Tunisia: Reinventing Democracy in the 21st Century

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Tunisia: Reinventing Democracy in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This study posits that democracy is possible in Muslim nations and uses Tunisia as a case study. Unique factors along the nation’s historical arc are isolated and identified as moderating variables which impress upon political, cultural, and societal dimensions and culminate into a complimentary platform for the democratic experiment. Along the historical trajectory explored time, social and political heritage, and particularities germane to Tunisia define the ideals to which Tunisians have ascribed. Islam is significantly important in all facets of life, however, in Tunisia’s case political openness, and a quest for modernity has permitted the political and the religious to coexists in an exclusive arrangement. Via societal models, the study explores areas for alignment between Tunisia and the West. The religious axis (of the West and Tunisia) when objectively drawn reveals similarities. Democracy as a political construct in Tunisia, when juxtaposed against the Ben Ali era, becomes problematic. The values of democracy are stagnated in an authoritarian system. Islam, the focus of the West as the antithesis to democracy, emerges in the study posing no significant threat to democracy’s advancement. Authoritarian values pose a greater threat as these erode basic democratic principles. Tunisia demonstrates that religion is not the prima facie factor hindering democracy’s advancement in Muslim nations and provides tangible proof that Islam and democracy are compatible. The study deconstructs and explores the elements critical to democracy’s success in Tunisia. Tunisia can be a positive democratic model for many Muslim nations.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Marie Mathilde Regis. She was an exceptional teacher, an inspiration and demonstrated throughout her life that hard work and brute determination are both compulsory elements required to ignite the engines of success. She believed what we experienced within our fragile lives could never encapsulate a mere fraction of the mystery of life itself. Truth was hidden on the path less travelled and demanded an objective approach to be discovered. She will always be loved and is dearly missed. This is a tribute to her unwavering dedication to life, family and God. Mom, I kept my promise. I hope I have made you proud.

This work is also dedicated to Cresentia Regis. She is an inspiration, and a guide on a rather difficult journey. The encouragement and support I received was unparalleled and provided the desperately needed motivation to complete a race started years ago. There are no words. A new journey will soon begin. I hope I have made you proud.

Magnolia Peters, your support throughout the years has been the anchor which held me steady. Thank you is inadequate, but for now it will suffice. Those long days and the constant hauling of library books at my request are finally over. You have made this possible.
Yadah!
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To Dr. Theodore MacDonald, thank you. Occasionally alignments in life are not coincidental. The approach taken within this body of work was heavily influenced by your course. Exploration of the rich dimensions of culture provided new lens with which to explore and extrapolate information from the past to determine the true value of what is seen today. To Dr. Doug Bond, you provided direction and clarity of vision, thank you. To Dr. Howard Hall, my mentor, there are no words. Thank you for revealing the world of Islam and the power of faith. Your encouragement, support and tutelage have been life changing. To my family who listened to my rationale and debated the issues, I love you all.
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Chapter I.
Introduction

Democracy and its rule of law is the social, cultural and political “bulwark” of Western civilization, and is often viewed as the antithesis to systems perceived as hinderances to the freedoms of human agency within all facets of society. The founding principles of democracy and its general division of power, the executive, legislative, and judiciary, establish the foundational constructs upon which Western society is erected. As with many social or political structures, democracy is rooted in historical and cultural particularities germane to peoples and regions, and it amalgamates with or infuses societies’ foundational pillars and functionalities of core beliefs. Principles of Western democracy were forged in the fires of European enlightenment, European historical and political realities, and determination via the will of the people as to what is paramount to an acceptable social contract. Consequently, because of the hybridization of historical and cultural imperatives within all social systems, any analysis of these systems should incorporate realities pertinent to the present landscape and delve into the realities which framed the past. Analysis should employ an objective review of the historical and social context which frames present-day reality.

Democracy as a social and political construct, therefore, is not immune to the impressions of history and societal norms or mores. The system cannot be examined in a vacuum framed by the present and exclusive of the past. One can examine the United States (as an example) and its social and political movement and adjustments over time as social imperatives of the past succumb to or metamorphose into modern democratic
norms. These movements are also identifiable along the timeline axis of racial relations and marriage. The United States in 1787, though drafting and enacting a democratic constitution, protected the institution of slavery denying basic human rights to many of its citizens. In the article *Racism and the Law: Slavery Integration and Modern Resegregation in America*, David Welsh wrote:

Severity in the United States began in 1607 until the Thirteenth Amendment to the constitution in 1865. The promise of equality originated with Thomas Jefferson’s declaration that “all men are created equal.” Subsequently, constitutional text diluted Jefferson’s words as the word slavery was carefully avoided by drafters, while a series of compromises permitted the continued importation of slaves, required the return of fugitive slaves, and counted slaves as three-fifths of a person for legislative purposes.¹

Welsh then demonstrates how over a specified period slavery was abolished, rights were granted to the ex-slaves, and then these very rights were rescinded over time.

After the civil War, the Reconstruction Congress amended the Constitution to abolish slavery, eradicate racist ideology and offer victims of past discrimination new constitutional protection. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments in 1865 officially abolished slavery, granted citizenship to slaves and secured voting rights for members of all races. During this period blacks enjoyed extensive power. The Compromise of 1877 gave Republicans the presidency, and over the next thirty years Southern states passed legislation targeting the suffrage rights of African Americans. Disenfranchisement spread with “black codes” voting requirements. The court abandoned its resolve to protect former slaves. In 1883 the court limited government authority to remedy private acts of racial discrimination, and upheld legislation imposing criminal penalties for interracial marriages.²

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The illegality of interracial marriage was challenged at the Supreme Court level after Richard Loving and Mildred Loving violated Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act of 1924. The couple, a white man and black woman, was sentenced to a year in prison. On June 17, 1967 the Supreme Court struck down laws prohibiting interracial marriage, ruling that the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses were violated. To further emphasize this point, there were during this period no provisions within the law for same sex couples. In some states same sex relationships were criminalized. However, after decades of discrimination and legal battles, on June 26, 2015 (Obergefell vs. Hodges) the Supreme Court decreed that same sex couples were constitutionally afforded the right to marriage. The United States today continues to struggle towards a more perfect democracy influenced by its present. Time is the ingredient required for germination of a more complete democratic ideal. This path towards a more improved system reflecting democratic ideals is not unique to the United States but is indicative of all Western civilization. Time and democracy itself renders democracy as a fluid concept. Time is another element necessary for progression into a system reflective of democracy’s purpose; a system representing the voice of the people or general majority.

The West was afforded the luxury of time to harness the ideals of democracy based on historical and other factors, perhaps other regions may be on similar trajectories within their quest for self-determination and manifestation of the will of the body politic or agents. If democracy is subject to our perceived realities in the present, then within the transient nature of our world-systems democracy is an ever-changing construct. What is

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fundamental to democracy today may tomorrow be considered lacking or obsolete. This flexibility is a quintessential rule which governs how democracy is sustained over time. This fundamental framing places democracy and its ideals within a construct bounded by fluid perimeters which allows the objects or agents to determine what comprises their will and freedoms. Democracy must, therefore, be afforded the recipe for growth and sustenance; the human agent, the body politic, a social contract, the will of the people, the capacity to exercise that will and time. This is an intricate recipe of struggles, wars, and corrective measures which exemplifies the human condition. Today, when examining world political and social systems, Western civilization places democracy in a vacuum bounded by the present, and inadvertently omits a key ingredient for democratic growth, time.

Today, Europe and much of the West embraces democracy in many forms. France, Canada, the United States, Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom employ various forms of democracy. The basic principles may remain constant, but the manner of expression is unique as specificities ensconced in historical experiences define the present. The post-colonial dominance of Europe following the European expansion has left an indelible impression globally. Not only does the West embrace democracy as the political and social imperative de jour, but in addition, the West has indirectly and directly influenced many nations to follow suit. Nations that do not necessarily embrace Western democracy within their societal and political structures are sometimes viewed as the antithesis to freedom and western values. There exists, on the global stage, a constant measurement (philosophical in nature) of these nations and their systems against political and social standards set by the West. As the West aligns systems of a “non-democratic”
nature to their perceived ideals of governance, the values returned create dissonance and conflict. The dichotomy between the two objects of scrutiny (the West and other) is then magnified with no apparent space for alignment.

Western Sentiment Post 9/11

The post 9/11 world has produced an increased level of scrutiny on Middle Eastern and Muslim nations. The events of 9/11 have further fueled the perceptions of some that Islam remains at deeper odds with Christianity and Western ideals of freedom. The perceived diametrically opposing values of Islam and the West prove for many that limited or no alignment between nations embracing Muslim beliefs and systems which champion the ideals of Western democracy exists. Political theorists and critics have attempted to substantiate these claims anchoring them in the political and historical realities of the region. Elie Kedourie is such a critic who surmised (before 9/11) that Middle Eastern culture and Islam are incompatible with democracy.

There is nothing in the political traditions of the Arab world—which are political traditions of Islam—which might make familiar or indeed intelligible, the organizing ideas of constitutional and representative government. The notion of the state as a specific territorial entity endowed with sovereignty, the notion of popular sovereignty as the foundation of government legitimacy, the idea of representation, of election, or popular suffrage, of political institutions being regulated by laws laid down by a parliamentary assembly, the ideas of the secularity of the state, autonomous groups and associations—all these are profoundly alien to Islam.4

These sentiments further permeated the academic arena as social scientists post 9/11 echoed similar opinions. The post 9/11 West has seen a rise in nationalism,

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xenophobia, and anti-Islamic sentiment. The Islam question defines the decisions of the body politic within the West, and has resulted in public debates about the incompatibility and inability of Muslim nations to adapt to Western values and embrace democracy.

Osman Baker says of Bernard Lewis a critic of Islam: The Lewisian belief is that Islam is incompatible with modernity, political democracy, and cultural diversity and pluralism; the elements which are considered hallmarks of Western civilization. The lens through which the object of discussion (Muslim nations) is scrutinized is a product of European values, and the definition of Western democracy is framed within the perimeters of what the West values today. Again, this act unintentionally ignores the European experience in its totality and hundreds of years of religious, social and historical realities’ influence on values standardized today by the West.

The philosophical debates surrounding Muslim nations post 9/11 has become increasingly restrictive pitting Western democracy against Muslim nations and their social systems. Within this context the possibility of a democratic Muslim nation has diminished. Western culture, values and customs appear diametrically opposed to that of Muslim nations on their quest for ideal governance and social harmony. At their core, the fundamental nature of these societies and their historical realities may appear non-conducive to the democratic experiment. The post 9/11 world has brought to the surface the dichotomy which is the East vs. the West with respect to religion, political and social differences. Middle Eastern and Muslim nations are, again, continuously scrutinized based on their alignment with Western democratic principles, governance and social

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mores. The fundamental question, however, persists. Can a viable democracy effectively take root within Muslim nations?
Chapter II.

Democracy, Islam and Tunisia

The concepts of democracy are ensconced within the Greek’s conceptualization of self in relation to governance, society and the cosmos. These concepts are interlaced with the Europeans’ quest for self-actualization and governance while pursuing the good life. These concepts are framed, therefore, by how Europeans throughout history have interpreted their reality. Democracy embraces the rights of the body politic, free choice and expression (political and civil), freedom of speech, pluralism and open elections. In summation, the constructs of a modern democracy are equality, civil liberties and political freedoms. The choices are inherent within the will of the body politic, and this will is shaped/influenced by the experiences of the agents. Democracy, therefore, is the expression of the free will of the body politic en masse to determine the society and government required for survival and the preservation of what is deemed the good life. Is democracy subjective? Samuel P. Huntington asks the question. How were democracies made? Huntington then explores the elements substantive to a good democracy.

They [democracies] were made by methods of democracy; through negotiations, compromises and agreements; through demonstrations campaigns, elections and the nonviolent resolution of differences . . . . they were made by leaders in government and the opposition who had the wisdom to recognize that in politics no one has a monopoly on truth or virtue.6

The substantive elements of democracy above which were identified by Huntington are static, and today these elements can determine the quality of democratic

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institutions, and the strength of a modern democracy. The commonality woven throughout is that democracy will always entail the right to choose and need to negotiate what is agreed upon as the best ideals for a civil society. A summation of Aristotle and Plato’s idea of the constructs of civil society was made by John Ehrenburg. Civil society was the politically constituted community that organized separate spheres of life in the state and, in the process, permitted them to express the full measure of their limited ethical potential. Civil society fused truth, beauty and goodness with power and the state. Immanuel Kant presents an argument for the transformation of man from the state of nature into civil society. Man is an animal whom in order to co-exist requires a leader; however, man abuses freedom if left unfettered and though his desire is for law establishing boundaries for everyone’s freedom, his selfish propensity induces him to exempt himself when he can. Kant then transcends beyond the order of civil society and follows these character traits’ ascendance into the global politics of nations. John Locke stated that no man in a civil society is exempt from its laws. This, the process of exemption, invalidates/weakens laws which are the foundation of any civil society. In such an arrangement, the laws must apply to all men who have subscribed to the agreement. It is the will of the majority. Everyman, by agreeing to one body politic under

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9 Ibid., 115.

one government, places himself under obligation to everyone in that society, thereby submitting to the will of the majority. 11

In western democracy, the will of the people is expressed through open and fair elections, laws uphold/reflect the will of the populace, the public sphere where dialogue between the government and people occurs is open. Protection of individual rights/choices are reflected in the duties of state to citizen and citizens to each other. Key components include the state’s duty to preserve these rights via agreed upon laws without abuse of power. The state and the society, therefore, are the embodiment of the people’s will. Western Democracy is framed within this context and infused with Western values. Rousseau summarizes this into an agreement of the people ratifying the idea of the state, the social contract.

The powers of the individual submit to the general will of the majority and every member is incorporated as the invisible part of a whole. In place of individual contracts this unity creates a corporate body embodiment of the will of the members. Thus, they create the body politic, in a passive role the state, and in an active role (international stage) the sovereign. Those associated with it can be called the people or individually citizens. 12

Rousseau expressed the importance of civil society, and the social contract as the prerequisite to civil society. The social compact/contract binds the society under common ideals.

The social pact establishes equality among citizens in that they all pledge themselves under the same conditions and must all enjoy the same rights. By the nature of the compact, every authentic act of general will by the sovereign binds or favors all citizens equally and makes no distinction between the members who compose it. It is a legitimate covenant because

11 Locke, Two Treatises of Government, 164.

its basis is the social contract; an equitable one, because it is common to all; a useful one, because it can have no end but the common good.13

Rousseau then presents us with the process via which man enters into civil society and agrees to the social contract.

The passing of man from the state of nature into civil society produces a remarkable change in man; it puts justice as a rule of conduct in the place of instinct, and gives his actions the moral quality they previously lacked. It is only then, when the voice of duty has taken place of physical impulse, and right that of desire, that man, who has thought only of himself, finds himself compelled to act on other principles and to consult reason rather than his inclinations. Although in civil society man surrenders some of the advantages that belong to the state of nature, he gains for greater ones. What man loses via the social contract is his natural liberty and the absolute right to anything that tempts him; what he gains by the social contract is civil liberty and the legal right of property in what he possesses.14

John Lock summarized the concept by stating that wherever any number of men are united into one society, as to quit every one of his executive power of the law of nature, and to resign it to the public, there and there alone is a political or civil society.15

If democracy within any civil society represents the right to choose, then each society regardless of their framework (religious or political) should be afforded that right. Any imposition of the will of another upon a people automatically weakens democracy’s value. Democracy’s malleability (discussed earlier) creates the environment for its survival.

13 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 76-77.

14 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 64.

15 John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, 159.
Democracy constitutes a fluid concept and it therefore:

1. Changes within the societal context along both historical and social timelines as the will of the agents are influenced by spatial realities.

2. Can emerge within any region over any period as people determine what constitutes their freedoms or rights.

3. Is transient because human nature and our world is transient.

Today many issues pervade the method of analysis used to formulate our perception of many Muslim nations. The unit of analysis (utilized by some citizens and political parties of the West) is Western democracy juxtaposed against the Muslim nation’s social, religious, and political realities. The Western lens, however, may not embody the adequate penetrative scope to provide a comprehensive view of the people, their experiences and systems of governance. The context in which the West frames democracy and other nations is steeped in the present (today’s West vs. other). It is evident that fundamental issues exist when melding the two. Some Muslim nations, though elements of democracy exist, struggle to fuse Western democratic concepts with existing facets of society, religion and politics. This does validate the ideals of incompatibility. Herein lies the paradigm differences.

Fundamental Paradigm Differences

Prior to any analysis of Western democracy, Tunisia (a Muslim nation and case study), and how compatibility can be achieved, the basic foundational constructs of each must be identified. It is unwise to erect a house on land where the terrain or the type of soil upon which the foundation must stand is unknown. Western democracy is predicated on the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John
Rawls. The fundamentals of democratic ideology embody the liberal individual/agent and their rights. Consequently, at the core of democratic theory and central to society is the individual. Within the Western model society, laws, governments and all structures are erected to protect the individual as their purpose and choices are paramount. The pursuit of life, liberty and happiness and the securing of property all in alignment with what the agent deems as achieving the good life, these are key determinants in how society functions. Religion and God in post-Protestantism Europe and in the United States are personal choices. In most Muslim nations, however, God is seen as central within society. Community and hierarchical structures are respected due to the historically collectivist nature of the society. Society, therefore, functions in accordance with religion as God orders all facets of life. The individual is understood to be replaced by the will of God (as the nucleus) and the greater good is achieved for the group.

Democracy or freedom, in one man’s opinion, may espouse the centering of God/religion within society and ordering all life around this nucleus as practiced in most Muslim nations (and often expressed in Western democracies, and earlier times and by Fundamentalists). This is in alignment with the good life. In Western civilization, however, democracy heralds the centering of the individual within society and the protection of the individual, their choices and rights. Within any analysis this fundamental difference demands an alternate approach to determining democracy within each example. One society’s freedom to place religion as central to all life, and another to place the will of the individual at the core of society should not be the defining factor which determines what labels can or cannot be assigned to a group. Today in the United States, components of Fundamental Protestantism have emerged with new fervor in the
political sphere. This resurgence has propelled the current Trump administration into power and stands as a response to the modernist and liberal sentiments regarded contrary to traditional values. In both instances, the body politics’ choices represent their expression of self, and freedom to choose how the good life is ordered. Democracy, if it is the ability to choose and exercise an agent’s will, then becomes subjective within this context. This concept will be explored later.

Tunisia

Tunisia is a Muslim nation with a Constitution that proclaims Islam as the official religion of the state. Article One reads: Tunisia is a free, independent, sovereign state; its religion is Islam, its language Arabic and its system is republican.¹⁶ In Tunisia the constitutional provisions which triggered the most intense reactions and mobilization on the part of all parties was Article One related to the nature of the state and the core of Tunisian identity.¹⁷ Tunisia’s historical trajectory has fostered a unique relationship with the West while deeply religious and traditional fibers permeate society. The nation is part of the Maghreb (a non-Western region). This is an area in northwest Africa that includes Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. Historically the area has embraced diversity as a mixture of cultures African, European and Middle Eastern in origin have blended. The Arab influence brought with it Arabs and Islam. Michael Willis summarizes the early formation of the Maghreb region in the following manner:

¹⁶ *Tunisia’s Constitution of 2014*, Title 1, Article 1, (2014).

The historical experiences and legacy of the Maghreb is highly mixed with no one experience or influence eclipsing the other. The earliest forms of political organization emerged with the Berber populations, a predominantly tribal people whose political organization reflected that fact. The arrival of Arabs in the seventh century had a mixed effect on political organization. The Arab influence was increased in the eleventh century as large-scale arrivals of nomadic Arab tribesmen helped further entrench Islam as the dominant religion.18

Willis further explains that due to the nomadic nature of the Arabs the existing political dichotomy that emerged in the region between the cities and towns of the plains and coast, with their own political organization, and the tribal hinterland, was not fundamentally altered by the Arab presence.19 The historical foundational platform was therefore created upon which modern-day Tunisia would be erected. Infused within the nation’s foundation was Islam, its values, the tribal characteristics, and the dichotomy between cities and town. Following 1,200 years of colonial rule the decision to embrace the Arab components of their historical identity, as official defining characteristics of the state, has advanced political controversy.20

Tunisia has historically provided a level of social homogeneity, and this reality sets the nation apart from Middle East nations fostering the integration of European forms of governance and society norms within the existing framework (though said framework is shaped by Islam and its cultural imperatives). One thousand two hundred years of colonial rule has left an indelible impression on Tunisia and in the quest for self-determination history, society and the will of the people has evolved into what today

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19 Ibid.

mirrors democracy. The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index ranks 165 independent states and two territories within their pursuit for the ideal democracy. The five categories used for assessment are: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; political culture.21

Tunisia ranks 69th on the Democracy Index, a flawed democracy but a democracy none the less. This means that basic political and civil liberties are respected and underpinned by a political culture conducive to democracy.22 There are two factors at play; 1) the decision to embrace Islam which is an extension of Tunisia’s identity; and 2) the decision to incorporate a democratic form of governance forged in the throws of colonialism. Can a viable democracy effectively take root in a Muslim nation? Tunisia appears to supply an answer in the affirmative. If so, a new question then emerges. How have they accomplished this undertaking?

A Brief History

The history of Tunisia is infused with the Berber, European and Arab-Islamic influence. The Berbers arrived in 2000 BC, therefore, the earliest forms of political organization in north-west Africa emerged with the Berber population. The idea of the formation of a state was foreign to early Berber society.23 The Berber’s tribal

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22 Ibid., 51.

23 Willis, Politics and Power in the Maghreb, 11.
arrangements, it can be presupposed, were the initial order via which any social or cultural collective was structured.

Typically found on the margins of areas of intensive cultivation were peoples who relied upon the idiom of blood and marriage ties to define those to whom access to resources was owed and those who would be denied. Kinship organization is thought to reflect a subsistence economy, but amongst the nomadic pastoralists of the arid zones of North Africa kin-ordered groups, “tribes,” play an integral role in local and regional trade. They were active participants in the religious and cultural world of the Islamic community.24

This tribal component provided in part the historical bedrock which upholds the modern political architecture and frames the cultural/social dichotomy that defines modern Tunisia. The tribal elements presented a layer of group/kinship association, and this nature brought within itself a collectivist approach to social or political organization. This form of arrangement, once engraved into the social and cultural fabric over time, consigns to its subjects particularities correlated to a particular original arrangement. For example, the social arrangement is collectivist in nature where the group stands predominate and kinship forms bonds, these elements have defined the realities visible within the social fabric of Tunisia in the modern era. Foundations of the past have become pillars for today’s society.

The Arab presence in Tunisia is attributed to the Hilalian invasion in the eleventh century when the nomadic Arab tribes invaded North Africa. The arrival of the Arabs and Islam indicated the commencement of the formation of a distinctly Maghrebi identity.25 The Arabs brought Islam, its customs and values to the region. Islam and its tenets were


quintessential markers that molded the region and people as pre-existing political power arrangements and social imperatives surrendered to Arabism. An important historical fact occurred due to cultural and geographic distinctions within the region. Michael Willis explained the two political distinctions rooted in the topology of the region.

This Maghrebi identity incorporated the previous dominant cultures who populated the region. The cities and towns, and the tribal hinterlands were arranged with two distinct political structures. This dichotomy between the two milieux formed a critical part of politics in the region, and has persisted today in the modern politics of the area.²⁶

Geographically what surfaced from the dichotomy was a divide between Berber and Arab speaking regions. The social impact of the Arabs through the Hilalian invasions significantly impacted the steppe and lowland areas leaving the desert and mountain areas untouched. These regions, though converting to Islam, remained predominantly Berber rather than Arab speaking and would remain so until the modern era.²⁷ These distinct historical differences play a critical role in modern Tunisia in terms of the distribution of wealth and political expression. This will be explored in the coming chapters.

Two early dynasties emerged as the cultural, social, and political evolution of the region developed. The Almoravids (1045-1147) and the Almohads (1147-1276). Michael J. Willis presents a diverse portrait that identifies historical mechanisms and social and religious elements that interacted with varied realities and emerge into modern Tunisia.

Both dynasties were formed along religious lines, and imposed a rigorous puritanical interpretation of Islamic practice on the cities that had strayed from the religious path. This established Islam as the legitimizing basis for any supra-tribal authority. Islam was the mobilizing force around which

²⁶ Willis, Politics and Power in the Maghreb, 12.

²⁷ Ibid., 12.
they unified the Arabs and Berbers. Both dynasties established justification of their rule via the link created between religious and political authority. This element, some would argue, persists to this day.  

The religious dynamics forged, from its inception, an integral part of Maghrebi identity. Religion was integrated within existing societal, cultural and political mechanisms germane to the peoples and region, and the peoples evolved with an identity ensconced within what was a social and historical amalgamation of varied social, religious and cultural realities over time. Both groups unified political control in the region; the Almoravids being of significantly Berber stock instilled an indigenous component to political power. It is imperative to note that both dynasties were modeled and defined by Islam. The Maghreb is defined by a Berber region in part in addition to a segment more directly influenced by Arab rule. Along this historical trajectory Tunisia emerged as a state inclusive of these marked distinctions though, for both groups, Islam is the banner of unification.

In 1574, Tunisia became part of the Ottoman Empire and was remarkably uniformed (one distinct Maghrebi identity). There are four schools of Islamic law Maliki, Hanbali, Hanafi and Shafii. These schools provide various interpretation of Islamic texts and application of these text within daily life. In Tunisia the Sunni uniformity in the Maliki school was predominate and Arabs migrating to the region slowly absorbed the Maliki Sunni orthodoxy and Tunisian mores. The integrative

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29 Ibid., 12.


31 Brown, Tunisia of Ahmed Bey, 26.
process of cultures and religious beliefs within Islam over time produced the heterogeneity that defines the region, but a homogeneous approach to identity. In terms of sectarianism, however, the regions embody a homogeneous quality which is beneficial when coalescing a group identity.

There are differences between Arab countries and between the east (Mashreq) and the west (Maghreb) of the Arab world, especially with regards to social homogeneity. The Mashreq is non-homogeneous and quite diverse—with regard to sectarianism— the colonial power having played a major role in the formation of minorities. This is in contrast to the Maghreb, which seems more homogeneous despite the strong Arab and Berber presence.32

This historical factor played a pivotal role in the ability of the peoples to co-exists despite differences and promoted cohesiveness. All distinctions along tribal/kinsmanship lines submitted to the mandates of Islam and coalesced into a uniformed identity of the people and the region. Turkish rule was accepted in Tunisia.

The uniformed identity of the Tunisians, ensconced within the Maliki schools of Islamic thought, provided a unified platform for incorporating the various Islamic schools of thought into what would emerge as the Tunisian identity along the religious path.

The Ottoman Turks came to Tunisia as Muslims following the Hanafi school of Sunni Law. However, this posed no issue as the Hanafi school of law was integrated with the existing Maliki structure. The Turks became political elites gaining acceptance by the society and they governed Tunisia. In Tunisia the four Islamic schools lived in tranquility and presented a level of uniformity which laid the foundation for the heterogeneity which differentiated the region from its counterparts in the East.33

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33 Ibid., 26.
Along its historical axis the region was one where the amalgamation of customs, beliefs and the ideas of outsiders appeared hybridized with the existing way of life. The foundation for Tunisian identity was secured along this historical trajectory. During Turkish rule the differences between Hanafi and Maliki passed unnoticed. When the ruling class became more Tunisian a historical pattern emerged in which Tunisia absorbed its conquerors while openly accepting new ways brought by the outsiders.\(^{34}\) Modern Tunisia’s foundation was laid within these historical particularities, and defined by the religious and cultural specificities and social nuances which were both brought into and were unique to the region. Tunisia was formed as a Muslim society the locus of which is Allah (God) and societal norms were arranged with the integration of religion into community life or Umma (the community of believers). God and community for the Muslim are not two distinctly separate constructs. God is central to life and all aspects of life must be God-centered. This is a unifying doctrine of Islam (Tawhid). The Arabic term \textit{tawhid} means “making one” or “unifying.” For Muslims, \textit{tawhid} refers to the oneness of God. It also implies that Allah is a unity, not made up of separate parts. Tawhid serves as the defining concept of Islam. It establishes the religion's monotheistic creed and asserts that God alone creates and sustains the universe.\(^{35}\) By the nineteenth century the historical variables had been molded in such a fashion that Tunisia was one of the most cohesive and uniform societies in the Muslim Mediterranean.\(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\) Brown, \textit{The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey}, 27.


\(^{36}\) Brown, \textit{The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey}, 27.
In Tunisia, with no great religious or linguistic difference to divide the body politic and the ruder elements of society (mountaineers and nomads) a safe distance from the heartland, Tunisia was less likely to slip from the grasp of its ruler at the first sign of weakness.\textsuperscript{37} The Islamic foundation should not be understated as it is a critical dimension in the regions’ identity, and has factored into modern politics and society. The regional differentiations have impressed greatly upon Tunisia’s existence today with geographic distinctions becoming one explosive element of the Arab Spring. The mechanisms were therefore in place to produce a region where democracy and other forms of government could be “tested”, and the environment for adaptation and success enhanced. Any Tunisian ruler who chose the path of innovation and reforms with its unavoidable cycle of experimentation-failure new experiments, would be blessed with a generous margin of error.\textsuperscript{38} The colonial presence would introduce a new form of political arrangement and test the boundaries of culture, religion and civil society.

\textsuperscript{37} Brown, \textit{The Tunisia of Ahmed Bey}, 27.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
Democracies are not homogeneous. A comparative examination, albeit brief, of the variances in Western democracy and their evolution is compulsory at this juncture. Tunisia and its present political system cannot be effectively analyzed without a brief understanding of Western democracy’s foundation. Why? Tunisia’s implemented system of democracy today is a transplant from Europe. Exploring the manner via which the mechanisms that define Western democracy differ within various nations, along what trajectory the divergence occurred and why, is paramount. Democracy, it was stated earlier, is a fluid construct. Towards this end the pluralistic nature of democracy in the United States and the French system of laicité will be examined. Exploring the French system of laicité is apropos because Tunisia was a French protectorate influenced by colonial government and administration, and has today incorporated a system of democracy akin to the French democratic system of laicité within the state. Identifying the origins of these influences and the impact on Tunisia’s modernity provides a richer illustration in exploring Tunisia and democracy.

The Church, Monarchs, Pilgrims and Freedom

A comprehensive study of modern Tunisia’s political landscape necessitates delving into the past and exploring the influences and the historical, social, religious and cultural threads woven throughout Tunisia’s history and braided into Tunisia’s political identity. Democracy in Tunisia is the result of many complexities colliding over time and
areas of neutrality within the subsequent conflicts identified, adapted and woven into the national identity. Likewise, the story of modern day America is complex, non-linear, and significantly defined by the Pilgrims’ lives. The Pilgrims migrated seeking a new home conducive to their ideals, the catalyst prompting this migration was their pursuit of religious freedom. Understanding the historical and social context which prompted this migration, and gaining insight into the mindset of these early settlers necessitates an exploration of Europe’s political, social and religious climate during that period.

In Europe, during the 1400s and 1500s, the Roman Catholic church played a predominant role in the social and political architecture of nations. France and England were two nations under Roman Catholic rule. The role of the church was unquestionable and those who defied the church and its dictates were usually executed. The atmosphere in Europe, for instance in France, Spain and England, was defined by religious dogma and the power that was the Roman Catholic Church. In 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain decreed all citizens to be Roman Catholics. During this period, the Jews and the Moors were expelled from Spain or killed if they refused to be converted. The Moors were practitioners of Islam. The Spanish Inquisition which followed was a brutal, torturous repression of religious expression.

France, however, embarked on a different trajectory. The Calvinist (Protestants) brought to France their belief of a more puritanical practice of Christianity. The Wars of Religion were then waged in France from 1562-1598. This period was characterized by the brutal suppression of religious freedoms as Catholics and Protestants battled for control and the Huguenots (non-Catholics) were persecuted for their faith. Huguenots were any of the Protestants in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many of
whom suffered severe punishment for their faith.  

France was embroiled in bloody religious civil wars. Religion was, therefore, a divisive agent. The monarchs of France ruled the populace with little regard for the well-being of individuals as the divisions between the ruling classes, the clergy and nobility, and the common man became polarized. The idea of a national identity and the state as an embodiment of that identity was not yet conceptualized, and the ruling classes were not interested in sharing but rather consolidated their power. The common man in France, therefore, faced two obstacles between his freedom and the full expression of the “good life,” church/religion and the nobility. The democratic model of the nation state is framed by notions of free will. The notion of free will is realized within the idea of the autonomous individual free to pursue ends, driven by self-interest, and protected by the state through its duty (via the social contract) to the citizens. Kant and Rousseau’s philosophies both recognize this autonomous individual and ascribe to him/her natural rights that are foundational (rights innate to men by sheer fact of their humanity). The state’s duty is to protect citizens as they pursue the good life, securing property, and embracing religious beliefs. Natural rights are fundamental as every man is equal having been ascribed no greater rights than another. Freedom (the right to be free, therefore, is not bestowed to man but is his natural right given by nature. Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains.  

Freedom and the ideas which convey the ideals of said freedom, embodied particularities which were umbilically connected to the historical, social and cultural experiences of French citizens. The two impregnable forces (the church and the nobility)

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were viewed as the antithesis to the ideals of freedom. The nobility and clergy symbolized to the working class all that was wrong with France and its social system—divisions along lines of religion, class, and gender for the benefit of the few and the subjugation of the masses. French citizens burdened by the state with taxes, frustrated with the subservient nature of life and the polarization which defined the classes and society, recognized that any prerequisite to altering their fate demanded the transfer of power from the hands of those few who wielded said power into the hands of the far larger masses. Concurrently, if power was transferred, a platform was necessary to; 1) dissuade the elevation of classes; 2) equalize the status of citizens within society’s strata; and 3) develop mechanisms that advanced and engendered ideas of equality among the citizens. The idea that all Frenchmen were equal within the society materialized under the oppressive conditions prevalent for over 200 years, and became a rudimentary construct of the new French citizen’s consciousness. This collective consciousness, ascribing to the transformative ideals of what it meant to be a Frenchman, sprouted during the religious wars and aristocratic rule of France. Collective consciousness refers to the condition of the subject within the whole of society, and how individuals view themselves as a part of any group.41 The idea of collective consciousness was pioneered by Emile Durkheim who proposed that societies maintain congruency by finding alignment within beliefs and norms. Out of the tyranny and oppression of the masses by rulers emerged a new order. This order was contradictory to the norm and altered the notions of power and citizenry.

In 1789, the French Revolution erupted amidst the call for liberty, fraternity and equality. The French conceptualized equality as an ideal free of religion and classist or group divisions. The emerging concept would later include the negation of racial markers. French citizenry began embracing a concept of a unified identity where distinctive markers were not recognized in the public sphere. The historical splintering of society by the power of the Roman Catholic Church and the aristocrats would not prevail in this new arrangement. In this new arrangement, the Napoleonic codes further entrenched the notions of equality and brotherhood.

- Article 8 Every Frenchman shall enjoy civil right.
- Article 544 Property is the right of enjoying and disposing of things in an absolute manner;
- Article 7 The exercise of civil rights is independent of the quality of the citizen which is preserved conformably to the constitutional law.42

The Napoleonic Code is the foundation of French Civil Law. The new arrangement created a state bound to protect the ideals of citizenry and the image of nationhood. The unique nature of the French ideal resides in the fact that in the public sphere the individual and all distinctions disappear, and national identity stands predominant. After the French Revolution codification became not only possible but necessary. Political unification was paired with national consciousness which in turn demanded a new body of law that would be uniform for the entire state.43

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and his brother are appropriated equal status via a social contract which mandates that fracturing elements (religion, classes, group identity) be excluded from the public sphere. The individual inhabiting the central space within the public sphere embraces one identity, a Frenchman. Again, the Frenchman is an individual viewed sans the markers which are the DNA of our individuality (race, sexuality, religious affiliation). The state considers all citizens equally thereby unifying the body politic. The only visible marker is, Frenchman, the citizen of the state. This basic concept provided the foundation for the French ideals of laïcité. *Laïcité a la française* (French Secularism) is mainly expressed in terms of a marked neutrality of the state’s law and public institutions, especially in relation to religious denominations. In France this neutrality also becomes synonymous with tolerance because it presupposes freedom of conscience in private and personal life.44

The interference of religion in education and state affairs was considered detrimental to the Republic. Education of the French citizen and what it means to be a citizen was the state’s domain, and divisive elements in the classroom (religions’ dogma) were not permitted. The citizens’ education would instill the concepts of nationhood, identity and citizenship in a secular environment. Church and state would remain separate ergo relegating religion as a private affair to be omitted from the secular public sphere. Concerning the recent headscarf debate, John Bowen, *Why the French Don’t Like Headscarves*, does in fact support the idea that state involvement in religious matters is part of the French tradition, though he sites factors driven by islamophobia as

Laicité became the cornerstone of the social contract. Samuel P. Huntington referred to this facet of French national identity: The French are more culturists than racists in any strict sense. They have accepted black Africans who speak perfect French in their legislature, but they do not accept Muslim girls who wear headscarves in schools. The French implemented a form of civic nationalism, one where identifying markers of the individual (race, religion, class) was replaced by a national identity. The national identity of the French, therefore, substituted religion and class as the nucleus of society with the Frenchman (an abstract form of citizenry). Ensconced within this social, religious and historical context French citizenship is developed based on abstract individualism. These ideals were exported with colonialism as France explored and seized global territory (this includes Tunisia) during the period of European expansion.

England remained under Roman Catholic control until 1534 when the Church of England headed by King Henry VIII was formed to offset the Catholic Church’s power. Two groups, however, opposed the church citing a return to the puritanical ways of faith and less of the rigidity of the Catholic Church. Separation from the Roman Catholic Church was not sufficient. The Puritans and Separatists refused to align with the Church of England. During this period aligning with any faith contrary to the beliefs of the

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Church of England was illegal. Separatists suffered persecution, and many fled to other parts of Europe. The Pilgrims were Separatists, followers of John Calvin’s teachings who believed that individuals had the right to interpret the meaning of scripture which was the guide in all matters of faith. In 1620, fearing greater persecution, the Pilgrims sailed to America on the Mayflower establishing communities in New England and embracing an idea of what they perceived to be the “good life.” The ideas of what constituted the good life were defined by experiences of the Separatists, and these ideas were ensconced in the cocoon of European culture, history, and social and religious realities. The ideal of what defined freedom, and the congruence between this ideal and reality, was contingent upon the Separatists’ ability to establish religiopolitical mechanisms which would govern and guide their lives towards the fruition of said ideal. William Elliot Griffis provided an analysis of these early settlers highlighting the Pilgrims’ “achievement and contributions to civilization and human progress.”

These Separatists broke the yoke of Norman feudalism. When a foreign conqueror laid hands on Anglo-Saxon land he compelled every bishop and church to be his liege and vassal. At a time when a semi-political church inspector called a bishop could imprison you the Separatists created their own state while renewing an ancient form of spiritual government. They set the model for what we enjoy today—a free church and a free state, which should be without interference from political rulers.

England was governed by feudal lords and individuals (serfs) lived under the protection or at the mercy of these leaders. The concept of an individual endowed with rights, autonomous human agency, and the pursuit of individual ideals of the good life,

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the concepts of a civil state governed by the social contract enacted by the body politic, these were ideas alien to the serf. In regions within Europe a life of servitude and control defined daily existence for many. Life was centered around the power of the church, feudal lords, aristocracy and monarchs. Serfs worked the Lord’s land in exchange for protection and security (food, shelter).

Separatists applied democracy to religion as they restored a form of Christianity when a church was in a house and consisted of a company of believers who chose their own officers. Religious freedom, therefore, was the basis of American democracy as it was this right which was stripped from the first settlers. The United States through time developed a pluralistic form of democracy which, within separation of church and state, afforded citizens the right to worship freely. This right included religious expressions within the public sphere. There would be no restrictions on individual rights in this regard. A Muslim could wear the hijab, a Sheikh the turban, a Christian the cross, and a Jew the yarmulke. The American democratic tapestry was painted with diverse pluralistic brushes. The individual, similar to the French conceptualization, was imbued with rights which were naturally bestowed to the agent. However, citizenship in the United States did not require abstract individualism as it did with the French. American citizenship recognized in all spheres the multifaceted dimensions of individualism based on the agent’s choice. Thus, the fabric of democracy reflected religions, races, sexes without any abstraction. The French system muted religion within the public sphere and relegated it to a personal private choice. The French embraced civic nationalism and democracy via

laicité, the Americans upheld differences and embraced pluralism within the public sphere.

Two Western democratic nations are identifiable yet with contrasting expressions of democracy. John Locke whose ideas were previously discussed is regarded as having a positive impact on the American Revolution. Locke’s ideas of government’s duty to protect property, liberty and life, rule of law, and limiting government resonated with the founding fathers. Napoleon was influenced by many Enlightenment philosophers including Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The will of the majority being recognized and the formation of civil society in accordance with that will is reflected within the language of the Napoleonic Code. In both instances the natural rights of man the inalienable rights ascribed by nature, these were the foundation upon which these nations reorganized or erected societies. These varied democratic models, though aligned, are different in composition due to the historical experiences of the agents. The impactful nature of historical, social and cultural particularities on the outcomes are apparent.

Democracy was adapted over time within each nation as realities of the present and past collided and demanded a response, thereby testing the will of the agents and the adaptability of the social contract. With Tunisia it should be no different. Though elements of history may differ fundamentally from that of Western nations, it is possible to integrate varied aspects of society and historical experiences to develop a democratic system with a level of functionality within the region.

By logical and historical extinction, therefore, Tunisia and any other Muslim nation must be allotted the time to align choices with their way of life and to decide the best method for adaptation, and model integrative processes for the development of a
chosen system of government. The West must cultivate a new understanding; though democracy thrives within a basic formula, vis-à-vis the rights of the individual, the foundations of democracy may be vastly different depending on the region where democracy will take root. Understanding some foundational and historical differences permits the possibility and thus acceptability of new, varied models of democracy and the opportunity for many non-Western regions to be observed as new incubators for the democratic process. The West, however, must acknowledge that early and apparent divergence in some foundational principals is not indicative of conflicting ideals or the impossibility of democratic governance taking root.
What are the unique contributing factors that have produced within Tunisia a nation amenable to the democratic experience? Many of these attributes or factors have been discussed and a few will be addressed in the upcoming chapters: 1) Berber and Arabs who settled the Maghreb region inadvertently created a distinct arrangement which would define modern Tunisia, both religiously and politically; 2) The Hilalian invasion affected the steppe and lowland regions, but left the desert and mountains relatively untouched; 3) The homogeneity of the region in terms of how the various groups uniformly viewed themselves. The Maghrebi identity was one which created a bond birthed from the interconnected nature of the groups in the region (Berbers and Arabs’ integrated norms creating a distinct identity); 4) Islam, though four schools of thought emerged teaching Islamic doctrine, presented no conflict as outside rulers integrated their belief systems within the existing structures. Hanafi schools of thought were superimposed on the Maliki structure and the Turkish ruling class fell readily into place as the political elite. 51 5) Within the Maghrebi region the customs of rulers were not rejected but absorbed within the local culture. The above factors fostered favorable outcomes when differences emerged. The Maghrebi region appears conducive to change and open to new forms of social exploration; a basin for cultural amalgamation from its inception.

51 Brown, The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey, 26.
The Ottoman Empire ruled the region from 1574, and Tunisia was by Mediterranean standards remarkably uniform. Again, Tunisia’s topology and the location of inhabitants created the ideal environment to spur growth and adaptation of new ideas without major conflict with the ideas’ progenitors. The uniformity within the region provided the fertile ground for social experimentation. By the nineteenth century the geographical constants had modeled the historical variables in such a fashion as to make Tunisia one of the most cohesive and uniform societies in the Muslim Mediterranean. With no great religious or linguistic differences to sunder the body politic, with the ruder elements of society—the mountaineers and the nomads—a safe distance from the heartland, Tunisia was less likely to slip from the ruler’s hand at the first sign of weakness. This dynamic will be explored later as it morphs into a polarizing force impacting Tunisia, and the entire Arab world. This topological dynamic stands as a demarcation between the less economically advantaged Berber descendants in the mountains and the political elite of the towns.

One aspect of Tunisian history which exemplifies its ability to maintain a uniformed identity is the occupation by the Ottoman Empire. Occupation was not regarded as invasive and Tunisian daily life was not disrupted. The identity and common thread remained constant. Ottoman involvement in the region came as the result of European Christian forces incursions into North Africa. Intervention of the Muslim Ottomans was welcomed by their co-religionists in the Maghreb. Again, this

52 Brown, The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey, 26.

53 Ibid., 27.

54 Willis, Politics and Power in the Maghreb, 15.
established the political and social topology of modern-day Tunisia. The hinterland was, to some extent, shielded from the direct benefits or impact of this social reality (the Ottoman culture was assimilated into the existing lifestyle). It can be noted that the French occupation would encounter the same topological dynamic in Tunisia. Apart from tax collecting and most basic forms of administration, the Ottoman presence was restricted to regency cities and coastal towns. This meant that there was limited interaction with the indigenous population.\(^55\) This arrangement does not imply the lack of Ottoman impact on Tunisia. The establishment of the regency of Tunisia helped further shape the identity and importance of the city and its surroundings. The urban elite of the coastal cities of Tunis were clearly affected by the trends and ideas emerging from the Ottoman heartland (the reform movement which developed in Istanbul) and later in Tunisia.\(^56\)

The Ottoman influence waned as the Europeans began establishing control. Willis states that the Ottoman influence in the Maghreb gave way by the nineteenth century to influence and control from the more disruptive direction of Europe.\(^57\)

The Islamic world faced a major challenge during the nineteenth century. Expanding Western Europe states and economies played an increasing role in determining events, both on a global scale and within Islamic societies. By the end of the century Muslim territories were under direct European control, and much of the rest of the Muslim world was dominated by the West. The basis for this European capacity for domination was the transformation of Western society through the processes of modernization.\(^58\)

\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 18.

Elements of Tunisia’s emerging political identity are visible via its interactions with the various axes of power that have governed the Maghreb. The region provides an integrative platform for outside forces. This does not imply complete compliance, but a level of uniformity and integration that produced more peaceful and amicable results for all parties. Tunisia accepted Berber rule and tribal governing arrangements to facilitate trade, Arab conquest and the acceptance of Islam and Arabic rule, and Ottoman control. Commercial trade with France, prior to 1830, was maintained as France exerted influence within northern Africa, though Algeria was the interested territory which France sought to control for expansion of their power. During that period, France was a relatively new nation state coalesced around the ideals of laicité, civil nationalism. It stands to reason that wherever the French army and administrative traveled these ideals migrated with them.

One of the most notable rulers of Tunisia is Ahmad Bey (1837-1855). Ahmad Bey understood the political position of France within the region in terms of geo-political power play, but also recognized the benefits of maintaining relationships with the French. He understood that France’s advocacy of Tunisian autonomy within the Ottoman Empire stemmed from the desire to keep the Turks removed from Algeria. Ahmad also believed that the French were interested in extending their influence into Tunisia.59 Despite these doubts, France and Tunisia developed commercial and other arrangement. European persons, commodities and ideologies flooded into Tunisia in greater numbers and with

greater intensity than any other period. The French influence was undeniable. Ahmad formed military alliances with the French and even adopted French clothing. This was in line with Tunisia’s willingness to adopt new ideas into the local milieu. Historically, Tunisia embraced the concept of a benevolent leader (tribal or Bey) with power vested in one individual. This political heritage would define how Tunisia politically construed itself. This heritage would impact the governance and political will of Tunisians and introduce conflict between the body politic and government in the modern era.

Despotism and simplicity were the two traits of Tunisian government in the early nineteenth century which impressed Europeans. Absolute power rested with the Bey, and armed with consolidated power, measures that would alter Tunisia’s political landscape were enacted. Ahmad accepted arbitrary rule, a small ruling class, the notion of subjects and not citizens, the subordinate role of non-Muslim minorities, a sensitivity to the distinction between urban and rural, a tendency to regard the tribes as being beyond the political community. Tunisia’s emergent political identity was heavily influenced by Ahmad’s relationship with Europe. Ahmad Bey emulated what was best of Europe both politically and culturally.

Ahmad added the alien concept of a powerful political apparatus, centralization, greater demands on members of the political community who were now to think of themselves as active participants rather than passive, wary observers, a larger efficient army, and other organizing principles. Ahmad was grafting the European notion of the nation state onto the Ottoman-Islamic notion of the bureaucratic empire. The European system worked, the non-European systems were backward. The backward could catch up by emulating the advanced. Some other acts were in stark

60 Perkins, A History of Modern Tunisia, 17.

61 Brown, The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey, 93.

62 Ibid., 313.
contrast to Tunisia’s political heritage. Every way adopted by Ahmad, clothing or mannerism may be seen as a commitment to the European-oriented new order.63 Ahmad altered the political paradigm by incorporating foreign governing functionalities within the cultural ethos of Tunisia. The penchant for things European pushed the government to the brink of bankruptcy even as the ideas of Europe challenged, in extraordinarily unsettling ways, traditional thinking about the most basic concepts of political, social and economic organization.64 Tunisia, however, absorbed these changes, and perhaps these changes adopted by societal systems proved advantageous to the French control of the nation. The exposure of Ahmad to the French systems of military and government, and the incorporation of European governing mechanisms in a selective manner altered the political trajectory of Tunisia, and later became elements of the system of government to which modern day Tunisians ascribe. His actions forged strong bonds between Tunisia and France. During the reign of Ahmad Bey, the preliminary mechanisms for European systems of government had been introduced to the Tunisian society. During the nineteenth century, Tunisia went from a relatively autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire to the status of a French protectorate, but it remained a monarchy and reflected the trends that were taking place in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. New schools were established, military modernization was undertaken, and there was a general attempt to expand the role of government while maintaining traditional structures.65 One can posit that the French ideals of democracy which began proliferation

63 Brown, The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey, 314-315.
64 Perkins, History of Modern Tunisia, 17.
into the Tunisian society is directly correlated to the receptivity of Ahmad Bey. Ahmad Bey’s belief, however, that France’s main goal was to secure control of Tunisia would come to fruition after his death.

Though Britain and Italy both had numerous citizens within Tunisia (the greatest number being Italians who comprised more than half of the foreign population) it was France who emerged as the ruler over a French protectorate. French control over Tunisia was part of an elaborate competition for overseas territory that was played between major European powers at the close of the eighteenth century.66 Tunisia was an amalgamation of Europeans, Jews, Africans, Berbers, Arabs and other people. European expansion into the region placed France at the helm as the nation once again reverberated from new political arrangements. In 1881, Tunisia became a French protectorate after Sadik Bey signed the Treaty of Bardo. Although the term protectorate was something of a euphemism which sought to obscure the reality of full French control, the mechanisms through which this control was exercised were different and ultimately less destructive to the existing political, social, and economic structures.67 The French, it can be reasoned, brought with them their political arrangement, ideas, and indirectly influenced the Tunisian political diorama. During the period of Ahmad Bey, France’s economic activity increased. The relationship between the European powers and Tunisia was a familiar one.

The French, it can be surmised, impressed the greatest influence on Tunisia’s political trajectory as the region transitioned into modernity. European foreigners living

66 Willis, Politics and Power in the Maghreb, 19.

67 Ibid., 20.
in Tunisia were able to legally purchase land and secure greater vested interest in the region. With these settlers came the ideas born out of the Enlightenment period. Tunisia, as was customary, absorbed these ideas and embarked on a new political journey directly influenced by Europe. The courts and governing systems embodied the administrative mechanisms desired by the French. Administrative bodies of government sought to create a powerful umbilical relationship between France and Tunisia. Indirectly, the framework for government and the body politic to support the particularities of government, the management systems for internal and external affairs, the integration of rule of law at various levels of society, these functions were reorganized in a manner reflecting the French form of government, and in favor of the French. Many French officials in both Paris and Tunis considered strong, mutually beneficial Franco-Tunisian commercial relations to be as important to binding the protectorate to France and marginalizing the interest of other European states as was the acquisition of property by French citizens.68

The government processes and the particularities which link government, commerce, education and social aspects of life were reflective of the French methods of government. This was a “systemic rewiring” of Tunisia’s political and social systems. The realities of life under the protectorate made at least a passing familiarity with the culture and language of the colonizers all but essential particularly in the urban areas.69 Emergent in Tunisia throughout its history is the impact of its topology; the dispersion of its people as a consequence of this topology creating an urban class, educated and connected to modernity, and a rural class with less access to economic advancement and the benefits


69 Ibid., 68.
of modernity. It would not be Islam, but this very distinction based within Tunisia’s history and topology which in the modern era defined democracy in the nation. Indeed, France would leave an indelible mark on Tunisia.

Finally, colonial powers utilized education as a means of instilling the needed ideology within the populace. Systems needed to be managed, governed and the local populace could provide manpower and assist in the management process. This methodology also kept locals contented to some degree with the appearance of shared benefits. The first elementary school to offer a modern curriculum to Muslim girls opened in 1900.70 The education process further catapulted Tunisia onto the political path that the nation would traverse. In the first decade and a half of the protectorate, thousands of young Tunisian men and a modest number of women were receiving an education that exposed them to an array of new ideas, and brought them into direct contact with the French population.71 Tunisia’s future was dependent upon young educated Tunisians instilled with French values which were distilled from the education system. These young educated Tunisians were being absorbed into positions within the government. By the 1890s, those who completed the highest level of the public education system were assuming positions in the protectorate government.72 Tunisians within the rural and urban areas were privy to different social realities. Contact with the educated masses and direct influence from the ideas brought to Tunisia by outsiders was not as accessible to those within the hinterland as it was for the urban populace. As earlier explored these

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71 Ibid., 69.

72 Ibid., 68.
Tunisians, descendants of Berbers, lived in the mountain region (hinterlands) away from the towns where the commercial centers and seat of government were located. The visible differences between the disadvantaged class and educated elite was emerging.

Tunisians attended college in France; these Western-educated students returned to serve within government. They supported the idea of the protectorate, attuned to the French principles of 1789, they believed that the application of those ideals in Tunisia would benefit all society. Tunisia would become a modern state as France had, technology would bind the country together as never before, and republican rule would replace arbitrary monarchical power. Tunisians, the educated class, were now imbued with the French ideals of freedom, nationhood and citizenry trained in the management of government, and armed with a new delegation of power to the body politic. A fundamental aspect of this transfer of political identity would entail its integration with the Tunisian Islamic identity. A platform for alignment with values had to be formalized. For all that, these men were not deracinated and continued to care deeply about their Arab-Islamic heritage. For most of them a second intellectual concept Salafiyya (Islamic Reform) exerted as strong a pull as European progressivism. A new Tunisia would emerge, one which embraced the ideals of French civic nationalism but needed to mesh this political identity with the Tunisian cultural and religious heritage. Islam would play an important role in the formation of the new Tunisia, but history, culture and time would solidify Tunisia as a democratic nation. A new model to support a hybridized system of

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74 Ibid., 70.

75 Ibid.
laïcité would be constructed. Democracy would be adapted and would complement the historical realities of Tunisia.
Chapter V.

Models of Society

A comprehensive analysis (albeit brief) of the foundational platform supporting societal systems is necessary. Societal systems of any nature are mechanisms integrated into the existing cultural dynamics. Within this analysis the platform on which the hybridized system of democracy via laïcité is erected must be identified and explored. This platform emerges as a consequence of Tunisia’s religious, social, and historical dynamics. We must first isolate the societal model for the West. A new model must then be extrapolated which represents the societal model upon which Tunisia is erected. This model will be developed from the historical realities which intertwined to form the current state. Within this model we must examine the role and placement of Islam.

Sociologists and anthropologists consider the organization of society to be a reflection of its culture, an important component of which is cultural beliefs. Cultural beliefs are ideas and thoughts common to several individuals that govern interaction—between these people, and between them, their gods and other groups—and differ from knowledge in that they are not empirically discovered or analytically proved. In general, cultural beliefs become identical and commonly known through socialization processes by which the culture is unified, maintained and communicated.76

To facilitate successful integration or to attempt an adaptation of any ideology, the agents will contrast the system dictates against the beliefs that frames said agents’ identity. One can surmise that the appropriation of a political, social or cultural system is a natural phenomenon. Cultural beliefs also influence societal organization since strategic

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interactions occur within a specific social and historical context. The necessary condition for an organizational change, however, is that those able to initiate it expect to gain from it, and expectation depends on their cultural beliefs. Once a specific societal organization is introduced, it influences the rules of historically subsequent games and hence the resulting societal organization. Systems or beliefs cross cultural barriers as interaction between two or more agents of differing backgrounds occurs. Ideas or beliefs will be accepted and incorporated into environments generally in one of three basic ways; 1) by force; 2) naturally or by exposure; or 3) by coercive measures. Alignment is a prerequisite to adaptation as areas of convergence are utilized to fuse the ideology into the existing social diorama. This albeit simple description is a basic process for the rejection or adaptation of new ideology or to change existing beliefs. Tunisia is not immune to this process.

Model I

France implemented a democratic system with its core being laicité, a muted expression of religion in the public sphere. In the United States, democracy exemplified pluralism at its core and religion was an open and expressed right recognized as part of the individual’s identity in the public sphere. These are two different views of a central construct. There is one point along which, though variances in the implementation and approach to democracy are evident, France and the United States align. The individual in both nations is central to society. This centrality is fixed, and society and its complementary systems revolve around the concept of the individual and the agents’

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77 Greif, Cultural Beliefs and the Organization of Society, 916.
natural rights. The concept of what comprises the individual may vary, but the centrality of the individual is undeniable. I am endowed with unalienable rights exercised within my society. My society exists to protect and ensure the capabilities I choose to exercise are not stymied by the dictates of the state. As an individual, an agent within society, I am free to decide what constitutes the best life lived. The state has a duty to all individuals; the state protects the individuals’ rights. Who is this individual? Frederick Douglas a former slave penned a letter to his ex-master, Thomas Auld, explaining why he ran away to New York to become a free man.

I am myself; you are yourself; we are two distinct. You are man, and so am I. God created both of us separate beings. I am not by nature bound to you or you to me. Nature does not make your existence depend upon me, nor mine to depend on yours . . . . We are distinct persons, and are equally provided with faculties necessary to our individual existence. I am leaving you, I took nothing that belonged to you, and in no way lessened your means for obtaining an honest living. Your faculties remain yours, and mine became useful to me their rightful owner.78

Craig Biddle explores Douglas’ letter and posited that human beings are distinct by nature, separate beings with unique faculties necessary for individual existence not in any way dependent on one another. Each must use their individual mind and body; people are individuals. He continued, the individual is metaphysically real, he exists in and of himself; the individual is the basic unit of human life.79 The individual is the atom, the very reason why the state exists, and the smallest factor in the concept of the state. In Western civilization the individual is the nucleus. In this analogy the alignment is apparent. Irrespective of the variances in defining how the individual is represented


79 Ibid.
within this centrality in Western democracies, the individual and individualism stands predominate. In more individualistic societies, many would argue that people tend to behave like homo economicus: they choose actions that maximize their private material self-interest.\textsuperscript{80} When a conflict arises between personal and group goals, it is considered acceptable for the individual to place personal goals ahead of the collective.\textsuperscript{81} In collectivistic cultures people give priority to ingroup goals rather than to personal goals. They pay more attention to norms than attitudes.\textsuperscript{82}

Earlier a brief examination of the United States and France illustrated the conditions which precluded the metamorphosis of the serfs into the central position of power, and once in possession of their rights, the emergence of the individual as society’s nucleus. The West determined particularities which comprised the “good life” and developed systemic models which supported these rights and the coinciding way of life. The by-product, therefore, is individualism as the root of Western societies. Western lens of perception, therefore, examines the world from a standpoint which places the individual and all rights conveyed central to all societal processes. Social scientist Harry Triandis has argued that perhaps the most important dimension of cultural difference in social behavior, across the diverse cultures of the world, is the relative emphasis on


\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.

individualism versus collectivism. These are essential dimensions of culture and by extension society.

Model II

Does the same phenomenon apply to Tunisia? An assessment of any societal system without attempting to gain a somewhat comprehensive understanding of the rudimentary components of system constructs can become an exercise in futility. If systems are adaptable and transferable via the migration and integration of agents, as history has demonstrated, then an analysis of the foundation into which the subject of research is imbedded is paramount. Such analysis can provide a broader perspective and lens for the identification of not only differences, but similarities that may go unnoticed. Most importantly, societal systems may appear similar, but harbor vastly differing foundations. Societal foundations and how they are structured impacts our interpretation of the development of the social construct being investigated and the world. For example, historical and social dynamics in Europe over hundreds of years impressed upon the types of democracy celebrated in France, Britain, and the United States. This phenomenon cannot be fully appreciated without an investigative journey into Europe’s past.

Societies are structured on core beliefs which embody historical fragments woven along anthropological lines that amalgamate and codify into the society’s identity. The social, cultural and religious fragments are extrapolated from the historical trajectory travelled. Many nations personify belief systems heavily influenced by outside forces.

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When two opposing influences are present or collide, the more dominant may impose their belief on the other. In other instances, cultural elements of each may merge and over time the symbolic significance, being distinct to a certain group, may be attributed to the alpha group. In the United States elements of African, Native American, Mexican, and European beliefs converge to create an American culture. History is replete with examples of cultural appropriation and cultural imposition.

Tunisia, it was earlier explained, is a nation forged from the Berber and Arab tribes with African influences. The early cultural norms were fostered via kinship and Islamic religious dictates. Tunisia’s foundation, therefore, is historically rooted in a collectivist foundation as kinsmen and tribes traded and developed the social dynamics which formed the basis of Tunisian identity. In more collectivist societies, many suggest that people tend to behave like homo sociologicus: their actions are conditioned by the norms, expectations and interests of the social groups of which they are part of.84 Collectivism is the idea that the individual’s life belongs not to him but to the group or society of which he is merely a part, that he has no rights, and that he must sacrifice his values and goals for the group’s “greater good.” The group or society is the basic unit of moral concern and the individual is of value only insofar as he serves the group.85 If it be debated that Tunisia is not a nation entirely rooted in a collectivist platform one can again review the nation’s history (the Berber, African and Arab influence) and most importantly Islam. The collectivist nature (via historical cultural influences and Islam) places the group central over the individuals’ needs as family and familial ties take


85 Biddle, *Individual vs. Collectivism*. 
precedence. We can again review the early tribal arrangements which formed the basis of Tunisian society. Amongst the nomadic pastoralists of the arid zones of North Africa kin-ordered groups, “tribes”, play and integral role in the local and regional economy. They were active participants in the religious and cultural world of the Islamic community.86

The Islamic influence is essentially the pillar which framed early culture and helped develop the Maghrebi identity. Both elements (tribal and religious) embody the dynamics of collectivism. Islam within its egalitarian structure recognized all believers as Muslims each with a responsibility to the other. Muslims were to guide each other on the right path. The community of Muslims were regarded as the Ummah. Central in any Muslim’s life was Allah (God) and every aspect of Muslim life aligned with the tenets of Islam. The individual was not central to society, God was. Family and the charge to live a life reflective of the core tenets of Islam were also key tenets. There existed an order where all aspects of life were centered around God and indirectly religion. Islam, brought to Tunisia by the Arabs, presents salvation as a group dynamic with Muslims in the Ummah unified in service to Allah. As opposed to Western civilization, the individual was replaced by God on a collectivist foundation. Tunisia was forged from the lens of collectivism, and the idea of God as central to society. This is the foundation of most Muslim nations.

The New Model-Alignment

The two opposing constructs are indisputable. Tunisia was historically formed as a nation with a society centralized around God/Islam, and Western nations centralized

around the individual and his/her rights. These two models appear irreconcilable and non-congruent, yet Tunisia is ranked 69th on the Democracy Index. If the critics’ arguments are correct, then no possibility or probability exists which would foster favorable outcomes that would allow Muslim nations to exercise democracy. Is Tunisia an anomaly? Examination of the two models reveal magnified and inescapable differences. Individualism versus collectivism, and in positions of centrality the individual versus God/Islam. The Western model, however, places God/religion on the periphery. To achieve alignment the lens must be adjusted. Perhaps the nucleus represents neither God nor the individual as central to society. Simplified, perhaps the nucleus equates to the “core belief.” The idea of the individual as society’s nucleus yields to the interpretation as a “core belief,” and the concept of God as the nucleus of society yields to the same interpretation, a “core belief”. Each society, therefore, is centered around a “core belief” chosen and adopted by the agents in their pursuit of the good and ideal life.

What is the core belief? In the West this would equate to the individual as the atom central to society, and individualism the platform upon which society is erected. In the Middle East or Tunisia this belief would equate to Allah and Islam as the atom central to society and erected on a collectivist platform. The core belief would, therefore, be assigned a value within the region where it is an extension or manifestation of the free will of the agents. Democracy’s value in this model is preserved, the value is not imposed but derived from the people and society. This approach addresses the democracy paradox which arises when democracy is imposed instead of internally derived. This approach allows two models to exist, differing in composition but somewhat complementary. This model does not point either to Islam’s centrality as the prima facie reason for
democracy’s failure in any region, or to a foundation built upon individualistic elements as the platform de facto for erecting successful democratic structures. Utilizing Nietzsche’s philosophy further development and analysis of the concept of a “core belief” is possible. Nietzsche indirectly elucidates this model in, The Gay Science – The Madman. Depicted is a world devoid of the concept of God/religion. The world instead is framed by objective concepts as it were which gives rise to existence. Existence/life, constructs both animate and inanimate, and the universal laws governing nature’s manifestations in the physical realm, these exist irrespective of man’s belief in the notions of religion/God. Religion in the West as an ethical construct upon which all was fastened was, in Nietzsche’s reasoning, problematic.

Where is God, have we killed him? How could we shrink up the sea, wipe out the horizon, unchain the earth from the sun? Where is it moving now? Where are we moving now? Are we not unhinged, moving in all directions plunging continually? Aren’t we perpetually falling? Backward, sideways, forwards, in all directions? God is dead, God remains dead. And we have killed him.87

Two interpretations can be derived from Nietzsche’s philosophical assessments. First, without the concept of God/religion upon which Western society has anchored its ethical and moral pillars, society, life and the universe would continuously function. Religion is not a prerequisite for the formation and progress of civilization. Religion removed from the equations of life does not impact the nature of things. This interpretation, ascribes a value to religion, subjectivism. Religion, therein, has no value but the one ascribed to it, and this perceived value has no impact on the underpinning of life and the universal order. Second, Western society’s early foundation in God/religion was relinquishing power to concepts less derived from the moral ethos. The rise of

individualism and the rise of atheism was moving society away from its anchor. The absence of the authority of God in society, therefore, and the rise of the individual in its stead would eventually lead to a zero-sum game, nihilism. There is a third wheel in the interpretation which gives rise to the new model within this chapter. Religion (recognized or not recognized) has no bearing on creation because all religions are subjective. Therefore, society can exist in and of itself with or without religion or the recognition of Ultimate Reality/God. The issue is not religion, subjective within man’s experiences, but instead the determining factor for our existence is nature, its laws. Religion makes no difference to universal law because the underpinnings/roots of all created, animate or inanimate seen or unseen, is buoyed in the metaphysical, nature.

In this new approach the two models, though different in composition, align within their structural core. The nucleus of society is no longer heavily political/religious, though it is connected to how the state and agents interact and operate, it is instead a belief central and specific to the society. A value is not assigned to any single core belief. Assignment of a value is the society’s choice. Within the model, with the central position muted, no value is assigned. This centrality, its notion and composition, thereby becomes subjective. The West embraces the individual as its core belief and Tunisia embraces God/Islam, one religion without string contradictions or disputes. What comprises that belief (religion or individual) does not negate the fact that the atom of central importance is a core belief chosen by the agents. Reason and the characteristics of the rational being is invoked as choice emanates from the agent’s free will. The free will is, as Kant explained, nature’s gift innate to man directing him as nature so desires. Kant portrays a being developed by nature, manifested as the human agent within the universal realm,
infused with laws and maxims which align with nature’s purpose, and consequently a being subject to nature’s objective purpose.

Nature has willed that man should produce entirely by his own initiative everything which goes beyond the mechanical ordering of his existence, and that he should not partake of any other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself without instinct and by his own reason. For nature does nothing unnecessarily and is not extravagant in the means employed to reach its end. Nature gave man reason, and freedom of will based upon reason, this was a clear indication of nature’s intention.88

Agents in any region make the determination as to what is central based on their social, historical and cultural underpinnings. Core belief, therefore, equates to the chosen element of centrality anchored in the experience (however varied) of the agent/society.

This model is not unique. Identical methodology was employed with the analysis of the French and American systems. Is the individual regarded differently within both models? The French excludes distinct markers, yet the American system embraces differences. Again, what is central to their models and creates uniformity is the core belief of individual rights ensconced within citizenry. One is an abstract individualism while the other heralds an individual labelled with the tags of his choice. The value is muted within the central space and Western nations determine (based on history) how the nucleus of society (the individual) will be construed. No value is assigned to the individual as each nation reserves the right to adapt the constructs as they choose. This approach negates fractious elements and dissonance and presents a unified system.

Tunisia’s societal axis is anchored into a different historical reality from that of the West. As illustrated earlier the nation was erected on a collectivist platform and has

historically placed religion central to society, Tunisia’s basic societal structure was communal based and not rooted in individual rights. The entire basis of societal structure, therefore, is fastened to Islam and the proud history of the Arabs and Berber (tribal elements). The foundation on which modern Tunisia was predicated is the seed from which all else has sprouted. To argue otherwise is to ignore historical facts. Even within religions the two models reveal their foundational societal elements. In Tunisia however, a collectivist society is aligned with a collectivist approach to religion, each Muslim has a responsibility to the other to assist on the path to God. *Au contraire*, the West’s societal axis is rooted in an individualistic approach to society, and historically justifiable via consequential historically moderating factors. Christianity presents a singular (individualistic) path to salvation. To develop alignment, the individual in the West must be deracinated from the central point of society and Islam from the central point within the Muslim/Middle Eastern model. These two abstract constructs must yield to a null value attributed to a newly defined central point, core belief. Integration then becomes a possibility.

When viewed with the alternative lens the West and the Middle East align along the central point of “core belief,” though what constitutes said belief may differ. This, again, is the same method used in aligning Western nations within their variances of democracy. The individual extracted from pluralism vs. the individual ensconced with pluralistic values. No dissonance occurs in the Western model. Tunisia, in the new model, then emerges as a region where democracy is possible because the core belief (God/Islam central to society) remains intact and other facets can be added complementary to the model. There now exists a reduced area for friction. Democracy is
no longer pitted against Islam/God. The question then becomes, How do facets of society democratize within a process that is agreeable to the agents? There now exists a space for efficacious integration. The platforms and basic societal norms exist in a manner that allows fusion. Democracy can then be allowed to mature as it clashes with, and is adapted to, a new platform. Fusion/integration does not occur without the elements of time and political struggle. What about Islam?
A critical examination of the influence of religion, religious beliefs and their impact on citizenry is critical. The albatross must be confronted. If, per se, Islam is a hinderance to democracy, then within the constitution of Islam the fundamental maxims governing believers should embrace differing views from Christianity in terms of the individual’s existence in relation to the physical/material and metaphysical world. There should exist non-alignment between the Muslim’s view of his position in relation to the natural and metaphysical world, and the Western or Christian’s view of his position in relation to the same. The following rationale can be applied to this hypothesis: If Islam is a hinderance to democracy, then by proxy we can at least test to see if Christianity functions in an opposing manner. If this wildly held assumption is correct, then Islam’s core tenets should embody values of an opposing nature and in direct conflict with Christianity’s values/maxims. One could then isolate these nuggets of opposite maxims and easily demonstrate the divergence in values, tenets or maxims.

The Islamic state was first conceptualized by Rashid Rida as a response to the decline of Islamic Civilization and the encroachment of modernity. Rashid Rida envisioned a state where Muslims could practice faith and exercise their Islamic prerogatives. He theorized that just as no language should allow the grammatical rules of another to govern its syntax and modes of expression, if it wants to keep its identity, no nation should adopt the laws of another without exercising its independent judgement and
power of adaptation for adjusting them to its beliefs, mores, and interests, otherwise it will fall prey to mental anarchy, and forfeit its solidarity and independence.\textsuperscript{89}

The Europeans are willing to sacrifice their lives and money for their nation, they have a loyalty, a fanatical devotion which is the basis of the strength of nations. All this the Muslims once had. Europeans are successful because they have abandoned their other-worldly religion and replaced it by the principle of nationality, but Muslims can find such a principle of nationality in Islam. Congealment crept into Islam through blind imitation (taqlid). Stagnation and imitation are bad, but more dangerous than before, now that Muslim countries faced a new civilization and therefore a need for new laws.\textsuperscript{90}

These ideas were explored at a time of the decline of the Islamic civilization and the rapid pace of European expansionism. Islam is a way of life. Muslims sought methods to integrate faith with the encroaching values of modernity. To maintain religious integrity and autonomy Rashid Rida envisioned an Islamic state. Islam and the preservation of Islamic values is extremely important to Muslim nations, and Tunisia is no exception.

Dismantling Metaphysical Barriers

Divergent views should contrast with how Christians view self in relation to the religiopolitical organization of their world. Why Christians? Christianity is the religion de facto of most Western nations and is part of a Western identity. This approach will create an added dimension to the lens used to analyze democracy via politicized religiosity. If religion in Muslim nations is in fact a hinderance to democracy, then values and maxims within Islam should promote significant dissonance and discord when aligned with Christianity and its maxims. The ingredients of concern, the determining components

\textsuperscript{89} Albert Hourani, \textit{Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 222.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 229.
within this analysis are objectivity and subjectivity. To instill a level of objectivity in the process, it is prudent that subjectivity be extrapolated from the debate. There lies a conundrum.

Technically, the previous chapter has explored the construction of Muslim society based in collectivist roots and contrasted this arrangement with Western society anchored in individualism. However, this exploration exposed the construct which supports the core belief, and the framework that defines the development of each society. What remains unexplored and begs investigation are the values or maxims which frame the agents’ view of self in relation to the core belief of choice. This is another overlooked yet crucial dimension when exploring democracies and how they thrive. This area can foster further alignment between the West and Muslim nations or Christianity and Islam. Again, how does the Muslim and the Christian view self in relation to the metaphysical and material world? How can politicized religiosity impact this view and an agent’s role within the political society? Is the impact similar within both religions?

In *City of God*, Saint Augustine portrays a distinct image of politicized religiosity by exploring faith, citizenry and the applicability of laws in the natural and metaphysical realms. Saint Augustine exposes a duality within religious citizenry which splits the agent into two the natural, physical self, and the spiritual or the soul. The unintended consequence of the collision between the metaphysical and the natural places the agent in this quandary. The agent, the Christian, is therefore a citizen of two worlds. The natural world demands citizenry with its specific maxims, and the metaphysical realm belongs to Ultimate Reality and demands the obeisance of the soul, the part of human agency from which the agent’s transcendental self pays homage to Ultimate Reality. This unveils a
new dimension and reveals how the agent views self when religion or spirituality enters the matrix. Saint Augustine recognizes this duality within the Christian agent:

For with us they [the angels] make one City of God….Part of this city, the part which consists of us is on pilgrimage; part of it, that part which consists of angels, helps us on our way. It is from that city on high where the will of God is unchangeable Law, it is from this supernal court (curia), so to speak, which has concern (cura) for us, it is from that community that the holy Scripture descended, brought to us by the ministry of angels.91

Christians are citizens of a metaphysical realm with unchangeable Laws. Perhaps Saint Augustine is hinting to the fallibility of man and the subjective nature of man’s laws. Here, as Saint Augustine positions the agent rend between two worlds the question arises, Can an agent loyal to a core belief and its metaphysical maxims apply said maxims to the physical world without contradicting society’s laws? Saint Augustine portrays the believer as an agent on pilgrimage (the body present in this world) but a citizen of another realm. Is it possible to be a law-abiding citizen within the political dimensions of this world and in tandem the political religiosity of the metaphysical? This is a vital question when statements claiming the undemocratic nature of Islam abound in religiopolitical debates.

Immanuel Kant provides an answer to Saint Augustine. Presuppose religion was removed from the equation. Instead we are faced with Tunisia and the West comprised of human agents seeking the common good sans Islam or Christianity. Kant posits that the metaphysical constructs of the universal order have predestined laws wired into the very nature of human existence. These laws define the being and the natural realm. However,

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the agent can exercise reason, a capability which differentiates agents from any other creature in nature. Endowed with unique capabilities reason, being the highest, has transformed all agents irrespective of religion or culture into rational beings. Thus, the faculties of said agents are rooted prima facie in the metaphysical. Kant, in *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, posits that nature has hardwired the human agent to act and think within strict perimeters for the manifestation of an agent’s purpose.

The constructs of human agency, therefore, are anchored in the metaphysical. If the metaphysical is universal governing manifestations in nature via its laws, then there must exist laws which govern all agents and to which all agents can subscribe, universal laws. These universal laws transcend the subjective laws of man. Their objectivity is grounded in perpetual, infinitely objective nature and prevail in spite and despite the existence of the agent. Kant, therefore, produces a human agent developed by nature in the universal sphere, infused with laws or maxims that align with nature’s purpose, and consequently the being is subject to nature’s objective purpose. Universal maxims are objective and not subject to the agent’s dictates. The laws/maxims stand predominate.

Kant suggests that these maxims are the Categorical Imperatives, universal laws of nature unaffected by the agents’ acceptance or rejection due to said laws’ objectivity. There is, therefore, only a single Categorical Imperative, act only in accordance with that maxim to which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law. Kant further stated that everything in nature works in accordance of laws. These maxims

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93 Ibid, 24.
place demands on human agency and characterize humanity’s purposefulness and value, and thus they are underpinnings of the sacred nature of the agent and life.

Christianity exposes a duality within citizenry and possible conflict between the believer and society; Saint Augustine makes this clear. In the New Testament Jesus is asked by Christians, “Who do we serve God or Caesar?” This certainly demonstrates a conscious attempt at rectifying the duality and conflict that exists as a consequence of serving two worlds. Matthew 22:15-22 provides a description of Jesus’ encounter with the Pharisees. “Is it right to pay imperial tax to Caesar or not?” Jesus asked for a coin and inquired of them whose image and inscription was on the coin, to which they replied, “Caesar.” Jesus then replied, “Give back to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar, and to God what is God’s.”\(^94\) It is possible to be a loyal Christian, follow the dictates of faith, and abide by the laws of the society.

Does Islam present a similar conundrum? Is there a duality present in Muslims’ view of self, in relation to the material and metaphysical world, as said agents implement religious maxims and simultaneously abide by the political maxims of society? Are the religious maxims similar to those of Christianity? Muslims recognize five pillars of Islam: 1) Declaration of God; 2) Prayer; 3) Fasting; 4) Zakat (a call to help those in need); and 5) Pilgrimage (hajj). These pillars are key to Islam and many Muslims abide by them. A Muslim should not commit the offenses considered sin as actions contrary to Allah’s law will negate one’s entry into paradise. The basic maxims governing Muslim life, however, are shared in Christian teachings for instance love, forgiveness, community, and serving God first. The declaration of God is an attestation of Muslims’

devotion on the journey to unite with Ultimate Reality, Allah. The Shahada is usually recited by believers, there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger. The unicity of God is acknowledged as Muslims strive to obey laws anchored in the metaphysical, and in addition to abide by the laws within their nation of choice. The conflict within this duality is obvious to Muslims; it is their personal jihad. Louay Fatoohi stated that jihad is the process of exerting the best efforts involving some form of strife, struggle and resistance to something to achieve a particular goal; jihad is resistance to something for the sake of a goal.\textsuperscript{95} Fatoohi states that armed jihad is a defensive rather than offensive struggle.\textsuperscript{96} Fatoohi them provides an explanation for inner jihad, the war within self.

Peaceful jihad is by far the most common form of jihad in the life of a Muslim. Peaceful jihad includes the efforts a person who embraces Islam makes in order to change himself to what God wants him to be. Behaving as a true Muslim means giving up personal and social evil habits and practices, resisting bad desires, sharing with the poor, being patient, forgiving etc. All these aspects of good behavior are forms of peaceful jihad. Peaceful jihad is the struggle against the bad qualities and drives of the lower self.\textsuperscript{97}

Conflict between the carnal, earthly and the higher spiritual self is recognized and accepted as part of Muslim life. Within both groups conflict between the mandates/maxims of God and those of society exist. However, what of the alignment? Are both religions aligned along their values and maxims or are their demands on believers diametrically opposed?

\textsuperscript{95} Louay Fatoohi, \textit{Jihad in the Quran} (Birmingham: Luna Plena Publishing, 2009), 23.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 33.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 56.
Finding Alignment

Duality exists within Islam and Christianity and the agents’ position within both the natural and metaphysical state. Muslims follow laws of a metaphysical nature while striving to adhere to societal laws. Immanuel Kant’s Categorical Imperatives can present a powerful tool for alignment. Within both religions, via political religiosity, there are laws which universally apply. It is, therefore, apropos to explore some areas of alignment. Thou shall not kill (one of the ten commandments) can be considered a Categorical Imperative and so is Zakat or tithing to help the poor. Quran 2:256 states that there is no compulsion in religion.98 In John 10:27 Jesus calmly stated, “My sheep will hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”99 Believing is an autonomous matter. Some maxims shared between the faiths are: Surah Al-A’raf 7:199 show forgiveness, enjoin what is good.100 Matthew 18:21-22 Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister? Up to seven times? Jesus answered, “Seventy-seven times.”101 Surah 76:8 And they feed for the love of Allah the indigent, the orphan and the captive.102 Proverbs 19:7 Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done.103 Matthew 7:12 Do to others what you would

98 Surah AL-Baqarah 2:226 (The Holy Quran).
100 Surah Al-A’raf 7:199 (The Holy Quran).
102 Surah Al-Insan 76:8 (The Holy Quran).
have them do to you.  

Ensconced within basic tenets one can find alignments between the metaphysically rooted commands of these two religions.

The objective nature of these maxims above places them within the perimeters of Kant’s Categorical Imperative, universal law. Subjectivity is primarily injected via interpretation and religious adaptation over time. Islam and Christianity have been subjectively influenced. Interpretation lends to man’s subjective nature and perspectives. Though Islam has attempted to mitigate the impact of interpretation by strict adherence to the Hadith, many do agree that extremism is rooted in a divergent interpretation of Islam. Hadith are the reports of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad and other early Muslims. After Muhammad's death, his companions carefully noted all of his teachings and actions, which they studied as the ideal model for Muslim behavior. Kant’s Categorical Imperative demonstrates that there are universal maxims that transcend religiosity. From an objective standpoint, these imperatives are cocooned within the moral and spiritual maxims of both religions and provide an axis for alignment. The dissonance at the core is reduced.

Gary Wills, in *My Koran Problem*, explores the similarities between Christianity and Islam by examining the Quran. Similarities were found in how heaven is viewed, the stories outlined which are stories included in the Bible, and the idea of God, monotheistic belief. Wills also outlines similarities on a more human dimension; there is slavery, polygamy, patriarchy and war in both the Quran and Bible. Wills discusses parallel

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104 Matthew 7:12 (The New International Version Bible).


traditions in Catholicism, for example, head coverings and nuns who wear habits. Similarities are unveiled within Scripture and culture though within Catholicism Wills acknowledges that some of the similar traditions have vanished over time. Pertaining to reading the Quran Wills stated, as a Catholic, I was surprised to see how often I was jostling along with the Muslims described in the Quran.107 If basic maxims align Islam and Christianity, particularly if anchored in a Categorical Imperative, then an overarching determination as to whether democracy is possible is weakened if rooted exclusively in religiosity. Tunisia did not require a Christian foundation to embrace democracy. Neither Christianity nor Islam in this case are precursors or deterministic factors or indicators of democracy’s viability.

107 Gary Wills, “My Koran Problem”.
Chapter VII.

Authoritarianism, Democracy and the Jazmine Revolution

In the previous chapters we explored the social and political arc which coursed through the history of the Maghreb, and isolated the factors which contribute to the uniqueness of Tunisia. We have traced the arc beginning with the Berbers, Arabs, Ottoman Turks and through the inputs of other important contributors to the emerging Maghrebi region’s identity. The factors which contribute to Tunisia’s current political identity have been isolated (extrapolated during our journey into the past) and these are; the region’s topology which relegated Berber descendants within the mountains to a somewhat isolated position shielded from direct outside influences, while the Arab speaking Tunis resided in towns open to trade and interactions influenced by outside ideas and customs; tribal arrangements and monarchical rule emerged as the genesis of leadership and government; the acceptance of outside rulers and ideas was part of the social dynamic within the region; the uniformed identity of the Maghrebi region; Islam, though, integrated into society, did not pose a significantly negative threat to advancement by clashing with modernity; elements of other cultures were occasionally incorporated for the social and political advancement of the region. These factors coalesced to create an environment and a people open to change. Unlike the Mashreq (the Middle East) where sectarianism and a less homogeneous populace resided and struggled to coalesce, Tunisia was a distinctive nation with an Islamic identity.

Through its historical arc within the region it’s indisputable that Islam played an important role; Tunisians, however, have interacted with Islam in a manner which
facilitates some autonomy in governing society, and when determining future paths. Ahmad Bey’s role in this regard is significant. Ahmad explored new modes of culture and government and aligned these with the internal demands of the region. Ahmad Bey indirectly presented Tunisians with a method for incorporating modernity while maintaining the Islamic identity. He demonstrated in an authoritative fashion that Islam in Tunisia, though central to life, was not necessarily a religiopolitical construct central to the governing of society. In addition, through exploration of culture and politics along the historical arc it can be stated that Tunisians, though loyal to their customs, have inherited the governing system of their French colonials, laïcité. The unique traits identified along Tunisia’s historical arc become moderating variables impressing upon the development of a nation suited for the democratic experiment. Time (measured along the trajectory of Tunisia’s history) allowed the Tunisian identity to evolve along the political, cultural, and social axes.

Islam, within Tunisia’s history, has not secured a position juxtaposed against modernity. Islam, though central to the life of Tunisians during the period of Ahmad Bey, was gradually placed outside the perimeters of government thereby allowing ideas to flourish despite the religion’s dominance in society. This act did not necessarily diminish the power of Islam but instead aligned its presence with modernity. Tunisians accepted new ideas for solidification/advancement of their identity and future. The analysis within the previous chapters along Tunisia’s social, political and historical arc, which culminated into the question of Islam’s impact on democracy, and the analysis of both religions (Christianity and Islam) which demonstrates alignment along the axis of religious mores and maxims, has led to the summation that Islam is not a hinderance to
democracy. If this is the case how then does Tunisia’s uniqueness provide a favorable
ground for democracy, and what is the true hinderance to democracy? The West, as
demonstrated in the previous chapter, cannot confidently claim Islam to be the de facto
hinderance. There exist more extemporaneous factors which negatively impact
democracy.

The Chains of Authoritarianism

The French bestowed a legacy to Tunisia anchored in the ideals of democracy. Ahmad Bey believed that emulation of the Europeans would produce the desired results of economic power, good governance, and facilitate the technological advancement of Tunisia. Democracy and its accouterments, however, is an earned right. The French ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality were earned through the blood and strife of Frenchmen. Justice, rule of law, equal rights, these concepts evolved through the quagmire of struggle. Tunisia would learn that democracy has its requirements, and the ideals of rights, justice and liberty have real connotations for national stability and representative government for the body politic. As a Muslim nation, Tunisia demonstrated an uncanny ability to absorb French ideals, and though young Tunisians who studied in France sought the ideals of French democracy for Tunisia, the nation’s political and cultural heritage would ultimately supplant one of the essential elements of democracy, the right of the people to a government reflective of the people’s will.

On March 1956, Tunisia gained independence from France. The first elected president was Habib Bourguiba, leader of the Neo-Destour Party. The conventions and mechanisms to formalize laïcité, civic nationalism, were in place. Tunisians were trained
in government and other social and commercial conventions aligned with the French ideals and government administrative mechanisms. In any society, the functionalities of government, commerce, and socialization processes of citizens align to facilitate the outcomes of the social contract. Akin to a well-organized machine, all cogs worked to engender the desired outcome. However, the historically inherited pattern of tribal and monarchical rule in Tunisia would not voluntarily capitulate to democracy’s dictates.

How would Tunisia achieve democracy? After independence in 1956, Tunisia’s President Bourguiba sought to create what he referred to as an open country meaning one turned towards the West. He argued that the reorientation of Tunisia towards the West would represent progress and prosperity.  

The banning of the veil by the Bourguiba government was considered part of the broader effort to modernize Tunisia. Inspired by French and Western notions of modernity and liberation the nationalist leaders envisioned the new Tunisia as a modern, progressive nation. Modernity signifies Western values of individualism and secularism and equality that derive from Enlightenment traditions . . . . Bourguiba emphasized religion as something spiritual and private rather than a communal affair.  

Tunisia pursued the ideals of laicité and democracy in an attempt to propel the nation into modernity. There was a careful demarcation between wearing the hijab (headscarf) prior to independence which was driven by nationalistic fervor, and after when the ideals of laicite were being implemented. The hijab was appropriated the distinction as a symbol of national pride and an image of Tunisian identity and this sentiment was meshed into the

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109 Ibid., 500.
local zeitgeist, before independence. Post-independence, however, the hijab elicited a contrary sentiment.

Just as French colonial authorities had identified Islam’s political and social power over Tunisia as something to be weakened the period after independence witnessed Bourguiba employing a similar strategy of secularizing Tunisia. Tunisia is the only Arab country where the modernist elite overtly attacked religious institutions in the name of systemic reform and social change. Religious schools were removed, and sharia law was eliminated. Bourguiba describes these modernizing reforms as a psychological revolution that radically restructured the society.110

Tunisia, it can be posited, embarked on a rapid societal reconstruction and adjustment program for the implementation of democracy defined by civic nationalism. Bourguiba was successful in this regard and moved the nation into a secular posture regarded as necessary for modernization and progress. Democracy, however, is dependent on the elements discussed in precious chapters; rule of law, free and open elections, a free press, separation of powers of government (legislative, executive and judiciary) the ability of the body politic to determine the government and social contract that is desired. These quintessential aspects of democracy were lacking in Bourguiba’s political regime. Tunisia, though outwardly mirroring the ideals of laicite, within its political paradigm lacked democratic mechanisms within core functionalities of government. A transfer of power contrary to democracy’s requirements occurred. State institutions would soon be under Bourguiba’s control. Separation of government powers, a key prerequisite for a functional democracy, was not allowed in Tunisia.

Bourguiba’s chosen tool for institutionalizing his role was the Neo-Destour party. The party had constructed a well-organized apparatus. He used the party to institute his rule over Tunisia and the party became central to the Tunisian state. The dominant role created for the Neo-

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Destour party in post-independence Tunisia was fundamentally similar to the established states in the communist world. The party’s structures increasingly merged with those of the state to create an effective fusion of party and state. Bourguiba’s position as both state president and head of the Neo-Destour ensured his full control over party and state.\footnote{Willis, \textit{Politics and Power in the Maghreb}, 64-65.}

Tunisia was no longer politically governed by a fully democratic system, but a hybridized system akin to authoritarianism. Power was not vested in the hands of the populace but in one man. Political control did not reside with the body politic, but instead was controlled by one man and his political party. Irrespective of the implementation of laïcité, the nation’s history of monarchical structure, tribal rule and power vested in its leaders be they tribal, Ottoman Turk, or colonial impeded the transition into a fully democratic system. From a political perspective this was a recurrence of a historical norm. Islam did not play a role in this hinderance to democracy neither did the fact that the nation was Arab influenced. Clearly, when the opportunity for self-government surfaced, the roots of authoritarianism and the collectivist nature of the social structure produced a system akin to governments of the past, though the goal was democracy and modernity. Authoritarianism became the lasso around the political neck of the nation slowing its democratic progress. One can surmise, therefore, that the chains of authoritarianism are not simply a hinderance, but also an antithesis to democracy. Islam, as was explored previously, did not arise in the equation.

Tunisians desired a system which, as history had demonstrated, was adaptable; one that would be complementary to achieving their desired ends. As is customary (and was identified along the political arc) the governing methodologies of their occupiers were accepted and incorporated, in this instance the French system of government. Islam
was placed in a position which permitted the integrative mechanisms for self-governance as Tunisians sought to redefine their nation in the modern era. The question of rights had not been juxtaposed against the reality on the ground. This element of democracy would soon be tested.

Testing the Mechanisms of Democracy

Bourguiba governed Tunisia until 1987 and was ousted through a bloodless coup led by Zine al-Abdine Ben Ali. During the period preceding the coup, Tunisia experienced civil unrests. Bourguiba’s regime lost favor with citizens as social and economic tensions flared. From the late 1970s the region began experiencing growing social and economic tensions. Prior to this period the region functioned under relative peace. Democracy promotes as its pillars, justice, equality, open governance, and individual rights are ensconced within the decisions made as a society defines what is the common good. These elements were lacking within Bourguiba’s political system. The economic disparities in Tunisia were exacerbated by the topology and the history which this topology helped frame. It is imperative to remember that throughout history less educated Tunisian’s resided in the hinterland regions. As was previously discussed Arabs, during their forays into the region, established trade centers in convenient locations conducive to trade. These areas became the center of Tunisian trade and government. The progression of time compounded the issues caused by isolation or to some degree “neglect” of the hinterlands by the governing bodies. The hinterlands were less advantaged in education and economically. Geographical and economic distributions

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112 Willis, Politics and Power in the Maghreb, 95.
divided Tunisia into two parts, modern, developed and prosperous, and the other backward, conservative and impoverished: a coastline reflecting Western modernity, and a marginalized interior.\textsuperscript{113}

Neglect was not deliberate, but again a consequence of the geography/topology of the nation. By sheer topology one section of the population lagged in terms of economic advancement. As also noted previously, during the colonial period those closer to the seat of government received education and the benefits of earned wages (as administrators within the system). This led to a class system in Tunisia. During the period of Bourguiba’s rule over 30 percent of the population supported the government,\textsuperscript{114} however, as economic realities pressed upon the nation and compounded issues of daily life more Tunisians became disenfranchised. Authoritarian rule entrusted one man to make all decisions with no serious challenge to leadership. The president consulted but always took the final decision. As the highest organ of the party (Neo-Destour) the politbureau was formally selected by the Central Committee of the party; however, Bourguiba controlled this process and by 1970 directly appointed the politbureau himself.\textsuperscript{115} If a form of government is to cohere with the concept of right, it must include the representative system, which is possible only in a republican form of government without which (no matter what the constitution may be) government is despotic and brutish.\textsuperscript{116} Tunisians became disenfranchised and the first real fruits of democracy were


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{116} Immanuel Kant, \textit{Perpetual Peace}, 115.
seen in the uprisings which erupted. Tunisians were learning the first lesson in
democratic systems; governments are to be held accountable and citizens had the right to
object, revolt. The notion of rights had not yet been thoroughly tested by the system.

The idea of natural rights was fundamental to the Enlightenment period and the
French revolution. We explored earlier the ideas of Kant and Locke and their summation
of a civil society, what it entails and the responsibility of government to the people. The
issue of rights within Tunisia and the role of government was never thrust within the
spotlight in the democratic sense. Tunisia was governed by the French as a protectorate
and the idea of rights were not conveyed to the governed by the French. When in control
of one’s destiny these questions, innate to human nature, begin to percolate to the surface
in the natural course of man’s search for the ideals of the good life. What are rights and
why were Tunisian’s, originally content with Bourguiba’s regime, now sowing seeds of
discontent? Locke explains that though man is endowed with natural rights he
relinquishes some control as he enters a civil society. The incentive for participating in
the social contract is the understanding that his rights to pursue the good life as he
determines will be protected by the state. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern
it, which obliges everyone: and reason, which is that law teaches all mankind who will
consult it that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life,
health, liberty or possessions.117 Men have the right to decide what is best and will enter
into civil society to guarantee these rights are protected. The duty of the state is the
protection of individual rights. It the state fails then citizens become discontented.

Historians may rightfully refer to the social discontent during the period leading up to the

117 John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, 117.
coup as the catalyst which sparked the unrest, this is partially true. It was, however, the stagnant fruits of authoritarianism which fueled the resistance to the status quo. Ineffective government and decisions emanating from one source, Bourguiba; the inability to voice concerns about the direction of the nation; and the inability to access resources to achieve one's ends as desired. These were latent undercurrents, extracts from the fruits of authoritarianism. The people were not in control and wanted change. Democracy in its true sense was being earned.

Rights are important to democracy, one of the core principles of laicité espouses the rights of the individual. Natural rights erupted to the surface as Tunisia’s historical propensities (authoritarian style rule) collided with the reality and demands of the laicité system. If the government does not function to the benefit of society it should be replaced. However, the authoritarian propensity within Tunisia again overshadowed democratic convention. A change in leadership will not suffice if the processes that foster democracy, and the mechanisms for its engendered success are negated in the change process. The people’s voices were muted, their rights ignored as Ben Ali assumed power and became the leader of Tunisia. Leadership change, however, the grinding machine of authoritarianism remained. In a modern democratic society, the individual’s rights and the voice of the disadvantaged weigh equally via the vote. Lack of a vote equates to silence from the populace. Ben Ali would present an even greater conundrum, and the question of human rights would evolve.
Under Ben Ali’s regime the press was suppressed, banks were under state control, and though state assets were privatized a few elite prospered. Economic growth was not equally distributed. Ben Ali received funding and support from many of the major international aid organizations, yet the economic prosperity of Tunisia was stifled. Tunisia received external funding to implement financial sector reform, privatize state sector firms, and improve competitiveness of business oriented towards the domestic market. After a decade, however, Ben Ali had achieved superficial rather than fundamental economic reforms. The measures to attract foreign investments were also disappointing. The public-sector firms remained a prominent and revenue-draining component of the economy. Ben Ali’s wife and families dominated the commercial elite and benefitted disproportionately from the privatization of state assets. Ben Ali’s regime curtailed political and press freedoms, and harassed and jailed political opponents. Economic progress, political stability and French national interest were enough to ignore the lack of democratic political reforms, the censorship of the media and the problems of human rights. Basic rights, the right of a free press, free speech and the right to seek political representation were repressed by the regime. Tunisia’s democratic inheritance metamorphosed into what some labeled a totalitarian state. Tunisia has become a totalitarian state: the smallest criticism becomes an affair of the state, citizens live in fear of an arbitrary police and the deprivation of their passports.


Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other human rights organizations all criticized Tunisia’s record and commitment to human rights citing cases of torture, harassment of government, physical abuse of prisoners and severe restrictions on freedom of the press.\textsuperscript{121}

Human rights violations placed citizens at odds with government. If Tunisia was a democracy, if the ideals of freedom were by right that of the citizens, then what was this new system, and did Tunisians ascribe to it? These questions are not necessarily asked in the open, but rationale beings as Kant labels us all, will reason. All men seek to attain the good life, it is our right by nature to work towards that end. Impediments to achieving the desired life, whether of our own volition or forces beyond our control, can cause man to seek redress. Why can’t I be free like other men to work, eat, travel, secure an education? If Kant’s rational beings identify the instrument of hinderance within a civil society (as a group) a new government may be elected reflective of the people’s will. In an authoritarian system there is no redress or recourse. Power is vested in one and a chosen few. The populace with the least power is ultimately rendered voiceless. This was the situation in Tunisia. Economic policies and state control of resources dissuaded investment and innovation, and fueled unemployment. Gana, in outlining the ills which plagued Tunisia under the regime, highlighted the effects of unemployment. These effects were compounded in the economically deprived areas.

The public sector which traditionally employed young graduates was under fiscal pressure and an accelerated privatization program was reducing job opportunities further. Unemployment was officially recognized as having reached 14.2 percent in 2008, with the greatest burden falling on young people and new graduates. Furthermore, unemployment was heavily concentrated in the geographic regions, In the

\textsuperscript{121} Pia Christina Wood, \textit{French Foreign Policy}, 99.
main towns of the Gafsa Mining Basin Area unemployment in 2007 officially stood at 38.5 percent. What new jobs were created were heavily concentrated in the coastal cities, leaving rural and inland areas behind in the distribution of development benefits.\textsuperscript{122}

Repeatedly, throughout Tunisia’s history the people of the hinterland have been marginalized. This marginalization compounded the issues of poverty. In addition, working class youth could not secure employment which was usually available within government sectors. As the Muslim Brotherhood attracted young students in North Africa during the rise of nationalism in the 1930s with the aim of addressing social inequalities, ISIS began recruiting the youth of Tunisia with similar promises. Ben Ali’s system of repression, superimposed on the stifled values of laïcité would encounter democracy’s most powerful pillar; the will of the people. One can surmise, therefore, that discontent with the regime was widespread and those who bore the colossal burdens of failed government policy were the disadvantaged citizens of the interior. Their limited access and resources were negatively impacted by the social and economic realities in Tunisia, their positions throughout history had placed them at a disadvantage. The poor in Tunisia felt the brunt of failed economic policies, and the blight of inequality within the authoritarian regime. The ideals of a good life, and pursing just ends to achieve the desired outcomes, became almost impossible for the poor to attain under the current political system. Democracy was about equality and the basic rights of the individual. The system lacked the will to guarantee these rights. The state again failed in its duties to citizens.

\textsuperscript{122} Nouri Gana, \textit{The Making of the Tunisian Revolution} (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 43-44.
One of the most powerful revolutionary acts which defied Tunisia’s power structure, and concurrently summoned an awakening of the will of the people, transpired in December of 2011. Mohammad Bouazizi was an unlicensed vendor whose cart was confiscated by a municipal officer. One day’s earnings was imposed as a fine for the return of his cart. Mohammad was the breadwinner in his family and from the steppe country (economically disadvantaged interior). Attempting to pay the fine he was slapped, spat on and insulted by the municipal officer. His attempt to seek redress was rejected. The government systems failed him, there was no avenue for redress, his rights as an agent within the state were conditional upon his economic status. Democracy resides in the will of the agent, and free will as Kant explained is the imbued right of each man. Bouazizi returned to the headquarters and self-immolated. Self-immolation was the only expression of free will, the only power or control the agent believed could be utilized to voice discontent, a final vote against the system. The act was in defiance of the oppressive regime and the denial of his basic rights, and the refusal of the state to perform its basic duty; protect the rights of the individual. What man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty and the absolute right to anything that tempts him; what he gains by the social contract is civil liberty and the legal right of the property in what he possesses.123

Democracy gives rise to the free will for expression. Tunisia’s authoritarian regime muted the voices of the people there was no vote, no avenue for addressing injustices inflicted on an individual by the state. Seeking redress through official mechanisms sworn to protect the rights of citizens equally failed because allegiance was

given to the leader within the system, Ben Ali and his regime. Citizens for the most part were powerless as Ben Ali’s government directly or indirectly stripped them of their political power. The agent, however, based on Kantian philosophy maintains power over his life via his will. The right to decide the good resided within the agent, Bouazizi, and standing before the instruments sworn to protect the rights of citizens he demonstrated the failure of the government to recognize and uphold basic human rights. In addition, Bouazizi signaled to fellow citizens that failure to act, complacency via fear of losing ones’ life, equates to compliance. He would no longer be a part of the system, and at the cost of the sacredness of life would freely choose his own fate.

Tunisians, discontented with the regime and the system of government identified with Bouazizi. Mohammad Bouazizi was a fellow citizen, oppressed or deprived by the policies and actions of the regime, and for varied reasons they (fellow citizens) were Bouazizi. His actions signaled that power was derived from action, and action stemmed from the will to be free, to be recognized as an agent with rights, and to be treated with the dignity afforded to man. The general will alone can direct the forces of the state in accordance with that end which the state has been established to achieve – the common good. Tunisia’s authoritarian regime collided with a key mechanism of democracy, the awakened free will of the people. Frenchmen would no longer accept the burden of taxes and tyranny of the church, serfs would no longer serve a master, Separatists would no longer be persecuted for their faith, and Tunisians would no longer be governed by and or ascribe to authoritarian rule; democracy materializes in varied forms (all were acting democratically). Tunisians, especially the youth, came to the realization that to be free

and to uphold ideals aligned with their dignity and conception of the good life, Ben Ali and the regime had to be challenged and overthrown. This culminated in dissolution of one social contract and signaled the beginning of another. The will of the people would define a new Tunisia. The Jasmine revolution erupted in Tunisia, and ten days after Bouazizi’s death Ben Ali’s regime was dismantled and his 24-year authoritarian rule ended. The actions of Mohammad Bouazizi, a product of historical neglect as a consequence of the nations topology, sparked the largest uprising in the Arab world (the Arab Spring) and authoritarian regimes across the Middle East were confronted with the battering ram of democracy.

In 2014 Tunisia ratified a new constitution which maintained that Tunisia is an Islamic State not incompatible with democracy. Tunisia emerged with a new social contract. Social contracts may take years to codify but are usually dismantled with blood when the body politic demands a new ideal. Historical disenfranchisement sparked a revolution, changed a nation, and brought democracy to the people. The hinderance to democracy was not Islam. Obstruction came in the form of the authoritarian state and the values which it promulgated. Authoritarian values within Tunisia were the antithesis to democracy. Authoritarianism can be the greatest hinderance to democracy because the will of the people is subject to the dictates of one “Benevolent King.” Tunisia possesses unique factors which fostered the political outcomes noticeable today.

Ranked 69th on the Democracy Index (a flawed democracy) there is work to be done. The nation, however, strives towards a system more reflective of the democratic ideals of the people. Breaking the chains of authoritarianism, Tunisians demonstrated once again that their homogeneity is their greatest strength. During the Jasmine
Revolution, the military did not violently en masse confront demonstrators, and consequently the transition was accomplished with minimal bloodshed. This is atypical during revolutions. The reality for other Arab nations where citizens confronted authoritarian regimes (as a consequence of the Jasmine Revolution) is grim. Tunisia has become an example of how democracy can flourish, and a lesson to the colonial powers that the pillars of democracy and appreciation of these pillars is derived through struggle and loss. Power and freedom must sometimes be lost to be fully appreciated. Time, social conventions, geography, political propensities and many nuanced particularities have created in Tunisia a nation amenable to change and suited for the democratic experiment. Democracy is a fluid concept, and Tunisia has upon a collectivist structure, on the pylons of an Islamic State, beset with historical penchants for authoritarian style leadership, erected the cornerstones for a new democracy. Islam is not the incompatibility factor; authoritarianism and its values pose significant resistance to democracy and its accompanying ideals.
Chapter VIII.
Summary and Conclusion

This work has explored Tunisia with an abstract lens. The approach was simple; trace the evolution of the region and its people along its social, religious, political and cultural arc; identify and isolate the key markers which have acted as moderators on each of the above trajectories; and determine via analysis of historical realities the impact of these markers on the implementation of democracy within the modern state of Tunisia. The concept of a modern democratic Islamic State has been debated in the West with many Western governments sounding the alarm that Islam is not compatible with democracy. The rise of nationalism in the U.S. and Europe has also fueled the debate. Islam’s values, many believe, are diametrically opposed to the values ensconced within the West's individualistic Judeo-Christian way of life. On the political front, these ideas have translated into votes at the ballot boxes as many citizens troubled by images of Islamic extremism have sided with the current zeitgeist and anti-Islamic sentiment in their nations.

Tunisia is, however, a democratic Islamic nation. What were the contributors to democracy’s root in Tunisia and was democracy an anomalous occurrence? Within the nation’s constitution Islam is recognized as the state’s religion. Was Islam a hindrance to democracy, and are its values diametrically opposed to Western values as we are led to believe? If alignment could be drawn between the fundamental beliefs (Christianity and Islam), then the parallels could possibly debunk the incompatibility argument. In Chapter One, we discovered the historical influences which were foundational to the Maghrebi
region and these determined the social, religious, political and economic structures that later developed into modern Tunisia. The political arrangement built on collectivist social structures, tribal and monarchical arrangements became entrenched early within Tunisia’s culture. Differences and geography presented an exclusive opportunity for emergence of a homogeneous group embracing one Maghrebi identity. The Western societal arrangements differ from that of the Maghrebi region. The Western platform sprouts from an individualistic root as opposed to the collectivist nature of the Maghrebi region. Isolating differences presented future possibilities for alignment. Though Islam remained central to Tunisia throughout its history, the West extrapolated religion from its core substituting it with Kant’s individual (the rational free agent).

Tunisia’s uniqueness, it was discovered, is ensconced within its penchant to absorb new, innovative ideas, and the people’s ability to adapt religiously, socially and politically to change. This quintessential difference has paved the way for political experimentation. An examination of democracy presented the case that democracies are not uniformed, but created from varied historical realities and experiences of the agents. The United States and France were the prime examples of democracies expressed differently in various systems, as a consequence of their specific historical realities. If democracies are pliable, it stands to reason that any region can adapt the concept within their social and political paradigm. In Chapter Three, the exploration of Tunisia’s political heritage isolated significant events, the willingness of Ahmad Bey to explore European political ideas imported from Europe, the gradual placement of Islam not as a geopolitical construct but as a part of national identity distinct from the business of government. Islam’s importance was not diminished. Ahmad Bey’s actions may be one
of the most important moderating variables on Tunisia’s political arc. The nation became familiar with European governance and commerce as the exchange of goods and ideas flooded into the region, and therefore transitioning to French rule did not necessarily destabilize the nation. Tunisia was familiar, within its own political arrangement, with the ideas of modernity and integrating new ideas within the society. Along the historical arc, the continuous isolation of the hinterland emerges as a dynamic which created two regions within the nation, a modern and economically prosperous and a poor region. This dynamic would stimulate political nuances and realign the nation’s political trajectory.

Prior to exploring the idea of Islam and its compatibility with the West the study deconstructs the Western model of society, the Tunisian model of society, and introduced alignment via a new model. These models were created to illustrate the differences fundamentally ingrained within each system (the West and Tunisia), the third model, however, illustrates a new way of analyzing these two societies. The core belief, what is central to each region in terms of societal structure, is aligned without a direct value added. What emerged is a model of compatibility allowing each society to define their nucleus as they deem appropriate (their ideals of the common good). We omitted naming the nucleus of each societal model (individual or Islam) and presented the idea that alignment is only achieved when each nation or region chooses what its core belief should be. Tunisia, though Islam is not largely present in governing structures, recognizes Islam as central to society, and the West the individual. The conflict is avoided as the value remains unnamed in the model but universally is identified as a core belief. Tunisia emerges within this model as a nation erected on collectivism with beliefs central to
Islam, one seeking democratic ideals. The nation is no longer judged solely on religion. Both societies embrace their ideas. Alignment in the models was then achieved.

The hinderance to democracy in the Middle East is believed by many to be Islam. To effectively counter that argument an abstract review of Islam and Christianity demonstrated their alignment in mores and values. These belief systems were indeed aligned. It was surmised that subjectivity, man’s interpretation of religious dogma, contributed to the contradictions between religions. If explored at face value and objectively analyzed there exists uncanny alignment in the demands placed on believers of both faiths. Islam and Christianity align in terms of fundamental values. If not Islam, what was the hinderance to democracy? Tunisia demonstrated that unique factors, historically derived, culminated into favorable conditions and a political platform upon which the democratic experiment would find success. However, one political tradition stagnated the progress to democratic governance - authoritarianism. Along Tunisia’s historical trajectory, with many factors contributing to the political and social identity of the people, authoritarianism emerged as the arrangement likely to derail the progress of the nation. This form of government was a byproduct of the political heritage of Tunisia. Democracy, it was discovered, could not operate under an authoritarian regime.

The values of democracy individual rights, an open and free press, government of the people with the separation of powers, these are not possible within authoritarian systems and therefore, democracy becomes stagnant. Islam disappears from the equation. Islam in Tunisia was not the issue. After the overthrow of Ben Ali’s authoritarian regime, Islam today has maintained its role as an essential part of the nation’s culture and identity. The study found alignment along religious lines and the models of societies
(though differences exist). No compatibility exists between authoritarianism and democracy, these systems are diametrically opposed. The dissonance returned as the two systems clashed resulted in a revolution. Democracy today exists in the Maghreb regardless of Islam, the Islamic state of Tunisia, and a collectivist approach to society. Democracy exists because the chains of authoritarianism which suppress individuality, creativity, and innovation, disregarding the rights of citizens and the duties of the state have been broken. Authoritarianism and democracy are incompatible. The Jasmine Revolution proves that Tunisia is not an anomaly, democracy is possible in Islamic states. Democracy can thrive in the Middle East, and time is the element required for change. Maya Angelou in, *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, encapsulates the entrapment within systems where freedom to live the good life desired is stifled and rights trampled.

A free bird leaps on the back  
Of the wind and floats downstream  
Till the current ends and dips his wing  
In the orange suns rays  
And dares to claim the sky.

But a BIRD that stalks down his narrow cage  
Can seldom see through his bars of rage  
His wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
So he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill  
Of things unknown but longed for still  
And his tune is heard on the distant hill for  
The caged bird sings of freedom . . . .125

Tunisia has proven that Islam is compatible with democracy and a replicable model exists.

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