

## The ‘Arab Spring’: breaking the chains of authoritarianism and postponed democracy

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While the events of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ constitute movements of vast social significance within the Arab world, they have at the same time raised as many questions as they have hopes and expectations. Among the most pressing causes for concern and further research are the roles that Arab audiovisual media and satellite broadcasting have played in not only covering events, but also in possibly even *fomenting* them through selectivity, timing, high-technology decoupage of images culled from the internet and new forms of social media, as well as the introduction of themes and slogans into various Arab public arenas even before the locals have taken such up themselves. The connection of Arab media to the political agendas of their sponsors as in the case of Aljazeera, for instance, has also been brought to the fore and writ large, leading to questions over whether or not media discourse is dialogic and genuinely responsive to multiple voices in the sense envisioned by Habermas or whether it is a Machiavellian enterprise directed towards very specific political ends. The political role of the media and individual newscasters has assumed new dimensions during the course of the upheavals of the ‘Arab Spring’ where it has been difficult if not impossible to characterize the media as strictly a passive observer of events and not also an active participant in initiatives for ‘democratic transition’ and other. Finally, while previous incarnations of state control and censorship of Arab media have been diminished or shed outright in a number of Arab countries – including Egypt and Tunisia – there are questions about what sort of conditionalities new corporate sponsorship may evolve. This article examines the philosophical and sociological dimensions of the Arab media of the ‘Arab Spring’, which like the events that it has covered have taken the Arab world into uncertain and uncharted territory.

**Keywords:** role of the Arab media and satellite broadcasting; the Arab Spring; dialogic discourse; Habermas; ‘democratic transition’; Aljazeera

### Preface

In a dialogical work that Michel Foucault published under the title of *Iran, the Revolution in the Name of God* (Brière *et al.* 1979) is a collection of essays and eyewitness accounts of the French philosopher who lived in Tehran during 1977 and 1978, and then again in 1979 during the tumult of the Iranian Revolution, when he was amazed by the explosion of religious ‘passion’ and the sweeping mass support for the overthrow of the regime of the Shah. In the Preface Foucault quotes a line from Karl Marx that ‘Religion is the spirit of a world without a spirit.’ He observes that many among the Marxists as well as their opponents have tended always to emphasize

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Marx's famous maxim: 'Religion is the opiate of the masses', forgetting or ignoring that the term 'opium' had a particular connotation in the nineteenth century when it was not always used in the sense of drugs (and their abuse), but also as a means to which doctors in hospitals would resort to lessen the pains of the sick and to tranquilize them in their sufferings. Moreover in the view of Foucault, Marx in his youth was still under the influence of Ludwig Feuerbach, and especially the effect of the latter's (1841) book, *The Essence of Christianity*, when he expressed a heightened sense of awareness of religion and its utility in society across history to the extent that even if he took a critical view of it, he dealt with it on the consideration that it was an existential and symbolic matter of the greatest seriousness and importance.

Foucault's concern was to witness an historical moment – a major event transpiring in the name of religion. Even though this philosopher was among the greatest of those who confronted contemporary myths through analysis, exposure and deconstruction – and among these the mechanisms and myths of authority – he was not motivated by major expectations with regard to the course and results of the 'Islamic Revolution in Iran' because he was convinced that the mixing of religion and politics precipitated forms of deprivation, subjugation, tyranny and death.

Perhaps the uprisings and demonstrations that the Arab world is witnessing today constitute a historical event according to all criteria. This is true if what is occurring represents an expression – in diverse languages, styles and interventions – of a new pattern or mode of manifestations of the Arab political imagination. It is an imagination that is not entirely removed from its authoritative points of reference or its 'religious' symbolic order – in the general cultural sense and not its particular 'creedal' or 'ritual' connotation. This is to affirm that the spark of the *intifada* that moved from Tunisia to Egypt and then subsequently to other Arab arenas represented a call to liberate politics from its impenetrable moulds – ones that Arab political authorities were vigilant about fortifying and protecting with an unsurpassed Machiavellian proficiency. The events that are occurring and the transformations in actions, movements and discourses are indicative of a way of dealing with politics that is 'semi-absolute'. That is, *politics* – across all the public squares and venues of protest – is the one subject that is the passion of all, object of all animosities and daily manoeuvrings that has become the subject of utmost importance and seriousness which cannot be displaced by any other sphere – with the exception of religious changes – as its actors or those who speak in its name, and they are many and various, intend a redistribution of values on the basis that whatever is not political and whatever does not enter into its locus or serve its ends whether in terms of art or love or any sort of celebrations must be subjugated to it in one way or another!<sup>1</sup>

The political imagination has emerged to impose its language on the spaces of discussion and action and in situations of tension and cooperation; religious expressions have come into prominence in politics along with the imitation of the call for building modern politics and whims in spheres that allegedly purport to respect rationalism. The matter pertains to a major event – or events – that audiovisual means and the internet have lent the appearance of a 'big show' or rather a 'spectacle' – even in its tragic moments – and have factored in all ways to create every sort of obfuscation and ambiguity where accuracy is lost in the transmission of information, as is clarity in analysis and commentary and the mobilization of all factors of impulsive reaction that produce observations and abbreviated judgments, which have no relation to life and socio-cultural complexities in this domain or that.

We can observe this collusion of factors in some of the manifestations of this confusion of this obfuscation and ambiguity in the prevailing discourses today about

democracy and the emergence from tyranny to pluralism/multiplicity, the resolution of controversies, and the roles of communication media in the process of transition.

### **Anxiety over understanding**

In light of what is transpiring in the Arab world – *intifadas* and transitions, confrontations of various forms, including armed ones – any discussion of democracy and democratic values imposes upon us a need for caution and circumspection. It is a problematic discourse, not innocent, and has generated different states of bewilderment and anxiety. To confront the various forms of uncertainty and complexity precipitated by the ongoing movement in the world at large demands a very singular and penetrating vigilance over and above tackling the major ambiguities that attend emergence from Arab authoritarianism and different incarnations of autocracy together with the degradation of the individual. Likewise, the challenge hurls us into states of fear and embroils us in the difficulties that divide politicians and elites at all levels when they attempt to anticipate or imagine the future.

The human being is haunted most of the time by feelings of determinism or fatalism that are difficult to explain, as whenever he refers to what he assumed to be ancient givens and preconceptions, he finds himself confronted with doubt and apprehension. It is not always the case that such states are invariably non-productive in awakening the reason and spurring thinking and communication. However, what is tantalizing about approaching the question of democracy and (related) values is the attendant sense of grief or mourning over the passing of some of the principles or even some of the convictions that used to prevail. Yet, the pace of transformation – in economics, the broadcast media, internet communication as well as new forms of violence – all impel the human being either to transform doubt into an system and a choice, or fall in to the trap of dogmatism.

It is worth recollecting here that the lengthy quest of the individual for liberation – as proclaimed by modernity – is extremely costly. This is apparently not well understood or given much attention in many analyses and commentaries on the Arab *intifadas*, that do not take into account the (role of) historical or political conditions – and especially not the cultural ones. Abdelilah Belkeziz noted this hugely important aspect a number of years ago when he recognized that the state as well as society in the Arab countries is predicated on a ‘grave deficiency’, represented in essence in:

the difficult birth of modernism in Arab political and civil societies; this structural difficulty is epitomized in the crisis of legitimacy in regard to the state and the weakness of the psychology of acceptance (i.e., the acceptance of modernism) within Arab society.

(Belkeziz 2001, p. 39)

Every individual or every society pays the price according to the nature of the forces and actors in it. Although we could to an extent calculate the cost that must be paid for the sake of freedom, this does not prohibit acknowledging the paradoxical dimension as being a burden and responsibility – far from easy – to the extent that it might turn into exploitation of a new sort. The individual, when he is in the process of liberating himself from the dominance of the group, is at the same time placing himself in situations of weakness, loneliness and vulnerability. Many Western writers and Arab intellectuals residing in the West who have written about what is transpiring within some of the Arab *intifadas* see this movement as a licence for the Arab individual to come into prominence in the political sphere. Such writings appear to me to be very

hasty and to exhibit poor assessment of the profound givens of these societies engaged in uprisings. Such can be seen in the case of what led Gilles Lipovetsky to assert that the collapse of traditional forms of framing and formation is not an indication of the creation of a *tabula rasa* or reaching a degree of 'zero' on the scale of values. Rather this collapse requires the individual to break free from the 'tried and true' guardianship (of the state) that suppressed the obligation to set out upon a path of ethics of responsibility (Lipovetsky 1996, p. 26).

The human being today in many of the countries of the West or those that have been exposed to the influence of the West – such as our countries – finds himself confronting two types of behaviour. The first is characterized by a 'boyish' or 'childish' avoidance of the responsible exercise of an individual's freedom which a person treats as though it is an amusement or passing fancy, The second is behaviour characterized by an individual who views himself as 'victim' exposed to an original or historic injustice and who views *himself* on the consideration that he *is* such, regardless of what this may incur of harm or what it may achieve of gains.

How, then, is it possible to live in a world without a compass? There are those who see, like Andre Comte-Sponville, that living in this wayward world, exploited by every form of tyranny and consumption, and immersed in the 'culture of perception' (as identified by 'Abd al-Jābrī 1999, p. 191) is possible. However, this is so not through the imagining of new values, but rather by innovating a new mode of loyalty to that which human history has bequeathed to us or that which the particular history of each society has produced. This approach takes into account the realities of disputatiousness and hegemony, alienation and anxiety. And what are these values? They are those that maintain the integrity of the root principles or the four principles of ethics that are oriented towards life; toward society and its welfare; towards the mind or what is universal in it; and lastly that pertain to love and compassion. Vital interaction between these four orientations is what establishes loyalty on the consideration that life stops at the limits of the needs of society, which stop in turn at the limits of reason, in turn defined and perfected by love and compassion. Thus, the transition which we are experiencing today in the sphere of politics and values is not a step from one rung of the ladder of values to the ladder of principles and other values, but rather is a transition from extreme conviction or faith to loyalty to noble values on the basis that loyalty is what gives faith its permanence at a time when we reckon we have lost it (Comte-Sponville 1996, p. 138).

Among the terms of expression for this new loyalty is the question of the relation between theory and history and between reason and communication/interaction. This new loyalty is built on the basis of discussion between cultures and individuals on the frontier of reconstructing a new meaning for group action. This is not a call for discourse immersed in ethics and driven by romantic inclinations, which is absolutely impossible. The intersection between politics, philosophy and ethics is an axiomatic matter whenever the matter pertains to a historical turning point or a movement aimed at transcendence or beginning a process of transition. How could we contextualize a collective act to establish a 'democratic state' that liberates the Arab individual from the state of 'humiliation' and the 'psychology of subjugation' to the promulgation of a new social and political contract? And to what extent can we anticipate the reconstruction of a 'democratic' political sphere on the basis of forces that are still internally beholden to a 'Bedouin culture in rebellion against the urban/civil mode' of living (Belkeziz 2001, p. 45)? And does what we are witnessing of *intifadas* and protests really portend the existence of a collective consciousness that possesses what is necessary in terms of qualifications to administer and manage multiplicity/pluralism and differences?

### On the consciousness of multiplicity/pluralism

Multiplicity/pluralism represents the basis of the democratic system where the styles and modes of administering it reveal the degree of conceptual, political, and institutional awareness of the intellectual and political elites responsible for facilitating public affairs or who aspire to bear the burden of their facilitation. However, what is occurring in the Arab countries undergoing revolutions, *intifadas*, armed confrontations and struggles that vary depending on the different chemistries within each country would suggest that there is a major ambiguity between democracy and political liberalism. If the latter is an expression of a political system that depends upon an agreed constitution and includes the undertaking of 'free and fair' elections, and which supposes a state based on truth, within which is a separation of powers and the protection of political freedoms, then all of these conditions refer to 'constitutional liberalism'. This *might* or might *not* be expressive of democratic choice which demands deference to rights that encompass and extend to economic, social and cultural dimensions. The slogans of 'freedom', 'justice' and 'dignity' that have been raised or are still being touted in the face of authoritarian regimes do not appear to transcend the threshold of demands possessed of a liberal frame of reference.

This is what the observer of the political movement notices – whether in the first country in which the spark of what came to be termed the 'Arab Spring' was ignited – Tunisia – or in what the various Syrian political forces are demanding in the way of a transition to a civilian political system that would admit and contain all the forces, currents and sensitivities.

Vis-à-vis tyranny and authoritarianism, it appears that there is semi-agreement over 'democratic choice', even from the perspectives of parties that have not ceased to criticize its cultural background and negative aspects. This is because it still represents the best possible way to administer public affairs. And whether this accord was initiated by tactical considerations, of this current or that, or clear intellectual or political convictions, all of the political and intellectual parties that emerge are presented as being representative of democracy or endeavouring to represent it. These include instigators of protests and opposition, or sides which are still clinging to power, or groups that have lost their protectors – as in the case of Tunisia and Egypt – but did not possess the requisite means and power to evade the process of transition to a different political sphere. Thus, democracy has not only become a system of rule or civilizational choice on account of its being a process for resolving differences and attracting more than one side to what it produces as gains for individuals and groups, but also it promises alternative ways to transcend systems of subjugation and tyranny. In fact, however, we find political parties and groups, particularly those affiliated to political Islam, have begun to present more than one justification for appearing in 'democratic' guise, even if that exposes them at a certain stage to distortion, and divests them from all their significations, especially given that most of its constituents 'want restricted democracy that does not contradict Islamic *sharī'ah*', and put preconditions on the principle of freedom demanded by the youth as well as other sensitive issues. These currents possess definite social bases and the ability to polarize and mobilize, given the nature of their discourse, and their organizational history, and they appear more and more every day to be elements entering into the scope of what we term as being 'impediments to democracy' (Namer 2003, p. 49).

What is the degree of influence of *thought* in presenting a concept conforming to what is happening in the Arab countries given the difference of their stressors, the degrees of

their tensions and the diversity of forces active in the struggle? We pose this question because Arab thought has provided critically important enquiries, over the past three decades, on state, democracy and civil society, and has produced substantial conceptual inroads into these, since the writing of *Al-Idiyūlūjīyā al-ʿArabīyah al-Muʿāṣirah* [*Contemporary Arab ideology*] (1970) and the *Maḥmū al-Dawlah* [*Concept of state*] (1981) of Abdallah Laroui, to the writings of Burhān Ghalyūn from *Bayān min ajl al-Dimūqrāṭīyah* [*Exposé for democracy*] (1978) to *Al-Miḥnah al-ʿArabīyah* [*The Arab inquisition*] (1993) and Aziz al-ʿAzmah, Ghassan Salame and Abdelilah Belkeziz. Also worthy of mention are the valuable intellectual works of various sources and the sensitivities that Dr. ʿAlī Khalīfah al-Kuwārī endeavoured to produce and publish in the framework of the initiative of *Al-Kutlah al-Tārīkhīyah ʿalā Qāʿidah al-Dimūqrāṭīyah* [*The historic bloc for the principle of democracy*] (2010). These works without exaggeration constitute an authoritative political reference rather than a ‘school’ in the context of inculcating democratic thought in Arab political culture. In the exploration of work ethics, discussion and commitment in the framework of what al-Kuwari, and those active with him in the initiative, termed the ‘historical bloc on the foundation of democracy’, these thinkers scrutinize in detail the prerequisites and the missions that must be undertaken in order to accomplish the transition to democracy.

Among the components required are:

the emergence of a democratic leadership fit and qualified for responsibility, imbued with the value of collective endeavor, partnership with others and communication with them, as well as being free of the mentality of exclusion, egoism and pretensions of possessing ‘absolute truth’. Also necessary is the practice of politics in a professional fashion along with what this dictates of professional politicians – pragmatism, planning, patience over the long haul, self-criticism, and circumspection, reliance on rationalism rather than emotionalism in propounding work agendas and meeting challenges, in addition to learning from past mistakes and the experiences of others. Meeting these requirements entails having faith in the existence of universal norms shared in common across different civilizations and regions around the world, as well as respect for the principle of the division of labor and consultation with experts and specialists/

(Al-Kuwārī and Mādī 2010, pp. 132–133; see also Al-Kuwārī and Mādī 2009)

Some of the writings of these thinkers are a valuable aid to understanding and keeping abreast of many of the political trends and views being voiced in Arab societies, including those which anticipate what Laouri termed ‘the future of the past’. Vis-à-vis what has occurred of transformations and what has accumulated of conceptual and intellectual analyses and open-minded enquiries, countering the high-handed and hegemonic onslaught of audiovisual media and its efforts either to mobilize or to justify developments, a question must be posed. Is there a way to create the necessary distance to understand the significance of what these transformations portend and arrive at a set of indicators suitable for application to the slogans and maxims being put forward for the aim of rebuilding the political sphere on the basis of contemporary democratic thought? We raise this question in this context, with a modicum of doubt because if democracy is considered a political choice, this relies on certain bases, the most important of which are the following: the promulgation of a constitution over which there is consensus; recognition of actual, effective political pluralism and not only multiplicity in the quantitative sense; establishing representative institutions resulting from fair elections; and the provision of conditions for the peaceful rotation of political authority/power. Then, in addition to the above, democracy is a translation of a mode of thinking, an order of values and an etiquette of discussion, competition and debate. Democracy is



not – and never has been – a given that is conferred based on individual choices, the primary purpose of which is to evade demands, as much as it is a product of collective efforts beginning with family upbringing, education, plus the media, as well as the means for managing differences and disputes in the public sphere. This is with the knowledge that there are various sources of democratic culture and memories of pluralism in light of which it is not possible to impose a ready-made model for administering principles of the social contract or control of political struggles. What is important here is that all these movements do not produce regimes that will turn into a front for the protection of capital, or for the justification of thinly veiled autocracy, or to provide cover for blindly imitative choices that bring about autocracy according to a new paradigm.

Many people defend, from a philosophical or political standpoint, the principle of pluralism on account of its being a founding condition of democracy. However, is it sufficient to defend this principle in the absolute? That is, given that there are a number of problems that confront the institutional, political and cultural application of this principle, does the matter necessitate an ‘acknowledgment of the multiplicity’ of group identities? Alternatively, does it serve to negate or marginalize them as being incompatible with the components of the political system in the framework of the foundations and constraints of the state or *ummah* (the nation) that – in the first instance – has been predicated on a religious or cultural legitimacy or that of a historical legacy? How can we judge between the individual independence of the citizen and the independence of a particular group and the considerations and calculations of the state? Or, more frankly, how can we construct a group identity or a *collective* ‘we’?

This is not the place to go into these questions in detail. What is important is that each discussion of pluralism calls for attention to the decisive importance of the principle of equality and renewable capacities that need to be created in order to construct a ‘public culture’ resting on shared values. A public sphere capable of enriching and protecting these values through group discussions – taking every word into account and meeting every argument with another – is the objective here. Since 2001, Fahmī Jad‘ān has mentioned the complexity of the democratic question in Arab society and has confirmed the following:

Our story with respect to democracy is now taking a new direction that demands examination of a set of essential issues:

First, we must reexamine the concept in an enlightened fashion or critically – whether negative, positive or both – because we must not unreservedly concede to any given of which we are not absolutely certain.

Second, we must confront the heap of discussions of democracies currently in circulation – especially those affiliated to liberal orientations – in conjunction with the general and regional conditions of the Arab world to arrive, if circumstances permit, at this or that appropriate model or mode of democracy.

Third, we must answer the following question: should we begin only using the ‘Western given’ as a point of departure or must we necessarily summon up or retrieve historical or ancient precedents in this regard, if there are any which merit such a retrieval?

Lastly, where does democracy fall – or in what sense – in the scheme of ‘political pressure’ that ought to be exercised on the Arab scene and in its [public] spaces?

(Jad‘ān 2001, p. 158)

He then adds that open democracy suffers from ‘in many circumstances, a lack of maturity and political consciousness among the “popular masses”’, and this means that:

the majority lack the maturity and political consciousness to rule and promulgate laws regulating the matters of society and state, and that the ‘minority’ that possesses the requisite experience and consciousness will be barred from this ... and thus it would be extremely easy to ‘exploit’ these masses and manipulate them through the use of the power of money that knows no limits and excessive and falsifying media orientations.

(p. 158)

Yet, are there conditions conducive to engendering a political sphere responsive to these dictates? This question arises against the backdrop of what we have witnessed in the period of authoritarianism – which is still fighting to maintain the sources of its continuity – and what occurred in Egypt and Tunisia, along with what is happening in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, where we have seen the transformation of the nature of the struggle from the natural general grievances – which should be accommodated into the proliferation of disputes, not subject to the norms of logical understanding, or amenable to control and framing or susceptible to being managed or resolved. Democracy is a long-term process not subject to the timetable of the dissolution of autocratic regimes. It is insufficient in this regard to trot out the ‘bogeyman’ of multiplicity, as witnessed today, nor is it sufficient to agree on ‘constitutional’ principles (such as having a constitution, elections and perhaps even rotation of power), ‘but rather democracy requires a clear, collective political consciousness that differentiates between the period of protest and the period of construction, which is based on economic-, moral-, social-, political- and conceptual choices’ (Ghalyūn 2001, p. 440).

This is why Ghalyūn considers that the provision of suitable conditions conducive to achieving democratic transformation requires accomplishment of the following five tasks. First:

developing a new democratic culture ... where here ‘consciousness’ does not imply merely belief in democracy or in it as a slogan or just knowing its simple connotation and content, but rather entails possession of a particular theory of it that is specific to the conditions of Arab societies in general, and to each society and its specific circumstances in particular.

This distinction is to be understood in light of the ‘present weakness of democratic consciousness or its dispersion and lack of coherence due to the generalized poverty of the political culture in our societies’ (Ghalyūn 2001, p. 440). The second task revolves around ‘guaranteeing material and moral resources, without which no political movement can persist’ (p. 440). As for the third task, it is represented in:

the building of an active, democratic and pluralistic centre [literally *qutb* – ‘pole’] as well as avoiding a one-sided view of reality as well as learning how to absorb intellectual and organizational multiplicity ... and this is the one way in our societies to transform democracy into a social choice, that is, into a common denominator and point of intersection among various social classes and groups and political forces.

(p. 440)

The fourth task necessitates:

changing the structures and reforming official and social institutions. There is no hope to advance along the road of democracy, and not only that but on the road of genuinely



sound political governance – in contrast to the savage rule prevailing on control by force and the imposition of submission and deference – without working to uphold legal institutions of the state and to liberate them from the imperialism of political-, tribal-, clientalist- or family partisanship ... and the battle to change and reform the institutions ought not be delayed until after the triumph of the democratic movement. However, there must be work at the level of these institutions and departments in order to realize this reform, which itself constitutes an important instrument of leverage in democratic work.

(p. 442)

This is at a time when the fifth task is embodied in ‘constructing a unifying collective political credo or national consensus’ (p. 443).

The question of the interstice in contemporary culture and the enigma of the incapacity to attain to democracy in emerging societies brings up another issue. It pertains to the capacity of the actors in the public squares of liberation and change to ameliorate and alleviate controversies and resolve disputes.

### **The battle over and within democracy**

It is obvious to say that contention or struggle – in the broad sense of these terms – does not represent a confluence of interests, sentiments, choices and conflicting goals only, but rather it is a component of human and social interaction and a catalyst of politics. Likewise, recognition of contention or struggle as being a natural reality of democracy and in political competition is not a result of a particular interpretation – of this side or that or this group or the other – of the nature and degree of contention in the midst of transition.

Arab autocracy has produced societies that penetrate to the very heart of the meaning of humiliation and degradation and the acceptance of the loss of dignity, for people accustomed to suppression and deprivation. With the sparks of the *intifadas*, what was being held pent up inside has exploded forth and the barrier of silence has been broken. Tongues and pens have been unleashed to aspire to the heights of social eloquence. As much as there was a determination to bring down the regimes – even if only *some* of their symbols have gone in Tunisia and Egypt, for example – on the basis of such being an agreed-upon slogan, deep differences have erupted over the nature and components of the alternative or hoped-for political system – either openly or behind the scenes – between factions, parties and groups driving the *intifadas*.

How can we deal with these differences when they are natural, given that, in principle, all have the right to participate in the public sphere? Does this emerging political society possess the necessary means to resolve conflicts and effect the crystallization of a new social contract, establishing a democracy responsive – during this transitional period – to the minimal components of social liberalism?

Posing the question in this context necessitates confronting two problems at least: the first pertains to the nature of the conflicts that have erupted and which require resolution; the second pertains to the method or technique adopted to resolve them. Doubtless, every Arab society has traditional means for arbitration to resolve conflicts, some of which persist in resisting the onslaught of new forms of organization and in some cases authoritarianism has worked to crush and eliminate. Violence was and is a means of practising politics in Arab countries to a degree noted by Abdelilah Belkeziz:

We have not known a stable political life free of violence except only very rarely! Those who have arrived in power since the end of the ‘Liberal Age’ got there through violence

(military coups). And those who maintain power do so by violence. As for their enemies and opponents who are looking to remove them, they too unsheathe thoughts of violence and occasionally resort to its instruments.

(Belkeziz 2008, p. 131)<sup>2</sup>

Apparently the tribal, clan, sectarian and factional grounding within the fabric of Arab societies has begun to reveal many of its symbols in a number of the *intifadas* indicating the tremendous possibilities for this tribal, clan, sectarian and factional rootedness to renew its components and replicate its expressions, according to the contexts and typologies of the struggles. There are a number of indicators that suggest that the Machiavellian style of expressing and resolving these conflicts is currently reigning supreme in managing these differences and disputes. Niccolò Machiavelli, as is well known, identified ‘struggle’ (*La Lutte*) as the preferred means of conflict resolution, or rather, it is the only possible way. This is unless – God forbid – domination over an opposing group or competing parties occurs by means of obfuscation/subterfuge, deception or lying. Conflict, according to him, is a confrontation between forces contending to remain in power or to acquire it. Resolving conflict, or neutralizing the opposition and creating the conditions for peace, cannot occur except as a result of fierce confrontation between these forces; that is, through the use of violence to seize power. So long as violence remains the essential means for resolving conflict, then the ‘art of battle’ becomes for Machiavelli the supreme art, the indispensable technique of political authority and power. To affirm this principle does not connote strictly physical violence alone as he advocates other techniques of a more ‘enlightened’ nature, such as the manipulation and utilization of people or various ruses – all of which are techniques tied to rhetorical discourse, movements and modes of communication (Lefort 1986, p. 71).<sup>3</sup>

Among that of which the *intifadas* have precipitated in relations of appeasement or conflicts with the prevailing political authority or in what is transpiring between driving forces in these *intifadas* are modes of exchange and interaction that most often betray carefully weighed tactical calculations and the adoption of Machiavellian styles more than any other option. In contradistinction to the Machiavellian approach we find contrasting exercises in *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) that view the subject of conflicts precipitated in the political arena as issues that may be resolved within the ‘framework of dialogue’ and thereby avoid all forms of violence – physical or ideological. Democracy, in the various modes in which it is practised and its institutional values, adopts a theory of the dialogic (*Dialogique*). Yet, how often is ‘dialogue’ and the Arab rhetoric deriving from and revolving around it employed in order to impose the will of one side on other sides? Dialogue, however, in its intellectual, political and contemporary connotation – especially according to Jürgen Habermas – is directed towards understanding and comprehension and presupposes a consideration of ‘the other’ as being *an end in itself* as opposed to a means to an end. Thus, it represents the only way for non-violent resolution of conflicts.

The goal of understanding or ‘comprehending’ the ‘other’ is predicated on a will to interact and cooperate with him as a person possessed of dignity. Whatever applies to him applies to all. This cannot possibly be realized unless we consider ourselves as ends rather than as a means to serve the ends of others. Acknowledgement of the dignity of ‘the other’ has great semantic and social weight; and in any contention the precondition of acknowledgement and respect is necessary in the view of Habermas. The question this raises, however, in many instances is reducible to one of means and the tangible

forms for such that an actor innovates in order to convey respect in the context of dialogue. It might be said that this occurs by according priority to listening and respecting answers, in the first instance, in what Habermas (1992, p. 67) terms ‘the will to search cooperatively for the truth’ (also Habermas 1987a, pp. 416–417, Habermas 1987b, II, pp. 114–115, Affaya 1998).

*Listening* cannot possibly be circumscribed here as only the *intention* to listen – even if intention to do so is presumably integral – because if one side desires that listening should occur and be realized effectively, it must make allowance for the other side to enjoy freedom of speech and expression. The situation is that freedom pertains more to social, political or objective situations more than it does to personal circumstances of the self. It is incumbent upon ‘the other’ to bear responsibility for freedom of expression and what is said – that is, to express his choices, intone or make known his particular goals and to accept the premise that the other has the right to express a position or a legitimate and rightful demand too.

Habermas sees that it is within the capacity of dialogue or discussion to bridge the chasm between politics in all its incarnations – among which is the authority of the state – and the order of truth. It can also create conditions for reconciliation between the practical dictates of political authority and expectations of rights, in the interests of arriving at oversight of the state instead of the perpetuation of the ‘state of surveillance’. This is achieved through depending upon plausible communicative mechanisms for cultivating or rooting – depending on the circumstances – the prerequisites of rights and freedoms. In mechanisms of communication, skills and acumen in negotiation, consultation and dialogue intervene to produce an entente between participants in the process and thence avoid betting on force, and accord primacy to establishing a consensus based on fairness and vigilance over interests and expectations of all actors. Moreover, in any situation where consensus is impracticable, it is possible to solve any conflict or difference through a temporary compromise to constrain any danger posed by one or other side looking for a way out from the principles of discussion. Where conditions for a genuine dialogue are provided, the best and most convincing argument is that which prevails on the basis of logic and persuasiveness, where other expressions might be added in the interests of national welfare, without resorting to violence, deception or manipulation.

It is certain that inculcation of the principle of dialogue in democracy is an essential and foundational task – not because it supports the construction of a peaceful approach to resolving conflicts, but because the mode of dialogue presupposes preparation and education. Likewise, proceeding according to dialogue and judicious use of its principles represents an opportunity to become conscious and aware of the differences that divide the different sides participating. To a certain extent, it also may also mitigate the reasons for struggle and potentially arrive at a peaceful solution by working to find compromise conditions instead of relying on a ‘consensus’ for which the necessary prerequisites might not be forthcoming at a particular stage. In any case, flexibility and the mutual ability to back down with the conviction that this will lead to understanding is what represents the goal of dialogue.

If the approach of Habermas pinpoints the cause of injustice in a lack of respect for the formal preconditions of public discussion, then there are other interpretations which hold that the experience of injustice expresses itself clearly when there are social, political and ethical motives underlying the contentions. Here, thought must be given to a type of ‘ethical codes of conflicts’ in the event it is not possible to prevent a clash or conflict of interests in social and political struggles only, given that a sense of

belittlement is to be expected when hegemony is imposed. Thus it is necessary to analyse givens and circumstances in all their various formulations and active components, as well as the intents which drive them, in order to distinguish between types of conflicts and thence find a suitable means for resolving them. There is a need for a mode of arbitration between interests and aspirations, some of which dictate relying upon diverse means to determine and delimit primary and genuine interests or the social or ethical claims of contenders. The normative expectations referred to by individuals who are suffering from injustice and belittlement mandate interpretation because they are expectations directed towards a type of mutual recognition through which is produced a kind of positive relation with the self. However, this condition is not entirely sufficient as it is not possible to construct a theory of social justice where such a theory is absent from the catalysts of protests, *intifadas* and revolution – in the context of a society that guarantees all its individuals the possibility of developing a productive relation with the self.

John Rawls is not mistaken when he introduces the concept of ‘the social bases for respecting the self’ (Rawls 1987, p. 76) among the enumeration of primary social values, the guarantee of which is mandated equally for all citizens. At the same time, it would be an injustice to pay heed only reductively to this dimension given that ‘a normative theory of democracy’ works to posit a just working answer for treating social conflicts wherein at least three considerations must be introduced. It is not possible to conceive of a social or political controversy simply because there is a social protest on the part of one group (or more) occupying a place within the social structure. Here, it appears that the social and economic mechanisms have greater importance in this situation. Secondly, there occurs a social controversy every time the members of a group perceive a type of injustice as catalysing the protest. Thirdly, it is not possible to consider this protest acceptable except in the case that those carrying it out are expressing a situation of group dissatisfaction over lack of consideration for their political, social and even cultural expectations.

Conflict resolution necessitates – in all instances – a genuine and appropriate understanding of its causes, types and means of expression. This understanding rests on a communicative and groundbreaking pedagogy accompanying the manifestations of contention over and above their derivation from the principles of truth, equality and noble sentiments of equanimity. Here, controversies and conflicts demand intermediaries who possess sufficient cognizance and capabilities for understanding as well as sound management skills to arrive at just solutions.

On the basis of what has been presented it should be apparent that these normative stipulations are applicable to societies firmly rooted in democracy that refer conflict resolution to particular arbitration procedures resting on an axiomatic culture or ethics of discussion in political and social exchange. However, this also does not preclude affirmation that the various *intifadas*, arising over humiliating situations across the entire geographic expanse of the Arab world, are in dire need of principles and mechanisms of ‘dialogue’ in order to manage and mitigate the differences produced by the shake ups to which Arab authoritarianism has been exposed and to which it is still being exposed. There can be no escape from democracy carving out ways and means to deal with struggles and controversies. It is a forward progress that demands maturity, pedagogy and extreme patience. This is because democracy is a price that must be paid. There is no third option: either proceed through consensual efforts to construct a contemporary political sphere or deceive this major movement and depart from its goals by focusing on new modalities of autocracy – either veiled or open. Recourse to these alternatives

rests on a social and political ground still congested and overcrowded, as Belkeziz (2001) has remarked:

in traditional and inherited manifestations of a tribal, clan, factional or sectarian sort where these have not ceased to be renewed or to reproduce themselves (or to be reproduced) on account of their being a 'natural' part of the present scene and which haven't ceased to present themselves – in what is actually worse and more reprehensible – as political dynamics and structures capable of engineering numerous instances of political conjunction and its realities in our current age.

(p. 443)

Have the upheavals underway in the Arab countries really shaken up these traditional phenomena rooted in the popular subconscious and the structures present upon which to affirm their pillars of support and reproduce the mechanisms of their continuity? Is the propagation of these 'revolutionary' protests truly impelled by and embracing a new and truly 'revolutionary' thought, holding out an alternative to what prevails in economics, politics and culture? Or, is the matter no longer one of an outburst of rage over humiliation, tyranny and corruption without political horizons or in particular a near-total absence of any shared conceptual or cultural referent, other than those alleged or raised by groups of political Islam or some youth groups which have liberal inclinations that profess secularism, in addition to very small nationalist, popular and socialist currents?

It would appear that thought is bewildered in the face of the vast scale of the eruptions and the types of umbrella groups precipitated by the movements in various Arab countries. What is occurring in this country or that precludes all stereotypical inclinations or predispositions as well as any all-encompassing assessment that purports to supply the requisite and applicable means for understanding all the *intifadas*. Likewise the unprecedented, excessive high-handedness of the audiovisual channels in their professionally dubious dealing and interaction with the images of the internet precipitate a genuine jolt to and distortion in thinking and the desire to understand. Aljazeera is not alone in infringing upon the principles of the accepted standards of audiovisual media, nor is it alone in presenting itself as representative of the voice of the 'revolutionaries' while at the same time giving special consideration – as per the different Arab arenas and the transformations of the chemistry of struggle – to the censure of some expression of pluralism. What is happening at the level of Arab satellite channels is startling where such channels are translating – as mediators or intermediaries – expressions of an Arab regional 'civil war' in a way that demands their accountability and requires enquiry and evaluation.

Undoubtedly the Arab world is witnessing a historic moment par excellence. Arab societies that had been ruled through complete subjugation and submission have risen. People have been liberated from fear and the youth have been the vanguard of the movements, utilizing all possible means – including the digital – and social, political and religious currents have ridden this wave to affirm their presence. Europe and America have mobilized every means and pushed every pen to decree that the youth of the 'Arab Spring' resemble 'us' as they are translating the principles of enlightenment into their public squares. 'Aren't freedom, equality and justice "our" principles?' they ask. Thus, overnight, the Western mode of perceiving the Arab has changed and the oft-repeated clichés embedded in the minds and imaginations with vigilant determination have been shaken. From societies stereotyped as producing violence, terrorism, emigration, drugs and images of veiled women come societies capable of raising

contemporary slogans and thirsting for freedom and democracy; and Europeans have expressed, in an unprecedented fashion, intentions to help these countries – especially Tunisia and Egypt – politically, materially and militarily while at the same time they are intent on keeping out some thousands of Tunisian youth who are attempting to escape unemployment. This is even to the extent that France has demanded a review of the system of ‘Schengen’ visas and a return to the monitoring of borders between European countries as a result of what it has termed a ‘flood’ of young émigrés.

### **The media and the cost of transitioning to democracy**

It is well known that institutions and research directives work, to the full extent of their capabilities, to study and follow the indicators and significances of these *intifadas* and through various means – in everything from descriptive to the reported – seek to observe the course of each particular Arab experience – even if much of what is published on the basis of these methodological *claims* does not measure up to the requisite standards – from texts, articles and writings characterized primarily by haste, entrenched positions and overgeneralizations. This is what causes the forfeiture of its intellectual merit and worthiness as well as the soundness of its deductions and inferences. Special editions of magazines are prepared and edited around these events, and research centres have sponsored meetings in order to comprehend what is going on and to predict what is expected to happen. However, all indicators suggest that television has played, and continues to play, a decisive role in presenting the events and airing deductions and commentaries on these. There are even channels that have entirely altered the structure of their programming so as to devote airtime exclusively to developments of affairs in some of the Arab arenas. Some have transformed into a factor/actor to motivate, provoke and goad the creation of an ‘organized’ web of reporters, commentators, ‘eye witnesses’, ‘strategy experts’ and specialists on revolutions. Rather, we have seen and heard channels raise the slogan of ‘down with the regime’ (*isqāt al-nizām*) before demonstrators have raised this slogan themselves (and chief among these are the Qatari station Aljazeera and the Iranian al-Ālam, by way of example, where there is more than sufficient material for researchers to uncover the political and ideological affiliation of the channels and the aims that are driven by the politics of the two states that fund them). We have also witnessed how the media has slipped into broadcasting a curious conceptual and political mixing between regime, state, political authority, the military and government, on the one hand, and reform, revolution, local divisions and democracy, on the other. Some of the channels adopted something of a policy of *confusion* from which they actually suffered in covering the events of Tunisia and Egyptian especially. They have also not ceased to follow particular – if nebulous – lines in their covering of the Yemeni schisms, the Bahraini movement, the armed fighting in Libya, and the savagery with which the Syrian regime has confronted demonstrations in its cities and villages. These news channels have followed a clearly war-like policy and style in language, editing, commentary and the compilation of images in addition to the ways in which they show them repeatedly; and this is what justifies the assertion that the audiovisual treatment of the *intifadas* in the Arab world, with rare exceptions, has fallen into consecrating and broadcasting states of impassioned emotionalism and participated in firmly rooting what Mohammed Abed al-Jabri referred to as the ‘culture of perception’ (*thiqāfah al-idrāk*) (‘Abd al-Jābirī 1999, p. 191; also al-Ghadhāmī 2004, pp. 207–208) at the



expense of news, edification and consciousness raising or respecting the freedom of viewers and militated against their right to choose the view they find most suitable.

How is it, then, that audiovisual media production can claim to cover *intifadas* over humiliation and belittlement and to anticipate the establishment and recognition of a contemporary democracy when it marshals all that it possesses editorially to 'advertise' and avoid all serious pluralism and multiplicity (of views). And it on the consideration that such propagandizing is the basis of the media that participates in reform and firmly anchoring the prerequisites of democratic choice?

It is obvious that there is no such thing as media or communications, or audiovisual broadcasting – Arab or other – that is motivated by 'angelic' intentions. This is because the audiovisual components, whatever their nature, and their technical and human elements as well as their editorial choices as well as their short- and long-range goals, are connected to a cultural model and political agenda. Thus, broadcast operations are not merely ones of transmitting and reporting because they are expressive of a desire to *produce an effect*, and occasionally *a reaction*. Likewise, most often they emphasize narratives of a culture or a society itself instead of the participation of audiovisual communication in expressing the details of group identity or the transformations that are occurring to the structures of mindsets, behaviours, political positions, and aesthetic sensitivities and sensibilities.

There is no argument that audiovisual communication operates in complex conditions in general as it is, in its essence, multidimensional and of manifold intent. It presents as if capable of anything and everything, and in a way that is sometimes excessive as in the matter of the Don Quixotesque style of some of Arab news satellite channels. Actual authority and power is represented in the relation of the media to various political and economic authorities and powers. Despite that to a certain degree the media avails itself of some of these possibilities, it suffers at the same time from a fragility the nature of which is constantly changing due to technological changes and changing calculations and political balances as well as the quality and value of human resources.

Television has an amazing influence, and it is not possible to consider new digital means of communication as constituting a challenge or detracting from the magnitude of this influence. We may observe the opposite in the complementary nature of the roles of television and these other digital media. Television broadcasts images and video recordings taken from the internet, which in turn embeds thousands of images and television programmes in its electronic websites and sites of social communication. Thus, television grants itself permission in everything. It makes public and reveals what it wants. It correlates and synchronizes the bit of information and the event that it has decided to present in a way and according to a timetable of its choosing. Similarly, it holds back occurrences and information and conceals them; and moreover, it is able instead to create distortion. It is a multifunctional tool possessed of multiple facets, influences and effects as well as a medium of 'strategic' importance in orienting policies and channelling expectations, needs, forms of deprivation, and even dreams and whims of a wide strata among the people.<sup>4</sup>

The Arab world has actually witnessed a carnival of satellite news, specialized and public/general channels in what exceeds more than 700 channels shown daily to Arab viewers. Approximately 20% of these are religious channels devoted to preaching and proselytizing and mobilizing. A massive group has invested and has vested interests in this sector, and states have come down with all their financial and political weight in a war by the various stations to influence people. These range from Aljazeera with which the state of Qatar does not hide its regional and political connection and

agenda to al-<sup>ᶜ</sup>Arabīyah, beholden to the major orientations of Saudi Arabia, to al-<sup>ᶜ</sup>Ālam which transmits the politics and positions of Iran vis-à-vis Arab issues, to BBC Arabic and France 24.

Those who follow the treatment of the Arab *intifadas* by these stations witness vast differences in approach, exposure and commentary. Some of these channels commit genuine ‘violations’ of news and plurality of opinion as well as infringements of practical media ethics even if they raise the banner of ‘One Opinion and Another Opinion’ (*‘al-Ra’yu wa al-Ra’yu al-Ākhir’*) as in the title of an Aljazeera programme, where this translates both editorially and practically into ‘Opinion ... the Final Opinion’ (*‘al-Ra’yu wa al-Ra’yu al-Akhir’*). If these stations express the policies, interests and positions of those who fund them and if their satellite broadcast and viewability through the internet permits them to penetrate many boundaries and limits and bypass traditional modes of censorship, then their broadcasts raise serious and real questions about the role of the media in observing and monitoring the reality of the Arab movement in its various forms and expressions, and its participation in efforts of ‘democratic transition’ and the distortion of this in one or another Arab country.

What is the role of the media and journalism in democratic transition? If the newscaster has a role in democracy, is it incumbent on him to recommend or be a spokesperson speaking in the name of a socio-political project? Or should that role go back to the political actors? What are the limits and points of intersection between news, opinion and liability?

Heated discussion has erupted between newscasters and journalists in Tunisia, for example, over the means of administering this transitional phase that is witnessing major difficulties represented in an unprecedented recession in tourism, the effects of which have negatively impacted social groups that derive their living from it, who number in the millions. Such is also the case with the departure of a number of corporations and the closure of others in a trend that has exacerbated unemployment and the return of tens of thousands of Tunisians who were working in Libya and have fled the ongoing war there. Accompanying this has been a rise in the prices of basic living staples over and above the lack of security in some outlying districts far from the urban centres.

Newscasters and journalists went from being defenders of the previous regime, cooperating with it, seeking to appease it or being suppressed by it – where silence or fear was the guiding principle, with few exceptions – to a number of them expressing with incisive frankness a loss of identity that reflects an existential crises over their practise of the profession of journalism in a society that has just recently emerged with great difficulty from authoritarianism. Likewise, some others have proved hesitant to be forthcoming in a situation in which they are torn between a temporary government suffering from a deficiency in legitimacy and the expectations of broad groups among the people who have begun to demand rights and are occupying some positions in the public sphere in an unprecedented fashion. Along with this, followers of events may notice that newscasters in Tunisia have been liberated from many professional, psychological and political obstacles from which they suffered during the phases of autocracy that distinguished the rule of al-Habib Bourguiba and, in particular, that of Zein al-Abidin Ben Ali. Tongues and pens have been freed from their restraints and the Tunisian press has come to deal with all subjects without trepidation or fear of prohibition, censorship or penalties. Tyranny had produced atrocities that Tunisians are sometimes unable to describe because they were so horrific. All the sources of information were controlled. No news was leaked except that which the political authority decided to

present to readers, listeners and viewers in ways, language and according to timetables that it chose. It exercised an extreme protectionism over the minds of Tunisians, which is what led a large number of people to abandon these means of media, or rather to 'despise and deride' them. If there was a group, aside from the police apparatus, that was exposed to scorn and ridicule – according to some – it was the group of newscasters to such a degree that they not only suffered from a lack of trust in them, but also some were harassed and even assaulted occasionally due to their positions or roles in justifying the tyranny of the previous era.

Doubtless, newspapers and journalists have maintained a minimum level of trust and believability and know-how to 'manoeuvre' around and 'negotiate' the previous era. Similarly, the internet exploded the calculations of the regime and a sizable number of newscasters set up sites expressive of the defiant desire of Tunisians for freedom, despite the fact that this transitional period in speech and expression has witnessed glaring slippages in professionalism. Thus, nothing is yet fully fledged and the maturation process requires time and accumulation in order to establish institutional bases – material and professionally – dedicated to creating a media that abides by a greater degree of fairness and objectivity in news and edification.

If previously the political authority publicly followed a strategy of containment with regard to 'independent' media initiatives, then a new amalgam has begun to appear by changing the logic of political pressure and following other methods of pressure exerted through and by those who possess the means of funding and the owners of capital. This is what will create new and pending obligations and conditionalities for the press, despite the palpable climate of freedom in the Tunisian media; and it is also that which will pose serious questions about the 'independence' of journalism, and the limits of criticism and accountability of various authorities.

It appears that the transitional period being experienced by Tunisia raises serious causes for concern in the statements of actors in national bodies (whether these be the 'Supreme Body for the Achievement of the Goals of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition' or the independent body that oversees elections or the body that will prepare the guiding principles for regulating written and audiovisual media).<sup>5</sup> The major challenges confronted by the various planners in this new stage has produced a mature awareness of the difficulties involved and the complexities of transition as well as the preconditions for its success and the preparedness to bear the costs of this upheaval in Tunisian political society. At the same time an ethic of discussion and listening has begun to crystallize, piquing attention or even arousing wonder and occasionally bewilderment. There are wounds created by the *ancien* regime among workers in the same field. The newscaster today finds himself divided between the desire to be rid of his status as an employee subject to directives and instructions and his being someone demanding to be an actor in the transition, to practise his profession normally – respecting multiplicity/diversity and observing professional conduct. The situation is that the newscaster, according to those actually working in the field, enjoys freedom today but is bereft of the tools and editorial preparedness, where a large number of them suffer from a deficiency in training as to how to exercise freedom. This is what necessitates a rehabilitation and reformation in order to be able to cope with the pervasive factors of sweeping changes and to translate them into journalistic forms and treatments in the media that will factor genuinely in bringing about the transition. However, the crucial question remaining in this context, in my view, pertains to whether it is possible to conceive a course whereby the means of written, electronic and audiovisual communication will lead to the successful transition

in disseminating the culture of citizenship and encouraging people to participate in making political and social decisions.

It might appear as though this question has something of a utopian nature, given that most of the means of communication are preoccupied with priorities other than those which might possibly be subsumed in efforts to deepen critical perception or encourage action and participation in public democratic discussion. Likewise, the websites and electronic journals have conditions more favourable to liberation from political bargaining and the constraints of money to which the written and audiovisual media subject them. However, how can it be expected that shackles might be shed and the heavy burden of advertising obviated along with the habituation of mindsets and imaginations and the instilling of habits of delegating trust and submissiveness in order to transition to an initiative of providing the requisite conditions for producing and distributing media qualified to assume roles of raising consciousness and deepening the culture of citizenship and participation?

Tunisia has come to know a raging activism, and it has problems beyond counting. Forward-looking expectations, intentions, and political and media projects make this country – which sparked the *intifadas* against Arab political autocracy – a genuine test bed for the promulgation of contemporary democratic principles, which many of those concerned predict will produce impacts and repercussions throughout the region. Doubtless, the ousting of the regime of Ben Ali created a huge vacuum in leadership, particularly in the political and media spheres, just as it appears that the country will pay a heavy price for transitioning to democracy. However, a modernizing elite coexisting alongside Islamists has led to calls for the emulation of the Turkish experiment in Tunisia (and it is a relation not incidental to the particular history of Tunisia with Turkey in any case, even if many Tunisian political bodies doubt the extent of commitment of the Arab renaissance movement to the intellectual orientations and politics of the Turkish Justice and Development Party).<sup>6</sup> This development is taking place in a civil society that has begun to organize itself on the consideration of it being a counter-authority and internationally supported even if it has not ceased to be a theoretical proposition that has not yet been practically translated into reality. All these factors taken in aggregate put Tunisians at a historic crossroads where there is no room for failure.

Of necessity, the course of transition imposes – in its obstacles and difficulties and the forms of interstices in the struggles for democracy – the necessity of liberating the media, and especially the audiovisual media. It also necessitates proffering new conditions for the presentation of a ‘national’ product capable of catalysing reconciliation with the expectations of the viewer instead of leaving him to Arab and ‘Islamic’ channels motivated by agendas that do not serve – and for which the passage of days *will* confirm that they do not serve – democratic construction. They are motivated instead by other intentions, among which is reverting Arab countries to something which predated the state and encouraging all the ‘*salafist*’ trends who cast democracy in the framework of unbelief (*takfir*) to agitate for the Islamization of societies.

There is no argument that the ‘arenas of struggle’ are ablaze and in the process of transition, especially in the context of liberation from the chains of autocracy and compliant submission. Every society contains within it these arenas replete with questions and issues pertaining to the reading of history, the place of religion, the importance of language and status of women, etc. The media, in particular the public audiovisual forms, plays decisive roles in dealing with these arenas of struggle and presenting them in the service of promoting local peace and critical national integration in order

to evade all the pitfalls that might dissipate or exhaust the efforts for democratic transformation, especially in a cultural context that has not ceased to produce obstacles to ‘modernization’ and which suffers from huge deficiencies in contemporary democratic culture.

## Notes

1. The importance of the religious unconscious emerges here. It is necessary to re-differentiate between religion, as a sacred referential authority, and its practical, creedal translations, and also between various manifestations of religiosity that modern society produces. A number of sociologists and anthropologists have worked since the 1970s to study group-collective situations or occasions that produce manifestations of religiosity, especially during football (soccer) games and huge concerts. Among these researches are the works of Michel Maffesoli (Maffesoli 1993, 2000, 2007) and others. See also the works of Régis Debray, who is considered to be one of the Marxists who noted the importance of religion in politics and modern life (while he was still in prison) in the late 1960s when he published his referential book entitled *Critique de la Raison Politique ou l’Inconscient Religieux* (1981). The data of the technological world and the expressions of the religious imagination, both the violent as well as the pacifist, confirmed to him the deep influence of religion in politics and society (Debray 2000, 2001). It has been noticed that Arab uprisings have created their own spheres of demonstration and meeting points, such as Tahrir/Taghyir Square, in which numerous slogans and placards of graffiti were held aloft dedicated to numerous themes such as the ‘Friday of Rage’, the ‘Friday of the Masses’, the ‘Friday of Steadfastness’, the ‘Friday of the March’, the ‘Friday of Freedom’, etc. Gatherings in these public venues acquired significant symbolic importance among demonstrators because they became occasions in which bonds, ties, connections, communications, discussions, and negotiations were made and created in what promoted forms of heartfelt, impassioned spiritual camaraderie, despite differences and contradictions that persisted among participants party to this public ritual.
2. Also since 1997 Muḥammad Jābir al-Anṣārī has observed Arab–Islamic experiments – from the Lebanese experience to the Somali one to the Afghani experiment – admitting the probability of other wider experiments in the Arab world that are equally dangerous in terms of schisms and insecurity. He has noticed that these pluralities and attendant groups are capable of ‘revealing’ their true ‘naked’ essence and transformation into what is genuine civil strife in nature in the framework of our socio-political reality, whatever we may raise of banners or slogans of nationalism and religion and however careful we may be in raising such or discussing them, or however we may confront the struggle with nationalist, regional or Islamic polemics (al-Anṣārī *et al.* 1977, p. 27).
3. It may be worth mentioning that the term ‘Machiavellian’ not only refers to the author of *The Prince* alone, but also is an indication of a collective representation attached to modern politics. It is, on the one hand, a term for politics attached to groups engaging in corrupt and deceptive behavioural conduct, while, on the other hand, it is indicative of the games played by the government/ruling authority which through various techniques ensures its tight grip and control of the people as being ‘subjects’. Such ways include deception, lies, fraud and trickery, meaning the ‘utilitarian and applied’ aspect of politics (also d’Allonnes 1999, p. 222).
4. The broadcasting of the hearings of the trial of Hosni Mubarak, his sons and others accused beginning on 3 August 2011 was, incontestably, a political moment with historic significance heralding a massive political sea change, and indicative of the precursors of Egypt entering a new era of human rights, and that it was undergoing a qualitative change in audio-visual coverage and treatment of events. At the very least it is indicative of the opening of new innovative horizons for the professionalism and competence of Egyptian media.
5. Numerous analysts began to examine the reasons and repercussions of this anxiety, about which Waḥīd ‘Abd al-Majīd has written: ‘the question being raised today is not about the time frame needed for the triumph of revolutions that seem to emanate from the desires of the majority of people, but rather pertains to whether or not they have actually succeeded in effecting change.’ He adds that ‘the scene in both countries [meaning Tunisia and Egypt]



is no longer indicative of the optimism which prevailed initially after the toppling of the regime, which perhaps dissipated a few weeks afterwards. The forward course is facing difficulties, and the transitional period is ridden with anxiety. Those who are leading it have committed and are accused, at most of conspiracy and at least of stalling and procrastination. Also the forces of the revolution and those who advocated it are divided and are unable to reach a consensus over the new regime' (Waḥīd 'Abd al-Majīd 2011).

6. Rāshid al-Ghanūshī argues that 'the state in Islam is a *civil* state, and those who are responsible for it are always subject to criticism, and lack any sacred attributes ... we oppose the notion that the state interferes in the creedal doctrines of people: in what they eat, drink or wear as such is the [private] affairs of the human being. And, if you wish consider this to be a form of laïcisme/secularism, then so be it' (al-Ghanūshī 2011).

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