THE 2011 ARAB UPRISINGS AND BEYOND: THE INCONGRUITY OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION AND AUTHORITARIAN PERSISTENCE/RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

One of the main questions that have revealed after the 2011 Arab Spring or Uprisings has revolved around whether they will lead to democratic transition or not. It has become ostensible that one of the initial outcomes of the public protests have been the sporadic overthrown of authoritarian regimes in several Arab countries. In this sense, this article aims to analyse synchronous upshots brought about by the uprisings, referring to the patterns of state-formation in the Maghreb and Mashreq. One of the main outcomes has been the persistence of authoritarianism in various forms, and the fragility of the Arab Republics coping with the protests as compared to the more resilient nature of the Monarchies. In addition, Islamist movement did not hijack the Arab Uprisings as some initially predicted. However, the Islamist movement has since re-invigorated as key actors, namely the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and elsewhere. Thus, to understand the changes and continuities in the processes of state-formation in MENA region in the post-2011 Uprisings era, analysing the changing faces or forms of authoritarianism in the region despite the timid reforms as well as the resilience of authoritarian regime-types in are highly imperative.

Keywords: *Arab Uprisings, democratic transition, authoritarian persistence, resilience of monarchies, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco*

ÖZET
2011 ARAP AYAKLANMALARı VE ÖTESİ:
DEMOKRATİK GEÇİŞ VE OTORİTER SÜREKLİLİK/ESNEKLİĞİN AHENKSİZLİĞİ

2011 Arap Ayaklanmalarının hemen ardından temayüz eden en önemli sorulardan biri söz konusu ayaklanmaların demokratik bir dönüşüm getirip getirmeyeceği yönünde şekillenmiştir. İlk bakışta, halk hareketlerinin başlıca sonucu dönemsel olarak bazı ülkelerde otoriter rejimlerin devrilmesi olmuştur. Bu çerçevede, bu makale çalışmasının temel amacını ayaklanmaların birbiriyle ilintili sonuçlarını Mağreb ve Maşrek bölgesindeki devlet-inşa süreçlerine atıfta bulunarak irdelemektir. Otoriter yapıların farklı şekillerde de olsa kalıcılığı/ sürekliliği ve buna ek olarak Arap Cumhuriyetlerinin halk protestoları sırasındaki kırılganlığı ve bölgedeki Arap Monarşilerinin ise benzer şartlarda gösterdiği esneklik bu çalışmanın temel argümanlarından birini teşkil etmektedir. Bunların yanında, bazı analistlerin ifade ettiği gibi Arap Ayaklanmaları İslami hareket tarafından ele geçirilmemiş, ancak İslami hareketin - Müslüman Kardeşler bağlantılı grupların Tunus, Mısır, Ürdün ve diğer yerlerde - yeniden temel bir

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siyasi aktör olarak yükselmesini sağlamıştır. Bu noktadan hareketle, Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika (ODKA) bölgesindeki devlet-inşa süreçlerinde yaşanan değişim ve sürekliliği ve de otoriter yapıların değişen biçimlerini analiz etmek için, otoriter yapıların esnekliği ve hayata geçirilen isteksiz reformların anlaşılması elzemdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Arap Ayaklanmaları, demokratik geçiş, otoriter süreklilik, monarşilerin esnekliği, Mısır, Tunus, Ürdün, Fas*

Introduction

The self-inflammation of Tunisian Mohammad Bouazizi had drastically led to large-scale public protests across the Maghreb and Mashreq region. Until the Arab 2011 uprisings, the weakness of democratic institutions and/ or liberalized autocracies (Brumberg, 2002) in Middle East is attributed to the 'myth of authoritarian stability' and academics on the Arab world were surprised by the upheavals (Gerges 2011: 81). The social movements that broke out in Tunisia in December 2010 then found quickly echo in the Arab world spilling over Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Morocco, Jordan and Bahrain. The popular uprisings, thus, unlocked a theoretical debate over both the resilience, and durability of the incumbent regimes in Maghreb and Mashreq countries. The cases of Libya and Syria have, irreversibly, gone the threshold of public unrest and ask for more political freedom; and instead, experienced with international intervention and an ongoing proxy-war respectively.

Although the uprisings broke out over economic crisis, as exhibited in the public's struggle with growing unemployment and corruption, what began as rallies escalated to widespread calls for incumbent regimes around the region to be supplanted? The main questions that have arisen since the Arab uprisings have centred on whether the uprisings will lead to democratic transition and the demise of authoritarian stability or persistence in the region.

It is evident that one of the key outcomes of the Arab revolts is the *persistence* of authoritarian regimes, Egypt representing the epitome of 'authoritarian upgrading' today (Heydemann, 2007). So, this article aims to analyse the synchronous outcomes of the uprisings, referring to patterns of state-formation in Maghreb and Mashreq. First of all, it would not be controversial to suggest that authoritarianism still persists in various parts of the region – such as through constitutional 'reforms' in monarchies. Moreover, the public upheavals have *not* brought the Muslim Brotherhood Society (*Ikhwan*) to an indisputable supremacy in any countries (with the short-lived experience in Egypt between 2012-2013) in the entire region. However, the Islamists like Ennahda of Tunisia or Justice and Development Party of Morocco (JDP) as new political actors have re-emerged as the decisive players in the aftermath of the uprisings in the form of *post*-Islamists or *neo*-Islamists (Bayat, 2011b). Thus, to understand the attributes of changing state-formation in the region, it is better to describe this period as one of 'transition' (Cavatorta, 2015). Although the popular upheavals have not yet brought about full democratic transition, we also cannot argue that nothing has changed in the Maghreb and Mashreq societies and politics.

MENA before the Arab Spring: Between authoritarian *reflex* and *pseudo*-democracies

In the first stage of the 2011 upheavals, there was a popular argument revolved around the public protests that the incumbent regimes would all decay and would be replaced by democracies. Nevertheless, this was partially correct and the post-uprisings period has demonstrated that long-term transition in the region is possible, it's not, however, easy to have an exact prognosis for long-term analyses. As aforementioned issue, the social upheavals have shaken the long-standing rules as it was exactly in the cases of Egypt and Tunisia with the overthrown of Hosnu Mobarek and Zeynel Abidin bin Ali respectively, the authoritarian *forms* of these regimes have proved *persistent* in most of the Arab Republics, and *resilient* particularly among the Arab Kingdoms (Anderson, 1991). Since the emergence of the modern Middle East state-system at the end of World War II, various forms of authoritarian regime-types have been endemic to the region (Owen, 1992). While the trend towards democratization in the Arab Middle East had begun by the late 1970s, particularly with the emergence of economic problems—bread riots and struggles with unemployment—such as in Egypt in 1976-77 with bread riots, the incumbent regimes responded to these challenges with pre-emptive top-down measures, liberalizing the political space as such and holding parliamentary elections where *façade* or pseudo or cosmetic democratization emerged. This was the case in Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan and elsewhere (Salamé, 1995; Robinson, 1999).

In other words, the Third Wave of democratization has missed the Arab world, but needless to say that political liberalization efforts of some Arab countries have already begun by late-1970s and early 1980s. The problem, however, was the *nature* of these democratic openings rather than its form. The reform-oriented political openings have been basically described as liberalization endeavours rather than democratization (Milton-Edwards, 1993). Precisely, the regimes responded the old problems with new tools and pre-emptive strategies of retaining their 'regime-survival' (Lucas, 2008) As Rex Brynen indicates, in some cases the trend towards democratic transition "involved partial or *periodic political openings*—a controlled degree of political liberalization and limited political pluralism that was intended by regimes as a substitute for, rather than a step toward, fuller democratization" (Brynen et al, 2013: 4). For Salamé:

> The idea of an Arab or Islamic exceptionalism has thus re-emerged among both western proponents of universal democracy and established orientalists, and this in turn has encouraged a great many local apologists of cultural authenticity in their rejection of western models of government (Salamé, 1994: 1).

In brief, regional impediments to democracy and democratization in MENA region are largely due to long-standing rulers, weak and fragmented civil societies, and divided or *un*represented political parties with weakly-organized ideological and mobilization bases.

Trajectories of Nation and State-Formation in Maghreb and Mashreq: A Historical Overview

Most of the countries in the region emerged either with the end of First or the Second World War. Countries in Mashreq such as Jordan, Syria and Lebanon took their full independence in 1946; Tunisia and Morocco in 1956, and Algeria took after a war in 1962 in Maghreb region. For Ilya Harik, the Arab countries are not only *old societies;* but also, *old states*, arguing that Iraq, Syria and Jordan are the only exceptions to this, having established modern states. Egypt has always been regarded as the most successful case of forming a nation-state, despite controversial debates on regime's treatment of *Ikhwan* as well as 10 percent Christian Coptic minority. Mohammad H. Heikal even more stringently argued that Egypt was the *only* nation-state in the region, describing all others as 'tribes with flags' (Karawan, 2002 in Telhami and Barnett, 2002: 155).

To examine the processes of state-formation among these countries more deeply, the example of Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is helpful. Its name signifies neither the word Kingdom nor Jordan; rather the pattern of state-formation was centred on the *Hashemite monarchy*, a lineage tracing its roots to that of the Prophet Muhammed. Jordanian nation-state formation operationalizes neither Islamic (religious) nor Arabic (linguistic) symbols as the building blocks of the nation, prioritizing instead dynastic continuity (Brand, 1995). The word Palestine and its derivatives were also excluded from the name, and the emphasis on Hashemite identity is reflected in both official state papers and royal discourse (Köprülü, 2014b). The annexation of East Jerusalem in 1950—until its occupation by Israel in 1967—had filled a historical gap in this process for the country as well. In this respect, Jordanians can be described as being in possession of the state and its citizenry, making the political structure one of a royal family and its subjects.

In this regard, kingdoms like Jordan and Morocco epitomizes the most stable regime-types in the entire region with their ability and flexibility to adopt themselves to changing circumstances, for the most part during internal unrest. At this point, a question can be asked to what extent the monarchies are distinct from the republics in the region. As Lisa Anderson argues;

> The relative strength of monarchy in the Middle East is not due to its evocation of regional traditions—hereditary monarchy as understood today is not a traditional regime type in the Middle East—but to its affinity with the projects of nation building and state formation, which consume the attention of all the rulers of the Middle East and North Africa (Anderson 1991: 4).

Thus, the robustness of the monarchies in the region is closely intertwined with their power being centred on 'traditional legitimacy' (Kuhnhardt, 2012). For Kuhnhardt, “traditional hereditary rule seems to be able to maintain power with more respect … and with less need for the exercise of violence against citizens” (Kuhnhardt

2012: 59). In other words, under conditions of internal unrest, monarchical regime-types provide the safest path to regime-survival. Monarchical governance has also sought to *neutralize or pacify* public discontent over the years more swiftly than the republican regimes. For instance, Morocco's King Mohammed VI and Jordan's King Abdullah II both inaugurated reform packages or so-called pre-emptive constitutional amendments that can co-opt the increased opposition while retaining their key executive powers in holding elections and dismissing the legislature when it deems necessary. After series of reforms, the Prime Minister in Jordan is still directly appointed by the King himself, although the country has an active parliamentary system. The 'cosmetic' reforms, which included holding national elections, are largely used for containing the protests. Likewise, in some Gulf sheikdoms, like Kuwait, the unrest never challenged the legitimacy of the ruling Al-Sabah family (Yom, 2012).

Beyond the Arab Uprisings: *Persistence* or *Resilience* of Authoritarian regimes?

The 2011 upheavals have opened the Pandora's Box in the region and led to the emergence and coalition of diversified ideological groups and cross-cutting classes to join the protests. Egyptians protests at Tahrir Square, Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution and Jordan's large-scale protests on Day of Anger have the revealed the very fact that the Arab people asked for change which were primarily revolved around combating against corruption and unemployment as well as demanding political reform – i.e. democracy! In addition, the rise of Islamist-affiliated opposition, leftists, liberals and secular groups were associated with the failure of the outdated authoritarian rules. However, the weakness of the opposition to mobilize and act coherently to bring a structural transformation as it was in Syrian experience has been another obstacle for the anti-regime political groups.

In this regard, Hinnebusch pays attention to the historical trajectories of state-formation and explains the different permutations of change and continuity after the Arab uprisings by citing the *variations* in state formation paths of the MENA states (Hinnebusch, 2015: 18). More precisely, while Kingdoms of Morocco and Jordan exemplify cases of 'controlled' political liberalization or 'monarchical pluralism' (Köprülü, 2014a) through constitutional reforms or amendments, Egypt as a republican regime has turned to a form of 'authoritarian upgrading' since the overthrow of *Ikhwan* (Hinnebusch, 2006; Heydemann, 2007; Rutherford, 2018); meanwhile, the case of Tunisia is a clear example of 'democratic transition'.

Egypt epitomizes as one of the region's old and traditional states, experienced large-scale public rallies with a large-scale public demonstration at Tahrir Square in Cairo. The protests at Tahrir Square comprises nearly more than a million people from various socio-economic backgrounds and cross-cutting ideological spectrum. As the most organized group Islamists' political agendas vary from one case to another, it is, however, needed to state that there is no coherence among the Islamist actors in the region. Moreover, their behaviours and political agenda to endorse *a post-Arab spring transition* is highly contentious that this article wants to highlight too. In this context, the case of Egypt and the short-lived electoral victory of democratically elected

President Mohammad Morsi and *Ikhwan* occupies a central place where the historically and ideologically the most fundamental Islamist movement of the entire region, i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood and its political party Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) was toppled through a coup d'état due to the authoritarian *reflex* of the deep-rooted civilian-military establishment in Egypt dates back to 1952 coup.

The Arab republics like Egypt (Libya, Syria and Iraq as well) have historically established their regimes through *coups d'état* and revolutionary movements, and accumulated their popular support and loyalty by mobilizing Arab nationalist (*qawmiyya*) ideologies, socialist ideologies or both as a 'prop' of legitimacy. Egypt has become the first country in the whole region abolishing a British legacy, the monarchy. However, for several reasons, these state building projects through utilizing Arab nationalism and the pursuit of legitimacy could not be sustained. After the Free Officers *coup d'état* in 1952, Egypt launched a policy of land reform to weaken, according to Hinnebusch (2015), the old *agrarian capitalist oligarchy*. The building of the Aswan High Dam and the inauguration of the Helwan Iron and Steel Complex constituted key measures taken by the new regime to consolidate its rule on the principles of Arab nationalism and socialism. State-led development was also behind Gamal Abdul Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company in 1956. Similar cases can also be found in Iraq, Tunisia and Syria during the 1960s and 1970s (Owen, 1992: 34-35). The Ba'th Party (Reawakening Party) in Syria and Iraq, the Jamahiriya Party of Libya and the Arab Socialist Party (ASU) of Egypt were all instruments of regime legitimacy later used to control and suppress opposition (Zubaida, 2013: 573).

The 'climax of Arabism', as well as the Arab socialist and Nasserist ideologies during 1950s and 1960s went into decline in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and Egypt's peace-making with Israel at Camp David in 1979, thus weakening the movement's goal of uniting all Arabs (Barnett, 1998). In addition, the fall of the Soviet Union pushed states throughout the region to realign with the West and move towards making peace with Israel (Hinnebusch, 2015).

With the inauguration of the Washington Consensus by the 1980s, Middle Eastern countries began to open their economies to foreign investment and engage in the neo-liberal economic order by receiving credits from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For example, Egypt launched its policies of *infitah* (opening) under the presidency of Anwar Sadat, and Jordan followed suit by the late 1980s. Thus, it was mainly the unsustainability and subsequent failure of this state-led *patronage* system which eventually culminated in the legitimacy crisis that was manifested in the recent public rallies in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere.

In addition, the Arab regimes have attempted to consolidate their rules and run the mechanisms of their states not only with political and ideological tools, but also by co-opting policies of *neo-patrimonialism*. Neo-patrimonialism, which was utilized as a measure to sustain the authority of Arab republics, is "based on unequal access to government resources and it constantly creates and recreates constituencies of the dispossessed and resentful" (Dodge, 2012: 7). Thus, the post-colonial Arab regimes, in Tim Dodge's own words:

> … attempted to transform society by unleashing … a 'revolution from above'. Their aim was to 'modernise' both economy and society without mobilising a mass political movement that could threaten their newly obtained political power. This strategy of sustained demobilisation was broadly successful until 2011… by taking the dominant role in the economy the republican regimes denied space for an indigenous Arab bourgeoisie to gain enough economic weight or political influence to challenge the state (2012: 7).

Likewise, Hinnebusch proposes that; "where the bureaucratic capacity is high relative to the patrimonial authority, loyalty to the leader is low; but its capacity to sustain the state establishment is high such as in Tunisia and Egypt" (Hinnebusch, 2015: 214).

With the downfall of Hosnu Mubarek in 2011, the Constituent Assembly (CA), which was in charge of drafting the new constitution in Egypt, was then frustrated and deadlocked by the cleavage among Freedom and Justice Party (of *Ikhwan*) and the *Nur* Party (of *Salafi*s) and liberal/secular/ minority groups. The new constitution was inaugurated after the referendum held in December 2012 with an overwhelming yes vote (63 percent) and a low voter turnout estimated as 33 percent (BBC News, 2012). Following the overthrown of President Morsi as well as *Ikhwan*/ FJP on 3 July 2013, some analysts argued that it was due to the fear of the '*Brotherhood*ization' of the state (Zwitter, 2014).

One reason behind the aforementioned ideological cleavage among Islamist and secular groups above was related with the 2012 Constitution which contained a debatable provision requiring that al-Azhar be consulted in matters related to Islamic Sharia. This article was afterwards replaced by the passage (minimizing the fearing impact of the previous) stipulating that the source of the legislation is Sharia Law. A clear departure from the era of Morsi to the epoch of Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi was the increased role of the armed forces in Egyptian political landscape. For Rutherford; since the demise of Mobarek's rule, Egypt is shifted from a 'provision pact' to a 'protection pact' where the transition with al-Sisi is left with fragmented elite and amplified role of military in every aspect of civilian life today (2018: 188). In addition, 2014 Constitution of the Republic has granted the National Defense Council (NDC) 14 members where only 5 of them are appointed from civilians (Rutherford, 2018: 188). Furthermore, the autonomy given to the armed forces, in fact, suggest that the authority of both presidency (executive) and the parliament (legislature) have diminished "as the elected officials" granting the military an incontestable or controversial involvement in country's politics (Brown and Dunne, 2013).

Then, what lessons can be deducted from Egyptian Spring? One clear argument is that, Egyptian path does not exemplify a democratic transition due to the absence of a structural regime change since 2011 uprisings. Nevertheless, the downfall of Mobarek's 30 years of authoritarian rule does not mean Egypt has swiftly moved to democracy or electoral democracy. Egypt, instead with enlarged role of military in domestic politics, heightened repression of the opposition and civil society

organizations (Hamzawy, 2017) and the lack of a mass political party represents something going beyond a *pseudo*-multi party regime and displaying sings of 'authoritarian upgrading' – defined by as follows:

> …meant to make up for the exclusion of their popular constituencies, such as divide and rule through limited political liberalization, co-optation of the crony capitalist beneficiaries of neoliberalism, and offloading of welfare responsibilities to Islamic charities – had appeared sufficient to keep protests episodic or localized enough to be contained by the security forces, preventing a sustained mass movement (quoted from Brynen et al, 2013: 213 in Hinnebusch, 2015: 209).

Rutherford (2018) argues that contemporary Egypt has entered into a 'New Authoritarian' regime-type with a new leader. Accordingly, Freedom House's freedom score for Egypt is 6 out of 7 for 2018 (2019a). When al-Sisi was re-elected as the President of the Republic in March 2018 he received with 97 percent of the votes, where the turnout was around 40 percent (Sisi wins landslide victory, 2018). For the Freedom House, during elections voter intimidation, vote buying and the use of state resources and media to support al-Sisi were evident (Freedom House, 2019a).

Another country in Maghreb region, the Republic of Tunisia has exhibited a different path as compared to Egypt's practice of authoritarian upgrading. In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings the Tunisian 'transition to democracy' has been described as the clearest exception after the uprisings, possessing the highest likelihood of building democracy in the region as a whole (Ghannoushi, 2014). According to Ghannoushi, Tunisian *exceptionalism* derives from the followings;

> Tunisia's 2011 revolution carried the seeds of its own success: Islamist fundamentalists played no role, the army came down on the side of peaceful change, and there was a strong civil service and middle class to build on. The role of Tunisian women in keeping militant Islamism at bay has been essential. Being smaller and less strategically positioned than Egypt may also have protected it from disruption from external powers (Ghannoushi, 2014).

Why is Tunisian *Spring* an exception then? The Tunisian path is, in fact, both promising and still fragile. The source of its exceptionalism is twofold; first of all, the excluded Islamist Party –Ennahda were included into to the system through electoral legitimacy and democratic procedures. In addition, Ennahda appears with a "virtue of its pragmatism, and efforts to reach out to other political forces" among its Arab counterparts (Crisis Group Report, 2011). The compromise among the Islamist-secular fractions following the 2014 parliamentary elections marks the first reconciliation in the region without excluding anyone.

In achieving this success story, the main trade union in the country –the *Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens* (UGTT) –took a leading role at public rallies with the outbreak of the demonstrations in December 2010. On 14 January 2011 with the

demise of the Presidency of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (who was in power since 1987), the Tunisian realignment with democratic transition has just started. The inauguration of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) in October 2011 was then set up to draft the new constitution of the country after a long single-party rule. Ennahda (the Renaissance Party–as aforementioned, the key Islamist movement in Tunisia) won the NCA elections and acquired the majority in the legislation with 89 seats out of 217 in total. The grand coalition called the *Nidaa Tunis* or Tunis Calls Party comprising liberal-secular coalition affiliated with the old *al-Dustur* Party of Habib Bourguiba and Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally (CDR) won the second largest number of seats in the assembly.

Ennahda's moderate character is highly principal in building the bridge among the seculars-Islamists divide. Ennahda was founded in 1981, and was barred from participation in the 1989 elections during Bin Ali era. It was recognized as a terrorist organization by the ruling regime, and many of its members were imprisoned. Its leader Rashed Ghannouchi has been known as the most moderate Islamist leaders in the entire region, and the Tunisian Islamist movement under his leadership has distinct itself its Egyptian counterpart. In Ghannouchi's own words, "*The type of state we want is one that doesn't interfere in people's private lives,*" and added that; "*The state should not have anything to do with imposing or telling people what to wear, what to eat and drink, what they believe in, what they should believe in*" (BBC News, 2013).

Following the success of Nidaa Tunis in the October parliamentary elections, Beji Caid Essebsi, former parliamentary speaker under President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, became the Nidaa Tunis presidential candidate. With the combined support of leftist and rightist seculars, Essebsi took 55.6 percent of the vote, defeating incumbent Moncef Marzouki. Ennahda had decided to remain neutral in the presidential elections process. One reason for this was the loss of one-quarter of its vote in the 26 October elections from its 2011 results, giving Nidaa Tunis the seats necessary to form the government. Upon election, Essebsi announced his party would not join Ennahda in any form of coalition. As a result, the only political role that Ennahda appeared to be left with at first glance was that of key opposition in the legislature. The new social contract after a series of negotiations between Islamists and secular/liberal groups aims to highlight "*the country's civil character and creates a more balanced political system*" (Al-Anani, 2014).

As Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone argue, the Tunisian Islamist movement has shifted from fundamentalism towards conservatism, and Ennahda shifted its agenda from establishing an Islamic state to a plural civil state by the 1980s (2013: 865). The origins of Ennahda trace back to the establishment of *Mouvement de la Tendence Islamique*—the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI)—in the 1970s, and served as "a critical reflection of Western modernity according to the model that Bourguiba, strictly following the secular tradition of France, imposed on country" (Cavatorta and Merone 2013: 871). Under the leadership of Rashid Ghannouchi the movement also collaborated with the labour movement. Unlike the cases of Jordan and Turkey in the region, the Tunisian political system did not allow Islamists to take part in

the political sphere. Under both Habib Bourguiba and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali they were treated as the main threat to the *raison d'etat*. Even throughout the years of political liberalization under Ben Ali, Islamists were only allowed to participate in elections as independent candidates. In addition, by the late 1990s, Islamists were perceived as "dangerous extremists who could not be trusted within the political system" (Noyon, 2003: 94). The normalization of MTI and other Islamists as political actors would only occur with the onset of the Arab uprisings.

Needless to say, Tunisia today appears with score 2.5 out of 7 in Freedom House records which clearly shows that it is a 'free' democratic country guaranteeing civil and political liberties as well as gender equality (Freedom House, 2019b). In this regard, guaranteeing all male and female citizens the same rights and duties and their equality before the law without discrimination (Gender Index, 2016) is legally endorsed in Tunisia today. The new constitution also endorses 'Islam' as the religion of the state (as it was before).

Within this context, the achievement of Tunisia's political transition towards democratization is directly linked to the capacity of its two key political parties forming the government, i.e. both Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes. As a result of the Jasmine Revolution, this consensus can be re-described as a 'secular-Islamist' one, which was basically reached in country's very first parliamentary elections held in 2014 since the uprisings (Yerkes and Yahmed, 2019).

Besides the success history of Tunisian Spring; most economic indicators have shown that socio-economic situation in the country has worsened since 2014. For instance, the unemployment rate, (among the young and educated) has reached to 30 percent in 2018, which was 23 percent in 2010 (Yerkes and Yahmed, 2019) which shows that Tunisian transition is yet not immune from socio-economic challenges.

Thus, in the aftermath of the uprisings, the Arab Republican regimes have shown that they are too fragile to cope with the public demonstrations when compared with the Arab Monarchies. Under conditions of social turmoil, monarchical structures provide the safest path to 'regime survival'. In the case of the MENA countries, the statecraft of the monarchies has also sought to *neutralize* discontent over the past four years more swiftly than the republican systems during the time of internal unrest. For instance, in Morocco and Jordan, King Mohammed VI and King Abdullah II both launched swiftly pre-emptive constitutional reforms that alleviated public frustration while retaining their core executive powers. The reforms, which included holding parliamentary elections, largely defused the protests in these countries. In some Gulf sheikhdoms like Kuwait, the unrest never challenged the legitimacy of the ruling family. As Yom argues,

> The monarchies of Morocco and Jordan claim their origin from the Prophet Muhammad; those in the Gulf command more ritualistic tribal respect. Such symbolic repute allows the typical Arab monarch, as Hudson averred decades ago, to 'earn deference of his people and thus acquire authority' (Yom, 2012).

The King of Morocco opted to contain the internal unrest through a 'proactive

reform model', and put the constitutional amendments to a referendum on 1 July 2011 (As-Safir, 2014). Following the referendum, early parliamentary elections were held on 25 November 2011. In Morocco, the constitutional reforms aimed to empower the role of executive bodies at the expense of the King for the first time. As the amended constitution reads, "*the Moroccan king has to select the prime-minister from the political party with the most seats in the parliament*" (Gallala-Arndt, 2012: 142).

Another monarchy in the Mashreq, Jordan, represents one of the most stable regimes of all times in the region, in spite of its rentier-state character and considerable dependence on external aid. When the Arab upheavals that have deeply devastated regional politics and long-standing incumbent regimes were contagious around the Arab Middle East, the demonstrators did not openly call for King Abdullah II to be deposed and the Hashemite monarchy toppled as it was in the case of Morocco. Likewise, Jordan has been shown to be one of few exceptional cases, as no group participating in the public demonstrations has called for regime change. On the contrary, the protesters have primarily centred their demands on issues such as economic recession, corruption and a drastic increase in the unemployment rate.

The huge influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan has also exacerbated prevailing socio-economic and political cleavages in the post-uprisings' era. Jordan is currently experiencing harsh repercussions of the Syrian crisis and other regional challenges. According to unofficial records, Jordan today hosts more than 1 million refugees who have crossed into the country since the onset of the war in Syria. There are 5.5 million Syrian refugees worldwide, primarily hosted in Turkey, followed by Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. However, with 23 percent of its overall population consisting of refugees, Jordan has the record number of refugees per capita of any country in the world today. Recent Syrian arrivals notwithstanding, Palestinians actually represent by far the largest group of refugees: 2 million Palestinians have settled in Jordan, mainly arriving in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli Wars of 1948–49 and 1967.

The protests in Jordan were less momentous and could be met by the regime (Beck and Hüser, 2015) quickly after reshuffling of prime ministers as well as implementing reforms for liberalization. The most recent public unrest in last June 2018 has again alarmed the monarchy which is said to have attributed to economic problems. For 30 years Jordanians have been overwhelmed by socio-economic disparities and unemployment, which reached 20 percent this year. The Kingdom was recently granted a $723 million three-year credit line from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which led the country to enforce austerity measures that have resulted in a drastic increase in the price of basic goods and services (Dahan, 2018). Even though the socio-economic difficulties have been persistent since the 1988–89 public riots (when the regime implemented IMF-led austerity measures and at the same time Jordanian Dinar was devaluated by 45 percent) the June 2018 riots is also rooted in the growth in opposition and peoples' apathy for politics. According to Arab Barometer records, Jordanians are satisfied with the performance of the government by 79 percent, but 98 percent of the respondents have chosen the army, 95 percent the police and only 53 percent of them the government as the main political institution that they trust at first

sight (Arab Barometer, 2017). In addition, the top three concerns for Jordanians have been documented as economy, corruption and Syrian refugees (Arab Barometer, 2017).

Jordanians have seen seven different prime ministers since the Day of Anger on March 25, 2011. The main strategy of the kingdom also worked during the Arab Spring which has been centred on the reshuffling of governments. The most recent parliamentary elections, held in September 2016, have also illustrated that Jordan's trend towards *controlled* democratization through legal measures still works as a regime-survival strategy, although public demands for greater political opening remain significant. In fact, the constitutional reforms and cross-cutting cleavages have historically muddled the shift towards democratization in the country, and the debate around 1993 electoral law is a 'safety valve'. The monarchy also found a way to immunize itself against enormous internal unrest by exploiting the so-called Palestinians and Jordanians divide. Notwithstanding the constitutional design, the process of democratization in Jordan during the post-2011 era is a stagnant one, not moving forward.

In this respect, the *trajectories* of state formation in the region following post-war settlement, and the Arab regimes' post-upheaval experiences, help us to understand how the demand at the public rallies for political change has ended in authoritarian stability in Egypt and regime survival in monarchies on the one hand, and a process of democratic transition in Tunisia on the other (Saouli, 2015: 316).

Conclusions: Where to go?

The argument of this article is; Tunisia's success story of transition to democracy, so far, verifies that democracy and Islam aren't in a contradiction. But also, this work admits that Tunisian example is still *fragile* and the processes of democratization in the region are susceptible to internal and regional challenges, as it was regrettably seen with the exodus of Syrian refugees and the detrimental spill-over effects of the war in Syria particularly on Lebanese and Jordanian socio-economic parameters.

Tunisians approved their new constitution with 93 percent of the electorate, even though the field consisted of plenty of political parties and divergent ideas. It has also been said that the constitution is the "most progressive" [one] in the entire region, empowering women's rights, freedom of belief and "banning incitement to violence and religious excommunication" (Ghannoushi, 2014). Furthermore, when Tunisia established its first post-transition government in February 2015 based on a valuable Islamist-secular compromise after the freely and fairly conducted 2014 parliamentary elections, they were awarded to The *Nobel Peace Prize* in 2015 which embraces the coalition of Tunisian laborers, lawyers, employer's union and various activists founded in 2013 – "when the democratization process was in danger of collapsing because of political assassinations and widespread social unrest" (Nakhle, 2017)[1]. The story of Tunisia is also very telling in reversing the Orientalist way of understanding region's

[1] Tunisia was awarded to the Nobel Peace Prize for the "Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet".

potential for full-functioning democracy. In this regard, Rashid Ghannouchi's Ennhada or Ennahda's Ghannouchi has become the voice of Islamist democrats or in Western terminology 'moderate' Islamist parties of the region (McCharty, 2018). Within this context, it is imperative to state that the Arab Spring was *not* hijacked by the Islamists as articulated by some analysts initially (Bradley, 2012).

In light of these developments, we can say that the Tunisian Ennahda has illustrated "a more-rapid shift than the [Egyptian Muslim] Brotherhood toward modernity and pluralism" (Gerges 2013: 396) despite its exclusion from the system during Ben Ali era. So, the exclusion of Ennahda did not radicalize or marginalize the movement; instead, its reformist stand and approach of compromise have immunized Tunisia from an Egyptian-type *coup*. Thus, the term 'neo-Islamists' is essentially used to describe parties like Ennhada as examples of "the new religiosity associated with the Arab uprisings and spontaneous cooperation with institutionalized political Islam" (Chamkhi 2013: 466; Bayat, 2011a).

The notion of robustness of 'authoritarianism' (Bellin, 2004) would have been historically helpful to analyse Arab politics previously. However, with the emergence of *hybrid* regimes exhibiting both liberal and authoritarian elements, we can no longer talk about a 'typical' Arab state or regime after the 2011 uprisings. In other words, there is no coherence in terms of trajectories of state re-formation in MENA region hitherto. The cases of Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Syria have shown that neither the restoration of an autocratic regime nor its preservation is a comprehensive option now. The end of the enduring rules of Mobarek and Ben Ali in Egypt and Tunisia respectively are still recent, and the indispensable willingness to 'adopt pragmatic and consensual approaches' to politics is not well matured yet and so democratic regimes are still a long way off (Heynes 2013: 176).

Besides the trajectories of state-formation, the case of Tunisia suggests that the absence of sectarian and/or tribal affiliations and cleavages provides an opportunity to overcome the challenges on the path to democratization without causing or aggravating sectarian cleavages, as in the cases of Syria and Libya. On the other hand, the geo-political location of each country in changing balance of power at the regional level also matters. In other words, Tunisia's remoteness from the heart of Middle East politics and Arab-Israeli Conflict is a blessing factor which relatively enabled Tunisians to practice, test and represent their 'own' path with a *limited or less* immersion by outsiders.

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