

**FROM IDEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES TO POLITICAL PRAGMATISM: THE
TRANSFORMATION OF TUNISIAN ENNAHDA PARTY**

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MSc Middle East Politics

**This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of MSc Middle East Politics of the School of Oriental and African
Studies (University of London)**

Date of submission: September 15, 2018

Word count: 9,859

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Signed Elif Zaim



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ABSTRACT

Under the repressive regimes of both Presidents Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Ennahda members were persecuted and excluded. This bitter historical experience of imprisonment, exile and underground had a deep impact on the party's future trajectory. Even though Ennahda party was legalized in the post-revolutionary era, the fear the of a renewed wave of repression kept haunting the members thinking. While Ennahda party had always been a moderate party which embraced democracy since 1980s and had been willing to work in the existing political system, in the aftermath of the revolution to secure their survival not only its members gave up on their previous religious claims, but they also backed down on revolutionary ideals. Being situated between its supporters' expectations and secularist oppositions' fears in an attempt to avoid any confrontation, acting pragmatically Ennahda members sought the path of compromise and were ready to make any necessary concessions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to sincerely thank Prof. Salwa Ismail who has always been an outstanding academic and a true source of inspiration for me. I will really miss our insightful conversations. I also owe an infinite gratitude to the amazing women in my family, my dear grandmother, my beloved aunts and surely my sweetest mother who always supported and cheered me. My amazing friends Semanur Pekkendir and Busra Bagdat who were there for me throughout this journey, I cannot express how blessed I feel to have you.



“In Tunisia, we don’t need to continue political Islam, because this is a reaction to dictatorship and to severe laicite (secularisation). We don’t want Islam to be an element of confrontation. Islam is now coexisting peacefully with the state. The state, as mentioned in our constitution, protects Islam. And Muslims and our free society protect Islam. So, Islam does not need to be protected by one party.”¹

Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda Party

INTRODUCTION

On 19th of May 2015, Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of Tunisian Ennahda Party in an interview he gave to French daily Le Monde stated that they “are Muslim democrats who no longer claim political Islam” (Wilson Center 2016). He further added that they want to be “a party that talks about day-to-day problems, about the lives of families and individuals, and not a party that speaks to them about final judgement, paradise” (Ibid.). Nevertheless, he specified that “Ennahda is a democratic, civil party whose points of reference are Muslim and modern civilizational values” (Feuer 2016). Next day on the Party’s Tenth National Congress, in line with these statements, the party leaders declared their decision to separate “politics” from “preaching” and to transform Ennahda into an ordinary “national democratic party” (Affan 2016, p.1).

While this declaration sparked a series of debates, Ghannouchi explained their stance by saying “We adopted the idea of a civil party so that we can distinguish between what is

¹ David Hearst (2016). Rached Ghannouchi Q&A: Thoughts on Democratic Islam, *Middle East Eye*, [online] June 12. Available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/rached-ghannouchi-interview-2016275498> [Accessed 10.08.2018]

sacred in Islam and what can be freely interpreted. The political field is not sacred nor immutable. It's civic, human" (Hearst 2016). In fact, this announcement was a culmination of Ennahda's ongoing transformation since the 1970s from being "an anti-democratic and illiberal movement" that was "determined to impose religious law" to one that accepted "[the] procedural mechanisms of democracy in the context of a pluralistic vision of society by the late 1980s" (Cavatorta and Merone 2013, p.858). Currently, the party is not only embracing democracy but also secularism.

Today Ennahda is praised as "the poster child of Islamist moderation" (Grewal 2018, p.2) and it serves as a model for other Islamists in the rest of the region. In this dissertation, I argue that the party's history of exclusion and persecution under the repressive authoritarian regimes of President Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali had a significant impact on Ennahda's philosophy, causing the prevalence of political pragmatism over ideological principles to ensure its survival. Moreover, I claim that in the aftermath of the revolution Ennahda always chose the path of compromise situated between its "opponents and allies". This was a strategic calculation to remain in the political scenery. The party not only made concessions in cases that were contrary to its pre-proposed religious principles but also on matters related to the revolution. Thus, rather than seeking short-term gains which would have satisfied its voter base and other Islamist groups in the country, Ennahda avoided confrontation and opted to side with the secular opposition composed of a variety of actors including political parties, civil society organizations, and Tunisia's labor union. In doing so, the party attempted both to ease opposition's fears such as the Ennahda having a hidden agenda aiming to Islamize the society or to establish an Islamic state, and to earn their acceptance since they were still the most influential players in the country.

In line with these arguments, this dissertation is divided into five parts. The first chapter lays the theoretical framework, discussing key terms such as Islamism, Islamist, and inclusion-moderation theories. The second chapter looks at Bourguiba's reforms to grasp the factors that led to Ennahda's emergence. The third chapter reviews the emergence of Ennahda as an Islamist movement which initially aimed the Islamization of the society and discusses its early

politicization. The fourth chapter examines Ennahda under Ben Ali and demonstrates how it oscillated between ideological principals and political pragmatism. Finally, the fifth chapter covers the developments that took place after the revolution until the second national election which was held in 2014. In this regard, it focuses on how Ennahda changed its early positions to secure its survival by looking at the constitutional debates, its approach to Salafis and revolutionary principles.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Islamism is a contemporary ideology that emerged as a result of a specific sociopolitical context in an attempt by the Muslims to face the challenges of Western ascendancy concerning military, economy, politics, and culture within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ayoob 2004, p.2). Questions such as how Muslims can survive under these circumstances without giving up on their identity, how they can both defend themselves and their religion resulted in the tradition that can be traced until today (Maydan 2018).

In the very general sense, it can be argued that Islamism is an effort to establish an “Islamic order” within the scope of the state, law (sharia), and morality in the society (Bayat 2013, p.4). While it is based on the notion that all aspects of the society should be shaped in line with Islam, it makes a strong emphasis on the centrality of politics for achieving this (Roy 1996, p.61). Hence, Islamism is an endeavor, a “form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups, and organizations that pursue political objectives” as “it provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on re-appropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition” (Denoeux 2002, p.61). Furthermore, while Islamism “attempts to center Islam within the political order” in this view “the political is the moment of the institution of the social” (Sayyid 2003, p.17) making the two intertwined to each other. Nevertheless, this approach constitutes an endless cycle as while on the one hand politics becomes essential for the creation of an Islamic society on the other society’s Islamization occurs to be crucial for the functionality of the political institutions (Roy 1996, p.60).

When it comes to the Islamists, it can be claimed that their common denominator is the understanding that their Muslim identity is at the heart of their political practice (Sayyid 2003, p.17). More broadly, an Islamist believes and acts upon the idea that Islam as a religion provides a guideline “about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary” (Volpi 2010, p.14). Nonetheless, although Islamists share similarities in their objectives and the themes they use in their rhetoric, there are significant variations among them due to the

differences in interpretation. Moreover, because their actions are “largely determined by the contexts within which they operate” (Ayoob 2011, p.15), they diverge in ways in which they seek to achieve their goals (Bayat 2013, p.5). For example, while reformists try to meet their objectives gradually within existing state structures and constitutional borders (Ibid.), revolutionaries resort to violence to challenge or topple the regimes (Zemni 2013, p.136). In addition to these, their historical experience adds on to their diversity in approaches to attain their objectives. Finally, despite sharing the ideal of the universal ummah (community) as one of the hallmarks of Islamism, in reality, Islamists operate within their national borders (Ayoob 2011, p.34) creating examples of “Islamism-nationalisms” (Roy 1996, p.26). Having said that Islamists constantly refashion themselves based on the changes in time and space. To sum up, “Islamists come in all shapes and colors: they are neither fixed nor unitary” (Sadiki 2016, p.11).

By being “the largest, best organized and most popular opposition group in the Arab world” (Wickham 2004, p.205), Islamists have always taken considerable attention and have been examined thoroughly. This interest towards them has been renewed in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings which swept the region in 2011. Notably, it became apparent that in the countries which managed to hold democratic elections it was the Islamist parties that won majority of the seats in their respective parliaments such as Ennahda Party in Tunisia, Justice and Development Party in Morocco and Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt regardless of the degree of their involvement in the demonstrations.

In this regard, what brought Islamists to power was their establishment of strong social networks and concentration on social investments (Gerges 2013, p.390), as people filled the streets demanding jobs, freedom and social justice. In other words, the success of Islamists was based upon their continued resistance to the authoritarian regimes indicating to a sense of fresh start in people’s eyes combined with the belief in their capability to deliver jobs, initiate betterment in the economy, to put an end to corruption and guarantee inclusiveness (Ibid.).

As these parties became “the real protagonists of the political life” in different countries (Cavatorta and Merone 2015, p. 30) endless debates on issues such as the relationship

between Islam and politics, the degree of genuine commitment of Islamists' to democracy, pluralism and individual freedoms gained currency. In fact, as mentioned earlier while Islamists have always been dynamic actors as they continuously kept repositioning “themselves to take advantage of changing political opportunities or to adjust to new constraints” (Ismail 2006, p.175) showing their capacity of “adaptability and resiliency” (Ismail 2001, p.34) in this atmosphere, particularly the factors and conditions that can and did lead to the moderation of Islamist parties' behavior and ideology once again began to be discussed widely.

Within this framework before conceptualizing moderation, it is essential to begin with the notion of who can be labeled as moderate. In broad terms, the actors “who seek gradual change by working within existing political systems” are called moderates (Schwedler 2011, p.350). On the contrary, radicals are the ones who aim at overthrowing the existing order (Ibid.). As these framings resemble the differences mentioned earlier among Islamists, it can be argued that moderate Islamists are composed of those who are willingly taking part in democratic systems even though they might have a different vision of democracy rather than the secular liberal version (Clark 2006, p.541).

Consequently, based on this definition, moderation becomes interlinked with the acceptance of “liberal notions of individual rights and democratic notions of tolerance pluralism and cooperation” (Schwedler 2011, p.352). In other words, it refers to the “change in positions on democracy, the economic system and the political role of Islam” (Karakaya and Yildirim 2013, p.1324) within Islamist groups.

That being said according to the moderation paradigm this acknowledgment or alteration happens on two levels. Firstly, Islamist parties can engage in existing political structures without giving up on their principal ideologies as on the one hand they “work within the procedural rules of an electoral game” while on the other their “end-goal remains the same – replacement of the existing system with an Islamic one” leading to a tactical moderation (Ibid. p.1323). Secondly, in addition to this strategic stance, they may as well change their ideological positions. In this case, ideological moderation becomes “the abandonment, postponement or revision of radical goals that enables opposition movement to accommodate itself to the give

and take of 'normal' competitive politics" (Wickham 2004, p.206). As a result of this, devotion to democratic principles that are encompassing "ideological and political pluralism and citizenship rights" occurs (Ibid.). However, in neither case the parties situate themselves in binary positions as the level of acceptance may vary substantially (Tepe 2012, p.469).

Nevertheless, it is also crucial to note that drawing a clear line between ideological and tactical moderation may lead to perceptions such as only ideological moderation is a substantial way of moderation while tactical moderation can be seen as "superficial and temporary" (Netterstrom 2015, p.114). However, in reality, it can be argued that while it is hard to distinguish between ideological and tactical moderation and oftentimes they go hand in hand together. Having said that, a groups' moderation on one case does not necessarily mean that it will adopt moderate positions across a different range of issues (Wickham 2004, p.206) or that moderation will be on the same degree holistically across all the party members (Broker and Künkler 2013, p.177).

One of the critical questions in this regard then becomes why or when Islamists moderate. There are several explanations on the matter. The first understanding emphasizes the importance of the state repression as being a key parameter in Islamist moderation (Karakaya and Yildirim 2013, p.1326; Cavatorta and Merone 2013, p.859; Somer 2007). In this context, it is argued that to eliminate state repression and to ensure their self-preservation which includes "jockeying for influence and relevance with the public and influential international actors" Islamist parties moderate (El-Ghobashy 2005, p.391). In the absence of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, the role of media and the stance of secular parties and organizations can be seen as a replacement in this equation as significant motivators in stimulating change among Islamists.

The second interpretation highlights the importance of electoral incentives (Driessen 2012; Pahwa 2017; Tepe 2012). According to this point of view as a result of an assessment of benefits, parties "pursue compromise and strategic gains, and become increasingly flexible on core ideological beliefs" which can become drawbacks for expanding public appeal to gain more votes (Pahwa 2017, p.1067). In other words, "vote-maximization entails developing

'centrist' political platforms" (Tezcür 2010, p.71) as Islamist parties run for a greater share of power being a party to a "participation/moderation tradeoff" or "democratic bargain" (Huntington 1993, p.169).

The third approach stresses the effect of "cooperation with non-Islamist parties and groups" by stating that the engagement with "diverse ideologies and worldviews" will eventually lead to a moderation among Islamists (Clark 2006, p.541). Especially in cases when other opposition groups are also repressed by the state along with Islamists, all parties can put aside their differences to "break out of the ideologically insular networks of Weltanschauung politics and become active in a cross-partisan campaign for political reform" (Wickham 2004, p.225) that would increase pluralism and tolerance.

Finally, it can be argued that not only domestic sociopolitical constraints and opportunities lead to political learning and moderation among Islamist groups, but they also take lessons from each other's experiences. For example, it cannot be denied that the crackdown on Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in the 1990s and the civil war that proceeded it in Algeria had a significant effect on other Islamist movements in the region shaping their decisions and actions. Another example can be seen in the intensive debates about emulating the "Turkish model" following Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in its moderate Islamism facilitating "economic development and democratic reforms" (Marks 2017, p.103) in the early aftermath of the Arab Revolutions which again shows that Islamists parties considerably affect each other in the region.

A SYNOPSIS OF BOURGUIBA'S REFORMS ON RELIGION

In the aftermath of Tunisia's independence from France in 1956, President Habib Bourguiba launched a series of policies that "were bold, modernist and unprecedented in the Arab world" (McCarthy 2014, p.735). In this framework, he introduced a broad range of reforms on religion from law to education to formulate "a unique Tunisian Islam which would reconcile religion with modernization" (Wolf 2013, p.561). To achieve this aim, on the one hand Bourguiba attempted to weaken the political power of the ulema (religious scholars) and on the other he tried to gain legitimacy for his decrees by employing religious symbols as he instrumentalized Islam "in surprising ways depending on the changing circumstances faced by the regime" (McCarthy 2014, p.735-36). Having said that, however, Bourguiba was careful to not to portray himself as a secular reformist but instead he wanted to be perceived as a "modernist reformer of Islam" by his population as he claimed that his real concern was "to return to the religion its dynamic quality" (Boulby 1988, p.592). Nevertheless, unintendedly this deliberate project of restructuring religion also constituted a basis for the politicization of Islam which eventually led to the emergence of the Movement of Islamic Tendency (MTI) in the following years (Ibid. p.591) as being the precursor of Ennahda Party.

As mentioned above one of the central targets of Bourguiba's large-scaled reforms was to undermine the role of the ulema who were a potential front of a challenge for the new regime. To succeed in this matter, Bourguiba had taken several measures. Initially, he started his project by confiscating and nationalizing the *habus* or *waqf* (religious endowments) lands that were used for financing mosques and religious schools which ensured both the ulema and the Islamic institutions a certain degree of independence from the state (Hamdi 1998, p.13). His next step was the abolishment of sharia (Islamic law) courts to unite the judiciary under the state control (Mestiri cited in McCarthy 2014, p.736). In addition to these, policies covering education created another vital aspect that significantly affected the position of the ulema. In this regard, being a "historic center of Islamic learning" (Hamdi 1998, p.13), Zaytouna mosque-university was integrated into the public University of Tunis with a western curriculum (Boulby 1988, p.592). Moreover, while religious education was completely disbanded from the

secondary schools, it was reduced to two hours a week in primary ones (Moore 1965, p.54) and its content and style were strictly supervised by the regime (Boulby 1988, p.592). As a result of these steps “deprived of their land, controlled by the state in the classroom and the mosque, the ulema lost much of their ground to the state” (Ibid. p.593).

On the other hand, while making significant changes, many of Bourguiba’s reforms also respected religious sentiments in some way in order to assure support from Tunisians. In other words, it can be argued that instead of separating religion and the state Bourguiba’s objective was to define an official Islam by which he could ensure political legitimacy for his actions and decisions. For example, the first article of the constitution which defined Islam as the religion of the state represents the new regime’s ideological inclinations (McCarthy 2014, p.736). Another good example in this matter is the promulgation of the Personal Status Code (PSC) which “aimed to improve the legal position of women by reforming divorce and marriage law” (Boulby 1988, p.593) by measures like abolishing polygamy, outlawing the unilateral repudiation right of men, setting a minimum age for girls for marriage (Moore 1965, p.51). In this case, while Bourguiba had taken severe steps that were offensive as being contradictory to the Islamic law for some people, he also left other issues such as the share of inheritance for women untouched to secure the appeasement of the conservative Tunisians and approval of at least some of the ulema (Marks 2013, p.231). According to him by introducing PSC, he was “conforming to the precepts of Qur’an”, and his decision was in no contradiction with the religious texts (Hopwood 1992, p.139).

There were also instances in which Bourguiba tried to legitimize his reforms by formulating religious justifications by reinterpreting Islamic traditions. For instance, the time when he advised Tunisians to stop observing Ramadan fast for the sake of economic development by stating that fasting reduced their capacity to work (Hamdi 1998, p.13) he said “This country needs to work and struggle to survive. It is inconceivable that religion could be an obstacle to the well-being and progress of Muslims” (McCarthy 2014, p.737). He further declared his opinion by saying “I do not believe that religion should be able to impose such a sacrifice. This is an abusive interpretation of the religion” (Moore 1965, p.56). Nevertheless,

he advocated his position by drawing arguments based on Islam as he likened the struggle for economic progress to jihad (holy war) and used Prophet's sayings as examples for permission of abstention from the fast during a war situation (Boulby 1988, p.594). However, in another occasion when he launched a campaign against wearing the veil describing it as an "odious rag," "a dreadful burden" (Charrad 1997, p.295), he argued it "has nothing to do with religion" (Moore 1965, p.55). These examples show that instead of separating Islam and the state Bourguiba tried to reinterpret religion in accord with his perception of modernization (McCarthy 2014, p.737-38).

During the end of the 1960s it became apparent that even though Bourguiba managed to undermine the religious establishment in the country despite his efforts, his modernist reinterpretation of Islam lacked popular support and thus failed to provide political legitimacy (Boulby 1988, p.595). On the other hand, this was not the only area in which support for Bourguiba was diminishing as signs of disappointment were becoming more and more apparent. The economic crisis was a significant source of concern for the public. The failure in providing the promised stability and prosperity resulting out of unsuccessful experimentations with socialist and later liberal economic policies created disillusionment among the people (Ibid. p.596-599).

FROM PREACHING TO POLITICS

By 1970s despite Bourguiba's attempts to formulate an Islam which was compatible with his understanding of modernity, a lively debate emerged "within Tunisian society about the place of religion and the nature of Tunisian identity" (McCarthy 2014, p.738). In this environment, in conjunction with these discussions, an Islamist movement called Al-Jama'ah Al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group) emerged. Being the precursor of Ennahda, the movement's primary target was to "revive Islam within the public sphere including in mosques, associations and education facilities" (Wolf 2017 p.32). In line with these objectives, while the movement initially began to work within the confines of Zaytouna mosque, in time it expanded its outreach with various publications (Boulby 1988, p.600). In these publications, the main theme movement emphasized was the need to return to "Islam as a solution" for curing existing societal problems (Ibid.). Thus, being an Islamist social movement, its main course of action was based on calling "people to observe the basic requirements of Islam, especially to attend the five daily prayers and to be proud of both their Islamic history and identity" (Hamdi 1998, p.20).

Although the movements' primary focus was based on preaching people about Islam, it went through a process of politicization during the late 1970s. There have been multiple reasons facilitating the movements' shift from preaching to politicization. Firstly, the university students who constituted a majority within the movement began to be interested in politics rather than talking solely about religious issues because of their constant confrontation with Marxists student groups in their faculties (Hamdi 1998, p.27). Thus, they compelled the leadership to be more engaged in practical political issues rather than simply focusing on religious matters (Ibid.). Secondly, the great labor strike of 1978 which resulted in a severe retaliation by the government leading to many deaths and injuries crucially affected the movements' perspective on sociopolitical issues (Ibid. p.31). After this incident, the members began to seek ways to build "direct relationships with the real people and their problems" rather than contemplating on "absolute state and pure Islamic justice" (Hermassi cited in Hamdi 1998, p.32). They realized that only calling people to observe religion did not reflect on people's daily

socio-economic problems. Finally, like all other Islamist groups in the region the movement was deeply influenced by the 1979 Iranian Revolution. In Abdelfettah Morou's words, who has been an important member in the movement since its foundation, the revolution showed them "a totally new dimension of Islam and what role it can have in politics" (Wolf 2017, p.48).

On the other hand, while the movement was gaining ground in the society, the regime did not try to control them initially undermining its scope and activity. According to Ahmed Mestiri, a minister of the time, in its early phase Bourguiba "accepted the Islamist movement, he even facilitated its growth," but this was "not an alliance, but a tactical choice" as his primary objective was to balance "the extreme left by supporting the Islamists" (Ibid, p.39). Albeit this state of being tolerated by the regime out of necessity, and perhaps being seen as a lesser evil in comparison with the leftists, the situation for the group members changed dramatically when the police uncovered the movement by chance in 1980. At that time Bourguiba realized "the scope of the movement, that it was not just a loose group but a real organization" (Wolf 2013, p.562) posing a serious threat to his power.

This incident was a turning point in the movements' history and marked the early separation between preaching and the political activity (Hamdi 1998, p.37). In this regard, the movement took significant steps. To avert the misuse of the situation by the regime (Hamdi 1998, p.37) it abandoned its policy of operating in secrecy, changed its name to the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) and made an official application to become a political party (Allani 2009, p.260).

Following this decision, the newly founded party also declared a statement outlining its objectives as being the revitalization of the Islamic character of the country, reassertion of popular will as a political force, establishment of social justice and the "revival of political and civilizational unity of Islam nationally, regionally, within the Arab world and internationally" (Hamdi 1998, p.42). MTI also declared that it was "in favor of common action with other legalized parties and total respect for legal rules" (Hermassi 1991, p. 194) and acknowledged democracy to be "the framework within which they would work to advance their goals" (Waltz 1986, p.658). This statement shows that since its inception as an Islamist political party MTI

always carried features of a moderate party by accepting democracy, showing willingness to work with other opposition parties regardless of their ideological framework and pursuing gradual change within the existing system but it also put a strong emphasis on the centrality of Islam within their political project focusing on issues such as revitalization of Islam, revival of the ummah.

With this declaration an outright confrontation began between the regime and the Islamists (Allani 2009, p.261-262). Bourguiba was determined to eliminate any challenge to his power (Ibid.). Apparently, the reason of the conflict was not about having different conceptions of religion but for Bourguiba, it was because MTI was seeking a share of his political power. The response of Bourguiba was very harsh making clear that he had no intention of tolerating any type of political challenges. MTI was not only denied from operating as a legal political party but within a couple of months, its members were sentenced up to ten years of imprisonment “on charges of propagating false information, belonging to an illegal organization and defaming the state” (Boulby 1988, p.609).

Interestingly, after the fierce crackdown on MTI unlike Bourguiba’ expectations instead of falling apart, the party actually benefitted from the situation (Al-Mansuri cited in Hamdi 1998, p.45). It expanded its base and began to garner support and sympathy from different political organizations for demanding their amnesty and the right to perform legally (Ibid.). Additionally, the movement also gained an international reputation as being a moderate group which was resisting the regime’s repression by pursuing change through democratic means within the confines of the law (Ibid.).

The tide turned for the imprisoned party members after three years, on the wake of “Bread Uprisings” in 1984. Because the Prime Minister of the time Muhammed Mzali had clashed severely with both the Minister of Interior and the labor union member considering the uprisings a plot, in order to find allies on his side he took a step towards MTI members facilitating their amnesty and release from prison (Allani 2009, p.262). Despite this compromising attitude of Mzali, the movement was not recognized officially. However, for Mzali

a rapprochement between the government and MTI was possible if MTI members agreed to give up on their demands (Wolf 2017, p.62).

Nevertheless, this brief period of relaxation ended after Bourguiba sacked Mzali and the regime started a new wave of repression on many members of MTI including Ghannouchi. They were once again arrested on charges such as plotting “to overthrow of the regime in collusion with a foreign state, holding arms, attacking security forces, calling for insurrection” (Hamdi 1998, p.55). The situation turned into a crisis drawing international attention when Bourguiba attempted to demand death sentences for the accused including Ghannouchi (Boulby 1988, p.612). The capital punishment was averted in a joint effort of some European and Arab states along with Minister of Interior Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Ibid).

BETWEEN IDEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND POLITICAL PRAGMATISM

On 7th of November 1987, after a bloodless coup, Ben Ali declared that he had taken over power on the grounds of Bourguiba's deteriorating health which reduced his capability to rule the country (Wolf 2017, p.66). Opening a new chapter in Tunisian history, upon his takeover, he announced his commitment to the republican state which guaranteed "conditions for a responsible democracy" (Ibid.) and promised greater political plurality.

After years of suffering under state repression during Bourguiba's regime, MTI leadership celebrated this event as a "divine act to save the country from a civil war created and maintained by the former President" (Hermassi 1995, p.110). Furthermore, drawing on the bitter lessons which they learned from their confrontation with Bourguiba to avoid the same fate, MTI leadership also declared that they were ready to "leave the past behind, engage in dialogue without reservations or preoccupations, support the stability and security of the country and to contribute to achieving everything that 7 November entails" (Ibid). This was an outright declaration of compromise and willingness to work in the existing political order.

Ben Ali was also determined not to make the same mistakes with Bourguiba taking lessons from his unpopular policies. His more conciliatory approach towards both the religion and the MTI members played an essential role in this regard. By this he aimed "to consolidate his power, ease confrontation with Islamists and establish legitimacy for his new rule" (McCarthy 2014, p.741).

Within this scope, he took several measures such as re-establishing the autonomy of Zaytouna mosque-university, broadcasting the call to prayer in national radio and television, instituting a Ministry for Religious Affairs and a Supreme Islamic Council to work on the compatibility between the state legislation and Islam (Wolf 2017, p.68). Considering Islamists, in a significant step he granted a presidential pardon to the imprisoned MTI members (Hermassi 1995, p.110). He also made other concessions by allowing them to be represented in the Supreme Islamic Council, to take part in the National Pact- which outlines the overall principles of political activity under the new regime- along with other parties, and to publish a newspaper (Ibid.). However, despite these striking sociopolitical openings Ben Ali also made

clear that he will not allow “exploitation of religion for political ends” (McCarthy 2014, p.742) and that it was the state’s responsibility to “watch over the noble values of Islam” (Wolf 2017, p.68). In other words, like his predecessor Ben Ali was also making clear that he would not be in favor of tolerating any major political challenge to his power.

In this atmosphere of reconciliation, MTI also responded by taking compromising steps “to adapt to the times” and “to win the confidence of authorities” (Hermassi 1995, p.111). The movement once again stated its refusal of usage of violence, commitment to democracy and assured the regime to refrain from organizing inside the army and the police forces (Hermassi 1991, p.199). Additionally, MTI also altered its uncompromising attitude towards the PSC by agreeing to be a party to the National Pact and began to consider it as “a body of choices and decisions which are part of different schools of Islamist thought” instead of “a campaign of forced and alienating westernization” (Ibid.). Alongside these efforts, because the new law banned the formation of political parties based on religion, the movement changed its name to Ennahda (renaissance) and tried to limit the usage of “Islam” in their party manifesto to avoid breaching the rules (Hamdi 1998, p.66-67). Thus, although ideological principles were still prominent in shaping party’s thinking, it was pragmatism and the desire to be a part of the political arena dominated Ennahda’s actions.

Nonetheless, despite the efforts of the Ennahda leadership to play their cards carefully and to uphold their intention to continue their dialogue with the regime (Halliday 1990, p.26) Ben Ali did not grant legal recognition for the Islamist party. However, taking an ambivalent approach to the issue he accepted Ennahda members to take part as independent candidates (Dunn 1992, p.47). As a response, Ennahda decided to have “a symbolic presence with which to gain a few more supporters without alarming Ben Ali or any of the other parties” (Hamdi 1998, p.67). Notwithstanding this decision it soon changed its policy and “fielded candidates in 22 districts, competing for 129 of the 141 parliamentary seats at stake” (Dunn 1996, p.157) becoming the sole opponent of Ben Ali’s Party- Demoratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) both at the local and national levels (Hermassi 1995, p.112).

The election campaign of Ennahda candidates was centered around three themes being identity, economy and democratization. Concerning identity Ennahda was accusing RCD with drifting away from Islam as the ruling party was responding by blaming “Islamists for mixing politics with religion” (Ibid., p.115). When it comes to the economy, even though Ennahda candidates did not present a real economic program, they made promises to address people’s concerns in order to succeed in the elections (Ibid., p.116-117). Finally, for Islamists continuity of democratization meant that they could continue their political activity.

When the election results were announced it was alarming for Ben Ali with Ennahda gaining 14.6 percent of the votes. Thus, the most crucial outcome of the election was that Ben Ali saw that Ennahda members were keen on seeking political power while they were ready to compromise but they were also willing to challenge the regime for achieving it. As a result of this political calculation, in the following weeks after the elections the regime launched a new crackdown on Ennahda followers by seizing their passports, making arbitrary arrests and torturing them (Wolf 2017, p.71). According to Ennahda members there was no possible ground for reaching an agreement with the Ben Ali regime anymore (Ibid.).

However, this was not still the worst situation for Ennahda, the most compelling confrontation with Ben Ali was yet to come in 1991. Several consecutive incidents took place over the year. The events began to unfold with three Islamists burning an RCD office in Bab Souika, which resulted in the death of the guardian there (Wolf 2013, p.564). This attack led to a division within the party as some of its leaders such as Morou condemned the situation and accused Ghannouchi of resorting to violence (Dunn 1996, p.160). On another consecutive incident, the regime launched a raid to the Islamist student organization (UGTE) based on the claim of the union’s possession of chemical products for the purpose of fabricating Molotov cocktails (Hamdi 1998, p.72). While violence erupted in the universities in aftermath of the raid, opposition parties made a joint statement condemning Ennahda as the student organization had links to the party (Ibid.). Finally, the regime declared that it found plans to overthrow the government and plots to assassinate the President (Dunn 1996, p.160-161).

The result was a nationwide crackdown on Islamists that included arrests, tortures, disappearances of the accused and their families (Masri 2017, p.28). Those who remained outside were subject to “blacklisting from employment and educational opportunities and police harassment which sometimes involved sexual abuse” (Marks 2015, p.2). On the other hand, there were others including Ghannouchi who managed to escape abroad for exile in Europe (McCarthy 2018, 372). For many observers inside and outside the country this was the death of Ennahda (Wolf 2013, p.564).



POLITICAL PRAGMATISM PREVAILS: CONCESSIONS AND COMPROMISE

The bitter experiences of suffering through imprisonment, underground and exile under the repressive authoritarian regimes of both Bourguiba and Ben Ali were still fresh in Ennahda members' memories and thus had a significant impact on the party's thinking. Even in the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution- the series of countrywide protests which led to the fall Ben Ali- the fear of a renewed persecution was the dominant factor shaping the party members' rhetoric and actions.

In this new environment, being back to the political arena openly after almost two decades, the party members saw "political pragmatism and inclusion in a coalition government, whatever the cost" as the best "protection against exclusion" (McCarthy 2018, p.373). This decision was not only based on the idea of acquiring political power, but by being a part of the government Ennahda hoped to be able to shape the transition process actively in its favor. For this purpose, they were ready to make any concessions and compromises that were deemed necessary to guarantee their survival.

Ennahda was finally legalized as a political party on 1 March 2011. When the first free democratic elections were held in the country since its independence in 1956 during October in the same year, by gaining 89 seats out of 217 in the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) and winning in all but one of the 33 constituencies (McCarthy 2018, p.374) Ennahda showed a remarkable comeback to the political scenery (Cavatorta and Merone 2013, p.857). With these results, it was indisputable that despite its long-term absence Ennahda was Tunisia's "strongest and indeed only mass party" as none of the other parties that ran in the elections came close to counterweight its organization and professionalism (Netterstrom 2015, p.117).

Despite its success by becoming the leading party in the elections, Ennahda fell short of forming the government alone and it was compelled to work in a coalition. Nonetheless, this was already the roadmap promised by the party leader Ghannouchi as he stated that their "Priority is to participate. One party should not govern alone. A party alone cannot face these (transitional, post-authoritarian) challenges" (Marks 2015, p.3). This predetermined decision was not only based on the idea of overcoming the obstacles of the democratization process

by sharing the burden with the other parties, but it was also the result of an attempt to seek acceptance from the other important players as a viable political actor within the country. Thus, for them “politics of pragmatism one that placed participation and long-term survival ahead of potentially fleeting victories represented the wisest path.” (Marks 2017, p.37).

While “no political actor officially opposed the participation of Ennahda in the political game” (International Crisis Group 2011, p.27) and everyone accepted the election results, some were at unease “about the future of secular Tunisia” (Zeghal 2013, p.262). Especially the secular segments of the Tunisian society and some in the international community were concerned about the possibility of Ennahda’s employment of democratic mechanisms for the sake of imposing their “own vision of society on the whole of the country” (Cavatorta 2018, p.244). According to Tunisia’s seculars, Ennahda was still an Islamist party that was aiming to establish an Islamic state by occupying “the most significant institutional posts within the state apparatus” (Cavatorta and Merone 2013). Particularly for them the issue at stake was about the protection of their individual rights and freedoms from any religious restrictions (Zemni 2015, p.13).

Besides the secular opposition, Ennahda members also knew that even though Ben Ali was gone, the remnants of the old regime continued to remain in their positions. Some of the “high offices of the state, the secret services and the police were still controlled by allies of Ben Ali” (Dell’Aguzzo and Sigillo 2017, p.527). Therefore, any political deadlock or unrest carried the risk of the possibility of bringing the former regime back to politics (Netterstrom 2015, p.117). According to Abou Yareed Marzouki, the advisor of Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali in the first Ennahda led coalition government “The security services, ministries, the media- all the people from the former regime were still there. Nominally we had the power, but in reality, they were in control” (ibid. p.117-118).

The political transition was Ennahda’s political opportunity to prove its commitment to democracy (Zghal 2013, p.259). Being constrained between the opposition and old regime factions Ennahda members knew they had to avoid any confrontation. As the first step in this regard, fulfilling their promises, Ennahda formed a coalition with two other secular parties

namely Ettakatol and Congress for Republic which was renown as the Troika government afterwards.

After forming the government, the primary challenge that awaited Ennahda was the new constitution drafting process in the Constituent Assembly- an important step to ensure the continuity of the democratization. However, this was a difficult task for the party and the stakes were high. On the one hand, the party leadership had to alleviate the fears of the secular opposition such as the party aiming to create an Islamic state, to bring sharia and waiting to ban freedoms and individual rights. The secular opposition was still the dominant political player of the country. It was composed of a variety of actors alongside the political parties including civil society organizations such as feminist associations and the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT). Particularly, UGTT had significant weight in the transition process since the union has been a well-organized strong political entity with members across the country (Netterstrom 2015, p.118). Also, due to the fact that the union was determined to prevent any Islamic influence on the constitution, Ennahda was specifically cautious about not provoking it to take any action by calling for strikes and rallying behind the secular opposition parties which could have collapsed the constitution-making process (Ibid). On the other hand, the party was under pressure to satisfy its own constituency and other Islamic groups in the country regarding the issues related with religious matters such as blasphemy.

Within this context, it is essential to point out the degree of cohesiveness of Ennahda in order to understand better the party's reactions to these dilemmas finding itself in this difficult situation. First of all, beyond all other things, Ennahda members and followers share a common history which unites them "by the harsh repression they all suffered" (Wolf and Lefevre 2012, p.562). Moreover, even though the party was not operating for almost two decades in the aftermath of the revolution it quickly revived itself. Thus, in the post-revolutionary era it works as a well-organized political party having "regional and local level representational structures linking grassroots supporters to party leaders" (Marks 2014, p.8). It also has democratic decision-making structures as it votes its decisions "in its highest body- the Shura Council" (Ibid.).

Having said that, sometimes divisions also appear within the Ennahda mostly along the lines of those who were in exile in western capitals forming the party's pragmatist reformist wing and the others who were in prison or underground in the country who can be labeled as hard-liners (Grewal 2018, p.10). However, despite the differences in opinion as a political party Ennahda has "a strong internal discipline" and "once a decision is reached the members tend to follow and defend the party position as if it were their own" (Netterstrom 2015, p.117). In this sense, Ghannouchi plays an important role in keeping the movement together by carrying a significant legitimacy as being an "organizational and intellectual authority" (McCarthy 2018, p.376).

"Gradualism and restraint have been hallmarks of Ennahda's leadership during the constitution writing process" (Marks 2014, p.20), as it became apparent rather than ideological principles it was political pragmatism that dominated the party's approach and thinking towards the matter. In this regard, as Ennahda was constantly under the spotlight, the discussions were centered around on how the party would act with regards to three contentious issues or the "gray zones" (Brown, Hamzawy and Ottoway 2006): "whether or not to include an explicit reference to sharia in Article 1 of the constitution, how to define the status of women and how to deal with the matter of blasphemy" (Marks 2014, p.20).

The first issue that led to confrontations was about the possible inclusion of sharia in the constitution. Even though Ghannouchi made an earlier statement in the immediate aftermath of the elections that "there will be no other references to religion in the constitution" (Heneghan 2011) by the spring of 2012 there was an intense debate going on among Ennahda members on the question of whether or not to include an explicit reference to sharia in the constitution (Marks 2014, p.20). The hard-liners within the party like Sadok Chorou and Habib Ellouze were in favor of implementation of sharia while pragmatists like Ghannouchi were ready to compromise and they were advocating a gradual approach concerning Islamic principles and practices (Wolf 2013, p.566).

According to Ghannouchi sharia was not about punishment but it represented "a set of values to be understood and translated into the society. These values are justice, liberty, mercy

and brotherhood”, therefore for him “Tunisia is now not outside of sharia but inside it. Every time justice is implemented, Tunisia comes close to sharia” (Ibid.). In fact, despite the debates his conceptualization was reflective of the majority of Ennahda members’ thinking as they also perceived sharia as an ethical framework encompassing more abstract terms like social justice, equality and good governance (Marks 2014, p.22).

As stated even though the majority of the party members were not interested in the implementation of sharia the situation they found themselves in was not easy. On the one hand, even the emergence of discussions on the matter among Ennahda party cadres, increased the already existing fears of the seculars (Ibid.20) and on the other hand, as expected the idea of giving up on sharia generated a certain discomfort among Ennahda supporters and other Islamist groups in the country (Netterstrom 2015, p.119).

When finally, Ennahda members decided not to pursue the inclusion of sharia as the source of legislation in Article 1, they justified their position by saying that their main aim was to keep “the society united at a fragile time” (Marks 2014, p.22). For the party, giving up on sharia and siding with the secular opposition was a necessary step, a pragmatic approach to avoid a backlash and even a counterrevolution (Netterstrom 2015, p.119). With this decision, it was now official that Ennahda was abandoning its earlier commitment to sharia and it was opting for a civic state instead. This was a turning point as the party was “openly subscribing to the idea that references to religion are purely identity based and not sources for public policy making” (Cavatorta and Merone 2013, p.861).

Another point of contention was about the status of women. Both feminist associations and seculars were concerned that Ennahda party leadership was engaged in a “double discourse” and despite their public promises, they would erode the gains regarding women rights by altering the PSC and enacting laws that would be in line with sharia principles (Gray 2012, p.287). In this regard, when the initial draft of the mentioned article was released defining women to be “complementary” to men large-scaled protests started (Charrad and Zarrugh 2013, p.235-236). For some of the Tunisian feminists this represented the first step of Ennahda’s Islamization program (Marks 2013, p.237). Although Ennahda was quick in

retrieving from the controversial cause by replacing the wording with “equality between men and women”, in the midst of the unrest, it failed to gain the confidence of the feminists in particular and seculars in general and lost a great “opportunity to allay opponents’ fears” (Marks 2014, p.23-24).

Finally, the last point that was subject to discussions in the constitution drafting process was the article considering blasphemy. For Ennahda members this was a challenging topic to come to a compromise as they were still aiming to revitalize the Arab-Islamic identity of the country (McCarthy 2015, p.447). Even though this objective was targeting cultural issues, the party members were sensitive about the freedom of expression and they perceived it “as the protection of the sacred” (McCarthy 2015, p.447).

Within the scope of this perspective, they released the first draft of the article stating that “the state guarantees freedom of religious belief and practice and criminalizes all attacks on that which is sacred” on the wake of two incidents: the airing of Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis film and La Marsa art exhibit where an art work featuring the phrase “Subhan Allah” in ants had been displayed (Marks 2012). Both cases were seen as offensive to Islam, and particularly La Marsa exhibition resulted in riots. This time instead of taking a cautious approach and criticizing the rioters Ennahda members tended to put the blame on the secular artists for provoking the society by insulting the religious values which they argued “Tunisians share naturally and deeply” (Marks 2014, p.25).

Interestingly, despite the fact that this broad definition paved the way for the risk of restricting the range of expression and could have been misused as an instrument for political and social repression, contrary to the expectation this time the secularist groups including Tunisian League of Human Rights, journalist associations and political parties did not vocally express their opposition as it was the case in other clauses (Marks 2012). Probably, the likely reason was the “fear of losing legitimacy with Tunisian society, which tends to view offenses against Abrahamic faiths in general, and Islam in particular as unacceptable” (Ibid.). In other words, it was not only Ennahda members that were drawing on lessons from their own past, but it was also seculars as they not want to upset the society by undermining religious values.

Even though, unlike in the other cases Ennahda's position did not spark an outrage from the seculars of the country, after long discussions with the local and international experts they have decided that "a gradual approach of convincing not coercing the public to respect Islamic values was better" for the country and that prohibitions should have no place in the constitution (Marks 2014, p.25-26). Ghannouchi expressed his support to the decision by saying "it is not suitable that Islamists and Muslims in general fear that freedom would harm Islam" and that "the greatest danger to Islam would be the absence of freedoms and the unavailability of sufficient guarantees for the freedom of conscience, the freedom of expression, the freedom of belief, the freedom of movement, and all social freedoms" (Netterstrom 2015, p.119).

Besides the constitutional debates, another issue that became a source of confrontation between Ennahda members and their secular counterparts was the party's engagement with the Salafi groups in the country. For Ennahda the Salafis "represented an ideologically pure and politically immature generation that would eventually be brought into the new system" (Cavartorta 2015, p.771). Showing his sympathy to the Salafis, Ghannouchi stated that "they reminded him of his youth and that Tunisians will make them change too just like they had changed Ennahda" (Ibid.). Therefore, despite the concerns of the secularists about Salafis religious understandings rather than taking a securitized approach Ennahda leadership argued for "engagement, dialogue, Islamic re-education and sociopolitical inclusion" to be the best ways "for moving young Salafis toward more moderate views" (Marks 2015, p.6). The party was also determined to avoid their marginalization (Cavatorta and Zouaghi 2018, p.3).

However, this approach ended, when a series of consecutive violent acts perpetrated by Salafis took place throughout 2012 and 2013 such as the already mentioned attack on the art exhibition in La Marsa and storming the US Embassy in Tunis in a protest against an American film ridiculing religion (Donker and Netterstrom 2017, p.147). "Maintaining a soft-touch, inclusion driven approach" towards Salafis in general began to be politically very costly for the party (Marks 2015, p.7).

Particularly the assassinations of the leading leftist politicians Chokri Belaid and Mohammed Brahmi by radical Salafis became the tipping point for the secular opposition and they called for “a general strike and boycotts of assembly, leading to a major political crisis in the country” (Yardımcı-Geyikçi and Tür 2018, p.790). Although in an attempt to calm the situation and to resolve the problem on the wake of these violent incidents Ali Laarayedh, the prime minister of Ennahda led government declared Ansar al-Sharia-being the most popular Salafi group- a terrorist organization (Cavatorta 2015, p.770), this step was seen as too little and too late by many (Marks 2015, p.7).

While Ennahda was trying to maintain its place in the midst of political turmoil a crucial development took place affecting all the Islamist political players in the region. On June 2013, the governing party of the Islamist the Muslim Brotherhood- namely Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt was toppled by a coup. A massive crackdown took place in the country on the Brotherhood members and supporters. The reluctance of the United States and the European Union even to vocally state a condemnation about the events shown Ennahda that the idea of “prizing authoritarian stability over democracy” was still the valid logic in some of the western capitals (Ibid. p.4). In Soumaya’s words- the daughter of Ghannouchi “the message sent to the people of the religion is loud and clear: either a made to fit democracy tailored to our [Western] needs and likes, or a dictator, odious though he may be” (Marks 2017, p.13). This served as a reminder of how fragile the situation was for the party in the country and thus “reinforced pre-existing postures of pragmatism and gradualism inside Ennahda that have been crucial to its survival in Tunisian society” (Marks 2015).

During the month following the assassinations, opposition parties, secular civil society organizations and associations along with citizens who were objecting the Troika rule went out on the streets in massive protests marching to the Bardo square outside the Constituent Assembly (Haugbolle, Ghali, Yousfi, Limam and Mollerup 2017, p.29). While they were calling for a government handover, some were even asking for “Egypt-like ousting of Islamists” (Ibid.). Especially Nidaa Tunis, the newly founded secular party that was largely composed of the business and political elites of the former regime (McCarthy 2018, p.375), was drawing on the

slogans which were used in anti-government protests in Egypt (Marks 2015, p.9). Nidaa was also claiming that even though it was not elected it had the street legitimacy justified by the thousands of protesters pouring into Bardo (Ibid.). On the other hand, Ennahda supporters were also holding demonstrations in the same venue defending the party and Troika's electoral legitimacy to rule (Ibid.).

One of the crucial decisions Ennahda had taken when the events unfolded was to withdraw its support from the political exclusion law. The law was introduced in the Constituent Assembly in early 2012 and it was based on the idea of the disqualification of all the members of the former regime "from holding certain elected or appointed positions and from forming or joining the governing bodies of any political parties" (Human Rights Watch 2013). Similar to its other counterparts in the Troika government, Ennahda was also committed to exclude the figures of the former ruling party and according to the leadership the lustration law was necessary to avoid old regime actors' possible abuse of "potential electoral gains to stymie reform and reverse Tunisia's transition" (Marks 2015, p.10).

However, the coup in Egypt looming large over Tunisia accompanied by the crisis broke out after the assassination of Brahmi significantly reduced Ennahda's ability to maneuver and "rendering pursuit of lustration legislation politically impossible" (Ibid.). With the acceptance of the situation in order to find a safe way out for Ennahda, Ghannouchi changed his earlier position and declared publicly that the lustration law would not be passed. With this move Ghannouchi hoped to ease the worries of the members of Nidaa Tunis and its supporters and bring them to the bargaining table (Ibid.). According to Jebali, this attempt to seek consensus with the old regime forces was "a kind of life preserver for Ennahda, shielding it from the counter-revolutionary waves sweeping the region" (Marks 2017, p.40). Nevertheless, this was by far the most turbulent issue the party faced as sacrificing revolutionary principles created even more intense debates in comparison with the concessions on religious matters (Ibid.).

The Bardo crisis was finally resolved after long negotiations within a process called National Dialogue mediated by the "Quartet" which was composed of UGTT, Tunisian Bar Association, Tunisian Union for Trade, Industry and Handicraft (UTICA) and the Tunisian

League for Human Rights (LTDH). According to Ghannouchi “the peace in the country was threatened and even the democratic transition is threatened after what happened in Egypt and the country needs to be unified and the past needs to be the past” (Haugbolle, Ghali, Yousfi, Limam and Mollerup 2017, p.29). Ennahda members were perfectly aware that their fate was tied with the continuity of the transition process and they had to make sure that it kept going no matter how high the prices they had to pay. As a result of this shared judgement, finally on January 2014 after signing the new constitution into law, Ennahda stepped down handing power to a technocratic caretaker government (Marks 2015, p.9).



CONCLUSION

To conclude, in this dissertation I argued that Ennahda party members' bitter experiences of suffering through persecution and exclusion under the regimes of both authoritarian Presidents Bourguiba and later Ben Ali deeply affected their future trajectory. Even though Ennahda has always been a moderate Islamist party since 1980s embracing democracy and showing willingness to work within existing system the party was never legalized because both Presidents' were ready to take measures to prevent any party from challenging their political power. Thus, Ennahda members being marginalized suffered through imprisonment and exile or were forced to go underground. In the aftermath of the Revolution, when Ennahda returned to the political scenery of the country as a legal party the fear of the possibility of a renewed repression was the dominant factor shaping its members' thinking and course of actions. Therefore, being situated between its "opponents and allies" Ennahda always tried to avoid confrontation. Rather than pursuing the implementation of religious principles like it did before, the party acted pragmatically. Driven by strategic calculations the party not only backed down on matters related with religion like inclusion of sharia law as the source of legislation in the new constitution, but it also gave up on revolutionary ideals such as the exclusion of old regime members from the political scenery. When Ennahda had to choose between its own supporters and secular opposition, in most cases the party decided to side with the seculars. In this regard, Ennahda was not only ready to compromise but it also sought to build alliances with the secular opposition to allay their fears and to be accepted by them as a viable political player to ensure its survival.

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