Islam and Politics in Tunisia

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Salafism in post-Arab Spring Tunisia and what are possible ex-
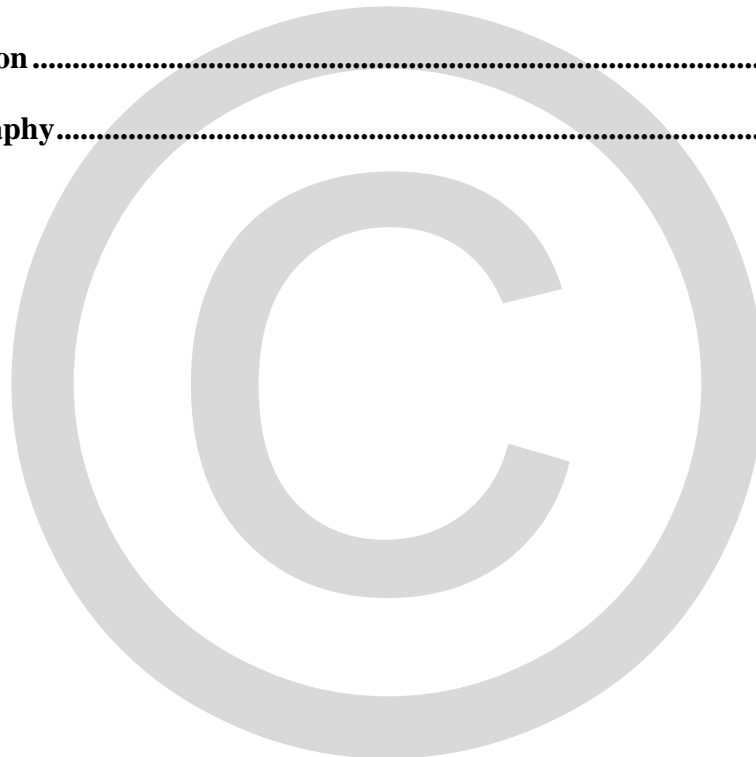planatory factors of this reaction?

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Islam and Politics in a Changing Middle East
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1.   Introduction

The political landscape in Tunisia has changed dramatically in the wake of the Arab Spring. Not only did the previously banned Islamist Ennahda party ascent to power following the 2011 elections, but also has the country been experiencing a growing presence of diverse Salafi movements. Besides staging demonstrations and sit-ins, some Salafi groups have clashed with security forces and are blamed to have launched attacks such as on an arts exhibition in La Marsa or the US Embassy in Tunis in September 2012 (Wolf 2013). Ennahda spoke out against violent extremism, but at the same time, the party took an accommodationist approach to Salafi groups who officially renounced violence (Marks 2012a). The Ennahda-led government allowed Salafi groups to participate in public life (Churchill 2012) and even decided to legalize four Salafi parties in 2012 (Alexander 2013). One year later, however, they officially designated the main Salafi group in the country, Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia (AST), as a terrorist organization (Torelli 2013).

This paper examines Ennahda's reaction towards different Salafi groups in Tunisia. More specifically it asks: How did the Islamist party Ennahda respond to the rise of Salafism in post-Arab Spring Tunisia and what are possible explanatory factors of this reaction? While most secularists accuse Ennahda of being in alliance with Salafi movements and pursuing a soft accommodationist approach, Salafis themselves mostly perceive Ennahda as an impious and unprincipled movement, not supportive of them and their ideology (Marks 2012). The paper analyzes the period between 2011 and 2013, arguing that Ennahda's official policy towards Salafi movements has not been clear. However, a change from adopting an accommodationist approach to a more confrontational one can be observed. In a second step, the paper shortly discusses possible explanations for Ennahda's policy (change) by drawing on the inclusion-moderation thesis and other political considerations.

This paper contributes to the wider debate of Islamists' engagement in democratic transition processes. While the relationship between Islamists and Secularists has been the focus of many studies, the relationship between different Islamist groups in democratization processes remains largely understudied. Yet, an examination of how Islamist parties react to and interact with other Islamist groups is important in that it influences fu-

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ture political trajectories of the Middle East. Moreover, how a dominant Islamist party positions itself in regards to other Islamic movements concerning issues of governance and public life may define the future of Islamism. In particular, analyzing the relationship between Ennahda and Salafi groups is relevant for the Tunisian democratization process because it gives insights into how an Islamist party deals with the question of its identity in a context of power politics and electoral competition (Torelli et al. 2012).

2.   Definitions and Theoretical Framework

Islamism or political Islam refers to the idea that Islam not only provides the guideline for social and personal life, but also for the political sphere. In a simplified meaning, the term refers to Islam that is used to a political end (Knudsen 2003). Islamists are individuals who "mobilize around the idea of creating an Islamic state as a solution to social and political problems they face in the contemporary world" (Donker 2013: 208). Olivier Roy (2006), for example defines Islamism as "the brand of modern political Islamic fundamentalism that claims to recreate a true Islamic society, not simply by imposing shariah, but by establishing first an Islamic state through political action" (ibid: 58). He further argues that Islamists consider Islam not just a religion, but rather see it as a "political ideology that should reshape all aspects of society" (ibid.). Yet, the conceptualization of Islamism is far from clear (Bayat 1996: 43; Denoeux 2002: 6; Roy 2006: 58; Volpi 2010: 14). Also, differences exist between Islamist movements and parties on how they put Islamism 'into practice' (Donker 2013: 221).[1]

The definition of Salafism is problematic and subject of debate as well.[2] The term originally means claiming the legacy of *al-salaf al-salih* (the pious ancestors), yet today it is mostly used in reference to radical Islamic movements (Torelli et al. 2012).[3] Salafis share the same creed (aqida), they emphasize tawhid (the oneness of God) and reject a role for human reason and desire in their strict and direct textual interpretation of the Quran and the Sunna (Wiktorowicz 2006). Salafis are oftentimes seen as a homogene-

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[1] For a more detailed overview on Islamism as well as its development see amongst others: Black (2001); Meijer (2005); Lapidus (1975); Roy (1994); Kepel (2002).
[2] See amongst others: Wiktorowicz (2006); Hegghammer (2008).
[3] The International Crisis Group (2012), for example, defines Salafism in its modern meaning as referring to "conservative Sunni Muslims who seek to apply literalist interpretations of scripture based on the example set by the Prophet and his companions" (ibid.: 5).

ous entity, but indeed, they represent very diverse movements. In the late 19th century, and with the emergence of Islamic reformism, Salafism simply implied a return to traditional Islam and was inherently apolitical (Torelli et al. 2012). This changed in the 1960s when members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood introduced a more politically oriented agenda to the purist Salafi community in Saudi Arabia (Wiktorowicz 2006). Moreover, an additional faction of Salafism developed during the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s when Salafis were confronted with more radical and politicized teachings in a context of warfare instead of a mere educational environment. As Wiktorowicz (2006) notes, these different Salafi factions are divided over "how Muslims should understand the context to which beliefs are to be applied, rather than the beliefs themselves" (ibid.: 234). A traditional classification is that of scientific versus jihadist Salafism. Scientific Salafis reject the use of violence and promote a pure form of Islam, they engage "in the promotion of individual behavioral change through dawa [spreading the message of Islam]", most of them reject politics and only operate in the social realm (Wolf 2013). In contrast, jihadi Salafis engage in violence in order to establish an Islamic state under sharia law. Yet, this categorization remains "only partially valid today as Salafist movements across the region are displaying quite different modes of activism" (Merone and Cavatorta 2012: 3). Wiktorowicz (2006) for example identifies three different forms of Salafism: purist, political and jihadist. The 'Purists' focus on nonviolent means of propagation as well as education and reject politics. Contrary, the 'Politicos' apply the Salafi creed to the political arena and can thus be classified as Islamist movement. Finally, in contrast to the former two groups, the Jihadis use violent methods and take an overall militant approach to reach their goals (ibid.: 208).

Moderation Theory: Inclusion-moderation hypothesis

There is a large body of literature on Islamist moderation, yet little consent exists between scholars on how moderation is defined and what factors actually cause it. In part due to the large variance within and between empiric cases of moderation, no generalizable theory of Islamist moderation is advanced, but scholars emphasize different independent variables.[4] Schwedler (2006) defines moderation as "movement from a relative-

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[4] Independent variables for the outcome 'Islamist Moderation' include amongst others: Inclusion (Schwedler 2006); Inclusion and social learning (Wickham 2004); Inclusion and political liberalization

ly closed and rigid worldview to one more open and tolerant of alternative perspectives" (ibid.: 3).[5] One of the most prominent arguments in recent debates about Islamist moderation is the inclusion-moderation hypothesis that assumes that political actors will become more moderate when included in a pluralist political process.

In a comprehensive study on Islamist parties in Jordan and Yemen, Schwedler (2006) explores the hypothesis in detail. She finds that while the Jordanian Islamic Action Front party (IAF) as well as Yemen's Islah party participated in similar political processes and elections, the IAF became more moderate but the Islah party did not. This variation, she argues can be explained by two structural and one ideational factor: the relation between the regime and public political space; the party's internal organization and practices of decision-making; and most crucially, "shifting boundaries of justifiable action" in terms of a broader Islamist agenda compatible with democratic principles (ibid.: 197).

Moreover, in a more recent critical review of the inclusion-moderation hypothesis, Schwedler (2011) distinguishes between behavioral moderation of groups, ideological moderation of groups, and the ideological moderation of individuals. Schwedler (2007, 2011) notes that Islamist parties' participation in elections or the democratic process is insufficient as an indicator for moderation. A group might as well "adopt moderate behaviour for strategic purposes while harbouring a more radical political agenda" (Schwedler 2007: 59). Although strategic moderation may lead to ideological moderation, this is not always the case (Schwedler 2011: 358). A change in political opportunity structures may lead to a change in behavior but not to ideological moderation.

Similar, Karakayaa and Yildirimb (2012) for example develop a two-stage framework of Islamist moderation, which is tactical and ideological moderation. They refer to tactical moderation as "the kind of moderation where radical parties make a decision on whether to accept electoral democracy as a means to achieve ideological goals without compromising their platforms" (ibid.: 1322). Thus, according to the authors, tactical moderation does not imply a change of ideology. In contrast, what they term ideological mod-

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(Brooks 2002); State repression (Somer 2007); Economic liberalization (Zakaria 2004); Spirit of compromise (Clark 2006); Participation (El-Ghobashy 2005).
[5] In Schwedler (2011) it is argued that the term 'moderate' is conceptually so problematic that is may be useless.

eration refers to "shifts in a platform from a radical niche to more moderate lines to respond to societal changes (…) to gain greater popular support" (ibid.). They argue that this shift indicates a move from policy-seeking party towards becoming a vote-seeking one.

In contrast to the inclusion-moderation hypothesis, Cavatorta and Merone (2013) advance what they call 'the moderation through exclusion hypothesis'. They develop the argument that social marginalization as well as political repression can cause moderation as well by examining the case of Ennahda. The authors argue that the Islamist party moved from an extreme anti-systemic position towards a mainstream conservative party. According to them, Ennahda originally pursued a fundamentalist vision of Islam in the 1970s but was forced to re-elaborate it in light of societal rejection as well as state violence and repression.

3. Analysis: Ennahda and the Tunisian Salafi movements
3.1 Ennahda

In 1972, Rachid Ghannouchi founded Al Jamaa al Islamiyya, the forerunner of what in 1981 was established as the Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI) and at the same time constituted the predecessor of what in 1989 became the Ennahda Movement (Allani 2009). Over time, the party has adopted a more moderate approach compared to its initially extreme anti-systemic position (Cavatorta and Merone 2013). The relationship between the movement and the Tunisian government has varied over time and shifted between confrontation as well as participation (ibid.).[6] Prior to the revolution, the movement experienced such a high degree of repression that no formal organization of it existed (Lynch 2012). It was banned in Tunisia and most of its members were imprisoned or escaped into exile, including its leader Ghannouchi himself.[7] Consequently, the movement did not play a big role in the revolution. Yet, after the ouster of Ben Ali in January 2011, Rachid Ghannouchi returned from exile and started to rebuild the move-

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[6] For a comprehensive study of the party's development see amongst others: Cavatorta and Merone (2013); Allani (2009); Stepan (2012).

[7] According to estimates by Amnesty International, under Ben Ali, at least 20,000 Ennahda members were tried for subversion and put in prison, and about 10,000 went into exile (Stepan 2012: 101).

ment (Lynch 2012).[8] The interim government legalized Ennahda in March 2011 and public support for the party grew very rapidly (Lynch 2011). It finally won 89 out of 217 seats in the October 2011 elections, making it the leading party in a three-party coalition with two secular parties (Torelli et al. 2012).

3.2   Salafism in Tunisia

Tunisia's Salafis are oftentimes classified into scientific and jihadist Salafis (Wolf 2013). Most of the Salafis in Tunisia are not jihadists and aim at establishing their favored social and political order by non-violent means. Some of them reject participating in politics altogether, denouncing it as impious distraction that replaces the law of God with human made law (ibid.). Although it is sometimes claimed that Salafism in Tunisia emerged not as a national phenomenon but rather constitutes a foreign import, this is not the case. Merone and Cavatorta (2012a) acknowledge that Tunisian Salafis have "cut their teeth abroad", however, they argue that the roots of the Tunisian Salafi movements today go back to the 1980s. They further claim that today's protagonists of the movement are "a young generation of disenfranchised youth product of the later years of the Ben Ali dictatorship" (Merone and Cavatorta 2012: 4). Torelli et al. (2012) argue that Tunisian Salafism has its roots in the discontent of a few Islamists vis à vis the political thinking of the MTI. In 1986, these Islamists created the Tunisian Islamic Front (TIF), which only had little influence due to government repression and many TIF members left Tunisia to fight in Afghanistan (ibid.). In an interview with Marc Lynch, Gannouchi argues that the Tunisian Salafis evolved "in the absence of Ennahda, and the absence of freedom. It started in Egypt, in the dark places of prisons of Abdel Nasser, and also in light of torture" (Lynch 2012a: 45).

3.3   Reactions of Ennahda to Salafism

Initially, Ennahda followed a strategy of accommodation and political as well as social integration towards Salafi groups. The party encouraged Salafi groups to participate in the political process, form parties, and asked them to refrain from using violence. Shortly after Ennahda came to power, it legalized four Salafi parties, which the interim gov-

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[8] "They established offices in every Tunisian province, quickly setting up sections for youth, women, social services, and politics and holding internal elections to select a new leadership" (Lynch 2012: 33).

ernment led by Beji Caid el-Sebsi had rejected before because of concerns of their democratic commitment (Zelin 2012). The troika government legalized Jabhat al-Islah on March 29, 2012 (Torelli et al. 2012), followed by Hizb Al-Tahrir on July 17, 2012 (Alexander 2013). Furthermore, Hizb Al-Asala and Hizb Al-Rahma were legalized on July 31, 2012 (Allani 2012, Amghar 2013). Although Hizb Al-Tahrir rejects party politics as such (Alexander 2013), in order to gain legal status, all four parties had previously renounced violence and committed themselves at least in theory to democratic principles (BTI 2014). Yet, they promote the application of sharia law as fundamental source of legislation (Merone and Cavatorta 2012).

Ennahda's public statements remained mostly unclear in regards to violent attacks of Salafi activists. Their response to violent acts "was never too hard" (Torelli 2013). When a group of Salafis attacked a movie theater in the Tunisian capital in June 2011, Ghannouchi condemned the attacks. He emphasized that Ennahda rejects the use of violence and any form of intellectual extremism. At the same time however, he referred to the right to defend 'Tunisian values', a caveat which, as Lynch (2012) notes, "immediately triggered the suspicions of his critics about Ennahda's true intentions" (ibid.: 35).

In November 2011, a group of Salafi students started to demonstrate at Manouba University in Tunis against a policy that prohibits wearing a face veil in class ("My niqab [face veil] is my freedom") (Lusardi 2015). In the beginning, Ennahda supported the protests referring to the freedom of religion (Donker 2013). Soon the demonstrations erupted into violence and some protesters removed the Tunisian national flag at the university's entrance, replacing it with a black flag that carried the *shahada*, the Muslim declaration of faith (Lusardi 2015). A national outcry followed and Ennahda took a more mediating role, however, as a professor at Manouba noted, this 'mediation' was "more about pressing the university to give in to some of the protesters' demands" (Donker 2013: 218). Moreover, the Ministry of Higher Education headed by Ennahda did not give clear directives on the issue (Freedom House 2012).

Moreover, according to Donker (2013), Ennahda first informally endorsed protests in favor of including sharia in the constitution in April 2012 but afterwards formally blocked them. Ennahda finally announced that sharia should not be included in the constitution as the source for all laws. Rather the new constitution should only refer to Is-

lam as the state religion, what was already included in the old constitution (Gerges 2013). In reference to the protests, Ghannouchi announced that Ennahda had started dialogue with the Salafis on sensitive topics.[9] One of his conversations with Salafi activists was thereby recorded and later leaked. In the controversial video, Ghannouchi propagated to take a more 'gradual' approach to "building a successful Islamist project" (ibid.). Previously, he had already emphasized that rushing to impose sharia was not a good idea, but that Tunisians first needed to get better education in order to understand what sharia is (Marks 2012). One version of the conversation can be found on YouTube[10] and is preceded by someone warning about the potential dangers of Islamism. Ennahda did not dispute the authenticity of the video, however, the party told Tunisia Live that "some passages were taken out of context" (Khlifi and Le Nevez 2012). According to Khilfi and Le Nevez (2012), the video seems to be edited with cuts.

When protesters attacked an art gallery in La Marsa in June 2012, claiming the exhibition showed blasphemous paintings, Ennahda labeled the incidence a terrorist attack (Wolf 2013). Subsequently, a young jihadi Salafi asked Monica Marks in an interview: "Where was Ennahda when we were protesting against the blasphemy in La Marsa? (…) They were trying to be hands-off, to play it safe – but they forgot Islamic values. They don't have Islamic principles – that was just a political trick for the last election" (Marks 2012a). At the same time however, Ennahda announced that "Religious symbols are above all derision, irony or violation" and claimed that it would "propose a constitutional provision against blasphemy".[11]

On September 14, after an Islamophobic clip produced in the United States surfaced on YouTube, jihadi Salafis attacked the American embassy in Tunis (Donker 2013). Consequently, Ghannouchi publicly declared jihadi Salafis to be a security threat to Tunisia (ibid.). Further, he announced that "any unlawful conduct on the side of the Salafis would not be tolerated and that the non-partisanship of mosques would be more closely supervised" (ibid.). While jihadi as well as vigilante violence steadily increased, Human

[9] Reuters, April 3, 2012: Tunisia's Ennahda party in talks with Salafi Islamists. Online available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/03/ozatp-tunisia-ennahda-salafis-idAFJOE83201W20120403 [20/04/2015].
[10] See video on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=WuHi-O-PGhI [04/04/2015].
[11] Middle East Online, June 13, 2012: Ennahda-led gov to go tough on Salafist rioters. Online available at: http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=52794 [20/04/2015].

Rights Watch accused the Ennahda-led government of not investigating the various religiously motivated attacks of extremists.[12]

In February and July 2013, two secular opposition politicians, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi were killed in attacks (Casey 2013). The same year, the government's relationship with the Salafists reached a turning point (Torelli 2013). In May 2013, Ghannouchi announced that AST's annual meeting in Kairouan would be banned because the organizers did not ask for permission, as required by law (Torelli 2013). On August 27, 2013 Prime Minister Ali Larayedh publicly claimed that AST "is responsible for the assassinations of (Chokri) Belaid and (Mohamed) Brahmi, as well as our martyrs in the police and the national army".[13] He further announced that the Ennahda led government had decided to denounce Ansar al-Sharia as a terrorist organization, referring to their affiliation with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (Torelli 2013). During his office as Interior Minister however, Larayedh used to be more lenient in regards to Salafi violent activism, tending to downplay their actions.[14] Brody-Barre (2013) in this respect argues that although Ennahda responded to 'Salafi provocation' it was oftentimes only after a public outcry and pressure from the Tunisian society. This, as he notes, was to many secularists "simply too little too late to be entirely credible" (ibid.: 216).

4.   Discussion

Several explanatory factors can be inferred in regards to Ennahda's response towards Salafism in Tunisia. Ennahda's own history may play an important role in explaining the party's approach of inclusiveness to Salafi movements. Other studies already emphasized the importance of Islamist parties' historical backgrounds. Haqqani (2013), for example, argues that "Islamists have a strong sense of history; their political behavior cannot be easily comprehended or predicted without taking history into account" (ibid.: 7). Ghannouchi oftentimes refers to the decades of repression Ennahda members' had experienced in the past when asked about the party's approach to Salafism. In prison or

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[12] Human Rights Watch (2012): Tunisia: Investigate Attacks by Religious Extremists.
[13] Middle East Institute, August 27, 2013: Salafist group behind Tunisia political killings: PM. Online available at: http://www.mei.edu/content/salafist-group-behind-tunisia-political-killings-pm [20/04/2015].
[14] Al Monitor (2013), Tunisia Struggles to Respond to Salafists. Online available at: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fa/politics/2013/05/tunisian-government-salafist-relations-ennahda.html [20/04/2015].

in exile, many seem to have come to the conclusion that dialogue and political inclusion offer "effective alternatives to extremism" and that exclusion and repression may be dangerous (Marks 2012).[15] In an interview[16] with Le Monde in October 2012, Ghannouchi rejected accusations of being too soft on Salafis. He argues that they "should not be demonized" and said:

> We must avoid calling them 'the enemy within.' We remember Ben Ali's experience, who imprisoned tens of thousands of activists and demonized Ennahda. If we demonize the Salafists, in 10 or 15 years, they will come to power ... We should talk to them as people, not as enemies. (Original version in French).

In another interview with Marc Lynch, Ghannouchi emphasizes similar themes:

> The prosecution of Ennahda movement could have led us to violence, and this is what Ben Ali wanted. But our experience in prison has deepened our belief in freedom and democracy, and Ben Ali failed to drag us into violence. And that's why he fell (Lynch 2012a: 45).

Also, Marks (2012) argues that Ennahda's leaders "tend to view the country's jihadi Salafis as wayward children – younger, more confused versions of themselves who never had the chance to be properly educated in a more cerebral form of 'Tunisian Islam'". Yet, while Ennahda may have the assumption that integration into the political process would moderate Salafis in Tunisia, moderation is a much more complex process and always contextual: suggesting a causal link between political participation and moderation may be misleading as Casey (2013) argues.[17] Also Schwedler (2007, 2011) emphasized that inclusion does not guarantee moderation and Ennahda itself is a counterfactual example as Cavatorta and Merone (2013) demonstrate.

If Ennahda's past experiences and their suggested belief in the inclusion-moderation-thesis may explain their approach of inclusiveness towards Salafis, what then can explain the change towards a more confrontational approach? First, the coup in Egypt that ousted President Morsi may have been an important warning signal to Ennahda to not sharpen confrontations with secularists. This event probably has contributed to the more confrontational approach to jihadi Salafists, especially AST and also "reinforced pre-

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[15] The fact that Ghannouchi insists that "Ennahda's commitment to democracy had been strengthened by the Ben Ali experience, when thousands of its members were imprisoned or forced into exile" (Lynch 2012a: 45) supports the moderation through exclusion hypothesis advanced by Cavatorta and Merone (2013).

[16] Le Monde (2012): Si nous diabolisons les salafistes, dans dix ou quinze ans, ils seront au pouvoir. Online available at: http://www.lemonde.fr/tunisie/article/2012/10/18/m-ghannouchi-si-nous-diabolisons-les-salafistes-dans-dix-ou-quinze-ans-ils-seront-au-pouvoir_1777448_1466522.html [04/04/2015].

[17] He argues that "Ennahda itself represents a compelling counter-example of a radical Islamist movement that has achieved moderation, despite years of repression, exclusion, and marginalization" (Casey 2013).

existing postures of pragmatism and gradualism inside Ennahda that have been crucial to its survival in Tunisian society" (Marks 2015, Torelli 2013). Yet, Torelli (2013) argues, "the basis of that decision was the need to give a signal of moderation to the secularists, rather than a genuine awareness of the actual [Salafi] movement's dangerousness". Second, Ennahda did experience growing pressure from secular parties as well as large parts of the Tunisian society when Salafi activism in the country seemed to increase throughout 2012 and 2013 (Casey 2013). Moreover, pressure to adopt a more confrontational approach to Salafism also came from Western countries (Lynch 2012a). After the attack on the US embassy, for example, the US demanded "a crackdown of Salafist activism" (Cavatorta and Merone 2013: 862). Ennahda may have come to the conclusion that a certain degree of pragmatism would be necessary, not only concerning Tunisia's secularists but also in regards to the United State's and Europe's interests in the country.

Finally, what factors can possibly explain the fact that Ennahda's policies towards Salafism have never been clear but rather ambiguous? First, electoral considerations may have been at stake. On the one hand side, the party probably did not want to alienate secular voters. On the other hand side, they did not want to alienate the Salafis as well as other Islamic actors either. This balancing act may have resulted in a rather unclear and not straightforward response to Salafism in order to prevent losing votes from one side. Yet, as the 2014 elections showed, this approach most likely made the party lose votes from both sides. Second, internal party conflicts may play a role in explaining Ennahda's reaction to Salafism as well. Marc Lynch (2012) already noted that he "found even Ennahda's leaders unsure about how to grapple with the rising Salafi trend (ibid.: 32). According to some scholars, this in part stems from the party's internal conflicts. Here, it is important to acknowledge that there exists no clear dichotomy between the 'moderate Ennahda party' and 'conservative/violent Salafi movements'. It is estimated that Ennahda's more liberal wing makes up only one-third of the party base while the other two-thirds represent more conservative views (Heneghan 2013). Also Marks (2012) argues that internal disagreements largely "contributed to the sense of gridlock and inaction surrounding Ennahda's response to jihadi Salafi violence". Moreover, Ennahda's base seems to have a more conservative tendency than the leadership (Alexander 2013). Alexander (2013) argues that some of Ennahda's conservatives have ties to

Salafi groups, especially through the controversial 'Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution' and that they tried to put pressure on the more moderates. The moderates, on their part, were "sensitive to Salafi interests in order to protect their right flank" (ibid.). For example, Abdelfattah Morou, Samir Dilou, Hamadi Jebali and Rachid Ghannouchi represent more moderate figures, who pursue a pragmatic approach, willing to make compromises at the expense of Islamic principles (Marks 2012, Wolf 2013). In contrast, Sadok Chorou and Habib Ellouze, for example, belong to Ennahda's more conservative camp, the party's 'doctrinal wing' that claims the supremacy of Islamic law (Wolf 2013). Disputes between those who were in exile (mostly British-influenced) and those who remained in Tunisian prisons, may have complicated the development of a clear and straightforward response to the rise of Salafism (Marks 2012). This internal division is also illustrated by the fact that Islamist militants ranked Sadok Chourou as their first choice for Ennahda's Shura Council (Wolf 2013).[18]

What remains open to debate is whether Ennahda's oftentimes unclear approach to Salafi groups has at least partially contributed to their electoral defeat in 2014, when they lost 16 seats to the secular party Nidaa Tounis. On the one hand side, Ennahda's rather inclusive approach towards Salafists might have alienated secular voters and made them suspicious of the party's 'true goals'. On the other hand side, the party's non-adherence to several Islamic principles and its willingness of compromise with secular parties, for example in regards to including sharia in the constitution, might have alienated a large number of 'Islamic' voters. Yet, the prevailing factor that contributed to their defeat may as well have been the party's inability to bring forward significant economic and societal change in Tunisia instead of their unclear reaction to Salafism.

Another crucial point of debate represents the issue of tactical versus ideological moderation in regards to Ennahda's approach to Salafism. Does the change from inclusive towards a more confrontational approach imply mere tactical moderation or is it a sign of ideological moderation? Did Ennahda move from a policy-seeking party towards a vote-seeking one? Indeed, as the analysis shows, it seems likely that Ennahda redefined its approach in order to respond to broad societal demands and to gain more popular

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[18] Some even consider Ennahda and Salafi movements as two faces of the same coin and claim an "implicit division of labor between the two of them" (Lusardi 2015). The argument here is that Salafis are able to take positions that Ennahda cannot embrace in public.

support. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that they do not pursue an Islamist agenda anymore. They may have accepted that it is important to behave differently in regards to Salafism and that a more confrontational approach may tactically be the wiser one. This does not say much about any potential ideological moderation in that a party's actions do not always necessarily mirror their objectives and ideology. Here, examinations of internal party debates are crucial.

5.   Conclusion

Throughout 2011 and 2012, Ennahda followed an approach of engagement and inclusion vis à vis Salafis. They promoted dialogue and encouraged Salafi groups to renounce violence and participate in the democratic process. In 2012, the Ennahda led government legalized four Salafi parties that previously had rejected the use of violence. Generally, Ennahda tried to diffuse Salafis' demands by emphasizing a more gradualist approach to Islamic reforms (Marks 2012). Although they publicly condemned violent action by jihadi Salafis, especially the attack on the US embassy, they did not alter their strategy of inclusiveness until 2013. As Salafi activism and violence as well as pressure from the opposition and civil society groups increased, Ennahda adopted a more confrontational approach, considering the risks "implicit in allowing Salafi groups to operate with full freedom" (Chruchill and Zelin 2012). They started to make a clearer distinction between jihadi Salafis and non-jihadi Salafis, labeling the former as "the greatest danger in today's Tunisia and a group that his government will need to fight" (Lusardi 2015). They further officially designated Ansar al-Sharia a terrorist group. While isolating the extremists, the party refrained from sidelining the non-violent Salafis.

Several factors possibly can explain Ennahda's response to Salafism. First, the party may have the belief that inclusion indeed leads to moderation and thus followed such an approach in order to moderate Salafis. Second, the party may have recognized the need to be more pragmatic towards secular demands in light of increasing pressure from society and adopted their approach to Salafis accordingly. Third, internal party disparities and electoral considerations may have contributed to an oftentimes unclear and indeci-

sive response, trying to balance between their obligations towards Secularists and Salafis.

It is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion of what actually caused Ennahda's reaction in regards to Salafism. Obviously, disparities between an Islamist party's actions and their true beliefs may exist. Schwedler (2011) refers to it as "the 'puzzle' of how to know definitively whether Islamists really mean what they say" and argues that it "requires the possibility that one's behavior can go against one's 'true' ideological commitments" (ibid.: 371). The difficulty to differentiate between pragmatic response and true belief or ideology is a major shortcoming of this study. For further research, getting insights into Ennahda's internal party debates is indispensable. This would, in Jillian Schwedler's words bring us closer to know 'what is in the heart' of the Islamists (Schwedler 2007: 60).
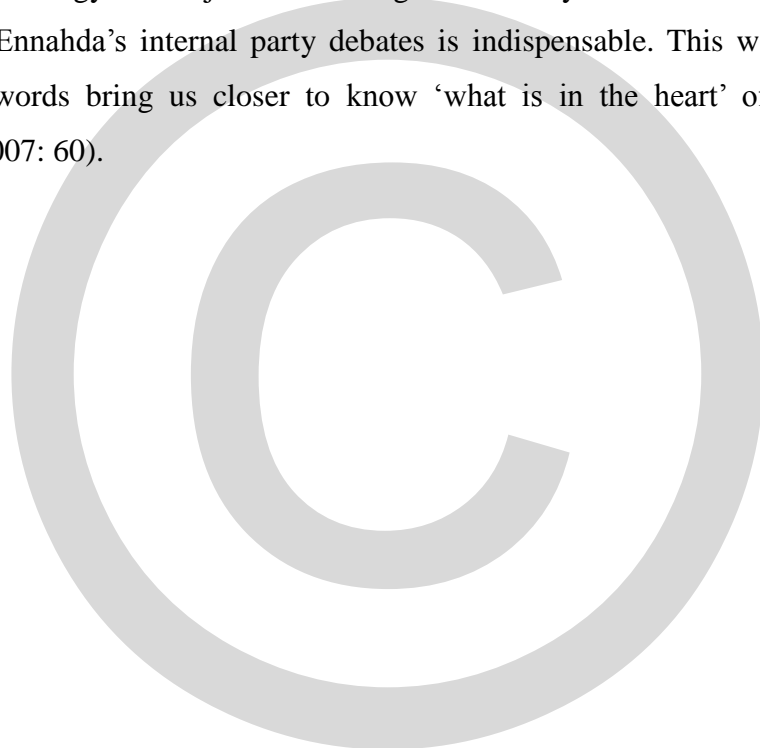
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