

CIVIL SOCIETY AS DOMESTICATION: EGYPTIAN AND TUNISIAN UPRISINGS BEYOND LIBERAL TRANSITOLOGY

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Recent debates on societal transitions to democracy have focused their attention on the notion of “civil society,” putting great hope in its democratizing effects. This essay re-examines the notion’s utility in the context of the post-2011 Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. It argues that at least in its conceptualization along the lines of the “transition paradigm,” the civil society framework is unable to capture the complex catalysts of the non-teleological, open-ended uprisings in North Africa. Not only does it largely ignore the importance of socioeconomic forces as well as the non-institutionalized, spontaneous forms of organization present in these democratization processes; the analytical failure of the civil society framework also takes up a transformative power in and of itself, structuring the empirical realities that it claims to describe. The concept of civil society therefore fails to accurately represent the dynamics at play in Tunisia and Egypt, and has negatively shaped them with respect to the outcomes of revolutionary contestation. “Civil society” has integrated an open and contingent arena into the closed structures of reproduced sovereign statehood. Rather than unleashing democratic energies in Tunisia and Egypt, it has sometimes even reinforced the very power structures it allegedly set out to challenge. Borrowing from the work of Hannah Arendt on revolution and Giorgio Agamben on the notion of “destituent power,” this essay argues for a conceptual opening in our analytical framework that corresponds to the radical contingency that lies at the heart of any revolutionary process.

The Arab Spring uprisings have shaken North Africa and the Middle East since 2011 and spurred a political transformation that has drawn widespread international attention.¹ A region previously considered to be forever stuck in a culture of predetermined “Arab exceptionalism,” untouched by the third wave of democratization, was suddenly taking the front stage in international debates on democracy.² Following a well-developed liberal tradition of scholarship on transitions to democracy, the Arab uprisings have been framed using theories previously applied outside the region. In this vein of thought, Western commentators have

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frequently stressed the role of civil society in the 2011 “democratic transitions” of countries from Tunisia to Yemen. The mantra of Western analyses of these uprisings has been that democracy in the Middle East is dependent upon a strong civil society as a precondition to democratization. Diverse international stakeholders, including American researchers Larry Diamond and Augustus Richard Norton, then-secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Egyptian social media entrepreneur Wael

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Ghonim, and the Ennahda intellectual Rashid al-Ghannoushi have all praised civil society for its role in democratization across the Arab world.³

To what extent does the widespread laudation for civil society really capture the dynamics of democratization in the region? This essay will use the cases of Tunisia and Egypt to argue for a critical reexamination of the concept of civil society, which, under closer scrutiny, is revealed to be an imposingly normative term and an analytical tool of only limited value. In analyzing the framework of “civil society” as it is applied to the multifaceted catalysts of the Arab Spring uprisings, the essay demonstrates that civil society, at least as it is traditionally conceptualized in contemporary social sciences, has not significantly contributed to the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt,

and, at times, even posed an obstacle to grassroots emancipatory struggles in the two countries.⁴ Moreover, the discursive lens of civil society has taken up a transformative power in and of itself, negatively shaping the outcomes of revolutionary contestations. In his lecture on the concept of “destituent power,” Giorgio Agamben argues, “A power that was only just overthrown by violence will rise again in another form, in the incessant, inevitable dialectic between constituent and constituted power.”⁵ In the post-2011 democratization processes, civil society has been integrated into this dialectic of a post-revolutionary reproduction of sovereignty.⁶ In order to avoid such attempts at domesticating open practices within the pre-determined frame of a liberal democratic state, the essay concludes with a consideration of the concept of “destituent power” as a way to escape the theoretical and political pitfalls that civil society mantras have produced in Tunisia and Egypt. It points to a conceptual opening in our analytical framework, which corresponds to the contingency at the heart of any revolutionary process.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS IN THE ARAB WORLD

Theories of transitions to democracy have commonly claimed that civil society plays a central role in democratization processes. According to O'Donnell and Schmitter, a transition is

The interval between one political regime and another. [...] Transitions are delimited, on one end, by the launching of the process of dissolution of an authoritarian regime, and on the other, by the installation of some form of democracy, the return to some form of authoritarian rule, or the emergence of a revolutionary alternative.⁷

Based on this definition, the two authors have theorized the “resurrection of civil society,” which, they claim, follows an initial opening due to a shift in a regime’s elite configuration, triggering a wider trend of democratization.⁸ Similarly, Linz and Stepan argue that “at all stages of the democratization process [...] a lively and independent civil society is invaluable.”⁹ Putnam seems to agree when he asserts that “social capital makes us [...] better able to govern a just and stable democracy.”¹⁰

Putnam’s view that theories of civil society and democratization have “properly focused attention on the need to foster a vibrant civic life in soils traditionally inhospitable to self-government,” which he would consider to include former authoritarian governments in North Africa and the Middle East, is also reflected in Western foreign aid policy and NGO practices in these regions.¹¹ From this point of view, civil society is distinguished from “political society,” comprising parties and political organizations directed towards the acquisition or influencing of state power, and “economic society,” including organizations of production and distribution.¹² Consequently, Cohen and Arato argue that “civil society refers to the structures of socialization, association, and organized forms of communication of the lifeworld to the extent that these are institutionalized or are in the process of being institutionalized.”¹³

This rigid conceptualization of civil society has been rightly exposed to criticism in the context of the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings. First, the concept has risen to prominence in the wake of Eastern European and Latin American “third wave” democratic transitions, and its prescriptive application to the Arab world carries heavy connotations of an occidental worldview imposing itself.¹⁴ The multiplicity of North African and Middle Eastern social practices and institutions is thereby normatively measured against the image of a “western civil society where well-informed citizens debate the important questions of politics and the good life without fear or favor, in contrast to the limited democracies, authori-

tarian systems, and general illiberalism.”¹⁵ Second, and rather consequently, a neo-Kantian concept of civil society can be seen as unable to capture the complex dynamics at play in Arabic politics of contestation. To what extent can NGOs, for instance, really be seen as “non-governmental?”¹⁶ Do the so-called civil society organizations actually escape the economic forces at play, as their conceptualization would imply? Furthermore, does the reality of a wide overlap between Islamic community organization and political party mobilization present at the grassroots level of the Tunisian Ennahda Party and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood allow for the clear-cut distinction between political and civil society, which the theory posits? The cases of Tunisia and Egypt provide evidence of civil society’s conceptual friability when applied to the tangled realities of sociopolitical systems in the Arab world.¹⁷

Lastly, the civil society framework does not merely suffer from imprecision, failing to capture the complex local dynamics of collective action; it also actively shapes and limits them to the disadvantage of potential revolutionary outcomes. Local knowledge and practices cannot be “assimilated into an administrative grid without being either transformed or reduced to a convenient, if partly fictional, shorthand [such as ‘civil society’].”¹⁸ James C. Scott aptly refers to such transformations of reality as a result of analytical categories as “legibility effects.” “Backed by state power through records, courts, and ultimately coercion, these state fictions transformed the reality they presumed to observe, although never so thoroughly as to precisely fit the grid.”¹⁹ These legibility effects have been at play at all stages of the Arab Spring as it unfolded in Tunisia and Egypt, and further preclude the civil society framework from living up to its promise of democratization. Rather than unleashing democratic energy, civil society has mostly stood for an attempt at the domestication of collective action in the interest of established power structures. If we measure the post-2011 uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East against their four most widely shared goals—bread, freedom, dignity, and social justice (in Arabic: *e’ish*, *horreya*, *karama*, *a’adala’h ijtima’iya*)—perspectives for their success will lie beyond civil society.²⁰

THE CASE OF TUNISIA: A DOMESTICATED REVOLUTION

The Tunisian case of democratic transition has been widely treated by Western researchers and media as the success story among the post-2011 uprisings.²¹ It seems to conform most closely to the trajectory theorized as the “transition paradigm,” figuring an apparently clear starting point (Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation on 17 December 2010); followed by mass mobilizations; shifts among moderates and hardliners within the regime (around 20 December of the same year); the dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali leaving the country (13 January 2011);

elections for the constituent assembly (23 October 2011); and, finally, the passing of a liberal constitution (26 January 2014).²² Many international stakeholders have attributed this “success” to the unique ways in which civil society institutions have been integrated into the national transition framework.²³ This integration has functioned primarily through the Higher Commission for the Achievement of the Objectives of the Revolution, of Political Reform, and the Transition to Democracy, under the leadership of the secular intellectual Yadh Ben Achour.²⁴ This advisory body, which was largely responsible for the organization of elections and proposals for the constitution, together with the “national dialogue,” including the country’s main union, the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT), the business organization Union Tunisienne de l’Industrie du Commerce et de l’Artisanat, the Human Rights League of Tunisia, and the Lawyers’ Association, has been credited with keeping the goals and achievements of the revolution in line with the liberal “road map.”²⁵

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Despite the prevalent triumphalism about the Tunisian “success,” it is important to draw attention to the origins of the uprising and evaluate the involvement of civil society in this light. Beinun and Vairel stress that, in the Tunisian context, the revolutionary spark did not come from an awakening of civil society that demanded public political participation. Instead, it was a revolt led by the “left behinds” of a development model that favors the northern parts of the country” galvanized by “a growing imbalance in the job market between the high demand for unskilled jobs in the textile and tourism sectors and the increasing supply of high school and university graduates.”²⁶ The origins of the Tunisian democratization, which started in December 2010, are located in a complex interplay between, on the one hand, socioeconomic grievances such as inequality, unemployment, and rising food prices, and on the other hand, the political marginalization of large parts of the population. While the Tunisian uprising’s trajectory did not follow a teleological accumulation of instances of activism, it is important to note that a similarly explosive mixture of problems had already resulted in the 2008 protests in the Gafsa mining district.²⁷ During the Gafsa revolt, however, the UGTT, which today is a central rallying point of secular civil society forces, was one of the targets, not the channel, of popular outrage.²⁸

Although the UGTT and other civil society associations certainly deserve recognition for providing a secular counter-weight to an otherwise dominant political

Islam, their role has been largely reactive to the ephemeral grassroots organizations, which culminated in the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime. It therefore comes as little surprise that the civil society-driven Tunisian transition framework, which shaped the conditions for compromise and moderation, has so far failed to live up to the demands for social justice at the center of the 2010 to 2011 uprising. The UGTT has undergone a metamorphosis, from a state-backed union loyal to the Ben

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Ali regime to a civil society force for democratization. However, it still remains hesitant when it comes to more radical demands for immediate socioeconomic change, instead backing the provisional government's more restrained trajectory to liberal democracy.²⁹

In this respect, the UGTT and other civil society organizations have become part of a post-revolution political body that mimics a revolutionary force, but in reality serves as an extension of, rather than a challenge to, established power. During the early phase of the

uprising, Tunisia witnessed an open and "living social flesh that is not a body;" that is to say non-institutionalized, spontaneous forms of grassroots organization beyond pre-existing structures. The civil society framework has served to domesticate these forces within a closed body, limiting the emancipatory potential visible at the origins of the Tunisian uprising.³⁰ Béatrice Hibou has used a Foucauldian framework to theorize the Ben Ali regime as a "society of control," featuring "normalized power" and "insidious mechanisms" of control diffused throughout society where one would expect the centralized power of an autocrat.³¹ It seems that as the transitioning Tunisian state has attempted to integrate civil society associations, the diffused loci of power, which Hibou describes, have effectively not been contested, but glossed over as a "legibility effect" of liberal statehood. The focus on civil society has drained the energy from the revolutionary grassroots, while the socioeconomic situation has remained largely unchanged.

THE CASE OF EGYPT: CIVIL SOCIETY AS A FRIABLE CONSTRUCTION

The Egyptian case similarly draws attention to what Heydemann calls "politics under the threshold," as it significantly challenges unequivocal praise for the role of civil society in democratization processes.³² Without denying the specificities of its political economy, assertions somewhat similar to the Tunisian case could be made when it comes to the root causes of the 2011 uprising in Egypt. Roccu con-

vincingly argues that the Egyptian uprising was the product of the “discontented” and the “dispossessed.”³³ While the Mubarak regime had allowed greater liberty to apolitical civil society associations as part of an economic opening (*infitah* or “new thinking,” as Gamal Mubarak puts it), this step towards reform served, in fact, to stabilize the autocratic regime’s power through what Allal has referred to as “participative authoritarianism.”³⁴ It is particularly noteworthy that American foreign policy gave financial support to both the Egyptian army and a variety of associations tolerated by the regime.³⁵


While the initial uprising was primarily driven by groups excluded from the official civil society frame, such as the Tamarod (Rebel) network, these originally “informal and voluntary” groups gradually re-worked their organizational structure based on the institutional techniques of civil society, which Scott and Hibou define as techniques of social control.³⁶ These techniques immediately slowed down the revolutionary trajectory. As El-Meehy notes, “Committees were everywhere in villages and cities. They became the heartbeat of Egyptian society.”³⁷ But similar to the Tunisian integration of civil society voices, what first appears as an empowerment of egalitarian participation ultimately reveals itself as a “top-down process designed to ‘maintain social peace.’” The system of socioeconomic and political marginalization, which the uprising set out to challenge, is instead strengthened. For example, the newly created rural committees reinforced local hierarchies from the Mubarak era and excluded women and the poor.³⁸

Moreover, the fact that many aspects of associational life in Egypt are controlled or influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood presents another insurmountable obstacle for civil society’s efforts to make progress on democratization in Egypt. These multifaceted forms of collective organization would not be included in the dominant definition of civil society as distinct from political society. Consequently, what has been labeled as “civil society” in Egypt seems to approach what Karl Marx understood by the term, namely the “bourgeois society” (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), which undercuts more substantive democracy as it strengthens elitist imposition.³⁹ This became most evident when so-called “civil society leaders” supported the military coup of July 2013, which ousted the democratically elected president Mohamed Morsi, preferring a return to a Mubarak-era status quo of extensive military power, rather than an insecure path under the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁰ The case of Egypt has therefore shown the two-sided friability of the civil society framework, both misrepresenting a complex reality and, in an actively coercive manner, shaping the object it claims to conceptualize. In contrast to the Tunisian case, its participants have reverted to open support for structures from the dictatorship era, failing to participate in the making of a liberal post-revolutionary state. What appears similar, however, is the incapacity of civil

society to address socioeconomic grievances, which inspired the Egyptian as much as the Tunisian uprising.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, civil society does not appear to be living up to the praise it has received as a driving force for the democratization of the Arab world in the wake of the 2011 uprisings. In contrast, as the cases of Tunisia and Egypt suggest, its conceptual frame is theoretically imprecise when applied to the complex realities on the ground, and this imprecision acquires a coercive power, negatively affecting the prospects of substantial democracy in the region. As opposed to the disciplining power of civil society, the future of successful democratic transitions might lie in what Hardt calls an “alternative community of social practices (call it, perhaps, the self-organization of concrete labor).”⁴¹ This is what Agamben has in mind when he argues that freedom is effectively reclaimed through “destituent power”—opposing the constituting effect of a political body, which reins in on the “living flesh” of social realities. “It means first of all the rediscovery of a form-of-life, the access to a new figure of that political life whose memory the Security State tries at any price to cancel.”⁴² Agamben’s vision of such a destituent power, which can never find its embodiment within state sovereignty, echoes Hannah Arendt’s writing on spontaneous revolutionary councils as radical instances of the political beyond an institutionalized and co-opted civil society.⁴³ Only through such a radically open conceptualization of democratization could the Arab uprisings accomplish their goals of socioeconomic change, instead of simply implementing an institutional frame that is nominally democratic but not fit to respond to the demands that lie at the heart of the Arab Spring.

The civil society framework, rather than empowering new forms of democratic practices, has primarily condensed multifaceted socio-political relationships, making them legible from a perspective of governance. What has been praised by the theorists of liberal transitology to be one of the crucial factors of successful transitions to democracy turns out to be of very limited utility if applied to the complex and diverse cases represented by the Arab Spring uprisings. A social science analysis of contemporary revolutions needs to turn the mirror on itself and commit to categories that are aimed at the understanding of complex and open realities, rather than participating in the active domestication of ongoing processes through the invocation of a fictional framework. 

NOTES

¹ Rashid Khalidi, “The Arab Spring,” *The Nation*, 3 March 2011, <http://www.thenation.com/article/158991/arab-spring>.

² Sanford A. Lakoff, “The Reality of Muslim Exceptionalism,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 4 (October 2004); Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner, *Democratization and Authoritarianism in the Arab World: A Journal of Democracy Book* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), ix; Samuel P. Huntington, “Democracy’s Third Wave,” *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1991).

³ Jason Willam Boose, “Democratization and Civil Society: Libya, Tunisia, and the Arab World,” *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 2, no. 4 (2012) 310–315; “The point has now become so much of a cliché in the literature that it is repeated almost as a mantra—by government agencies, funding institutions, project consultants, experts, and activists. Most statements on this point end up by merely repeating the new liberal dogma: ‘participation of civil society through NGOs.’ Participation, however, has one meaning when it is seen from the standpoint of those who govern, i.e., as a category of governance. It will have a very different meaning when seen from the position of the governed, i.e., as a practice of democracy.” Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 69; Larry Diamond, “A Fourth Wave or False Start? Democracy After the Arab Spring,” *Foreign Affairs*, 22 May 2011; Richard Augustus Norton, ed., *Civil Society in the Middle East* (New York: Brill Academic Publications, 2005); Kim Ghattas, *The Secretary: A Journey with Hillary Clinton from Beirut to the Heart of American Power* (New York: MacMillan, 2014), 320; Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater Than the People in Power: A Memoir* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 44–45; John Keane, *Old Images, New Visions* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1998), 2–31.

⁴ I.e., in the diverging, yet complementary visions of “civil society” in liberal transitology (O’Donnell, Stepan, Linz, Huntington et al., i.e., authors of the *Journal of Democracy*) and neo-Kantian political theory (Habermas).

⁵ Giorgio Agamben, “What is a Destituent Power?,” trans., Stephanie Wakefield, *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 32 (2014), 65–74.

⁶ Claude Lefort speaks of the “embodiment model of representation,” in Claude Lefort, “Permanence du Théologico-politique,” in *Essais sur le Politique* (Paris, France: du Seuil, 1986). For the critique of this theologically charged model of absolute sovereignty as located in the constituent power and then “embodied” in the constituted power (the state), as first theorized by Sieyès in the French Revolution, see also: Seyla Benhabib, Roy T. Tsao, and Peter Verovsek, eds., *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 140.

⁷ Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁹ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, “Toward Consolidated Democracy,” *Debates on Democracy*, ed. Larry Diamond (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 7.

¹⁰ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 290.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77; Amy Hawthorne, “Middle Eastern Democracy: Is Civil Society the Answer?” (Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC: March 2004), 44.

¹² Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), ix–xi.

¹³ Cohen and Arato, ix.

¹⁴ On examples in Latin America, including Brazil and Argentina, see Feinberg, Richard et al. *Civil Society and Democracy in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). For examples in Eastern Europe, such as Poland and the Czech Republic, see Graeme Gill, *Democracy and Post-Communism: Political Change in the Post-Communist World* (London, UK: Routledge, 2002), Chapter 4; John J. Patrick, “Civil Society in Democracy’s Third Wave: Implications for Civic Education,” *Viewpoints* 120 (September 1996).

¹⁵ Bruce Cumings, *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 97. This criticism of “civil society” is originally developed by Cumings in the context of East Asia but is effectively applied to a discussion of civil society in the Arab world by Joel Beinin, and Frédéric Vairel, eds., *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

¹⁶ This question would open up a wider problematization of what is considered to be “the state:” a

well-defined institution with a discrete set of characteristics or a set of practices, which potentially escapes an essentialized definition? The very idea of a “civil society” along Habermasian lines, i.e. as encompassing “non-governmental [...] connections,” seems to rest on the state’s conceptualization as a closed entity against which civil society is posited.

¹⁷ The French researcher Michel Camau speaks of “actually existing civil societies,” which escape the model and contradict any teleological narrative of democratization processes. Michel Camau, “Sociétés civiles ‘réelles’ et téléologie de la démocratisation,” *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée* 2, no. 9 (2002) 213–232.

¹⁸ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sarah Mousa, “Democracy versus Tahrir,” *Al Jazeera English*, 23 June 2012. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/06/2012622122653356816.html>.

²¹ Michel Petrou, “Tunisia is Becoming the Lone Arab Spring Success Story,” *MacLean’s Magazine*, 24 February 2014, <http://www.macleans.ca/authors/michael-petrou/tunisia-is-becoming-the-lone-arab-spring-success-story/>.

²² For the transition paradigm, see O’Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, 6; a comprehensive timeline of the Tunisian revolution can be found in Emma C. Murphy, “The Tunisian elections of October 2011: a Democratic Consensus,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 18, no. 2 (2013), 231–247.

²³ Ibid, 243.

²⁴ Francis Ghilès, “Democracy in Tunisia could Rewrite the History of the Mediterranean,” *Mediterráneo y Oriente Medio*, 21 January 2011.

²⁵ Mohammed Salah Omri, “The Tunisian Constitution: The Process and the Outcome,” *Jadaliyya*, 12 February 2014, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/16416/the-tunisian-constitution_the-process-and-the-outc. The role of international NGOs has been equally stabilizing for the updated power framework that has emerged in the wake of the 2010 to 2011 uprisings. Unfortunately, this essay does not provide the room to discuss the international linkage of NGOs in Tunisia and Egypt. Nevertheless, empirical evidence from both countries seems to confirm Hardt and Negri’s assertion that “NGOs [...] present the ‘community face’ of neoliberalism,” thereby offering only very limited contestational potential (if any). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 313.

²⁶ Benein and Vairel (2011), 238.

²⁷ Asya El-Meehy, “Relative Deprivation and Politics in the Arab Uprisings: Social Justice and Development Policy in the Arab World” (Research Report, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon: May 2014), 5; Amin Allal, “‘Ici, si ça ne ‘bouge’ pas, ça n’avance pas!’ Les Mobilisations Protestataires de l’année 2008 dans la Région Minière de Gafsa. Réformes néo-libérales, Clientélismes et Contestation,” in Myriam Catusse, Blandine Destremau and Eric Verdier, eds., *L’état Face aux Débordements du Social au Maghreb: Formation, Travail et Protection* (Paris: Karthala, 2010).

²⁸ Amin Allal, “Trajectoires ‘Révolutionnaires’ en Tunisie: Processus de Radicalisations Politiques 2007–2011,” *Revue Française de Science Politique* 5, no. 62 (2012), 825.

²⁹ Chirs Toensing, “Tunisian Labor Leaders Reflect Upon Revolt,” *Middle East Report* (25 March 2011), 258, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer258/tunisian-labor-leaders-reflect-upon-revolt-0>.

³⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 192.

³¹ Béatrice Hibou, *La Force de l’obéissance: Économie Politique de la Répression en Tunisie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), Conclusion.

³² Bein in and Vairel (2011), 18.

³³ Roberto Roccu, “David Harvey in Tahrir Square: the Dispossessed, the Discontented and the Egyptian Revolution,” *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2013), 423–424.

³⁴ Gerasimos Tsourapas, “The Other Side of a Neoliberal Miracle: Economic Reform and Political De-Liberalization in Ben Ali’s Tunisia,” *Mediterranean Politics* 18, no. 1 (March 2013), 23–41; Stephan Roll, “Gamal Mubarak and the Discord in Egypt’s Ruling Elite,” *Sada* (1 September 2010), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/09/01/gamal-mubarak-and-discord-in-egypt-s-ruling-elite/6bcv>; Amin Allal,

“L'autoritarisme Participatif. Politiques de Développement et Protestations dans la Région Minière de Gafsa en Tunisie 2006-2010,” *Les Cahiers d'EMAM* 22 (2014), 132.

³⁵ For a detailed account of U.S. aid to the Mubarak regime, see Lloyd C. Gardner, *The Road to Tahrir Square: Egypt and the United States from the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak* (New York: The New Press, 2011).

³⁶ Asya El-Meehy, “Egypt’s Popular Committees: From Moments of Madness to NGO Dilemmas,” *Middle East Report* 265, no. 42 (Winter 2012), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer265/egypts-popular-committees>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question* (1844), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>.

⁴⁰ Michele Dunne, “The Revival of Secular Dissent in Egypt,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 25 November 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/11/25/revival-of-secular-dissent-in-egypt/gulk>.

⁴¹ Michael Hardt, “The Withering of Civil Society,” *Social Text* 45 (Winter 1995), <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/michael-hardt/articles/the-withering-of-civil-society/>.

⁴² In his foreword to Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Michael Hardt writes: “How can we create a politics of constituent power that is never reined in by a new constituted power and never subordinated to sovereign authority? If we could set in motion such a revolutionary process, then we would begin to see what democracy really looks like” (xiii). It appears as if Giorgio Agamben has reflected on possible attempts to answer Hardt’s question: “Starting with the French revolution, the political tradition of modernity has conceived of radical changes in the form of a revolutionary process that acts as the *pouvoir constituant*, the ‘constituent power’ of a new institutional order. I think that we have to abandon this paradigm [NB: which would include contemporary models that aim at the integration of “civil society” in post-2011 Arab politics] and try to think of something as a *puissance destituante*, a ‘purely destituent power’, that cannot be captured in the spiral of security.” Giorgio Agamben, “For a Theory of Destituent Power” (Lecture, Nicos Poulantzas Institute, Athens, Greece: 16 November 2013), <http://www.chronosmag.eu/index.php/g-agamben-for-a-theory-of-destituent-power.html>.

⁴³ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London and New York: Penguin, 1963), 249–251. Arendt places great hope for a future revolutionary spirit in “those councils, Soviets and *Räte*, which were to make their appearance in every genuine revolution throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Each time they appeared, they sprang up as the spontaneous organs of the people, not only outside of all revolutionary parties but entirely unexpected by them and their leaders [...], utterly neglected by statesmen, historians, political theorists, and most importantly, by the revolutionary tradition itself.” It seems as if the spontaneous appearance of such councils in the post-2011 uprisings as well as their subsequent domestication within a state-sponsored civil society framework have once more confirmed Arendt’s insight.