

# The Political Economy of the Jasmine Revolution: On the Collapse of a Model and the Challenges of the Revolution

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In recent days, Tunisia has experienced a major change in its contemporary political history, a change that has allowed it to end a hated dictatorship and has paved the way for the establishment of a truly democratic regime that could promote the emergence of a new historical experience and the building of a new, open and inclusive government, placing the interests of its citizens at the heart of its concerns. The Jasmine Revolution and the hasty departure of the former President were the culmination of a sweeping popular movement that started with the self-immolation of young Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010, in protest against harassment by administrative officials. This desperate and symbolic act aroused strong popular mobilization which continued to grow despite repression, backpedalling and manoeuvres by the old regime and its promise to foster greater democratic openness and a new era of freedom. It was too little, too late.

The demonstration held on Friday 14 January 2011 in downtown Tunis had many points in common with the great popular revolts of recent history, such as the events of May 1968 or the demonstrations in the former 'homelands of the workers' movement': Prague, Budapest, and Gdansk which culminated in the fall of the Berlin Wall. The demonstration swept away all hope for the former President to remain in power. It will go down as one of the major events in the history of Tunisia.

Thousands of demonstrators took part: young people who had probably known no other government than Ben Ali's; former activists who had become resigned due to the ferocity of the repressive machinery but now found a new taste for struggle; and union members and civil society activists who carried on resistance through thick and thin, so that, even now, one can only wonder how they found the strength to stand up to such a cruel and repressive regime. On the morning of 14 January 2011, the demonstrators were joyous and festive, but also determined and committed. They spoke of a

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'Tunisian Spring' and a new Arab era without knowing that by the end of the day people would be talking about the Jasmine Revolution. Men and women of all generations united around two slogans: 'Ben Ali, out', and 'Trial for figures of corruption'.

A power struggle then took place between the demonstrators, who occupied the main street, Avenue Habib Bourguiba, and the forces of law and order, which defended the besieged Ministry of the Interior. The struggle went on all morning and part of the afternoon. In mid-afternoon, law enforcement officers decided to clear the main street of Tunis with tear gas and beat back the last resisters with batons. The forces of law and order thereby put an end to the unique gathering and the police announced a state of siege. And yet it was a Pyrrhic victory, for the television announced what many had already begun to whisper: the President was gone and the popular revolution had triumphed. A movement of jubilation and euphoria swept through all of Tunisia, a movement that was expressed enthusiastically and uninterruptedly on radio and television stations suddenly freed from the fear and worry that had silenced them for years. But this joy was darkened by hours of anxiety caused by the reign of murderous insanity and terror perpetrated by armed groups hoping to restore the old regime by creating chaos: a sorry wager on the part of the security services of a people that had been demonstrating a desire for freedom and a thirst for dignity for nearly a month. Not only did this Machiavellian scheme fail, but it actually reinforced the revolutionary process by making the citizens the true guardians of the new era. Neighbourhood defence committees multiplied, sparking the return to politics

of millions of citizens who had been discouraged by the Ben Ali regime.

This revolution is an important date in the history, not only of Tunisia, but of the whole Arab world, where most countries managed to avoid the democratic revolutions experienced around the world in the 1990s. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the post-colonial world also underwent a democratic transition, and freedom became the foundation of tropical political regimes. From Africa to Asia and from South to Central American countries, authoritarianism retreated in the face of democratic revolts, thereby allowing citizens to overcome their 'national disenchantment' (to quote the title of one of Hélé Béji's prescient essays) and write a new page in post-national history. Only the Arab world was left untouched by the winds of freedom that swept across the South and which our old autocratic regimes disdained. These regimes also resisted democracy 'at gunpoint, when American neo-conservatives decided to impose freedom on our countries in the early 2000s. Of those years of imperialistic adventurism promoting a democracy from the outside, nothing is left but the desolation of civil wars, the rise of intolerance in Iraq and the smiles on the lips of our old autocrats as they contemplate the 'butter-wouldn't-melt-in-the-mouth' attitudes of the American administration!

These repeated failures of democracy in the Arab world confirmed what neo-orientalists had always written about the hermetic nature of our societies when faced with modernity and the winds of freedom. The failure of transplanted democracy to 'take' in our societies confirmed their hypotheses on the essential separation between the eternal East subject to myths and unable to look beyond the allegory of the golden age, and the West with its universal freedoms and human rights. These views have been shared by different ends of the spectrum, ranging from certain Westerners, who used them to justify their lack of interest in the region, to Islamists who used them to legitimize their rejection of modernity

and prove the relevancy of the Islamic revolution or autocratic regimes that could openly criticize the imposition of Western standards on our lands.

However, the Jasmine Revolution contradicted all these views and all the right-minded people who had speculated for years on the confinement of our societies in an absolute relationship with the divine and submission to an external Other. The revolution and its echoes in other Arab countries showed that we are no strangers to the horizons of freedom and reason, and that active citizenship is a goal that is also shared by Arabs.

Today, the euphoria and enthusiasm of the people's mobilization and victory are giving way to reflection and analysis. No doubt in the days to come, this revolution will be the subject of research, analysis and studies. This article is intended as a contribution to these thoughtful efforts to better understand and study the revolution, its underlying causes and its future. With this in mind, we will focus on a specific question, which is the role of the economy and its place among the causes of the revolution. This question is particularly important in the light of the fact that the stability of the political regime in Tunisia has always been attributed to the success of its economic model. In the view of many, the liberal economic model, open to globalization, was the reason for Tunisia's strong economic growth, which promoted the development of a large middle class that formed the social foundation for its political regime and a rampart against Islamists. For many years, the discourse on Tunisia highlighted the successes of a model of development that was central to the political legitimization of the regime and which explained the silences on such issues as freedom and democracy.

The discourse changed radically at the time of the revolt. Rather than a model of economic development, people spoke of a mirage undermined by corruption and racketeering by a Mafioso clique. There was also a new focus on the poverty of the inland regions and the growing imbalances between the coastal areas and the inland areas, indicating that the model was on its last legs. Furthermore, the crises in the mining regions of Gafsa in 2008, the border region of Béni Guerden, and in Sidi Bouzid as of autumn 2010, served as points of departure for the revolution that would ultimately put paid

to the government of Ben Ali. Others did not hesitate to point to unemployment and particularly unemployment among graduates which, for the past several years, had constituted a serious limitation with considerable impact on the prevailing development model.

Thus, the economy and the development model were at the heart of a major controversy. From being a factor of stability and considerable success, the development model became a target of criticism from the outset of the revolution, and many do not hesitate to point out that the major limitations of the model, particularly in terms of transparency, regional imbalance and unemployment, are at the root of the crisis. And so the development model, which had acted as a supporting force for the political regime, ended up digging its grave.

The question that is raised today is what was the weight and impact of the economy on the Tunisian revolution? Our aim is to determine whether economic issues were the real cause of the revolution, or whether the true motivation for the upheaval was political in nature, notably due to authoritarianism. How much did symbolic issues and corruption contribute to the fall of the Ben Ali regime?

The goal of this article is to reflect on the origins of the revolution and the challenges that lie on the road ahead.

### **Years of High-tech Dictatorship**

The change of government and the arrival of Ben Ali at the head of the state on 7 November 1987 were causes of great hope for several reasons. First of all, the atmosphere at the end of the Bourguiba regime and the struggles for power in the topmost ranks had caused great uncertainty and anxiety as to the future in all segments of society. Furthermore, the end of the regime had been marked by heightened repression and arbitrariness, and an explosion of political arrests and trials. The biggest trial was that of the leadership and high-ranking officials of the Islamic Tendency Movement, with heavy punishments that were apparently far from satisfying an increasingly absent 'father of the nation', who would have preferred for the court to hand down capital sentences against certain leaders, notably Rached Ghannouchi, the head of the movement. The trials led to the radicalization of major factions, and particularly the youth of the Islamist

movement, some of whom turned to violent action. Islamist activists placed a bomb in a hotel in the tourist area of Monastir, killing one. The aim was to weaken the regime by attacking its economic foundations and thereby retaliate against repression of the Islamist movement. Parallel to this attack, which received considerable international attention, there was a spate of attacks by Islamist activists against local militant supporters of the party in power or judges.

Times were tense in the late 1980s and the atmosphere was heavy and grave. The change that took place on 7 November 1987 appeared to be a deliverance for a country on the verge of a breakdown. The resignation of the 'father of the nation' for 'health reasons' and the arrival of a new president were welcomed as the removal of a heavy weight from the country. However, it should be noted that the change of leadership did not give rise to overwhelming joy or euphoria on the part of the population. Instead, an attitude of reserve and circumspection prevailed for several months. Initially, there were no major popular demonstrations in favour of the new government. Even the single party, caught short by the ousting of its historical leader, was slow to put its full support behind the new Head of State, to the point where, for a time, Ben Ali envisaged founding a new presidential party that would be unwaveringly devoted to him.

There were several reasons for the tepid welcome of the new government, notably the personality of the new strongman. Ben Ali was not an unknown and he brought back memories of the dark days of repression by the authoritarian regime. In fact, he had been in charge of the police forces and had supervised the repression of demonstrators in the riots of 28 January 1978. Then, during the brief democratic spring in the early 1980s, he was exiled to the Embassy of Tunisia in Poland. He was later called back, in the mid-1980s, when the authorities reneged on their promise of democratic openness and felt the need to stifle the growing Islamist protest movement. Thus, the image of Ben Ali was associated a time of repression and his arrival in power was perceived with considerable restraint, or even fear. However, an effort was made to improve his image by associating him, during the change of government, with a handful of civilian officials from the party

in power, and particularly with the liberal and social wing, notably including the former Minister of Social Affairs, Hédi Baccouche, who would be Ben Ali's first Prime Minister.

The new authorities rapidly sought to quell the people's apprehensions by undertaking to reform the authoritarian regime and engage Tunisian nationalism on the road to democracy and pluralism. These commitments were included in the statement read by the new President during a speech broadcast on radio and television, which became the hallmark and foundation of the new regime, although the commitments would be buried a few years afterwards. Furthermore, the President and his new Prime Minister held numerous talks and dialogues with opposition leaders, union officials and civil society associations. These meetings and dialogues culminated in the preparation of a national agreement document ('Mithak al-Watani') that would be signed by the different political and social forces and which announced a commitment in favour of the liberalization of the political regime.

These commitments were followed by concrete reforms in the political area aimed at opening up the political system. The most important reform was probably the constitutional reform, which put an end to the lifetime presidency inherited from the 'father of the nation'. The period also marked a thaw in Tunisian politics, which experienced a new spring until the end of the decade, with the liberalization of the media and the return of newspapers that had been forbidden or seized in the past. New opposition newspapers were also allowed, the most important of which were the weekly *El-fajr* published by the Islamist movement, which had taken on the name Ennahda, and *La voix du peuple*, the organ of the far-leftist party led by Hama Hammami (the POCT). Opposition parties were able to resume their activities with increased energy. It was also a time of new impetus for civil society, particularly the Human Rights League.

Alongside the political reforms, the new government also undertook to address the obstacles in the system of accumulation and the limitations of the structural adjustment programmes. Economic reform focused on three main orientations. The first involved the stability of the major economic accounts, where the State sought to significantly reduce major defi-

cits and inflation. This was achieved through an orthodox economic policy that sought to wipe out major deficits by spending cuts and higher interest rates. From this standpoint, the policy made it possible to meet its objectives in terms of reducing disequilibria, and the government officials at that time did not hesitate to say how proud they were of meeting the Maastricht criteria, which even certain developed countries and members of the European Union were unable to achieve.

The second thrust of the reforms consisted of liberalizing and opening up the economy to international markets. In this regard, the new government strengthened the reform programme undertaken in the early 1980s by negotiating several free-trade agreements, the most important of which was signed with the EU. The agreement was accompanied by an upgrading programme to help businesses increase their competitiveness and meet the challenge of foreign business. Other free-trade agreements are worthy of mention, such as the Agadir agreement with certain Arab countries, the agreement signed with Turkey and those negotiated with sub-Saharan African countries. This liberalization led to increased foreign investments and rapid growth in exports of manufactured products, which became the main source of foreign-origin income in the Tunisian economy.

The third thrust of the reforms concerned the degree of priority given to new technologies. This issue was at the heart of the crisis affecting the old development model based on cheap labour, and the transition towards an economy founded on sectors making more intensive use of new technologies. The transition to a knowledge economy was the key to the different economic development plans beginning in the 1990s. Seven technology poles, the most famous of which was El Ghazala, were set in place and managed to attract considerable investment from new local start-ups or major international firms including Alcatel, Ericsson and STMicroelectronics. There was also a rise in investment in telecommunications with the development of infrastructure, increased telephone network coverage and quality and improved access to Internet.

These choices led to the rapid development of new technologies – particularly the Internet – in Tunisia. Publinets (subsidized public Internet centres) and cyber

cafes proliferated and the new technology craze took off in the various regions. Like other countries around the world, Tunisia saw strong falls in the cost of equipment, and Internet connections allowed a growing number of cyberspace users to escape the constraints and repression that prevailed in the real world. In the second half of the decade, Tunisia entered the Web 2.0 era and participated in the social network revolution with the development of Facebook, YouTube, blogs and other new forms of communication and networking. Note should also be taken of the spread of mobile telephones with the liberalization of the sector and the emergence of three operators. Internet and mobile telephones soon converged to offer new communication opportunities, including the ability to send photos and video images instantly. Progressively, the development of new technologies led to the formation of a new community and a cyber-society which escaped the mechanisms of state control and the headaches of nit-picking bureaucracy. This new society played a considerable role in cyber-dissidence and the revolution of 14 January 2011.

New technologies were more than an economic choice; they became an ideology for a regime in search of a benchmark and a link to the modern world. New technologies offered a source of legitimation and fulfilled a need for contemporariness and belonging to the times and the world. The image of a President keen on new technologies and the Internet was projected by the official media to reinforce the image of a Tunisia firmly anchored in technological modernity. Several initiatives were launched by the government to demonstrate its commitment to new technologies. The most important of these was the hosting of the World Summit on the Information Society in 2005. The event, which was supposed to confirm Tunisia's commitment to modernism and the emerging world, rapidly turned however into a disaster. In his opening speech, the President of the Swiss Confederation did not hesitate to remind the audience that new technologies and the world of Internet and the future did not mix well with repression and denial of freedom. A serious disavowal for an authoritarian regime that had always believed it was possible to modernize without embracing modernity and be rational without reason and freedoms.

As of 1987, the new government attempted to reform the floundering authoritarian regime and open up new perspectives for the aging nationalism that had been unable to bring about a democratic revolution. However, this attempt at reform by the authoritarian regime was cut short by the start of the next decade. At the political level, the flowers of the new Tunisian spring were quick to wilt and authoritarianism reappeared. The regime reverted to its original nature, beginning with the first free legislative and presidential elections, which were marked by a major fraud and helped the party in power to strengthen its hegemony over the political landscape. Then, the Islamist movement was subjected to fierce and indiscriminate repression in the 1990s, and its leaders were condemned to long prison sentences or exile. This repression was later extended to the whole of the opposition and civil society institutions, and notably the Human Rights League and professional associations such as the association of journalists and the association of judges.

The closing of the public space also affected the press. Several independent newspapers were either shut down or subjected to strong censorship. Furthermore, the centralization of advertising spending through the ATCE (Tunisian External Communication Agency) reinforced political control by subjecting independent newspapers to a financial diktat. While independent newspapers were caught in a vice-like grip, government-backed newspapers proliferated. These papers distinguished themselves by their campaigns against the opposition and the leaders of civil society institutions. Furthermore, the liberalization of communications benefited those close to the government, who were on the receiving end of agreements for the launching of new radio and television stations.

Repression and authoritarianism had returned to the fore. Their return was not restricted to modern phenomena, such as political parties or newspapers; it also extended to the virtual world. Indeed, the regime was quick to realize that cyberspace was home to a libertarian and subversive culture. The world of the Web had escaped the aging mechanisms of control and repression typical of the modern world and created a new universe of contestation and dissidence. But repression extended its grasp to cyberspace through a ban on opposition websites

and blogs, and even the sites of certain newspapers such as *Le Monde* and *Libération*. Control even extended as far as manipulation of the email boxes and social network accounts of opposition leaders. Thus, a tool for individual freedom and autonomy and for escaping the constraints of the modern world became a new locus of control and repression for the authoritarian regime. An Orwellian Big Brother was watching the Net. It imposed a high-tech dictatorship to overcome 'cyber-dissidence' the same way it had subjected and silenced the opposition and independent voices in the world of classical modernity.

At the economic level, the new development model experienced a few weeks of glory in the 1990s and managed to further boost the relatively strong growth that had always been above global and regional averages. However, the growth dynamics could have been much stronger as indicated by several international institutions, including the IMF. Instead, they were undermined by serious constraints. The first of those was obviously the corruption and poor governance that developed in the early 1990s and which benefited the circles closest to the government and various Mafioso clans. These practices led to the accumulation of large fortunes in a very short time and above all control over large sectors of the economy, particularly in the areas of banking, tourism, and housing construction. The fortunes amassed, but above all their obscene display, which many Tunisians discussed in secret and which was exposed by the American ambassador's cables published by Wikileaks, contributed to the loss of legitimacy and the popular rejection of the Mafioso clans.

Above all, the rising corruption affected and hindered economic growth. The private sector, subject to growing uncertainty caused by corrupt practices and a lack of transparency, curtailed its investments and risks taken on the future. It adopted a wait-and-see attitude that prevailed for years and was the focus of a great number of restricted ministerial councils that were unable to change the situation. Thus, the contribution of the private sector to growth dynamics was smaller than expected.

The limitations of the development model and the obstacles to the transition towards capital-intensive growth led to deepening unemployment, especially

among graduates. Official figures estimated the unemployment rate at 14.2 percent in 2008. However, among young people aged 20 to 24, it reached 30 percent, and 19 percent among degree holders. In addition to unemployment, there was rising inequality between the regions and considerable despair in the inland areas with the decline of farming and mining activities. These inequalities and the increased unemployment in these regions caused the initial revolts in 2008, with the uprisings in the mining basin. Later, the border areas with Libya were inflamed by the proliferation of red tape hindering population movements between the two countries. These inequalities and the demoralization and despair that reigned in those regions were the underlying causes of the desperate act committed by the man viewed as the first martyr and the initiator of the Jasmine Revolution.

The obstacles inherent in the model were heightened as of 2008 due to the global crisis, whose shock waves hit Tunisia hard. Economic growth dropped strongly in 2009 and even more sharply in 2010. Exports also dropped considerably, especially exports to the EU, which continued to be Tunisia's main trade partner.

The year 2010 dawned in a Tunisia in the midst of crisis. The political authorities were increasingly cut off from society and answered its demands with growing repression. At the same time, the wildest innuendo and rumours were spread regarding the power struggles between the different clans surrounding the President. There was a rise in corruption and displays of Mafioso fortunes, which only reinforced the rejection and feelings of indignation among the people. The stifling of the media and the even more aggressive and repressive control of cyber-society were unprecedented and contributed to a heavy and uncomfortable atmosphere throughout 2010. The climate was explosive and steeped in unprecedented violence, which broke out inexplicably and uncontrollably at every major popular gathering, notably during football matches. This detrimental atmosphere was heightened by the economic crisis that weighed heavily on Tunisia's economy and was the cause of increased unemployment and inequalities. The times were dismal in late 2010 and the atmosphere was sullen. The zeitgeist was strangely reminiscent of the latter days of the regime of the 'father of the nation', prior to the advent of the Ben Ali regime

in 1987. With one notable difference: this time, the failure of the second attempt at reforming the authoritarian regime did not lead to a new beginning, but rather a genuine popular revolution. It was the point of departure of the Jasmine Revolution.

### **The Challenges of the Tunisian Revolution**

In this context of great anger and tremendous disenchantment, Mohamed Bouazizi committed an act of desperation which would become the founding act of the popular revolution in Tunisia. His act would serve as a catalyst for a broad social movement that would topple an authoritarian regime that had made repression its only response to the social movement and political opposition. Initially, it was a movement of the disadvantaged, the unemployed and the hopeless. These outcasts, many of whom had been jobless degree-holders for some time, were at the heart of the revolts, both in the inland regions and the major social protests in various regions, from Gafsa to Kasserine, and from Kef to Jendouba. These social movements escaped the grasp of the traditional political parties and made rioting and insurrection their chief means of political action. These choices were sparked by the closing off of the legal political space and reduced opportunities for expression and negotiation. The authoritarian regime responded to social movements with repression. Retribution, punishment and occasionally grotesque propaganda, as during the festivities of the year of youth, formed most of its interaction with the social movements. And yet the movements did not weaken and their impact only grew, notably with the establishment of support committees in the various regions during revolts in the mining basin.

Another major force that was strongly mobilized and played an essential role in the Tunisian revolution was cyber-dissidence. The development of new technologies and the Internet in Tunisia led to the rapid emergence of a community of bloggers and cyber-dissidents who escaped repression by the authorities and their totalitarian methods that no longer fit with the new political production modes. A Web 2.0 civil society was formed and its mobilization capacity far exceeded that of the political parties and traditional civil society organizations. These new forms of mobilization took advantage of the digital revolution to join

in the fight for democracy and reject authoritarianism, nepotism and corruption. This new opposition was very different from the traditional modern oppositions, in that it diverged from the Leninist image of a headquarters preparing for political revolution. It was a more diffuse, secret opposition that proved impossible to silence. It had also broken away from the old patterns of democratic centralism typical of the communist parties and advocated a new political culture marked by the absence of a charismatic leader and considerable decentralization and dissemination of its forms of political organization.

It should also be noted that this Web 2.0 civil society advocated a new political culture marked by pluralism and diversity, distancing itself from the major ideological schemas and tales of a better world inherited from modernity. The new, libertarian political culture subverted the classical patterns and above all the models of closed societies and closed projects. The new cyber-dissidence, where democracy and freedom became essential values, marked the advent of a new political culture. This new political culture was probably why the Islamist parties and the far-leftist parties calling for total revolution experienced difficulties in taking on a major role, hence their marginalization since the beginning of the events and in all the social movements that began since the revolts in the mining basin in 2008. The Web 2.0 opposition played an important role in strong mobilization by denouncing repression and by producing new discourses contradicting the hegemonic one, thereby successfully breaking the monopoly on narratives and discourse heretofore held by the authoritarian regimes. From this standpoint, the Tunisian revolution and its Egyptian counterpart became the first post-modern revolutions.

The role of the radical opposition forces in the revolution should also be mentioned. Despite repression, they never lost hope for a major political change that would spell the end of authoritarianism. They included opposition parties, civil society institutions and especially the main labour congress which, it should be recalled, was the initiator of the demonstrations of 13 and 14 January. However, as we have already pointed out, the parties' contribution did not attain the same scope as that of the social movements. It should be noted that the parties, particularly those that refused to join the government,

were subjected to merciless repression and saw the space available to them for political action shrink alarmingly.

The convergence of these different forms of mobilization was the source of a revolution without precedent in the contemporary history of Tunisia. The revolution tolled the death knell for an authoritarian regime whose growing isolation was accompanied by rising despotism. The regime had reduced political space considerably and made its despot the only actor allowed to play a political role. The system also established corruption and nepotism as foundations for the exercise of power. In recent years, authoritarianism, despotism and nepotism had become the essential characteristics of the regime, and they were the crux of the ever-growing divisions between the regime and society. The revolts in the mining basin and other mobilizations in the inland regions, such as the mobilization of civil society, including the Human Rights League and independent associations, such as associations of lawyers, journalists and judges, were unable to halt the regime's downward spiral into authoritarian abuse. It took the desperate act of Mohamed Bouazizi to convince the social movements, cyber-dissidence, political opposition and society as a whole to go beyond the point of no return and begin the revolution that would ultimately topple the authoritarian regime and become the point of departure for a genuine democratic spring in the Arab world which, in turn, would bring the Egyptian government to its knees.

The importance of this revolution lies in the fact that it managed to overcome the reign of fear that had been imposed by an authoritarian regime over the whole of society. The police and information services had been developed until they were able to permeate the whole social fabric. Above all, they managed to convince the public that they were everywhere and that 'big brother' was watching them at all times. And beware to those who sought to challenge the established order collectively or individually! Such people were subjected to fierce repression, as in the case of the Islamist movement and certain personalities such as the lawyer Mohamed Abbou, Moncef Marzouki, or the journalist Taoufik Ben Brik, and many other personalities. Henceforth, people only spoke in whispers. Rather than speak out, they mumbled. Rather than voicing their opinions

clearly, they suggested them half-heartedly. But these attitudes and fears were the sources of an unprecedented feeling of shame throughout the social body. People were ashamed of submitting to despotism. In the face of this defeat at the hands of the authoritarian system, shamefulness prevailed. The feeling of dishonour dominated an elite that had deserted civic life and the political sphere and sought refuge in the private sphere, thereby escaping the wrath of the regime. Thus, the public sphere was given up to despotism, incivility, vulgarity and sometimes gratuitous violence, which allowed the social body to escape from the leaden weight of repression. The revolution was an important moment in recent history to the extent that it enabled the social body to overcome its fear and recover its dignity.

The Tunisian revolution and the fall of the Egyptian dictatorship were also crucial moments to the extent that they made it possible to overcome the Orientalist prophecies that tut-tutted on the theme of the 'Arab exception' and the supposed incapacity of the Arab world to cast off its myths and the dream of a return to the glory days of Medina. Of course, it should be noted that the events of the second half of the last century had backed up their claims. The Arab world remained silent during the three great democratic revolutions since the fall of the southern European dictatorships in the 1970s, in Latin America in the 1980s and in the 1990s in the former 'peoples' democracies' and in Africa. Throughout those times of democratic joy and euphoria, Arabs remained faithful to their nationalisms, which grew increasingly authoritar-

ian and closed the doors to the winds of freedom. Their deafness to the siren calls of democracy was the cause of the expansions and theses on the Arab exception and the lack of democrats in a region still steeped in mythology and submission to divinities, and its resulting incapacity to free the individual. But these revolutions showed that the Arab exception did not exist and that the region, like others, only sought to join the universal movement of liberty and reason.

Since victory and the departure of the former President on 14 January, Tunisia has been confronted with the challenges of building a new and open democratic regime. These are of two types: short-term challenges, and medium- and long-term challenges. Over the short term, it seems to us that the Tunisian revolution is faced with three major concerns. The first is linked to the explosion of sectoral demands that the authoritarian regime had managed to contain and which are now mushrooming and require solutions. However, while addressing these demands is important, it is obvious that they could threaten already delicate economic equilibriums. The second type of challenge involves security. It is linked to the dismantling of the former security apparatus that relied on the old Mafioso clans and the difficulties of reconstruction. The security issue should be counted among the priorities of the new government to ensure a return to normal living conditions and forestall those nostalgic for the old regime from glorifying it as a defender of law and order. The third type of challenge is linked to the difficulties of running the country's institutions. It should be noted that these

difficulties are due in part to resistance by the former party in power and in part to 'casting errors' in the appointment of certain officials. From this standpoint, it is necessary to ensure that all appointments are the subject of a broad consensus and that they are entrusted to respected personalities who can succeed in re-establishing the legitimacy of the institutions.

The medium-term and long-term challenges are also considerable. On this level, three major issues should be highlighted. The first involves political reforms and the establishment of a new democratic regime. A committee of high-level experts and jurists presided over by Professor Yadh Ben Achour has undertaken reflection to increase Tunisia's grounding in freedom and economic modernity. The second challenge is economic in nature and concerns the definition of a new model for development that will ensure a real transition to an economy based on knowledge and new technologies. This model will require a break with the economic policies of the past, which, contrary to those set in place in the emerging countries, lacked ambition and scope. Finally, the last major issue is the emergence of a new political elite and a leadership capable of making way for social change and democratic revolution.

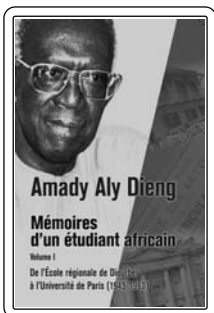
The popular revolution in Tunisia has been an important moment of euphoria, freedom and liberation from the authoritarianism that was at the heart of the nationalist project. It is crucial for this new era of freedom to be embodied in new democratic institutions and a new, inclusive, development project that will allow Tunisia to join the ranks of the new emerging countries.

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Ces mémoires d'un étudiant africain sont essentiellement destinés aux jeunes Africains qui veulent continuer le combat en faveur d'une indépendance et d'un développement véritables. Il ne s'agit pas d'égrener un chapelet de souvenirs d'anciens combattants, mais de transmettre par écrit aux jeunes Africains les expériences politiques, syndicales et sociales de l'ancienne génération. L'auteur, né durant les années consécutives à la Grande Crise de 1929, a pu obtenir son Certificat d'études primaires élémentaires (CEPE) en 1945. Comme tous les élèves de sa génération, il a connu les affres de la Seconde guerre mondiale et les pénuries qui en ont résulté. La période allant de 1945 à 1960 est une période exaltante de lutte en faveur de l'indépendance et de l'unité des pays africains. La défaite de l'armée française à Dien Bien Phu en Indochine a considérablement contribué à affaiblir le système colonial français. Elle sera suivie par le déclenchement de l'insurrection de 1954 en Algérie, l'indépendance du Maroc, de la Tunisie, du Ghana et l'accession de beaucoup d'autres pays africains subissant la domination française à la souveraineté internationale. L'année 1960 qualifiée d'année africaine va clore le chapitre de la lutte contre le colonialisme classique, et ouvrir une ère nouvelle caractérisée par le combat contre le néocolonialisme.

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