przeworski (1991) interprets a more reluctant civil society as being more efficient on the way to democratization. Instead of open confrontation, civil society should act strategically and gradually reveal its critical potential. This notion goes together with the processes of strengthening and diversifying civil society. The terms "strategic" and "rationalist" should not be confused seeing that civil society associations do not necessarily act according to rational interests. In fact, associations often act very norm-based. How these developments fold out in regards to UGTT, as a unified labor union, will be interesting.

Another important factor is whether there is one flagship of civil society (e.g. the *Solidarnosc* in Poland in the 1980s) or a wide range of organizations (Lauth & Merkel 1997a: 23). In both cases, the critical function of an organization is to create a counter-power within civil society against the regime. The normative claims and social capital of an organization allow for immense power that only economic organizations do not have (Ibid: 24). According to Lauth & Merkel (1997b: 24), civil society in this stage has an *unrestrictedly* positive impact on transformation and it has no ambivalent role (as in the later stages possible). As O'Donnell & Schmitter state: "The shorter and the more unexpected the transition from authoritarian rule, the greater the likelihood of popular upsurge and of it producing a lasting

impact on the outcome of the transition” (1986: 55). At the very least, organizations are capable of strengthening social rights and can even evolve into the strongest protagonists of change.

### **2.4.3. Second Stage: The Institutionalization Process (democratization)**

The key component of the second stage is *democratization*. O'Donnell et al. (1986: 8) define the process of democratization as the new rights and obligations of a citizen within the polity. In this stage, citizens experience new liberal rights and create a new polity that fits with previously achieved liberal rights. This phase is undoubtedly the most volatile phase of the transformation process due to its vacuum of power. At the same time due to the non-existence of stable institutions, civil society actors are able to use the creativity of this phase to create new institutional structures that fit the country's political traditions, cleavages, and societal demands. The process of determining which representative system to enact plays a key role. As new institutions are formed, determining whether to establish a presidential, parliamentary or a mixed representative system plays a key role in this process. This stage occurs between the end of the authoritarian rule and the first free elections (founding elections) (Lauth & Merkel 1997a: 35).

#### **Constructive Civil Society**

Civil society has a crucial role during this stage. At this time, authoritarian rule is over and, for many citizens, this is a promising moment to become politically engaged. O'Donnell et al. (1986) dedicate an entire chapter to its role and view the “resurrection of civil society” as not explicitly but logically situated somewhere between stage one and two of our model. Grassroots organizations often emerge during this period and a process of diversification within civil society occurs due to the new possibility of plurality. Associations with heterogeneous membership can break apart or divide into factions. They exhibit a high amount of influence in the process and in transformations such as in Tunisia, it stands out for its clear-cut civil society. The role shifts from counter-power to a force that can shape the process (Lauth & Merkel 1997a: 38).

Since a vacuum of power occurs during this stage, civil society itself bears most of the responsibility of political rule and the process of developing a new constitution. Many times, experts take the stage and speak freely about the restricted conditions (i.e. lawyer associations) but courageous actors with affirmative motives, such as “human rights organizations [...] emerge with enormous moral authority” (O'Donnell et al. 1986: 52). The role of civil society associations depends not only on its constituency but also on its political orientation and institutional purpose. In particular, organizations that played an important role in the former system (e.g. taking over functional tasks such as collective bargaining) are important stakeholders and their positioning can have decisive importance. In this context,

UGTT actions can be analyzed in order to assess its importance as a labor union and its impact on civil society.

Often during this stage, civil society associations act in accord with Weberian *ethics of responsibility* rather than *ethics of conviction* (Lauth & Merkel 1997b: 30). O'Donnell et al. (1986) research demonstrates a clear bias, nevertheless, the following excerpt illustrates the importance of associations with material interests as a key factor:

“The greatest challenge to the transitional regime is likely to come from the new or revived identities and capacity for collective action of the working class and low-ranking, often unionized, employees. Not surprisingly, this is the area to which liberalization is extended most hesitantly and least irreversibly. Not only have the organizations of these actors been the focus of a great deal of attention by authoritarian rulers – either through outright repression or state corporatist manipulation – but the direct relations of these actors with their employers have been decisively affected by the regime’s policies” (O'Donnell et al. 1986: 52).

### **2.3.4 Third Stage: Strengthening Democracy (consolidation)**

New political institutions are put into practice after the design process is complete. The initial moment of the “switching on” of the new polity are the “founding elections” (O'Donnell et al. 1986), which are the first free elections where people can vote according to newly gained rights. The literature commonly refers to the state of this stage as “consolidation.”

Due to the potentially unlimited duration of this process, transformation scholars often discuss the question: “When is a democracy consolidated?” (Merkel 2010: 110). Typically, indexes that follow a differentiated methodology, such as Freedom House or Bertelsmann Transformation Index, are used in order to assess the political freedoms and the state of transformation and also to determine if a democracy is actually free or democratic. Dahl (1991) names five ideals that characterize an ideal democracy but which no existing democracy actually meets. For Pridham (1995) a democracy is consolidated when the elites and majority of the population support the system. Merkel further develops this notion by differentiating the consolidation process into phases that occur simultaneously but vary in the amount of time: (1) *constitutional stage*, (2) *representative stage*, (3) *behavioral/integrative stage* and (4) *civic society consolidation* (Merkel 2010: 112). The constitutional stage is in some respects the final step of the democratization stage. During the (2) representative stage, civil society gains importance due to its functional significance for public tasks that go beyond the pure interest of representation. Collective bargaining is an important aspect because it releases the state from certain tasks and at the same time strengthens democratic

ideals in the sense of Tocqueville's "school of democracy." The behavioral stage focuses on the cognitive processes of stakeholder. This stage consists of the ability of important societal stakeholders to adapt their behavior to democratic norms and is particularly important for institutions such as the military. The (4) civic society phase involves the emergence of a civic culture (Almond & Verba 1963) and is the phase that usually takes longest to complete. Similar to this, Dahrendorf states (in regards to transformation in Eastern Europe) that "[...] they would need 6 months for creating a constitution, 6 years for institutionalizing democracy that is of creating the rule of law, of the parliamentary system, political and ideological pluralism, and of 60 years to implement a democratic society" (Dahrendorf 2005).

### **Reflexive Civil Society**

As observed in countries of the fourth democratization wave such as Poland or Hungary, civil society and the establishment of a civic culture are not at all determined processes. Instead, they can also reverse. Parties can take over the role of civil society and weaken it thereby (Schmitter 1992: 164). Especially in the case of the Visegrad states<sup>3</sup> after their transformation during the 1990s, parties often developed into 'cartel parties' and pushed civil society organizations from the stage (Ágh 1996).

Many times civil society degrades after the formal establishment of a democratic system. Parties take over the role of civil society and professionalize the complete decision-making process. Cohen & Arato see this problem of civil society in liberal democracy clearly recognizing that [the liberal model of civil society] can lead to "[civil society's] full depoliticization and its dependence on the forces of the market economy" (Cohen & Arato 1992: 57).

In my opinion, the disappointment in regards to the impermanence of civil society is due to a flaw of liberal democracy. Liberal democracies, as established in the aforementioned cases, tend to favor "privatism," meaning individuals have rights protecting them but no obligations or at least incentives of being political - a *zoon politikon* in an Aristotelian sense. In political theory, this problem is showcased in the debates between *liberals* and *republicans*, the latter insisting more on "civic virtue." In a similar thought, Schumpeter (1972) describes the liberal stance as not being in favor of a strong participative civil society. However, in his view, a civil society is not necessary and not even desired. According to the Schumpeterian democracy model, an elite-led government of experts is more efficient. As a reaction to this form of liberalism, *communitarianists* revive civil society

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<sup>3</sup> Visegrad states are a group of four key states in Middle-Eastern-Europe: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia

by setting the intermediary associations as the solution to this problem<sup>4</sup>. It will be interesting to see if civil society in Tunisia follows the “liberal degradation reflex” after the establishment of the polity or if it stabilizes. Achieving a self-reflexive character is crucial to maintaining a vivid civil society and civic culture. It is only when civil society actors reflect on their own importance and function that they continue to engage in political debate. In this respect, a self-reflexive civil society cannot be purely economic.

## **2.5 Using Civil Society in Order to Analyze the Role of a Labor Union in the Concrete Case (UGTT in Tunisia)**

It should be taken into consideration that civil society in the MENA states might function differently and that other associations or social entities will take the supporting function of the new democratic order. An important aspect is the “religious question,” which refers to the debate on whether religious organizations can be part of civil society. In Europe, this applies mainly to Christian churches. In the Tunisian context, this is a crucial point because the main cleavage in political debate is concerning secular vs. religious actors. Secular civil society activists translate the Arabic notion of *madani* (Engl: civil) with “secular” thereby exclude Islamic associations. Islamic associations use *ahli* that also include charitable religious and mosque organizations (Lübben 2015: 3). This paper includes religious organizations in its analysis, defining them as part of civil society. When applied to the Tunisian case, it is essential to include religious organizations due to the strong political position of religiously affiliated groups.

From the three stages of liberalization, democratization, and consolidation, three assumptions are made and therefore I derive three hypotheses. These assumptions are rooted in the assumed role civil society takes throughout the transformation process (strategic, constructive and reflexive).

### **Hypothesis 1**

During the liberalization stage, civil society actors are expected to behave strategically. It is assumed that actors are stronger if organized across political cleavages and more successful if they act reluctantly. In the case of a “civil society flagship,” such as *Solidarność* in Poland, there is the danger of over unification of civil society into one

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<sup>4</sup> Yet we can see that the debate mostly failed and that on the long run scientific community broadly rejected communitarianism for being a culturally conservative project that tries to fall behind the achievements of liberal democracy. The idea could not unfold its potential to revive notions like “civic virtue” or “community.”

association. Associations create stronger normative leverage when they do not focus on purely economic aspects of the transformation process. Among other things, transformation depends on the given constitutional circumstances and to which degree the civil society organization can have considerable influence. This impact is even more positive if the association's normative claims are strong and organizes a high number of citizens. According to these preliminary theoretical implications, the following hypothesis is formed:

Hypothesis 1: During the first stage of transformation (liberalization), UGTT took a stance promoting the forwarding of liberal rights under the circumstances of an authoritarian regime, without seeking open confrontation with the regime.

### **Hypothesis 2**

In the democratization phase, citizens obtain new rights and the constitution is in development. However, this stage is very unstable. The constructive character of civil society institutions consists of its diversification and in exercising its influence according to "Ethics of responsibility" (Weber & Dahrendorf 2004). O'Donnell et al. (1986: 69) stress that during transformation towards liberal policies, maintaining property rights of the bourgeoisie is crucial and must not be violated being a "fundamental restriction that leftist party have to accept if they expect to be allowed to play in the central parts of the game (Ibid: 69)." A labor union, as in this paper, is more likely to be unsuccessful or even threaten the democratic transformation by taking a Marxist stance. According to this theoretical concept, the following hypothesis is formed:

Hypothesis 2: During the democratization process, UGTT took a stabilizing role, assuming its responsibility in the polity building process and actively participated in designing a new political system.

### **Hypothesis 3**

During the consolidation stage, civil society organizations enter a delicate phase. Due to loss of function, especially in the case of political parties, organizations can potentially vanish. However, a labor union such as UGTT remains important in the "(2) representative" phase of consolidation by taking over tasks such as collective bargaining. Labor unions also act as a school for democracy by helping establish a civic democratic culture. The most important factor in the preservation of a powerful civil society is its turn towards reflexivity and the maintenance of normative and not purely economic functions. The democratic constitution, which enters into force at the beginning of this stage, determines the capabilities and limits of a civil society institution. Therefore, the following hypothesis is made:

Hypothesis 3: In the consolidation process, UGTT conceded to parties and the polity in general and stepped back into its function as a labor union, though still exercising a certain politicizing function and being reflexive about its new role.

### 3. Methodological Aspects

The methods of choice for this paper are predominantly qualitative techniques, since these methods can best answer the main research questions while allowing for the further investigation of the three proposed hypotheses. Due to this, results are differentiated. In general, hypotheses in deductive designs often tacitly expect to be answered precisely with hard facts (i.e. data) (Behnke et al. 2010) by either falsifying or dropping a double-sided hypothesis. This is not the approach of the paper. The three hypotheses are derived using a deductive approach (Diekmann 2008), however the third hypothesis includes an inductive feature:

Hypothesis 3: In the consolidation process, UGTT conceded to parties and the polity in general and stepped back to its function as a labor union although still exercising a certain politicizing function and being reflexive about its new role.

When investigating the “consolidation hypothesis,” this section aims to determine whether civil society institutions play a different role in Tunisia in comparison to previous theories on transformation. Additionally, it intends to determine if a completely new mechanism in regards to intermediary associations and the processes of consolidating a democracy exists. This is what I call the inductive feature of hypothesis three. Subsequently, while assessing hypothesis three I intend to investigate (1) to which degree we can consider Tunisia a consolidated democracy, using data from Freedom House and BTI, as well as (2) find out whether we can draw new conclusions about the role of civil society for the consolidation of young democracies.

Another factor in the decision to employ a predominantly qualitative design in this paper is that the area of investigation is a very recent one. As previously mentioned, Tunisia is part of a group of Arab countries currently experiencing democracy for the first time. A quantitative approach would not properly grasp the developments within Tunisian society because statistical social investigation is still very young in the Maghreb. The “Arab Barometer” (since 2004/2005) is available but generally offers very limited standardized data. Data generation through valid and open methods was not available before the Tunisian Revolution, because the authoritarian regime did not allow it.

Methodologically speaking, this paper is an “interpretive case study” (Berg-Schlosser & Cronqvist 2011: 61). The documents used are scientific articles, official documents (i.e., two relevant constitutions from 1959 and 2011), blogs, and Tunisian French-speaking and French media sources. As stated earlier, quantitative data is applicable to a limited degree. A one-case-study (n=1) poses the risk of “rotating around itself” and drawing conclusions that are not framed within the larger context. In order to avoid these risks and false conclusions the systemic transnational context as found in international relations theory is taken into consideration. The systemic transnational discourse includes the Mediterranean, African and the Arab contexts, and cover large issues such as migration, climate change, regional integration and global and local inequalities. In order to gain deeper insight into the transformation process, it is more promising to investigate only *one association* in *one country* instead of integrating all four 2015 Nobel Prize bearers in a comparative design.

#### **4. The Tunisian transformation towards democracy: Course of events**

In order to lay the foundation for the case study, the following section begins with an overview of Tunisian history starting from independence in 1956 to present. A special focus is placed on the period between the first significant protests that started in the city of Gafsa in 2008 and the ongoing process of consolidation that began in 2014. Before testing the three hypotheses, the features of Tunisian society, civil society and UGTT’s role as an organization within it is examined. A rich description of UGTT as an organization and an elaborate discussion of the societal background are needed in order to understand UGTTs behavior throughout the three stages of the transformation process. The third section consists of a case study and concludes with an empirical section.

##### **4.1 Short History of the Revolution and its Aftermath in Tunisia**

Tunisia gained independence from France in 1956. The Tunisian struggle for independence was relatively peaceful compared to Algeria and its war of independence. Habib Bourguiba, the charismatic leader that founded the Arab-nationalist Neo-Destour party during colonial rule in 1934, became the first president of independent Tunisia. At first, the authoritarian character of his regency was not yet apparent but during his first decade of rule, Bourguiba established a dictatorship. In 1959, a constitution under Bourguiba entered into force in which Tunisians possessed considerable rights but in actuality held very few. Bourguiba was and still is a contested person because, despite his authoritarian rule, Tunisians often consider his legacy as positive due to his charismatic attitude and socialist



politics that included, among others, comparably strong support for women (Pott 2013: 125ff).

From an economical perspective, Bourguibas' rule is problematic. High collectivization in the 1960s combined with the large concentration of crucial branches of trade on the coastal areas that coincided with negligence of the inner Sahel and the Southern parts, created a coast-center disparity that persists to this day. Coastal areas in the north and east benefit still today from tourism and industry. As a result of these reforms, central areas in the south and west are underdeveloped and rely heavily on mining and agriculture (Gerlach 2016b). Tunisia's main trade partners are EU countries, which make Tunisia partly reliant on the European economic cycle.

On a positive note, Bourguiba abolished polygamy and established free schooling in Tunisia. Gender laws established at this time attracted special attention as they were among the most progressive in the Arab world. Ideologically, Bourguibas rule is characterized as Arab-nationalistic, secular, and western-oriented. The regime persecuted Muslim organizations that attempted to enforce policies that are more religious.

In 1987, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali seized power in a non-violent coup. Similar to Bourguiba, Ben Ali enforced western-oriented modernization politics, advanced economic liberalization and strengthened the welfare state and women's rights, yet at the same time established repressive authoritarian politics.

Towards the end of his rule, Ben Ali allowed elections, but they clearly failed democratic standards and thus cannot be considered a move towards democracy. A key element of his politics is the repression of the *Ennahda* religious movement, an Islamist campaign led by Rached Ghannouchi. His political positions represent a moderate Islamic stance that believes democracy and Islam are compatible (Ginzel 2016). Ghannouchi returned to Tunisia in 2011 after spending 22 years in exile in London. Rached Ghannouchi's influence during the transition years is enormous. Many secular Tunisians mistrust Ghannouchi and the Ennahda movement, due to fear of de-secularization. Whereas others defend Ennahda as a normal, religiously affiliated democratic Party that is comparable to Christian Democrats in Germany or the former *Democrazia Cristiana* in Italy (Pott 2013: 128). Nevertheless, Ennahda's inner debates are of high importance because it is one of the most important political forces in Tunisia. Inner-Ennahda controversy between moderates such as Rached Ghannouchi and fundamental Salafists remain undecided (Pott 2013: 132). The latter try to gain influence and align public policy with their religious agenda.

### **Before the Revolution: The First Stage**

The beginning of the first stage dates back to the 2000s. This period is marked by its immense discontent in respect to the unsuccessful economy and politically repressive rule.

For many Tunisians, Ben-Ali's rule grew insupportable by the mid 2000s (Chouikha & Gobe 2011: 219ff) and the situation only worsened with the worldwide economic crisis in 2008. Yet, singular mobilization in various sectors of the economy did not bring about significant protests. Ben-Ali's last years of rule stand out due to an increase in disorientation and helplessness in regards to the future of the state. Although highly authoritarian, the Ben-Ali regime did not have a strong connection to the military. To this day, the Tunisian army is small and not very influential, due to the country's geo-strategical unimportance. At present, the army consists of around 35,000 men, compared to 120,000 men in the security services. In their study on the Bourguiba and the Ben Ali rule, Camau & Geisser (2003: 207ff) conclude that for neither ruler was the army the "spine" of their regency.

After the first violent incidents in the phosphate-mining region of Gafsa in 2008 (see chapter 6.1), the situation escalated in December 2010. This occurred during a period of high unemployment and political discontent and further escalated when Mohamed Bouazizi, a young street vendor, set himself on fire in the central Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid. This was done due to the desperate situation Tunisian police left him in when they confiscated his merchandise and accounts to prevent him from earning money.

Around the same time, violent protests spread throughout the country, which provoked lawyer associations and UGTT to organize general strikes. Young bloggers, such as Sami El Gharbia and Lina Ben Mhenni, reported the mass movements on Facebook and blogs in order to help further mobilize the population. Analyst credit the reasons for the massive political mobilization that occurred as a result of the increasing dissatisfaction with high corruption, increased cost of everyday goods, high youth unemployment and lack of political freedom, particularly online<sup>5</sup> censorship. The role and impact of online media on the revolution is highly debated still to this today. Later in the thesis, Chapter 6.2 further discusses these developments. Despite widespread attention from the public, police violence continued until January 14, 2011, when, under pressure from mass protests, dictator Ben-Ali fled Tunisia and went into exile in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. This day marks the end of the first stage of transformation: the end of the authoritarian regime.

### **During the regime change: The second stage**

Already at the time of mass protests, the military sided with the protesters. Even after Ben Ali fled, the military did not get involved with politics and instead limited itself to maintaining security and permitted the open competition of political actors (Pott 2013: 123). Mohamad Ghannouchi<sup>6</sup>, prime minister under Ben Ali, announced his intent to install a

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<sup>5</sup> During the protests against Internet censorship, many activists ironically used the acronym „404” as a protest against the usual 404 error that appeared when a page had been closed down by official security services.

<sup>6</sup> Not to confuse with the Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi

transitional government, together with the president of the two legislative chambers, Fouad Mebazaa and Abdallah Kallal. The government declared a state of emergency. Yet, riots and protests continued and Mohamad Ghannouchi selected a provisional government that consisted mainly of members of the former government. People from poorer inner parts of the country continued to protest and initiated a *caravane de la liberté*, a march from central-western Tunisia to Tunis. Several dozen Tunisians died because of the revolution.

On January 26, 2011, the Tunisian government issued an international arrest warrant for Ben Ali and his family. Four days later, Rached Ghannouchi returned to Tunisia, the main leader of Ennahda who lived 22 years in exile in London. The RCD<sup>7</sup> (former Neo Destour) party of Ben Ali was outlawed on February 6. Mohamad Ghannouchi resigned and Beji Caid Essebsi took over as the temporary prime minister with a contested provisional government on February 27. The new government lifted the ban on Ennahda and after decades of repression, it started to form and to organize politically. In addition, the secret police dissolved and on June 20, 2011, former president Ben Ali and his wife received lengthy sentences of more than 30 years and monetary fines. On October 23, 2011, the first free elections since independence in 1956 (Zayed 2015) to the *Tunisian Constituent Assembly* were a huge success for Ennahda. The Islamic party under Rached Ghannouchi won an overwhelming 89 out of 217 seats, followed by secular CPR under Moncef Marzouki (29 seats), the Popular Partition (26 seats), social democrat Ettakatol (20 seats) and Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) (16 seats). Ennahda, Ettakatol and CPR formed into one coalition. Ideally, it was supposed to take one year to develop a constitution.

Hamadi Jebali from the Ennahda party became Prime Minister; Mustapha Ben Jaafar from Ettakatol president of the Constituent Assembly and Moncef Marzouki was elected transitional president. The end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012 marked the onset of the complicated process of building a democratic order and it was soon realized that the process was more difficult than assumed. The economy and particularly the important tourism branch, suffered from the instability and high unemployment. In the summer of 2013, this heated situation led to the assassination of two leftist politicians, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi. The transformation process grew very unstable and the main cleavage of secular vs. religious Tunisians that existed before the revolution turned out to be the dividing line of the conflict for the months to come. Zayed (2015: 2) calls this type of struggle a *Kulturkampf*. A new party called *Nidaa Tounes* emerged and tried to unite smaller parties with secular constituency. The current leader is the charismatic and former RCD politician Beji Caid Essebsi.

As a consequence, protests sparked once again and forced Ennahda party officials to hand over power to a provisional technocratic government, whose main task was to develop

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<sup>7</sup> RCD: *Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique* was the name that Ben Ali gave to the party in 1988

a democratic constitution. The debates were hard-fought with the role of religion and Sharia principles in the constitution as the main issues of dispute. The disagreement on religion made its way into Article 6 and was finally drafted as the following:

“The state is the guardian of religion. It guarantees freedom of conscience and belief, the free exercise of religious practices and the neutrality of mosques and places of worship from all partisan instrumentalization. The state undertakes to disseminate the values of moderation and tolerance and the protection of the sacred, and the prohibition of all violations thereof. It undertakes equally to prohibit and fight against calls for Takfir<sup>8</sup> and the incitement of violence and hatred.” (Art. 6; Tunisian Constitution of 2014)

During these heated months in 2013, UGTT and three other civil society organizations assembled, namely the Tunisian Order of Lawyers (*Ordre National des Avocats de Tunisie*), the Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (*Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat*; UTICA) and the Tunisian Human Rights League (*Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme*; LTDH). This Tunisian Dialogue Quartet managed to bring together secular and religious political forces to negotiate. On September 17, 2013, the 21 participating parties signed an agreement in order to start negotiations, a so-called *roadmap*. Thus, the re-installation of talks was successful. Months of negotiations followed that led to the completion and later the ratification of the new democratic constitution on January 24, 2014.

### **Towards a consolidated democracy: The third stage**

The end of the second stage of regime change and the beginning of the consolidation stage is marked by the first regular free elections. Presidential elections were held in two rounds on November 23 and December 21, 2014. Beji Caid Essebsi, an 88-year old Bourguiba fellow and leader of *Nidaa Tounes* party, entered into office, beating Moncef Marzouki in the second round<sup>9</sup>. Ennahda did not position a candidate of its own in order to calm critiques that feared the party had a too strong position. The secular candidate Nidaa Tounes also emerged as a great winner of the parliamentary elections for the first democratic parliament, a unicameral house with around 37% and 86 seats out of 217. Ennahda came in second place with around 27% and 69 seats. President Essebsi appointed independent Habib Essid as Prime Minister. In his function, Essid formed a cabinet that united

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<sup>8</sup> *Takfir* is a problematic practice within Islamic circles to denounce other Muslims being infidel (Arabic: kafir) for their way of practicing religion.

<sup>9</sup> The fact that Marzouki peacefully left office and handed control over to Essebsi was celebrated (though not quite correctly) as the first democratic transfer of power in the Arab world

representatives from all large parties in hopes of creating a strong base in the Tunisian National Assembly. In 2016, Yousef Chahed (\*1975) took over after Essid lost the confidence of parliament members.

Since 2014, the political situation has been unstable. Legislative institutions seem to function relatively well, however, the judicial branch is far from being a neutral corrective and executive forces. This includes a police force that is considered highly corrupt and does not fully respect democratic principles, most notably non-violence. In 2015, two terrorist attacks shattered the country and further deteriorated the economic situation, especially in the tourism sector. The two main demands of the revolution called for better living conditions and jobs, both of which are far from being accomplished. Thus, Tunisian democracy is still in an ongoing process of consolidation.

**4.2 How Consolidated?**

First, despite all the difficulties and ongoing undemocratic tendencies within the country, Tunisia is the white hope of the Arab world in terms of democratization. This is reflected in the MENA press and in two of the most important democracy indexes: Freedom House and Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI). On its tripartite scale, Freedom House considers Tunisia as a “Free Country” in its 2017 index with a score of 78/100 (see Figure 2). According to this index, Tunisia and Israel are the only “free” countries in the MENA region. Mainly in terms of Political Rights (PR), Tunisia performs well in Freedom House but also in Civil Liberties (CL, with the Scale ranging from 1=best to 7=worst). Another index from Freedom House, the *Freedom of the Press Index 2016*, labels the country as being only “partly free.”

**INDEPENDENT COUNTRIES**

Country	PR	CL	Aggregate Score	Freedom Status	Freedom of the Press 2016 Status	Freedom on the Net 2016 Status
Tanzania*	3	4	58	Partly Free	Partly Free	
Thailand	6	5	32	Not Free	Not Free	Not Free
Timor-Leste*	3	3	65	Partly Free	Partly Free	
Togo	4	4	48	Partly Free	Partly Free	
Tonga*	2	2	74	Free	Free	
Trinidad and Tobago*	2	2	81	Free	Free	
Tunisia*	1	3	78	Free	Partly Free	Partly Free

Figure 2: Freedom House Foundation 2017: 24

Tunisia’s ranking is remarkable and stands out even more when compared to other MENA countries (see Figure 3). In the BTI’s political transformation index, Tunisia is the only country to improve and is now listed among “Defect Democracies” together with Turkey.

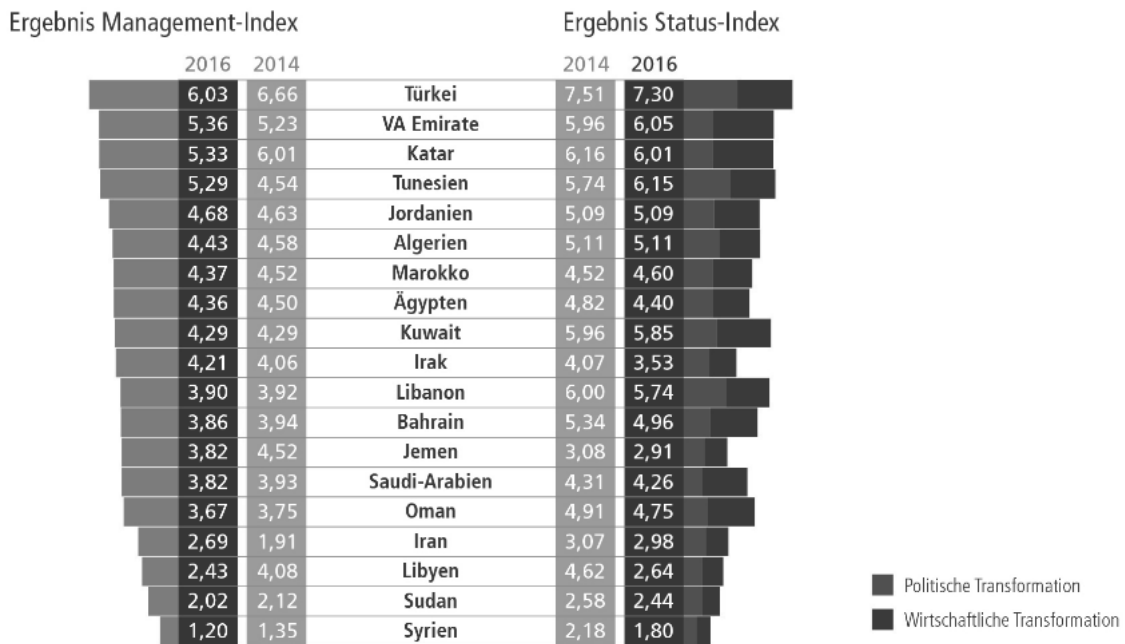
**Tab. 1: Entwicklungsstand der politischen Transformation**

sich konsolidierende Demokratien Werte 10 bis 8	defekte Demokratien Werte < 8 bis 6	stark defekte Demokratien Werte < 6	gemäßigte Autokratien Werte > 4	harte Autokratien Werte < 4
	Türkei	Libanon ▼	Algerien	Vereinigte Arab. Emirate
	Tunesien ▲		Kuwait	Ägypten ▼
			Jordanien	Marokko ▼
				Katar ▼
				Bahrain
				Irak ▼▼
				Oman
				Iran
				Jemen ●
				Saudi-Arabien
				Sudan
				Libyen ●▼
				Syrien ●

Die Tabelle folgt den Indexwerten im BTI 2016. Die Länder sind entsprechend ihrer Bewertung des Demokratie-Status angeordnet. Pfeile markieren Kategorienwechsel im Vergleich zum BTI 2014, Punkte bezeichnen zerfallende Staaten.

**Figure 3: Völkel 2016: 4**

In the BTI combined political and economic transformation index (see Figure 4), Tunisia is on track to assume the lead position among MENA states, ranking second in 2016 with a score of 6.15 compared to 5.74 in 2014. Turkey fell back a spot from 7.51 in 2014 to 7.3 in 2016. Among the lowest ranks, are the war-torn countries Syria, Sudan, and Libya.



**Figure 4: Völkel 2016: 14**

## 5. A Sociological Perspective: Society and Civil Society in Tunisia

The previous sections discussed the mass mobilizations and widespread movement for freedom during the Arab Spring and in order to learn what was behind the development this section aims to unpack the term civil society, specifically the “society” part of civil society. The following sections step away from the political level of the recent turbulent transformation years to focus on the societal level.

Upon further examination of the phenomenon, several questions come to surface. First, how was such a strong mobilization of citizens’ possible? Second, what sets Tunisia apart from other Arab countries? In regard to civil society, what role did UGTT play and how did the national trade union center function? This part aims to gather the necessary knowledge regarding civil society in Tunisia and UGTT from a political sociological perspective in order to examine the case study in the last step.

### Ottoman and French Colonial Roots

Ethnically speaking, Tunisia is a very diverse country. This diversity is due to several factors that trace back to times before the Ottoman Tunis and even as far back as the Classical Age. The area of Tunis was a hub in North Africa during the rule of Ottoman Sultans between the 16<sup>th</sup> century and circa 1870. Over the centuries, the areas numerous inhabitants ranged from Arabs, Berbers, Jews, Spaniards, Greeks, Phoenicians and Turks and all left their mark on the country. This ethnic diversity is reflected until today in its society (Lafi 2016: 6).

The Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms during the 1870s were particularly important for the modernization of the country. A Tunisian-Ottoman politician named Hayreddin Pacha executed these reforms. Through new infrastructure, education and a new legal system, Pacha transformed the Maghrebi provinces in the *Ifriqiya* region that spanned from Tunisia to present day Libyan territory (Lafi 2016: 7). Lafi best captures this change by stating, “From Tunis until Bengasi and Tripoli, the Ottomans created modern administration structures” (2016: 7). Additionally, this era shows the first intent of a separation of powers. Paradoxically, politicians such as Pacha and reformist like Ahmad Ibn Abi Diyaf viewed the French system as the best role model and Tunisia as an example of what not to be during the last year of Ottoman rule (Boubakri 2015: 66).

France colonized Tunisia in 1881 and implemented institutions of the occidental type and not through democratic means. The French legacy is two-folded for several reasons. As in most Arab countries that were colonized, western imperial powers meant upheaval but also some continuity. On the one hand, the French left a modern legacy that included

railroads, a *code civil*, and modern administration. On the other, the French also left certain Ottoman structures in tact such as the position of a *bey*<sup>10</sup>. At this point, Tunisia differed significantly from Algeria, which became a *département* - an official part of French territory (Baker 2015). Tunisia gained independence from France in 1956, and in spite of all the reforms, the French left behind a partially torn society. Tunisian society was torn between Arab-Islamic traditions (Arabic: *turaat*<sup>11</sup>) and imported western modernity. Despite the fact that Tunisia existed as a country long before French colonization and the modernizing effect of the Ottoman reforms, the main political cleavage is rooted in this inner conflict typical for the modern age.

In April 1956, a National Constituent Assembly (NCA) was formed and a democratic constitution that included sovereignty of the peoples' rule and basic human rights was formally created. Habib Bourguiba was elected president through universal suffrage (Boubakri 2015: 69). Yet, after his election, Bourguiba quickly converted the country into a one-party system and often called himself *al-Mujahed al-Akbar* (Engl: supreme combatant). In 1975, he was officially appointed president for life.

In November 1987, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the prime minister at the time, brought forward a medical report on Bourguiba that declared him incapable of governing. As a result, Ben Ali took over in a bloodless overthrow. In many Arab countries during the 19th and 20th century, a Nahda (usually translated as “renewal” or “renaissance”) movement gained momentum and it is viewed as a response to repressive colonial rule. These movements were displays of a desire in the Arab world to seek appropriate societal responses to modernity that swept across the Arab states starting in the 19th century (Gaebel 1995: 9ff). In the Arab world modernity, or more precisely Western enlightenment values and ideas, was perceived as something foreign and its characteristics were thus irretrievably connected to the “West.” As occurred in Western societies, a struggle between the old feudal and the new bourgeois classes did not evolve in the Arab world. Modernity is considered an imported “western style” from Europe (Gaebel 1995: 11) and in all other Arab countries, the issue of compatibility or incongruence of traditional and “modern” values remains a crucial topic to this day.

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<sup>10</sup> The title *bey* denominated in the North African Ottoman tradition a ruler equivalent to a Governor. In 1881, the French did not touch this office and it was kept until the 1940s. The last *bey* officially lost power to Habib Bourguiba in 1957.

<sup>11</sup> *turaat* (English: *heritage*; German: *Erbe*) – a word with heavy connotations in Arabic and mainly denominates the Islamic heritage of Arabic provenance



In his study on the work of the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri<sup>12</sup> (1995), Michael Gaebel views this cleavage as interconnected because it runs through every aspect of life: culture, society, economy and administration. For Gaebel, this overreaching cleavage results in a schizoid character of individuals that is torn between modernity and tradition and as a result, the need to choose creates suffering. The conflict in Tunisian society reflects this cleavage between secular individuals represented by *Nidaa Tounes* and religious individuals represented by *Ennahda*.

### **Independent Tunisia**

Despite repression, the authoritarian rule of Bourguiba and Ben Ali left some room for the formation of associations. According to many scholars, there are two policies initiated by Bourguiba that demonstrate the rulers first intentions to create a civic culture that proved to be crucial for the creation of associations. Bourguiba's first policy invested highly in public education. His second policy promoted the equality of women in public life both legally and politically<sup>13</sup> (Gerlach 2016a). In Tunisia, tribal structures and a respective tribal solidarity (Arabic: *qabiliya*) are hardly found. In ethnically fragmented states of the Arab world, this tribal structure often renders it difficult to bridge the cleavages between the religious and ethnic factions and create a common identity (Gaebel 1995: 68). In contrast to other states in the Arab world, Tunisia was successful in creating a common national identity and the nation-state produced a more binding and integrating capacity. This can also be said for the problem of rentier states. A rentier state is a state that relies mainly on rent-generated income, for instance, through the production of oil or capital and not on labor. This theory applies to most of the oil-rich states in the MENA region. Ouaisa (2013) and Hafez (2009) point out that a rent-based economy strongly opposes a democratic society since it blocks the evolution of a middle-class. This argument represents a reversal of the idea of *no taxation without representation*. If the state does not actively intervene in the income structure of its citizens via taxes, as it does in welfare-based economies, then citizens cannot demand political rights (Meyer 2007: 2). In Tunisia, the economy is only loosely based on fossil resources and hardly on oil and gas, therefore the income structure of its citizens is different and favors the evolution of a more middle-class society that exists in Western capitalist countries.

When it comes to the topic of democracy building in an Arab-Muslim country, many activists and scholars express doubts in regards to Islam's adaptability to liberal democracy.

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<sup>12</sup> Al-Jabri wrote a widely noticed series of four books called „Critique de la raison arabe” (Critique of Arabic Reason; 1984-2001) in which he analyzes and adopts the work of Andalusian Moor philosopher Ibn Rushd (1126-1198 AD)

<sup>13</sup> The Constitution of 1959 says in Article 6: All citizens have the same rights and obligations. All are equal before the law

Scholars often argue that since Islam does not have institutional churches like Christianity there cannot be institutional arrangements between secular states and religious institutions such as *concordats* with the Catholic Church. However, Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri is more optimistic about the compatibility. Al-Jabri explicitly states that neither the Quran nor the Sunna make claims regarding polity or the political system (Gaebel 1995: 99). In Tunisia, Ennahda is a political force that explicitly aims to bring together Islam and democracy. The role of “moderate Islamists” in the transformation process is very important.

The last feature of Tunisian society to be discussed is the character of the demands of the revolution. It would be a mistake to frame the protests and revolution as purely normative and aiming only at the possibility to participate and establish democratic principles. Most scholars agree that protests sparked mainly due to a disastrous economic situation and rather high unemployment of young men and women. Over the last decades, the problem of *diplomés chômeurs* (jobless graduates) has affected the entire Maghreb region. The population in Tunisia is young, the average age is 27.8 years old and around 31% of the population is younger than 25 years old (Zayed 2015: 1). Ben Ali invested large sums in the quantity of the education system but little in its quality. As Schäfer (2016: 14) points out, high investments in education were made during authoritarian rule but the labor market could not absorb the increase of college graduates. As a result, strong disparities remain and young academics often do not meet the demands of the labor market. The high number of young and well-educated people combined with low job chances usually poses a threat to every political order. This appears to be one of the very few ‘laws’ in the social sciences in so far that such a situation causes revolts. In Tunisia, the high level of youth unemployed consists mainly of women with high self-esteem and historically strong rights (Lafi 2016: 10).

In reference to the social demands of a revolution, Al-Jabri warns of prioritization of social demands (“social democracy”) against “political democracy” (Al-Jabri 1991). In the Tunisian context, where a high level of political participation was previously reached, it seems absurd to not put emphasis on the social aspects. As demonstrated later in the paper, the question of social vs. political demands is also reflected in the debates about and within UGTT. Traditionally, the labor union has strong political demands that go beyond collective bargaining. In addition, a last non-sociological but geopolitical fact plays a role: Unlike Egypt or Syria, Tunisia was simply lucky that it was not under the focus of global powers and did not have any geopolitical value. Under the circumstance of the country being “left on its own,” Tunisians were able to construct a new democratic system and act with tranquility in their own “little laboratory” (Gerlach 2016a: 21). However, this circumstance did not spare the country from the threat of global terrorism.

## Tunisian Civil Society

As previously mentioned, entities of collective representation existed during the authoritarian rule of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. In transformation research, there is a debate about whether or not civil societal activity under authoritarian regimes is possible. Mullin (2015: 89) and Netterstroem (2016) are optimistic about the possibility for democratic activism during the last years of the regime. However, such activism can only happen within associations that are officially approved by the regime. Consequently, most of the active NGOs in the country formed after the revolution (Lübben 2015: 8) and are currently experiencing a discovery phase with little expertise. As stated in the theoretical section, there are religious and secular civil society actors, and the division between them is crucial.



Figure 5: UGTT @ Twitter

Interestingly, this division line does not exactly follow class lines in the sense that secular Tunisians are wealthy and poor Tunisians favor Islamic organizations. For instance, the political party Ennahda exerts a great deal of influence among the middle classes, especially among teachers who are organized in white-collar labor unions under the umbrella of UGTT (Lübben 2015: 10).

From a historical perspective, after independence the situation for labor unions was favorable due to the historical socialist tradition of the country, which is similar to Arab socialism in Egypt. Omri (2015: 24) views this trade unionism as an important component of Tunisian society. Within the tradition of trade unions, UGTT stands out as a unified labor union because it is made up of different professions and draws its strength out of the diversity and breadth of its individual members and member organizations. Yet, there are a number of rivaling associations to UGTT. Some associations have a long tradition, others only formed more recently. An example of an older association is the Tunisian Union for Agriculture and Fishing (*Union Tunisienne de l'Agriculture et de la Pêche*; UTAP) founded in 1949. At the beginning of independent Tunisia, UTAP had an important position and traditionally Ennahda had a strong influence on the association. Yet, in the 1970s UTAP lost significance and credibility after not intervening when agricultural reforms went against their members' interests and the association. UTAP wanted to participate in the peace quartet but UGTT refused to allow them (Lübben 2015: 12). Examples of unions formed more recently are the Union of Tunisian Workers (*Union des Travailleurs Tunisiens*; UTT), founded in 2011 and the *Organisation Tunisienne de Travail* (OTT), founded in 2013 (Omri 2015: 22). Despite the formation of new unions, UGTT's hegemony was never seriously challenged (Bishara 2014: 5).

## 5.2 A Closer Look: UGTT - Its Organization and History

Omri (2016: 10) views UGTT as a pivotal intersection within society. On the one hand, UGTT is a civil society organization and strongly linked to social movements. On the other hand, the labor union even assumed governmental tasks and contributed to the process of constructing a state. Founded in 1946 under French colonial rule, UGTT united several unions under the first and very popular leader Farhat Hached (in office 1946-1952). A French right-wing group (*La main rouge*) killed Hached during the struggle for independence in 1952. During his mandate, Hached identified two main duties of the organization that are metaphorically inscribed into the DNA of the organization. First, UGTT must aim to preserve worker's rights and secondly, remain actively involved in the fight for independence (Mattes 2014: 2). Therefore, it can be concluded that UGTT has a long history of social struggle. Particularly helpful is the fact that since 1951, UGTT is closely associated with the Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions (CISL) and therefore its president traveled around the world, as Hached did (Mizouni 2012: 76). The integration into transnational labor union structures was generally helpful in order to exchange knowledge and to professionalize the responsible staff.

From the start, UGTT was involved in the fight for independence from France but after independence unexpectedly never completely sided with Bourguiba rule, even though they were allies before. The union never relinquished a certain degree of independence (Kübler 2014). Furthermore, Omri illustrates the character of UGTT during authoritarian rule by saying, "[...] to be a unionist became a euphemism for being an opponent or an activist against the ruling party" (Omri 2013). Already during the strikes in 1978 and 1984 and later in 2008 in Gafsa, UGTT built up the main base for anti-government protests. When Bourguiba introduced new bills that were aimed to liberalize the economy, UGTT became the major antagonist to lead general strikes in 1978.

UGTT is an example of a unified labor union founded after the Second World War. It consists of 24 individual regional unions, 19 specialized professional unions and 21 grassroots organizations (Kübler 2014). The structure is comparable to an umbrella association such as the *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (DGB) in Germany but at the same time exercises functions of a typical union. As of 2017, UGTT is comprised of around 700.000 members, a number that has since doubled (from 350.000) after the fall of Ben Ali (Bishara 2014: 6). This is an outstanding rate of unionization, compared to many unions in Europe (Tunisia's population is approximately 11 Million). The fact that UGTT attracted and continues to attract new members hints to its success story but also to its credibility among Tunisians. This high rate of unionization is reflected in its representation structure. With 150 offices across the country, UGTT is said to have "[...] an office in every governorate and

district” (Omri 2015: 20). Groups represented within the union are state public enterprises, civil services, and industrial employees. The education, healthcare, telecommunication and post unions are particularly important organizations of a leftist Arab-nationalist struggle. This importance leads Kübler (2014) to talks of a “second UGTT” and Chouikha & Geisser (2010) call it “two UGTTs.” The phenomenon of a “Second UGTT” is very important. A structure established within the party during Bourguiba’s rule explains partly the important role UGTT played during the revolution. While the upper parts of the organization hierarchy remained officially loyal to the ruling, the lower sections of UGTT maintained a degree of “popular independence.” The fact that UGTT remained connected to the “everyday people” enabled its action during the revolution.

The importance of Ennahda within UGTT has changed over time. Historically Ennahda was strongly represented within the union. In 1989, the predecessor of prohibited Ennahda made up one-third of all UGTT delegates (Lübben 2015: 10). Despite this, the secular-religious division has sharpened since the revolution. Since the legalization of Ennahda in 2011, religiously affiliated activists changed their official party, leaving UGTT mostly in the hands of secular Tunisians of all social background. Today the head management of UGTT tries to actively keep Islamist influences out of the union (Lübben 2015: 10).

A paradox within the UGTT is the role of women. The organization is in favor of promoting women’s rights, however, there are hardly any women in leading positions. This is a contradiction and a weakness that remains unsolved (Omri 2013). Another criticism is the high degree of centralization despite the “*implantation nationale*” (Chouikha & Gobe 2011: 221) and weak representation of private employees. Additionally, the organization degree is low in the densely populated Sahel area. Yet, UGTT is the largest organization that brings together women and men of different political and religious affiliations, regions and social backgrounds.

### **5.2.1 UGTT: Dependent from the authoritarian rulers or not?**

The question of whether UGTT was politically dependent and following the authoritarian regime or a nucleus of resistance can only be answered vaguely. It seems that the organization’s degree of resistance shifts throughout time. Important for the case study is the relationship between the Ben Ali regime and the union. Yet, the first direct confrontation between the government and UGTT happened in the 1970s. It can be said that during the 1960s and the 1990s, UGTT was relatively faithful to the rulers and even restrained members’ rights as workers (Bishara 2014: 3). Mizouni (2012: 82) discusses a “domestication” of UGTT under Ben Ali. In the 1970s, Ben Ali was in charge of national security and is regarded as co-responsible for suppressing the strike of 1978. On “Black

Thursday,” Ben Ali commanded UGTT to suppress the striking unionists among them. This is one reason for the strained relationship between Ben Ali and UGTT. After Ben Ali came to power, the 1990s were a decade of little social protest with regard to UGTT. Mizouni (2012: 84) attributes the loss of credibility on a national and international level to the “taming” of UGTT by Ben Ali who had previously experienced that UGTT could become uncomfortable for him in 1978.

The situation becomes more interesting in the 2000s. It was a decade of uprising that finally led to the events in the city of Sidi Bouzid and the revolution. In general, one can see that there was always a potential for injustice within UGTT. Since its formation, UGTT dealt with heavy internal debates and struggles, and as a result, changed its proximity to the incumbent Bourguiba (and later Ben Ali) from being very tightly linked to a deeply autonomous action. The issues were not always of a political nature. Consequently, arguments such as the one supported by Brigitte Hibou that qualifies UGTT an “appendage to the regime” (Hibou 2011: 124) are too uniform and inexact, mainly because of the organizations 71 years of existence.

From a cross-Arab perspective, there are differences concerning unionism. UGTT maintained a stronger degree of autonomy towards the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regime compared to its Egyptian equivalent, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) because it was founded 10 years before Tunisian independence (Bishara 2014: 2)<sup>14</sup>. When comparing the two countries (which is not the aim of this work), one might tend to see a causal relationship between the degree of independence of its workers’ movement and the outcome of the transformation. Chouikha & Gobe (2011: 221) view UGTT as an outstanding association that is unique due to its presence at all levels of public life (*implantation nationale*), which gives it a role unprecedented and incommensurable in the Arab world.

## **6. Case Study: UGTT’s influence during the transformation stages**

The last part of the empirical work investigates the behavior of UGTT during the revolution based on the three stages of transformation that were identified in the theoretical section. Some may ask what the importance of international relations and transnational processes are and question if there was considerable interference on the international level. If there was not, then one must ask why? Without delving into the topic too deeply, it is worth emphasizing again that the geo-strategical insignificance of Tunisia was a significant asset in the transformation process. The relative absence and lack of international interference that went beyond the Arab world led me to investigate the Tunisian case as a transformation

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<sup>14</sup> Egypt has with Nasser and Sadat a socialist history and is therefore interesting to compare.

research project and not as an international relations project. Without a doubt, there are international factors but I do not consider them as highly influential in this particular case.

## **6.1 The end of the authoritarian regime: The first stage**

The roots of the revolution trace back to the early 2000s. In 1989, Ben-Ali attempted to resolve the conflict and his tense relationship with UGTT by installing the loyal general secretary, Ismail Sahbani. As a result, UGTT remained quite calm during the 1990s (Netterstroem 2016: 388ff). After a low degree of politicization in the 1990s, UGTT began to politicize again in the early 2000s. Exploring the turning points in the democratic struggle during the last years of the first stage will help to better understand the reasons for the revolution.

Two “little revolutions” in 2000 and 2003 in the cities of Ben Arous and Kairouan, were the main catalysts. Left-wing anti-Ben-Ali members took control of regional chapters of the union in a sort of conspiracy move. The leading figure of the events in Kairouan was Houcine Abassi, who later became secretary-general of UGTT from 2011 to 2017. There remains to this day an often-underestimated effect of economic unrest. The desired effects of economic liberalization did not happen and thus created an immense discontent with the economic situation that occurred throughout almost all of Tunisia in the early 2000s. In a survey conducted in 2011 during the year of the revolution, two out of three Tunisians name the economic situation as the main motivation to participate in the protests. Political and civic freedoms were the main motivators for only one-fifth of the population surveyed (Ginzler 2016: 211).

Considering the strong economic motivation of the protests, the importance of UGTT becomes apparent. Unlike other comparable organizations, such as the employers association UTICA or the Lawyers’ association, UGTT combined two kinds of demands that corresponded exactly to protesters’ worries: (1) political participation, and most importantly, (2) decent work. Based on a strong workers’ tradition, both Netterstroem (2016: 384) and Omri (2013, 2015) argue that:

“The confluence between a largely secular and humanist education and an engrained labor activism have been, I would claim, the main bases of a Tunisian social formation which has allowed it to develop a culture of resistance to authoritarianism with a specific humanist and social justice content.” (Omri 2015)

This makes sense because when the tradition of social-democrat or socialist struggle for workers’ rights meets the political situation in 2010, UGTT seems to be the “natural protagonist” to fight for the demands of the revolution. This becomes evident in the reasons

behind the revolution. Events that unfolded in 2008 in Gafsa were decisive. Already at that time, people started to protest before the background of a concrete case of perceived injustice arrived. In this area, the *Compagnie des Phosphates de Gabès* employed 5.500 miners, compared to 14.000 in the 1980s. The Gafsa region is located in the center of the country, with rich phosphate resources that are generally underdeveloped. The few available posts were given to privileged regime-loyal employees during a recruitment round. This led to a revolt that lasted five months (Zemni 2015: 81) and caused an internal UGTT conflict. One local UGTT leader, Adnan Hajji, risked open confrontation with the local leader of UGTT, Amara Abassi, who was known for being a highly corrupt member of parliament for Ben Ali's RCD party (Netterstroem 2016: 392). Hajji supported the indignant protesters in this dispute. As a reaction, the new oppositional offices in Kairouan and Ben-Arous sent messages of solidarity and finally forced national secretary general, Jerad, to negotiate with the protesters in Gafsa. Chouikha & Gobe (2011) interpret the Gafsa incidents as an encouraging symbol to the poorer areas of Central Tunisia because its inhabitants were able to play an important role in changing the political circumstances. However, locals in this region were not able to spark a movement that would go beyond the regional borders until two years later in Sidi Bouzid. Nevertheless, Chouika & Gobe consider the events in the Gafsa mining district as "[...] revealing about an unprecedented social mobilization" (Chouikha & Gobe 2011: 220). Hence, in some aspect Gafsa can be seen as the 'final rehearsal' for the revolution. What started in 2010 in the small city of Sidi Bouzid has made history. Protests in Sidi Bouzid sparked as a response to the self-immolation of Mohamad Bouazizi and were 'spontaneous' (Chouikha & Gobe 2011: 220). In the course of the events, police bullets killed another young academic. Chouikha & Gobe (2011) describe the role of UGTT officials during these first days as mere witnesses of the events because they did not directly intervene. Local activists started a movement and organized solidarity events in the Sidi Bouzid area. Yet, the union did not officially respond to the conflict. As the protests were growing Union members only at the local level started to organize *sit-ins* and marches against corruption, local social inequalities, youth marginalization and police oppression against protesters in mid-December 2010 and early January 2011 (Chouikha & Gobe 2011: 221). The problem of *diplomés chômeurs* for UGTT turned into a strategic asset (Ginzel 2016: 211), as it diversified the social composition of the protests. Not only did UGTT mobilize its members to protest, but also unemployed young and relatively well-educated people. In contrast to the Egyptian case, this *mixité* was one important success factor of the Tunisian protests. UGTT absorbed the demands of both the young and old and offered them a platform. In particular, the divisions of UGTT that escaped Ben Ali's influence forced the union to take action against the regime. Members of UGTT's health service, postal service, and secondary education division played a highly active role in this internal activation. Protesters gathered on central



squares in Tunis in the weeks between December 17, 2010, and January 14, 2011 (Ibid: 221). In the following weeks, protests spread to other cities such as central-western Kasserine. In early January 2011, protestors found favorable conditions and support, most notably with the local leader in Kairouan, Houcine Abassi.

December 25, 2010, is a particularly important day in which many local bureaus began to defy and protest the regime. On January 11, 2011, the national *commission administrative* of UGTT, under increased pressure from local bureaus, officially authorized regional and local offices to organize general strikes throughout the territory in order to protest against “[...] the bullets on citizens of Sidi Bouzid and Kasserine” (Chouikha & Gobe 2011: 221f). The next day, the start of nationwide general strike took effect, first in Sfax on January 12, 2011, and in Tunis on January 14, 2011 (Netterstroem 2016: 394).

On January 13, 2011, secretary general Abdessalem Jerad met with Ben Ali. The official head of UGTT was still reluctant and unsure whether they should officially side with protesters’ demands. This resulted in the peculiar incident of UGTT leaders sending text messages to members, advising them not to take to the streets but rather to “strike at home.” Some observers see this as a tactical move to not officially confront the ruling and content of Ben-Ali but to hold a protective hand over their members. This ‘protection’ is especially important because, in the first two weeks of January 2011 (Ben Ali went into exile on 14 January), no one foresaw that Ben Ali would leave so quickly (Sallon 2014). Hence, UGTT was reluctant in order not to risk prohibition in the event that the protests would fail. At the same time, it was uncertain what the leave of the authoritarian ruler would bring for UGTT. Both scenarios were unclear at the time and UGTT prepared for both of them.

“The position seems incoherent, but it was exactly this ability to send mixed signals and hedge one’s bets that made it possible for the UGTT to both survive the dictatorship and be a part of the political transition” (Netterstroem 2016: 395)

In hindsight, Chouikha & Gobe (2011: 222) do not see the central office of UGTT as a mobilizing force. Without doubt, it had finalized the collective action. However, as described earlier a decisive force behind these events that turned critical towards the ruling already during the beginning of the 2000s was the local resistant bureau in the countryside outside Tunis. UGTT’s revolutionary impulses thus came from bottom-up. Chouikha & Gobe further argue that the protest movement was a movement without a leader. In their opinion, the internet (used with proxies to avoid censorship) was the main tool to organize the movement. The same applies to unionists. The factual overthrow occurred in the streets but it would have been impossible without the mobilizing power of the internet.

## **The role of the Internet and Social Media**

Tunisia's internet usage today is among the most developed in Africa; with an estimate, that one-third of the population uses the internet (Honwana 2013: 49). In 2011, the country had 1.8 million Facebook users and 3 million internet posts. It can be said that the revolution was a moment when class barriers, which in Tunisia strongly follows the coast-center divide, vanished for some time. The mobilization of such a heterogeneous group was also possible due to a mixture of classic media and new social media (Zemni 2015: 83f). It was unprecedented that some internet activists became 'mobilization entrepreneurs' (Chouikha & Gobe 2011: 223) whose efforts resulted in real demonstrations, like *sit-ins*, strikes or mass demonstrations. Slogans in the streets called out "Work is a right, O you gang of thieves" and "Bread, Dignity, and Social Justice" (Zemni 2015: 84). Images of the immolation of Bouazizi continued to run across media networks and as a result, people became less fearful of the government after seeing that they were not the only ones to protest (Chouikha & Gobe 2011: 223). The young bloggers Lina Ben Mhenni and Sami Gharbia<sup>15</sup> played an important role in mobilizing citizens through social media.

The phenomenon of people losing fear and becoming mobilized by means of the internet is worth further investigation in the field of social psychology. The variety of social media, blogs, tweets, and visualization of what occurred appears to have been an advantage for mass mobilization. However, this is not an aim of this study and hence remains as a follow-up project.

## **6.2 During the regime change: The second stage**

Immediately after the ousting of Ben Ali on January 17, 2011, UGTT became part of the first transitional government in Tunisia. Under the rule of temporary Prime Minister Mohamad Ghannouchi, three UGTT unionists became members of the interim government: Houcine Dimassi, Abdeljelil Bédoui, and Anouar Ben. Interim president Fouad Mebazaa denounced the constitution of the "Higher Authority for Realization of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition" (*Haute instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution, de la forme politique et de la transition démocratique*; HIROR). The HIROR was supposed to lead the transition process until the elections for an assembly that would create a constitution.

One day later, on January 18, the three UGTT representatives immediately left the government after instructed to do so by the head of UGTT. This unexpected move was justified by the accusation that Mohamad Ghannouchi appointed leading members of the former Ben Ali party RCD that attempt to claim the revolution for their own purposes. UGTT

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<sup>15</sup> Both founded influential blogs, Ben Mhenni "A Tunisian Girl", Gharbia "Nawaat.org"

officials demanded a “dignified government” and were unable to recognize the existing one. In addition to the three UGTT representatives in the government, the social democrat Mustafa Ben Jaafar (Ettakatol) resigned.

We must imagine UGTT in the following situation: After the successful overthrow of Ben Ali, the “strategy”<sup>16</sup> of the “Double-UGTT” had proven to be successful. For many people, UGTT was the driving force behind the strikes and thus crucial to the success of the ousting. Netterstroem (2016: 396) stresses that the popular legitimacy of the union experienced a genuine boost and people placed trust in the integrity of the labor union. On February 27, 2011, Beji Caid Essebsi succeeded Fouad Mebazaa as Prime Minister. Essebsi was also a former Bourguiba politician but maintained a high degree of autonomy and credibility, which in turn made him acceptable in a post-revolutionary setting. Moreover, the divide between seculars and religious gradually sharpened. Whereas before 2011, religiously conservative Tunisians had a strong constituency within UGTT, the two groups now started to drift apart. After its legalization on March 1, 2011, the more religious members went to Ennahda and left behind a clearly secular UGTT.

With its legalization, Ennahda started to create a powerful organization under its returned leader Rached Ghannouchi. Most UGTT officials were skeptical towards him and the organization. Ghannouchi’s attitude towards violence within the party was particularly under dispute, and the standard reproach by secular Tunisians was that Ennahda would accept violent Salafists among them.

HIROR convened for the first time on March 6, 2011, but protests against the newly assembled transitional government followed in May and June 2011. On June 13, UGTT organized a strike in Sfax where people expressed their demands for good work and a dignified life (Omri 2015: 21).

During the summer of 2011, UGTT secretary general Abdessalem Jerad attempted to abolish the five-year term limit for the post of secretary general. This was seen as a clear attempt to maintain his power over his two terms. Consequently, the democratic assembly of UGTT firmly rejected his initiative. The elections for the National Constituent Assembly (*Assemblée Nationale Constituante*; ANC) on October 23, 2011, were a landslide victory for Ennahda. The party of Rached Ghannouchi gained 89 of 217 seats in the ANC. Yet, in order to calm the situation, Ghannouchi formed the so-called *troika* government, consisting of the three leading parties Ennahda, social democrat Ettakatol, and CPR under Moncef Marzouki. Many secular Tunisians, suspected Ennahda of secretly following undemocratic and fundamentalist objectives while following a strategy of doublespeak. Ennahda’s success was a catastrophe but Ghannouchi continually rejected these accusations.

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<sup>16</sup> Quotation marks because it was only partly intentional

The ANC elections ended with UGTT becoming once again the opposition. The strategy used throughout the preceding months turned out to be successful. Once again, Tunisians saw UGTT as the only powerful and critical voice against a potentially authoritarian rule, this time Islamist (Kübler 2014). It cannot be said what would have happened if it had not been for UGTT as a counter-power against the troika government, but there are reasons to believe that the powerful union on the other end of the political spectrum balanced the position of the extremist members of Ennahda. However, UGTT's criticism was not only aimed at Ghannouchi. The fact that the troika government still included former RCD ministers was another strong point of criticism by UGTT.

On December 12, 2011, Moncef Marzouki won the presidential elections and became the first democratically elected president of Tunisia. At the time, Ennahda was angry about the open political engagement of UGTT. Leading figures of Ennahda reproached Jerad and the head of UGTT for being members of the old regime, which was not a false accusation given the phenomenon of "Double UGTT." Due to this, fundamental changes occurred within the union.

At a congress at the end of December 2011, left-wing anti-Ben-Ali members took over important positions within the association. The former Kairouan representative, Houcine Abassi, became secretary general and two other important protagonists of the left wing, Sami Tahri, and Anouar Ben Kaddour became members of the executive bureau (Yousfi 2015: 149). Jerad, who never had a clear pro-revolution and anti-Ben-Ali stance resigned from office and handed it over to Abassi, the charismatic high-school teacher who had previous experience with the struggle within the union during the 2000s. The ANC elected a government around the same time, on December 24, 2011. Hamadi Jebali became the new Prime Minister. Jebali was an Ennahda politician who under Ben Ali, was imprisoned under extremely rough conditions for more than 10 years.

As a result of the defensive position in which secular moderate Tunisians found themselves in between January 2011 and the formation of the Jebali government in December 2011, they created the new party *Nidaa Tounes* (Call of Tunis). Essebsi headed this new party and left the position of Prime Minister to Jebali. Nidaa Tounes can be understood as a collecting basin for secular Tunisians that attempted to unify their political influence into one party. Ideologically, the party was and still is clearly anti-Ben-Ali but interestingly quite pro Bourguiba.

During the spring and summer of 2012, UGTT officials confirmed their mistrust towards Ennahda after violent Salafists threatened and attacked UGTT protesters during the traditional demonstrations on May 1, 2012. Additionally, militant Salafi activists attacked liquor stores, bars and an art exhibition in a symbolic act of retaliation towards the hated of secularism in the country. An association called "League for the defense of the revolution,"

which was clearly Ennahda affiliated initiated the violence. UGTT demanded the prohibition of the organization. The two associations mutually insulted and criticized each other. Yet, the violent incidents continued. One such incident occurred on December 4, 2012, when members of the “League” violently attacked UGTT activists while they celebrated the anniversary of the death of their first leader Farhat Hached. As a result, more than 20 people were injured.

Conflict increased at the beginning of 2013 and the situation turned out to be the most vulnerable moment of the whole process. On February 6, 2013, militant Islamists killed the left-wing politician Chokri Belaid and many accused Ennahda of being involved in the murder. As a response, on February 18, 2013, Hamadi Jebali resigned as well as Ennahda politician, Ali Larayedh, also a former prisoner under Ben Ali. On top of this, on July 25, 2013, a second left-wing politician, Mohamad Brahmi was killed under similar circumstances. The two killings in 2013 sparked a summer of long protests, the so-called *Bardo* protests and the *errahil sit-ins* (*errahil* means departure). During the *errahil sit-ins*, protesters accused Ennahda of being involved with promoting a climate of intimidation towards secular Tunisians, and the killings of Belaid and Brahmi (Kübler & Saliba 2014). In order to reinforce their protest, UGTT organized a general strike.

All the protests and an insight on behalf of most responsible political protagonists lead to what Antonakis-Nashif (2016: 131) describes as a change towards a “[...] conservative, consensus-oriented culture that paved the way for elections between October and December 2014.” It slowly turned out that this vicious circle would only end up destroying the revolutionary achievements. On September 28, 2013, under public pressure, Ennahda agreed to surrender their elected power and agreed to form a technocratic government. The technocrat Mehdi Jomaa took over as Prime Minister from Layaredh. Already in May 2013, there was an attempt to organize a mediation process under the supervision of Ennahda and Moncef Marzouki but it quickly failed. It was only in December 2013 that the four associations of UGTT, UTICA, the Lawyers Association, and the LTDH formed a committee to initiate a national dialogue - the rest is history.

The mediation process between leaders of the four associations led to a technocratic deliberation regarding crucial questions of the constitution. These deliberations resulted in a draft constitution, a package of legal reforms and the scheduling of the first free elections that took place in winter 2014 (Kübler 2014). UGTT never lost its credibility during the revolution and assumed the responsibility of stabilizing the difficult situation without renouncing central claims of the revolution and without siding strategically with any of the incumbent parties or politicians at that time. The distance towards the government and its political legitimacy made it a powerful democratic corrective during the entire democratization process.

“UGTT, and the culture it nurtured, were perhaps not revolutionary enough to provide the leadership and the ambition necessary to turn the 2011 uprising into a workers’ revolution. Instead, it took part, a constructive one, in *structuring* the transition to a political phase where it may see its own role curtailed, a phase in which radical politics could be freed from the political limitations of trade unionism.” (Omri 2015: 28)

### 6.3 On the way to a consolidated democracy: The third stage

There is a lack of research on the specifics of the Tunisian the consolidation stage. Current research describes the consolidation stage between the years 2014 to present (2017). The democratization process as specified in the theoretical framework ends with the first free constitutional elections. This took place in November and December 2014 and the parliamentary and the presidential elections ended in success for Nidaa Tounes (see Figure 6).



Nidaa Tounes won the majority of electorates and Beji Caid Essebsi won the presidential election against his opponent Moncef Marzouki. Essebsi nominated the independent politician and economist Habib Essid as Prime Minister who, in turn, formed a broad secular coalition.

In June 2015, terrorist attacks in Port El-Kantaoui shattered the country and deepened the crisis, and in this case mainly economically due tourism being one of the main income sources of the country. Up until this year (2017), the mutual accusations between secular and religious remained the main source of conflict.

Figure 6: Selon Anadolu Agency 2014

In August 2016, 31 MPs of Nidaa Tounes left the fraction, which led to the dismissal of Habib Essid. President Essebsi nominated Youssef Chahed as new Prime Minister of a grand coalition of almost all parties. However, what happened to UGTT afterward? According to the theory of this paper, one can assume that UGTT vanished from the political stage because of the liberal political system developing an institutional framework. Could it turn out

that the liberal system will a-politicize UGTT and make it a solemn collective bargaining? When the interests of the democracy are secured in the form of a strong democratic party, will it fade away? There are reasons to assume that UGTT will remain.

First, the problems are far from being solved. One issue for which UGTT recently receives a lot of criticism is the perceived neglect of its social tasks, such as strong collective bargaining or legal support of dependent workers, and too much emphasis on its political work. This demand for more social and less political engagement is contradictory to this paper's assumption, assuming the disappearance of civil society in the consolidation phase. At the same time, it is understandable because the claims of the revolution are insofar accomplished as a formally democratic system is now established. In the words of Bill Clinton, it seems as if the economy was the crucial task to solve these days - "It is the economy, stupid!"

Second, the democratic quality and integrity of Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes are in doubt. Surely, they all agree to the democratic consensus that is written in the constitution. Yet, both parties possess some sort of an anti-democratic flaw. In the case of Ennahda, this is due to its extreme wing of Salafists. In Nidaa Tounes, it is because of the considerable number of politicians that served loyally under Ben Ali and who are still proving their loyalty to the democratic constitution. As long as the consolidation of the party system towards stable cleavages and stable democratic traditions is not yet satisfying, UGTT will continue supporting political claims. In particular, president Essebsi turned out to not be as progressive as presumed (Lefèvre 2015: 308). He continues to oppose basic social liberalization laws and is primarily in such a strong position because he is capable of uniting the secular camp. Not only that, he has close ties with former RCD politicians, which is surely problematic. For example, he named the former RCD secretary general as his personal advisor in 2015 after that one was imprisoned between 2011 and 2013.

One possible scenario is the division of UGTT (Lübben 2015: 11). Throughout its history, the union fought against repression: against the French, against Bourguiba, then Ben Ali and then against the transitional government of Ennahda. In 2015, for the first time in its history, UGTT was able to lean back for a moment, not having to defend against an oppressor and dwell on the achievements that took the union 70 years to accomplish. The question here is if this will weaken civil society in the young Tunisian democracy. Alternatively, this can be viewed as a plus for diversity and the fact that unionism in Tunisia keeps getting stronger. Lübben (2015) constitutes a polarization of civil society, according to the principal cleavage between secular and Islamic Tunisians. Omri (2015: 28) assumes the union to stick together and keep its merits. UGTT clearly stands on the secular side.

What does a more diversified civil society mean in terms of religious civil society? One cannot assume that civil society automatically becomes stronger and anti-democratic under a stronger Islamic influence. Theoretically, UGTTs leader Rached Ghannouchi endorses the concept of civil society that controls the state (and the parties), rather than the other way around and this seems closer to the Participative or even radical tradition of civil society (Chapter 2.1). This hails from Ghannouchi's understanding of the very early *umma* in Medina in 622 B.C., a civil society that stands above the state. Ghannouchi does not acknowledge the division of secular and Islamic civil society institutions and hence remains contested. The situation is far from being perfect. As demonstrated in Chapter 4.2 How consolidated?, Tunisia is on a good path. However, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) still reports numerous violations of union rights (ITUC 2013). The blogger Lina Ben Mhenni and others suggest that the revolution is taking a break and it seems logical that after an intense stage of social struggle and instability the country needs some recreational time (Ben Mhenni 2011; Gerlach 2016a: 196f).

### **Perspectives of Consolidation**

Regarding polity, time will tell if the created system is viable. There is a lot of criticism towards semi-presidential systems. In Tunisia, it is a compromise between secular parties and Ennahda. Ennahda was in favor of a parliamentary system, the secularists afraid of an Ennahda-victory, which would pave the way to an Islamist state. President Essebsi (\*1926) is over 90 years old and it remains unclear who will follow him. Nidaa Tounes mostly lives from Essebsi's popularity. Kübler (2014) thinks its necessary to reform UGTT internally, because the main demands during the revolution were of a social nature, the need for decent work. Therefore, UGTT needs to focus again on their social function as a labor union. Without any doubt, UGTTs important function was crucial during the revolutionary process. However, Kübler sees the necessity for UGTT to abandon this field at least partially and to re-focus on its social functions.

### **7. Concluding remarks: Lessons learned or What Tunisia teaches us**

What can be learned about civil society and its positive influence on democratic transformation from the Tunisian case? Historically, Tunisia is in a way exceptional because the various rulers left similar civic traditions. The Phoenicians influence made it a key strategic point in the Mediterranean, where cultures met and mixed. For the Ottomans, Tunisia was one of their most progressive provinces and they left their mark with the *Tanzimat* reforms. The French brought along with repressive colonization Montesquieu,



Tocqueville and a variety of illustrated thinking. The country does not have a strong tribal system and the Tunisian economy is only to an insignificant degree a rentier economy. In addition, the Arab-nationalist heritage contributes to the cohesion of the country. Many social science researchers today consider the existence of a nation as a prerequisite or at least favorable for the development of a democracy. The social structure of Tunisia is very mixed and the main bond to hold people together since independence is the idea of a Tunisian nation.

The demands of the revolution did not set out to become political in the first place. In fact, such a description would be a romanticization of the revolution. The revolution was to a high degree concerned with material issues: work, working conditions, unemployment, and regional inequalities. As demonstrated in this paper, UGTT fit the revolutionary body perfectly. Since its foundation, UGTT always had a two-folded agenda - social rights and political rights. The ability to express these demands gave the union legitimacy and credibility, which to this day remains due to them not giving up these demands for strategic reasons. It could be said that UGTT combines a participative Montesquieu tradition but also materialism and that its socialist tradition helped and still helps to mobilize the masses.

This work should not be complete without a reference to the Tunisian military. As previously described, the armed forces are small and have little influence. However, the history of transformation has shown that when the military gets involved, no one can help – not even a strong civil society. Thus, the role of the military, i.e. its non-involvement was crucial, yet poorly discussed afterward.

In regards to Hypothesis 1, we can resume that UGTT did indeed act reluctantly, following the organizational advantage of a “Double UGTT.” Its behavioral opportunities were restricted under authoritarian rule, which limited its scope of action. Its vertical disunity turned into an asset, officially being obedient but at the base working against Ben Ali. Unexpectedly, in the right moment, UGTTs shift turned out to be the right tactic yet was partly involuntarily. Thus, we can respond to our hypothesis that UGTT acted strategically. It was the beginning of organization across the main cleavage of Tunisian society, although it lost its more religious members to Ennahda and therefore this advantage. Yet, the base of UGTT remained very broad, as the doubled rate of unionization since 2010 shows. The not purely economic focus certainly helped to mobilize citizens. We can say that the double-nature of UGTT (not to confound with the “Double UGTT” under the authoritarian rule) with social and political claims gave the association their assertiveness.

Concerning hypothesis 2, it turned out that UGTT did not act only pragmatically towards an ethics of responsibility. Throughout the entire course of events, an ethics of conviction for social and political change played a role. Besides, UGTT could always lean on

its broad popular base. The role that Houcine Abassi and the rest of the National Dialogue Quartet played in 2013 and 2014 stabilized the situation through mediation between conflict parties that in the end led to a constitution and elections. UGTT's role was constructive and we can see Hypothesis 2 as being fulfilled.

With regards to Hypothesis 3, we only have limited possibilities to answer. UGTT has not yet vanished but is experiencing a diversification process. The consequences of this are not yet foreseeable. On the one hand, diversification could lead to a strengthening of civil society. Differentiation in the social sciences is usually seen as a key component of growing modernism and thus in the case of Tunisia's unionism could lead to its reflexivity and necessary diversity. It is possible that the "democratic flagship" UGTT functionally will fall apart in favor of smaller unions. Yet, UGTT still exercises collective bargaining functions and continues to demand social rights. In 2017, Nouredine Taboubi took over the position of secretary general from Houcine Abassi and it is unclear whether he will continue in a similar manner like Abassi. The pessimistic case from UGTT's point of view would be a loss of its political influence. So far, this has not happened.

In reference to what I called the inductive element of Hypothesis 3, it is hard to come to a clear conclusion. What do we learn theoretically from the empirical findings of the consolidation stage? One new aspect is certainly digitalization; the internet and the possibilities to organize that come along with it. The role of Facebook, Twitter etc. during the Tunisian revolution is unprecedented. The blogosphere and what we could call "digital civil society" is new to transformation research. Thus, we could claim that transformation research about consolidation of democracies has yet to take into account the "digital factor."

If we think about transformation research more generally, it seems incisive that civil society in the case of this paper played a strong role. In reaction to the influential elitism of the transition paradigm of many transformation scholars, among them O'Donnell et al., there is an attempt to give civil society a more prominent position in the literature. Scholars of social movements have pushed this agenda in particular. For example, Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, and in the German context Roland Roth and Dieter Rucht have emphasized how the democratization of Western Europe was largely a product of social movements' pressure on the states to open up the political system. I think it will be interesting to see whether civil society in the course of transformation and democratization debates will take a more prominent role and whether its democratizing value is recognized, especially when compared to approaches that focus more on elite constellations.

Many problems are unsolved - especially the stagnant economic progress. The problem of *diplômés chômeurs* is still pressing, and Islamist terror still poses a threat to the country. Radical Islam is especially attractive for young Muslims (Lefèvre 2015). The fact that

current president Essebsi is over 90 years old and that Slim Amamou (\*1977), a young digital activist who was appointed by the government for anti-censorship politics resigned from office after a short time gives strong symbolic testimony of the hierarchical and overcome structures within the Tunisian political system. The political system needs for the youth to engage with real politics and civil society can function as a connection between the political system and the social movements.

Lauth & Merkel (1997b) see civil society actors as characteristic for “mature democracies.” In this sense, the Tunisian society is on a positive path but there is still much ahead. Omri (2013) provides a good summary of the different factors of the success for UGTT stating:

“A combination of the symbolic capital of resistance accumulated over decades, a record of results delivered for its members and a well-oiled machine at the level of organization across the country and every sector of the economy, has made UGTT unassailable and unavoidable at the same time. UGTT has been a key feature of Tunisian political and social life and a defining element of what may be called the Tunisian exception in the MENA region.” (Omri 2013)

I am confident that Tocqueville would call UGTT a school for democracy.

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Figure 1: Own graph according to Merkel 2010: 95; Lauth & Merkel 1997a; O'Donnell et al. 1986

Figure 2: Freedom House Foundation (2017): Freedom in the World 2017 Index.

Figure 3: Völkel, Jan Claudius (2016): Die Dominanz der Barbarei. BTI 2016. Regionalbericht Naher Osten und Nordafrika. Bertelsmann Foundation. Gütersloh, S. 4.

Figure 4: Völkel, Jan Claudius (2016): Die Dominanz der Barbarei. BTI 2016. Regionalbericht Naher Osten und Nordafrika. Bertelsmann Foundation. Gütersloh, S. 14.

Figure 5: UGTT Logo @twitter UGTT

Figure 6: Selon Anadolu Agency (2014): The Tunisian election. Online verfügbar unter <https://arunwithaview.wordpress.com/2014/10/>.

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